

A FIELD GUIDE FOR CAMPUS MINISTRY

CAMPUS

ONNECTIONS

BARRY ST. CLAIR

Campus Connections: A Field Guide for Campus Ministry

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Communicating God's love
to students is arguably
the most important ministry
on the most important mission
field in America!

Campus Connections:

A Field Guide for Campus Ministry

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Section 1 – CATCH GOD’S VISION FOR THE CAMPUS



**Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”
(Matthew 9:35-38)**

Section 1 – CATCH GOD’S VISION FOR THE CAMPUS

Chapter 1 – BEYOND DISCOURAGEMENT: A RENEWED VISION FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

“Something is missing,” Gary said. “I’ve seen God do amazing things in my life, and I’ve worked with some of the best students around. But am I really making an impact?”

Gary worked at a growing church, but a lack of ministry results plagued him. He had begun with a strong sense of calling and a burning desire to see students grow in their relationship with Christ, but all of his hard work seemed to produce minimal fruit. As we talked over breakfast, it became very clear that he was frustrated with how things were going.

Gary’s frustration may sound familiar. Youth leaders average about three years in one position. The reasons vary—sometimes they leave youth ministry for a new role or go to another church, and sometimes they leave ministry altogether—but often this happens because they’ve lost the vision they once had, and the struggle doesn’t seem worth the minimal reward. The sense of purpose and direction that wouldn’t let them quit has dissolved.

A Worthy Calling

Rarely have youth leaders like Gary lost their vision. They still believe their work is a noble calling. Like Jesus, they want to “seek to save the lost,” standing in the gap between hurting human beings and the God who loves them, sacrificing themselves daily for their mission. But sometimes that “noble calling” gets lost under too many meetings, events, disgruntled parents, and the voices telling them to get a “real job” where they can earn “real money.” Eventually, retail starts to look pretty appealing.

Most youth workers want to make an impact for God’s Kingdom and see partnering with schools as a win-win opportunity. Students spend the bulk of their time at schools, which can benefit from the supportive role youth leaders and their churches can provide to students, families, and staff. Support comes in a variety of forms—help with finances, emotional health, educational goals, transportation, communications, and much more. That can translate into deeper trusted relationships, greater community ownership, and greater awareness of needs.

Yet as rewarding as youth ministry can be, it can also be discouraging. Plenty of patience and persistence plus a high tolerance for drama and unpredictability go with the job. All too often, youth workers end up feeling less like mentors and ministers and more like glorified babysitters.

I think Jesus could relate. His was truly a noble calling and a worthwhile mission, yet the spiritual immaturity of the people around Him took extraordinary patience, persistence, and a high tolerance for spiritual immaturity. Yet He never departed from His purpose and calling.

We see His compassion and commitment, but also the challenges He faced, in one passage that reveals His pattern of ministry:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his

disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:35-38)

Jesus’ commitment to His mission and His compassion for people never waned or wavered. He recognized peoples’ desperate need and the enormity of His mission. Without His divine perspective, He easily could have become overwhelmed and discouraged—just like many youth workers today.

A Renewed Vision

What was it about Jesus that prevented Him from giving up? He saw the big picture—that no matter how great the needs are, the gospel is greater. No matter how many people are out there, God can raise up workers to serve them. No matter how big the problems are, the Holy Spirit has the power to overcome them.

The passage above implies two critical conditions for hanging in there: (1) to reorient our vision—i.e., to see people with compassion and the harvest as plentiful; and (2) to pray—to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

That’s where youth ministry begins and how it is sustained in tough times—with vision and prayer. There’s much more to it than that, but the rest will hardly get off the ground without a renewed vision and persistent prayer behind it. It is often said that God does a work in us before He does a work through us. If you’re looking for the Lord to move mightily among the students in your church and community, this is where to start.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- What do you see now that causes problems like lack of volunteers or church leaders support, declining numbers, slow progress, a lack of depth in your youth ministry, and/or other issues unique to you?
- What results do you think your ministry would have if you had an army of trained volunteer leaders who reach and disciple students, as well as students who share the gospel with their friends and classmates? Think about the steps necessary to develop that kind of ministry and identify some people to start with as soon as possible.
- What action steps can you take to:
 - (1) reorient your vision and your volunteers’ vision to see people with compassion and the harvest as plentiful?
 - (2) raise up pray-ers who will ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers to the campus?

Chapter 2 - UNDERSTANDING A DESPERATE CAMPUS CULTURE

By the numbers, the younger generation has grown increasingly indifferent to matters of faith, and the church in America is declining. Some projections estimate that between 26 and 42 million adolescents raised in Christian homes will disaffiliate from Christianity by 2050 and the percentage of Christians in the U.S. will drop from 73 percent to anywhere between 64 and 54 percent.¹ In fact, the unaffiliated—the “nones”—are the fastest growing religious category in the U.S.² Though many believe in a “higher power,” masses of students and parents see Jesus as irrelevant to their lives.

God is not subject to numbers, of course. The growth of His Kingdom is not governed by current trends, worldviews, and sociological models. A widespread spiritual awakening in the coming years could transform youth culture in the U.S. and around the world. However, when the Holy Spirit brings about a revival, He generally does so through His people. The question is whether His people are prepared for the opportunity to lead millions of students into His Kingdom.

A Disoriented Generation

Young people today find themselves forced into an adult environment without the time, opportunity, or desire to grow up emotionally. Teens and pre-teens are making choices—whether to have sex, drink, or do drugs, and now even what gender to identify with—that were once made in college or beyond, if at all.³ Greater numbers of young people experience deeply traumatic events and living conditions than ever before. About 600,000 cases of child abuse are reported every year.⁴ Students go to school with a fear of knowing what to do if someone with a gun enters the building. They live in a very uncertain, unstable world.

Depression, mental health disorders, and suicide are rising at alarming rates.⁵ The normal emotional turmoil of adolescence poses difficult problems in itself. But combined with such stressful, traumatic conditions, the strain can render a young person emotionally paralyzed, unable to handle normal teenage pressures.

The emotional distress sends students on a search to fill the emptiness inside. Like other people, adolescents want to experience love but fear that they can’t. Plagued by emotional traumas and cultural messaging, many have a distorted view of love; they can’t separate love from sexual involvement and believe they can only find love by having sex.⁶ That results in even greater insecurity and fear of not being loved, as well as high rates of pregnancy and abortion—further traumas that only exacerbate the emotional crisis many young people experience. Many students end up feeling socially bankrupt and unable to carry on their own lives, much less sustained relationships.

Adding to their emotional and social distress, many teenagers live in a spiritual environment that offers no real hope and even adds to their problems. The average high school graduate has spent 18,720 hours in twelve years on campus, excluding extracurricular activities, immersed in teaching that presents no absolutes. They’ve gotten the message that life is not related to any

all-powerful, all-knowing God, but revolves only around themselves. They rarely have the opportunity to seek answers that can meet their real-life needs.

Because students sense no relief from the emptiness of their culture, they do what seems logical—they quit trying. If they are taught that they came from nothing and are going to nothing, they naturally conclude that everything in between means nothing. They see no hope.

Hopelessness leads to escapism, whether in the form of substance abuse, sexual activity, withdrawal from society, or suicide, now a leading (and growing) cause of death among teens.⁷ Without the foundation or tools to cope with the threats, traumas, fears, and anger they feel, many turn to violence and crime. They are experiencing the crisis of a society that has lost its moral authority and absolutes.

Bridging the Gap

Students are looking for a moral compass. They often turn to the messages they hear from peers, influencers, and public opinion. In an age of unprecedented connectedness—with instant global communications that transcend borders—students around the world are influenced by the same voices. They watch and listen to the same media personalities, listen to the same music, play the same online games, and embrace the same lifestyles and values. The problem is that those lifestyles and values are constantly shifting and often leave them disconnected from God and the truth that can revolutionize their lives.

Today's students are longing for a reason to believe and even to live. They desperately need relationships with people who know and love Jesus to show up in their lives. They need spiritual mentors—caring adults across the table who simply say, “Tell me what’s happening,” and then listen without judgment. No matter how much they and their social influences may try to keep Jesus at arm’s length, He is still the only source of life and truth.

We can help them bridge that gap. We will discuss relationships and mentors more in coming articles, but it begins with people who have compassion and a calling, a willingness to serve and sacrifice, and a strong commitment to patience and persistence that can break down the barriers between the desperate needs of students and the Answer they long for.

When churches, families, youth workers, and students catch that vision, the Christian community will stop lamenting discouraging statistical declines and instead become captivated by the amazing opportunity before us: a mission field ripe for harvest and a Savior eager to work through His people to accomplish His purposes in the younger generation.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Identify the top three needs of students in your community and pray about ways your team can help meet them.
- Through your ministry network, local Christian counselors, and community, look for resources to help provide biblical responses to the needs of students dealing with adverse life conditions and mental health issues. Begin developing a list of contacts who could help students at risk.
- Fuller Youth Institute and other researchers suggest that if students have at least five caring adults in their lives, they will likely remain in the faith after graduation. Identify possible mentors for students—trusted adults in your ministry (young adults or senior adults, not current youth leaders) who might be willing to serve as a listening, caring mentor to a student.

¹ Pinetops Foundation, *The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050*, 2018, 18-21.

² Gregory A. Smith, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated,” Pew Research Center, Dec. 14, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>

³ This was true in 1987, when Victor I. Stursberger of the American Academy of Pediatrics wrote “Today's Adolescents—Different Choices, Greater Risks” (*Youthworker Update*, vol. 1, no. 6 [Feb. 1987], 1) and has intensified many times over since then.

⁴ www.nationalchildrensalliance.org

⁵ <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/03/25/anxiety-depression-increasing-among-adolescents/>

⁶ This is true for a significant number of teenagers, though trends and conversations about sex are changing. Some examples of change are cited by Thomas Lickona, “Talking to Teens about Love and Sex,” at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/raising-kind-kids/202202/talking-teens-about-love-and-sex>

⁷ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading causes of death among teenagers aged 15–19 years are accidents (unintentional injuries), homicide, and suicide (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db37.htm>); research suggests that 48 percent of teenagers who spent five or more hours per day on electronic devices reported a suicide-related behavior <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/11/171130170212.htm>

Chapter 3 - OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE CAMPUS

Lance's youth group had grown from six students to a hundred—a point he proudly emphasized in a meeting with his pastor. The pastor commended Lance for his good work, but he also detected a hint of ego behind those numbers. "I'd like to show you something," he told Lance. They got in the pastor's car, drove to the local high school, and parked near the front entrance.

"Let's just sit here, watch, and listen," the pastor said. All Lance could hear or see was the wind in the trees and birds chirping in the distance. Then the bell rang, and hundreds of students rushed through the school doors—some laughing, one crying, some talking with friends, some yelling across the parking lot, and many walking alone.

"Think about it, Lance," the pastor said. "Every one of them is a unique, made-in-the-image-of-God person with their own set of life issues and problems, and like everyone else they are trying to find their identity and purpose." The scene, similar to what Jesus observed in a crowd of people, made a powerful point.

See What Jesus Saw

When Jesus saw the crowds who came to see Him, He was moved with compassion. They were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). That's a pretty good description of teenagers today. Students are "harassed"—depleted, exhausted, distressed; they are "helpless"—vulnerable, incapacitated, disheartened; and they are "like sheep without a shepherd"—wandering, directionless, purposeless, looking for someone to follow.

Lance's pastor wanted him to see beyond himself. As positive as the growth of his youth group was, this young leader needed to see the deeper, bigger picture—to view that mass of unreached students through the eyes of Jesus. So many students fit Jesus' description above—hurting, helpless, and hopeless. Almost all of them have dreams for their lives, yet most of those dreams don't include Jesus because they don't think He is relevant to their lives.

The Harvest Is Plentiful

The good news is that the harvest is "plentiful" on school campuses today, just as it was when Jesus saw the crowds. Students are ripe to experience God's love, hope, peace, and fulfillment. They may not know that Jesus is the answer—many are sure that He isn't—but they are searching for something worth living for. Even more, they are longing for something worth dying for.

So far, most students have come up empty in their search. That's why so many are drawn to premarital sex, get involved in peer groups with a negative influence, and align themselves with causes and issues so they can feel like they "belong." They long for anything that resembles love and acceptance.

Deep down, even if they don't realize it, they also wonder if God really exists and can love them just the way they are. Yet I have never seen a time when so many students are so open to the gospel of Christ.

My friend Keith met a girl on campus who handed him a note one day. "Lately, my life has been crazy," it said. "Everything seems to be going wrong. I wish I had someone to talk to. That's mostly why I was hoping we could find a way to connect." This young girl's family had never gone to church. Her parents had divorced, and each had been through a second divorce. She had never heard that God loved her and wanted a relationship with her. Keith talked to her several times and connected her with some Christian students who would encourage her and follow up with her. Three weeks after she handed him that note, a student involved in our ministry led her to Christ.

Students like her are desperately, frantically searching. They want to know if anyone can be trusted, if anyone cares, if anyone is real. We have a great opportunity to be the "yes" to those questions.

The Campus Is Your Mission Field

This mission field that is ripe for harvest is in desperate need of compassionate people who will make themselves available to share God's unconditional love. Throughout years of youth ministry, my colleagues and I have encountered very few youth workers on campuses. Yet meeting students where they are—on and around the campuses where they spend so much of their lives—is the only way to reach those who will not come to a church. Youth workers can't afford to wait for students to come to their church. It is vital to go where students are.

This is not a matter for youth workers alone, of course. In fact, one of the greatest mission forces on the planet is already embedded on campuses across the country—students! They just need to be mobilized. Christian students already know the language and culture, already have a network of relationships on campus, and simply need to be inspired and equipped to reach their peers.

And to this harvest labor force we can add teachers, church leaders, parents, and the entire church community. When the church envisions school campuses as a mission field and begins to pray, plan, train, and send, lives will be changed.

Map the Campus and Adopt Your School

Just as Jesus strategically planned where He would go, in our own environments, we can too! How, then, can we take strategic steps to "pray, plan, train, and send" toward the campus? These two excellent tools will give you specific direction. They provide you with the ability to map your campus, to adopt your school, and to lead your students to see their campus as their

own mission field. Use these two links to create your own strategic and specific campus ministry plan:

- Map Your Campus - <https://www.everyschool.com/resource/mapping-the-campus/>
- Adopt Your School - <https://www.everyschool.com/>

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- What support and connections do you need in order for you to significantly influence the campuses around you?
- What support do you think Christian students need from the adults and church community around them? As you continue to read, identify some practical steps you can take to create this kind of support-centered ministry.
- Who can participate in your harvest labor force? List some parents, educators, leaders, and community leaders who might join you to reach the campuses around you. Determine your best approach to connect with these groups of people for a “listen and learn” time, hear their ideas, and develop an action plan with their help.
- Imagine your committed students becoming “campus missionaries”. As you read on, develop a plan to train, equip, and send them to their schools as missionaries to their schools.

Chapter 4 - SEEING CAMPUSES WITH EYES OF LOVE

“Because Jesus told us to make disciples.”

“Because I want to make an impact for the Kingdom.”

“Because we have a moral obligation to this generation.”

“Because we are facing a cultural crisis.”

These are often stated motivations for ministry, whether among youth leaders or anyone else. Scripture tells us to go, and we want to be obedient to the calling. These motives may also be mixed in with some unstated ones:

- to “be somebody” in God’s Kingdom
- to prove ourselves to others
- to think God will value us more
- to gain respect in ministry circles

We all have mixed motives for doing what we do, yet God often uses us in spite of them. But if we really want to experience His Spirit at work within us, our primary, overarching motive needs to be something else—love. It’s not duty, significance, respect, or even raw obedience. We need to be thoroughly, consistently, relentlessly moved by love.

Moved by Love

Without the driving force of love, we fall into the trap of seeing students as targets, prospects, numbers of rear ends in seats, or ministry projects. But when love drives us, students become real people with deep spiritual, mental, emotional, and relational needs—people who need to be loved and connected with their Father who loves them.

Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples. It’s easy to think of that mission as an effort to increase our numbers or make the world more Christian, but it goes much deeper than that. We know from our own experience that we are broken, wounded people healed by the love of Jesus. The whole point of reaching out to students is to offer them a relationship with Jesus that is filled with and saturated in His healing, restoring, overwhelming love.

Notice how often the Gospels point out that Jesus was moved with compassion. He saw God’s people as sheep without a shepherd and chicks needing a mother hen (Matthew 9:36; 23:37); He had compassion on crowds hungry for healing and food (Matthew 14:14; 15:32); He opened His heart to a grieving widow and blind men pleading for sight (Matthew 20:34; Luke 7:13); and He wept over a city heading toward judgment (Luke 19:41-42). As John 3:16 so clearly affirms, Jesus and His Father were motivated by unconditional love for the people they had created.

We can’t have a love-driven ministry unless we have encountered the Father’s love ourselves. We need to experience it, immerse ourselves in it, be filled and overflowing with it, expressing God’s own nature to others. His love in us and through us motivates us to give our greatest effort to reach lost kids with that same love.

The Desperate Need

With that as our foundation, we'll find that the more we enter into relationships with non-Christian students, the greater our burden for them will become. More and more, we recognize how desperately they need the love of Christ.

Like Jessica . . . During a discussion in my living room, I asked a group of students, "If you could have one thing in life, what would it be?" Jessica spoke up first. "I would have a mom." Then she broke down and cried. She told us that when she was 8, her mom had died, and another family had adopted her. Since then, she had lost two mothers through divorce and currently had no mom. She resisted suicidal thoughts for the sake of her dad. "All I ever wanted was a mom I could talk to and who would hold me," she said.

And like Tommy . . . He grabbed me and said he wanted to talk about God. He and his siblings had been raised by his mother since he was 12. His dad had left after finding out Tommy's little brother had Down syndrome. Tommy never talked about his dad and got into a lot of fights at school. As we talked, he became angry. But after some serious and heartfelt conversation, Tommy accepted Christ that night. At the end of our conversation, he looked me in the eye and said, "This is the first time my heart has ever felt clean."

These two examples have been repeated in the lives of thousands of students who desperately needed the love of Christ and now have encountered Him. There are thousands more like them who may not show any hint of how deeply they are hurting and desperately need someone to love them and express Jesus' love to them. When we begin to see the campus community through the eyes of love, we will be compelled to seek people out.

Love is the key motivation for going to the campus and coming alongside students through all the ups and downs of their lives. A desire for impact, the willpower to obey a calling, and convictions about the shape of our society aren't enough. Divine love is. Only when God's love is expressed in the flesh and His message is delivered through our hearts of love will we see change in students, schools, communities, and even our entire culture.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Spend time thinking about your ministry and the motivations behind it. Consider some ways you can redirect your focus to connecting students to God's love.
- Meet with your leadership team and network to find ways to come alongside students on their campus as part of your ministry. How can you be present on campus and point students to Jesus?

- List the names of five non-Christian students with whom you have a strong relationship. Describe your relationship with each one in a sentence or two. What practical steps can you take to demonstrate God's love for them?

Chapter 5 - COMPELLED BY LOVE

I clumsily picked up my phone and cleared my throat to mumble a “hello,” wondering who could possibly be calling at 1 a.m. It was the mother of one of the girls in my youth group. She frantically asked if I would come over to talk to Rob, a young man who was dating her daughter Pam. Pam had broken up with him, and he showed up angry, drunk, and out of control.

Rob had accepted Christ a couple years earlier and had been coming to youth group. I had poured my life into him and grown closer to him. At Pam’s house, I spent a couple of hours talking to Rob but eventually realized talking wasn’t going to help. I gave him three choices: go home, go to the hospital, or wait while I called the police. He decided to go home. That was the last I saw of Rob. He turned completely away from God and would no longer talk to me.

I’ve learned that rejection and disappointment can be common in campus ministry. We can’t afford to base our sense of fulfillment on either rejection or acceptance. We need something deeper and stronger to carry us through struggles like this. Only one thing will give us the determination and endurance to keep going: the love of God.

That love was what gave Jesus the strength to die on the cross for a world that rejected him. It enabled Him to see “the joy set before him” (Heb. 12:2). It also compelled Paul and his ministry companions to persevere through numerous attacks and setbacks (2 Cor. 5:14). And love is the distinguishing characteristic that will mark us as authentic followers of Jesus.

A study of 2,000 young people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area who had left the church found that most had done so because they found it irrelevant, unloving, and inauthentic.⁸ Tragically, they did not perceive Christians as very compassionate. The lack of love they saw in believers contributed to their exodus.

Visible Love

It’s one thing for us to be motivated by the love of Christ, yet another for students to see that love. Loving students consistently and persistently is vital, but it comes with numerous challenges, especially in a time when love, acceptance, and agreement are often seen as synonymous. Sometimes simply disagreeing with someone’s beliefs can subject us to accusations of “hate.”

Yet somehow Christians who love kids need to find ways to demonstrate that love and acceptance through all the highs and lows of what teenagers are going through even if our Christ-centered convictions are seen as counter-cultural. Realizing how much we are loved by Christ motivates us to give our lives away to others. When we realize how patient God has been with us, we are much more likely to be patient with students, endure rejection, and continue relating to them as long as they will let us.

Knowing Jesus’ love for us and others also sustains us through difficult times, as Paul expressed so eloquently. He wrote of being “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but

not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

To minister on campus over the long haul, we need to be sustained by Paul's example of endurance, and even more by Jesus' enduring love as demonstrated on the cross. Their examples will give us eyes to see through students' defenses and wounds and into the needs of their hearts. That kind of love flowing through us will empower us to continue loving unconditionally, even if our teenage friends don't respond and if we don't feel successful.

Sustaining Love

We can try these practical avenues to sustain that kind of love and put ourselves in a position to release it to students:

1. *Focus on spiritual realities.* Our world constantly bombards us with lies about what's important—that what we own, how we look, how people see us, and what we accomplish are what life is all about. We get the false impression that the physical world, whatever we can see and touch, is the only reality.

God gives us a different picture. Behind the physical world is a spiritual realm that will last forever. It's as real as it gets. That's why His Word tells us to "set our minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2), and why Jesus told His followers that the Spirit gives life and the flesh counts for nothing (John 6:63). When our hearts are set on the Lord and His concerns, we can base our lives on the perspective that our investment in relationships lasts forever. Whether we lead a student to Christ or keep loving a student who has snubbed us for the hundredth time, we are investing in both the present and eternity to come.

This is why Paul encouraged us to be patient: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). We can press on because we know that everything we do in the name of Jesus—every kind word, sacrifice, pat on the back, act of service—will bring an eternal reward when Jesus comes in all His glory. Our responsibility is to love others well.

2. *Enjoy the journey.* We often set goals and then become so focused on them that we can't see anything else. For example, if we envision hundreds of students coming to Christ, we may begin to see each one as an objective toward the goal and ignore those who don't quite fit our expectation. The goals begin to dominate our hearts and lives.

That isn't how Jesus ministered. He savored the process and each moment of it. He refused to be controlled by schedules, quotas, or the expectations of others. Unhurried, He took time to love children, hang out with Samaritans and outcasts, and teach the same truths again and again. He did whatever the Father led Him to do in each moment without worrying about anything else.

Each encounter with a student is a divine appointment. That takes the pressure off; we can sit back and watch God work. The love of Christ enables us to enjoy the journey.

3. Embrace difficulties enthusiastically. Sometimes God wants to use difficulties to expand our capacity to love. As I once pointed out to a desperate mother who begged me for advice on how to help her son—he was in jail for drugs, theft, and threatening violence—she needed prayer as much as he did, but for different reasons. God wanted to work in her through those trying circumstances and bring her to a greater awareness of His purposes both for her life and her son's. God is at work growing each of us through life's circumstances.

Students will sometimes break our hearts, but God can use them to enlarge our capacity to love. He calls us to love as He does—by experiencing His love deeply and then loving others in the same way. As difficult as that can be, it creates a powerful testimony for students to see.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Reread the “Sustaining Love” section above and develop an action plan for adopting the attitudes and perspectives described there. What steps can you take to help yourself remain focused on spiritual realities, enjoy the journey, and embrace difficulties enthusiastically?
- Discuss these perspectives with youth volunteers, students, and others involved in your campus ministry efforts.

⁸ “Not on Our Watch: The Greater DFW Next Generation Survey,” Arbor Research Group research findings presented to Movement DFW, May 2022.

Chapter 6 - MAKING LOVE VISIBLE

When Kevin shared Christ with José, an unresponsive student, he could have considered his responsibility with José fulfilled and moved on to others. Instead, he pointed out to José that he might want a relationship with Jesus one day, so he asked him how he would find it if no one was around to tell him how.

Kevin maintained a pressure-free friendship with José, and one day José hurried over to him with some exciting news: “Guess what I did last night—I decided to begin a relationship with Jesus and became a Christian!”

José saw in Kevin someone who genuinely cared about him and would not give up on him, and that relationship with Kevin led to changing his life.

Unconditional Love

What’s the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian? In the eyes of many outside the church, not much. But when people see someone loving others unconditionally, they recognize the contrast. Whether they realize it or not, they have gotten a glimpse into God’s nature.

Scripture presents love as a distinguishing mark of believers. The Greek word *agape* is distinct from all other Greek words for love. It describes something radically different from friendship or romantic passion. It’s a constant, lasting, unrestricted love, based not on the object but on the nature of the one who loves. It’s the unique kind of love God has for us—a no-strings-attached sort of love. His supernatural love receives us regardless of our attitudes, actions, and behaviors. And Jesus told His followers they would be known for it (John 13:35).

