
LEADING IN HIGH SCHOOL MINISTRY

By James Rochford and Josh Benadum

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INTRODUCTION

These authors have not sought to write a “Mishnah” or a “Talmud” for high school leadership. This is not a rule book to be followed step-by-step, but rather, it is a collection of biblical principles, wisdom, research, and leadership experience that can equip leaders to serve in their unique settings. It has been our consistent prayer in compiling and writing this material that God would use this to train leaders to better influence the students He has put in their lives.

We could see using this booklet in a variety of ways: **(1)** reading through this on your own, **(2)** reading through this booklet with someone who is leading in high school ministry, **(3)** reading sections together at leaders meetings for group discussion and edification, or **(4)** sending sections to coleaders to read who need help in specific areas.

We would like to thank Bret McCallum for pioneering the core content of this material in his classwork on this subject, as well as his ongoing love and leadership in high school ministry. We would also like to thank the various high school leaders who contributed countless insights that made it into this booklet, as well as the hundreds of leaders who serve so faithfully in our high school ministry each and every week.

AUDIO

[Here](#) is the audio for the class taught in 2018. The password is **2018class**.

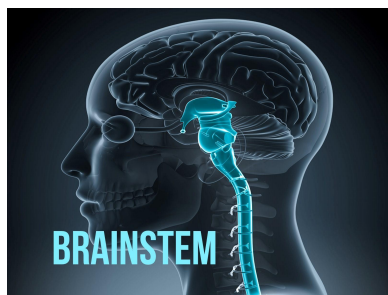
PowerPoints from our class (2018) are archived at the Study Center.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEENAGE BRAIN

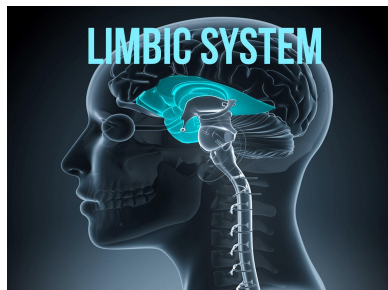
Missionaries in foreign fields spend time studying the culture and people they are serving. All Christian leaders would do well to follow this principle: *studying* our field will help to equip us in *serving* our field. Our culture changes so rapidly that even a 22 year old high school leader could be behind on some of the key cultural changes in the lives of teenagers today. Moreover, many of us weren't aware of the biological and developmental changes that occurred while we ourselves went through adolescence. Therefore, we would be wise to begin by studying the developmental and cultural changes that occur in adolescence.

The brain rapidly transforms during the teenage years. Consider the three major parts of the brain:¹

Brainstem: Siegel compares this part of the brain to the palm of your hand. The brainstem is the foundational part of the brain, which regulates the most fundamental responses to stimuli: **fight, flight, freeze, or faint.**

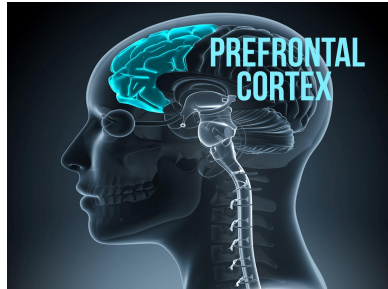


Limbic system: Siegel compares this part of the brain to the thumb of your hand that is balled up into a fist. This portion of the brain regulates **emotion, motivation, evaluation, memory, and attachment.**



Prefrontal Cortex: Siegel compares this part of the brain to the fingertips that overlap the thumb and palm on our hand (specifically the finger nails of your middle and ring fingers). The prefrontal cortex integrates the brainstem, limbic system, and the body. It is responsible for **abstract thinking, language, and decision making.**

¹ See Daniel Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2013).



Before adolescence (ages 2-12), the brain acts like a sponge that soaks up information, creating neurons. But during adolescence (ages 12-24), the brain goes through a period of **pruning** that eliminates about half of these neurons. Frances Jensen explains, “The connectivity of the brain slowly moves from the back of the brain to the front. The very last places to ‘connect’ are the frontal lobes. In fact, the teen brain is only about 80 percent of the way to maturity.”²

During adolescence (ages 12-24), the prefrontal cortex also goes through a process called **myelination** (pronounced my-uh-lin-nation). Myelin is an insulated sheath that forms around neural connections in the brain. Think of myelin like “brain oil” that greases the skids of neural connections, making them easier to connect. As this process happens, teens “develop the ability to hypothesize, look into the future, deduct, analyze, and logically reason.”³ As myelin increases into adulthood, this hits the breaks on impulsive, erratic behavior.

Adults rely more on their prefrontal cortex—often responding logically to stress and pressure. But teens rely more on the amygdala, responding emotionally.⁴ The amygdala is the “first responder” to stress. The pituitary gland releases adrenaline (also called epinephrine), as well as another neurochemical called cortisol, which “freezes” the hippocampus.⁵ These hormones and neurochemicals are higher in teens—especially girls.⁶ During stressful periods, the hippocampus shrinks, and the amygdala appears to grow in size.⁷ Adolescents who have been physically or emotionally abused have less gray matter in the prefrontal cortex.⁸

In addition to these standard brain developments, multiple neurotransmitters and hormones are underdeveloped in teenagers. Consider several examples:

² Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 37.

³ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 13.

⁴ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 14.

⁵ The hippocampus is part of the limbic system. It is responsible for response inhibition, memory, and cognition. Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 173.

⁶ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 172.

⁷ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 176.

⁸ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 179.

THP is a hormone that has a calming effect in adults. But instead of having a calming effect in teens, the “hormone stirs up additional anxiety.”⁹

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that makes us feel calm, and it “is at a natural low during adolescence.”¹⁰

Melatonin is a hormone that helps us sleep. Both children and adults release melatonin earlier in the night. However, during the teenage years, the body begins to release this hormone later at night.¹¹ Specifically, the hormone is released two hours later in teens than in children or adults.¹² Therefore, teens are wide awake at night, and they sleep in later than either adults or children.

Teens need 9.5 hours of sleep per night. However, only 15% of American teens get this much sleep. In fact, most only get 6.5 hours per night.¹³ A study of 7,000 high school students revealed that moving the start-time of school from 7:30am to 8:40am increased grades and lowered depression.¹⁴ Jensen writes, “Teenagers who had trouble sleeping at ages twelve to fourteen were two and a half times more likely to report suicidal thoughts at ages fifteen to seventeen than adolescents with good sleep habits.”¹⁵

Why is this important?

We do not share this research to be condescending toward teenagers. Adolescents hate to be treated like “kids.” In fact, if you *treat* an adolescent like a “kid,” then he or she will most likely act like a “kid.” It should go without saying that such a patronizing attitude will poison your ability to love and lead teens. Instead, we share this material because it could help us work with adolescents in a number of ways:

Emotional instability. These developmental data explain why teens are happy one moment, but emotionally erratic the next. For instance, if a parent says, “Your hair is in your eyes...” the teen might respond by saying, “You hate my hair! You’ve always hated my hair!” and leave the room in tears.¹⁶ One moment a teen might say, “I hate you... I’ll never talk to you again!” Yet a few days later, the same teen might be friendly and warm as usual. Until the prefrontal cortex is developed, teens rely “on their amygdala—the seat of emotion. Not only do the wild emotions get first say about what teens will do next, their ability to negotiate

⁹ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 171.

¹⁰ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 104.

¹¹ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 112.

¹² Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 89-90.

¹³ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 89.

¹⁴ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 94.

¹⁵ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 96.

¹⁶ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 81-82.

their way out of a tense moment by using carefully chosen, diplomatic language is fledgling at best.”¹⁷

Our response: Youth workers should learn to exercise emotional and relational stability with teens. If we get caught up in the whirlpool of their emotional instability, this will only make things worse. Learn to not be reactive to emotionally charged outbursts, speaking calmly to them when they are in such a state.

In addition, we should encourage teen friendships and student leaders. This may seem counter-intuitive, because it could be a case of “the blind leading the blind.” At the same time, adolescents are sometimes better at drawing out one another. Feinstein writes, “Logic isn’t always the best answer among adolescents.”¹⁸ Teens may have a better intuitive ability to understand how another teen is feeling, and this should be encouraged.

Flooding. The concept of “flooding” comes from car engines: If the car engine is “flooded” with too much gasoline, then the car won’t start until the gas evaporates. “Flooding” with emotions is similar. This happens when a person is overwhelmed with emotions and has a hard time thinking clearly about issues on the spot. This also could explain why teens mentally freeze by saying, “Whatever...” or “I don’t know...” or “I don’t care...”

Our response: Like a pressure cooker that is about to explode, look for signs of emotional overload. This is an example where leaders can be proactive, rather than reactive. If you sense that your friend is “flooding,” it may be best to let them calm down before talking about an issue further. Rather than following them into hysteria, leaders should remain cool and calm, modeling the emotional stability that they are looking to develop. Researchers note that it only takes about twenty minutes to calm down after feeling flooded.

Short-term memory loss. During adolescence, short-term memory increases by about 30%.¹⁹ This might explain why teens are so forgetful during this season of life.

Our response: Remember that teens have a hard time remembering! Without nagging, we should learn how to give reminders about important things like shared goals, upcoming retreats, planning ahead, etc. Don’t assume that your friend is intentionally rejecting such things; it could simply be that they legitimately forgot. Consider ways to help them in these areas (e.g. texting them a helpful reminder, breaking down complex goals into smaller steps, etc.).

Create some structure? Some authorities on the subject of adolescents argue that giving some structure can help. For example, having a checklist can give a form of stimulation and achievement for adolescents. However, we do not think that this

¹⁷ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 14.

¹⁸ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 85.

¹⁹ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 3.

approach would work well for motivating an unmotivated student. Moreover, we never want to play the role of a parent or a teacher in their lives, and we run the risk of this when thinking through structure for diffuse students. As a leader, you will need to think through how to approach your friend to help them with short-term goals on a case-by-case basis.

Use vicarious learning. Jensen suggests that we should constantly tell real stories to adolescents. This is because the teen brain lacks “prospective memory,” which is “the ability to hold in your mind the intention to perform a certain action at a future time.”²⁰ This is closely associated with the frontal lobes.

Misinterpreting facial expressions or body language. In one study at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, researchers monitored brain activity in adults and teens as they viewed a series of photographs of people showing certain emotions on their faces. Feinstein writes, “Every adult was able to identify the emotion as fear, compared to only fifty percent of the adolescents. The other fifty percent of the adolescents confused the facial expression with shock or anger. On further inspection, the researchers noted that adolescents and adults used different parts of their brain when interpreting the photos. The adolescents relied on their amygdala, whereas the adults relied on their frontal lobes.”²¹

One study showed that teens “going through puberty decreased in their ability to identify emotions by as much as twenty percent and did not resume normal levels until about age eighteen... [They] may confuse sadness with anger and surprise with fear. No wonder miscommunication is so rampant at this age!”²² Sheryl Feinstein writes, “To adolescents, interpreting body language is like trying to decipher a foreign tongue. A teacher shakes his head in confusion, and the student explains it as ‘He hates me.’ A look of surprise is interpreted as a glare of anger. A teacher cracks a joke, and a teen takes it seriously and finds offense. These misunderstandings and misinterpretations are common occurrences behind much moodiness and temperamental behavior.”²³

Our response: Realize that much of your concern could be misinterpreted as anger, disappointment, or even hostility. After serious or tense conversations, make sure to capture what you’re feeling in words. You might even recap what you communicated to avoid being misunderstood.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What are one or two key points that you took away from this reading?

How might these change your approach in leading teens?

²⁰ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 39-40.

²¹ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 82.

²² Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 82.

²³ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 82.

If you could go back and have a “redo” of a situation with a teen (e.g. mentoring, teaching, leading, etc.), what might you want to change? And why?

UNDERSTANDING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TEENAGERS

Gender differences are real. Social scientists often argue that gender differences are simply the result of culture—namely, cultures construct gender stereotypes. While there is some truth to this sentiment, such a hypothesis explains only the most superficial kinds of gender differences (i.e. “Boys like blue, and girls like pink”). Physiological differences exist between men and women—even being grounded in their brain structure. In fact, researchers at Yale and Massachusetts General Hospital “were able to classify 92 percent of brains as either male or female, even after controlling for overall size differences.”²⁴

Not every person fits into binary masculine or feminine behaviors or interests, but there are general biological and neurological differences which are real. We might compare this to age differences in a child’s growing development.²⁵ For instance, not all four year olds are the same in their development of speech, socialization, etc. However, we can still identify *general* behaviors, capacities, or interests of children at certain stages of development. Of course, not all males and females fit into strict categories, but these categories still exist.

Gender differences are less drastic over time. Sax writes, “Sex differences in childhood are larger and more important than sex differences in adulthood. By thirty years of age, both females and males have reached full maturity of all areas of the brain. When people over thirty years of age think about their own experience as adults, they may not see significant sex differences in how women and men learn new material or master new tasks.”²⁶

Understanding Gender Differences in Teenagers		
(As we noted above, these are generalizations from the scientific literature—not absolutes)		
Males	Differences	Females
Reading and writing develops 1.5 years later.	Reading and writing	Reading and writing develops 1.5 earlier. ²⁷
Harder time with organization.	Organization	Easier time with organization. ²⁸

²⁴ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 85. The study is found in Adam Chekroud and colleagues, “Patterns in the Human Brain Mosaic Discriminate Males from Females,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, volume 113, p. E1968, 2016.

²⁵ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 8.

²⁶ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 88.

²⁷ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 228.

Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men* (Basic Books: New York, 2009), 17-19.

²⁸ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 232-233.

Cognitive maturity (the frontal and parietal lobes) peaks in the <i>late</i> teen years.	Cognitive maturity	Cognitive maturity (the frontal and parietal lobes) peaks in the <i>early</i> teen years. ²⁹
14% larger cerebellum than teenage girls. This “may explain why the boys... like to be in motion (moving their legs and stretching their arms) and the girls don’t mind sitting and listening.” ³⁰	Cerebellum	Far easier to sit and listen in a conventional classroom setting.
30x more testosterone than women after puberty has ended. ³¹	Hormones	More estrogen than boys.
Larger amygdala: Leads to irritability, anger, hostility, and illogical decision-making. ³²	Amygdala	Smaller amygdala.
Smaller hippocampus during puberty.	Hippocampus	Larger hippocampus (maybe due to estrogen, though this is uncertain). ³³
Prefer competition. ³⁴	Socializing	Prefer cooperation. ³⁵
Boys who physically develop later aren’t taken seriously. They often compensate with attention seeking behavior.	Maturation	Girls who physically develop sooner are more likely to smoke, drink, feel depressed, and have eating disorders. ³⁶

²⁹ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 60.

³⁰ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 37.

³¹ Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 21.

³² Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 66.

³³ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 65.

³⁴ Psychologists ran a famous “Ring-Toss” experiment, where they asked participants to throw a ring onto a target. In the first round, men threw the ring from a farther distance, and women threw the ring from up close. On the second round, they asked the participants to repeat the experiment with same-sex peers in the room. Sax writes, “Most young women will toss the rings just the same when other women are present as they do when they are by themselves. But most young men behave differently. When other young men are watching, most young men will demonstrate what psychologists call a ‘risky shift.’ If the man tossed the rings from two feet when he was alone, he’ll back up to five feet when other men are in the room. If he tossed the rings from five feet when he was alone, he’ll back up to ten feet when other men are watching—even if he’s never met the men before and never expects to see them again. ‘I guess I didn’t want them to think I was a wuss’ is the way one explained the change in his behavior.” Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 28-29.

³⁵ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 71.

³⁶ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today’s Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 101.

May use intimacy to get sex.	Sex	May use sex to get intimacy. ³⁷ Casual sex is less about arousal—more about popularity, pleasing, or pressure. ³⁸
Boys have a worse sense of smell.	Sense of smell	Girls have a better sense of smell. ³⁹
Boys hear eight decibels <i>less</i> .	Sense of hearing	Girls hear eight decibels <i>more</i> . ⁴⁰
Boy on boy bullying is usually the bullying of atypical boys. ⁴¹	Bullying	Girl on girl bullying is usually the bullying of girls that they envy. ⁴²
Boys engage in physical violence about 20 times as much as girls. ⁴³	Violence	Less violence
Boys relate “shoulder to shoulder.”	Relating	Girls relate “face to face.” ⁴⁴
Sex is part of the <i>lower</i> portions of the brain	Sex	Sex is centered in the <i>higher</i> portions of the brain (cerebral cortex). ⁴⁵

³⁷ Leonard Sax writes, “providing a boy with a sexual outlet may give a girl the feeling of being wanted, desired, and somehow in control. Even girls who insist that they enjoy sexual intimacy for its own sake often want the intimacy more than the sex.” Leonard Sax, *Girls on the Edge: The Four Factors Driving the New Crisis for Girls* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 2010), 19.

³⁸ Sax writes, “In one major study, girls didn’t even list sexual arousal as a reason for having sex. Teenage girls often engage in sexual intimacy for reasons that are not related to sexual fulfillment. Girls may hope that having sex will earn them points in the popularity contest, or they may just want to please the boy they happen to be hooking up with, or they may feel pressured either by the boy or by other girls who are having sex.” Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 126.

³⁹ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 13-18.

⁴⁰ Sax writes, “For the average boy to hear you as well as the average girl, you have to speak about eight decibels more loudly. A difference of eight decibels is about three clicks on the volume dial of a typical car radio.” Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 19.

⁴¹ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 65.

⁴² Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 66.

⁴³ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 50.

⁴⁴ Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 75.

⁴⁵ Sax writes, “One consistent finding is that men show comparatively more activity in the older, more primitive areas of the brain such as the amygdala, thalamus, and hypothalamus, while women show proportionately more activity up in the cerebral cortex; that’s true even when the women report feeling more sexually aroused than the men.” Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017), 122. Sax cites these studies: “Two early reports are Sherif Karama and associates, ‘Areas of Brain Activation in Males and Females during Viewing of Erotic Film Excerpts,’ *Human Brain Mapping*, volume 16, pp. 1–13, 2002; and Stephan Hamann and colleagues, ‘Men and Women Differ in Amygdala Response to Visual Sexual Stimuli,’ *Nature Neuroscience*, volume 7, pp. 411–416, 2004. More recent reports have confirmed and extended these findings: see for example Serge Stoleru and colleagues, ‘Functional Neuroimaging Studies of Sexual Arousal and Orgasm in Healthy Men and Women: A Review and Meta-analysis,’ *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, volume 36, pp. 1481–1509, 2012. See also David Sylva and colleagues, ‘Neural Correlates of Sexual Arousal in Heterosexual and Homosexual Women and Men,’ *Hormones and Behavior*, volume 64, pp. 673–684, 2013.”

(amygdala, hypothalamus, etc.).		
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Questions for reflection and discussion

This reading argued that boys and girls are different. What are key ways that you mentor, teach, or generally lead boys differently than girls?

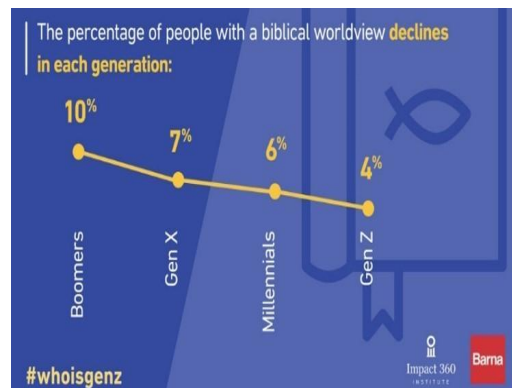
As you read this section, were there any areas that came to mind in how you might want to rethink how you lead students in your group? If so, which ones and why?

UNDERSTANDING TEENAGE CULTURE

Generation Z are people born after 1999, comprising roughly 69 million people.⁴⁶ According to the most recent research (2018), social scientists have discovered many key features of this upcoming generation.

Decreased Christian worldview

Only 4% have a biblical worldview.⁴⁷

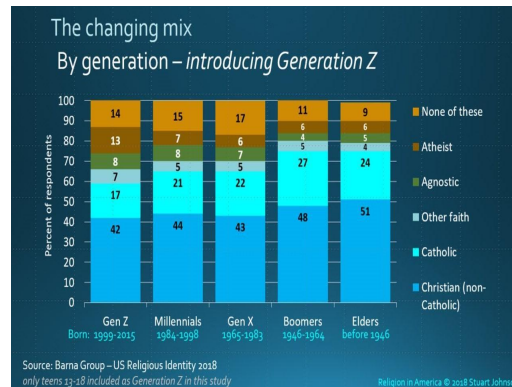


Teens 13-18 are “twice as likely as adults to say they are [an] atheist (13% vs. 6%).”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Millennials were born from 1984 to 1998 and Generation X were people born from 1965 to 1983.

⁴⁷ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 12-13.

⁴⁸ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 14.



51% say “happiness is their ultimate goal in life.”⁴⁹

IT addiction

57% use screen media four hours or more per day.⁵⁰

Phone use is cutting into sleep. 26% say that are on the screen “*eight* or more hours” per day.⁵¹ People in this generation have “nomophobia,” which is an anxiety of being detached from their phones.⁵²

33% claim they are “being bullied online.”⁵³

“They are twice as likely as adults to say ‘I enjoy interacting online with people I have not met in real life’ (18% vs. 9% all adults).”⁵⁴

They are way more likely (48%) to trust information on social media than adults (34%).⁵⁵

39% of Gen Z stated: “Looking at other people’s posts often makes me feel bad about the lack of excitement in my own life.”⁵⁶ This is much higher compared to Gen X (24%) and Boomers (8%).

⁴⁹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 14.

⁵⁰ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 12-13.

⁵¹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 16.

⁵² A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 15.

⁵³ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 14.

⁵⁴ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 17.

⁵⁵ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 18.

⁵⁶ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 20.

31% of Gen Z stated: “Looking at other people’s posts often makes me feel bad about the way I look.”⁵⁷ This is much higher compared to Gen X (20%) and Boomers (4%).

“Only two out of five engaged Christian parents have ever talked to their teen about healthy media use (41%).”⁵⁸

Reluctance to grow up

“Half are *somewhat* excited about becoming an adult (52%), while one in four is not looking forward to it (28%). Interestingly, white teens—who tend to enjoy greater wealth and comfort, on average—are more likely than black and Hispanic young people to say they are not excited to grow up (32% v. 15% black teens, 26% Hispanic teens). We see another symptom of reluctance to embrace independence in the dramatic drop-off in teen driving: Nearly all Boomers had their driver’s license by their senior year of high school, but more than one in four of today’s seniors is not licensed to drive.”⁵⁹

Psychological dangers

Teens are physically safer, but psychologically endangered. They are less likely to “leave their homes, drink alcohol, get their driver’s license and go out on dates than generations before them at the same age. But while teen pregnancies, for example, are rarer than ever, rates of teen suicide and depression have skyrocketed.”⁶⁰ Twenge notes, “In 2011, for the first time in 24 years, the teen suicide rate was higher than the teen homicide rate.”⁶¹ Moreover, a “stunning 31% more 8th and 10th graders felt lonely in 2015 than in 2011, along with 22% more 12th graders.”⁶²

Ethics

“One quarter of Gen Z strongly agrees that what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society.”⁶³ This is much higher compared to Millennials (21%), Gen X (18%), and Boomers (12%).

“Only one-third of teens believes lying is wrong (34%), compared to three out of five Elders (61%), the oldest adult generation.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 20.

⁵⁸ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 80.

⁵⁹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 52.

⁶⁰ Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 15-16.

⁶¹ Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 19.

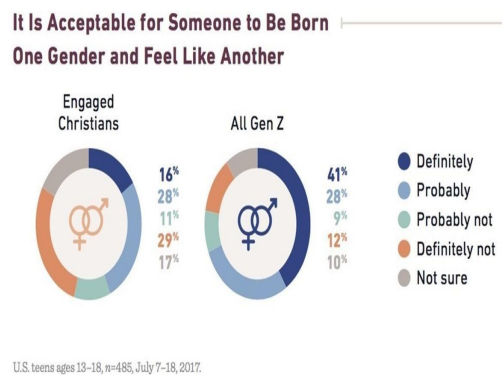
⁶² Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 97.

