



MINISTRY

HINDSIGHT

5 THINGS I WISH I KNEW WHEN I STARTED

*RUSSELL ST. BERNARD*



*Youth Ministry Hindsight: 5 Things I Wish I Knew When I Started*  
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And last, but not least, thank you to my bride Erica for being by my side consistently and thank you to our awesome daughter, Karis, for just being you. 😊

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in Brooklyn, New York to a single mother and loving family, Russell knew he wanted something different in his life. He moved to Maryland to attend Morgan State University, where he, before finding Christ, was a well-known party promoter. Now his mission and vision is to promote Jesus to everyone he meets.

Russell received his undergraduate degree in Business Administration from Morgan and his Master's of Divinity degree from Howard University. He was licensed and ordained in the AME Church under Dr. Jamal Bryant at the Empowerment Temple AME Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

While at the Empowerment Temple, Russell was blessed to serve as the Minister to Teens, where he led the teen service "Teen Temple," which allowed students to worship God in their own way through Step, Rap, Dance, Drama, and other styles of youth focused worship. Over 150 students attended each service.

Russell also served as the Pastor of Students and Young Professionals at The Fountain Ministries, in Florida. There he was able to create a new name, focus, and vision for the ministry. The H2 (HYDRO) ministry is focused on "being a relevant light" for students. While at the Fountain Ministries, Russell started several new ministries and improved/enhanced other ministries so that students became more involved in Church and more importantly more committed and connected to Christ. During Russell's time at The Fountain hundreds of students connected with the ministry and Jesus Christ.

Russell has been blessed to create a student curriculum (2009-2010) & adult curriculum (2010-2011) for The Urban Youth Workers Institute's National Youth Ministry Conference "Reload". In addition Russell was contacted by Outreach Magazine to be the "Youth Ministry Expert" for 2012, 2013, and 2014 and asked to rate the top youth ministry resources of the year. Outreach Magazine also highlighted Russell's Eleven 22 Youth Ministry with a feature profile in its 2012 issue of the 100 Fastest and Largest Growing Churches in America. Russell was also honored to be interviewed on TBN (Trinity Broadcast Network) as an expert in youth ministry.

Russell's desire is to assist churches and youth ministries in doing ministry more effectively, thereby providing students the opportunity to grow in every area of their lives. Russell is the founder of After The Music Stops LLC, which is a full-service youth ministry resource company with the goal of creating youth ministry resources and tools to assist leaders and parents as they serve their students. Current releases under After The Music Stops LLC can be found and purchased through the online bookstore. Titles currently include "Fresh, What is Love?, Devoted, The Proverbial Girl, After The Music Stops, and Wild Ones Wanted". Russell is currently the Director of Ministry Operations and Outreach for Reid Temple AME Church in Maryland. One of the ministries he created and provides leadership for is the Eleven 22 Youth Ministry, where students Learn their faith, Live their faith, and Lead with their faith. The Eleven 22 Youth Ministry has a student service on first Saturday Night's called "The Remix", where hundreds of students have received and committed their lives to Christ since the service began.

Russell is the proud husband of Erica St. Bernard and the proud father to Karis Olivia St. Bernard. They currently reside in Maryland.

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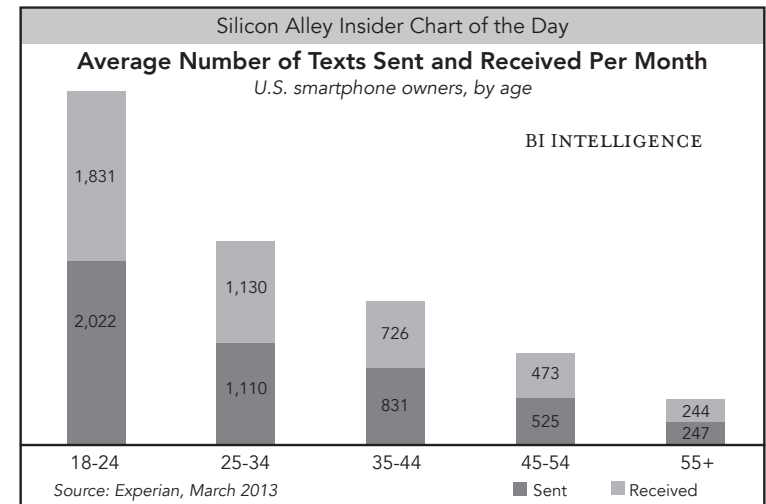
# INTRODUCTION

I have been serving in youth ministry for several years now and I pray that God sees fit to allow me to serve His students for many more years to come. As the years have gone, I have succeeded and failed in ministry. Some of the beliefs I had about how to serve students, as well as some of the ways that I used to do ministry have changed. Along with leading the students at our church, I also have the privilege to train, coach, and consult with youth ministry leaders locally and across the world who are new to the role or who want to grow their ministries and have experience in serving students. One of the questions that is consistently asked of me is: what have you learned from your time in youth ministry? This question can have many different answers as well as explanations. However, in this book I want to share the top 5 things I wish I knew when I started in youth ministry, given the hindsight I have now.

