



## **YPT Guide for New Youth Ministers**

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# **Section One**

## **Welcome to Youth Ministry!**

Dear new youth minister,

Welcome to youth ministry! It can be pretty overwhelming to be a new youth minister. Some of you have spent years dreaming and praying for this opportunity, endured a gauntlet of applications and interviews, and now the real work is about to begin. For others, it can seem overwhelming because it was suddenly thrust upon you when you weren't expecting it and you feel underprepared.

I hope this packet will encourage you and help you get started with confidence in the Lord's provision while also providing a few practical tools that will help you develop a sustainable plan.

YPT believes that youth ministry is pastoral ministry. That's true whether you hold the office of pastor/elder or if you serve as a ministry director. The ministry itself is pastoral: You are called to proclaim the gospel and teach God's Word, you will provide pastoral counseling to students and parents, you'll build and develop a team of church members who evangelize and disciple teenagers, among other duties.

As you begin, I want to encourage you to think big but start small (more on that in section three). There are lots of recommendations on the Youth Pastor Theologian blog and podcast, but these are a good starting point if you're feeling overwhelmed and don't know where or how to begin.

Finally, your students don't need the world's best youth pastor - they only need you to be faithful. God is great enough, so you don't need to be. Relieve yourself of the pressure to be everything and do everything that you feel pressured to become. Rest in God. He is already building his Church, and that's what He will continue doing.

With you in Christ,

Mike McGarry  
Founder/Director, Youth Pastor Theologian

## Section Two

# Essentials of a Biblical Youth Ministry

There are many paradigms of youth and family ministry. Some are better than others, but there isn't one specific "biblical" ministry structure, because ministry is always culturally located. For example, a biblical youth ministry will be different in Birmingham Alabama than in Birmingham England. As churches continue to prayerfully discern how to pass the faith from generation to generation, it's important to ensure we are building on a biblical foundation.

Over this past year, I've had the opportunity to talk about this question with youth workers from the USA, Australia, UK, Ireland, and Canada. This is an increasingly common question, as youth workers want to be confident they are building their ministries on a biblical foundation. My book [A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry](#) sets out an exegetical, historical, and theological foundation for understanding what youth ministry is, and this article (Is Youth Ministry Biblical?) provides a short summary. Here are three essentials that summarize the argument made in *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*.

### **Gospel Always**

The biblical drive of youth ministry is not to make teenagers Christians. Instead, the goal of youth ministry is to make adult disciples whose faith took root in their teen years. This happens through proclaiming and applying the gospel in everything we do. *Lead Them to Jesus* provides guidance for youth workers and their volunteers to know what it looks like to apply the gospel to your entire ministry.

In short, we need [a broader understanding of the gospel](#). It's more than an evangelism tool, it's the very heart of Christianity. Therefore, we preach it every week and apply it to every element of our ministry. Ministries like the *Rooted Ministry*, *Growing Young Disciples*, and *Reformed Youth Ministries* are doing excellent work training youth workers to do this kind of ministry.

### **Worship Together**

When youth ministries are structured in a way that nurtures teenagers' faith to grow in the soil of the youth ministry, then we shouldn't be surprised when transplanting them into the foreign soil of the church doesn't work very well. Instead, students' faith is better served by parents and youth workers collaborating to nurture their youths' faith to

grow in the soil of the church's corporate worship. Whenever we look at the biblical witness, we see the generations of the church worshipping together.

When children and teenagers attend their own ministries rather than participating in the corporate worship of the church, then we need to be willing to confess, "Our kids don't go to church." If this is something you're willing to say with a clean conscience, then please continue. Otherwise, it's time to dig into the biblical teaching about [what the Church is](#) and how Christians have passed on the faith to the next generation throughout Scripture and Church History. After reading about this in A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry with your youth leaders, parents, and church elders, prayerfully consider how your church can better integrate students into the life of the church.

### **Co-Discipleship with Parents**

Youth ministry is biblical. The above truths don't undermine the biblical role of youth workers. But they should reform what your ministry actually looks like.

