

FIRST PERSON: New school year, same mission

By Shane Pruitt

DALLAS (BP) – For many students and ministries, the start of a new school year feels the same as New Year’s resolutions for many adults. Most students see returning to school as offering more new opportunities and better chances to start over compared to the beginning of a new calendar year.

As leaders, we tend to feel the pressure of overthinking what we will do differently in our ministries each school year. We want to be innovative, creative, and think outside the box or even crash the box to build a whole new one.

However, I’ve found that after being in ministry for over 20 years, if it’s never been done before, there is probably a reason. Now, don’t get me wrong. Be creative, innovative and think outside the box, but don’t feel pressured to overthink it so much that you forget the basics of what has been true for 2,000 years.

Here are some strategies that have been solid and reliable for a very long time and remain trustworthy today for a new school year:

Be led by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26, CSB). This a good reminder that if you have been bought by the blood of Jesus and have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you, then rest assured that the Spirit inside of you desires to reach young people even more than you do. No matter how long you’ve been in ministry, the Holy Spirit knows how to disciple

students more effectively than you do. So, trust Him. Be led by Him.

Even more than seeking to be a numerically growing ministry this school year, seek to be a Spirit-led ministry. If you desire to be Spirit-led, everything else will fall into place. Leonard Ravenhill said, "Gifts and talents can build a crowd, but only the Holy Spirit can build the church."

Preach the Bible.

If you want to be a relevant ministry this school year, then preach the Bible. The Word of God is always relevant. The writer of Hebrews said, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, CSB).

Notice that every descriptor word he uses to describe the Bible uses present tense language: living, effective, sharper, and penetrating are all given in present tense. It's not past tense because the Bible is not an old book; it's an eternal Book. It's not a history book; it's a living Book. If you want to be a relevant ministry this school year, stick to the Book!

Share the Gospel.

Often, people will be open to the Gospel during changes in their lives. There is something about entering a new grade, going from middle school to high school, and going from high school to college that causes people to desire community, stability, and support. Students going through ever-changing seasons of life desperately need a never-changing God that provides eternal life.

Plus, we should enter this school year encouraged by the truth that the same Gospel that has saved young people for 2,000 years still works today. Students are looking for hope,

answers, and truth, especially in today's world with many cultural shifts. Ultimately, whether they realize it or not, we, the church, know they are looking for someone. Hope has a name, the answer has a name, truth has a name, and that name is Jesus! Share that good news, and train students to share that good news.

Stay on Mission.

The last great promise and call that Jesus gave His disciples before ascending to Heaven was, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, CSB). The Spirit in us will empower and propel us to stay on mission by being His witnesses. The primary purpose of our ministries is to know Jesus and to make Jesus known. God's Plan A of getting the Gospel onto school campuses and into the ears of students is the church, and there is no backup plan. That's the plan. The Spirit empowers the church to take the Gospel to "their Jerusalem" and beyond.

So, if we want to approach things differently this school year, then let's return to the basics of what has always been true. What would it look like this school year if we were so laser-focused on the mission that we refused to be distracted or discouraged by ineffective busyness and unnecessary drama? What would this school year look like if we set goals for challenging students to have Gospel conversations? What would this school year look like if students were intentionally and regularly trained on how to articulate the Gospel? What would this school year look like if we equipped the saints for ministry work according to Ephesians 4:12? What would this school year look like if we discipled students to understand that they're not the church's future, but the church right now?

Wouldn't that make for an amazing school year for the glory of

our great God?

“It’s not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world.” – Christopher J. H. Wright

Find resources for you and your ministry at www.gensend.org.

Pruitt is executive director of next gen evangelism at the North American Mission Board.