Think about how God loves the world. *Agapao* is the verb in John 3:16, which famously describes the extravagant love that compelled God to send His Son to die for us. This is how we are to love people, even if they engage in bad behavior, reject us, tell off-color jokes, moon a youth group (an unfortunate real-life experience), or even make fun of Jesus. It’s natural to love those who treat us well. It’s supernatural to love those who don’t.

If you struggle with receiving and/or giving that kind of love, or if you want more of it, the first step is to ask God for it. He is delighted to fill up His children with it until they overflow. He may need to heal some old wounds or correct some false perceptions in the process, but He wants you to experience it fully and give it freely.

Channels of Love

Along with embracing *agape* love, it’s also important to distinguish between loving people with an agenda—i.e., in order to “win” them to Christ, use them for some purpose, etc.—rather than loving them simply because we have God’s supernatural love inside of us. When we let go of our agendas and just love people, we can trust God’s work in their lives, even if it doesn’t look like we expect it to look.

Beyond that, Scripture gives us clear instructions on how to love students unconditionally: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). In actively embracing those three elements—a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith—we become channels of God’s love.

1. A pure heart. Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the 18th century Moravian movement, began a round-the-clock prayer meeting that lasted a hundred years, and in many ways launched the modern missions movement. He famously stated, “I have but one passion: It is He, it is He alone.” The Lord led Zinzendorf to disciple Peter Bohler, who witnessed to John Wesley, which led to his heart being “strangely warmed.” The enormous fruitfulness that came from Zinzendorf’s singular passion cannot be overestimated. He had a pure heart focused on one consuming passion.

Someone with a pure heart is single-minded, dedicated, and eager to deal with anything that gets in the way of his passion. This would include quickly confessing sin so it does not become a hindrance to fruitfulness. God promises to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9). Those with a pure heart are not perfect, but they have swept their hearts clean and prioritized God’s presence and power over all other desires. They willingly let go of anything that gets in the way of pursuing God’s best and are motivated exclusively by their devotion to Jesus.

Today’s students can sniff out hypocrisy a mile away. Now more than ever, students need to know that Jesus is real, and they will see that reality in our passion for God.

2. A good conscience. God’s love flows through unclogged, free-flowing channels. Only when we have a clean conscience can the Lord flow through us. That means making any wrong relationships right—seeking reconciliation, asking for and receiving forgiveness. This is rarely easy.

One of the hardest things I ever did was to go to a professor and confess that I had cheated in his class. But when he forgave me, it was one of most freeing experiences I have ever had. I had a clean conscience.

The Bible strongly emphasizes how important this is: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). In order to open the channel of God’s unconditional love to others, including students, we need to make all of our relationships right.

3. A sincere faith. A faith that is sincere—literally meaning “without hypocrisy”—opens up the spigot of God’s unconditional love flowing through our lives. People who have genuine faith not only believe, but also live out their faith consistently.

Depression and low self-esteem are epidemic, and they often come from not living up to what we know is right and what we believe. We start living a lie. Yet when we know God loves us unconditionally, we no longer need to prop up our self-esteem by living up to a false image of

ourselves. As His totally loved children, we can simply be who we are—before Him and others—in all sincerity. We can respond to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and conviction without worrying about our reputation, even if it means confessing some offense we got away with years ago. If our highest priority is to be used by Him, we will be eager to let go of anything that gets in the way. We are free to be ourselves and please Him through honest, sincere, loving obedience.

A friend once said, “You put into practice what you believe every day. All the rest is just religious talk.” The greatest mistake we can make in trying to reach the campus is thinking we can love students with a clogged “love channel.” But when we pursue a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith, love flows. We become open channels pouring out God’s unconditional love on young people, and the possibilities of having a significant influence on campus open up before us.

Your Next Steps

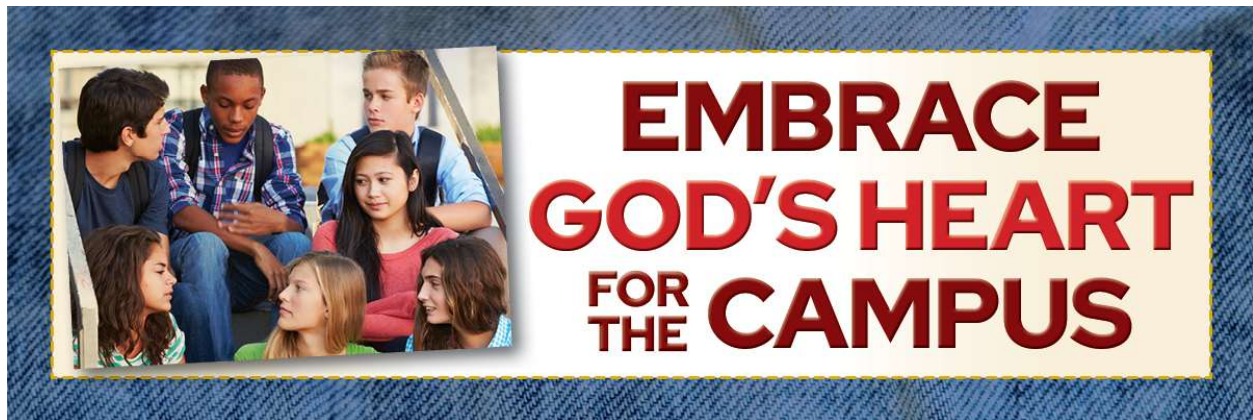
We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Jesus said believers would be known by our love for one another. Take an honest self-assessment: Is there anything about you that causes people around you not to know you that way?
- Meditate on 1 Timothy 1:5 and ask the Lord to speak to you about your capacity to love as you answer these questions:
 1. What motives, besides a selfless love for students, cause me to want to minister on the campus?
 2. What are God’s pure motives for me to go on the campus?
 3. In what area(s) do I need to unclog sin so that God’s love for students will flow through me?
 - o pure heart
 - o good conscience
 - o sincere faith
- As you look through Colossians 3:3-9 to see what the Lord wants you to “put off” and Colossians 3:10-17 for what he wants you to “put on,” ask the Holy Spirit to show you what changes you need to make to move forward with Jesus as Lord..

Section Resources

- *Every Student Every School*, sponsored by the Campus Alliance, gives a broad range of campus ministry resources. Look it over to see how it can help you think about and move more intentionally toward campus ministry: www.everyschool.com/resources/campusconnections.
- *Every Student Every School*, sponsored by the Campus Alliance, helps students and youth leaders pray for their campus and reach out to students: www.everyschool.com/resources/. These excellent tools will give you what you need to map your campus and all of the campuses in your area, and to adopt your school with a "Prayer/Care/Share" strategy.
 - Map Your Campus - <https://www.everyschool.com/resource/mapping-the-campus/>
 - Adopt Your School - <https://www.everyschool.com/>
- "9 Month Mission Trip" will help you train and mobilize your students to see their school as a mission field and give them ideas and strategies for their ministry on campus: www.9monthmissiontrip.com.
- 1 Corinthians 13 to read and memorize
- *The Power to Bless* by Alan Wright
- *Gentle and Lowly-The Heart of Jesus for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dane Ortland
- An Awesome Way to Pray—Student's Guide – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>
- An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader's Guide – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguid>

Section 2 – EMBRACE GOD’S HEART FOR THE CAMPUS



For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

Section 2 – EMBRACE GOD’S HEART FOR THE CAMPUS

Chapter 7 - MOBILIZE A STUDENT MOVEMENT

Can you envision one student on a campus deciding to follow Jesus and that leading to a high percentage of that school deciding to follow Jesus? Is it possible that a small number of Jesus followers at a school can become a campus-wide “Jesus movement” . . . where conversations about Jesus take place every day . . . where there is a buzz about Jesus . . . and where significant numbers of students are deciding to follow Him?

That kind of “Jesus Movement” actually happened in the city of Sychar. The entire population were Samaritans who hated Jews. You know the story: A Samaritan woman had a life-changing encounter with Jesus when she was drawing water from a well and Jesus asked her for a drink. That conversation with Jesus changed her life on the spot! Immediately she went from the “well-encounter” into the city. Encountering Jesus made such an impression on her that she left her water jar at the well, apparently forgetting why she had come to the well in the first place. And then she hurried into the town to tell everyone about Him (John 4:28-30).

This disrespected and despised woman with five husbands told about her encounter with Jesus . . . and her declaration started a city-wide movement of Jesus’ followers. “Many who came out to see Him believed right away, and as Jesus remained in the town to teach for two days, many more believed His words. As they told the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world’” (John 4:42).

An encounter with Jesus changed her life. And because of her encounter with Jesus, the lives of many in Sychar encountered Jesus as well! I believe that is what Jesus wants to do on campuses across the country! Can that really happen?

When you lead one student to faith in Christ, you do what Jesus did in talking with the Samaritan woman. When you equip many Christian students to share their faith with their friends, you teach them to do what the Samaritan woman did after she believed.

Sparking a Movement

But what if it doesn’t end there? What if you can spark a movement to reach an entire campus, just as the Samaritan woman sparked a movement in her town?

That can happen if students and their leaders ask the Lord for the courage and boldness that the Samaritan woman had—the same kind that Paul, who had killed Christians, had after his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

When students on one campus, and then on campuses across the country, begin to encounter Jesus and become bold witnesses like the woman at the well—and like the Apostle Paul, then

the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes will fuel a spiritual awakening on any campus where that happens.

Can we grab hold of that vision as youth leaders? Can we pray for and encourage our students to “not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ?” Can we desire that they experience so much of the power of God in their lives that it will cause them to “not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ”—and that our students will be so consumed with Jesus that they boldly proclaim Him to their friends and to their school . . . and that many of them will decide to trust and follow Jesus for the rest of their lives.

It can happen as evidenced by many students who have experienced this on their campuses.

Watch and listen to Audrey’s story at barrystclair.com:

<https://www.barrystclair.com/ministry-videos>

Now check out what Steve said about what he and his fired-up friends did at their school:

“Once one person raises his/her flag for Jesus, a whole bunch of others will raise their flags. . . If you will take your stand for Christ, and radically love your friends and fellow students, then Jesus will use you to significantly influence your campus for Christ. I decided to make a “10 Most Wanted” list. I wrote the names of my ten best friends who I wanted to know Jesus. Within two months, 9 of the 10 had accepted Christ. . . Then we all began to roam the halls sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ! And, Roy, the tenth student, gave his life to Jesus two years later! By the end of the school year, you could not walk down the hall of our school without seeing about every third student carrying a Bible on top of his/her books.”

These two examples of “God movements” on a campus have three essential characteristics in common.

Joyful Boldness and Enthusiasm

The Samaritan woman could not contain herself after she encountered Jesus. Nor could the Apostle Paul. And nor could Audrey and Steve. They boldly, joyfully, enthusiastically told everyone what had happened to them.

Prayer-Inspired Witnessing and Disciple-Making

Jesus, prayerfully listening to and led by His Father, went out of his way to go through enemy territory to meet this Samaritan woman, and was led to stay two extra days to invest in a disciple-making relationship with her. And Saul became Paul the apostle because God led Barnabas to prayerfully and courageously invest in a discipling relationship with a man who previously wanted to kill him and all Jesus-followers.

Courageous witnessing emboldened by students' prayers will change their campuses. The Matthew 18:18-20 Jesus' strategy of 'Prayer Triplets'—

"3 Christians/praying
3 times a week for
3 non-Christian friends"

—will empower and mobilize them to reach their campuses. [See *An Awesome Way to Pray* in the Resources below.]

Boldly Communicating the Gospel

Even before Jesus went into the Samaritan woman's town, she boldly left her water jar, went back into the town where she was a very unpopular person and said to all of the people: "Come see the man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus! Then Jesus stayed there so ALL could meet Him and be transformed by Him.

And think of the daring bravery of Barnabas when he stepped into the life of a known murderer to make Jesus known.

One of our great challenges as youth leaders is to embolden our students to share Jesus. Three excellent tools will encourage them:

- A "10 Most Wanted" List. Create, print, and hand out a one-page sheet titled "10 Most Wanted" numbered 1-10. Have the students list 10 of their friends who need to know Jesus. And then challenge your students to lovingly but courageously talk about Jesus to those 10 friends—one at a time.
- "3 Circles." Go to www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/ to download free
- The "Student-Led Free to Speak Campaign." To help you and your students, Gateways to Better Education (<https://gogateways.org/studentled-fts>) launched the free "Student-Led Free to Speak Campaign." (Student groups receive the box of materials at no cost when an adult leader—or youth pastor—fills out the online form at www.GoGateways.org/studentled-fts.) Do this simple activity in only a few minutes to introduce it to your students. It can have a lasting impact in their schools in four significant ways:
 - It softens the soil for students sharing their faith in class.
 - It activates students to be bolder in expressing their faith.
 - It dips their toes in the evangelism water with a pre-evangelism activity.
 - It will help grow the group's attendance as students speak more boldly about their faith with classmates.

God wants to use your students beyond their wildest imagination to change their generation! And you can serve as the bold and courageous catalyst for that to happen!

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Prayerfully consider how you boldly and courageously share your own faith as described above. Make your own “10 Most Wanted” List and begin to tell each person on that list about Jesus.
- Begin to boldly yet sensitively communicate to your students to make their own “10 Most Wanted” List, and then equip them to lovingly and boldly share the gospel with each one on their list.

Chapter 8 – PRAYER DEFIES ALL ODDS

About 120 believers came together in the days before Pentecost (Acts 1:15), and both their local society (Jerusalem) and larger imperial society (Rome) were hostile to their beliefs. As an embryonic spiritual movement, they faced astronomical odds against their growth and survival. Yet today, nearly 3 billion people, more than a third of the world's population, identify as Christian.

History is full of examples of God's people defying the odds. Nineteenth-century missionaries in Asia and Africa often spent years on the mission field but saw only a handful of converts from their efforts, yet today hundreds of millions of believers and hundreds of thousands of churches are vibrant influences in the cultures of those continents.

Backs Against the Wall

In 1795, Lyman Beecher observed the alarming decline of faith on college campuses like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—places where the church was “almost extinct.” Gambling and sexual immorality were common, Enlightenment skeptics were honored as authoritative, most students were atheists, and the number of genuine believers could be counted on one hand. Committed Christians were so unpopular that they often met in secret.⁹

Sociological studies and skeptics would have predicted the continuing decline or even extinction of Christianity in such times, but often when things look hopeless, God has authored history-changing awakenings instead. In almost every case, He has done so by first prompting His people to embrace dependence, surrender their hearts and agendas, and pray.

That's an encouraging truth in times like today, when Christians again feel like our backs are against the wall. One study anticipates that at least 35 million youth raised in Christian homes will leave the faith in the next 30 years.¹⁰ Many believers are discouraged by the secularization of our culture, the hostility directed at Christians and the church, and the perception that faith is unfounded and irrelevant in today's world. The odds against us look overwhelming—exactly the conditions in which God historically has inspired great awakenings.

Seek God's Face

If we ever needed prayer, it's now. No situation is too big for God, but He insists on working through His people to accomplish His work in this world. We get to participate in the Holy Spirit's work, but it doesn't happen automatically. We connect with Him in worship, faith, surrender, dependence, and prayer. In response to the faith of those who love Him, He moves in miraculous ways.

After Solomon had built the temple in Jerusalem, God spoke to him about how His people should respond in crisis situations: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from

heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). In other words, it doesn’t matter how desperate the times seem. He is the answer!

For God to work on campuses, the Christian community—students, parents, youth leaders, church leadership, and Christian educators—must commit to sacrificial prayer. J. Edwin Orr, a 20th-century scholar who researched the spiritual state of college campuses in the late 1700s, called it “extraordinary prayer”—the kind that gets people up at 6 a.m. or makes them willing to skip lunch to meet with other believers to intercede for students.¹¹

That kind of prayer doesn’t occur in a vacuum. It is cultivated in a climate of worship and surrender, when those who desperately seek God’s intervention lay themselves at His feet and acknowledge their complete dependence on Him. In faith, we seek Him daily, even constantly, for Him to pour out His Spirit on a generation.

According to Orr, that’s what happened at Harvard, Bowdoin, Brown, Dartmouth, Middlebury, Williams, and Andover colleges. New societies were formed to resist the ungodly influences on those campuses. Small groups of believers committed themselves to mutual watchfulness, ardent prayer, frequent fellowship, mutual counsel, and friendly accountability. They met regularly in private and cultivated a climate of praise, surrender, and dependence.¹²

Dramatic results ensued. Several campuses reported the conversion of a third to a half of their students.¹³ In an era of apparent decline, the trajectory of Christian history radically changed directions.

Refuse the temptation to lose heart when you observe today’s culture or read today’s headlines. God’s people have been down this road before, and He has never abandoned us to despair. Just the opposite, in fact. When His people have turned their focus from the mountains in front of them to the mountain-mover at work within them, good things—miraculous things—have happened.

The task in front of us is great, but God is infinitely greater. With our eyes fixed on Him—His presence, power, and love—this moment in time is truly a season of opportunity.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- From reading Acts 1-2, what specifically do you believe God wants you to pray for your students, for the campuses around you, and for this generation?
- Describe what you believe God wants to do on your local campus.

- Plan an evening of “extraordinary prayer”—a prayer meeting—with your adult youth leaders and/or committed students to pray for the campuses where your students attend. Break into groups of three and pray by name for principals, teachers, coaches, and students they know.

⁹ J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1971), 19.

¹⁰ The Pinetops Foundation, *The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050*, 9.

¹¹ Orr, *The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakening* (New York Oxford, 1976), 8.

¹² Orr, *Campus Aflame*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Chapter 9 - DIVE INTO EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER

Sitting in my car at 5:30 on a cold, dark Friday morning, I struggled to stay awake and keep warm. I blew smoke rings with my breath and played tic-tac-toe on the foggy windshield until finally I saw the headlights of another car through the fog. Zach, a friend and fellow youth leader, parked and stepped out. Our most important appointment of the week was about to begin.

We had consistently come to the school to walk around it and pray for God to move on the campus. We had learned through frustration and failure that just spending time on campus, even with a clear plan and strategy, wasn't getting the job done. We were convinced that to have a significant influence on this campus we needed to engage in "extraordinary prayer."

John Bunyan once wrote, "You can do more than pray after you've prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Or, as the psalmist put it, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). We can do all kinds of work in planting seeds and cultivating them, but only God can make things grow (see 1 Cor. 3:6-7).

For God to work on a campus, youth workers must commit to prayer—not just any prayer, but sacrificial, "extraordinary" prayer. We pray ordinary prayers all the time—in worship services, before meals, and whenever we need to ask God for something. But the kind of prayer that precedes great movements of His Spirit is usually different. When people get up at 6 a.m., stay up until midnight, or give up their lunch time to pray, that's extraordinary!

Start with Prayer Dependence

People don't pray "extraordinarily" unless they come to realize how dependent they are on God and how desperately they need Him to answer. We are generally driven to extraordinary prayer by desperation that results in a humble attitude, just as we noted earlier in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

"Pray" in this verse means to intervene, to stand in the gap for someone. It has two emphases: (1) meeting with God and (2) doing so on behalf of someone else. The pray-er carries a burden to partner with God to make a difference, knowing that the only real difference-maker is God Himself.

Only this strong prayer burden will cause changed lives on a campus. If the good news of Jesus is going to make an impact there, it will be because those who carry that news are urgently and consistently coming to the Lord on behalf of students.

This has happened again and again throughout history. Often in particularly dry times of ministry impact, leaders have made only one adjustment: adding extraordinary prayer. Where students were once apathetic toward Jesus or turning away from the faith, they were soon

turning to Jesus in encouraging numbers. It didn't happen because of programs and gatherings—though those do have some value. It happened because people prayed intensely and persistently.

History is filled with examples of this kind of humble prayer that leads to ministry impact. Jeremiah Lamphier, a 19th-century missionary in New York City, prayed daily during the lunch hour for businessmen. He invited others to join him, but no one came. He kept on praying and inviting, and eventually a few gathered to pray with him . . . then more . . . and eventually 10,000 men were meeting daily to pray. That resulted in movements across the region and thousands of conversions to follow Jesus.

Many similar “extraordinary prayer” movements have resulted in God’s Spirit moving extraordinarily—in Europe, China, Korea, and around the globe. The bottom line is that Christian history has been shaped by extraordinary pray-ers. If we want to shape history at this critical moment, extraordinary prayer is a vital first step.

Take One Prayer Action Step

Start a Prayer Triplet. Follow the model Jesus gave us in Matthew 18:19-20—“Again I say to you, if two or three of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”

Download free *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* and *Student Journal*, two in-depth resources to implement the Prayer Triplet strategy in your youth ministry and church.

AWTP Leaders Guide <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>

AWTP Student Journal <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>

A “prayer triplet” looks like this:

3 Christians praying

3 times a week for

3 non-Christian friends

3 Christians praying. Find two other people who have a heart for students to pray with you. It will work best if all of you have a concern for the same campus. These can be people on your church’s leadership team, students in your youth group, and/or youth leaders at another church. Praying with two others will keep you accountable. If more people express interest and want to get involved, start more prayer triplets. This can spread across your entire ministry!

3 times a week. Your prayer triplet can decide when, where, and how you will meet. You can choose to meet three times in person, on the phone, through text, or in any combination of

those methods. When you meet in person, search for a good location. If you are close to a campus, that's a good place to meet.

3 non-Christian friends. Ask the Lord to show you three nonbelieving students He wants you to pray for. Once all three of you have done this, nine nonbelievers will be prayed for.

This has proven to be a very positive, powerful, and fruitful experience for the many prayer triplets I have initiated or known about. The one I participate in now is making a significant impact on each of us and on the nine people we pray for.

Once this begins and spreads, hundreds of non-Christian students will be lifted up to the Lord every week. And the Lord has promised—if you ask, He will answer!

Kevin Miles' Prayer Triplet Experience:

We challenged our students to begin praying, not just for their campuses but for specific friends. We launched by allowing time for them to pray in their Prayer Triplets and urged them to PUSH—Pray Until Something Happens. My role became to encourage them to keep praying and not give up. Their goal was to pray for each person until he or she accepted Christ.

The students' prayers were not answered overnight. Some prayed for weeks, months, and even a year, but eventually they began seeing the friends they were praying for accept Christ.

One of our students, Hannah, was praying with two of her friends for a girl named Katie. Little did they know that in addition to being a non-believer, Katie was also thinking about ending her life. They prayed for Katie for months. Katie accepted Christ, began to be disciplined by Hannah, and even joined the prayer triplet when she found out that they had been praying for her. She wanted to be a part of praying for her non-Christian friends!

Prayer Triplets marked the beginning of a movement in our youth ministry. Students did not just see someone accept Christ at church or at an event. It became personal. They were empowered to pray and share the gospel with their friends.

Some students carried the Prayer Triplet card with them as a visual reminder of their prayer partners, prayer times, and people they were praying for. Some attached luggage tags to their backpacks, with the names of their Prayer Triplet on one side and the names or initials of the people they were praying for on the other. And we added a visual element of a Prayer Target. We let students put each person's name on a target bulletin board—red for those who had not heard the gospel, yellow for those with whom they had shared the gospel, and green for those who accepted Christ. As names were moved to show they had accepted

Christ, we noticed that every name of someone who accepted Christ had two or more people praying for them.

Do not compromise your time to pray. Many demands will compete for that prayer time. Don't let them. The enemy will also try to derail you. Don't let him. Repeat often the following prayer of your commitment to intercede for your students: "Lord Jesus, with your help, I *will* intercede for specific students on this campus."

Finally, remember that God honors the desires and petitions of those who love Him. No matter how long it takes, success is only a bent knee away.

Your Next Steps

- Commit to establishing prayer triplets for yourself, your leaders, and students.

Chapter 10 - POWERFUL PRAYER FROM HUMBLE HEARTS

Love comes first, and then prayer. But also, we must have humility to complete the foundation that will lead to a campus revival. A humble heart recognizes the need to be completely dependent on God for everything, no matter how big or small.

Charles Spurgeon called humility “a right estimate of one’s self.”¹⁴ That doesn’t mean being timid or seeing yourself as inferior—a humble person can be as bold as a lion. But it does mean you accept God’s assessment of you—helpless apart from Him while also being immeasurably loved, valued, and empowered. As A. W. Tozer said of someone who has this balanced perspective, “In himself, nothing; in God, everything.”¹⁵

Paul knew the value of humility. He learned to boast about his weaknesses because it was in those places of weakness that God worked most powerfully in him (2 Corinthians 12:9). God shows up powerfully in the lives of humble people.

That’s exactly what God wants for all of us. He gives us the privilege of partnering with Him in His work, but He’s the one who does it. We can’t produce any fruit on our own. When we realize how much we need Him, we fall on our faces in His presence and pray with desperation—not with hopelessness but with the expectation that He hears and responds to the prayers of those who know how completely dependent they are.

We cannot change the lives of students if we depend on our own strengths, abilities, personality, relational skills, programs, and strategies. If we want to do God’s work on campus, we need to seek Him desperately and trust that when we humble ourselves, He will answer our prayers and step into our weaknesses with power.

Aligned Hearts

In a posture of humility, we need to align our hearts with God. We ask Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit so we can have His character and nature. With the Spirit we can get in sync with His agenda, and then we line up our activities with what He is doing.

Even though God doesn’t need us to accomplish His work, He has joined us to Himself in partnership in astonishing ways. He has given us...

- His nature (2 Peter 1:3-4)
- His mind (1 Corinthians 2:16)
- His mission and ministry (Matthew 28:18-20)
- His works (John 14:12)
- His name (John 14:13; 15:16)
- His ability to love (Philippians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 John 4:7-11)

The more we realize this amazing unity we have with Him, and the more we share in His nature, the more powerfully He is able to work through us.

