**7 Ways to Improve Your Youth Ministry Impact**

Have you ever had a massive youth ministry fail?

Snapping a teenager’s ankle at Mystic Island Lake

The Quart of Prune Juice Game

I love youth leaders. And, although I get to train thousands of them all across the nation every year, one of my favorite things is learning from them. Many youth leaders have great and effective strategies that they're implementing to create the most impacting youth group programs possible.

With this as a backdrop, here are 7 simple ideas that will vastly improve your youth ministry program:

**1)  Make prayer numero uno.**

In 2013, [Dare 2 Share](http://www.dare2share.org/) commissioned a national research project that helped us uncover the best practices of the best youth groups out there. This shouldn't have surprised us, but the number one characteristic of the youth groups that were the most effective was their commitment to prayer.

Youth leaders prayed. Students prayed. Adult volunteers prayed. There were extended times of prayer before the program and, in some cases, in the actual program.

Me, myself and I prayers vs intercessory prayers!

Intercessory prayer is the hard work of prayer but it does a work in us. It decentralizes our prayers from being all about us and our needs and gives us a heart for others!

We need to help them pray for each other and for other believers!

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18

What kind of prayers did the Apostle Paul pray? We see 12 recorded prayers of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament and his prayers for other believers were prayers of intense intercession. He was praying on behalf of his fellow believers.

Ephesians 1:15-19, “*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe*.”

And, of course, there is the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 where he prays, not just for his disciples, but all those who would come to faith through them…that includes us!

And even now Jesus is interceding on our behalf. The Bible says in Romans 8:34 that Jesus is interceding on our behalf!

I love the words of Robert Murray M’Cheyne, “*If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.”*

What about taking part of youth group to have teenagers pray for each other and maybe even pray for a teenager in another country, maybe even a persecuted country.

We need to help our teenagers pray for the lost. Just like Jesus prayed for the loss on the cross when he said, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing” we can help our teenagers to pray that God would forgive their lost friends who have yet to respond to the Gospel.

I’ll be diving into this deeper in a future podcast but the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:1 said, *“Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”*

Paul was constantly praying for his fellow Israelites to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. And we need to help our teenagers do the same.

I tell the story of the radical conversion of my Uncles and how a preacher, named Yankee reached them for Christ but what I should probably share just as often is the story of my grandma who prayed for their salvation day and night. I’ll never forget when she told me before she died so many years ago…

The simplest way to deepen your impact in youth ministry is to deepen your commitment to prayer, both personally and programmatically.

Give example of youth leader who is praying and calling teenagers to pray.

**2)  Take time to prepare a lesson that rocks.**

The most effective youth leaders I know are the most committed to preparing each lesson with the time and work it needs to be excellent. These youth leaders think ahead, labor over their teaching outlines, illustrations and exegesis to make sure they are presenting the best talk possible.

*“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:**preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”* 2 Timothy 4:1,2

Far too many youth leaders go to a lesson-outline-churning website the afternoon before their program and frantically try to find something that will hit the mark.

But the best talks are thought over and prayed over long in advance. They have just the right blend of content, creativity and interactivity.

Even in preparing for this talk I had someone offer to prepare my lesson for me and I told them, “No thanks. I like to chew my own food.”

Now does that mean you can’t use other people’s curriculum? Of course not! But I would make sure to wrestle through it and make it your own. Make sure it’s theologically solid and culturally relevant. You are the one God has placed over these students to preach the Word too and you are responsible before God.

Tony Evans definition of Biblical preaching, “the proper exegesis of the text delivered to the needs of the audience in the power of the Spirit through the personality of the preacher.”

…exegete your audience…exegete your text…explain it in a way that they can understand and apply.

One of the most effective sermons I ever preached wasn’t a sermon at all…talking about forgiveness at Lone Tree Bible Ranch

**3)  Give the Gospel every week.**

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2

Why…(elders at Grace sin of Achan)

Sin of assumption…lady at CU

Give Gospel…

**4)  Equip your teens and adults to win, build, train...repeat.**

Your teenagers and adults need to be inspired and trained to win the lost, build them up spiritually and [train them](http://www.leadthecause.org/?__hstc=106114972.4c242aa1e1010d11ac396074d7d29d6e.1544224035131.1556213020987.1556557518190.37&__hssc=106114972.1.1556557518190&__hsfp=1306002164) to do the same with others. Then, they need to be equipped to repeat the process.

This takes intentionality and focus. It takes actually putting training events on your ministry calendar that will equip them to do this effectively.

Equip them to win the lost…

**“**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”  Romans 10: 14

Take off to touch down Gospel conversation…

Equip them to build the new believers…

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28: 19-20

Not just the content but obedience to that content!

Train them to reach and build others…

Story of Gil Lavato (Gibo)…guy on the roof that we won, built and trained…his funeral service

Many youth leaders I talk to include this kind of training as a part of their annual camps/retreats. They also do curriculum series (like [Shine](https://store.dare2share.org/collections/curriculum/products/shine-curriculum-1)) throughout the year so that their teenagers and adults can navigate a gospel conversation from take off to touchdown in a simple, natural way.

