

It's obvious, isn't it?

Maybe you haven't thought about it in great depth yet, but we see it...and we get it, too.

We know why you are willing to serve students.
We know why you've made yourself available to Jesus.



You do this because the next generation matters.
You do this because you feel called to love and lead
students into a fully-alive relationship with Jesus.

You do this even though you can hardly find one more minute in your week,
sometimes get snubbed by students, and often feel stumped about what to do
next.

We know that you doubt your impact.

Sometimes you wonder if you're qualified...
even though God loves using the JV team in the Varsity game.

Sometimes you question if you're really getting through...
even though God's job is to change lives - we're His tools.

Sometimes you think of yourself as just a volunteer...
*even though the word "just" should never be
in the same sentence as the word "volunteer."*

We know that some people think what you do is a lost cause.

Teenagers can be moody, chaotic, ornery, and quiet.

Sometimes they talk way too much.

Other times you wonder if they even have a voice at all.

Amazingly, you don't give up.

You give 100% even when no one notices.

You use your vacation days for retreats and road trips.

You do this on your best days and your worst days.

Whether you realize it or not, you're actually

loving Jesus as you take care of His kids.

Thank you for loving students.

Think about this...

God wants to use YOU to change lives!

That's not hype. *That's truth.*

I have a special concern for you church leaders. I know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory.

Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd.

Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way.

When God, who is the best shepherd of all, comes out in the open with his rule, he'll see that you've done it right and commend you lavishly. And you who are younger must follow your leaders.

But all of you, leaders and followers alike, are to be down to earth with each other, for:

***God has had it with the proud,
But takes delight in just plain people.***

*So be content with who you are, and don't put on airs.
God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time.
Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you.*

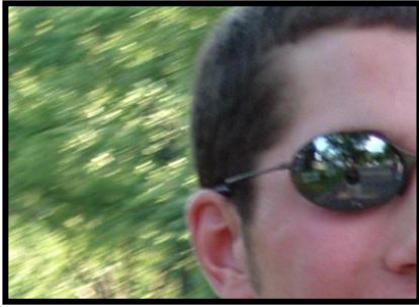
(1 Peter 5:2-7, The Message)



God asks *you* do this.

It may mean stretching
in ways you otherwise wouldn't
stretch.

Then again, can you think of a better excuse to grow?



Every day in this country...

- Thousands of students drop out of school.
- Thousands of teens get pregnant.
- Thousands of tweens become sexually active.
- Thousands of kids bring a gun to school.
- Thousands of youth will ditch school because of insecurities.

These "thousands" begin with the "ones" in front of you.

"I need a leader who will challenge me and spur me on, who will see the real me under the all the versions of me I keep trying on." – High School Junior

I became a Christian at the beginning of my junior year of high school. Although I knew something had happened in my life, I honestly had no clue how that decision was to be lived out on a daily basis. I didn't know how my Christianity could translate into time alone with God or affect my thought life. I didn't know what spiritual strength looked like, what to do with a Bible, or even how to pray.



I think this is the case with most teens even today... they're "in" and yet they sometimes feel "out." What made the difference for me was having some caring adults and peers who loved Jesus enough to invest into me. Maybe it was the same with you, too. Without spiritual coaches, we can still feel "lost" even after we've been "found." - Tony Myles (@tonymyles)

In the next 30 MINUTES in your city:

- How many kids will give birth?
- How many kids will have an abortion?
- How many kids will attempt suicide?
- How many kids will be abused, raped, or beaten by their parents?
- How many kids will face a broken home?
- How many kids will not know what to turn to, ending up turning toward something destructive?



What could you do in the next 30 MINUTES:

- **Be a FRIEND... it offers kids STABILITY.**
 - Ask them "how they're feeling" today.
 - Meet up at a school sporting event.
 - Get breakfast together before work/school.
- **Be a ROLE MODEL... it offers kids an EXAMPLE.**
 - Share a Scripture that's speaking to you.
 - Commit with your group to pray for each other at a certain time of day every day.
 - Talk about spiritual disciplines that work for you, as well as how this is similar or different than how you've approached God in the past.
- **Be an ENCOURAGER... it offers kids HOPE.**
 - Write a note, email, or text message.
 - Leave a crazy voice mail.
 - Challenge them with something that will stretch them, unique to their personalities.

