

GREG STIER

M I N I S T R Y
mutiny
a youth leader fable

REVOLUTIONARY PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMING }
YOUR STUDENT MINISTRY }

Ministry Mutiny

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LETTER

It took him a week to write the letter.

Dear Pastor John,

This letter serves as my official resignation as the youth leader here at Central Community Church. I have appreciated the opportunity that God gave me to serve Christ here for the last three and a half years and will genuinely miss being a part of the ministry team at Central.

Tyler Cooper leaned back at his desk, staring at the paragraph on the computer screen. The machine whirred patiently as he grasped for the perfect words.

How would Pastor John react? With surprise, even shock. The youth ministry was looking great—attendance up, kids happy, few complaints from parents. Ty took home a decent paycheck, he had his own office, and he got along with the rest of the staff. No, John would look for the story behind the story. “Time to move on” just wouldn’t cut it. Ty had to tell him more.

The thing is, I'm just not happy. Over the last few weeks I've finally figured out why.

That's as far as Tyler got on the first day. He had to run out to a soccer game that some of the kids were playing in. And that night was a preliminary planning meeting for an upcoming retreat. It was strange to be making arrangements for events he'd never be part of.

The next morning, after e-mailing a report on the planning meeting, he called up the "regis" document and stared at it some more.

This has nothing to do with that incident with the church van. As I told you then, I just loaned it to St. John's Episcopal for their weekend retreat. I didn't know all about the liability and insurance issues. I was just trying to be a good neighbor. And like a good neighbor, State Farm was there. Believe me, if insurance hadn't covered the damages, I would have paid out of my own pocket (although it may have taken a few years!). I know some of the elders were calling me irresponsible, but you had my back, and I will always appreciate that.

Maybe that was the problem with being hired fresh out of college: You're always seen as just another student. The church loved the youthful energy Ty brought to his work, but they didn't always trust him with grown-up stuff.

"Whatcha working on?"

Jolted from his reflection, Ty looked up. In his doorway stood Natalie Lopez, one of the most active students in the youth group.

"It's a letter," Ty answered. "Why aren't you in school?"

“Testing. I got off early. I came to update the youth group bulletin board.”

She smiled and flipped her hair out of her eyes. “Who’s it to? The letter.”

Ty looked back at the screen where the next chapter of his life was about to be written. “It’s kind of personal.”

“Oooh.” Natalie’s curiosity was piqued, but she saw that Ty was tight-lipped about it. “Just thought I’d say hi.”

“You need to talk?”

“Not really,” she mumbled. “You seem like you’re really into something. See you Sunday.” And she was gone.

Ty fought off a guilt pang. Was Natalie really looking for some counseling? No, he figured, she would say so. Some kids were cryptic, but not Natalie. She was just killing time. No need to kill any more time thinking about that. He had to get back to his letter of resignation.

I wish that I could give you a simple explanation for my sudden resignation, but I can't. I think I have to dig into my background. Believe it or not, my reasons for quitting go back to when I was a teenager.

Church had no part in Ty’s young life, but in his junior year of high school, his best friend, Ben, invited him to a youth group meeting. Ty was about to say no, but then he remembered that a lot of the school’s cheerleaders went to Ben’s youth group. After thinking about it some more, he figured at the very least he could meet some cute girls out of the whole deal.

The next Wednesday night, Ty walked through the doors of Ben’s church and he immediately knew something was different. This was not going to be the stuffy, stained-glass experience he had expected. The place was packed full of teenagers. Some were hanging out in what looked like a

coffee shop right there in the youth room. Other kids were playing pool and video games. But most of them were just standing around talking and laughing.

Sure, there were the familiar sizing-up glances that go on every day in school. Guys wondering, “Would she ever go out with me?” Girls wondering, “Is she prettier than me?” But in this place that sense of competition seemed less intense than usual. There was a genuine feel of acceptance. Ty was used to cheerleaders rolling their eyes when he said hi. Here, one of them actually smiled at him. *This is gonna be a good night*, he thought.

He had no idea how good it would get.

Everybody was kind of milling around when Jeff, the youth leader, stepped up on the 18-inch stage and asked everybody to sit down. The background music stopped and he gave a few announcements. “Are there any visitors here tonight?” Jeff asked. With a sharp elbow in the ribs from Ben, Ty raised his hand, and he wasn’t the only one. Out of the hundred or so teens in the room, at least 10 were first-timers. The entire group applauded for these guests. Ty had never felt so immediately welcomed anywhere, especially by fellow teenagers.

