

Steve Fitzhugh's commitment, dedication, and gifting to reach and impact the youth of today has been demonstrated over a number of years and makes him more than qualified to speak to how churches can reach today's youth. You will find his book *Pastor, We Need A Bigger Boat* engaging, enlightening, and empowering. If you want to make a difference in reaching youth, read this book!

Pastor John K. Jenkins, Sr.  
First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Maryland

I have had the privilege of witnessing Steve Fitzhugh's incredible ministry to youth for over 25 years. It is amazing to see how the Lord uses him to reach all kinds of students, no matter where or who they are. He is always relevant and extremely gifted and has proven insight on how to effectively serve America's youth.

Charles Whitaker, Senior Pastor  
River of Life Church, Marlow Heights, Maryland

Steve Fitzhugh is one of the finest, most gifted communicators in the country. It is an opinion I developed while witnessing him in action and seeing audience responses. He is hilarious, artful, and authentic – integrating his entire body to launch his thoughts and ideas. A national treasure. Even though I hate the “R” word, *Bigger Boat* is RELEVANT for local church leadership. Steve presents clear solutions that connect with youth. This is out-of-the-box thinking for every pastor serious about the church of tomorrow!

Joel A. Freeman, Ph.D.  
CEO/President, The Freeman Institute

If there is any one reality that all pastors are aware of it is that times and things are changing. How do we reach, enlist, and engage the next generation? Many have sought to answer that question, but most have fallen short. Into that wide area of need comes this book.

Steve Fitzhugh is not a theorist, he is a practitioner. When he writes, he does so with a pen sharpened on the anvil of experience. Fitzhugh knows his stuff. This book paints a picture and points the way for us, as pastors, to minister to this present age.

Timothy J. Clarke

Senior Pastor, First Church of God, Columbus, OH

# **PASTOR, We Need A Bigger Boat**

**A Paradigm Shift for Reaching Today's Youth**

**by: Steve Fitzhugh**



Copyright © 2014 by Steve Fitzhugh

ISBN: 978-0-9919839-9-5

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other, without prior written consent from the publisher.

Unless otherwise marked, Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

JAWS TM & © Universal Pictures (1975). References used pursuant to fair use doctrine of U.S. copyright laws.

Author photo by Robert Shanklin

Published by Touch Publishing  
Requests should be directed to:  
P.O. Box 180303  
Arlington, Texas 76096  
[www.TouchPublishingServices.com](http://www.TouchPublishingServices.com)

To schedule Steve Fitzhugh to bring a high-energy, engaging, passionate message to your next youth event, contact him through his website: [www.PowerMoves.org](http://www.PowerMoves.org)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014939224

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

## In dedication to Reverend Ronald J. Fowler

With eternal thanks, Brother Ron, for introducing me to Jesus Christ and training me to become a lifelong disciple. You modeled integrity in ministry, compassion for the lost, and you fanned the flame of passion for Christ within my young teenage heart. You accepted and encouraged my unique approach to ministry and gave me the confidence to always be myself. I, along with so many others, am bountifully grateful for your tremendous influence upon my life. I am humbly aware that the fruit I produce began long ago in the garden of a young heart, where you first planted good seed.



# Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - The Closest to the Water	15
Chapter 2 - Terror in Amity	25
Chapter 3 - Why the Youth?	35
Chapter 4 - The Journey Begins	47
Chapter 5 - Shady Strategy	59
Chapter 6 - The Super Hero	73
Chapter 7 - Hooper Brings the Edge	87
Chapter 8 - As Goes the Head, So Goes the Body	99
Chapter 9 - Who's on Watch?	115
Chapter 10 - The End-ing	121
About the Author	135
Also by Steve Fitzhugh	136







# Introduction

The greatest challenge facing Christian churches today is the task of successfully engaging, educating, and evangelizing the next generation. In church-speak this group is called “the youth.” I believe with all my heart that the benchmark of relevance for any church is its ability to attract, disciple, and send forth youth infused with purpose to be kingdom citizens; men and women equipped and ready to be ambassadors for Jesus.

It’s fair to say that if your church is anemic in this area, then you have a problem. You might not be fully cognizant of the magnitude of this problem at the moment, but ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now it will be glaringly obvious. The hopes and dreams of our future are predicated on our success in this one vital

area. The safety and security of our children and grandchildren and the sustained viability of our schools and communities also depend on those who have godly influence on the mindset and heart of today's youth.

