



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 20

Foundational Lessons  
for Youth Ministry

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Nazarene Youth International

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Introductory Comments**  
**Dean G. Blevins**

There is no doubt that youth ministry represents the fastest growing arena of congregational care and service in the last half century. The phenomenon began primarily in North America, but grew as a global concern within the Church of the Nazarene. While ministry “to” youth—primarily through local youth groups—seems to be a recent church event—beginning in the mid-19th century—ministry “by” and “with” youth extends back to the early church. One might argue that young people bring a visionary role to the church, often living and leading at the forefront of revival and church renewal throughout the history of Christianity.

Providing sound leadership that both guides and empowers youth remains a crucial task for local congregations. All too often youth leadership must rely on entrepreneurial, independent, ministry training, often inconsistent with Wesleyan Holiness teaching and practice. This module attempts to provide a comprehensive approach for a theologically grounded, faithful, ministry with young people for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

This module represents the diligent work of more than fourteen youth ministry educators across the globe. Seasoned and emerging youth educators, working individually and collectively on this project, designed the sessions. As with most multi-authored work, the project offers a diverse range of insights and methods that often overlay each other with common themes and concerns. While not uniform in design, the module offers a united desire to shape and empower future youth leaders in their ministry both to and with young people.

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Often the “voice” of the initial contributor will appear quite different from one session to the next. Every effort has been made to accurately represent the original intent of the principal contributors while adjusting some of the original content to provide a consistent series of sessions for the sake of the readers of this module.

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# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 01

Introducing  
Youth  
Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson One: Introducing Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Introducing Youth Ministry: Ministry Method Map
- Youth Ministry Method: Practical Theology Exercise
- Map of Youth Ministry the Four C's of Ministerial Training
- Outlining the Book: Identifying Strengths and Challenges

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Possess preliminary knowledge concerning youth ministry
- Model the method of theological reflection in practical theology
- Understand the importance of the four Cs in youth ministry

#### **Introduction**

This course provides a basic introduction to providing ministry to and with young people. This module incorporates both a general introduction to the scope of youth ministry education as well as a basic method of theological reflection known as practical theology. By the end of the session you should have a basic understanding of the different topics and skills associated with youth ministry whether one is a lay worker or local minister.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Introducing Youth Ministry: A Ministry, A Method, A Map**

Before you begin reading this module, take a minute to “answer” the following questions. Jot down your responses on a piece of paper, at least enough information you can check them later.

- *What do youth workers need to know about youth to make them good youth workers?*
- *Can you name three key personal traits essential for a youth worker?*
- *What is the difference between a Christian youth worker and a community youth-worker?*

#### *Defining Youth*

Entering into youth ministry brings a person into the very “heart” of the church. Young people represent not only the future of the church but also the congregation’s present “heartbeat.” Kenda Creasy Dean notes in her book, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*, that youth often supply the kind of passion that gives life to the congregation. Youth provide fresh visions of what the church can accomplish for the Kingdom of God and youth display compassionate care for people that often challenge other members in the church to reach out as well. Youth also represent an emerging independence, the ability to be both weak and strong at any given moment. At times youth seem more fragile, like children, needing extreme protection and guidance. At other times, young adults demonstrate a kind of seasoned maturity

and resiliency that allows them to meet challenges more mature adults struggle to overcome. No longer fully dependent on adults, but not completely independent of adult guidance and support, youth provide a type of “semi-dependence” that allows them to exercise their gifts while relying on the guidance of others. Youth embody the term “relational.” In their most independent moments they still recognize the need to be in relationship with other people. In their weaker times, they recognize that relationships support their lives during tough moments.

### *Defining Youth Ministry*

In one sense youth ministry, as ministry, seeks to help youth define the quality of their relationships through the Gospel, understood as holiness or Christ-likeness. Youth ministry focuses on work both for and with youth. Following the Apostle Paul’s confidence in Timothy we can say with confidence “<sup>12</sup>Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (I Timothy 4:12, New International Version).” Youth ministry involves supporting youth in areas where they still depend on adult guidance, but also empowering youth to live out their own Christian lives to the fullness of their potential, in their witness, their lives, their loves, their faith and their purity.

*Take a minute to review your answers to the questions asked at the beginning of this section. How does this information defining youth and youth ministry support, challenge or change your initial responses? How will you change your approach to ministry based on this information?*

### *Methods and Maps that Guide Youth Ministry*

Throughout this course you will discover various insights on the nature of youth and youth ministry. Hopefully the modules will provide you with resources and skills to be a better minister with young people. Before moving to the rest of the course we need to review two basic approaches that should undergird most of your ministry. The first approach represents a particular way of thinking about ministry (and even about life) that takes God seriously in everything we do. This approach, or “method” of reflection, frames our thoughts and decisions about faithful ministry practice, whether you are a dedicated lay worker or a youth pastor. The second approach involves gathering a basic understanding of the different abilities needed for a comprehensive understanding of ministry. Reviewing these abilities provides a basic framework, or a “map,” for organizing the different aspects of ministry into a coherent plan.

### **Practical Theology: A Method of Reflection**

Let’s first look at the method. This module began with a couple of questions around your working knowledge of youth ministry. In a sense, we began with your personal experiences and then began to raise questions through our reflection about what we considered important for the sake of ministry with youth. The module then provided a definition of youth ministry that included both a definition of youth and a Christian goal for youth ministry. You were asked to assess your responses in light of this broader definition and to envision what else you needed to add to make your view of ministry more comprehensive. Our opening exercise actually modeled the method that guides all youth ministry, a method known as practical theology.

“Practical theology” describes both a domain within the broad field of theology as well as a particular method of theological reflection. When ministers use the term theology, they primarily describe a particular approach to exploring and talking about the nature and actions of God in the world. Christian theology begins with the assertion that God has been revealed in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ministers, using

- 1) the resources found in scripture,
- 2) core Christian doctrines,
- 3) the history of the church and
- 4) the experiences of day-to-day Christian living,

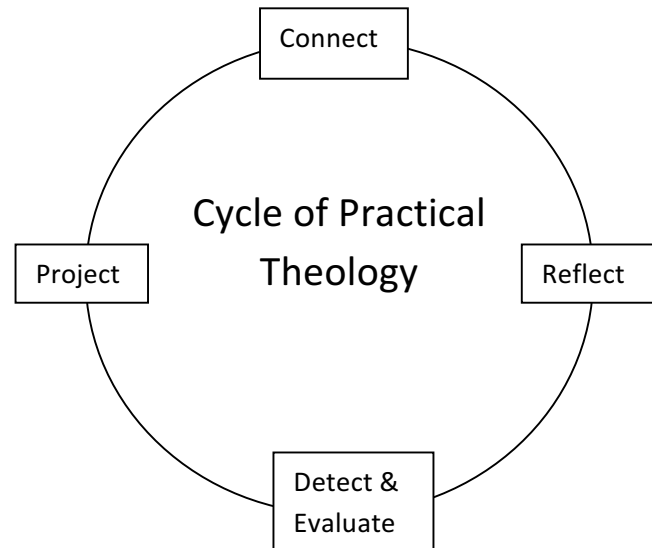
seek to name the grace of God, offer salvation through Jesus Christ and discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world. Over the years different specializations grew up around certain resources that inform our understanding of God and God’s work in the world. Different ministers and academic theologians began with a certain resource to guide their thinking. Some ministers began by studying scripture and seeking to find connections between God’s actions in the Bible and the world today. Other ministers choose to focus on historical periods of the church or specific Christian doctrines as a key resource and attempt to explain their meaning for today. Still other specialists focus on how we think, particular philosophies, and relate those ideas to life and meaning. Other ministers choose to begin in the pastoral practice within the church or in the practical concerns of daily Christian living as the beginning point for seeing and understanding how God is at work today. Like the overall framework of a house, all of these approaches provide the basic “architecture” of theological study. Together they lift up important points for our consideration: scripture, church history, doctrine, philosophical assumptions, pastoral concerns, and daily life.

For this course, the final two approaches provide our beginning point. That does not mean that we ignore scripture, or church history, or doctrine. We will find that the “contents of the Christian faith” remain vital or else it will be hard for us to call our ministry a Christian ministry. However, the method we will employ begins in daily living and our ministry responsibilities in the life of church. This method has proven a powerful resource for both youth workers and youth alike. While we begin in everyday experience and ministry practice we also take advantage of the full experience provided within the life of faith as well as God’s revealed will found in scripture and formulated through the doctrine of the church. Nevertheless experience, while not the final teacher, becomes the context to shape our questions for learning.

Kenda Creasy Dean, in the book *Starting Right*, provided key terms to describe this process. First, we start by naming our concrete experiences, seeking to name and **connect** their importance to challenge our understanding of their true meaning. We **reflect** on those experiences, probing our assumptions and revealing what we think is the most important part of those activities. Once we explore fully the experiences of youth and our ministry with them, we will then bring the knowledge we have gained into direct conversation with Christian thought and historical practice. In this phase, we **detect and evaluate** our daily practice with the Christian faith, allowing our core Christian beliefs shape a more faithful ministry. Then we attempt to **project** what new ministry looks like that proves more faithful to the nature of God and what God is doing in the world as we implement this ministry. Obviously these new, more

faithful, approaches to ministry create even newer experiences that we can then connect, reflect, detect and project once more to create an even deeper more mature approach to our ministry.

### Illustration: Cycle of Practical Theology



- **Connect:** Naming and connecting every-day experiences that are part of our ministry. (How well do we see what is really happening?)
- **Reflect:** Taking a step back to probe our assumptions, selecting those aspects of the experience that prove to be most important (How well do we understand the various influences that shape our experiences and what we value about them?)
- **Detect and Evaluate:** Bringing the “big ideas” that surface from our reflection into direct dialog with scripture, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church. (How do the contents of the Christian faith critique or affirm our ministry actions?)
- **Project:** Beginning to imagine and implement new ministry strategies based on a more faithful vision of ministry. (How well do we learn from our experience as we plan the next ministry activities?).

While this approach seems pretty abstract, lay workers and ministers use this approach regularly. At the beginning of the section we asked you to “connect” to your everyday understanding of youth ministry. We asked you to name certain traits about youth and youth workers. Next, we included a reflection question where you had to think about the difference between a Christian youth worker and a community youth worker. We then provided some basic definitions of youth and youth ministry to detect and use to evaluate your own understanding of ministry. Finally, we asked you to think (project) how your ministry might change. Anytime we pause in our ministry with youth to ask: What is really happening?... Why?... Is it faithfully Christian?... What do I need to change? We repeat the cycle of practical theology.

## The Map of Youth Ministry Education the Four C's of Ministerial Training

As our method of practical theology suggests, youth ministry does not occur in a vacuum. Every act of ministry must always be in conversation with core Christian beliefs and in conversation with other skills and abilities necessary for ministry. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene lists the majority of these competencies in its section addressing education for all ministers under the general section on Ministry and Christian Service. The list includes four major categories.

- **Content**—Knowledge of the content of the Old and New Testaments, the theology of the Christian faith, and the history and mission of the Church is essential for ministry. Knowledge of how to interpret Scripture, the doctrine of holiness and our Wesleyan distinctives, and the history and polity of the Church of the Nazarene must be included in these courses.
- **Competency**—Skills in oral and written communication; management and leadership; finance; and analytical thinking are also essential for ministry. In addition to general education in these areas courses providing skills in preaching, pastoral care and counseling, in-depth biblical study (known as exegesis), worship, effective evangelism, biblical stewardship of life resources, Christian education and Church administration must be included. Graduation from a validated course of study requires the partnering of the educational provider and a local church to direct students in ministerial practices and competency development.
- **Character**—Personal growth in character, ethics, spirituality, and personal and family relationship is vital for the ministry. Courses addressing the areas of Christian ethics, spiritual formation, human development, the person of the minister, and marriage and family dynamics must be included.
- **Context**—The minister must understand both the historical and contemporary context and interpret the worldview and social environment of the culture where the Church witnesses. Courses that address the concerns of anthropology and sociology, cross-cultural communication, missions, and social studies must be included. (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, Section 424.3.)

The “big four” of Content, Competency, Character and Context describe the primary domains that guide not only ministry preparation but also life-long learning. When you think about the range of material covered under these domains you realize ministers, either dedicated lay leaders or clergy, can never master everything they need to know. Mastery is not the issue. Gaining basic competency should be the goal when we start ministry. We can then expand on our abilities throughout our ministry based on the wealth of knowledge God provides. Perhaps the key issue revolves around passion. Do we have the passion to these domains a focus for life-long study?

- When it comes to **Content**, do we have the passion to learn everything about the Christian faith that God has provided through scripture, doctrine, and Church history... particularly as they reveal God's vision of holiness?

- When it comes to **Competency**, do we have the passion to develop all the skills we need to guide congregations as faithful ministers or lay workers?
- When it comes to **Character** do we have the passion to allow God to shape and form our personal, moral, spiritual lives according to Christlikeness?
- When it comes to **Context**, do we have the passion to want to learn everything about the social/personal circumstances people live in so that we can lead and minister faithfully?

If we can say “yes” to these questions, if we can acknowledge a Godly passion to learn everything we can about God and others, then we will be able to engage these domains throughout our ministry as life-long learners...beginning today.

### **Outlining the Course: Identifying Strengths and Challenges**

When we bring together our new practical theology method and our comprehensive map of ministry preparation, we realize that, by rearranging the domains, we are left with a great resource for navigating youth ministry that guides the layout of this course.

### **Overview of the Course**

#### **Context of Youth Ministry**

1. Introducing Youth Ministry
2. Cultural and Social Influences in Youth Ministry
3. Psychological and Developmental Influences in Youth Ministry

#### **Content of Youth Ministry**

4. Biblical and Theological Foundations of Youth Ministry
5. History of Youth Ministry
6. Philosophical Foundations of Youth Ministry

#### **Character of the Youth Worker**

7. The Youth Worker’s Relationship with God
8. The Youth Worker’s Relationship with Others
9. The Youth Worker’s Relationship with the Body of Christ

#### **Competency for Youth Ministry**

10. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Worship
11. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Witness and Evangelism
12. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Nurture and Teaching
13. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Compassion and Service
14. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Community and Fellowship
15. Youth Ministry Discipleship—Simplicity and Retreat
16. Youth Ministry Shepherding—Offering Direction
17. Youth Ministry Shepherding—Providing Care
18. Youth Ministry Shepherding—Equipping Leaders
19. Youth Ministry Shepherding—Empowering Youth
20. Youth Ministry Craft—The Legacy of Long-Term Ministry

Rearranging the map of ministry preparation to match our method of practical theological reflection allows this course to provide a range of modules that will help us become both accomplished practical theologians and competent youth workers.

Looking over the modules, we begin with context, developing our ability to really **connect** and understand the contexts that influence our ministry practice including culture and personal lives that youth live within. **Reflecting** critically and creatively on these contexts helps us to identify the opportunities and challenges we face as youth workers. We can then bring this information directly into conversation with the very contents of faith that to **detect and evaluate** our understanding of youth ministry via scripture, doctrine, history and even the philosophical assumptions that often influence our approach to youth ministry.

The outcome of this process calls for two different forms of **projecting** ministry into basic abilities. First, we have to acknowledge how this information shapes who we are as youth workers. In other words, we have to deal with our own spiritual journey and our relationship with God and those close to us as well as our strategies for youth ministry. Secondly the information shapes what we do as dedicated youth workers. We begin to fashion ministry practices, particularly those involved with discipleship and shepherding, forming and empowering youth and youth workers for the sake of faithful discipleship. Since there are a number of these practices we will dedicate a number of modules for each of them, but all of these strategies and activities must be held in balance with our understanding of context, the Christian faith, and our own personal journey as youth workers. As you look over the different topics, think about the basic categories, where do you feel most challenged to learn?

Of course, we will begin the journey of lifelong learning even as we travel through the different modules in this course. No single course answers everything about youth ministry but should invite us to seek more information about the social forces that influence youth, the nature of our beliefs, resources for our own personal spiritual journey, and recommendations for stronger ministry skills. Hopefully we will see how even a book like this one begins to connect to the overall educational plan for ministry training. Ultimately, we will get a sense of what it means to be a well-rounded youth worker that works to nurture and empower youth into Christ-like relationships, which is the ultimate goal of our ministry.

Paul writes a powerful challenge for all of us in youth ministry in the book of Ephesians. As you read these words how are you challenged in your understanding of what you need to prepare to be a faithful youth worker.

<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held



together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-16, NIV)

The good news is that we might not have to do everything on our own; we are part of a church called to minister to and with youth. However, we do have a goal that we are all called to by God's Grace. Let these words serve as both a word of affirmation and a word of challenge as you engage in youth ministry.

### **Application**

Spend the week talking with at least five parents of youth. Ask them what they consider are their key concerns for their children and for other youth. What do they look for from a good youth worker? Write down a summary of your conversation.

Spend the week interviewing people in your church about what they believe youth workers need to know (content and context), be (character), or do (competency) in order to be faithful youth workers. Compare their observations with the overall plan for the class, what do they affirm as important for ministry? What seems to be missing? What does this exercise tell you about the church's expectations?

Select a particular experience in your ministry and "work through the cycle." Summarize the event in a paragraph. Reflect on the implications of the ministry event, reflect the implications and key observations and write down key thoughts in sentence form. Identify a scriptural passage or key theological doctrine that affirms or critiques your observations. Write another paragraph summary of this portion of connecting your ministry with the Christian faith. Finalize your exercise by suggesting one or two action steps you can take the next time to make your ministry more faithful.

Review the Table of Content, identify areas you feel comfortable with and areas that you feel challenged to learn more.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:*

- 1) *What was the major influence in your life that called you into youth ministry?*
- 2) *What key knowledge do we need to possess before we work with youth as leaders?*
- 3) *Name three basic skills or abilities necessary for ministry to or with youth?*
- 4) *Does any of this knowledge or these skills change if we move from one ministry setting to another?*

*Review your answers with your mentor and ask how many responses focus on the supporting youth (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant) and how many answers focus on empowering youth? Which of these answers support the goal of living Christ-like relationships? Why? What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful, to the role of the youth worker as one who both supports and empowers Christ-like relationships with youth?*

*Review the four domains of ministerial preparation (content, context, character and competency). Which of these domains seem to be emphasized the most in your youth ministry? Which of these domains represent the greatest challenge for you to develop a basic competency for ministry? Which domain encourages ongoing life-long learning?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 02

Cultural and Social  
Contexts for Youth  
Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Two: Cultural and Social Contexts for Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

Youth Ministry and Culture  
Youth and Ministry Subculture  
Youth Ministry and the Neighborhood Community  
Youth Ministry and the Household Family  
Youth Ministry and the Congregation  
Youth Ministry and Asset Building

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- understand definitions for terms “culture” and “subculture”
- identify the range of social contexts that shape youth and their culture
- identify strategies for working with youth in their neighborhoods and within their families
- articulate why congregations are vital to healthy youth ministry
- identify the types of assets that help youth grow and mature

#### **Introduction**

In every youth ministry, youth find themselves surrounded by multiple contexts:

- The context of culture
- The context of subcultures, especially youth subcultures
- The context of their neighborhood communities
- The context of their household families
- The context of their congregations

Effective youth ministry is aware of and responds to the powerful influence of each of these contexts. At first, this may sound like an overwhelming task. However, by cultivating sensitivity and awareness, youth workers can learn to understand, appreciate, and harness the power of each of these contexts.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Youth Ministry and Culture**

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz believes culture deeply and powerfully shapes every human being. Put another way, culture is like the water in which fish swim. Fish simply take the water for granted, but the fish remain completely indebted to the water for life itself. In a similar way, culture surrounds all of us and affects the way we live our lives, but often without our conscious awareness of it.

Historically, God's people have resisted culture. The apostle Paul put it famously when he wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:2). Certainly, culture does not often reflect the vision and values of the Kingdom of God. At those points we should resist its influence. However, God also calls us to share Christ in a culturally effective way.

Think about it: isn't that what God did in sending Jesus to us? What could be more culturally effective than to reveal salvation to human beings through another human being? God's greatest work did not come through an angel or another "other-worldly" sign. Instead, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message*). Culture itself is not the enemy of God's people. Instead, it is only some of the sinfully-aimed "powers and principalities" within culture that tempt God's people to do evil (Eph 6:12). Not all powers in culture are evil, because God has created them (Col 1:16). To summarize, God's people should carefully and critically assess culture, determining whether or not to avoid or utilize cultural forces in the name of the Gospel of Christ.

Youth develop a sense of identity—vision, values and commitments—by interacting with opposing forces within culture. They "construct" themselves out of cultural interactions, just as we all have done when growing up. Marketing understands this reality. Subculture themes are carefully mass-produced and marketed to youth who are hungry for identity. Sometimes, we call these subcultures as "popular culture," because they are mass-produced, distributed and exchanged.

The beliefs, social forms, symbols and signs of these subcultures may be touched (such as clothes or toys), spoken (such as slogans or slang), seen (such as corporate logos or cartoon characters), heard (such as music or sound effects), or smelled (such as perfume or food). Culture is like a big field within which subcultures clash and collide. Subcultures define themselves by differing from the greater culture and from each other. Youth often prefer the symbols and language of one subculture over another.

Can you describe the beliefs, relationships, symbols and signs that accompany:

- The subculture of athletic youth engaged in sports?
- The subculture of youth that enjoy computers or other technology?
- The subculture of youth that prefer music and arts?

These are just examples that may or may not always apply in your context. However, there may be other youth subcultures that also rely on particular beliefs, certain rituals or symbols that identify their group.

The apostle Paul seemed to understand the value of contextualizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ within and among many cultures when he wrote:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win

those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19-23).

The Gospel writers also seemed to understand the value of contextualization. For example, Matthew wrote a Gospel that presented Jesus in a way that easily connected with those of a Jewish context. In contrast, John presented Christ in a way that aimed at those of a Greek mindset.

Within youth ministry, there are good ways and not-so-good ways to present Christ to those of different subcultures. Cultural contextualization requires careful discernment. Here are some “dos and don’ts” to consider in youth ministry contextualization:

- Do take time to watch, listen, and learn about the subcultures of your youth. By doing so, you will show them that you care about the things that matter to them.
- Do participate in the activities of the subcultures of your youth. Try to be “in” their world without being “of” their world.
- Do show patience and do be slow to judge or criticize the subcultures of your youth. They may not be well equipped to tell the difference between criticism of their subculture and criticism of themselves. If something about their subculture needs to be addressed, then ask them to talk and think with you about what they are doing. A thoughtful, careful conversation is generally more effective than scolding or shaming. Your mission is to help youth in thinking Christianly, not to coerce them into pleasing you or pleasing God on your own timetable.
- Don’t assume that a single subculture (especially your own) is better or holier than the subcultures of your youth. The Gospel speaks across all cultures, meaning that it can both work within and work despite any individual subculture.
- Don’t pretend to be an “inside member” of a youth subculture. Instead, play the role of a curious, interested, visitor.
- Don’t assume that all of the members of your youth group belong to the same subculture. If one or two subcultures are dominant, then you may need to go the extra mile to learn and value more about the minority subcultures in your youth group. If you succeed in valuing the minority subcultures in your youth group, then you will teach your youth that everyone belongs in the Kingdom of God.

Youth workers cannot pretend to know everything about youth culture but they can be open to learning and model to youth the ability to judge culture through the eyes of faith. We need to help young people faithfully interpret what they see in culture so they can make connections between their personal experiences and their Christian faith.

## Youth Ministry and the Neighborhood Community

Like all communities, your neighborhood reflects culture. It is likely that many subcultures exist in your community. In this case, however, those subcultures may be determined less by popular culture and more by age, ethnicity, and class. Like all communities, your neighborhood cares about its youth. Some members of your neighborhood see youth as a problem to be solved, while others see youth as an investment in the future. In some neighborhoods, congregations like yours take a very active and public leadership role while other congregations tend to focus more on the concerns of their own people.

The neighborhood surrounding your congregation serves both as a mission field and a God-given resource for your congregation. It is a mission field because most certainly there are people in your neighborhood who are not a part of the Kingdom of God and who do not experience the hope of Christ at work in their lives. At the same time, your neighborhood is a God-given resource. According to the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace, God's grace is "freely bestowed upon all people" in your neighborhood, enabling them to embrace righteousness and good works" through Jesus Christ.

In short, God has placed people in your neighborhood who can and will nurture the healthy growth and development of youth—people with whom your congregation should partner. If your neighborhood and your community both care about youth, why not work together? Such strategic partnerships for youth ministry have the potential to build trust between your congregation and your neighborhood. Eugene Roehlkepartain, in *Building Assets in Congregations*, suggests guidelines for building partnerships between congregations and neighborhoods:

- Count the cost: Partnerships require investment, but the potential benefits are worth it.
- Build bridges between nurturing regular youth and reaching out to neighborhood youth. Avoid creating a competitive environment between "our kids" (congregation) and "their kids" (community).
- Tie the partnership to your congregation's strengths and values: Unless your congregation can see that the partnership "makes sense" with its tradition and heritage, it is unlikely to maintain any commitment that it might make.
- Begin by nurturing relationships: Put your early emphasis on listening, understanding and trusting each other.
- Focus on common ground: Focus your early efforts on helping all youth toward health, toward caring for others, and toward responsibility. If you target conversion right away, you will undermine any trust built. In today's culture, evangelism follows careful and loving relationships.
- Involve the youth, the congregation, and the neighborhood in decision making: In any true partnership, all stakeholders must take part in the planning and decision-making processes.
- Commit to the neighborhood: Too often, congregations abandon neighborhoods for "better locations" elsewhere. God has placed your congregation within your neighborhood for a reason.
- Keep it simple: Start with short-term, bite-sized goals. Then build to something bigger.

- Put “neighborhood” into job descriptions: Unless you include “partnership” or “neighborhood” in your ministry leadership positions, it probably won’t be addressed.
- Be willing to change: If you want to help the neighborhood become a healthy, safe place for youth, then the congregation must be willing to change as well.
- Take the long view: All partnerships take time to grow and deepen, especially when congregations are involved.

Increased trust means increased opportunities for ministry, both inside and outside of your congregation.

### **Youth Ministry and the Household Family**

In her comprehensive work titled *Family Ministry*, Diana Garland describes culture as “the family’s story on who ‘their people are.’” Later, she defines culture more technically as “the core values of those who share an identity with a place, a religion or membership in an ethnic or class group.” To Garland, families are social contexts in which their members acquire shared behaviors, values, identity, and meaning. This process, often described as “socialization” or “enculturation”, operates through shared experience, tradition building, and story-telling. Household families generally enjoy greater opportunity to influence the growth and development of youth than any other social or cultural institution, including the congregation.

Parents may serve as a youth worker’s greatest allies in nurturing the faith and lives of youth. Youth workers can also be great strategic allies for the concerns of parents as well! Sadly, however, many youth workers fail to establish effective partnerships with parents for a variety of reasons, including:

- The youth worker’s insecurity before other adults
- The youth worker’s arrogant assumption that he or she understands youth better than parents
- The emotional tension that often divides youth from their parents
- Parental indifference or hostility toward the congregation.

Roehlkepartain suggests that in order to establish close partnerships with parents, youth ministers must shift their thinking from building well-attended programs to supporting the work of families that is already going on. He suggests the following strategies:

- Get to know the families of your youth: This is the first step toward partnership with parents. Learn their stories. Gather personal information from them. And most importantly, present them with a safe and personal “face” that connects them to the youth ministry and the congregation.
- Respect the limits on your parents’ involvement: Parents may not be able to “run the youth ministry” for you. Their family commitments may prevent them—or their youth—from participating in much of the program that you direct. However, if you are able to support, educate, and equip parents to develop a healthier life together at home, then that can be the true measure of your leadership effectiveness.



- Provide opportunities for parents and teens to interact: Do most of your youth ministry events pull families apart into age-exclusive activities, or do you largely provide a safe environment in which parents and youth can develop new and safe ways to connect with each other?
- Empower parents through education: Ask the parents of your youth to identify their critical concerns. Then provide social experiences in which parents can pool their knowledge and experience together.
- Provide support for parents: Parents need each other, because raising youth is very challenging. Help them to form relationships with each other. Direct them to community resources, such as counselors and programs.

When youth worker's and parents work together, youth often grow in a rich culture of love, Christian values, and faith.

### **Youth Ministry and the Congregation**

The congregation is the common denominator between culture, neighborhood, family, and youth group. It is the network that links together all four. A wise youth worker will seek to engage the whole congregation in youth ministry, rather than attempting to organize and lead separate ministries to neighborhood youth, the families of youth, congregational youth, and the congregation itself through an “intergenerational” ministry. In his book, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries describes the misguided attempt to lead a youth ministry isolated from the rest of the congregation as the “one-eared Mickey Mouse” phenomenon. He challenges youth ministers and youth workers to integrate youth with adults in all typical youth group settings.

The congregation needs to serve as an intergenerational family for youth. Very early in the Old Testament ministers discover a culture where God's people function as an intergenerational family of faith, nurturing their children together. The New Testament renames the people of God as the body of Christ, an intergenerational means of grace (Acts 2:17-21; 1 Tim 4:12). This intergenerational faith family does not replace the household family, but enriches and empowers it for ministry to youth. The role of the faith community doesn't demean the nature and purpose of the family, the Church exists as a “family of families” that share a mutual commitment to nurture the faith of all its families.

In order to help your congregation, become an effective context for intergenerational youth ministry, community ministry, family ministry and congregational ministry, start by asking this single, simple question: “What can we do together (intergenerationally) instead of doing apart?” For example, can youth invite adults into neighborhood service projects? Can youth serve as teachers and support staff for children's ministry like Vacation Bible School? Congregations that practice this approach to ministry provide as a “crucible” for the spiritual growth and holistic development of youth. Congregations shift their focus from delivering programs to becoming “vibrant cultures” that contribute to the formation of youth. There is no shortcut to intergenerational ministry, only the long road of building partnerships based upon the shared vision with your congregation.

## Youth Ministry and Asset Building

When congregations, families, and communities come together for the sake of intergenerational youth ministry, chances are youth grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Those words—healthy, caring, and responsible—reflect the work of the Search Institute in Minnesota, USA since 1989.

The Search Institute devotes itself to identifying the cultural and social contexts of effective youth work—including youth ministry—determining building blocks of sound development so young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Search Institute identifies 40 assets that help youth, clustering them into two groups: external and internal. External assets include positive social experiences that encircle youth with support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time that assist them in making healthy choices.

<b>Support assets</b>	<b>Empowerment assets</b>	<b>Boundaries and Expectations assets</b>	<b>Constructive Use of Time assets</b>
Family Support	Community Values Youth	Family Boundaries	Creative Activities
Positive Family Communication	Youth Seen as Resources	School Boundaries	Youth Programs
Other Adult Relationships	Service to Others	Neighborhood Boundaries	Religious Community
Caring Neighborhood	Safety (youth feel safe)	Adult Role Models	Time at Home
Caring School Climate		Positive Peer Influence	
Parent Involvement in Schooling		High Expectations	

Internal assets incorporate internal strengths, commitments, and values that provide guidance and direction for youth.

<b>Commitment to Learning assets</b>	<b>Positive Values assets</b>	<b>Social Competencies assets</b>	<b>Positive Identity assets</b>
Achievement Motivation	Caring	Planning and Decision Making	Personal Power
School Engagement	Equality and Social Justice	Interpersonal Competence	Self-esteem
Homework	Integrity	Cultural Competence	Sense of Purpose
Bonding to School	Honesty	Resistance Skills	Positive View of Personal Future
Reading for Pleasure	Responsibility	Peaceful Conflict Resolution	
	Restraint		

These external and internal assets are seen as the product of socialization through systems such as neighborhoods, congregations, families, youth groups, and schools. The range of assets may seem large. However, if you will take seriously the idea that effective youth ministry:

- Requires many adults—not just one or two—to get involved in the lives of youth
- Stands strongest when cooperating with the household families of youth
- Cares about all youth, whether inside the congregation or outside in the neighborhood
- Seeks to engage community resources through the establishment of trustful partnerships with neighborhood leaders
- Views the whole congregation as a youth ministry “crucible”
- Takes the long view toward building an intergenerational ministry
- Seeks to help youth become healthy, caring and responsible
- Pursues all of this in the name and the power of Jesus Christ . . .

You will find that working with assets really help. In short, when congregations, families, and communities form active partnerships for the sake of their youth, they can accomplish much more together than they ever could apart. In the final analysis, God has designed your own congregation to function as a spiritual culture that can help youth regain the fullness of the image of God through the power of Christ.

### **Application**

Identify one project that your church could partner with a local neighborhood.

Can you name three places where youth contribute to the total congregation and learn from the total congregation?

Identify assets you recognize in your youth? Which assets do your youth ministry put the most time and attention into? What could your ministry do to address other assets?

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*What aspects of your culture seem to be the most helpful and good for youth ministry? What aspects of your culture seem to be the most harmful and bad?*

*Can you name and describe any other subcultures that are represented within your own youth group? In your youth group, how do members of one youth subculture tend to treat those of a different subculture? Have you typically seen subcultures as enemies or allies to youth ministry? Explain what you mean.*

*If you were going to write an advice column about cultural and sub-cultural contextualization in youth ministry, what would you say? How would you describe the culture and subcultures of the neighborhood surrounding your congregation?*

*What do you need to do to nurture partnerships with parents? What obstacles will you face, and what will it take to overcome those obstacles?*

*In what ways is my congregation already serving as an intergenerational network that integrates the youth ministry with other ministries?*

*In what new ways could my congregation function as an intergenerational network for youth ministry?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 03

Psychological and  
Developmental  
Influences in Youth Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Three: Psychological and Developmental Influences in Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Thinking Developmentally
- Early Adolescence
- Middle Adolescence
- Late Adolescence
- Importance of Transitional Periods

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Identify the differences between early, middle, and late adolescence
- Explain the implications for each stage of development for youth ministry
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the importance of these transitional periods in the lifecycle

#### **Introduction**

This session provides a brief overview of the three periods of adolescence known as; early, middle, and late adolescence. While each period informs our developmental view of youth we also need to pay particular attention to how the stages work together in the transition for persons from childhood to adolescence and then adulthood.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Thinking Developmentally**

Youth workers often see youth travel through the process of becoming a unique individual, different from one's family and friends. Traditionally, theorists note youth go through three psycho-developmental tasks during this journey called adolescence: identity formation, autonomy, and belonging.

#### *Identity*

Erik Erickson, the leading theorist on identity formation, proposes that if adolescents do not emerge from this time with an integrated sense of self they will experience "identity confusion." Two of the vital components of Erickson's identity formation theory include personality and role experimentation. In some ways these function as different suits of clothes to try on. This is precisely why some adolescents can seem so different in personality from day to day. It is not simply due to the various physiological changes that are taking place, but perhaps due to an intentional shifting through the myriad personalities and roles they are trying until they find the one(s) that "fit." Choosing one role leads to a stable sense of self.

## *Autonomy*

The process of becoming a unique individual different from one's family and friends, particularly parents, is called "individuation." Theorists describe the process as the development of the autonomous self in which one follows internal convictions. In some ways this process mirrors the opposite side of the coin, the search for "attachment" (which will be discussed later). Youth workers need to understand that individuation has little to do with the adolescent's feelings toward the parents. Healthy families go through adolescents' push for independence by treating the adolescent more as an adult. Stereotypical rebelliousness happens when parents attempt to control youth as when they were children. Authoritarian parenting commonly ends up backfiring as it pushes the young person further from parents rather than drawing them closer. This process of individuation is natural and necessary in the development of a healthy self and attempting to hold it back is akin to fighting gravity. At some point youth must exert their autonomy or they will remain children in their parent's house forever.

In part, our autonomy rests with sound decision making particularly in moral circumstances. Lawrence Kohlberg is a leading theorist with regard to the moral development of persons. His theory of moral development involves moral reasoning that unfolds in a series of stages. Kohlberg's theory specifies six stages of moral development, arranged in three levels.

<p>Level I: Preconventional/ Premoral</p>	<p>Moral values reside in external influences. The child is responsive to rules and evaluative labels, in terms of the physical power of those who impose the rules.</p>	<p>Stage 1: The obedience and punishment orientation includes both respect and fear. People defer to superior power or prestige, or at least to avoid trouble.</p> <p>Stage 2: Self-interest governs behavior. People comply in order to satisfy personal needs.</p>
<p>Level II: Conventional/Role Conformity</p>	<p>Moral values reside in performing the right role and in maintaining the expected order of society. People consider good behavior a value in its own right.</p>	<p>Stage 3: The good-boy/good-girl orientation includes people seeking to please and help others. People evaluate their behavior in terms of good or bad intentions.</p> <p>Stage 4: People seek to maintain social order. People often demonstrate a sense of "duty," and show respect for authority while maintaining the given social order. People behave out of a sense of obligation, not just trying to be "nice."</p>
<p>Level III: Postconventional/Self- Accepted Moral Principles</p>	<p>Kohlberg defines morality terms of conformity to shared standards, or rights. People base their allegiance upon a sense of right and wrong.</p>	<p>Stage 5: The contractual/legal orientation includes norms of right and wrong, often defined in terms of laws or institutionalized rules which seem to have a rational basis. When conflict arises between individual needs and law, people, while sympathetic to needs, believe the law must prevail.</p> <p>Stage 6: People base their concept of morality on individual principles of conscience. Moral decisions include existing social rules, but the conscience directs decisions based on mutual trust and respect, and principles that seem universal throughout life.</p>



While Kohlberg included six stages, he admitted that few individuals ever reach stage five and even fewer stage six (reserving that stage for people like Jesus, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.).

### *Attachment*

Closely associated with individuation is attachment. Recently developmental psychologists began looking at the importance of adolescent attachment to their parents. They found attachment to parents helps young people's sense of social competence and well-being, reflecting self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and physical health. Attachment provides important connections for the adolescent to the adult world as they negotiate their own passage from childhood to adulthood. An extremely important part of this journey is deciding which groups and causes one will give themselves to. Parental attachment plays a crucial role in this process, in providing security, and to enable the adolescent to not commit prematurely to any identity and/or community before they are developmentally equipped.

The general search for identity, autonomy and attachment occur throughout youth. However, developmental psychologists also note that young people seem to go through several transitional phases during the adolescence. While the actual physical ages might differ based on cultural influences, in general youth experience different biological, psychological and relational challenges during early, middle and late adolescence. The remainder of this session addresses each "age" of adolescence.

