



Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

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Youth Ministry
Discipleship - Nurturing
and Teaching

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Lesson Twelve: Youth Ministry Discipleship—Nurturing and Teaching

Lesson Introduction

Session Overview

- A Glance at Culture and the Development of Our Young People
- Lessons from a Great Teacher
- The Teacher as Midwife

Learner Objectives

At the end of this session you should:

- 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 themselves 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 workers develop effective learning environments.

Lesson Body

A Glance at Culture and the Development of Our Young People

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 raised 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, been taught in one system 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 that 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 is it we are teaching with these creative ways?

Youth themselves are changing. New developmental research tells us that 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 that 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 if they relate 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 that 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 that 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 that younger and younger adolescents possess, they are forced to make decisions on their own—some decisions lead them down destructive paths.

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

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. It has generally been assumed that high-school-aged youth have the capacity for abstract thinking. What [Clark] noticed during this study, however, is that 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, it adds to the complexity of our adolescent population's attempt to make discerning, healthy decisions. Clark is convinced that the reasons these issues are growing are that the adolescent culture has developed a "world beneath," a sub-culture, that is 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 7th 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 that youth learn differently depending on their personal make-up, their level of maturity—which changes daily—and their family support system. Is 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 that 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

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

1. Cognitive (receiving): What content, facts, and ideas do I anticipate my young people will learn in this study?
2. Affective (feeling): What sort of feelings might I anticipate this study will invoke in my youth?
3. 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?
4. Existential (being): How do I anticipate this study might impact the basic values and inner core of individual youth?

Robbins from the same chapter, gives us a variety of examples of the way Jesus taught that can serve as a model for us. Some that he points out are:

- 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

Using some of these same models, Dan Lambert, in *Teaching that Makes a Difference*, talks about how Jesus might teach today's adolescent if He were here. Here is his observation on the way Jesus taught:

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

Lambert offers the following thoughts of 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 that 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

In *The Godbearing Life*, Kenda Dean and Ron Foster wrote 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 along to focusing on practices of faith. The concept of becoming a midwife with our youth is a commitment to the whole process, and understanding that 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 key to passing on our faith. The process involves four steps:

Pack your Bag

It involves a readiness at all times. I remember when we were expecting our children, the bag was always packed, sitting by the door with all the essentials that would be needed for the birthing, and the two-three days following. Be ready, be present. How do we pack for this journey? Dean explains it as three essentials:

- The first essential is unpacking, owning up to biases and seeking redemption for baggage left over from previous experiences that we may project onto young people.
- Unpacking happens by helping youth improve the four basics—study of scripture, practice of prayer, the exegesis of adolescence and culture—making them ready to go. In other words, using these four sources helps us to more accurately determine where each adolescent is and avoid a one-size-fits-all mentality.
- Last, we need to recognize what is going on in adolescents' lives. We must enter and understand youth culture (as mentioned in previous sessions) which allows us to enter the world of youth 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: family, social and even church, open doors to creativity. Helping youth name struggles, to explore disconnects in their lives allows young people 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, providing means that allow them to claim and lean growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Breaking 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, relevant to their lives. We 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

Being “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. Often, they are experiences only as we live life, ready for them whenever they are. 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, but it should be intentional in its approach. We teach intentionally, we nurture and follow with youth on their journey, we also follow-up when they are ready to expand their vision of what God might do with their lives.

Application

Take a copy of the curriculum you presently use, and evaluate how you think it addresses the issues covered in this lesson. Use these questions to help you evaluate not only the curriculum, but also 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, and what are the changes that need to be made to make them more of a priority?

Talk with community leaders and identify the people in your church's city/parish/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?

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

What do you think are the most important aspects in teaching adolescents/teens?

What is the most difficult part of teaching our youth?

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?

Where do you see evidence of Jesus' methods in what you teach? How can you do better?

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?



Nazarene Youth International

