

## *Keep up* WITH YOUR GRADUATES THROUGH EMAIL, THEIR MYSPACE OR FACEBOOK PAGES, OR AN ALUMNI WEB SITE

**2** If they go off to college, consider taking another leader with you for a once-a-year road trip to the schools within driving distance. Visit with as many as possible, bringing care packages and maybe even a devotional book for each one. If possible, visit a ministry office on each campus and ask them to connect with your former student(s). Encourage them to follow Christ faithfully.

## *Plan a reunion* **1**

**3** After you've been in ministry for a while, plan a reunion for all your graduates. Make it a big deal, or just have dinner and talk. Ask some of the influencers from past years to organize it. Show old pictures and videos. Specifically invite some of them to talk. And make sure to invite them all—the “problem children” and the “golden children.”

## *Shut your ministry down* FOR ONE MONTH

**4** Use the break (I suggest August) to mark the end of one school year and the beginning of another. I take advantage of the break to train leaders, rest, and transition from one era to a new one. Consider taking a personal retreat during this time. Reflect on the past year or two of your ministry, create silent space to listen to God, and refresh yourself in his presence.

You could treat this time as a mini-sabbatical. For a season, plunge into something completely different. Journal about the year, write a book or an article or a pamphlet or a poster, learn a new skill, or travel. Find something that refreshes you.

## *Repent and forgive*

**5** Make sure you have no “unfinished business” as your seniors leave. If you have something to apologize for, now's the time. And if you have something to forgive, complete that circle. As much as it depends upon you, send them out “clean,” with no lingering issues that could weigh them down as they launch into a new life.

## *Distribute the joy* AND THE GRIEF

**6** As the school year draws to a close, plan an evening to spend just with your adult leaders. Tell stories, share your grief and your joys, pray for each other, confess to each other, and encourage one another to press into the new relationships that are on your horizon.

## *Chew on* PHILIPPIANS 2

**7** I've found that as every school year comes to an end, I'm gravitationally drawn to reread Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT): “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross...”

In short, Jesus left his safe place to go to a risky place, because he loved us. In turn, we leave the safety of our emotional defenses and love the new kids. Through that process, we better understand the persistence of God in moving toward us, better understand Jesus' sacrifice for us, and then live it out in front of our kids so they can better understand it by watching us.

So what does it look like for you to leave the safe places of your life to move into closer relationship with your family? the leaders you work with? the kids in your group? Talk about it with your senior pastor or a mentor. How have you withdrawn over the last few years? Do you recognize a distancing relational momentum gaining steam? Is it a life pattern or just a ministry pattern?



Deep inside even the toughest of us, each graduation leaves a sad little scar. Those scars can become more sensitive as each school year rolls by. Learn to embrace “it's not like it used to be” as an opportunity for new life, just like winter into spring. ■

**scott** is a youth ministry veteran and founder of The UpStream Project, which helps aging churches reach “next gen” young people. He lives in Virginia.



**1** For a powerful account of what can happen when you plan a youth group reunion, check out Les Christie's group article “Lessons Learned From a Youth Group Reunion” in our November/December 2008 issue. Just go to [youthministry.com](http://youthministry.com), click on the Community link, then click on group Magazine, then click on the archive button, then enter your subscriber number (found on your mailing label), and go to the issue.