### **Early Adolescence (11-14)**

Since the turn of the 20th century the onset of puberty has been steadily declining around the world. Researchers identify puberty with the onset of menarche in young women. Generally, this event corresponds to the onset of puberty in both sexes. With puberty comes secondary sexual characteristics such as the deepening of the male's voice, the development of breasts in women, and growth of body hair in the arm pits and pelvis region in both sexes. Undoubtedly, these changes are the source of both excitement and consternation of young persons.

Although Piaget's fourth and final stage of cognitive development—formal operational thought—roughly corresponds to this time of life, it has been my experience that not many early adolescents demonstrate these abilities. In fact, it seems that most still default to a more "concrete" processing. For a formal operational thinker, the ability to consider and conceptualize the abstract has developed. One of the sure signs of this stage is the ability to think about thinking.

The advanced concrete operations thinker—the early adolescent—is able to follow logical patterns and arguments quite well. For example, in one of Piaget's most famous experiments, a young person was presented with three beakers of the same capacity. Two of the beakers were of the exact same size and shape with the same amount of water in them. The third beaker was taller and more slender than the other two but of the same capacity. A person working in

concrete operations is able to pour the water among the various beakers understanding the amount is unchanging even though it looks different in the different sized beakers.

What is important to understand about the early adolescent's cognitive ability is their ability and comfort following linear reasoning. For example that  $A + B = C$ , or that God's grace + our sin = salvation. However, to discuss abstract concepts such as the Trinity will be beyond the cognitive ability of most young persons in this stage.

### *Identity Formation*

Along with physical changes comes the ability to begin to think of one's self as separate from one's family of origin. Up until this point we only understand our own identity as being a son/daughter of our parents and thus embedded in our families of origin. With growing cognitive ability comes the growing capacity for self-awareness and self-reflection. These abilities—which develop at different rates in each individual—give way to the ability and necessity to exert one's individuality and uniqueness. In early adolescence this process is just beginning and some role experimentation may be evident, but by middle adolescence it is the norm.

### *Moral Development*

Youth tend to reflect Kohlberg's stages two and three. These stages reflect moral reasoning based upon rewards and self interest or desire to be seen as "good." The young person in these stages will either obey because they believe it is in their self interest to do so or because they desire to be thought of as "good" or "obedient" by those in authority.

### *Relational/Social Development*

Carol Gilligan says at this stage girls are the most relationally intuitive beings on the planet. She means by saying this that they are constantly "reading" the situation—"Do you like me?" Boys carry with them an internal reservoir of experiences and observations of suffering—they store it up and process it later and much slower than girls. This is to say boys take in a lot of information without seemingly being affected by it, at the time. However, in middle adolescence, as their cognitive abilities begin to catch up with girls, boys begin to process the experiences stored up in their reservoir. Generally speaking, youth maintain groups organized by gender, with girls spending time with girls and boys with other boys—although this changes to mixed groups as middle adolescence approaches.

## **Middle Adolescence (14-18)**

The physical changes that began in the early adolescent generally run their course during middle adolescence. That is not to say that no physical change occurs after age 18 but the average person has completed the majority and most dramatic changes by this age. Middle adolescents typically show "strong preoccupation" with their changing bodies. This is an important issue for which those of us working with young persons must be sensitive. It can be "acceptable" among youth workers to "tease" young people about these changes . . . this should not be. Obviously the

young person cannot control the timing, duration, and affects of puberty. We must show extreme discretion if and when we broach this subject.

In middle adolescence, many young people achieve the ability to think abstractly. Piaget called this formal operational thought. One of the sure signs of this stage is the ability to think about thinking. This can be quite an exhilarating experience for the young person who is able to, for the first time, step outside their own skin enough to consider what it is that is taking place within her or him. With this new found ability come both blessings and distractions. Some developmental psychologists subdivide Piaget’s final stage of cognitive development into early and late formal operational thought.

It is characteristic of the early stage for thinking to overlook daily reality as the world becomes one gigantic possibility. The ability may become a distraction and evidenced in the common refrains offered by some middle adolescents, such as “what if?” or “but it’s possible . . . .” In the late stage a restoration of intellectual balance comes as the adolescent finally adjusts their thinking to address both daily life and “big questions.” In addition, many middle adolescents, particularly boys, will raise issues of the past will become necessary to deal with, particularly painful events of childhood. The good news is that youth now have the cognitive ability to address these issues.

### *Identity Formation*

As mentioned before, role experimentation during middle adolescence remains the norm. Researcher James Marcia presents a helpful theory. Marcia (like Erickson) subscribes to the idea of “crisis” being quite important to identity formation. Crisis, as Marcia uses the term, defines a meaningful sifting through the alternatives. Youth go through the process in order to make a “commitment” to a particular role and path that suits the young person. Marcia defines the various combinations of “crisis” and “commitment” in the following ways,

<b>Marcia’s Label</b>	Identity Moratoriums	Foreclosure	Diffusion	Achievement
<b>Crisis</b>	Present	Absent	Absent	Present
<b>Commitment</b>	Absent	Present	Absent	Present

A young person who has done some sifting through the various roles and identities but has not yet made a commitment is in Identity Moratorium. This is probably the normal and healthy place for the majority of middle adolescents to occupy. Youth who have not meaningfully sifted through alternatives, but make a commitment, represent Identity Foreclosed. Young people suddenly close off life options, a perspective often unhealthy for youth. However, when Christian families coerce young people to make a decision for Christ at a young age, they may struggle dealing with alternatives. How can we help them avoid premature foreclosure? Perhaps the only way is to allow for doubts and role experimentation later in their adolescent years without condemning them for doing so.

For the person who has not done any sifting and has made no commitments they remain in the category Identity Diffused and basically “float” through life without any real aims and direction. Finally, Marcia identifies young people who both sift through alternatives and make

commitments in the category Identity Achievement. Youth now make authentic commitments but remain open to engage new challenges and possibilities. Frankly, youth workers hope young people ultimately reach this perspective, but most do not until after middle adolescence.

### *Relational/Social Development*

Groups in middle adolescence appear noticeably different than in early adolescence, often including both male and female young people. The presence of both genders does not necessarily change the reality that the most trusted group of friends remains typically of the same gender as the young person. This group, known as the “cluster,” remains markedly different from a social “clique.” Clusters help with self-image. In other words young people of strong self-image will band together while those with lower self-image will also group together. The cluster typically describes a group of 4-7 young people (often same gender) that serve like a family to each other.

This group plays a vital role in the individuation of the young person as the cluster’s influence replaces parents for a time. This is not to say that parents do not always have a very strong influence in the life of the young person. However for young people, in the process to fully individuate and become their own unique self, the cluster plays an important role for a time. Generally, by the end of middle adolescence the cluster disbands as each member goes their own direction.

### *Moral Development*

Middle adolescents model Kohlberg’s stage three and stage four in moral decision making. These stages reflect the desire to be seen as “good” and understanding duty, respectively. The young person in stage three will obey because they desire to be thought of as “good” or “obedient” by those in authority.

The adolescent in stage four makes an important step. A young person’s ability to think abstractly will enable him or her to conceptualize the need for a functional society, to have rules, justice, and order. This important distinction marks more “adult-like” thinking. The visible difference between the early and middle adolescents in this area, during times of open dialogue in groups, proves quite distinct.

### **Late Adolescence/Emerging Adulthood: Ages 18-25**

Physical development is essentially a non-issue in late adolescence since the majority of persons become physically mature by about age 18. Although some developmental psychologists subdivide Piaget’s final stage of cognitive development into early and late formal operational thought, not all late adolescents reach the late stage of formal operations. However in this late age, some intellectual balance comes as the adolescent focuses their thinking.

### *Identity Formation*

The goal of late adolescence/emerging adulthood is to complete the process of identity formation. Young people must sift through the alternatives and make a commitment of an identity that likely involves a role in life—typically in terms of finding meaningful work.

There is a growing new body of research on emerging adulthood. Jeffery Arnett identifies five characteristics of this age of emerging adults.

- An age of continuing identity exploration as young people try out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
- An age of instability as late adolescents postpone final decisions about work and family.
- An age where young people remain focused on themselves.
- An age of feeling in-between, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
- An age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, and when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.

These characteristics provide a strong framework for the identity formation process. Because this has not yet been resolved for the late adolescent/emerging adult they have not fully achieved adulthood, which is defined by Arnett as:

1. Accepting responsibility for one's self.
2. Making independent decisions.
3. Becoming financially independent.

Moving into these identity characteristics helps emerging adults finally embrace adulthood.

### *Moral Development*

Emerging adults may remain in stages four and five. Some emerging adults may show signs of advancing toward, Kohlberg's final two stages as they consider, respectively, the rights of the community versus individuals and even the ability to conceptualize universal human rights. As mentioned above, Kohlberg doubts many people, regardless of age, enter full stage five (only 10% of the population) and even fewer stage six. Late adolescents, however, may exhibit some signs of these stages as they leave young adulthood.

### *Relational/Social Development*

At this stage, late adolescents often make decisions about the type of person they would like to spend their lives with. Although this process began in middle adolescence, it takes center stage at this point. There may still be evidence of "groups" in the lives of late adolescents but more often than not the "groups" are closely associated couples. A good rule of thumb in dealing with late adolescents comes from Dr. Chap Clark, who suggests that late adolescents ought to be treated as adults but guided as adolescents.

While deeply conditioned by cultural expectations (not all youth experience this stage throughout the world), theorists speculate that identity formation has been de-railed due to a lack of cultural markers common in many cultures. Youth delay joining adulthood due to three mistaken assumptions that adulthood requires:

- Image—People must be gifted with a special uniqueness (such as been good looking) that gives the person in power a reason to feel good about themselves
- Performance—what I'm good at or excel at defines who I am
- Conformity—a view that young people who do not “stand out” must simply conform in order to survive.

Emerging adults may accept a sense of identity without giving into a particular image, They can accept the person God's has made them without an “ideal” body or personality. Emerging adults can exercise autonomy through a sense of vocation, a sense of contributing to life, without feeling they must constantly perform to be credible. Finally late adolescents can find a sense of community that allows them to be themselves without having either to lead or simply conform to social norms. As Emerging adults resolve these issues they move forward in life.

### **The Importance of Transitional Periods**

The transitions into puberty and adolescence and then into adulthood are significant as we have encountered in this lesson. Youth need opportunities to identify these transitions. Often such transitions need “meaningful events” that help people identify with the transition. Theorists often identify these events, ceremonies, celebrations as rites of passage. Often going through ceremonies help you settle key issues including identity (who am I?), autonomy (what can I stand upon?) and attachment (who are my people?). Take some time to reflect on the following questions as you close this lesson. As you envision transitions both within adolescence (early, middle and late) as well as transitions out of childhood and into adulthood, how might you respond?

- Are there ceremonies that we could create akin to rites of passage in our churches/ministries to facilitate these transitions?
- What might those look like?
- How would they be beneficial to not only the individuals going through the ceremony but also to the congregation in informing them that these are people in process who deserve our love, respect, and partnership?
- Are their roles that the early, middle, and late adolescent ought to play in our congregations in which they are not currently involved?

## **Application**

Interview an adolescent in each of the stages of development this week to explore further the developmental issues discussed here.

Identify at least one opportunity to celebrate a “rite of passage” with youth as they enter adolescence and leave for adulthood.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Do you remember the discomfort and/or elation you experience at this time of life? Who helped prepare you for these changes? Anyone?*

*When did you first begin to see yourself as unique from your family of origin? What were the accompanying behaviors that resulted from this realization?*

*What are ways we can meaningfully and sensitively discuss the realities of adolescent changes in the Church? Do any passages of scripture come to mind in discussing puberty and the accompanying transformation that occurs?*

*Did you experience a “cluster” of friends in your middle adolescence? What kind of influence did they have on you? What are some implications for youth ministry given the “sifting of alternatives” that is taking place in middle adolescence? How might we reassure parents/families during this time?*

*Dr. Chap Clark who suggests that late adolescents ought to be “Treated as adults but guided as adolescents.” How can this advice be actualized in your setting? Are there things that ought to occur in terms of contact with young people who have left our youth groups? What role(s) do healthy Christian couples play in the youth ministry in your setting?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 04

Biblical and Theological  
Foundations of Youth  
Ministry



# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Four: Biblical and Theological Foundations of Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- It is God's Ministry
- Consistent Ministry: Biblical Considerations
- Consistent Ministry: Creedal Considerations
- Holding Convictions Together: Your Personal Creed
- Pertinent: A Real-Life Youth Theology

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand the importance of Bible and theology in guiding youth ministry
- Relate the holistic nature of salvation in Christ to the holistic development of adolescence
- Reflect on the vital connection between youth and the church
- Relate missional direction of the church with the passion of youth

#### **Introduction**

To this point in we have focused on the nature of youth and their context. We now turn to understanding youth ministry from God's perspective. This session helps the youth worker understand and apply biblical and theological foundations to the practice of youth ministry.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **It is God's Ministry**

Youth ministry, to be Christian, must be God's ministry first... and our efforts second. Our efforts are important but we must look to God's ability as our source, to God's purposes as our goal, and to God's actions as our guide if we hope to offer authentic ministry. There are a number of important helping roles that adults might play in and through the lives of youth. Many different adults provide young people quality counseling, compassionate care, recreation, entertainment, and spiritual guidance. In any of these actions the Holy Spirit may well be at work implicitly or indirectly through these adults (and the youth). However, youth workers make sure God remains "up front" in our ministry and make sure that we represent God's passion and purpose. Youth workers need to name God's desire for youth, to discern God's direction for youth, and to witness to the power of God at work both with and for youth today.

When we accept this responsibility we expressly accept our role as theologians. The word theology might be defined as the "making God known" either through study, or witness, or just everyday life. Everyone reveals something of what they think or believe about God in everyday conversations and actions. However, workers remain dedicated to a disciplined understanding of God so that our actions and attitudes remain consistent with what we believe, coherent so people can understand them, and pertinent so people can see how God is at work in their lives as well.

There are a lot of places where we can begin this task, but we need to have a biblical and theological view of our ministry.

### **Consistent Ministry: Biblical Considerations**

When one turns to scripture for the motivation and direction for youth ministry, there are a number of considerations. First, scripture provides the basic story of God's gracious salvation for all of creation: beginning in the Old Testament with the creation and calling of the nation of Israel, focusing through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, continuing through the power of the Holy Spirit with the creation of the Church and culminating with Christ's return and the transformation of all creation at the end of the age. The Bible portrays the truth of God in a storied fashion, a magnificent narrative of God working in the lives of people through the centuries and, through Jesus Christ, providing the basic means for our salvation. The narrative power of scripture relates directly to the way youth understand their own lives as stories. Through reading scripture, youth can discover humanities' basic tendency toward sin and its consequences for people and nations. Young people also discover God's continuing love and Christ's redeeming power in the face of sinfulness, and our ability to receive salvation by grace through faith. Youth are challenged to live lives shaped by the message and example of Jesus, and to participate with God's ongoing missional work in transforming the world, seeking to bring about "Shalom" (a Hebrew word that describes total peace or a restoration of wholeness) among people and throughout creation. Participating with God's mission, discerning how Christ might shape whatever we do in life, allows us to discover our true meaning for life.

Second, with this large backdrop in mind, we turn to particular passages that give direction to ministry with youth. Young people need an opportunity to hear and respond to the Good News of Jesus and to learn to live within the Christian story so they can demonstrate holiness of heart and life. However, do young people have a role to play within the Gospels? Youth workers often turn to 1st Timothy 4:12 ("Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young") as motivation for ministry both to and with young people. However, the passage seems to have less influence after reading commentaries that argue Timothy must have been between thirty and thirty-five years of age when receiving this letter. In some cultures, and historical periods, thirty-five years of age was considered young, particularly for leadership. For youth workers working with adolescents half this age, such a claim can be difficult. Other youth workers turn to a "young" Jesus of Luke 2:52, as He "increased in wisdom and in stature (or years), and in divine and human favor." However, once again, Jesus' ministry begins much later when He is about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23).

So where do we turn to discover the role of youth in scripture? Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, in *The Godbearing Life*, argue that the beginning point might be Mary, the mother of Jesus as the "God bearer." Based on marriage custom in Jesus' day, Mary may well have been around sixteen years of age, yet she played a special role, bearing the Son of God. In addition, one might read about Samuel's anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16. David was not only the youngest (v. 11), but also the eighth son. In a culture which values the number seven, David was outside the expected order, a marginal son, whom Samuel anoints and who ultimately changes the destiny of Israel. David, like Joseph, Jeremiah, and even Samuel himself as a child, all seem like unlikely candidates to be given their callings so early in life. David, Mary, even Timothy

represent younger people on the edges of the social order, not those expected to be used of God to lead. Paul embraced a younger Timothy as part of his ministry because Paul also saw Timothy as an “agent” (not object) of God’s mission. This view reminds us that God is vitally involved with people that society might not consider “mature” enough or “ready” to represent the Kingdom of God, persons that often include many of the young people in our world, regardless of culture. Adults tend to view youth as “in-between” childhood and adulthood, unable to take responsibility, not quite ready. Yet God reaches into the lives of these young people and calls them forward, like David, Mary, and Timothy. Youth workers must guide, empower, and serve as advocates for young people awakening to what God might do through them.

The Bible reminds us that young people need to hear and embrace God’s love in their lives just like any other person. The Bible also reminds us that God may well use these young people to spread the “Good News” to their contemporaries and to the world at large. Ultimately Youth Ministry, if it is biblical, must accept its role in discipleship to both share and nurture young people in Christlikeness and also accept its role as shepherd and advocate as young people also share God’s grace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Consistent Ministry: Creedal Considerations**

While scripture provides a good beginning for the message and purpose behind youth ministry, the church has also looked to doctrine as another key resource. Beginning with the early church, Christians sought to ‘confess” their faith through concise statements that make up the core convictions of biblical faith and practice. One of the earliest versions, known as the Apostle’s Creed, has guided churches throughout the centuries.

#### *The Apostles’ Creed*

*I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.*

*And in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic (universal) Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen*

In a similar manner, the Church of the Nazarene ascribes to an “Agreed Statement of Belief” that is quite similar to the Apostle’s Creed. This Statement of Belief attempts to summarize the basics of the Christian faith within our tradition.

- We believe in one God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures, given by plenary inspiration, contain all truth necessary to faith and Christian living.
- We believe that man is born with a fallen nature, and is, therefore, inclined to evil, and that continually.
- We believe that the finally impenitent are hopelessly and eternally lost.
- We believe that the atonement through Jesus Christ is for the whole human race; and that whosoever repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified and regenerated and saved from the dominion of sin.
- We believe that believers are to be sanctified wholly, subsequent to regeneration, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the new birth, and also to the entire sanctification of believers.
- We believe that our Lord will return, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment will take place.

In addition, the Church of the Nazarene developed sixteen Articles of Faith that elaborate on the Agreed Statement of Belief. The Articles provide the core convictions of our tradition about the nature of the Triune God, the person and mission of Jesus Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, salvation and holiness, the life of the church, the practice of the sacraments, and the return of Christ. Drawing from scripture, these doctrines try to summarize the nature of God and God’s purposes in the world. As a key resource, they guide the core message of the Christian faith.

### **Holding Convictions Together: Your Personal Creed**

Ultimately what we believe about the message of scripture, about the nature of the Christian faith, and about youth, must come together to provide a biblical and theological “creed” for Christian ministry. Creeds express what we believe God intends in our ministry for the sake of youth. Each of us must fashion our personal convictions into a coherent statement, but that creed must also relate to the message of the Bible and the doctrine of the Church. Each person must work out their own personal creed, one true to scripture and doctrine. As you read the sample creed offered, do you see some statements you believe true for you as well?

#### *A Sample Youth Ministry Creed:*

Youth Ministry is a part of the Church’s ministry, reflecting the Church’s call to model holiness of heart and life and pursue God’s mission to redeem creation. Creeds normally identify the Church within the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, this placement in the creed should not ignore the rest of the Trinity’s expression in the Church. The Church (and therefore youth ministry) was created by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). However, the purpose of that creation was to reveal God the Father’s grace as expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the power of the

Holy Spirit. Youth ministry finds its identity in God's redemptive activity through Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit's working through the communities of faith. No youth ministry (parish or parachurch) may be seen separate from the Church universal or from the Biblical account of authentic Christianity. Therefore, all youth ministry is connected to all other forms of ministry expressed by the Church at large, working cooperatively with other congregational ministries and accountable to biblical standards.

Youth Ministries (be they particular programs or persons such as youth workers, parents, youth themselves, or other ministers) do not save youth...only Christ does. God calls people in Youth Ministry to witness to the biblical story of Jesus Christ and by allowing the Holy Spirit to work through their actions to communicate grace (what John Wesley understood as becoming a Means of Grace). Relationships between youth workers and youth remain important as they model the relational love found between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such love never manipulates or coerces youth into relationships. Instead, youth workers allow God's love to flow through them to disciple youth, teaching them the basics of the faith, nurturing devotional practices, and empowering them for God's mission to the world.

What makes youth ministry distinct surfaces from ministry to people as they grow, including the period commonly known as youth or adolescence. Youth ministry seeks to redeem the contextual issues facing youth while encouraging youth to continue to grow in grace and thus "come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13-14). The goal being an ongoing growth into a life of holiness of heart and life and a missional heart to participate with God's redemptive plan for the whole world.

The church recognizes that all church members are in some way ministers (the priesthood of believers), INCLUDING YOUTH THEMSELVES. Just as God used young people strategically in Bible and through the history of the church, the Holy Spirit continues to empower and guide young people today to follow God's mission to redeem the world and build up the body of Christ, the Church. Empowered as members of the Kingdom of God, young people can live out the Kingdom of God, modeling holiness of heart and life, to the best of their ability. The church, however, also recognizes that some people are called of God to lead youth within the church, demonstrating "gifts and graces" bestowed by God. So, youth leaders are also called of God yet acknowledged by the community of faith.

### **Pertinent: A Real Life Theology of Youth Ministry**

When one turns to the nature of and purpose of Youth Ministry, the same doctrines remain available to guide our goals and actions. In addition, the Church of the Nazarene provides one other valuable resource that describes not only the essentials of our belief but also the nature of our practice in youth ministry. These "core values" speak directly to what we should consider important in youth ministry but they must manifest themselves in ways that speak directly into their lives. In many ways, the core values provide a broader biblical/doctrinal perspective under three core themes: Christian, Holiness, and Missional. Our responsibility remains taking these central beliefs and asking how they relate directly to the lives of youth but also reflect the basic shape of our youth ministry.

## *Core Values of the Church of the Nazarene (abbreviated)*

### *We Are a Christian People*

As members of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

### *We Are a Holiness People*

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including "entire sanctification" and "baptism with the Holy Spirit"-cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

### *We Are a Missional People*

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

As we review these basic assertions we also have to show how they relate directly to youth and youth ministry in our context. For instance:

### *Christian*

Obviously, the primary goal with youth ministry is to see Jesus as Lord of the life of every young person in our ministry. This vision shapes our desire for youth to accept Christ by grace through faith and live under the direction of the Holy Spirit. However, many youths in different cultures today actually respond best by first exploring and following Jesus' life and commandments before making an actual statement of faith. Many adults may be used to a process where we first "believe" the gospel, then "belong" to the church as the formula for salvation. They may be surprised as youth first attach themselves to the youth ministry, seek to live out the Kingdom of God, and ultimately respond to Christ by faith, allowing the Holy Spirit to fully direct their lives. The goal remains the Lordship of Jesus but the process may reflect a different approach that connects with the lives of youth.

Christian should also define our approach to youth ministry. No matter how entertaining, no matter how much numerical growth, each of our practices, programs and relationships need to

model Christlikeness first and foremost. Often youth workers use the term “incarnational” (incarnation means enfleshment as in Jesus’ taking on human form) to mean that our ministry must “embody” Christlikeness in all we do. Incarnational ministry does not mean youth workers “become” Jesus... a danger that leads to a messiah complex in some young workers ... but that Jesus is revealed in relationships with and among young people. We cannot abuse relationships for personal objectives, instead we must be willing to patiently work with youth to understand their struggles and be alert to how Christ might be at work in their lives. At best, we must make sure everything we do in our ministry remains a worthy witness to Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:22).

### *Holiness*

One primary distinctive of the Wesleyan tradition revolves around a deep appreciation of the depth of transformation available by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification describes a depth of relationship with God that Nazarenes believe remain available to all people. Holiness of heart and life defines this perspective, a life of total love expressed toward God and manifested in daily living toward other people. Young people often respond to the vision of holiness offered in the gospels. However, many times the developmental nature of youth presents particular challenges. While there may be moments of deep, experiential change, often young people find themselves on a journey into holiness, constantly growing in grace, moving toward that distinctive moment of entire sanctification. Premature pressure to force this issue often results in youth attempting to live the holy life in their own strength rather than yielding to the Holy Spirit’s direction. Young people can become discouraged and begin to doubt the very power available to them. With nurture and careful discipleship youth often find themselves ready to embrace all that God offers at the appropriate time.

Holiness also defines youth ministry. Holiness not only describes individual experience; the term also characterizes the nature of the community that seeks to be “set apart” to God. For youth workers, the challenge remains maintaining the same vision of holiness of heart and life within the ministry, resisting cultural temptations to be something less than what God desires. Often youth ministry faces social pressures to provide programming that merely repeats social values of materialism, entertainment or a surface spirituality. Instead youth workers must work to ensure that the practices and strategies they embrace resemble God’s direction. Whatever the cultural challenges, the values of the Kingdom of God must come first in youth ministry.

### *Missional*

Youth can embrace God’s missional call. Youth see the possibility of God being at work in the world, of God making a difference. Young people also need to be empowered through practices that shape missional living. If there is a danger, it may well be that the very idealism that empower youth to see what God can do, often makes young people impatient with the church. Young people, held captive to their own idealism, may reject the church if they feel left out or abandoned in their own efforts. Youth need to experience God’s missional call in worship, to ground their actions through faithful discipleship, and to explore their gifts through evangelism and compassionate care of others.

A missionally shaped youth ministry recognizes that youth remain a part of God's mission in the world. Youth workers will work to teach young people to be patient, but ministers will also stand as youth's advocate with the rest of the congregation. Ministers and youth workers need to make sure youth are part of the larger church, connected and serving within the congregation. Such integration allows youth the opportunity to see how God is at work in the church. At the same time, young people may also inspire and challenge the rest of the congregation. Historians often find young people at the forefront of any revival, taking the lead in calling the church to boldly follow the God's mission to engage and redeem the world. Youth ministry attending to missional concerns will work to see that both the youth and the rest of the congregation work together for the sake of Kingdom of God.

Youth workers remain challenged to reflect on how their biblical/theological doctrines speak directly to the lives of youth in order to transform them into Christlike disciples. As long as God's goals shape the ministry, youth will be transformed according to God's direction.

### **Application**

Identify key scriptures or doctrines that guide you in three important areas: 1) in youth receiving the Gospel, 2) in youth being empowered to live out the Gospel, and 3) in youth ministry reflecting authentic Christlikeness with youth.

Write out your own personal creed for ministry with youth. Which of the three challenges from the lessons remain the most difficult in developing your theology of ministry: Consistency (drawing from the sources of faith), Coherence (keeping key points organized) or Pertinent (keeping youth in mind)?

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Identify key scriptures that guide your ministry with youth*

*Review the Apostle's Creed, the Agreed Statement of Belief and perhaps the Articles of Faith. Identify why certain statements prove crucial for young people today.*

*How are your statements about youth ministry:*

- *Consistent? (How do these statements draw directly from your understanding of the total message of the Bible and the solid doctrines of the Church?)*
- *Coherent? (How do the statements relate to each other and to what you currently do in youth ministry? Are they reasonable?)*
- *Pertinent? (How do the statements speak directly to the lives of young people today?)*





# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 05

History of  
Youth Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Five: History of Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- A Historical View of Youth
- Global Youth Culture and North American Historical Definitions of Youth
- Cycles of Youth Ministry in North America
- History of Nazarene Youth Ministry

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Recognize the historical influences on social definitions of youth and young adults
- Identify Sunday School as one of the beginning points of youth ministry
- Recognize several 19th century youth ministries; particularly Christian Endeavor Societies as the forerunner of contemporary youth groups
- Review 20th century North American youth ministry developments including congregationally-based young people's societies, parachurch youth clubs, as well as see youth ministry as a maturing academic discipline and Christian norm
- Understand the beginnings of the NYI and its commitment to purity, mission, scripture, and youth empowerment

#### **Introduction**

This session helps youth workers understand the historical origins of youth ministry, particularly within the Church of the Nazarene, in order to effectively draft an NYI ministry plan in accordance with the NYI Charter.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **A Historical View of Youth**

To be honest, most people live roughly in a 100 to 120 year-old historical “box.” In other words, our historical awareness of how life functions remains shaped by roughly three generations of human knowledge and experience. When we are born we rely on our parents’ and grandparents’ generations for their understanding of history and how the world should work. As we grow older, and grandparents pass away, we replace that distant history with our own experience... and later that of our children... in understanding of how things “should work.” Unless we take time to cultivate a larger view of history we remain limited by our assumptions, sometimes repeating mistakes of the past, or struggling with the unexamined expectations of others. However, when we turn to a better understanding of our historical roots we find resources for not only for understanding, but often for inspiration, as youth workers.

Before discussing the history of youth ministry, you must recognize that you have to deal with youth themselves. Honestly the concept of “youth” remains an elusive topic in history, the age Joseph Kett defines as “semi-dependence” where young people live in a world neither fully dependent on adults nor fully independent as contributors to society.

While biblical studies of children and the family have grown in recent years, specific studies of youth or young adults remain limited. Perhaps for good reason, since one of the earliest biblical accounts of youth or young adults may well be Deuteronomy 21:18-21, where parents are given permission to punish disobedient sons by stoning them to death!

Nevertheless, one does find evidence of youth and even youth culture at different points in history. Often, in pre-industrial Europe, poor youth did not qualify to inherit their family’s meager farms. Instead they found themselves forced to wander the countryside or move to towns. As wanderers, these young people (mainly boys) often banded together through apprenticeships or other “groups” in Britain, Germany and France until they reach some sense of professional competence or economic independence.

While elusive, there does seem to be a relationship between young people who are no longer children but not quite adults, and the culture they live within. Seeing our concept of youth tied to culture and history allows us to understand how the same concept may be understood differently in different global settings. For instance, in many cultures, young people do not advance to adulthood until marriage—regardless of age. Rather than fixing a strict age level to this category, one must pay attention to the specific historical and cultural expectations, asking how the church can best minister with a group of people who live in the transition between childhood and adulthood.

### **Global Youth Culture and North American Historical Definitions of Youth**

For all of the local emphasis on cultural expectation of youth, today one finds a global “youth culture,” exported with similar norms and expectations communicated primarily through media. This youth culture seems to be primarily a western export, including some of the popular ideas concerning the nature of youth ministry. Recognizing this prevalent—albeit primarily North American view—of youth and youth ministry, youth workers may find it instructive to explore how these concepts surfaced out of their historical circumstances.

Believe it or not, the age of adolescence has not always been a part of historical study. Until the end of the 19th century, children went through the teenage years, but these years were largely viewed either the end of childhood or the beginning of adulthood. The time for transition was generally quite short, though recognizable even in Christian circles for less than desirable reasons. For instance, young people were often blamed for spiritual or moral decline by older generations during the foundation of the United States, making them primary targets of many revival campaigns in later periods.

Nevertheless, the primary discovery of youth as adolescents occurred around the turn of the 20th century. There were many social factors that influenced the development of adolescence as a specific developmental and social age: specifically, the rise of the industrial era when fewer

young people needed to work, the creation of mandatory public school systems that provided a new social setting, and the rise of economic wealth which turned young people into consumers.

Chief among these influences was the work of social scientists. G. Stanley Hall. Hall, who was heavily influenced by the ideas of evolutionist Charles Darwin, applied the scientific, biological aspects of Darwin's views to the study of adolescent development. By 1904, Hall's study affirmed the belief that heredity interacts with environmental influences to determine the individual's development. He asserted adolescence defined a time of "storm and stress" in a person's life, where conflict abounds. Hall's definition of youth, combined with the other social influences created a historical/cultural view of a distinct age-level or youth "subculture" recognized today. The post world-war II concept of "teenager" did not surface until 1941, in a *Popular Science Magazine*. Throughout the twentieth century, young people in the United States stayed in school longer, delayed life decisions like marriage and vocation, yet gained greater consumer influence due to the economic generosity of their parents. The idea of young people, "struggling" to make the now longer transition from childhood to adulthood was a part of the social fabric of Western society. While explaining why adolescents don't act like adults, Ron Koteskey stated that one reason is the self-fulfilling prophecy—namely, that young people act irresponsible, immature, etc. because that is what adults expect of them. If we take this idea seriously, what should be the expectations of the church for adolescents? Perhaps some clues surface from the history of youth ministry in the same context, North America.

### **Cycles of Youth Ministry in North America**

If one chooses a logical beginning point for ministry with youth, at least in Western culture, one could begin with Robert Raike's (circa 1780-1786) creation of the Sunday School in England. While normally associated with ministry to younger children, there is evidence that Raike's ministry would have included older children that today would be considered early and middle adolescents. Admittedly starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century may seem like an arbitrary point to begin. However, the rise of Sunday School ministries marked the beginning of a special "para-church" ministry that spread throughout North America and marked a special emphasis on providing Christian education to children and youth alike.

As noted, just as many recent ideas about "youth" emerge from North American soil, so do many assumptions concerning the nature of youth ministry. Therefore, a historical overview of these efforts may prove helpful for understanding the assumptions and expressions of youth ministry in other cultures. If you look throughout history, there are historical patterns that seem evident. The same proves true of youth ministry. In 1992, Mark Senter wrote *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*, where he details three historical cycles and speculates about the start of a new fourth cycle. Each cycle lasts approximately fifty years and every cycle follows the same pattern: for the first 20-30 years of a youth movement there was an excitement and constant innovation which drove it forward in attempts to reach the young people for Christ. Then around year 30 something happened. Stagnation began to characterize the movement and increasingly did so for the next 20 years while the movement's earlier momentum and good reputation carried it along. Finally, a crisis happened and there was no longer a way to disguise the fact that the movement was bankrupt.

### *Cycle 1 – Expansion and Interventions (1824-1875)*

The first cycle of youth ministry in North America was deeply influenced by the rise of the modern era, often called the Enlightenment, which placed heavy emphasis on human reason and questioned religious convictions. In addition, families in the United States experienced fragmentation due to western expansion and the beginning of the industrial revolution which altered the pattern of people's lives and the way they earned a living. The national struggle over the issue of slavery also challenged and divided youth during this era.

In response to these changing social conditions, the American Sunday School Union (1785/1830) started out by trying to place a Sunday School in about 4,500 new locations throughout the southeastern United States. The Sunday School became the most widely spread agency for working with youth. However, they soon fell into a rut, having organized more new Sunday Schools than adequate leadership. In addition, young people also benefited from the new Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations, the YMCA (London 1844/USA 1851), and YWCA (London 1855/USA 1858) tried to fill void that young people faced. The purpose of these para-church agencies was to help young people retain their Christian commitments after they had moved into the urban jungles where jobs were available. This led to a huge revival that swept the United States between 1857-1859. In addition, a number of other movements took strong root during this time: singing schools (1717) served as the forerunner of the gospel music tradition, young people's missionary societies (circa 1790's) and temperance unions which opposed the use of alcohol (circa 1820's).

Two key crises seem to stop this cycle. The first was the Civil War (1861-1865) where over 600,000 soldiers died, half of them teenagers. The second was the birth and support by taxation of the Public High School (1875). This public movement helped to completely change the nation's definition of youth. The discovery of adolescence, both from a legal perspective and an educational point of view, meant that youth work would have to change. It should be noted, oddly enough, that the various agencies and grassroots movements of the first cycle still existed at the end of the 20th century. Singing schools have become church choirs. Temperance unions have been succeeded by Students Against Drunk Driving societies. Young people's missionary societies now are agencies like Youth with a Mission and Teen Mission. Sunday Schools have become places for students to socialize and learn in the church. Only the YMCA/YWCA seemed to shift their emphasis away from Christian support.

### *Cycle 2 - The Period of Accountability (1881-1925)*

The second cycle surfaced as cities and urban living replaced rural life. By 1920, 73% of people in the United States had non-agriculture related jobs. With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, the mechanization of farm equipment and creation of factory assembly lines made it possible to carry out tasks once performed solely by human labor. This had a direct impact on young people who often tended simple machines until automated and efficient machines made this type of labor unnecessary. Also 25 million people immigrated to the US between 1900 and 1920, limiting work options. Education became the norm for youth as high school graduates increased from 6.4% in 1900 to 60% by 1956. Isolated from work, public schools provided an institutional context where youth were given a new social role and set of psychological tasks.

New movements surfaced to reach young people. Francis E. Clark founded the Society for Christian Endeavor (1881), built on the idea of accountability. Students signed a pledge to be present at every meeting, and at least once a month to give an accounting of their spiritual progress. Though each society was under the authority of the host church and pastor, the international conventions, regional conferences, and area-wide rallies brought an interdenominational flavor to the movement. Fearing a loss of denominational identity and loyalty, denominations created their youth society and began producing appropriate literature. The societies were so popular they were adopted by many churches and denominations like the Luther "League" and (Methodist) Epworth "League" as church related youth groups. Into this setting stepped the first professional youth workers, employed by denominations who traveled from site to site to oversee and give guidance to the local ministry. Soon, however, these independent Christian movements began to lose their influence over middle-class young people. Instead new youth associations surfaced (circa 1910), like Boy and Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, 4-H Clubs, and Boys Club of America. While not associated with churches, the groups shared an ethic based on a Judeo-Christian heritage. These groups emphasized wholesome activities designed to build character in boys and girls. Since these groups required free time and discretionary moneys in order to participate, the youth movements of the second cycle remained solidly middle-class.

The second cycle ended due to the expansion of the public education. While youth movements remained largely static in design, public high schools made radical changes. By the 1929-1930 school year, nearly 5 million students were enrolled in secondary schools. School curriculum changed as well. There was less emphasis placed on religion, and more on socially relevant courses. Science, and specifically evolution, increasingly began to take its place in the curriculum. The school, rather than the church, had now become the focal point of the community. Conservative Christians, bristling over the Scopes evolution trial (1925) withdrew from the general public and sought to develop their own communities of support.