**5.  Go to great websites to "*steal*" great ideas.**

I think of Jonathan Mckee's [The Source For Youth Ministry](http://www.thesource4ym.com/), Doug Fields' [Download Youth Ministry](http://www.downloadyouthministry.com/) and [youthministry.com](https://youthministry.com/) to name a few. There are so many great websites out there that can provide practical how to's, game ideas, lesson outlines, inspiring articles, etc. And these can help you take the guess work out of youth ministry so you can focus on being the best youth leader you can be and building the best program you can build.

“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” 1 Corinthians 3:9

My son, “Dad, I want to go hunting but you don’t’ know how to hunt.” Jeremy, you got to either be the man or know the man. I know the man!”

You know the man! Doug Fields, Jonathan McKee and so many others!

**6.  Invest your life in the few.**

This is something that we can't help but learn from the life of Jesus. He programmed for the many but invested in the few. Jesus' main focus was not the pizzazz of the miracles, but the intensive personal training of the disciples.

Another way to think of this is that Jesus "*played favorites*" in his ministry. Out of the crowd of thousands there were 72 that he invested in personally ([Luke 10:1-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A1-11%2CLuke+10%3A16-20&version=NIV).) Out of the 72 there were 12 that were his inner circle ([Mark 3:13-15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+3%3A13-15&version=NIV).) Out of the 12 there were 3 that comprised his inner, inner circle ([Matthew 17:1-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A1-3&version=NIV).) Out of the 3, he had one favorite ([John 20:2.](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A2&version=NIV))

Jesus played favorites. He invested his life in those who were willing to go the furthest, farthest and deepest. If he did, then we should. Focus on pouring your life into those students and adults who will have the highest spiritual yield.

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. **14**He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” Mark 3: 13-14

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.” Matthew 17:1

Who are the teenagers you are investing in?

…Kenny Sanchez, Mark Schweitzer and more.

Love everyone. Minister to all. But pour your life into the few.

**7.  Create a story-telling culture.**

Stories are fodder for revival. Every great spiritual awakening has been accompanied by great stories. And great stories breed even more stories.

When teenagers are sharing their faith, they also want to share their stories. When teenagers are growing deeper in Christ, they want to let others know.

Program storytelling time into your youth groups and small groups. Encourage teenagers to go do something that is story-worthy. Once this catches hold, it will create an unstoppable spiritual momentum in your youth group that will turn your ministry from theoretical to practical in an emotionally engaging way.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.” Psalm 107:1-3

“Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story:” Acts 11:4

The Power of the Campfire at Camp (telling stories of impact from the week)

The Power of the Campfire every week (story telling time)

Story of Mr. Bill and The bell (get his script from PG)…

As a result, each week at Legacy, students are sharing about Gospel conversations they are having with their friends and those friends are one by one coming to faith in Jesus!!!

Because of all these ways Dare 2 Share has invested in me, my wife has a better husband, my church has been energized and more students have been mobilized to share the gospel with their friends than ever before!

I’d like to close with the story of Nick Myer.

I remember the first time Nick came to our student ministry, which we call Legacy. He was invited by one of our students Kira. I walked up to meet him and he said, “Hi I’m Nick, I’m an atheist.” Smiling back at him I said, “Hi I’m Mr Bill, I’m glad you’re here! Tell me more about yourself.” But that was Nick, always establishing himself, and such a great guy to talk to. So Nick continued to talk with Kira and come to periodically to Legacy.

About a year later, a friend told me this story about a bell (hold bell up). He had visited a Concentration Camp in Dachau, Germany. Under the reign of Adolph Hitler…… tens of thousands of Jews were housed there & died. Many were tortured there, in unimaginable ways..… It was a place of death & hopelessness. But today & every day at 3:00 a bell rings out (ring bell). So why the bell? And why 3:00? You see, the Bible records that Jesus died at 3:00, and that bell rings today & every day in Dachau to remind everyone visiting that – in the midst of dark & seemingly hopeless times - Jesus offers hope and life! One night, I shared this message with our Legacy students. As believers, we too are called to “ring the bell of hope”, not just at 3:00, but all the time. Not just in Dachau, but everywhere. We are to remind everyone, that regardless of what you’re facing, there is hope in Jesus!

After I shared that message, we took this bell and we hung it in our Legacy room. We began asking students at the end of each night, after our lesson, if they’ve had a chance to share Jesus with anyone, and if so, to come up, ring the bell and share their story. We would then pray for them as well as for their friend. This took off and has become a really awesome and gospel advancing practice with our students. Well, one night, Nick stands up and starts heading towards the bell - and I’m watching with anticipation not knowing what to expect – which is pretty much what student ministry is always like anyway – LOL!

Nick rings the bell, looks at the room filled with Legacy students and says, “It’s me!” And he was so soft spoken we were all like, “what?” Nick says again, “It’s me! This week I put my faith in Jesus!!!” And everyone was like “NO WAY – THAT’S AWESOME!!!”

He shared how he had been coming for over a year, having talks with KIra and finally believed that Jesus had died for his sins and was offering him eternal life! Four months later Nick was found to have aplastic anemia, which breaks down your immune system. Two weeks after that, Nick contracted a fungus, was hospitalized. A few days later that fungus went into his brain and he died. Today, Nick is enjoying heaven because a teenager named Kira was willing to talk to Him about Jesus.