Along to Assist

This includes recognizing God's desire and ability to reveal Himself to each student in ways that will connect their hearts uniquely with Him. Instead of praying for this or that student to behave a certain way, make a commitment according to our timetable, or fulfill our expectations in one way or another, it seems wise to focus our prayers on the person, presence, and power of Jesus to work in that student's life—with Jesus leading the way and us along to assist Him.

That frees us from praying manipulative prayers, trying to arrange divine appointments ourselves, and riding all the ups and downs of students' journeys toward a commitment to Christ. Sometimes—actually often—God wants to work in ways that are different from how we think He should work. We can trust Him.

Love, Prayer, and Humility

Love, prayer, and humility make a powerful combination. In fact, if we think of people whose lives have impacted us the most, we'll probably see that combination in each of them. We were attracted to Jesus, grasped God's unconditional love, and saw what it means to follow Him through the lives of people who have loved us, prayed for us, and humbly served us.

That's how students will see Him in us too. We don't have to demonstrate the nature and character of Jesus perfectly—in fact, we can't—but devoting our lives to following Him in love, prayer, and humility makes a powerful impression on students who are desperate to find acceptance and meaning in their lives.

This is not a matter of punching the right buttons or pulling the right strings to get God to do what we want. He will not be manipulated, and He always chooses to give Himself to us through a relationship rather than through formulas for success. But if we relate to Him deeply, let His nature rub off on us and work within us, and live a lifestyle that reflects who He is, good things happen. As we reflect Him, He works powerfully through us.

G. Campbell Morgan once wrote that “we cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.”¹⁶ Living a life saturated with love, prayer, and humility does not guarantee we will reach every student on a campus for Christ, but it does come with promises that God will bear fruit through us.

We can live loving, prayerful, and humble lives with that expectation. Scripture and history assure us of that. God loves students even more than we do, and He has plans for this generation that will encourage and inspire us. We get to be a part of what He is doing. The more we align with His heart and seek His face, the greater our role becomes.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Think of who you know and admire who exhibits these three traits of love, prayer, and humility, and then write down some insights about how their lives reflect these traits.
- Now consider—with humility—how your life reflects these traits too, along with a few thoughts on what “blind spots” you might have that hinder you from reflecting them.
- What specific, practical steps do you need to take to more fully engage in loving, praying, and humbling yourself?

Section Resources

- Go to www.barrystclair.com/books to download free:
 - *Taking Your Campus for Christ*
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Student’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>
 - *Giving Away Your Faith*
- Go to <https://gogateways.org/studentled-fts> to access the "Student-Led Free to Speak Campaign."
- Go to www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/ to download "3 Circles" free.
- Go to Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry Online (<http://www.jfym.online/>) for a biblical, practical strategy for your entire ministry.
- J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994).
- Download free *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* and *Student’s Guide*, two in-depth resources to implement the Prayer Triplet strategy in your youth ministry and church.
 - *An Awesome Way to Pray—Student’s Guide* (<https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>)
 - *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* (<https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>)

¹⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Pride and Humility," sermon delivered Aug. 17, 1856, at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark.

¹⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1982), 113.

¹⁶ Stephen Olford, *Lord, Open the Heavens! A Heart-Cry for Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1980), 92.

Section 3 – MOVE FROM THE OUTSIDE TO THE INSIDE



Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:8-9)

Section 3 – MOVE FROM THE OUTSIDE TO THE INSIDE

Chapter 11 - CONNECTING WITH THE CAMPUS

The man suddenly showed up on campus with a box of Bibles and handed them out at the front door to anyone who would take one. Soon the principal came out and told him he had to leave.

“These students have a right to the Word of God,” the man said, refusing to move. He was creating quite a stir.

The principal called security, and the man was firmly escorted off campus, his “ministry” there essentially over.

Getting on and staying on a campus involves much more than showing up with a box of Bibles and demanding your rights. In fact, it calls for just the opposite.

Youth leaders from across the country tell me that it’s impossible to get on their school campus, and I understand why. Often someone like the man handing out Bibles spoils the opportunity for everyone. We live in contentious times, and many people are either opposed to Christian beliefs or reluctant to show any partisanship that might erupt in controversy. Some campuses are more closed than others.

But even when a school administration shows a completely closed mind to having religious people on campus, you can still have an effective ministry on the campus if you handle it the right way. In fact, if you carefully follow biblical principles and current legal guidelines, you can have a ministry on virtually any campus in the United States. (See Chapter 33 "Exercise Campus Legal Opportunities.")

Know the School

My friend Keith Naylor played basketball with Athletes in Action (so did I). He told me of a time years ago when his team was scheduled to play two games against the Yugoslavian national team soon after they had won the Olympic Gold Medal. The AIA team had only two months to prepare, so they ate, slept, and drank Yugoslavian basketball for those two months. Every morning, the scrubs (including Keith) ran the Yugoslavian offense. For four hours every afternoon, they watched and rewatched videos of the Yugoslavian team. They learned every detail of their strategy. By the end of those two months, they knew every play, every player’s strengths and weaknesses, and even their favorite restaurants and video games. As difficult and time-consuming as their preparation was, the Athletes in Action team was ready—and they won.

The application to campus ministry is clear: the better we prepare, the better chance we have of success.

The apostle Paul knew that. When he arrived alone in the city of Athens, far from where he began, and was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him, he walked around and observed the culture. He was “greatly distressed” to see that the city was full of idols (Acts 17:16), just as we

might feel distress when we look at school campuses today. But during that week of preparation and observation, he found a point of connection.

When Paul eventually spoke from the Areopagus—which was a huge rock where people often gathered to speak publicly—he pointed out how religious they were and that they had an altar “to the unknown God.” That was not an unusual inscription among Greeks, who wanted to make sure they didn’t leave out any important deities. Using that as a starting point, Paul went on to introduce them to the “unknown” God. That poignant point of connection created the opening he needed to share the truth about Jesus.

From Paul’s example, we can notice at least three important actions he took because he “scoped out” his surroundings. These will help us find our own open doors to the campus.

Observe the School’s Environment

Rather than barreling into the situation, Paul took time to understand the environment. He “walked around” Athens (Acts 17:23)—a verb that in Greek implies continually passing through, not just taking a one-time look. He really wanted to understand his circumstances and the people who lived there. For hours, he observed their affinity for talking about religion and philosophy, and their interest in new ways of thinking. He grasped the environment and mapped out his ministry area.

These two excellent tools - described in Section 1.3 - will give you specific direction to do what Paul did. They provide you with the ability to map your campus, to adopt your school, and then to lead your students to see their campus as their own mission field. If you have not already done so, use these two links (in the Resources below) to create your own strategic and specific campus ministry plan:

- Map Your Campus - <https://www.everyschool.com/resource/mapping-the-campus/>
- Adopt Your School - <https://www.everyschool.com/>

Walking around your school—whatever that means in your situation—and observing its environment puts you in a position to know and understand its culture and its needs. You get a sense of its basic personality—something every school has. Of course, if you have students in your church who attend that school, that’s a huge advantage. Either way, find out about the school’s events. Most of them are open to the public. In most schools these events comprise a high percentage of the school calendar.

- Athletic—include the most obvious and best-attended, but also some of the less-attended sports.
- Non-athletic—dramas, musical performances, pageants, debates, parades, etc. Many of these involve a crew of volunteers and may provide an opportunity to develop friendships with parents and other supporters.

To get a good sense of all event options, go to the school's website. If that doesn't work, then call the school office and ask an administrator or someone in charge for a calendar of school events that are open to the public. If you have the time to volunteer, ask if they need any volunteers. If they ask you why you want that information, you can say that you live in the community, know students who attend, and want to support the school.

Once you have a good sense of the events, try to put some of them on your schedule and attend one or more events per week. It's probably the quickest, best way to get to know the school and the people in it. The big advantage to attending these events is just showing up! Doing this will give you an opportunity to meet new students, parents, and teachers, and engage them in conversation.

Once you get acclimated, take some of your volunteer leaders with you and hang out with some students before, during, and/or after the event. Doing this builds relationships and forms a group of people with a common connection—the school. And along the way you will get to know plenty of kids who need to know Jesus.

Take Good Notes on What You Observe About the School

Before you engage in school events, one of the best ways to get a head start on learning about the school's unique environment is to study the school yearbook. You can borrow one from a student or ask the school if you can borrow or buy one. When you go through the yearbook, ask yourself some of the questions raised below. Looking for people and events that appear on multiple pages will tell you who and what students consider most important.

When you are actually in, on, or around the campus or at school events and observing, queue up a few of these questions in your mind as you go. Create a text with three or four questions that make you curious, and then note your observations later. Eventually, ask and answer as many of these questions as you can:

- What are some of the different groups represented here?
- Are any other ministries present on campus that you could collaborate with?
- What do students seem most interested in?
- What do they wear?
- What appears to be cool to them? What is not cool?
- What are the different ethnicities and do those students separate or integrate?
- Do some kids sit by themselves?
- What attitudes do you observe?
- What are the faculty and coaches like?

- Are many parents in attendance at events? Do moms and dads sit together?
- How do people respond when the team loses . . . or wins?
- Do you notice students drinking alcohol or taking drugs?
- What is their social media platform of choice?
- What is one characteristic of the largest group? the smallest group?
- Where are the natural gathering places for students?

Observing and then recording your observations will give you a pretty good sense of the school. Once you have hung out around the school environment, write down your impressions of the school's personality and culture. After several events and conversations, you'll begin to get an overall feel for the school.

Remember Faces and Names

Since relationships are the keys that will unlock the school and keep it open for you, pay close attention to the names and faces of the people you meet and what you learn about them. Write down names and observations, and then review this list and add to it frequently.

Pretty soon, like Paul, you will notice a variety of connecting points—events, places, and particularly people—that will give you a sense of direction on how you, your students, and your church can connect with the school in some specific and meaningful ways. This will both deepen the relationships you have started with people at the school and continue to broaden the number of relationships you have developed. And you will have the opportunity to share your faith in Jesus when the time is right.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep notes of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Review and consider the suggested questions above as you're making observations about the school.
- From your notes, create a written plan—what you have learned so far and what you would still like to know. Include attending events, reading school publications, and building relationships with people. Then, as with a journal, keep adding to it.

Chapter 12 - FROM OBSERVING TO INTERACTING

Everyone has a “god”—something that controls their lives, consumes their minds, and/or dictates their values. As we observed previously, when Paul arrived in Athens, he walked around and looked carefully at their religious culture and objects of worship (Acts 17:16-23). He could see what they chose to honor and prioritize. Observing their altar “to an unknown God” gave him an entry point into a discussion with some of the city’s leaders.

Ironically, the Athenians acknowledged that there might be a god they didn’t know, even though they ordered their lives around the ones they thought they knew. Paul pointed out that they were pursuing something—a god they didn’t understand. That’s a pretty good description of how today’s student culture operates.

What are some of the obvious and not-so-obvious driving forces—“gods,” if you will—that drive students’ lives, and therefore create the campus culture? What motivates today’s students? What are the entry points into their lives? The very best way to find out is to talk to them, listen to them, and get to know them—interacting with them. Earlier we pointed out how to observe them. That’s great. But moving to the next level and interacting with them will give you not only better insights, but also build better relationships.

How do you build relationships in a campus environment? Well, you have to hang out, spend time, show interest, ask questions, and ultimately, love students!

Interview Students

Here are a few questions that can keep a conversation going—even with a quiet, introverted student or teacher—as well as some active steps you can take to build better relationships.

Ideally, you already know some students at the school from your church or community activities. Meet with some of them and ask them a few of these questions:

- What is your favorite part of your day at school (besides the final bell)?
- What is your least favorite part of school for you?
- What extra-curricular activities do most enjoy?
- What social media do you use the most?
- How would you describe the different groups in the school?
- What do most students do after school? What are their favorite off-campus hangouts?
- What is the principal like? Do students like him/her?
- Who are the favorite teachers? Why are they the favorites?

- What are the biggest problems students face at your school? What do they struggle with the most?
- Do you know who the Christian teachers and students are?
- What Christian groups are represented at the school? Do they meet on campus or off campus?

Ask Teachers

Teachers will give you great insights into the students, but they can also provide an insider's view of the administration, especially the principal's perspective. In the most informal way possible, talk to teachers, especially those who may go to your church and/or live in your community. See if you can have coffee or meet two or three teachers one-on-one during an off period, "just to chat"—not interrogate. After a few minutes of personal chatting and asking "get to know you" questions, ask some questions like these:

- How did you get to this particular school?
- What is the most positive aspect about teaching at this school? Why do you like teaching here?
- What do students most enjoy about this school?
- What are the most challenging problems your students face?
- What are the most challenging problems you face as a teacher?
- What are the greatest needs of the school?
- Where do volunteers fit in (for example, people to answer the phone, ushers at ball games, sponsors, coaches, etc.)?
- If the teacher is a Christian, ask what Christian groups are active on this campus. Any teachers' prayer groups, moms' prayer groups, student Bible studies or clubs, Christian organizations, etc.? (If the teacher is not a Christian you can still broach the subject.)
- (If you know the teacher well): Do you think the principal would object to me coming on campus? Why or why not?

Teachers can become your greatest allies. Remember, effective campus ministry will involve them as well as students.

Hang Out Where Students Hang Out

This feels risky, but the rewards are great. In their environment you will see a different side of students. By hanging out, you get insights into what's going on in their lives. That doesn't mean you'll see their true selves; they still put on masks to impress their friends. But you can see

them interact with each other beyond the boundaries of their parents and the church environment. You will notice their fears and insecurities as well as their motivations and values.

If you're wondering how to do this without seeming like a narc, a predator, or a social intruder, the best approach is to be yourself—friendly and accepting of them right where they are. At first, hang out with students you know, then meet their friends, and continue to build relationships from there. Give them time to get to know you and recognize you. It won't take long before they will warm up to you and be open to conversations.

Pay attention, be aware, and observe.

These guidelines might help too:

- Don't go places where you aren't wanted—a party just for kids, for example. You probably couldn't get in anyway, but even if you did, you would not be welcomed.
- Do go to public places. Ball games, coffee shops, fast-food restaurants, malls, parking lots, and other places where students hang out provide ideal opportunities to put yourself in their world, meet them on their turf, enjoy them in a relaxed environment, and begin to get to know them on a deeper level.
- Once you know where the students hang out, stick to that place. Just be a fly on the wall and observe and be friendly. In no time you will have received an education in youth ministry for free—except for the cost of burgers and fries! You will quickly become friends with more students than you could have imagined.

Describe How You See the School

Given what you have discovered from the principal to teachers to students, write your description of the school. These questions will spur your thoughts:

- What is the school known for? What does it take pride in?
- What does the school value?
- What activities dominate the school?
- What groups are represented at the school and who leads them?
- What role do sports play?
- In what areas has the school succeeded? In what areas has the school failed?

As you think through the answers to these questions, you will know the basic landscape of the school. You will gain a pretty good understanding of the spiritual and social environment of the school community. And you may get a sense of what they are really pursuing in the depths of their hearts—and know more about how to meet the needs of the school and the people who go there.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- As a youth leader stepping onto the campus and into personal relationships with students, how do you see yourself addressing “the longings in their hearts?” Spend some time thinking about how your ministry meets their real and felt needs.
- Develop a specific plan for each one of the numbered items above—interviewing students, talking to teachers, spending time where students hang out, and describing the school.

Chapter 13 - BECOME A SERVANT

A youth leader who had spent some time going to events and talking to people at his nearby school had noticed parents lugging heavy band equipment to and from football games. It was the same two dads every game, so the youth leader volunteered to help them each week. Obviously, they were grateful. Interestingly, after several weeks, the band director invited the leader to join them at all the practices and school functions.

This kind of serving can find many different expressions: keeping stats at track meets, wrestling matches, and other sports events; judging at debates and musical contests; getting a bus driver's license to drive a bus for school events, and many more.

The motive for going to the campus is not for the school to serve you and your ministry, but for you to serve the school. You have no guarantees that any students will decide to follow Jesus or come to your church, but ministering to the community, the school, and students by serving them will clearly reveal that you care about the school and the students there.

Just as Jesus came to serve (Matthew 20:25-28), we're called to serve with the same servant-hearted spirit. The idea is to look for a need that the school does not have the personnel to fill—then fill it. And once you have spent time getting to know the school community, you certainly will have noticed some needs to be met. How about inviting some of your youth ministry volunteers to step up, step in, and meet some of these needs? Once that happens, the number of students each of you know begins to expand and multiply.

Serve Wisely

Wisdom is needed to serve on a campus. It's true that we have the truth that transforms. We hold the key to the lives of students, and we have the solution to hopelessness, immorality, loneliness, purposelessness, and much more. We hold the answer to problematic issues that no educational institution can solve. And even though many school administrations fight to keep the church out of schools while giving godless and humanistic philosophies easy access to their students, we still hold the key—the only solution that is both true and lifechanging.

Though our highest priority is to give students the hope that is in Christ, we must be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16) when we are on or around the campus. It's wise to willingly lay aside our immediate desire to verbally share Jesus with students in order to earn the right to be heard. That's where the amazing tool of serving comes into play. We don't need to demand our rights to be on campus. It will only alienate us from the faculty and administration. Instead, our goal is to saturate the campus with Jesus-focused leaders who can build ongoing relationships with students and can come alongside them to meet their needs. We want to position ourselves to develop relationships that will allow us to introduce Christ, as well as encourage and embolden the Christ-followers. We can do that when we sensitively discern the needs around us and then meet those needs by serving the school and those students.

Meet Needs

Taking some very simple steps, you and your team can meet a significant number of needs. More than anything else, doing this is mostly a matter of showing up with a giving heart. How do you do that practically and meaningfully?

1. Evaluate your strengths and the strengths of your youth ministry team. Begin by asking yourself and your team what you liked to do when you were in school. Think back—far back, for some of us—and remember what you enjoyed doing in school. Write down two or three things you enjoyed then that you might enjoy now in a serving capacity. You don't have to excel at these because your primary role on campus is serving, not impressing people. Make yourself available to step into a serving role you will enjoy. The result is that others will be drawn in to how much you are enjoying serving them. As the saying goes, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

2. Prioritize your lists of needs with your team. Together, ask each of your leaders to write down two or three situations where they would enjoy serving. Discuss what you wrote, then decide who wants to pursue certain needs. Then think about them in terms of each person's strengths, the school's needs, the contacts you currently have at the school, and who would be interested in the need(s) you identified.

3. Determine your availability. With your team, decide when each of you have time in your weekly schedule to commit to serving on or around the campus. Is it every day? Every other day? Once a week? Can you attend practice or only the event? What time can you arrive, and when do you have to leave? Commit yourself only to do what you know you can do faithfully.

4. Contact the appropriate person(s). God has a place for each person on your team to serve, and He will open the door for it. Yet, you still need to knock on the door. Find out who is in charge of the group you will serve, make an appointment to see that person, explain that you and others have some time to help, and emphasize that your goal is simply to serve. If that person says no, go to the next person or the next until you find an opening.

5. Serve with a group. Consider expanding your serving team by collaborating with other organizations on the campus and/or other churches. For example, serve a meal to a sports team before games. Since you are serving and paying for the meal, you can give a devotional. A few other ideas: Hand out water and oranges after team practices; throw an appreciation party for the choir; gather sanitation kits for the school social worker to give to families in need. Opportunities abound with an ever-expanding team.

If you follow suggestions like these for serving, you will be able to build relationships, become a positive influence in the school community, and share your faith with those who are open to hearing about it.

But be patient. This can take time. Remember, when you partner with others on your leadership team, you can divide responsibilities, speed up the process, and expand your influence. But even then, don't rush. Relationships and trust need time and experience to develop, but the benefits are well worth the wait.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Spend some time thinking about how serving might expand your current ministry and build a solid foundation for future ministry on campus. In what ways does serving open peoples' hearts to the message of Jesus?
- Review the four steps under "Meet Needs" and develop a written plan for you and/or your team to begin serving on campus.

Chapter 14 - RELATE WELL TO SCHOOL AUTHORITIES

Antonio had a strong desire to reach the students at the school near his church, but the school was closed to any ministry coming on campus. Yet Antonio was determined and figured there had to be a way. So, when he had the opportunity to be a substitute teacher, he saw it as the ideal opportunity, giving him access to hundreds of students for hours at a time.

During class, Antonio took the opportunity to give Christian answers to controversial subjects. As students' interest increased, so did Antonio's boldness. But he never bothered to meet with the principal. He felt nervous about talking to an administrator he didn't even know.

When the principal heard about Antonio's conversations in class, he forbade Antonio from expressing his religious beliefs there and warned him that he would no longer be able to teach if he continued to do so.

To Antonio, this meant depriving kids of real-life answers. He felt it was his duty to share Christ with students, even if it cost him his job. And it did.

Now the school has substitute teachers who don't have the same heart for students that Antonio did. And he no longer has access to them, and because of what he did, neither do other youth leaders.

This is not a question of rights. It's a matter of wisdom. Being disruptive to the educational process will close doors and work against you. But when you establish a constructive relationship with school administrators, you have a basis for dealing with issues positively. It's important to be sensitive to teachers' and administrators' responsibilities and needs and "earn the right to be heard."

Submit to Authority

We're told to submit ourselves to governing authorities, who have been instituted by God—even when we don't agree with those authorities (Romans 13:1-5). Not to do so opens us up to God's disfavor toward our ministries. To have an effective campus ministry, we need to understand what an attitude of submission looks like, how it's beneficial to all, and why it's so important.

Submission opens doors and builds trust, and it allows us to minister on campus with a clear conscience. I've found over years of student ministry that it's much easier and more effective when I have an attitude of submission to school authorities—not because I want to use or manipulate them, but because I genuinely honor the position God has placed them in.

That doesn't mean I've always liked the approach school administrators have taken. Sometimes they show no interest in the spiritual aspect of kids' lives. They can become pawns in the hands of parents and school boards. And sometimes they turn their backs on solutions because they don't want to make waves. There is no need to judge or blame; just accept the situation for

what it is. It's easy to think they're short-circuiting God's will. But no one short-circuits God's will. He can work in any situation, even through people who do not embrace His ways and the outcomes we had hoped for. That's why we submit to authority and leave the results to the Lord.

Cultivate a Submissive Approach

To develop a submissive approach to school authorities without compromising your sense of calling or purpose, follow the guidelines in Ephesians 6:5-9. Paul wrote this to household servants in the first century. He told them to serve with respect, fear, and sincerity of heart, just as they would if serving Christ. In fact, they should serve earthly masters just as wholeheartedly as they serve Jesus Himself, knowing that God rewards everyone for the good they do.

We can take that same approach in any situation today and expect God to honor it. Applying Paul's three components of a servant's heart will set us apart on campus and set us up for success.

- **Respect.** If we appreciate and even admire the responsibilities of school authorities, we can have a positive perspective from the start.

School principals and administrators have one of the most difficult jobs in the country—long weeks, hundreds of employees who answer to them, big budgets to balance, a staggering array of student problems to address, and a nagging feeling that even their best efforts are inadequate. They work under constraints placed on them by school boards and parents—they have hundreds of people in the school district and community to report to—and when anything goes wrong, the buck stops at their desk.

And they live with the constant awareness of how high the stakes are. They are dealing with one of society's most precious and difficult commodities: children and their education.

Not that long ago, the biggest offenses at school were talking, chewing gum, running in the halls, making too much noise, and wearing inappropriate clothing. Now they are rape, robbery, assault, vandalism, extortion, drug and alcohol abuse, and guns. Many principals have resorted to guard dogs, metal detectors, plainclothes officers, and a security staff. Sometimes they operate a daycare center for students with babies. The responsibilities go well beyond education.

Most principals—and teachers and coaches too—could easily get better-paying jobs in the business world, but they choose to stay because they care for young people. They may not share your beliefs, but in most cases, they do share your concerns.

Learn to see principals, teachers, and coaches as people with bills to pay, families to tend to, and their own set of personal needs and concerns. Ask God to give you a heart for them. They are not a barrier to get past in order to minister to students. They are human beings who, like all other human beings, need God's love and presence too.

- **Fear.** In the context of Ephesians 6, fear actually means obedience—a desire to fulfill responsibilities and not fall short. On campus, this means carrying out the wishes of school administrators.

My good friend worked hard for two years to develop a relationship with the boys' varsity basketball coach, hoping the coach would invite him to help. He believed it would open doors to relationships that otherwise wouldn't be opened. When the coach finally asked him, he was ecstatic.

My friend shared his excitement with a teacher friend, who asked if he was aware that only people currently teaching at the school were allowed to coach. He knew lots of people broke the rule, but the teacher thought he should honor it as a Christian. My friend didn't appreciate this teacher's perspective at first, but he knew it was right. When he asked the coach about it, the coach said he was aware of the rule, but said it was his team and he could ask anyone he wanted to help out.

My friend wrestled with this for a week. He reminded God how many students, parents, and teachers he could reach by coaching. He told God no one would care if he fudged on an obscure rule. But eventually, my friend told the coach he couldn't do it.

The coach didn't understand, and neither did many of the players. It felt like his ministry was taking a huge step backward. But in the end, he knew being obedient was the right decision, and his conscience was clear. He quickly found other ways to connect to students on that campus.

- **Sincerity.** When we look at all of the potential and real frustrating situations we can encounter at schools and the people who seem to enjoy resisting our efforts, we might start to think that Paul was only kidding about "sincerity of heart"—that it's okay to cut corners or bend the rules a little to work some situations out. Yet God tells us through Paul to work with sincerity of heart, just as we would obey Christ.