### *Cycle 3 - Reaching Youth for Christ (1935-1987)*

The great Depression in the United States (1929-1941) caused young people to move from thinking about fun to thinking about survival. At the height of the depression, more than 250,000 teenagers were living on the road in America. In addition, more and more students stayed in school longer, due to the scarcity of jobs. In the meantime, religious instruction was being removed from the public school, which left a vacuum of religious and moral instruction. Finally, the advent of World War II (1939-1945) sent many leaders to serve in the war and often youth ministry simply ceased to exist. However, the war created a crusade spirit and, as the former leaders of youth ministry returned home, they carried with them the idea that they had saved the world politically and militarily. Now they would endeavor to save it spiritually.

Several new movements surfaced to reach young people. A number of independent "Youth for Christ Associations" (circa 1940) began during the depression and war years. As WWII came to a close, America was ready to celebrate. Ten years of depression followed by six years of war had put a damper on the nation. All that was needed was an excuse to enjoy life and a bit or organizational "know-how." YFC provided both. Jack Wyrzten and Billy Graham were most

responsible for the Saturday night rallies which became their primary method to reach youth. In the 1960's Campus Life (a branch of YFC) adopted a two-part approach to reaching teens: Insight meetings for discipleship purposes, and Impact meetings for evangelism. Jim Rayburn founded Young Life (1941) with mass rallies similar to YFC, but soon scrapped them in favor of a club- and camp-based strategy. Soon Campus Life and many other groups adopted this model. For instance, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1954) influenced athletes at all levels using "huddles" (small groups) as well as conferences and camps to present the Gospel. Campus Crusade (1966) started with college ministries and moved to high school ministries (Student Venture with a primary emphasis was on discipleship through small groups. Once again denominations felt the need to maintain their identity and loyalty among students by creating programs that rivaled the parachurch organizations.

This cycle began to end with the rise of the professional youth worker. As servicemen returned from the war, they wanted to make a difference, and often went into the ministry. Thousands of people went into professional youth ministry, largely in response to the initial "Baby Boom" of new children born between 1945 and 1965. Unfortunately, volunteer youth workers felt either obsolete or second-class citizens. New organizations like Youth Specialties/Group (1968/1974) were instrumental in helping local churches adopt the ideas of Young Life, YFC, Campus Crusade and the other clubs. These organizations initiated national and local training such as well as extended efforts through publishing. It would be easy to say that these factors breathed new life into the local youth group. Actually, the opposite is true. The Youth Specialties/Group phenomenon merely allowed an increasing number of youth workers to communicate more effectively to an ever-decreasing population. It may be the last gasp before the death of the third cycle.

#### *Cycle 4 – "Emerging" Youth Ministry (1990-???)*

A shift in the way young people think, call postmodern thinking, and a loss of influence by current approaches to youth ministry signal new forces that influence this next cycle. Postmodernism may be a difficult term to define but the concept describes both certain contemporary perspectives and cultural tendencies. Due to rapid technological changes and many different cultural influences, young people have a greater tolerance for ambiguity, multiple interpretations of a given situation, and openness to new ideas. In the meantime, church and parachurch ministry methods do not seem to be reaching students in North American context. Youth workers will begin to look for new approaches to youth ministry and means of reaching the community much like parachurch ministries did in the last cycle.

What will this cycle look like? There are some clues. First, in light of diverse, global, cultures, youth ministry will require leaders from those cultures to stand up and create ministry which caters to their ethnic group. With more youth in cities, urban-suburban links will be vital in breeding new strategies for youth ministry. Evangelism will tend to focus more on small groups than massive rallies and even one-on-one evangelism. Worship and prayer appear to be more important to youth today, yet ministry may well occur outside traditional church settings (much like previous movements) where many innovative ideas surface. Lay leadership seems to be on the rise, with the professional youth minister serving more as a trainer of adults who do the hands-on ministry. Many of these new professional youth workers will also be women, who

already account for more than one-third of the youth workers in local churches in the North America. While all aspects of the fourth cycle of youth ministry remain unknown, youth workers around the world recognize changes will occur in the coming years. Our challenge will be to integrate these new innovations while relating them to the history we know in the Church of the Nazarene.

### **History of Nazarene Youth Ministry**

NYI Global Director, Gary Hartke's February 2005 report, "The Organizational History of Nazarene Youth International in the USA", provides a helpful overview of the history of youth ministry in the denomination. Drawing from a number of helpful resources, his synopsis provides a helpful understanding of the history and future of the global NYI. Hartke notes youth ministry began in the very first Church of the Nazarene, founded in 1895 by Phineas Bresee, in Los Angeles, California. By 1903, there were two youth ministries entitled "Company E" and the "Brotherhood of St. Stephen" offered to the young people in Bresee's church. Company E included young ladies in the church who met on Friday evenings for study of the Word, united and intercessory prayer, testimonies, and evangelism. Members of the groups searched for a verse that would represent their desire to live what they described as "the higher Christian life." The two groups ultimately agreed on 1 Timothy 4:12 as their theme verse: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (King James Version) These young people of Company E and The Brotherhood of St. Stephen wore a badge which consisted of a Maltese cross with "I Tim 4:12" engraved into it. The young men and young women wore this badge as a visual reminder of their commitment to live the higher Christian life. In 1907, the leadership of the Church of the Nazarene began what would be a fifteen year journey of a general youth ministry by the creation of a fourteen member Committee on Young People. These early expressions of Nazarene youth ministry begin to explain how young people and the vision of holiness and missional outreach continues throughout the history of the Church of the Nazarene. At times, efforts to reach and disciple youth fell behind a largely adult effort at evangelism and church consolidation, but never for long. At times youth ministry became the central setting for ministerial leadership training in the Church of the Nazarene, and the location for innovation and new expressions of organization for the sake of ministry from the inception of the Nazarene Young People's Society in 1923, to the establishment of Nazarene Youth International in 1977.

By 2001, the NYI ratified a Charter and Ministry Plans. The Charter provided the foundation for youth ministry globally. The Ministry Plans provided a standard local, district, and regional ministry plan. However, instructions were included to enable each level to modify the plans resulting in more effective ministry. In addition to clear lines of accountability to the local congregation, the NYI was empowered with a degree of flexibility to make ministry more effective and charged with three particular ministry responsibilities: Evangelism, Discipleship and Lay Leadership. The result of the newly ratified Charter and Ministry Plan marked significant changes at the global and local level.



## **Application**

Identify the historical movements that still influence your current youth ministry. What changes do you see occurring that might signal a start of a fourth cycle?

Develop a sound plan for youth ministry that includes both a Biblical/theological foundation as well as a historical appreciation of the expectations of any youth ministry.

Review your local youth ministry setting in light of the NYI's History, Charter and Ministry Plan. How would you assess the ministry and what improvements might you suggest?

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*What is your definition of "youth" or "young adult"? Is there another word in your community/culture that is preferred? What ages do you typically assign to this category? Why?*

*How do adults in your church define youth? Why? How do people in your congregation 'know' who belongs in the youth group? What is the criteria?*

*Do you agree with Kett's definition of semi-independence for youth? How do you react to the statement: While explaining why adolescents don't act like adults, Ron Koteskey states that one reason is the self-fulfilling prophecy—namely, that young people act irresponsible, immature, etc. because that is what adults expect of them.*

*How would you define the historical forces that now influence youth ministry? Where do you see signs of new forms of youth ministry that will shape the future?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 06

Philosophical  
Foundations of  
Youth Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Six: Philosophical Foundations of Youth Ministry**

### **Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Why and What Youth Ministry?
- Philosophy of Ministry
- From Philosophy to Model
- Models of Ministry
- From Model to Program

#### **Learner Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants should:

- Demonstrate how a philosophy of ministry lends itself to particular models of ministry
- Articulate why ministry models are important
- Identify the various models available
- Implement models based on their current context and beliefs

#### **Introduction**

While many youth workers share a common theological heritage, each local church will have differing views on many of the elements of a philosophy of youth ministry. This session assists you in understanding how one's philosophy of youth ministry directly impacts the model of ministry that guides your efforts.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **“Why” and “What” Youth Ministry?**

Why should the church have youth ministry? What are the most important values that define quality youth ministry? Answering these questions may not always be easy. Many youth workers carry a set of assumptions “in their head” that might be understood as a working philosophy of youth ministry, basically a set of assumptions that justifies and guides their ministry efforts. However, while different youth workers may agree on some reasons for youth ministry, and even on many of the values it should be built upon, we know there is a diversity of opinion on the “why” and “what” of youth ministry. Often, a careful investigation of the basic assumptions helps as we put our implicit assumptions “in writing” and organize our thoughts for a working philosophy of youth ministry.

#### **Philosophy of Ministry**

A youth ministry philosophy, in written form, describes the basic values upon which a youth ministry model and program are built. Basic values include the ideas, and commitments that shape and mold a youth ministry. They reflect what is important, including:

- A theological perspective of ministry
- A view of what is “real” (metaphysics)
- A view of knowledge (epistemology)
- A theological and philosophical view of person
- A view of learning and the nature of teaching
- Leadership roles
- A reason for doing youth ministry
- The basic components of sound youth ministry
- How the components relate to each other
- The place of youth ministry in the whole church’s ministry
- A commitment to proper evaluation.

In sum, philosophy answers the questions, “why have a youth ministry” and “what is youth ministry all about?”

Regardless of our common theological heritage, each local congregation has different views on many of these elements of a philosophy of ministry. A suburban, long-term established Nazarene church may follow very traditional patterns related to issues like leadership styles, the rationale for youth ministry, or the place of youth ministry in the whole church. A smaller, new, inner-city congregation may have very different views on each of these subjects. These differences often surface based on many contextual issues: education level; location of the church; primary socio-economic group present; presence or lack of theological training; etc. These differing beliefs result not just in a differing philosophy of youth ministry, but ultimately different practices of youth ministry from one another.

Norman DeJong created a tool to help us better understand this issue of philosophy of ministry and how it impacts ministry. Visually he created a ladder that guides our climbing. Each “step” influences our rise the next level of questions.

1. Basis of Authority. What is the basis of authority for the ministry philosophy?
2. Nature of persons. What does it mean to be human, and how does this understanding shape a ministry philosophy?
3. Purposes and goals. This is the all-important question of destination. Where should this faith journey take us?
4. Structural organization. Regardless of our context, which path is most likely to take us where we need to go? What supplies will we need to take on the journey?
5. Implementation. How can we use the resources God has provided (both people and materials) to pursue this goal?
6. Evaluation. Understanding that we need to regularly look at where we are, where we are headed, and whether we are still on the right path to get there. Are the goals we’ve established for ministry actually occurring through our efforts?

The first rung deals with the issue of authority: upon whose authority do we do what we do? While that may appear to be a no-brainer, the reality is that too many people are doing youth ministry for reasons other than the fact that God called and empowered them.

The second rung asks us to consider what it is that we believe about the teenagers with whom we're working. Are they inherently good, sinful, or can God work through them regardless, due to God's grace? Do we believe they are the church of today or tomorrow? How do their developmental issues impact our understanding of things such as whether teenagers are capable of assuming leadership, or even being sanctified?

As we continue to climb, the next rung asks us to have the end in sight. Where do we want to go? What does a fully-formed disciple look like? Next, we start addressing how will we get there? This is where we start thinking about specific models of ministry. We'll address this aspect more fully later in this lesson. On the fifth rung, we look at the available resources and consider how we can use them in order to reach the goals we have for ministry and our students.

Lastly, after we have put the ministry model in place, we then closely examine what we are doing to see whether we are meeting the goals we established. If not, then we work to discover why not and what we need to change in order to get there.

The creation of a philosophy of ministry is a time-consuming task. To help you with this task, let's look at a four-phase process developed by Aubrey Malphurs.

- Phase One: Mission—the “Why?” question. Why does the ministry exist?
- Phase Two: Core Values—the “How?” question. How will the ministry conduct its mission?
- Phase Three: Vision—the “What if?” question. This provides a mental picture of what this organization or ministry should look like.
- Phase Four: Strategy—the “What now?” question. How can we accomplish this mission?

Once we have a working idea of what we believe should go into our philosophy of ministry, and the steps to move from philosophy to model, we can examine exactly what a model of ministry looks like.

### **From Philosophy to Model**

A model of ministry tells us what the youth ministry philosophy should look like in real life. It helps us understand how the ideas and ideals of the youth ministry philosophy will be organized. Through the basic components of the model, one should be able to understand what the ministry's philosophy of ministry is about. However, a model is just a conceptualization. While it moves us from philosophy toward the real world, it is only an intermediate step. Models have to be lived out through programs. A program is the detailed, planned activity of the model and philosophy applied to a particular youth ministry in a particular local church. It is the “doing” of youth ministry. In one sense, we can say that our philosophy of ministry establishes our goals while our chosen model of ministry provides the methods by which to reach those goals.

<i>Philosophy of Youth Ministry answers</i>	<i>Model of Youth Ministry answers:</i>	<i>Program for Youth Ministry answers</i>
• WHY have a youth ministry?	• WHAT should a youth ministry look like?	• HOW will our youth ministry operate?
•WHAT is youth ministry all about?		

In choosing a model, your experience of youth ministry and your theological priorities will predispose you to favor some approaches over others. We start with our theology and philosophy of ministry. Then we examine our current context (people and resources). Once we understand it, then we can develop a response to our unique setting and need. The resultant response will be a model of ministry. The model will help ensure we not only are moving toward the goals we laid out in our philosophy of ministry, but will also ensure we are meeting the needs of youth at their various levels of commitment.

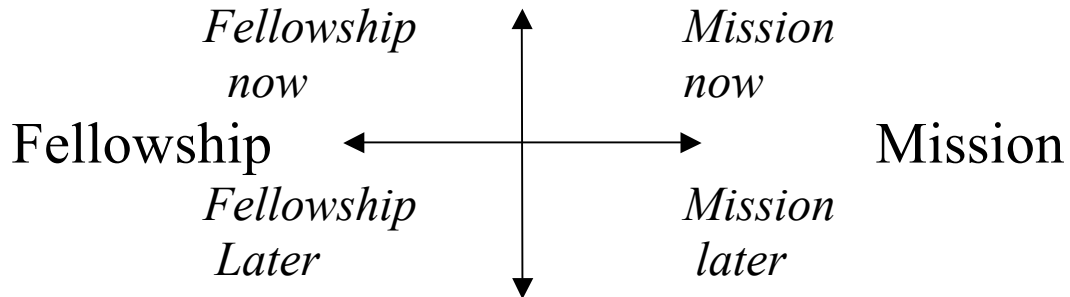
#### *Basics to considering a Model of Youth Ministry*

As we consider what type of model to adopt, there are many things we need to consider. One core issue is an examination of the relationship between fellowship and missiology. In *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, Mark Senter notes that Missiologist George Peters frames the discussion as centrifugal versus centripetal approaches to mission. Centripetal draws momentum toward a central point (in this case, the church), while centrifugal strategies spin energy toward the periphery (the non-churched). Historically, church-based ministries have focused on nurture and discipleship (centripetal) while parachurch ministries have concentrated on evangelism (centrifugal).

A second core issue that's important in thinking about a model revolves around developmental issues. "At what stage of a young person's life is it possible for evidences of spiritual maturity to appear; so that, the young person can be a full participant in the life of the faith community? Are there theological issues that prevent adolescents from full participation in the life of the church?" In short, the question becomes, are youth the church of the present or the future?

## Two axes of youth ministry

### Church of the present



### Church of the future

# FELLOWSHIP/MISSION

If you focus more on fellowship than mission but also believe youth are developmentally ready, you will adopt a “fellowship now” approach. If you focus more on mission, engaging the world in youth ministry, but feel youth are not developmentally ready to handle these encounters, you might emphasize “mission later” preferring to focus on training. In considering any model of youth ministry, one must decide where you fall in regard to these two axes.

## *Models of Youth Ministry*

Let's look at three models which have proven themselves particularly helpful in youth ministry.

### *1. Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry—Doug Fields' model*

Drawing from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39), Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church, has suggested that there are five primary purposes that all churches should practice. Doug Fields, the youth pastor at Saddleback, has applied these five purposes to youth ministry, as found in his book, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*:

- Evangelism
- Discipleship
- Ministry
- Fellowship
- Worship

This model of ministry seeks to create programs and ministries which give students at all levels of commitment the opportunity to engage each of these purposes.

### *2. Christian Practices—Kenda Creasy Dean, Mark Yaconelli, Tony Jones, Mike King, Dorothy Bass' models*

One growing model advocated by a number of current youth ministry specialists begins with the assumption that ministry occurs primarily through practices or disciplines that shape the spiritual life, rather than through general activities or programming. Particular attention is given to basic spiritual disciplines such as worship, celebrating communion, prayer, scripture reading, compassionate service and witness. The primary ministry focus in this approach is to teach youth to appreciate and engage in different spiritual formation disciplines as individuals and as groups. Kenda Dean and Ron Foster note, as youth participate in the soul-shaping practices of faith, their life begins to look like Jesus' life. In many ways, these practices define the shape and call of Christian living. A major goal is to encourage young people to develop a "rule of life" or series of commitments to maintain both certain Christian values and specific spiritual disciplines that both cultivate youth devotion and guide their witness in the world. Mike King writes "A rule of life is an intention to place Jesus Christ at the center of life, community and ministry."

### *3. Incarnational-Relational—Andrew Root's framework*

While the previous models rely primarily on programming or practices, one other prominent approach begins with relations, particularly between adults and youth (but sometimes also between young people themselves.) This model trusts that Christ becomes manifest in the middle of open, honest relationships shaped by Christian intention and guided by the Holy Spirit. As noted in the previous lesson, Andrew Root, cautions that relationships must take seriously the lives of youth and calls for creating a space or place, where youth can authentically share their pains, hopes, and passions. Root writes "Just as Jesus incarnate, crucified and resurrected was fully our place-sharer, so we too, as Jesus' disciples, must ourselves become place-sharers, suffering with and for young people. When we rethink and reimage relational youth ministry as



place-sharing, we will be able to see human-to-human relationships as the location of God's presence in the world, and therefore honor the broken and yet beautiful humanity of adolescents (and ourselves!).” Ministers in this model trust that Christ may work not only through adults but also through youth, even those who have yet to embrace the gospel. Root offers the following guidelines that provides a sound beginning for this approach, the he titles: Rules of Art for Meaningful Relationships as the Presence of God.

- The youth worker should have a connection to all adolescents in the congregation but be in a relationship with a few.
- All adolescents should be invited into relationships of place-sharing.
- The youth worker is to support, encourage and assist adult and adolescent relationships of place-sharing.
- Relationships should be built around shared interests or a common task.
- Relationships should develop as organically as possible, in which adults are authentically human (in an open-and-closed manner) alongside adolescents.

As one might imagine, each of these models acknowledge that programs, practices and people are all important in youth ministry. However, in each model, one of these domains guides the efforts of youth ministry more than the other two emphases. Where one begins, and what one trusts makes the most difference, establishes the model.

### **Models to Programs**

Unfortunately, many youth workers find themselves in churches or other settings with programs already in place. At other times, we experience a lot of pressure to “do something” about an issue by starting a new program. Unfortunately, we often inherit, or create, programs that do not fit our overall design for ministry. If we have a good working model of ministry we can gradually adjust programs to match our philosophy of ministry. We are in much better shape when we have a working model first, then select programs that match our goals and structure.

Choosing a model of ministry that fits us is not as easy as one might think. It requires us to ask good questions.

1. Does the church have a distinctive philosophy of ministry that must be reflected in the youth ministry?
2. How well developed are the communication skills of the youth worker, especially in front of large groups?
3. How competent are the organizational skills of the youth worker?
4. How adept is the youth worker at meeting and gaining a hearing from non-Christian students?
5. What kind of vision does the church have for ministering to the community immediately surrounding the church building?

6. How strong are the family ties within the church, especially as they relate to spiritual nurture?
7. To what extent are mature and talented adults available to implement the model selected?
8. Are the students presently in the youth group sufficiently eager to make the changes necessary to implement a model that would have a significant spiritual impact on their lives?
9. What kind of facilities and resources does the church have that would enhance or weaken the model chosen?
10. Does the model chosen emerge from your personal philosophy of ministry?

While choosing a model is important, once the model is chosen it is equally important we continue to use our philosophy of ministry to continue to guide us.

Have any of you ever driven a tractor to plant seeds? When you do, it is important that you find a point on the horizon to aim for, and keep your eyes on it the whole way in order to have a straight row. If you don't, when you get to the end of the row and look back, you'll probably discover that your row looks like a geometric figure. The same thing is true once we've picked our model. We still have to look at individual practices within that model and determine whether they fit the elements of our philosophy of ministry. Once we have established the model and put into place our programs and ministries, we then have to do good evaluation to determine whether the model and practices are moving us where we wanted to go. That means that we have to plan ahead with our key principles in mind. We have to know when (and why) to say "yes" and when to say "no" to ministry programs and activities, as not all programs (even really good ones) are the best fit for our context and philosophy of ministry.

### **Application**

Write down four "big ideas" that guide your philosophy of ministry. Can you provide a "working" philosophy of ministry that you could explain to another youth worker or volunteer in five minutes or less? Try to create one.

Work on your model of youth ministry. Answer the following questions as you think about your local church:

1. Does the church have a distinctive philosophy of ministry that must be reflected in the youth ministry?
2. How well developed are the communication skills of the youth worker, especially in front of large groups?

3. How competent are the organizational skills of the youth worker?
4. How adept is the youth worker at meeting and gaining a hearing from non-Christian youth?
5. What kind of vision does the church have for ministering to the community immediately surrounding the church building?
6. How strong are the family ties within the church, especially as they relate to spiritual nurture?
7. To what extent are mature and talented adults available to implement the model selected?
8. Are the youth presently in the youth group sufficiently eager to make the changes necessary to implement a model that would have a significant spiritual impact on their lives?
9. What kind of facilities and resources does the church have that would enhance or weaken the model chosen?
10. Does the model chosen emerge from your personal philosophy of ministry?

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Do you think it's important to really address all of the issues described in a philosophy of youth ministry? After all, it's only youth ministry.*

*In your opinion, should all Nazarene churches adopt the same philosophy of ministry? Why or why not?*

*How does your context influence your philosophy of youth ministry?*

*Can you answer the "why," "what," "how," "what if," and "what now" of your youth ministry?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 07

The Youth Worker's  
Relationship with God

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Seven: The Youth Worker's Relationship with God**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- A Centered Life
- Transforming Practices
- Cultivating a Reflective, Contemplative Spirit
- Creating Space for Discernment
- Life as Prayer

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Be motivated to practice youth ministry from a healthy, personal, spiritual center
- Reflect on their faith journey and create space for centering their life in spiritual discipline
- Demonstrate various discernment processes for health and wholeness

#### **Introduction**

This session explores how spiritual practices shape and nurture our faith journey and help us lead others in more holistic ways. We will explore how reflection, contemplation and prayer give way for the gift of discernment to take shape in our personal and professional life.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **A Centered Life of Spiritual Discipline**

In the fifth chapter of the letter to the Galatians, the writer implores God's people to be made in God's holiness by guarding their hearts and minds against the ways of the world and by learning to live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. This is such a striking passage because it calls us to be awake and aware of harmful living, and to choose instead kingdom living which brings freedom. As youth workers, we share in the sacred responsibility of guiding young people to an understanding of what it means to live kingdom lives in this world. If we are going to guide others in this way then we will need to understand what it means to live authentic lives before God that enables us to be led by the Holy Spirit. Apart from the ways we learn this in community, we also learn this through the spiritual disciplines that regularly connect us to God and nurture our faith.

Consider the fact that there is an external and internal side to our faith. The external side includes the things we do, our outward behavior as a result of serving God. The internal side includes the relationship we develop with Christ and the character shaping qualities we gain as a result of being transformed. For various reasons Christians tend to emphasize outward behavior. The danger of focusing on our actions without paying attention to the inner life is that we can perform without being transformed in our hearts and minds. We can choose to do things and we

can be involved in ministry without being led by the Spirit. However, when we are led by the Holy Spirit we enter a process where we are ever-learning new ways of being, new ways of seeing, and new ways of being with others. Careful balance of doing and being requires a life centered on spiritual discipline where reflection and discernment becomes a guiding tool for our own lives and the lives of those around us. Especially in our ministry roles, part of our commitment to others requires that we commit to develop an authentic relationship with God.

In many cultures, there is a growing expectation for immediate results which makes it difficult for us to slow down, to rest and to nurture our faith journeys. This growing demand for immediate results sometimes finds its way into the church and impacts the way we worship or the ways we expect to grow and stretch our faith. However, spiritual growth involves a life-long process and so comes steadily. The ability to recognize the various ways God is continually speaking to us takes practice.

### **Transforming Practices**

The term “spiritual disciplines” defines those practices we engage in that help us create rhythms for sustaining a life of continually seeking and returning to God with our whole lives. Our minds, hearts, bodies, relationships and time are continually offered to God. Participating in spiritual disciplines brings deeper meaning to our lives because we are forced to examine what we really believe and thus, what we do as a result of that belief. They also help us create balance in our spiritual journey by focusing on various dimensions of being Christian in this world. As one pastor explained it to me, “We form habits so that habits can form us.”

Depending on your context or your personality, the word “discipline” may be troubling. Discipline can imply a sense of perfecting a given task. For this reason, it may be more practical to see the spiritual disciplines as practices we participate in, especially when we understand that we may never be fully perfect in our practice of them. In other words, it is not how well we are able to pray, fast or sit in silence. Rather, God encounters us in those moments and they shape and form our character and daily actions. When we learn to be in the presence of God we are better able to offer this presence to others, even and maybe especially in the midst of difficult pain or pressing social issues. It is a very Wesleyan concept after all, that as Christians “we participate in the means of grace in order to become a means of grace in the lives of others.”

The spiritual disciplines open us to God’s interpretation of our lives. However, we will not be able to recognize God’s voice if we do not develop the ability to adequately quiet ourselves, listen and reflect through the various disciplines. Left to our own devices, we often choose those disciplines that we are most familiar with or those that are comfortable for us to practice. We must learn to grow and challenge ourselves if our practices are limited. We miss out on allowing God to bring transformation to our lives in all ways possible.

## *The Five Categories of Spiritual Disciplines*

Spiritual Disciplines are those practices and disciplines that call us to and help us live into our relationship with God and neighbors. We can put the spiritual disciplines into five categories that help us remain balanced:

- Word-Oriented Practices (Prayer, Scripture, and Spiritual Reading)
- Sacramental Oriented Practices. These practices are world-embracing practices that help ground us in our bodily realities. (Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Art, Icons, Film, Marriage & Family, Academic Study, Nature, and Athletics)
- Ascetic Practices. These practices are world-denying rather than world-affirming. These practices warn us from getting caught or trapped by anything that is not from God. These are sacrificial practices that keep in mind the greatest commandments—to love God and neighbor. (Tithing, Fasting, Living Simply, Sabbath/Rest, Marriage and Parenting, Celibacy, Exercising, Studying, and Writing)
- Connecting Practices. The ways we connect to others. (Spiritual Friendship, Spiritual Direction/Mentoring, Small Groups, Corporate Worship, Ecumenism, and Being In Creation and so, in nature we become witnesses to an earth that cries out for reconciliation with God.)
- Serving Practices (Almsgiving/Hospitality, Social Justice, Evangelism, Building Up The Body Of Christ, and Caring For Creation.)

When organized in this manner it is evident that the spiritual disciplines serve many purposes. Since these categories reflect five character-shaping qualities that reflect who we are called to be.

### **Cultivating a Reflective, Contemplative Spirit**

A life of reflection and contemplation is an invitation to the process of wholeness. Jeremiah 29:11, is a beautiful passage rich in meaning but perhaps one of the most often misinterpreted passages of our time. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” The literal meaning here is God knows the plans that He is continuously in the process of making, and they are plans to give His people shalom! To wish shalom on someone means to wish them peace, but it also means to wish them wholeness. A centered life of spiritual discipline learns to receive the various seasons of life trusting that God is always present.

Despite the many gifts that reflection and contemplation provide, we still often resist. There are numerous reasons for why we might set aside time for reflection and contemplation. Some reasons include ministry assignments, personalities, relationships, our work or home environment, the need to keep up with youth culture, etc. Even some worshipping congregations with unhealthy expectations for involvement can be a hindrance. Recent studies indicate the average congregation on a Sunday morning can tolerate only fifteen seconds of silence before someone feels compelled to break it with an announcement, a song, testimony or something else. Ironically, the church often impedes our efforts to reach inward and upward toward God when the congregation spends all of its time emphasizing social connections, busyness, and noise.

Though reasons vary for why we set aside time with God, they often stem from our need to belong with God. There is within us all a deep longing for a sense of belonging, and a desire to figure out things related to life and love. There can be multiple desires within us, the desire to be good and the desire to sin, the desire to live a simple life and the desire to indulge in all that life has to offer. Reflection and contemplation guide us into discovering those deeper longings that throughout our day normally go unnoticed or unchallenged. Discovering these deep longings may actually be painful because they reveal core issues at work within us. Through solitude, silence and contemplation we confront ego, pride, self-rejection, hurts, bitterness, and others. A willingness to work these out in our lives will eventually bring new life.

At first the practice of silence and contemplation may be very difficult. Intruding thoughts, body aches, fear of silence, discomfort with God or ourselves all work to block our efforts. However, taking those intruding thoughts into God's presence, if we follow them out, may actually be a tool to inform us about something we need to address. The important thing is to practice, and even experiment. Know that physical movement within silence is okay and good. In fact, many people often discover pain or fatigue as they begin to practice silence and stillness. The point is to listen to your life.

A simple way to begin to develop a reflective spirit might be to begin with daily prayers, specifically, morning, afternoon and evening prayers. For centuries, people have been pausing throughout their days to reflect on God if only for a few moments. Scripture reading is another way to reflect and is perhaps the most common way we can contemplate on the character and ways of God as well as find direction for our own lives. Many Christians have used *Lectio Divina*, a sacred reading of the scriptures, as a way to pray through scripture that is different than normal Bible study. Developed during a time when most people were illiterate and books were not easily accessible, *Lectio Divina* became a way for the congregation to meditate on the message they heard in the scriptures.

As we cultivate this reflective spirit we may come to find that we are more willing to bring unpleasant encounters or relationships before God especially as we are made aware of our anxieties. All of us at one point will encounter someone who is angry with us or who is difficult for us to love. One helpful exercise of praying for that person while also bringing ourselves into prayer is to pray the Lord's Prayer by inserting their name in the prayer as often as possible. For example,

“ \_\_\_\_\_’s Father in Heaven,  
may your name be honored.  
May your kingdom come soon,  
May your will be done in \_\_\_\_\_’s life just as it is in heaven.  
Give \_\_\_\_\_ food for today,  
and forgive \_\_\_\_\_’s sins,  
as he/she forgives those who have sinned against him/her.  
And don’t let \_\_\_\_\_ yield to temptation,  
but deliver \_\_\_\_\_ from evil.  
For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”



I know no other remedy for healing from pain caused by someone else than to pray for them; to pray for their healing and wholeness. Prayer in this way personally transforms and creates a desire for their lives also to be transformed.

One final suggestion to consider for cultivating a reflective, contemplative spirit is the use of a prayer corner. A prayer corner or room or chair is simply a designated place you return to again and again to encounter God. You may choose to place some things there, favorite books or objects that have special meaning for you in your spiritual journey.

The spiritual life draws us into the reality that all of life belongs to God. Everything that makes up our lives is brought before God—our work, rest, play, relationships, home, times of renewal—these are all offered up to God who sanctifies them all.

### **Space for Discernment**

As we learn to create space to develop reflective and contemplative spirits we naturally enter into the process of discernment. Many of our daily decisions are small. But we are always in the process of making bigger decisions—choosing right from wrong, giving and taking, knowing when to move forward or to wait, not to mention the host of issues facing those we lead. These bigger decisions impact not only our individual lives but those around us. There are many ways spiritual discernment can impact our faith journey and our communities but for our purposes we will focus on how discernment impacts the way we make decisions as we attempt to minister out of a healthy center.

#### *Developing a Healthy and Balanced Life of Work, Rest, Play, Relationships and Renewal*

What does a balanced life look like to you? In the midst of our increasingly busy lives the concept of balance may seem like a dream. But a more careful analysis of our habits might reveal that there are numerous ways to bring a healthier sense of balance into our lives. Balance is a lifelong process and does not mean that every area of our life—our work, relationships, rest, play—is always given an equal amount of time. Rather, balance is the careful work of knowing when any of those areas need our most focused attention.

Balancing all the areas of our lives requires that we learn to say “no” to things we love in order to make room for other things or relationships that nourish us in different ways. Saying no may be so difficult that, at first, it may be painful and feel like a loss. As we work, balance begins to make sense, honors our relationships and all things that make us whole beings. The greatest gift you can give to those that follow you is to lead a faithful, balanced, life centered on life in Christ.

There are various elements that make up a healthy, balanced life—meaningful work, rest for our mind and bodies, play, relationships, and renewal. Meaningful work gives us a sense of purpose and place in God’s kingdom because we are invited to participate in the co-creation of our workplace and the relationships within that setting. Ministry is a great responsibility yet even the most meaningful work can lead to fatigue if we do not take time out to rest so that the natural process of renewal for our bodies and our minds can take place.

Play is another important aspect of our lives. While many might challenge the notion that the youth worker needs to include more play into their lives, the reality is that in youth ministry the lines between work and play can get blurred. Play can look very different depending on the person. For some play can be listening to music, exercise, gardening, or reading a book. Good play that gives us rest from our work and strengthens us for the ongoing journey.

Relationships, specifically friendships, may take several forms worth considering.

- Spiritual Friendships—those friendships that encourage us and with whom we can pray. This may be a small group or prayer partner.
- Life-Giving Relationships—those friends that are easy to be with. They help us laugh and bring joy into our life.
- Close friendships—those friends that know our story and with whom we can share joy, pain and sorrow. These persons often recognize our fatigue before we do.
- Mentoring Relationships—those persons who have walked the journey ahead of us and who help us see who we really are; help us identify our strengths and weaknesses and continually point us to God.
- Committed Relationships—those persons in our life with whom we have committed relationships because whether they are family or not, we have committed to walk the journey closely with them. These relationships are often the most difficult to sustain but also can be the greatest source of growth.

Ultimately, we need a range of relationships to sustain our lives. Finally, there are numerous ways to find renewal but the most common is simply rest. Rest is essential to the Christian minister because the work we do can be such an emptying process. Throughout our days there are numerous things that either deplete or rejuvenate our energy for life and work. A lot of spiritual fatigue may well be physical fatigue.

*Knowing how to work for God's approval before the approval of others*

Colossians 3:23-24 states. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." Our insecurities are often so deceptive that they often blind us from the varied and mixed motives always at work within us.

There is within us all a desire to belong and to perhaps confuse that belonging with the accolades we receive through our ministry and service to the church. We all like to be liked. We enjoy the attention we receive when an event or a lesson has gone well. We enjoy being sought out by others and enjoy being able to help others. All of these can be very healthy ways to interact with others and let us know we are being helpful ministers. It is when we rely solely on these encounters and allow them to feed our ego that we become unhealthy. Relying too much on the feedback we receive from others often just sends us into emotional upheaval because we run around trying to please others rather than ministering out of our deep convictions developed from a reflective life. A truly reflective heart knows the insecurities at work in the inner life and is able to name and face these insecurities in the presence of God in humility and without fear.

## **Life as Prayer**

*Praying without ceasing and doing all to the glory of God*

If prayer is anything, it is first and foremost practicing the presence of God. But prayer is also a way to encounter ourselves and God. In his book, *Praying the Psalms*, Walter Brueggeman describes the various experiences or phases in our journey to describe the Christian life and the movement of many Biblical stories. The basic premise is that we are always moving through three phases: Orientation, Disorientation and Reorientation. Brueggeman suggests that the Psalms are a way to pray through these phases, particularly the disoriented phase; a stage he believes we encounter most throughout life.

We all experience moments of Orientation, moments when we have a sense of a clear direction; when life seems fairly whole and balanced. We are content and at peace with ourselves, others and life in general. The ground beneath us seems fairly sturdy, the road ahead often exciting, and our options wide and varying.

We all experience moments of Disorientation. Any time we experience the pain of loss, deception, grief, shattered dreams, false hope, and difficult transitions, among many other things, we are ushered into a state of disorientation. Though our default mode may be to see a set-back as only a frustration, a mirror of our not-yet-mastered faults or weaknesses, these times are not only healthy patterns of growth, but are quite necessary to our development as human beings.

We all experience moments of Reorientation, when we emerge from disorientation with a renewed sense of hope and often a renewed understanding of God or the faith journey. It is the resting place; the calm after the storm of disorientation that makes it possible for us to move forward with a renewed sense of trust in God. So, praying the Psalms becomes a very helpful way to pray through the various seasons of our spiritual pilgrimage and growth.

Prayer is paying attention to all of life—your life in particular, the life of those around you, the world, your work, relationships. Prayer can also be continual. Practicing the presence of God, attributed to 17th century monk Brother Lawrence, includes desire to maintain an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day and regardless of the task.

We have talked much about being people of balance, spiritual disciplines, reflection and prayer. A way of maintaining accountability for these practices is to create a Rule of Life. A Rule of Life simply states that we believe there are practices that advance, deepen, enrich and convert us, both as individuals and congregations. Prayer is paying attention in our encounters with God. Through these daily prayers and encounters we center our lives on the Holy One, continually inclining our hearts, continually seeking and being found in Christ, continually resting in God's presence until our lives become a prayer to God.

## **Application**

Interview 2-3 people and ask them about the spiritual practices they have found to be meaningful in their life.

Choose a spiritual practice introduced to you through this session and attempt to practice this every day this week.

In a prayerful act, answer the following questions and ask God to reveal those areas in your life where you may need a better sense of balance.

- How do you create space for your relationship with God?
- What can I eliminate from my life to draw closer to God?
- Are there moments during the day when I can capture time with God?
- Is there a specific place where I can do that?