Ironically, most leaders would agree with such a premise. However, agreement and action are two separate realities. Pastors are quick to articulate a commitment to reach the youth and they subsequently welcome the applause of such convictions. The youth hear these promises declared, but too often are disappointed when they don't come to pass. The last thing today's youth need is the disappointment of empty promises. The question we must ask is whether or not the "talk" will ever match the "walk" in these declarations. Until Bible leather turns into shoe leather, words and wishes are unwelcome by our young people. One might think that with such broad consensus of necessary and needed focus on the youth that churches and their leaders would demonstrate their commitment with follow-through.

One tangible vehicle in which this commitment could be reflected is in the youth ministry line item of a church's annual budget. Another is the extent to which the designated finances invested in youth-specific paid staff are protected. Are these finances viewed as an *expectation* rather than an *expendable extra*? With youth at the fulcrum of the success and failure of our faith communities, and considering the priority of youth in God's global economy, it could be supposed that church leadership would be quick to explore

beyond the limits of the norm and think creatively what it will take to accomplish its goals pertaining to the outreach, programming, and discipleship of our youth.

Tragically this is not the case. Typically, too many churches treat the youth program as a modest option for investment. And when compared to the church's overall budgeting dollars, the youth line item is nominal at best, if it is even a consideration at all.

Ray Lewis, one time perennial All-Pro linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens of the National Football League, found himself in crisis before his career ever really took off. It was while facing two first-degree murder charges, sitting alone in a jail cell, indicted, that for the first time ever he heard a whisper in his ear that changed his life forever: "Can you hear me now?"

He's been listening to that voice and doing what it asks of him ever since. The Church is in crisis! To each of us God is saying, "Can you hear me now?"

Are we listening?

Students are on a rampage, bullying defenseless classmates. Teen violence is perpetrated against defenseless victims, like the elderly and the homeless. Drug abusers, alcohol users, rape and murder victims are masked in youthful faces. Instead of preparing for bright futures, they find themselves casualties of their own bad decisions. Parents are at the end of their rope, uncertain of how to engage their distant teenager and, in some cases, even afraid to confront inappropriate behavior. It is no wonder teachers in the schools can't get students to be respectful and obedient, teens

disrespect and disobey their own parents at home!

Crisis!

Television, the music industry, and music videos all saturate our youth with compromising thoughts and actions. Hostile and aggressive video games dominate the time and attention of our youngest children. Their young minds are desensitized to the unfathomable. They accept that which they should abhor.

Crisis!

Social media allows students to exist in an unmonitored virtual reality where they experiment with taboo thoughts and topics. Through the World Wide Web students are just a few mouse clicks away from unfettered access to a world of pornographic addiction. Graduation rates are declining.

Crisis!

Teen abortion is on the rise. Teen parenting is a norm. Every two hours and sixteen minutes a teenager commits suicide in America. For every successful suicide, there are dozens of failed attempts. Families fractured by that one reprobate, rogue sibling find it difficult to even answer the phone not knowing whether or not the voice on the other end is going to report tragedy or devastation.

Crisis!

Teens are unequipped to handle the stress in their lives and cut themselves, searching for relief. They self-medicate with harmful temporary solutions including, but not limited to, prescription pills, drunkenness, and promiscuity.

Crisis!

We have been forewarned that the last days would bring unprecedented evil. In the New Testament, Paul exhorts his spiritual son Timothy by saying,

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

*(2 Timothy 3:1-5)*

Paul warned us that it would be bad, but who could imagine the callousness, hardness, commitment to self-gratifying lusts, and bold rebellion which we witness among America's youth today? Unattended, it's destined to worsen. Our students have become victims of church leadership who are ill-equipped to lead. Our students are sheep who need a shepherd that speaks their language and identifies with their culture, their needs, and their world. If we who are responsible for them do not take heed and make provisions, their fate is sealed—sadly they will become the victims of adult dysfunction.

Many parents are oblivious to the secret risky exploits practiced by a son or daughter living under the

same roof and sitting night by night at the same dinner table. They think all is well. But all is not well. We are in crisis!

