

## **WE WANT KIDS TO GROW**

We all want to see teenagers grow in their faith. But how? We're committed to creating a healthy ministry first, because we believe a healthy ministry will create the conditions for teenagers (and our ministry) to grow. To do that, we're pursuing health in six key areas.

**DISCIPLESHIP:** Everything we do is structured around four key spiritual habits that help people of all ages grow spiritually. These habits are the backbone of our entire strategy!

**TEACHING:** We teach with teenagers in mind. We have a strategy to teach them in the ways they learn best, based on their stage of development and needs.

**ENVIRONMENTS:** We have a plan to create a weekly environment for teenagers that is fun and welcoming because our program sets the stage for them to learn and grow.

**EVENTS:** We won't do random events just to fill the calendar this year. Instead, we'll do events that are strategic for students' relationships with others and with God.

**FAMILIES:** We don't just care about teenagers – we care about you and your whole family, too. We have a strategy for connecting with and supporting parents and caregivers.

**VOLUNTEERS:** If we're going to have a healthy ministry, it starts with our team. We are working on a plan to invest in our volunteers so they can better invest in teenagers.

## **DISCIPLESHIP | It's About Application, Not Information**

You don't disciple teenagers with sermons. You don't disciple them with classes or workbooks either. Discipleship isn't about learning more stuff about faith. It's about putting faith into practice. Discipleship is organic, personal, unpredictable, and a little messy sometimes. But that doesn't mean we can't put a strategy around it.

There are four spiritual habits that help people of all ages (including you) grow spiritually.

**SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** This is sometimes the only habit we think about when we think about growing spiritually, but it's really only one of four. This is about personal spiritual disciplines. If teenagers are ever going to make their faith their own, they've got to start spending time with God on their own. It means opening the Bible on their own, having conversations with God on their own, and discovering how they best connect with God through worship on their own.

**SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** Engaging in healthy community can, and should, be a spiritual habit we help teenagers develop. But "healthy community" doesn't just mean hanging out with other Christians. This spiritual habit is about growing in godly relationships with everyone. We do this through small groups and empowering teenagers to engage in relationships with others in their communities.

**USE YOUR GIFTS:** Students need to know that God made them unique, with really specific gifts, talents, passions, and resources. Then they need to use those gifts to love God, love others, and impact the world around them. Because when teenagers begin to discover who God made them to be, and then use their unique identity to love both God and others, they grow.

**SHARE YOUR STORY:** Teenagers need to learn how to talk about God. Sharing your story is the spiritual habit of making faith a regular, every day, go-to topic of conversation in our lives. Because when we talk about God and God's place in our story (or, more accurately, our place in God's story), it helps us believe, helps us understand, and helps us take ownership of our own faith.

So how is this a strategy? Each quarter, we'll focus on one spiritual habit. These habits will guide everything we do for that quarter.

**FALL:** We'll focus on spending time with others so we can help teenagers find a safe community at the beginning of the year. They'll need that community to keep them engaged and growing throughout the rest of the year.

**WINTER:** We'll focus on using your gifts to serve others. The holidays are a great time to focus on this so that students are challenged to think about others' needs, instead of themselves.

**SPRING:** After we've spent half the year building relationships and trust with teenagers, we'll challenge them to go deeper in their relationships with God by challenging them to focus on their personal spiritual disciplines.

**SUMMER:** During the time of mission experiences, spending time with friends, and getting ready for a new school year, we'll focus on helping teenagers learn to verbalize their stories of faith and challenge them to share those stories with others.

## ***TEACHING / It's Bigger Than Sermons***

Every week, our teaching time is designed to answer three questions:

**WHAT?** What are we talking about?

**SO WHAT?** Why does it matter to God and to us?

**NOW WHAT?** What should we do about what we just learned?

Sometimes when we hear "teaching," we think "sermons." Sure, sermons are part of it, but they can't be the primary way we teach kids. **Only a very small percentage of teenagers learn best by listening to a sermon.** There are more effective ways for teenagers to learn, so we're committed to making those teaching techniques part of every week of our teaching — and we'd love your creative ideas!

**QUESTIONS AND POLLS** give teenagers the chance to share their opinions and thoughts, which keeps them engaged and helps us better understand their perspectives.

