



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 19

Youth Ministry  
Shepherding -  
Empowering Youth

## **Youth Ministry Training**

### **Lesson Nineteen: Youth Ministry Shepherding—Empowering Youth**

#### **Introduction**

##### **Session Overview**

- Inviting Youth to Leadership
- Discerning Leadership Gifts and Temperaments
- Organizing Youth Leadership Teams
- Thinking Strategically
- Empowering Youth
- Encouraging, Supporting, Nurturing Youth

##### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session, you should

- Articulate the importance of deliberately exposing to and preparing youth for leadership
- Teach, guide, and counsel youth workers for effective team ministry

##### **Introduction**

Youth ministry requires more than ministering to young people; we must also minister with youth, cultivating their leadership abilities. This session helps you to develop a sense of some of the practical aspects of empowering youth for ministry.

#### **Lesson Body**

##### **Inviting Youth to Leadership**

From a Christian perspective leadership describes a dynamic process where men and women use the ability God provides to strategically influence people (congregation, community or group) to fulfill God's vision in their context. One of the initial steps to empowering young people entails getting them to respond to the God's general call on their lives. Youth should be invited and challenged to leadership through several themes:

- The need for Godly leaders
- The privilege to represent Christ
- The opportunity to serve others in the ways of Christ
- The blessing of influencing others to become all that God wants to make them

Often a sensitive process, empowerment requires much care in ensuring that we do not use guilt, coercion, or any other means which does not respect the right of the potential young leader.

##### **Helping Youth to Discern their Leadership Gifts and Temperaments**

Any attempt at discerning one's gifting and temperament can be a confusing thing for most persons. It would be helpful to guide a young leader through this process. Thankfully, youth workers possess a large pool of material when helping a young person become a leader. Ginny

Ward Holderness and Robert Hay, in *Teaming Up: Shared Leadership in Youth Ministry*, encourage youth workers to investigate scripture and draw themes that relate to young people and to youth ministry. They offer several passages that relate to themes of caring, reaching out, acceptance, invitation, community, challenge and leadership.

- John 4:3-30—Jesus and Woman at the Well
- John 1:35-42—Calling Andrew and Simon Peter
- Luke 15—Parables of Prodigal Son and Lost Sheep
- John 15:1-5—Jesus the True Vine
- Mark 4:35-41—Jesus Calms the Storm
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-26—The Body of Christ

Each of these passages and others allow youth workers to use their God-given imagination to help youth explore the meaning of leadership. Sometimes, different persons within God's story offer a fresh vision of leadership. When it comes to leadership lore in scripture, these biblical giants demonstrate key principles for youth.

1. *Closeness with a few—Jesus*: Undoubtedly Jesus modeled the ability to work within the close community of the disciples. His ability to teach and model authentic devotion to God by example invites us to consider the importance of this approach to leadership development. What are some of the benefits and challenges of this kind of leadership?
2. *Wanting to lead—Isaiah*: Isaiah's vision in chapter six reveals a God "high and lifted up" whose holiness both humbles and calls Isaiah to exercise his role as God's prophet. One must note that Isaiah did not accept this prophetic call based upon his own ability, but out of God's forgiveness. Was your response to God's call to ministry/leadership similar to Isaiah's?
3. *Enthusiasm covers a multitude of [mis-steps]—Peter*: To say that Peter was impulsive may be an understatement. Peter seemed to be a man of extremes, willing to die but also capable of denying Jesus. Ultimately the Holy Spirit tempered Peter's passion, giving him a God-centered desire. Do you think it is good to err on the side of passion?
4. *Don't play God—Joseph*. In Genesis 50:19 Joseph offers the fateful phrase to his brothers, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? Joseph had known the worst of times and the best of times. Now, given incredible power from Egypt's pharaoh, Joseph still recognized God's ultimate authority. Even at our best, do we recognize God's authority over our leadership?
5. *The strength of vulnerability—Hosea*: Perhaps no other prophet embraced the pain and sadness of a people like Hosea. Hosea's vulnerability served a greater purpose, revealing the holy love of God rather than the personality of the prophet. Is your strength more on the side of being impressive?
6. *Women can lead—Deborah*. During the crucial period of the Judges of Israel, Deborah accepted and fulfilled her role as leader (Judges 4) both as a leader and prophet in her own right. Deborah represents many women throughout the Bible who fulfilled God's call as a leader. What is your personal position on women being in leadership in the Church?

