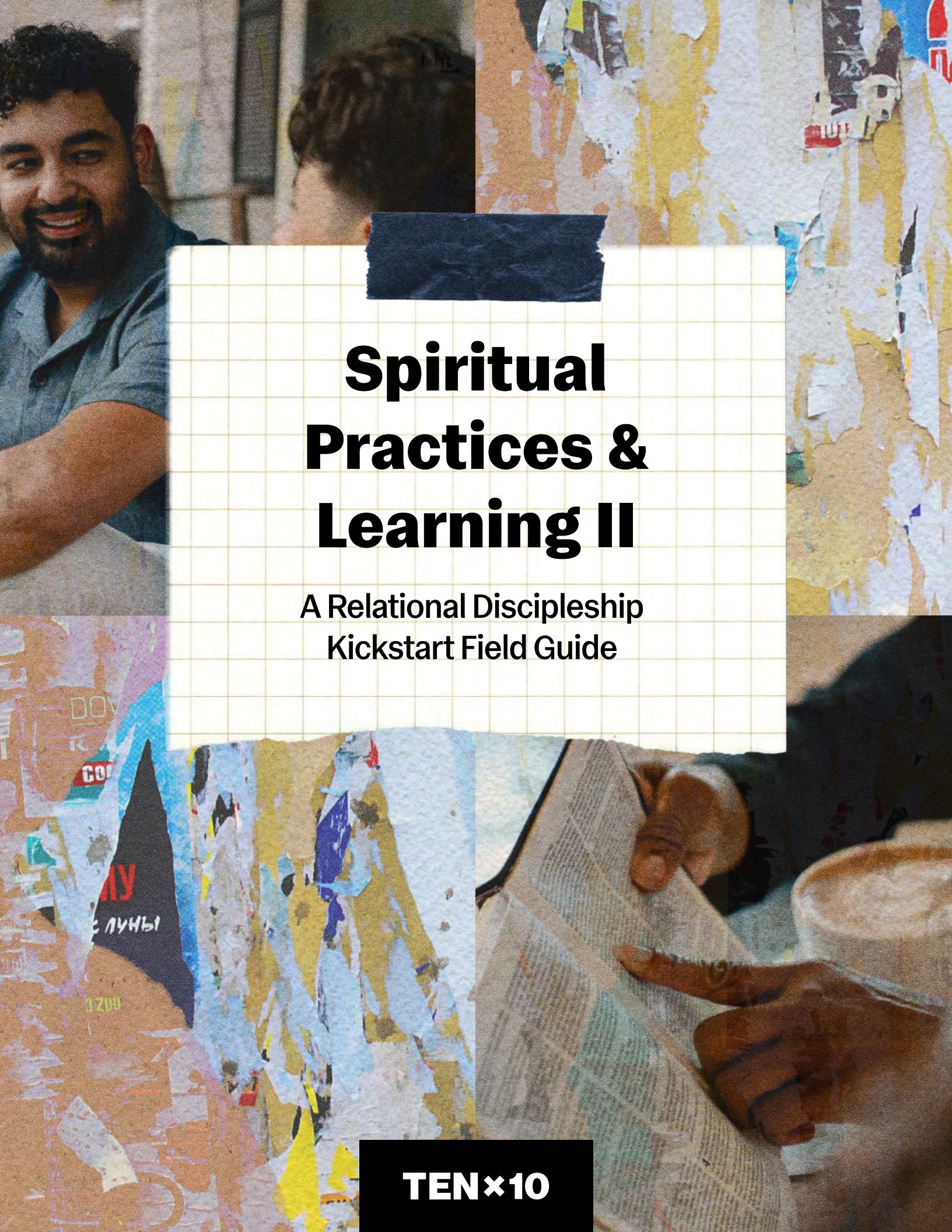




Spiritual Practices & Learning II

**A Relational Discipleship
Kickstart Field Guide**

TEN×10

**Goal: Young people own their faith
and have a strong sense of who they are
in Christ by exploring tough questions,
learning core teachings, and adopting
spiritual practices.**

Faith Formation Framework



Shared
Faith *shared* by adults.

Internalized
Faith *internalized*
through spiritual
practices and learning.

Applied
Faith *applied* through
service and justice.



Catalyzed
Faith *catalyzed* by
family intimacy and
intentionality.

