

YOUTH MINISTRY BREAKOUT

Teens are extremely conscious of their environment, and when they decide to go to church, it is a very complicated decision. Some questions a teen will ask before coming to church are:

- Who will be there that I know?
- Will I be invited into a group?
- Am i going to be all by myself today?
- How do i look today?
- Do I look like the other people at church?
- Will I have to pretend to be like the people there?
- What will we learn about/discuss?
- Will i be asked to do something publicly?
- I sinned this week, is God mad at me?
- Will the bad things in my life be exposed in front of everyone?

Believe it or not, these questions and countless others like it will determine whether or not a teen will decide to go to church, or participate when they are there. Many young people miss out on some of the most important growing times and character shaping times of their lives because these questions are not answered well, or not answered at all. It is up to us to answer these questions.

Teenagers need a positive environment that is cultivated by loving people to thrive, and become all that God has created them to be. It is our responsibility as ministers of the gospel to meet these wonderful students right where they are and walk closely with them through this formative and difficult season of life.

As we walk through how to engage youth students, things can start to get very complicated and before we move ahead it is important to remember three things:

- 1) The Holy Spirit will be your guide through dark places where there are no easy answers to what you will face. You are not built to minister alone and you will never have to.
- 2) The things you learn from failing are the most positive things that can happen in a youth ministry, and in your relationships with teenagers, so there is nothing to be afraid of.
- 3) The details, methods and resources you will leave with today are helpful and valuable, but they can NEVER replace your **presence** and **time** in a teens life. When we choose to show up for Jesus, He shows up for us.

Now that the essentials are covered, lets look at the 4 foundations of youth ministry:

- Engagement
- Environment
- Discipleship
- Release

These four foundations prepare a place for God to freely move among us and among our students. He loves us and these teens more than we could imagine, and he gives us examples in his word for us to follow as we reach out to other people of all ages. Putting these foundations into place does not mean that everything will run smoothly or perfectly, but they do help us follow Jesus' example the best we can and help us reach people with the same love, care and consideration that Jesus had when he was here to make disciples of us all.

Foundation 1 - Engagement

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost”

Youth ministry is very unique in how they need to be engaged. Adults in most cases have decided whether or not they go to church. Children usually do not have a choice, they are brought by their parents and will engage willingly. Teenagers are very different because they are in the process of deciding and discovering where they fit, and what they believe for themselves.

This gives us the unique opportunity and responsibility to GO TO THEM. We follow the example of Jesus in Luke 19 when he meets Zacchaeus. Scripture tells us that shortly before entering Jericho, Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee. The ancient road that goes directly between these two regions does NOT pass by Jericho. I love this story, and this small thing can be easily missed: JESUS WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO FIND ZACCHAEUS.

Are we willing to go out of our way to find teenagers that are desperate for a place to belong? a place to be themselves and a place where they can be known? A place where they can come face to face with Jesus?

The story ends with salvation coming to the house of Zacchaeus, and Jesus making the great declaration “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” we need to do the same. Here are some practical tips:

- Invite
 - “Hi” isn't enough. Teens never assume they are welcome, they need to be invited
 - Invite each student into a group, introduce them to other students
 - Invite them to serve and connect with your team

- Welcome
 - Make sure that when they walk in, they feel wanted and welcome
 - When they come to church, they should NEVER be alone. This is YOUR job.
 - Develop a culture where EVERYONE welcomes EVERYONE
 - The last thing teenagers will remember is your sermon, the first thing they will remember is their family in Christ.

- Digging Deep
 - Most students take a LONG time to get to know. the investment is worth it
 - Most students will not willingly share their failures or victories, dig deep
 - Be CONSISTENT with students, its the only way to build trust.
 - Ask HARD questions about their life
 - Use small talk, don't abuse it. Digging deep means REAL conversations

- Consistency
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 - If you say hello to a student once, whether you understand it or not, you have crossed a line that cannot be uncrossed. What you do from this point on will either help or hurt them. If you stay consistent, continue greeting them and engaging with them, you will build trust. If your invite, or greeting is a one-time thing, the teenager will see it as a betrayal, and you will break trust with them before even getting started.