⁶³ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 55.

⁶⁴ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 40.



33% say that “gender is how a person feels inside, not their birth sex.”⁶⁵



“One in eight describes their sexual orientation as something other than heterosexual (12%).”⁶⁶ They continue, “To put that in context, for as long as Barna has asked survey respondents about their sexual orientation, about 3 percent of all US adults have identified as LGBT.”⁶⁷

“Seven out of 10 believe it’s acceptable to be born one gender and feel like another (69%).”⁶⁸

“Only half of today’s teens believe one’s sex at birth defines one’s gender.”⁶⁹

“Most teens would either remain neutral (38%) or encourage a friend (31%) who was considering a gender change; few would actively discourage it (8%).”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 12-13.

⁶⁶ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 40.

⁶⁷ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 46.

⁶⁸ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 40.

⁶⁹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 46.

⁷⁰ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 48.

Sheltered and hyper protected

Jean Twenge writes,

iGen [Generation Z] teens are less likely to experience the freedom of being out of the house without their parents—those first tantalizing tastes of the independence of being an adult, those times when teens make their own decisions, good or bad.⁷¹

Nearly 40% of iGen high school seniors in 2016 had never tried alcohol at all, and the number of 8th graders who have tried alcohol has been cut nearly in half.⁷²

Wanting to feel safe all of the time can also lead to wanting to protect against emotional upset—the concern with ‘emotional safety’ somewhat unique to iGen. That can include preventing bad experiences, sidestepping situations that might be uncomfortable, and avoiding people with ideas different from your own. That’s where things get dicey—both for iGen and for the older generations struggling to understand them.⁷³

We protect children from danger, real and imaginary, and are then surprised when they go to college and create safe spaces designed to repel the real world.⁷⁴

Materialistic drive

43% believe “happiness is defined by financial success.”⁷⁵



“A plurality of Gen Z considers personal achievement (43%) and hobbies (42%) most important to their sense of self. All other generations rank family at the top of the list.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 20.

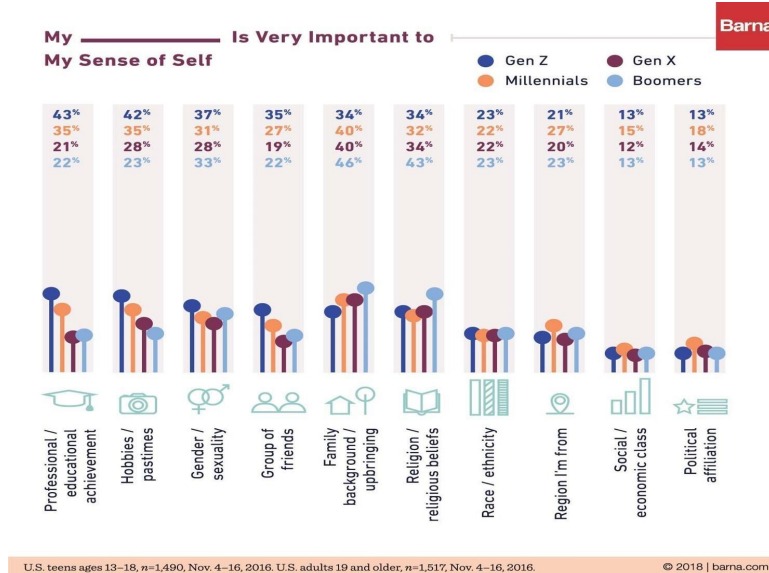
⁷² Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 36.

⁷³ Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 153.

⁷⁴ Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 164.

⁷⁵ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 12-13.

⁷⁶ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 40.



“Two-thirds want to finish their education (66%), start a career (66%) and become financially independent (65%) by age 30. Only one in five wants to get married by then (20%).”⁷⁷

“Personal achievement, whether educational or professional, and hobbies and pastimes are most central to Gen Z’s identity. Twice as many teens as Boomers strongly agree that these are important to their sense of self, while older adults are more likely to say their family background and religion are central to their identity (one in three in Gen Z considers these important).”⁷⁸

“The trends Barna identified among Millennials—high priority on career achievement, low priority on personal and relational growth—are amplified in Gen Z.”⁷⁹

“Six out of the top 10 reasons teens look up to their role model are related to career or financial success.”⁸⁰

What I Want to Accomplish Before Age 30⁸¹ [We BOLDED the areas which are higher for easy comparisons]	
<i>Gen Z</i>	<i>Millennials</i>

⁷⁷ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 40.

⁷⁸ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 41.

⁷⁹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 54.

⁸⁰ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 55.

⁸¹ We rearranged this chart on the Millennial side to show the key differences easier. We also bolded the sides that have higher percentages. A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 53.

Finish my education 66%	Finish my education 52%
Start a career 66%	Start a career 51%
Become financially independent 65%	Become financially independent 59%
Follow my dreams 55%	Follow my dreams 31%
Enjoy life before you have the responsibilities of being an adult 38%	Enjoy life before you have the responsibilities of being an adult 24%
Find out who you really are 31%	Find out who you really are 40%
Travel to other countries 21%	Travel to other countries 20%
Get married 20%	Get married 28%
Become more mature spiritually 16%	Become more mature spiritually 29%
Become a parent 12%	Become a parent 21%
Care for the poor and needy 9%	Care for the poor and needy 9%
Try to become famous or influential 9%	Try to become famous or influential 5%

Family

56% say that “parents are their primary role model, but only one-third that family is core to their identity.”⁸²

Importance of apologetics

58% of Gen Z identify as “Christian.”⁸³ However, the “percentage of people whose beliefs qualify them for a biblical worldview declines in each successively younger generation: 10 percent of Boomers, 7 percent of Gen X and 6 percent of Millennials have a biblical worldview, compared to only 4 percent of Gen Z.”⁸⁴

“Barna researchers heard time and again from teens, ‘I don’t know; I’m so confused’ and similar remarks in answer to seemingly basic questions like ‘Who was Jesus?’ (You will also see in this report that ‘not sure’ is a popular option on a majority of multiple-choice questions.) Many teens are deeply reluctant to make declarative statements about anything that could cause offense, and thus they struggle with anxiety and indecision when it’s time to give an answer, or time to act on it.”⁸⁵

“Three in 10 non-Christian teens say the problem of evil is a barrier to faith (29%).”⁸⁶

⁸² A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 12-13.

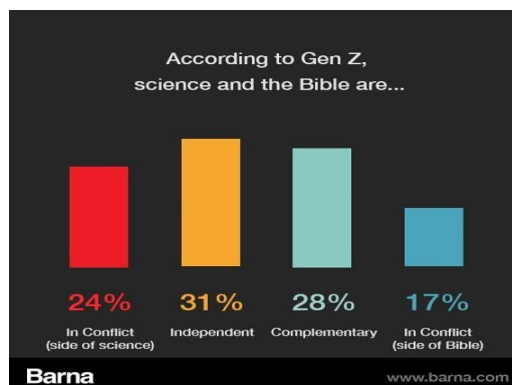
⁸³ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 26.

⁸⁴ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 25.

⁸⁵ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 28.

⁸⁶ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 62.

“Only about one in four among all Gen Z believes science and the Bible are complementary (28%).”⁸⁷



Gen Z's Biggest Barriers to Faith ⁸⁸	
I have a hard time believing that a good God would allow so much evil or suffering in the world	29%
Christians are hypocrites	23%
Science refutes too much of the Bible	20%
I don't believe in fairy tales	19%
There are too many injustices in the history of Christianity	15%
I used to go to church, but it's just not important to me anymore	12%
I had a bad experience at church / with a Christian	6%

⁸⁷ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 62.

⁸⁸ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 63.



“Teens who do believe one can know God exists are less likely than adults to say they are very convinced that is true (54% vs. 64% of adults who believe in God).”⁸⁹

46% of Gen Z say “I need factual evidence to support my beliefs.”⁹⁰

Gen Z males are more likely to want factual evidence for their beliefs (51%) versus girls (43%). They are less likely to think Science and Scripture are harmonious (53%) versus girls (66%). About one quarter say, “I don’t believe in fairy tales,” versus only 14% of girls.⁹¹

Importance of authentic Christian parents

“Four out of five engaged Christian teens agree ‘I can share my honest questions, struggles and doubts with my parents’ (79%).”⁹²

“Two-thirds of youth pastors say their biggest struggle is parents who don’t prioritize their teen’s spiritual growth (68%).”⁹³

Questions for reflection and discussion

Which statistics stuck out to you as particularly important for your personal ministry?

What are some creative ways to respond to these shifts in our culture?

⁸⁹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 64.

⁹⁰ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 65.

⁹¹ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 75.

⁹² A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 80.

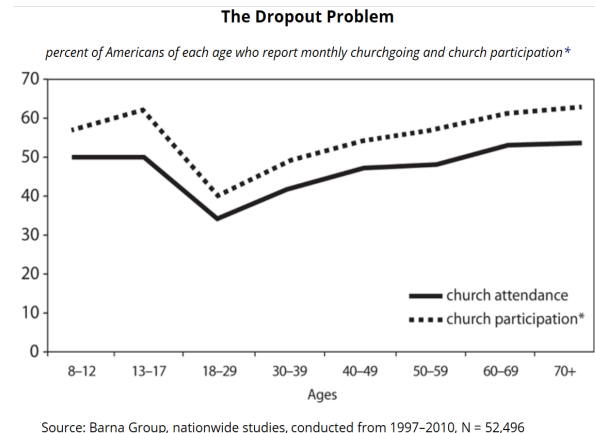
⁹³ A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018), 80.

Watch [Jean Twenge's TED talk](#) (starting ~2 minutes) for her assessment of Generation Z (or what she calls iGen). What are ways we can combat these cultural shifts that Twenge describes?

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN TEENAGERS

“Overall, there is a 43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million twentysomethings who were active churchgoers as teenagers but who will no longer be particularly engaged in a church by their thirtieth birthday.”⁹⁴

“The majority of young dropouts are not walking away from faith, they are putting involvement in church on hold. In fact, as heartrending as loss-of-faith stories are, prodigals are the rarest of the dropouts; most are either nomads or exiles—those who are dropping out of conventional forms of Christian community, not rejecting Christianity entirely. In other words, though I believe these issues are interconnected, *most young Christians are struggling less with their faith in Christ than with their experience of church.*”⁹⁵



Pew survey: “Most people who change their religion leave their childhood faith before age twenty-four.”⁹⁶

Christian teenagers appreciate nuance and things being complicated.⁹⁷

“The vast majority of churchgoing teenagers said they understand the teachings of the Bible ‘very well.’ But when we asked specific questions about the basic content of those teachings, most teens in the study performed quite poorly. In other words, their self-confidence was totally out of proportion with their actual knowledge.”⁹⁸

“This generation wants and needs truth, not spiritual soft-serve. According to our findings, churches too often provide lightweight teaching instead of rich knowledge that leads to wisdom. This is a generation hungry for substantive answers to life’s biggest questions, particularly in a time when there are untold ways to access information about *what*

⁹⁴ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 22.

⁹⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 27.

⁹⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.” (April 27, 2000; accessed October 2010), <http://pewforum.org/Faith-in-Flux.aspx>. Cited in David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 32.

⁹⁷ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 98.

⁹⁸ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 117.

to do. What's missing—and where the Christian community must come in—is addressing *how* and *why*.”⁹⁹

“We must do a better job challenging and training all young Christians—not just the science geeks—to think clearly, honestly, and comprehensively about matters of science. This includes understanding the various philosophies that undergird science, scientism, and knowledge. Teaching philosophy to teens and young adults is not easy, but if we don't we may be asking too little of the next generation and setting our expectations of them too low.”¹⁰⁰

“The best-prepared young Christians are encouraged to think for themselves, with Scripture as the viewfinder through which they interpret the world around them, including the world of science. And God's natural revelation, interpreted through the lens of their scientific aptitudes, helps them expand their understanding of God as well. They are taught *how* to think well, not simply *what* to think.”¹⁰¹

“Four out of five unmarried evangelicals ages eighteen to twenty-nine have had sex.”¹⁰²

“One-fourth of young adults with a Christian background said they do not want to follow all the church's rules (25 percent). One-fifth described wanting more freedom in life and not finding it in church (21 percent). One-sixth indicated they have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them (17 percent). And one-eighth said they feel as if they have to live a “double life” between their faith and their real life (12 percent).”¹⁰³

“Young Christians hold more conservative *beliefs* about sexuality than the broader culture (for example, that one should wait until marriage to have sex, that homosexuality is not consistent with Christian discipleship, and so on). Yet their sexual *behavior* is just as libertine as non-Christians in most ways.¹⁰⁴⁶ In other words, they *think* in traditionalist terms, but most young Christians *act* like individualists.”¹⁰⁵

“Founder of *Off the Map*, Jim Henderson, has described eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds as ‘the great agreement generation,’ because young people prefer finding areas of common ground rather than emphasizing differences that may lead to conflict.”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 127.

¹⁰⁰ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 142.

¹⁰¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 145.

¹⁰² Tyler Charles, “True Love Isn't Waiting,” *Neue* 6 (April/May 2011), 32–36. Cited in David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 152.

¹⁰³ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 152.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, 206.

¹⁰⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 158.

¹⁰⁶ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 172.

Percentage of 18 to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background¹⁰⁷		
Subject	Completely True of Me	Completely or Mostly True of Me
I don't feel that I can ask my most pressing life questions in church.	14%	36%
I have significant intellectual doubts about faith.	12%	23%
My faith does not help with depression or other emotional problems.	10%	20%
I have or had a crisis in life that has made me doubt faith.	9%	18%
The death of a loved one has caused me to doubt.	5%	12%
College experiences cause me to question my faith.	5%	11%
I am not allowed to talk about my doubts in church.	5%	10%

Percentage of 18 to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background¹⁰⁸		
Subject	Completely True of Me	Completely or Mostly True of Me
Churches are not accepting of gays and lesbians.	19%	38%
Christians are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths.	13%	29%
I feel forced to choose between my faith and my friends.	12%	29%

¹⁰⁷ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 190.

¹⁰⁸ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 175.

Church ignores the problems of the real world.	9%	22%
Church is like a country club, only for insiders.	8%	22%
I have never really been accepted by church people.	6%	14%

Questions for reflection and discussion

Which statistics stuck out to you as particularly important for your personal ministry?

What are some creative ways to respond to these shifts in our culture?

Studying our Strongest

Our college sphere leaders created a list of what we believed to be some of our strongest HS groups. These were groups that were growing, had a history of church planting, or both. We sent leaders to research these eight groups, observing their fellowship, interviewing leaders, talking with students, sitting in on leaders' meetings, etc. Afterward, these researchers reported their findings in a written report. Here were the **most common themes** that were reported regarding the **ethos of the group**:

(8 out of 8 groups) Students participating during teachings and prayer.

(8 out of 8 groups) Students having quality friendships with each other.

(7 out of 8 groups) Students becoming spiritual leaders.

(7 out of 8 groups) Leaders meetings *not* focused on sin issues or problems. (While these were addressed, they were done quickly and moved on or delegated to email.)

(7 out of 8 groups) Leaders felt free to speak up at leaders meetings. (Almost all leaders spoke up at leaders meetings.)

(6 out of 8 groups) Leadership teams had considerable trust and unity. (Leaders expressed how fun and enjoyable it was to be with their coleaders.)

(5 out of 8 groups) Follow up was an emphasis—often highly delegated by the leaders.

(4 out of 8 groups) Prayer meeting was an emphasis.

(4 out of 8 groups) Guys and girls enjoyed close relationships.

(4 out of 8 groups) Leaders meetings had short updates—quick and to the point. (This allowed for more time to be spent on other issues on the agenda.)

(3 out of 8 groups) Equipping students to do follow up.

Student Testimonies

“What personally led you to commit your life to Christ?”

Peer friendships

“The relationships in the group were so deep and authentic.”

“Having peer friendships.”

“Seeing the example of other high school students.”

“Seeing the difference in how people asked me questions and cared about me. This showed me God’s love.”

“The relationships in the Body of Christ won me over to committing my life to Christ.”

“The group felt like a family.”

Seeing the emptiness of living for sin and the world

“I saw sin in my life and didn’t want to keep living that way.”

“I saw that living a life for the world led nowhere.”

“My parents left fellowship, and I saw how it negatively impacted their lives.”

Discipleship

“I was faking it until I was disciplined.”

“Mature believers invested in my life. A senior girl invested in me when I was a freshman.”

“Being disciplined.”

Family influences

“I had older siblings following Christ.”

“I saw my older sister give her life to Christ, and I knew that this is what I wanted to do too. My older sister set an awesome spiritual example for me.”

Epic

“Epic was really important for me.”

Grace

“An understanding of grace.”

Vision

“Seeing the impact I could have on others.”

“What do you love the most about your HS group? What are you the most excited about?”

Love and unity

“Unity. The guys and girls hangout, and we have good hangouts together every Saturday.”

“I have solid relationships.”

“Our home church is so loving and accepting.”

“It’s so diverse! Nerds, funny people, and cool people all hang out together.”

“The relationships. There’s no drama. The guys and girls are really close too.”

“The relationships are like a family.”

“The high energy in the group. Everyone is so serious about following God.”

“The leaders and students working together.”

“I really like our guy hangouts.”

“The love and unity between the students in the group.”

“The close relationships and unity in the group.”

“The unity in the group, despite the differences.”

“I love my friendships with both the girls and the guys in the group.”

Being a spiritual influencer

“The ownership that the students have of the HC... I get to influence the younger students to become workers as well and create real change.”

“I love that I have a role, and it’s not just the leaders doing everything.”

“I got to lead my friend to Christ.”

“Looking forward to planting and seeing incoming freshmen.”

Teachings

“The teachings.”

“I love the teachings.”

Leadership and Discipleship

“My discipler shares her struggles with me.”

“The leaders are loving, but they can also let loose and have fun.”

Fun

“It’s super fun.”

“As you think about your time following Christ in high school, what were some of the best moments?”

Evangelism

“Seeing my friend come to Christ.”

“My best time in high school group was seeing my friend come to Christ this year.”

“My friend receiving Christ this year was the highlight of my time in HS group.”

“Fighting for my non-believing friend... fighting for him... Seeing him come to Christ and bring his friends. Even though it was hard, it was worth it!”

“Leading friends to Christ.”

“Being able to baptize my friends after leading them to Christ.”

“Giving my testimony at our home church harvest meeting. This was a really scary step of faith, but people came up and told me how much it impacted them.”

Events

“Epic. Retreats.”

“Epic.”

“Freshman transition, trips, fun activities, baptisms.”

“Going to Epic... The late nights riding around on the golf cart with Brian [Adams].”

“Retreats.”

“Retreats.”

Friends and fellowship

“Riding around in the car after CT with guys and girls, playing music and joking around.”

“Growing in friendships with the girls and brotherly friendships with the guys.”

“Friendships.”

Ministry house

“Going to campus to spend the night at the ministry house.”

“Hanging out with the college group guys.”

“What have been some of the worst times that you’ve had in following Christ? How did you work through that?”

“I felt a lot of pressure to do the right thing and felt like I was failing. I needed to learn how to wrestle with sin and experience grace.”

“Freshman and sophomore year I went through a lot of doubts, drama, and gossip. I got through this by being transparent and getting mature counsel from others.”

“Seeing many of my long-term friends decide to not follow God. The best thing for me to get through this was talking to people in the college group.”

“I wanted to give up because of sin. Fighting to get under grace was key.”

“It’s been hard to get one-on-one hangouts with people, so unity has been difficult for me.”

“I feel safe opening up to the other girls, and they’ve really helped me work through difficulties in my life.”

“It was real hard when our group went through a time of low morale.”

“My dad passed away. I didn’t want to initiate with people, but they initiated with me. They asked me questions and drew me out. I was able to start viewing God as my perfect Heavenly Father.”

“I was in sexual sin, and I learned a lot about God’s grace and love. Despite that, people in my group still accepted me and cared about me.”

“The guy that brought me out left fellowship for sexual immorality, and I grew up in a dysfunctional home with bad friends too. I overcame this through my relationship with the guy who discipled me and with my spiritual friendships.”

“When our group split, a lot of my friends went to the other side. I realized that I had an important role to play, and I recognized the spiritual warfare involved in trying to take me out. I shared a lot of how I was feeling with girls in the college group.”

Questions for reflection and discussion

As you look at this research above, **are your priorities as a leader similar to what we found in our best groups?**

- ✓ Are you building a close friendship with your students?

- ✓ Do you emphasize them building quality friendships with each other?
- ✓ Are your students motivated and inspired to become role models and student leaders?

Is your emphasis aligned with these areas above, or do you need to modify it? What might need to change in your emphasis as you mentor, teach, and lead in your group?

BUILDING A BURDEN

Our fellowship has historically placed a high level of resources into student ministry. But why? Why should we spend so much time, talent, and treasure on reaching young people for Christ? On the personal level, maybe you are asking the question, “Why should *I* put so much time into high school ministry?”

First, God strategically uses young people throughout the Bible. We can’t decide if our culture expects kids to grow up too quickly or too slowly. They grow up quickly in the sense that they are rapidly exposed to adult content, but they grow up slowly in the sense of responsibility (e.g. “adulthood” memes). But God sees things differently. Throughout the Bible, we see that his method of operations is to reach, call, and use young people to grow and enrich his kingdom:

John of Zebedee was likely a teenager when he started following Jesus.¹⁰⁹ He was one of Jesus’ “inner three” disciples, and he planted many churches, wrote one gospel, three letters, and the book of Revelation.

Timothy arguably became Paul’s best disciple, and he was probably only a teenager when Paul selected him.¹¹⁰ Paul later told him, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Tim. 4:12).

Mark wrote one of the gospels, and he received training from his older cousin Barnabas as a young man. He also served under Paul (2 Tim. 4:11; Col. 4:10) and Peter (1 Pet. 5:13).

Mary was likely just a teenager when she responded to God’s call for her life. In this culture, betrothal took place just after puberty,¹¹¹ so Mary could have been as young as 12 or 13 years old.¹¹²

Joseph began his life of adventure in Egypt when he was only 17 years old (Gen. 37:2).

¹⁰⁹ John wrote his books as late as the 90’s AD, which would be 60 years after Jesus died. This presupposes that he was a very young man in Jesus’ day. Moreover, the imagery of him laying on Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper may imply that he was a young man (Jn. 13:23).

¹¹⁰ Paul picked up Timothy in Acts 16, which was in the late 40’s AD. A full decade (or more) later, Paul could still refer to Timothy having “youthfulness” (1 Tim. 4:12), which would place him anywhere from 30 to 40 years old (see comments on **1 Timothy 4:12**).

¹¹¹ Leifeld, W. L. (1984). Luke. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 830). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹¹² Bock, D. L. (1994). *Luke* (Lk 1:26). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Samuel was just a young boy when God spoke to him (1 Sam. 3). God chose to speak to the younger generation (Samuel), rather than the older generation (Eli).

David received criticism from Saul for being “but a youth” (1 Sam. 17:33), and likewise, Goliath underestimated David for being “but a youth” (1 Sam. 17:42). But God used this young man to kill Goliath, and consequently, God empowered David to rescue the entire nation of Israel. Likewise, **David and Jonathan** began a close friendship that lasted for their entire lives when they were young men (1 Sam. 18:1-4).

Solomon felt intimidated by his youthfulness when he took over the kingdom. He told God, “I am only a *little child* and do not know how to carry out my duties” (1 Kin. 3:7). But God gave him discernment to rule over the nation of Israel (vv.9-12). Later in life, Solomon wrote, “It is better to be a poor but wise youth than an old and foolish king who refuses all advice” (Eccl. 4:13 NLT).

