



Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

11

Youth Ministry
Discipleship - Witness
and Evangelism

Youth Ministry Training

Lesson Eleven: Youth Ministry Discipleship: Witness and Evangelism

Lesson Introduction

Session Overview

- Motivation for Evangelism
- Models for Evangelism
- Building Relationships and Overcoming Diversions
- Methods for Relational Evangelism
- Teaching Youth How to Share Their Faith

Learner Objectives

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand how to see witness as a sign of one's life, with or without words
- Define relational evangelism with youth
- Identify and develop different evangelistic approaches
- Teach youth how to share their faith with peers and in families

Introduction

Youth ministry serves God as we witness and proclaim the gospel to young people. However, youth workers and youth should share this responsibility. This session teaches how to understand and effectively lead youth in witness and evangelism.

Lesson Body

Motivation for Evangelism

When youth workers seek the proper motivation for evangelism, the scriptures offer a major source. Anchored in the message and mission of Jesus, revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, many of the writers in the New Testament constantly exhort Christians to reach out with the message of salvation. There may be other resources to help us understand the nature of evangelism in our contemporary culture, but scripture provides the logical beginning point for our understanding the importance of our Christian witness in every situation including youth ministry.

There may be a number of key insights from the scriptures. Perhaps some of the most important begin with the good news that God takes the first initiative to save people, including young people, from their sinful, hopeless condition. Our witness serves as a response to what God has done and is already doing in our lives. We are called to practice the gospel by our very presence in society. Our actions as Christians often speak louder than merely talking about our faith. Evangelism must be the proclamation of the gospel in both word and deed, providing the message of Jesus by living lives modeled after Jesus. That is not all that scripture says, but these ideas challenge us to take seriously everything we do as youth workers as part of our Christian witness.

Models for Evangelism

Our witness as Christians, particularly our efforts to evangelize people, occur only as we prayerfully, patiently, and persistently, work with individuals regardless of their life circumstance. Such an approach proves crucial when reaching out to young people. Depending on culture and personal context, the moment of presenting the gospel message, of evangelizing youth, may take different expressions. Historically, the church has adopted several approaches that seem to relate to various approaches in the Bible.

Confrontation

This approach confronts a person with the logical direction their current life will take them—personal and spiritual destruction—and offers a frank but redemptive alternative. Sometimes confrontation arises through negative critique and challenging a young person. Sometimes young people find themselves confronted through radical healing or unexpected expression of love and care in someone's life. Confrontation may be either positive or negative, but the moment of confrontation opens the opportunity to show a redemptive alternative.

The biblical imagery that undergirds this approach rests in Acts 9 with the apostle Paul's Damascus journey where Saul (Paul) finds himself confronted by the resurrected Christ, knocked off his feet, blind, but ultimately understands—thanks to Ananias—the full meaning to his encounter with Jesus and proceeds with the same zeal in proclaiming the gospel and testifying to his transformation. Youth workers who use this approach should always avoid the danger of manipulating youth emotions with extreme and fearful images. Nevertheless, real confrontation allows youth to accept for themselves the claims of the gospel.

Invitation

This approach acknowledges a person's life is a journey but also invites people to allow Jesus to enter into that journey. Rather than focus on negative aspects of a young person's life, this view often includes the assertion that the Christian life provides a sense of meaning and fulfillment to what God has in mind. Youth workers do encourage specific decisions but many times based on the strength of their relationship with the youth and the possibilities of what God might accomplish. Often young people are already active within the youth ministry but have not made a specific commitment until the youth worker engages them and gently makes them aware of the different ways Christ can become even more important to them.

Often this form of evangelism finds biblical imagery in Luke 24:13-35, the Emmaus Road journey, more important. Christ joins travelers on the journey, opens their minds to the importance of His life from the scriptures, never pushes and seems almost to move on until an act of hospitality by the travelers allows Jesus to be recognized, only to disappear again so the travelers—now changed—can continue their journey.

Specific conversion experiences may seem more elusive in this approach, often youth may merely see themselves continuing the journey, but their hearts are indeed “made warm” by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Youth ministers using this approach have to make sure that youth do

not accept Christ just to meet personal needs. Jesus not only fulfills longings but also challenges young people to follow Christ instead of their personal desires. Nevertheless, this developmental approach often allows youth to embrace Jesus at a level consistent with their personal journey.

