

## **Smith, Efrem. (2003 Youth Specialties) "The Theology for 'Thug-ology' ".**

### **OVERVIEW**

Smith starts out by saying: "In our culture today there seems to be a growing glamorization of the thug. The bad guy is now the good guy." Any adult can look at the culture of today's youth and see that it is surrounded by and dramatically influenced by the thug, the gangsta, the playa - whatever you want to call it. But what we don't understand is why.

Why has the bad guy now become, not only the good guy, but more importantly, a role model to these kids? It's because this generation is faced with so many challenges, difficulties, and hardships in their lives that they look to mainstream gangstas like 50 cent, Eminem, and Tupac who have survived drugs, shootings, raping, abuse, horrible family situations, and still made it to the top. These so called role models are setting an example that even the worst of thugs, carrying scars caused by illegal drug use, can fulfill their ego and become rich and famous. Not only are thugs portrayed through music, but also through movies and sports. Kobe Bryant, Mike Tyson, and Denis Rodman all set an example of how an underdog thug can make it without changing their character. There are hundreds of films showing the thug coming out of the shadows. Movies like Freddy vs. Jason, The Terminator series, The Gangs of New York, all show criminals who are very influential even if their power is based only through sheer fear.

One would expect that once these gangstas have hit the top they would look back and see that much of their pain was caused by the actions that they continue to do (drugs, pre-marital sex, abuse). But they are so blinded by their fame that they cannot see themselves for who they really are. And what's worse, they are blinding others by their fame and relentless search for money and success.

So how do we work to bring the hope of Christ to a generation that looks to thugs for guidance and support? It's a difficult task because this generation has come to believe the only thing that will get them through life is the accountability to themselves, truth based upon experience, and a tolerance that accepts everything. Smith suggests we go after the thugs themselves because they are the ones hurting the most. "If the thug is so influential, why not proactively create a ministry to the thug, offering an opportunity to raise up former thugs to become radical evangelists?" If we as youth workers can provide an atmosphere of radical transformation and bring about real truth based upon a foundation outside of themselves, then the effect we have will be revolutionary.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION**

1. What have you learned about thugs throughout this article and why do you think they are so influential to Generation X?
2. How can we as youth leaders provide an atmosphere that is welcoming to thugs and church kids alike?
3. How do your ideas of a thug compare to those of youths'? Should both points of view be the same or should we as youth leaders work to show the thug for who he or she really is?

4. If we are to reach out to thugs and encourage dramatic transformation for the glory of God, what needs to happen and/or change in our process of outreach to bring these kids through church doors?

5. How can we train our youth leaders, adults and young alike, to love thugs regardless of what they are doing, to live lives that bring light into their world and to make them question who they are following and why they are living the way they are?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

A true understanding of the thug and what it means to this generation is the only way that we will be able to reach this generation. Sooner or later, thugs will come to a realization that the role of living that the thug shows them does not help the hole in their heart, but in fact it makes it worse. We as youth leaders need to be ready and willing to witness to thugs and encourage them to be transformed and become the radical evangelists we need to reach out to a lost generation.

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