Youth ministry is the church's expression of partnership with parents to co-disciple the next generation. Parents are called to disciple their children. The church is called to disciple parents and their children. It's the same calling. When godly leaders in the church come alongside parents in order to cultivate a gospel-centered youth ministry, it can be a gracious incubator for students' faith to grow and mature.

Obviously, much more can be said about what these essentials look like. Some of these youth ministries can be highly developed with multiple pastoral staff roles; others will be smaller and entirely volunteer-led. It's important to prioritize these core-convictions rather than focusing on building any particular program. May the next generation discover the life-giving message of the gospel through our ministries and grow into adult disciples whose faith took root in their teen years.

*(note: this article was published on [Youth Pastor Theologian](#), 1/19/21)*

## **Section Three**

### **Advice for New Youth Ministers**

#### **Regarding Your Soul: Keep Your Eyes on Jesus and Your Feet Rooted in God's Word**

It's easy for young ministers to allow their new profession to also become their spirituality. Since we are whole people, and not divided selves (family life here, private life there, and public/ministry life over there), there's going to be a strange mixture of your personal spirituality that is commingled with your ministry. If that isn't the case, then your ministry is either lacking your personal convictions or your ministry is mere work rather than an overflow of your spiritual vitality.

Developing a healthy prayer life and personal commitment to Bible study is essential. Learn what other disciplines (fasting, journaling, meditation, silence, etc.) strengthen your commitment to prayer and Scripture... and then make an intentional effort to plan around them. This is part of your work. Keep your heart near Christ.

#### **Regarding the Gospel: Preach the Gospel to Yourself First**

Some people say your preparation to teach is different from your personal Bible reading. On one hand, that's true. If you only read the Bible when you're preparing to teach then there's a problem. But on the other hand, your preparation to teach should always be devotional, too. If the biblical text hasn't struck your own life then you aren't ready to teach it.

It's fairly common for gospel-centered youth workers to be intentional about giving grace to students but not themselves. The gospel means you can trust the Lord when you bomb a message, or when an event is a trainwreck, or when you lose your cool on your family before heading out the door for youth group. You are a sinner, saved by grace. God obviously knows this, and he has still chosen you to lead this ministry. Preach and apply the gospel to yourself. Walk in grace-saturated repentance. Live with joyful confidence in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Regarding Students: Minister to Your Actual Students, not to "GenZ"**

There's a great benefit to reading the latest research about generations. These types of reports and sociological studies help us understand what's happening in our students' worlds. When we understand our students then we can communicate with greater clarity and apply the gospel with wise pastoral care.

Personally, I read everything I can about GenZ by the Barna Group and Jean Twenge. But the students in your youth ministry are not merely statistics in sociological research. The students in your neighborhood will obviously share much in common with teenagers from other parts of the country, but there are particular differences that are important to recognize. This is why ministry to students in urban, suburban, and rural settings don't look identical. You are called to pastor your students, not an entire generation.

### **Regarding Leadership: Think Big, Start Small**

It's important to be strategic and to have big ideas about what you want your ministry to become. But hold it loosely and with great patience. As you learn more about your church and ministry culture, you'll identify areas that you want to see changed. There may even be things that make you think, "That's not even biblical! Why in the world would we do that?!"

Remember God's patience towards you. He doesn't call new believers to repent of every sin all at once. He patiently leads us into holiness. In the same way, keep your eyes on the big picture while making the easiest change possible in the right direction. By making small and easy changes, you'll prove your trustworthiness and wisdom so bigger changes will be easier. The way you explain and implement these small changes will show them whether or not they can trust your leadership when it's time for bigger changes down the road.

### **Regarding Loneliness: Don't Try to Do Ministry Alone**

If your ministry has an existing team of volunteers then warmly embrace them. Few people in the church will want you to succeed more than these men and women. Even if they seem hesitant about changes you want to introduce, don't assume there's a power struggle going on. You need to give them the benefit of the doubt and lead them with pastoral care. Meet with them, pray for them, and serve together. One of the best ways for your ministry to develop a healthy gospel culture is for the youth leadership team to love one another genuinely.