Sometimes school administrators are not only aggravating, but also dead wrong. But there's nothing to gain, either at the school or in God's eyes, by defying them. The only appropriate, godly response is to obey and serve them as though they were Jesus Himself.

If you apply these three attitudes to your relationships with all school authorities, you will honor God and position yourself for His blessing on your ministry. You will also set yourself apart as radically distinctive in a campus environment. The rest is up to the Lord, and with these perspectives, He will use you powerfully.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Spend some time considering the positive benefits that could come from establishing favorable relationships with school principals, administrators, and teachers. How can that help you meet needs at school, build relationships with more administrators, teachers, and students, and eventually give you access to meet more and more students?
- Write a list of reasons why it matters to obey the rules and the administrators we may not agree with—and in some cases may seem contrary to God’s purposes—and write some concrete conclusions for how you will approach these situations.

Chapter 15 - GAIN ACCESS TO THE CAMPUS

As a new youth leader in town, Kevin knew one of the first places he needed to see was the local school. As he was settling into his ministry, a parent of one of his students called to let him know of an event at the junior high where he could meet some people. He walked into the cafeteria, connected with that parent, and was introduced to the principal, several students, and some other parents.

The doors of schools are often open during the week for games, concerts, pep rallies, and other activities. This was Kevin's open door to the campus. No agenda, no program, no teaching or leading. He just showed up. That provided opportunities to build relationships, serve, and be known as a trusted person at the school and in the community. It also provided an excuse for students to introduce him to their friends.

"Hey, let me introduce you to my youth pastor," they'd say.

Sometimes their friends would ask, "What's a youth pastor?"

Kevin not only got to hear how his students described a youth pastor; he also got to know plenty of students he would otherwise never have connected with.

Kevin's strategy for gaining access to the campus was as simple as showing up. As a result, his ministry has thrived through serving sports teams, speaking at career day, providing food for teachers, serving in hallways during teachers' meetings and on school leadership teams—all by simply being present during events.

Grow Your Relationships

By nature, your ministry to students requires you to spend time with them. That doesn't have to be on campus, but you take a huge leap forward if it is. That means you want to wisely and carefully develop relationships with the administration and teachers. You will have greater opportunities as you gain the confidence of the school administrators and teachers, and thus more freedom to come and go at the school.

When you apply a submissive attitude and approach to the campus, you will, in all likelihood, have a ministry there. With that approach, what practical steps can you take to gain access to the campus?

1. *Pray.* Ministry on a campus involves a spiritual battle. That's why you need to make prayer the foundation of your campus ministry. Pray—and invite others to pray—that the Lord will . . .

- provide natural meetings with school administrators
- give you wisdom and favor in those encounters
- let the love of Jesus flow through you in all your interactions

- open the right doors to the campus
- bring administrators and all others who don't know Christ into a relationship with Him.

Those are *big* prayers, but remember God's promise: "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

2. Meet the principal informally. If you have acquaintances who know the principal personally, ask one of them to introduce you. Extracurricular events offer an open door for informal introductions because principals usually aren't immersed in major responsibilities at those.

Keep these thoughts in mind as you think about this informal meeting:

Ask a mutual acquaintance to introduce you as a person who works with young people, not as a youth pastor—not because you're trying to hide anything (you aren't) but to avoid any stereotypes that would start the relationship on the wrong foot. Never be deceptive, though. If the principal asks where you work, respond honestly.

Don't try to force the conversation; let the principal initiate it, and let it flow. Speak positively about the school. Your only goal is to make contact, so don't try to impress or push the conversation toward a goal. Be your friendly self and let the Lord build the relationship.

Conclude the conversation by telling the principal how glad you are to meet him or her, and then offer to help in any way you can if ever needed. Let the principal know you can be reached through your mutual friend. A casual, informal contact like this opens the door to developing the relationship further.

3. Write the principal a note. Within a few hours, write a handwritten note, thanking the principal for taking the time to meet you. Write something like, "It was a pleasure to meet you at the game. I look forward to seeing you at other events. Please feel free to call me if I can serve you or the school in any way."

4. Call for an appointment. Within a couple of weeks, follow up with a phone call and ask if you can meet in person for a few minutes to talk about ideas he/she may have about needs at the school. Ask how you might help. If the principal asks what you mean by that, simply explain that you have a genuine concern for students in the community and would be glad to give some time to serve the school in a way that would be helpful.

Some guidelines for your call: Speak directly, express confidence (but not arrogance), have your calendar ready so you can quickly set a date for a meeting, and accommodate the principal's schedule as much as possible. Temper your expectations; don't expect to be treated as an answer to prayer. At this point, your interest may still seem suspicious.

Once you set the appointment, express thanks and confirm the date and time of the meeting. If he turns you down, thank him and tell him you will look forward to seeing him again at the next school event you plan to attend, and make a note to seek him out.

5. Meet the principal formally. Assuming the principal gave you an appointment with him, then what do you say to him when in his office? Keep it simple, relaxed, and conversational. Establish rapport by sharing a couple of positive things you noticed about the school, your love for students, and your desire to lend a hand in any way that he would see as helpful.

A few tips:

- Pray before you enter the school.
- Dress appropriately (not in jeans and a t-shirt).
- Arrive ten minutes early and check in with the administrative assistant, reiterating in your conversation your appreciation and desire to serve.
- Say to the principal something like this: “I want you to know how much I appreciate your time. I know you’re very busy. The reason I wanted to get together with you is that I have a deep love and concern for the students in my community and the problems they face today. I want to help them in any and every way I can. It seems that one of the best ways I can help them is to help the school that helps them. I don’t know everything that the school and its students need, but I do have a little time available. I would like to volunteer that time to help in any way.”

Let the principal take it from there. Don’t keep talking. Honor the time commitment, but also anticipate questions about your background and what you do for a living. If you’re a youth pastor, say so. Volunteer some details about your church while assuring the principal that you have no desire to proselytize students and will not share your faith on campus. Be clear that you will do anything that he deems as “helpful help” to the school.

If you are asked for more of an explanation for why you want to help the school, explain that, like the principal, you have a calling to invest in young people, and doing that in their everyday environment is a helpful way to be a positive influence in their lives.

Know in advance how much time you are willing to volunteer so you can commit on the spot, if needed. When the conversation is over, express thanks for the time you’ve been given.

Don’t be surprised if the principal has no idea how you can help. Your only goal at this point is to begin opening doors by establishing a relationship with the school’s primary authority figure. Be available to continue building that relationship, but be aware of the following “don’ts”:

- Don’t give the impression that you’re an expert on students and schools.
- Don’t insist that you have a right to come on campus.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep. If you can volunteer only one day a week, communicate that clearly.

- Don't share your opinions about such controversial subjects as abortion, church and state, prayer in schools, or anything else that might alienate the principal. Just keep the conversation centered on the school and how you can help it.
- Don't let the principal intimidate you. Although you should speak to this authority respectfully, you are also peers.
- Don't make demands. That's not how we represent Christ. We know God is in control and will work through human authorities to accomplish His will.
- Don't ask "what can I do for you?" They are too busy to come up with a reason for you to be there. Come with a plan, such as "I understand you need volunteers for . . .," or, "I understand you're looking for mentors/tutors." If you discover that he/she is a Christian, then you can say: "Our group prays for students, teachers, and administrators. Are there some ways you would like us to pray for the school?"

6. Write another thank you note. Again, express appreciation for the principal's time and reiterate your willingness to help out. Include your contact information.

7. Pursue an opportunity to serve. If the principal has zeroed in on an area of need, then ask permission to pursue helping in that area—even if it is something you would not have chosen to do. If the principal comes up with nothing, ask a teacher, coach, or another staff member who has oversight and responsibility for another area if you can volunteer your time to help, making it clear that you want to serve.

8. Continue to communicate with the principal and build the relationship. Do this in any ways that are open to you. Attend at least two school activities where you will likely see the principal, reintroduce yourself, and continue to demonstrate your interest in the school and its students.

At some point in this process, you can mention that you have an opportunity to serve, and you would like to do it if he approves. For example, "The wrestling coach has invited me to help with the team, and asked if I could record videos of the practices so the wrestlers can work on their moves. I just wanted to make sure that is okay with you before making a commitment."

Then wait prayerfully (and silently) for a response. If the answer is yes, you're good to go. Write another thank-you note in the next week or two.

If the answer is no, don't be discouraged. Respond politely and appreciatively. Write another thank-you note to express appreciation for your request being considered, for all the principal does for students, and for the privilege of getting to know him or her recently. Reiterate that you will still be available to help in any way if the need arises.

Keep going to extracurricular activities. The principal or an assistant is required to attend these, and when you see one of them, continue a friendly tone of conversation. Keep looking for ways to serve outside of campus and school hours (concessions at ball games, driving the bus for the

band, etc.). And keep praying for the principal and the school daily. If the door is not open yet, wait for it! God will eventually open a door for you to serve.

9. Remind yourself to treat the principal as a person, not a barrier or steppingstone. Continue to honor him or her and present yourself as a person of integrity. If you're asked to do something, do it responsibly. Periodically talk to the principal by stopping by the school office and/or saying hello at events. Send notes of appreciation and, if appropriate, let him or her know you are praying for the school. Congratulate the principal for any school achievements in academics, sports, or anything else.

Going on Campus During School Hours

Many youth leaders try to get permission to come on the campus during lunch or to lead an early morning Bible study. In some cases that works, but it's best not to spend time with students during school hours unless you have an official invitation from an administrator, teacher, or coach to do so. Otherwise, you appear to be serving your own agenda rather than the school's. Since you don't work for the school, and you have no job description or accountability, the last thing a principal needs is another problem to deal with—or even the hint of a potential problem.

If eating lunch or attending an early morning Christian group is open to you, then go for it. If students can go off campus during lunch, then go. If you are invited to watch a team practice, then go. But if none of these opportunities are available, then pursue personal conversations in after-school hours.

Personally, my youth pastor friend and I established a relationship with the principal at our local school following the steps above. Our first volunteer work was sweeping the floor before basketball practice. Years later, the principal asked my friend to speak at the baccalaureate service. He once told another teacher that he wished our type of campus involvement happened more often and on other campuses—and this was in a county known for its closed schools. We had the continuing privilege of serving on campus because we followed God's principles of submission and honor. That approach will work for you too.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Putting yourself in the principal's office (where I spent plenty of time for the wrong reasons when I was in school), what specific concerns would you have if someone offered to serve or help at the school? Make a list. And as you think about that principal/administrator as a real human being with a life full of real needs and feelings, what words, attitudes, and actions are most likely to alleviate concerns? Make a list of these too.

- Review each numbered point above and develop a simple, step-by-step action plan to follow in getting to know school administrators and looking for a way to serve.
- Enlist partners, including your prayer triplet to pray for you and with you and to hold you accountable to the plan.

Chapter 16 - SERVE LIKE JESUS

Keith had played basketball most of his life and worked in more basketball camps than he could count. He knew the game. Watching the high school team practice, he got excited about how he could help. He knew just what their coach needed to do to get players motivated and improve their skills. So, Keith found an opportunity to speak to the coach, introduced himself, and proceeded to work his basketball credentials and expertise into the conversation. He even gave the coach a few suggestions and offered his services if the coach ever wanted some help.

Not surprisingly, the coach didn't implement any of Keith's ideas, and he hardly acknowledged Keith's presence at the next practice. His "in" with those students closed, and he remained "out."

Meanwhile, the wrestling team coach told Keith and Bill, a fellow youth worker, that they needed help. Keith's mind raced with all kinds of possibilities—coaching, teaching, advice. As it turned out, they wanted Keith and Bill to make sure no one brought soft drinks into the gym during the upcoming state tournament and that no one sneaked in without paying. Keith was indignant. *A guy who knows so much about students, basketball, and God, and my big opening on campus is to keep cokes and freeloaders out?* This didn't quite fit Keith's vision of campus ministry.

We think it means to follow Jesus and what Jesus thinks it means to follow Him often come from two different worlds. Jesus had to continually reorient His disciples' thinking on this point:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

What happens once you have your foot in the door of the campus? You serve.

From a purely pragmatic standpoint, serving gives an entrance into the places where we want to minister, like school campuses. The old saying is true: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Administrators, teachers, and students don't care about our impressive resumes, but they will respond to someone who is great enough to serve. They don't want know-it-alls. They want help.

Manning the ticket table for hours, cleaning up trash, washing sweat off of wrestling mats . . . these are ways to serve as the Son of Man served. When we do that, the Lord often swings the doors to schools wide open. Faculty and administration love the help.

When the basketball coach who didn't want Keith's advice saw him humbly serving, his attitude toward him changed, and he eventually asked him to help with the team. When we serve, God moves.

What we think about serving in a campus context shapes how we go about it, so here are some important principles to keep in mind.

Servant-Heartedness Is Powerful

It's the way of God's kingdom, and even the way of the King. When the Lord of all creation, who has power and expertise beyond our imagination, clothed Himself in flesh and stepped into this world, He did it in a stable in an out-of-the-way town and lived among us as a servant—to the point of eventually dying on our behalf. And He calls us to serve others in that same spirit.

Serving Does Not Come Naturally

We would rather impress people with our authority and expertise and have other people serve us. We want to feel significant and influence others with our unique skills and assets. We at least want to be valued and respected. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be significant, valued, and respected. Jesus didn't rebuke His disciples for wanting to be great. But He did redefine greatness for them. It begins with having the heart of a servant—doing what's needed rather than what makes us feel important. He will gladly use our skills and expertise when He wants to, but our heart has to be focused on serving.

Servant-Heartedness Identifies Us with Jesus

Why did Jesus say, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant"? Because humanly speaking, everyone wants to be great and first. But to become "great" and "first" in other people's eyes, we must serve them, not use them. We might see serving as demeaning, but Jesus highly valued it. When we sacrificially offer ourselves for whatever people need, we are demonstrating the nature of God.

Serving is how we build relationships. We demonstrate to administrators, faculty, and students that we are friends, not local youth leaders who have only come to prey on helpless, unsuspecting kids, or manipulators trying to score a few victories in the culture wars. We have to show that we aren't there to make the principal's job harder. Instead, we really are there to make the entire school better.

When we make a conscious choice to serve on campus, we express the heart and nature of Jesus' character. Even if serving has never fit our vision of greatness, when we serve, we open the door for God to use us however He chooses!

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Write down some times when you have found servant-heartedness difficult to do, and identify some of the reasons why you did not want to serve. What attitudes or perspectives do you think made serving so challenging for you?
- Write down some times when you did choose to serve others. What motivated you to do that? How did those you served respond to your acts of service?
- Identify a specific area on your local campus where you sense God is leading you to serve. If that somehow does not work out, what alternative would you consider pursuing?

Chapter 17 - SNAPSHOT OF A SERVANT

“How can I serve you?” That’s rarely a question I ask. Most of the time, I’m thinking, “How can you serve me?”

But serving is a profound way to build relationships, demonstrate the nature of Jesus, and present the power of the gospel. Many youth groups send their students on service projects throughout the summer—mission trips, music and drama groups, camps, and various other opportunities—to share God’s love and have an impact on people’s lives. Those people on the receiving end and the students on the giving end benefit tremendously from these acts of unselfishness.

To change from a selfish person to one with an unselfish attitude, it will help to ask, “What does a real servant look like?” The lines can get blurry when I personalize that question and apply it to the campus I want to reach. Rarely am I loving people with completely pure motives. So, the defining question is, “*Am I serving people the way I want to serve them or the way Jesus would serve them?*”

How can we tell what a real servant looks like? One way is by the degree of sacrifice involved. Consider Jesus as Paul describes Him:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8-9)

Jesus had no selfish motives behind giving up so much. How do we become more like Him? Let’s answer that generally, but also as it applies to our campus ministry.

Serve Humbly

Humility is the first mark of servanthood. These three questions will help us sort out whether or not we are serving humbly:

- Do I care about this person?
- Am I here for this person or for me?
- Am I willing to serve even if serving this person is inconvenient?

Regarding the campus, we can discover how to demonstrate servanthood by asking and answering selfless questions. For example, what does a first-year teacher need? Certainly not another piece of advice, but rather someone humbly willing to offer help, support, and

encouragement. When we focus on sacrificially meeting another person's need, then we will know we are humble servants.

Serve Felt Needs

A servant-hearted person realizes that it's not necessarily up to them to define what someone else needs. We might think we know what's best in a certain situation, but that doesn't matter if the person being served doesn't perceive our help as actually helpful. So, it's important to consider what needs this person feels most acutely. And most often, the best way to find out is to ask them directly.

After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, angels came and "ministered to" Him (Matt. 4:11). That word is used several times in the Bible in the context of meeting physical needs. The angels weren't just encouraging Him spiritually. They were addressing His physical needs.

As Jesus' human messengers, we have the privilege of tending to the needs of people every day—as *they perceive them*. When we serve on campus, these are some of the opportunities.

- Does someone need a ride?
- Does a student need help with homework?
- Are ticket sellers needed for arts or athletic activities?
- Does the gym floor need to be swept?

You get the point. These kinds of needs are everywhere. When you become aware and act on those needs, you become a true servant.

As you observe people at school, put yourself in their place. If you were them, what would you least enjoy doing? Then volunteer to do that. You may find yourself in some thankless positions and begin to wonder why you're putting up with kids doing things like snatching water out of your hands or rearranging chairs you've just arranged. You know you're qualified for so much more. But whenever you start to think, *Why am I doing this?* go ahead and answer your own question: *Because Jesus would.*

Serve in the Small Things

Doing small things enhances our ministry in several ways. First, it keeps our hearts and motives pure. Anyone can go for glory, but it takes a sincere servant of Christ to do what others will not do.

Doing the little things also lets people know we care about them. A true servant doesn't care if they get attention and recognition, only that they express their care and concern.

And doing small things opens up greater opportunities for ministry. David took food to the front lines for his brothers and ended up defeating a giant and earning a reputation that would

validate his leadership (1 Samuel 17). In His parable of the talents, Jesus commended two faithful servants for managing and multiplying their master's money. As a result, he gave them much greater responsibilities (Matthew 25:14-30). When God sees our faithfulness in small things, He knows we're ready for more, and then He opens the way.

Serve Sensitive

Have you ever had someone breathing down your neck, bugging you by asking again and again what he can do? Irritating, isn't it? Serve, but not obnoxiously.

Jesus had some sensitive servers around Him—the women who were “watching from a distance,” following Him “to care for his needs” (Matthew 27:55). They were waiting in the wings, watching to see what His needs were before stepping in to meet them. That's sensitive servanthood.

Serve Consistently

The best way to destroy the trust you've built with the school is to “over promise and under deliver.” If people can't count on you to follow through on what you say, how can they trust you with anything else—especially when it comes to their students.

You can't do everything, so only make promises you can keep. Say no when you can't do what you're being asked to do. You aren't closing the door if you don't do everything asked of you; you're simply being realistic. But when you say you will do something, keep your commitments, no matter what—because you said you would.

Serve Open-Handedly

Servanthood costs. I remember having a group at our house the night we had new carpet installed earlier that day. One of the kids got sick to his stomach. He panicked and ran all around the house, puking as he went. We debated if we ever wanted other people's kids in our house again!

Years earlier, however, we had made a commitment not to hold our things too tightly. We wanted to take this A. W. Tozer quote seriously: “He who possesses nothing owns everything.”¹⁷ That decision was tested that night. We barely passed the test, but we never forgot it.

Serving costs, but it is always worth it when we invest in people, especially investing in the younger generation.

Serve Lovingly

Jesus washed His disciples' feet “to show the full extent of his love” (John 13:1). Even though He was and still is the Son of God, no act of love is beneath Him. Often, we have had “foot-washings” on retreats when I have washed the smelly feet of many teenagers. It always reminds me how much I love them. But beyond the symbolic action of foot washing, we have so many

opportunities to actually show students the full extent of our love by serving them. If we look for those opportunities, we will find ways to serve kids—and parents, teachers, and coaches—and experience the joy of it costing us something to please them. That’s when we show how much we care about them and love them.

Bottom line: if you keep on serving and loving students, then not only do you go from being an outsider to an insider on the campus; all of that serving also produces spiritual fruit and a lifetime of friendships. You can change the school and the students who go there from the inside—if you serve.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Write the names of three or four people in your life who have demonstrated servant-heartedness. What about them makes you think of them that way? Identify and list some of their attitudes, words, and actions that reflect their servanthood, and then resolve to further incorporate these qualities into your life and pray that God would help you do so.
- Find an accountability partner with whom you can mutually challenge and encourage each other to grow in servant-heartedness.

¹⁷ A. W . Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1948), 52.

Chapter 18 - THE CAMPUS CULTURE WE SERVE

Tony was so excited. His ministry was going well in his first full-time position as a youth pastor. Students were coming and energy was building throughout the church. But even though he and his youth group were reaching students within their relational network, so many more students in the community were not connected to any church. In fact, many people in the church and community looked down on them and kept them at a distance. He wondered how those students could be reached.

One of the students in Tony's group wanted him to meet his friend—a skater, one of those marginalized kids in the community. As Tony listened to this skater, he realized there was a huge group of kids just like him who were looking for a sense of belonging. They were considered by many to be troublemakers, but when they found out that students at Tony's church were interested in who they were and what they were doing, doors opened up. The church began a skate ministry and decided to build a place and a space for these skaters that eventually opened their hearts to the gospel.

It wasn't an easy process. They had to create a plan and a budget, negotiate with insurance companies, and build skate ramps—but they made it happen. One conversation with one student turned into "Skate Church" every Thursday with more than fifty skaters showing up. Many were looking for belonging, love, and acceptance and found it through people who decided to serve them. And many of them began their relationship with Jesus through "Skate Church!" This group went from being marginalized to being the talk of the town. Even city leaders came to see what God was doing at Skate Church.

The Ins and Outs of Student Life

Student culture is often highly stratified. Some people are "in" and others "out." It's human nature to categorize people—it happens from early childhood to old age—but in middle school and high school, when kids find themselves at the height of their insecurity, struggling hard to discover their identity and trying to connect with their peers, categorizing "in" and "out" is a big deal. Socially, cliques can create a support group for students with common interests, but they can also have the negative impact of people getting excluded.

This phenomenon of exclusion can often lead to bullying. Exclusion and rejection only reinforce students' insecurity about knowing who they are and the false self they have created. The belittling by others often results not only in them rejecting themselves, but also in them belittling and rejecting someone else. They tend to put others down in order to lift themselves up. Insecurity and exclusion that leads to rejection and/or bullying stems from students trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in.

Grasp the Complex Culture

Where, then, does a youth leader begin to connect with this complex social environment? On one hand, it's good to reach influencers—the kids everyone else seems to follow. This has been a philosophy and approach to youth ministry for years. You move with the movers. If you can impact the key leaders, others presumably will follow. The have-nots always look up to the haves, right? The cool students lead the way.

That's not always true, of course. There are plenty of students who are sure they will never fit in with the cool kids and aren't even going to try—and they may even develop animosity toward the cool kids in the process. Add to that the intensity toward diversity in our culture, which creates even more serious issues in the social environment.

Interestingly, from Jesus' point of view, the social constructs aren't so much about who the campus-wide leaders are but who the leaders of these smaller and more diverse campus groups are. We know Jesus didn't categorize people as “movers and shakers” or “dweebs.” But He often did gravitate to the marginalized—the ones no one else would engage with, the underside of society that got pushed out of the accepted social circle. He told His disciples that people would be judged according to how they ministered to “the least of these” (Matthew 25:31-46). Polite society mostly ignored the “outcasts and sinners,” but Jesus turned His focus to them, seemingly more than to anyone else.

Focus on “the Least”

Schools are full of students left in the margins. The “in” influencers still tend to be the most visible and get the most attention while the marginalized most often get disregarded and ignored. Many of those who don't fit with the popular kids have their own social group. And many students don't quite fit in with any group.

But all students, from top to bottom, struggle with their identity and place. And from top to bottom, Jesus cares about everyone equally. Yet in the Gospels, He seemed to lean in to “the least of these.” Jesus wants to reach them—through you.

When you do focus on “the least,” the results can be surprising. Chris managed the football team—a position not entirely admired by everyone else in the school. The manager is usually the person who wanted to play but wasn't quite good enough. By serving as manager, he still gets to be part of the team, but he doesn't get much recognition. The Lord showed me that I needed to serve Chris.

As chaplain of the high school football team, I would hang out at practice and be in the locker room for games. During practice and games, I sometimes helped Chris carry equipment and prepare water bottles for the players. We became friends. Two years later, Chris accepted Jesus and went on to serve as an athletic trainer at his college. He used his training skills to share the

gospel with players in a way that had a significant influence on individuals as well as the entire team. “One of the least of these” became “one of the greatest of these!”

Check Your Attitude

Beyond status and social hierarchy, the underlying issue is about attitude. Though we can’t control students’ attitudes, we can control our own attitudes. And we can influence the attitudes of the other youth leaders who go to the campus with us. We don’t need to overly concern ourselves with the way students see themselves or where they fit in the social structure, although recognizing that is helpful. We just need to think of students like Jesus thought of all people. And He thought of people others have ignored, rejected, and/or discarded.

In Jesus’ world, the ground is always level at the foot of the cross, where everyone other than Him is the “least.” That perspective leads to changed lives. When we model this to our volunteers and Christian students, they will see what we do and develop their own heart for the hurting, outsiders, and down-and-outers that they would not otherwise see. The outcomes of adopting and taking action on this attitude will become life- and ministry-transforming for everyone. In Jesus’ world, everyone is invited to the party!

