20 IDEAS FOR DISCIPLING TEENAGERS

No matter how long you've been serving in youth ministry, one of the first things you hear about is discipleship—what it is, how to make it easier, and how to get teenagers to invest in discipleship on their own. At its core, discipleship is helping people grow and develop their relationship with God. But as much as we might want it to, discipleship doesn't happen right away—especially for teenagers.

There are times when discipleship can feel challenging, and if you've never had to think through a discipleship strategy before, it can be challenging to know where to start. But here's the good news—**you're not on this journey alone!** (if you need a discipleship strategy, you can steal ours!)

That's one of the reasons why we host GrowCon every year. It's an online conference offering practical strategies, ideas, and resources for youth ministry leaders like you—and **it's completely free!**

This year, for GrowCon24, we invited Danny Sugimoto to share some ideas to help youth pastors think about discipleship differently. Not only does Danny have years of experience working in youth ministry, but **he's also the Content Strategist at Stuff You Can Use!**

Check out his session from GrowCon24 below, or if you just can't wait to hear his ideas for discipleship, keep reading for a quick summary. Be sure to snag the notes for this session and a practical exercise we made just for you!

If you're looking for new ways to help teenagers grow in their faith, here are a few ideas ...

1. HELP THEM BUILD SUSTAINABLE HABITS

You're probably serving in youth ministry to help teenagers grow closer to God. This process takes a lot of time, but it's easier when you help teenagers create habits that shape the decisions, behaviors, and rhythms they put in place. You can help teenagers develop habits for spending time with God, **spending time with others, using their gifts, and sharing their stories.** Instead of asking teenagers to "do more," you can help them look at their *current* habits to see what God is already doing in their hearts and minds. Then, it's not a matter of adding something new but making a slight, sustainable shift in how they approach the habits they already hold.

2. HELP THEM PERSONALIZE THEIR TIME WITH GOD

If you compared the spiritual habits of two people, it's not likely those habits would be exactly the same. **Faith is personal to each of us, and we can let teenagers have some freedom in spending time with God.** Not everyone is wired to wake up early in the morning for a devotional. It might be easier to listen to the Bible than to read it ourselves. So what if we inspired teenagers to spend time with God in ways their bodies and minds are already wired to prefer?

This might look like helping them learn to ...

- Set a regular time to read through a book of the Bible each day.
- Take a walk and pray or take in nature and their community.
- Journal through a prompt, a passage of Scripture, or as a way to process their faith and questions.
- Disconnect from an app, their phone, TV, video games, or something else.
- Schedule a few times of silence throughout the week so they can be still and listen or reflect.

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3. HELP THEM INVEST IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Each teenager in your ministry is already invested in relationships—whether in person, online, or a combination of the two. Often, we challenge teenagers to make *new* relationships that are focused on faith, but instead, **you can help them be more intentional with the friends and family that are close to them.** You could help them learn to show these people love, care, and kindness by modeling what it looks like to follow Jesus closely.

You can invite teenagers to invest in their relationships by ...

1. Organizing a hang-out or group activity.
2. Calling a family member or friend to talk.
3. Organizing a study group to share their knowledge.
4. Sending a card in the mail.
5. Asking for help with a problem or a task.

4. HELP THEM FOCUS ON THEIR GIFTS

Every teenager in your ministry has a series of unique gifts, talents, and skills. **As a youth pastor or ministry leader, you can give teenagers opportunities to discover which gifts God has given to them.** Make space during your weekly environment to let them explore who they are and who God designed them to be. That means carving out specific responsibilities where the teenagers in your youth ministry can step in and lead. Let them explore their gifts safely, and support them when they make mistakes and grow.

You could help teenagers explore their gifts by having them ...

1. Take a personality assessment.
2. Serve in your youth group.
3. Be an advocate for a cause/person.
4. Share something they have, like their energy, resources, or time.
5. Help someone with homework or studying.

5. HELP THEM SHARE THEIR STORIES EASILY

For a lot of teenagers, talking about their faith can be pretty scary, but it doesn't have to be. Sharing about faith doesn't always have to look like a long conversation. Instead, **the goal should be to make faith a regular, go-to part of their conversation.** That means you can help teenagers find the language they need to talk about their faith. You might even help them by giving them smaller, practical steps to talk to others about their faith and share what God is doing in their lives.

This might look like inviting teenagers to ...

1. Share part of their story on social media.
2. Start a conversation with a friend about spiritual practices.
3. Talk about a struggle they're having, how they're growing, or a big question they're processing.
4. Ask someone they respect to share their story with them.
5. Create something that represents their story.

These are just a few ways you can help disciple teenagers so they grow in their faith. And we made a great exercise to help you think through how some of these ideas can fit into your ministry context. On your own or with a team of volunteers, you can brainstorm, map out, and build on these twenty discipleship ideas to create something unique for your youth ministry. Check it out below!

And if you're looking for even more ways to help your teenagers grow in their faith, we've made some for you in Grow Students Curriculum! With every volume of Grow Students Curriculum, you'll get ...

- 50 weeks of teaching lessons
- Parent & volunteer tip videos
- Parent & volunteer conversation guides
- Quarterly events & discipleship activities
- Volunteer meeting guides
- Annual strategy guides
- And more!

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Discipleship is an important part of ministry, and we'd love to help you with your discipleship strategy. (Again, feel free to steal ours here!) Whether you use these twenty ideas to help your teenagers or start up a free trial of Grow Students Curriculum, we hope it helps you as you lead teenagers in discipleship!



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