Prioritized
Faith *prioritized* by the
entire faith community
and leadership.





Introduction and Context





Meet Avery. Avery's a senior in high school who's grown up in the church, regularly attends youth group, and has applied to Christian colleges to study computer engineering.

Avery's friends know that she's a Christian. She talks about her church all the time, even at school. What few people know is that there's a battle raging inside Avery. She's questioning her faith.

When she tells adults at her church that she wants to be a computer engineer, some say she should "be careful of all that science." She doesn't understand how some of the Christians she knows can support the war that's been dominating the headlines when one of the commandments is "Don't kill." She's frustrated because she feels like some of her friends wouldn't be welcome at her church. When she looks at the world around her, she sees people who often talk about God's love, but who aren't loving their neighbors. To her, Christianity feels hypocritical.



For Maisa, a high school sophomore, her time is consumed with school, homework, helping with cooking and cleaning, and watching her younger siblings while her mom works at a restaurant. She started attending a youth group when a friend invited her and goes when she can, but everything they talk about is new to her. She's not sure how to find the verses when the youth leader asks them to pull out their Bibles (not that she has a Bible anyway). She likes hearing about Jesus and how

he said people should take care of each other. But some Bible stories are super weird and can't possibly have really happened. So why do the leaders act like they're so important? If you asked Maisa, she'd say she has no idea if she's a Christian. But there's something she likes about how people sing together, pray together, and care about what it means to be a good person.



Ty is a freshman, and to be honest, it's tough to focus on Sunday mornings, let alone stay awake. The sermon is boring; the pews are uncomfortable; the music isn't his style; and the other kids are kind of nerdy. He only goes to church because his grandma makes him. He thought it was pretty cool when he went along with his grandma and other church members to help out with a public elementary after-school program a few weeks ago. He played basketball with a few younger boys and

packed meals for participants to take home for the weekends. Ty would say he is a Christian. If you asked him what that means, he'd say, "That I believe in God...?"

These are just a few examples of the young people we know in our churches, parishes, and youth ministries. You probably recognize teens like these, each with their own strengths, quirks, and developing beliefs.

When it comes to understanding themselves or knowing what they believe, they have many opinions, questions, and doubts - which often change as quickly as their adolescent bodies and the world they live in.

In their research-based book *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager*, Kara Powell and Brad Griffin suggest the four current answers most young people reflect when answering the “who am I?” identity question are:

- I am what others expect (“I am what others want or need me to be. I constantly feel pressured to live up to the expectations of family, teachers, friends, church, and society.”)
- I am not _____ enough (“I fill in the blank with whatever I feel most judged about by others or myself: funny, smart, athletic, thin, pretty, accomplished, Black/Latino/Asian, and so on.”)
- I am my image (“I curate the identity I want the world to see through social media and beyond. I’m working on the brand—or style—I want to project. Sometimes it’s more like a mask I wear.”)
- I am more than my label (“I am more than what others say about me, including my mental health or learning-style diagnoses, stereotypes about my race or ethnicity, my test scores, or my past trauma.”)¹

This is why helping young people develop a **Christ-centered identity is so important.**

