

Discipleship for Young Adult Ministries

Seth Wertz helped start his church's softball team to connect with other men in the church. They also saw the possibility of outreach as men who lived nearby and friends of team members joined them.

Recently, Ryan joined the team as pitcher, something the team desperately needed. Ryan is new in town, moving to Louisville after completing his master's degree in business. A new job and new town left Ryan longing for connections.

Ryan hadn't been a team member very long before Seth recognized that Ryan had potential—as a businessman and a team player. Seth began to think of ways to become better acquainted with Ryan. Since Ryan wasn't married, Seth wondered if he would appreciate some home-cooked dinners.

After one practice, Seth invited Ryan to join his family for dinner on Sunday and Ryan enthusiastically agreed. While eating, the conversation flowed easily and Seth and Rachel learned about Ryan's early years. The Wertz's shared some of their family stories and they discovered several common interests.

Seth and Ryan settled into the family room to watch ESPN. Their conversation soon turned to work and the challenges of being a Christian businessman. Seth told about a time when his Christian principles clashed with his employer's agenda. As Seth relived this experience, Ryan asked questions to understand better how Seth's actions were guided by these principles.

As their friendship developed, Ryan often discussed some of his work related challenges with Seth. Seth was delighted to help Ryan develop professional skills. One of Seth's main goals was to help Ryan understand that his Christianity defined who he is and that it was more than something he did.

As their conversations turned to spiritual issues, Seth was challenged to strengthen his spiritual disciplines, resulting in Bible study, prayer, fasting, meditation, and journaling. Soon Bible study, accountability, and prayer were part of their time together.

A year later, Seth and Ryan continue to meet regularly one-on-one. Both have grown professionally and spiritually. Their discipleship developed a desire to extend to other men what they experienced.

The Need for Small Groups

"Small groups" are one setting where spiritual growth, transformation, and Christian fellowship can be found. The best Christian small groups provide a safe environment to ask questions, to be held accountable, and to be challenged to live a Christ-centered life.

Our culture often breeds isolation. Electronic technology facilitates communication without face-to-face conversations. Email, text-messaging, instant messaging, and Facebook and other networking sites allow us to talk with others without ever hearing their voices. Some think this is a good method since they can reply as time allows or it fits into their schedules. But that is not how God intended for us to live.

Christianity is relationship-based. Jesus Christ came to earth to interact with people. When people accept Jesus Christ as Savior, they begin a relationship that transforms their lives. That transformation extends to family, friends, and the surrounding community.

In the book *Building a Church of Small Groups*, the authors list four benefits found in small groups.

1. We get strength for life's storms.
2. We receive wisdom for making important decisions.
3. We experience accountability, vital to spiritual growth.
4. We find acceptance that helps us repair our wounds.

Some churches may find that Adult Bible Fellowship (ABF) groups (Sunday School classes) fill this need for community. As your ABF groups are evaluated, you may discover they provide one or two of the above benefits but are lacking in the others. As a result it may become necessary to meet at an additional time to address the other benefits.

Some churches find small groups are easily formed around specific desires or interests. These include gardening, photography, biking, parenting, or marriage. Other groups may form for Bible study or to study a book such as *Making a Marriage* or *Silent God* (both available at [Nazarene Publishing House](#)).

Discipleship Principles

Accountability for spiritual development enhances transformation. One of John Wesley's contemporaries expressed regret that his ministry didn't result in developing believers who were well-grounded and spiritually matured. At the core of Wesley's methodology for discipleship was four specific questions that were asked of everyone during weekly class meetings. They are:

1. Where are you spiritually?
2. Are you doing or not doing what God asked you to do?
3. What opportunities have you had for service and witnessing? How did you do with them?
4. What temptations have you faced and how did you overcome them?

Mixed of Exclusive Groups

Young adults, like all Christians, need to be integrated into the discipleship strategies of the local church body. While some applications of discipleship principles may differ, young adults need to be part of a group that includes both genders, various age groups, and families. However, accountability aspect of discipleship will be best served with gender exclusive groups.

| Discipleship Trait | Gender Exclusive | Status Exclusive | Group Setting | One-on-One |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|------------|
| Accountability | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Experiential | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Training—doctrine | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Training—mentoring | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Community | No | No | Yes | |
| Prayer and/or spiritual disciplines | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |

Creating Confidentiality in Small Groups

One of the basic components of a small group is confidentiality. This means members share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences without fear of sharing outside of the group. Each group and each member must commit to honoring this basic principle: *What is said here, stays here.*

People will not receive full benefit of a small group unless a level of intimacy is developed. And for that intimacy to develop there must be a feeling of safety and confidentiality. This process takes time.

