

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

*Created by Nazarene Youth International (NYI) and  
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**SESSION 8**

The Youth Minister's  
Relationship with Others

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# The Youth Minister's Relationship with Others

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Relationships with Youth**

**Incarnational Relationship Ingredients**

**Relationships with Parents and Families**

**Relationships with Other Adult Youth Workers**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the vital components of Incarnational and relational youth ministry.
- explain the implications for this type of ministry with the parents and families within the youth minister's sphere of influence.
- demonstrate an appreciation of the importance of modeling appropriate pastoral care with other adult youth workers.

## INTRODUCTION

This lesson addresses the system of relationships in the life of the youth minister. The relationships addressed are those between the youth minister and:

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

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH



### NOTES

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

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

Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11, The Message)

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

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



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

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

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



## INCARNATIONAL RELATIONSHIP INGREDIENTS



### NOTES

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

- authenticity
- integrity
- a John the Baptist mentality

#### *Authenticity*

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

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

For this relationship to be relevant, the adult must enter (as Jesus in Philippians 2) the world of the young person. They must go where young people are, spending time with young people on their turf (their context), and modeling appropriate love, vulnerability, and understanding. Most of all, adults must listen to young persons and truly seek to hear the words between their words (their implicit



meaning) in order to foster understanding and pastoral care. It is this sort of modeling of what an adult looks like in front of young persons that not only offers them hope but a healing relationship. For this relationship to be truly authentic, it must not require anything of the young person but their friendship in return. If there are conditions then further abandonment is the result.

### *Integrity*

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

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

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

### *A John the Baptist Mentality*

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

 **NOTES**

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

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



## RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES



### NOTES

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

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

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

It may be necessary for us to relearn what it means to be a youth worker. We are not able to do every form of ministry and need to develop partners in ministry who can. *Soul Searching* makes it clear youth leaders must focus on the parent as much as the young person. One simple corrective involves inviting parents and involving them in what is already going on in the ministry. Whether as

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guests, participants, or even sponsors, parental attendance and participation in the spiritual formation practices of the youth group substantially influences the spiritual growth of youth and adults.

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

### *The Family of the Youth Minister*

There is much that could be said about the family of the youth minister, particularly those who are married with children. This concern could range from the importance of family devotions, to involving the spouse in ministry, to the need for the family to be supportive of the youth minister, etc. However, the single issue is that the youth ministers' family is his or her first ministry priority. Without first caring for one's own household (in an authentic, integral, and self-emptying-love-sort-of-way), all of one's outside achievements are worthless.

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

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

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ADULT YOUTH WORKERS

### NOTES

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

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

Summon before me seventy of the leaders of Israel. Bring them to the Tabernacle to stand there with you. I will come down and talk to you there, I will take some of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone (Numbers 11:16-17, NLT).

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

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

Another important value of the adult volunteer team of youth workers is the modeling of healthy relationships between adults. When a team of likeminded Christian adults comes together to love a group of young persons toward Jesus, powerful modeling on several fronts takes place. Not only do the young people



realize there are a number of adults seeking them out in their own context with authentic, and self-emptying love, the youth also witness these adults showing that same love, respect, and kindness to each other. This can be revolutionary in the lives of young persons who may be surrounded by marital discord, bickering siblings, and the daily news reports of antagonism between various factions all around.

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

Every follower of Jesus is called to live in His steps as Peter's first epistle reminds us. All followers of Jesus ought to pattern their living after His example. Our sacrificial journey of love does not occur in isolation. When we join with youth, families, and other adult workers we make this journey together.

## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Interview 2-3 people in your local congregation and ask them for their definition of the church. In their context how do they understand their relationship to the local congregation?
2. Speak to various other adults in your congregation about their willingness or unwillingness to serve as adult volunteers in youth ministry. Use the conversations to help build a philosophy of team ministry.

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. One of the primary challenges youth face is abandonment.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. We often reveal our true character when youth, and ourselves, are under pressure.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. \_\_\_\_\_ means to seek in all things to be whole and uncompromised.
  - A. Authenticity
  - B. A John the Baptist mentality
  - C. Integrity
  - D. All of the above
4. Having \_\_\_\_\_ includes pointing youth toward Jesus.
  - A. authenticity
  - B. a John the Baptist mentality
  - C. integrity
  - D. all of the above
5. Nurturing \_\_\_\_\_ will help when seeking to avoid the temptation of hypocrisy.
  - A. authenticity
  - B. a John the Baptist mentality
  - C. integrity
  - D. all of the above
6. The single most important influence in the spiritual lives of youth is youth ministers and other youth leaders.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. Unfortunately the families of youth workers have to take second priority to the ministry.
  - A. True
  - B. False





8. Our relationship with our family influences our ability to form intimate relationships the rest of our lives.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. Youth ministers can only minister to a handful of youth by themselves.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. \_\_\_\_\_ should be the primary approach to working with youth leaders.
  - A. Delegation
  - B. The team approach
  - C. Looking for fun people
  - D. All of the above

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Who is someone living an example of the Philippians 2 passage in your life?
2. How have you (or someone you know) displayed authenticity, integrity, or a John the Baptist mentality in your ministry? Can you give possibilities when you or others have been tempted to not demonstrate these characteristics?
3. How did your own parents model love and respect to you in your family?
4. What are some positive natural outcomes of involving a team approach to youth ministry?
5. Would it be important to involve persons on the youth ministry team different from yourself? Why or Why not?