**PERSONAL STORIES** give them real-life examples of faith, doubt, and difficulties to learn from and remind them they're not alone.

**IMAGES, VIDEOS, AND MUSIC** engage their eyes and ears, and help us recapture their attention when it wanders.

**OBJECT LESSONS** give concrete experiences to help them understand or remember abstract ideas.

**ACTIVITIES** get them moving and interacting in ways that will help them better remember what they learned, because they didn't just hear it — they experienced it.

**MOMENTS OF REFLECTION** give them a chance to sit quietly, write, think, or pray, so they can better process what is being taught.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESPONSE** give them a chance to do something about what they've learned, like make a commitment or choose a next step.

There's one more method we use to teach teenagers, and it might be the most important. **DISCUSSION** gives teenagers an opportunity to have conversations with their peers, and with us, about what they're learning. Our discussion times aren't meant to review or summarize a lesson. Our discussions are designed to help teenagers **personalize and apply what they've learned.** Teenagers learn best by processing out loud, asking questions, giving pushback, sharing opinions, listening, debating, and being involved in the learning process. This can only happen in a discussion.

## **ENVIRONMENT | Welcoming Every Teenager**

It doesn't happen intentionally, but the natural drift of any culture is to cater to its insiders at the expense of its outsiders. Here at church, that means **we sometimes make the mistake of planning for church insiders instead of being strategically welcoming to outsiders**. But here's how we can prevent that . . .

**WE HAVE FUN.** We don't play games or do silly things without reason. We make our ministry fun because fun breaks down walls and allows connections to happen. When a new student comes to our church, they're going to feel uncomfortable, but a little fun can go a long way in helping them feel welcome.

**WE ASK QUESTIONS.** We have to be willing to ask questions about how we've "always" done things. We need to evaluate what we do by asking the question, "If I had never been to church before, how would this feel, and what questions or objections would I have?"

**WE EXPLAIN.** Even if we're pretty sure everyone knows what Bible-y words like "redemption" mean, we explain anyway. It helps put at ease anyone who was afraid to admit they weren't sure.

**WE ACKNOWLEDGE.** Simply acknowledging that there are people in the room who are unfamiliar with church or don't yet believe can make a big difference. Our words speak volumes to teenagers about who is welcome. We'll work hard this year to view everything we do through the lens of a first-time visitor. If we don't, we run the risk of catering to church insiders, at the expense of welcoming everyone.

## **EVENTS | Doing Less for More**

There are a lot of things we *could* put on our youth ministry calendar. Camps, concerts, retreats, trips, conferences, tournaments, game nights, movie nights, themed nights . . . the list could go on forever. If we did every event we ever thought about doing, we'd have a few problems. We'd be **adding to the chaos** of your family's calendar that is already full. We'd be **giving teenagers so many options** that we'd probably see them attend just a few things each year, resulting in lower participation in everything we do. We'd be **spending time, money, and resources** on things that aren't always strategic.

With so many potential options, we need a strategy to help us guide which events we'll do when. We've chosen to **do fewer events for a bigger impact**. We won't do everything, but the events we do will be done with purpose. Our events will be strategically designed to connect teenagers with each other, with trusted adults, and with God. When it comes to events, our "win" is not about participation, but about strategy. Even the most well-attended events can actually be a hindrance to our growth, if those events are not leading teenagers somewhere strategic.

## **FAMILIES | Earning Trust, Not Expecting It**

There's a big mistake some youth ministries make: they believe parents like you should automatically support what they're doing. **They expect parents to trust them with their teenagers even though they haven't really earned that trust**. This year, we want to do everything we can to earn your trust.

We won't always get it right or agree on everything. But it's our hope you'll see how much we love and want to care for your kid — and you too. From the things we teach your kid, to the way we communicate with you, it's our hope that what we do will bring value to you, your kid, and your family. Why are we letting you in on all of this strategy? **Because we need each other**. You are the most important person in your kid's life, and that's not going to change. As a church, we are here to support you, come alongside you, and do everything we can to care for not just your teenager, but you as well.

This upcoming year with your teenager won't always be easy, but **we'll walk alongside you and your family, no matter what this year brings**. We can't wait to see what God does in and through your family this year!