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- What needs to change in your attitudes and viewpoint toward the students at your school and community for you to become more oriented toward “the least?”
- Identify at least one place on campus where you can begin to “reach the least.” Can you identify at least one person who is in “the least” category that you can get to know?
- Decide on the leaders and students you would like to join you in reaching out to “the least.” Identify the leaders and students in your ministry that you want to take with you, and together come up with three steps that it will take to move in that direction.

Section Resources

- Every Student Every School (<http://www.everyschool.com/resources>) , sponsored by the Campus Alliance, helps students and youth leaders pray for their campus and reach out to students. These excellent tools will give you what you need to map your campus and all of the campuses in your area, and to adopt your school with a "Prayer/Care/Share" strategy.
- Map Your Campus - <https://www.everyschool.com/resource/mapping-the-campus/>

- Adopt Your School - <https://www.everyschool.com/>
- Young Life Contact Work: younglifeaccess.com/contact-work
- Everyschool.com has many resources for crafting your own simple campus strategy, including the opportunity to “adopt” your school.
- John Maxwell, “Jesus’ Teaching on Servant Leadership,” www.thenivbible.com/blog/jesus-teaching-on-servant-leadership
- Every Student Every School, <http://www.everyschool.com/resources>, sponsored by the Campus Alliance, helps students and youth leaders pray for their campus and reach out to students.
- Search your school or school district website for a “Volunteer Handbook.” Many schools and districts make these available, giving more local input on how schools view volunteers and engage with them.
- John Piper, “Served in Serving Others,” www.desiringgod.org/articles/served-in-serving-others
- *Improving Your Serve* by Charles R. Swindoll
- *The Ripple Effects of Love* by Dawn Rowe

Section 4 – CONNECT STUDENTS WITH CHRIST



By spending time with students, giving of ourselves, going where we don't seem to fit, engaging in awkward conversations, breaking through relational barriers, and showing that we care, many will come to drink the living water that Jesus offers.

Section 4 – CONNECT STUDENTS WITH CHRIST

Chapter 19 - BUILD A FOUNDATION OF CONFIDENCE

One night during an inner-city riot, a young girl woke up frightened by all the noise. Forgetting that her mother was still at work, she cried out. No one answered. After what seemed like an eternity, her mother came home. The girl told her mom how terrified she was.

“I know,” her mother said, “but remember—God is always here with you.”

“But mama,” the girl replied, “I needed someone with skin on.”

That’s how we want to serve on campus—to be the presence of God with skin on. Just as Jesus was the incarnation of God on earth, we are called to the same role (John 20:21). We want students to know who Jesus is and how He can change their lives, and God communicates that message through us—not just in words but in living out the message. As Joe Aldrich once wrote, “God’s communication strategy has always been to wrap an idea in a person.”¹⁸

Our goal is not just to meet students where they are. It’s to build relationships with them, demonstrate God’s heart for them, and share with them how they can know Jesus.

The first time I walked onto campus as a youth leader, I had no idea what I was doing. Everyone could tell I was too old to be a student, and I was not dressed like a teacher. I felt as if everyone was staring at me. When I walked up to a group of students to introduce myself, they acted like I was contagious with a deadly disease. I went home feeling like a failure.

For some reason, the students didn’t care that I’d sacrificed valuable time to share eternal truth with them. In fact, they didn’t even care that I existed. I needed a crash course in self-confidence!

Before building relationships with students, you must build confidence in who you are. Three key confidence builders will lay the foundation for meaningful connections with students. We have much to learn from Jesus about this.

Know Who You Are

The story of Jesus’ encounter with a woman at a well in Samaria (John 4:1-42) gives us several clues about His ability to relate to people. One of the first things that we notice in this story is that Jesus had a firm grasp on His own identity.

When Jesus’ disciples came back with food, only to find Him talking with this Samaritan woman, they urged Him to have something to eat.

“I have food to eat that you know nothing about,” He told them (John 4:32). He knew His roots and His resources. Earlier in this Gospel, He called Himself the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God” (John 1:51; 3:16-18). He knew where He came from and where He was going.

To have the proper degree of confidence around students, you must know who you are. You are not a teacher, administrator, student, coach, staff member, or security guard. Even as a volunteer, you aren't just a volunteer. People may look at you as though you're from another planet, but you *are* from another kingdom. You're an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), a child of God, "chosen to declare the praises of the one who called you out of darkness and into the light" (1 Peter 2:9). Even when others don't think you belong, God says you do.

Know the Significance of Your Mission

Jesus said His "food" was to do the will of the one who sent Him (John 4:34). His purpose was eternally inscribed on His heart.

When you immerse yourself in God's purpose for you, generally, and in His purposes in specific situations, everything else—including eating, as Jesus showed us—becomes secondary. That kind of intensity and single-mindedness attracts people, especially young people. They may not think about this specifically or ask you about it personally, but internally they are wondering what drives you. What would cause you, an adult with no particular job description related to the school, to hang out around them? Even if they don't understand your sense of mission, they know there is something about you that causes you to be there with them.

Know Who Is in Control

Jesus never had any uncertainty about Himself personally or about His mission. No concern bothered Him about what might happen if no one accepted His Messiah-hood. No anxiety distressed Him about whether people would like Him or not. He knew His Father started this work and would complete it. He knew God was in control.

You will save yourself a significant amount of emotional stress if you realize that God started the work on your campus and will complete it, and that He has called you to join Him in it. No reaction from a student, teacher, or administrator will derail His purposes. He has a plan, and He wants you to participate in it. But, thankfully, you are not responsible for making everything work out.

Your confidence is one of the most powerful and important aspects of your ministry. Be strong in your identity as a disciple of Jesus; know the significance of the mission He has given you; and believe that the Holy Spirit is both empowering you for this mission and will oversee what happens to bring about the results He desires.

Like Jesus, you will both survive and thrive on the food He has given you—and He will give you all you need to do the work of the One who sent you.

Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Imagine walking on the campus for the first time with kids staring at you. Now come up with one Bible verse to memorize and carry with you that will remind you of who you are and what you are doing there. Some options include: Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 4:13; 4:19.
- Create a one-line “mission statement” for your campus ministry to help you remember the significance of why you are going there.

¹⁸ Joseph C. Aldrich, *Gentle Persuasion: Creative Ways to Introduce Your Friends to Christ* (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), 49.

Chapter 20 - ENTER INTO THE CAMPUS CULTURE

Jews did not look kindly on Samaritans. They saw them as half-breeds and heretics. So when Jesus “had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4), His disciples probably “had words” with Him about why He was putting himself in such an awkward, compromising position. They certainly wouldn’t have gone there on their own.

Yet Jesus headed directly into the place everyone else refused to go. It didn’t matter to Him that He wasn’t welcome, didn’t fit in, and had no relationships there. He had nothing to fear in “hostile territory.” His mission was not shaped by prejudices. He knew God loved everyone.

In many instances today, churches, Christians, and youth leaders see young people outside the church as “hostile territory”—like the disciples saw the Samaritans—and are afraid to venture in. Since we all fear the unknown, we avoid it. But Jesus did not! Instead of walking around, He took His disciples right through Samaria. And that’s what Jesus wants us to do with the campus—walk right through our fears and the social barriers and go into that territory. We need to be willing to go where others won’t go!

Step Toward Students

To connect with students, these two venues give you a very good entry:

1. *Athletic events.* Find a seat in or near the student section. Show up and look for students you know. During a break, hang out at the concession stand. Since there is plenty of socializing, just “hanging out” will give you ample opportunities to see and talk to students. If you don’t see anyone you know, introduce yourself. Doing this will put you in a great position to listen, learn, and engage.

2. *After-school hangouts.* One very good time to meet students is immediately after school. Though they can’t wait for the bell to ring, they often hang out around campus after school. Often they hang out in the same areas: locker rooms, practice fields, parking lots, in front of the school, or at bus stops.

Sometimes they regather somewhere else, a hangout close to the school like a fast-food restaurant. Wherever they are, you can hang out there too. It may seem awkward at first. If so, take someone with you. Eventually, when you see the same students there consistently, you will begin to feel more comfortable, and they will become comfortable seeing you there too.

Persevere with a Purpose

As Jesus moved through Samaria in the heat of the day, He grew tired and thirsty (John 4:6). He could have been consumed with His own need and drawn His own water and left. But He persevered through His weariness because He had a divine appointment to meet a Samaritan woman in the place of her need.

You'll have many days when distractions and interruptions keep you from going to campus. You may even feel like quitting. Sometimes you may go and vow never to return again. If you're in any kind of ministry, you'll get tired. Even Jesus did.

To be honest, ministry demands quite a bit of spiritual, mental, and emotional energy. If you need a break, take one. But once you do, decide to persevere—and keep going. Many divine appointments await you!

Play No Favorites

Jesus knew how much Jews and Samaritans despised each other, yet He willingly ventured into a taboo social situation. In the eyes of most Jews, the Samaritan woman had three strikes against her: (1) she was a Samaritan; (2) she was a woman; (3) and she had a less-than-stellar reputation. Jesus crossed numerous social barriers to meet this woman at her point of need.

You'll face social barriers on campus too. You'll find that a lot of students don't associate with peers in another group. Racial barriers, social status, and other categories that cause people to look down on others still exist. Geeks and jocks still often avoid each other; the artsy types and the conventional types don't always fit together; and kids from different economic strata are still distinguishable from each other. It's easy for some students to look at others like "Samaritans." But Jesus played no favorites.

Breaking through these barriers to build relationships on campus is a constant challenge. But regardless of their peer group, background, or perceived status, all students long for someone who cares enough to break through barriers to touch their lives. It takes time to go beneath the surface and explore their hearts, especially when they don't even know their own hearts.

As you meet students who have no idea about who they are or what's in their hearts, you get to point them to the heart of God. And regardless of their circumstances or spiritual condition, God wants you to love them all.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Decide on one group of students you want to get to know better, and write down three specific steps that could open the way for you to build relationships with them.
- Identify the barriers you see and what you will need to do to gain entrance into their world.
- Write into your schedule dates and times you will spend with students in their world—on or around their campus. Then keep those appointments with yourself for the sake of kids you don't yet know!

Chapter 21 - BECOME A FRIEND

When the Samaritan woman came to the well where Jesus had stopped to rest, He had plenty of out (John 4:4-9). No one would have considered Him rude for refusing to talk to her. That was par for the course among Jews and Samaritans, not to mention men and women. No one would have been offended. But Jesus initiated a conversation because He knew He was there for more than a breather and some water. He came for a divine encounter!

Realize that Relationships Save Everything

In many respects, unlike Jesus, we live in a non-interactive society. Plenty of people interact with strangers online, but it's not at all unusual to ignore the strangers standing and walking around us. We have become a society of very selective associations.

But to become like Jesus, we have the privilege of initiating caring conversations, knowing that each person we talk to may represent a divine appointment. You may see yourself as shy, introverted, or not a good conversationalist, but it's important to realize, as one person said, "In the end, relationships save everything." Because that's true, and if we want to be like Jesus, we must step over our internal barriers and the external barriers to initiate relationships.

Implementing some of these ideas will break down those relational barriers:

- When you go to the campus, take a partner with you. It will help you not to feel awkward and alone. As Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one, because they get a good reward for their labor."
- Ask questions—even if you can't think of anything other than, "Where's the cafeteria?" or, "Do you know where the water fountain is?" If you struggle with conversation starters, ask about their interests—what activities they enjoy, what the arts or athletics program is like, etc.
- Remember names. Use memory devices like repeating names when you are first introduced, using them in conversation, associating them with memorable people or images, writing them down later—whatever it takes. Names are critical in building relationships.
- Pray for each student by name. After a conversation, note their interests and needs. That will help you pray for them more specifically—and help you remember what to ask about next time you see them.

Be Yourself

Jesus was not afraid to be vulnerable and transparent with people. He openly admitted a need in His conversation with the Samaritan woman—"Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7). He made no effort to impress her or anyone with how important or spiritual He was. He simply acted like Himself.

Students have an amazing ability to pick up on inauthenticity. Like most other people, they are drawn to people who are real. The last thing anyone wants is for you to act like a student or be someone you are not. God reveals Himself and His love through those who can relax in His Spirit and just be themselves.

Penetrate Defense Mechanisms

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water, she put her defenses up. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (v. 9). Jesus wasn’t put off. In fact, He went straight to the heart of the matter: “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (v. 10).

Students can come across as tough and defensive, but often behind the hard exterior is a hurting heart in need of love and compassion. Sometimes those hearts have been abused. Defensive walls are a means of self-protection. When a student rejects you, it’s usually to find out what you want and if you care enough to keep coming back. You’re being tested—don’t take it personally. Build up your resistance to rejection and find ways to tear down those defensive walls.

You can do that by speaking to them every time you see them, listening to what they say, and responding to them with honest answers to their questions. And you can continue to build the relationship by showing up at their events and noticing their interests and achievements. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw them to Himself and let you know when they are ready for a conversation about Christ.

Engage in Relationship-Building Conversations

Jesus knew how to take a conversation deeper. After asking for a drink from the Samaritan woman, He told her about the living water that gives eternal life. Finding that kind of conversational bridge can quickly take your relationship with students to another level.

You can find that bridge by focusing on their interests (people love to talk about themselves), listening carefully, and diving a little deeper into their interests each time. Move from informational questions to probing questions to “feeling” questions. Doing that creates an opportunity for gospel conversations.

For example, if Elena mentions that she moved to the city because her parents got a divorce (information), ask how her mom is doing living alone (probing), then how she feels about her relationship with her dad (feeling). Eventually, you may want to ask how she’s dealing with the pain of all she’s gone through (leading to spiritual). These are the kinds of probing questions that can quickly lead to a discussion in which you can introduce the gospel.

This can happen in one conversation, but more likely it develops over several. Over time, you get a glimpse of what students’ lives are like, how they feel about their struggles, and then what they think about God. Doing this creates a natural bridge to talk about faith.

Expand Your Relationships Network

Jesus' relationship with the Samaritan woman ended up influencing an entire village. She ran back into town to tell everyone about Jesus, and they came out to see. Many of them believed (see John 4:28-30). When people encounter Jesus, word gets out.

Like the Samaritan woman and the villagers who came out to see Jesus, students thirst for living water. When someone genuinely cares and gives it to them, they will bring their friends. That creates multiplied and ever-expanding opportunities to build relationships.

As those relationships increase, you'll want to take three important relationship-advancing steps:

1. **Pursue** meaningful, moving-toward-the-gospel conversations with every student you meet every time you meet.
2. **Equip** students who begin a relationship with Jesus to [tell their story](#) and [the gospel story](#) with their friends.
3. **Engage** your students and adult youth leaders in participating in and leading discipleship groups that will rapidly expand their own contacts with students on the campus.

Give Freely of Your Time

Nothing communicates love more than time. Jesus demonstrated that by always seeming unhurried and uninterrupted. He stayed two more days in that Samaritan village to teach these new believers (vv. 39-42). Time is vital to the art of building relationships.

I've talked with students for months about things that seemed unimportant to me, but were important to them. In many instances, that time investment results in a life changed by Christ. One young man in whom I made that time investment became an intern in our youth ministry and later went on to train youth leaders in eastern Europe. Every minute spent on that relationship proved fruitful.

By spending time with students, giving of ourselves, going where we don't seem to fit, engaging in awkward conversations, breaking through relational barriers, and showing that we care, many will come to drink the living water that Jesus offers.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Write the names of all of the students you know who need to know Jesus.

- Keep in mind one student with whom you want to build a relationship, and write down four questions you can ask to move ongoing conversations toward the gospel.
- Ask several of your adult leaders and Christian students to share with you three names of students who need Jesus. Then challenge them to pray for those students, consider ways they can cultivate those relationships, and engage those students in gospel conversations. This will significantly expand the relationship network with nonbelievers.

Chapter 22 - CREATE A GOSPEL-SHARING ENVIRONMENT

“Jamal, does this make sense to you?” Keith asked.

Jamal nodded.

“Has anyone ever shared this with you before?”

“Never,” he said.

A half-hour of conversation over a Coke and curly fries had led to that point, and Jamal was genuinely amazed that God wanted a personal relationship with him. “With so many people in the world,” he wondered, “why would God want to know me?”

At one point in the conversation, Keith asked Jamal if he wanted to accept Christ, but he could tell he wasn’t quite ready. Jamal wasn’t sure about giving God certain areas of his life. So Keith gave him a copy of the Gospel of John and asked him to read it and write down any questions he had. As Keith drove home, he prayed that God would open Jamal’s heart so he would understand Jesus’ love for him.

Four months passed. Jamal and Keith talked often, but Keith never pressed him about having a relationship with Christ. Then one Sunday night, Jamal showed up at a discussion session. After listening to students talk for over an hour, Keith explained what it would mean to ask Christ into their lives and encouraged those who were ready to talk to him afterward.

Jamal did. With tears in his eyes, he told Keith he was ready and opened his heart to Jesus. Keith drove home thinking, *It doesn’t get any better than this!*

Create an Atmosphere of Love and Acceptance

When students sense that you’re more concerned about straightening out their lives than being loving and accepting, they become defensive and tune you out. So when you meet to talk about what it means to have a relationship with Christ, it’s vital to create the kind of atmosphere of love and acceptance that Jesus did in His interaction with the Samaritan woman. Here are some ways to cultivate that atmosphere:

1. Listen intently. Spend some time asking questions. Focus on their interests, not yours. Most people long to be heard and understood, so let them express themselves and make mental notes about what he or she says. Fully engage in the conversation.

2. Ask open-ended questions. Questions that begin with “are,” “is,” “will,” “do,” “has,” and “can” are closed questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no—the default responses for most students, especially insecure or less talkative ones. Instead, ask questions that begin with “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” “why,” and “how.” “Where are you going for spring break? What are you looking forward to doing there? Who will you be staying with? What is it like there?” These allow a conversation to unfold.

3. Encourage expressions of feelings. When a student mentions a significant life event or struggle—separated parents, moving into a new neighborhood, difficulty in making new friends, relationship frustrations, grades—ask questions about how they felt in that situation. “What was that like for you?” “How did you find the strength to deal with it?” “What did you say in that situation?” These kinds of questions encourage a student to open up and will make him or her feel heard, understood, and cared for.

In all your conversations with students, authentically convey your humanness, inadequacies, and vulnerabilities. Be transparent and honest (without oversharing), and genuinely share your interest and concern for them. As you invite them to share their heart with you, remember that you are not only sharing your heart with them but also the heart of Jesus for them.

This creates an environment in which His love can be clearly expressed and felt. Students are yearning for someone to love and accept them, and when they sense that you do, they will allow you to share the message of Christ. An atmosphere of openness encourages them to open their hearts to Him.

Sow the Seed of the Gospel

Once we begin to cultivate relationships with students in a way that shows them that someone cares about them, we have a meaningful context to tell them God cares about them. But we want to do more than that. We want to continue to sow the seed of the gospel into the fertile soil of their hearts. How do we do that?

At times, you may find an almost immediate, natural segue into sharing the gospel in a casual conversation with a student. In that case, do so! But be sensitive not to create an awkward situation. If that conversation is happening with a student’s friends around, he or she may be glad for others to listen in or could feel self-conscious or inhibited in responding to you. You also run the risk of being interrupted. Ideally, it’s best to have a private, focused conversation.

With Jesus as our best possible example, think about His encounter with Nicodemus in John 3. We don’t know the full background of their meeting, but Jesus and Nicodemus were together—alone. We can follow a few practical ideas from this conversation on creating the best environment for sharing the gospel.

- Block out time in your schedule to meet with students. With all of the people clamoring for Jesus’ attention, He set aside this specific time to meet with Nicodemus. We can do the same. We’re as busy as are the students we want to talk to, but by setting aside blocks of time to meet with them, we make this a priority. For example, set aside a couple of afternoons after school and some time on Saturdays. Then flex as much as you can to meet when your students are available. Do whatever works best for you and your students. When we give freely of our time and create an atmosphere of love and acceptance, we demonstrate not only that we care, but also that the God we represent cares too.

- Decide on a semiprivate (but not secluded) location—someplace the student will feel comfortable to talk freely. Avoid formal places (like an office), but also places that are too informal (like a student hangout). A quiet restaurant often works well.
- Never meet with the opposite sex alone. Too many leaders have put themselves in compromising situations or even the appearance of one, and it never turns out well. If you're meeting with a student of the opposite sex, invite a leader of the opposite sex to join you.
- Invite the student. If you have cultivated a good relationship, that student will want to spend time with you. It doesn't have to be a big deal—just ask if they want to have a Coke after school.
- Give the reason. A student may ask why you want to meet, and you can honestly say you want to get to know them better. Or you can say, "I want to get your opinion on something." If the answer is "no," don't take it personally. Spend more time building the relationship.
- Confirm the appointment beforehand. Get a phone number when you make the appointment in case something comes up. Text the night before to confirm; otherwise the student may not remember.
- Arrive 15 minutes early. Many students won't wait for an adult more than five minutes, so make sure you're there by the time he or she arrives. The last thing you want to communicate is that you have forgotten him or her.
- Never miss an appointment. If you forget, the student may say it's okay, but it will feel like you didn't care and will take a lot of effort to regain lost trust.
- Pay for the food. Have you ever met a student who doesn't love a free meal? Of course not. Plus, you're the one who asked, so make it as easy on the student as possible. (But if it's a guy, don't say you will pay until you see how much food he has ordered!)

You can imagine Jesus thinking through these steps before Nicodemus showed up. Jesus was prompt, organized, always ready to serve, and prepared to engage with Nicodemus and convey this message and more: "For God so loved the world he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but would have eternal life" (John 3:16).

These simple, practical steps will create an environment for students to open up and give you the opportunity not only to turn the conversation to Christ but also to share the gospel fully and freely in an unhurried manner, and in a quiet place and with time to open their hearts to Jesus.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- In your experience, what attitudes and approaches have you found that might cause a student to feel defensive and not feel love and acceptance? What practical steps can you take to avoid or overcome that defensiveness?
- Keep in mind one student with whom you want to build a relationship, and write one question for each area mentioned above (Information, Probing, Feeling, Spiritual) to help you engage in a relationship-building conversation that could create an opportunity for a gospel conversation.
- Think through the conversation you want to have with this student. Before you meet, write down two or three questions you will use to get into the conversation.
- Be prepared to share a gospel presentation like “Life in 6 Words” or “3 Circles.”
- Decide the next steps you will take if this student does pray to receive Christ, as well as what approach you will take if he or she is not yet ready.

Chapter 23 - PREPARE TO SHARE THE MESSAGE

Hopefully by now you've built some relationships with non-Christians on the campus and have sensed that now is the time to share the gospel with them. How do you do that? Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria was a master class in presenting Himself as the Messiah.

Notice that Jesus did not take months or even days to let this woman know who He was and invite her to receive Him as Lord of her life. Sometimes sharing Jesus takes only a matter of minutes of relationship-building preparation. Other times it takes longer. So ask the Lord for the balance between being bold about Jesus and giving space for the other person to feel comfortable about considering His claims.

Jesus began the conversation at her point of need and showed genuine concern for her as a person. He made some enticing statements that stirred up a desire in her to hear more. And He refused to rush the conversation in order to get to the bottom line. But He did keep bringing the conversation back to Himself as the Messiah.

Make Jesus Relevant

Even as believers who know Jesus meets every need, we sometimes struggle to trust Him in the midst of our challenges. Imagine how much more difficult it is for a non-Christian to take that first drink of living water. Only when they know we care about their needs and desires will they even begin to listen to our solutions.

One reason so many young people are not interested in a relationship with Christ is that they don't see how He is relevant to their lives. You can help them realize how very relevant He is by showing how He can meet their needs and longings. Walking across the relationship bridge you have built, it seems very natural to explain how they can have a relationship with Him.

Turn the Conversation to Christ

You can use these suggestions to walk across the "Jesus conversation" bridge.

1. Notice and show interest in that student's interests. As soon as the Samaritan woman realized Jesus was "a prophet," she wanted Him to settle a dispute about the right place to worship (John 4:19). Though Jesus knew she needed something else, He started with what seemed to be her interest.

Students have important questions too—like social justice, the environment, economic disparities, or something else that is world-changing. It is important to take those at face value as their real concerns. We may not agree with their ideas or think they have the best solutions in mind, but their passion usually reveals a good and true desire—like concern for others, a sense of fairness, or an awareness that something has gone wrong in the world and that there must be a solution. We know God cares about these things too, and in one way or another, the

gospel speaks to these kinds of concerns. Find ways to affirm the heart and motives behind their questions and concerns, even if you strongly disagree with the solutions they have in mind. We know that beyond these world-changing issues, their deeper needs, concerns, and desires are closer to home.

2. Find a felt need. Since Jesus was talking to a woman who had come to a well for water, thirst was an obvious need, yet He told her about a different kind of water that would satisfy her thirst forever (John 4:13-14). Not all needs will be this easy to spot, but they usually appear in what people talk about the most. So listen for topics that come up repeatedly. Notice any negative self-perceptions the student has, as well as what he or she does not say.

Take Lucas, for example. He kept talking about how he couldn't wait to get a job and be on his own. With a couple of questions, I easily discovered that he lived in a foster home in a difficult situation. Often you will discover felt needs in the painful subjects hidden just beneath the surface, and sometimes it takes more probing questions to get to deeper issues below the surface.

3. Whet their appetite. Jesus' words about "living water" were so intriguing that the Samaritan woman practically begged Him to tell her more (4:15). In doing so, He revived her hope for a solution in her life. Though she didn't know what she was looking for, she had an innate desire to quench her thirst with something deep and meaningful.