Too many leaders have their heads in the sand and proceed with their personal agendas, thinking a band-aid is a sufficient remedy for this generation already living in catastrophe. In light of this war against our children, how has the church responded? The institution which throughout time has been the great equalizer, the Church, suffers from a frightful disconnect with today's youth in today's culture. The worldly competition for the time and attention of our students is so intense that most church-based approaches to reach and teach our youth are simply irrelevant, antiquated, and, in many cases, laughable. And when outdated efforts are offered in a feeble attempt to connect, they fail miserably. A student stained by an inappropriate encounter with an impotent, lame youth ministry will probably never return.

Most church events commonly include music as a quintessential element of the program. This is especially true with youth. I recently attended a youth function where the best music the church could offer was played in the fellowship hall on a boom box with a microphone positioned in front of it. Believe it or not, the music player only played cassette tapes! CASSETTE TAPES! Next to the boom box was a case of dated cassettes. Now in fairness, it may have been the case that the boom box was the best that they could do.

However, a quick inventory of other church expenditures proved such a presupposition false. Few pastors are willing to push the envelope to finance a youth pastor and commit to an unwavering youth ministry budget.

My response begins with Scripture: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.” (2 Corinthians 4:8)

There is an answer, there is a solution to even the greatest challenge. Our divine architect has available through His word every resource needed to break the mold, change the game, rescue our youth, and help build up kingdom-minded, spiritually grounded young ambassadors for change. I know this because it is in God’s word. God said it and I believe it. And is there anything more powerful than the word of God? No. I tell you again, there is nothing more powerful than the word of God! I have always believed that, but is it scripturally the case?

*Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother and anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you **nullify** (emphasis mine) the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied*

*about you:*

*“These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.  
They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules.”*

*(Matthew 15:3-9)*

What does nullify mean? According to Merriam-Webster, nullify is defined as “to make something legally null; to cause something to lose its value or have no effect.”

What stronghold is retarding the advance and nullifying the word of God in the lives of youth and ministry to youth? Tradition! Some churches are so anchored to protocol and tradition they are unwilling to budge. I have witnessed it firsthand.

Standing in the pulpit one Friday night for a “Youth Explosion” I noticed most of the teens sitting in the very back of the sanctuary. The deacons, clad in their black suits, filled the first two rows. Before I began my youth presentation I asked if the deacons would allow the teens to populate the first two rows. After all, it was their event. The teens had raised the money to cover all of the expenses of the event to expose their peers to a youth-specific ministry style bringing a relevant word from God.

The deacons absolutely refused to move. They laughed at me and looked at me as if I had lost my mind. The students even stood, eagerly anticipating



coming to the front. I could tell they felt special because they were singled out to come to a prominent place in the church. The deacons would not budge. In my mind's eye, it was as if tradition had chained these deacons to the front pew and ego had thrown away the key.

After some awkward pleading and encouragement from the new pastor, the deacons relented, to which the rest of the congregation applauded. It was not a cheerful relenting; they begrudgingly gave up their coveted, traditional seating arrangement. The youth left the back of the church on their special night, and filled up the front of their church. The looks on their faces were priceless.

It is standard practice to offer evaluations or some thought-out vehicle for feedback at the conclusion of special events, programs, or conferences. Annual evaluations are even done for routine tasks to allow opportunity for improvement moving forward. After all, only that which is measured can be improved. Evaluation is a proven way to determine what works and what doesn't, or what is effective and what is not. Let me ask, when was the last time you invited your congregation to evaluate or comment on your youth program? Unfortunately, within our churches, formal evaluation seems to be the most underutilized tool for growth and health. When done properly and taken seriously, evaluation can lead to strengthening performance and production. Outreaches, strategies, and programs seem to be birthed all the time, but

rarely receive the kind of annual critical evaluation needed to confirm continuation, make adjustments or identify the need for elimination.

Joe Gibbs, former head coach of the Washington Redskins, experienced Super Bowl success. He was noted for not only building championship teams, but championship men. One key element of his success was his willingness to make halftime adjustments to his game-day strategy. How have you adjusted your strategy to save your youth? That isn't to say that God has not imparted anointed initiatives for a certain time, for a certain place, and for a certain people! But is God so limited that he must use the same paradigm to reach the lost for every time, every place and every people? I would say not!

Times change, people change, norms change, and culture changes. The truths of God never change, but how we present the truth may need to change so the truth can be heard.

