

Youth Ministries 'Get Real'

You've read the reports about teenagers leaving the faith in droves.

Despite the blood, sweat and tears of many youth pastors, a study from Britt Beemer, a former senior research analyst for the Heritage Foundation, reveals a disturbing trend: as many as two-thirds of young people in evangelical churches will leave when they enter their 20s.

These and other studies sounded an alarm in the Body of Christ—and a new breed of youth ministries is rising to the occasion to stop the enemy from stealing, killing and destroying not only church kids but also unchurched kids in need of a Savior.

Randal Lee is among those setting out to ignite a passion for Jesus in American youth. The 20-year-old minister has been on the "Stand Up and Stand Out" tour with solo artist Leah Faith since January. Lee is known for using visuals—like a Pizza Hut delivery car light or a can of Coke—to get Christians thinking about what they are proclaiming to the world with their lifestyle.

"My vision is to encourage other teens to be world changers in their communities and wherever they go in life to always be a light for Christ in this darkened world," says Lee, who first sensed a call into ministry at age 12. "It's OK to be excited about God. It's OK to be different. It's OK to be all that God has called you to be."

While Lee is preaching the Gospel on tour, Ron Hutchcraft Ministries is taking a different tack. Hutchcraft uses comedic shorts and video blogs to connect with young adults, and reports bringing 11,000 youth from 48 countries to Christ through the multimedia effort.

Hutchcraft's latest effort is "The Doug and Jon Show," a web site that offers teens a place to laugh, connect, share and go deeper. The site features light-hearted, quirky videos and cartoon shorts based on the latest pop-culture trends, as well as a "Life Video Blog" section that touches on serious issues young people face, like popularity, loneliness, bullying and sex.

"It is amazing at how young an age people can throw their lives away. These days they face so many heartbreaking problems tied in to family, school and peer expectations," says Doug Hutchcraft, site personality and co-founder of "The Doug and Jon Show." "Our goal with is to provide a refuge for them. A place where they can laugh and be entertained or discuss tough even choose to hear the hope only Jesus can offer."

The Doug and Jon Show aims to fill a void of "clean" teen-oriented comedy web sites. Visitors may not immediately recognize the Christian aspect as site personalities. Doug, Jon and Kara Taylor, who offers a female perspective, focus on connecting with teens in a real way, creating relationship and trust, before discussing Christ.

Once a relationship is established, the trio encourages teens to check out the "God" section of the site, under which each personality shares honestly about their Christian faith in a straightforward but "non-religious" sounding way, offering teens the opportunity to make a personal salvation decision.

Aiming at even younger youth, the Almighty Bible offers a multimedia book series that brings stories from the Bible to life in a way that aims to connect with media-driven youth. The project aims to make the Word of God more engaging and relevant to a "bored" generation.

That's potentially pivotal, considering the National Study of Youth and Religion shows that more than 77 percent of youth

associate themselves with one of the denominations of Christianity—yet 48 percent of those surveyed claim to never read scriptures alone. The Almighty Bible relies graphic novels and mobile apps to present Bible stories.

Dramatically illustrated layouts support a story edited from the original Bible text. In Exodus, for example, readers go on a journey with Moses. They witness God's selection of Moses, the devastation caused by the plagues, the Passover, and the crossing of the Red Sea.

"A lot of today's kids and teens resist reading the traditional Bible," says Kevin O'Donnell, the project's producer. "We've made the bible as engaging and entertaining as possible."