

I'm reminded of a very simple truth, both depressing and encouraging: Teenagers listen better to their peers than to adults like me.

As much as I've tried to become an expert in communication, teenagers will always give their riveted attention to their peers—especially when they're sharing their faith stories. It's bad for my ego but encouraging for our ministry. Here are some ideas for how you can get your kids to share their stories.

■ **Challenge kids to write out their faith stories.**

They *have* a story about their faith—even if they have no faith. There's something powerful when a teenager takes the time to go personal. I ask all of my kids to write out their “testimony” and look for the moments where they've had what I call God-sightings. I want them to be able to articulate their faith stories, so I ask them to write them out word-for-word. It forces them to think a little deeper than just a spontaneous, “Hey Ryan, come up here and share your testimony.”

■ **Read all stories.**

If kids take the risk to write out their stories, make sure you take time to read them.

■ **Encourage!**

I immediately call, text, or email each teenager and thank them for writing their stories. In addition, I give a specific encouragement that connects to each story and proves that I've read it. I've never read a kid's story and not found something praiseworthy. I also tell them, “One of

call on you to read your story to your peers.”

■ **File the story for the right message.**

I tag each faith story with a specific topic (family problems, crisis, death, suicide attempts, friendships). Then when I'm preparing a message I don't have to look very far for a relevant illustration—I've got them sitting in my filing cabinet.

■ **Celebrate their stories.**

Every time a teenager shares his or her story, I follow with a public affirmation of their bravery. I want my high schoolers to know they have something to share and that each of us can learn and grow from what God is doing in their lives.

You have great stories sitting in your high school ministry...let them be heard. ■