The bad news? The worldview students hold to will often be formed by the brokenness in the world.

The good news? They didn't intentionally choose this way of thinking, which means there's room for a better alternative.

So here's the **BOTTOM LINE**



Your relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing.

Please read that again, because it's the thing we're tempted to forget and short-cut. Don't ever confuse serving God as a substitute for spending time with God. Without this foundation, any kind of ministry you do will become a burden and burn you out... but if you stay healthy, your heart for people will, too.

There's another side to this, though. It's ridiculous to try and take someone to a place with God that you have been yourself. It's like trying to give directions to a location you've never visited and hoping they make the journey. As we're trying to love and lead students, we need to do it out of the overflow out of our hearts (and not just out of our intentions for them).

Your heart for students needs to be more than talk.



Students won't come up to us... we have to go after them. While a program or a cool building may attract kids, RELATIONSHIPS are what help students get connected with Christ and His community. They need to know that we care about them and desire a friendship with them. This won't happen by just sitting in the same room or relying on a leadership title... it happens when we make a deliberate relational investment for the sake of Christ.



You need to be a self-starter.

Did you consider the possible stats on the previous page? We can't waste any time – we need to be a team of self-starters! What if in all of the scheme of human history, God put us in this region to be His "plan A" to these teens? That means there is no "plan B" - it's us partnering with God through prayer, sacrifices, and going after students. That means we don't show up to the events or programs with empty cars, but call "our kids" to give them rides. It means that we don't wait and see who shows up to an event or small group, but we know exactly who is coming because we've called them or spoken with them first. It means that we live lives of integrity and godliness, modeling what it means to be a part of the greater church body.

And yes – it also means being everything else we are, too. You are still either married or single. Maybe you're a parent. You might work a job or take care of a home. Whatever your roles in life are, they will demand things of you, too. What we're proposing is that you put God first in all things, including what you do here. If you can only give five minutes or five hours, great! Let's just make those five minutes or five hours count for all their worth and honor God!

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15-16)

the incarnation



“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
– John 1:1-2, 14

What if God was one of us?

The passage above is one of the greatest biblical foundations for noting the Incarnation - the incomprehensible reality that Jesus was truly one with God the Father, yet chose to manifest Himself as a baby born on the dirt of this earth. Through His time on the planet as teacher, prophet, priest, and Messiah, He showed us more about the unseen world than thousands of years of Scripture had ever proclaimed.



All throughout the Bible we see examples of the Holy One desiring to interact with humanity in a highly personal manner. It is the Creator walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-2), Jacob wrestling with the strange Man (Genesis 32), Jesus transfiguring Himself before the disciples (Matthew 17), the thief on the cross receiving forgiveness from the graceful lips of the crucified Savior (Luke 23), the Visionary Voice blinding and restoring Saul on the Damascus road (Acts 8-9), and the triumphant Faithful and True Warrior riding a fiery steed on His way to conquer the enemy once and for all (Revelation 19). Over and over again, the Perfect interacts with the imperfect, all in the hopes of offering life to the tilt, both now and into eternity.

Even wilder than how you get to embrace that... is how you get to reveal that.

I don't know to this day why I remember this the way I do, but in reflection it marked the turning point for me with God. And the irony is that it was something so simple... a touch.

I had been attending the student ministry for awhile and getting plugged into my small group. The friend who got me to go was actually absent that night, but somehow I'd found a ride to church, not even sure why I was going. After all, my family was falling apart before me as my parents fought night and day over trivial things that ultimately would lead to their separation. And so in a daze I stumbled into the side room my group was meeting in and put on my best face to hide it all... something I was good at. No one knew what was happening at home, and I wanted it to stay that way.

After some devotional thoughts from our adult leader, Scott, we were told we'd be moving into prayer. This weirded me out since it was only the third time I'd tried the "deeper" Sunday night gathering. Regardless, I walked over and sat down in a group of guys who began sharing prayer requests. "Should I share about my family?" I wondered, quickly dismissing the idea. I already felt bad for not knowing the Bible – I didn't want these guys to think I was messed up in other ways, too.