Josiah was very young when he took over the kingship in Israel (2 Chron. 34:1-3), and he turned out to be one of Israel’s greatest kings.

Jeremiah was insecure that he was only a “youth.” But God told him, “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak” (Jer. 1:7).

Esther was a “young lady” (Esther 2:7), but God used her to rescue the Jewish people in Persia.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah were young men when they came to Babylon—probably teenagers. Yet we read, “As for these four *youths*, God gave them *knowledge* and *intelligence* in every branch of literature and *wisdom*” (Dan. 1:17).

Second, high school is statistically a ripe time for evangelism. The Barna Institute studied the ages at which people come to Christ in America:¹¹³

43% come to Christ before age 13.

21% come to Christ from age 14-18 (i.e. high school).

13% come to Christ between the ages of 18 and 21.

23% come to Christ between age 22 and death.

We would have to assume that the first statistic is largely related to biological conversion. That is to say, these converts likely (though obviously, not always) came to faith through their Christian parents. While it is absolutely vital to see our children come to faith in Christ, this statistic could be misleading when it comes to our investment as leaders. As leaders, we should really focus on the statistics of when people come to Christ as adults. If we exclude the 43% of people meeting Christ as children (before the age of 13), this means:

36% of “adult” converts come to Christ from ages 14-18 (i.e. high school).

¹¹³ Barna, [“Evangelism is Most Effective Among Kids.”](#) Barna Institute, October 11, 2004.

23% of adult converts come to Christ between the ages of 18 and 21.

40% come to Christ between age 22 and death.

In other words, ages 14-21 are a ripe time to see unchurched people come to faith. This is a time when people are exploring their beliefs for the first time, and it is a key time for them to be introduced to Jesus.

Third, many of our leaders came from or through HS ministry. Roughly 40% of leaders in our college ministry came from Christian homes in our fellowship. Students who are effectively disciplined in high school learn a love for ministry, gain ground on various besetting sins and dysfunctions, and have a foundation for following Christ into adulthood. We would be remiss to neglect such a fruitful field of ministry!

Fourth, college groups with poor HS work lose their youth. Experience shows how much college groups benefit from a perpetual flow of youth coming up from HS. When we fold HS groups, individual college groups will lose their stake in HS ministry.

Fifth, on a subjective level, we have found that working with youth is deeply satisfying. When we see the lights come on in the eyes of 14 year old, we see how impactful this ministry can be. As you continue to love and lead young people, you will find that your burden only continues to grow.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Do you sense a personal burden to lead in high school ministry? Was this a sudden burden or more of a gradual one?

If you are not feeling an increasing burden, what steps might you take to grow your burden for working with young people? Reflect on Paul's words to the Corinthians: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer" (2 Cor. 5:14-16 NIV).

LEADERSHIP TUNE-UP

What areas should leaders explore as they think about their church? We suggest focusing on three central categories: (1) quality ministry, (2) strategy, and (3) teambuilding. As you read, reflect on the questions and evaluate your own leadership, as well as your team.

(1) Quality ministry

Leaders should aim to keep their team focused on the central mission of the church. If the quality of these ministries is poor, leaders shouldn't look for some exotic spiritual disease. Instead, they should focus on quality control in these areas:

Evangelism. We need to learn how to lead our group into effective evangelism. Evangelism is the life-blood of the church.

Who are your biggest bringers? Who are your best evangelists among the students or on your leadership team?

Who most often leads people to Christ: (1) **leaders**, (2) **students**, or (3) **leaders alongside students**?

McCallum, [“Leading Home church Evangelism”](#)

Rochford, [“Evangelism”](#)

Follow up. The problem with most high school groups is not evangelism, but follow up. We see more first-time guests and conversions in high school group (per capita) than in college group.

Which new people have become incorporated? Which have not? Were these losses unavoidable, or the result of poor work?

Are new students neglected or left alone at fellowship? Which leaders have the responsibility of relationally engaging them?

Do students follow up with new people?

Discipleship. Leaders should work from day one to raise up quality student workers. Without this, home church growth won't matter, because you won't have a solid group to plant. While the leader primarily does this through their own personal ministry, they also apply the same interest in their coleaders. They should offer insight, encouragement, and discernment to one another.

Do your disciples view you as a genuine friend? What steps have you taken to build a genuine friendship with them? What has worked and what hasn't worked well?

Do you get students visit the ministry house? Do they enjoy their time there with older believers?

What have you been modeling to your disciples lately?

What approaches have you taken to help your friends get into the Word? What has worked and what hasn't?

How do you respond when your friend cancels on your time together?

When is the last time you did ministry alongside your friend? What did they learn from this?

What areas of discipleship are challenging for you? What have you learned about these challenges recently?

Share some recent feedback you have been getting from your co-leaders about your discipleship?

McCallum, *Organic Discipleship*.

Community building. Quality fellowship has a powerful effect on the watching world (Jn. 13:34-35; 17:21-24). Leaders keep their fingers on the pulse of their group to see if this area needs growth.

Do students look forward to meeting together? Do they generally have fun when they see each other, or is your group boring?

Are your students genuine friends with each other? Are they friends with the leaders of the group?

Which areas of group quality are in your control as leaders? Which are out of your control?

Do leaders mostly talk to one another? Or do they engage with the students during fellowship?

What proportion of your group attends CT and HC regularly?

How does your group generally do in getting students to Epic, retreats, and classes?

How might you lead change in group quality, so that students enjoy the group more?

McCallum, *Members of One Another*

Rochford, [“High Dedication Ethos.”](#)

Teaching. Leaders don’t need to have the gift of teaching, but they need to be able to consistently deliver biblically rich teachings that persuade, inspire, and equip their people. The operative word here is *consistently*. Leaders may not give an A+ teaching, but they rarely give a C teaching.

Leaders also need to have the courage to put the best teachers up when their group is struggling with morale. They need to persuade their less effective teachers to teach less, so that the stronger or more experienced teachers can teach more. While this is sometimes a shot to the pride, everyone on the leadership team should be willing to put the needs of the group above their own personal desire to teach. It’s always exciting to have your non-Christian guest hear a great teaching. Likewise, it’s painful to have a friend visit when the teaching quality is poor.

Rochford, [Teaching Essentials](#)

Rochford, [Teaching Structure](#)

Rochford, [Teaching Tune-Ups](#)

Prayer group. Charles Spurgeon called his prayer group the “engine” of his church. We agree. Our time in prayer together teaches fellow believers how to pray, and it breaks down demonic fortresses. Your prayer group teaches your students how to value God’s part in ministry, and the role of faith in serving God. Furthermore, prayer group is a great place to

set vision and influence the ethos of your group. If possible, the senior leader should be the one to lead the prayer group, or they should delegate it to someone gifted in this area. Your group won't get very far if you neglect this. Some leaders like using these wineskins to enhance their prayer meeting:

- ✓ Starting the time by having a student talk about how they shared their faith that week.
- ✓ Splitting up into groups of three to pray once a month with a mature student or leader in each group.
- ✓ Spending a few minutes at the beginning teaching students *how* to pray (Lk. 11:1).
- ✓ Highlighting answers to prayer.
- ✓ Modeling passion for what God is doing in the group.
- ✓ Bringing pizza or snacks once in a while to the prayer group.
- ✓ Keeping it short. Some groups only have a prayer meeting for 15 minutes.

See McCallum, ["How to Run a Worker's Prayer Meeting."](#)

Rochford, ["The Means of Growth: Prayer"](#)

Rochford, ["Insights into Sanctification"](#)

Standing for the truth. Leaders need to know how to effectively speak the truth in love. If they are unwilling to do this, the group will lose vitality. Leaders need to have a good read on their group, being able to discern what warrants instruction, correction, or rebuke. Then, they need to be willing to follow through. Undisciplined groups are superficial and uncommitted. This often gets exposed when it comes time to plant and people's motives are tested by the discomfort that comes with splitting.

Christopher Kolenda, *Leadership: The Warrior's Art* (Army War College Foundation Press, 2001), chapter 5.

(2) Strategy

Discernment. This is arguably the most important aspect of leadership, because it spreads across so many different areas. Good leaders are neither *optimistic* nor *pessimistic*, but strive to be *realistic*. Bad discernment often manifests when assigning long-term follow up. Those with underdeveloped discernment find themselves trusting the untrustworthy. On the other end of the spectrum, negativity can slow down and even derail home churches. Those with discernment avoid both extremes.

Leaders should be able to accurately identify promising Christian workers, as well as those who have questionable character or work ethic. They need to be able to see trends in the group, analyze them, understand their causes, and creatively seek solutions for how to improve.

Having good discernment also means knowing what is important and what isn't—what should be emphasized and what should not. Good leaders don't allow pettiness, drama, and nitpicking to bog them down. Instead, they intentionally rip their eyes off of the common frustrations of leadership and focus instead on the big picture.

Our most effective and even gifted leaders are distinguished by how much they constantly confer and seek counsel. Stay in close contact with your coaches and pastoral staff, keeping them up to date regarding important developments in your group. The more they know, the better advice they can offer.

Hilario, [“Honing Your Spiritual Discernment”](#)

Rochford, [“Discernment”](#)

Vision. Leaders need to develop a compelling vision for coleaders, future plant prospects, and potential problems that can be fixed or maybe avoided altogether. This often begins with prayer and thinking about how to get the most out of people and having them realize their own spiritual potential. Merely “warehousing” high potential people isn't sufficient. Leaders need to learn how to help them bear real fruit.

Effective vision is also practical—not merely inspirational. Effective leaders know how to break down vision into practical steps to carry it out. They use venues like discipleship, fellowship, leaders meetings, workers meetings, and prayer meetings to instill and carry out their vision for the group.

Would the average worker in your group know what our current vision is? Are they excited about this vision?

Do you have a good vision that might need to be rekindled? Or do you need to start from scratch?

McCallum, [“Vision and Christian Leadership”](#)

McCallum, [“Leading Change”](#)

McCallum, [“Motivation”](#)

Planning ahead. There are many things we do which are not a part of our regular schedule of ministry, but nevertheless can be life changing. God regularly uses things like retreats, trips, potlucks, classes, and workers meetings to raise morale. Don't wait until the last minute to plan or promote events! If you aren't personally able to promote these, then delegate this to a **faithful coleader** and hold that person accountable to follow through. If you fail to plan ahead, you will create more stress for yourself and your team and will end up missing key opportunities.

Are you effective at planning meeting nights, organizing rides, and coordinating follow up?

Are you an *active* leader or a *passive* one? Do you wait for “marching orders” from your coleaders, or do you actively seek ways to serve?

Have my coleaders delegated anything to you? Have you recently asked for ways that you can carry the load of leadership?

Assessing our role in ministry versus God's role. Good leaders constantly reflect on what they can do on their end of things. Ineffective leaders are often quick to blame circumstances or obstacles and fall into fatalism. They know how to coach and counsel their coleaders in this area, reminding them of God's promises on the one hand, and our important contribution on the other.

Are you missing or minimizing your role in any way? Have you done everything you can on your end?

What can you learn from our letdowns so that you don't repeat the same mistakes in the future?

What does your three-part chart show about your group, and what can you learn from it?

Is it possible that you are blaming your people or coleaders for problems, or are you actively trying to overcome obstacles?

McCallum, ["God's Part in Ministry"](#)

(3) Team building

Leading the leaders' meeting. Senior leaders should set an agenda to work through at the leaders meeting. Here, you should focus on the "important, but not urgent" quadrant of leadership. This helps leaders meetings from spiraling into a "problem focus." Senior leaders sometimes email a suggested agenda in advance so that their coleaders can prepare for the discussion, or suggest additions to the agenda. But this is not necessarily the approach all effective senior leaders take.

Do your leaders feel energized by your time together, or do they feel bored or frustrated?

Are these meetings efficient or inefficient?

Are they too long?

Are they too frequent or too infrequent? Should you adjust how much time you meet together?

Do you facilitate good communication and discussion? Do some leaders talk too much? Do some leaders not talk at all?

McCallum, ["Leadership Team Building"](#)

Promoting unity. Leaders should constantly assess how the team is working together.

Are my fellow leaders unified? Are there any issues that have caused resentment or frustration on the team? Have they been fully resolved? If so, how?

Is there hidden conflict or “peacefaking”?

Is there an overly judgmental spirit on my team, or do my coleaders feel a general sense of trust, encouragement, and motivation from one another?

Which leaders gravitate toward one another? Which do not talk with one another?

McCallum, [“Leadership Team Building”](#)

Developing coleaders. Leaders should watch to see how they can develop their coleaders. Our coleaders need to feel empowered to try new things, be creative, and even fail. Leaders must give credence to other people’s ideas and encourage their creativity. They certainly shouldn’t be calling all the shots and doing everything themselves.

One of the biggest roles of the leader is to be a keen observer. Instead of bearing the burden of the group on our shoulders, we need to learn to bring our observations to the team and brainstorm solutions, seek input, and delegate in moving forward.

What unique gifts do your coleaders have? Are these being used effectively? How can you deploy their gifts even better?

Do you ever read papers that inspire, train, or equip your team?

Are you bringing encouragement for the special ways your coleaders exercise their gifts on your team?

Are any of your coleaders discouraged or disengaged? What’s your plan for helping them get refocused?

Are you communicating problems that you’re seeing to the sphere staff or the college group leaders to get help?

Raising up other senior leaders. Senior leader need to identify and train a new senior leader for their next church plant.

Name two coleaders who could likely take over after you plant or perhaps step out after your tour is over. Why did you pick them?

Do they need to be urged to do more, or are they eager for more responsibility?

Do I have a plan to develop them? What would hold them back from leading tomorrow? Work backwards from this hypothetical and work on the key issues.

Team player. If you can’t work well with others, you aren’t going to make a very good leader. You need to be helpful with others, humble to input, flexible to different types of leaders, and appreciative of those who work hard.

Do you get along and thrive with your coleaders?

Are you stimulating them to love and good deeds?

Do others generally enjoy leading with you?

Communication. Good leaders know how to communicate, listen, and value others' input. They know how to model healthy communication and work with those who are poor communicators. They initiate and respond to initiation through email, text, phones, and other venues.

How is your team's communication?

Who are the best communicators on your team?

Do you share mostly about problems, but not potential solutions or plans?

Are you willing to share your ideas—even if you might be wrong?

Do you contribute to discussions and plans over email?

Do you speak up at your leaders' meetings with ideas and opinions?

Thinking globally. Poor leaders have a “silo mentality,” where they only look at their personal ministry, rather than the entire home church. Effective leaders keep a bird's eye view of both cell groups, and seek to offer input and support wherever needed. They realize that the health of the entire home church will necessarily affect the health of their own personal ministry. Many leaders like to identify a strong leader in the other cell group to help them think about the universal group—not just the men's or women's sides.

When was the last time I built up my coleaders' ministry?

Do I partner up with others to do ministry?

Do I give encouragement and constructive feedback to my coleaders?

When was the last time I gave teaching feedback to one of my coleaders?

Fighting discouragement. Ministry is fraught with ups and downs, advancement and retreat. This instability can wreak havoc on leaders in many ways: It can lead to confusion, discouragement, distraction, frustration, or stress. Strong leaders know how to model faith, character, and reliance on God's power during these times. During times of discouragement, coleaders often look to one another to see how they should be respond.

Consider a young child who takes a tumble. If the mother reacts with wide eyes and hysteria, the child will likely panic based on her reaction. However, if his mother tells the kid, “Good fall!” the child will likely emotionally rebound quicker. While coleaders are not like the child in this illustration, this is analogous to some degree. Leaders need to model that everything is in God's hands and will be worked out for the good.

Passion-infusing. A leader who is bored and unexcited about the things of God is a paradox. If a sports' team coach presented himself as disinterested in the game, who would feel inspired to play? Infusing passion is an attitude we need to seek to infuse our coleaders.

Questions for reflection or discussion

Think through these categories below:

Quality Ministry	Strategy	Team Building
Evangelism Follow-up Discipleship Community building Teaching Prayer group Standing for truth	Discernment Persuasion Vision Planning ahead Assessing God's role versus our role	Leading leaders meeting Promoting unity Developing coleaders Raising up another leader Team player Communication Thinking globally Fighting discouragement Passion-infusing

What key insights are you taking away from this study?

What is most important to work on? Why?

What are three strengths of your team? What is one area that is lacking? What action steps can you take to develop in these areas? Make sure to consult with your coleaders, as well as your sphere coach for wisdom and input.

What are the minimum requirements for leadership?

Home church. Come on time, and don't leave early. Don't just talk with your coleaders, but invest yourself in contributing to loving the students and building up the meeting.

Discipleship. This should be weekly, include content, be relational, and times of fun. As a general rule of thumb, we think that new leaders should establish at least one discipleship relationship within the first six months of entering the group. Otherwise, they should step aside and let someone else try.

Length of service. You should commit to staying at least until your disciple graduates.

CT attendance? We do not require this for high school leaders. However, attendance at CT doubles your opportunity to invest and make an impact on your students. This is an excellent opportunity for leaders who are looking for more involvement.

Note: Leadership requirements may vary based on the current needs of each group. So leaders should negotiate what is needed on this basis.

How should leadership teams select new leaders?

Ministry ethics. You need to be sensitive to all of the college home churches who serve in your HS group. This means that you should not "box out" college groups from sending potential workers, so that your college group can have a bigger stake. We shouldn't expect God to bless a group that is unethical and involved in ministry greed like this.

Take your time. If you hire an inept worker, you'll either need to give them considerable coaching, or you'll need to fire them down the road. Obviously, students bond to the college workers in the group, so having them step out will have an effect on them as well as your team. Think back on the good hires and bad hires that you made in the past, and what you learned from these decisions. Assess who might be a good match for your team and the needs of your group.

Invite workers to visit. Have potential leaders come down to help once in a while to give their testimony, to give a guest teaching, or to help with rides. See how they interact with the students. Could you see this person making a contribution, or do you have second thoughts? What do your coleaders think?

Stretch your coleaders before bringing someone in. As a general rule of thumb, our leadership teams should grow as the number of students grow. The knee-jerk reaction on high school teams is to call for more leaders when they feel overwhelmed. This could be a mistake. The bigger your team, the less ownership each leader will have. It's better to stretch your coleaders to lead creatively before calling for new leaders. Having too many leaders can smother a burgeoning student leadership. Therefore, it's important to encourage your student leaders to carry some of the load of being influencers in the group.

Consult with your sphere staff. Sphere coaches often have a much better knowledge of new, potential leaders. They will often suggest workers that you didn't consider, or provide good insight on workers you are considering.

When should leadership teams remove new leaders?

We delegate this responsibility to the senior leader of the home church, who should work in concert with their sphere leader. Before you consider removing a leader, you need to ask these questions:

Have they been able to win a disciple in the first six months of leading? If not, this is a fairly objective sign that they should step out, and give someone else a try.

Have you tried to coach this person? Have you given concrete and clear feedback on areas that need improvement? How have they responded to your feedback?

Have you shared your observations and feedback with the leaders in their college group? You should give their college leaders an opportunity to help coach the person before removing them.

Have you warned them that they could be removed? Leaders should not be surprised by being removed from HS ministry. They should be warned first, and given an opportunity to turn around.

What will the fallout be in the group if they are removed? We need to weigh this carefully, knowing that removing leaders could have a big effect on students. Likewise, what will the cost be if we allow them to remain in leadership?

Senior Leadership

Aren't all leaders created equal? Why do we even have senior leaders on home church teams? What role do they play that other leaders do not? What sort of characteristics should we look for in a leader to fit this role?

Why do we have senior leaders?

We have found that leadership teams generally flourish when someone has the responsibility of leading the team. We're all familiar with the mantra, "Everybody's job is nobody's job." Without a delegated person to lead the coleaders, we have found that leadership teams lack vision, direction, and initiative. To put it simply, the role of the senior leader is to lead his coleaders.

Does the senior leader have more authority than his coleaders?

The senior leader cannot "overrule" his coleaders. He does not get an extra vote in a debate. He does not have a "senior leader card" which he can play in a discussion or disagreement. Like any other leader, he leads through persuasion in the midst of disagreement.

That being said, we do delegate some authority to senior leaders in at least three ways:

(1) Calling for a vote when leaders are gridlocked. This may happen after long, time-consuming discussions on the topic that needs to be expedited. If the senior leader feels that the team is wasting too much time, they can call for a vote.

(2) Making urgent judgment calls that can't wait for a discussion. For example, if weather conditions may be too dangerous to have a meeting, the senior leader can cancel the meeting for that night. This would be because there wouldn't be enough time to discuss such a subjective judgment call.

(3) Vetting and interviewing potential leaders to bring into the leadership team. We feel that the leadership team should all decide on whom to bring into their team, but the senior leader should play the lead role in (1) vetting potential leadership candidates and (2) putting forward the best option. If the team cannot attain consensus, then they should consult with sphere leadership staff for further wisdom and guidance.

DISCERNMENT

The Greek word for discernment is *diakrisis* (pronounced dee-OCK-ree-sis), which is a derivative of *diakrino*. It means "to evaluate carefully" or "to be able to judge, ability to make judgments, ability to decide."¹¹⁴ This term covers a lot of things. For our purposes, we are going to equate discernment as the ability to make wise decisions for difficult judgment calls. For instance, how can we learn to believe in people without being naïve or cynical? When someone falls into a serious sin, how long should we wait before trusting them with serious ministry? What are signs that someone might be in secret sin? What are signs that we can

¹¹⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*.

trust up-and-coming workers? How do we correctly weigh priorities in a group and keep our emphasis on the most important priorities?

The skill of discernment is important for a number of reasons. It helps us to recognize dangerous members in the church (Acts 20:29-30), not waste time with the hard hearted (Mt. 10:14; Eph. 5:15-17), and learn how to recognize the people whom God is raising into leadership. All of these judgment calls are subjective, and yet, vitally important to the health of the church. Therefore, we should consider several principles that will help to sharpen our discernment in making wise judgment calls:

Discernment takes practice. The author of Hebrews writes that mature believers “because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). If you’re not gifted in discernment, give yourself grace. You’re going to make mistakes. Just make sure that you’re open to God’s teaching, rather than trying to justify yourself from mistakes that have been made.

Don’t “mind read.” Sometimes, we will sense that the Holy Spirit might be giving us insight into a person’s problems. But discernment is not a “spidey sense” that tells you what is wrong. We shouldn’t judge someone based on these intuitions without objective facts. This might cause us to investigate further, but in the absence of any facts, we need to let it go. However, after pressing the case further, we might see further signs that surface. In this case, perhaps the Lord is guiding us to press the case further.



Similarly, consider if you hear funny noises from your neighbor’s house. You shouldn’t walk over and kick down the door, because you’re feeling suspicious. Instead, you should investigate further (e.g. ask questions, knock on the door, etc.; see the Alfred Hitchcock movie *Rear Window*).

Look at deeds over words. Repeatedly in Scripture, we read that works are more important than words. Our walk is more important than our talk. Jesus said, “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Mt. 11:19). Speaking of the Pharisees, he said that they do not follow their teachings “For they say things and do not do them” (Mt. 23:3). John writes, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:6). And he said, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 Jn. 4:20). In the extreme case of false teachers, they can be discerned—not by their words—but by their actions (2 Pet. 2:18-19; Mt. 7:15-20; Jn. 10:12-13). Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits.” Of course, it is possible for a person to say one thing, but do another. The NT says that actions are more important than words (Mt. 21:28:31).



Therefore, we should beware of having a “good talk.” Learn to suspend judgment and wait for deeds. We’re not advocating cynicism, but realism. If you had a good talk, that’s great. But, not enough. Wait until you see action. If we ran our group according to what people said, rather than did, then the biggest hypocrites would be leading the group.