7. *Champion of the weak—Amos.* Amos announced God’s love and justice on behalf of the poor. How important to you is ministry to the poor, the hungry, the powerless, the widows, the orphans, and the oppressed?
8. *A touch of organization—Nehemiah.* Nehemiah was called to rebuild the temple, no easy task. His leadership transformed a beaten group of refugees into a nation. How organized are you generally?
9. *A bit of drama—Elijah.* Few men would think to stand against the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, but Elijah was willing to “stand out” for God’s sake. It is important to remember that Elijah’s willingness to take such dramatic steps served only to point to God, not the prophet. Is the use of the dramatic in ministry appealing to you?
10. *Confidence is contagious—Paul.* It is hard to believe how one man could so command so much respect and controversy throughout his ministry. Smuggled out of Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:25), rising from the dust in Lystra (Acts 14: 19-20); standing before the council of Jerusalem or giving witness to Herod Agrippa, Paul’s confidence in God shows through. Paul always balanced his confidence with his deep awareness of his need of God’s grace. Do you think self-confidence is healthy, and if so, when does it become unhealthy?

Ultimately a review of leadership in the Bible reminds us that youth need to be grounded in the total story of scripture. The Bible proves more than willing to demonstrate the strength and weaknesses of these leaders, so that our confidence will remain in God. Perhaps our attention to Jesus, the first model presented, should remind us that we need each other since no one person can really reflect all of the aspects of leadership portrayed in scripture. Teamwork provides youth the means for learning from each other while discovering their individual gifts.

### **Organizing Youth Leadership Teams**

Ultimately empowering youth includes providing a strong relational environment where they can work together while developing their leadership abilities. Often youth workers accomplish this goal through teamwork. In his book, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, John Maxwell gives four traits for forming a dream team of leaders.

1. **Common goal:** The goal/s must be clear and kept as the focus of all that is done.
2. **Cooperation:** Each team member must be prepared to share the work.
3. **Communication:** There must be agreed channels of communication and these must be kept open.
4. **Commitment:** This is the glue which keeps the team together even in difficult circumstances.

When teams work well together they develop traits that demonstrate strong ministry. These traits include a sense of cooperation, the ability of persons with differing opinions coming together in agreement for the sake of a greater cause. In addition, teams focus on clear communication. Churches can be damaged when communication is poor and eventually destroyed when people do not talk to each other. Teams remain change-oriented. Growth often means change, since nothing growing stays the same. Teamwork also requires contribution. Winning teams all have members who make equal contributions in effort. They all give their best. Finally, teamwork

requires commitment. Commitment is necessary for your own spiritual growth as well as the growth of your church. In addition to these traits John Maxwell also gives ten qualities of a dream team:

1. Team members care for one another.
2. Team members know what is important.
3. Team members communicate with one another.
4. Team members grow together.
5. There is a team fit; an attitude of partnership and trust.
6. Team members place their individual rights beneath the best interest of the team.
7. Each team member plays a special role.
8. An effective team has a good bench of members ready to substitute in key roles when needed.
9. Team members know exactly where the team stands.
10. Team members are willing to pay the price.

The better a team works together the stronger the leadership capabilities. Individual leadership abilities surface within a team; however, constant teamwork also develops general skills needed for leadership. Leaders, particularly young adult leaders, grow and develop as they learn from each other, pray for each other, and encourage each other in the development of their abilities.

### *Establishing a Covenant of Standards*

One way of establishing a sound foundation for youth leadership emerges through the use of covenants. Covenantal language is important in both the Old Testament and New Testament. John Wesley, the founder of the Wesleyan tradition, employed a covenant with the Methodist people each year and called his ministers to make covenantal commitments before they served the movement. One of the earliest forms of youth ministry in the United States, Christian Endeavor societies, also created covenants or a “pledge” to guide their actions.

For the sake of the Kingdom of God, a youth leadership team needs to hold each other accountable for their leadership. The covenant provides guidelines for the Youth Leadership Team.