Why then do churches embrace the same exhausted approaches to outreach—and specifically youth ministry—that were used thirty years ago? Ten years ago? Five years ago? Because of tradition! Tradition is comfortable, safe, and proven. Initially the paradigm was successful. It produced fruit. It was done again and again for years with the same results. But when was the last time you audited those efforts? Is it producing the same fruit today? When have you last examined your approach, or evaluated what you've come to accept simply as, “the way we do things here at

this church”? Certainly there has been cultural change in the last thirty years that would demand we reexamine our approach to ministry through the filter of contemporary culture? Could it be that the reason youth work at your church is on life-support is because it is time for a change?

“Ah,” but you say, “it’s about Christ, not the culture.”

Jesus would beg to differ with you. As you already know, He leveraged culture in most of His efforts to communicate the truths of the kingdom. For instance, He lived in an agriculturally-based society, so He talked about farmers sowing seeds, vines, pruning, reaping, and harvesting.

When Jesus saw Peter and the other fishermen consumed within their trade, Jesus had to think to himself, “Hmm, I can use that.” He then called them to be “fishers of men.” He spoke of casting nets, launching into the deep, and fishing. These “plain sight” elements were consistent with the culture and his time.

To the woman at the well He talked about water; to the fishermen He talked about fishing for men. One of the most popular trades (of which he was also a part) was carpentry. The carpenters made wooden yokes. Custom yokes assured that oxen could work comfortably. So Jesus discussed how His yoke is easy and His burden light. Instead of leaning toward his own devices, it appears Jesus looked at the world around him and imagined how he could use the plain, the ordinary, and the commonplace of His time to expound

upon his message.

Should we not take His cue and assess our world to find relevant paradigms that capture the attention of today's youth and then use our imagination to employ them? Sadly, we do not. It has become easier and safer to trust tradition. Although the youth are touted as the church of tomorrow, today, when it counts most, they are a budgetary after-thought. Less than 1% of the average church's annual budget is allotted for the youth program (outside of salary). Only one of every twenty churches even has a paid youth staffer. In most churches, ministry to the youth is an unpaid proposition assigned to a quasi-interested volunteer, who happened to be standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Youth ministry suffers today and the outlook for tomorrow is bleak.

The challenge at this juncture is not necessarily to kindle the fire of passion for ministry to youth within the youth minister and the pastor. The fervor and intent to serve and minister to this audience certainly already exists. They both want to see the gospel spread and lives changed among the youth. It's all about perspectives. The pastor is typically consumed with the ministry of shepherding the flock and the business of ministry needed to sustain the church as an organization. The time and energy of the youth worker includes, but is not limited to, preaching, teaching, building relationships with the youth, hearing their problems, serving as their counselor, and visiting their world on school campuses. Consequently, the person

with the greatest sensitivity as to what it's going to take to reach the youth will be he or she who is closest to them.

I like to parallel the classic movie *JAWS* in my assessment of the condition of our churches and their commitment to the youth of this millennium because there is a “shark” terrorizing your students. In *JAWS* it was the person who was closest to the water who first saw the shark. I believe that youth ministers, who are the closest to the predators of our youth, are also the ones who can best assess what is needed to kill the shark. They are crying out for help. In *JAWS*, the man who first recognizes the enormity of the problem cries out, “We are going to need a bigger boat!”

Can you hear your own youth minister calling out? I bet you can. If the one who is in and around the water frequently says, “We need a bigger boat!” let's trust that voice. Let's get him a bigger boat. Let's help him develop a new paradigm.

For over thirty years, I've been close—in, under, and around the water of the youth of America. I've seen the dimensions of the shark that's terrorizing your students. I've devoted most of my adult life documenting snares set for our youth and rescuing our disadvantaged teens from complacency and delinquency; bringing them to new life, hope, and productivity. I've buried far too many good kids and have been forced to visit far too many students locked away in our penal systems. I have heard more heart-gripping stories than I care to recount of teenage

tragedy.

At my peak as an assembly speaker, I averaged over 150 middle and senior high campus visits a year as the national spokesman for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes One Way 2 Play Drug-Free Assembly Program. I've engaged over a million students in America. Hear me when I say that when it comes to the typical local church paradigm to reach youth: "Pastor, we need a bigger boat!"

We need local pastoral leadership with the courage to make a paradigm shift in their approach and execution of ministry to youth and community. Many existing youth ministry prototypes are irrelevant and devoid of impact and anointing. My hope is that at the end of this book you, too, will not only agree that we need a bigger boat—you'll commit to doing what it takes to get one.