What is the difference between Negativity and Discernment?	
Negativity	Discernment
Comes from Satan	Comes from God
Refuses to believe all things (1 Cor. 13:7)	Rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13) Believes in what people can become, but isn’t gullible of human nature
Fatalistic	Realistic
Often causes us to retreat from our people (“They’ll never change.”)	Often causes us to move towards our people (“They really need me to speak to them.”)
Often clouded by emotion or hurt feelings (“They betrayed me.”)	Experiences emotion and hurt feelings but places God first (“Their issue is primarily with the Lord...”).

The best indicator of FUTURE behavior is PAST behavior. Of course, there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit changes lives and hearts. But when entrusting someone with responsibility of some kind, we should base this on their record of sacrificial love and faithful in the past, rather than their possible record in the future. Of course, they could change and become a faithful worker if we entrusted them with a responsibility. God is surely big enough to do this. But the same could be said of anyone in the Body of Christ from the least faithful to the most.

Learn to empathize. Ask yourself: “What would I do in their situation?” This helps us to see what might be missing from their story or recounting of an event.

Look at the company they keep. Solomon wrote, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20). Paul wrote, “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor. 15:33 NLT). Much of the Proverbs tells us to look for this as well. If they feel comfortable around the values of people who are apathetic or hostile to Christ, what does this say about this person? Put yourself in their shoes: Could you regularly spend time around people who were hostile to Christ without being heartbroken or otherwise affected in some way? Why does this not seem to bother them?

Listen carefully. While we can’t know what’s going on inside a person’s heart or mind, Jesus said that we can learn this through listening to a person’s lips. Jesus said, “[The] mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Lk. 6:45). What are they passionate about? Do they

talk about what they're reading? Do they have stories about answered prayer? Do they have stories about witnessing or serving?

Beware of “niceness.” Jesus was loving, but he wasn't nice. Thus nice people often make the worst Christian workers! Churches today will often consider the ornery, arrogant, or prideful people as bad Christians, and they will play favorites with the nice, polite, and compliant people. However, we should base our judgments on spiritual fruit and love, rather than etiquette or niceness.

Beware of temporary change. It's possible for people to change temporarily to avoid confrontation.

Learn to face the facts. We need to avoid excessive optimism and face the facts with our ministry. Most people are biased towards believing that their discipleship is awesome, when it isn't. They sometimes think that if they just ignore the problems that these will somehow disappear. While it is painful to see problems honestly, admitting these is the fastest way to start dealing with them. Therefore, we need to avoid minimizing, excusing, and even being in total denial of the problems right in front of us. This mindset is often motivated by the fear of rebuking others who need it.

Avoid hysteria. Hitting the panic button doesn't help anyone. People are sinful. We need to learn to cope with this. It doesn't help our discernment to be hysterical, when people fall into sin. Take your time to sit quietly before the Lord before making any sort of rash decisions.

Grow in the word and prayer. Solomon writes, “Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established” (Prov. 16:3). The psalmist writes, “Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments” (Ps. 119:66).

Confer regularly with colleagues. Who has good discernment on your team? Present your plans or observations to co-leaders for critique. Don't just ask people to do their thinking for you.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What is one key point that you took away from this reading?

What is one area of discernment that you often overlook?

What are your personal tendencies with discernment? Do you lean toward optimism or pessimism?

PERSUASION

Larry Page—the cofounder of Google—said, “To just invent something and have a great idea is a lot of work, but it is not enough. [You need to know] how to get people excited.”¹¹⁵ As Christians, we are working with the greatest ideas of all time, those belonging to the Creator of the universe! We know the word of God has power all of its own (Rom. 1:16), and

¹¹⁵ Cited in G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa, *The Art of Woo* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 9.

that the Holy Spirit moves in people's hearts (Jn. 16:8). But these factors don't get us off the hook from learning to persuade! God has chosen to deliver his truth through people, and the way we communicate that truth certainly matters and has a real effect on the choices people make.

What is persuasion?

We can define persuasion in this way: **convincing people of the truth, urgency, and application of Christian goals.**

Why should we learn to be persuasive?

If we do not use persuasion, then what is the alternative? Fundamentally, the alternative to persuasion is coercion. Persuasion works *through* a person's reason, while coercion works *around* their reason. Without persuasion, we will really be guilty of manipulation—not motivation.

Motivation	Manipulation
Leads through <i>persuasion</i>	Leads through <i>coercion</i>
Done to <i>give</i> something to the person	Done to <i>take</i> something from the person
Explains what, <i>why</i> , and how	Explains what and how
Empowers others	Self-glorifying
Seeks to release control and input over time	Seeks to gain more and more control over time
Getting <i>underneath</i> others	Getting <i>over</i> others

Most Christian leadership books conspicuously overlook the importance of persuasion. And yet, persuasion is the method that God chooses to change us (1 Pet. 3:15-16; 2 Cor. 5:11; Rom. 12:1-2; Ps. 34:8). Some leaders retreat into passivity or helplessness when it comes to motivating others. Consequently, we should utilize this method to help others grow as well.

How do we become more persuasive?

Can persuasion be learned? Absolutely! Like most aspects of leadership, persuasion is a learned skill. Consider some of the following keys to become more persuasive:

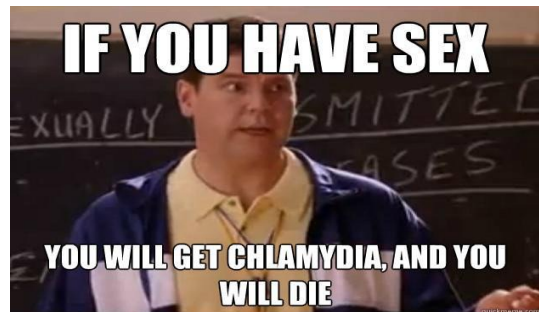
Appeal to Scripture. We are surprised how often leaders skip this step. They often think that a person has read the relevant Scriptures on a particular topic. This is very often not the case. Furthermore, even if they have read them, they may not have internalized these passages. Or they may simply need to be reminded of these important truths. Peter and Paul had no problem repeating themselves on key issues, because the human heart is prone to forget or reject important biblical teaching (2 Pet. 1:12; Phil. 3:1).

When we appeal to Scripture, it is important that we not only appeal to a biblical *teaching*, but also a biblical *emphasis*. Repetition and passionate language usually show a biblical emphasis. Help them to see that this issue is close to the heart of God. Collect the relevant

Scriptures and read through these together. Suggest that they pray through these passages on their own, which will give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to convict them.

Appeal to reason. Think through your arguments carefully. People respond to a well-reasoned case. This can be done informally through a dialogue, or by doing some reading on the topic together.

Make conservative claims. God's truth is so powerful that we don't need to exaggerate it. When people sense that we are exaggerating, we lose credibility. So, instead of saying, "Your life will be absolutely miserable if you go for _____," you might say, "Yeah, you'll have some fun times if you go for _____, but you're going to pay a high price in several areas."



Explain the cost. Paul said, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It is persuasive when we explain the cost and suffering that could come from a potential decision for Christ. The listener thinks, "Wow, they think that this will involve suffering, but they are *still* saying that I should consider doing this!" Instead of letting the other person make these counterarguments, it's powerful for them to hear you articulate these first, because it shows that you've considered both sides.

Learn when to wait. Sometimes it's important to make a call, and then say, "I'm not asking you to make a decision. But would you just think and pray about it this week?"

Build relational rapport. This is a fancy way of saying, "Love your people." While not always necessary, persuasion is often done best in the context of a close relationship. We listen to those who listen to us. When we have loved a person and earned their respect, they are often willing to hear us out, and our words carry more weight. Personal appeals make sense are often well received where there is trust already built.

Appeal to self-interest. People often ask, "What's in it for me?" Selfish motivations do not last long in the Christian life. But not everything that is in our *self-interest* is necessarily *selfish*. For instance, it is in our self-interest to breathe air, but this is not a selfish action. God gives us many promises for why we should follow him, and we should leverage these in persuasion (e.g. Jn. 13:17; Acts 20:35).

Appeal to others. Show how a certain course of action is going to benefit others. Rather than just thinking about *me*, they should think about *we*. How would their decision in a particular area affect those around them? What impact might it have on eternity?

Empathy. It's not enough to share ideas or arguments that *we* find persuasive. We need to care less about how we look or sound, and more about the other person's thoughts and comprehension. Ask yourself, "If I share this with them, what would they likely think, feel, or say?" After a conversation, ask yourself, "What was their biggest hang-up? What did they walk away with from that conversation?"

Be bold. People tend to believe people who really believe in what they are saying. Insecurity and self-doubt tend to be repulsive. We need to take the time to become deeply convinced of the truths we are trying to convey (2 Tim. 1:7).

Utilize public teaching. We can bring far more heat and passion when teaching to a group than we can for an individual person. When you teach, think through the current needs of the group and persuade based on these. Every Bible teaching is an opportunity to make a persuasive case for the people in your group.

The role of antithesis in persuasion

Jesus spoke of the man who ruined his life by not counting the cost (Lk. 14:28). Paul frequently pointed to immature and ungodly examples (1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Tim. 1:6-7; 1:20; 4:1-3; 5:8; 5:15; 5:20; 6:9-10; 2 Tim. 3:2-9; 3:13; Titus 1:10-11; 1:16). In fact, Paul would sometimes even name *specific* people (2 Tim. 1:15, 20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:14). His message? Don't be one of them! The key to a strong antithesis is the contrast between the good and the bad models. Here are different ways to create a compelling antithesis:

Share stories. Your friend can learn vicariously through the example of someone else. Rather than having to face the consequences themselves, they can learn from the example of someone else. Personal examples from your own life can also be persuasive and serve the dual purpose of building trust.

Share the process of becoming deceived. No one wakes up one morning and says, "I think I'll deny God today!" Most believers turn away from God through a long process of self-deception, hardening, minimizing, blame-shifting, and repeated failures (Heb. 3:13). Share about the false beliefs that led to a hardened heart.

Share about the liberty of coming into the light. Our natural inclination is to stay in the dark. Emphasize with your friend that liberation comes, when we walk in the light. The antithesis should be about how the person could have made it out alive, if they had only experienced grace through confession and counsel (Jas. 5:16; Ps. 32; 51).

Get them to connect the dots. As you think through people who have become compromised, dialogue about *why* the person lost their walk. This is best done, when *they* are connecting the dots—not you. Of course, make sure that the focus is to help love and motivate the compromised believer—not to gossip.

Be proactive—not reactive. Don't wait and twiddle your thumbs until these issues come up in the life of your friend. Get ahead of these issues *before* they become a problem.

Use relevant antitheses. Why talk about legalism when your students are superspiritual.

The role of modeling in persuasion

Attempts to persuade without modeling the lifestyle you are calling for is tantamount to hypocrisy. It's not enough to explain what it looks like to trust God in an area of your life; people need to be able to see it.

Jesus went everywhere with his disciples, and his values rubbed off on them. The disciples rarely quote Jesus in their letters, but their writing drips with his worldview and values. This shows that they didn't merely recite his teaching, but they understood and internalized his values and teachings. It's no wonder that the disciples emphasized the importance of modeling:

(1 Cor. 11:1) “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

(Heb. 13:7) “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

(Phil. 3:17) “Join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

(1 Thess. 1:7) “You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.”

(1 Thess. 3:7, 9) “You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you...⁹ [We did this] in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.”

(1 Tim. 4:12) “In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”

(Titus 2:7) “In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds.”

(1 Pet. 5:3) “[Prove yourselves] to be examples to the flock.”

Many values and skills are more often *caught*, than *taught*. We often learn more from watching a skilled evangelist, than from reading multiple books on evangelism. The same is true for friendship building, romantic relationships, finances, and many other important areas of the Christian life.

We need to make sure that we are getting enough time with our friends to be effective models. We also need to expose younger believers to the entire Christian community, so that they can learn from many models—not just us.

The role of emotion in persuasion

Persuasive people know how to combine facts with feeling. Charles Spurgeon wrote, “In many instances ministerial success is traceable almost entirely to an intense zeal, a consuming passion for souls, and an eager enthusiasm in the cause of God, and we believe that in every case, other things being equal, men prosper in the divine service in proportion as their hearts are blazing with holy love.”¹¹⁶ Paul writes that we can be “bold” and “loving” at the same time (2 Tim. 1:7). In other words, “boldness” and “love” are not antithetical. Persuasion needs passion!

¹¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *Encounter with Spurgeon* (Lutterworth Press, 1964), 79.

Of course, we don't want to be "cheerleaders," making everything a high-pitched, ecstatic, and emotional appeal. When you think about it, it is actually monotone to speak this way, because there is really only one tone: *high!* At the same time, we need to infuse passion into the things that matter most. Different personalities express emotion in different ways, and this is fine. But we *all* need to learn to infuse passion in our own way.

Passion is often effective for fostering early motivation, but becomes less effective for the long term. Truth and reason need to be at the core of true persuasion. Otherwise, people will lose motivation when they are unplugged from the passion-infuser.

What should I do if I meet resistance?

Get creative. It's easy to throw in the towel after an appeal falls flat. Don't be deterred. To use an illustration, consider if you locked yourself out of your house. What would you do? First, you'd see if any of the doors were left unlocked. Then, you'd ring the doorbell over and over to see if anyone happened to be inside. Next, you'd call all of your roommates. If this didn't work, you'd see if a window was left unlocked. (You get the idea.) Similarly, we shouldn't get discouraged if *one method* was unfruitful. Go back to the drawing board, pray, get advice, and rethink your approach.

Give it time. A rule of thumb in persuasion is this: the bigger the decision, the more persuasion you'll need. It can take a while for a person to become convinced to make a major life change. We should respect God's timing in sanctification, and look for another opportunity to circle back and try again.

Be appropriately urgent. On the other hand, if our friend is facing imminent consequences, we can't be slow to the act. Ask yourself, "What will happen if they don't take action in this area soon?"

Break down the steps. It could be the case that what you are calling for is too complex or overwhelming. If you can't get a *touchdown*, then at least settle for a *first down*. Smaller steps are less daunting and usually help a person gain confidence for bigger steps later.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Consider two insights you took away from this reading. How might you use these in your leadership and discipleship in the next week or two?

We defined persuasion in this way: convincing people of the truth, urgency, and application of Christian goals. What might happen if our persuasion lacked one of these three components? (truth, urgency, or application)

Why are some models followed, while others are not? What sorts of attributes make us want to imitate a model?

Exercises

Let's say that your friend was struggling with getting into the word and prayer. What are **five different ways** you could persuasively address that topic? What are good questions that you would ask? What are good points that you would make?

EVANGELISM

It is mysterious how God brings people to Christ through our efforts. Very often, we strategize and work in one area, only to find God bringing people to Christ in ways we didn't expect. While this is mysterious, we wonder if God is simply looking for steps of faith and effort on our part before he sends people to us who are spiritually interested. This shouldn't diminish human agency on our part. Instead, we should be constantly watching for where God is leading us when leading in the area of evangelism. In this section, we will explore some of the principles of leading evangelism in the church.

Motivating evangelism

What does it look like to motivate evangelism in a healthy way? Perhaps you are a gifted evangelist, but do you know how to teach this to others?

(1) Getting evangelism STARTED

Appeal to Scripture. People need to see the theological framework for why we should share our faith.

Rochford, [“Evangelism”](#)

Study apologetics. We don't need to read rigorous books on apologetics with high school students, but we should read good content that is developmentally appropriate.

Lee Strobel has various **STUDENT EDITIONS** for his various books: [The Case for Christ](#) or [The Case for Faith](#) or [The Case for a Creator](#).

McCallum, *Discovering God*.

William Lane Craig, [Animated Videos](#).

Rochford, [“How to Utilize Apologetics in Evangelism.”](#) We would suggest reading this paper and doing some roleplay on the common questions or objections that people might have. As the leader, start by playing the role of the Christian in the conversation, modeling how to respond to the objections. Then, in subsequent weeks, switch roles to have your friend play the Christian, and you can play the devil's advocate role. Aim to model gracious responses, short answers, and good questions.

Rochford, [“Daniel 9 Video.”](#)

Rochford, [Apologetics Articles](#)

Story telling. When you come into your time for discipleship, be prepared to share one story about evangelism. This could be a personal story of how you led someone to Christ, how someone came to Christ in your group, a powerful testimony you heard, or even stories of failure. Failure stories can be encouraging if you follow them with, “It was an epic fail! But it really wasn't that bad afterwards... In fact, I laughed about it later that night!”

Prayer. When you pray together, don't miss the opportunity to ask God to open doors, open your eyes, or open hearts to the gospel (Col. 4:3-5). Pray for people by name. Pray for your friend to have wisdom, clarity, boldness, and courage (2 Tim. 1:7-8). Paul asked his friends for these sort of prayers (Col. 4:3-6; Eph. 6:19), and he was a gifted evangelist! How much more should we be praying in this area for one another?

Discover why they don't bring. It takes prayer and discernment to discover why your guy or girl isn't seeing success at reaching friends for Christ. Ask yourself these questions:

Do they fear rejection?

Do they feel guilty for not witnessing?

Do their friends, family, classmates, and coworkers know that they're a Christian?

Do they openly share about their faith as an ordinary part of their lives?

Do they focus on the gospel or peripheral issues?

Is there a relational issue we could work on such as perhaps being too argumentative, too churchy, or too serious?

Raise appropriate tension. Students don't have to be *gifted* or particularly *successful*, but they have to *try*. Of course, angry rebukes are not necessary and will only discourage others to share their faith. Leadership expert Bruce Powers states that tension is healthy for leading change, but too much tension can lead to discouragement. He writes, "Tension can be healthy or destructive in life-giving leadership. At its worst, it becomes a disruptive and divisive factor. The life-giving leader must understand the role of tension and how to use it effectively."¹¹⁷ Later he writes,

Learning occurs only in the presence of tension. Without tension there is no reason or motivation for change. But too much tension produces hostility, frustration, and even flight or quitting. Ideally, enough tension should be present to motivate people to productive action, but not so much that their behavior becomes nonproductive. For the life giver, tension is generally produced by leading people to identify discrepancies between that which they possess and that which they would like to possess in the areas of knowledge, values, and skills. Too much tension is usually the result of overt pressure or manipulation; this is not characteristic of life-giving leadership. A healthy level of tension exists when people are actively identifying and solving the discrepancies in their lives. This is a judgment which the life-giving leader must make: Are people growing, or are they simply existing? The constraint is to maintain sufficient tension to induce personal and corporate growth.¹¹⁸

Therefore, learn to raise appropriate tension with the group. For instance, you might say:

"We haven't seen anyone new for three months... Who is going to be the one to take a step of faith and reach out?"

¹¹⁷ Bruce Powers, *Christian Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 19.

¹¹⁸ Bruce Powers, *Christian Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 31.

“I thought that teaching tonight was awesome... I wish your buddy from class was out to hear that.” Or perhaps, “That was so much fun tonight... I wish your friend from school could’ve experienced that. I bet he would’ve loved it.”

“This group feels so much more exciting when new people are here.”

Giving a good experience. If you can give your friend a good experience of evangelism *once*, you’ll have a far better chance seeing this happen again and again. Once they get a taste of leading someone to Christ, there is a good chance that they will develop an ongoing desire to reach people for Christ. Make this as a prayer and goal for your time with him and capitalize on this when it happens.

(2) Keeping evangelism ONGOING

Encouragement. This form of motivation isn’t effective for *starting* behaviors, but it is effective for *continuing* behaviors. We want to encourage any effort, however small. Failure stories are actually a good sign of effort and need encouragement. If a student has a friend on the prayer list, this is good, but it can also be misleading. Reserve your encouragement for actual effort and steps of faith in this area.

Explore possible “bridges.” One new person could be a “bridge” to an entire friend group. Ask the question, “What do your friends or family think about your interest in Christ?” Questions like these impart vision, which motivates people far more than admonishment or nagging.

Team work. We need to be convinced that the ethos of the group will have a powerful effect on evangelism (Acts 2:42-47). Talk to other people in the group about following up and sharing their faith with new people coming out.

Modeling. If we had to choose between reading ten books on evangelism versus watching a gifted evangelist in real life, we would choose the latter every time. Bring your friend with you when you share your faith. They will often intuitively learn how to share their faith by simply watching you in action, but very often, it takes instruction and explanation afterwards for modeling to have a potent effect. We appreciate this standard approach to modeling below:

I do/you watch

I do/you help

You do/I help

You do/I watch

Notice the order above: You need to take the lead when a new person comes out. Your friend just did the hard part by inviting someone out to the group. They need to know that you are going to take the lead with follow up. As leaders, we need to be prepared to linger in the “I do/you watch” or “I do/you help” sections above. It could take time before your friend can really learn to share their faith well.

Set goals. Goals are not the same as desires. We might desire to see three people come to Christ, but are not really in control of something like this, because people have free will. Therefore, this doesn't make for a very good goal. A better goal would be that we would *invite* three people out to fellowship before the end of the year, which is in our control.

Equipping

Once your friend is motivated to lead people to Christ, they will benefit from equipping. As leaders, it is our job to “equip the saints for the work of service” (Eph. 4:12).

Teach the basics of communicating the gospel.

Antithesis is a form of communication that describes the gospel by saying what it is NOT. Leaders should teach how to describe the differences between law versus grace, faith versus works, and religion versus relationship.

Illustrations communicate abstract concepts like faith, forgiveness, and the need to receive Christ. We like illustrations such as cashing a check for a million dollars, the Judge and his Son, a marriage proposal, or Facebook stalking.

Memorize basic passages such as John 1:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9. Does your guy even know where to turn in the Bible to lead someone to Christ?

Teach them how to be a winsome bringer.

Break stereotypes. Non-Christians assume that following Christ is boring, hypocritical, or rigid. Teach your guy how to discern and dismantle these false views.

Explain what your church is NOT. The best bringers are good at breaking down barriers by saying, “I bet you think coming to a Bible study will be boring or awkward. I thought that before I came out. But you don't need to sing... You don't need to dress up... You don't need to share... After the teaching, we like to hangout and have fun! Come check it out for yourself... I bet you'll love it!”

Don't bait and switch. This occurs when your friend invites someone on the assumption that he's going to a social event, rather than a Bible study. This is super awkward and uncomfortable—not to mention unethical! Instead, we should teach students to talk openly and sincerely about their involvement with Christ.

Teach them short answers to common objections. In a conversation, most people will not listen for longer than a few minutes before losing interest or perhaps feeling uncomfortable. Teach your friend to make their points quickly and give an opportunity for a back-and-forth, if possible. The goal is to have a *conversation*—not a *presentation*. They should try to *share* their faith, rather than *declare* their faith (see [“Apologetics and Evangelism”](#)).

Teach them how to deliver a strong testimony. See [“The Power of a Good Testimony.”](#)

Teach them good questions and conversation starters. We suggest picking two from this list, rather than trying to remember all of them:

“Do you have any Christian friends or family? What was your experience with them? Good or bad... or ugly?”

“Did you grow up going to church? How does this meeting compare with your past experience?”

“What is the main thing holding you back from receiving Christ?”

“Have you ever been to a Bible study like this before?”

“Do you have any spiritual beliefs?”

“Would you be interested if there was evidence for God?”

“What do you believe about Jesus?”

“Do you ever pray?”

“Do you believe there’s such a thing as an afterlife or heaven?”

“What does being a Christian mean to you?”

“Have you been learning anything from the teachings lately?”

“Would you consider yourself an open-minded person, or do you feel like you’ve already made up your mind about God?”

“Growing up and going to church, I never heard the message that you need to receive Christ... Have you ever heard anything like that before?”

“Would you be willing to call out to God to see if he exists?”

Teach basic relational skills. Teach your friend how to take an active interest in other people. Teach them how to start, continue, and close conversations. Teach them how to listen (Jas. 1:19; Prov. 10:19; 17:28; 18:2, 13; 20:5). Teaching your friend how to ask questions and take an interest in other people will take the pressure off of them.