If you come to a ministry with few or no volunteers then you will want to pursue the parents. Invite them (and others) to meet together to pray for the youth in your church community. As you prayerfully ask the Lord to call and raise up the next generation, ask them how you can serve and encourage them. Even if the response is small, be faithful in prayer for the students in your ministry and trust the Lord to raise up a team that is committed to reaching your teenagers. When people pray for teenagers a funny thing

happens - they begin talking to the teenagers they're praying for. God will raise up youth leaders in your church if you pray.

There are likely other faithful, gospel-preaching churches in your community. If they have a youth ministry, make the effort to meet their youth leaders. There might already be an active network of youth leaders in your region that you could join. Sure, you probably won't fully agree with everyone there. That's ok. Even despite those disagreements, you can learn from seasoned youth leaders, and you can pray for each other.

## Section Four

### Developing 30-Day and 90-Day Goals

It's important to have a ministry plan, otherwise you'll find yourself busy doing a bunch of stuff while hoping it leads to fruitful discipleship. I've seen it many times - pastors whose ministries are busy and active with good and biblical things, but there's an underlying sense of anxiety whispering, "But are you actually *doing* anything?"

Ministers should lead and serve differently than business executives, but that doesn't mean they should do everything that has a biblical motivation and hope it fulfills the Great Commission. These thirty and ninety-day goals are offered to set you up for long-term and fruitful ministry.

As you develop your thirty and ninety-day goals, there are two factors to keep in mind.

- **Strategic:** they set you up for ongoing development.
  - Examples: Learning names, Discerning the culture of the ministry/church, Identifying strengths and weaknesses of your volunteers, etc.
- **Urgent:** Are there important issues that need immediate attention?
  - Examples: Setting up your office and technology so you have a usable workspace, What will you teach next week at youth group, Recruiting Sunday school teachers and selecting a curriculum, etc.

Please use these to prayerfully discern your own goals, but feel free to "borrow." In general, it is wise to have some overlap between the 30 and 90-Day goals so the strategic 30-Day goals are further developed into strategic 90-Day goals (which may eventually develop into annual goals, but do not need to).

#### 30-Day Goals

Identify 3-5 goals for your first thirty days. Make sure there is a mixture of strategic and urgent goals.

1. Learn the Names of Students and Parents
  - a. If you have a medium/large ministry, determine which age group you'll make a priority to establish relationships.
2. Get to Know Your Team
  - a. Fellow staff members, and what are their key roles and responsibilities.
  - b. Members of your volunteer leadership team, along with their key areas of emphasis (high school Sunday school teacher, middle school girls small groups, games leader, parent liaison, etc.)



3. Learn the ministry's history
  - a. Study the ministry's regular meetings for the last three years. What was the structure and emphasis of the program?
  - b. Study the ministry's retreats and special events for the last five years. Where were they? If there was a change, that's probably for a reason... find out why.
  - c. Ask if there are any legacy programs/retreats you should know about.
  - d. Ask staff for some history on the last few youth ministers - what were their strengths, weaknesses, and what are some challenges they faced?

### **90 Day Goals**

1. Learn the church culture (by observation and conversation)
  - a. "How do people treat each other by default?"
  - b. "What are we really good at?"
  - c. "Where does our ministry struggle?"
  - d. "What are some particular issues or students deal with?"
  - e. "What do the parents expect the youth ministry to do?"
2. Meet with each youth volunteer (1-1 or in small groups)
  - a. Listen to their testimony
  - b. Ask about their passions and what they think they bring to the team
  - c. Ask about how you can set them up for success... and about what sorts of things would frustrate them
  - d. Make sure you pray together during your meeting
3. Develop a six month teaching plan
  - a. What are some priorities you want to get across to the students, leaders, and parents?
  - b. Teach an accessible series that will not drain you. There's plenty of time for a challenging series down the road, you don't need to start with a deep-dive.
4. Begin recruiting and training your team to get on the same page
  - a. Work with your staff and volunteer team to determine what volunteer roles need to be filled.
  - b. Ask youth, parents, and staff/leaders who they think would be good youth leaders. Keep a written list of those names, and add a Y/P/S (youth/parent/staff) next to their name.
  - c. Prioritize those who are mentioned by multiple people.