Jeff then introduced a game that involved pillows, marshmallows, and road construction pylons. *Oh brother*, Ty thought, *a game. I don’t think I’ve played a group game since I was in the first grade.* But as everybody got involved, it felt less dorky. Chosen to represent one team, Ty threw himself into the contest—and won. Talk about moving from zero to hero in nothing flat! Ty gave a comic bow as the room cheered. He had never felt more at home.

Once the games were over, the group entered into something they called “worship.” Some ragtag student band led a sing-along of strange songs about a strange God with indescribable love. Words like *awesome* and *grace* and *majesty* peppered the music. They sang for 20 minutes straight and nobody seemed to mind. Before he knew it, Ty found himself singing

along, singing words he really didn't understand. He was caught up in something, confused and attracted at the same time.

When Jeff grabbed the microphone, all the teens were quiet. He had a commanding presence. You could tell that when he was in high school he was the football jock that all the girls wanted and all the guys wanted to be. He was good-looking, strong, well dressed, and funny as all get out. Within minutes he had everyone laughing. Then just as quickly, he got dead serious. Some giggles were still bouncing around the room when Jeff asked a question that got Ty's attention. "If God suddenly showed up and looked into the secret chambers of your heart, what would He see there?"

Ty didn't know who God was or where exactly the secret chambers of his heart were, but this sounded pretty intense. For the next 20 minutes the Holy Spirit performed surgery on Ty's soul through Jeff's talk. By the time the Holy Spirit was through, Ty was through. He was finished playing games with his life. He wanted to know Jesus for himself. The whole group bowed their heads and closed their eyes, and Tyler Cooper became a Christian.

"If you've decided tonight to trust Christ as your Savior," Jeff was saying, "I want you to look up at me. Just look me in the eye. I'll know what you mean."

Without hesitation, Ty looked up.

Jeff's face was warm and welcoming. "God bless you. Welcome to the family of God."

You know that I found Christ as a high school student. God used a dynamic youth leader and an exciting youth group to bring me into the fold. Once I joined, I never missed a meeting. I was there every Wednesday night for youth group and every Sunday morning for Sunday school. I even joined a small group.

But something started to happen a few months into my new

walk with Christ. I wanted more. I was like a sponge, asking everybody about everything spiritual and poring over my Bible every day. I didn't always understand, but I knew there was a lot of good stuff to learn.

As I entered my senior year of high school I found myself asking why Jeff didn't talk more about the Bible in our meetings. While his talks were really good, it felt more like spiritual junk food than the nourishment my hungry soul longed for. Every week it was the same old drill with different bits, a few funny stories strung together with some Bible verses, topped off with a serious story and a gospel presentation. Although a bunch of teenagers came to Christ, not many of them were growing deeper in their relationship with God.

As Ty thought back to those days, he wondered if Jeff had been running on leftover adrenaline from his own glory days in high school. Were the years that Jeff enjoyed as a football star simply replaced by the nights he was enjoying as a ministry star—a church celebrity adored by a roomful of teenagers? The guys marveled at his guns. The girls gushed over his looks. And he had a great ability to captivate a crowd. But instead of a football, now his identity was defined by a microphone. Ty didn't want to be harsh about this—after all, the guy had led him to Jesus—but he thought that maybe Jeff was every bit as desperate for acceptance as the teens in the group. Their adoration was the fuel that kept him going.

That wasn't the only problem. Jeff had built the kind of youth ministry that was initially exciting, but became routine within a very short time. Ty remembered a time of disillusionment in his senior year when he actually sat down and did the math. The youth group had about 20 visitors a month and, on average, three of these would stay and get plugged in. Every year,

then, you'd expect this group of a hundred to grow by about 30. In the five years Jeff had been there, the group should have doubled or even tripled in size. Instead they were hovering at the hundred mark every week. Everybody talked about this "exploding" youth group, but the numbers didn't show it. After a few months of excitement, people were drifting away.

What Jeff had managed to build was not a community of growing, thriving young believers, but a revolving door. People spun in, trusted in Christ, and spun out. Ty hoped that they would find a healthier youth group somewhere else, but it's likely that many faded into a spiritual isolation that proved disastrous for their tender faith.