And then it happened... we prepared to go into a time of prayer. For me this meant I'd probably start out praying, then I'd quickly zone out into my own thoughts and daydreams. But again, this is when it happened – just as I was getting ready to bow my head, I saw Scott move next to me and slap his arm on my shoulder. That's it – He didn't say anything before, during, or after it happened. And I didn't say anything to him about it at the time either. All I knew is that there was suddenly a God-bearing "touch" in my life – and it felt like the nail-pierced limb of Jesus did it.

I've often thought of that moment in the years that have passed, and even tried a few times to adequately thank Scott for something as trivial as extending out His hand. It may sound weird, but without that simple touch I may not be here today. But in the end what was at surface glance just a volunteer youth worker touching a teen in trouble was in reality the hand of God hugging my heart. And from that moment on, God and I were personal with each other.

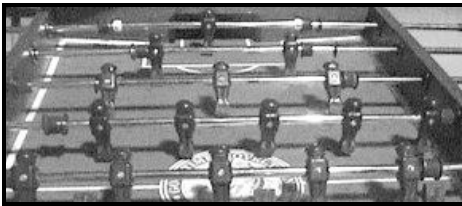
incarnational ministry



Incarnational ministry is when we allow the presence of the Lord to saturate the way we interact with others.

It can be an outright proclamation of Jesus or even a small seed-planting opportunity that points someone towards heaven. A special kind of sensitivity is required to figure out what's most needed in any given situation. While some of this can be learned as a skill, the Holy Spirit is the best one to listen to in each situation so that appropriate coaching and care can be administered. This helps us treat every student as an individual instead of taking a cookie-cutter tactic or attitude.

Scripturally speaking, incarnational ministry shows up in several instances. It's Joshua spending the night with the people (Joshua 8:9), Elijah mentoring Elisha in ministry (2 Kings 2), the disciples acting on Jesus' behalf to feed the 5,000 (Matthew 14), the Day of Pentecost inspiring the apostles to boldly speak the truths of God (Acts 2), Peter and John at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3), and the charge (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) and approach to ministry through Paul to become "all things to all people." With this context in mind, the reality is that being an incarnational presence among students is more about the process than it is about milestones.



Being seen: Use some of the ideas below to build "outside of the church" connecting points. This will help in building a core base of relationships.

- Find out what places our students work and make a point to show up there as a customer.
- If you have a day off, grab lunch with a teen at school.
- Show up to local school events.
- Chaperone for a school dance.
- Volunteer in a concession stand.
- Talk about the ministry to teens you meet when you're out and about.
- Come early to our program nights and play a game with students.
- Help new kids get welcomed.
- Wear a ministry shirt in public.
- Take advantage of whenever teens have their jerseys or work tags on to get to know names (and use it whenever possible).



Being known: Find ways to make sure your students know that you put your pants on one leg at a time just like they do. Bring them into your life in appropriate ways.

- Before programs or events, take the time to listen and ask questions. Kids can smell if you're being fake but would typically welcome the chance for you to get to know them.
- Provide moments to take teens places with you, be it a grocery store or the bank.
- Blitz students from every side: Write them a note, take them out for a pop, send them texts, bake a pizza, play video games, go to sporting events, go shopping, movies, roller rink, bowling, etc.
- Get to know the whole family – parents and siblings, too.
- Plan a fun weekend as a group.



Being understood: Out of all the students in the ministry, focus on discipling a core group of 3-5 teens. This will simplify your efforts and maximize potential impact.

- Have a regular thing you do with them, be it meeting on Fridays after school for a slushee, going through a devotional book together, or just having them at your house for Sunday dinner.
- Remember your role in the life of the student isn't to replace their parents. Instead, help them see just another example of a Christ-follower living out their faith.
- Try to know the "questions" your teens have about their faith. This will help you to "pay attention to God" on their behalf.
- Take pictures of key events and bust them out for the memories.

Incarnational ministry doesn't always have to be "deep." As long as you're connecting with God on your own, they'll pick up on that as you create fun memories together that become future mental snapshots.

the empty chair



Who needs to be in it so that they can hear about Jesus?

You see them all the time, don't you? That kid that lives a few doors down from you... the girl who takes your ticket at the movie theater... the guy who just got the lead in the play. What if you're more than just bumping into them? What if God put you near them for a reason greater than that?