- d. "Hi \_\_\_\_\_, I know we haven't had a chance to get to know each other yet, but I've asked students, parents, and the church leadership for recommendations about who they think would be a good youth leader. You were mentioned by multiple people! Would you please pray about serving in the student ministry and meet with me in a week or two so we can discuss it sometime?"
- e. Make sure to follow up. Don't nag or guilt them into serving, but some people assume you're just being polite and won't take your invitation seriously until the second or third time you mention it.
- f. If possible, pair the new youth leaders with a seasoned youth worker so they can focus on meeting students and learning names before they have significant leadership duties.

## Section Five

# Developing Yearly Goals

I have always found it more effective to plan according to the people I'm serving rather than according to the "purposes" I'm trying to establish.

If you are a church-based youth minister then you will have four primary audiences: Students, Parents, Youth Workers, and Church Members. Parachurch youth workers can adapt these as needed, but since I've been a church-based youth pastor I'll share from my own experience.

Each of these plays an integral role in helping students discover their identity in Christ and develop a faith that lasts for the long haul. It is also wise to plan a goal each year for your own personal development.

With that in mind, here's a model for how your goal-planning might take shape.

### **Template:**

**Audience:** Students/Parents/Youth Leader/Personal

- **Goal:** Short word/phrase that categorizes what you hope to accomplish
- **Reasoning:** One or two sentences explaining why this is your goal for this audience
- **Pathway:** How do you plan to fulfill this goal? This can be one change or key emphasis, or a series of steps you plan to take over the course of the year to fulfill the goal.

### **Examples:**

#### **Students**

- Goal: Student Leadership
- Reasoning: We want to identify spiritually mature students who are teachable and looking for mentors. Let's invest in them as we rebuild the ministry in order to deploy them to minister to their peers and in the church.
- Pathway: Student Leadership Bootcamp
  - A weekend retreat to launch this effort.
  - Student Ministry Crew: Monthly meetings for training and deployment.
  - Deploy student ministry crew to actively serve in our regular ministries.

## **Parents**

- Goal: Ownership over their teenagers' spiritual development
- Reasoning: Parents are the most important spiritual influence in their kids' lives. They know that, but don't always know how to disciple their teenagers.
- Pathway
  - Parents Meetings: Reframe the mission of youth ministry as co-discipleship and co-evangelism
  - Parents Newsletters: Equip them find and use good resources
  - Establish personal relationships with parents to hear their concerns, frustrations, and stressors about parenting teenagers. Demonstrate to them that we are genuine partners for their kids.

## **Your Planning Template:**

### **Students**

- Goal:
- Rationale:
- Pathway:

### **Parents**

- Goal:
- Rationale:
- Pathway:

### **Youth Leaders**

- Goal:
- Rationale:
- Pathway:

### **Church**

- Goal:
- Rationale:
- Pathway:

### **Personal**

- Goal:
- Rationale:
- Pathway:

## **Section Six**

### **Organizational Leadership:**

### **Mission Statements and Ministry Values**

Mission statements don't provide a secret key for leading effective ministries. I do recommend them, but with the reminder they're for the sake of clarity and organizational health. Some so-called leadership gurus talk about mission statements and values as if they're what will determine your success or failure. I know good youth pastors who don't have one, because they naturally lead with clarity and focus. I also know others who have spent considerable effort to craft excellent statements, only to see very little benefit. Here's why – because a statement alone means nothing.