Urge them to serve spiritually. Often, students who are serving in other areas (e.g. building friendships, initiating with people, relationally engaged, etc.) will find that evangelism becomes more natural. The best evangelists are the ones that talk about God all the time—with whoever is in front of them.

Explore warm contacts. Who is in their friend group? Try to meet these friends through hangouts. Students should try to reach their families for Christ.

Explore cold contacts. Seniors should explore winning underclassmen.

Emphasize bringing non-Christians. It isn’t our mission to bring Christians from other churches to ours. Moreover, this isn’t a very exciting vision for young students. It’s only when people transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light that excitement for evangelism is borne (Col. 1:13).

Reopen “closed” doors. If someone doesn’t want to come to a meeting, continue to explore *why* they are so against the idea, rather than just throwing in the towel at the first sign of disinterest.

Be direct, when necessary. When a person comes to a Bible study, it would be inappropriate if we didn’t talk about the Bible in such a setting! Often students have questions, but don’t know how to start a conversation. Students are far more receptive to direct conversation than adults—especially hyperactive students. It’s appropriate to be direct from time to time, saying something like, “Hey, let’s talk stop kidding around for a minute... I’d like to talk about the teaching for a little bit.” Or say something like, “We’ve been hanging out for a while, but I haven’t heard what you think about spiritual things.”

Car rides are a great time to be bold, because the car is a quiet and non-distracting environment for conversation. It is also a great time to model to your friend how to share their faith.

How to lead an “Evangelism Campaign”

If you sense that you’ve lost evangelism in your group, what should you do to get this back? We have a number of suggestions:

Gain agreement. Good leaders know how to win over their coleaders before they try leading change. The bigger the change, the more time it takes to build a consensus. For example, if you are trying to change where you will go to eat after a meeting, you probably don’t need to spend a whole lot of time gaining a consensus with your coleaders. But if you are trying to change something as big as your evangelistic ethos, you should take your time to gain agreement.

Study the objective signs. Many high school leaders falsely believe that their problem is evangelism, when it is really another issue altogether (often follow up). Spend time looking over your three-part chart to see if evangelism is the real need.

Do your coleaders agree? What do you need to do in order to persuade them that this is a serious and urgent issue?

Does your home church coach agree? It’s important to reach out for a second opinion to make sure you’re on the right track.

Do your members agree? In our experience, true Christian believers know that evangelism is *important*, but they don’t always see it as *urgent*. What signs lead you to believe that students see this as an urgent goal? What can you do as a leader to persuade them of its urgency?

Don’t panic your people! Again, we should aim to have the “Goldilocks’ effect” with tension: not too little, not too much, but “just right.” Panicked pleas to the church will likely result in too much tension (e.g. hysteria, discouragement, contempt, etc.), rather than appropriate tension.

Depending on the ethos of the group, this process of gaining agreement could take considerable time. We need to be patient in leading change. The goal is to see that the group is taking consistent steps in the right direction.

Prayer. Leaders get their strength through prayer. They trust in the fact that prayer is essential to leading evangelism. We are facing so many spiritual obstacles in evangelism (e.g. sin, Satan, the world-system, etc.) that only the unadulterated power of God will be able to bring change.

Pray big. We don't agree that we should pray for 20 people to come to Christ in the next month. This isn't because of a lack of faith, but rather, an honest evaluation of the group. After all, why would we expect God to bring us 20 new believers if we couldn't honestly disciple and care for all of them? At the same time, we should set prayer goals that we think would be healthy, and pray for these regularly.

Celebrate answers to prayer. If we see the first of three people come to Christ, we need to thank God for this and remind people of God's faithfulness. This serves as a catalyst for praying for the rest of the goal.

Don't over-exaggerate success. Students know when they haven't really made effort, and we shouldn't offer insincere or hollow encouragement. Instead, reserve your encouragement for times of real effort and authentic steps of faith.

Discuss what God might be doing if prayers were NOT answered. If your prayer goal wasn't reached, don't just sweep this under the rug. Use this as an opportunity to discuss with the group what you can do on your end or what God might be teaching you. These are opportune times to model faith. Instead of blaming God for the lack of answered prayers, you can use this as an opportunity to learn from what God may be teaching you.

Teaching. During an evangelism campaign, we can't allow boring or lifeless teaching. Period. There's simply too much at stake. We suggest:

Putting up your best teachers. Our best teachers should be put up on a more regular rotation. Mediocre teachers should willingly step back during this time, and support the group in other ways (e.g. plan activities, pastor newer students, organize events, etc.).

Giving regular feedback. This should be given regularly and publicly over email. After all, our teaching is a public ministry, so our feedback should be public as well. We are accountable to our coleaders for the quality of our teaching. We suggest giving some positive feedback, along with an area to improve upon. We need to give honest feedback, but we also need to consider the unity and morale of our team.

Picking an exciting teaching series. This is not a good time to do a study on the Minor Prophets or the book of Leviticus! It would be better to create an engaging teaching series on a topic that students could see bringing a friend to.

Teaching as though unbelieving guests are present. If non-Christians do not show up on a given night, what's your move? Some teachers start to treat these

nights like a worker's meeting, where the "Christianese" flows freely. But think about what this communicates: This sort of teaching only reinforces what you're trying to avoid—namely, an inward ethos! It would be better to deliver a strong teaching (as though the non-Christian was sitting there) to reinforce the idea that students should have brought their friend. When students hear consistent, seeker-friendly teachings, they will be more likely to bring their friends.

Quality meetings. What do you remember about your first time to a Bible study? Personally, I can't remember much about the teaching or the room we met in. But I do remember the people and the love relationships! This must be why the Bible places such a high premium on authentic love relationships in the Christian community, as well as having quality times of participation and fellowship together:

"Love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34-35)

"I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me... May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me" (Jn. 17:21, 23 NLT).

"Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Mt. 18:20).

"If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor. 14:23-25 NIV)

Do your meetings look like what these passages describe? Are the leaders and students loving each other from the heart, building genuine friendships? Are they filled with enthusiasm and eager to participate?

An often overlooked factor in coming to faith this: It's not whether I can see myself *believing* in Christianity, but whether I can see myself *belonging* in Christian community. Christianity might be reasonable to a non-Christian, but they might never follow Christ if they are repulsed by a lifeless ethos.

Lyle Schaller is an expert in church planting movements. In his research, he states the number one factor that correlates with church growth more than any other: *the attitude that Christians have toward their own fellowship*. He writes,

Are they enthusiastic about their faith as Christians? Are they enthusiastic about this congregation? Are they enthusiastic about their [teachers and leaders]? Are they enthusiastic about what is happening in this congregation today? Such contagious enthusiasm is the most distinctive mark of the rapidly growing church.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Lyle E. Schaller, "Evaluating the Potential for Growth" *The Christian Ministry* 10 (1979).

Are the students in your home church enjoying the group? Do they love coming? Are they disappointed if they need to miss? How can you set up an environment to develop love relationships, unity, and overall enthusiasm?

Planning events. Evangelism campaigns often fall flat due to lack of preparation and poor execute of your plans. Often, leadership teams do a lot of quality work on the front end, bringing excitement and motivation, but they fail on the back end by neglecting to plan quality events. Students are more likely to bring friends when they know what the plan is for the teaching and for afterwards (e.g. a special teaching series, game, food, event, etc.). Some leadership teams like to pass out a schedule to students so that they can look forward to these events. Others like to create fliers to hand out, so that students know what is coming up next.

Case studies

Evangelism Case Study #1: “Jack-Hammer HC hasn’t seen a first time student in three months. Things really slowed down after one of their student leader’s graduated who was a big bringer. They have a few non-believers still on the scene from when he was around, but almost no evangelism this fall. They tried to do an evangelism campaign in September, had a special prayer meeting, and even planned some fun events. But now, it’s November and still nothing has happened.”



What questions do you think this leadership team should be asking? What might be missing in their approach?

- ✓ How well executed was their evangelism campaign? What might have been overlooked or done poorly?
- ✓ What about going and getting on the students’ turf?
- ✓ Notice that they didn’t mention discipleship above. This is a conspicuous omission. Campaigns and prayer meetings are only effective if individuals are personally getting equipped and motivated.

Evangelism Case Study #2: “Himalaya HC is a pretty tight knit group. Students spend lots of time hanging out and even get together to read the Bible one on one. With such a sweet community, it’s a mystery why they can’t seem to get anyone to come out. Students actually invite people at school to meetings pretty often, but usually just get made fun of or shut down.”

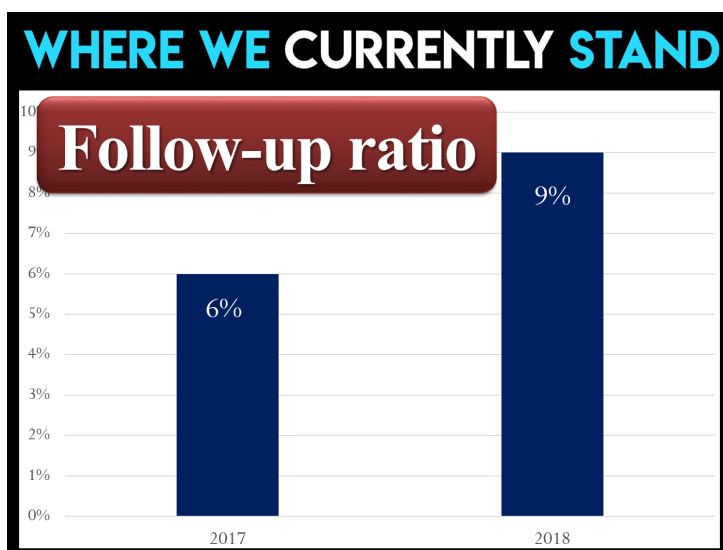
What questions do you think this leadership team should be asking? What might be missing in their approach?

- ✓ This could be a tribal group. They love each other, but perhaps, the group has gone inward.

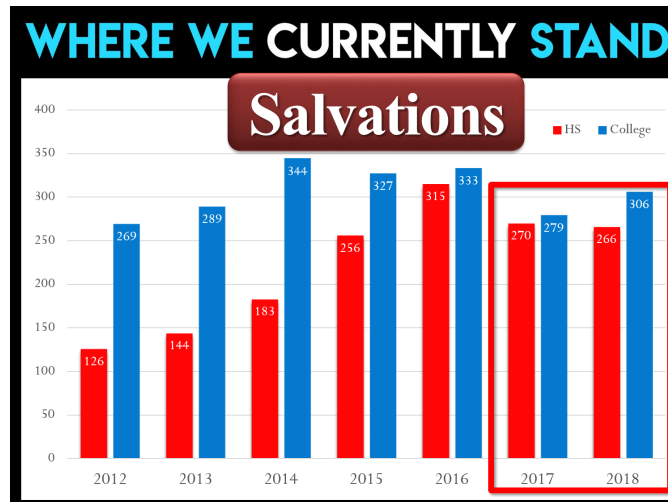
- ✓ Do students actually go and befriend non-believers? Or do they just make casual invites?
- ✓ Are they emphasizing “love for *others*” in teaching, or just “love for *each other*”?

FOLLOW UP

We are still seeing *massive* amounts of students meeting Christ in HS ministry. In 2017, in a ministry that only has **700** people, we saw **262 salvations**. This is just about equal with college ministry, which has **1,800** people! Moreover, HS ministry saw **1,416** first-time guests to HC (in a ministry of **~700 people**). That is roughly **2 FT’s per high school student** per year. By contrast, college ministry saw **2,687** first-time guests (in a ministry of **~1,800 people**), which is roughly **1.5 FT’s per college student** per year.



God is still reaching HS students in large numbers. However, even though we’re seeing 260 salvations a year and 1,416 FT’s per year, *our high school ministry is still declining!* What does this mean? This shows definitively that evangelism is not our central problem.



Doug Pollock gives the illustration of football to describe quality evangelism.¹²⁰ Instead of throwing four “Hail Mary” passes down the field, good teams strive to get continual progressions and first downs. At the end of the night, you should be able to see that progress was made and celebrate that fact (“Was this a first down, or did we fumble the ball?”).

Leading fun, diffuse activities. There is nothing unspiritual about having fun. The most spiritual people we know are also some of the most fun. Leaders should participate in games and make these exciting, leading by example. Some groups like to encourage fun competition during games. For instance, they might play “leaders versus students.”

Leading relational, conversational activities. If you are aiming for a relational night, then the leaders need to set up an environment where relationships can build and quality conversations can happen. Some groups like to do camp fires, s’mores, etc. Others look at how their house is set up, so that they can have conversation areas spread out throughout the house.

Be intentional. Memorize new people’s names, be friendly, get phone numbers, and become friends on social media.

Offer invitations and rides. Make sure each student is invited and offered a ride each week. Leaders will likely need to make these invitations themselves. If they delegate this to a student leader, they need to be confident that they will be faithful. We want to make sure that people aren’t being neglected: If the new person isn’t there, we should at least know why they aren’t there.

Vision for student follow up. Teach students how to listen and ask questions. Teach them how to learn and take an interest in people.

Utilize our current wineskins. Utilize proven wineskins like CT, ministry house, retreats, trips, and Epic. We don’t want to reinvent the wheel. We should only try new wineskins if we are sure that we’ve already made a serious effort with our current wineskins.

¹²⁰ Doug Pollock, Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, *Irresistible Evangelism: Natural Ways to Open Others to Jesus* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2004).

Try new wineskins. We suggest reading our paper to help brainstorm new ideas (see [“Creative Leadership”](#)).

Learn from your history. Differentiate between “good” and “bad” losses. Good losses are contested, unavoidable, diligent, and well fought. Bad losses are due to negligence, usually unexpected, and nothing was learned from them.

Leaders should assign follow up for before and after meetings. Often, students fall through the cracks because no one purposefully assigned follow up. Beware of the proverb, “Everybody’s job is nobody’s job.” This sort of initial follow up should include both leaders and mature students. To borrow a sports analogy, “zone” doesn’t work as well as “man-to-man.”

Develop a strategy for those between conversion and commitment to Christ. How do we help new believers make the second decision for Christ? We like to think in terms of (1) ground, (2) prepare, and (3) launch.

(1) Ground. For a brand new believer, we want to take time to *ground* them in their faith: emphasize grace, their identity in Christ, and the basics of spiritual growth. This can be done **informally** (e.g. talking after home church several weeks in a row, texting, etc.) or more **formally** (e.g. getting dinner before home church, doing a three-week study, pastoring, etc.). Some groups will temporarily release leaders from teaching so that they can spend more time doing grounding with new believers. After all, why should we emphasize teaching, if we are losing young Christians? Regardless of our approach, we need to see this happen with new Christians. Why would God bless us with more people if we aren’t being faithful with the people he already has entrusted to us?

(2) Prepare. We need to make new believers aware of other problems that they will face like sin, suffering, and Satan. We can address these issues by saying things like:

“If you ever find yourself in a serious moral fall, I really hope that you’ll reach out to me for help.”

“I’ve found it helpful to get my thoughts off of my chest when I’m going through doubt, suffering, etc. I hope you’ll feel comfortable opening up like this when you go through difficult times in the future.”

(3) Launch. As they develop into a disciple of Jesus, we want to see students serving, sharing their faith, and growing spiritual friendships. However, it’s important to make sure that they are grounded and prepared as well.

Case Studies

Case Study #1: “Pipe-Pidgeon HC is never lacking in new students. There are multiple students who bring a couple of friends almost every week. Leaders have their hands full each meeting just trying to get phone numbers and keep new people straight!



However, when studying their attendance, they realize that 90% of first time guests never show up to more than a couple meetings, and as a result the group isn't really growing."

What might be happening with this group? What might they try to reverse this trend?

- ✓ This could be a case of diffuse rather than strategic follow up. We can't equally pursue every student. Whom should we prioritize and why?
- ✓ Is this a fun but not a spiritually engaging atmosphere?
- ✓ How is the teaching quality?
- ✓ Are they just texting students offering rides or really trying to connect relationally with them?
- ✓ Are the leaders being hands-on in leading the follow-up? Or are they trusting students to do this on their own?
- ✓ Are they working with the bringers and helping them focus their efforts?

Case Study #2: "Abraham Lincoln HC does not see many first timers. However they recently saw two siblings out to a movie night, and one of them came to cell group the following week."

What moves do these leaders need to make within the next two weeks?

- ✓ Leaders need BOTH girls' numbers.
- ✓ They need to meet their parents.
- ✓ Leaders and/or students should invite them to HC and CT.
- ✓ They might prepare food before a meeting to make their group more hospitable.
- ✓ They should definitely pray for them at prayer group.

Case Study #3: "Shelly is a junior who's been coming off and on to Star Fortress HC. She's a musician and straight A student, but doesn't seem to have many friends. She's shy but spoke up once during a teaching and had good insight. She hasn't been responsive to invitations to special events, but just seems to come whenever she can."

What's one step they might try to win through with this student?

- ✓ Has a leader initiated one on one time with her? (After all, she's shy)
- ✓ Has anyone ever attended one of her concerts?
- ✓ Does she have any friendships in the group? If so, who?

- ✓ Find out what she likes to do.
- ✓ Did anyone take the time to encourage her on her insightful sharing? (It may have been difficult for her share if she's naturally shy)
- ✓ Has anyone given her something to read? (If she's a straight A student, she might be interested in doing some quality reading)

Case Study #4: “Parker is a football player at Central. He will come to Battle Axe HC, but only with his buddy from the team, who is pretty inconsistent and disinterested in spiritual things. Leaders have tried to initiate a hangout with him but it fell through.”

What's one step they might try to win through with this student?

- ✓ Don't assume the friend is unwinnable. Keep trying with him.
- ✓ Hang out with him and his friend together.
- ✓ Go to one of his football games.
- ✓ Don't drop the ball when he is at meetings. Make those times count.
- ✓ Play sports at your HC.

Case Study #5: “Chaz is a likable sophomore who comes every Tuesday. His mom however won't let him attend Grand Tetons National Park HC on Sundays. His dad recently divorced Chaz's mom, and she feels overwhelmed with working and taking care of her other children.”

What's one step they might try to win through with this student?

- ✓ Get to know the mom. Discover ways you can serve her.
- ✓ Hangout with him at his house.
- ✓ Enlist people from your college group to serve practically.
- ✓ Empathize with him on losing his dad.

DISCIPLESHIP: THE BASICS

When we consider the difference between “our role” and “God's role” in ministry, discipleship is an area that has been entrusted to us as leaders. Jesus told *us* to “go make disciples” and to “teach” young believers (Mt. 28:19). Like all ministries, we are dependent on God's power, wisdom, and guidance when it comes to discipleship. However, we need to do all that we can on our end to disciple effectively. We believe that effective discipleship is the engine of a healthy church, and we need to prioritize this at the top of our list as leaders.

Selecting disciples

What if we are too aggressive in selecting disciples? If this is the case, we can enter into a relationship with a person that won't turn out well. This could result in needing to drop the student, which can have fallout. Discipleship is easier to *start*, than it is to *end*. We can also fill up all of our availability working with students who are disinterested.

What if we are too conservative in selecting disciples? Most of us weren't very spiritually minded until someone started to work with us. We could be waiting (indefinitely!) for the perfect disciple to fall from the sky. Remember, we are called to *make* disciples—not have them appear in excellent spiritual condition. God could be calling on us to be faithful with what we've been given before entrusting us with more. This is especially apparent when we see leaders who aren't working with anybody.

What are other signs that indicate we should pick up on a student? What are misleading factors?

What is their spiritual *direction*, rather than their *current* spiritual state? Are they moving in the right trajectory?

Have they been given resources to grow spiritually? How did they respond?

Have you prayed about this decision? (Lk. 6:12)

Are you empty-handed? If so, it's probably better to start investing in someone on some level.

What does your team think?

What does your HC coach think?

What are our options if we still aren't sure? We may need to try out new wineskins to select disciples. Is there a middle ground between “all or nothing” when it comes to discipleship?

Pastoring?

Friendship building?

Doing a short study?

Biweekly or monthly hangout to get a closer look?

Discuss ALL discipleship decisions with your leadership team. We don't like to hear about people picking up disciples without first conferring with their coleaders—and perhaps, with their HC coach as well.

Case studies

Case Study #1: “Karen is a long term HS worker who just graduated up two good girls. She wants to stay and keep serving in Kilimanjaro HC. There are



two girls currently coming out to their group... **Ava** is a junior who wasn't disciplined originally because she was so inconsistent. But **Ava** appears to have had a change of heart, and even brought a friend last week. There is also a new freshmen, who grew up in the church, named **Evelyn**. She is pretty immature, but comments regularly at meetings and reads the Bible regularly on her own."

What would be the pros or cons for Karen picking up on one of these girls over the other?

- ✓ Ava could be on a temporary move upward. It's important to catch students on an upswing like this, rather than holding out for perfection. Remember Francis Schaeffer's wisdom: "If we want perfection or nothing, we will get nothing every time."
- ✓ Evelyn could also be a good choice to invest in. A freshmen who reads her Bible regularly is a rarity. It might be good to start investing with her as well.
- ✓ This isn't a decision between a good or a bad choice, but between two good choices.

Case Study #2: "Blimp HC has a hard time getting discipleship established. Many of its students are from low income and unstable homes, making it hard to see them consistently. Nathan has been a leader in the group for five months and has struck out with guy after guy. However there are three incoming freshmen students who seem a bit different. Jordan, Thomas, and Will all have at least one involved, attentive parent, and seem to pay attention at meetings."

What other factors should Nathan be considering as he figures out which of these guys to disciple?

What moves could Nathan make to vet or prepare these guys for discipleship?

Dropping disciples

Dropping disciples is the easy route! We need to explore every option before dropping a disciple:

Have you talked to the parents (if appropriate)?

Have you conferred with your coleaders and your coach?

Have you tried to get their friends to speak into their lives and help them to grow?

Will they be surprised if they are dropped from discipleship?

Are you dropping them for commissive or omissive sin? (If the person is a commissive sinner, they will likely only do worse when they are dropped from discipleship.)

Have you raised appropriate tension? (It's better to have a disciple drop you.)

If you drop a disciple, you shouldn't neglect or ignore them. Instead, you should continue to initiate with them and spend time with them, showing pastoral care.

Motivating disciples

We would hate to hear about high school students feeling discouraged or nagged by their leaders. Motivation comes most naturally through love relationships, as well as other means that can be learned by all:

Persuasion. See our later section on "Persuasion" below.

Vision. See McCallum's essay, ["Vision and Christian Leadership."](#)

Have them verbalize their own desires. When your friend articulates that they want to be a servant leader and spiritual influencer in the group, we can encourage them to that personal goal.

Don't set a low bar. Mediocrity isn't an exciting vision—especially for students. Furthermore, encouraging mediocrity only lowers your credibility. Students often know when they are half-hearted and disinterested in God. If you encourage them in this, it will lower your ability to effectively encourage later. Instead, develop realistic goals and expectations that you could see them achieving.

Emphasize (spiritual) risk taking. Teens desire novelty and unpredictability.¹²¹ If our message and activities are too scary, teens will crumble. But if it is too boring, they'll yawn.

Outline of discipleship time

Allow boys to be active. Leonard Sax notes that boys contribute to 90% of behavioral problems in high school classrooms and 80% of ADHD. Feinstein suggests, "Help [boys] out by letting them move and actively involve themselves in their learning—there is nothing wrong with motion in the classroom."¹²² Sax advocates sports for boys. American sports focus on the elite athletes, but Sax appeals to Australian high schools where everyone can play and get a shot at competition. In these schools, boys practice during school in some cases, and only practice three days a week.¹²³

¹²¹ Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 19.

¹²² Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 71.

¹²³ Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men* (Basic Books: New York, 2009), 45.

(1) Study. We suggest starting small with your study time. Rather than stuffing them with content, leave them hungry for more. The goal is to get your friend to enjoy your study time together, and this should build over time. Make sure to pick developmentally appropriate topics to study. For instance, we would *not* suggest studying Francis Schaeffer's book *The God Who is There* with a freshman! Aim to have content that is slightly above their heads, but not so much that they are discouraged or frustrated by the study time.