We want to help teens understand their identity as **beloved children of God:**²

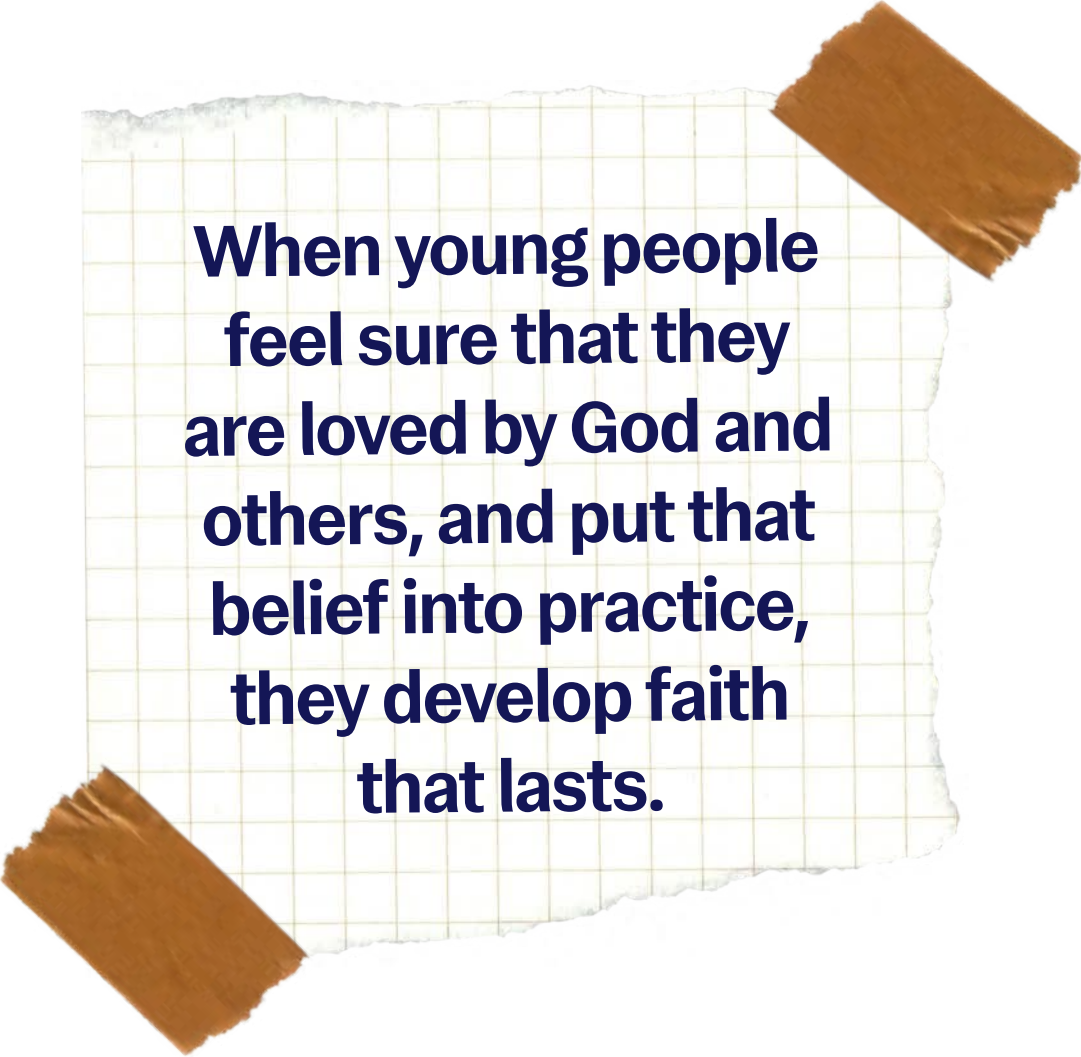
- They are **valued for the unique selves God created them to be.**
- They are **needed parts of the body of Christ**—just as much for their strengths and wonderful characteristics as for their doubts and questions.

¹ Kara Powell and Brad Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2021), 94-104.

² Powell and Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager*, 115.



Having a strong identity in Christ does not mean sticking to a strict prayer routine, never questioning something they read in the Bible, or always making good choices. It means knowing that God loves them and is with them in their joys, celebrations, fears, doubts, mistakes, friendships, loneliness, and everything in between—and that they will live the best kind of life when they live in and according to God's love. It means internalizing their faith so it becomes part of who they are and how they live in the world.



**When young people
feel sure that they
are loved by God and
others, and put that
belief into practice,
they develop faith
that lasts.**

Questions for Reflection

Before we focus on young people today, take a minute to think about your own teenage years and respond to the following:

**What parts of church, Mass, or youth ministry felt meaningful to you?
What parts felt boring or kind of weird?**

Did you feel loved by God and other people? What did that look like? If you didn't, how did that impact your understanding of God and faith?

When did you have the chance to share your gifts or questions with your faith community? If you didn't, how might it have helped if you had?





What We Know About How Young People Internalize Faith



Before we jump into a deeper exploration of how young people internalize faith, we want to briefly remind ourselves about the Faith Formation Framework, or the components of a discipling ministry that helps young people develop a faith that outlasts their teenage years.

Here are those 5 drivers again:

- **Faith shared by adults.**
- **Faith internalized through spiritual practices and learning.**
- **Faith applied through service and justice.**
- **Faith catalyzed by family intimacy and intentionality.**
- **Faith prioritized by the entire faith community and leadership.**

The identity formation of young people—especially that part of their identity that is most directly connected to their faith—is informed by multiple aspects of the Faith Formation Framework, but particularly by the second of those elements: faith internalized through spiritual practices and learning. That’s where we’re going to focus in this guide.