Borrowing a term from Chris Folmsbee, in his book *A New Kind of Youth Ministry*, this approach utilizes encourages youth to bring their friends for an engaging activity, a brief gospel invitation, an opportunity to discuss the event over food. This particular approach reflects a “seeker sensitive” approach that often encourages a real love for the unreached while also seeking approaches that will invite them into the church through the youth group.

The blend of friendship evangelism and event-based evangelism allows youth workers to offer non-threatening opportunities with the hope that, on occasion, these events will result in energizing moments of deep encounter. Folmsbee admits that this approach may not always prove effective since there are a number of challenges, including the tendency for youth to not think about their Christian witness beyond the events themselves. Often discipleship can be lacking, so youth evaluate the ministry based on the quality of these events. However, limited use of these gatherings can provide an opportunity for moments of deep awareness and commitment.

Participation

This approach begins through a person’s regular participation in a community of faith and sees salvation occurring in the midst of regular practice. Sometimes participation includes growth in one’s spiritual journey until young people suddenly come to an awareness that they have to embrace their Christian faith as part of their growth in grace. At other times participation begins in the mission of God, serving others until the person comes to the reality they need to embrace authentic faith, or until they discover that they now possess a faith they did not know they had.

The biblical imagery that undergirds this approach often begins in Exodus with God’s efforts to guide the children of Israel through the wilderness, and the many practices and observances used to shape them into God’s people. This imagery continues in the New Testament in Acts 2:42-47 and through the New Testament writers, often encouraging and exhorting an open yet consistent church that engages in ongoing practices “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

Youth workers must be careful not to assume that activity always indicates a clear sign of salvation, young people need to embrace God by faith. Nevertheless, young people often awaken to this faith under the strong relational bonds of the youth group, a consistent vision of the gospel reason for the existence of the group, and carefully designed practices that embody the Christian life.

Chris Folmsbee notes that the future may call for a “life-dynamic” evangelism that calls us to missionally enter into the lives of non-believers—rather than attracting them to the church—and using our daily walk as the form of witness that encourages others to see God’s love through us. Following Luke’s account of Jesus, this approach assumes that God is at work in the lives of

youth regardless of where they live and youth workers must go and live “incarnationally” by witnessing with their lives.

Pete Ward, in his text, *God at the Mall*, asserts this approach often calls youth workers to engage youth who are often “outside” the traditional influence of the church. Ward notes this strategy often requires not only contact, but extended contact with youth who require considerable time before they will trust someone different. Even after initial evangelism many youths require extended nurture before incorporation within the church. A danger might be that youth workers may be unduly influenced by the youth lifestyle. Nevertheless, youth workers must be willing to enter into the lives of youth and spend time in their social world in order to make a difference in the lives of youth.

The different historic youth ministries in session five did not all use the same evangelistic approach. Context, cultural expectations, personal life experience all influence our evangelistic approach. Approaches may be confrontational or developmental, they may occur in over long periods of time in community or in strategic moments. Even these approaches do not adequately summarize the myriad ways God uses human beings as instruments of Christ’s saving actions through the Holy Spirit in the lives of youth.

Perhaps the best known of all approaches still relies on the relational evangelism. Jim Burns and Mark DeVries, in *An UnCommon Youth Ministry*, note the majority of people become Christians through influential relationships and family relationships regardless of the term used. People respond to Christians with a vibrant, genuine lifestyle.

Building Relationships and Overcoming Diversions

When engaging in relational evangelism, one must always be ready to engage youth in a personal way and, when the opportunity arises, address their life in a way that opens the door to evangelism. We must acknowledge that sound evangelism with youth begins with our ability to build relationships with young people. There are a number of key concepts to creating quality relationships so we can offer the good news of the gospel worth our consideration.

Key Concepts for Building Relationships

1. Consistency builds friendships: Relationships often begin informally with consistent communication. Communicating both with youth and promoting the efforts of young people to adults reveal a steady interest in their lives. For instance, basic practices like circulating a regular monthly newsletter, or general correspondence through church publications, may appear impersonal; however, these actions remind young people that you want to stay in regular communication with everyone on a consistent basis.
2. Demonstrate hospitality: Invite people to your home, or a general meeting place if more appropriate, for a meal, beverage, or just sharing. You do not have to force these opportunities but a lot can happen over coffee and conversation.

3. Cultivate common interests: Discovering a similar interest or hobby creates real opportunities to build relationships. At times, we must be willing just to invest ourselves in a young person's personal passions. However, taking time to discover and share mutual interests provides positive topics you both enjoy.