- The covenant should reflect the standards of Scripture.
- Each team member must be prepared to commit to the tenets of the covenant.
- Encourage each team member to appreciate the value of the covenant as a means of bonding and strengthening the team.
- Each team member should have a copy of the covenant.
- The team should remind itself of the covenant by repeating/reading the covenant in unison at meetings.

Youth should also focus on the “preamble and purpose” of the leadership team when developing a covenant for the leadership team. The “preamble” describes what God has done in bringing the youth together. Preambles may include statements such as:

- Because God has brought us together...
- Understanding God’s grace supports our ministry...

Statements like these remind youth that their leadership always begins with what God has accomplished. Likewise, young people need to remember the purpose for their leadership. Purpose statements may include:

- Desiring to follow Christ’s ministry for the Kingdom of God we will...
- Recognizing God’s vision for youth in our church we will...

Purpose statements help youth workers maintain the focus of their covenant ministry. Often youth workers become fragmented by trying to do too much or they become distracted by focusing only on their role within the team. Maintaining a sense of purpose reminds youth of the “big picture,” the primary goal of their ministry together. Ultimately the preamble and purpose guide youth to determine the specific covenant commitments they will make together. These commitments include specific tasks and strategies each member can accomplish for the overall good of the team. Establishing the covenant must include specific opportunities and challenges that any leadership team will face. However, the covenant should also reflect God’s intent for the leadership team.

### *Encouraging a Youth Leadership Team to Live with Integrity*

Leadership which flows from the inside out is not only biblical but it also emphasizes the need for us to BECOME before we PERFORM. Leadership activity without character leads to tyranny and chaos. Teams themselves demonstrate this character as well as the youth within them. Stephen R. Covey, in *Principle-Centered Leaders*, gives eight characteristics worth consideration.

1. Leaders (and Teams) are Continually Learning
2. Leaders are Service-Oriented
3. Leaders Radiate Positive Energy
4. Leaders Believe in Other People
5. Leaders Lead Balanced Lives
6. Leaders See Life as an Adventure
7. Leaders are Synergistic, constantly interacting cooperatively for a common purpose
8. Leaders Exercise for Self-Renewal

While character development remains crucial we must not allow our search for integrity to shift our focus away from community. Chris Folmsbee, in *A New Kind of Youth Ministry*, cautions that focusing on ourselves may inhibit the great emphasis to glorifying God. A leadership team must be motivated by a heart to reach out and empower others to pursue Christlikeness.

## **Empowering a Youth Leadership Team to take Initiative**

Initiative is an ability every person, leader or not, should aspire to have. Initiative allows a youth worker to be fresh and effective. Thinking ‘outside of the box’ is part of standard practice of this kind of leader. While initiative respects tradition, it is not afraid to go beyond tradition to be effective. Initiative also makes the youth worker dependable when they have to make tough decisions.

John Maxwell, in his book *the 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, lists several qualities of leaders who show initiative:

1. They know what they want. It’s the only way to recognize opportunity when it comes.
2. They push themselves to act. Initiators don’t wait for other people to motivate them.
3. They take more risks. Good leaders are willing to take risks because they recognize there is a risk for not initiating too.
4. They make more mistakes. Initiators make things happen, but they also make a lot of mistakes.

Demonstrating initiative may not always be easy. To improve your initiative, leaders may try the following. First, change your mind-set. Recognize that the problem comes from the inside, not from others. Once found, address it. Second, don’t wait for opportunity to knock. Opportunity is everywhere. Where do you see needs? Who is looking for expertise you have? What unreached group of people is practically dying for what you have to offer? Finally, take the next step. Someone once offered: “Everyone has a great idea in the shower, but only a few people step out, dry off, and do something about it.”

Empowering a youth leadership team may entail allowing them to take risks with decisions. We may need to allow them to fail on occasion, yet also help them learn from their failures. Youth workers should be able to anticipate the consequences of good and bad decisions so they can anticipate the potential risks involved with decision. We should not let young adult leaders risk so much as to ruin their leadership or risk the reputation of the church. Nevertheless, some risks may well be worth the consequences, if they fail. However, when the group shows initiative and succeeds, they gain tremendous confidence. More importantly, even when they fail but learn and improve their ministry, they begin to understand that initiative may have additional benefits.

