

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

*Created by Nazarene Youth International (NYI) and
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SESSION 12

Youth Ministry Discipleship:
Nurturing and Teaching

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Youth Ministry Discipleship: Nurturing and Teaching

SESSION OVERVIEW

A Glance at Culture and the Development of Young People

Lessons from a Great Teacher

The Teacher as Midwife

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

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

INTRODUCTION

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

A GLANCE AT CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE



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

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

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

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

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

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

Learning Styles

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

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


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

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

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

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

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



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

LESSONS FROM A GREAT TEACHER



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

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

From the same chapter, we see examples of the way Jesus taught that can serve as a model for us.

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


NOTES

Using some of these same models, Dan Lambert, in *Teaching That Makes a Difference*, talks about how Jesus might teach today's adolescent.

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

Lambert also offers the following thoughts on how Jesus might teach students today.

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

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

THE TEACHER AS MIDWIFE

NOTES

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

Pack Your Bag

Be ready at all times. I remember when we were expecting our children; the bag was always packed, sitting by the door with all the essentials needed for the birthing and the days following. Be ready; be present. How do we pack for this journey? Dean explains the essentials.

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

Name the Pain

Ultimately disequilibrium occurs in this process as youth understand life struggles are faith struggles. Youth relationships such as family, social, and even church help youth name struggles, examine disconnects in their lives, and allows young people to relate with God and explore how they are growing into that relationship. We can help them name their pain so they can seek understanding



and even healing from whatever struggles may arise. We also get to help those who have yet to develop a confidence in God by providing means that allow them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Breaking the Water

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

Be Ready for the Catch

To be ready for the catch means staying close, alert, and ready to respond whenever a young person's faith begins to grow. Moments like this do not always happen in the classroom. We have to be comfortable with the preparation process, the struggle, and the insight that follows a growing faith in order for us to be ready to work with youth in the follow-up.

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

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Take a copy of the curriculum you presently use and evaluate how you think it addresses the issues covered in this lesson. Use the following questions to help evaluate the curriculum and your commitment to the holistic teaching process.
 - How does the curriculum address the development, maturity, and learning styles of your youth?
 - What can you do to make your teaching more experiential?
 - How can you use curriculum to supplement the life you are sharing with your youth?
 - How committed are you to the relationships you have with your youth? What are the changes that need to be made to make them more of a priority?
2. Talk with community leaders and identify the people in your church's city, parish, or neighborhood who suffer most. Who are the widows, orphans, and strangers in your town? How intimately and regularly is your church involved in the lives of those who suffer? How intimately and regularly is your family involved in the lives of those who suffer? How intimately and regularly are you involved in the lives of those who suffer? Write a 2-page response.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Youth have a very specific view of God that demands accountability.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. The age span of adolescence is _____.
 - A. complicated
 - B. lengthening
 - C. important
 - D. all of the above
3. The best way to reach adolescents is to incorporate the _____ learning style.
 - A. intuitive
 - B. analytic
 - C. logical
 - D. pragmatic
 - E. all of the above
4. In today's society, adults seem more accessible to young people than ever before.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Today's young people are engaged in more destructive behavior than ever before.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Because of the freedoms younger and younger adolescents possess, they are forced to make decisions on their own, and some of these decisions lead them down destructive paths.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. To reach and effectively minister to today's youth, teaching has to be more than the content of our curriculum.
 - A. True
 - B. False



8. Understanding how youth think and weighing it with the other factors affecting their lives, can help us develop an effective teaching-learning environment.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Jesus modeled only one basic form of discipleship.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. The midwife teaching style includes _____.
 - A. being ready at all times
 - B. helping youth to identify struggles
 - C. being responsive to learning moments
 - D. maintain relationships
 - E. all of the above

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What do you think are the most important aspects in teaching adolescents/teens?
2. What is the most difficult part of teaching our youth?
3. How do you see evidence of the three variables in teaching—development, learning styles, and unbridled freedom—in today’s adolescents? What role do these issues play in our attempt to teach adolescents/teens?
4. Where do you see evidence of Jesus’ methods in what you teach? How can you do better?
5. What are you hearing in the analogy of midwifery in relation to the spiritual development of students? Who played the role of midwife for your spiritual development? How does this affect your approach to teaching youth? How does this affect those we recruit to teach youth?