The culture of your ministry is the most important thing to cultivate – not a catchy slogan you can write on a shirt. A mission statement is only helpful if your ministry's vision and practice align. To some degree, every mission statement is aspirational: it's what you hope will become true of your ministry. If your ministry values don't provide guardrails to lead you towards fulfilling your mission, then there's a big problem. That is, by far, the number one reason I've seen mission statements prove useless.

#### **On Mission Statements**

A mission statement is one sentence that clearly and simply captures your ministry's goal. Some mission statements paint a portrait of what they hope students are like by the time they graduate ("we graduate teenagers with a maturing faith in Christ who are committed to lifelong faith"), others are more straightforward ("We want students to know Christ and grow in him for the long haul"). However your mission statement is worded, it's a big picture statement that helps you focus yourself and others around a shared outcome.

As an example, here are the two mission statements I've used in ministry, and my reflection on their distinctive strengths.

#### **Example 1**

***"We are here to welcome teenagers to worship and walk with Jesus Christ  
and to witness to those around them."***

I developed this statement fairly early in my ministry career and used it for fourteen years to lead my team. This statement contains what I called the "four W's" – Welcome,

Worship, Walk, Witness. I wanted to make sure that youth group welcomed students into relationships with Christ, with one another, and with youth leaders who would care for them. Since nonChristians cannot worship, that was our verbiage for conversation and leading students into saving faith. Youth ministry is primarily about discipleship, and so, we obviously hope to train students to walk faithfully in Christ, and to be witnesses of Christ saving grace to their friends through evangelism.

This mission statement is helpful as one (long) sentence that captures our ministry's core commitments. But that's also it's weakness – it's trying to do too many things. By enfolding the mission and values into one sentence, it became tempting to focus on just one of the W's to the oversight of others, while missing the bigger picture of why these matter. In the end, this mission statement was more of a "value statement," so we periodically focused more on how rather than what. When I started at my current church I didn't feel compelled to revive this, so I started over.

### **Example 2**

***"We make adult disciples whose faith took root in their teen years."***

This is a short and crisp mission statement that paints a picture of what we're trying to do over the long haul. It tells you how we measure effectiveness in our ministry. When we build our ministry schedule and evaluate opportunities, this statement is our guide. In this way, there are times when it'll be more "on mission" for us to invite students to participate in a church cleanup day than to plan a fun youth event where teenagers will come to be together instead of working side-by-side with adults from the church.

### **Counsel for crafting your mission statement**

- **Keep it memorable and simple.** I cannot express this strongly enough. If no one remembers it then it's useless and you're always going to be frustrated that parents and leaders and students aren't on board. Maybe they are on board, but the statement isn't well-crafted. Listen to how others describe your mission – maybe they've come up with a more memorable way to put it than you originally did. Let it be a work in progress for your first year or two.
- **Remember the Great Commission.** Your statement should reflect the Great Commission, for obvious reasons.
- **What's Next?** Students will graduate and leave your ministry. What do you want to see happen next in their lives? Your long-term vision for them should affect how you minister to them today.
- **Think about the big picture.** The youth ministry is not the only hope for students. How does your mission statement reflect partnership with parents and a

commitment to integrate them into the church? This doesn't always need to be explicitly stated (remember, you want it short and memorable), but if your statement is dependent on a particular program of your ministry, then you're thinking too narrowly.

### **On Ministry Values**

Whereas a mission statement highlights your end-goal, your values define the guardrails that keep you on track towards fulfilling that mission. Your values won't be exhaustive of everything that you do, but they highlight the particular aspects of your ministry that set it apart from others. Hopefully, when students describe your youth ministry they'll accidentally list your ministry values.

Try to identify two or three ministry values that are absolutely central to your ministry convictions. These are the hills you will die on. If your pastor or elders asked you to minimize these things, then you'd seriously consider finding a new ministry elsewhere. There are other commitments you may have, but these few ministry values shape and drive all others.

For my own ministry, I've emphasized two primary values: gospel-community and theological-depth. Maybe hyphenating these values is cheating, but it's important to highlight the centrality of the gospel to the way we build community.