Try to create that kind of thirst in your conversations. Like the Samaritan woman and many other people, students can be fatalistic about their lives and lose hope in finding solutions. When it became clear that Lucas' father had deserted him and his family, I said, "It must be tough living without your dad, always wondering where he is. You know, I think I can help you with how that feels." That stirred up Lucas' hope, and he wanted to know more. Students tune in when we meet them at their point of need.

4. Move to the student's real need. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus for the living water, He could have immediately pointed to Himself as the water of life. She seemed ready for the gospel, and the good news was sitting right in front of her. But first He told her to go call her husband (4:16-18). He knew she had a deeper need to be addressed.

5. Keep digging deeper. It's often difficult not to rush things when someone expresses interest. We want to get them into the kingdom *now*. But Jesus was concerned about the Samaritan woman's life. She had had five husbands and was living with a man she was not married to. She needed physical water and living water, but she also had a relationship void that only God's love could fill. Only when Jesus pointed it out did she become convinced that He could fill that void in her life.

I wanted Lucas to tell me about his life when his father was home. "Was it ever happy?" I asked. He told me that even though he loved his dad, things had always been difficult. His dad had abused Lucas' sister and abandoned his mom and him. Home life couldn't have gotten much

worse. No wonder Lucas wanted to get a job and be on his own. With more sensitive but probing questions, I helped him see that what he valued—getting a job—was not what he was really looking for. What he valued wasn't giving meaning to his life. By this point, he knew something significant was missing.

You may be able to get to that point in one conversation, or it may take several conversations. But no matter how effectively you share Jesus with people, they have to come to a point where they see their real need and realize they can't meet it on their own.

Once a real need surfaces, you can share the good news of Jesus with students, and they can cross the bridge to meet Him!

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Identify one or two students you know with underlying and unmet needs.
- Write three or four questions that could help identify those needs and open the way for a “below the surface” gospel conversation.
- Prepare to give your personal testimony of how one of your needs led you to Jesus.
- Identify and order gospel-sharing tools from the list below. Study the tools carefully so you can share with ease when the opportunity comes.

Chapter 24 - TELL YOUR STORY

Vast numbers of people have never met a fully devoted follower of Jesus, much less heard their “Jesus story.” And in my experience, most believers have not been taught to share it. But it’s a powerful tool that most people, including non-Christian students, will at least find interesting. The Holy Spirit can use it to grab their attention and convict them of their own need for Jesus. That’s exactly why youth leaders and our Christ-following students must learn how to tell our stories in a clear and compelling manner.

Telling our “Jesus story” brings out the “realness” of who Jesus is here and now. Many people think Christianity is a religious system of “do’s and don’ts” rather than a vibrant, personal relationship with Jesus. Telling the gospel story becomes much more compelling when it is connected to our own personal “Jesus story.” Then people can see “Jesus in you” in flesh and blood.

The Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at the well thought of religion in terms of rules and behavior. As soon as she realized Jesus was no ordinary person, she asked Him a question about the right way to worship (John 4:19). She wanted to know the best way to earn favor with God. Instead, Jesus pointed her beyond rules and religion to a loving, intimate relationship with God. “God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth” (4:24).

What Jesus did to move this woman beyond religion to a relationship is what we want to see happen with students on every campus in America and around the world! He did it by briefly telling her His own story about His relationship with His Father and the Holy Spirit. And when she inquired about “the Messiah,” He powerfully identified Himself.

We want to help students avoid religion and discover a fresh, vital, life-changing relationship with Jesus. They will want to know what that looks like. Your testimony may be exactly what they need to hear.

Prepare to Share

Telling what God has done in your life, and students telling what the Lord has done in their lives communicates powerfully, and even more so if you’ve taught them how to do it effectively. The following suggestions will help you prepare.

1. *Begin with an interesting, attention-grabbing sentence*—something like, “All I wanted to do was play basketball . . .,” or, “When my dad and mom divorced . . .”

2. *Make one Scripture reference the centerpiece of your story.* Using more than two or three can sound overwhelming, so limit it to a couple and focus primarily on one. Examples include John 3:16; 10:10; or 14:6. For me it was Galatians 2:20 and Matthew 6:33.

3. *Build your story around a theme*—a poor self-image, a broken family, a loving family, dashed dreams, the need for love, or any other need that led you to the point of conversion. My story

included, “When I made a D in history my first semester, I felt like I was so dumb and a total failure. Though I knew about Jesus, that negative experience led me to a head-to-heart encounter with Him.”

4. *Don’t embellish.* It’s fine if you’ve never taken drugs or committed a crime. You don’t need a dramatic testimony, just a genuine one. Your experience with God’s love communicated in the power of the Holy Spirit will make your story powerful.

5. *Be honest about your problems and difficulties.* Real-life experiences will help non-Christian students identify with you.

6. *Be positive.* Negative statements about the church, organizations, or people are not compelling. Neither is preaching at people, speaking in vague generalities, or using words that non-Christians are unfamiliar with (like “saved,” being “filled with the Spirit,” etc.).

7. *Remember your story well enough that you can express it naturally.* It should not sound scripted, but it also shouldn’t sound like you’re winging it. Practice, practice, practice saying it out loud. Tell it within three minutes so that it’s focused and flows easily.

8. *Trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through you.* Ask God to give you enthusiasm and energy as you describe your experiences with Him. Believe that He will use your story to impact students’ lives.

9. *Conclude in a way that makes people want to know more,* like telling one or more specific ways Jesus changed your life.

Vital Ingredients

Not every “Jesus story” needs to be comprehensive, but most of the time you will want students to get a full picture of how Jesus changes someone’s life, whether through you telling your story or you teaching your students how to tell their story. Be sure to include these vital ingredients as often as you can.

1. *Your life before Christ.* What problems or needs illustrated the sinfulness or brokenness in your life? Feelings of anxiety, emptiness, hopelessness, unhappiness, or futility, and/or experiences like destructive habits or dysfunctional relationships are common and relatable. Focus on one or two, relate one experience that communicates how you felt during that time, and describe the sequence of events that brought you to a point of knowing you needed God.

2. *How you came to know Christ.* Describe the specific circumstances surrounding your experience of asking Jesus into your life—how you did it and what that experience was like.

3. *How Jesus changed your life.* Tell some kind of before-and-after story—at least one specific way your life has changed and how it relates to that problem you communicated before. Give some clear and simple illustrations of how your life has been different since giving your life to Christ.

Preparing your story will take some time and effort, but it will be worth it. It will give you a powerful tool you can use again and again to lead students to Christ. Because your journey with God is meaningful and relatable, they will begin to envision how the Lord can change their lives too, and many will begin a life-changing and eternal relationship with Him.

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Recall a couple of testimonies you have heard that most impacted your life. Think about why what that person said affected you the way it did. Then think about your own story and how your story can affect others.
- Write out your story following the guidelines in this chapter. Prepare it so you can present it in three minutes. If you have done this before, do it again to refresh what you want to communicate and refine your presentation. Use the outline above: your life before Christ, how you came to know Christ, and how Christ changed your life.
- And remember: Later on, you will show your students how to do what you just did!

Chapter 25 - MAKE THE GOSPEL CLEAR

All of the time and energy you have invested in connecting with students takes you to a pivotal point: leading them to trust and follow Jesus. One of the greatest perks in youth ministry is for students to have the opportunity to hear a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus and then to respond to that invitation and become a disciple of Jesus. The ripple effect from that can be utterly amazing.

Bill played baseball for the school team. I met with him and some other guys every week to explore who Jesus is. As a result, Bill opened his heart to Jesus and began to grow in his faith. When he graduated, he went back to his high school and did what I did with him—he gathered a group of guys to explore who Jesus is.

One of the guys in his group was Foley. Through Bill, Foley opened his heart to Jesus. Bill became one of my best friends and has spent his life introducing people to Jesus and discipling them like I did with him. And then Foley did the same. He became a pastor, and then later he became the leader of his church denomination's worldwide fellowship. When you make the gospel clear, and it resonates with the younger generation, you never know how the Lord will use that to change students' lives, and then how they in turn will change their worlds!

Sharing Jesus is ultimately important, so how do we do that in the clearest and most compelling way possible?

Transition to the Gospel

Near the end of Jesus' long conversation with the Samaritan woman, after drawing her in with the idea of "living water" and explaining that life with God involves a relationship rather than religious principles, He finally told *His* story. He revealed His identity as the Messiah that she and so many others had been looking for (John 4:25-26).

Like Jesus, once you tell your personal "Jesus story," you can immediately transition from yourself to focus on the person you're talking to. Do that by asking if they have a "Jesus story" like that. Whether they answer "yes," "no," or "maybe," go ahead and ask them if you can share a simple, easy-to-understand presentation of the gospel. To make this presentation both verbal and visible, have a good gospel presentation tool in hand. (Find good ones in the resources below.) Make sure you read through the one you use several times and, for all practical purposes, memorize it.

You can follow these steps to make the transition from your testimony to the gospel:

- Ask if he or she has experienced a personal relationship with Jesus like the one you just described.
- If so, ask him/her to share their story with you.

- If not, ask directly if he or she would like to begin that relationship now. If you have come to this point, rarely does anyone say “no” to your question.

Ask the Important Question

Then ask point blank: “Would you sincerely like to open your heart to Jesus now?” If you sense a genuine desire to do so, lead in a prayer to receive Christ that is in the gospel presentation. The prayer will say something like this:

Jesus, I need You, and I want You to take control of my life. I admit that I have tried to live life on my own, but because I am a sinful person, I am not able to do that. I need You, Jesus, who died on the cross to save me from my sin and from myself, and who rose from the dead so your Spirit can live in me. Now I invite You to enter my heart and my life, and take control of my life now. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Listen for the Response

People who want to receive Christ have an awareness of their own sin and an appreciation for what Jesus did on the cross. You may not always see these signs visibly because people can respond emotionally in so many different ways. So you can simply ask: “Were you sincere when you prayed that prayer?”

Listen carefully to the response. If he or she responds with something like: “I try to be good” or “I go to church,” that reveals that this person has not quite yet grasped the point. But if their prayer was sincere, they will have a desire to know more or to ask searching questions. Take them at their word, and then in your follow up, build on the prayer that was prayed. A variety of feelings can express themselves, but usually when people come to grips with God’s unconditional love, they have some kind of feelings about that. Then just ask them to share their feelings.

Sometimes you can get students to say or pray just about anything, but it means nothing if the Holy Spirit has not drawn them to follow Jesus. So be patient. If the student isn’t ready, don’t push it. Encourage them to think about it for a few days and then get back together to talk some more. That takes the pressure off and keeps the door open for more conversations.

Those who do pray to receive Christ, whether initially or after considering it for a time, need to get started in growing in their relationship with Jesus. In the next few articles, we will discover how to practically get them on the road to becoming a passionate follower of Jesus!

Your Next Steps

We encourage you to keep a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

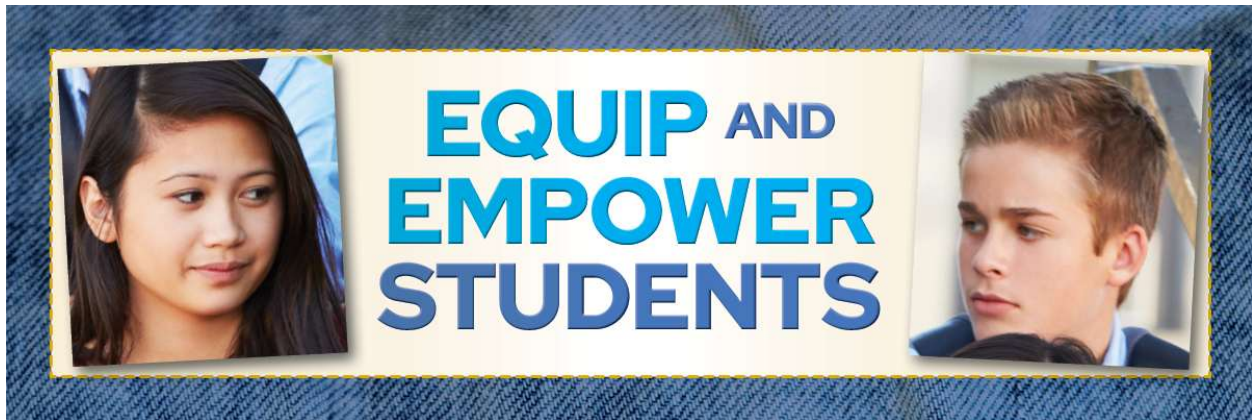
- Read through "3 Circles" or "Life in 6 Words" (or one of the other gospel presentations you chose) several times to prepare yourself to go through it again during your next appointment. Doing this will strongly reinforce your presentation.
- Set up your next appointment as soon as possible.
- Write a summary of the key points of your gospel-sharing experience. Recall things like the questions you asked to create an environment of love and acceptance, how you turned the conversation to Christ, what the student's real needs and real feelings were, how you felt about sharing your story and the gospel story, and the response to it. Decide what changes or improvements you would like to make for your next appointment.

Section Resources

- Go to barrystclair.com/books to download free:
 - *Jesus No Equal*
 - *Jesus No Equal Journal*
- Steiger is a ministry that equips and mobilizes Christians to understand youth culture and effectively engage with and reach young people with the gospel: see www.steiger.org
- *Not Beyond Reach* by Aaron Pierce.
- Young Life Contact Work: younglifeaccess.com/contact-work
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Student's Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>
See "Tell Your Story" on pages 65-68 for more on learning how to share your testimony effectively
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader's Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>
- "3 Circles" gospel presentation and app: <https://www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/> and "3 Circles" Evangelism Kit <https://nambstore.com/products/3-circles-evangelism-kit-e-and-l> (free download)
- "Life in 6 Words," Dare 2 Share, www.dare2share.org
- Go to barrystclair.com/books to download free:
 - *Giving Away Your Faith*, an entire book for you and your students on preparing and practicing sharing Jesus with others.
- Dare to Share "Before-Then-After" Digital Curriculum, <https://store.dare2share.org/products/before-then-after-digital-curriculum>. In one lesson,

Before-Then-After helps your students understand the value of their salvation story and then tell it.

Section 5 – EQUIP AND EMPOWER STUDENTS



Jesus always had time for relationships. No matter how many large crowds gathered around Him, He consistently gave people His time and attention. We see this when He called His disciples individually, by name; when He cast demons out of Mary Magdalene; in His nighttime conversation with Nicodemus; and when He called Zacchaeus down from a tree, healed a paralytic, and cast demons out of a man.

Section 5 – EQUIP AND EMPOWER STUDENTS

Chapter 26 - CULTIVATE A ‘NEW BELIEVERS’ COMMUNITY

If you look across a barren landscape on a cold winter day, you won’t see any green foliage flourishing anywhere—unless there’s a greenhouse somewhere on that landscape and you are able to step inside. There you will find all kinds of plants that can grow in this warm, bright environment. What’s the difference? The conditions outside the greenhouse do not promote growth, whereas the conditions inside it do. Any plant rooted and nurtured within it has a chance not only to survive, but also to thrive.

That’s what new believers need. In the cold, barren, often harsh, secular world and in a school environment that can be withering, how wonderful to have a spiritual “greenhouse” where students can grow roots and thrive. If they are left exclusively in their old environment and don’t receive the nurture they need to grow, they will most likely wither spiritually or even return to their old ways of living and thinking. A supportive spiritual community—where new believers are welcomed, faith is contagious, and discipleship is emphasized—is vital to their growth.

Following up with new Christians includes many responsibilities, and it’s easy to focus primarily on teaching them the truths that will help them understand the Christian life and grow deeper in it. But it’s just as important to help them find their place in the family of God.

Over the years, I have seen many people make a decision to follow Jesus. Some have grown while others have given up and turned back to the world. The common thread for those who grow in their relationship with Jesus is getting plugged into a local fellowship of loving Christians who care about them. That’s the environment in which God’s Word and their faith takes root in their lives. Follow-up ends and disciple-making begins when a new believer becomes part of a vibrant Christian fellowship.

Not all churches and youth groups are naturally “new believer friendly,” so you will want to take steps to make sure you help new Christians find the kind of environment where they can thrive. Aim to make your youth group a spiritual greenhouse—a warm, bright atmosphere that stimulates growth. Here are some ways you can facilitate that:

Create an Entry Place for New Christians

Often churches and youth groups pick up certain lingo, cultural habits, behavioral patterns, and programs that only Christians understand. To a new believer, this can look like a foreign culture. Ask yourself how you can set aside Christian jargon and communicate in easy-to-understand terms and language.

Years ago at my church, our youth group created an entry point for new believers called “The Breakfast Club.” We provided a delicious breakfast on Saturday mornings and talked about Jesus. We had gathered their questions when we started and then answered them in the context of a book, *Jesus: No Equal*, (<https://www.barrystclair.com/books>) designed specifically

for this purpose. (You can download free as many of these books as you need at barrystclair.com/books.)

Develop an Inclusive Environment

Train your students to reach out to nonbelievers and new believers. Students tend to be cliquish, so your youth group will need to be intentional about opening up and helping new believers feel welcome. When newcomers arrive, they need someone to talk to them. Just as you want your students to build relationships with non-Christians, help them to know how to initiate relationships with new Christians.

An environment of reaching out to new Christians actually begins much earlier—when they were not yet Christians. Ideally, your students have been praying for their non-believing friends in a [prayer triplet](#) and at least one person has shared Christ with them. Ask those with a connection to any new believer to bring that person into a Christian environment—to youth meetings and/or church. Look for ways to include them in every way you can. The bottom line: surround newcomers with loving Jesus followers.

Encourage Your Students to Invite Their New Christian Friends Into the Youth Ministry and the Church

If you train them to know what to do, they will quickly grow comfortable with it. Ask them to make sure new believers have a ride to youth activities. Encourage them to invite their friends several days in advance, call them the night before to remind them, spend time with them when they come, introduce them to others—as a friend, not as a new believer—and include them in whatever social activities your students do after meetings.

It's also important to ask new believers about their experience at church. What did they get out of it? What can they put into it? You'll get some insights into what they need in a church as well as convey the message that church life is important.

At first your students need to take the initiative to provide a way to get their new Christian friend to student gatherings. But over time, your students can let their new Christian friends take the initiative to get to youth meetings and church services on their own. And as they do, encourage them to bring friends or family members who need to know Jesus.

Help New Believers Get Into a Discipleship Group

Small groups deepen relationships, provide accountability, and create a natural environment for encouragement and growth. A discipleship group involves students in a deeper level of engagement with Jesus, in a deeper concern for friends who need Jesus, and in due time leading their own discipleship groups—becoming “disciples who make disciples.”

When a student has progressed from being uninformed about God and His Word to making a decision to follow Jesus, growing in faith, engaged in a disciple-making group, and being

incorporated into the family of God, you can step back and, with great pleasure, know that God has done a miracle and is producing fruit that will remain. What higher calling or great joy could you possibly have?

Mobilize Your Adult Leadership Team

Let's say 50 students come to Christ. Who is going to follow up with them and disciple them? By arranging and engaging your adult leaders to gather a small group of these new believers, not only will you multiply your time by the number of trained leaders mobilized, but you will also have these students involved in their first discipleship group.

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Reread the five strategies above and decide on several practical steps for making your youth group more new-believer friendly. Share these steps with adult and student leaders in your church and ask them to work with you to create a welcoming, nurturing environment.

Chapter 27 - INVEST YOUR TIME WISELY

One of the greatest gifts you can give a new believer friend is your time. Students who have entered into a new relationship with Jesus most often have plenty of questions. Most of them know their lives will be very different now. They need someone to walk with them in their new life.

You value your time, and so does your new Christian friend. As a new believer, he or she needs to be nurtured and rooted in the basic truths of following Jesus. As a student, the time and opportunities for doing that are limited. So you will need to maximize the time you spend with those who have recently prayed to receive Christ—for their sake and yours.

Your follow-up conversations between and during your weekly sessions provide a great time to answer questions and teach them the basics of what the Christian life looks like. Leading them through the sessions of *Getting Started* (see Resources below) will help you do that.

Consider these practical suggestions to increase the value of your time investment, both with new believers and in a Discipleship Group:

Stay On Topic

Off-topic conversations can lead to some interesting interactions, and there is a place for that. But it's generally better to have a plan and then deviate from it only if necessary. Defer off-topic conversations until after the group time.

Make Notes

Keep a record of each appointment with notes on their answers given to questions of both on-topic and off-topic conversations, and jot down their comments/insights into how they are experiencing their new life in Christ. Then, from those notes, decide what you need to bring up the next time you meet.

Call and/or Text Often

During the first week after a new believer has prayed to receive Christ, text or call several times. Ask if you can help or answer any questions generally or questions from *Getting Started*.

Be Available

Let your new believer friend know you're available to talk if they need to call with any question or want to get together. Make sure they have your number.

Answer Questions

When a new believer asks a question, answer it specifically. Don't pretend to know answers you don't actually know; help find the answers together. *Giving Away Your Faith* is a good resource

for answers to the seven most-asked questions by new Christians. You can download this book for free (see Resources below).

Pray Diligently

Ask God to give your new Christian friend a growing hunger and thirst to follow Jesus and to get to know Him better every day.

Be Patient

Growth takes time. Let new Christians grow at God's rate, not yours. New believers progress in different ways. Some have an initial growth spurt and then seem to stagnate. Some start slowly but then "get it" and take off from that point forward. Sometimes new Christians seem to not grow very quickly but are blossoming in ways that aren't very evident on the surface. There is no template for the rate of spiritual growth. All you can do is invest in that person and then let the Lord produce fruitfulness in His timing. Realize that you may be just one of several people He has put in their path to help them grow. Whatever their response, continue to be a friend!

Sometimes this is the way it works: Once I ran into a guy four years after I had led him to Christ. I had assumed he had lost interest in growing spiritually. To my surprise, he had met some people in college who invested their time in him, and together they shared the love of Christ with non-Christians through music and personal testimonies. "I will never forget that day when you led me to Christ," he said. "It changed my whole life."

Let that encourage you to keep at it. You don't know how your investment of time will pay off, but God has promised to honor your faithfulness. Keep communicating and connecting, be patient and available. Whether you see the evidence right away, later, or never, keep praying for God to work powerfully in their lives. He will. He wants to do that even more than you want Him to!

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Give your time freely, knowing that investing your time in relating to nonbelievers or in following up new believers is never a waste of time.
- Download and become familiar with *Getting Started* and the *Hard Questions: Answering Questions Non-Christians Ask* in *Giving Away Your Faith*.

Chapter 28 - GET NEW BELIEVERS STARTED

Over several months, I spent time building a relationship with Cameron. Then I shared the gospel with him when I thought he was ready. He prayed to accept Christ. Everything about his response seemed genuine, and he appeared to be sincere. But his relationship with Christ never went further than that prayer.

Brianna came from a nominally Christian background. Though her parents had never shown any interest in spiritual matters, she jumped at the opportunity to receive Jesus. She showed a consistent hunger to grow from that day forward, asked lots of questions, and worked through several personal issues. She made Jesus the center of her life and went on to lead others to Christ in high school and college.

Why do some students who accept Christ grow rapidly and others stagnate almost from the start or along the way? There is no formula for getting a student to mature spiritually. Sometimes the reason some grow and some do not is a mystery. We know God wants everyone to know Him and to grow in their relationship with Him, but He doesn't force anyone to grow. Each and every person has to make ongoing, daily decisions for the rest of their lives to either follow Jesus or not. As leaders, then, what is our role in helping students get started and keep growing in their journey with Jesus?

My friend Keith explained it this way:

Years ago, my wife and I had a tomato-growing contest, and the stakes were high: the loser had diaper-changing duty for a month. My wife spent an hour prepping her square-foot patch of ground with potting soil, fertilizer, and plenty of water, while I watched in amusement. When she was done, I grabbed a teaspoon, dug a hole three inches deep, stuck my tomato plant in it, covered it with soil, and flooded it with water and verbal encouragement. (Yes, I spoke to my tomato plant.)

Over the next month, she pampered her plant while I ignored mine. I trusted nature to take its course; she worked with nature for greater results. Eventually the difference was obvious. My tomatoes were green, the size of acorns, and hers were big, red, and juicy. The lesson was reinforced every time I took out the diapers.

Students respond like the tomato plants. We can't make them grow, but we can create an environment that encourages growth. As Jesus promised, what is planted in good soil produces a bountiful crop (Matthew 13:23).

The Significance of a Relationship

Jesus always had time for relationships. No matter how many large crowds gathered around Him, He consistently gave people His time and attention. We see this when He called His disciples individually, by name; when He cast demons out of Mary Magdalene; in His nighttime conversation with Nicodemus; and when He called Zacchaeus down from a tree, healed a

paralytic, and cast demons out of a man. When the Samaritan woman believed in Him and ran to tell everyone else in the village, He stayed for two days to teach her and other new believers so they could begin to grow. Almost every page in the Gospels shows us how Jesus focused in on individual people.

It is easy to view a student's prayer to receive Jesus as the end of the process, but it's really just the beginning. Just as when a new baby is born into a family, the parents have a significant responsibility to care for and guide that baby to grow into a strong and mature adult. So it is when someone is born into God's family.

The Effectiveness of a Good Plan

Healthy spiritual growth requires following a good plan. With a haphazard approach, a new believer's life will likely not change significantly. Like the tomato plants, lack of nurturing and letting nature take its course is not a wise strategy. We can trust God to work in a new believer's life. Yet He almost always does His work through His people. God entrusts us with the amazing privilege of guiding new believers to grow.