Who needs to be in it so that they can be challenged and encouraged to keep growing with God?

We love celebrating salvation and steps that students take with Jesus. But let's not forget about them, even on an unconscious level. Our "core" teens may have it all together, but they need to know their presence and participation in growth opportunities in just as important as anyone else's.

Who needs to be in it that hasn't been in it in awhile?

No one gets left behind! That includes students who haven't been a part of the student ministry for awhile. Most of the time students leave for trivial reasons. Don't accept it – get on the offensive and love on them with phone calls and prayers! What's the worst that could happen? They say no?

three phone calls



Three phone calls a week? That's reasonable, isn't it? Five minutes tops would do it – just enough to let a student know we care about them.

Visitors: Call some kids who came that you think might become "your kids." Ask them what you can pray for them about, then pray for them on the phone:

"Hi, _____! This is _____ from youth group. I was so glad you came recently. How did you like it? (pause) I'd like to find out what's going on in your life that I can pray for you about. What might that be? (pause). Great! Can I pray for you now? (pray) Hey - I'd love to see you again this week. I'll be looking for you!"

Regulars: How are your group members doing this week? Find out by picking up the phone:

"Hi, _____! This is _____ from youth group. How's your week going? (pause) What's the "big thing" on your brain in the next couple of days? (pause). Who are you sharing Jesus with these days? (pause) Great! Can I pray for you now? (pray) I'm looking forward to seeing you again this week. I'll be looking for you (and your friend – be sure to invite them)!"

Agree or Disagree?: "We will measure success by nothing else than the level of which we are reaching the lost and broken students in our region and leading them to become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ."

- This will be birthed in our biblical purpose and power.
- This will be reflected in our Christ-like character.
- This will be contagious in our relationships.
- This will be exposed in our growing depth and size.
- This will be continued in our students as they grow up.

How many students?

Numbers aren't the focus, but they can be one way to understand our context. What would it mean to boldly ask God to find us ready (and prepare us) to actively reach and care for at least 5-10% of the students in our region? What is that number? Would you do your part in actively helping this happen?

relational basics

Give your full attention.



Jesus did this, whether speaking with groups of people or one-on-one. There were certainly times people needed to get to Him to get His attention. When they had it, though, they had it - for however or short the conversation lasted. Just imagine how that felt to those who received it.

Be comfortable with ignorance.

You know you don't know everything. Why would you pretend like you do? It's likely you'd never say such a thing, and yet you may feel like you have to answer every question a student throws at you with the depth of a university professor. Try to field the questions that come at you with a welcoming phrase, such as "That's a great question," or "I like how you feel free to ask that." Take them to the mystery of God, while also sharing what you do know to be true and why.

Don't become too comfortable with ignorance.

Students do want to know why you believe what you believe. This again is a great reason to dive into studies on your own time that will strengthen your own spiritual journey.

That way as questions do come up from kids you can reply with, "Let me tell you not just what I believe about that, but how I came to realize it." This way they'll see you less as a spiritual giant they can't relate with and more as someone they're on their spiritual journey with.



Some other basics:

Practice active listening:

Listen to what students say, paying attention to the words they choose and why. Consider how their body language (as well as your own) are also factors in the conversation. Ask for clarity on things you don't understand, and think about giving short replies that allow them a chance to reply versus long discourses. Use eye contact, not just by staring at them but by looking away from time to time so they feel listened to and not cornered by your attention.



Understand what's needed:

Sometimes students just want to feel listened to. Other times they merely want encouragement. There will be kids who really do desire deep discipleship. Know who you're talking with and why they're sharing that piece of their world with you. If you navigate the shallow asks well, you might earn your way into something deeper down the road.

Ask questions:

Help students reply to you by giving them things they can answer as well as things they have to think about. For example, "How long have you lived here?" creates a quick reply. "How do you feel about our town or your school?" requires a bit more thought. "What do you think is really needed in your generation?" needs some space. Each question is like a cooking utensil - don't use a blender when what's needed is a soft spatula.