Faith must be internalized, not just inherited.

Research consistently shows that parents’ faith practice is the number one predictor of a young person’s faith practice in adulthood. When churches, parishes, and youth ministries invest in whole families, it benefits everyone (see the Field Guide on *Families* for more on this). These efforts are vitally important. (And yes, we recognize that for many young people, their families may not yet have faith, which requires a different type of support for their journey.)

At the same time, most of us know young people who seem to only show up on Sunday mornings or weeknight gatherings because their families say they have to. Many teens (many adults, too...) call themselves Christians. But when pressed, they will confess they aren't really sure what that means (and if we aren't hearing these struggles, we're probably not asking the right questions). When church expects kids to adopt their parents', caregivers', or any family member's beliefs without questioning, their faith often weakens when presented with new challenges.³

Faith doesn't last because young people inherit it, although inherited faith can be a great starting point. It lasts because young people choose

it for themselves. In our ministries, parishes, and churches, we need to help teens access ways of finding and claiming faith for themselves. Which leads to our next point:

Young people need space to safely express their beliefs, doubts, and questions.

Young people question everything. They are questioning things about themselves, the world around them, the Bible, and many Christian traditions. They are developing their critical thinking skills. They are learning to identify and call out hypocrisy. They are learning how they want to dress, what they like, and how others perceive them.

Teenagers are in flux, figuring out just about everything.

³ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2016).

This is why it's so important that we give young people places to share beliefs, questions, and doubts out loud—in our large gatherings, in small groups, with mentors, with their peers. Teens' faith is a work in progress, and that work will progress more when they verbalize what they're thinking or questioning.

For example:

- Kylie attended youth group very regularly throughout middle school and high school. She thought it was super fun and loved the sense of belonging she experienced. The youth group was kind of like a hip, youth-oriented church service, really, with awesome singing and a great message from the youth director. But Kylie never really got to process her questions, to verbalize doubts or faith. Kylie was a passive recipient but wasn't actively internalizing anything. When she got to college the next year, none of it seemed to make enough sense to pursue further, and it all simply became a fond memory.
- The truth is, Jackson caused regular frustration for the two volunteers who led the youth ministry at his church (well, it wasn't actually at the church—they met at one of the youth workers' homes). Jackson always believed that he was encouraged to ask hard questions and make bold statements about what he believed, even if he wasn't completely sure he actually believed what he was saying. Occasionally, one of the youth workers would sigh when Jackson asked yet another question. But they always seemed to rally, smile, and thank him for pushing them. As a 20-something, Jackson is still practicing his faith and asking questions: of himself, of church leaders, and of God.



Young people might seem flaky, wishy-washy, or all over the place, particularly when they're "trying on" statements of belief for themselves. But we get to embrace that. We want to walk with them as they try out new aspects of their personalities, asking them good, open-ended questions ("Why do you think that is?") and inviting them to keep talking while we keep listening ("Can you share more about that?").

When young people know the things they share will be met with love and curiosity, they come to better understand themselves and God's love for them.

Young people need the chance to understand the Bible and ask questions about it.

Some of our teens have grown up in a church or parish, absorbing Bible stories like plants absorbing energy from the sun. Some of our teens grew up in a church or parish where they tuned out from the moment they

walked in the door until the moment they left. Some of our teens grew up hearing almost no Bible stories, or hearing them out of context, or hearing them brandished in hate-based or judgmental ways that showed little of God's love.

All that to say, we can't assume biblical literacy for any young person. We also can't assume our worship practices, rituals, or church's teaching have helped them understand the great love story God has written in Scripture. We have an incredible opportunity to help teens engage with the whole of the Bible: the gospels, the Old and New Testaments, Psalms and Proverbs, the ugly parts, the poetry, the prophecies, the beautiful stories of sacrifice, belief, and doubt, and of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus and the redemption of creation. Instead of presenting Scripture as something to accept or reject, we can invite young people to discover the meaning of Scripture along with us.



Young people need to take action with their faith.