(2) Coach. Remember to prioritize and emphasize areas that are the most important. We suggest that friendships should be at the top of the list: both with Christians and non-Christians. We should start by building a friendship with them personally, as well as encouraging them to build friendships with others. If they build deep and quality friendships, this will get them to enjoy fellowship and become a better sacrificial servant in the group. Remember, these students could likely be your future ministry partners, so learning to love them is critical.

Coupled with friendship is teaching them how to serve and love others. If they don't see a meaningful role in the Christian community, something else will capture their attention. They need to sense the real purpose God has given to them in your group.

Finally, friendship building should include reaching non-Christian people in their lives. We need to allocate time in our coaching to teach them how to build relationships with non-Christians around them.

(3) Counsel. We need to help our friend work through besetting sins without being sin focused. The goal is to build trust to the point where they are transparent and honest. Leaders need to learn how to persuade students of making wise decisions without pressuring them.

We should address some of the big issues confronting students like pornography, IT addiction, the world-system, eating disorders, cutting, depression, family problems, etc. However, do not make this the focus of your time together each week, which can quickly become sin-focused (see our section on "Counseling Teenagers" below).

(4) Pray. This is your time to model faith to your friend (Heb. 13:7). Pray over the issues you discussed together, express faith in God, and remember to pray for the things your friend shared with you.

What are areas to avoid in discipleship?

Sedentary discipleship time. For example, we do not advise sitting at a coffee shop for two hours, reading, talking about feelings, and complaining about drama. It's better to be active, hangout with their friends, etc. This helps get them to "unplug" from their phones, and you can build memories together.

Talking about their feelings the entire time. Students often like to dump their feelings. This is part and parcel of good friendships, but we can't let this dominate our time, because it isn't healthy. Rather than allowing the student to drive your time, take the initiative in the first few minutes by being directive in your conversation and your plan for your time together.

Acting like a parent. Teenagers resent being “treated like kids.” This is only compounded when a 22 year old is “treating them like a kid.” While they are not yet adults, they are not children either. You’re not their parent, so don’t act like it. Build a friendship with them as you would anyone else. Show genuine love and appreciation for your time together. God doesn’t just love us; he also likes us. Gary Delashmutt writes, “Invest until you feel affection.”

Criticism. Learn to drop the small stuff. Don’t “pin them” on major issues, but give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to bring conviction.

What if my guy keeps cancelling on me?

Rethink your approach. Without self-condemning your efforts, ask the hard questions: Have I been too negative in our time? Is our time too boring? Too serious? Too inconsistent? Too aimless?

Reschedule. This can be difficult, but without consistency, your discipleship will lack momentum. Be flexible and make other times available—even if it’s only dinner or catching up.

Sweeten the pot. You may need to consider buying them some food or a movie ticket from time to time.

Don’t give students multiple opportunities to cancel. Sometimes leaders will send students multiple texts confirming that they are hanging out. This gives the student multiple times to cancel. If you get a commitment to hangout, then take it. It’s possible you could get burned by showing up and they aren’t there, but the student will learn that you took them at their word.

Should students disciple other students?

We suggest caution here. Pseudo-discipleship is still pseudo-discipleship—no matter what the age. We feel that freshmen and sophomores are simply too young to disciple, and these students really need to sit under someone else’s leadership first before having a leadership role themselves. We also feel that most juniors and seniors are simply not mature enough to disciple.

We also prefer to see upper classmen doing more relational investment first, rather than jumping into discipleship. This could include grounding the younger person in the means of growth, befriending, doing a peer study, etc.

At the same time, if you decide to have a student disciple, then you should treat this relationship with integrity. That means that you should let them finish the job even after graduating. If a senior starts to disciple a freshmen, then this could be three years of not being in the same group as them. We usually like to see HS seniors step out of the group for a year before coming in as HS workers. So, this needs to be considered as well. Moreover, if a student discipler fails, then their college discipler needs to be ready to pick up the person if something goes wrong.

DISCIPLESHIP: FRIENDSHIP BUILDING

What is the primary basis for our influence on others? We do not believe that our primary influence comes from our status, our title, or our authority as leaders. Instead, our greatest influence comes from being able to build a close, quality friendship. What are markers that we are succeeding in the area of relational depth? We can think of a few key areas:

- ✓ Do they view you as an authority or a friend?
- ✓ Do they have fun spending time with you? Do they enjoy your time?
- ✓ Do you look forward to spending time with them?
- ✓ Do they trust you? Or are they afraid to share their lives with you?
- ✓ If something important happens in their lives, would they be excited to share this with you?

What are some of the key ways to build a quality friendship? Often, we have an intuitive sense of how to build friendships, but here are some suggestions on how to build depth in our friendships with teenagers:

Ask provocative questions. Jonathan McKee argues that most questions asked of teenagers are either “Yes or No” questions, which are generally dull. He writes, “Teenagers have a PhD in one-word answers... if we don’t ask the right questions.”¹²⁴ McKee states three keys to developing good questions:

1. Think ahead. McKee writes, “We need to start thinking proactively and come up with questions that require more than one-word responses... If we’re willing to put a little more thought into our questions, we might get a little more from their responses.”¹²⁵ The author of Hebrews writes, “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works” (Heb. 10:24 NLT).

2. Use controversy. McKee writes, “I find that kids can be provoked by controversy. Share a story from the newspaper about a current event and simply ask, ‘Were they right?’”¹²⁶ McKee has discussion prompts for [pop music](#) and [popular movies and shows](#) at his websites for [parents](#) and for [youth ministry](#). These could be worth exploring.

3. Use your eyes and ears before your mouth. McKee suggests observing T-shirts or jerseys that they wear. He writes, “Notice what teenagers are excited

¹²⁴ Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 2.

¹²⁵ Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 3.

¹²⁶ Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 4.

about, ask them about it, and then you won't have to do much talking at all. You might even wish you never got them started!"¹²⁷

We have included a list of McKee's discussion prompts at the end of this booklet (see **Appendix A: Asking Good Questions**). However, here are a few of our favorites:

If you could skip all your classes tomorrow except one, which class would you choose to actually attend? Why?

Who has been your favorite teacher, and why? Who is one of the worst teachers you've had? If you were a teacher, how would you teach differently?

If you could change one thing about your school, what would you change, and why?

Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever bullied others? Why do you think people bully others?

What was the best day of your life? What made it so awesome?

What was your worst day? What made this day so bad? How did you get through it? How did this day change you?

When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up? How has this changed as you've gotten older? What influences in your life have swayed your thinking on this?

If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of advice before high school (or middle school), what advice would you offer? Would you have listened? How would your life have changed if you had?

Half of all college students drop out before receiving a degree, according to a recent study. And one in four college freshmen don't even complete their first year.¹²⁸
Why do you think so many college students don't finish?

Dove's Real Beauty campaign claims, "Women are their own worst beauty critics." In their research, they found only 4 percent of the women in the world consider themselves beautiful. When women were asked to describe themselves, they all described themselves uglier than others described them.¹²⁹ **Why do you think so many women think negatively about themselves?**

If you could ask God one question, what would you ask? How do you think he might answer? What do you hope he wouldn't say? Why do you want to know?

¹²⁷ Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 8.

¹²⁸ "Infographic: Unprepared for College,"

<http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/infographic-unprepared-for-college>.

¹²⁹ Dove's Real Beauty Campaign, <http://www.youtube.com/user/doveunitedstates>.

Have fun together. If you don't enjoy your time together, how will they? There is nothing spiritual about being stern and serious all of the time. The most spiritually minded people that we know like to have a good time, and draw others into the fun.

Share your life with them. What will you intentionally share this week during your time? Parents and teachers don't share intimate parts of their personal lives, but friends do! Show that you have weaknesses, being open about your struggles when appropriate.

Believe in them. This is an intangible of Christian love (1 Cor. 13:7). This isn't necessarily explicitly verbal (though it should be from time to time). This is expressed more in how you think about your friend and how you relate to them. When your friend starts down a fatalistic path, it's important to say something like, "No way... That's not going to be you... You're not going to end up like that." Or maybe share, "It isn't a matter of *if* you're going to grow, but *when*..."

Show passion for God's word. Would you be bored by how you teach the Bible one-on-one? How about when you were fifteen years old? We are fighting against an instant gratification culture, so you need to put some passion into the things of God.

Share how you feel about them. We like to do this outside of our time together. Maybe pull them aside after a meeting to share how much your time means to you, or how much you've enjoyed building a friendship. Write an encouragement letter. Show genuine and appropriate affection during these times (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Explore what they are going through. You may get culture shock from how much things have changed since you were in high school. Explore what they are going through and what they value.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Would your high school student consider you a friend? Why or why not?

What is one area that you'd like to improve upon in your ability to build a friendship with your student?

DISCIPLESHIP: TEACHING SERVANT LOVE

A key component of Christian friendship is serving together. Serving needs to be based on (1) biblical indicatives, (2) why it's an emphasis, and (3) why it's beneficial for them. A person who has thrown themselves into this lifestyle will see a number of qualities emerge:

Serving cures many emotional and spiritual issues. This is the great lesson of Love Therapy: an outward focus is the key to a happy and wholesome life (Jn. 13:17; Acts 20:35). A lot of the drama, gossip, insecurities, and selfishness will dissipate if they learn to develop an outward focus.

Serving grows their faith. Paul writes, "Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and *great assurance in their faith* in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:13).

Serving gives them a sense of purpose. Our calls to dedicate their lives to Christ will fall on deaf ears, unless they have a clear sense that God is using powerfully. Without seeing the importance of their impact, times of fellowship will become boring.

Serving reveals their need for the other means of growth—specifically Bible-reading and prayer. When someone is giving out love, they quickly see their need for God to feed them spiritually (1 Pet. 2:2).

Serving is integral to your group’s health. Our home churches need students who are mature in Christ. Our studies consistently revealed that the healthiest groups had quality student leaders. This has a magnetic effect on those who are on the fence with regard to following Christ.

Serving will make them better workers in the long run. Their transition to the college group will be far better, and they may even be one of your future high school leaders. We need to take the “long view” on discipleship, building the foundation for a lifetime of following Christ.

Teach that this is part of your whole life. Teach them that serving is not only for times of fellowship, but also at school, at work, and at home with their families. A servant lifestyle is one of the biggest keys to our own spiritual health, as well as our testimony to others.

DISCIPLESHIP: MOTIVATING CHRISTIAN TEENS

Make sure they are truly a believer. We are regularly surprised at how often we discover that teens from Christian homes are not truly Christians themselves. It will be impossible to disciple a person *who doesn’t have the Holy Spirit*. Rather than settling for a vague testimony from when they were four years old, make sure that they are truly regenerate. You can discern this by writing out their testimony together (see [“The Power of a Good Testimony”](#)), or perhaps by going through basics on grace (see [“The Logic of Salvation”](#) or [“Do Good People Go to Heaven?”](#)).

Explore the benefits and barriers that they have. Even though someone grew up in a Christian home, this does not mean that their lives were perfect. All families have positives and negatives—healthy aspects as well as dysfunctional ones. Explore these together to get a better grasp of your friend’s history.

Answering common false beliefs

“I’m not unique because I grew up in a Christian home.” Some of the best Christian workers that we encounter grew up in Christian homes. For instance, Timothy grew up as a “mama’s boy” in a biblically based home (2 Tim. 3:14-15). And yet, he was surely Paul’s most influential and capable disciple! Paul Little writes,

If we came to new life in Christ as a child, we probably did not notice much change in our lives. We need not feel inferior or apologetic about this, as though somehow our experience were not as genuine as the more spectacular. Paul’s

conversion was wonderfully dramatic, but we must always remember that Timothy's was just as real.¹³⁰

“The only reason I’m a Christian and not a Buddhist is because I grew up in a Christian home.” This statement commits what philosophers call the *genetic fallacy*. This fallacy occurs when someone asserts that they have invalidated a belief by showing the origin of the belief. But this is surely false. To show the intellectual poverty of this assertion, consider the fact that people learn most things through the influence of their parents! Would a writer be embarrassed for learning about the alphabet from his mother as a boy? Would a history teacher feel embarrassed for learning about the Civil War from his father?

Furthermore, a person from a non-Christian home could easily tell themselves, “The only reason I came to Christ was because I hit a hard time in my life, and I needed something to cling to.” Just like the statement above, this also commits the genetic fallacy! Perhaps this person *did* learn about Christianity because of hard circumstances in their life, but this says nothing about the truth or falsity of Christianity. This could be comforting for a Christian teen to hear, because they often idolize those who had more dramatic conversions.

“My testimony isn’t powerful, because I didn’t do drugs or sleep around.” Christian workers who radically live by faith always have great stories of answers to prayer, sacrifices that they’ve made for Christ, and periods of doubt that they’ve encountered. All of these stories comprise our witness for Christ—not just stories about being drunk, high, or far from God! For instance, Sean McDowell (son of the famous apologist Josh McDowell) tells the story of doubting his faith in high school. His father famously told him, “Son, I’m not worried about your doubts. Just seek the truth, and you’ll find Christ.” Today, Sean McDowell has become a major influencer for Christ, serving as a professor, writer, and speaker around the world.

Instead of daydreaming about living for sensual experiences, emphasize the power of living consistently with their beliefs. According to researcher David Kinnaman, people aged 16 to 29 were asked what word they would pick to describe “Christians” or “Christianity.” 85% used the word “hypocritical.”¹³¹ When church kids can explain how God changed them from being a hypocrite or a cold and unloving person, this has a potent effect on listeners.

Instead of feeling guilty for being raised in a Christian home, emphasize the virtue of gratitude. Ask them, “Why would you want to rebel when you have such a great life?”

“I’m too afraid to share my faith!” Christian teens often struggle with fear in sharing their faith. But this quickly turns around once they actually try. At first, they are often worried that every non-Christian is a brilliant and devout atheist, who will rip their faith apart. However, after actually talking to the average non-Christian, they will quickly discover that most people are not ardent atheists. In fact, most people are far more interested in Christ than we typically expect. Moreover, the study of



¹³⁰ Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1966), 38-39.

¹³¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 28-29.

apologetics can have a powerful effect on lifting the morale of a young Christian.

We like to emphasize that fear is what makes our walk with Christ exciting. Teenagers are thrill-seekers and risk takers. If everything was easy, the Christian life would be boring.

“I’m afraid of failure.” Even in grace-based churches, Christian teens can develop an intense fear of failure. When they fail, see this as an opportunity to encourage them. Also, share your own personal failures with them.

“I wonder what it would be like to live for the world.” Emphasize that you don’t need to try this to know that it is empty. (I don’t need to taste human feces to know I wouldn’t like it!) Why would we be envious of someone’s scars that they took from the world?

“Non-Christians are so sinful!” We need to preach and teach against a self-righteous, fundamentalist attitude like this.

COUNSELING TEENAGERS

Many leaders have an errant view of what Christian counseling looks like. For instance, after a student emotionally dumped on them for two hours, a leader might say, “We focused more on counseling in our time together today...” But this is NOT counseling! This is being a doormat who is being walked all over. But neither does Christian counseling consist of nitpicking at people’s problems, or immediately sharing Bible verses with a person.

Principally, Christian counseling consists of helping a person understand and combat their false beliefs, which result in destructive or dysfunctional behaviors. It also includes exhortation, emotional support, and guidance for how to move forward. While others have already written on various topics related to Christian counseling (see [“Christian Counseling”](#) and [“Counseling Resources”](#)), we have a few suggestions to give a framework for counseling teens in particular.

Assess what is IN and OUT OF their control

In this method, start by listening intently to what your friend is sharing, drawing out what they are going through and empathize with them.

At some point (maybe not in this initial time together), list out the current problems that they are facing (e.g. their parents are getting divorced). List what is **in their control** on one side of a piece of paper, and then list what is **out of their control** on the other side. This might end up looking like this:

In my control	Out of my control
✓ Talking to my friends about how I feel	✓ Changing my parents’ minds about getting divorced

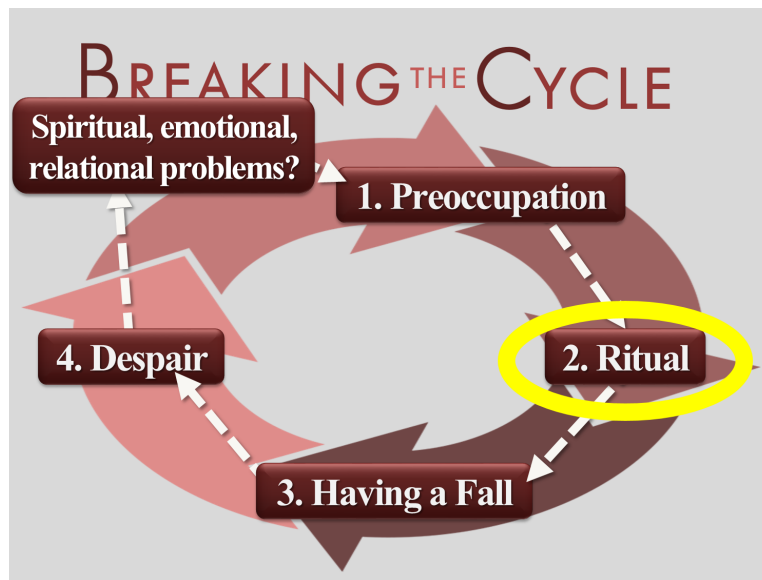
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Giving thanks despite this suffering ✓ Setting boundaries with what my parents share to me about one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Controlling how my parents act or feel
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For the areas that are **in their control**, have your friend write out a list of action steps that they could take in these areas. It's appropriate to help them brainstorm ideas, but it is better if they come up with the list, because this encourages ownership

For the areas that are **out of their control**, share Scripture on God's promises, wisdom that you've gathered, and offer support. Take time to pray together over these issues.

Identify truths that they don't believe

We like to illustrate this with the (apocryphal) story of the [five monkey experiment](#). This illustrates that we could be doing certain behaviors, but not know *why* we are doing them. So, when your friend says, "I really should be reading my Bible more..." It is important to push back and ask, "What are the biggest reasons that you have for why we should read the Bible?" Or ask, "Why do you personally want to do that more?" By asking these sort of questions, we can get at their motivational structure and the false belief-systems that they hold.



Address perspective bias

Teenagers often only have one way to view a certain situation: their way. Like adults, they assume that their interpretation of the facts is the *only* way to view a situation. For instance, a teen once shared, **"All of the girls in the group hate me! I told Susie that she had a nice**

shirt, and she just completely ignored me! Later, I saw all of the girls sitting at a table, and they were looking at me and laughing.”

It might be easy to start arguing with your friend at this point. But instead of taking that route, try to address your friend’s **perspective bias**. Give them three or four other possible interpretations of what happened. For instance:

“What if Susie didn’t respond to you because she simply didn’t hear you? After all, the music was cranked up really loud in that place, and maybe she was just distracted. I’m not saying that this is what happened, but *do you think that’s even possible?*”

“What if Susie thought that you were flirting with her by making that comment? I’m not saying that this how she felt, but *do you think that’s even possible?*”

“What if the girls were looking at you and laughing because one of them likes you? Again, I’m not saying that this is what happened, but *do you think that’s even possible?*”

The point of this method is not to argue with the person, but simply to show them that there are other *possible* ways to understand their circumstances. This approach helps your friend to see things from other perspectives, rather than dogmatically dwelling on their own approach. It also teaches them to empathize and learn how others could be interpreting what happened, rather than holding to binary, black-and-white thinking.

Reinterpreting negatives

God wants to change us through the “renewing of our mind” (Rom. 12:2). Naturally, humans drift toward a negative interpretation of events. By reinterpreting negative thoughts, behaviors, or circumstances, we can help our friends to see things from God’s perspective. This is also a way to pull people out of their discouragement or fatalism. Consider a few examples:

	Negative	Positive
Anxiety	“I’m so worried even though I know I’m not in any danger. I can’t stop thinking about what might go wrong.”	“Your ability to dwell on thoughts and ideas is actually a good quality. This is <i>good</i> for biblical meditation. You just need to learn how to shift what you dwell on.”
Depression	“I’m so disappointed with my life and circumstances. Why should I even get out of bed in the morning when I know that nothing is going to change?”	“It’s actually good—to some degree—to be critical of the world. Hyper-optimists can become easily hurt or taken advantage of. The goal is just to move you more toward a

		balanced mindset by including God's view."
Porn addiction	"I'm such a freak because I'm obsessed with porn."	<p>"Actually, much of porn use is tied to wanting to feel desired, valued, and loved. This is all true of you in your identity in Christ."</p> <p>"Porn use is usually triggered by wanting to avoid negative feelings like stress, depression, or anxiety. God wants to help you deal with those feelings, rather than turning to porn."</p>
Discouragement over their own gifting	"I'm not as gifted as John. I'm jealous of his gifts."	<p>"What if everyone in the church was like John? Consider how horrible our church would be!"</p> <p>"Do you know who is gifted like you? One of our top leaders has your same gift set. I wonder if you could have an impact like she does."</p>
Failure or lack of fruit	"I've been serving God for several years, and I've never borne any fruit."	<p>"Success doesn't always show us <i>why</i> we bore fruit—only <i>that</i> we bore fruit."</p> <p>"You're learning lessons about legalism (i.e. comparison and performance) that others won't learn for years to come."</p>
Gossip, drama-queen	"I constantly share about people's problems behind their back."	"You are really bold to go around and share to everyone like that. Why don't you use your boldness to speak directly to the person who needs to hear it?"

Make observations – not conclusions

This counseling method relies more heavily on asking **questions**, rather than making **assertions**. It makes **observations**, rather than value **judgments**. The goal is to let your friend connect the dots to come to their own conclusions, rather than stating these for them. Compare these different approaches below:

Value Judgment	Observation
“You have been disengaged when I’m talking to you. You’re not a good listener.”	“I notice that you are on your phone a lot when we talk. You seem distracted. Have you noticed the same thing?”
“You keep retaliating at others when you’re in the wrong.”	“I saw that you raised your voice when you were in that conversation the other night. What happened?”
“You are worrying too much.”	“It seems like you’ve been on edge lately. How have you been feeling?”
“You have been slandered people and talking behind their back.”	“Katie and Lisa both said that you have been talking about them. What happened?”

Express confusion over discrepancies in what they are sharing. But be careful not to corner them or play “Gotcha!” by catching them in a lie or inconsistency. Instead, gently allow them to see the inconsistencies and feel the tension for themselves.

The goal of this approach is to get them to connect the dots, rather than imposing your view. Rather than working hard to make them see things a certain way, let your friend see the issues themselves in order to make connections that they didn’t see before. The goal of this approach is to not work harder than your friend. As you continue to draw out your friend, you might ask questions like these:

“I’m hearing you say _____. Is that right?”

“I would feel _____ if I was in your shoes... Is that how you’re feeling?”

“Right now, you look sad. Is that how you’re feeling?”

“Can you think of reasons why you said or did _____?”

Address the Felt Loss of Choice

When I drive to work every day (71 North to 270 East), this becomes so routine that sometimes I don’t even notice taking my exit. This becomes apparent when I need to drive to Polaris (or further north), and I still get off on the outer belt! Because this drive is so frequent, I tend to go on “autopilot.”

This sense of mental “autopilot” is analogous to other behavioral patterns in life. We become so accustomed to sinful behavior that it feels like we lack a choice. The key to breaking these patterns is to address this **felt loss of choice** with the “renewing of our mind” (Rom. 12:1-2). Help your friend to become **aware** of the times that they had a choice or a “way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13), but they didn’t take it. Here are some ways to do this:

“What were you thinking about *before* you had a fall into sin?”