By the middle of my senior year my excitement had turned to indifference, and by the end of my senior year the indifference in my heart had morphed into anger. By then I had already determined that I wanted to be a youth pastor someday, but I didn't want to be anything like Jeff. Nope, when I became a youth pastor I was going to get into the Word of God with the teens under my spiritual care, answer their tough questions, and disciple them into the image of Christ. It wasn't going to be about the numbers with me. It was going to be about spiritual growth.

I held that same conviction as I graduated from high school, got my degree in youth ministry, and showed up on your doorstep at Central asking for a job just when you were beginning the search for a full-time youth pastor. I believed then, as I do now, that the Lord led me to this ministry.

"Well," Ty chuckled, "the Lord and Google. . . ." For months he had been praying to find the right job, but he was also surfing the Net. In some chat room, it so happened that Pastor John told an old seminary buddy he

was looking to hire a youth pastor. “Do you know of a young, just-out-of-college youth guy that I can get cheap?” Some search engine picked that up and delivered it to Ty’s computer. He made a call, went through extensive interviews, and landed the job.

Although I was a wide-eyed 22-year-old youth pastor, I was excited about the mission before me, and the first few months were great. Then I got my first official complaint. You remember when the elders brought me in and told me about some "key members" who were having a hard time with my approach to youth ministry? They said some of their teenagers were alienated by my straight-up, no-frills Bible teaching. I believe the words "irrelevant" and "boring" were used.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

The keyboard was bearing the brunt of the anger Ty felt all over again. His pounding was interrupted by the phone’s annoying buzz and the crackle of the secretary’s voice: “Line 2.”

He picked up the receiver and barked, “What!”

“I love you too.” The sweet voice of his wife summoned him back to the present.

“Christina.”

“Have we talked about phone manners lately? Because I did work my way through college as a receptionist, you recall. Maybe I could give you some tips.”

“Right.” He loved her gentle humor. Throughout his odyssey of youth ministry, she had kept him from imploding.

“I mean, if it were the chairman of the board on the line, you wouldn’t want to answer the phone like Quasimodo.”

“What’s he going to do, fire me?”

“Right.” There was a brief silence. “Have you finished the letter yet?”

“Still working on it.”

“What is this, day eight?”

She was ready to move on, he could tell. She had been trying not to push, but he was dawdling. “Something like that.”

“At this rate you might get it done by your retirement party.”

“Ha ha.” Now she was pushing. “I—I’m working on it,” Ty stammered. “I just need to explain why.”

Another silence. “Have you figured out why?”

“I’m getting there.” Ty smiled wearily. He knew his job crisis affected her, even more now that they had found out she was pregnant. But they had been discussing these things together even before the news about the baby. Over the previous six months or so, they had talked often about his growing dissatisfaction. Christina had listened well, and then she started to explore new job options. Now she needed him to pull the trigger.

“Take your time, Ty,” she assured him. “Really. You need to do this right.”

“Thanks, hon. I was just writing about the ‘play more games’ meeting.”

“You’re getting into that?”

“That’s where the problems started.”

“Say no more. That would make me growl too. Listen, could you pick up a video and some popcorn on your way home? I feel like a quiet night at home.”

“Any movie in particular?”

“No,” she said. “I trust your judgment. Really.”

Ty was beginning to wonder about his own judgment. Was he doing the right thing? He had felt so passionate about youth ministry to begin with, but now he just seemed frustrated with it. His airy dreams had been deflated.

His thoughts turned back to that meeting with the elders, three months

into his work at Central. For two hours he was grilled about his ministry philosophy, but they didn't seem to listen. He wanted to promote spiritual growth through serious attention to Bible study, prayer, worship, and obedience. They were convinced that students couldn't handle that. The conclusion? More games, less talk. More programs, less preaching. More breadth, less depth. "Let's leave the preaching and theology to Pastor John," said the chairman. It felt as if he were patting Ty on the head. "You just love on these kids, teach them some basics, and build a program that kids want to bring their friends to and everything will be all right."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing! Here I was being called on the carpet, not for teaching heresy but for teaching too much truth and not playing enough games! John, I left that meeting dazed and confused. You knew what you were getting when you hired me. The elders did too. I made it clear in the interview process that I wasn't going to be about fun and games but about teaching teens the straight-up truth from God's Word.