Identify key friends, opportunities for renewal, play and rest that might help you this coming week.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*What are some external things we do simply because we are Christians? What are some internal qualities or, character shaping qualities we gain as a result of being Christian? Does our external faith, the things we do, always influence our internal faith? What is the relationship between our external and internal faith?*

*Would you say that your life is currently organized around God and His ways?*

*When you consider the disciplines you listed, is there a qualitative life to them or do you find yourself simply performing these tasks? Is the list of disciplines diverse or similar?*

*What criteria did you use to gather these—based on frequency, personality-based, perhaps their effectiveness, other factors?*

*Which of the forms of prayer presented appeal to you personally?*

*What forms of prayer have provided you with opportunities to listen, as well as talk with God?*

*How do you accomplish Sabbath?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 08

The Youth Worker's  
Relationship with Others

## **Youth Ministry Training**

### **Lesson Eight: The Youth Worker's Relationship with Others**

#### **Lesson Introduction**

##### **Session Overview**

- Relationships with Youth
- Incarnational Relationship Ingredients
- Relationships with Parents and Families
- Relationships with Other Adult Youth Workers

##### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Identify the vital components of incarnational-relational youth ministry.
- Explain the implications for this type of ministry with the parents and families within the youth worker's sphere of influence.
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the importance of modeling appropriate pastoral care with other adult youth workers.

##### **Introduction**

This lesson addresses the system of relationships in youth ministry. The relationships that will be addressed are those between youth ministers and workers and

- the young person (people)
- parents and families (including that of the youth minister)
- other adult youth workers

#### **Lesson Body**

##### **Relationships with Youth**

If ever there was a passage of Scripture that captures the heart of God for the relationship between the youth minister and the world it would have to be Philippians 2:5-11.

*Philippians 2:5-11 (The Message)*

*Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.*

*Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father*

In this “Christ-hymn” Jesus is presented as the definitive prototype of a missionary God whose sole motivation was love, which acted in obedience to His Father to come to earth, be made a servant, and make the ultimate sacrifice in that obedient service. In this passage, the youth workers (and every Christian) possess the template for self-emptying love that was the trajectory of Jesus’ entire life. In this passage is a pattern of our life’s work.

God invites us to nurture the growth of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ in our lives and the lives of the young people with whom we work. Yet, it seems that this way of living can prove particularly difficult in our own homes at times. Perhaps this setting provides the most important place for God-bearing (or Christlikeness) to occur. With so much of what takes place in our homes influencing our ministries (for good or ill), perhaps the most vital place for us to mimic Jesus’ servant ways occurs with our own families and friends. Somehow it seems that these relationships represent part of the mystery of Jesus’ way. We cannot pretend, so we better be very serious about embracing Christlikeness in every aspect of our lives.

There is a saying, “Christians are a lot like tea bags, you never know what is inside until they are in hot water.” Working with young people will ensure that we will all find ourselves in some sort of hot water at some point (as will being a parent)! When we do, people all around us will find out what is inside. It would seem self-evident that when we cultivate this sort of “holy living” in our homes, that not only we will shape what is inside ourselves, but we will perpetuate Jesus’ example with those whom we love more than anyone else on the earth. May this way of living and being saturate all we do and are in our homes and ministries.

Chap Clark, in his book, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers*, observes that the defining issue for contemporary youth in North America revolves around “abandonment.” Youth experience this abandonment at work, in school, on sports teams, at church and even within families. Developmental psychologist David Elkind, in his book *Ties that Stress: The New Family Imbalance*, notes that postmodernity often leaves young people feeling victimized as they suppress personal needs for the sake of security and protect. They believe they must give in to parental and society expectations before they can become independent. Often, they turn this anger in on themselves (for letting themselves be used) or outward to the world.

Have we overlooked young people’s needs because we were only thinking about our own? Have we forgotten about the importance of the individual young person in favor of the crowd? Have we “stepped” over the hurting young person in order to get assignments done?

### **Incarnational Relationship Ingredients**

To talk about incarnational relationships is to say that we want Jesus to be at the center of our relationships. To define incarnational relationship with young people there are at least three required ingredients. Those are

1. Authenticity
2. Integrity
3. A John the Baptist mentality

## *Authenticity*

In being authentic the youth worker should not attempt to be anything but exactly who they are. The literal translation of the Greek word, “hypocrite,” means “mask wearer.” This term describes precisely the opposite meaning of being authentic. When an adult (or anyone) “puts on” an identity other than who they actually are that person is “acting” rather than being. This is what is literally meant by being a hypocrite.

There are lots of reasons why an adult youth worker might sense a temptation to fit in with the local youth culture by mimicking youth in a particular way. However, when the adult acquiesces to this temptation they, “sell out (or forfeit) their adulthood” and lose their greatest asset in their relationship with the young person. Wayne Rice (co-founder of Youth Specialties) has a saying: “A young person will gravitate toward the oldest person in the room that will take them seriously.” Not only is it unnecessary, it is counterproductive for the adult to be anything other than an adult in the life of the young person. Most young people do not need more adolescent friends. They need adult friends and mentors who take them seriously and offer youth a perspective and outlook far beyond that of their contemporaries. A relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and equality allows the young person access to the maturity of an adult through a safe environment often guaranteed by that selfsame mature adult. For the adult to be anything but “adult” is to abandon the very characteristic that is most important to the young person in this relationship.

For this relationship to be relevant, the adult must enter (as Jesus in Philippians 2) the world of the young person. They must go where young people are, spend time with young people on “their turf” (their context) and model appropriate love, vulnerability, and understanding. Most of all, adults must listen to young persons and truly seek to hear the “words between their words” (their implicit meaning) in order to foster understanding and pastoral care. It is this sort of modeling of what an adult looks like in front of young persons that not only offers them hope but healing relationship. For this relationship to be truly authentic it must not require anything of the young person but their friendship in return. If there are conditions then further abandonment is the result.

## *Integrity*

The ingredient of integrity is closely associated with authenticity. Jesus reminds His listeners in His Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5—7) of the importance of keeping our word. However, Jesus’ message for us does not ask us to “prove” our sincerity through oaths or any other sort of verbal gymnastics or games. We simply allow our “Yes to be Yes, and our No to be No” (Mt 5:37). This sort of “word keeping” precisely provides evidence of one’s integrity.

However, integrity is much more than simply keeping one’s word. Integrity defines a way of living that seeks in all things to be whole and uncompromised. With regard to the youth worker, the implications of this way of living remain quite evident. It means that the youth worker maintains constant vigilance not only about their own conduct but also about even the appearance of impropriety to those outside of the immediate relationship. Although it may prove



near impossible to always avoid doing or saying anything that will not open the possibility of misinterpretation such propriety defines the life of the person of integrity.

For example, the youth workers must be above reproach with regard to financial dealings and with relationships with young persons—especially of the opposite gender. In order to do this well, youth workers are strongly advised to involve other mature, Christian adults in all situations that require leaders to handle money and when chaperoning an overnight activity with youth. These are simple safeguards that cannot be ever ignored in doing ministry. According to Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, people are most vulnerable to failure when they see themselves beyond a particular sin. In maintaining integrity, we choose to always involve the counsel, presence, and help of other trusted Christian adults of integrity in important situations and decisions. Youth ministry is NOT an individual sport—nor is ministry of any sort.

### *The John the Baptist Mentality*

Youth ministry can provide quite a boost to one's ego to enter the world of the young person successfully and establish meaningful relationships. This role seems like being a missionary to a different culture other than one's own. People effectively navigating in this "new world" can find themselves the recipient of considerable attention and becoming quite important to a young person (or group). With this adulation, the reality of ministry takes hold, calling youth workers to closely pattern themselves after John the Baptist.

In the first chapter of the gospel of Mark we encounter John the Baptist. He bursts onto the scene with a prophetic message and a crazy diet and attire to back it up. People were swarming to him from the "whole Judean countryside." He was gaining significant popularity and prominence. However, John never lost sight of who he was. He never confused his role and the role of the one true Savior—Jesus Christ. John the Baptist demonstrated this type of attitude in John 1 when it is recorded that John the Baptist encounters Jesus he says of Him, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" and a few verses later some of John's own disciples follow Jesus. It is also why in John chapter 3, when asked by his own disciples about Jesus, that John says, "He must become greater; I must become less."

It is precisely this sort of mentality that must be that of the youth worker. We must ALWAYS point young people—and all people—to Jesus and NOT to ourselves. This is a very real temptation for anyone that becomes the focus of the attention of others. In fact, John is asked by the "priests and Levites" (Jn 1:19) about his credentials. They wonder if he is "the Christ" or even "Elijah" he denies both. The point here is simple, John does not see himself as more than he actually is (in fact he does not even grasp all that he is) and properly points all who follow him to one that is "greater" and one whose thongs of His sandals he is "not worthy to untie." John displays such humility and clarity of purpose and identity! May all of us involved in this critical ministry with the lives of young people maintain such understanding as John the Baptist.

## Relationship with Parents and Families

*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, emerged from the largest study ever conducted on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents in the United States. In excess of 3,300 students, and their parents, were involved in telephone surveys in a nationally representative sample. Both English and Spanish speaking persons were surveyed. Further, researchers conducted 267 in-person interviews across the country. The research that went into this study was conducted during 2001—2005 through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The noted sociologist Christian Smith was the architect of the study.

Smith lists eleven points in his concluding chapter. Among his findings are some encouraging observations, such as the great value that most young people place on their faith system and the statistical difference that religiously grounded relationships make in an adolescent's life. The largest observation, however, reaffirmed that the single most important influence on the spiritual life of youth were parents. In other words, young people will most often look like the religious and spiritual life of their parents. The bottom line of this observation states; if we are not engaging parents in spiritual growth our attempts to engage their adolescents in spiritual growth may simply be temporary phases the young person goes through.

Failing to enlist parents in their youths' spiritual growth contributes, at least in part, to the reason why so many young people in the United States graduate from high school—and Christ's Church—when they reach age 18. I wish I could tell you the “answer” to this situation, I cannot. I do not know what it means for all of youth ministry—let alone exactly how to deal with this in my own church. Maybe it is time for us to take seriously ministering to youth and their parents. If Christian Smith is right, and I believe on this point he certainly is, then youth ministry must meaningfully engage the parents of the young people we are seeking to influence for the Gospel. Maybe cultivating parent relationships can happen with the smallest of adjustments to our programming . . . maybe it means that youth ministry needs a radical makeover. Regardless of the cost, I am absolutely convinced that something must change with the way we minister to and with parents.

It may be necessary for us to re-learn what it means to be youth workers. We are not adequately able to do all forms of ministry and need to develop partners in ministry that can. Simply said, *Soul Searching*, makes clear beyond any denial that youth workers must focus on parents, as much as young persons, as part of their ministry. One simple corrective involves inviting parents—really involving them—in what is already going on in the ministry. Whether as guests, participants, or even sponsors, parental attendance and participation in the spiritual formation practices of the youth group substantially influences the spiritual growth of youth and adults.

Of course, this suggestion does not solve all problems. It will take much more than simply inviting parents into the current structures and experiences of the youth. However, these invitations provide a good start and such participation would likely shape the type of activities in which the youth were involved. In any event the spiritual lives of the parents and families of youth must be a part of the youth worker's “job description.”

## *The Family of the Youth Worker*

There is much that could be said about the family of the youth worker, particularly those who are married with children. The subjects under this concern could range from the importance of family devotions, to involving the spouse in ministry, to the need for the family to be supportive of the youth worker, etc. However, the single issue that I want to raise here is simply that the youth workers' family is their first ministry priority. Without this primary objective of first taking care of one's own household (in an authentic, integral, and self-emptying-love-sort-of-way), all of one's "outside" achievements are worthless.

Paul writes to Timothy of the qualifications for both overseers and deacons in his first letter to his young follower. In both of the lists of qualifications Paul mentions the family as an important indication of the person's fitness to be a leader in the church. Elsewhere, Paul writes to the Ephesians of this same topic. He warns the Ephesians of the critical importance of the relationships of husband to wives, wives to husbands and of each with their children. These relationships ought to be saturated with all of the very same characteristics of good youth workers. They must be persons of love, integrity, that listen and put the needs of their family above that of their own. What use is it to be a beloved youth worker if our own spouses and children have not learned from our example to love and serve the LORD Jesus?

Single youth workers often overlook this important question. However, our relationships with current family often reflect our ability to form intimate relationships throughout our life. Whether our immediate "family relations" involve only extended family and close friends, how we respond to the needs of those people close to us often reveals our ability to balance ministry during the crucial moments in our lives.

### **Relationships with Other Adult Youth Workers**

"Youth ministry requires a team approach." These may be self-evident instructions but they are important to state clearly. There is no way one adult can meaningfully minister to more than a handful of young persons. In other words, if there are more than 4-6 students in a youth group, youth workers will find it vital to have others involved. Further, even if there are only 4-6, it is important to involve at least another person, in upholding one's integrity and purity.

Kenda Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, use the story from Numbers 11 to remind us of the importance of "sharing the mantle" of leadership with others as youth workers. In this chapter Moses comes to within a moment of complete burn-out as the leader of Israel. He finds himself daily the mediator of disputes and the judge in innumerable decisions for this enormous group of persons he has been commissioned to lead out of Egypt into the desert. He realizes, finally, that he cannot do it by himself. He first complains to God as if it is His fault . . . God answers that Moses ought to lead through delegation (my paraphrase). And so, God instructs Moses to,

Summon before me seventy of the leaders of Israel. Bring them to the Tabernacle to stand there with you. I will come down and talk to you there, I will take some of the Spirit that

is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone (Num 11:16-17, NLT).

Moses follows God's instructions and his burden is relieved. The importance of gathering the elders was not for the benefit of Moses, but for the benefit of Israel because they would have lost their leader had something not changed.

The importance of personal character cannot be overstated. It is more important to be short-handed than to bring in the “wrong” type of adults. An elder in ancient Israel was someone of experience and a person that others respected. These are vital characteristics of anyone in ministry. Too often the stereotypical youth workers are young, “fun”, perhaps “athletic” and male. These descriptions do not fill the Numbers 11 vision of proper leaders for the people of God. Instead leaders are called “elders” and their qualification and empowerment comes from the “spirit” God places in them. Let us look for this same “spirit” when we seek other adults to work with young people.

Another important value of the adult volunteer team of youth workers is the modeling healthy relationships (between adults) that can be a natural outcome. When a team of likeminded Christian adults comes together to love a group of young persons toward Jesus powerful modeling on several fronts takes place. Not only do the young people realize there are a number of adults seeking them out in their own context with authentic, and self-emptying love, the youth also witness these adults showing that same love, respect, and kindness to each other. This can be revolutionary in the lives of young persons who, today, may be surrounded by marital discord, bickering siblings, and the news reports of antagonism between various factions all around.

Adult volunteers provide the type of support for the youth ministry, and each other, that only comes from persons who “really understand” what we face in youth ministry. Often, we have much in common with these people who serve not only as our partners in ministry, but also as some of our very best friends.

Every follower of Jesus is called to live “in His steps” as Peter’s first epistle reminds us. All followers of Jesus ought to pattern their living after His example—summed up at the beginning of the session in Philippians 2:5-11. Of course, the middle section—the part about death—does not appear to be very encouraging and obviously quite different from our traditional understanding of “fun,” associated with youth ministry in many contexts. However, our sacrificial journey of love does not occur in isolation. When we join with youth, families and other adult workers we make this journey together.

## **Application**

Interview two to three people in your local congregation and ask them for their definition of the church. In their context how do they understand their relationship to the local congregation?

Speak to various other adults in your congregation about their willingness or unwillingness to serve as adult volunteers in youth ministry. Use the conversations to help build a philosophy of team ministry.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Who is someone that is a living example of the Philippians 2 passage in your life?*

*How have you (or someone you know) displayed authenticity, integrity, or a "John the Baptist" mentality in your ministry, or can you give possibilities when you or others have been tempted to not demonstrate these characteristics?*

*How did your own parents model love and respect to you in your family?*

*Share the example of a minister's family that you know who models these characteristics well.*

*What might be some other positive natural outcomes of involving a "team" approach to youth ministry?*

*Would it be important to involve people on this team different from yourself? Why or Why not?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 09

The Youth Worker's  
Relationship Within the  
Body of Christ

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Nine: The Youth Workers Relationship within the Body of Christ**

**Lesson Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- Hopes and Expectations
- The Ones You Love
- Participating in the Body of Christ
- Alongsideness—Unity in the Body

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Consider and reflect on the nature of the church relationships they currently participate in
- Consider their understanding of healthy relationships as single or married youth workers
- Understand and commit themselves to developing a healthy approach to the relationships that they are a part of within the congregation
- Identify and consider ways of expanding their relationships

**Introduction**

This session explores the multiplicity of relationships encountered by youth workers within the body of Christ. It includes considering the role of youth worker as a model, example, bridge builder, and reconciler in their relationships with others within the church. The need for youth workers to maintain healthy relationships with their own families, the congregations they serve and others in ministry is vitally important

**Lesson Body**

**Hopes and Expectations**

The reality of youth ministry varies widely depending on circumstances: For example, are you paid? Do you work full-time for the church? Are you a volunteer in leadership? Do you work part time for the church? Do you work with a team, or are you on your own? Are you single or married, male or female? No matter what your circumstances, however, the question of dealing with expectations within the body of Christ can be a crucial one. What do you expect of your church?

- Advocacy for justice?
- Service to the poor?
- Proclamation of hope?
- Support for ministry?
- Transportation for young people?
- The attendance of other volunteer leaders?
- Young people who will actively participate in activities?
- Financial backing and a budget to work with?

And what does your church expect of you?

- Perfection?
- Modeling faith?
- Being a voice for justice and hope?
- Absolute Integrity?
- ALL of your Time; Energy; Commitment; Enthusiasm; and Longevity?

The reality for many of us is that we usually have very high hopes for our churches and our ministries, and they often have high hopes for us. Our cultures will also impact upon our expectations. In some cultures, it is likely that hospitality, open homes, intense amounts of time and participation in one another's lives is both permissible and normal. In other cultures, it is more likely that there will be rigidly scheduled times, with limitations set on seeing one another and participating in one another's lives as a church family or youth group. Depending on where you start from you may well have different questions to address when thinking about your relationship within the body of Christ.

For many youth workers, there is never enough time in the week to do all that they would dream of doing. There is also the added reality that trying to do all that the church asks, (and all that they don't ask for, but seem to expect), can create even more pressure. Then there is the vision and calling that the youth workers have for their own lives. The question of balance then becomes a critical one for youth workers to consider.

It is certainly true that deeply embedded within the idea of ministry is the notion of sacrifice, but what does that mean in our cultures? How does 'sacrifice' (which at times has led to high-impact, short term ministry) mesh with the evidence that young people crave stable, long-term relationships in order to understand their faith? How does the idea of sacrifice tie in with the biblical command uttered by Jesus to love God and love others as yourself? In Western culture the challenge includes balancing an appropriate amount of personal time in relation to the time spent with others, particularly youth. In some cultures, the challenge relating to balance includes seeking an appropriate amount of personal time in relation to the time spent with others, particularly youth. Other cultures view the relational balance differently, often focusing on the nature of the relationship maintaining genuine hospitality or maintaining one's "honor" (or "face") in the midst of relationships. Nevertheless, we need a sound sense of our personal identity in the midst of cultural expectations.

While it is an important idea, the notion of loving yourself, taken to an extreme, can certainly lead into selfishness and self-focus, on the other hand, embedded in the idea of loving yourself well is that of discipline. Truly loving oneself means being willing to

- Reflect honestly on your life and practice,
- Think holistically about your way of living
- Think about who you are, what you do and why you do what you do
- Loving others and being outward looking
- Living well within creation



If it is true that we must lead lives that demonstrate Godliness, holiness and balance, how is this possible? How can we help juggle our hopes for holistic lives with the demands placed upon us by the expectations of our congregations? Here are some suggestions gleaned from people whose lives are devoted to thinking about leadership:

1. *Focus on Christ*: prayer, scripture reading, developing habits of spiritual living
2. *Clarify expectations*: sit down with your church leadership and the team you work with and consider their explicit and implicit expectations for your leadership
3. *Acknowledge tensions*: be honest about the areas where you find it most difficult (e.g. your church leadership/church expects numerical growth in the youth group, but you are investing in a small number as part of developing discipleship)
4. *Build in seasons of time and rest*: look at the long-term view of your ministry. Have you built in 'Sabbath rest'; time dedicated to retreat? Have you built in time for rest? Are you able to take a day away from 'ministry' and be with friends?
5. *Give and receive*: recognize that as you give of yourself you must also find places or people from whom to receive. Be willing to be gracious in receiving.
6. *Surround yourself with strong people, build a team*: resist being a 'one-person-show'. Don't be afraid of other people who are better than you and can propel your ministry in other directions. Remember that Jesus spend as much time with the disciples as the multitudes. Resist being the only one who can lead, or make decisions, or set direction, instead, deliberately cultivate key others who are equally strong as you. You will still shine.
7. *Care for 'the weak'*: be a person who advocates for those who are different from yourself. Exercise compassion, learn the art of empathy.
8. *Develop Accountability and find a mentor*: find someone to be held accountable to, for your thoughts, time, actions and ministry. Find someone more experienced than you to mentor you and develop you. Deliberately seek someone out who will ask good questions of your ministry. Recognize that working alongside people in need can be draining. Build in systems of support; people who you can share in confidence with. Develop systems of support that are outside of your local church.
9. *Put others first*: think of those you love and put them first. If your friends never see you, or family begin to ask questions of your time, remember that people are always more important than programs. Attend carefully to the needs of those who love you.
10. *Live holistically*: take a lesson from Jesus and spend time alone. Take care of your body—with food and sleep, exercise and prayer. Remember that we are created to be co-creators with God, find time to celebrate, laugh as well as cry. In general, seek to live a whole life before God. Love the world and learn to care for the creation you are a part of.

11. *Learn to say no*: realize that it is important not to say yes to every request. Learn the difference between the truly urgent and the seemingly urgent. Be available but remember that we need to empower people we serve to develop and grow into interdependent not dependent human beings.
12. *Invest in relationships*: it is vital to realize that youth ministry takes place over time and that the fruit of the relationships may not be immediately evident, but the importance of allowing genuine relationships to exist between you and other leaders, young people and your family will be a part of the transformation that God brings about when people are in relationships with each other.

## **The Ones You Love**

In addition to the suggestions presented there are other dynamics that may impact the life of leaders. The way you live your life as a single leader or married leader is significant. You will be perceived as a role model for the young people you serve. Caring for yourself, accepting yourself, and learning to love yourself is vital. Being someone who cherishes and nurtures your relationship with God and with those you love will be one of the most significant things you do. This is because we are created to be in relationships, mirroring the trinity, who exists in a community of love.

Regardless of whether or not you are single or married, ensuring that you work well with other leaders is important. Developing appropriate relationships with your team-workers, people in your church, and expanding your circle of friends takes time and energy. It is important that you discipline your life to do this.

### *Single in leadership*

As an unmarried leader, your time is often perceived by others as less full/important and more flexible, and your own temptation can be to pour all time, energy and enthusiasm into the youth you serve. There are enormous questions to ask here, however:

Do you have relationships with people of your own age and maturity? Do you cultivate these relationships? Do you love others and give your life to others in mutual relationships?

It is critical for single youth workers to develop healthy relationships with people who can give them support and love at a mature level. Your time is, perhaps, slightly more flexible, but you must discipline yourself to create the space for you to have time to nurture your relationship with God and others. You also must be careful to ensure that your relationships with young people are not merely related to enhancing your self-esteem or creating a false sense of community and support. It is important as a single person to deal in healthy ways with your sexuality, the need for love, ways of sharing and shaping time and cultivating relationships that will help you to grow and be transformed. Incidentally, the last two sentences are equally true for married people.

### *Married in leadership*

As married leaders, the questions shift again: to what extent does your family become involved in your calling and ministry? Is your husband or wife automatically involved? How do you discipline your time? How do you ensure that you have the time and energy for your blood family as well as your Christ-family? Certainly, there is often an assumption of ‘two-for-the-price-of-one’ in church settings, and while there is some truth to that (it is impossible to exclude the family) there is also an important reality that time devoted to being a wife or mother, husband or father is also important. What are the ways you nurture a positive relationship with your family?

Your time may be slightly more rigid; however, it will be important to strive for balance. Many marriages have been sacrificed on the altar of a youth worker’s inability to say ‘no’. You also must be careful to ensure that your relationships with young people are not merely related to enhancing your self-esteem or creating a false sense of community and support. It is important as a married person to deal in healthy ways with your sexuality, the need for love, ways of sharing and shaping time and cultivating relationships that will help you to grow and be transformed. [Incidentally, the last two sentences are equally true for single people.]

### *Protecting and nurturing your marriage while in youth ministry*

If you are married you also must pay time and attention to your marriage. Does your spouse understand the demands of your ministry? Do you share a vision of your marriage that touches on time, money and life-style? Do you have an open-house policy? Do you spend time together privately, working on communicating and loving each other? Do you deliberately set times when you are able to reconnect with each other? Listening to one another and reflecting deeply on one another’s hopes and expectations of marriage and ministry will be vital.

The role of power and intimacy must be considered. Those in youth ministry often will be seen as having authority and power in a relationship with young people and other leaders. It is vital that youth workers (married or single) reflect carefully on their use of time and their energy. Likewise, caring for young people, sometimes vulnerable, always needing to be nurtured and cared for can lead to relationships that seem intimate and then can lead to inappropriate relationships. Taking heed, guarding time, being ruthlessly honest, allowing accountability partnerships to develop are all critical. If married, listening and responding to the concerns of your spouse can be vital, and allowing other people’s instincts to guide you can be extremely important. If single, it is vitally important to have people you are accountable to, and listen to their instincts. It is sometimes difficult to perceive the danger if we are too close to it.

## Participating in the Body of Christ

The gap between our expectation of ourselves and the body of Christ we are a part of and the realities that we experience can create tension and stress unless it is acknowledged and accepted. It is important to consider the ‘hard’ issues of finance, time allocation, job descriptions, budgets and so on, and the more ‘soft’ expectations of hopes for young people, spiritual development, relationship building and so on. Although all of these areas are worth exploring (maybe in a different lesson) in this session we are going to consider our expectations of our own participation as youth workers and the lives we lead in several key areas.

The question of being a participant in the life of the congregation you serve is important. This speaks to a particular understanding of ministry: either ministry ‘from above’ or ministry ‘from within/below.’ In the church, there has historically been some debate. Is the minister one of the congregation or above the congregation, leading from a different level/plain? As noted before, the idea of incarnational-ministry has been vital in the understanding of ministry over the last years. The leader ministers from within, alongside and as one of the congregation. The minister, in this view, is as likely to have weaknesses and needs as any other member of the congregation, and is considered a participant first, leader second.

The importance placed upon this view is derived from scripture. Reflecting again on Philippians 2, the model that Jesus Christ offers is one of coming among us, becoming flesh, being one of and with the people—even though He was entitled to much more, He willingly chose to be clothed in human flesh and die our death. The idea of the incarnation serves as a model then of our ministry. If that is true then in the body of Christ we are both a participant and leader, one who enters into the experience of the local body of Christ and one who helps shape it.

Whatever else is true, it seems that to be a participant in the body of Christ expressed locally in your congregation, will mean several things.

You will:

1. Be involved in the local church as she participates in what God is doing in a local area or setting
2. Be called to love people and be loved by them
3. Be part of the mission of God in the world and try and see how God is at work around you
4. Take part in the disciplines and practices of the local church
5. Take part in the projects of the local church
6. Participate in the worship gatherings of the local church
7. Share in the Eucharist of the local church
8. Disciple and be discipled within the local church
9. Seek to share in the vision of the local church
10. Support the leaders and other members of the local church
11. Recognize that you are part of the body of Christ formed around the world, reflecting Jesus to the world.

That's quite a lot! Alongside this list—which is true for all Christian believers throughout time and space—it is important to realize though that it can be difficult for leaders to simply participate.

It is vital to share in the life of the congregation as a youth worker. You must. This takes discipline. It takes deliberately recognizing yourself as a servant and participant first. It means empowering others to share in the responsibility for the tasks you find hard to leave behind. It means sitting amongst the congregation and entering into worship. The importance of being an authentic participant is vital for your ministry and your health. If you cannot worship alongside your sisters and brothers in Christ, then you must reflect again on your role within the church and how you can be transformed into a participant in the community as a worshipper as well as a 'professional' or a 'worker.'

### **Togetherness—Unity in the Body**

You are not alone! Though at points it is tempting to be like Elijah—in 1 Kings 19: 9-18—the reality is that there are other ministers in the congregation you serve. Spending time, sharing vision, praying together, developing systems of accountability, honing one another's skills, listening to each other are all vitally important as you serve God. Not being afraid of other people's gifts and strengths is important—God calls all of His people to serve and equips them—and the place you are called to serve deserves people who are of one mind. Please don't read that as having no arguments or always being clones! Normalizing conflict is vital in the church, and learning ways to be reconciled is essential. Read Acts for the rest of the story about leadership! It is tough, and demands thought, prayer, creativity and perseverance. The one-mindedness of the Epistle is to have the goal and focus of Christ who will be called Lord and before whom every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue confess.

Likewise, the history of the Christian church has recently been marred by a sense of mistrust and disunity, brokenness, you might say. In terms of healthy ministry relationships, however, Jesus' prayer for unity compels us to look to other local congregational leaders, to meet and talk and share and pray with others nearby who also long for Christ to be glorified. Until all the people locally are Christians there is no need for a sense of competitiveness, rather, there is every need for a sense of common ministry. Learning from others as well as teaching them, sharing with others as well as listening to them are all vital in the Kingdom sense of being the body of Christ.

If we allow ourselves to focus first on the Kingdom of God and second on what unites us, centering our conversations on Jesus and working together for His sake, then we are more likely to be able to meet and pray, share and worship alongside one another. Certainly, there are differences. Again, thinking biblically about Paul's descriptions of the body there is a little toe and an eyelash to be considered, but in humility regarding others as better than oneself, it may be that we can work together in unity not only within our own local expression of the body of Christ, but also with others who are united in the vision of seeing Jesus as Lord of all.

## **Application**

Take time to write a ministry statement that responds to these questions:

- What are your hopes and expectations of your ministry? Do they differ from your church's expectations and hopes? How can you gain clarity?
- How can you improve in one area of relationship (your church, other ministers, other leaders, with your loved ones)?
- Who can you identify as a mentor or co-leader? What steps can you take to approach them for support?

Identify at least three people in your life that provide healthy relationships beyond the life of the church. Do you have accountability partners?

If married discuss with your spouse the church's expectations for the both of you, do you agree?

Make a list of activities in the church where you can participate apart from youth ministry. Which ones provide both support and fellowship?

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Think about how your lifestyle as a youth worker impacts the people around you. Would you describe yourself as living a balanced life?*

*If single, share the issues that are most critical in developing healthy relationships with non-youth.*

*If married, share the issues that are most critical in developing healthy relationships with your spouse.*

*Is it possible to be a leader and a participant?*

*Can you share in the life of the church as a youth worker but also just as a member?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 10

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship - Worship

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Ten: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Worship**

**Lesson Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- An Exercise in Belonging
- Worship as a Response to Our Culture
- Practicing Worship
- Worship-Centered Teaching

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Articulate a holistic definition of worship
- Weave this definition of worship through her or his ministry to, with, and among young people
- Understand the various movements in worship
- Teach based on worship-centered principles

**Introduction**

This session explores the nature of worship as a Christian discipline. Not only is this discipline a necessary part of a healthy Christian life, but it is also an essential part of a healthy ministry to young people.

**Lesson Body**

**An Exercise in Belonging**

I'd like to learn something about the places you grew up. I have a few questions about your home village, town, city or country. Are there any festivals, celebrations, customs or traditions that are unique to your area—so unique, in fact that I may never have heard of them? Let's look at another question. Are there any words or phrases that are unique to the people who live in your area? In other words, is there a language all your own, a unique set of words or phrases that someone outside your area would never know? Language is another way we can know we belong to a place and a people. Here's another one. Is there any chapter in your town's history, your part of the country that helps to define you as a group of people? Are there names, places or dates or stories in your collective memory that are important to you, but that may have gone unnoticed or unappreciated everywhere else? These stories and events, either as tragedies or celebrations, demonstrate that you belong.

Can you see what is starting to take shape? We have talked about the traditions, the unique languages and the particular, local histories. These are powerful ways in which you and your community belong together. This is all part of your shared history, your collective memory.



Now think about the church. Are there traditions and customs that we intuitively know about? We don't have to explain these customs to each other, we just know. How about Communion? What about a Good Friday service, a Maundy Thursday service, or anointing with oil? Some of the things we do in the regular rhythm of being the Church make no sense at all to those people looking in from the outside. But we know and understand, because we already belong, we are part of the history.

Are there words and phrases that we use on a regular basis? What about the phrases, "I'm saved," "washed in the blood," "the blood of the Lamb," or "born again"? What about the word, "grace"? Do we have a shared history? Do those of us who are members of this global Kingdom known as the Church have any events in our shared past that bind us together? Yes, we do! What are some events in our recent history that are reasons in and of themselves that we belong together? Keep pushing it back, back now into the pages of the Bible.

The Bible is an incredible collection of shared history and collective memory of God's presence and interaction with His creation—especially humankind. The Bible and all its stories is our story—our belonging to someone bigger than ourselves. Do our people know the story as well as the church history of those who chose to follow Jesus throughout in the face of many different challenges? Do we know our own Story well enough to tell it? So often the people around us, the people not yet aware of our story have questions about life, about the nature of our God, about Jesus. Sadly, just as often, the people of God don't seem willing or able to respond.

You are working with a generation of young people who don't mind that you have an organization that has standards or a statement of belief. They want to belong to a group that gives them an identity. What is that identity? We are the people of God.

### **Worship as a Response to Our Culture**

The truth of the matter is this—this era, with all of its good and bad, is a perfect time for the Church to be the Church! As it has been for each generation, it is our time for us to reintroduce ourselves to the planet as the people of God, a people of worship!

**WORSHIP!** The word invokes images of worship-style preferences. Fixation on our personal preferences will derail the Church's efforts to change our world. In order to make our mark in society, the Church must recapture worship's thorough, practical and holistic meaning. We are in danger of missing the point. I believe that the church's place in society is at risk. Churches aren't very often the major, society-shaping forces that they used to be. We are frighteningly close to being a non-issue, and again, our ability to influence and flavor the culture around us may be dependent on our ability to recapture a healthy, holistic and biblical definition of the word "worship".

How does the Bible itself describe or define worship? There are several Hebrew and Greek words translated as worship. In the New Testament alone there are four significant words translated as worship. Sometimes, we don't have all the words we need to communicate a Biblical concept. We miss out on the true meanings the original authors intended or the history around it.

Take for example, one of our most treasured and often-quoted verses in all of Scripture, Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.” Look at the first word, “Therefore.” It’s obvious that this word is referring back to something said or written earlier. What is it referring to? This statement refers back to Romans 9, 10 and 11, where Paul walks through God’s stormy relationship with His chosen people, Israel. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca and all who would follow. Paul mentions Jacob, Esau and then Moses. God’s love and devotion to His people is the common thread that runs through this entire story despite Israel’s best efforts to rebel and frustrate the God of the promise, the God of the covenant.

Paul writes of a God who refuses to give up on His people. Nowhere else is God the “God of the second chance” like He is with the people of Israel. Finally, God redraws the boundaries of His kingdom in such a way as to include all who would call on the name of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles. And still, God demonstrates the eternal love He has for Israel. “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Rom 10:21). In chapter 11, Paul, a self-proclaimed Jew among Jews, still hopes, prays, and yearns for the redemption of his people. Paul, awash in this amazement, says finally in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you . . .”

True worship arises because God has called and continues to call His people, the Church. As an echo, the Church’s worship directed to God is a response to His gifts. Crucial to worship then, is the Church’s ability to remember and recognize God’s gifts throughout history. But those stories are not just God’s stories. They are the stories of the Church as well—they are OUR stories. Not until we as members of the Church rediscover our story, the story of the dynamic relationship between God and His people, can we properly respond to God and His gifts; without our story, we cannot be living sacrifices; without our story, we cannot worship.

Can we be honest? Much of what is now called worship, isn’t. Worship cannot be self-centered. God is not the ultimate vending machine. While God the eternal Father does seek to comfort His children, He is still God and still worthy of worship even if our “needs” aren’t met. What seems to be moving Paul to tears in Romans 12 is not so much what God has done for Paul, but what God has done for mankind as can be discovered in God’s salvation history as recorded in the pages of the Bible. Each of us has some idea of God’s graciousness to us, but our perspective is hopelessly and helplessly limited.

Youth workers have to teach our story; tell and retell our story, or else young people will not truly know Him. If you don’t tell the story, they won’t know how to be people of worship; they won’t know how to respond! Worship is about the story. It’s about understanding and responding to all that God has done throughout the chapters of our history.

### *Worship is not a Religious Exercise, it is a Relationship*

Note Paul's emphasis on "living" sacrifices as opposed to the "dead" sacrifices of the Old Testament. For it is not just in the dying, but living in relationship with Him, that we become acceptable sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. We continually give our lives to God. We no longer decide our future. Instead, we rely totally on God to lead us and guide us. We give God the totality of our lives. How can we give our all, not knowing what the future holds? The answer lies in the relationship. In what has been since the beginning of time a dynamic and living "relationship," God has sought each of us out, interacting with us, building a heritage, a story that continues to this day. It is a story that continues to be written through our lives as we live in relationship with this God of relationship.

### *Worship is a Lifestyle*

Paul says, "This is your spiritual worship." It is crucial at this point to recognize that the act of giving ourselves over completely as living sacrifices is equated with the Greek word "*latreia*," which includes the idea of service or religious homage. With this definition in mind, Paul writes that believers truly worship when their lives are lived entirely in grateful response to God's nature, to His purpose, and to His good gifts that He gives to His people. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases 12:1:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.

The implications are clear: reclaiming our story enables believers to recapture a way of life that has been dormant since the earliest days of the Church. The proper response to God will necessarily result in a particular, sacrificial way of life. True worship—the recovery and repossession of the story, our story—is a distinctive and peculiar way of life. Look at this snapshot of our ancestors—the earliest Church:

Everyone around was in awe. All those wonders and signs done by the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold everything they owned and pooled their resources, so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the temple, followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw and every day their number grew, as God added those who were saved (Acts 2:42-47, *The Message*).