“This week, would you **pray for awareness** of what you were thinking about beforehand? Ask God to make you aware of when and where he was giving you a choice to avoid having a fall again.”

This practice helps to reengage the mind, so that your friend isn’t living on mental “autopilot.” By activating the mind, your friend will be more aware of the false beliefs that led them into sin, rather than just having habitual falls.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What is one tool that you took from this reading that could improve your ability to counsel more effectively? How can you use it this week?

TEACHING

For materials on how to teach, consider read these articles below:

[“Teaching Essentials”](#)

[“Teaching Structure”](#)

[“Teaching Tune-Ups.”](#)

Who should teach?

Are all teachers created equal? No, and that’s okay. God has gifted the Christian community in different ways, and some teachers are more gifted than others (Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:7). All leaders can become more skilled through practice (1 Tim. 3:1 “*skilled in teaching*”), hard work (1 Tim. 4:15-16), and experience. For this reason, we should have the strength to put our best teachers up more often if needed.

If you are aiming for **growth**, it may be better to favor your **best teachers** more frequently or even exclusively.

If you are aiming for **leadership development**, it might be better to favor **younger teachers** to prepare them for an upcoming plant.

Won’t this hurt my coleaders’ feelings? While being asked to teach less is sometimes a shot to the pride, everyone on the leadership team should be willing to put the needs of the group above their own personal desire to teach. It’s always exciting to have your non-Christian guest friend to hear a great teaching. Likewise, it’s painful to have a friend visit when the teaching quality is poor.

Should we put students up to teach? High school leaders sometimes argue that student teachers can help students “take ownership of the group.” This might be true. But just as in all aspects of leadership, we need to consider all possible factors and consequences—not just one.

We suggest having students teaching sparingly (e.g. communion, retreats, team teachings?), rather than consistently. Students should focus their efforts on reaching their friends for Christ (an activity that leaders cannot do), and leaders should focus their efforts on delivering quality teaching (something that they can do well). We also suggest being careful whom you pick to teach: student teachers should be good role models to the group in their love for the lost, their character, and their example. Having a poor role model teaching will only reinforce bad values. As a rule of thumb, you shouldn’t have a student teach others if they aren’t teachable themselves. Furthermore, you shouldn’t have a student teach the *group* if they aren’t teaching *individuals* first. We suggest painting a vision for mature students serve in other ways—perhaps by building peer friendships, doing peer discipleship, or grounding younger believers in the word.

Length

How long should a typical teaching last? While there are no hard and fast rules, we suggest anywhere from **30 to 45 minutes** from prayer to prayer. That is, if the teacher starts talking at 7pm, then the group should be getting up from their seats at 7:45pm. We would also add that if you are losing your audience, then you should pull the plug earlier. The old proverb remains true: “We can forgive a *bad* teaching, but we cannot forgive a *long* one!”

Some leadership teams have a signal if a teaching is going too long. For instance, waving their cell phone above their head in the back of the room. This way, leaders can cue the teacher to cut their teaching short if they are going over without having to cut off the teacher in a potentially embarrassing way.



Feedback

We suggest giving public feedback over the leaders’ email line. After all, when we get up to teach, we are serving the entire home church, and we are accountable to our team for working hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 4:13-16). By giving public feedback, we can not only help sharpen the teacher, but all of the leaders can learn from the feedback. All of the leaders can see what worked well and what didn’t. Also, by giving feedback, you will find that you yourself will grow as a teacher, because you will train your ability to see what constitutes a good teaching.

Of course, it’s important to be gracious with our public feedback. We not only want to instruct fellow teachers, but we also want to build morale and unity as a team. We suggest giving some positive feedback, as well as areas for improvement.

Teaching Preparation

What is the use and abuse of listening to mp3's from the Xenos website? The benefits are obvious: quality content, teaching, delivery, and preparation. The negatives might be that (1) these are geared to a different age demographic, (2) these have too much content for a high school group, and (3) they lack discussion questions.

What do you think the difference is between SIMPLIFYING a teaching and DUMBING IT DOWN? We are obviously in favor of the former, but not the latter. We suggest teaching a little bit over the heads of the students, but not to the point where they are frustrated, discouraged, or checked out. Remember, these students are sitting through chemistry and math classes all day long. They aren't braindead, and "Sunday school" level teaching can actually come across condescending to them. We suggest tackling difficult topics, rather than avoiding them. After all, their friends at school are asking them tough questions, so we need to have solid answers.

What are ways to simplify your content? The first three rules of teaching are (1) cut, (2) cut, and (3) cut! Ruthlessly cut details that are irrelevant to your main point. We also find that using illustrations, analogies, humor, and storytelling are key aspect to delivering complex content.

Start early. Less experienced teachers should start their prep several weeks in advance. They should allow time to get feedback on their outline and even rehearse with a friend. This also helps teachers to develop a burden and avoid making glaring mistakes.

Condense notes. Teachers shouldn't have five pages of notes to cover. We suggest condensing your larger outline into a one-page document.

Rehearse out loud. This may be the most overlooked tool for improving our teaching. You can do this alone, or have a friend sit and listen to you. If you are teaching to a friend, it's better to sit 20 feet away from the person to simulate what the teaching will actually be like. If you rehearse alone, actually pretend that you are delivering the teaching for the group.

Over preparation. Some teachers will sink 20-30 hours into a single teaching. This is far too much and totally unsustainable! It implies that the teacher needs help learning how to build a good outline, rather than getting lost in rabbit trails. It could also imply that the teacher is trying to manufacture results out of the power of the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

Delivery

Infuse passion. Teachers need to bring passion to the point of personal discomfort. If you think you're going over the top, you're probably only halfway where you should be.

Discussion

Challenging. Boring questions are going to receive boring responses. Don't confuse the quantity of answers with the quality of the discussion.

Not repetitive. Discussion questions should not result in hearing about the means of growth each and every week.

Be ready to cut your discussion short. It's better to cut off the discussion with hands in the air, than to let every person share. After all, people can share with each other after the meeting. It's better to leave the group hungry, rather than stuffed.

Limit sharing from leaders or strange sharers. As the leader, you are driving the discussion. If someone is sharing in a bizarre or unedifying way, it's your responsibility to cut them off. If someone is sharing for each and every question, it's fully appropriate to say, "We've already heard from you... Let's see what others have to say." If leaders are sharing too much, it's also appropriate to say, "Let's hear from some of the other people, rather than just the leaders."

Encourage students to share before the teaching starts. This can be during discipleship or through texting out your questions in advance.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What feedback have you been getting recently on your teachings from your coleaders?

Describe your strengths as a teacher. How can you leverage those strengths even more?

Which areas of teaching could use improvement? What is your plan for improving in these areas?

QUALITY COMMUNITY

The Bible teaches that we cannot *create* unity in the Christian community, but it does teach that we are to *preserve* the unity that already exists (Eph. 4:3). All true Christians are identified with Jesus at the moment of conversion, and therefore, we have unity with one another through the mystical union of the Body of Christ.

The "youth group" model is dissimilar from what we are aiming for in home churches. In our view, home churches are authentic churches that should fulfill the key functions and roles of the Body of Christ. Passages like Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are not *wineskins* that will change according to our cultural moment; these are the *wine* that God has given us direct the local church. Of course, this refers to our collective *position* in Christ, rather than our current *condition*. Some groups are profoundly disunified—either actively fighting or passively disengaged from one another. Learn to look at your group in their *position*, rather than their current *condition*.

What factors lead to building unity, and what role do leaders play in this process? How can we build deep and lasting friendships with our students, and how can they build authentic friendships with one another?

What are unique barriers to building community in high school ministry?

The barriers to building Christian community in Generation Z are legion: Many students don't drive, families may be unstable or unsupportive, students could get grounded, students

have bad times, students are inundated with various addictions, etc. All of these affect building quality Christian community.

The role of leadership in building community

As leaders, our job isn't to make people unified. **Instead, our role is to set up an environment where unity can build and grow.** To borrow an analogy from Chuck Smith, we don't create unity like a factory, but we do water it like a garden. That is, we set up certain conditions and watch God grow the unity in the Body of Christ. Here are some ideas for creating such an environment:

Getting our college group to help. We can either have our students *come up* to visit the ministry house or cell group, or we can have some of our quality college workers *come down* to help out for a night. This could include cooking food, guest teaching, giving testimonies, giving rides, etc.

College connection. God regularly uses this wineskin to give vision and excitement to upperclassmen. But we cannot simply expect this to happen. Leaders need to plan ahead to make this a successful weekend. This involves persuading college roommates on the importance of this weekend. Share a vision with your college friends about the importance of investing and ministering to the high school students coming up to visit.

Cross pollination. This phrase refers to having the men and women helping each other. Sometimes, male leaders can bring a word of encouragement, insight, or vision to the girls, which can go a long way. Likewise, female leaders can help with the guys. This is a step in the direction away from having a "silo mentality" in your group where everyone only focuses on their own ministry. Remember that Epic can be an excellent time for the guys and girls to build in with each other in this way.

Regular CT attendance. If students are only coming on Sunday night for home church, they are similar to the Sunday morning Christians we so regularly talk about. Brainstorm creative ways that you can encourage getting your students to CT, participating in this meeting, and enjoying fellowship that night.

Sleepovers. To have a successful sleepover, high school leaders will need to get their college groups on board to serve. They should prepare their people by urging them to serve the students coming up to visit. These don't have to be with these entire group. If you only get a couple of students up for the night, consider that a success. Invest in the students that you do have, rather than complaining about those whom you don't. If your students enjoy their time in fellowship, this will make it a winning night regardless.

Movie nights. Some groups like watching B-movies, because these are funny, lead to interaction during the movie, create inside jokes, and no one has seen them before.

Making a movie. This is good for building memories, and they also like to show these to their friends.

Dinners. Good food creates a warm atmosphere. Consider doing potlucks or maybe having your college friends come down to help for the night by cooking and serving in this way.

Seasonal activities. Many groups like to go apple picking, sledding, or have pool parties. Activities like these build memories and friendships.

Watching sports. This is especially good for the boys. One group gets together every Sunday to watch the Browns play. The leaders would normally do this anyway, so why not include students?

Road Trips. These don't need to be to exotic places, and also don't need to be with the entire group. These can be good for building in with a few core students.

Home church hangouts. Some groups like to initiate hangouts with other home churches that they recently planted from or others that they don't know. This is especially good for smaller groups to gain morale.

Peer studies. This isn't a discipleship relationship, where one person has more to teach than the other. Instead, the vision for this is to see students reading a book and praying together weekly.

Raising up student leaders. College leaders can't do all the work. They need to paint a vision for students to become Christ-like servants. Of course, this doesn't mean that students will be in the leaders' meeting or on the teaching rotation. Instead, it means that certain students will initiate hangouts, follow up, and be quality role models in the group. Who are your best students, and why? How are you seeing students take ownership of the group?

Expressing love. True biblical community is defined by faith, hope, and (especially) love. Leaders need to set the pace in this area. Regularly communicate your enthusiasm to see students and that you love being around them. Some leaders aren't naturally expressive, and this could cost them if they do not lean against this tendency.

Conclusion

Does this sound like a daunting task? That's because it is! Creating an environment where true biblical community can grow will take a good deal of work among the leadership of the church. But there is hope. If you can develop an ethos of this, it will pay off in amazing ways. There will be an initial cost up front on the leaders' end, but as the students slowly begin to buy in, they will naturally take over the load.

Questions for reflection and discussion

As you review these ideas above, which of these should you start with? Which should you wait to initiate when the morale is higher?

When it comes to building community, what is out of your control as a leader? What is in your control?

OUT of your control	IN your control

Does your college group love hanging out with the high school students in your group? Or are these students viewed as a “distraction” or as a “nuisance”? How can you lead change this area to improve their attitude toward this important ministry?

LOVING DISCIPLINE

Loving discipline is essential not only for individuals but also the groups they make up. High school groups with discipline issues can be overrun with sinful, distracting, and even destructive behavior. Not only do groups like these lose the aroma of Christ which draws people to saving faith, but healthy spiritually interested students are often alienated or neglected. It's important that leaders not fall into black and white thinking in these areas, but really take the time to learn the skill of loving discipline through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Discipline in high school groups often looks different for a number of reasons:

First, leaders are adults while students are legally children. This means high school leaders bear greater responsibility for what happens at high school meetings, and must do what they can to protect students under their supervision.

Second, unlike adult college students, high school students are under their parent's authority. This means high school leaders will usually need to communicate with and involve the parents.

Third, a student's relative immaturity needs to be taken into account. High school leaders will find that effectively disciplining developing adolescents takes patience, flexibility, and creativity.

Many students come from homes where they were harmed either by a total lack of discipline or discipline that was harsh, unpredictable, and unloving. Moving towards a student with affirmation and love, while teaching appropriate relational and behavioral boundaries gives a sense of direction and stability that students often lack elsewhere. Rooting our calls to change and grow in God's Word provides stark contrast to the outbursts of emotion and manipulation experienced at the hands of others. We should keep in mind scriptures like Hebrews 12:5-6 and Proverbs 19:18 which affirm that discipline is a critical aspect of biblical love. Furthermore, meditate on verses like 2 Timothy 2:24-26 which teach us how to confront students in a godly way.

Is it immaturity or is it sin?

How can a freshmen guy bring three friends one week, help lead one to Christ, and then turn around the very next week and do something as destructive and insane as... fill in the blank? Experienced high school leaders will have no problem filling in this blank, and with real anecdotes! The Bible teaches that the flesh is always at war with the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), so we should never be surprised to find people at any stage of life to be a mixed bag of sinful and spiritual motivations (including ourselves!).

However, the contrast in high school ministry often seems especially sharp. High school students are both sinful and immature. We need to approach discipline in a way that takes

into account their immaturity. Asking yourself the following questions can help you get the right perspective:

(1) Is this a part of a pattern, or is it an isolated event? HS students often have low impulse control and are very easily influenced by their peers. In this vulnerable state, it shouldn't be surprising to see them succumb to temptation despite their convictions. Falls from grace like these provide valuable opportunities to affirm grace and teach them how to handle future temptation. However, perpetually choosing sin is different, and might suggest a real controversy with God.

(2) What positive things are happening in the student's spiritual life? It can be easy to become discouraged by a student's immature behavior. When your friend won't read the word, keeps forgetting your study time, and is disengaged at meetings, leaders sometimes wonder if they even care about God at all! During moments like this, it's important to zoom out and focus on the areas of progress (e.g. bringing friends, building friendships, etc.). These factors change the picture, and we should favor heavy encouragement over admonishment whenever possible.

(3) What else might be going on? Anytime you see sudden behavioral shifts with students, you should wonder what else might have recently happened in their lives. Students often act out or withdraw depending on stress at school or trauma at home. Take time to dig deeper and understand what might be affecting them behind the scenes. Showing compassion not only extends the love of Christ, but also builds trust, friendship, and influence in the lives of students.

(4) How old is this student? High school is a period of rapid development. A 17 year old is closer to being an adult, while a 14 year old is very much closer to being a child. This should inform our expectations and help us be more patient with younger students.

Informal discipline: admonition

Don't appeal to *abstract* issues, but to *concrete* issues. What do we mean by abstract issues? Perhaps comparing abstract and concrete issues we can make better sense of this category:

Abstract	Concrete
"People don't feel close to you."	"Your anger issue is hurting your relationships."
"You're prideful and arrogant."	"You're condescending and dismissive."
"People don't respect you."	"You have been sarcastic and mean-spirited to others."

When we raise tension on abstract problems, people may feel conviction, but they lack direction. It can result in feeling confused or discouraged. The more abstract the *admonition*, the more abstract the *action*.

Abstract problems usually focus on the *why*, rather than the *what*. That is, abstract issues focus on the *reasons* for why we do something, rather than what it is we're doing. Of course, all good Christian counseling needs to focus on these false beliefs underlying our behaviors. But before we can know *why* we do something, we first need to hear *what* it is we're doing in the first place. Don't start to counsel a person, when correction and confrontation are needed first.

Don't assume that people *agree*, just because they are acting *agreeable*. While you have been thinking and praying about these problems for a while, this is the first time the other person is hearing them. Give them time to reflect, pray, and think about what you've said before you conclude that they agree. Sometimes, it's best to say, "I don't want you to agree on the spot, but will you please pray about these things this week? Then next week, we can discuss them some more. Sound good?"

Don't assume that *resistance* is a clear sign of *unrepentance*. In the moment, many people feel "flooded." That is, they are adrenalized, overwhelmed, and perhaps angry. Some people shut down and "stonewall." Others lash out in anger. We need to give people freedom to be heard and express their thoughts and discouragement.

Don't assume that a person understands after having a "good talk." Leaders cannot expect that one conversation will effect life-giving change in a person. Depending on the enormity of the problem, we need to be prepared to follow up multiple times with a person.

Don't overload the difficult conversation with content. We need to make our call as simple and direct as possible. When we overload the conversation, people could feel overwhelmed.

Don't assume that long pauses make it a bad conversation. Silence can give a person time to think and digest what you're saying. Rather than filling the air with comments, allow the person to take in what you said.

Don't allow for deflection or blame shifting. Unrepentant people will often point the finger, rather than dealing with their problems. They will argue that others are unloving or unsympathetic to their problems. Listen for this in your conversation. There are multiple ways to respond:

(1) Tell your friend that you can't take their accusations seriously when they are unwilling to admit their own problems (Mt. 7:3-5).

(2) Tell them that you have heard their feedback, and you will consider it. But will they consider what is being brought up to them?

(3) Ask the person to define their terms: What do you mean by "legalistic"? Or what do you mean by "unsympathetic"?

(4) Don't allow the person to make blanket statements without justifying them. Ask them, "Is that how you felt, or is that what I actually said?" Or ask them, "Are you basing this on direct, firsthand information, or have you heard this second or third hand?"

(5) Direct them back to the people they are accusing. Tell them, “If you really think you were treated wrongly, then you need to confront that person. However, as far as I can tell, there hasn’t been any mistreatment. If you continue to accuse that person, then I’m going to have them confront you on your accusation.”

In a sense, don’t allow the person to misdirect the conversation by accusing others and getting off track. Tell them that you’ll look into their accusations together, but you’d like to focus on the issue at hand.

Don’t take someone’s reaction personally. It’s difficult to remain emotionally under control when someone is verbally attacking you or shutting down. Remember that the person’s problem is between them and God—not you and them.

Ask people to capture what they heard in the conversation. Self-justification occurs when people are “selective listeners.” They may also make the issue about their entire character (“So you’re saying I’m bad?”), rather than focusing on the specific issue. This can help you to be crystal clear in what you’re trying to communicate. If you misspoke (which isn’t unlikely), it will give you an opportunity to correct any misunderstanding.

Ask what questions they have for you. This will give them the opportunity to ask you for clarity or tell you what they disagree on.

Keep the dialogue fresh and open ended. If the person isn’t consistent, tell them that you’d like them to be ready to continue the conversation the next time you meet. You want to avoid “leave alone, ZAP!” leadership.

Have the person consider ways to change or grow. Instead of telling them what to do to change, ask them to take this initiative. You might ask them to come up with questions that they want answers to, or options that they can take to grow. If they tell you the steps they want to take on the spot, tell them that the best ideas are often not discovered in the moment, but upon reflection and prayer. Urge them to take their issues to God, rather than coming up with solutions on the spot.

Offer good questions for them to reflect upon. For instance, you might leave them with questions like this:

- (1) What are the main problems that were brought to my attention?
- (2) How does this issue negatively affect me and other people?
- (3) Why should I change?
- (4) What is God teaching me here? Or what has he been revealing to me about this issue lately?
- (5) What practical steps can I take to grow in this area? How will these actions benefit my relationship with God and people around me?

Follow up afterwards. If a person doesn’t reflect or have any answers after a difficult conversation, be ready to ask them what they don’t agree with. Be prepared to bring another

person along to help you talk to the person. This is especially important if they are mischaracterizing what you said.

Encourage them when they show signs of repentance. Make sure not to flatter a person for no effort, but equally make sure to encourage them for even a little effort. Make sure to encourage them for taking *concrete* steps, rather than *abstract* steps (see the distinction above).

Give feedback on what they came up with. Find ways to affirm the ideas that you like, and give suggestions on the parts that don't seem realistic. Be prepared with concrete steps that you think would be beneficial, and explain why.

Formal discipline: removal from fellowship

Jesus taught that loving discipline isn't all or nothing, but escalates according to the situation (Mt. 18:15-17). But, how do we know where to draw the line, and when should we patiently wait for change? Once again here are a few principles to keep in mind:

Prioritize teaching, correction, and biblical persuasion before resorting to discipline. Our goal as leaders isn't to stamp out sin (which is an impossible task!). Instead, our goal is to see people meet Jesus and grow in a relationship with Him. In most cases, we should be able to demonstrate we have exhausted other options before taking a confrontational line with a student. As we have already mentioned, leaders can't afford to think in black and white terms. Be sure to lean heavily on your co-leaders and coaches to discern when developing your approach.

What kind of effect is the sin having? Are other students being influenced? Is the student descending deeper into self-destructive behavior? Factors like these should affect our sense of urgency.

Take a strong stance on highly disruptive behavior. There are certain behaviors leaders can't afford to be patient with at meetings: Violence, verbal threats, drug use (at group), and theft. If you allow these to take place, this will drive healthy students away and ruin the spiritual ethos of the group. You even risk parents becoming worried or angered by the permissiveness allowed in your group. Imagine what it would look like to be a parent and hear about destructive behavior happening at your child's Bible study.

For these reasons, disruptive and dangerous behaviors need a more immediate kind of discipline with enforced consequences. It isn't enough to talk it out with a student and show them Scripture. There need to be clear boundaries. These are moments when leaders need to be able to switch hats quickly from friend/mentor to a legitimate authority figure. We are responsible for keeping the environment physically and spiritually healthy for other students.

There is obviously a spectrum involved here: each call is different and requires good discernment. Two guys getting heated while playing sports may only warrant a talk and a warning. But one guy punching another in anger crosses the line. The same goes for stealing. In cases like these, the student should be taken home immediately, banned from meetings for at least a week, depending on the severity. Even regular disruptive behavior like talking during the teaching or being disrespectful to leaders can merit these sorts of moves—although it would be wise to contact a sphere coach for guidance.

It is important to follow up this sort of discipline with an affirmation of love and an explanation of the discipline, with clear steps towards change. Often, students who are spiritually uninterested will choose to stop coming around after they realize they can't act this way. But other students will actually respond well and mellow out. Students often feel loved by being given boundaries by someone who actually cares for them.

It is important for leadership teams to be unified on this subject; otherwise, it will take up unwarranted time and attention. Your team should seek for efficiency. After all, we don't want to be full time disciplinarians; we want to be leaders and good friends to these students! By having clear expectations and boundaries, you will be able to quell disruptive behavior effectively and get back to what we all want to be doing which is having a blast with the students who want to be there. Often times, you will end up winning the disruptive student over in this way once they see what they are missing out on.

What does formal discipline look like in high school ministry?

It should go without saying that you should never enact or threaten formal church discipline without first discussing it directly with your sphere leader. Formal church discipline is reserved for the rare cases where a person is in ongoing serious, damaging, and unrepentant sin.

Leaders can remove dangerous individuals on the spot without needing to follow any formal process (i.e. taking a student home, suspending them for a week, etc.). But for ongoing removal, all decisions need to be cleared with your sphere leader.

Questions for reflection or discussion

What steps might leaders take that would avoid having to put someone through a formal process of church discipline?

- ✓ Moving *toward* disruptive students—not *away* from them.
- ✓ Keeping in contact with their parents.
- ✓ Repeated warning with “two or more” (Mt. 18:16).
- ✓ Having upperclassmen transition to the college group early, where they can get more accountability.
- ✓ Suspending students for three to six months (pending sphere leadership approval).