To be honest, I almost submitted my resignation the next day. But Christina reminded me that both of us came to Christ through the kind of youth ministry that you and the elders were describing. She challenged me to go for it without compromising my principles. I could plan an exciting program and still teach the deeper things of God to those who were willing to listen.

The secret, Ty and Christina decided, was a funnel-type ministry. At the top, a broad group of teens would be attracted by the fun and games. But they'd be pushed to deeper levels of commitment to Jesus, the small

part at the bottom of the funnel. What would come out of the spout would be the few fully surrendered followers of Jesus whom Ty longed to lead.

Armed with this plan, Ty decided to stick it out at Central. With a renewed sense of purpose, he tackled the challenge the board had laid out before him. He bought the most popular youth ministry curriculum available and followed the lessons to the letter. When the curriculum called for a game, he led it. When it called for a question, he asked it. When it gave an outline to teach, he taught it.

Ty was shocked at how well this worked, and how quickly. Over the next three years the youth ministry at Central exploded in attendance. Games, relevant curriculum, great worship, and cutting-edge videos were all crucial to the weekly routine, and the kids loved it. Once the top part of the funnel was full of teens, Ty would begin pushing them to deeper levels of commitment.

At least that was the plan. But as the months turned to years, he found that he was pouring all his energy into the top part of the funnel. The bigger the youth ministry grew, the more unspoken pressure he felt to outdo himself the following week. If he just finished up a killer curriculum series one week, he would have to launch something bigger and better the next week. He constantly needed better curriculum, funnier illustrations, more games, and more talented musicians. And it wasn't just the weekly meetings that demanded growing attention. The annual camps and retreats had to be bigger and better too. He spent days searching for the best youth speakers and hottest worship bands he could afford.

Three years after that official rebuke from the elders, the youth group had tripled in size. Attendance at the weekly meetings was now about one hundred. Some of these teens were even coming to Christ. Ty started a new-believers class at his house, happily teaching basic doctrines to these Christians. But, with a few exceptions, these students wouldn't be growing beyond

those basics. At least not in this youth group. Here it was all about the fun. There was little time for spiritual growth.

The elders asked to meet with Ty again, not for confrontation but encouragement. They loved the way things were going. Their kids were excited about church, eager to come to youth group. The elders' encouragement extended to financial support as well. They offered to set up a top-of-the-line youth room, complete with two Xboxes, one killer sound system, a high-def plasma TV, a used pool table, and Ty's personal favorite, an espresso machine.

As Ty thought back to that meeting, he remembered his mixed feelings. He was truly grateful for their vote of confidence, but he felt a gnawing in his gut. They were rewarding him for the very things that frustrated him. And the blessings they were bestowing on the youth group—a room full of high-tech toys—would make it even more difficult to do any serious soul-building. He wanted to say, “Thank you, but you just don't get it, do you?”

His fingers found the keyboard again, and he added to his farewell epistle.

You know the numerical success we enjoyed as I tried to employ that funnel plan. I only half succeeded in the strategy. I was creating an exciting program that dazzled the teens and drew more of them in. But I was not teaching the deeper things of God. There was no time for that, no energy, no interest. Maybe the thrill of a hundred teens in the building should be enough for me, but it's not. I've been there. My own high school experience was exciting but shallow. I vowed I would not repeat those mistakes, but I've been taking a hard look at my youth ministry here at Central, and you know what?

I have become the babysitter that I loathed. I have become Jeff.

Our ministries—Jeff's and mine—are essentially the same, a mile wide and an inch deep. The two of us are basically the same kind of youth leader. We're two acceptance junkies who inject self-image steroids into the veins of our self-centered souls. Our syringe? Teen applause, parental backslaps, and pastoral affirmations!

He pushed back from his computer and reread the last paragraph. A bit much. Maybe it was true, but he didn't need to dump that on Pastor John. He pulled the cursor over those sentences and hit Delete.

At that point, Ty took a break from the letter. He needed to sort through it all once again. Was he wanting too much? Were his hopes realistic? Maybe he could find a new plan that would dig deeper but still entertain the kids (and keep the church happy). Christina was anxious for him to get the letter done, to move on to the next stage of their lives, to have a stable atmosphere to raise a child, but Ty was having a hard time saying good-bye.

It's never easy to admit defeat, and the irony of this situation was that Ty's ministry looked like a huge victory. Every so often, he attended a network meeting of youth leaders in the area, and he knew that there were several people there who envied his success. Some of the smaller churches would love to have a hundred kids with the kind of energy that Ty's kids had at Central.