The climate is right, the time is right for a rebirth of an Acts 2 Church. Living life in worship, day in and day out with consistency, we experience the truth of a loving God. Our spiritual hunger is by relationships with God and each other in the Church. We belong since God has invited us to belong to His family. That's worth celebrating.

## Practicing Worship

Perhaps the best way to understand the true meaning of worship still rests in practicing it in the middle of a worshipping community. In this sense, the term “practicing” does not mean a rehearsal of what we do, or a strategy to become masters at worship. Instead, the term ‘practicing’ means that we give ourselves over to the structures and forms that guide our worship until we are shaped and conditioned to experience and respond to God with our whole heart. We do not master worship; instead we allow worship to bring us into a posture of obedience where we serve God.

Worship also means attributing worth or respect to God, which often comes in many styles and shapes throughout the world. Worship can be used to describe both personal devotion and community worship, the gathering of people as a Christian assembly. Author James White, in *Introduction to Christian Worship*, notes we usually treat our assembling for worship as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ’s name is itself an important part of common worship. These gatherings, however, can be quite diverse. From the early history of the church there have been a number of different “classical” worship traditions. Regardless of the different approaches to the worship of God, one thing remains clear, worship should bring us into the presence of God and also awaken us to God’s love so that we can respond with our whole lives.

In order to “practice” worship we need to keep in mind some key elements that most worship services share, no matter how formal or informal. The elements may look different in various cultural contexts, but they remain crucial for sound worship leadership with young people.

First, worship incorporates a basic sense of “space.” While worship might happen anywhere, often we are called to fashion a space that people find helpful to their worship experience. This space may be a church sanctuary, a classroom, a meeting hall or outdoors. The key challenge is to arrange the space so that the focus is on God. This space might include special altars and furniture, or religious symbols and artwork, or music played and sung. The goal remains to structure this “sacred space” so that young people know they are in a place that signals a sense of reverence and expectation that God will do something.

Second, almost all worship has a sense of timing, rhythm, or flow. Whether an open praise service or a formal, liturgical, worship setting, almost all worship tries to bring people through a series of actions into the presence of God. While small changes might be made, the overall flow remains important, whether a “free church” worship and liturgical worship. Free church worship describes congregations that like to keep a portion of the worship service spontaneous and open. The term liturgical often describes congregations that have a set, often printed, worship structure that they follow in a regular pattern. Regardless of the level of spontaneity and freedom included, some blended worship services try to incorporate both. Historically almost all congregations still follow some basic structure aimed to help people actually enter into worship. The four basic acts, from the beginning to the end of the worship service, that provide a rhythm or flow to worship include the following:

### *Four Basic Acts that Structure Worship*

1. *Entering into God's Presence*: Actions such as singing and praying designed to invite people into God's presence.
2. *Hearing God's Word*: Actions such as hearing scripture read and proclaimed so that we hear Christ's message for us as we rest in God's message.
3. *Responding/Celebrating with Thanksgiving*: God's word invites our response, be it at an altar or through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Responses can include times of commitment but they also express moments of giving thanks to God for what we have heard and for the chance to be in the presence of God.
4. *Sending*: Finally, worship includes some form of dismissal so that we can be called to love and serve God's world. The final act of gathered worship includes the command to live out our worship throughout the week.

Finally, almost all worship requires dedicated, authentic leadership. Youth workers learn early that the goal of leading worship revolves around getting young people to focus on God, not on the worship leader. Nevertheless, sound, spiritually grounded leadership remains a key concern. One does not have to be unduly outgoing to be a good worship leader. Instead, a good worship leader recognizes that they must focus more on the rhythm of worship than on their personal abilities. Quiet, reflective people may serve as strong leaders as long as these adults--- or young people--- can direct the worshippers' attention toward God.

Regardless of our role in worship we need to remember that the focus must be on God. We can have a beautiful worship setting, great technology, excellent music, powerful preaching and dynamic leadership and still miss the goal of worship. If people do not enter the presence of God and if they are not inspired to then live out worship in their daily lives we have failed to understand the basic purpose and rhythm of worship.

### **Worship Centered Teaching**

Beyond the practice of worship, how do we prepare youth to live a life anchored in the true direction worship calls for? Can we relive the story of God, respond relationally, live fully a worship-centered life? Can our teaching resemble our worship? Can God's story found in the pages of the Bible really influence the way you are doing youth ministry? The Bible has great transformational power. Here's a question: How do you teach the Bible?

### *Finding Ourselves in the Story*

Unfortunately, young people under our care often do not receive the full Story of God, but only those bits-and-pieces that the youth worker feels are important. I did a little bit of checking to see how the ancient Israelites taught their children. Without many of the wonders of technology that more and more of us have at our disposal to transmit Biblical truth, how did the ancient Israelites teach faith to their children? They told stories. They told them in a particular order so as to build their children from the inside out.

Let's talk about the Story of the Bible. Make a timeline—use the back of this page or some other means. Let that timeline represent the storyline in the Bible. Take a few moments to put Creation at the beginning and the Second Coming at the end. Now, answer the following question: If it were your responsibility to tell the Story of God to someone who had never heard it before, what stories would you believe to be the most crucial? We want to completely cover what it means to be the People of God. Go ahead, take a few minutes, and write these on the timeline. Do your best to try to keep the stories in order.

Now your timeline should show a gap between the end of Biblical time and the Second Coming. Do you know what belongs in that space? We do. That is where we live now, you and I, as we minister to our young people. Why is that so important? Your people won't truly belong until they know that they belong on this timeline right here with the likes of Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ, all members of the family of God. If we'll do this thing right, we can show them how they can be a part of God's story—the story that continues to be written through us by God.

*More Active than Passive.*

Worship-Centered Teaching is in its essence more active than passive. The traditional lecture style is a passive form of teaching and learning. You know, from painful experience, that the lecture style is not always the best way to get your point across. Psychologist Edgar Dale notes we learn more as our activities get us closer to direct, purposeful, personal experience. So, we learn:

- 5% - 10% Verbal or written
- 25% - Media
- 40% - 60% Role-play
- 80% - 90% Experience

Edgar Dale's work is of monumental importance to us who teach. When we can actually figure out a way for our young people to experience the truth of the lesson in a hands-on way, then they take home eighty to ninety percent of the lesson we're trying to get across. It is not enough to say, "As Christians, you should go and feed the poor." Instead, after you teach that lesson, go and serve. Go and help to feed the poor! I know it sounds simple, but we act as if it is nearly impossible. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your people is to cancel your regularly scheduled activities so that you can give your youth an opportunity to experience the truth of a lesson. You'll be amazed at what you can teach and what your young people can learn.

*More We-Oriented, than I-Oriented.*

The focus of Worship-Centered Teaching is not on the individual but on the community. It is this kind of emphasis that will tie our students to the traditions of the church and the depth of the scripture. This is the perfect time to say, "Here is a place to belong and here is how we believe." This doesn't mean that we seek to take advantage young peoples' desire to belong, creating youth who appropriate our beliefs but fail to live them out. Rather we can provide a place where students can feel welcomed and accepted. When the students make the choice to enter our groups, we can then stand up and say, "This is who we are and this is how we believe." Worship-Centered Teaching does not apologize for having distinctive beliefs.

Another aspect of being more “we-oriented than I-oriented” is in how we assist our teens with their devotional life by focusing on personal and community practices. We all know that a regular devotional time is essential to the development of faith. Our young people often aren’t equipped to be the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture, and we do them a great disservice when we look at them solely for personal interpretation and individual application. We need to make sure they also encounter scripture in community with people who can serve as sound references and to live the story through accountability and guidance from others. Only as we model Worship-Centered Teaching for our students, and provide opportunities for them to join us, will they come to understand and find their place in God’s Story.

### **Application**

Construct a timeline of Biblical History on a large wall in the place you minister to your young people, and make sure to leave a large space for the pictures that you will take of your students. Place these pictures on the wall, in the timeline of God’s ever-unfolding story.

Attend your local worship service, identify the basic movements that go on in the service designed to bring people closer to God and send them back into the world.

Read Nehemiah 8 and 9. Compare and contrast this passage of scripture with the Romans 9-12 passage that we studied in this lesson.

Review the lessons you have taught over the past years. Have you been telling and retelling the story? Or have you been bouncing from topic to topic? In light of what you have read, what plan do you need to implement to guide your teaching to ensure that you cover the entire story with your students?

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Are there any festivals, celebrations, customs or traditions that are unique to your area—so unique, in fact that other people may never have heard of them?*

*What are some events in our recent history that are reasons in and of themselves that we belong together?*

*How does your understanding of Romans 12:1 impact your leading of worship for youth?*

*Do you know the Biblical Story well enough to help your students find their place in it?*

*Does your youth group see themselves as part of the continually unfolding story? Why or why not?*

*What are some concrete ways that you can begin to change your teaching to reflect a Worship-Centered Teaching approach?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 11

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship - Witness  
and Evangelism



# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Eleven: Youth Ministry Discipleship: Witness and Evangelism**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Motivation for Evangelism
- Models for Evangelism
- Building Relationships and Overcoming Diversions
- Methods for Relational Evangelism
- Teaching Youth How to Share Their Faith

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand how to see witness as a sign of one's life, with or without words
- Define relational evangelism with youth
- Identify and develop different evangelistic approaches
- Teach youth how to share their faith with peers and in families

#### **Introduction**

Youth ministry serves God as we witness and proclaim the gospel to young people. However, youth workers and youth should share this responsibility. This session teaches how to understand and effectively lead youth in witness and evangelism.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Motivation for Evangelism**

When youth workers seek the proper motivation for evangelism, the scriptures offer a major source. Anchored in the message and mission of Jesus, revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, many of the writers in the New Testament constantly exhort Christians to reach out with the message of salvation. There may be other resources to help us understand the nature of evangelism in our contemporary culture, but scripture provides the logical beginning point for our understanding the importance of our Christian witness in every situation including youth ministry.

There may be a number of key insights from the scriptures. Perhaps some of the most important begin with the good news that God takes the first initiative to save people, including young people, from their sinful, hopeless condition. Our witness serves as a response to what God has done and is already doing in our lives. We are called to practice the gospel by our very presence in society. Our actions as Christians often speak louder than merely talking about our faith. Evangelism must be the proclamation of the gospel in both word and deed, providing the message of Jesus by living lives modeled after Jesus. That is not all that scripture says, but these ideas challenge us to take seriously everything we do as youth workers as part of our Christian witness.

## **Models for Evangelism**

Our witness as Christians, particularly our efforts to evangelize people, occur only as we prayerfully, patiently, and persistently, work with individuals regardless of their life circumstance. Such an approach proves crucial when reaching out to young people. Depending on culture and personal context, the moment of presenting the gospel message, of evangelizing youth, may take different expressions. Historically, the church has adopted several approaches that seem to relate to various approaches in the Bible.

### *Confrontation*

This approach confronts a person with the logical direction their current life will take them—personal and spiritual destruction—and offers a frank but redemptive alternative. Sometimes confrontation arises through negative critique and challenging a young person. Sometimes young people find themselves confronted through radical healing or unexpected expression of love and care in someone's life. Confrontation may be either positive or negative, but the moment of confrontation opens the opportunity to show a redemptive alternative.

The biblical imagery that undergirds this approach rests in Acts 9 with the apostle Paul's Damascus journey where Saul (Paul) finds himself confronted by the resurrected Christ, knocked off his feet, blind, but ultimately understands—thanks to Ananias—the full meaning to his encounter with Jesus and proceeds with the same zeal in proclaiming the gospel and testifying to his transformation. Youth workers who use this approach should always avoid the danger of manipulating youth emotions with extreme and fearful images. Nevertheless, real confrontation allows youth to accept for themselves the claims of the gospel.

### *Invitation*

This approach acknowledges a person's life is a journey but also invites people to allow Jesus to enter into that journey. Rather than focus on negative aspects of a young person's life, this view often includes the assertion that the Christian life provides a sense of meaning and fulfillment to what God has in mind. Youth workers do encourage specific decisions but many times based on the strength of their relationship with the youth and the possibilities of what God might accomplish. Often young people are already active within the youth ministry but have not made a specific commitment until the youth worker engages them and gently makes them aware of the different ways Christ can become even more important to them.

Often this form of evangelism finds biblical imagery in Luke 24:13-35, the Emmaus Road journey, more important. Christ joins travelers on the journey, opens their minds to the importance of His life from the scriptures, never pushes and seems almost to move on until an act of hospitality by the travelers allows Jesus to be recognized, only to disappear again so the travelers—now changed—can continue their journey.

Specific conversion experiences may seem more elusive in this approach, often youth may merely see themselves continuing the journey, but their hearts are indeed “made warm” by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Youth ministers using this approach have to make sure that youth do

not accept Christ just to meet personal needs. Jesus not only fulfills longings but also challenges young people to follow Christ instead of their personal desires. Nevertheless, this developmental approach often allows youth to embrace Jesus at a level consistent with their personal journey.

Borrowing a term from Chris Folmsbee, in his book *A New Kind of Youth Ministry*, this approach utilizes encourages youth to bring their friends for an engaging activity, a brief gospel invitation, an opportunity to discuss the event over food. This particular approach reflects a “seeker sensitive” approach that often encourages a real love for the unreached while also seeking approaches that will invite them into the church through the youth group.

The blend of friendship evangelism and event-based evangelism allows youth workers to offer non-threatening opportunities with the hope that, on occasion, these events will result in energizing moments of deep encounter. Folmsbee admits that this approach may not always prove effective since there are a number of challenges, including the tendency for youth to not think about their Christian witness beyond the events themselves. Often discipleship can be lacking, so youth evaluate the ministry based on the quality of these events. However, limited use of these gatherings can provide an opportunity for moments of deep awareness and commitment.

### *Participation*

This approach begins through a person’s regular participation in a community of faith and sees salvation occurring in the midst of regular practice. Sometimes participation includes growth in one’s spiritual journey until young people suddenly come to an awareness that they have to embrace their Christian faith as part of their growth in grace. At other times participation begins in the mission of God, serving others until the person comes to the reality they need to embrace authentic faith, or until they discover that they now possess a faith they did not know they had.

The biblical imagery that undergirds this approach often begins in Exodus with God’s efforts to guide the children of Israel through the wilderness, and the many practices and observances used to shape them into God’s people. This imagery continues in the New Testament in Acts 2:42-47 and through the New Testament writers, often encouraging and exhorting an open yet consistent church that engages in ongoing practices “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

Youth workers must be careful not to assume that activity always indicates a clear sign of salvation, young people need to embrace God by faith. Nevertheless, young people often awaken to this faith under the strong relational bonds of the youth group, a consistent vision of the gospel reason for the existence of the group, and carefully designed practices that embody the Christian life.

Chris Folmsbee notes that the future may call for a “life-dynamic” evangelism that calls us to missionally enter into the lives of non-believers—rather than attracting them to the church—and using our daily walk as the form of witness that encourages others to see God’s love through us. Following Luke’s account of Jesus, this approach assumes that God is at work in the lives of

youth regardless of where they live and youth workers must go and live “incarnationally” by witnessing with their lives.

Pete Ward, in his text, *God at the Mall*, asserts this approach often calls youth workers to engage youth who are often “outside” the traditional influence of the church. Ward notes this strategy often requires not only contact, but extended contact with youth who require considerable time before they will trust someone different. Even after initial evangelism many youths require extended nurture before incorporation within the church. A danger might be that youth workers may be unduly influenced by the youth lifestyle. Nevertheless, youth workers must be willing to enter into the lives of youth and spend time in their social world in order to make a difference in the lives of youth.

The different historic youth ministries in session five did not all use the same evangelistic approach. Context, cultural expectations, personal life experience all influence our evangelistic approach. Approaches may be confrontational or developmental, they may occur in over long periods of time in community or in strategic moments. Even these approaches do not adequately summarize the myriad ways God uses human beings as instruments of Christ’s saving actions through the Holy Spirit in the lives of youth.

Perhaps the best known of all approaches still relies on the relational evangelism. Jim Burns and Mark DeVries, in *An UnCommon Youth Ministry*, note the majority of people become Christians through influential relationships and family relationships regardless of the term used. People respond to Christians with a vibrant, genuine lifestyle.

### **Building Relationships and Overcoming Diversions**

When engaging in relational evangelism, one must always be ready to engage youth in a personal way and, when the opportunity arises, address their life in a way that opens the door to evangelism. We must acknowledge that sound evangelism with youth begins with our ability to build relationships with young people. There are a number of key concepts to creating quality relationships so we can offer the good news of the gospel worth our consideration.

#### *Key Concepts for Building Relationships*

1. Consistency builds friendships: Relationships often begin informally with consistent communication. Communicating both with youth and promoting the efforts of young people to adults reveal a steady interest in their lives. For instance, basic practices like circulating a regular monthly newsletter, or general correspondence through church publications, may appear impersonal; however, these actions remind young people that you want to stay in regular communication with everyone on a consistent basis.
2. Demonstrate hospitality: Invite people to your home, or a general meeting place if more appropriate, for a meal, beverage, or just sharing. You do not have to force these opportunities but a lot can happen over coffee and conversation.

3. Cultivate common interests: Discovering a similar interest or hobby creates real opportunities to build relationships. At times, we must be willing just to invest ourselves in a young person's personal passions. However, taking time to discover and share mutual interests provides positive topics you both enjoy.

4. Develop a care-giving mindset: In our contemporary society, we see a number of hurting young people. Youth face family problems, broken marriages, health issues, feelings of rejection, times of failure, interpersonal pain, and the challenges go on. Simply providing Christian care and guidance when the opportunity arises in these situations sets the stage for building bridges to evangelism.

5. Develop practical service: Youth may also build relationships through compassionate service. There are a number of lonely or hurting people, including from the elderly to children, who will appreciate young people calling and spending time with them. All these efforts will create opportunities for relationships that may lead to witness and evangelism. Youth may be either the agents, or the recipients, of the gospel through these encounters.

Building relationships proves important not only for presenting the gospel, but for living out our Christian witness based on what God calls us to be. As mentioned in session four, Andrew Root cautions that we do not just build relationships just to present an evangelistic message or to pursue our personal agendas, we build them to make a difference in every aspect of a young person's life. Sometimes those relationships merely serve as a supportive presence because a young person needs support. Other times those relationships will open up natural moments to address spiritual issues and evangelize the youth.

Also, relationships do not end once we have presented the gospel; they continue as we extend opportunities to build Christlike lives and empower youth to make a difference in the lives of their friends and family. Building relationships may be the beginning of evangelism but establishing relationships reflect our witness and maintaining relationships establish our desire to work for the best in every young person.

Reaching global youth remains a prime concern for the church, particularly as we note their personal challenges which may sometimes include diversions;

- loneliness
- lack of boundaries
- struggle with self-worth
- preoccupation with popular culture (music, technology)
- escapism as a solution to problems
- rising anger
- loss of meaning
- tendency to live only in the present moment
- premature callousness

However, you present a real readiness for Jesus when we can overcome the diversions. No one can read the gospel records without noticing Jesus' care for each person. Our witness and

evangelism is effective only when we prayerfully and persistently work with individuals, their experiences and personal challenges. In youth evangelism, our disciplined, respectful investment in the life of youth often establishes receptivity to the message we preach or share personally.

## **Methods for Relational Evangelism**

Regardless of diversions, we can move from building relationships to bringing the good news to people. There are some basic approaches that help us much like Jesus used in engaging others.

### *Key Principles for Relational Evangelism based on John 4*

*Establish natural contacts:* The best opportunities for evangelism occur naturally in ordinary settings. If we are learning to live and walk in the spirit, things will just happen in our everyday life: at a local school cafeteria, in a coffee shop, during casual talk within our neighborhood, or other settings. Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman in a common daily setting and built appropriate bridges to talk with her.

*Cultivate interest/eagerness:* When we make initial contact, we need to develop an engaging conversation that sparks ongoing curiosity, at times through stimulating or intriguing statements. Jesus neither quoted text to the Samaritan woman nor uncovered the gospel before she was ready for it. Her curiosity aroused when His conversation pointed beyond her present experience. We need to get a person to a stage where he or she asks questions or requires our help. Reality, integrity, and testimony can make people curious about Christ. Young people often ask is it real? Where is the evidence for what you are saying? Our life will show the truth if only we live what we say. Relational evangelism requires integrity, modeling consistent wisdom, discernment, faith, and initiative that must flow out of our lives. Finally, personal testimony can make people curious to know more since such testimony carries its own authority and conviction.

*Engage life issues:* Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman brought out gently the disappointments of her life. Jesus showed concern for those issues that mattered most to her. In personal evangelism, touching core personal problems remains a necessary task in leading a person toward a commitment to Christ.

*Re-direct Diversions:* Bringing the person back to spiritual issues is important. Young people can divert the conversation which detracts from the main focus.

*Engage personal commitment:* Ultimately, we seek to bring youth to a personal commitment. Jesus came face to face with the reality of the Samaritan women. One approach may begin with giving our own testimony and inviting the young person to also open his or her own life to Jesus. Often, we can use a simple strategy once we have reached the level where young people are ready to hear the gospel. The "ABC" of evangelism includes.

- **Admit and Accept:** Admit that our life does not match God's intent and accept that, even when we have failed God, God loves us enough to reach beyond our limitations
- **Believe:** That God has provided a means for our salvation through Jesus Christ. We do not need anything else other than to believe this strong enough to put our trust in this fact.
- **Confess:** The final stage is to put our belief on the line by confessing to God not only where we are but, more importantly, our trust in Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, we must bring a person to pray and commit. Often the moment of personal commitment may appear quite different depending the young person's personal context. Nevertheless, we must be ready to respond and encourage a commitment. Scripture provides resources that speak of God's response to different circumstances.

As noted, diversions present a key challenge to our efforts in Christian witness. Jesus engagement with the Samaritan woman takes us through Jesus method of dealing with a seeker. His gentle approach to the needy Samaritan woman, and His responses to diversions, proves instructive.

Once a young person has made a commitment, youth workers must always be ready to follow-up with ongoing discipleship. Evangelism proves incomplete without a commitment to disciple a young person after they have made a decision for Christ, a commitment that involves the local church. We must motivate the entire congregation in reaching young people.

### **Teaching Youth How to Share their Faith**

Young people serve a key role in evangelizing their peers. Sharing faith with fellow youth will influence the entire church. Often young people respond well and invest in the congregation if we take seriously their role in reaching youth for Christ. Youth need preparation if they are to be faithful evangelists and witnesses, both in relational and group evangelism.

#### *Learning to Prepare an Evangelistic Message*

While often considered preparation for large group evangelism, understanding the basics of an evangelistic message prepare youth not only for speaking but also for a deeper understanding of the gospel in relational settings. There are a number of considerations when preparing an appealing evangelistic message.

Youth must invest in prayer and personal holiness for clear insights into their own personal journey and a deeper understanding of human frailty, as well as a deeper appreciation of God's good news. Youth need to learn how to understand their listeners, regardless of age. Knowledge of the intended audience remains an important factor in selecting the scripture on which to base their message. Young people need to understand the heart of the gospel, the heart of the good news—salvation is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they must spend time studying their Bible text, reading and re-reading and discovering questions will bring out the facts.

Youth need help constructing their message. When we construct our message, we trust the Holy Spirit is the supreme evangelist; however, we must choose a message that will stay in the hearer's mind. Good beginning texts include Luke 15:11-24, John 3:1-16. Youth do need your supervision and guidance as they engage in this activity. Finally, it is essential youth include some application points to insure their message reaches youth.

### *Learning to Share Personal Testimony*

Youth need assistance in sharing their personal testimony with peers. Church scholars note that, in the early church, often a person's personal testimony revealed the truth of the message. One way to train youth involves three steps:

1. My story/life before God
2. Hearing God's story
3. My story/life with God

Sometimes it is better for youth to start with their contemporary testimony—where they are today—but they need to include how God is working in their lives. Sharing their own experience with the power of Jesus in their lives often provides both the method and motivation for the need to share the gospel with others.

### *Learning to Reach the Home*

It is important to value home or family-based evangelism. Family evangelism offers positive advantages and provides several important opportunities for spreading the Gospel for both you as a youth worker and for the youth. The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality associated with the family, all help to make this form of evangelism particularly successful.

Youth may not always serve as the best evangelist in this setting but often they can create a hospitable context that allows youth workers or other Christian adults to engage in evangelistic conversations. Home visits offer a powerful medium for reaching people, where we meet other people whom Christ may seek to win for Him. Bible study at home provides the entire family especially children and youth, a stable environment for Christian faith formation.

When youth encounter Christians who remain genuinely respectful of them as persons, taking full interest in every aspect of their lives, these young people will find themselves receptive to the message of the Gospel.



## **Application**

Spend time talking with at least five young people about their salvation experience both in coming to faith and also in being nurtured as Christians. Write down a summary of your conversations. How important was relationship building in those conversations?

Using the material in this session, prepare a class session for teaching Christian youth the basic skills for evangelizing youth/others they might encounter or know closely. How would you use the format of this lesson (motivator, introduction, covering basic information, incorporating discussion and small groups, closing) in developing your lesson with youth? Bring a prepared lesson with you to the next class session.

Develop a plan for how you are going to use your youth group to teach, preach, witness, and serve others.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Which approaches to youth evangelism have you seen at work in your context? Why do you believe certain approach might be more important in light of youth culture in your setting?*

*When thinking about the key concepts that build relationships, which offer the best chance for developing relationships with youth in your setting? Why?*

*What are some key diversions that people use to detract from the gospel message?*

*What are some advantages to concentrating on preparing young people for reaching youth for Christ?*

*Do your youth have the opportunity to preach? Not just the ones that have felt a call to preach but everyone? How valuable would that be to both the group and the individuals? What kind of church leaders would these young people become? Have you thought about a regular schedule where each week one of your youth gives a 5-minute sermon?*

*Have any of you had experience with helping youth prepare their testimony? What helped them the most? How often do you have the youth in your group give their testimonies to the group?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 12

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship - Nurturing  
and Teaching

## **Youth Ministry Training**

### **Lesson Twelve: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Nurturing and Teaching**

#### **Lesson Introduction**

##### **Session Overview**

- A Glance at Culture and the Development of Our Young People
- Lessons from a Great Teacher
- The Teacher as Midwife

##### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand youth have a variety of different learning styles
- Relate the four moments of midwifery to the teaching-learning process
- Use an understanding of culture to help shape lessons
- Understand how and when learning is taking place
- Understand and commit themselves to the incarnational teaching process by creating participatory learning environments

##### **Introduction**

The lives of young people are shaped by a media-driven, interactive, participatory culture. Having developed relationships with our youth, our goal is to develop a learning environment to nurture their spiritual growth. This session examines cultural influences and youth expectations for learning and proposes an incarnational teaching process that helps the youth workers develop effective learning environments.

#### **Lesson Body**

##### **A Glance at Culture and the Development of Our Young People**

People we admire and with whom we have developed relationships play key influential roles in our lives. As youth workers, we want to be in a position to influence our youth. We cannot earn the right to be listened to through the classroom alone. So, how do we become key influencers in the lives of our youth?

Christian Smith's groundbreaking study, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, identifies issues facing the church related to integrating young people into our Christian faith. The issue revolves around the lack of involvement of adults in the lives of young people as we attempt to teach them our systems of belief. The result, according to Smith, is a very generic view of God with little demands on young people's lives. As Smith observes, "The overwhelming number of US teens engage and value religion, not for the sake of God, or the common good of a just society, or for composing through ministry and observance a distinctive community of people, but for the instrumental good it does for them." For young people, even those raised in conservative households with professions of faith, the primary purpose of God is to make youth "happy."

This insight was illustrated as a teenager from a small rural church described her involvement in her home church. She shared how her local church combined the children and youth into a single program. The interviewers began to explore the importance her faith played in her life and her relationship with Jesus Christ. When the interviewers asked her to describe the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and what that meant to her. She didn't have a response. A 17-year-old high school junior, who had grown up in the church, been taught in one system using consistent curriculum, was not able to describe the significance the death and resurrection of Jesus had on her faith. I'm not sure if I was shocked, embarrassed, or ashamed, but I definitely realized that we are failing to teach our youth the key doctrines of our faith.

Content is not enough or this young person would have gotten it. Experience is not enough either. At different times, we have sacrificed content or experience to use what we thought were more effective teaching methodologies. If there is an arm of the church that has had to respond to the "boring" complaint, it is youth ministry. In response, we have had to become more creative in how we teach. But, what is it we are teaching with these creative ways?

Youth themselves are changing. New developmental research tells us that the age span of adolescence is lengthening. Not only are children entering puberty at earlier ages but the maturation process is being delayed at the older end of the scale. This creates some issues that neither the church nor the secular world have adequately addressed.

Youth are not just different because of where they are on the maturation scale. They also learn differently because of how they are wired. Jim Burns in his book, *UnCommon Youth Ministry*, describes four learning styles that help us understand how people learn. Marlene LeFever, in *Learning Styles*, points out that we each have a dominant or preferred learning style and asks questions to help us identify our personal preference.

### *Learning Styles*

- Intuitive people learn from experiences. They relate to people easily and are usually very relational. They love small groups and the opportunity to share ideas. Intuitive people tend to be sensitive to feelings and to other people. They are feelers.
- Analytical learners are listeners. They make careful observations before making a judgment. These people like to view things from different perspectives and are always looking for the deeper meaning of things. They seek facts and ask what the experts think. They are observers.
- Logical learners look for logical analysis of ideas. They are excited about systematic planning and act only upon an intellectual understanding of the situation. They are very practical-minded; usually they want to know how things work and if they relate to real life situations. They ask, how does this work? They are thinkers.
- Pragmatic learners do not lead a dull life; they influence people and events through action. They are dynamic learners with the ability to get things done and are not afraid to take a risk. You'll find that they prefer the trial-and-error method, which sometimes can come across as being pushy. Their favorite question is, what can this become? They are doers.

Learning styles and developmental issues are also coupled with the fact that young people are engaged in more destructive behavior than ever before. More youth drink, more youth experiment sexually, more youth lie and cheat in the classroom with very little apparent structure to help address these issues. As noted, adults seem more absent from the lives of young people than ever before. Because of the freedoms that younger and younger adolescents possess, they are forced to make decisions on their own—some decisions lead them down destructive paths.

Chap Clark in his book, *Hurt*, gives three reasons for why an adolescent's decisions can be destructive:

1. Most of the newfound freedoms that accompany mid-adolescence (the term used for high-school-age youth), were originally designed for late adolescence (Chap's term used for college-age youth).
2. Because today adolescence lasts up to fifteen years, a mid-adolescent has a more difficult time than did previous high-school-aged youth seeing college and career as the hope of a secure and fulfilling future.
3. It has generally been assumed that high-school-aged youth have the capacity for abstract thinking. What [Clark] noticed during this study, however, is that mid-adolescents' ability to engage in abstract thought is limited to the immediate context of a discussion.

Couple these influences with the shift in the institutional family as a diminishing source and resource for meeting life's challenges, it adds to the complexity of our adolescent population's attempt to make discerning, healthy decisions. Clark is convinced that the reasons these issues are growing are that the adolescent culture has developed a "world beneath," a sub-culture, that is isolated from adult awareness and ability to address, and adolescents are very good at living in two worlds. Do you see any evidence of his research regarding this adolescent sub-culture?

These factors at times make teaching seem more complex than ever. Teaching has to be more than the content of our curriculum. It has to be more than controlling and engaging 7th grade boys for one hour a week. It has to be more than convincing and convicting our youth of our core set of beliefs. It's all that, but it's also realizing that youth learn differently depending on their personal make-up, their level of maturity—which changes daily—and their family support system. Is family engaged in their lives? Are they struggling with the transition between concrete and abstract thinking? And regarding their learning style, are they intuitive, analytical, logical, or pragmatic?

Beginning to understand how our youth think, and weighing it with the other factors affecting their lives, can help us develop an effective teaching-learning environment. According to Clark, in order to teach, we have to be willing to enter their world. Our understanding of the make-up of youth can also help us realize why some of them are connecting with some parts of the lesson, while others seem completely disconnected. It might not be the subject matter, it might be the way they are being taught.

Have you ever had students come up to you after a lesson, and tell you that was the best lesson they have ever been a part of, while the very next week, the same students are falling asleep on you? Or, have you ever been challenged by a group of students in your group to go deeper, complaining about how shallow your teaching is, calling for more “meat”? How about the students who constantly are asking for more service projects or more hands-on experiences? Or, the students who want to teach the lessons, tired of not being used, and crying out for ways to be more involved in ministry? None of these are necessarily directed at what you teach, but maybe how you are teaching, and how they learn.

### **Lessons from a Great Teacher**

In *Starting Right*, Duffy Robbins’ chapter, “Thinking Creatively,” describes a holistic approach to the task of designing a Bible study that incorporates ways to address the facets we have just described.

1. Cognitive (receiving): What content, facts, and ideas do I anticipate my young people will learn in this study?
2. Affective (feeling): What sort of feelings might I anticipate this study will invoke in my youth?
3. Behavioral (doing): If the students take seriously this truth from God’s word, how might their behavior be different on a day-to-day basis?
4. Existential (being): How do I anticipate this study might impact the basic values and inner core of individual youth?

Robbins from the same chapter, gives us a variety of examples of the way Jesus taught that can serve as a model for us. Some that he points out are:

- Object lessons—John 4:1-42
- Relational ministry—John 1:35-51
- Problem-solving—Mark 10:17-22
- Conversation—Mark 10:27
- Questions—the gospels record over 100 questions posed by Jesus in various situations
- Lecture—Matthew 5-7; John 14-16
- Parables—John 10:1-21; 15:1-10
- Teachable moment, teaching through experience—John 4:5-26
- Contrast—Matthew 5:21-22,33-34, 38-39, 43-44
- Illustrations, examples—Matthew 26-34
- Simulations, symbols—John 13:1-20
- Large and small groups—as many as 5,000, or as few as three
- Modeling—Luke 18:15-17

Using some of these same models, Dan Lambert, in *Teaching that Makes a Difference*, talks about how Jesus might teach today's adolescent if He were here. Here is his observation on the way Jesus taught:

- He taught critical thinking
- He taught with clarity
- He used comparison and hyperbole
- He used criticism
- He taught with authority
- He taught with conviction and passion

Lambert offers the following thoughts of how Jesus might teach students today:

- Jesus would teach to make disciples
- Jesus would teach obedience to God's commands
- Jesus would teach everyone, especially those who might not be welcomed by traditional churches
- Jesus would teach in a variety of settings
- Jesus would teach different groups differently
- Jesus would teach theologically
- Jesus would teach to raise expectations
- Jesus would teach to increase critical thinking
- Jesus would teach with authority and confidence
- Jesus would teach so students respond
- Jesus would teach holistically.

What are you learning from what Robbins and Lambert are saying about the teaching styles of Jesus? One of the most effective things about the way Jesus taught was that He was living and experiencing everything He was teaching His students, His disciples. He did not just teach them to pray, He showed them how to pray. He didn't just talk about holiness, He lived holiness in front of them. He didn't just teach on living sacrificially, He lived sacrificially with and for them. The life Jesus lived was a platform for His teaching.

### **The Teacher as Midwife**

In *The Godbearing Life*, Kenda Dean and Ron Foster wrote about a method of teaching they equate to midwifery. They use the birth analogy to help us understand how the learning process works in our ministry. Dean notes we have to move beyond Bible verses along to focusing on practices of faith. The concept of becoming a midwife with our youth is a commitment to the whole process, and understanding that teaching happens all the time, not just for one hour in the classroom. It involves the passing on of a baton. Faith is not a topic we master but a life lived in light of God's saving grace. Our youth know too well that the God-problem is not a math problem to be solved, but a relationship to be lived in. Modeling that as a midwife is key to passing on our faith. The process involves four steps:

### *Pack your Bag*

It involves a readiness at all times. I remember when we were expecting our children, the bag was always packed, sitting by the door with all the essentials that would be needed for the birthing, and the two-three days following. Be ready, be present. How do we pack for this journey? Dean explains it as three essentials:

- The first essential is unpacking, owning up to biases and seeking redemption for baggage left over from previous experiences that we may project onto young people.
- Unpacking happens by helping youth improve the four basics—study of scripture, practice of prayer, the exegesis of adolescence and culture—making them ready to go. In other words, using these four sources helps us to more accurately determine where each adolescent is and avoid a one-size-fits-all mentality.
- Last, we need to recognize what is going on in adolescents' lives. We must enter and understand youth culture (as mentioned in previous sessions) which allows us to enter the world of youth to engage faith on their terms as well as ours.

### *Name the Pain*

Ultimately disequilibrium occurs in this process as youth understand life struggles are faith struggles. Youth relationships: family, social and even church, open doors to creativity. Helping youth name struggles, to explore disconnects in their lives allows young people relate with God and explore how they are growing into that relationship. We can help them name their pain, so they can seek understanding and even healing from whatever struggles may arise. We also get to help those who have yet to develop a confidence in God, providing means that allow them to claim and lean growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

### *Breaking Water*

As mentioned in previous sessions we invite youth into an act of understanding or discernment. Hopefully, there will be moments of direct engagement in growing faith. There may be times of renewed commitment or fresh vision of what God might do through them. Exactly when these moments occur often rely upon the particular circumstances of a young person's life so we must know our youth. In those moments, we can help make their faith vibrant, concrete, relevant to their lives. We encourage them to remain loyal, trusting God's faithful presence. No two situations are the same, but God breaks forth in the midst of these crucial moments.

### *Be Ready for the Catch*

Being “ready for the catch” means staying close, alert, and ready to respond whenever a young person's faith begins to grow. Moments like this do not always happen in the classroom. Often, they are experiences only as we live life, ready for them whenever they are. We have to be comfortable with the preparation process, the struggle, and the insight



that follows a growing faith in order for us to be ready to work with youth in the follow-up.

Dean's approach takes seriously the spiritual development of youth through a very deliberate method. Teaching is not a shotgun approach, nor should it be reduced to simplistic answers, but it should be intentional in its approach. We teach intentionally, we nurture and follow with youth on their journey, we also follow-up when they are ready to expand their vision of what God might do with their lives.

## **Application**

Take a copy of the curriculum you presently use, and evaluate how you think it addresses the issues covered in this lesson. Use these questions to help you evaluate not only the curriculum, but also your commitment to the holistic teaching process.

- How does the curriculum address the development, maturity, and learning styles of your youth?
- What can you do to make your teaching more experiential?
- How can you use curriculum to supplement the life you are sharing with your youth?
- How committed are you to the relationships you have with your youth, and what are the changes that need to be made to make them more of a priority?

