

# FRESH CALLING

ministry coaching and consulting

## Student Ministry is hard work – Don't let it steal your joy.

Description: This session will speak directly to the heart of youth pastors, offering encouraging insights on maintaining a healthy balance in ministry and pursuing personal holiness.

---

I love joy rides in my jeep! It's my escape. Country music blaring, doors off, top down, no map, no destination! It's sunny and 75 and not a care in the world. Joy! A smile on my face and a peace in my heart. I'm just present with no expectation. As I was writing this breakout, and thinking about these joyous jeep rides, I wondered why ministry doesn't feel this way! It seems more like a traffic jam with anxious people, honking horns and overheating cars. Where's the joy in the middle of all that?!

**"Ministry can rob you of your joy!"** You've heard this before. When we started in to this gig, we never thought it would be possible to lose the joy! But without warning and without any interference on your part, the joy seems to slide out the back door.

So, I have 6 scenarios I believe articulate how we get to the spot of a joy lost. We all fall into one of these traps... which one are you?

### 1. The "Burned Out Event Planner"

You spend months planning a weekend retreat. Every detail is covered: speakers, worship, transportation, even allergy-friendly snacks. But during the retreat, students are disengaged, some parents complain about the cost, and one adult volunteer criticizes the way things were run. **Result:** Instead of feeling encouraged, the youth pastor feels like a failure and wonders, *"Why do I even try this hard?"* The joy of creating meaningful experiences turns into resentment and exhaustion.

### 2. The "Invisible Shepherd"

You pour into a student for years—discipling them, walking them through family struggles, even helping them get their first job. Then that student suddenly stops coming, gets involved in destructive habits, and won't return texts.

**Result:** The youth pastor feels invisible and unappreciated. Doubts creep in: *"Did I really make a difference at all?"* Joy is replaced with disappointment and heartache.

### 3. The "Program Trap"

Each week becomes about making sure the service runs smoothly: slides, snacks, sermon, songs, schedule. There's little space for spiritual renewal or relational connection.

**Result:** Ministry becomes mechanical. The youth pastor begins to dread Wednesday nights and loses the spark that once fueled their passion. It's all performance and no presence.

### 4. The "Comparison Game"

You scroll Instagram and see another church's youth group with hundreds of students, LED lights, and mission trips to Europe. Meanwhile, you're struggling to get 15 students to show up to small group.

**Result:** Envy quietly erodes their contentment. Instead of celebrating what God is doing in their church, they start questioning if they're good enough. Joy shrivels under comparison.

## 5. The "Isolated Leader"

You feel like no one truly understands the pressures they carry—late-night crisis texts, balancing expectations from parents and pastors, and trying to have a personal life. You have no close ministry friendships and feel like they can't be honest about their struggles.

**Result:** Loneliness replaces joy. They begin to think, *"Maybe I'm just not called to this anymore."*

## 6. The "Spiritual Drought"

In the rush of preparing sermons, leading teams, and responding to crises, you stop spending personal time in the Word. Your relationship with Jesus becomes professional, not personal.

**Result:** Ministry becomes a job, not a calling. The joy of simply being with Jesus is lost in the grind of doing things *for* Jesus.

**Here's the point:** Joy doesn't leave all at once. It slowly leaks through fatigue, unmet expectations, lack of boundaries, and spiritual neglect. The good news? **Joy can be restored** — through rest, repentance, renewed vision, healthy rhythms, and deep connection with Christ and others.

Let's be clear, we are not chasing the emotion of joy. It is a joy that comes from a connection to the Father, with a pure heart and no distraction. To truly be at peace with the Lord. In right relationship with Him. A resolute confidence in the calling He has given us.

**Ministry can steal your joy.** There are two main reasons why I think ministry steals our joy. Unrelenting Pace and Mismanaged Expectations. Think about all the hard things we endure. We all could agree student ministry is the busiest ministry in the church. Think about the youth pastor job description! Not the one the personnel team wrote... but the one we do every day! I made the mistake of writing down everything I do on a daily/ weekly basis. (Show a pic of the list) Crazy!!! If we are not careful the pace and demands of ministry will steal our joy!

So how can we keep our joy at the same time as keep the pace. Is that even possible? I say YES! With emotional and spiritual harmony.

- **Emotional stability.** How do you work through your own baggage? Past hurts. Trauma. Addictive behaviors that if anyone knew about it you would be fired on the spot. What about family relationships/ tensions? What about staff relationships? You will never have joy in your life if you are not first repentant and seeking the Lord restoration.
- **Spiritual discipline.** This is the work of the Lord! He is the one we should listen to. He is the one who called us. How are you abiding in Him? What does your daily discipline of Biblical intake look like? Are you reading any spiritual books? Listening to any good podcasts? What is your morning routine? What "first connections" are you making every day?

This is probably going to sound elementary, but when these two "parts" of our lives are in harmony, joy in ministry is right around the corner. When these are in harmony, no regrets. No hinderances. No guilt. Pure joy. If ministry feels like a burden 100% of the time, we're doing it wrong. **Reclaiming joy is about getting back to the heart of why we're here.** Not to impress people. Not to produce results. But to walk with God and invite students into the joy of knowing Him.