As he sat at his keyboard, Ty wondered if he should just appreciate what he had. Perhaps he just needed more patience. Maybe a deeper program could develop in a few more years. And then he thought of Jesus' saying about gaining the whole world and losing your soul. He had certainly

gained numbers, acclaim, approval—but at what price? Was his own soul eroding in the process?

His second- and third-guesses made it impossible to write any more of the letter that day. Besides, he needed to prepare for that night's youth meeting.

Normally he would just lift a prepackaged outline from one of the countless youth ministry curriculum factories that he had grown dependent on, but he had just finished a series the previous week. With everything going on, he hadn't decided on a new series yet, and he didn't want to start something he couldn't finish, so he tried to slap something together on his own, a single, stand-alone lesson.

Maybe he still held out the hope that he could salvage the situation with one amazing session. Could he sow some seeds that would get the teens jazzed about spiritual growth? Whatever he was hoping, he drew a blank on subject matter. So, an hour before the youth meeting began, he raided the fridge for leftovers—that is, he went to the filing cabinet for notes from a past camp talk.

The meeting was, to put it kindly, a disaster. The leftovers were stale. The jokes weren't that funny, the closing illustration was lame, and he forgot one little detail—a point. He had always enjoyed this 15-minute talk in front of his fan base, but this was a nightmare. Time stood still, but the teens didn't. They were having a grand old time watching their youth leader crash and burn in front of them.

In situations like that, adult audiences tend to be rather forgiving. They'll nod their heads, smile at you, and at least pretend to be interested. But teenagers roll their eyes, check their text messages, and make sarcastic comments. At least these teenagers did. Ty was hurt, but he was also troubled. This was his flock. Hadn't he taught them to act any better than this? Their response distracted him, making his talk even more disjointed. After

rambling on for about 20 minutes and never really finding any coherent theme, he closed quickly in prayer, grabbed Christina, and left. One of the volunteer leaders could wrap up, sweep up, and lock up.

As soon as he got into the car, tears started flowing.

“What is it, Ty?” Christina asked. She had never seen him cry like that.

“You were there. You saw it.”

She put a hand on his hand. “You had a bad night. Anyone can have a bad night.”

“No, it’s not that. It’s—it’s everything. Everything I’ve done here. That’s what they are. That’s what I made them.”

“You had some help.”

Ty looked up and saw his wife’s gentle face, her brow furrowed in concern for him. Sometimes he thought he could fall into those big brown eyes of hers.

“I know, Christina. I’m just saying—I don’t know what I’m saying.” He stared out the windshield at the imposing brick walls of the church. “I saw it tonight. I saw what I had built here. It’s a house built on sand—a well-constructed, highly programmed youth ministry that’s just a spiritual catastrophe waiting to happen.

“There they were, sitting in front of me, a bunch of teenagers spoiled by the games, by the programming, by the entertainment, by *me*. Most of them are just going through the motions until graduation. They can’t wait to get to college where they will pick up their four-year ‘get out of jail free’ card when it comes to morality. You know that as well as I do. How many stay with it? How many even call themselves Christians after a year or two in college? Twenty percent? Ten percent?”

“We don’t really know, Ty.”

“Maybe not. But we both know there’s something missing here.”

Christina was backed up against the passenger door, turned completely

toward Ty. Their 1997 Honda Accord still sat in the quiet church parking lot. They knew the youth group would be playing games inside for another half hour.

Ty continued, “You know? As I was doing the worst talk of my life, I couldn’t help but think of the movie *Frankenstein*. The mad scientist labors to put together a man, creating from dead parts a living being, and when he finally succeeds, it turns into a dangerous monster. That’s me. The mad scientist. The youth group is the monster. We’ve thrown together music and entertainment and games and a few Bible verses, and we’ve assembled the most self-centered kids in the world. Would you call any one of them ‘on fire for God?’”

“Stephen. Maybe Rachel. Natalie, on her good days.”

“Yeah, a few,” Ty muttered. “But so many aren’t.” He pounded the steering wheel in frustration and the horn sounded. The surprise sparked a laugh from both of them.

“Maybe we’d better get home,” Christina suggested.

They drove halfway home in silence. Then, in a thoughtful, slow-paced monotone, Ty began to dig deeper.