Talk with community leaders and identify the people in your church's city/parish/neighborhood who suffer most. Who are the widows, orphans and strangers in your town? How intimately and regularly is your church involved in the lives of those who suffer? How intimately and regularly is your family involved in the lives of those who suffer? How intimately and regularly are you involved in the lives of those who suffer?

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*What do you think are the most important aspects in teaching adolescents/teens?*

*What is the most difficult part of teaching our youth?*

*How do you see evidence of the three variables in teaching—development, learning styles, and unbridled freedom—in today's adolescents? What role do these issues play in our attempt to teach adolescents/teens?*

*Where do you see evidence of Jesus' methods in what you teach? How can you do better?*

*What are you hearing in the analogy of midwifery in relation to the spiritual development of students? Who played the role of "midwife" for your spiritual development? How does this affect your approach to teaching youth? How does this affect those we recruit to teach youth?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 13

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship -  
Compassion and  
Service

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Thirteen: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Compassion and Service**

**Lesson Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- The Right Focus
- Open Our Eyes, Open Our Ears
- Refuse to be Consoled
- Responding: Prophetic Imagination

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand Jesus' witness and call to a life of compassion and service as not just an option, but a central calling for all Christians
- Identify the range of social issues in their own contexts that lead to suffering in their community and the world within their reach
- Identify strategies for helping youth learn to lament/mourn with those who suffer
- Articulate the practices of the church catholic (universal) that their own church might employ to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world, particularly to those who suffer
- Articulate at least three practical next steps for nurturing a more compassionate youth group

**Introduction**

This session focuses on developing a compassionate view of the world from God's perspective and working to provide not only compassionate care but also peace and justice through the church.

**Lesson Body**

**The Right Focus**

It is becoming increasingly obvious to Christian youth that God's work in the world includes care for the proverbial widow, orphan and stranger (see Deuteronomy 24:17-18, Exodus 22:21-24; Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27). Making disciples of all nations includes teaching the practices of compassion, service, and justice. However, we must guard against these acts of justice becoming a new works-righteousness; we show mercy because God first showed mercy to us.

Faithful youth ministry includes discussions of the temptations to avoid. When working with idealistic young people, youth workers will be particularly challenged by their temptations:

- To be heroic—try to save the world themselves
- To wallow in despair—“it's far too complex,” “I'm only one person”
- To forget that hope is in what God is already doing
- To allow youth to slip into the comfortable apathy of cynicism—“I can't believe that THOSE PEOPLE could do such a thing;” not confessing our own complicity

It helps to keep the focus on what God has done and is doing in the world around us in very practical, material terms.

### **Open our Eyes, Open our Ears:**

#### *Listening to the depths of exploitation in our world*

The pursuit of justice and reconciliation is at the heart of our Christian heritage, the foundation of our church and the life of holiness. We pursue justice when we let the oppressed go free, share our food with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into our homes, clothe the naked and satisfy the needs of the afflicted (Isaiah 58). Living a Christian life involves being able to name injustice and to confront the powers that cause injustice. More importantly, living a Christian life involves being the kind of people that live God's justice and reconciliation practically in the world.

Historically the church has responded to the bodily needs of the community around them through what have been called the "Works of Mercy":

1. feeding the hungry
2. giving drink to the thirsty
3. clothing the naked
4. harboring the harborless
5. healing the sick
6. releasing the captives

Often, they can be used to categorize different ministries at work.

- Feed the hungry: Fair trade and the globalization of food
- Give drink to the thirsty: Lack of access to clean drinking water
- Clothe the naked: Sweatshops and the global garment industries
- Harbor the harborless: Homelessness and aid efforts for refugees
- Heal the sick: The unequal distribution of global health care to those who can pay for it
- Release the captives: The modern global slave trade

These works of mercy serve not only as individual practices but also as different lenses through which to see the injustices in our world. As we grow in the awareness of the problems, and the responses of different people, we begin to see options and opportunities where young people can enter into God's work with these issues. If you are looking for a place to start, many options are available through the Church of the Nazarene itself, both through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries ([www.ncm.org](http://www.ncm.org)) and The Justice Movement ([www.justicemovement.com](http://www.justicemovement.com)).

## **Refuse to be Consoled: Mourning with those who mourn**

Remember that in the very first book of the New Testament, the story of Jesus starts with a mother in mourning. “A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah—weeping and mourning unrestrained. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted—for they are dead” (Mt 2:18, NLT).

We are constantly tempted to seek easy consolation and quick fixes. We have little tolerance for pain and suffering. Mourning and lament are Christian practices that help us to connect the pain of the past with a hope for the future. Our rapid-paced, consumer, youth-oriented culture makes this very difficult for us. We have to learn how to pray, how to mourn with those who mourn. Jesus’ says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Mt 5.4).

Prayers often involve a range of responses toward God:

- praise and adoration
- thanksgiving
- confession
- repentance
- intercession

However, we must be sure not to neglect prayers of confession and repentance while moving on to intercessory prayers too quickly. Prayers of confession and repentance can help make the connections for your youth between the local/global injustice and their own passive/active participation in that injustice. Most of all, we need to spend time right now bowing before God, praying for hurting people and the needs they face.

## **Responding: Prophetic Imagination**

In *Compassion: A Reflection on Christian Life*, Henri Nouwen cautions that our actions on behalf of the poor should not come from a sense that we, as privileged people, “reach down” to people in need. We cannot think we are higher or better than others we assist. We do not practice compassion out of a sense of “pity” or polite sympathy upon people who failed to be as successful as we are. Instead compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.

Compassion and service grow out of the heart of God and must spring up from who we are as Christians. Our actions of compassion and service are grounded in our worship of God and our calling to love one another. God calls us to pour ourselves out for other people in thanksgiving as Christ poured Himself out for us on the cross. God asks us to radically reorient our lives to make possible this kind of love. Just as Jesus invites us to the Lord’s table, He invites all to join together and be transformed. When we glimpse what God might do, much like the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, or even the apostles, we begin to “see,” to imagine a new way of addressing the poor, those needing justice, and respond accordingly. Our responses might include providing resources, or working with communities to develop their own strengths and resources, or we might be called in advocacy against policies and social structures that harm people and keep them poor. Regardless our ability to see the problem afresh, to envision what God might do through our efforts, remain crucial as needs change.

Christians are called to participate in God's justice as a response to God's grace, as a gift, as the fruit of the forgiveness we have received. We should not be so pretentious as to assume that we can end all suffering, as if it only took our creative and communal action to bring about God's justice. However, as Christians we are the Body of Christ, the hands and feet of the incarnated God who suffered on our behalf. We can be better witnesses to the justice of God already at work in the world by paying special attention to those who suffer most in our world.

Often, compassionate action responds to particular contexts based upon the needs of the people and the capabilities of youth. Context might call for specific ministries. Different circumstances or levels of need require different interventions. When people experience sudden crises (flood, fire, typhoon, or other natural disaster) often the response might include crisis care and even counseling to cope with the trauma. Specific, immediate resources often come through agencies that provide basic services, medical treatment, housing, and nurturing presence. Other circumstances may call for ministries that provide prevention and treatment ministries. Children suffering from natural disasters or poverty-ridden areas may need basic medical care or safe sanitation. In other contexts, compassion may take the form of basic education (vocational skills training) or enrichment (afterschool programs) that help develop methods for self-improvement or self-esteem. Finally, other context or situations may call for ministries of advocacy or empowerment working with people to gain a sense of agency and confidence in circumstances that seem to limit their options and opportunities. Often a key question might be: "what do God's people need in this circumstance to be able to live through the moment... first? Compassionate responses might include a blending of ministries; however, youth may be best suited in a given circumstance to help people at their most pressing need.

Overall ministries tend to reflect three basic approaches: provider, development, and advocacy. Provider ministries offer resources that help people in daily life. Young people serve in food pantries, sort for clothing ministries, and create crisis-care kits... providing basic resources for people who live in the day to day. Often these ministries provide the first line of direct care in areas suffering from immediate disasters or long-term struggles. Such ministries may be short term, strategic, and crucial during crises. Other ministries commit to more difficult situations that require longer commitments. Usually these ministries develop networks to replenish their resources. Vital in many settings, these ministries sometimes create a sense of dependency among the poor unless other approaches are used.

Development ministries attempt to change the basic circumstances of people, often providing resources or education that assist people to grow and improve their situation. Development ministries often take much longer than provider ministries and engage multiple areas of need such as life skills training, tutoring children after school, even providing micro-loans to start local businesses. Youth often serve as resource for these long-term ministries, serving alongside each phase of community effort, often learning from people who they assist through these ministries. Development projects often result in people who are able to reclaim their lives, finding new means to break the cycle of poverty in their community. Unfortunately, some projects falter as agencies realize there are forces that often restrict the people's ability to help themselves. The restrictions may come from local laws, the presence of economic forces

opposed to local development, unfair tax systems and other obstacles. Development alone may not be enough.

Advocacy ministries attempt to help people overcome obstacles either by confronting local restrictions directly or by mobilizing people to change their habits so that the poor have a better chance of improving their lives. Youth may take direct action by mobilizing people to overcome modern day slavery through education and fundraising to help children and young women escape their bondage. Youth may encourage people to purchase products created by local business that often do not enjoy special tax benefits like large corporations. In every circumstance, advocacy often help youth better understand and appreciate the plight of people they work with in compassionate action. Advocacy involves a clear desire to see all people experience justice and peace based upon God's love.

God pays special attention to the poor not because there's anything virtuous in being poor, but in part because they are the ones most often called upon to forgive. We see God's grace and forgiveness no more clearly than when we are with those who suffer—when we are among those who suffer. Enmesh your life in the life of those who regularly suffer most and you cannot help but see the evil powers and principalities that oppress. When we are with and among those who suffer, we do not need extra encouragement to act to resist the oppressive habits and structures that cause suffering. Consider for a moment:

Christians who seek to participate in the justice and reconciliation of God stand in a long tradition stemming at least back to the call of Moses to liberate the Hebrew slaves. Christians around the world have long been at the core of social movements pressing for justice, from the abolition of slavery to leadership in civil rights struggles, from contemporary campaigns to end global poverty to the creation of fair trade networks and an end to exploitative labor practices, from fighting against the traffic in global prostitution to calling for an end to the international debt that is choking the poorest of the poor to death.

You don't have to (although I might encourage you to) join an international debt relief campaign to begin to participate in the justice and reconciliation to which we have been called. You can start by beginning to see and be engaged in the change of oppressive habits that are in your own life.

Churches, schools and local businesses can be encouraged to buy uniforms from sweatshop-free garment companies; you might want to look into the labor and environmental practices of the companies where you buy your clothes. Young people can join efforts to bring about more affordable housing and more livable wages in their neighborhoods; you might want to find out if companies you or your parents (your church) work with pay their lowest-wage employees a living wage. We have to at least begin by making time to see those who are suffering in our community.

In every response we might first ask, how might I locally or globally, provide resources, assist development, or advocate with those needing assistance? Strategies may surface through each of these approaches (resource, development, and advocacy) that connect with the issues at hand.

In each case we must remember that we are working with God and God is already at work before we are. We have to remember that our motivation comes from Christ's love for the poor, not out of our sense of being "different" or "better" than those we help. Young people possess a great capacity to embrace those hurting, to mourn with them. Youth also possess great vision to imagine how God might work through them to raise resources, to create new opportunities, to resist forces that harm others. Our responsibility rests with assisting youth to both help other and alter the patterns of their lives so that we live and work together God's compassion and justice.

### **Application**

Research and summarize the realities facing those that are going hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. in our world either through websites, or through service groups within your community attempting similar efforts.

Create a lesson that encourages young people to show compassion without treating people as somehow less than the youth serving them. Focus on Christ's ability to identify and "suffer with" people in need. What scriptures might you use?

Identify one agency in your area that serves primarily as a provider ministry, one that offers community development, and one that serves as an advocate in your community. Explore how young people in your congregation might join with each of these ministries.

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*In what ways could you see increasing the role of lament/mourning in the prayer life of your youth group/congregation?*

*Imagine a Church where the people act as one. What might it look like in your community? How can you work with your youth/church to live justice in your world both locally and globally?*

*What practical steps do you need to take in your youth group to see through the eyes of Jesus and hear through His ears?*

*How can we cultivate our "prophetic imagination"? How does this impact the way we live? How does our "prophetic imagination" affect the way we worship? What would a Church that lives by God's "prophetic imagination" look like in practice beyond the walls of the church?*

*How will you help the youth in your ministry develop eyes to see and ears to hear the plight of the widows, orphans and strangers in their worlds? How might the worship life of your congregation change to more faithfully witness to God's concern for the widow, orphan and stranger in our midst?*





# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 14

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship -  
Community and  
Belonging

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Fourteen: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Community and Belonging**

**Lesson Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- Biblical Theological Foundations
- Games and Play as Trust-Builders
- Small Groups as Arenas of Belonging
- Hospitality and Assimilation
- Intergenerational Community

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand how to effectively establish community and fellowship with and among youth
- Organize and nurture different types of small groups
- Develop different expressions of Christian hospitality

**Introduction**

Teenagers are profoundly sensitive to and shaped by other people in their social contexts: Parents, peers, media, and hopefully for Christians, their church congregation. This session will point out the unique character of Christian community as built on its biblical and theological foundations. On this foundation, various practices and programs can be effective in building Christian community, such as playing games, participating in small groups and intergenerational activities, and offering hospitality.

**Lesson Body**

**Biblical and Theological Foundations for Christian Community**

Jesus is not just for me—He’s also for us. In fact, the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—asserts individual spiritual growth in the context of community. Christians are to live in community because of the very nature of God as a Trinity, which is the prime spiritual community. Reflecting the divine community, the Church is:

- The covenant people of God the Father
- The Body of Christ, the Son
- A community born on Pentecost and held together by the Holy Spirit

For instance, when thinking about personal spiritual growth in community consider the following:

- Genesis 17: God establishes covenant with Abram/Abraham to be his God and the God of Abram’s descendants.

- Exodus 19—24: Covenant people formed by God at Mt. Sinai and guided by practical ways of life that lies behind the Ten Commandments and The Law.
- Jeremiah 29: God promises to bring Jewish exiles home from Babylon to Palestine, as His covenant people (not a promise for individual prosperity).
- Luke 6: Jesus selects a group of 12 men to be His closest followers.
- Acts 2: The Holy Spirit comes upon a group of believers, forming them into a faith community, who devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and sharing of material goods.
- Romans 12: We are all members of the body of Christ—a living sacrifice.
- 1 Corinthians 12: Paul’s explanations of Christian believers as members of the Body of Christ

If God lives “in community” as the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), should it surprise us that God works “through” community in shaping persons... both as individuals but also as a people, God’s people, Christ’s disciples, bound together by the Holy Spirit. If we expect youth to grow spiritually, we must understand that often they will do this “together” in community.

### **Games and Play as Trust-Builders**

It is said that “play is the work of children.” Since teenagers still display many characteristics of childhood, it stands to reason that games and a playful atmosphere will be important as a means to healthy human development. In addition, games and play can have a theological role in that they can be a way of keeping Sabbath. With all the pressures and stresses that teens face, taking time out of their hectic schedules to play can be a way to connect with the person God created them to be.

More directly, games serve as youth ministry aids by building community, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, games are ideal “come-and-see” entry-level activities that are non-threatening for visitors and regular attendees alike.

### **Small Groups as Arenas for Belonging**

One of the most effective practices for helping teens feel a sense of belonging is using small groups. Participation in small groups helps socialize students into Christian faith. Peers have a strong influence in building not only self identity, but also a strong faith. With at least one adult youth worker to guide and facilitate, small groups can be a major element of a strong youth ministry.

Short-term groups can be used effectively to carry out some tasks of the youth ministry program, such as planning and carrying out social events, or road trips. Small groups can also be used during a lesson or Bible study to involve more people in discussion or to study lengthy scripture passages within a brief period of time as a “divide and conquer” strategy.

Long-term groups comprised of the same members who meet regularly are another means of small group ministry. Regardless of their chosen task—studying the Bible, providing support, encouragement, and accountability, or developing discipleship and leadership—the real benefit of long-term groups is found in the process of meeting. The mere experience of being together with other Christian teens will allow relationships to form and grow, which in turn has a powerful effect on fostering a sense of belonging, acceptance, and community.

Jim Burns and Mike DeVries, in the *An Uncommon Youth Ministry*, observe that there are several reasons for developing small groups in youth ministry under the C.A.R.E outline.

C = Connect. Small groups provide a place where young people can consistently relate to a few people, forming the basis for true community.

A = Accountability. Small groups provide a place where young people may be held lovingly accountable as they seek to apply spiritual truths. Small groups provide an environment where honesty and transparency make spiritual growth possible.

R = Relevancy. Small groups serve as a place that students can struggle with and learn the relevancy of the Bible in their lives. Small groups allow youth struggle with doubts and in-depth questions while discovering just how relevant scripture is for their day.

E= Encouragement. Small groups provide a setting where people can see close up where God is at work in lives of young people and offer both affirmation and encouragement for what God is doing. This form of encouragement leads to deep change in youth.

All youth groups do not “arrive” at this level of CARE immediately. Burns and DeVries note that healthy small groups often go through different levels of intimacy and growth as youth begin to learn about one another.

1. History–giving: Learning each others’ stories as young people open up to each other;
2. Sense of Warmth and Affection: Caring and valuing each other as people;
3. Deeper Sharing: Feeling safe enough to be vulnerable and honest;
4. Depth: Seeing the group as family and having a sense of belonging.

Youth workers face two common mistakes: either skipping the first two levels and pushing too quickly for deep sharing (often a threatening approach) or just staying within the first two level without ever seeking to take the group “deeper” into intimacy. It is important to note that leading a small group requires different “skills” for each level the group experiences. Early small group leaders may be more directive and focus on reducing anxiety until people begin to know each other. Later, the youth worker may have to learn to “let go” of leadership but still monitor the level of intimacy and self-disclosure (particularly among young people). Creating a safe, dynamic, and open atmosphere assists groups. Learning how to ask questions, listen carefully, and tolerate silence may help the group move to deeper levels of understanding in following God.

Often groups learn to openly share with one another based on good discussions, which require good questions.

*Flow:*

- Start with general questions that are non-threatening and call for little or no self-disclosure. What is your favorite meal, event, entertainment?
- Move to general, but more serious questions that call for analytical thinking and moderate levels of self-disclosure. Why did Jesus say this? How would the world be different if more people followed Paul's advice?
- End with personal questions that call for self-evaluation and voluntary self-disclosure. What do you think of God's invitation? What changes might you make in your life to show your love for God?

*Stimulate Thinking:*

- Ask questions that call for a review of the facts or questions that measure your group's knowledge. According to Mark 10:45, why did Jesus come to earth?
- Ask broad, open-ended questions. Avoid questions that youth can answer with a simple yes or no. Instead of asking should Christians live a holy life? You might ask What do you think it means to live a holy life?
- Ask people to "unpack" their thinking. How did you arrive at your answer? Why do you believe that?
- Ask follow-up questions for clarification or more information. Is this what you mean? Can you elaborate? Tell us more. Can you give an example?
- Ask your group to analyze an idea. How does this compare with \_\_\_\_\_? Why do you think that is true?
- Ask what consequences an idea or action might have. What if everyone did that? What would happen if we followed that to its logical conclusion? If you did this would it lead to the kind of life you want to live?
- Promote active listening. Ask someone to summarize their friend's response or to offer a response to another youth's comment.
- Keep pointing people back to the passage to make sure they are making accurate observations, not jumping to conclusions that are unsupported by scripture.

*Getting Personal:*

- Ask for people's opinions.
- Ask for people's feelings.
- Withhold judgment. Do not try to extend a judgment. Say, "Thanks for sharing" rather than indicating whether an answer is correct or incorrect.
- If the person exhibits faulty thinking or shaky theology, use analytical questions above instead of direct disagreement or correction.

Among the marks of a healthy small group are accountability and encouragement. Spiritual formation authority Richard Foster describes a “formula” for safe accountability and affirmation in a small group:

- Encouragement—as often as possible
- Advice—once in a great while
- Correction—only when absolutely necessary
- Judgment—never

Remember that the goal remains to help a group create a sense of community and to grow in grace. Often this takes time. Groups usually begin tentatively with youth just getting to know one another and understanding their place in a community. Often groups go through a difficult period of “storming” as youth, and youth workers, sort out their roles and contributions to the group. This is often the most dangerous time, one when it might be too easy to give up on the group. However, with patient leadership and guidance many groups “grow through” these difficult times to become close community.

### **Hospitality and Assimilation**

Hospitality and belonging are not only good Christian practices in and of themselves; they also serve as the initial phases of evangelism. Relationship provides the front door to evangelism and missional ministry. Often how we receive new young people, how we describe them, help them to understand our community, and connect them to other young people or groups, prove important. Think for a moment, who, if anyone, greets teenagers who come to your church or youth meetings? Do you have specific activities that seem important for the youth group but may isolate new visitors?

Learning how to gather information from visitors without embarrassing them, following up with a note, phone call or personal visit demonstrates hospitality. Following up on young people later, including members of the youth group who miss extended periods, also demonstrates hospitality over the long term.

When youth experience a well-led small group setting that includes belonging, hospitality and acceptance, they experience a level of community that helps them respond to others as well.

Remember that good group leaders:

- Encourage participation
- Invite everyone to talk
- Facilitate discussion
- Stimulate new questions
- Ask clear, interesting questions
- Affirm the significance of each person’s opinion, experience, values, or faith

Creating a community that proves warm and acceptable often requires a caring, guiding attitude and thoughtful context. Youth workers begin with a good environment. Often seating works best in circular, semi-circular, or horseshoe arrangements with level, comfortable seating that matches

the purpose of the group. Practice discretion; encourage youth to agree that what is said in group stays in group unless the comments create real problems for health and safety. Model respect, trust and acceptance. Encourage questioning, remember that there is no such thing as a dumb question. All opinions and ideas are worthwhile (although not all are equally valid). You can disagree with an opinion, but respect the person. Avoid sarcasm, put-downs, etc. Listening is as important as speaking, so only one person should speak at a time. Remember, youth workers should guide the discussion to keep it on topic. Remain flexible. Focus on people over plans but do not allow exceptions to become the rule. Remember participation is a major goal of discussion but also allow people to “pass” if the question is too threatening. Youth workers should invite, encourage, direct participation but no one should be forced to share.

### **Intergenerational Community**

Beyond small group experiences in the youth group, youth workers must ask some crucial questions about the role of youth in the larger life of the church. How do we understand our ministry with young people in light of the total community of faith? We must understand that church remains larger than our specific age-level ministry.

Youth need to be part of a larger community of faith. Young people need to have direct interaction with other adults and even with youth and children younger than themselves. The fact remains when a young person connects to a church, involved in local ministries and engaged in decision making, the greater the sense of community. Youth workers should be aware of how teenagers are supremely sensitive to finding and knowing their place in a variety of social settings—at home, at school, on sports teams, in their neighborhoods, and the larger world. Building Christian community shares many of the same dynamics as other forms of community: acceptance, participation, sense of belonging, peer influence, cooperation, encouragement, tolerance, honesty, friendship, and so on. Therefore, workers would do well to know and practice effective ways of providing opportunities for all these things to occur.

However, Christian community has a distinct “flavor” and unique elements that go beyond a generic “best friends forever” atmosphere that might be encountered in other settings. Christian community views friendships as disciple-making relationships, not necessarily private and intimate relationships based on shared interests and/or personalities. As Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster note in *The Godbearing Life*, spiritual friends pull us toward our journey with God. Christian unity comes not from attraction, but from the union Jesus seeks with each person. Support, encouragement, vulnerability and all the other element of friendships are good, but not enough, in and of themselves. Christians seek communion, more than mere community for community’s sake. A circle of Christian friends is rooted in God’s friendship with us.

## **Application**

Develop a plan for developing stronger sense of community within your youth group.

Identify one or two specific areas where you might strengthen and suggest strategies that might be developed to help youth gain a stronger sense of community

Identify two to three possible opportunities for youth to intersect with other members of your church. Begin with natural connections but also explore new possibilities for intersections.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*In what ways can games help foster and nurture a sense of community in a youth ministry? What games have you observed or played that discriminate against players who are not particularly athletic? What are some games that should be avoided because they tend to eliminate “losers” from the game, rather than keep everyone involved and participating?*

*What language do you use to refer to visitors? (Guests, strangers, new people, prospects, friends?) How long (or how many visits) does it take for your church and churched teens to accept a guest as “one of us?” Who, if anyone, greets teenagers who come to your church or youth meetings? How are guests connected/introduced to individuals and groups?*

*Do youth feel “connected” with the rest of your church? Do young people have chances to make friends with other adults? Do they participate in the regular ministries and feel they belong in ministry?*





# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 15

Youth Ministry  
Discipleship -  
Simplicity and Retreat

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Fifteen: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Simplicity and  
Retreat**

**Lesson Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- Retreat or Advance?
- Practices of Simplicity
- Meditative and Contemplative Exercises
- Be Still and Know
- Bringing it Together

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Discover methods for Sabbath and renewal in our personal life
- Uncover ways in which renovation and Sabbath can benefit our youth ministry
- Teach the youth worker how to understand and effectively lead youth in simplicity and retreat
- “Put into practice” these concepts by experiencing specific periods of simplicity and silence

**Introduction**

This session is about creating space and time for reflection, silence, and contemplation. We will not only examine the spiritual practice of renewal, retreat and renovation, we will actually “put into practice” these concepts and ideas by giving you time to actually try some of the exercises. We will also suggest ideas and activities designed to create stillness and listening in the lives of youth. Finally, we will provide resources for planning and implementing a contemplative retreat for youth.

**Lesson Body**

**Retreat or Advance?**

Historically youth workers have to address a number of questions when planning retreats.

1. What are you trying to accomplish? (Curricular outcomes)
2. Where will you go? (Location)
3. How will you get there? (Transportation)
4. How much will it cost? (Budget and Finance)
5. Who will be a part? (Target group)
6. What will you do? (To accomplish your curricular outcomes)
7. How will you tell people about it? (Promotion/Publicity)
8. Before and After (Report to the congregation)
9. How will you know if you did what you set out to do? (Evaluation)

However, often our retreats prove to be much more complicated, and busy, than we hoped they might be.

Youth ministry is constantly on the go, even when on retreat. Richard Foster points out in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Satan, the Adversary, majors on three things in the midst of contemporary society: noise, hurry, and crowds. Our only hope to advance beyond the superficial aspects of our culture, secular and religious, we but learn how to recreate silence.

### **Practices of Simplicity**

From over scheduling to late nights to lack of rest and more hurry and rush, many of our retreats end up looking more like “advances.” Discipleship fails due to distraction or exhaustion. Even when retreats themselves do not appear this busy, the constant pressure of the world often competes for our attention, particularly when we are trying to “simply” focus on God’s presence and direction in our lives. How do we overcome our busy lives and focus on God? This is the challenge of what many in the field of spiritual formation call the practice of Simplicity.

How would you define the word Simplicity? This term is relatively new in discipleship though the concept, like that of simplicity, is quite old. Possible responses might include:

- Habit or rhythm breaking
- Respite
- Re-creation
- Changing routines
- Time-out
- Pause, breather

One way to look at Simplicity is to see the concept as the opposite of forming or developing habits, or the breaking and reformation of existing habits. It is learning to “simplify” our lives from business.

In most churches if one asks rhetorically “What would our lives and/or retreats look like if we intentionally planned and programmed for Sabbath, rest, and renewal?” I suspect they would still look like many retreats that often include a busy schedule, packed with programmed activities, not much different for daily life for many people. We have to consciously decide to live otherwise. If not, we risk living aimlessly with according to daily routines rather than deliberately choosing to live as part of God’s kingdom. Practicing Simplicity helps us reshape our patterns, remove those elements in the background that clutter our attention, and listen more closely to God’s music.

### **Meditative and Contemplative Exercises**

There is a long tradition of meditative and contemplative worship within Christianity. The Bible in general, and the Psalms in particular, remain rich with illustrations and references to this tradition. Great examples surface as we read the scriptures, such as Psalm 4:4, Psalm 27:4, Psalm

63:6, Psalm 77:12, Psalm 119:15, Psalm 119:27, Psalm 119:48, Psalm 119:78, Psalm 119:148, Psalm 143:5, and Psalm 145:5.

Historically many Christian writers have used the terms “meditation” and “contemplation” interchangeably. In one sense both terms speak to the same goal, removing daily distractions so one can focus on God and rest, and receive God’s holy love. As Marjorie Thompson writes, “Such communion with God is an end of itself, not a means to another end, however good. We do not enter the prayer of rest in order to become better servants of God; that is a natural side effect. The sole purpose of contemplation is to adore and enjoy God, which glorifies divine love.”

One way to understand the difference between these two approaches rests in the object of the prayer. Meditation seeks to encounter God through Christian images, scripture, music, even the beauty of God’s creation. The goal remains to use resources God provides to focus our attention away from other distractions and ultimately allow this image to provide a bridge to our encounter with God. The image may be created through words, reading specific scripture or singing a favorite hymn, it may be revealed in a symbol like the cross, or appear like an Easter sunrise to sharpen our attention away from other competing distractions. As we actively focus our attention we become aware of the source of the image, God. Richard Foster calls this action “sanctifying the imagination” so we come to God with both mind and heart set apart for love.

If meditation describes an active or focusing, process, then the practice of contemplation, or contemplative prayer, reflects a more passive or receptive process that relies on relationship. One of the best human analogies occur when we are content to just “be” with someone we love, a husband with wife, or parent with child, resting in a relationship. Marjorie Thompson, in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, notes that contemplation signals our move from communicating with God through word to “communing” with God through God’s loving presence. We find no words for these moments, just a deep sense of God’s love. We release any attempt to intentionally speak or even attentively listen out of our own effort. Instead we quiet ourselves before God, allowing God’s Holy Spirit to work freely and reveal to us a renewed life and a deep sense of wholeness.

In contemplative prayer, we are not escaping our sense of personhood, not stripping away our personal sense of self. Instead we are becoming fully aware of God’s presence, fully embraced in our relationship with God.

Obviously both prayer practices work together, focusing to remove distractions, resting to receive God’s presence and love. Not surprisingly they have been combined in one of the best known practices of “praying scripture” known as *Lectio Divina* or Divine Reading used as both an individual and community practice. Often this approach begins with reading scripture, moving to meditating over the text and even using the scripture to spark a prayer conversation with God, then resting to receive God’s presence. There are a number of excellent resources both in print and online that use the *Lectio Divina* as the centerpiece of both meditative and contemplative prayer.

Meditative and Contemplative practices represent our attempts to practice Simplicity. Practical exercises that create space for these practices include:

1. Talking to God: Set aside time(s) each day for prayer. (minimum 10 minutes)
2. Listening to God: Spend time each day in silence (minimum 10 minutes)
3. Read daily from the Bible as well as devotional classics
4. Observe a weekly Sabbath
5. Keep a prayer journal
6. Rewrite a psalm in your own words
7. Take a walk
8. Turn off your car audio while driving to work
9. Exercise without music, TV or other distractions
10. Fast technology for 24 hours
11. Take an overnight personal retreat to a place with no TV or telephone
12. Practice *Lectio Divina* in your devotional time

### **Be Still and Know**

For the next few minutes I want you to engage in practices of Meditation and Contemplation. Be alone with God, engaged with God.

#### *Practicing Meditation*

If you need to find a quiet corner in a room, go. If you need to look out the window, do so. If you need to walk or read out loud, do it. Do whatever you need to do to be fully with God, having totally shut out the rest of the world. Select a favorite scripture or perhaps one you read recently for devotions. Reflect for a few moments on the passage of scripture. As you reflect, make a list of words or phrases that come to mind as the scripture is read.

What did you hear? What words or phrases stand out? How is God described? What responses are asked for?

#### *Practicing Contemplation*

Put away all books, paper and pens. Sit up straight, feet on the floor, arms resting in your laps. Beginning now and for the next 10 minutes focus on silent listening. You may close your eyes or simply sit still until our time for silence is over.

You might begin with a simple process from the scriptures and allow time for God to speak to you through the silence

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am . . .

Be still and know . . .

Be still . . .

Be . . .

“What was it like? What did you think? What thoughts went through your mind? Did you hear anything? Was the silence uncomfortable for you?” Ultimately the goal of Simplicity is not to “add” another experience but to “create space” for God to speak in the midst of busy lives.

### **Bringing it Together**

We began this lesson discussing typical “retreat” activities. The key question remains whether many of these activities distract us from God, deepen our attention upon God, or help us fully receive God’s love and refreshment. When planning a retreat, we often have specific planning questions that include location, resources, and the nature of the people attending. Obviously not all retreats accomplish the same purposes. However, if the goal is simplicity, if it is creating an opportunity to listen to God, then often this purpose will shape other planning questions. How would our retreat planning be different if we kept in mind the need for simplicity? How would our schedule be affected? Would some locations be more conducive to rest and renewal than others?

As noted at the beginning of the session, young people...and ourselves... are tempted to spend most of our time “busy,” even in our times with God. While the “information” for this session is relatively light, our desire will be that you will use this time to really engage in practices of simplicity, not as another task to accomplish but as an invitation to “rest.”

### **Application**

**PERSONAL RETREAT:** Although your first thoughts maybe that you could never do this, I would like to encourage each of you to take an afternoon away from your work. Get away from the noise, hurry and crowds. Take your Bible and if possible go to a fairly secluded place—your “tent of meeting.” Spend some time reflecting on your relationship with God. Don’t take any work with you. See the mini-retreat as an opportunity to simply spend time with God. Use this time to not only learn about your relationship with God, but also to learn about what it means to practice rest, retreat and renewal.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

What types or kinds of things do we do each day that would be considered “routine?”

What is it about routine tasks that cause us to “drift aimlessly?”

What does the quote have to say to us about this topic of rest and recreation in our retreat planning and preparation? Our weekly programming? Our personal lives?

What would it look like for you to “reprogram your frequencies, reduce the clutter of your life and redirect your heart?”

Consider the three phrases the authors used—reprogram, reduce clutter, redirect the heart—are they all the same?

How would our retreat planning be different if we kept in mind the need for simplicity?

What things would be different? What things would be the same? How would our schedule be affected? Would some locations be more conducive to rest and renewal than others? Who should be a part of such a retreat?



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 16

Youth Ministry  
Shepherding -  
Offering Direction



## **Youth Ministry Training** **Lesson Sixteen: Youth Ministry Shepherding—Offering Direction**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Discovering and Practicing Wisdom with Youth
- Challenging Youth through Spiritual Direction
- The Strong Guide: Guiding with Courage

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand the nature of spiritual direction
- Identify strategies within spiritual direction for guiding youth through discernment and critical thinking
- Understand how to use spiritual direction as movement toward accountability and discipline
- Begin to plan ways to creatively incorporate and develop skills in youth programming that is associated with spiritual direction

#### **Introduction**

In *Uncommon Youth Ministry*, Jim Burns tells us that youth workers today are encountering a “generation of crisis” riddled with pain, abandonment and deep insecurities about themselves and this world. Knowing how to care for youth in ways that will help them lead healthy lives into adulthood will require careful guidance rooted in spiritual direction that is neither weak nor overbearing. Rather, spiritual direction rooted in mutual trust can empower youth to learn to recognize God in the current landscape of their lives. This session presents the nature of spiritual direction as a way to guide and teach youth how to recognize God’s work in their life and in the world.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Discovering and Practicing Wisdom with Youth**

Through spiritual direction we learn to open our mind and hearts to seek, know and understand ourselves, and God. In *Sacred Journey*, Tony Jones summarizes the task of a spiritual director as one who helps the other person listen, discern, interpret and receive God’s voice in their life. If there is a running theme woven in the task of spiritual direction it is the hope that the other will come to know their “belovedness,” and be able to appropriate that belovedness in their daily life. Persons seeking spiritual direction are persons simply seeking spiritual formation. Spiritual formation involves the patient work of slowing down so that we can pay attention to all that is happening in our lives. We must learn to explore our experiences and recognize that our life struggles affect our faith journey. Through spiritual direction we learn to trust in the wisdom and experience others share with us as they listen and help us discern the movements of our lives. We also learn to articulate our journey which involves the process of identifying and naming those things that may be affecting our ability to recognize God.

People offering spiritual direction require just as much discipline and patience. It takes great discipline to guide others to slow down. One must be familiar with the many shortcuts we take, and our tendencies for quick results. It also takes discipline to recognize the movements of God in the lives of others, and careful and patient guidance that allows young people to discover the truths for themselves, rather than always relying on others for easy answers. Ministry is always about preparing others for life beyond the present moment. We should be helping to prepare youth for the various encounters and transitions of adulthood. It takes great restraint and patience to sit and listen to another person without offering advice by discerning when to speak and when to be silent. Youth workers need discernment to know the appropriate stories and elements to share for the benefit of the other person's journey. Persons are at different stages of development and some may not be ready or willing to move beyond. The task of the spiritual director is to help the other discern when they might be ready to move beyond a certain stage which would bring a greater awareness to God's presence.

### **Challenging Youth through Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual direction involves the process of critical thinking which is crucial to their emotional and intellectual maturity. Though spiritual direction may sound like a process that only mature adults can participate in, youth greatly desire to be challenged to a deeper level of processing about all that is occurring in their life and God's participation in it.

#### *Spiritual Direction as Presence*

The greatest gift we can offer those we lead is the ministry of presence and a deep desire to simply listen to them. Even the smallest child appreciates being taken seriously and many people do children and youth a disservice by not acknowledging the value that their presence and insights might offer us personally, and the ways they might positively help to shape society, faith congregations, societal organizations, movements, culture, and many involvements. As Chap Clark points out in his book *Hurt*, many young people feel that there is no one they can trust because they have experienced abandonment in so many ways by the time they reach the teen years. Adults need to get beyond young people's defenses, recognizing youth will ultimately welcome those who are genuinely open to them. Young people may trust us enough to share their joys, sorrows, dreams and faith journey with us. When this occurs, they are learning to begin to let others speak into their lives, which is a highly developed skill all persons need, and it develops throughout a lifetime. When we share in a young person's journey, the ways we are present and listen will be crucial to our ability to guide them in what they are experiencing.