Remember that taking initiative is not the same as doing everything ourselves. Chris Folmsbee notes “doing all the work ourselves might make us look busy and feel satisfied, but it certainly doesn’t help our ministry become more effective in fostering spiritual progress.” The goal always remains to cultivate personal initiative among team members, encouraging them in their tasks but also reminding them to reach out to others as a community.

## Encouraging, Supporting, and Nurturing the Youth Leadership Team

A major part of the responsibility carried by the pastoral leadership of a church is the task of encouraging, supporting, and nurturing volunteers. It will demand much effort, great skill, and deliberate action of every pastor. Because volunteers are people, their wants and needs cannot be disregarded.

Often adult and youth leadership develop in a similar fashion depending both on the adult's readiness to hand over ministry and young people's readiness to receive leadership roles. Holderness and Hay, in *Teaming Up*, note that there may be stages to shared ministry.

Level	Adult Leader Involvement	Youth Leader Involvement
Zero	None	Youth are not involved; there is no real youth ministry
One	One or Two Adults do it all	Youth don't know what's going on. Many attend because their parents make them.
Two	Adults help the adult leader or the adult youth director/minister.	Youth are coming to activities because they want to.
Three	Adults work well as a team. They take responsibilities.	Youth are involved in planning—partnership with adults.
Four	Adults are in good relationships with youth. They ask young people to help.	Youth are involved in leadership—partnering with adults.
Five	Adults are in partnership with the youth. They are supportive and encouraging of young people as leaders.	Youth are championing youth ministry

Often a youth worker has to invite both adults and youth into casting a vision for the ministry. Sharing responsibilities for ministry must include the ability to “dream” together about the future of our ministry. Drawing from the arena of sports, John Maxwell notes that a “dream-team” coach displaces several characteristics.

1. Chooses players well
2. Constantly communicates the game plan
  - Tell them what you expect of them
  - Give them an opportunity to perform
  - Let them know how they're getting along
  - Instruct and empower them when they need it
  - Reward them according to their contribution
3. Takes the time to huddle
  - Focus
  - An opportunity to listen
  - An opportunity to make personnel changes
  - An opportunity to make play changes
  - An opportunity to rest



4. Knows what his or her players prefer
5. Excels in problem solving
  - Problem-solving issues with players
  - Problem-solving issues with preparation
  - Problem-solving issues with the game
6. Provides support needed for success
7. Commands the respect of the players
  - Trustworthiness
  - A caring attitude
  - The ability to make hard decisions
8. Does not treat everyone the same
9. Continues to win
  - Work on specific skills
  - Make a change
  - Reward the unrewarded
  - Transfer the burden
  - Above all, don't dwell on yesterday's victory
10. Understands the levels of the players
  - Players who need direction
  - Players who need coaching
  - Players who need support
  - Players to whom you delegate

Maxwell's characteristics may seem more appropriate on a soccer field or basketball court than in a local congregation. Nevertheless, the idea of team members working together, like a good sports team, toward a common goal may well represent good team ministry. Young people demonstrate this kind of harmony when leaders trust one another, anticipate each other gifts and strengths, and work toward a common goal.

Christian leaders of the future have to be theologians, persons who know the heart of God and disciplined—through prayer, study, and careful analysis—to manifest the divine event of God's saving work in the midst of the many seemingly random events of their time. They should also be leaders capable of working together in covenant, demonstrating both initiative and integrity, advancing God's mission and serving God's people.

### **Application**

Interview a pastor on his or her strategy for empowering youth for ministry.

Develop your own strategy for empowering youth leadership in your ministry context. Which scriptures and principles appear most important? Could you begin a young adult team that developed leadership capacities?

Write a sample covenant that might guide a young adult leadership team. Consider preamble and purpose as well as ministry commitments youth might make.

## **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Evaluate the different traits and qualities that determine a good youth leadership team. Are there cultural issues at stake in your context? Would specific traits or qualities prove more helpful, harmful, in their setting? Could the students include other traits or qualities?*

*Have you ever thought about the “preamble” and purpose of your own ministry? How might you state them?*

*Where do youth have the opportunity to take the initiative in your ministry setting? What happens when they succeed or fail? How do they learn from their mistakes?*

*How would you evaluate the level of adult involvement with youth leadership in your ministry setting?*



Nazarene Youth International