TOOL - Small Booklets or a Notes app

Write down students names, prayer requests and any special information, this will help you get to know your students better and communicate to your student that you care about and love them

Foundation 2 - Environment

Matthew 14:14-20 “And they all ate and were satisfied”

This foundation may be the least spiritual of the four on the surface, and can be seen as a pretty shallow thing to focus on, but it could not be more deep and more important to the Lord. Jesus does not really talk specifically about creating an environment for people to meet with him, but when we read about the life of Jesus, he creates environment EVERYWHERE he goes.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus is almost always eating? Whether he is turning water into wine, multiplying bread, reclining at the dinner table or planning a passover feast, Jesus is always making sure that the people he is around are, healed, cared for, fed and comfortable.

I want to highlight a few key elements in Matthew 14:14-20 that show us how Jesus approaches setting up an environment for people.

- 1) The very first thing Jesus does when he sees the crowd on the shore is heal their sick.
- 2) Jesus has them sit down on the GRASS. Jesus wanted them to be comfortable, relaxed and clean.
- 3) Jesus feeds all the people and all the disciples FOR FREE

When we establish a good environment, we are providing a place for God to meet with his people, we are providing a place where God can heal, give peace and rest and provide for his people. Youth need this so desperately because very often they are not capable of taking care of themselves physically or spiritually, they need our help and guidance to receive all that Jesus has for them. Here are some practical tips for setting up a healthy environment:

- Becoming PEOPLE they want to be with - The Environment starts with YOU
 - Be a person of Integrity
 - Be a person who strives for excellence
 - Be a person who is careful to carry the presence of the Lord wherever you go
- Building a PLACE for them to grow - not a building, a kingdom of God where they belong
 - Build a place where they want to hang out, where they have fun and want to bring others
 - Build a place where they feel that they belong
 - Build a place where they can be themselves (a place of safety)
 - Build a place where they encounter the presence of God
- Developing a CULTURE for them to fit in - Culture starts with YOU
 - A culture of love
 - A culture of acceptance
 - A culture of encouragement
 - A culture of relationship, NOT legalism or religion
- Build an environment where they can meet JESUS. A place where they can express themselves to Jesus and where Jesus can express himself to them.
 - Provide a place of WORSHIP
 - Provide a place of PRAYER
 - Provide a place where they hear the WORD of God
 - Provide a place where the gifts of the Spirit are Powerful and evident

TOOL - Name card wall craft

Get creative, and encourage students to do so as well, you will be shocked to see how expressive and creative teens can be when they are given the opportunity.

Foundation 3 - Discipleship

Matthew 4:19 - "And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"

For most people, this is the most difficult foundation to lay. I think this is mostly because discipleship is not a formula, there is a "right way" to make disciples, but there is definitely not "one-way" of doing it. As we look at the discipleship foundation I want to point out a misconception that most of us have about discipleship in general.

Misconception - Jesus tells us that WE need to disciple people

There are **parts** of this misconception that are true, and that is why it seems so right, but let us truly consider the words of Jesus: "Therefore go and **MAKE** disciples of all nations..." I do not believe that Jesus wanted us to carry the burden of discipling people, instead, he commands us to go and **MAKE** disciples out of people. In other words, Jesus asks us to go and create people who will follow HIM out of people who only know how to follow their flesh.

I have seen people try and disciple others, and ask others to follow them and trust them, to look to them for guidance and truth. In every case, I have also seen those people fail, sin, or break under the pressure and in doing so cause a great deal of pain for many people.

Our chief goal in **MAKING** disciples, is to show by teaching and by example what it means to walk with Jesus, to look to Jesus and to trust in Jesus. The process of making disciples requires a lot of humility, because it never gratifies us, it never sets us up to be the star of the show. A good way to tell if you are making disciples the right way is by how often your students say "teacher said" vs how often they say "Jesus said". Here are some practical points to help guide you through the complicated process of discipleship:

