

## What is the single-most important thing that a youth pastor can do to help you grow deeper in your relationship with Christ?

**1 Lead by example!** Nothing is more magnetic to a teenager than an adult who is congruent in her faith—someone whose life speaks louder than her words. They are hungering for role models who are “all in” with Jesus:

- “Answer my questions about my faith, and demonstrate their own.”
- “Be an example and help me go deeper by telling me what I don’t know.”

**2 Connect with me!** Teenagers live in an “alone in a crowd” culture that offers a surface version of connectedness, but very few “I see you well” connections. They’re longing for relationships that are characterized by purposeful engagement:

- “Be supportive and share their advice and knowledge, without being condescending.”
- “I think the most important thing a youth leader can do is not only minister to us, but really make a connection with us.”

**3 Help me understand!** The crying need of this generation of young people is an ability to “articulate their faith”—again, one of the major findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion. And teenagers themselves sense their own poverty in this arena:

- “Activities to make you understand things rather than just read it.”
- “Challenge my beliefs so I discover what and why I believe what I do.”
- “Have a time to just focus and listen for God. It’s hard for me to hear God.”

- “Read a biblical passage and apply it to real life.”
- “Have activities or stories that make you more interested in learning about God.”

**5 Pray for me!** Perhaps the most profound form of support kids are craving is also our most intimate intrusion into their story—prayer that tangibly expresses our advocacy:

- “Pray with me and guide me in the right direction.”
- “Pray, talk, encourage, and listen to God with me (and/or other people).”

## What is the single-most important thing that has already helped you grow deeper in your relationship with Christ?

**1 It’s the community, stupid!** The fertilizer for deeper growth in Christ is, simply, authentic relationships. And, as we all know, fertilizer is generally expensive—it costs us something to “apply it.” But as kids make clear, the cost is way worth it:

- “Being around people who love God.”
- “Seeing others strive to be like Christ alongside me.”
- “Fellowship with others—especially during tough situations in life.”
- “The faith of the youth from my church. I have learned so much from them.”

**2 Hardship and woe!** A few years ago I asked Christian college students to look back on their trajectory and pinpoint the things that truly contributed to their growth in Christ. “Crises” were second on the list, right behind “parents.” And the kids we surveyed echoed that truth:

- “A death in my community. I found peace through God.”
- “Difficulties that have helped me see his power and love in the world.”