One small group of women formed to answer the four questions John Wesley asked his bands. The group leader recognized these questions could not be honestly answered without forming relationships. The group spent six weeks reading and discussing a book. As the group's relationships developed, a safe environment was created as members responded to questions and began to implement the book's concepts. Several weeks were invested in relationships building, the foundation as the group moved into deeper accountability questions.

Small group leaders must be willing to remind the group about the need for confidentiality. Should confidentiality be violated, the leader must be willing to talk with those who broke it. This conversation needs to occur as soon as the group leader learns that confidentiality was breached. The leader will need to talk with all involved to repair the damage. Unfortunately, once confidentiality is broken, hard work is required to repair the damage. Sometimes, it may not happen and the group will disband. Trust and confidentiality ensured growth at its best.

Five Steps to Developing a Discipleship Ministry for Young Adults

With this background information in mind let's look at the steps to developing a Discipleship Ministry.

Step One – Lay the Foundation

1. Form a small group of people (core group) willing to work with young adults.
2. Set a timeline for studying *Listening Inside Out* by David and Rhonda Kyncl. For a study guide, go to <http://clt.nazarene.org/>.
3. Continue to develop and strengthen relationships with young adults in your congregation as you develop a vision for ministry to young adults.

Step Two – Share Your Passion and Vision with Others

1. Meet with the core group and enlist others who are willing to disciple young adults.
2. Pray asking God to guide and bless your discussions.
3. Share ideas about discipleship with core group.
4. Identify the receptive young adults in your congregation and ask if the need and relationships are strong enough to develop a discipleship ministry?
5. If the answer to the above question is "no", then postpone the launching of the discipleship ministry until relationships are solid enough to proceed.
6. Keep the senior pastor and the appropriate staff members informed and included in the meetings.
7. Before the next meeting, develop a purpose statement for this ministry. Here's an example:

The purpose of Discipleship Ministry for Young Adults is to foster an environment that encourages young adults to live Christ-centered lives and to integrate Christian principles into all areas of their lives.

Step Three – Continue to Building Momentum

1. Keep prayer central. Ask God to guide and bless the ministry.
2. Introduce the purpose statement and discuss the ways the purpose can be accomplished through both formal and informal methods.
3. Determine the number of small groups needed to minister effectively to the young adults in your congregation. Remember a small group works best with 8-12 members.
4. Consider options for meetings.
 - a. One large group for group instruction with small discussion groups.
 - b. Several small groups that meet throughout the week in various locations such as homes, restaurants, and the church.
5. Determine the frequency and location of meetings.
6. Continue to strengthen relationships with young adults by:
 - a. Conversations with young adults before and after church services.
 - b. Inviting a young adult to have dinner with you.
 - c. Planning social activities such as canoeing, working around the church, or caring for senior adults, or doing a missions project in the community.
7. Present the outline for the ministry to key young adults, seeking their support.

Step Four – Meet With Key Young Adults

1. Open with prayer, asking God to guide and bless your discussions.
2. Take some time to become better acquainted.
3. Present the ministry strategy.
4. Listen to initial reactions of the young adults.
5. Develop a time line for implementing the ministry.

Step Five – Ministry Kick-off Event

1. Open with prayer, asking God to guide and bless your discussions.
2. Become better acquainted with those present. [Click here](#) for two suggested large group icebreakers.
3. [Distribute the survey to assist the leader in knowing the needs of the group.](#)

Additional Notes

Be sure to schedule regular times with the small group leaders. Use these meetings to talk about successes, challenges, discussion topics, and other concerns. Also plan outreach activities that provide opportunities for young adults to invite friends.

Monitor the group size. If a group grows beyond 12 members, consider multiplying into two groups. When this happens, take time to strengthen relationships in the new groups.

Conclusion

Relationships are a high priority for many young adults. They often look for qualified mentors as they begin careers, establish their own homes, and build marriages. Discipleship provides one means to meet these needs while encouraging young adults on their Christian journey.