4. Develop a care-giving mindset: In our contemporary society, we see a number of hurting young people. Youth face family problems, broken marriages, health issues, feelings of rejection, times of failure, interpersonal pain, and the challenges go on. Simply providing Christian care and guidance when the opportunity arises in these situations sets the stage for building bridges to evangelism.

5. Develop practical service: Youth may also build relationships through compassionate service. There are a number of lonely or hurting people, including from the elderly to children, who will appreciate young people calling and spending time with them. All these efforts will create opportunities for relationships that may lead to witness and evangelism. Youth may be either the agents, or the recipients, of the gospel through these encounters.

Building relationships proves important not only for presenting the gospel, but for living out our Christian witness based on what God calls us to be. As mentioned in session four, Andrew Root cautions that we do not just build relationships just to present an evangelistic message or to pursue our personal agendas, we build them to make a difference in every aspect of a young person's life. Sometimes those relationships merely serve as a supportive presence because a young person needs support. Other times those relationships will open up natural moments to address spiritual issues and evangelize the youth.

Also, relationships do not end once we have presented the gospel; they continue as we extend opportunities to build Christlike lives and empower youth to make a difference in the lives of their friends and family. Building relationships may be the beginning of evangelism but establishing relationships reflect our witness and maintaining relationships establish our desire to work for the best in every young person.

Reaching global youth remains a prime concern for the church, particularly as we note their personal challenges which may sometimes include diversions;

- loneliness
- lack of boundaries
- struggle with self-worth
- preoccupation with popular culture (music, technology)
- escapism as a solution to problems
- rising anger
- loss of meaning
- tendency to live only in the present moment
- premature callousness

However, you present a real readiness for Jesus when we can overcome the diversions. No one can read the gospel records without noticing Jesus' care for each person. Our witness and

evangelism is effective only when we prayerfully and persistently work with individuals, their experiences and personal challenges. In youth evangelism, our disciplined, respectful investment in the life of youth often establishes receptivity to the message we preach or share personally.

Methods for Relational Evangelism

Regardless of diversions, we can move from building relationships to bringing the good news to people. There are some basic approaches that help us much like Jesus used in engaging others.

Key Principles for Relational Evangelism based on John 4

Establish natural contacts: The best opportunities for evangelism occur naturally in ordinary settings. If we are learning to live and walk in the spirit, things will just happen in our everyday life: at a local school cafeteria, in a coffee shop, during casual talk within our neighborhood, or other settings. Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman in a common daily setting and built appropriate bridges to talk with her.

Cultivate interest/eagerness: When we make initial contact, we need to develop an engaging conversation that sparks ongoing curiosity, at times through stimulating or intriguing statements. Jesus neither quoted text to the Samaritan woman nor uncovered the gospel before she was ready for it. Her curiosity aroused when His conversation pointed beyond her present experience. We need to get a person to a stage where he or she asks questions or requires our help. Reality, integrity, and testimony can make people curious about Christ. Young people often ask is it real? Where is the evidence for what you are saying? Our life will show the truth if only we live what we say. Relational evangelism requires integrity, modeling consistent wisdom, discernment, faith, and initiative that must flow out of our lives. Finally, personal testimony can make people curious to know more since such testimony carries its own authority and conviction.

Engage life issues: Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman brought out gently the disappointments of her life. Jesus showed concern for those issues that mattered most to her. In personal evangelism, touching core personal problems remains a necessary task in leading a person toward a commitment to Christ.

Re-direct Diversions: Bringing the person back to spiritual issues is important. Young people can divert the conversation which detracts from the main focus.

Engage personal commitment: Ultimately, we seek to bring youth to a personal commitment. Jesus came face to face with the reality of the Samaritan women. One approach may begin with giving our own testimony and inviting the young person to also open his or her own life to Jesus. Often, we can use a simple strategy once we have reached the level where young people are ready to hear the gospel. The "ABC" of evangelism includes.

- **Admit and Accept:** Admit that our life does not match God's intent and accept that, even when we have failed God, God loves us enough to reach beyond our limitations
- **Believe:** That God has provided a means for our salvation through Jesus Christ. We do not need anything else other than to believe this strong enough to put our trust in this fact.
- **Confess:** The final stage is to put our belief on the line by confessing to God not only where we are but, more importantly, our trust in Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, we must bring a person to pray and commit. Often the moment of personal commitment may appear quite different depending the young person's personal context. Nevertheless, we must be ready to respond and encourage a commitment. Scripture provides resources that speak of God's response to different circumstances.

