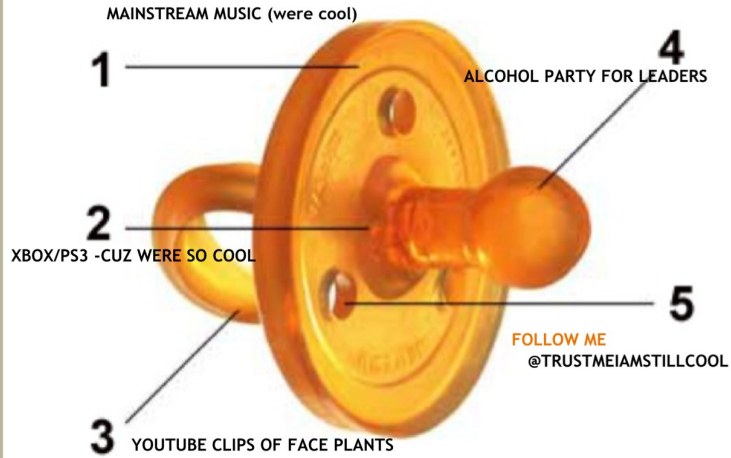


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**"Pacifier youth ministries"**

## "Pacifier youth ministries"

Before I'm put in a purest file, I'm not saying church youth group shouldn't be cool, matter of fact I believe the opposite! I like having games for the kids, like ps3/xbox, lights, concert sound etc. I travel around full time as a speaker/rap artists/DJ, and I know full well the advantage of making an event culturally relevant!

Unfortunately, I've seen something recently that just puzzles me. It use to be that cutting edge churches would try outside of the box methods, to carry the timeless message of the Gospel. No matter how *outside the box* it got, the Gospel was very clear, and discipleship highly valued! Somewhere that has seemed to switch. It's increasingly more and more about the packaging and less about message.

The other night I did my thing at a youth group for a bigger church. I sat after the service really taking inventory of what we [I] am doing with the youth for Christ. The kids walked in with mainstream music playing in the lobby, and left playing around in the parking lot like after any school function. I asked my bro, "What are we doing?" Not only did we seem to have zero impact on youth culture, sadly it was clear youth culture has a major influence on the church.

This is not an indictment against all youth groups there are many that are outstanding, & again, I'm not a purest! I

don't only listen to K-Love/TBN/ etc... I think there are times when its wise to incorporate youth culture to make your point relevant, but when just being relevant IS the point, we've all missed the point!

Look, I know that back in the day most ministry was so content focused, it really lacked effective presentation. You can make something overly content based to where its stuffy, lecture format and not well received. There has been great need for updating the presentation! But too often today it's all presentation, all hype, little to no content. In all my traveling I'm stumbling on a recurring principal, and it's about whats most important.

### **The why is often more important than the what!**

Usually in a healthy situation the *what* is birthed out of the *why*. I would love to get to the bottom of "why" certain youth pastors try to do "what" they do. Is it for a ministry purpose, or is it to fill an unmet need to feel cool and be validated? (even if just by the youth)

As an example, I was talking with a worship leader recently, who was troubled at having to learn a mainstream (dirty) song to open service. He said he was told just change the dirty words.

I started with the "why"? Is the hook of the song matching with the service message? Will the service message minister from some of the lyrics or backstory of the song? Is there

any way to connect the dots from the *what* we are trying to do and the *why* we have youth church to begin with?

The youth pastor had no why just "trust me, it will work" he said.

"it will work?" I asked. What does work mean?

Possible answer:

Work=kids will like it?

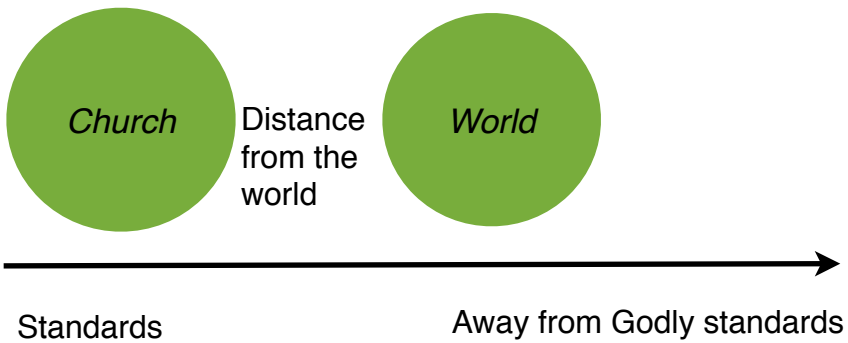
Look I'm all for serving the youth in love, and serving them in their language, and through their culture, but at some point, are we lifting the culture over the Christ in attempt to look and feel cool? That would be a codependent need for youth validation. If I as the youth pastor have a need for acceptance from the youth, how can I lead them? It's paramount that I am secure in my identity (not perfect) but secure so I can give that security to the youth. If not I replicate insecurity, and create a generation more concerned with fluff than foundation. In that case, I am no longer a Youth Leader, but a Youth Follower!