I don't have any empirical research to back this up, but I suspect community and fellowship are the most common values across youth ministries. This emphasis on community can easily devolve into merely "hanging out" or an unhealthy obsession with fun and games. Please, do not make "community" or "fellowship" one of your values without clearly articulating what you mean - otherwise it will most likely devolve into a commitment to "hanging out," and teenagers can never do that enough so your emphasis on discipleship will slowly erode.

### **Aligning Mission Statements and Ministry Values**

Your ministry values will keep you on track to fulfill your mission statement, otherwise you're wasting your time by having either. I've been in meetings where a ministry or event was proposed and approved because, "it's biblical." But if we approve every ministry opportunity that has a biblical basis, then we could be hosting a different event every night of the week. Obviously, we should only do things that "are biblical." But we need clarity and focus, or else we're going to attempt every good opportunity and burn out.

Whether you're evaluating a ministry program or your considering a potential new ministry or event, your mission and values are crucial. Will they move the needle in those areas, or not? Sure, you can do the occasional event that's just fun or that emphasizes a different aspect of evangelism or discipleship – but if you do not consistently use your mission and values to discern what gets a “yes” and what gets a “no,” then your mission and values have become useless and you're just hoping discipleship will happen on its own.

### **A Final Analogy**

If the mission statement is your destination and your values are guardrails that keep you on track - then other ministry opportunities are off ramps, potholes are unexpected challenges, and stop signs are setbacks. A car crash could be represented by a crisis that comes from the outside – someone who intentionally causes division or a significant event that affects you or your community. If you aren't careful, you can fall asleep at the wheel or run out of gas – so remember to take care of your soul to rest in the gospel, and to fuel your youth leaders and parents to keep moving forward over the course of the long journey.

*(Edited from an article published on YPT, 8/17/22)*



## Section Seven

### Recommended Resources

Visit [youthpastortheologian.com/resources](http://youthpastortheologian.com/resources) for more lists of helpful resources.

#### **Books on Youth Ministry**

- **[Lead Them to Jesus: A Handbook for Youth Workers](#), by Mike McGarry**  
This book is written for volunteer youth workers and reflects the heartbeat of this site: half the book is dedicated to theological questions students ask, and half is given to equip youth workers to grow in the skills it takes to be a fruitful youth worker.
- **[A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church](#), by Mike McGarry**  
Youth ministry today has fallen on hard times. Many churches continue to employ the same methods that have become entrenched over the last few decades, while others are questioning the need for youth ministry at all. McGarry explores the foundation of youth ministry in the Old and New Testaments and brings that together with Church history in a compelling way. This book should be high on the reading list for pastors and elder boards as they prepare to launch or restructure the youth ministry in their church.
- **[Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide](#), edited by Cameron Cole and Jon Neilson.**  
Establish the gospel as the fulcrum of your youth ministry. These practical essays by Jon Nielson, Elizabeth Elliott and others provide a sure theological footing for implementing cross-centered principles. Stressing Christ's victory over sin and death, youth pastors will find generous insight into exploring students' function in the life of the church.
- **[Remodeling Youth Ministry: A Biblical Blueprint for Ministering to Students](#), by Chris Talbot**  
This book offers important foundations on which you can build your youth ministry as well as helpful corrections for the future. Recognizing that philosophies of youth ministry have been articulated as models of ministry, Talbot offers a remodel. Remodeling is hard work. But now may be the time to remodel your structure of youth ministry with the blueprint of God's Word. Instead of rebuilding the youth ministry house, Talbot proposes a remodel.
- **[Alongside: Loving Teenagers with the Gospel](#), by Drew Hill**  
*Alongside* is a much-needed resource that unpacks the challenges teenagers

face and how youth leaders and parents can share the gospel with them at this crucial age. Full of practical insight and biblical knowledge, *Alongside* is an invitation to love teenagers well with the hope of the gospel.