Now let's be clear: I understand that God allows us to learn as we go and grow. However, even though I am sure that with these lessons not being given to me in the beginning, and with me having to learn them, they have significantly shaped who I am and how I serve students. I am also clear that if someone can learn from the mistakes I have made or the lessons I have learned – without having to go through it, that person or those people will be able to do more faster and go farther as well. This is the reason for this book. I pray that these lessons help you and your team serve your students more effectively. Throughout the book, you will find statistics, and you will also hear from current and former

youth pastors about their youth ministry hindsight and its impact on their lives and the sustainability of their ministries.

Read it with an open mind for insight and for ideas on how to take the youth ministry that God has entrusted you with to the next level. Then use it as a development tool to share with your leaders so that they, too, can maximize their gifts in order to help your students be who God is calling them to be. Our role as youth pastors and youth leaders is to help develop spiritually mature Christians. Our students are at a very impressionable age where their attention is divided among so many things. According to this report done by Experian, students send and receive thousands of text messages alone throughout the month.



Ministry must be their main attraction and not simply a distraction. Working with youth is one of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences that you will ever have. It will grow you as a leader while you seek to help your students grow. Yes, there are some ups and downs in youth ministry, but the challenges can be met with compassion, concern and a genuine willingness to invest in their spiritual lives. So, let's get started.



## CHAPTER 1

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# BIGGER DOESN'T MEAN BETTER

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When I first got into youth ministry, I was drawn toward seeing what the “Big” church’s youth ministries were doing. I wanted my youth ministry to be like theirs. I thought that the only thing I needed to be successful in youth ministry was a crowd of students coming to my weekly or monthly student service or gathering. However, now I realize that size is not the most important thing. Don’t get me wrong - I believe and trust that God wants our youth ministries to grow and reach as many students and families as possible, but size is not the most important thing. The most important thing is effectively developing and training students to learn and then live their Christian faith in a REAL way. If we get caught up in the numbers of youth ministry we miss out on the “ministry” of youth ministry, which consists of meeting the needs of those that make up the numbers— they are

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*If we get caught up in the numbers of youth ministry we miss out on the “ministry” of youth ministry.*

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and should be the focus. We have to be willing and able to move past size and do ministry.

### Hearts Over Hundreds (Connecting Students to Christ)

When we do youth ministry, our focus should be on the heart of the students and not simply on the number of students. I believe that God wants all youth ministries to grow in size; however, it is also important for us to encourage the students to grow in their faith. So these simple questions have to be asked:

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*Move past size and do ministry.*

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1. When was the last time you connected with the heart of a student?
2. Where in your youth ministry are you being intentional to connect to the hearts of the students?
3. How are the leaders who serve with you connecting with the hearts of students in the ministry?

Each student has his or her “need” or reason for being in the youth ministry. We will talk about meeting this need later in the book. If we are going to be more focused on the students’ heart over the number of students in the ministry then there must be a process or some keys to doing so, right?

If you are going to focus on the hearts of the students, then the first important key is to be able to “**Hear**” them. Our students live in a society, where now more than ever, their voice is important and they can be heard in almost every environment. Think about it - from Twitter to Instagram, to Snapchat, to Periscope and other tools, our students can be heard 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. When was the last time you were intentional about getting feedback and just listening to the responses of your

students? Mainstream media does this on purpose at almost every event through live video conversations with students at home, to tweets that scroll during shows and more. However, mainstream media isn’t really concerned with the hearts of our students. They do understand that the more they “hear” from our students the more popular they (the media) will be and the more units, or whatever they are selling, will move. Now if we are going to allow our students to be heard in our ministry, then some of the areas of our ministry might have to change in order to make this happen. What do I mean? I am glad you asked. Hearing from students is not something you do once or twice throughout the year; rather it has to become a way of life for your ministry.

This means that you will have to examine every area of your ministry and see if there are clear places and spaces for your students to give feedback.



1. When was the last time you examined your ministry to see what was working and what was not working?
2. What goals have you set for your ministry to achieve this year?
3. While the message is going forth, is there someone on social media listening for the voice of the students?
4. Throughout the week is someone following and listening for the voice of your students and their friends online?

*These questions and others will help you as you try to connect with the hearts of your students.*

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Life is about living and learning from what you have done. In youth ministry the same can be said that we learn from our experiences. If we had certain things to do over again we would change something based on our current view or hindsight. This book shares real-life practical ministry experience of serving students and parents from urban and suburban communities, whether it's single-parent or two-parent homes. If your ministry has a budget or you have to raise the money, you'll find insight. I have been blessed to serve in success and in failure. My prayer is that this book will help you to learn from my mistakes and do better as you serve the students and families in your ministry. I've also included in-depth interviews from some of the top leaders in youth ministry: Pastor Tony Lee, Pastor Adam Durso, Pastor Sharee Johnson, Pastor Phil Johnson and Pastor Jerrod Gunter. Their hindsight will help take your youth ministry to the next level. Get ready to learn from the 5 things I wish I knew when I started.



Russell St. Bernard is the founder of After The Music Stops LLC, a full-service youth ministry resource company that creates youth ministry resources and tools to assist leaders and parents as they serve their students. Russell is currently the Director of Ministry Operations and Outreach at Reid Temple AME Church's North Campus in Maryland. He created and leads the Eleven 22 Youth Ministry, where students Learn their faith, Live their faith, and Lead with their Faith.

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