**Young Speakers’ Meetings: Are They Wise?**

By: Nathan Battey

Young Speakers’ Meetings are among the fastest growing trends in church activities today within our brotherhood. If congregations want to have a successful meeting, where people from area congregations and even surrounding states turn out in droves, a Young Speakers’ Meeting is sure to do the trick. People who normally will not travel across town to hear the gospel taught will travel half way across the country to attend such an event. It seems that each year a new congregation announces it is beginning an annual Young Speakers’ Meeting and in the first year of doing so meets with great success.

So, the questions arise: Why are Young Speakers’ Meetings becoming so popular? Why are they so successful? And, is it wise to have such meetings? Though these questions are rarely, if ever raised, they are worthy of our consideration.

**Preliminary Comments**

Before launching headlong into a discussion of this topic, some preliminary statements need to be made:

First, the motives of leadership at any congregation that hosts a Young Speakers’ Meeting are not being called into question. Congregations that conduct such meetings do so with only the purest and noblest of intents. They are trying to strengthen their youth and ground them in the most holy faith. The question, therefore, is not one of intent but of outcome. Many things, though done with good intentions, often fail in the mission they set forth to accomplish.

Second, it is recognized that not all Young Speakers’ Meeting are designed and conducted in the same way. In fact, some meetings are rather termed Young People’s Meetings, indicating the speakers may not be young, though the targeted audience is. The primary focus of this article is Young Speakers’ Meetings, though some of the general principles may have application to Young People’s Meetings as well.

Third, this article is written in generalities. Though all points may not be applicable to every Young Speakers’ Meeting, they do represent the norm.

Fourth, though this article will likely be met with opposition because of the popularity of such meetings and the number of people involved in them, it is hoped that it will be received in the spirit of concern from which it was written. Please consider the article with this idea in mind: action never dictates truth. Just because congregations have done something for years does not mean wisdom has been employed or methods cannot be improved. The aim of this article is to identify some of the shortcomings of Young Speakers’ Meetings and challenge brethren to reevaluate how they conduct these meetings.

Lastly, this article is based on first-hand experiences. This writer has hosted a number of Young Speakers’ Meetings and participated in countless others. One year he participated in eight such meetings and acted as host in five or six of them. It is because of his direct involvement and experiences that he writes this article. These are not the words of a disconnected or disgruntled elderly person, but rather the concerns of a young man for whose benefit Young Speakers’ Meetings were designed.

**Setting the Stage**

The main goals of Young Speakers’ Meetings are to encourage, motivate, and educate young people in the faith. The consensus of many church leaders is that young people either will not listen to or cannot relate to older brethren. Thus, in an attempt to reach their young people, they call in younger speakers who can relate to them; and a Young Speakers’ Meeting is formed. Church leaders usually select as speakers young men who gave a five-minute talk at one of the big meetings like the New Years Meeting or the Fourth of July Meeting. After choosing and assigning topics to the speakers, congregations announce the meeting across the brotherhood, and a large crowd from all over gathers to hear these young men teach the Word of God.

In deciding to have a Young Speakers’ Meeting, there are several assumptions drawn that need to be questioned. Here are some questions leaders need to ask: Can young people not relate to older brethren or have they not been trained to relate to them? Are the topics that are chosen truly beneficial to young people? Are the young men who are being called to participate the most capable teachers for the occasion? Most importantly, do Young Speakers’ Meetings live up to their goals of encouraging, motivating, and educating the youth?

**Positive Benefits**

Certainly all who attend a Young Speakers’ Meeting are encouraged. It is nearly impossible to spend a weekend with brethren of like precious faith, and with friends rarely seen, and not be encouraged. The Lord’s people feed off one another and need opportunities to be together. The encouragement hereby gained is largely a result of social interaction. All who attended are saddened for a period after the meeting’s conclusion because real life returns and friends are missed. Many young people refer to this feeling as Post-Meeting-Depression-Syndrome (PMDS).

For some period after a meeting, most are motivated to “do better” than they have in the past. They spring forth into action with great enthusiasm but are quickly cut down by the cares of this life (Matthew 13:19-21). Many fail to recognize zeal and faith as two separate concepts. Our zeal can be fueled by our companionship (Hebrews 10:24), but our faith can be built only by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Every Christian needs the encouragement and motivation that comes through companionship, but encouragement and motivation cannot be mistaken for the building of faith.

**Issues Raised**

Though there are some great benefits to Young Speakers’ Meetings, there are also some drawbacks. Stepping back to evaluate a situation fairly and recognize both the positive and negative aspects of a situation is a difficult task. While people dwell on the positives of Young Speakers’ Meetings, few consider the negative issues that come with them. A failure to recognize and deal with the shortcomings of Young Speakers’ Meetings will result in a failure to achieve optimum success. The remainder of this article is an attempt to identify and deal with some of the difficulties Young Speakers’ Meetings present.

