

YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP SECRETS== PRODUCING MATURE, COMMITTED, FAITHFUL CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

"Make disciples" That's Jesus' final mandate-his marching orders to his followers before the Ascension. Translated to youth ministry, it means I can't measure my success by how many youth show up at church or attend my events. Success, by a "discipleship" definition, may have little to do with how thrilled my pastor and parents are with my ministry. The bottom line is this: Am I partnering with God to produce long-term, genuine followers of Jesus?

PRODUCING SERVANT LEADERS

Jesus described discipleship through the lens of humble service- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Like always, he lived out what he proclaimed. He did it by washing his disciples' feet and healing the lowly and shouldering the cross. If we're producing disciples, others will experience their servant hearts.

1. Seek God's face. Spend lots of time in prayer deciding what type of mission to do. Once we discern God's mission for us, we know it's God's thing, and where the Lord guides, the Lord provides. This puts the emphasis on God, not us.
2. Make a service mindset pervasive in your ministry. Service is a whole lot more than a summer work camp-it's a year-round emphasis. Do service projects throughout the year & also offer weekly opportunities for service both within your youth group and reaching out to friends.
3. Provide training for service. Give kids strategic training that preps them to find and respond to opportunities to serve. Always look for needs to meet. Year-round training ensures that they arrive at service opportunities ready and equipped to serve. Your overall goal is that everyone is trained in missions, whether or not they go. The life skills and ministry skills we teach to the entire group equips all students to serve. We intentionally and personally call every student and adult volunteer to walk more deeply with the Lord.

When your numbers start getting big; divide up into ministry teams-the equipment team, food team, servant team (members look for additional ways to help), encouragement team, heart team (they offer loving smiles and small gifts). Each team has specific job descriptions they're responsible to perform.

4. Prioritize community-building and relationships. "It's all about relationships," "Our adults are taught to take advantage of travel time to get to know students. Do a Survivor Camp to emphasize group bonding. Offer a giant buffet of retreats and conferences, some of which challenge our own youth to follow Christ, others that emphasize relationships.
5. Rally the church to support your youth. Service trips and training take time and money. Without the backing of the congregation, it couldn't happen.
6. Be willing to think outside traditional youth ministry structures to gain focus and impact with your program. Have no high-powered, weekly youth group meeting with a great praise band and all the trappings. Instead, the ministry is organized around small groups that go through monthly training for mission trips, hold occasional rallies, and go on the trips. Their draw is relationally-charged mission trips, something that even small groups without cool youth rooms and talented musicians can emulate.
7. Lead the way. Leader is key to all this. He relates well with students and relates God's will to them. They all feel included. Surround self with people who care, and be sincere. Spend lots of time team-building where teens can be themselves and be accepted. Do a 2-hour leadership meeting hang out with them till midnight, then get coffee with them. Being a part of this group changes your heart-service is just what we do, it's fun."

PRODUCING LONG-TERM CHRIST FOLLOWERS

1. Make leadership development a top priority. Of course, it's a work of God. But from the human side, attribute it primarily to strong leadership development. Most leaders are young. College students lead high school students, high schoolers lead the middle school students, the younger respect the older. Lead the most spiritually mature, whether they be middle school or college. They in turn train other students in leadership. They have a major part in producing our Tuesday night service. They do outreach, sound, lights, drama. Also, they lead small groups of 8 to 30 students on other nights.
2. Make your regular meeting the hub of your training to inspire discipleship in the context of a movement. The Tuesday night meeting is exciting! The formula for the meeting is actually pretty simple: passionate worship, drama, announcements on video, and relevant teaching.

The biggest things are to train leadership, to work as a team, and to focus on our mission: "Love God, Love People, Make Disciples." All our leadership focuses on the relational aspect, patterned after the way Jesus worked with his disciples.