#### *Spiritual Direction as Decision Making*

One of the most common behaviors we will observe in adolescents is a desire and passion to live out their faith. This quality in youth can be quite attractive and contagious. They are wired for high emotions and for expressing their faith. I witness this passion, energy and desire constantly among young adults. Though youth go through unique experiences, young people can and do have the general tendencies in how they deal with questioning, confusion, fear, anger, etc. How we learn to respond, process and receive these experiences in healthy ways requires a choice to

grow beyond what is familiar. When persons begin to seek answers to difficult questions, they begin to move beyond the concrete and experience intellectual and psychological development. Dr. Brad Kelle points out that there are two “Christian Virtues” to be aware of as we guide young persons.

- Moral Courage requires a willingness to establish, defend and enact one’s moral vision and belief.
- “Truthful” Humility describes the ability to recognize one’s finitude and fallibility as well as a willingness to review, reexamine and alter one’s convictions in dialogue with others.

Development passes through predictable, sequential stages similar to physical maturation. Persons can move through three stages with varying changes regarding moral courage and epistemic humility.

### *Understanding the Movement Toward Complex Commitment*

Early and many middle adolescents live with a dualistic understanding of the world where everything is seen in terms of black or white, good or bad, right or wrong. These young people are often convinced that there is one correct answer to every question. They may in fact choose to recognize a diversity of opinions, but assume diversity opinions are illegitimate, explained away by appeal to sin, stubbornness, sloppy scholarship, stupidity, etc. These young people may even express a disdain for the language of “interpretation.”

Adolescents in the stage of plurality may accept diversity as a part of life but in a despairing way. The youth may perceive all knowledge and values, including one’s authority, as contextual and relativistic. Diversity is no longer a problem to overcome; rather diversity represents simply the way things are in their minds. It is common in this stage for the person to scorn the old dualistic self. In this stage of development, relativism and moral ambiguity reign in many areas of life and thought and the person now experiences epistemic humility, the ability to acknowledge one’s own social conditioning and potential for error. In this stage, moral courage may also largely be absent.

Complex Commitment describes the most critical stage because a person can choose to live with an understanding and acceptance of plurality yet making real commitments toward moral courage. Persons begin making new and more cautious commitments in the midst of complexity. The person now acknowledges the need for continuous ethical reflection with a spirit of “truthful” humility as they now realize that commitment is an ongoing, unfolding activity through which we can express our faith. In this stage, the person experiences both “truthful” humility and moral courage in both their intellectual and moral reflection and decision-making. As we consider these stages we should point out that persons can move through to the final stage in one area of their life, while remaining in the pluralistic stage in other areas.

Decision making arises particularly during moments of transition. People are able to move from one stage to another only when the previous stage no longer “works” for them. Youth experience these transitions as emotionally difficult, and resistance to growth can be common. Kelle points

out that the need for moral courage since, as Christians, we have to believe some things. Ambiguity and complexity demand epistemic humility, but Christian faith and love also demand moral courage. The key to learning is to be able to make decisions even while understanding the complexity of issues, and knowing that perhaps later our stance may change but that this is where we currently stand.

### *Spiritual Direction as Discernment*

If one of the greatest gifts we can offer youth is our presence and an attentive listening then one of the greatest tools as spiritual guides is our ability to use questions to guide the process of discernment. The questions asked are discerning questions; questions that are revealing and that lead the other person to discover for themselves the landscape, the longings, the motivations, and the Spirit guiding them in a direction. This will take time to learn since we are so accustomed to offering youth answers. But this work becomes easier the more we are familiar with this work in our lives.

As youth begin to take seriously the role of reflection and awareness, they are empowered to make better and wiser decisions in their life. Though sometimes helpful, it is not enough to simply teach them simple lessons that will help them get through the next week. As youth workers, we must teach them life-transforming truths they can grow into and that help them develop discerning skills they can use into adulthood. Today's youth seem to face more choices as they face more opportunities than ever before. Many cultures are moving at such a fast pace that it is growing difficult to slow down long enough to reflect on our lives, much less the growing choices we all face.

The process of learning to choose well is simply the process of discernment. Discernment is partnering with God as we search for and practice wisdom in every area of our lives. As youth workers, teaching discernment is valuable because it empowers youth by teaching them that they have the potential to solve issues and problems in their own life. The verb "to discern" comes from the Latin verb "*discernere*," which means "to separate, to distinguish accurately one object from another." Discernment involves the ability to differentiate and thus involves critical thinking. To think critically means that we are able to consider all the factors with an open mind, and to ask questions about the implications of a situation and about a decision. While we may already be biased, it involves an openness to weigh all the options. It involves analyzing, interpreting and evaluating all of the information, as well as our own reaction to things. Critical thinking ultimately leads us to reflect on the possible motivations behind every person involved in any given situation.

Critical thinking does not only involve rational thinking but also involves the heart as we participate in honest discussions about our own desires, motives and interests that influence our decisions. The ability to be honest with ourselves and with others about the reasons behind the choices we make is critical to our growth as healthy persons. One of the greatest benefits of critical thinking is that it teaches us to move beyond our self and self-interests as we begin to understand the world and others in a new way. What a radical difference to watch someone grow to learn to incorporate the needs of others into their decision process.

## *Steps to Discernment*

Pierre Wolff, in *Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well*, suggests that all persons require adequate time, critical thinking, listening to our hearts and using our faith values, to guide us toward good discernment.

1. *We need adequate time.* Wolff suggests that the more difficult the decision, the more time is required as we consider the options. Youth often grow anxious over a situation and feel they must immediately make decisions. Encourage them to take their time to adequately discern all the variables.
2. *We need to use our head* to analyze, distinguish and objectively look at the situation. Many youths are prone to lean heavily on their emotions when making a decision. This is a great time to teach them critical thinking when making a decision, helping them recognize the advantages and disadvantages of a choice as well as the possible consequences.
3. *We need to use our hearts.* Rational is important but we cannot abandon our hearts when making a decision. Almost all of us have made a decision at some point that didn't make sense to others. In other words, when we weighed all the factors by all accounts we should have made a specific decision, but careful reflection also revealed that making that decision would mean a sacrifice in another area of our lives that we were not willing to make. Whatever the case, we balance the rational arguments with what we know about ourselves and our call as Christians.
4. *We use our faith values and Christian vocation as a guide.* Would this decision help me to be faithful to the things that God has called me to be as a person, as a Christian? How will this decision affect those close to me? Does the decision neglect my call to love others as I do myself?

David White suggests that discernment should not only be practiced at an individual level, but that it can serve to challenge faith communities by incorporating discerning practices that impact both youth and adults to learn to understand one another and therefore to learn from one another. In his book, *Practicing Discernment with Youth*, White argues for discernment as a four-fold process which consists of:

- *Listening*—Loving God with our hearts by appreciating youth and their stories
- *Understanding*—Loving God with our minds by exploring with young people their context and the issues they face
- *Remembering/Dreaming*—Loving God with our souls by bringing youth into conversation with scripture and history of the church—remembering—and also bring youth into God's vision for how the world should be—dreaming.
- *Acting*—Loving God with our strength by guiding youth to take Christian action in addressing the issues their lives

This process does not need special preparation can occur in congregations as a whole. White also argues that we only harm youth by marginalizing them into groups and fostering distance from the whole faith community. When this happens youth experience firsthand participation in the movement of God among people of God.

## **The Strong Guide—Guiding with Courage**

Walking alongside youth as they grow, mature and develop creates opportunities to recognize and help them move beyond unhealthy behaviors due to a lack of reflection and critical thinking. The task of direction is to guide students to become increasingly self-aware while at the same time increasing their awareness of how their choices impact others.

As mentioned, some youth are better equipped to receive direction, while others struggle to hear or apply the hope and freedom of the message of Christ. And sometimes, a person may be so caught up in their life and world, they are completely unaware of how their behavior is affecting others and it requires firm but loving guidance to direct, discipline or hold them accountable to the values of the faith community. Though Jim Burns reminds us not to become too judgmental about self-preoccupation since youth need understanding and accountability as they grow.

How can we encourage them in their journey? There are a number of key considerations, specific questions and general activities that may assist our guidance. Blending these elements provide a holistic approach that gives us the courage to know we can provide faithful direction in the lives of youth. Determining the right “blend” often requires our understanding of youth context and practicing discernment in developing our own approach to spiritual direction.

Ask youth questions about their choices without judgment as you help them process a situation. The task is to help them see their behavior as inconsistent with who they have expressed they desire to be. Trust that young people have the ability to identify and name their own destructive behaviors when given enough space to process the situation.

Use as many tools as possible (conversations, comments made, commitments voiced, personality tests, etc.) to use as reference points for helping them assess their tendencies and strengths and weaknesses. These tools help youth find and develop a language for what they are processing internally. Youth desire for us to be honest with them about their lives. When young people sense that we truly care and are genuinely listening to them, they will be able to engage in a mutual processing and able to receive direction in the form of honest feedback, warning, caution and even discipline.

Communicate respect for their spiritual journey by carefully listening and knowing when to caution. These conversations involve making them aware of the dangers of certain decisions but freeing them to make the decision(s) on their own. When we give others greater responsibilities they often step up to the challenge and begin to take more seriously the implications of their decisions. When a person chooses a direction that is not the best choice, revisiting their decision-making process and helping them process the outcomes is crucial and is just as important as celebrating their good choices. We often learn more from our mistakes than our successes and as youth workers we need to not fear the lessons that failure or missteps can play in the shaping of our lives for the good. The more we grow in our understanding of growth, the more willing they are to receive instruction in the form of honest assessment of their lives, warning, caution and discipline.

Direction often has a personal element as every person is unique and responds to situations, instruction and challenges in their own way and time. There is no formula for guiding and directing every situation. In *Uncommon Youth Ministry* Burns and DeVries points out three popular misconceptions people have about God.

- *God is demanding and unforgiving*—difficult time accepting the concept of Grace  
Recognizing these misconceptions in youth as they process situations will help you know how to help them critically think about their experiences and beliefs. The three misconceptions are:
- *God is Distant and Distracted*—God is too busy running the universe to care about me
- *God is Slow to Forgive*—sense of shame. Remind them continually of timeless truths: Romans 8:1-2 and 1 John 1:9.

The most difficult task of providing guidance is being able to identify and set aside self-interest as you enter the process of analyzing a situation. Self-interest can be quite powerful and misleading. Even as adults it is easy to rationalize our desires and confuse them for God's will. We can mislead ourselves to believe that we are sensing "God's peace" toward a direction when what is really happening is that we are sensing a peace about finally figuring out a way to get what we want. During these times, there may not be anything we can do to convince another person to choose a particular way, however, we must commit to attempt to help the other recognize the consequences of their actions, and to help them see beyond themselves in a situation.

Providing direction involves identifying true conviction from self-imposed guilt or shame. Examining sin as it relates to our longings and its consequences can be something we seldom talk about in the church. We don't always know how to strike the right balance of discipline and grace. But it will be important to teach young adults how to rightly discern when God is using conviction in their lives.

Try to include community approaches that hold youth accountable through regular programming. When persons participate in Communion with a proper understanding of confession and the practice of receiving the grace offered through Christ, this practice can be a rich experience with both personal and corporate reflection.

Challenge the student to practice self-discipline and discernment with caution and accountability. The following are examples of some questions taken from the book, *Spiritual Mentoring*.

- In what ways am I aware of living outside of God's will today?
- Are there words of confrontation that God might wish to speak to me today?
- Are there words of consolation that God might wish to speak to me?
- What is life-giving here and why?
- What is not life-giving here and why not?
- Who is suffering?
- What are some reasons for this present state of affairs?
- Can you explain some of your own attitudes?

Directors may also raise specific questions. The tools of spiritual direction and discernment guide us to hear more fully the voice of the Spirit that guides and directs our steps and calls us to become the persons and communities God is calling us to become.

- How is your prayer life?
- How are you making space in your life for God to speak?
- Where do you sense God in this situation?
- In the midst of all that is confusing to you right now, what do you know to be true? What do you know to be true about the situation? About the person that has wounded you, or that you have wounded?
- Were you faithful to follow the disciplines to which you committed yourself?

True spiritual direction is about trusting that God is at work in the whole life of the other person and that our role in their life remains part of a greater set of influences and voices God is using. There are times when we will need to move out of the way in order for the Holy Spirit to move. We also are freed from believing that we are the only voice in the life of the student. We let go and yet remain present to the movements of growth in their life that even they might be surprised by our awareness. Remember that journeying with youth day in and day out can lead us down avenues with them that we would never have expected, where discipline and accountability must be present. Nevertheless, offering direction will also prove to be a wonderful experience as together we discover again and again the grace and mercy of God in and among us.

### **Application**

Identify some current popular media resources used by youth today (magazines, music, video or internet). Choose 2-3 items and describe the message you believe they are sending youth. What do these messages implicitly say about our responsibility to encourage discernment? How do these messages affect young people's relationships with their parents, school, work, home, church?

Do your own study of how listening can impact youth and adults in your faith community by creating a survey that youth and adults can use to interview one another. Once the study is done, debrief the experience with the youth, and then debrief the experience with the adults that participated. What did the two groups discover about one another?



## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Can you give examples of youth in the dualistic stage, in the pluralistic stage, or in the complex commitment stage?*

*What are the largest issues of society today that challenge youth decision-making?*

*Who were the people that helped you to learn to practice discernment in your life? What was the most difficult element of discernment when you were learning to think critically as a young person?*

*What are other factors to consider, or situations where you anticipate you might need to use discipline or accountability in your work with youth?*

*What are your biggest questions or fears about incorporating discipline and accountability in your work with youth?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 17

Youth Ministry  
Shepherding -  
Providing Care

## **Youth Ministry Training** **Lesson Seventeen: Youth Ministry Shepherding—Providing Care**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Who Cares?
- Anything Can Happen to Teenagers
- Why Care?
- Please Care!
- Caring Well

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Establish a personal identification with the struggles of adolescence
- Know the biblical basis of spiritual care and understand how the principles of effective caring relate to shepherding young people
- Identify strategies for reaching out to students with immediate issues and with deep hurts, and connect them to contemporary problems facing today's youth
- Plan for ways to enact various means and methods of spiritual care in youth ministry in their own ministry contexts
- Begin to articulate a philosophy of spiritual care that flows out of experiences, commitments, and passions

#### **Introduction**

Effective youth ministry practices rest on the concrete mix of discipleship and shepherding. It is often the love expressed and felt in the midst of adolescent growing pains that solidifies the impetus for a life committed to Christ. Just as Wesleyan theology embraces a life of personal holiness as the intense response to the mercies of God, the disciplines of young Christ-followers often flow out of gratitude for a faith community where hurts are healed and challenges overcome by the presence of caring mentors and friends. Youth workers care because Christ has done so for us, and in doing so bids those freed from that which would destroy them to “go and sin no more.”

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Who Cares?**

In *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, Bruce Petersen notes pastoral theologian Thomas Oden's belief that pastoral care resembles a physician's care of the body, often called the care of souls. Pastoral care does surface as one of the traditional roles of the pastor. Historically, pastoral care encompassed four major responsibilities:

- Healing: overcome impairment and moving toward wholeness
- Sustaining: helping hurting persons endure and transcend their circumstance

- Reconciling: restoring broken relationships, both personal and communal
- Guiding: helping people to make wise choices and pursue mature lifestyles

Often members of the congregation find themselves in situations where they offer counsel to other people, including youth. Many youth workers use the term spiritual care to emphasize the relationship between a youth's physical, social, and psychological well-being and to frame our love for students as an outgrowth of our own life in Christ.

Recognizing that youth are often the most vulnerable of all sheep, the significance of spiritual care is unlimited and the significance of care in youth ministry is unlimited. Often these moments of vulnerability include awkward or painful moments in the lives of youth. These situations may appear at any moment. May all we do demonstrate how much we care!

### **Anything Can Happen to Teenagers!**

All of us have no doubt had those moments when we thought we were going to die from embarrassment, when there seemed to be no tomorrow, when you would have just as soon skipped adolescence and gone straight to middle age! Even though we can laugh now, it was painful then. Understanding our own past helps us to be ready to receive the struggles of youth today.

Most of us get over embarrassing moments without long-range damage. But what about those “anything can happen moments” that were painful or difficult to handle? Would a couple of you share what one of those may have been?

As you look back on that, was there someone who was there to comfort you in that instance? If not, what would it have taken for someone to be a “champion” in your life in those moments?

We are probably all aware of the difficulties some teenagers face.

- Some are the results of poor choices made by the teenager—addictions, disorders, personal conflicts, violence, unmarried pregnancy, even incarceration.
- Some are tragedies that flow out of the actions of others—physical injuries, divorce or other family issues, poverty, victimization.
- Still others come from situations that no one could control or anticipate—health-related issues, handicaps, family illness or death, psychological illness.

Behind every challenging circumstance exists a need and an opportunity for someone to respond. Can youth workers miss these opportunities? They sure can. How? Some make the assumption that young people would rather not share their problems. Some don't commit the time to be present and available to teenagers in a way that builds rapport and trust. Others remain afraid or uncomfortable with talking about the struggles in their own life. They were too painful! More than pizza and fun programs, even more than compelling sermons and praise rallies, the deepest need for many adolescents from their youth workers is spiritual care.

## Why Care?

Pastoral care forms a familiar biblical and historical basis for responsive and restorative ministry offered by Christ-followers, though in recent years the term often has been associated more specifically with clergy or the specialized work of counseling. Since we understand that professional and lay youth workers share equally in caring for the needs of young people, many prefer to use spiritual care both to identify the role more broadly and to emphasize the importance of holistically connecting youth to the source of all care, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Caring youth workers also recognize how developmental realities in adolescence lend themselves to linking life lessons learned through struggle and pain to what God may be doing in our lives to disciple us and help us grow. Spiritual openness may never be a prerequisite for spiritual care, the opportunity for commitment and growth is always woven into the fabric of reaching out with the love of Christ.

### *The Biblical Basis of Spiritual Care*

The English word “pastor” derives from the Latin word meaning “to feed” or literally “to pasture.” The image is that of a shepherd who brings the flock to graze where nourishment is plentiful. The Spanish expression of the familiar opening phrase of Psalm 23 makes the connection: Jehovah es mi pastor—The Lord is my shepherd. From Jacob to Moses to David, shepherding framed Israel’s understanding of God’s leadership, protection, and discipline.

The prophets agree. Isaiah described God as one who “leads His flock like a shepherd, gently” (40:11), and Ezekiel and Jeremiah contrasted poor leaders as those who saw the sheep only as a means for personal gain and did not care for them. They did not strengthen, heal, or bind up the weak and their lack of care had scattered and caused Israel to wander from God. Unmistakably, the expectation was that those who lead should do so out of a heart of love that shows its depth in caring for the most vulnerable of God’s creatures.

Jesus assumed the identity of the caring shepherd as His own, and references to the metaphor abound in the gospels. John chapter 10 expresses—

- Intimacy— “the sheep listen to his voice . . . he calls his own sheep by name”
- Commitment— “the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” that the shepherd feels for his flock.

The provision of the Good Shepherd was “life to the fullest” (Jn 10:10). Matthew 9:36 illustrates Christ’s compassion for the hurting by describing them as “like sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus’ commission for His followers to make disciples accompanied Jesus’ promise that He would be with them until the end of the age. Peter affirmed that those who live out Jesus’ model of caring for the flock could be assured that “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). He assured His readers that those who led with humility toward each other could cast all of our cares on Him, knowing that His humble sacrifice on our behalf assures us He cares for us in the same way (v. 5-7).

Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, in the *The Godbearing Life*, note the shepherding role expanded for pastors to include the oversight of souls. They continue that youth ministry focuses on relationships not because of who teenagers are but who God is. God is a relationship . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . and significant relationships with other Christians matter because they teach us something about what God is like . . . the One who can love us passionately enough to suffer willingly on our behalf. Youth workers care for young people as a reflection of the nature of God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 echoes this divine relationship of God's essence and our care for each other in a way that applies to us all: "Praise be to the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." The intersection of personal struggles and God's grace provides an avenue of reaching others with the same compassion that we ourselves have experienced. We look back at our distresses as stepping stones to a deeper understanding of the hurts of teenagers. We know that growth and spiritual strength comes not in spite of but because of the burdens that we bear.

Jesus was described in Hebrews 4:15 as one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has encountered them Himself. As we grow in faith and trust in He who provides for us, we regard our current sufferings as reference points for feeling alongside of those around us. In the same way that Paul was comforted by Titus who had been comforted by the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:6-7), together we form a community of wounded healers whose care for each other flows out of Christ's love and back into comfort for ourselves in times of need, and in doing so find rest for our own souls (Mt 11:28-29).

Paul understood his role as a leader as being one to prepare others to serve so that the church may become stronger (Eph 4:12). Shepherding and spiritual care is never confined to the pastoral position. Every believer is a minister and every youth worker has the opportunity to "pastor" young people, protecting and providing for their well-being. Pastoral care is simply spiritual care shown in the name of Jesus, and is carried out by any compassionate relationship that focuses the needs of the person receiving our personal care toward the One whose love reaches to the deepest hurts with profound healing and grace. Those who do not serve in pastoral occupations and those who are pastor-leaders both have the duty to train and empower others to share in the mission of compassion and care.

It is easy to look at the miracles that characterized Jesus' ministry to those who were sick, sorrowful, or oppressed and lose sight of the fact that these acts of kindness and healing were not ends in themselves. Time after time His physical interventions were followed by instructions to follow a life of faith and to leave their life of sin behind. Nothing was more important than their relationship to the Father, and Christ's presence brought that divine encounter down to where they could see it and touch it. He spoke out against those who would expect signs and wonders for self-serving purposes and miss the true reason for what had taken place. If faith did not follow, the opportunity for wholeness became only a random act of kindness, a good thing for the short term but without eternal benefit (Lk 17:11-19). The same is true for Christ-followers.

Understanding that the focal point of life is a human's relationship with God relates all other aspects of life to it. Though certainly not every problem is a spiritual one, a person's faith is a link to their greatest resource, both directly and communally. To those in pain, Jesus offered rest and relief, knowing that a response of gratitude to the mercy of God laid the foundation for spiritual stamina and growth. As we care for the hurts of young people, we must never lose sight of the "bottom line" of spiritual care—a heart that finds its rest and its strength in Christ.

### **Please Care!**

"What can I possibly do?" that was my first thought as I walked out of the senior pastor's office. I was serving in my first summer youth ministry experience, hardly out of youth group myself, when I was asked to visit the hospital room of a teenager injured in an accident who was related to someone in our church. Realizing that I had never been hospitalized myself and had only visited a hospital when visiting one of my own family members, I hardly felt equipped to respond to this need. Maybe it was seeing him connected to all those tubes as I entered the room that made me quickly sense that "connection" was just what Bill needed—knowing that another person was present and available to console, encourage, and care for him. Frequent stops to visit over the next several weeks led his family into involvement in the church and eventually to a commitment to Christ.

### *How Care Impacts the Lives of Youth*

As we commit ourselves to caring for young people, it will become evident that some of the struggles they face come out of the same context as those affecting adults. Severe or chronic illness or injury, death of a loved one, family conflict, or loneliness and isolation that may accompany relocation to a new home, community, or situation are just a few of the common circumstances that can bring a sense of crisis into the lives of young and old alike. Even peer pressure and self-esteem issues are often present in adult experience as they are in teenagers' lives. The difference is how an adolescent is able to process them at their stage of development and experience. There are also, however, challenges related specifically to their stage of life for which those who work with youth will be wise to have awareness and sensitivity.

As noted in earlier lessons, Erik Erikson's study of human development defined the primary task of adolescence as identity vs. role diffusion (failure to clarify identity). The gap between sexual maturity and being able to sustain oneself financially and socially widened as the economic and educational climates began to change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Physical changes such as bone and muscle growth and sexual characteristics create fluctuations in appetite and energy. Differences within or across genders can bring on adjustment difficulties and antagonism. Mental and emotional transitions move young teenagers from concrete to abstract thought and older ones to mid-lobe thinking that enhances idealism, passion, and romance. Moods can fluctuate with body changes, and a lack of control or acting on impulse are common to many youths. Socially, teenagers moving from parental oversight to a peer focus of relationships, in the natural progression toward adulthood, search for the answers to three questions related to three essential needs:

- Who am I?—Identity
- Do I matter?—Belonging
- Am I competent?—Autonomy

Les Parrott in *Helping the Struggling Adolescent*, identified common paths adolescents take in their search for identity:

- Testing and clarifying family relationships
- Questioning and sometimes rebelling against authority
- Seeking status among some of their peers and excluding others
- Seeking the opinions of mentoring adults outside of their parents
- Fashioning some of their perspectives from both the immediacy of role models and more distant yet still powerful cultural “idols” and icons
- Experimenting with “grown-up” behavior

As changes and struggles occur, youth handle them by

- Holding them in
- Acting them out
- Working through them

For the preferred third option, nothing is more vital than significant adults who help young people make the transition healthy and whole. The best conditions for growth occur when youth feel accepted unconditionally, that they are with someone trustworthy and real, and that they are deeply understood. This combination of warmth, genuineness, and empathy prove essential traits of those who can effectively work in partnership with the Holy Spirit to help sustain and guide youth through turbulent times.

The primary aspect to providing care in crisis is to create a place of safety in which students can feel loved and confident of the person with whom they can share their problems. Teenagers need a youth worker who will listen to their story, help them dig deep to understand what is really going on, allow for them to express their feelings, help them find appropriate outside help if needed, and be assured that hope lies in the healing and restoring work of the Holy Spirit. Rich Van Pelt and Jim Hancock, in *The Youthworker’s Guide to Helping Teenagers in Crisis*, provide several questions when youth workers become aware of situations that cry out for caring in the life of a teenager:

- What is the perceived problem? What is the identified problem (the core issue behind the immediate situation)?
- What are the positive and negative outcomes that can result if it persists? What is desirable? What will it take to move toward that outcome?
- What resources are available to reaching the desired outcome? What are the roadblocks?
- Who else should be involved (family, school, church, professional help)?
- What are the steps that must be taken? What ongoing support and feedback is needed?
- What is the timetable?



Pastoral counseling is an area where professional youth workers can equip themselves should they have opportunity, interest, and prevalent need in their ministry setting. A variety of models for pastoral counseling exist, yet most of them revolve around the same principles and steps:

- Establish relationship and rapport
- Explore and define the problem
- Establish and structure goals
- Encourage them to work toward attaining their goals
- Evaluate and follow-up as needed

In many countries, there are legal concerns involved in attempting to counsel youth. The lack of specific training and experience may set up a misunderstanding of what a youth workers can and cannot do. Legal issues such as the duty to report, duty to warn, needs for documentation, and conflicts of interest are just a few of the barriers to adequately providing this level of care. In such countries, the best thing a youth worker can do if the problem requires extensive work or extended attention is to refer the teenager to a professional.

### **Caring Well**

Whether simply being present and available or making sure that professional help is needed, youth workers who care about students will commit themselves in the pattern of Jesus to incarnational approaches, “dwelling among” the teenagers they care for, being transparent and vulnerable, and most important to connecting them to the divine resources of grace and truth that reside in our Heavenly Father (John 1). In any crisis that an adolescent may face, patient and persistent listening does makes a difference.

Active listening remains the most important tool in the caring youth workers belt. Fully engaging your attention and focus in listening to what teenagers both say and feel unearths hidden emotions and issues, helps take away fear, facilitates true learning, and ultimately helps a person to be their own counselor. It involves two basic ingredients:

- Reflection: responding to the emotional content of what is being said (and not being said) and “hearing” what is being felt
- Clarification: asking questions in the process to gather additional information that together can be explored more thoroughly, and expressing a clear desire to understand

As youth workers actively listen to a teenager in the midst of their problems, being fully attentive, communicating non-verbal openness, and responding appropriately is key. Some things to avoid include interrupting, judging too hastily, giving advice prematurely or excessively, or making references unduly to your own experience and subtly diverting the focus of what they are feeling. Good listeners will listen with the whole person, with acceptance, with their own limitations unpacked, with an interest in the “story behind the story,” and with God’s help.

Active listening describes a specific skill that caring people develop with practice. Some people might be more attentive to people than others due to their natural disposition or due to

formational influences when they were young. However, we all need to cultivate basic listening skills.

Young people don't always know about making a formal appointment. They ignore the idea of privately sitting down with someone, and will often just blurt out what's on their mind to someone they trust. Youth workers should be ready to seize those opportunities to care. In such situations, youth workers can affirm them for asking and work to uncover what they may really be searching for. It is also possible to connect what they discover with applicable biblical truth in natural terms, guiding them to do their own thinking. Sometimes they will pull from within themselves the help they need, and other times they will sense a more extended conversation would be a good thing. In either case, being "rehearsed" in good listening skills can be a real advantage to caring in the few minutes that young people may give you to do so!

As part of your homework assignment for this lesson is information dealing with confidentiality and community resources. These are two areas that need careful, serious consideration in your ministry. Remember, in the midst of pain, God is often up to something good! As New Testament Christians did, "We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us!" (Rom 5:3-5).

### **Application**

Identify local agencies that can support you in providing care to youth. Using the large categories of family relationships, personal health, as well as social challenges. The possible list should include school counselors, a drug and alcohol abuse agency, crisis-pregnancy program, family mediation and legal service, area social worker, poison control center, child protection services, crisis center or telephone line, recovery support group, Christian counseling services, psychiatric hospitals with specialized units for adolescents, hospital emergency special care units, adolescent stress unit, eating disorder treatment program and support group, and community health center. The entry should include the name, a possible contact person, address, and phone number.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Is there anyone who, in the midst of the specific situation you shared, had a person who was on your side, who reached out to you, or who continued to like you even when embarrassing things happened? Tell us about them. If not, what would it have taken for someone to encourage or console you at that moment?*

*What aspects of caring do you find appealing to you personally? Which ones create fear of anxiety in you? Which ones do you believe you are good at? In what ways can we develop a caring team to help us in areas in which we may feel inadequate?*

*What are the challenges adults face in dealing with the Issues of Care?*

*What are some of the advantages that youth workers have when dealing with adolescent issues in a church-related setting?*

*What areas of struggle do you believe your experiences, training, and personal gifts equip you best for? Which ones do you feel inadequate to address?*

*What anxieties or fears might keep you from listening well?*

*What situations would require you to seek help from other professionals?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 18

Youth Ministry  
Shepherding -  
Equipping Leaders

## **Youth Ministry Training**

### **Lesson Eighteen: Youth Ministry Shepherding—Equipping Leaders**

#### **Introduction**

##### **Session Overview**

- Identifying and Recruiting Volunteer Youth Workers
- Leadership Commitment and Training
- Empowering and Encouraging Youth Workers

##### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand the importance of deliberately preparing for succession in ministry
- Identify, recruit, and equip adult youth workers
- Express greater appreciation for the Ministry of Shepherding

##### **Introduction**

This session gives a general introduction to the theoretical and practical Christological/Biblical model of shepherding and equipping leaders.

#### **Lesson Body**

##### **Identifying and Recruiting Volunteer Youth Workers**

###### *Setting a Biblical Foundation*

Identifying and recruiting adults as volunteer youth workers can be a challenge due to a number of different reasons. However, Dan Chow, in *No More Lone Rangers: How to Build a Team-Centered Youth Ministry*, notes that youth ministry must develop volunteers as team-members to overcome a leader's temptation to do everything on their own. Moses relied on Aaron, Hur and Joshua. Jesus' called twelve really different disciples, and later seventy, to extend His ministry. The New Testament church teaches us that everyone has gifts and roles in the body of Christ, so we should expect youth ministry to be a collective effort.

Four images of ministry surface from four sections of the New Testament, providing a theological base for church volunteers. Each of these perspectives remind us that leadership may change based both on context and also our understanding of the Kingdom of God at that moment. Balancing these approaches may seem best but often leaders and communities express certain strengths and limitations based on the setting. As you review these traits of a leader, which of these descriptors tend to be the greatest strength in your setting, the greatest challenge in your setting? Why?

###### 1. John 13:14-16 The Servant Leader

Those who carry leadership positions in the church also carry—first and foremost—the responsibility of serving those volunteers, in whatever lowly manner may be necessary.

## 2. 1 Peter 2:9 The holy priesthood

There exists no hierarchy of vocation—all function as priests, although clearly not all are involved in “church” work. For Christians, there exists no “secular” vocation. As we build our theology of volunteers, we must respect the sacredness of volunteers’ weekday work. Their calling to their jobs carries no less godliness or need for commitment than the pastoral vocation; within those callings the royal priesthood will minister.

## 3. Romans 12:4-5 The body concept

God uses the physical body as an image of the church to drive home this point: No one with this holy priesthood may consider himself or herself unessential to the ministry of the whole. The structure suffers harm and/or inefficiency when parts of it remain inactive and do not contribute to the health and work of the whole.

## 4. Ephesians 4:11-16 The equipping leader

Servant leadership does not seek to force volunteers into service or to heap guilt on them so they reluctantly take their places—counting the days until the sentence of service runs out—but to equip them so they serve with competence.

A true theology of volunteers believes the work of God’s kingdom goes on even when the formal or informal programs of the church may seem inadequately staffed. As equippers, we must ensure that God’s people have an adequate knowledge of Scripture and an adequate unity in Christ so they can grow to maturity.

### *Leadership in History*

Historically the church has adopted a number of leadership models based on context and need. Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter, in *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches*, offer a range of approaches from the rise of the abbot, who shepherded monastic communities, to Lutheran and Reformed pastors who challenged contexts yet also established innovated new communities, to Quakers who trusted community guidance and Pentecostals who put tremendous emphasis on individual gifts. Banks and Ledbetter note each generation of leaders seemed to negotiate three different tensions.

- Tradition and adaptation
- Preservation and innovation
- Stability and change

Each tension called leaders to both look to the past and anticipate the future in light of the needs of their communities and the conditions of their context.

Even the general study of leadership in North America, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today, changed over time. Banks and Ledbetter note that early studies emphasized the lives of great leaders (biographical study). However, researchers later applied scientific methods to leadership to discover if leaders held common biological “traits” or possessed a particular character. By mid-century the focus moved away from the person of the leader to their particular “style.” Often studies in this period noted that leaders must balance their emphasis on meeting certain tasks while also maintaining relationships with followers. By the late twentieth century, the human

resources movement expanded the style question as it focused on follower readiness. By this point researchers, like Paul Hershey and Kenneth Blanchard, in *Management of Organizational Behavior*, emphasized the need to adapt leadership based both on 1) the goals in mind and 2) a follower's ability to attain those goals in relationship to the leader. Balancing tasks and relationships proved crucial if one wanted to extend one's leadership throughout the organization.

Banks and Ledbetter observe leadership includes at least four important elements: (1) the person of the leader, (2) the relationship between leader and follower, (3) the task a leader is attempting to accomplish, and (4) the influence of the context or setting in which a leader leads. Often the quality of our leadership rests with how well we communicate trust in our personal actions (that we will be consistent), assess the ability of our followers in the tasks they must accomplish, maintain a vision for ministry and continue to study the context of our ministry. Assisting others to accept their responsibility with these four tasks remains an important part of leadership development.

Dale Carnegie was a master at identifying potential leaders. Once asked by a reporter how he had managed to hire forty-three millionaires, Carnegie responded that the men had not been millionaires when they started working for him. They had become millionaires as a result. The reporter next wanted to know how he had developed these individuals to become such valuable leaders. Carnegie replied, "[Leaders] are developed the same way gold is mined. Several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold. But you don't go in the mine looking for dirt," he added. "You go in looking for gold." That's exactly the way to develop positive, successful people. Look for the gold, not the dirt; the good not the bad. The more positive qualities you look for, the more you are going to find.

Chris Folmsbee, in *A New Kind of Youth Ministry*, observes that people tend to volunteer their time due to four contributing influences:

1. A sense of calling and opportunity to make a difference
2. A chance to do something they do well
3. Being encouraged and empowered along the way
4. Serving with like-minded people with a real sense of community

Holderness and Hay, in *Teaming Up*, note that parents may be involved with the ministry. However, many parents may not always be leaders since youth need to develop relationships with other significant adults.

## Discerning Gifts and Graces

Part of recruitment must include self-assessment. Many adults remain interested in working with youth but they must also be able to identify key gifts and graces that they offer to a youth ministry. Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, in *The Godbearing Life*, offer a series of helpful questions to help adults and youth workers discern one's disposition and ability to work with youth.

1. Can I model for youth the meaning of a happy, healthy and whole adulthood?
2. To what extent have I been able to forgive my own parents, and reflect their positive attributes and not reacting to my negative experiences?
3. How do I deal with "loss," learning to let go and speak of my experiences openly?
4. What is my theology of friendship and is it reflected in healthy and faithful friends?
5. Do I find time for solitude, feeling comfortable with myself in these moments?
6. Do I maintain adequate boundaries with other people, keeping them neither too distant nor too close for my personal needs?
7. Have I realized and accepted that I can't save every young person?
8. Do I focus on experiences of gratitude and cultivate a sense of being grateful?
9. Can I accept not doing everything right, do I learn from my mistakes?
10. Am I able to maintain a sense of integrity, even when I am called to make difficult decisions that may demand sacrifice?

These questions help adults in self-assessment but there are other means of identifying and cultivating adult youth workers. Often, we must review a number of considerations when recruiting volunteers, such as:

1. Give volunteers the options of short, medium, and long-term periods of ministry service.
2. Identify the different areas of responsibility that volunteers can commit to, e.g. Adult chaperons on field trips, Bible Quiz Ministry Coaches, and Study Partners.
3. Allow for potential volunteers to meet informally with current volunteers to share experiences and ideas.
4. Always give as much detailed information as possible to help potential volunteers with their decision making.
5. Use statistics and other vital information to inform volunteers of needs and the results others have had.

Ultimately positive qualities must align with the overall goal of ministry. Developing a "ministry match" includes discovering the unique gifts in leaders and also providing the basics of what is required in ministry. Often called "job descriptions," one is actually providing a form of "ministry profile" that provides the skeleton on which the ministry often "takes flesh" as the Holy Spirit gives life. Traditionally ministry profiles include the following:

1. Position title.
2. Position purpose. How does the role fit into the mission of the whole church?
3. Description of roles. How could the ministry be summarized?
4. Qualifications. What characteristics will be required of the youth worker?