At the same time, the Bible also teaches that faith without works is dead (see James 2:26). That alone is a compelling reason to help young people put their faith into action (whether it's new, long-established, a little flimsy, or barely a flicker). When we invite young people into opportunities to serve, they see and experience God's Word in action. (Note: this theme of serving is addressed in greater detail in the *Service and Justice* Field Guide.)

Young people also develop lasting faith through sharing their experiences (what some call giving “testimony”)—whether that’s telling their stories in small groups, speaking to a large group, or engaging in open conversations. They develop and grow into their identity as they are invited to lead, whether that’s in a leadership role or more informal ways of helping shape what ministries or church services should look like. When we show young people we value their voices and need their input as active participants, we help them put their faith into action.

We need young people to lead and share, not because they have everything figured out, but because they don't. It helps them recognize what they believe and why it matters, and often inspires others around them to discern those things for themselves.

Pause for Reflection & Action

Quickly review the three subheadings above, the elements that help teenagers develop a strong sense of identity.

Which of these three do you think is most strongly embraced in your faith community's ministry with young people?

Which of these three do you think could use some attention, some elevating?

What are a few ideas you have for putting that into action? Who might you bring in on the process of making this happen?





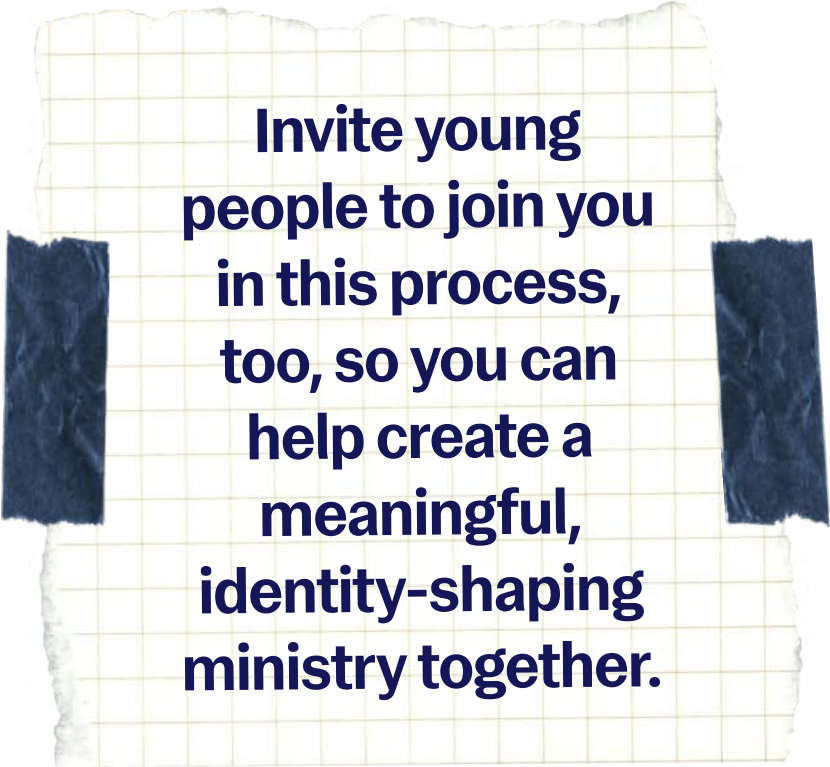
**Real-Life Ways We
Can Practice All of the
Above in Our Churches,
Parishes, and Ministries**



Okay, so we've gone over the components that are needed for a young person to develop a lasting identity as a beloved child of God. Now it's time to take those components and put them into action.

We've heard from many of the churches and parishes we work with that what they really want are practical, usable, teen-approved ideas to implement in their settings. We get it—and that's why what comes next is a *whole bunch* of ideas and practices you can try out.

We use that word, "practice," intentionally. As we give young people increased responsibilities, as we worship in new ways, and as we invite teenagers to share their honest perspectives, their words will likely be unpolished and imperfect. But that's okay—it's even expected! These are teenagers, after all. After you try a new form of worship, way of serving, or leadership opportunity, gather with your team to talk over how it went; think about what you might do differently next time; and reflect on what it taught you.