Paul put it this way:

We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy he mightily inspires in me. (Colossians 1:28-29)

How do we do this effectively? What is the goal? Again, Paul gives us direction:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

Begin this adventure with new believers by addressing their felt needs: *What will my friends think? What about my parents? What if I do something wrong? Will Jesus leave me? What is this new life going to look like?* Raise these questions for them and with them, giving them the opportunity to express their fears, doubts, and apprehensions. But also teach them the basic truths about following Jesus:

- What happened when I accepted Christ?
- How do I get to know God?
- How do I tell other people?
- How do I connect with other Jesus followers?

What happens if I mess up?

- How will my life change?

A valuable tool to get them plugged into the life and resources God has for them is *Getting Started*. This small book covers the basic truths of growing in Christ and most of the common questions new believers have (see Resources below). It will help you walk through these basic truths with your new disciples.

Using the *Getting Started* book will quickly accelerate the growth process. Plan your first *Getting Started* meeting as quickly as possible and then, if possible, meet six times in the next six weeks. Use these simple, practical guidelines.

1. Bring your weekly goal clearly into focus. If you know your goal for each meeting, you will be confident about what you want to accomplish. What do you want this new believer to understand as a result of this meeting?

2. Get into the Bible immediately. As soon as people accept Christ, they need to start reading God's Word quickly and regularly. Give them a paperback Bible and ask them to start reading 1 John that night. Show them where 1 John is. Call them the next day to see if they did the reading. If not, do it with them on the phone. If they continue to struggle with doing the reading, call them every day and do it with them. Encourage them to ask you questions about what they read. If they don't have any, ask them questions.

3. Give your new disciple focused attention quickly. For new believers, many questions immediately come to mind: "What will my friends think of me?" "How am I supposed to talk and act?" "How will my parents respond?" They have many legitimate questions. By answering them, you communicate that you care and are available to help. The first few days after a decision for Christ are very vital, so find time to talk or at least text as often as possible that first week. After that, get in a rhythm of communication that doesn't smother them but keeps the two of you in close touch.

4. Find a quiet place to meet. In your follow-up conversations, find an informal place that is convenient for both of you.

5. Follow a simple format. You can shape the conversation for greatest effect by following a simple structure:

- *Personal:* Check in on how they are doing, what is going on in their world.
- *Progress:* Ask how they are doing with grasping and applying what they have been reading in the Bible and learning about Jesus. Go through one session in *Getting Started* at each meeting.
- *Problems:* Encourage them to talk about struggles: their personal life, family, friends, school, and other significant issues.
- *Prayer:* Pray with them and for them about what was discussed above and about whatever large or small concerns they want to pray about. After a couple of follow-up sessions, encourage them to pray.

If you take these steps with your new believer friends and go through the six sessions of *Getting Started*, they will be off to a great start and begin to grow deeper in their new, life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Next, take the steps outlined in this article to continue with your discipleship group—to “make disciples” as Jesus challenged us to do.

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Download two free *Getting Started* books, one for you to read through and one for your new believer friend. Make notes on how you will communicate these significant first steps in order to help your new believer friend grow.
- Plan and start your six weekly meetings.
- Keep track daily of your new believer friend with calls and texts.
- Prayerfully consider others who would benefit from one-on-one or group conversations with you. If a few students decide to follow Jesus, consider an entire group led by you or one of your trained leaders.

Chapter 29 - TAKE PRACTICAL STEPS TO MAKE DISCIPLES

When I equip people to disciple others, I like to ask them, “Can you read?” If they can, they can lead a discipleship group. I often make simple things way too complicated, but disciple-making doesn’t have to be complicated. God has an amazing knack for putting the cookies on the lower shelf for people like me.

Engaging students in the “go and make disciples” mandate from Jesus naturally leads us to the next step of their spiritual growth—discipleship. In time, making disciples leads to multiplying disciples and fulfilling Jesus’ strategic plan to reach “all nations.”

To make disciples you simply start a discipleship group, either with new Jesus followers or with ones who have already been participating in your youth group. You and other adult leaders you have invested in can follow these clear-cut, practical steps to begin a disciple-making group.

Pray

This step serves as a reminder that without God’s presence and power we don’t accomplish anything of eternal value. Invite the presence and power of God into everything you do.

Select

Ask the Lord, “Who do You want in this group—who is open and hungry to know You?” The ideal size is four to eight, no more than ten. Once you have some direction on this, meet with each person individually. In that meeting give them a strong challenge about this opportunity to focus on and grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Challenge

Some people have apprehensions about inviting others to join them in the disciple-making adventure. That’s understandable, but that kind of apprehension doesn’t come from God. You may think of many reasons why someone would not want to do this. Resist those thoughts.

Challenge each person to pursue God’s vision for his or her life. When you meet with each one, open your Bible to Matthew 4:19, read it, then look that person in the eyes, and say, “I see God’s potential in you. He has such a great purpose for your life. I want to help you discover how to follow Jesus and to fish for people. That’s why I want you in this group.”

View the group as a long-term process—hopefully you will disciple these people in some way for the rest of your life! And potentially you will work with this particular group over the next months or few years.

Commit

Once you challenge each person individually, meet as a group. In a relaxed environment, with some food included, discuss the following issues:

- *The cost*: “We will meet one hour every week at _____. I am asking you to pay a price, so to speak, to join this group. If you commit, you will need to attend every week and do all of the assignments each week.”
- *The benefit*: “This group will help you to become a man/woman of God. You will move toward maturity in Christ, and you will become a leader who helps others trust and follow Him.”
- *The commitment*: Give each one the first *Moving Toward Maturity* book—*Following Jesus*. (See Resources below and take them through the process of downloading the free book). You can say: “This book will guide you and our group each week. As part of our commitment, you must come prepared. Turn to page 11 in *Following Jesus* so we can understand clearly our commitments to each other.” Read the commitments out loud. Then during the first two or three group meetings, reread the commitments to them each time. Ask different ones to read each point. By doing this, they grasp the seriousness of their commitment.

Prepare

Prior to the first group meeting, several actions need to occur for you and your group to come prepared.

Use the downloadable *Moving Toward Maturity* books with the long-term process in view. (See Resources at the end of the Section.) The *Moving Toward Maturity* series, five books of ten weeks each, will take you on a stair-step course of maturing your group in Christ. Each book builds on the previous one.

- *Following Jesus* builds a solid foundation for a life-changing relationship with Christ and for becoming a disciple of Christ. (You will want to get your own copy of *Following Jesus*. Go through it just like your disciples go through their books.)
- *Spending Time Alone with God* deepens each person’s relationship with Jesus by learning how to spend time with Him.
- *Making Jesus Lord* challenges each person to obey Jesus and to give Him control in day-to-day issues.
- *Giving Away Your Faith* guides each person into the wild adventure of overcoming his or her fears and taking the risk to boldly communicate Christ.
- *Influencing Your World* shows the group members that they can become influential leaders through loving people and serving the needs of the people around them.

Four additional free downloadable books—two for you as the leader and two for your students—will supplement the disciple-making process:

- *Moving Toward Maturity INDEPTH Leader's Guide*, will give you very specific and detailed guidance for each chapter in the MTM books so you can lead a lively and life-changing discipleship group.
- *Moving Toward Maturity BRIEF Leader's Guide—Practical Steps for Disciple-Making* offers a more general and overarching directional approach to leading your group.
- *Time Alone with God Notebook* gives your students the practical tools and a daily journal to start their lifetime adventure of daily spending time alone with God. I highly recommend that in your first group meeting all of you download this book.
- *Getting Started* helps new believers successfully begin their walk with Christ.

Going through all of these books will take two-plus years. If your group is younger teenagers and you begin while they attend middle school, they will finish in two years. Somewhere along the way they will begin to disciple a younger group of students—multiplying disciple-makers!

Lead

The success of the group depends not only on the curriculum, but even more on the way you lead. Build the relationships. Keep your disciples focused. Follow these guidelines to structure the group:

- *Decide*. Work with the group to determine the time, place, length of meeting, and size of the group. Again, four to eight people is ideal. Each book takes at least ten weeks to complete.
- *Prepare*. At this age, the tendency is not to prepare. You can help them come prepared by calling them a couple of days before the meeting to ask them if they have done the assignments. If they have not prepared, ask them if they need help. If they do, go over the assignments with them. If they come unprepared, meet with them personally during the week to help them prepare. Do this until they get in the habit of it.
- *Focus*. Begin each meeting by reminding them of the purpose of the group. Memorize Matthew 4:19 and say it to each other weekly.
- *Review*. For the first two weeks, go over the commitments on page 11 of *Following Jesus*, and the same page 11 in all of the other *Moving Toward Maturity* books. Again remind them to come prepared. Each week ask them to review one specific insight that God taught them the previous week and one specific way they applied that insight.
- *Pray*. After reminding them of their purpose and reviewing their insights, divide them into prayer triplets. Keep them in the same groups of three for several weeks, then switch. If the group doesn't divide exactly in threes, pray in twos.
- *Discuss*. Spend at least thirty to forty minutes going through the material related to the book. When they raise topics outside of the focused discussion, engage them, but do not get derailed.

Discuss those topics later. At the same time encourage them to talk. Resist the temptation to lecture. Let them do most of the talking. A fun “heads up” —you will have plenty of joking and laughing!

- *Share*. Save time each week to talk about the personal issues and the questions they raise. At first the conversations will be on the surface, but as the group grows closer they will openly discuss their issues. If time becomes a problem, invite them to meet outside of the group time to continue—either as a group or one on one.
- *Involve*. Once the group begins, involve them in doing ministry outside the group—take them with you when meeting a need, sharing Christ with their friends and other students, going to the inner city, doing a local missions project, and/or taking a mission trip in country or overseas.
- *Multiply*. At some point, after you have gone through the first couple of books, determine if and when they are ready to begin to have their own disciple-making group with some younger students. You can equip them to do this by following what is in this article and from you own experience.

As you follow these steps, the Lord will use you with your group and those they influence in ways you cannot even imagine now!

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Pray through and review this article as you take notes about your specific plans to begin a disciple-making group.

Section Resources

- Go to barrystclair.com/books to download free:
 - *Jesus: No Equal*
 - *Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry Online*. One session in this 8-session strategy for youth leaders is “Build Leaders.” In it, you will discover how to begin and lead your Leadership Team.
 - *Getting Started*
 - *Giving Away Your Faith*
 - *Building Leaders*, books 1-3

- All nine of the *Moving Toward Maturity* books suggested in this article.
- *Parent Fuel* (See chapter 10 for more indepth information on discipling your own children and their friends.)
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Student’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>

Section 6 – EXPAND YOUR CAMPUS LEADERSHIP TEAM



**Our coaching job as youth leaders is to continually prepare them for the “real game”—to instill in them fierce desires: to become more like Jesus every day and to do what Jesus did—
“to seek and to save the lost”!**

Section 6 – EXPAND YOUR CAMPUS LEADERSHIP TEAM

Chapter 30 - SET THE STAGE FOR STUDENTS TO REACH THEIR CAMPUS

One question asked often: “How do I get my students motivated to share Christ?” Students who do talk about Jesus with their friends have two characteristics in common: A daily relationship with Jesus, and a desire to live out and speak about their relationship with Jesus with their friends. Equipping our students to embrace those two characteristics unleashes their motivation! But how do we get them there?

Practicing then Playing

In any sport, intense preparation leads to winning. Preparing students to engage in the fierce activity of consistently sharing Jesus with their friends will motivate them toward that goal. But then we must create “real game” situations for them to put their preparation into action. Sure, practicing a sport is fun for a while, but then it’s time to “play the game”.

In so many youth ministries, honestly, weekly youth group meetings are just more “practice...practice...and more practice.” When do your students get into the rough and tumble, fierce intensity, adrenaline-flowing heat of the faith-sharing game—scared to death, not sure they can do it, yet stepping out and boldly talking about Jesus with their friends? Living out the gospel certainly involves training, but it also calls for putting that training into action. If we structure our youth ministry activities to spend less time in our “practice sessions” and more time in the “live action of the game”, then our students will become highly motivated and passionately enthusiastic about Jesus and about sharing their faith.

Think about it this way: The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee share close geographical proximity, and even resemble each other in many ways. However, they are radically different. One is like its name implies—dead...nothing can live in it. The other is fresh and full of life. The Dead Sea only has water flowing in—with no outlet to keep it fresh and alive. The Sea of Galilee has water flowing in and out—keeping it fresh, vibrant and alive.

If students only “take in” without ever “flowing out,” they become stagnant—often resulting in being bored and dropping out. They need an outlet for their faith. Where can they flex their spiritual muscles by boldly stepping out and sharing Jesus with their friends? How can that happen? It happens by praying for friends who need Jesus, by mentioning the name of Jesus—out loud and often, by standing for their faith against opposition, and then by seeing their non-believing friends decide to trust and follow Jesus! That’s when boring practice turns into exciting real game action! That’s when the Dead Sea becomes the Sea of Galilee! For students following Jesus, life doesn’t get any better than that!

Preparing for a Real Game Environment

Jesus made it very clear what His “end game” and our “end game” is: “to seek and to save the lost.” Our coaching job as youth leaders is to continually prepare them for the “real game”—to instill in them fierce desires: to become more like Jesus every day and to do what Jesus did—“to seek and to save the lost”! Doing that will guide them toward God’s desire to reach their friends who desperately need Jesus. For that to happen we need to create the right environment.

These powerful principles will create the kind of environment that will help them to switch from “practice mode” to “game mode.”

1. Practice Setting the Pace. All leaders can fall into the trap of telling people how to do things without doing them ourselves. Yet leaders are pacesetters. And Christian leaders set the pace in every area of the Christian life. Communicating Christ to others is one of those areas. And when we do that, then our students catch our enthusiasm, and much more readily share their faith with their friends, classmates and teammates. Our example sets the pace!

2. Pray Like Students’ Lives Depend on It. Someone once said, “Prayer is not preparation for the battle, prayer is the battle.” If leaders and students are trying to share their faith, or sharing it and not seeing people respond positively to Jesus, then perhaps it’s because we try to share Christ without covering our efforts in prayer. Throughout history prayer has lit the fire of evangelism and revival. And that reality will be true in your ministry as well.

You can ignite that spark with your students using this strategy that Jesus strongly encouraged:

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
Again, truly I tell you that if two of you agree about anything they ask for,
it will be for them by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.
(Matthew 18:18-20)

We can practically and personally express Jesus’ prayer strategy this way:

3 Christians pray
3 times a week for
3 non-Christian friends

Practically, the students in this “prayer triplet” agree to hold each other accountable to pray for and with their prayer partners three times a week. They can choose the time and place, and do it in person, online, or on the phone. By doing this for a school semester they will see the Lord answer many prayers in the lives of these nine people they pray for. Once they do this for at least a semester, then they can decide to renew their commitment and/or switch prayer partners. Either way they keep on praying...and sharing their faith.

[You can find more guidance on how to structure this by reviewing Section 2 – [Embrace God’s Heart for the Campus](#), and in *An Awesome Way to Pray* (see Resources at the end of the Section.)]

When students ask God to accomplish His purposes in the lives of their friends, they will see the Lord work in amazing ways. Keep reminding them that they need to follow up their prayers by allowing God to use them when they share their faith. They will come alive with enthusiasm as they see their prayers for non-believers answered.

3. Plan with a Purpose. You can create a “snowball effect” of students’ praying and sharing their faith by the way you plan your student gatherings. Evaluate by asking yourself: “Really, what are we trying to do here?” Consider these questions as you answer that question.

- Do we plan according to a well-stated “Mission Statement” like: “Our vision and mission: ‘To lead students to trust and follow Jesus and to make disciples?’”
- Are our gatherings conducive to leading non-believing students to know Jesus?
- Do we have a healthy balance between evangelism and spiritual growth?
- What creative steps can I take to make every youth group meeting an opportunity for students to respond to Jesus?
- How can I arrange the weekly agenda so believing students have a platform to start conversations about Jesus with those around them? (You can do this with students giving their testimonies up front, or in small groups with a “Jesus oriented” question for the group to discuss.)
- How can I give my Discipleship Group leaders the tools for students to equip them to share their Jesus story? (See *Giving Away Your Faith* below.)
- If I provide an opportunity for students to respond to Jesus, how can I equip and mobilize my students in discipleship groups as counselors? (Use *Getting Started*.)

Balance your gatherings with “take in” and “give out” opportunities that balance spiritual growth and evangelism.

By preparing for these three “real game” environments, you set the stage for evangelism, discipleship, and missions that will lead you toward a spiritual awakening—both for your students, but also for a spiritual movement on the campuses where your students attend.

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Review the three points above and take steps to implement them:
 - How would you evaluate your lifestyle and the example it sets for students to share their faith? Resolve to make any adjustments you need to make.
 - Plan a prayer strategy to use with your youth group that involves prayer triplets. See *An Awesome Way to Pray* (in Resources below) for more details.
 - Assess the activities in your youth group for how well they balance the need to “take in” as well as to “give out”—building up and reaching out. Then develop a plan that reflects

an appropriate balance, including opportunities for your students to be aware of and share their faith with non-Christian students around them.

Chapter 31 - EQUIP STUDENTS TO REACH THEIR FRIENDS

Often young Christians have never thought about telling their friends about Jesus, or they want to, but don't know how. Your encouragement and equipping will prepare them to give away their faith. Encouraging and equipping them to share Jesus, watching them do it, and then seeing their friends come to Christ is one of the most fulfilling experiences students and their youth leaders can have!

Show Them Who They Are

For anyone who engages in youth ministry with a desire to reach young people with the Gospel—helping them discover who they are—their identity in Christ and their calling—is great news for three reasons:

- It raises the enthusiasm of the entire youth group to a new level.
- Once one person in a social group has come to know Jesus, the Lord often uses that person's encounter with Christ to reach others inside that group of friends.
- It shows them who God has called them to be: MISSIONARIES!

Yet, the vast majority of Christian students do not see reaching their friends as a possibility or a priority. As a result, they do not see themselves as MISSIONARIES to their peers! How can you change the perception that they are “just going to school” to “going to school with a mission” . . . going with a laser-focused purpose: to influence every person they know to consider following Jesus.

Encourage Them

You can take an initial step toward helping them see their mission by encouraging them to see the possibilities of how much influence they can have. To become a “campus missionary,” students don't need to learn a new language, immerse themselves into a new culture, spend years preparing to reach their peers, or be “sent” into their mission field. *They are already there.* What they need is someone to encourage them to open their eyes and see the mission field that they live in every day, and then to lead them to do what God has called them to do: share Jesus with their friends. Stories abound of “campus missionaries” who have done this and have had a tremendous influence on their friends and in their school.

You can use this “Code Red” video (<https://www.barrystclair.com/ministry-videos>) from Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry Online (<https://www.jfym.online/>) to encourage you and your students!

Consistently reminding your students of their campus missionary role will increase their courage to step up and speak out. And when one or two do, then more will follow. Soon you will have a team of students seeing themselves as mission-minded disciples . . . going to school to make a difference in Jesus' name!

Equip Them

To equip your “campus missionaries” you have many resources at your disposal. [See “Resources” below, particularly *Giving Away Your Faith*.] Instead of treating this like a “course” or a “training” to go through, set aside a few minutes every week in the youth group and in their discipleship groups, to learn and practice one simple faith-sharing tool like “How to start a conversation about Jesus.” Doing this will lessen their concern about what to say or how their friends at school see them, and instead gain confidence in speaking up and speaking out in Jesus’ name—and at some point—seeing some of their friends discover Jesus.

You can equip them and build their confidence using one of these simple topics for five minutes each week in your youth group. As well, you can lead all of your Discipleship Groups, and/or students showing a high level of enthusiasm for sharing Christ, through these easy-to-grasp, practical topics.

1. *See the need.* The first major barrier to students speaking about Jesus is helping them to see that their friends really do need Jesus. Jesus Himself was very clear about this. He said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10) The spiritual reality is that those who are lost need to be found!

2. *Overcome fear.* Very often students’ fear cripples their faith and prevents them from talking to their friends about Christ. Rejection is a terrible thing for anyone, especially teenagers. Yet God promises to honor those who honor Him—even if we are rejected. When students grasp that reality, they will rise up and step beyond their fear.

3. *Rely on the Holy Spirit.* Sharing the love and message of Jesus goes beyond human effort. When students realize that they have the life, love and power of the Holy Spirit living in them, they will begin to grasp that they are not arguing with their friends about a religion, but lovingly sharing about a life-changing relationship with Jesus!

4. *Make friends for Jesus.* Without a friendship, a long-lasting relationship is virtually impossible. It has been said: “In the end relationships save everything.” Yes! For adolescents building healthy, positive relationships is often a struggle. Yet, part of growing up is developing the ability to relate well with others. Add to that, building relationships that include the desire to share the love of Jesus with friends is particularly difficult. Yet, a vital part of growing in Christ involves learning how to develop and deepen friendships by showing Jesus’ love to others. Youth leaders and parents play such a vital role in guiding students in relationship building.

5. *Start conversations.* Often students—and the adults around them—tend NOT to be “others-oriented.” Instead of taking the initiative to introduce themselves to other people and to ask questions about them, people often think only about themselves and what others think about them. Students can become “others-oriented” when we encourage them not to “think about themselves more highly than they ought to think” (Romans 12:3) and show them how they can

start a conversation with almost anyone. Asking questions often leads to an ever-deepening relationship that soon gives the right and privilege to talk about Jesus.

6. Tell their personal stories. Sharing firsthand experiences about their relationship with Jesus is difficult for most students—and many adults—often because they have not thought about it and simply don't know what to say . . . and no older Christ-follower has coached them to think through that personal experience and write it. Guiding them to write their story is a significant step in helping them share their faith. You can do this by taking them through a simple step-by-step process that guides them to know what to say and how to overcome their fear of saying it. (You will find the specific tools you need to do this in *Before-Then-After*, *Giving Away Your Faith*, and other very helpful tools in Resources below.)

7. Share the Gospel. Students who have genuinely accepted Christ have at least understood the basic truths of what it means to follow Jesus. That does not necessarily mean that they grasp those truths well enough to share them with others. Coaching them to communicate to their friends the basic Gospel message in a meaningful, relevant way will give them confidence in their own relationship to Jesus, but also the confidence to boldly share that message with their friends. You can do that by training them to use one or more of the resources below. (You will find the specific tools you need to do this in *Life in 6 Words*, *Giving Away Your Faith*, *3 Circles*, and other very helpful tools in the Resources below.)

8. Lead their friends to make a decision. Having the courage to ask a friend or another student to invite Jesus into his/her life takes conviction and courage . . . and the distinct possibility of rejection. That moment of decision is a huge hurdle for both the person asking and the person answering! Equipping your students to use one of the tools mentioned in the Resources below takes that pressure off. Once they become very familiar with that tool, then urge them to become bold and courageous! Encourage them to ask the question: “Would you like to invite Jesus into your life—to trust and follow Him from now on?”

9. Answer questions fearlessly, honestly and lovingly. Sharing Jesus will inevitably invite both openly hostile or genuinely interested in Jesus questions. It certainly helps if your students know the “Hard Questions” people will ask, how to handle them and answer them. In *Giving Away Your Faith* you will find the answers to the top seven “Hard Questions” non-believing students ask. Feel free to create a handout of the questions to give to your students and prepare them to answer those questions.

10. Guide their new Christian friends to grow. Once a person makes a decision to follow Jesus, then what? Students need to know how to help their friends grow in their new relationship to Jesus. See “Get New Believers Started” [[Section 5.3](#)] and use the *Getting Started* book in the Resources list below to guide that experience.

Walking through these steps with your students will help them not only to reach their friends, but also will encourage and equip them for their lifelong journey of walking with Jesus and

leading others to do the same. You can help launch them into a lifetime of being disciples who make and multiply disciples!

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- Continue to think about major obstacles your students face in sharing Jesus with their friends, and practically how you can help them overcome those obstacles.
- Develop a plan to encourage and equip your students to reach their peers.
- Download or order the resources below that you need.

Chapter 32 - MULTIPLY LEADERS FOR THE CAMPUS

Friday had come and gone . . . I was overwhelmed! In addition to my regular work week, I still had meetings to lead and students to see. My promised time to get together with several new Christians who seriously needed follow-up had run out. And my family time was in a deficit. I complained to the Lord about my dilemma—how all of the needs, opportunities, and responsibilities He had given me were overwhelming me, and how my time and energy to handle them had reached an all-time low.

Contrast my dilemma with Jesus who also faced overwhelming needs and opportunities, yet He never seemed anxious about them. As Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching, preaching and healing with His huge heart of compassion, He confirmed to His disciples that He could not do it all! In fact, He completely turned the situation back to them when He told them to pray about their role in dealing with the immensity of the task. He said:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,
therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest
to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:38).

In essence, Jesus told them: We need more workers . . . and you are part of the answer to that prayer!

In my little world, I had fallen into the trap of thinking everything was on my shoulders. In addition to an attitude adjustment about my dilemma, I needed a vision adjustment as well. Jesus’ view of ministry was much bigger and better than mine. Taking that vision adjustment seriously led me to make three practical paradigm shifts.

First, I needed to train laborers to go into the “harvest field” with me. The demand of leading a youth ministry AND trying to reach a campus were way too much for one person. I needed a team of many “laborers!” So, then I asked myself—and maybe you need to ask yourself—“How can I multiply myself in the lives of others?”

