

SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN THE YOUTH GROUP

Welcome to the youth group! You'll never know how thrilled I am that you are a new part of our great group. I'll never forget when I was promoted into 7th grade--it was one of the most exciting and scary times of my life. In so many ways, I wanted to join the youth group, but in so many other ways I was really nervous about doing it.

I was the smallest guy around, I wasn't very strong and I knew that I would get teased a little. Then, I wasn't sure how to act, how to dress or what kinds of things to talk about. Looking back, I can see some things that I wish I hadn't done, and I can see some things I'm glad I did. Either way, somehow I did survive and I'm sure you will too.

To be honest, I want you to do more than just survive; I want you to thrive! I mean, I want you to grow, learn, mature, and have more fun than you've ever had. In six years, you'll either be dedicated to God and on your way into life with your brain and heart packed and prepared to serve God, or you'll be rebellious against God's will with a brain and heart packed full of sin and wrong. The next six years will be filled with decision-making times and needed spiritual growth that you must have in order to survive and thrive. Where do you want to be in six years? Do you want to be right with God? Do you want to be doing His will? Do you want to have learned, grown, and had a lot of fun? If so, then you'll need to understand and do some things ahead of time.

1. Get Serious for God! Ecclesiastes 12:1, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;* Alright, you've had 12 years of goofing off...now it's time to get serious, at least about one thing...your spiritual life. Seventh grade is the breaking point...either you get serious now, or you probably never will. Now is the time to start listening intently to Pastor's preaching, Bible study times, and your class teacher. Now is the time to begin having your daily devotions. Now is the time to decide to get to know God. Now is the time to decide what you believe and why...and not just because your parents believe it. Talk to Him, prove Him, and learn about Him. Now is the time for you to make God your #1 priority. Don't allow yourself to slide through the youth group with no concern for spiritual things. First of all, you'll feel out of place because the majority of the youth group teens are serious about God. Secondly, you'll miss the real joy of being a teen and you'll go into life completely unprepared. Get serious!

2. Get Fanatically Involved! Ecclesiastes 9:10, "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*" Hey, you have got one shot at being in the youth group! Be as involved as you possibly can. Get all you can while you can! Do everything that is available and be excited about it. If it is a picnic, game, retreat, or ditch digging party, remember, it is for you. Don't miss out on the fun. Everything our group does is planned and scrutinized so you will grow, spiritually, and so you'll have a lot of fun...so why stay

home? Be a faithful, active part of your youth group. Your excitement and involvement is what will keep our youth group great!

Be a youth group fanatic! Be at everything and be excited about it! I promise you'll have a lot more fun that way, and you'll grow and learn more, too! In six years as you walk across that platform to get your high school diploma, you'll be able to look back at your youth group years and be glad you were involved.

3. Get a Permanently Good Attitude! Proverbs 25:28, "*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*" Proverbs 17:22, "*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*" Proverbs 16:32, "*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*" Psalm 51:10, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*" Your spirit is your attitude. Your attitude is the way you look at life and then the way you respond to it. The next few years will bring a lot of changes. The changes are not all that bad if you look at and respond to them the right way. Many times a very nice and respectable sixth grader becomes a troubled and rebellious eighth grader. Why? Because somewhere along about seventh grade he took a different approach to life. An approach that left God, Mom, Dad, and Pastor in the dust. An approach that says, "I'm going to do things my way no matter what anybody says." Suddenly they become rebellious and troubled.

With this type of person, every youth activity is stupid; all of the Bible teaching is boring. Mom, Dad and Pastor are despised, and all the "good teens" are jerks. Guess who this person makes friends with? The trouble makers. Do you know what their lives are like? They have problems...at school, fights with friends, in trouble with teachers and parents, failing grades, rock music, bad jokes, grounded at home, everybody seems to always be on their case, nobody can trust them, they seem to get blamed for almost everything. In short, their life is miserable. They don't love God, have any good friends, and are missing the real fun of being and doing right like everybody else in the youth group.

Do you know where this person ends up? Remember Cain? Remember Lot? This teenager will end up running from God like Jonah. Before too many years, he will either turn and get his heart right or he will run away and be destroyed by sin. Again, I ask you, where do you want to be in six years? Keep a good attitude! No matter what changes come, no matter how tough the problem, no matter how hard it is...keep a good attitude--toward parents, teachers, youth workers, Pastor, and most of all, toward God.

4. Get Prepared for a Little Teasing Psalm 119:165, "*Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*" We all hate to get it, but we all love to deliver it. Well, now is your turn to get a little. Suddenly you're going from being the top dog of the elementary group to being the little pup of the youth group. A little teasing is part of the territory. Be ready for it, and laugh at it when you get it. The sixth

grader who gets upset and mad will be marked. One of the best ways to make a friend is to show that you can handle a little fun.

Don't worry about any initiations or radical forms of seventh grade torture. Our teens aren't into that, but they are into joking around. Whatever you do, don't take it personally if you get teased. Just laugh at it. Next year you'll be the one doing the teasing.

5. Get a Sensitivity Toward Your Parents. Ephesians 6:2, *“Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise.”* It happens too often. A person turns twelve and then they go crazy for friends, fun and being "grown up" and they flat leave their parents in the dust. Don't do that! Remember, for twelve long years they have taken care of you, fed, burped, changed your stinking diapers, clothed, and loved you. They deserve a little more than a pat on the head and a, "Thanks, Mom, now can I have the car keys?" The easy mistake to make is to get so wrapped up in yourself, your friends, and your "new" status as a teenager, that you completely forget your parents. Remember, they need time with you. They like being with you and you need to be with them. Seeing you grow up is hard enough on them. Don't kick 'em while they're down. Your parents need your love and attention. They want nothing more than to see you have a great time in the youth group, but I can guarantee they will be making you stay home and wash dishes if you forget to love, respect, honor, and obey them.

In six years you'll be standing, getting a diploma, crying about how much you love your parents. Shortly after that you'll be leaving and going to college where there will be no parents. Then you'll wish you had loved them more. Love them NOW!

6. Get Barricaded Against Peer Pressure Psalm 1:1 *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”*

Peer pressure is one of the biggest battles you'll face over the next few years. Thank goodness that in our group there is good peer pressure. Peer pressure is doing something because someone else is. We all want to be accepted...we all want people to like us...we all want friends. Over the next years, you'll have many opportunities to make choices. The choices will be to do what others are doing so they will like you, or to do what is right at the risk of losing your friends. They are tough choices, and unless you're prepared for it, you'll make the wrong choices. You see, that kind of peer pressure is a lie. It is based on the lie that good friends will only like you if you do what they are doing, and that if you don't do it, you won't have any friends.

First of all, it helps if you choose friends that will help you do right. Warning: stay away from those who you can tell have bad attitudes. They will not help you. They will hurt

you. Secondly, a true friend would never ask you or pressure you to do wrong. Thirdly, when you do take a stand for the right at the risk of losing your friends, God always honors that by giving you better friends.

When you feel pressure to be, do, or say something you know is not right, stand up and do right. When someone is bad-talking authority, talking wrong, or pressuring you in some wrong way, you do right and let God take care of the friends. And, over the next six years, don't ever let yourself get stuck in the mode of doing things just because others are; this includes both good and bad things. You do what you do because God wants you to.

7. Get Buckled in for the Six Most Exciting Years of Your Life! I Timothy 6:12
“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, and in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” The next six years can be awesome if you want them to be. They could be a nightmare if you make the wrong choices and go the wrong direction. You only have one chance to be a teenager, make it the best it can be. Get ready for more fun than you've ever had!