**Invite young
people to join you
in this process,
too, so you can
help create a
meaningful,
identity-shaping
ministry together.**

Give Teens Space to Express Faith, Doubt, and Questions

- Either as a large group, in small groups, or a mix of both, regularly ask young people to respond to open-ended prompts (avoid yes or no questions!):
 - What's one thing that brought you joy this week?
 - What is one question you're wondering about God right now?
 - What is one question your friends are wondering about God right now? (Sometimes it's easier for young people to share what their friends are wondering than what they are.)
 - Where did you see God moving in your life this week?
 - What is something we talked about in our gathering today that didn't make sense?
 - What are you learning from other people (maybe even here in this room!) about the kind of person you want to be?
 - When you think about God, what are the first few characteristics that come to mind? Why do you think that is?
- Put a question box in your gathering space and invite young people to submit questions anonymously. Read (pre-screened) questions in the large group. Instead of giving all the answers yourself, also invite teens and other leaders in the room to respond to one another's questions. It's okay for this to feel more like an open-ended discussion than a Q&A. Remember that it's always okay to say "I don't know," or "I'll have to look into that more and get back to you," or even, "Maybe we can research that together."

- Hang a big sheet of paper on the wall and leave columns for celebrations/joys and doubts/questions. Provide time for young people to write on the paper what they're thinking and wondering. Spend time praying as a group over what they write, and make a note of everything that was shared to follow up with teens later. You'll likely find good things among their doubts and questions to inform what you teach in future weeks.
- Remember that many young people won't feel comfortable sharing what they're thinking and processing with a big group. Provide consistent small groups and make sure that every young person is regularly connecting with one or more adult leaders who will ask them the kinds of open-ended and meaningful questions that invite young people to safely talk and reflect.

Give Teens Chances to Interactively Explore the Bible

We'll get into curriculum more in the next section, but regardless of the topic of any given gathering, always look for ways to invite young people in as active participants.

- Give small groups bags of props and instruct them to use them to act out a passage of Scripture in one minute or less.
- Invite young people to share favorite Bible passages they've read recently and why. This can work in a large group or small group settings. (Tip: arrange a few "ringers" who will be ready to share in advance.)

- Pick a verse to memorize together as a whole group. (Maybe one related to your ministry purpose statement from the *Leading Yourself* module).
- As you teach, use the “think-pair-share” model to engage young people with open-ended questions throughout the talk. For instance:
 - **Think:** “Take a minute to think for yourself: what do you think Jesus meant when he said, ‘Let he who is without sin cast the first stone?’”
 - **Pair:** “Turn to your neighbor and share with them what you were just thinking.”
 - **Share:** “Could a few people from different groups share with our big group what they thought about?” This gives every person the encouragement to reflect and share at a time and place where they are comfortable.

This gives every person the encouragement to reflect and share out loud in a setting that feels safe to them.

- After a time of teaching, invite a couple of young people to share their questions about what was shared. Do your best to respond; invite others from the group to respond; or say you’ll need to get back to them later (and then actually do get back to them later).
- Invite young people to be part of large group sharing every time - whether that’s reading a verse, sharing a personal story related to the topic, or praying out loud together.
- Help them develop basic skills to be able to read the bible on their own. A classic go-to is the **SOAP method** for basic bible study:
 - Starting with reading a **(S)**cripture passage
 - **(O)**bserving the key themes and messages
 - considering ways to **(A)**pply the passage to daily life
 - and closing with **(P)**rayer, drawing from what God revealed in that day’s reading.

Invite Young People to Take Action With Their Faith

- Look for ways to regularly serve together. Invite teens to help decide what makes the most sense for your group based on your community and interests. (Find much more on the importance of service and how to do it well in the *Service and Justice* Field Guide).
- Invite teens to participate in designing what your youth gatherings look like - whether that's as a formal student leadership team that meets regularly, or more informally through casual conversations. Ask young people what they think about how things are going with youth ministry and what might be good to change. Keep an open mind. Listen to their perspectives. Ask follow-up questions, and invite them to help come up with experiments that make things different.
- Invite young people to be leaders of small group discussions.
- Invite teens to be part of leading worship, greeting attendees, running audio, helping with set up and tear down, or anything else they might possibly have an interest in.
- Host an "Ask Us" panel: Have young people write anonymous questions in advance. Sort through them and pick a few that feel relevant and helpful to your group. Then invite a panel of youth to respond to them.

Pause for Reflection & Action

Look back over the last few pages—all those great, practical ideas. If you've printed this out, put a big star next to five to ten of them that you would like to experiment with, introduce to your young people, or learn more about. If you're reading this on a screen, copy and paste those five to ten ideas into some other format where you can activate them!