“It’s my fault, ultimately. My fault for not leading them spiritually, my fault for not standing up to the elders, my fault for failing to follow Scripture. I love every one of those teens, no matter how spoiled they are, but I haven’t loved them enough to lead them to spiritual growth. My failure was that I loved the applause of protective parents more than the applause of God.

“You know the intentions we had when we started. We had dreams to build strong, young Christians, a generation of committed disciples. It turned out to be real easy to let those dreams go. I can’t do this. I really thought I could do youth ministry, but obviously I can’t.”

More silence. Just the engine’s hum and the ping of the blinker as they turned onto their street.

“Anywhere?” Christina asked.

“No. I’m done with youth ministry for good.”

Ty and Christina decided to pray about it one more day before he finished the resignation letter and turned it in. Maybe there would be some reprieve, some ray of hope. The next evening Ty’s cell phone rang. It was Christina’s dad.

“I think I told you last Christmas about a new division we’re opening at Netfast. We’re at the hiring stage now and we need some good, dependable people. You could start out as a sales rep, learn the business, and work your way up.”

Netfast was a computer software company that had seen explosive growth in the previous five years. Christina’s dad, Phil, had bought the company years ago and guided it through a successful expansion. He had never quite connected with Ty, who always suspected that Phil wanted more financial security for his daughter.

“Nowadays most of our clientele are all 30 years younger than I am,” boomed the voice on the phone. “To be honest with you, I need the insights and perspective of some new, younger blood. We need some people in here who know how to talk with your generation. I’ve been looking all day at these expansion plans and I keep thinking of you. Now I know you’re committed to the church job, but I’m just wondering—”

“Have you been talking to Christina?”

“Not lately. A week and a half ago, maybe.”

“She didn’t ask you to hire me?”

There was some kind of interference on the line, something that sounded like a sneeze or a cough or a minor explosion. Then Ty heard his father-in-law’s voice. “Not for about three years, Tyler. You might recall back then I was trying to get you on board over here, but she told me to lay off. In no uncertain terms, I might add.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“And she’ll probably be pretty steamed about this call too, but like I say, I couldn’t get you out of my head all day. I thought I’d give it a shot. Any chance you’re ready to join the business world?”

Ty listened to the offer and promised to give an answer at the end of the next week. The pay was incredible, and the timing was perfect, especially with the baby coming. Maybe this was the final answer Ty had prayed for. The next morning he reloaded the resignation letter and finished it.

Pastor John, I want you to know that my problem is not with you, with Central, or with the teens. It's with me. I don't know how to build a youth ministry that makes a real difference, a deep and lasting transformation. Whatever "it" is, they didn't teach it to me in college. And frankly I'm tired of faking it—pretending I'm a success when I know deep down that all my efforts over these last three and a half years have actually yielded very little of truly lasting value.

I have not shared this decision with anyone else at this point and am committed to making the transition a smooth one. As a matter of fact, I would love to keep going to Central and maybe be involved as a volunteer in the youth ministry that I have grown to love, but only as a mentor or helper. But if you want me to move on right away, I totally understand. I guess it could be weird for whomever you hire to take my place otherwise.

Thanks again for the privilege of serving with you over the last few years. My prayer is that God will provide a youth leader who will find the balance that I cannot.

*In His Service (wherever that may take me),
Tyler Cooper*

With a last look at the screen and a huge sigh, Ty clicked the Print icon and strode to the copy room where the printer spewed out the pages

smoothly. It was Friday morning, a free day for most of the church staff. And that's how Ty felt—free, strangely free. Free of the charade of being a happy, successful youth pastor now that he realized he'd been little more than the church's recreation director for teens.

Back at his desk he glanced up at the wide activities calendar on the wall. The squares were almost all filled with Ty's block lettering—meetings, activities, birthdays, and so on. It suddenly occurred to him that the calendar didn't matter much anymore. It had charted his life course for three and a half years, but now it was just a collection of hieroglyphics.

Noticing even more weekend activities for the church than usual, Ty decided to wait until Monday to hand in his resignation. He didn't want to distract Pastor John. He would deliver it personally on Monday morning.

The square for Monday had a note about the monthly network meeting for youth leaders in the area. He had bothered to attend only one of these functions in the last few months when the network had brought in Josh McDowell as a guest speaker. While he had enjoyed Josh's talk immensely, Ty wasn't much for typical network meetings. They seemed a lot like bodybuilder gatherings, everyone flexing their youth ministry muscles, bragging about attendance and growth under the guise of "sharing what God is doing in my church."