- **[Engaging Generation Z: Raising the Bar for Youth Ministry](#), by Timothy McKnight**

To disciple the youth in student ministries today, we have to understand the unique characteristics of Generation Z, and apply lessons learned from recent decades of youth ministry. Following an overview of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Generation Z, McKnight provides youth pastors and volunteers with a complete plan for discipling adolescents through the local church.

### **Books for Students**

- **[Discover: Questioning Your Way to Faith](#), by Mike McGarry**

It's ok for you to have questions about your faith. You aren't the only one that has those questions, and you shouldn't be embarrassed by them. In *Discover: Questioning Your Way to Faith*, Mike McGarry explores the twenty most common questions teenagers ask.

- **[The Jesus I Wish I Knew in High School](#), by the Rooted Ministry**

This is a student devotional with 30 chapters by 30 diverse authors, reflecting on what they wish they knew about Jesus in high school. It's a gospel-saturated book that helps students learn how to apply the gospel to their everyday experiences.

- **[The New City Catechism](#)**

A modern compilation of classic catechisms of the Church, expressing the core teachings of Christianity in a simple question-and-answer format. Crossway, the publisher, has also published a devotional, a children's edition and children's curriculum based on it.

- **[RYM's Track Series](#)**

These books are written specifically for teenagers, to help them thinking biblically about important topics. Accessible and easy to read, these books are a treasure for youth workers.

- **[Superheroes Can't Save You: Epic Examples of Historic Heresies](#), by Todd Miles**

In this book, Dr. Todd Miles teaches about Christological heresies by comparing them with different superheroes. For example, Superman represents Docetism because he seems like a human, but is isn't; and Batman represents Liberalism because he's nothing more than a remarkable human. This is a creative and understandable way to teach students important theological foundations for their maturing faith.

- [\*\*10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask \(and Answer\) about Christianity\*\*](#), by **Rebecca McLaughlin**  
McLaughlin's writing style is extremely readable, easy to understand, and profoundly engaging. Students who read these books will actually understand them, and they will be blessed. Her style of apologetics is compelling to postChristian readers.

## **Curriculum**

- [\*\*The Rooted Curriculum\*\*](#), by the **Rooted Ministry**  
I (Mike) was involved in the development of this curriculum, so I know the heartbeat that drives it, and it's a good one! Each lesson is question-driven around the three main questions of hermeneutics (What? So What? Now What?), so they're learning how to do exegesis/hermeneutics as they work through each lesson. There are a multiple different tracks available with more coming each year. This is a great series for small groups or Sunday school, but would be tougher to adapt to a Youth Group sermon series.
- [\*\*The Thread\*\*](#), by **YM360**  
Although YM360 has many curriculum options and their content is reliable, *The Thread* stands out among them for the way it teaches biblical theology to students. Lessons are teacher-friendly but do require prep time so you can teach with confidence and clarity. It will be helpful to remind the teacher that most curriculum is designed with the assumption the teacher will modify somewhat - so if you try teaching *everything* you'll probably run out of time (and attention). But this is one of the best Sunday School curricula I've used (twice!).
- [\*\*Reframe Youth Curriculum\*\*](#)  
Reframe does an excellent job integrating cultural relevance and biblical fidelity. Their curriculum (most of which are four-week series) shares the Truth while creating space for conversations on topics that don't always seem conducive to spiritual edification. This curriculum empowers you to adapt content to your context and navigate the hyper-skepticism native to Gen Z's worldview. Reframe is newer and not as well known, but the content is solid, engaging, and their graphic design is on point (which every youth worker knows is important for student engagement).
- [\*\*The Gospel Project\*\*](#), by **Lifeway**  
This has become one of the most widely-used curricula, and for good reason. It's well edited and there's a kids, youth, and adults edition - so each age group can study the same series, though in age-appropriate ways, and have a good family

discussion on the ride home from church or over dinner. This is a great option for churches who are looking for a solid curriculum with an intergenerational emphasis. When I used this curriculum (years ago, so it's likely improved since then) it was theologically sound, but my volunteers had to put in extra work to make the lessons work for them.

