

# youth pastor

By Houston Heflin

## Reviewed by Andy Castle

I was drawn to this book by the title. As someone who was a youth pastor for ten years I was delighted to see that here was a book aimed specifically at employed youth ministers. However, this book is much more than that as the subheading eludes to, 'The Theology and Practice of Youth Ministry'. This is a useful book for all of us who are leaders of young people in whatever capacity: employed, part-time or volunteer.

Heflin, an American professor, helpfully outlines five roles of the youth pastor which, simply explained, are two-sided coins. He explains the differences and suggests that we will each have a natural leaning to one side or the other. It is important that we play to our strengths but we must not miss out on developing the flip side.

The first unit looks at our approach to education and he makes the case for the two sides being 'evangelistic missionary' and 'discipling teacher' and says that 'the fundamental difference between these two approaches is the difference between teaching to make disciples (conversion) and teaching to mature disciples (nurture)'. We need to be doing both, but we

will each have our own natural leaning or preference.

The second unit looks at our allocation of time, looking at being a 'pastoral shepherd' or an 'organised administrator' (not something always associated with youth leaders!). Heflin helpfully explains how most people will be drawn to youth ministry because of this pastoral heart, a concern for the young people that we come into contact with. So there is a natural tendency towards spending all our time pastoring, but it is essential we become organised in our administration if the ministry is to develop.

The third unit looks at our position of advocacy. 'Young people need godly ministers who serve both as priests and prophets. They must hear God's word boldly proclaimed in creative and relevant ways while also having advocates who can speak for them before God, the church, and their parents.'

The fourth unit looks at the focus of our relationships – as 'spiritual friend' or 'equipping recruiter'. Heflin helps us consider lessons from how Jesus was a spiritual friend to the disciples and then explains how we need to be recruiting more

people to join in the ministry and how recruitment shouldn't be seen as one more thing on the to-do list, but as a partnership with God.

The final unit looks at our division of responsibilities – how we need to be both 'visionary leader' and 'faithful teammate', not always an easy tightrope for youth leaders to walk. He finishes with a helpful exercise to discover our own natural ministry style and how it informs our work.

This is a great, easy-to-read book. Whilst not profound, it raises some helpful issues about how we keep these different areas of ministry in tension, helping us to become more rounded and effective in our leading.