WORKING WITH PARENTS

How can leaders communicate and work alongside parents? How can we build trust with parents and feel like we are on the same team? How do we demonstrate that we are allies—not adversaries?

Understanding parents

Appreciate parents. We need to remember that parents are a legitimate authority given by God in the lives of children (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20; 1 Tim. 3:4, 12). Moreover, parents are obviously extremely influential in the lives of their children.

Respect parents. We can respect parents even if we don't agree with them. When we don't agree, we need to communicate respect. Paul told Timothy, "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father...the older women as mothers" (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

Parents often want help. In the vast majority of cases, parents actually value the role of spiritual leaders and mentors in the lives of their teenage children. The teenage years are a time where students begin to follow their peers, rather than their parents, and parents are all too aware of this fact. It leads to them feeling worried for their kids, and they value good role models and influencers during this time.

Develop a good relationship with at least one parent. In our modern culture, it is becoming less common to find both parents involved relationally and spiritually with their kids. We should make it our aim to regularly communicate with the parent who is most involved and receptive to our input. When you pick up a student on a Sunday night, come to the door, smile, and introduce yourself. This is a key opportunity to build a relationship with the parents.

What about non-believing parents?

Be a good witness. We should view this as an opportunity to share our faith. After all, our disciple would love to see his mom or dad come to Christ, and you could play a major part in this process.

Serve them. We heard one recent story where a non-believing parent was upset with the fact that her son was bringing home D's on his report card. She grounded him from coming to fellowship until his grades came up. Instead of giving up, the high school leader talked to the mother, and offered to tutor the son in his school work once a week. The boy got his grades up over time, and the mother was so happy for the help that she allowed her son to come to fellowship long before the semester was over.

Communicate regularly. Adults still use email (unlike high school students!). Ask for the parent's email and keep them in the loop on big and small events. Share about the teachings and what happened at the home church that week. For more serious content, phone calls are more appropriate.

Find common ground. Since all people have been endowed with a conscience, we can bank on the fact that we have values in common. Look for ways to appeal to these common values (e.g. being emotionally healthy, having good relationships, becoming more loving, setting yourself up for a career, etc.).

What about believing parents?

Encourage them. When a believing parent makes a strong, spiritual call with their child, be quick to offer encouragement. Parenting teenagers is tough! Your encouragement could go a long way.

Ask for advice. The parent has known their child a lot longer than you. Treat them as an invaluable resource in understanding how to invest in their kid.

Pray with them. This creates unity with the parent, keeping the focus on God.

Don't make assumptions. In your college group, you likely have a mixture of mature and immature believers. The same is true with adults. We should build a relationship with parents to see where they're at spiritually, rather than assuming one thing or another. Your initial read on a situation can often be wrong for good or for bad.

NEVER help students hide serious sin. It isn't healthy to share every detail in a student's life with their parents. This would likely break down trust in your relationship with the student. At the same time, we need to urge students to share serious sin with their parents (e.g. sexual sin, drug use, etc.). We suggest giving the student an ultimatum, such as, "If you don't tell your parents in the next week, then I'm going to have to call them and tell them about this." You might even offer to share this with the parents together as a way to offer support.

Be diplomatic. Whether it is justified or not, parents are often very sensitive to leaders who take an aggressive and direct approach (1 Tim. 5:1-2). We realize that leaders sometimes need to take a direct approach, but this should be infrequent.

Direct approach: "I think you're being too strict in not letting your kid come to fellowship. You seem more concerned about his grades than his spiritual life."

Diplomatic approach: "You're the parent, and you need to decide what you need to do here. However, I feel like God put something on my heart to share with you. Would you consider praying about taking a different approach with letting your kid come to fellowship? I know you want him to get his grades up, and I'm on the same page. But I think grounding him from fellowship could create more tension in your relationship... Again, you're in charge here, but that's just my thought from the outside looking in."

Direct approach: "You are really running your kid ragged with all of these sports leagues that he's in. He rarely comes to fellowship, and he isn't interested in spiritual things at all. Why are you pushing him in his athletics, rather than in spiritual growth?"

Diplomatic approach: "Your kid shared that he's feeling overwhelmed and pressured with all that he has on his plate. I've seen kids in his situation really meltdown during this season of life, and honestly, I'm worried for him. I know how much you love seeing him compete in sports, but I'm wondering if he just has too much on his plate. I know you see him a lot more than I do, but I wonder if it would be better if he stepped out of one of these extracurriculars, so he isn't so burned out. I get stressed out just thinking about his schedule! (haha) Are you seeing the same thing? I'm here to help. What do you think would be a good approach for him right now in his life?"

Agree before you disagree. Before disagreeing or offering your input, do your best to capture what the parent is saying and is not saying. You might say, "I hear you saying _____,

is that what you're thinking?" or "I think we're on the same page with ____." This helps you from talking past one another. When a parent feels heard, they will be more willing to listen.

Be assertive where appropriate. Parents are a delegated authority by God in the home, but leaders are a delegated authority by God in the church (Heb. 13:16). It's appropriate to say, "I appreciate your thoughts and input, but we are going to have to pray about our decision on this" or "In good conscience, I can't agree with that approach. I promise to consider what you're saying, but I can't promise to agree with it."

Reach out for help. Our sphere leaders are here to help with parents. Furthermore, our student-adult liaisons are an excellent resource for working with parents.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What is one key insight that you've taken away from this reading?

Are there any "blind spots" in your leadership in this area?

Do you have a good relationship with your friend's parent(s)?

What are some ways that you might be able to build a better relationship with him/her?

FRESHMEN TRANSITION

We can't depend on freshmen transition to grow our home church. We need to keep our focus on reaching lost students from the world. At the same time, freshmen transition is an excellent time to recover some of the losses of your exiting senior class and stimulate further growth in your group. It can also be a time that is a unifying and exciting both for the leaders and students.

Freshmen transition can also be a chaotic time. Careful planning and preparation can cut down on the confusion and stress that leaders sometimes experience, as well as becoming a time for promoting a unified and exciting vision for your group. Below are tips for preparing your home church for freshmen transition and ideas for further follow up.

Prepare as a leadership team

Prepare all year long. Assess changes in your ethos that you'd like to see before freshmen transition. Does your group have high CT attendance? How's your prayer group? Do students contribute during teachings, or are your meetings boring and stale? Freshmen will not save a dead group. Instead, leaders should strive to grow their ethos the entire year, so that the values of relational follow up are already in place.

Prepare to sacrificially serve. Freshman transition is a period of time that the leaders will be called on to make extra sacrifices. Are you prepared to make this sacrifice for a short amount of time?

Lead quality discussions as a team. Leaders should spend time discussing how to make this a successful transition beforehand. Questions like these might make for good discussion:

What is our role as leaders in doing follow up? How much can we expect from our students regarding follow up?

How can we cast vision and practically prepare our students for this month?

What makes our group unique or special? How can we communicate this in a winsome way to the incoming freshmen?

How can we make our group *appealing* without being *overwhelming*?

What might be some good questions to ask the freshmen when they come out? For instance:

What qualities are you looking for in a high school group?

What are you hoping to accomplish with God in high school?

When did you decide to receive Christ into your life? (This is especially important because many freshmen coming into high school group are not Christians.)

Delegate who will make first contact. Assign which leaders will contact freshmen. (We don't want three leaders all calling one student!) These leaders should call the students, and let them know that they can give them a ride to the group. This is a key time to meet the parents and to introduce yourself.

Get your assigned students around your group. We give a two week window before freshmen transition for leaders to initiate with students. This is a key time to build in with these freshmen. Failure to take advantage of this time is negligence on the part of the leaders.

Plan your teaching series. Schedule your best teachers for this month. You may consider shortening your teachings slightly, because many incoming freshmen aren't used to sitting through a 40 minute teaching. However, this is your prerogative as leaders. We also need to give the freshmen an accurate idea of what the high school group will be like.

Plan your activities. Plan all activities in advance for HC and CT. Delegate this responsibility to a particular leader (perhaps someone gifted in administration), but come up with the activities as a team. Remember that there is nothing spiritual about being boring and serious all the time! Have a calendar for after meeting activities so you can hype these events beforehand.

Preparing your students

Paint a vision for student ownership. Students play a major role in making freshmen feel welcomed and included. If they were once a freshman that made this transition, discuss how to alleviate the transition for others.

Work alongside your students. Students often care about initiating, but they frequently avoid the awkwardness of talking to an insecure freshmen. Express that you (the leader) will be there to help.

Equip students and set goals beforehand. This might include (1) how to ask good questions, (2) how to initiate relationally, (3) how to share their testimony, (4) how to share how God used them in this group, or (5) what it was like for them to go through freshmen transition themselves.

Do's and Don'ts. It's important to give practical instruction to your students during this time, such as, "Do ask good questions" and "Don't blow your vape in their face."

Game plan for the first night

Initiate with parents. We believe it's preferable to pick up students on their first night, and meet their parents. Parents have a really strong influence regarding where their kids go. Avoid easily giving offense (e.g. smoking, vaping, being late, cussing, weak handshakes, etc.). Ask them when they would like their child to be home. Offer to exchange phone numbers or at least offer your number to the parent(s).

Before the teaching. Take them to dinner, and include your disciples. This way, the freshmen will have at least a couple people they know before entering into the chaos of a new group.

If you are not picking a freshman up, get to the meeting early. This way freshman won't walk into an empty house, and you can help set up a friendly and fun atmosphere before they show up.

Empathize. You want to help the freshmen get over the fear or awkwardness of visiting a group of older people. The atmosphere should be welcoming, warm, engaging, and fun.

Focus on being spiritual—not just stimulating. Win them with love, encouragement, and spiritual content—not simply being wild.

Welcome junior high workers. They are there to help accompany the students, and they can be a real ally in helping these younger students to feel welcomed.

During the teaching. In addition to having a quality teaching, consider having a student give their testimony about how God used this group to grow them spiritually, and how God used them to impact people for Christ. Have the student share why they decided to transition to this group. We would suggest doing this on the first night of the transition.

After the teaching. This is an ideal time to get into intentional spiritual conversations and explain what your group is all about. Remember, most freshmen will have short attention spans for personal conversation, so try to connect with them quickly and engage them spiritually instead of trying to drag out the conversation.

20 minutes or so after the teaching, break out the pre-planned activity and get the students engaged, which will ensure that the night will end on a good note!

Central teaching. Invite freshmen to your prayer group and post-CT activity. The ride home is another key time for intentional conversations, and this could be the least distracting time you have with them the whole night.

You can also invite students that were not assigned to your group to these times after their first week at their assigned group. It's great to have students out for dinner or an activity after CT in particular. CT is so diffuse that getting them to dinner is far easier for intentional conversation and relationship building.

Consider providing dinner at prayer group during transition (e.g. pizza?).

Do not promise or imply that you will personally disciple the student if they join your group. Since you don't know the student yet, it's better to tell them that people are available to disciple them when the time comes.

General rules and conduct

You can contact and hang out with students after the assigned date (usually two weeks before transition begins). However, do not invite any students to HC or CT whatsoever, and do not recruit students in any way that are assigned to other groups before the first week. This is unfair and undermining of other groups, and we need to have a willingness to "compete according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5). You can reach out to other students on your "eligible" list after this first week.

You should NOT (1) invite incoming freshmen to sleepovers, (2) invite them to ANY meetings, or (3) urge them in any way to come to your group before the first week.

Do NOT bad mouth other groups or undermine other members of the Body of Christ. This is unspiritual, unethical, and doesn't work in winning freshmen anyway. Moreover, make sure your high school students know that they should not engage in these kind of unethical tactics for recruiting students.

Do not have overnights during freshmen transition because many parents will not appreciate this as their student is still in middle school.

Get incoming freshmen home on time. Fellowship nights are school nights. Many will get rides from parents. Others will need rides from our workers. Be mindful that some parents will be uncomfortable allowing their son or daughter to be driven by a high schooler. Drive responsibly. Pay attention to our policies for youth workers.

Questions for reflection or discussion

What are some other ways HS groups could win freshmen besides freshmen transition month?

- ✓ Sibling nights
- ✓ Friend nights

- ✓ Starting a junior high bush group
- ✓ Having college workers bring their younger coworkers or siblings to the group for a night

HOME CHURCH PLANTING

If you have taken your group to the point of planting, you should be congratulated: planting high school home churches is a rewarding (albeit difficult) goal. At the same time, we want make sure that we aren't planting stillborn groups that are doomed to fail. What are some of the keys to successfully planting a high school group? How can we set up the planting group to succeed?

Size matters. When planting groups, we suggest having 20 or more students to set them up for success. Don't be fooled by superficial growth. It isn't enough to have a good week or two. You need to be confident that the new groups will have relatively stable numbers before planting.

Age matters. You should make sure not to plant groups that are heavy in seniors. This could give the shelf-life of the group only a year before falling into dire straits when the seniors graduate. Likewise, it is preferable to spread out the freshmen evenly if possible.

Timing matters. We advise not planting immediately after freshmen transition, because (1) this can feel like whiplash for the incoming freshmen and (2) you need time to see how stable these freshmen are before planting a group. We feel like fall is the best time to plant—after all, summers are spotty for attendance, as are the holidays. Fall is a good time to see the group grow.

Geography matters. Ideally, it's best to keep high schools together. Imagine being the only person in your group who goes to a certain high school. This isn't a death sentence to a student, but it isn't ideal either. Try not to unnecessarily disrupt friend groups.

Leadership matters. Before sending off your leaders, make sure you have confidence in their ability to lead apart from you.

In a sense, we are suggesting balancing both sides of the plant. Having a weak group go out is not going to do any good. Aim to have good discipleship established on both sides, and try to have multiple bringers on both sides—ideally one or two in each new cell group.

When we consider these criteria above, we see that there is a relatively **narrow window of opportunity** to plant our home church. Sometimes, leaders need to make this decision or wait six months before the window opens again. Much prayer and planning need to be in place before sending out the new church.

RECOMMENDED READING

Here are a list of books we recommend for understanding and working with adolescents.

For understanding Generation Z

A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (2018).

Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

Twenge is a psychologist and professor at San Diego State University).

David Kinnamann and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

For understanding adolescent brain development

Sheryl G. Feinstein, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching and Teaching Today's Adolescents* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009)

Frances E. Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015)

Daniel Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2013).

For relating with adolescents

Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014).

For counseling boys and girls

Leonard Sax (M.D., Ph.D.), *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men* (Basic Books. New York. 2009).

Leonard Sax, *Girls on the Edge: The Four Factors Driving the New Crisis for Girls* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 2010).

Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2017).

APPENDIX A: ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Jonathan McKee, *Get Your Teenager Talking: Everything You Need to Spark Meaningful Conversations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014).

General conversation starters

If you could watch a video showing the actual footage of any event in history, which event would you pick?

If you could visit any period in history and hang out for a week, what period would you choose?

School

“If you could skip all your classes tomorrow except one, which class would you choose to actually attend? Why?”

What makes someone popular at your school? Do you have any of these qualities? If you could have one quality or characteristic that made you feel more accepted by others, what would you want?

What are some cliques at your school? What do you think of these social labels? Which group is easiest for you to get along with? Which group is the most difficult for you to get along with? What advice would you give someone for getting along with these difficult groups?

Who has been your favorite teacher, and why? Who is one of the worst teachers you’ve had? If you were a teacher, how would you teach differently?

If you could change one thing about your school, what would you change, and why?

What is the biggest misconception people have about teenagers? What is the biggest misconception teens have about adults?

Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever bullied others? Why do you think people bully others?

Music, movies, books, etc.

What song is your go-to song you listen to whenever you are feeling sad? What is it about this song that makes you feel this way? Do any specific lyrics resonate with you?

Who is your favorite actor or actress? What criteria do you use to choose a favorite actor (looks, ability, who they are when the camera is off, etc.)? What is your favorite movie or show with this actor?

Of all the books you have read, what has been the most impactful? What specifically did you like about this book? Has this book changed the way you think or act? In what ways?

What is a movie everybody hated, but you liked? What did you like about the movie? Is there any truth to people’s dislike of the movie? How could the film makers have made it better?

Information technology

What is your favorite phone app?

If the power went out in our city for a day (and you forgot to charge your battery-operated devices), what would you do? What would you do if there was no electricity

for an entire week? What would you miss the most? How difficult would this be for you? Would it be good for you?

Philosopher Albert Camus said, “In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion.”¹³² What did he mean by this? Do you agree with him? What are some great ways to “unplug” and truly relax from the busyness of the world?

Values

If you could eliminate one evil in the world, what would you destroy, and why?

Describe the top three qualities you want your future spouse to have. Which of these is the most important to you? Are any of these qualities negotiable? Is it important to date people with these qualities?

What possession do you treasure the most? Five years ago, what possession did you treasure the most? In five years from now, what do you think you’ll treasure the most? In twenty years will it be something different? Why?

Exploring someone’s past

What was the best day of your life? What made it so awesome?

What was your worst day? What made this day so bad? How did you get through it? How did this day change you?

When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up? How has this changed as you’ve gotten older? What influences in your life have swayed your thinking on this?

If you could relive one day of your life, but this time, do something differently, what would you do? How would your life be different now? What have you learned from this experience? If reliving the day meant forgetting this wisdom you have gained, would you still relive that day?

Name an accomplishment you are proud of. What was the most difficult part of this accomplishment? Would you do it again?

If you could freeze time and live at a certain age, what age would you stop at? What are some benefits of living life at this age? What would you miss out on, staying at that age?

What is one of the biggest lies someone ever told you?

What is one of the biggest lies someone ever told *about* you?

What is the best gift you’ve ever given someone? Why was the gift so meaningful? How could you tell that it was so impactful to them?

¹³² Albert Camus, *The Minotaur*. Essay found at <http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/minot.htm>.

If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of advice before high school (or middle school), what advice would you offer? Would you have listened? How would your life have changed if you had?

What bad thing happened to you that turned out for the best? How did you respond when it first happened? How long was it before the situation resulted in some good? How did you respond then? What did you learn from the situation?

Emotions

What is the last thing you cried about? What does it take to bring you to tears? Which is better, crying or holding in your emotions? Why?

How do you respond when you see a friend crying? How does this help? How would you like someone to respond when you're crying?

What is one of the most embarrassing moments in your life?

What do you like to do to relax? What changes do you notice after times of relaxation like this? Do you relax too much or too little?

When is the last time you laughed so hard you cried? What usually makes you laugh? Who usually makes you laugh?

Evaluating culture

Watch a short, but provocative YouTube video on a topic. Follow up with questions that could lead to good discussion.

50 percent of younger people—ages eighteen to twenty-nine—considered texting during a meal permissible, compared with only 15 percent of those age thirty and older. Similarly, 33 percent of the younger people considered texting during a meeting appropriate, compared with 17 percent of those age thirty and older.¹³³ **Why do you think younger people find it more appropriate to text during meals and meetings?**

Not long ago a book was published titled *What Every Man Thinks About Apart from Sex*. All two hundred pages are completely blank. The book soared through the bestseller charts and became a craze on college campuses, where students used the blank pages to take notes. **Why do you think the book was so successful?**

The Center of Alcohol Studies at Rutgers University followed hundreds of young women from their senior year in high school through their freshman year of college. Of all girls whose biggest binge had included four to six drinks in one sitting, one-fourth said they'd been sexually victimized in the fall semester. That included anything from unwanted sexual contact to rape. And the more alcohol those binges involved, the greater the likelihood of sexual assault. Of women who had consumed ten or more drinks in a sitting since starting

¹³³ Cathy Payne, "Minding Your P's and Q's When Texting," USA Today, February 11, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/02/08/mobile-device-etiquette/1894737/>.

college, 59 percent were sexually victimized by the end of their first semester.¹³⁴ **What's your reaction to this study?**

Should cash be used as an incentive for young people to do well in school? The question came up a few years ago when New York City officials considered a pilot program to reward fourth and seventh graders \$100 to \$500, depending on their test scores. Some parents called it a bribe and said they didn't believe in rewarding kids for something they are supposed to be doing anyway. Kids should learn "because they want it, not because they're getting paid," one dad said.¹³⁵ **What do you think? If you were in charge of education in this country, what changes would you make to your school and others, so kids would learn better?**

Half of all college students drop out before receiving a degree, according to a recent study. And one in four college freshmen don't even complete their first year.¹³⁶ **Why do you think so many college students don't finish?**

A recent study revealed, "The more money parents provide for higher education, the lower the grades their children earn." The students deemed "least likely to excel" were the ones who were given essentially a blank check for college.¹³⁷ **Why do you think this is? If providing a blank check—paying for everything—is too much, how much should parents help with their kid's college expenses?**

Two-thirds of Americans say pro athletes have more influence on society than pastors, youth pastors, or any faith leaders.¹³⁸ **Why do you think this is? What factors have influenced this leaning toward sports figures as role models? What are young people learning, or gleaning, from most sports icons?**

A few years ago the Tennessee state legislature started requiring DUI offenders to pick up trash on roadsides wearing neon-colored vests with huge letters, reading, "I AM A DRUNK DRIVER."¹³⁹ Many people were skeptical of the effectiveness of this shaming technique. **Do you think it would work on most people? What do you think is an adequate punishment for drunk drivers? How important is it to give people consequences for their actions? Why?**

Dove's Real Beauty campaign claims, "Women are their own worst beauty critics." In their research, they found only 4 percent of the women in the world consider themselves

¹³⁴ "Freshman Women's Binge Drinking Tied to Sexual Assault Risk," I, January 2012 press release, <http://alcoholstudies.rutgers.edu/news/JSADpress/JSADJan2012.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Joseph Berger, "Some Wonder if Cash for Good Test Scores Is the Wrong Kind of Lesson," *New York Times*, August 8, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/08/education/08education.html>.

¹³⁶ "Infographic: Unprepared for College,"

<http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/infographic-unprepared-for-college>.

¹³⁷ Survey results from Laura Hamilton, University of California—Merced, originally published in the *American Sociological Review*, as reported by Scott Jaschik, "Spoiled Children," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 14, 2013, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/01/14/study-finds-increased-parental-support-college-results-low-er-grades>.

¹³⁸ Barna Group, "Athletes Influence Greater Than Faith Leaders," February 2, 2013,

<https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/36-homepage-main-promo/602-barna-update-01-23-2013>

¹³⁹ "Tennessee Hopes Shame Will Help Combat Drunk Driving," Associated Press/FoxNews.com, December 31, 2005,

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/12/31/tennessee-hopes-shame-will-help-combat-drunk-driving/>.

beautiful. When women were asked to describe themselves, they all described themselves uglier than others described them.¹⁴⁰ **Why do you think so many women think negatively about themselves?**

Famous nineteenth-century novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) wrote, “Lying to ourselves is more deeply ingrained than lying to others.” Do you think he is right? What is an example of someone lying to himself? Why would people lie to themselves? Describe a situation where someone you know, or know about, didn’t want to see the truth.

Friendships, family, and close relationships

Who is someone you could talk to about anything—even an embarrassing secret? How would this person respond if you told him or her something embarrassing? How would this person help you?

It’s Friday night, you’re hanging out with your friends, but you’re all broke. You want to go somewhere fun, and they say, “You choose.” Where could we all go and have fun for free?

If you got lost in a foreign country for a few days, who would you want with you, and why? How would this person help you in this situation? What do you like most about this person? If you had to choose one family member to be with you during this time, who would you want with you, and why?

If you got in huge trouble and needed someone to talk to, someone who would encourage you, who would you call?

Who is the person you hate disappointing the most? Why do you hate disappointing him (or her) so much? When is the last time you disappointed him or her? If you were he or she, would you have been disappointed in “you” in this situation?

Theological questions

If you could ask God one question, what would you ask? How do you think he might answer? What do you hope he wouldn’t say? Why do you want to know?

If you had to teach on a topic in the Bible, what would it be?

¹⁴⁰ Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign, <http://www.youtube.com/user/doveunitedstates>.