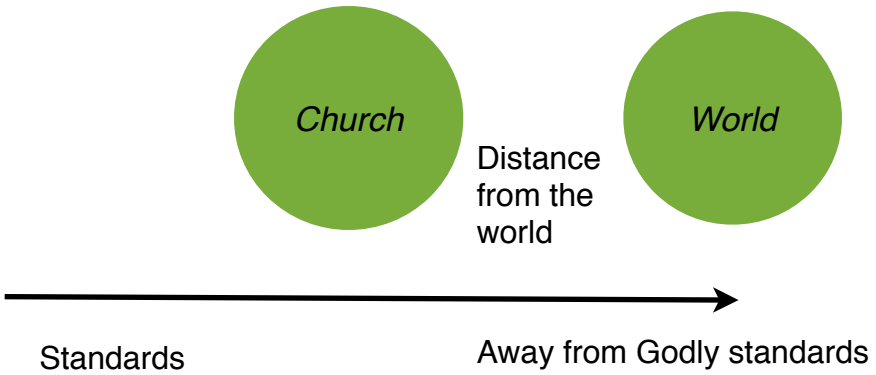
I had the honor to work under an old skooler in the faith named Ron Hutchcraft for many years... Ron was an establish national youth guy since before my time. He teaches for Billy Graham and even in his elderly age is one of the best youth speakers I know. He once shared with me

a concept that radically shook my belief system with how we do church. He makes the compelling illustration of how the church undergoes a negative cultural shift.

For decades the church has been defined by it's distance from the "world". By keeping one arms distance from the world we are firm in our standards, and separated from the worldly culture. Not separated from the people, but the cultural values. I can see how this separation between us and the "world" could have biblical origins, but unfortunately for church culture it causes us to justify ourselves in an "us vs them" mentality, instead of being justified by the Christ. We see ourselves justified by that one arms distance from the world. Theres several problems with this but the greatest importance here is how it affects our cultural standards.

5





See the lost world system is headed away from God, and Godly standards. By not being steadfast in our standards, we can become focused only on our distance from the world, as they move away from God we move right along with them keeping our one arm distance the whole way.

Today, the church embraces way more than it ever would have, thinking it's fine based on it's distance from the world, instead of being based in Godly standards.

The reason this bugs me is because I use to DJ in the *world*. I've worked in clubs, car shows, raves etc... When I became a Christian I sold out... I gave up rapping (watched our rap group go on to be in the source magazine, and do shows with 50cent/busta rhymes/etc...) Well, now I currently speak at national youth conference that aren't christian. Its normal when I DJ for them or a High School, the administrator will ask me to keep the music from cussing, but also, not play preachy stuff either... So no explicit, but

no Lecrae either. I have to dig deep for super squeaky clean versions of songs like black eyes peas, etc...

What saddens me is when I finally get to DJ for a christian event, (nywc/DCLA/larger church youth groups) there's some young leader encouraging me not to play Christian music. I look forward all year to the few events where I get to play and champion christian artists, & music with christian content. It's sad when I finally get to jam out to christian music and it's seen as so "uncool" by the leaders.

This brings up my point:

**I am so sick of these too cool for Sunday school leaders, that are more concerned with looking cool, than championing the Christ.**

To those leaders I ask, why not play current christian music and champion that to the people coming to your event? Is it too cheesy? I admit that it use to be, but even so, it's not now. Christian music has came so far, that it's no longer behind in style. Besides whatever happened to being a thermostat instead of a thermometer?

I miss church!

I know when a lost person goes to a building with church in the title they are not coming for black-eyed peas, or edited versions of LIL Wayne. They may think its cool on a surface level, but really, on a deeper spiritual level, they

already have that and they are coming for something they don't have yet.

I LOVE it when people to ask "who is this?" while Im DJing and Im able to say, "Lecrae/cam/Dre murray/family force 5/toby mac/KJ52 etc. We have such a platform to expose them to a music culture that without our lead, they would never know. We are so busy being seeker sensitive we overlook a great opportunity.

Christian Artists have the deck stacked against them. Not only are there few radio and video opportunities, the last best place to play them, refuses them & instead play music that the people hear already. I love it when unchurched youth come up to my turntables and add artists to their iPhone they never knew existed prior.

For the record, I don't have anything against mainstream music as a part of church culture. Matter of fact I've seen it be used quite affectively. Whats missing for me is balance, wisdom, and leadership thats clearly *FOR* the kingdom.

We need youth leaders that will LEAD youth, to affect their culture. We no longer need babysitters, that try to compete with MTV with coolness. Instead I desire leaders that rest in the coolness of God.

There are two types of people in the church. People *in* the kingdom, and people *for* the kingdom. People in the kingdom are great! We are excited for them, and everything



we do is to invite more. Somewhere it seems some in leadership have lead from an *in* the kingdom position, and that has caused an erosion I believe of Godly culture. A leader needs to be more than just “*in*” the kingdom. A leader needs to be “*for*” the kingdom.

It's like there was a shift to what I call a pretty peoples church mentality, and many with Godly convictions have been outed, for a cooler looser youth leader. I'd love to encourage all the youth leaders made to feel religious because they desired to honor the Lord. Its so weird how the pendulum can swing. It became so cheesy to speak christianese, that in the hallway at church people roll their eyes when you answer “blessed” to “a greeting of, “how are you?” Meanwhile, at the counter at best buy, the person working the register, stops in her tracks, and asks, “did you say blessed ...wow i needed to hear that today!”

There use to be a saying about church folk, My Grandma use to say, “You can be so spiritually minded that you're no earthly good.” Today we are in danger of the opposite. Are we so earthly minded (self minded) that I sat in the parking lot after that youth event wondering if we are still doing a spiritual good?

Its time for a healthy balance. Spiritually minded, to do good in the earth. It's funny, the Bible talks in places about spiritual consumption like eating meat vs milk. Well, if we end up being a pacifier we end up providing neither. | onemarcus