But Ty had a few friends who attended those meetings. It might be good to reconnect with them, he thought. Besides, it never hurts to network. Despite his offer to stay at Central as a volunteer, he doubted that Pastor John (or the next youth minister) would want that, so maybe he could scout out a new youth program in the area to volunteer with.

Ty bent over to sign the letter, then carefully folded it and slid it into a Central Church envelope. He had a plan. Drop the bombshell on Monday morning and escape the fallout by going to the network meeting in the afternoon.

It almost worked out that way.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: A WORD ABOUT MUTINY

This book is designed to be catalytic, thought-provoking, and practical. Although it uses the idea of mutiny as a hook, it is in no way designed to be negative against any one person or program. What it primarily rails against is the unspoken philosophy of an entertainment-driven, babysitting model that has been delivered, perhaps unknowingly, from past generations. I don't know anybody who consciously advocates a babysitting model of youth ministry, but the nature of the way most youth ministries are carried out almost always leads to it. It is also in no way designed to give youth leaders a license to be disrespectful of those God has placed in authority over them in ministry. Each of these ministry mutiny principles should be implemented with love, prayer, and sensitivity.

Ultimately my desire in writing this book is to offer a positive and transformational rebuilding after the rebellion. These principles can be applied to any youth ministry in any demographic. Any youth leader, young or old, experienced or new, relational or visionary, can put them into practice. My prayer is that all kinds of youth leaders will take these principles and find ways of putting them into practice, even better ways than I have suggested via the characters in this book.

If you would like to comment on these ministry mutiny principles or share your own insights visit gregstier.org. Select Ministry Mutiny from the webpage sidebar options to share your comments.

Again, this list of ministry mutiny principles is by no means exhaustive. To suggest a final list would seem arrogant to me. These are simply principles

that God has been re-vealing to me over the course of the last two decades of my life, initially as a junior-high youth intern at Community Baptist Church, secondly as a church planter and preaching pastor at Grace Church, and finally as president of Dare 2 Share Ministries. I am actively seeking to learn more of these ministry mutiny principles as I listen for His whisper every day in the pages of His Book and the chambers of my heart.

My prayer is that this book has been a blessing to you as you seek to glorify Him through your youth ministry.

—GREG STIER

APPENDIX: HELPFUL RESOURCES AND IDEAS TO START LIVING THE MINISTRY MUTINY PRINCIPLES

Ministry Mutiny Principle #1

Listen for God's Whisper

Get an easy-to-read translation of Scripture. Discover your own “cave” to hear God’s whisper every day.

Have your normal devotional times and ask God questions like, “How does this passage of Scripture apply to my specific circumstances in life and ministry today? What is God whispering to me through this text?” Search the Scriptures for more insights. Reflect, pray, write, and listen.

Be willing to take extensive times of prayer, reflection, study, and listening as needed (especially when confronted with big and confusing challenges, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane).

Ministry Mutiny Principle #2

Get Real

Take a spiritual maturity inventory of your teenagers. Meet with each of them one-on-one or with another trusted adult sponsor and ask them the following questions:

On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your spiritual passion for God?

If I were to ask you how a person gets to heaven, what would you say?

If I were to ask you how a Christian grows spiritually, what would you say?

How do you think you are doing in your spiritual walk with Christ and why?

Which of the following four words describes your spiritual condition right now: rebellious, apathetic, interested, or passionate? Why does that describe you?

Are you willing to take the steps to get to the next level of spiritual growth and development? What do you think those steps will be?

Can we take a few minutes right now to develop a spiritual growth plan?

Work with teenagers individually to develop a spiritual growth plan that will help them grow deeper in their walk with Christ. Use the graph on page 105 of the Grow Deep section to develop that plan. Do an annual or bi-annual evaluation of their spiritual progress and continue to coach them along the way.

Ministry Mutiny Principle #3 **Go Wide**

Go to www.dare2share.org for the following resources:

Culture Commission: A weekly article for teenagers that deals with something culturally “hot” (a new movie, band, Web site, game, sport, phenomenon, etc.) and uses that subject as a conversation starter to share the gospel. You can download this article weekly and pass it out to your youth group to help them start going wide with the gospel.