Second, I realized that instead of reducing my vision and ministry, I needed to enlarge it. That seemed rather counter-intuitive to my earlier frustration: Yet what I saw in Jesus—one individual—was that “Jesus went through *all* of the towns and villages” with a vision for each one (Matthew 9:35). And “When He saw the crowds—harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd”—instead of being disheartened, He saw in His heart that they were “ripe for harvest” (Matthew 9:36; John 4:35).

My vision had been limited to one campus. But Jesus saw ALL of the people then, and He sees ALL of the students on ALL of the campuses around the world now. And He wants us to open our eyes to see what He sees—the potential of reaching EVERY student on EVERY campus! And in some large or small way using us!

When I considered the question of how to establish a viable ministry on every campus in my part of the city, I began to imagine campus teams—adults and students working together to reach the schools in our area—and with that vision I experienced a burst of enthusiasm!

The third paradigm shift occurred when I focused on Jesus' description of His ministry in Luke 4:18-19. He came "to proclaim good news to the poor, declare freedom for captives, give sight to the blind, and set the oppressed free." But He didn't stop there—thinking He would do it all by Himself—even as the Son of God. His vision was to equip His disciples to do what He had done. Even before His Resurrection, He gave them a few practice-runs. And then after His Resurrection, He sent them out fully equipped, full of the Holy Spirit—to do exactly as He had done . . . they preached the good news, healed the sick, and delivered people from demonic oppression (Mark 6:12-13).

The clincher for me: Jesus' phenomenal promise that He gave His disciples in John 14:12-13. And that promise applies to all youth leaders and students everywhere! He told them:

"...anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

"Anyone" includes me—and you—and everyone we train for ministry. The same Jesus who accomplished all of those amazing works during His earthly ministry lives in us through His Holy Spirit to carry out His ministry vision. His promise: He would not only do His work then, but now. And He would not only do His work through me to do that, but also, He would work through my team and the students in our group. We have the same ministry Jesus had! Knowing this certainly expands our ministry vision and assures us of His capacity to accomplish it!

Dealing with a generation that is more anxious, more mentally and emotionally distressed than ever, the desperate need exists to reach students with the good news of Jesus. As youth leaders we desperately need the kind of ministry that Jesus challenged us to engage in: "preaching, teaching and healing." Every young person needs to know the good news that they can enter into a relationship with Jesus ("preaching"). Every one of them needs to learn and apply what Jesus said in the Gospels and New Testament ("teaching"), and many or most need mental, emotional and spiritual healing from the deep wounds inflicted on them that will free them from the oppression of addictions and life-destroying habits ("healing"). And, certainly, the only way for them to come in contact with that ministry is for Jesus-filled youth leaders to equip multiplied thousands of skilled laborers for the harvest!

So, what do we do? Where do we start? Jesus gave us a practical pattern for training laborers in the way He trained His disciples: *model, motivate, mobilize, and multiply*.

Model: I Do It

Jesus never asked His disciples to do something He did not do Himself first. He knew His disciples needed to see ministry done by Him if they were ever going to do it themselves. Knowing this, He put a high priority on setting the example. How grateful I am that someone modeled how Jesus did ministry to me! Getting involved in Young Life in college, going on the campus with experienced leaders who were already going there, that was what I needed to get started. A year later, after I had learned the basics of campus ministry, I had my own campus. THEY DID IT!

Later, playing basketball with Athletes in Action, I was on one or two campuses every week for months. When not practicing or playing basketball, we met and talked to athletic teams, fraternities and sororities, and other venues, and ate lunch with students in the cafeteria—all for the purpose of interacting with students so we could share the Gospel with them. What I experienced and learned by going on the campus then—to “preach” (speak the Gospel), to “teach (disciple those who responded to the Gospel), and “heal” (pray over spiritual, emotional and physical issues)—I have continued to put into practice for years. I DID IT! YOU CAN DO IT TOO!

Motivate: I Do It, and They Are with Me

Doing ministry alone rarely works as a good strategy! I tried that . . . and it failed. I quickly realized the importance of bringing others into the process—just as Jesus did. For His disciples, those three years with Jesus was a tumultuous learning experience. One example: When 5,000 or more people showed up in a remote place to hear Jesus, they got hungry. With nothing to give them but a few loaves and fishes, the disciples saw it as a hopeless situation. Yet Jesus saw it as a learning experience for His disciples. They watched as He took the opportunity to depend on His Father and watch Him work. To the disciples’ astonishment, they not only got to see food multiply and feed everyone, but beyond that they saw that the Father, through Jesus, provided so much more than they needed (Mark 6:35-44).

Certainly, in their amazement Jesus’ disciples realized that they were not Jesus, and that feeding 5,000 people went way beyond their pay grade. Yet they gained great confidence just in being there, watching Jesus, and then participating with Jesus in this miracle. That’s essentially what happens when we raise up leaders. Though feeding 5,000 is beyond our pay grade, yet as our leaders and students watch us, they begin to move from watching to doing. They see, then they do . . . because they are “with me!”

Practically—for all of us who are not Jesus (that means me—and you), I/we need to take our upcoming leaders through an informal training process. Invite them into your Leadership Team. With a few other new leaders, take them through *Building Leaders: A Personal Walk with Jesus Christ* and then keep going through the other two *Building Leaders* books. (See Resources below.) They will learn as they get exposed to various facets of the ministry—first as observers,

then assisting, and then with greater responsibility. MOST IMPORTANT: get them involved in relationships with students. Assign them 3-5 students to get to know and then have them invite those students into a small group, taking them through *Jesus: No Equal* or *Following Jesus*. Check in with them often, debriefing often—until, over time, you and they have confidence for them to take total responsibility for various aspects of the ministry. Honest evaluation along the way is always appropriate, along with huge dose of affirmation and encouragement.

When you let people see how God works and let them in on the action, they become highly motivated!

Mobilize: They Do It, and I Am with Them

After Jesus demonstrated for the disciples what to do and let them do it with Him, He let the rope out even more. He sent them out on their own—as a team, with His power and authority to do what He had been doing (Luke 9:1-2)!

When we mobilize people as Jesus did, they will respond with enthusiasm. I remember one youth leader named Anton, who worked with us for a long time. He went through the process above with me and our other leaders. At one point we sent him out on his own to see what would happen. He came back completely energized because a young man, in whom he had invested months of time, decided to accept Christ. His confidence soared, and conversations turned from basic questions to big dreams. Anton eventually started a ministry for at-risk youth.

To mobilize people to do ministry on their own, don't be afraid to stretch them, give them specific responsibilities with all the support they need to fulfill them, and meet with them regularly for ongoing encouragement and equipping.

Multiply: They Do It, and I Am in the Background to Encourage

After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers they would receive His Spirit and the power to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Those Spirit-filled people scattered over the face of the earth, doing exactly what Jesus had done and what He had trained them to do—preaching, teaching and healing. Of course, Jesus was not physically present. They operated in and by the Spirit.

God's movement has multiplied across the face of the earth since then. We have the amazing opportunity and privilege to participate in this movement of doing what Jesus did, and along the way raise up other leaders who will go far and wide beyond what we have done! And our influence will be greater than we ever imagined it would be!

Practical Action Steps to Multiply

Multiplying ministry speeds God's process along. And you can speed your multiplication process by having your own plan and implementing it toward multiplication! These practical actions will give you a roadmap to follow.

1. Train your leaders. Often the best people to involve in campus ministry are college students who can give time to building relationships with students. Consider using the three *Building Leaders for Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry* books to equip them. [See Resources.] These books will guide you through the four steps above.

2. Claim your campuses. Make a list of the middle and high school campuses in your area, pray over them, and ask God where He wants you to send the people you train. Use the Campus Mapping tool in Resources for a specific strategy and plan to map the campuses around you.

3. Choose which campus(es) to focus on next and adopt that school. Use this link to discover how to Adopt Your School (<https://www.everyschool.com/adopt-your-school/>). Only go when you have an equipped and called team.

4. Assign a team to that campus. As more teams receive training and build more relationships with students, assign them to other campuses.

5. Get your leaders started by going with them yourself. Help them develop a positive relationship with the principal, teachers and coaches. Guide them as they learn their way around the school.

6. Network with other churches and youth organizations that may have already established campus ministries. This will cultivate a united youth ministry coalition in your community.

7. Consider recruiting interns. College students make excellent interns. Place interns on a leadership team under a veteran leader. Assign them as part of a team to a campus where he or she will build relationships, evangelize, disciple, and mobilize Christian students to reach their friends.

Personally, I have benefited greatly from faithful leaders who invested their time, energy, experience, and training in me. In turn, I, and many others, have invested in young leaders in the same way. This is how God multiplies His ministry around the world. If you are faithful to *model, motivate, and mobilize* other leaders, God will *multiply* your efforts in due time!

Your Next Steps

We encourage keeping a notebook or journal of ideas, action steps, and resources that will help you advance your youth ministry. You can use the following questions and suggestions for brainstorming and developing your goals and plans.

- In what ways have you felt overwhelmed by the needs, opportunities, and responsibilities you face weekly? How does Jesus' model for ministry relieve your stress concerning those burdens?
- If you have begun training other leaders, whether formally or informally, at what stage are you now in developing them: modeling, motivating, mobilizing, or multiplying? What steps do you need to take to move each one to the next stage in their training?

Chapter 33 - EXERCISE CAMPUS LEGAL OPPORTUNITIES

Kevin couldn't believe what he read. He immediately called the principal to see if he had done something wrong. The principal apologized for having to write the letter to Kevin and acknowledged that he had been a positive influence on the students and had conducted himself appropriately. But, he explained, the law prevented Kevin from coming on campus during school hours for religious purposes.

Youth leaders often hear this kind of response . . . that the law prohibits them from access to the campus, much less doing ministry on public school campuses. In a recent Lifeway Research poll and a Freedom Forum poll, over half, respectively 54% and 56% of Americans think religious liberty is taking a hit—facing serious threats in the good old USA. From what we hear on the news reports, it's surprising those polling stats are not higher. Yet when we know the legal realities, IS THAT REALLY TRUE?

More Religious Freedom than Ever!

Most people now know the famous Coach Joe Kennedy case. According to Restoring Faith (<https://rfia.org/>) in America, in Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, Coach Joe Kennedy scored a touchdown for religious liberty. The court system had said he could not kneel at the center of the football field after a game to pray, and his players could not pray with him even though the prayer was voluntary. After he was fired from coaching and after a long battle through the court system and eventually going to the Supreme Court, they ruled in his favor, giving him the green light to pray at the 50-yard line after games. And that win was not just a win for him—it's a game-changer for all of us. The Supreme Court said goodbye to Lemon v. Kurtzman, a now out-of-date precedent that has kept us from exercising our legal rights for way too long. Teachers, staff, and coaches can let their faith shine without holding back!

Youth leaders—plus teachers, parents, and students—have exciting times ahead as we plan for another school year! The legal landscape has changed significantly thanks to some major wins at the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as clarity for teachers and students from the U.S. Department of Education.

To take advantage of these changes for campus ministry purposes, we need to know the lay of the land. What opportunities and options do we actually have? To help you and your students, Gateways to Better Education (<http://www.gogateways.org/studentled-fts>) launched the free "Student-Led Free to Speak Campaign." Their two excellent videos provide helpful information that will guide you regarding your rights as a youth -leader on campus: "Guidance for Educators on Religious Expression" and "Guidance for Students on Religious Expression" available on <https://www.barrystclair.com/ministry-videos>.

It's a new day! We have more freedom now than we have had in decades!

Students and Religious Freedom on Campus

While current First Amendment interpretation prohibits public schools from observing certain religious practices, and while youth leaders may have only restricted access to the public schools during school hours, youth leaders, teachers, parents, and students need to know that the Constitution protects the rights of teachers and students in the public schools.

The same rules apply to students who wish to express their religious views on the public-school campus. Students also have the right under the First Amendment to freely associate with others who are like-minded. Some youth leaders have found that occasionally a hostile administrator may attempt to intimidate Christian students from expressing their views, or from sharing their faith on the campus. The United States Constitution protects students in such situations, and both the students and the administration should be informed of this fact. Youth leaders can conclude, then, that the Constitution protects the student who wishes to share his faith and disciple others. In addition, youth leaders need to inform their students regarding their constitutional rights as well as equip and mobilize them to be bold witnesses at school, without engendering a rebellious spirit on their part.

Teachers/Coaches and Religious Freedom on Campus

Teachers and coaches like Coach Kennedy also have a right to express their views under the First Amendment. As the Supreme Court stated in the Tinker case (<https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/publications/youraba/2019/march-2019/after-half-a-century--tinker-decision-still-protecting-student-s/>), "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights . . . at the schoolhouse gate." That means teachers and coaches, like students, are entitled to express their views under First Amendment protection.

However, the courts do not give as much latitude to such expression for teachers because of a concern that students may interpret that the school approves or officially sanctions the teachers' views. Also, teachers are not permitted to use the classroom to indoctrinate students. The ideal open door with teachers is for youth leaders to come alongside Christ-following teachers and help them develop strategies that will permit them to express their views without violating the prohibition on indoctrination. It's a call to action for teachers and coaches!

Youth Leaders on the Campus

Effective youth leaders understand the importance of establishing rapport with school officials before having permission to come to the campus and have a presence there. Without relationships built, making unannounced visits is not wise. A solid relationship of submission and service with sympathetic administrators can lead to greater access to students and fruitful ministry.

Though access to the campus for a youth pastor varies widely across the nation, as a youth leader you can maximize your influence by reading and implementing the practical suggestions and solutions in the first five sections of Campus Connections. Doing that will help build strong relationships on a campus with school administrators, teachers, coaches . . . and students as well.

Join the Movement

According to Restoring Faith in America (<https://rfia.org/>): "For decades, public religious expression was censored, and people of faith were stripped of their constitutional rights. Religious Americans were accustomed to playing defense and reacting to violations of our First Freedom. But with this new momentum for religious freedom, we cannot stand idly by . . . it's time for us to go on offense."

If you are unsure about taking some forward steps of action, it's always good to reach out for guidance. Your religious rights in public schools are protected, but it is important to remain respectful and in line with what your school allows. If you are unsure about what your rights are or are challenged about them, a number of organizations stand ready to support you and guide you.

Now is the time . . . this is our call to action! By following the rules and building relationships, the "adults in the room" can motivate, equip and mobilize our students to become the bold advocates and witnesses for Jesus on their campuses that He has called them to be!

Section Resources

- Go to barrystclair.com to download free:
 - *Giving Away Your Faith*—To equip your students to share Jesus
 - *Getting Started*—To help new Christian begin their journey with Jesus
 - *The Magnet Effect*—To create outreach opportunities that have simple, yet powerful, strategies and tools to attract non-believing students to engage with the Gospel
 - *Giving Away Your Faith*
 - *Getting Started*
 - *Taking Your Campus for Christ*
 - *Building Leaders for Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry*
 - barrystclair.com/build-leaders-1
 - barrystclair.com/build-leaders-2

- *barrystclair.com/build-leaders-3*
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Student’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPstudentguide>
- *An Awesome Way to Pray—Leader’s Guide* – <https://tinyurl.com/AWTPleaderguide>
- Go to www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/ to download free:
 - *3 Circles*
- Go to www.dare2share.org/resources/ebooks/ to download free:
 - *Life in 6 Words*
 - *Before-Then-After*
 - *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, Greg Stier, (Dare 2 Share Ministries)
- Go to Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry Online (<http://www.jfym.online/>) for the entire strategy to multiply leaders.
- Go to these two links to map your campus and adopt your school:
 - Campus Mapping (<https://www.everyschool.com/resource/mapping-the-campus/>)
 - Adopt Your School (<https://www.everyschool.com/adopt-your-school/>)
- These resources from Restoring Faith in America and First Liberty offer quick, simple, practical and highly encouraging guidance.
 - “Now You Can!” (1:27) – Regaining the freedom to express your faith (available at <https://www.barrystclair.com/ministry-videos>)
 - “Great News” (3:04) – Kelly Shackleford explaining what can be done by everyone to help restore faith in America (available at <https://www.barrystclair.com/ministry-videos>)
 - “Public School Protection Kit” (<https://firstliberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Religious-Liberty-Protection-Kit-for-Student-and-Teacher-PDF.pdf>) – Exercising your rights in public schools
 - Gateways for Better Education (<http://www.gogateways.org/studentled-fts>) to access the “Student-Led Free to Speak Campaign.”
 - “The Latest News” (<https://rfia.org/news-2/>) – Staying in touch with issues regarding the campus and more
 - “Excellent Resources” (<https://rfia.org/resources/>) – A variety of resources that address the campus and more

Thanks

Thanks to the following. Their research and materials have been very helpful.

- Restoring Faith in America: rfia.org
- The Freedom Forum: freedomforum.org
- Lifeway Research: Research.lifeway.com
- Gateways to Better Education: gogateways.org

Chapter 34 – NETWORKING CAMPUS CLUBS MULTIPLIES LEADERS

The sun had barely risen when the first students arrived. They gathered quietly around the flagpole before school—backpacks slung over their shoulders, hoodies pulled tight against the morning air. A small circle formed at first. A few friends standing together, talking softly.

One student began to pray . . . Within minutes, more student gathered. A group of athletes walked across the parking lot after noticing the gathering. A few band members joined after recognizing friends in the circle. Someone invited a classmate walking across the campus. A pair of freshmen lingered at the edge before slowly stepping closer. They prayed together that morning until the bell rang.

What began from that small moment quietly grew . . . just students praying together for their school in 1990.

That was then . . . this is now. Now scenes like this happen each year at schools all across the country . . . and now in every country around the world. It's "See You at the Pole" when students gather at their campus flagpoles to pray for friends, teachers, and their communities.

At first glance the moment seems simple and fleeting. But something deeper is happening. Students are engaging in and activating their relational networks—in Jesus' name.

Friends invite friends.

Teammates invite teammates.

Classmates invite classmates.

Exponentially multiplied this simple gathering expresses a powerful truth—easily missed. The power of that moment is not the event itself—rather it releases and energizes Jesus-centered relationships. Each relational connection becomes a pathway for encouragement, prayer, and the message of Jesus to travel.

This is a classic example and the essence of campus ministry networks!

Why Do Networks Matter on Campus?

Middle schools and high schools are among the most strategic mission fields in the world.

Every day students arrive on campus carrying questions and struggles about identity, belonging, and purpose. They form friendships, test ideas, and build friendships—relational networks—that often shape the trajectory of their lives.

Students don't walk into a church building on their own daily. But they do . . .

– walk into a classroom.

– show up at practice.

- sit at lunch tables.
- live their lives surrounded by peers every day.

This is why campus ministry matters! It goes where students are . . . where the church building and the church youth program cannot go. It lives inside hallways, locker rooms, cafeterias, group chats, and friend groups.

Uniquely, Christian campus clubs provide an opportunity—not merely to hold meetings—but to mobilize, deepen and expand the relationships already present among students—in a Christ-centered environment.

The gospel has always traveled most naturally through relationships. When students share their faith with friends, teammates, classmates, and neighbors, the message carries authenticity and credibility. That is almost impossible for a church program in a church building to replicate.

A network-driven campus club recognizes this reality and equips students to live as ambassadors for Christ within their everyday circles of influence!

Students are not the audience. They are “Jesus with skin on.” That’s why engaging them and then mobilizing them through campus clubs matters!

What Does a Network-Driven Campus Club Look Like?

A network-driven campus club is a student-led Christian community that intentionally engages the relational networks already present among students and with teachers on campus.

Rather than relying primarily on large gatherings or attractional events, these clubs focus on empowering small groups of students to reach the people they already know. They do it right where they spend most of the hours of their lives during their teenage years.

Why is that important? Because the mission of Jesus is not confined to an event, program, or large group gathering. Rather . . .

It moves through relationships . . . shows up in conversations . . . and happens in places where churches can rarely go.

In these networking clubs, students learn to pray intentionally for friends and classmates who need Jesus, to care for others through authentic relationships, to share their faith naturally and respectfully, and to disciple peers within their existing network of friends.

Every lunch table, classroom, sports team locker room, and extracurricular activity becomes an opportunity where their faith in Jesus can be lived and shared.

Instead of a single gathering influencing a few students, the ministry expands outward through hundreds of relational connections across the campus.

Isn't Creating a Network What Jesus Did?

Network-driven campus ministry needs to reflect a pattern found throughout Scripture but vividly expressed in Jesus' ministry . . . pretty much on every page of the Gospels. For example,

- Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus.
- The Samaritan woman shared her encounter with Jesus, and her entire village came to hear Him.
- The early church spread rapidly as believers met in homes, shared life together, and enthusiastically talked about Jesus to anyone who would listen.

Instead of building a centralized place for people to meet, Jesus met with them wherever there was available space—outdoors, in a field, in the marketplace, at the synagogue. It did not matter—Jesus went where people gathered. And He gathered them around Him. His disciples went wherever He went. They brought their circle of family and friends to Jesus. And in a short time, they went to places where they had no relationships. Jesus sent them out to include and expand the circles of relationships.

Spiritual movements grow from circles of relationships...when disciples of Jesus become disciple-makers. That's why and how the early church multiplied!

Campus ministry follows this same "Jesus" pattern.

How Does Prayer Activate a Campus?

Jesus told his disciples that they "...should always pray and not give up." (Luke 18:1)

When students gather for a prayer event like See You at the Pole or any other Christian event, even a weekly youth group meeting, the most important impact is not that single gathering, but rather the ongoing, smaller prayer gatherings that are consistently ongoing—before/after class or practice, around lunch tables, and in random conversations and text messages. Students who pray together begin building deeper spiritual friendships, and conversations about faith become more natural.

Then practically, what can you do to mobilize your students to pray like that? Jesus gave us the simple strategy: "Again I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." This challenge by Jesus to His disciples motivated and mobilized them to pray in what we call Prayer Triplets (<https://www.barrystclair.com/awesome-way-to-pray-lg>) It works like this:

3 Christians/praying

3 times a week for

3 non-Christian friends

As Prayer Triplets begin, and non-believing friends begin to respond, and then more Prayer Triplets begin and then multiply, these groups become a catalyst for conversations about Jesus to spread through friendships and can result in a spiritual awakening on a campus!

The result is a culture where faith is not hidden and speaking about Jesus is not hard, but it becomes visible and vibrant.

What Can You Do To Build, Mobilize and Sustain Networking Campus Clubs?

Simply follow this practical 3-pronged strategy:

PRAYER—CARE—SHARE

PRAYER—talk to God about people.

CARE—show your love through *attention*—just show up, and *action*—just meet a need.

SHARE—talk about Jesus at every opportunity. If you just mention His name, it opens amazing doors!

When students begin praying intentionally for friends and classmates, using the Prayer Triplet strategy and resources, something powerful happens.

Faith conversations emerge naturally within trusted relationships.

A student shares their story during lunch.

A teammate asks a question after practice.

A classmate opens up during a difficult moment.

These moments rarely appear on a ministry calendar, yet they are where real influence happens. This is where ministry moves into everyday life.

Using this simple, biblical strategy develops leaders! And for a networking ministry to last, leadership must be multiplied. That happens when students who are being discipled grow in confidence and maturity. They learn how to pray with others, share their faith, and lead conversations—Prayer/Care/Share! And very soon these students can begin to disciple other students.

This creates a multiplying cycle of leaders who develop more leaders, who reach new networks of relationships, who then develop more leaders.

When this kind of environment and culture exists, then the ministry becomes a multiplying movement of relationships that continues year after year!

Will You Imagine the Possibilities?

What could happen if churches, leaders, parents, and students embraced this truth: the future of ministry is not confined to programs or buildings. Rather it flows through people.

What if prayer guided every effort?

What if belonging came before belief?

What if making disciples became relational and reproducible?

What if Jesus was the topic of daily conversations?

What if leaders collaborated instead of competing?

The result would not just be bigger campus clubs and youth groups, rather it would become

- a vibrant network of students on campuses living out their faith in Jesus...

- mobilized to spread the “good news” to others...

- with the Gospel carried to every corner of student life.

The mission mobilized and multiplied!

For a current list of campus ministry partners, visit www.everyschool.com under “Join the Movement.”

Campus Connections:

A Field Guide to Campus Ministry

The high school and middle school campus can be a lonely, hostile and pressure packed environment. Daily students face emotional, social and spiritual challenges. Anxiety levels are at the highest rate ever. Students need Jesus' followers to care about them and relate to them right where they spend the vast majority of their time, the school campus. When we do that, then students can discover a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ and you can be one of those who makes that difference.

In *Campus Connections: A Field Guide for Campus Ministry*, Barry St. Clair gives an in-depth approach and practical strategy for how to equip yourself and your team to bridge the gap between your ministry and the school campus. You will discover how to develop relationships with administrators, teachers, coaches and students.

Praying for the campus and communicating God's love to students is arguably the most important ministry on the most important mission field in America!



DR. BARRY ST. CLAIR desires to influence the younger generation to follow Jesus. He has been on the cutting edge of youth ministry for over five decades, equipping youth leaders, parents, and students in over thirty countries. Through his leadership thousands of youth leaders and churches have implemented Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry strategies.

As founder and president of Reach Out Youth Solutions for 45 years, he now serves as Vice President of Global Youth Engagement with East West Ministries International. He is the author of more than thirty books, many of them in 16 languages.

Barry began the Global Youth Coalition a collaborative partnership to pursue reaching and discipling the 2.3 billion unreached youth around the world. He played basketball on the third ranked team in the nation at Davidson College and with Athletes in Action, along with running in the Boston Marathon. He and his wife, Lawanna have five married children and fourteen grandchildren, and live in Atlanta, Georgia.