**How to Talk with a High School Senior Who Is Reconsidering Fall Plans**

**By Charlie Goeke**

Student ministry is a unique calling. Finding people who genuinely love teenagers is like finding needles in a haystack.

Those “needles” live in the thick of teenage drama, attitude, passion, and excitement—all the while pointing students toward Jesus and helping them make choices that are in line with God’s purpose for them.

There’s a difference between having a class for this age group and having adults who deeply care: Care about how they make decisions, not just keep them from drugs and alcohol.

Care about their spiritual growth, not just gather a big student group. Care about the deep things in their hearts and help direct them to use those passions for the Kingdom of God.

Whether you or someone else in your congregation or on your staff is that a needle in that haystack, here are a few steps your church can take to create an environment where young disciples can mature in Christ.

1. GATHER THEM.

Students need things that are for them and no one else. They need a space of their own, events of their own, and a time of worship of their own.

These things pull them together, create family for them, and get them connected to the same mission.

Pull them in early by putting on a “Get Ready for Middle School” weekend the summer before they join your student ministry. Older students can get to know the new ones coming in and help them feel comfortable in your student ministry and give school advice.

Create an engaging Friday night alternative they want to attend to give them a way out from the parties and uncomfortable situations where they could find themselves.

Start a youth-only worship service during the week.

Occasionally serve breakfast before school and gather students to eat and pray together.

Take advantage of events like “See You At The Pole,” retreat weekend, camps, and mission trips to make your group into a family.

Have them over to your home for dinner.

Purchase a foosball table, ping pong table, or something similar for your youth space to make it a place they want to hang out after school.

Let them decorate, paint, and furnish their own area for Bible study or group gatherings so they are proud of their space.

My favorite student event is doing “Mystery Thursdays” during the summer break. Students show up to the church not knowing what will happen (and by showing up they agree to anything we have planned).

We might take them to a water park, mini-golf, or something else fun. Maybe we take the first 30 minutes to prep them, then go door to door sharing the gospel with people or serve in a local ministry that needs support.

Every week is different, but there’s always a challenge, and whatever we do is gospel-focused. Students love these events—mostly because of the element of surprise.

2. TEACH THEM TO LOVE THE CHURCH.

We’ve all heard the statistics about teenagers who graduate out of student ministry and end up leaving the church.

Are you being intentional to address this by teaching them to love the church? It starts with you. Set the example by outwardly loving your church and lead your students to have the same attitude.

Always speak positively about church leaders, members, visitors and ministries. Students pick up on every negative comment and will follow your example.

Be respectful of your pastor and church leaders and lead your students to do the same—encourage them, thank them for serving, and get to know them as fellow believers to help your students see them as ordinary men and women who are serving God with their lives.

Print the church name on every material for your students: on t-shirts, flyers, etc. Help your students identify with the whole church, not just the student ministry.

Teach enthusiasm about giving. Help them understand how their financial giving benefits the Kingdom and teach them to give joyfully of their tithe, time, and heart.

As they get ready to graduate your student ministry, help them transition to a young adult group in the church or help them find a solid local church in their new location. Keep up with them through the transition and ask frequently how they are serving in their new church.

3. CHALLENGE THEM.

I’ve never met a teenager who won’t rise to a challenge.

It might come out in a bad attitude or pushing against authority. But it could come out in doing extraordinary things for the Kingdom that will shape their worldview forever. So challenge them to some Kingdom-altering things this year:

Challenge them to read through the Bible.

Challenge them to pray every morning for a friend who doesn’t know Jesus.

Challenge them to go on a mission trip.

Challenge them to lead worship at your student gathering.

Challenge them to teach the main lesson in their small group.

Challenge them to invite unchurched friends to an evangelistic event.

Challenge them to share their testimony with one person every month.

Challenge them to memorize Scripture verses that will help with specific areas where they struggle in their Christian life.

Challenge them to gather their friends at school to pray together regularly

Whatever the challenge, make it specific so they know when they’ve hit the goal and celebrate when they do.

Create a challenge chart that you keep in your student area to they can see how they are doing and celebrate students who are completing challenges by posting on social media or the church website about their success.

4. GET THEM TO SERVE IN THE CHURCH.

It’s easy for a student group to isolate and become their own thing within the church. Remind them that they are a part of the body of Christ and help every student find a place they can serve in the church.

Here are some suggestions of roles and duties students can fill outside the youth ministry.

Door greeter.

Parking lot attendant.

Nursery workers.

Children’s class teacher.

Help clean the church.

Run errands for struggling church members.

Bring food to a grieving family.

Visit someone in the hospital.

Help with administrative work in the church office.

Pray with the pastor before he preaches.

Visit a shut in member to take them recordings of the sermon or help them get on the church website to stay connected.

Know your students well enough to help them find something they’re good at doing so they use those skills in the life of the church. Make sure you as the leader are setting the example of how to joyfully serve in the church.

Faithfully participate in church-wide events and Sunday worship to show them how they should serve and stay informed about all church ministries so you can help your students get involved in things they would enjoy.

Keep in mind that student ministry is not about creating events to fill their time; it’s about creating disciples. Does everything you do in your student ministry drive them to be better disciples of Jesus and to live out their faith boldly?

Don’t get stuck in a rut of doing things simply because “that’s what we always do.” Instead, plan out this year’s calendar to build disciples who serve and love the local church.

The above article, “How to Talk with a High School Senior Who Is Reconsidering Fall Plans,” was written by Charlie Goeke.

The material is copyrighted and should not be reprinted under any other name or author. However, this material may be freely used for personal study or research purposes.

This article may not be written by an Apostolic author, but it contains many excellent principles and concepts that can be adapted to most churches. As the old saying goes, “Eat the meat. Throw away the bones.”