Free resources to launch your own e-team (a team of students who lead the way for outreach on a youth group level).

The GOSPEL Journey Adventure Kit: A cutting-edge, eight-part DVD training series takes seven very different teenagers (a Cajun Wiccan, an athlete-atheist, an agnostic ex-Jehovah’s Witness, an unsure black girl from the city, a Hispanic Episcopalian, a minister’s kid, and a suburban Presbyterian) to the rugged Rocky Mountains of Colorado for the adventure of a lifetime. Over the course of six days these teens experience several extreme adventures as well as a journey through the story of the Bible as it unfolds from

Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. The result is a powerful training series that equips Christian teenagers to share the whole story of the gospel with their friends who don't know Jesus.

Ministry Mutiny Principle #4 **Grow Deep**

Go to www.dare2share.org for the following resources:

Review the list of 30 core truths (in question form) that teens should know, live, and own by the time they graduate from high school.

Use these 30 questions to annually test your teenagers in their basic mastery of these core truths (verbally or in an essay form).

Sign your teens up for Soul Fuel, a free weekly e-mail that trains them in one of these 30 core truths in a holistic and relevant way.

Go back to www.dare2share.org weekly to access the FREE youth group curriculum that builds on the current issue of Soul Fuel.

Ministry Mutiny Principle #5 **No More Outsourcing!**

Have the parents of the teens in your youth group and your pastor read *Ministry Mutiny* to help convince them of the need to stop outsourcing.

Meet with your pastor to ask if he or she would be willing to help you set the expectations by encouraging this approach (parental involvement with their teenagers' spiritual development) from the pulpit.

Encourage and equip parents through regular meetings, newsletters, e-mails, etc.

Develop discussion questions from your weekly talks for parents to use with their teenagers.

Encourage parents to go to www.dare2share.org and sign up for the FREE Soul Fuel Parent Guide. This will encourage parents by providing 3-6 interactive questions for them to discuss with their teens weekly.

Recruit the most passionate, godly adult sponsors you can find to invest in the lives of the teenagers who don't have godly parents willing to invest in them.

Ministry Mutiny Principle #6

Build on Values, Not Fads

Choose to build all your efforts around the five purposes/principles/values mentioned in Acts 2:42-47.

Read *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* if you haven't already. If you have, reread it with fresh eyes.

Do a value analysis of your youth ministry with your staff. Rate each of the five purposes or ministry values on a scale of 1 to 10: worship, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and evangelism.

Build a student ministry team for each of these five values and emphasize ongoing training.

NOTES

1. Gary Railsback, "An Investigation of the Faith Commitment of Evangelical College Students at Secular and Evangelical Colleges," unpublished, p. 23.
2. Nancy Jeffrey, Jennifer Frey, Leslie Goldman, Melanie Kaplan, Darla Atlas, and Vickie Bane, "When Parents Outsource: Need to potty-train your kid? Bake class cupcakes? End thumb-sucking? These days there's a pro for every parenting task," *People*, August 1, 2005, p. 73.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Stier is the founder and president of Dare 2 Share Ministries (D2S). Over the last decade, Greg has impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of teenagers across the country through Dare 2 Share conferences. Dare 2 Share's vision is to equip 1,000,000 Christian teens across the nation to know, live, and share and own their faith in Jesus.

For more information on Dare 2 Share training conferences or how to start an e-team (a team of students who lead the way for outreach on a youth group level), go to www.dare2share.org. Look for the free resource Soul Fuel that will equip teens to grow deeper in their faith and sign up to receive it online.

Other Resources by Greg Stier:

- **Dare 2 Share** A field guide to sharing your faith with anyone, anytime, anywhere! A ready resource for teens to throw in their backpack and reference as they share their faith.
- **GOSPEL Journey Adventure Kit** Follow seven very different students on an unscripted Rocky Mountain adventure through the gospel in this reality DVD series. Designed to be used as an evangelism training tool for Christian teens and an evangelistic outreach tool for non-Christian teens, this journey unfolds with raw, real, and riveting discussions.
- **Outbreak: Creating a Contagious Youth Ministry Through Viral Evangelism** Discover how the power of the gospel can unleash a contagious epidemic to change, not only lives, but entire societies!
- **Battle Zone** Put on the indestructible armor and ready the powerful weapons provided by your Supreme Commander. Then step into battle!

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