- **[Deep Discipleship](#), by LeaderTreks**

This curriculum has multiple series, built around the “8 Roots” of discipleship: Rescue, Knowledge, Kingdom, Outreach, Apologetics, Worship, Community, and Identity. These roots show up throughout the various series in order to give students a clear way to think about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. The engaging way this line is written makes it a good curriculum, especially for churches who are transitioning from a more entertainment-driven model of ministry to a gospel-centered approach. And the different series (each of which will last a full school year) means you can build scope and sequence for your ministry off this framework. Churches who are looking for a more straightforward “Bible Study” may want to go another route.

- **[Bible Studies](#) and [Tracks Series](#), by Reformed Youth Ministry**

Where can you find a Bible Study for teenagers about [Christology](#)? At RYM, that's where... and it's free! They have ten different Bible Studies available for free (of varying lengths). The Tracks series of books provides a books on various topics for youth workers to read with students. The series is adding to their titles every year, some include: Sanctification, Glorification, Prayer, Technology, Anxiety, Gaming, and more.

- **[Feed Bible Studies](#)**

Feed has various (free) Small Group studies that are built around the catechism. Although I haven't used this curriculum, other trustworthy youth workers vouched for it.

## **Training Cohorts**

- **[Rooted Mentoring Cohort](#).**

Follow and work through a comprehensive 15-lesson curriculum alongside others in a similar stage of ministry and led by experienced youth pastors. Spend focused, one-on-one time each month with your mentor as they help guide you further up and further into the role and ministry over which the Lord has given you stewardship. You'll also enjoy access to our large collection of training videos, illustrations, and other resources.

- **Gospel-Centered Family Cohort**

Registration includes eleven cohort sessions, three books, and a one-on-one coaching call. Our Student Ministry Leadership Cohort will train you in gospel-centered strategies for discipleship as you seek to lead students and families to know and love both God and his church. You will be challenged to think critically about your own ministry and context, while being encouraged to dream and set vision for your ministry. You will also have the chance to work with our coaches through the practical aspects of ministry, such as event planning, policies and procedures, recruiting and training volunteers, and prioritizing the safety of our students.

## **Conferences**

- **The Rooted Conference**

The heart of the youth pastor needs to be filled. Rooted is one of the highlights of the year for me. The camaraderie of like-minded youth workers, the preaching in the main sessions, and the training during the workshops combine to provide a meaningful and life-giving conference. Sometimes you can go to a conference and come home overwhelmed by what a failure you are and with a desire to make a ton of changes in your ministry. When you come home from Rooted your soul will be full and your desire will be to invite students to discover rest in the grace of God.

- **Reformed Youth Ministry's Youth Leader Training**

RYM's Youth Leader Training is especially good for new youth workers. Similar to Rooted, there is a desire to see the gospel impact everything about youth ministry, but there is a structured track for new youth workers to follow throughout the week in order to develop a gospel-centered philosophy of ministry. At the same time, no veteran youth workers will go home thinking, "Well that was a waste of time, I already knew all that!" If you go, you'll hear the gospel proclaimed and applied, you'll meet new friends, and your ministry foundation will be strengthened. RYM hosts two YLT's each year.

- **Youth Ministry Conclave**

Conclave describes itself this way, "Each year we work in cooperation to provide a training event for youth pastors, youth leaders, and volunteers. Corporate worship, breakout sessions, and networking are designed to create a training conference to equip and rejuvenate your youth ministry team." This is a conference organized by baptistic youth workers, though I'm sure it'd still be helpful for non-baptists.

- **LeaderTreks' [Refuel Retreats](#)**

I haven't actually attended one of these retreats but I know the staff at LeaderTreks and trust them enough to recommend this retreat if you need to get away and refuel. LeaderTreks excels at training youth workers to make disciples by equipping students to become student ministers/leaders. If you want to grow in your leadership capabilities and you're accustomed to more theologically-driven conferences (like TGC or T4G), this might be the change of pace you need.