**I am only one... but still I am one.
I cannot do everything,... but I can still do something.
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something
That I can do.**

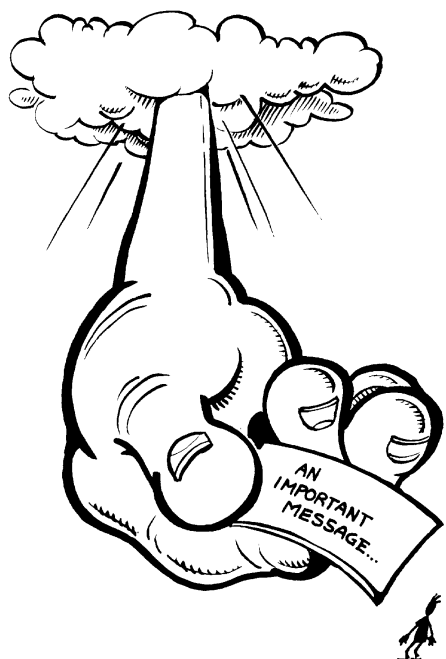
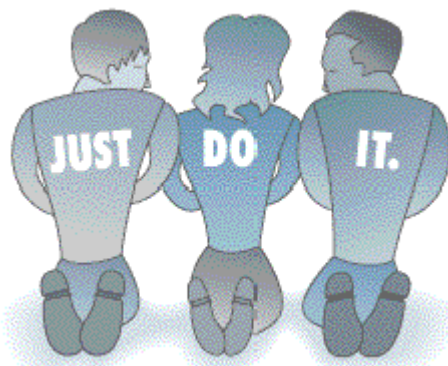
Playing Favorites

What are your thoughts about having "favorite" students? You know – the ones you actually look forward to pouring into. It might be one special teen or a sacred few, but we all know how sometimes the chemistry is just there in a greater way with some students than it is with others.

Is this biblical? Some would argue it is, seeing as Jesus often got away with His favorite "twelve," and sometimes even with a special "three." Others would assert that this is nothing more than business world propaganda, seeing as we should never neglect the needs of anyone for the sake of a strategic investment.

Whether it's one student you're trying to impact or one hundred, here are some principles on how to go about it all:

1. **Kneel for the best perspective.** If you pray about everything first, you will find certain students may tend to be regular burdens on your heart. They sometimes "pop" up in your head, or even can be traced in your relationships with them. Consider these names and pray for them, asking that God will show you or tell you if this is a teen that you are to pour your life into. If it is of the opposite gender, ask that God would raise up someone else to meet the need.
2. **Create a hang out.** If you sense that you're starting to bond with a student, think about a regular way you can hang out with each other. It might be your car as you go on random errands around town, or perhaps the living room of the student's house so you can get to know his/her family, too. The key is to create a consistent place or pattern of getting together so that the teen feels a growing sense of comfort and community. Whatever you do, though, be sure that this is an "open" hang out that you can invite others into, too.
3. **Really be real.** If you want them to put their trust in Jesus, it begins with them being able to put their trust in you. One thing this generation is really good at is spotting a fake, so don't be one. Granted, you'll have your weak moments... but share these appropriately as reality checks, too.
4. **Swap stories.** Don't go and give an out-of-the-blue four hour account of your life, but be ready to share suitable snippets of your personal history. Invite them to do the same, looking for points of connection. If you can relate, then tell them how; if you can't relate to what they're going through, don't fake a connection.



5. **Listen to what you hear.** It's one thing to hear what a student says, but it's another thing to listen. Sometimes students want advice, but more than often they simply want to share their burden with someone who cares. Before you offer advice, ask a lot of questions and be in prayer for how God might want to use you as a mouthpiece.
6. **Share your heart with them.** Dream out loud, just like Jesus did. If you really have a God-breathed burden that you believe should be contagious (like our ministry's vision, perhaps), be sure to share it with consistency and articulation. Don't be surprised if one of your students starts to say the same things you do (often without realizing where the source was). They might even rub off on you, too, and you will change each other's lives for the Lord.
7. **Don't expect everything to happen overnight.** It takes time to build trust, so do what you can to initiate the relationship but give it room to breathe. You might find that they're not fun to hang out with initially, but after some time to mature you might find some connections worth working for. Have fun getting to know them, and make sure you never forget your role as a mentor.