First, the main purpose of a gospel meeting should be the preaching of the gospel and, through it, building faith (1 Corinthians 14:26), not socialization. Unfortunately, the social aspect of Young Speakers’ Meetings has for some time outweighed the edification aspect. Young people are often more concerned about who is attending the meeting than they are about the speakers or the topics. The memorable parts of Young Speakers’ Meetings are not the speakers or the topics, but rather what takes place after services. Simply put, the teaching does not currently match up with the socializing. As a result of the imbalance between teaching and socializing, brethren need to question whether or not Young Speakers’ Meetings have turned into a form of the Social Gospel in which the emphasis is placed on what gets people in rather than what builds people up. The social benefits of meetings are great, unless they become the driving factor of a meeting. In John 6, Jesus emphasizes the fact that the teaching of the gospel must far outweigh any other motivation. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul stresses that the Church must take heed how she builds lest she build with wood, hay, and stubble, and in the end her works be burnt up. The truth, actually, is the only way to strengthen and establish young people in the faith; thus, these meetings should emphasize the preaching of the truth.

Second, planners of these meetings should select topics of greater substance. Young Speakers’ Meetings are supposed to emphasize the young people and topics they need to hear, though, in reality, most needed topics go untouched. Typical topics assigned to young men include the following: love, peace, gentleness, kindness, heroes of faith, mercy, goodness, and so on. One topic given to this writer was, “Meditate on Whatsoever Things Are Lovely.” Now, while all of these topics are Biblical concepts, young speakers develop few of them beyond the point of a word study. As well, these topics do not really address issues that are troubling our young people and the Church in today’s society, nor through them are young people being equipped to fight the good fight of faith. More critical and relevant topics for young people are Bible authority, scriptural worship, the scheme of redemption, how faith and works go together, how to combat Calvinism, why it is wrong to drink alcohol, how to overcome sexual temptation, etc. Not only do young people need to hear these topics taught, but older people do, too! Sadly, since young people are not being taught what they need to hear at these meetings, their faith is not being strengthened.

Third, planners should make better choices in selecting the young men who are asked to speak. Poor selection of speakers can result in the poor selection of topics because usually the young men asked to speak are not capable of handling the meat of the Word. They are not capable because they have not trained nor have they had any experience in defending the truth, at least on some important subjects. Leaders want young men to speak but are afraid to give them topics of any substance for fear of what they might teach. Such fears are legitimatized when young men embarrass themselves through lack of preparation or make terrible choices of content to include in “safe” topics.

2 Timothy 2:2 states:

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

As an evangelist, Timothy had to train men in the doctrine of Christ to the point where they could teach and train others. Paul’s admonition to Timothy should raise the following question in regard to Young Speakers’ Meetings: Have the young men been properly trained before they are asked to teach at meeting?

Congregations often ask young men to participate in their meetings knowing very little to nothing about them other than what they heard during a five-minute talk. It is assumed that since these young men are speaking they must be faithful and they must have received training. Often times these assumptions could not be farther from the truth.

Most young speakers have had little training (if any) and are being set up for failure. Failure? Yes, failure. Young men are given a concordance in one hand and a commentary in the other and expected to come up with a sermon on any topic found therein. After speaking a few times at home, they are asked to speak at a meeting, praised highly for an average job, and never critiqued or challenged to improve. They confuse speaking with teaching and encouraging with edification. They are left with a false sense of ability and end up developing the idea that they do not need any training when someone finally offers it to them. What begins with the good intentions of well meaning brethren often ends in the destruction of great potential.

The common practice of inviting young men to speak at a meeting is to call and ask them directly rather than calling and discussing the matter with leaders in their home congregation. There have been instances in which a young man was not allowed to speak at his home congregation, yet was asked to speak at many Young Speakers’ Meetings. Such not only undermines the autonomy of individual congregations but also damages the spiritual development of young men.

Here is the bottom line: If a man has not trained (2 Timothy 2:2), he should not teach (James 3:1). Though this conclusion may seem cold and harsh, remember it comes from a young man who has been through the system and has seen the effects of a failure to train in many of his peers. Young men need correction and instruction (Proverbs 15:5). They need mentors in the Lord as Timothy had with Paul (1 Corinthians 4:17). Though we claim young men should study, travel, and train with an older preacher as did Timothy and Titus, few actually do. Instead they are taught that if they will get up a couple sermons, they can get on a circuit and, in a short time, claim to be a preacher. Though they are not sent out by (Acts 13:3) nor accountable to a congregation (Acts 14:26), they are encouraged to keep up the “hard work” by congregations that are more than willing to let anyone teach for them. To make matters worse, these young men are trained to expect payment beyond gas money with the invitation to speak. Again, they are being set up for failure, and the church is being set up for trouble. The blame is to be shared by both young men who do not seek training and leaders who fail to give any.