Assess What You're Teaching to Ensure Young People's Identities Are Rooted in the Basics of the Christian Faith



One of our TENx10 partners shared a story about the youth ministry at his church, where he volunteers. His church has a very high view of the Bible. In other words, their theological conviction is that the Bible is God's primary revelation, and should be a central focus of what the church (and youth ministry) is about. But after years of thinking their youth ministry small groups were really hitting it out of the park, they had a stark realization. Their small groups were great places of belonging for young people, but they were so focused on having fun and talking about each other's lives that most groups never got around to even looking at a Bible verse or talking about Scripture. They described their realization this way:, "Our small groups have been mostly therapeutic. We've succeeded in creating safe places, and in teenagers being known. But we've dropped the ball in helping our teenagers have any contact with the Bible!"

We can all benefit from regularly reflecting on what we're teaching in our ministries about the Bible and the character of God. The next section is designed to help you do just that.

Make a list of every topic you've taught your youth ministry in the last six months.



Now, let's evaluate your teaching using the following questions:

- Have you covered the basics of the Christian faith? Based on the Apostle's Creed - a statement of faith that outlines the essentials of our Christian faith and that TENx10 upholds - the basics of our Christian faith might entail:
 - Who God is
 - Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection
 - The Holy Spirit
 - The church
 - Sin and forgiveness
 - Our resurrection, judgment, and life after death
- What Scripture passages have you taught? Have you taught from both the Old and New Testaments? The Gospels? The Epistles?
- Based on your teaching, what would your young people say the Bible is about?
- Does your weekly teaching always connect to Jesus? Since the entire Bible points to Jesus, your teaching should too. Young people—particularly those who are newer to their faith or the church—won't always be able to make those connections on their own. It's your job to help them connect the dots between whatever you're talking about and Jesus.
- Does your teaching help young people see themselves as beloved children of God? Do your teens understand that they are both sinners and sanctified? While humanity's fall happened, it's not the end of the story, so it shouldn't be the end of your teaching either.



Once you've evaluated your teaching using the above questions, invite others involved in your ministry to do the same. Ask key volunteers, parents and caregivers, senior leaders, and even teenagers to answer the same questions. Then compare their answers with yours. If your answers are different, gather your team to discuss what they're seeing, so you can better assess what's actually happening in your ministry.

If your answers are similar, continue building on your ministry's strengths, while at the same time making minor and major changes to address your weaknesses.

While a set curriculum isn't everything, having one can significantly aid or hinder your quest to anchor young

people's identities in Christ. Using curriculum from a trusted source provides multiple benefits:

- They tend to have built-in a variety of topics, including Bible book studies, theological basics, and felt needs of young people. In other words, smart people have done this work for you.
- Since asking great questions is such an important priority in youth discipleship, it's great to have help from professionals who know how to write great questions!
- Using a curriculum as your starting point saves you tons of time, which leaves you more time for the critical relational aspects of youth ministry.



If you do use a purchased curriculum, we still strongly suggest that you modify it to your unique context. As theologically and educationally trained as those curriculum writers might be, they don't know your young people!

We encourage you to meet with key stakeholders and prayerfully explore a range of great resource options that cover the basics of faith, like [TENx10's Faith Foundations series](#). TENx10 also has many partners who create other curricula that might work for you.

Set a learning sequence.

As your ministry grows and takes shape, you might also find it helpful to establish a scope and sequence for middle school and high school ministry. That ensures the basics of faith are taught repeatedly during the critical period in which young people are already trying to answer the question, "Who am I?"

An example of a scope and sequence for middle school through high school that you can contextualize for your setting is included at the end of this Field Guide.





Helping Launch Anchors and Build Tether Points



Mariela has been the part-time youth worker at her church for a number of years. She's also the mom of three young kids. While balancing those roles requires regular recalibration, she loves the work she gets to do with young people. Recently, she shared the following: "Until a year ago, I was happily gliding along in youth ministry, doing what we've always done: creating a fun and engaging space for the dozen-or-so youth from our little church to hang out in a positive environment." But a year ago, Mariela went through an earlier version of the Field Guide you're currently reading, and it pretty much rocked her world. She said, "It dawned on me that, for all the good stuff I could name about our youth group, we were basically teaching kids that 'Jesus likes you, and you should be good,' nothing more. And I realized that our youth group graduates totally fit the patterns talked about in the TENx10

resources—the majority of them, sadly, fading away from active faith within a couple of years of graduation."