5. Responsibilities. What are the specific assignments and expectations?
6. Accountability. To whom and for whom will the person in this position be accountable?
7. Committees or teams. Does this position involve serving on any committees?
8. Goals for the year. What measurable objectives will be used to evaluate job performance?
9. Share with each other your ministry profile.

Ministry profiles should include mutual responsibilities. Not only what the church/ministry expects of the new leader but also what the church/ministry will also provide, in resources, training, prayer, encouragement, or support. Mutual commitment establishes a climate for better ministry.

### **Leadership Commitment and Training**

Commitment and training often operate as two inseparable realities. Although commitment is a personal attitude, leaders who are trained are likely to be more committed than those who are not. If we are to work with volunteers in the church we will need to address three basic responsibilities:

- Motivating people
- Guiding them into the right ministry
- Supporting and supervising them as they minister.

In addition, adult youth workers often have to fulfill specific roles very similar to the minister. Holderness and Hay indicate these roles include being a significant adult friend to youth, serving as an advocate for youth and partner and “guarantor” (someone who provides a sense of security) with youth, as well as being a role model and advocate for youth. Each of these roles prove crucial with youth but often require “coaching” with new adult youth workers.

Training requires working positively to build a sense of commitment and motivation toward the ministry. Both tasks require disciplined engagement to encourage volunteers while resisting the temptation to manipulate for our own desires, rather than God’s direction! There are some basic steps that we can take to accomplish both tasks.

First and foremost, we need to screen youth workers. Before anyone joins church ministry they should go through a period of discernment. The beginning point may only be a willingness to be active in a local congregation for several months to a year before gaining a leadership role (though new members may participate much sooner). Leaders may also want to meet with adults to determine how their gifts, personal tendencies, and even experiences might influence their approach to youth ministry. In many settings youth leadership needs to have more formal procedures that screen potential sponsors and youth workers before they enter the ministry. In many countries, specific instances of child abuse mandate this careful process. Refusing to undertake this type of formal screening may reflect poorly on the witness of a local church, leaving the local community with the impression that the congregation does not value the welfare of youth and children. Churches need to take seriously whether they offer “safe sanctuaries” for youth and children. Steps for Screening Youth Workers include the following:

1. Have a written application
2. Do criminal background checks through Nazarenesafe.org (Available in English only)
3. Ask for references and check those references
4. Have a personal interview
5. Use a team to decide who serves the ministry

If you make no exceptions to these steps it reduces resistance and instills confidence with the parents and youth. Keeping youth safe is more important than the worker's feelings.

Volunteer training encourages ongoing leadership development. Even adult leaders changing from one ministry role to the next require new skills in order to have confidence for ministry. Volunteer training often undergoes several stages. First leaders must focus on preparation, setting the climate of the training, defining the task within the context of the ministry and motivating volunteers who attend. Second leaders need to determine the best way of implementing the training, rather through local settings or attending institutes that focus on leadership. Implementation should invite continuous improvement, eliminate fear and barriers between volunteers. Hopefully implementation will result in a sense of competency and desire to take what is learned and transform it into the volunteer's ministry. Finally, training must have time for personal evaluation of one's abilities in light of the new knowledge. Trainers need to include themselves in this process, inviting short accounts of new insights, encouraging demonstrations of the teaching, offering themselves as mentors and engaging in loving confrontation to encourage volunteers grow through the training. As trainers, we must remember Christian commitment remains crucial for everyone since it serves as the foundation for all improvement. Commitment ultimately includes young people, adult youth workers, parents, church and lead pastor. We must ask for commitment, there is a difference between interest and commitment. People interested in doing something often do it only when it is convenient. People committed to something, accept no excuses.

Holderness and Hay encourage that we see adult leaders as "team members" in the ministry. When we create opportunities for them to share in leadership and decision making their commitment grows. As people know clearly what they are supposed to do, as we show them how to be leaders, and as they experience joy in accomplishments as they use their God-given gifts, adults become key contributors. Our responsibility is to motivate them toward ministry rather than manipulating them to achieve our goals.

### **Empowering and Encouraging Youth Workers**

Empowering and encouraging youth workers reflects the best of contemporary leadership. Banks and Ledbetter, reviewing the most recent leadership literature, offer the following observations about leadership in our current context.

- Leaders frequently define leadership as a potential in everyone, not just a special group.
- Leaders see authority as shared, distributed, or pervasive throughout the ministry.
- Leaders emphasize the servant-leader paradigm or the image of the leader as a steward or trustee.

- Leaders use the language of ministry purpose and vision rather than merely exercise power based on their position in the group.
- Leaders focus on transformational language, attitudes, and practices.
- Leaders model what they want to accomplish and focus on encouraging others.
- Leaders serve as key figures on a team rather than as soloists.
- Leaders accept a reciprocal relationship with co-workers as vital.
- Leaders emphasize the importance not only of ethics but also of wider values in relation to their ministry.

Motivation and training serve only if volunteers are empowered to do their ministry and receive continual encouragement along their ministry. Too many volunteers—and ministers—are set in a position but not given the authority or ongoing encouragement to see their ministry flourish. Burnout often comes from the struggle that rises when one sets out to accomplish what one has been trained to do—but not given the power or encouragement to do. Holderness and Hay observe that team-based ministry and open communication help overcome burnout. We need to cultivate our ability to empower people and also constantly remind them of their value to our ministry. Jim Burns and Mark DeVries, in *An Uncommon Youth Ministry*, reminds us that any effective ministry to a wide variety of young people must be done in the context of a team.

Creating a leadership team includes empowering others to their potential. First begin by evaluating potential leaders, helping them to know the knowledge, skill and even desire they possess. Second you need to model passionate leadership for them, giving them a chance to see leadership qualities but also see your humanity and humility before God. Third, give them permission to succeed as well as to fail. Expect success, verbalize what success might look like in a given situation and reinforce their efforts when they are successful rather than penalizing their failures. Fourth you must transfer authority to them, either in short term projects or in specific aspects of ministry. Fifth, publically show your confidence in what they do. Make sure other people know they have leadership and respect their decisions. Make sure you supply your new leaders with feedback, providing praise and loving challenge where needed. Finally, you must release them to continue on their own. Leaders need opportunity to develop their own leadership style, their own passions, and their sense of being part of a team where they contribute at every level. Good leaders also serve as good followers; that means you must learn to follow at times as well. Ultimately leaders feel empowered when they know they are part of a shared leadership team where they can step in when the situation calls for their expertise and direction.

While these specific guidelines assist our efforts with specific leaders, we can also create a “climate” of empowerment among all volunteers. We need to reward volunteer effort with public or private affirmation. Hand-written notes of appreciation, personal compliments that identify specific actions, pictures of volunteers in action posted in a prominent place, acknowledgement made in worship services of specific volunteer activities, gifts of gratitude, and appreciation dinners all serve as means of acknowledging volunteers. We should constantly observe volunteers in action, looking for strengths upon which to build. We can also support volunteers by providing them resources to complement his or her skills. Our efforts need to focus on volunteer development. We might use different strategies and methods for development such as general education, sponsorships, personal coaching & counseling and even direct confrontation with suggestions for improvement.

Ultimately, we may help in creating volunteer communities. Methods may vary but leaders may well use the following:

- Use scripture to teach the importance of loving, caring ministry teams.
- Draw upon church life to illustrate the viability of supportive volunteer groups.
- Feature people who are part of encouragement teams by allowing them to testify in public services.
- Stimulate the development of new teams by putting people with similar passions together in ministry.
- Demonstrate the importance of mutual support by being part of a small group that provides strength and encouragement for each other.

As Chris Folmsbee observes, real leadership is not about what I do best. It is about discovering what volunteers and parents do best, and helping them find ways to contribute.

### **Application**

Write down your own approach to leadership, which scriptures, historical perspectives and contemporary concerns inform your understanding?

Develop a written process for recruiting new youth workers based on the session. Set criteria for screening volunteers in your setting.

Develop a written, one year, plan for training new youth workers based on the session.

Identify a relational or “team” approach to ministry that would work in your context.

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*What guidelines do you have for screening, educating, investigating and preventing abuse in your context? Have you investigated your responsibilities as well as resources available in your context?*

*Which areas of training does your church or ministry do well? Where are they challenged to provide better training? How do you motivate volunteers in your ministry?*

*Where do you see the greatest temptation for manipulation? What guidelines can you set to avoid this danger?*

*How well does your ministry reflect the “team” concept? How might you improve your understanding of shared leadership in your setting?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 19

Youth Ministry  
Shepherding -  
Empowering Youth

**Youth Ministry Training**  
**Lesson Nineteen: Youth Ministry Shepherding—Empowering Youth**

**Introduction**

**Session Overview**

- Inviting Youth to Leadership
- Discerning Leadership Gifts and Temperaments
- Organizing Youth Leadership Teams
- Thinking Strategically
- Empowering Youth
- Encouraging, Supporting, Nurturing Youth

**Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session, you should

- Articulate the importance of deliberately exposing to and preparing youth for leadership
- Teach, guide, and counsel youth workers for effective team ministry

**Introduction**

Youth ministry requires more than ministering to young people; we must also minister with youth, cultivating their leadership abilities. This session helps you to develop a sense of some of the practical aspects of empowering youth for ministry.

**Lesson Body**

**Inviting Youth to Leadership**

From a Christian perspective leadership describes a dynamic process where men and women use the ability God provides to strategically influence people (congregation, community or group) to fulfill God's vision in their context. One of the initial steps to empowering young people entails getting them to respond to the God's general call on their lives. Youth should be invited and challenged to leadership through several themes:

- The need for Godly leaders
- The privilege to represent Christ
- The opportunity to serve others in the ways of Christ
- The blessing of influencing others to become all that God wants to make them

Often a sensitive process, empowerment requires much care in ensuring that we do not use guilt, coercion, or any other means which does not respect the right of the potential young leader.

**Helping Youth to Discern their Leadership Gifts and Temperaments**

Any attempt at discerning one's gifting and temperament can be a confusing thing for most persons. It would be helpful to guide a young leader through this process. Thankfully, youth workers possess a large pool of material when helping a young person become a leader. Ginny

Ward Holderness and Robert Hay, in *Teaming Up: Shared Leadership in Youth Ministry*, encourage youth workers to investigate scripture and draw themes that relate to young people and to youth ministry. They offer several passages that relate to themes of caring, reaching out, acceptance, invitation, community, challenge and leadership.

- John 4:3-30—Jesus and Woman at the Well
- John 1:35-42—Calling Andrew and Simon Peter
- Luke 15—Parables of Prodigal Son and Lost Sheep
- John 15:1-5—Jesus the True Vine
- Mark 4:35-41—Jesus Calms the Storm
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-26—The Body of Christ

Each of these passages and others allow youth workers to use their God-given imagination to help youth explore the meaning of leadership. Sometimes, different persons within God's story offer a fresh vision of leadership. When it comes to leadership lore in scripture, these biblical giants demonstrate key principles for youth.

1. *Closeness with a few—Jesus*: Undoubtedly Jesus modeled the ability to work within the close community of the disciples. His ability to teach and model authentic devotion to God by example invites us to consider the importance of this approach to leadership development. What are some of the benefits and challenges of this kind of leadership?
2. *Wanting to lead—Isaiah*: Isaiah's vision in chapter six reveals a God "high and lifted up" whose holiness both humbles and calls Isaiah to exercise his role as God's prophet. One must note that Isaiah did not accept this prophetic call based upon his own ability, but out of God's forgiveness. Was your response to God's call to ministry/leadership similar to Isaiah's?
3. *Enthusiasm covers a multitude of [mis-steps]—Peter*: To say that Peter was impulsive may be an understatement. Peter seemed to be a man of extremes, willing to die but also capable of denying Jesus. Ultimately the Holy Spirit tempered Peter's passion, giving him a God-centered desire. Do you think it is good to err on the side of passion?
4. *Don't play God—Joseph*. In Genesis 50:19 Joseph offers the fateful phrase to his brothers, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? Joseph had known the worst of times and the best of times. Now, given incredible power from Egypt's pharaoh, Joseph still recognized God's ultimate authority. Even at our best, do we recognize God's authority over our leadership?
5. *The strength of vulnerability—Hosea*: Perhaps no other prophet embraced the pain and sadness of a people like Hosea. Hosea's vulnerability served a greater purpose, revealing the holy love of God rather than the personality of the prophet. Is your strength more on the side of being impressive?
6. *Women can lead—Deborah*. During the crucial period of the Judges of Israel, Deborah accepted and fulfilled her role as leader (Judges 4) both as a leader and prophet in her own right. Deborah represents many women throughout the Bible who fulfilled God's call as a leader. What is your personal position on women being in leadership in the Church?

7. *Champion of the weak—Amos*. Amos announced God’s love and justice on behalf of the poor. How important to you is ministry to the poor, the hungry, the powerless, the widows, the orphans, and the oppressed?
8. *A touch of organization—Nehemiah*. Nehemiah was called to rebuild the temple, no easy task. His leadership transformed a beaten group of refugees into a nation. How organized are you generally?
9. *A bit of drama—Elijah*. Few men would think to stand against the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, but Elijah was willing to “stand out” for God’s sake. It is important to remember that Elijah’s willingness to take such dramatic steps served only to point to God, not the prophet. Is the use of the dramatic in ministry appealing to you?
10. *Confidence is contagious—Paul*. It is hard to believe how one man could so command so much respect and controversy throughout his ministry. Smuggled out of Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:25), rising from the dust in Lystra (Acts 14: 19-20); standing before the council of Jerusalem or giving witness to Herod Agrippa, Paul’s confidence in God shows through. Paul always balanced his confidence with his deep awareness of his need of God’s grace. Do you think self-confidence is healthy, and if so, when does it become unhealthy?

Ultimately a review of leadership in the Bible reminds us that youth need to be grounded in the total story of scripture. The Bible proves more than willing to demonstrate the strength and weaknesses of these leaders, so that our confidence will remain in God. Perhaps our attention to Jesus, the first model presented, should remind us that we need each other since no one person can really reflect all of the aspects of leadership portrayed in scripture. Teamwork provides youth the means for learning from each other while discovering their individual gifts.

### **Organizing Youth Leadership Teams**

Ultimately empowering youth includes providing a strong relational environment where they can work together while developing their leadership abilities. Often youth workers accomplish this goal through teamwork. In his book, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, John Maxwell gives four traits for forming a dream team of leaders.

1. **Common goal:** The goal/s must be clear and kept as the focus of all that is done.
2. **Cooperation:** Each team member must be prepared to share the work.
3. **Communication:** There must be agreed channels of communication and these must be kept open.
4. **Commitment:** This is the glue which keeps the team together even in difficult circumstances.

When teams work well together they develop traits that demonstrate strong ministry. These traits include a sense of cooperation, the ability of persons with differing opinions coming together in agreement for the sake of a greater cause. In addition, teams focus on clear communication. Churches can be damaged when communication is poor and eventually destroyed when people do not talk to each other. Teams remain change-oriented. Growth often means change, since nothing growing stays the same. Teamwork also requires contribution. Winning teams all have members who make equal contributions in effort. They all give their best. Finally, teamwork



requires commitment. Commitment is necessary for your own spiritual growth as well as the growth of your church. In addition to these traits John Maxwell also gives ten qualities of a dream team:

1. Team members care for one another.
2. Team members know what is important.
3. Team members communicate with one another.
4. Team members grow together.
5. There is a team fit; an attitude of partnership and trust.
6. Team members place their individual rights beneath the best interest of the team.
7. Each team member plays a special role.
8. An effective team has a good bench of members ready to substitute in key roles when needed.
9. Team members know exactly where the team stands.
10. Team members are willing to pay the price.

The better a team works together the stronger the leadership capabilities. Individual leadership abilities surface within a team; however, constant teamwork also develops general skills needed for leadership. Leaders, particularly young adult leaders, grow and develop as they learn from each other, pray for each other, and encourage each other in the development of their abilities.

### *Establishing a Covenant of Standards*

One way of establishing a sound foundation for youth leadership emerges through the use of covenants. Covenantal language is important in both the Old Testament and New Testament. John Wesley, the founder of the Wesleyan tradition, employed a covenant with the Methodist people each year and called his ministers to make covenantal commitments before they served the movement. One of the earliest forms of youth ministry in the United States, Christian Endeavor societies, also created covenants or a “pledge” to guide their actions.

For the sake of the Kingdom of God, a youth leadership team needs to hold each other accountable for their leadership. The covenant provides guidelines for the Youth Leadership Team.

- The covenant should reflect the standards of Scripture.
- Each team member must be prepared to commit to the tenets of the covenant.
- Encourage each team member to appreciate the value of the covenant as a means of bonding and strengthening the team.
- Each team member should have a copy of the covenant.
- The team should remind itself of the covenant by repeating/reading the covenant in unison at meetings.

Youth should also focus on the “preamble and purpose” of the leadership team when developing a covenant for the leadership team. The “preamble” describes what God has done in bringing the youth together. Preambles may include statements such as:

- Because God has brought us together...
- Understanding God’s grace supports our ministry...

Statements like these remind youth that their leadership always begins with what God has accomplished. Likewise, young people need to remember the purpose for their leadership. Purpose statements may include:

- Desiring to follow Christ’s ministry for the Kingdom of God we will...
- Recognizing God’s vision for youth in our church we will...

Purpose statements help youth workers maintain the focus of their covenant ministry. Often youth workers become fragmented by trying to do too much or they become distracted by focusing only on their role within the team. Maintaining a sense of purpose reminds youth of the “big picture,” the primary goal of their ministry together. Ultimately the preamble and purpose guide youth to determine the specific covenant commitments they will make together. These commitments include specific tasks and strategies each member can accomplish for the overall good of the team. Establishing the covenant must include specific opportunities and challenges that any leadership team will face. However, the covenant should also reflect God’s intent for the leadership team.

### *Encouraging a Youth Leadership Team to Live with Integrity*

Leadership which flows from the inside out is not only biblical but it also emphasizes the need for us to BECOME before we PERFORM. Leadership activity without character leads to tyranny and chaos. Teams themselves demonstrate this character as well as the youth within them. Stephen R. Covey, in *Principle-Centered Leaders*, gives eight characteristics worth consideration.

1. Leaders (and Teams) are Continually Learning
2. Leaders are Service-Oriented
3. Leaders Radiate Positive Energy
4. Leaders Believe in Other People
5. Leaders Lead Balanced Lives
6. Leaders See Life as an Adventure
7. Leaders are Synergistic, constantly interacting cooperatively for a common purpose
8. Leaders Exercise for Self-Renewal

While character development remains crucial we must not allow our search for integrity to shift our focus away from community. Chris Folmsbee, in *A New Kind of Youth Ministry*, cautions that focusing on ourselves may inhibit the great emphasis to glorifying God. A leadership team must be motivated by a heart to reach out and empower others to pursue Christlikeness.

## **Empowering a Youth Leadership Team to take Initiative**

Initiative is an ability every person, leader or not, should aspire to have. Initiative allows a youth worker to be fresh and effective. Thinking ‘outside of the box’ is part of standard practice of this kind of leader. While initiative respects tradition, it is not afraid to go beyond tradition to be effective. Initiative also makes the youth worker dependable when they have to make tough decisions.

John Maxwell, in his book *the 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, lists several qualities of leaders who show initiative:

1. They know what they want. It’s the only way to recognize opportunity when it comes.
2. They push themselves to act. Initiators don’t wait for other people to motivate them.
3. They take more risks. Good leaders are willing to take risks because they recognize there is a risk for not initiating too.
4. They make more mistakes. Initiators make things happen, but they also make a lot of mistakes.

Demonstrating initiative may not always be easy. To improve your initiative, leaders may try the following. First, change your mind-set. Recognize that the problem comes from the inside, not from others. Once found, address it. Second, don’t wait for opportunity to knock. Opportunity is everywhere. Where do you see needs? Who is looking for expertise you have? What unreached group of people is practically dying for what you have to offer? Finally, take the next step. Someone once offered: “Everyone has a great idea in the shower, but only a few people step out, dry off, and do something about it.”

Empowering a youth leadership team may entail allowing them to take risks with decisions. We may need to allow them to fail on occasion, yet also help them learn from their failures. Youth workers should be able to anticipate the consequences of good and bad decisions so they can anticipate the potential risks involved with decision. We should not let young adult leaders risk so much as to ruin their leadership or risk the reputation of the church. Nevertheless, some risks may well be worth the consequences, if they fail. However, when the group shows initiative and succeeds, they gain tremendous confidence. More importantly, even when they fail but learn and improve their ministry, they begin to understand that initiative may have additional benefits.

Remember that taking initiative is not the same as doing everything ourselves. Chris Folmsbee notes “doing all the work ourselves might make us look busy and feel satisfied, but it certainly doesn’t help our ministry become more effective in fostering spiritual progress.” The goal always remains to cultivate personal initiative among team members, encouraging them in their tasks but also reminding them to reach out to others as a community.

## Encouraging, Supporting, and Nurturing the Youth Leadership Team

A major part of the responsibility carried by the pastoral leadership of a church is the task of encouraging, supporting, and nurturing volunteers. It will demand much effort, great skill, and deliberate action of every pastor. Because volunteers are people, their wants and needs cannot be disregarded.

Often adult and youth leadership develop in a similar fashion depending both on the adult's readiness to hand over ministry and young people's readiness to receive leadership roles. Holderness and Hay, in *Teaming Up*, note that there may be stages to shared ministry.

Level	Adult Leader Involvement	Youth Leader Involvement
Zero	None	Youth are not involved; there is no real youth ministry
One	One or Two Adults do it all	Youth don't know what's going on. Many attend because their parents make them.
Two	Adults help the adult leader or the adult youth director/minister.	Youth are coming to activities because they want to.
Three	Adults work well as a team. They take responsibilities.	Youth are involved in planning—partnership with adults.
Four	Adults are in good relationships with youth. They ask young people to help.	Youth are involved in leadership—partnering with adults.
Five	Adults are in partnership with the youth. They are supportive and encouraging of young people as leaders.	Youth are championing youth ministry

Often a youth worker has to invite both adults and youth into casting a vision for the ministry. Sharing responsibilities for ministry must include the ability to “dream” together about the future of our ministry. Drawing from the arena of sports, John Maxwell notes that a “dream-team” coach displaces several characteristics.

1. Chooses players well
2. Constantly communicates the game plan
  - Tell them what you expect of them
  - Give them an opportunity to perform
  - Let them know how they're getting along
  - Instruct and empower them when they need it
  - Reward them according to their contribution
3. Takes the time to huddle
  - Focus
  - An opportunity to listen
  - An opportunity to make personnel changes
  - An opportunity to make play changes
  - An opportunity to rest

4. Knows what his or her players prefer
5. Excels in problem solving
  - Problem-solving issues with players
  - Problem-solving issues with preparation
  - Problem-solving issues with the game
6. Provides support needed for success
7. Commands the respect of the players
  - Trustworthiness
  - A caring attitude
  - The ability to make hard decisions
8. Does not treat everyone the same
9. Continues to win
  - Work on specific skills
  - Make a change
  - Reward the unrewarded
  - Transfer the burden
  - Above all, don't dwell on yesterday's victory
10. Understands the levels of the players
  - Players who need direction
  - Players who need coaching
  - Players who need support
  - Players to whom you delegate

Maxwell's characteristics may seem more appropriate on a soccer field or basketball court than in a local congregation. Nevertheless, the idea of team members working together, like a good sports team, toward a common goal may well represent good team ministry. Young people demonstrate this kind of harmony when leaders trust one another, anticipate each other gifts and strengths, and work toward a common goal.

Christian leaders of the future have to be theologians, persons who know the heart of God and disciplined—through prayer, study, and careful analysis—to manifest the divine event of God's saving work in the midst of the many seemingly random events of their time. They should also be leaders capable of working together in covenant, demonstrating both initiative and integrity, advancing God's mission and serving God's people.

### **Application**

Interview a pastor on his or her strategy for empowering youth for ministry.

Develop your own strategy for empowering youth leadership in your ministry context. Which scriptures and principles appear most important? Could you begin a young adult team that developed leadership capacities?

Write a sample covenant that might guide a young adult leadership team. Consider preamble and purpose as well as ministry commitments youth might make.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Evaluate the different traits and qualities that determine a good youth leadership team. Are there cultural issues at stake in your context? Would specific traits or qualities prove more helpful, harmful, in their setting? Could the students include other traits or qualities?*

*Have you ever thought about the “preamble” and purpose of your own ministry? How might you state them?*

*Where do youth have the opportunity to take the initiative in your ministry setting? What happens when they succeed or fail? How do they learn from their mistakes?*

*How would you evaluate the level of adult involvement with youth leadership in your ministry setting?*



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 20

Youth Ministry  
Craft - The Legacy of  
Long-Term Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Twenty: Youth Ministry Craft—The Legacy of Long-Term Ministry**

### **Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- Entering Ministry
- Evaluating Long Term Ministry
- Personal Considerations
- Professional Factors
- The Spiritual Life

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Determine the key issues of youth ministry to facilitate a long-term legacy in students, families and church communities.
- Assess your personal and spiritual bases for youth leadership.
- Assess the implications of professional ministry.

#### **Introduction**

It takes more than enthusiasm to work with youth. In fact, there are many facets to a well-balanced youth ministry. In this lesson, we will explore how to work with youth over the “long haul” to create effective change in youth, their families and the church.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **Entering Ministry**

*Just Point and Go:* My first ski trip was in college. It was listed as Physical Education. My thought? It looked like a lot of fun for academic credit. My first time on the slopes I stood on top of the hill and looked at the sign in front of me: “easy black diamond.” Now that’s an interesting oxymoron. Black diamonds are the most difficult level of ski slope on a mountain. Everyone takes off, I’m sort of lost. Waiting for help, one friend pushes off, looks back and says, “Just point your skis and go.” I have to tell you, it wasn’t that great of a ski run.

That experience sort of describes us in youth ministry—right? Chances are many of us looked at the need, heard God’s call and just “pointed and went.” For good or bad we lasted in ministry. A lot of us have probably woken up in the middle of the night and thought,

“What in the world am I doing?”

“Am I too old for this?”

“Will I ever NOT feel tired?”

“What am I going to do with the rest of my life?”



Should I stay in youth ministry for the long haul or hang it up? Within the broader scheme of things: wars and rumors of wars, the AIDS pandemic, spoiled sports stars, ruined sports stars? Does God really have time to worry about me and youth work? Maybe the big question is this: Is it worth staying in youth ministry for the long term?

An unqualified “YES!” So how do we best position ourselves to last in youth ministry?

### **Evaluating Long-Term Ministry**

It is critical to ask yourself the hard questions in life and ministry. Often youth workers do not prioritize this type of honest self-evaluation. Some questions we must ask ourselves are:

- Why do you do what you do?
- Were you called by God to your tasks or by someone else? Yourself?
- Do you take good care of yourself?
- Are you too busy? Tired? Worn out?
- Approaching Burnout? First sign of burnout is finding yourself scanning the employment ads in the newspaper and thinking when you see the many help wanted ads, “You know that wouldn’t be so bad.”
- Are you at a point where you don’t know if you could or should go further than you’ve gone right now?

C.S. Lewis once stated: “The most progressive person is the one that turns back soonest when they are lost.” Too often, self-evaluation gets elbowed aside in the crunch of a frenetic schedule, yet it’s in busy lives that self-evaluation is most important.

### **Personal Considerations**

Preparing for long-term ministry includes a serious look at our personal lives and close relationships. A personal awareness, of our own self-awareness, church relationships, and family relationships help determine the quality of our ministry. There are a number of areas to consider:

*Taking Care of Yourself*— Often, long-term ministry begins with self-care. Success doesn’t necessarily mean charging ahead, it may mean down-shifting to find a place where our gifts are being used and to recover our passion. For instance: A great youth worker is flexible and adaptable in many areas of their life while remaining fixed to the Cornerstone of their salvation.

*Understanding Youth Culture*— One really has to work at it. Why? Because as you age, you move further beyond adolescence. Then it’s easy to lose touch with the culture. How do you stay in touch with adolescent culture? Primarily through incarnational, relationally oriented ministry that keeps you in touch with youth and their social context.

*Establishing Relationships within the Church*—It is an easy thing to sense isolation from your peers. After all, are many of your friends playing crazy games or trying to keep up with teenagers on a weekly basis? Often, we need people who identify with our purpose and ministry to support us and to serve as close friends during difficult times. In addition, managing conflict

remains the key to long-term youth ministry. Face conflict and do not ignore it. Conflict is teaching you about a potential “blind-spot” you may have or teaching you to be empathetic to others point of view. Open yourself to others’ input and point of view.

*Possessing a Correct Focus*— Often your personal attitude determines how circumstances influence your life. Maybe you don’t do everything in youth ministry anymore. In fact, the more you do, the less other people tend to do. The problem stems from the law of diminishing returns, working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less. Be flexible enough to change your focus on what is important to the ministry. Will you be able to stay with your commitment, or will it stress you out? Will other commitments grow and consume your free time? Can you be objective and maintain focus, or do you keep tacking things on or succumb to the tyranny of the urgent? Can you stay student focused? Too many times youth ministry becomes more about the adults than the students. Resist that temptation.

*Maintaining Energy and Freshness*— How well are you taking care of yourself? Are you exercising? Eating well? Sleeping too little or too much? Get away from your ministry to gain insight, to gain “room to breathe.” Step outside your denominational fences. Your friends in other denominations or para-church ministries will do things differently than you do. Find out why and adapt, if needed. Enrich yourself through varied experiences. When your entire life is the church and a certain group of people, you lose depth and dimension in your life. Keep yourself balanced.

*Continuing your Education and Career Goals in Ministry*— We remain life-long learners and need ongoing development. Consider seminars outside of youth ministry, child development classes, taking ordination classes, signing up for theology classes at a Nazarene seminary. Talk to a counselor or educator who specializes in adolescence and explore youth through their eyes. It can be amazing to hear what a high school teacher or counselor hears every day.

*Establishing an Inner rather than an External Source of Direction*— When you are driven by those around you (expectations, criticism, dominant opinions, etc.) and not what you know to be Christian, Spirit-filled, Bible-centered and kingdom-motivated, you will lose your focus and your way in ministry.

*Taking Care of Your Family*— Whether you’re married or single maintaining connections with family will require an intentional effort. If you are single, continue to reach out to parents or siblings. If you are married, work on becoming a better spouse. If you have children find ways to invest in them consistently. The family unit is God’s representation of wholeness to the world. Treat it as such. You need to decide to give more time to your family rather than ministry.

When a life is out of balance, a ministry is out of balance. How can we say we love others when we ignore or marginalize those closest to us—our family? How do we youth pastor our own children? Carefully. We must lose our “parent eye” and treat our children the same as others. Too often youth workers put the church and youth group ahead of their spouse, children and extended family. The wounds that occur when this happens can be irreparable. Don’t let it happen in your family and ministry.

## Professional Factors

While personal factors influence our long-term ministry, professional factors prove equally important. You may not be a professional youth pastor, or even aspire to be one. Nevertheless, these guidelines may help you regardless of your leadership role and will definitely assist you if you enter professional youth ministry where you deal with church and staff relationships.

*Respect the Senior Pastor*— Show humility and seek the Pastor’s counsel. Work on communication with pastor and staff. What if you are older or have been at your church longer than your senior pastor? He or she could be intimidated. In fact, members of the church might relate to you more than the Senior Pastor. Seek to help the church recognize pastoral authority. Remember, the Senior Pastor must be understood as a real congregational leader, while you must find alternative ways to express leadership where appropriate.

This could cause problems when the Pastor sees himself or herself as leading the youth ministry in spite of you being the designated youth worker. However, give the position the honor due the position. Be humble in the relationship; don’t surrender to pettiness, disillusion and back-biting. Prove your integrity and credibility by your actions and reactions to those around you. Learn to discipline your responses and reactions to youth, their parents, church members and the Pastor. Let people know how you want to work and what you value, as well as, what you want to accomplish. And get that information from them as well. In any relationship, take the high road, be a Kingdom builder.

*Be a team player with other staff people*— Lend support to the entire church team. A youth ministry that exists only for its own benefit is a shallow and unproductive ministry. Act professionally, think of how you’re perceived in the congregation:

- Are you always goofy, funny?
- Are you often dressed inappropriately?
- Are you always late or leaving early?
- Do you appear distracted during staff meetings?

The more you perform in a professional manner, the more credibility you’ll bring to your ministry throughout the church and community.

*Organization*— Being organized remains a critical component of effective ministry. Keep on top of your schedule. It’s difficult to be organized in ministry and private life, but it’s crucial. Take a moment and write down the condition of the following areas: Computer, files, library, desk. Would you be embarrassed if someone you respected walked into your office right now? Learn to manage clutter and interruptions professionally.

Learn to prioritize your schedule and not have your schedule prioritize your life. A chronically disorganized person is less able to perceive a downward trend. The mark of a good ministry strategy is that it specifically defines what we’re not going to do as well as what we’re going to do. Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Learn how to say “no” with respect and conviction. Simply adding more to your schedule doesn’t make you a better youth worker. In fact, saying “no” to things will probably make you a better youth worker.

*Do the “right thing” by people*— Be attentive and caring to those around you. You need to remember and respond appropriately to key events:

- Birthdays, anniversaries, key dates
- Appointments
- Special events
- Are you up-to-date on thank you notes, correspondence?

*Form a Leadership Team*— This is the surest hedge against developing the “Messiah complex,” where you feel like you are responsible for doing everything and in turn saving everyone. The more valuable ministry is, the more it has to be a shared ministry. Simply stop doing ministry by yourself. That is a recipe for disaster in so many ways.

*Stewardship*— We need to learn to take care of personal and ministry finances as well as caring for people in our ministry. This task remains an essential aspect in the life of a youth worker. Someone who lacks integrity in finances and structure will not be respected enough to be listened to about God’s plan for a young person’s life.

Keep personal and ministry finances separate. You need to model good personal stewardship while avoiding any appearance of misusing funds directed for youth ministry. Often temptation surfaces when money becomes accessible. Take care to maintain good records and have other church members available to hold you accountable.

Develop your yearly budget carefully. Ask a business person in your congregation to look it over. Even if you don’t have much money to work with, when you show wisdom and integrity you’ll probably be trusted with more. Never handle cash. Ask parents in the youth ministry to collect, count, and submit any cash given to the ministry. Appoint a treasurer if you don’t have one on the youth council, to handle the financial transactions. In addition, be wise about spending your own money on ministry.

*Do Ministry Carefully*— Don’t take unnecessary risks just to be the “fun” person in the group. Jack Crabtree notes the real problem of giving into bad choices and foolish actions. We often come close to real disaster and yet live to tell about it by God’s grace. Nevertheless, we risk the welfare of youth who might mimic our actions with deadly consequences. Youth workers need to be the adult in all situations and not succumb to being liked for the sake of temporary thrills that could cost someone his or her life. Think safety and make appropriate plans at all times.

## **Spiritual Life**

Ultimately your inner spiritual life is the strength of your life and ministry. As previous lessons have noted, you need to maintain a close relationship with God.

*Stay in God’s Word*— The Bible remains a crucial resource for ongoing growth. Even John Wesley, the spiritual “grandfather” of our tradition, considered himself “A man of one book.” We would do well to heed God’s direction through scripture.

*Transparency*— We also need to remain transparent and accountable with youth, parents, youth sponsors, and pastoral staff. The greatest defense against burnout is a group of people that you can be honest with, share, confide, celebrate and cry with. Become accountable for successes and failures, professionally and personally. Give people permission to be honest, to point out blind spots in your life and attitudes. Burnout is most easily seen by others, so be open to what counsel they offer—it could save your ministry. In all, we must remain honest before God and others about our spiritual state.

*Rule of Devotional Life*— Remember to establish a personal plan, a rule of devotional life that guides your spiritual walk:

- Develop a plan to read and study the Bible. Prioritize a time alone with God every day.
- Consider taking personal retreats that could be one or several days. We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. So, plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation and scripture.
- Evaluate your life and ministry by spirituality and not by a secular, consumerist basis (success/growth). “More, bigger, best” is not the standard of success in the church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and scripture.

Take a minute and write down one very specific thing that you will begin tomorrow in your spiritual relationship with God. Make this a covenant between you and God. How did we do with our list? Is there something else that we need to help each other learn?

*Calling*— The call of God is difficult to explain but impossible to ignore. We find ourselves facing a consistent awareness inviting us into make a difference. Our experience of the call often comes without words but rests deep within us where a voice surfaces through our passion for youth, a sense of fulfillment working with them, a yearning to do more. Saying “yes” to this call makes us feel a new sense of belonging, of being “at home” in our ministry. Whether in professional ministry or serving as a dedicated worker in a local church, our calling gives us a sense of direction, a means for personal evaluation, professional development, spiritual growth toward a central purpose of serving God. The calling may begin with youth and lead to other areas of ministry in the future... or it may continue with young people for a lifetime. Regardless, God serves both as source and guide as we engage youth for the sake of the Kingdom of God, welcome to the journey.

## Application

Complete the following Self Evaluation:

- Why do you do what you do?
- Were you called by God to your tasks or by someone else? Or yourself?
- Do you take good care of yourself?
- Are you too busy? Tired? Worn out?
- Approaching Burnout? First sign of burnout is finding yourself scanning the employment ads in the newspaper and thinking when you see the many help wanted ads, “You know, that wouldn’t be so bad.”
- Are you at a point where you don’t know if you could or should go further than you’ve gone right now?

Develop a Rule of Devotional Life for the next two years.

- Develop a plan to read and study the Bible. Prioritize a time alone with God every day.
- Consider taking personal retreats that could be one or several days. We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. So, plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation and scripture.
- Evaluate your life and ministry by spirituality and not by a secular, consumerist basis (success/growth). “More, bigger, best” is not the standard of success in the church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and scripture.

## Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

*List the reasons many people would give for wanting to be in youth ministry. Based on the list you have developed, which one is the most compelling to you? Which reason seems most ridiculous to you?*

*What are the reasons people don’t last in youth ministry for the long term?*

*What are some obstacles that keep us from consistent self-evaluation of our ministry?*

*What are some issues or categories that require regular evaluation? Why does it help to know in advance, areas that we should be evaluating on a regular basis?*

*How can you begin to accomplish a Rule of Devotional Life? What have you tried that has worked for you? Are you still doing it? Why? What hasn’t worked? Can you identify why not? Is there someone who you can partner with who will hold you accountable?*

*How do you see your call lived out each day when working with youth?*



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