Fourth, young men who have not established their faithfulness should not be asked to participate in Young Speakers’ Meetings. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul required that a man must be found faithful before he was even allowed to train; yet many young men who stand before our congregations have not proved their faithfulness, let alone received training. The principle of faithfulness has been taken too lightly and has affected the results of Young Speakers’ Meetings.

Case-In-Point: Many young men who have spoken at numerous Young Speakers’ Meetings over the past five to ten years are no longer in the Church. Though it is now evident that they are not faithful, through a little investigation it could have been discovered that they were not faithful then either. Young men who are drunkards, drug users, fornicators, or generally immoral have no business speaking at Young Speakers’ Meetings (James 3:1; 1 Corinthians 5).

Lastly, the theory of having young men relate to other young people and address topics that will help the young people is in itself half-baked at best and is not the pattern of scripture. The book of Proverbs stresses over and again the necessity of the younger learning knowledge and gaining wisdom from the elderly. Young people would benefit exponentially more from leaders of the Church or preachers of the gospel than they would from young men who, at best, are still in training. Who has more knowledge and wisdom: a preacher of sixty years, or a sixteen-year-old? Why then do we assemble large audiences and travel half way across the country for a young man, yet not for a preacher?

Admitting that our young people are not listening to the elderly is a recognition of a problem, but the solution is not to abandon the Biblical principal. For further reading on this topic, “A Weed in the Church” by Scott Brown is highly recommended.

Young Speakers’ Meetings further serve to drive a wedge between the younger and the elderly. Young people are trained to think that things are supposed to revolve around them while the elderly are left out of the picture. Older brethren frequently state, “Why don’t we have an Old People’s Meeting?” This statement is made in jest, yet truths are often found in jest. Can both the young and the old not be benefited at the same time?

In regulating the worship assembly and pointing out its purpose, the apostle Paul wrote the following:

1 Corinthians 14:26-31

“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.** 27If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. 28But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31For you can all prophesy one by one, **that all may learn and all may be encouraged.**” (Emphasis mine).

From this scripture we draw the following points:

1. The purpose of the assembly is for the edification of all (vs. 31).
2. We are not to divide the assembly over age, race, or language but are to be all taught together so that all may be edified (vs. 26, 31).
3. If a man cannot edify, he has no business being placed in the role of a teacher (James 3:1) but should rather be in a training role (2 Timothy 2:2).

The brotherhood has defended this passage (and rightfully so) against the innovation of Bible classes through which the assembly is divided and all are not edified together. Yet when we call together a single assembly in which not all are included/invited have we not missed the point?

Here is an example: Roughly two years ago some brethren in Mexico decided they wanted to have a Young People’s Meeting in which the elderly were not allowed/invited to attend. Where is the Scriptural authority for such a meeting (1 Corinthians 14 and Colossians 3:17), and where is the wisdom? The fact is that one cannot read of such an assembly taking place in the New Testament. The tenor of Scripture indicates that when a preacher came to town, all were gathered together and learned together (Matthew 18:1-8, Acts 12:12-17, 20:7-12, 1 Corinthians 14:26).

Furthermore, why would these young people want to be separated from the elderly? Division does not take place over night, and thus the action taken by these young people was merely an attempt to promote an unspoken division. Such a mindset of distinguishing between young and old can ultimately lead to division.

Here is some a question for consideration: Why do we use the terms “Young Speakers’ Meetings” and “Young People’s Meetings”? Should not the goal of all gospel meetings be the same: preaching the gospel to both young and old?

**Conclusion**

The crux of this article is threefold:

First, brethren need to question the type of edification that takes place at Young Speakers’ Meetings and the reason for having them. Are they merely social events, or is the emphasis on edification? (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Second, brethren need to start communicating with leaders of congregations before asking young men to speak at meetings. Communication needs to take place for the sake of autonomy as well as making sure men are trained and qualified to teach. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Third, parents and leaders need to reflect on the separation that often exists between the younger and the elderly. Are we seeking wisdom and directing young people towards it? Or are we training them in the way of Rehoboam and teaching them to seek the counsel of their peers. (1 Kings 12)

Fourth, parents and leaders need to reconsider the Lord’s pattern for training and encouraging young people. (Proverbs 22:6/Titus 2:1-8)

May God continue to bless His Kingdom and raise up young men and women grounded in the faith (Colossians 1:21-23), equipped to do battle (2 Timothy 4:7), and able to pull down the strongholds of Satan (2 Corinthians 10:4). May the training of the young never be neglected, nor the respect and appreciation of the elderly lost. May they both learn to work together and utilize the abilities the other possesses (Proverbs 20:29).