As noted, diversions present a key challenge to our efforts in Christian witness. Jesus engagement with the Samaritan woman takes us through Jesus method of dealing with a seeker. His gentle approach to the needy Samaritan woman, and His responses to diversions, proves instructive.

Once a young person has made a commitment, youth workers must always be ready to follow-up with ongoing discipleship. Evangelism proves incomplete without a commitment to disciple a young person after they have made a decision for Christ, a commitment that involves the local church. We must motivate the entire congregation in reaching young people.

Teaching Youth How to Share their Faith

Young people serve a key role in evangelizing their peers. Sharing faith with fellow youth will influence the entire church. Often young people respond well and invest in the congregation if we take seriously their role in reaching youth for Christ. Youth need preparation if they are to be faithful evangelists and witnesses, both in relational and group evangelism.

Learning to Prepare an Evangelistic Message

While often considered preparation for large group evangelism, understanding the basics of an evangelistic message prepare youth not only for speaking but also for a deeper understanding of the gospel in relational settings. There are a number of considerations when preparing an appealing evangelistic message.

Youth must invest in prayer and personal holiness for clear insights into their own personal journey and a deeper understanding of human frailty, as well as a deeper appreciation of God's good news. Youth need to learn how to understand their listeners, regardless of age. Knowledge of the intended audience remains an important factor in selecting the scripture on which to base their message. Young people need to understand the heart of the gospel, the heart of the good news—salvation is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they must spend time studying their Bible text, reading and re-reading and discovering questions will bring out the facts.

Youth need help constructing their message. When we construct our message, we trust the Holy Spirit is the supreme evangelist; however, we must choose a message that will stay in the hearer's mind. Good beginning texts include Luke 15:11-24, John 3:1-16. Youth do need your supervision and guidance as they engage in this activity. Finally, it is essential youth include some application points to insure their message reaches youth.

Learning to Share Personal Testimony

Youth need assistance in sharing their personal testimony with peers. Church scholars note that, in the early church, often a person's personal testimony revealed the truth of the message. One way to train youth involves three steps:

1. My story/life before God
2. Hearing God's story
3. My story/life with God

Sometimes it is better for youth to start with their contemporary testimony—where they are today—but they need to include how God is working in their lives. Sharing their own experience with the power of Jesus in their lives often provides both the method and motivation for the need to share the gospel with others.

Learning to Reach the Home

It is important to value home or family-based evangelism. Family evangelism offers positive advantages and provides several important opportunities for spreading the Gospel for both you as a youth worker and for the youth. The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality associated with the family, all help to make this form of evangelism particularly successful.

Youth may not always serve as the best evangelist in this setting but often they can create a hospitable context that allows youth workers or other Christian adults to engage in evangelistic conversations. Home visits offer a powerful medium for reaching people, where we meet other people whom Christ may seek to win for Him. Bible study at home provides the entire family especially children and youth, a stable environment for Christian faith formation.

When youth encounter Christians who remain genuinely respectful of them as persons, taking full interest in every aspect of their lives, these young people will find themselves receptive to the message of the Gospel.

Application

Spend time talking with at least five young people about their salvation experience both in coming to faith and also in being nurtured as Christians. Write down a summary of your conversations. How important was relationship building in those conversations?

Using the material in this session, prepare a class session for teaching Christian youth the basic skills for evangelizing youth/others they might encounter or know closely. How would you use the format of this lesson (motivator, introduction, covering basic information, incorporating discussion and small groups, closing) in developing your lesson with youth? Bring a prepared lesson with you to the next class session.

Develop a plan for how you are going to use your youth group to teach, preach, witness, and serve others.

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

Which approaches to youth evangelism have you seen at work in your context? Why do you believe certain approach might be more important in light of youth culture in your setting?

When thinking about the key concepts that build relationships, which offer the best chance for developing relationships with youth in your setting? Why?

What are some key diversions that people use to detract from the gospel message?

What are some advantages to concentrating on preparing young people for reaching youth for Christ?

Do your youth have the opportunity to preach? Not just the ones that have felt a call to preach but everyone? How valuable would that be to both the group and the individuals? What kind of church leaders would these young people become? Have you thought about a regular schedule where each week one of your youth gives a 5-minute sermon?

Have any of you had experience with helping youth prepare their testimony? What helped them the most? How often do you have the youth in your group give their testimonies to the group?



Nazarene Youth International