This breakout is not all about how we lost the joy of ministry but also about how we can reclaim it. Let's revisit the 6 types of youth pastors who have lost their joy, and what's the antidote is for when we find ourselves in one of these traps?

### 1. When you're the Burned-Out Event Planner

**Galatians 6:9 (CSB)** – *“Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.”*

**Reminder:** Your work matters even when you don't see immediate results. God sees what others overlook. **Joy comes** from trusting in God's timing, not instant applause.

### 2. When you feel like the Invisible Shepherd

**1 Corinthians 15:58 (CSB)** – *“Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”*

**Reminder:** Even when students walk away, your investment is not wasted. **Joy returns** when you remember God is still writing their story — and yours.

### 3. When you're stuck in the Program Trap

**Psalms 16:11 (CSB)** – *“In your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.”*

**Reminder:** Ministry isn't about performance — it's about presence. **Joy is found** not in how well things run, but in staying close to Jesus.

### 4. When you're trapped in the Comparison Game

**Philippians 4:11 (CSB)** – *“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.”*

**Reminder:** Contentment is a learned discipline, not a result of success. **Joy flows** when you stop measuring ministry by numbers and start trusting God with your portion.

### 5. When you're the Isolated Leader

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (CSB)** – *“Two are better than one... For if either falls, his companion can lift him up.”*

**Reminder:** You were never meant to lead alone. **Joy grows** in authentic relationships where burdens are shared and hearts are seen.

### 6. When you're in a Spiritual Drought

**John 15:11 (CSB)** – *“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”*

**Reminder:** Jesus wants you to have His joy — not just give it to others. **Joy is restored** when you abide in Him, not just work for Him.

---

Let's get practical for a minute... **How can we reclaim the joy in ministry?** Here are seven encouragements if you have found yourself at a loss of joy and desire to reclaim it.

**1. Returning to the One Who Called You.** Remember *why* you started — it wasn't for events, numbers, or applause. It was because Jesus called you. Go back to that moment and let Him remind you again.

*“Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit.”*  
*Psalms 51:12 (CSB)*

**2. Abiding Before Producing.** You're not a machine. You're a branch. Stay connected to Jesus before trying to bear fruit for Him.

*"The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me."  
John 15:5 (CSB)*

**3. Saying No to the Wrong Yeses.** Joy gets stolen when your calendar is full, but your soul is empty. Choose margin. Say yes to what matters most.

*"Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with turmoil."  
Proverbs 15:16 (CSB)*

**4. Letting People Be People (Not Projects).** Your students are not spiritual performance reviews. They're people. Love them without expectations and trust the Spirit to do the work.

*"And I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion..."  
Philippians 1:6 (CSB)*

**5. Finding Life-Giving Friendships.** Isolation is a joy-killer. Reach out. Be honest. Let others lift your arms when you're tired.

*"Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."  
Galatians 6:2 (CSB)*

**6. Celebrating the Small Wins.** Not every week will be a spiritual firework show. But every seed planted matters. Celebrate when one student grows, prays, or even just shows up.

*"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin."  
Zechariah 4:10 (NLT)*

**7. Letting Jesus Minister to You Too.** You were never meant to be the Savior — only to point to Him. Sit at His feet. Let Him fill you again.

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."  
Matthew 11:28 (CSB)*

**Here are a couple of quick hits about reclaiming your joy in ministry.**

- **Joy isn't a luxury in ministry—it's essential.** It's what keeps your heart soft when criticism is loud, what lifts your eyes when the results don't match the effort, and what reminds you that serving God is a gift, not just a grind. Somewhere along the way, many of us trade in our joy for performance, comparison, or sheer survival. We start measuring impact by numbers, approval, or affirmation, and when those things falter, so does our joy.
- **Biblical joy is deeper than emotion—it's a soul-level confidence in God's presence, goodness, and sovereignty, no matter what's happening around you.** Paul talks about being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10), which reminds us that joy doesn't mean pretending things are fine. It means being rooted in the One who is faithful even when ministry is hard.

- **Reclaiming joy starts with re-centering your ministry around delight, not just duty.** Ask yourself: what used to light you up about this calling? Was it watching a student truly get it for the first time? Hearing a small group open up about real struggles? Praying with a parent? Those moments still matter—and they still happen, if we have eyes to see.
- **Sometimes we need to laugh again. Not as a break from ministry, but as part of it.** Joy restores energy, attracts people, and points to the goodness of God. Jesus wasn't grim-faced when He welcomed children or celebrated meals. Neither should we be.

There is no greater joy than serving the Lord. Serving students and leading them to a joy-filled relationship with the Lord, but let us not forget we need it too! If you are feeling like you've lost your joy and need some help navigating the possible burnout, God has uniquely placed this talk for you. He is revealing it to heal it.

**Got questions or comments on how you remain joyful in ministry?**

I'd love to have the opportunity to coach you through it. Visit [www.freshcalling.org](http://www.freshcalling.org) and schedule a 1:1 Coaching session with me. Let's pray and believe together.

# FRESH CALLING

ministry coaching and consulting

Need some help? Schedule a time to meet with Steve or shoot an email. I'm here to help. You can connect with him at [www.freshcalling.org](http://www.freshcalling.org)

*This outline is provided by Fresh Calling Ministry Coaching and Consulting.  
All rights reserved. Copyright 2025. Intended for personal use only.*