

PLUNGING YOUR KIDS INTO A JESUS-SIZE MISSION

How to move your ministry from a defensive to an offensive stance-calling your kids into a great mission instead of managing their morals. Months of drought often precede a downpour of satisfying impact. We're stuck in the desert more than we'd like. When teenagers turn to drugs, or fail classes at school, or fight with their parents, or get pregnant, the landscape seems so barren. These seasons of drought teach us to spend all our time and energy keeping our kids out of trouble rather than seeding growth in them and celebrating as they reach their friends for Christ. The desert is hard, and a lot of us are stranded there. We long for seasons of rain.

When our students commit to the cause of Christ, the rains begin. We can precipitate this change in their lives. When Jesus gathered a band of followers, he called them into a great mission: "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4: 19).

What are we calling our teenagers into?

RECAPTURING OUR GREAT CAUSE

We generally expect too little of our students. The miracles we're looking for are, in context, minor. We hope they stop smoking pot or drinking alcohol. We hope they stop sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend. We pray that they stop fighting. None of these goals represents the kind of grand "fishers of men" hope that Jesus put in front of people.

And our kids know it- they're easily bored with our "to-do" lists and even more bored with our "not to-do" lists. They're hungry for someone to call them into a life that is on mission, just as Christ did. Jesus asked his followers to live on the edge- to share their belief in him with friends, family, and enemies. He asked them to make disciples. We need to recapture that urgency for our teenagers.

1. Cause creates community. Jesus was the greatest small group leader in history -just look what his disciples accomplished. But Jesus wasn't inviting them into a Bible study group. He didn't even ask them to clean up their behavior first. Jesus called them to join him on a great mission. And as they moved into that mission, they built community. Cause creates community. A great cause creates great community.

If 8 teenagers showed up for youth group and each one came hoping to have their needs met, how

many would get what they wanted? None. If all 8 came intent on meeting the needs of others, all of them would get what they want. "The church isn't here to meet our needs. We are the church, and we are here to meet the needs of the world."

2. Cause creates life transformation. When kids commit to the cause of Christ, they're transformed because they can't continue to live their same lifestyle. Students who commit to sharing their faith with their friends become more like Christ.

3. Cause creates Christlikeness. What does it mean to be like Christ? Those who are passionate about what he was passionate about are Christlike. Jesus "came to seek and to save what was lost". He was a friend to sinners. He called us to grow as disciples by making disciples. We need fewer rehab- style ministries and more revolutionary style ministries. Revolutionaries don't need rehab. What's the point of your personal journey with Christ? Are you helping teenagers commit to the cause of Christ?

CREATING DESIRE

Apathy can keep us in the desert. We hate the heat, but not enough to do what it takes to get out of it. To move, we must be thirsty. So how do we raise up teenagers who are thirsty to reach their friends for Christ?

1. Tell stories. When a young person places her faith in Christ, celebrate! And story is at the center of that celebration. You want students to hear their peers tell miraculous stories about their friends embracing Christ, the transformation that happens when someone repents and follows Christ as Lord. That's more miraculous than healing blind eyes

2. Reward evangelists. It's important to reward what we value. Affirm what you hope to build in your students. What are you rewarding in your ministry? Do you honor those who are committed to the cause of Christ?

3. Create role modeling opportunities. One way to create a thirst for faith-sharing in your kids is to invite them into "do as I do" experiences. How often do you invite thirsty kids into your own faith-sharing experiences?

RECOGNIZING RECEPTIVITY

Jesus said, "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matthew 10:11, 14).

To move out of the desert we must find receptive people- kids who are receptive to sharing their faith in Christ and others who are receptive to hearing about that faith.

1. Find receptive faith-sharers. Too often we spend the lion's share of our time with the same teenagers who stubbornly refuse to move forward in their faith. Instead, we need to give our time to the one or two teenagers who want to see their friends come to Christ. Run with those who are ready to run! You're looking for the quiet girl who consistently brings a friend to youth ministry events, or the guy who actually prays for his unchurched friends. Then set up an evangelism training time on a Saturday morning. If you get just one person, go with that person to visit his or her friends that morning.

2. Find receptive hearers. Spirituality is in. Atheism is out.

Today, almost all teenagers believe in God. 95% of all Americans say they believe in God. Our training must teach teenagers how to reach spiritual seekers who haven't met Jesus. Kids are tired of the brokenness and pain of living in homes where parents and older siblings have rejected God. They're open to hearing that Jesus Christ offers hope and life.

MOVING KIDS TO THE EDGE

Our goal should be to assess where our kids are, then move them forward one step. The first step takes them from selfishness to serving; the second step moves them from inviting their friends to an event to inviting their friends to faith in Christ.