

NFL Pro Bowler Derwin Gray Discusses Youth Ministry

How do you reach today's youth?

The answer is actually quite simple, according to Derwin Gray, a two-time NFL Pro Bowl selection and current pastor of Transformation Church, just south of Charlotte, N.C.

And it has nothing to do with a list of do's and don'ts.

"Teenagers are looking for a consistent example of what it means to live an adventurous life with Christ, when it really matters, day-to-day," said Gray, who recently visited the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association headquarters to film a video for 's couch session series.

The father of two boys, ages 15 and 11, Gray has a little experience on the matter. And the best advice he could give a parent or church leader in how to reach the youth: Start from within.

"There's a tendency for Christian parents to hide them from the world," he said. "I'm more concerned about what's in my kids' heart."

Reaching the heart of a young person is a topic that will be on the hearts and minds of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association as five evangelistic outreach events in three countries will be geared specifically at the youth of today.

It started with Rock the Lakes in Rochester, N.Y., on June 16-17, and continues in Green Bay, Wis., on Aug. 18-19 and Buffalo, N.Y., on Sept. 22-23.

The effort to reach the youth went overseas with nearly 20,000 hearing the gospel at the Baltic Youth Festival in Riga, Latvia, on June 9, and will go north of the border, with Rock

the River Ottawa, Sept. 29-30.

Each event will be slammed with high-energy musical artists but in between will feature the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ, delivered by Franklin Graham.

Still, the question remains: How do you reach a student's heart?

It starts in the home, according to the no-nonsense Gray. And it's all about love.

"The bottom line is when you teach a morality-based spirituality, it turns into a list of do's and don'ts," said the former Indianapolis Colts and Carolina Panthers defensive back. "But when you teach a gospel-based spirituality, your kids fall in love with Jesus.

"And when you fall in love with Jesus, that empowers your heart."

This also makes the job of being a **Christ-like** parent even tougher.

"They're tired of us adults playing religion," Gray said.

Gray realizes reaching youth is a huge challenge and has spent a significant amount of energy trying to break through to this demographic at Transformation Church, the second fastest-growing church by percentage in the United States, now over 2,000 in weekly attendance in just over two years of existence.

Two of the 20-plus staff members are teenagers, said Gray, whose church's vision is both multi-ethnic and multi-generational.

"We're not going to underestimate what God can do through teenagers," he said.

Biblically, Gray points out, teenagers played a big part throughout Scripture. There was Virgin Mary, whom most scholars estimate was 14 or 15 when she gave birth to Jesus. David was 16 or 17 when he slayed Goliath.

Two of Jesus' disciples—John and James—were also both teenagers.

"Throughout history, God has used teenagers to do epic things," Gray said. "They're not the church of tomorrow. They're the church of today."

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