

## WHAT I SAY TO YOUTH GROUPS IN LATIN AMERICA

By Bob Young

I was only 15 when I preached my first youth rally. In my second year at Wichita State University, at age 18, I began to preach for a small rural congregation three Sundays each month. I began full-time ministry when I graduated from Oklahoma Christian College and was frequently asked to speak at youth events. A few weeks at youth camp began a staple on the calendar during those first years. I was myself only a youth. Along with the young people and young families in the first two congregations I served, we grew up together, experienced difficulties, debated our understandings of Scripture, and developed friendships. We practiced meaningful fellowship and reached out to others. God used those initial experiences to disciple (teach) me, change me, and firmly launch me in ministry.

Today as I find that age 70 is not all that far away, I seldom receive invitations to speak to young people in the U.S. However, such invitations are not all that uncommon in my travels in Latin America. I love talking with youth—they are so fresh, honest, serious, wise, and committed to Jesus. I learn from them; I trust that they also learn from me.

Here are four of my favorite themes as I talk to young Christians in Latin America.

**Get God right.** Youth everywhere need Jesus in their lives. Youth who have come to Christ need to deal with the life issues that show up all through life. Youth want to experience the transformed life. They are wonderfully transparent in many of our sessions together. Adults might find it helpful for me to talk about spirituality, but in most youth groups, my summary is much simpler: Get God right!

**Get relationships right.** Youth, like all of us, are relational beings and need to belong. God made them for community. In the developmental years of adolescence, this need is especially acute in impersonal, dysfunctional societies—even young people who come from relatively stable backgrounds need meaningful relationships. In a sex-crazed world, such relationships are especially difficult, but isolationism is a tool of the enemy.

**Figure out service.** Effective youth programs encourage everyone to serve. Involvement is key. Participation is at the core of the abundant, meaningful life. No one sits in the back seat. As youth share their stories, ask for prayer, and minister to one another, they are transformed in the process. They become the ministers and grow as Christ's disciples.

**Figure out life**—you have something worth sharing. Youth reaching out to youth has the potential of discipling a new generation for Jesus. Youth know the needs of their own generation and are best able to evangelize those in their own age group. Youth are effective at reaching out, and when they actively seek God, develop relationships, minister, and share, many lost souls will be saved and disciplined.

I believe God wants to use young Christians to make disciples who make disciples, whether those young Christians are in the U.S., Central America, South America, or other places in the world.