- Develop Relationship
 - If you want people to follow your example, you have to get to know them, and let them get to know you as well. Showing people how you follow Jesus is more powerful than just words
 - Fear of people seeing your mistakes and shortcomings is not Godly. When students see that you are not perfect, and you still follow Jesus, that is GOOD. Don't hide YOU, good or bad.
 - Live life WITH your students. If the only time they see you is when you are in church teaching them, it makes them feel like you have an agenda. Living life with them outside of church lets them know that THEY are valuable no matter what.
- Teach REAL truth, for REAL life
 - Youth students are more exposed to the world than ever before in history. They have real questions, that come with some hard answers. Don't be afraid to give a real answer.
 - Never underestimate what a teenager is capable of feeling or considering
 - Learn to be comfortable as they struggle with faith and life in this world, and NEVER react by shoving the truth in their face. Teens need to led, not pushed.
- Teaching them how to hear the holy spirit FOR THEMSELVES
 - Even if they grew up in church, they are learning how to hear Jesus for THEMSELVES for the first time. They will need a lot of guidance
 - Giving teens the right answer is not always helpful. Learning to hear the Holy Spirit is one of the most important things we will ever do on this earth, help students practice.
 - Encouragement without correction always ends badly. If they "hear from the Lord" and it does not line up with scripture, do not be afraid to gently and lovingly correct them.

TOOL - COFFEE, SLEEP, BOUNDARIES

Making disciples requires sacrifice, and it will be emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausting. If you do not take care of yourself, your family and your marriage first, everything will break.

Foundation 4 - Release

Luke 10:1, 17 - "...The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them o ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go"

Release is the most scary, most stressful and most FUN foundation. Releasing people, even young people, into the ministry that God calls us all to, is one of the most important and rewarding things we can do as leaders, pastors and teachers, but the idea of letting go of authority and trusting someone who is not fully developed can be difficult and scary at times. To help navigate these difficult seasons we need to face three things.

The first thing we all need to face is that one day, the things we are in control of now will be handed over to someone else. This is a GOOD thing and a GOD thing. God is a gardener who loves the process of growth, and he shares that love with us by letting us help Him grow these teenagers into trees that will bear fruit one day. Let the Lord take your pride and not hold on to authority that only God can give.

The second thing we all need to face is that releasing people into areas of authority, responsibility and leadership will not always be smooth and clean. People are rough and messy, and when we stretch people you can be sure that we will find those rough edges. It is OK for people to fail and get a little messy, its our job to walk them through it. We will also find our own rough edges. We are humans, who get tired and angry and frustrated. Sometimes we bend, sometimes we break and we need to make sure we let God continue to grow US through this process of growing our youth.

The third thing we all need to face is some teens might actually be better than us at some things. When we release people, we need to understand that young people have gifts that we know nothing about. Let them be different than you, let them go further than you have ever gone. HELP them be better than you ever could be. Remember John 14:12 when Jesus says "...whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing. He will do even greater things than these..."

Here are some practical points to help guide you through releasing students into ministry of their own:

- Discover your student's unique talents and spiritual gifts, then USE them
 - Listen: when teens talk, they often reveal what they are passionate about, keep your ears open.
 - Ask: Don't be afraid to ask your youth what they love and what they do best, its ok to dig a little.
 - Pray: Pray for your youth to develop and reveal these gifts. Pray that the Holy Spirit gives them courage to be who they were created to be and use their gifts for God's purpose.
 - There might be some gifts you don't know what to do with. Do your best to make room for that gift or to find an outlet for that gift even if its not in your ministry.

- Provide a place for them to grow and fail in safety
 - Growth is not easy. Being stretched is difficult and it comes with a lot of failure. Its ok.
 - Failing can be a good thing. Be there to catch them when they fail, and show them love and encouragement when they do.

- Provide opportunities for students to LIVE for Jesus, not just learn about him
 - If all we do is teach them about doing good, we are only fighting half the battle. Jesus asks us to MAKE disciples, not just tell them what a disciple should look like.
 - If you allow youth to DO things for Jesus, their faith becomes real, active, effective and useful.
 - Get creative about ways they can serve, not everything has been done before. Dream big!

- Develop students that will take your place of leadership one day
 - One day you will not be where you are now. Teach people to do what you do.
 - Students look up to you, bring them alongside you and you will ALWAYS have enough help
 - What happens when you don't make it to church? One sign of a healthy ministry is that it runs smoothly when the captain is gone.
 - Giving students leadership roles communicates that they are valuable and are capable of working for Jesus, they might not remember any of your sermons, but they will remember THAT.