Mariela sprang into action. First, she had dinner with her small team of volunteers and her church's pastor to talk about the problem and get some buy-in on experimenting with change. Then Mariela, with help from her team, staked her claim that their youth ministry was going to have "two rails" (her language) for the next year: two priorities for forming identities anchored in Christ. First, they were going to regularly introduce the young people to new spiritual practices, about every other week. These were mostly a variety of prayer practices, but also included other things like serving together and giving testimony. After each experiment, the group would debrief, and those practices that resonated with the group became more regular opportunities.

In addition, Mariela developed a teaching plan for the year that ramped up Bible engagement and included the use of the [Alpha Youth Course](#) (a free “basics of Christianity” video series⁴) as a basis for teaching and dialogue about core Christian theology.

A year later, Mariela says, “We have a ways to go, but I’m seeing amazing progress. In the past, our kids knew they were Christians, but really didn’t know what they believed, or why. Now I can tell that they’re internalizing it.”

You, youth worker, are a hero - whether you feel like it or not. And this might sound cheesy, but it’s true. Jesus is so pleased with you. It’s hard work to be consistent in the work of youth ministry. But if we stop to think about it, none of us wants to merely entertain young people for a handful of years, only to see them walk away from their faith in their twenties. We want to help teenagers develop anchor points for their faith, an identity tethered to the confidence that they are beloved children of God. We get to play a role in this beautiful tethering process.

What a gift to us, that God includes us in what’s got to be some of God’s favorite work, right?

⁴ <https://alphausa.org/youth/>. Alpha is free to use. It’s really created to have conversations about Christianity with those who are not yet believers but want to explore Christianity’s basics. However, many youth workers have also found Alpha can be a useful tool for young people who already believe, but aren’t clear on what that means.

Closing Reflection & Action

As you worked through this material, what was Jesus showing you?

Where do you see God's grace already at work in the lives of your youth? What are you celebrating and giving thanks for?

Re-read your notes above. What are a few practices you will put in place to (A) give teens space to express faith, doubt, and questions; (B) give teens chances to explore the Bible interactively; (C) invite young people to take action with their faith; (D) and invite young people into different forms of spiritual practices?



Tool: Sample Teaching Scope & Sequence

Middle School Year 1: A walkthrough of the Bible, beginning to end, that helps young people understand the arc of Scripture and the redemptive nature of who God is

Middle School Year 2: Attributes of God

Middle School Year 3: Jesus—What Jesus taught, did, and why it matters

High School Year 1: Basics of faith

- What the Bible is and why it matters
- Who God is
- Who Jesus is
- Who the Holy Spirit is
- Hot topics

High School Year 2: The Church

- What the Church is and why it matters; God's design for the Church
- The importance of Christian community
- Your role in the Body of Christ
- Spiritual Gifts
- Hot topics

High School Year 3: Living out your faith

- The two greatest commandments
- Sharing the Gospel
- Service and justice
- Spiritual disciplines and practices
- Hot topics



Tool: Sample Teaching Scope & Sequence

High School Year 4: Who I am?

- Identity in Christ
- Call and vocation
- How to make faithful decisions
- Hot Topics

Depending on how large your youth ministry is, such a scope and sequence could be set up as a rotation where your entire middle school or high school ministry covers a certain topic in a year OR as a year-by-year model. For example, you could have 6th graders discuss the Year 1 curriculum while 7th graders discuss Year 2 and 8th graders discuss Year 3.

The high school scope and sequence includes a Hot Topics series each year. This series is designed to address the questions your young people are currently asking and/or the faith-related issues dominating the news. As we saw in Avery's story, questions impact a young person's identity and faith formation. While it can be scary to talk about them in our youth ministries, it's important to realize that young people are already discussing hard and complex issues. The only question is whether or not your church is going to be part of that conversation.

There is, naturally, some overlap between some of these topics. That's intentional. The overlap invites you to employ spiral learning, a teaching method where you intentionally revisit topics multiple times, each time at a more advanced level. As you do, young people see and understand that the Bible's stories are rich and complex, just like their own lives.



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