

INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Topic: Discipleship

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Biography:

Rachael Heffer serves as the Youth Adviser for Ely Diocese. As part of the Mission Team, she is passionate about equipping, resourcing, training, and encouraging employed Youthworkers, Volunteers, and Clergy in their engagement with 11-18s in their churches, communities and schools. Previously Rachael spent 14 years with Youth for Christ developing resources and networks for evangelism amongst young people.

Rachael is married to Darren who is an Architect in Cambridge, and has two young boys. She is also a local Youthwork Volunteer, Mentor, and trained Coach.

INTRODUCTION

Our interaction with young people needs to be all about not just putting on great and attractive programmes, but about creating healthy and intentional discipling relationships.

The aim of these relationships is one that sees us walking with them in the variety and complexities of their young lives and helping them to make sense of life, in all its ups and downs, as well as exploring how the Christian faith and God's big story can connect relevantly with their everyday life.

Intentional relationships allow us to take time to consider *the whole person* – their character, personalities, and the challenges that they personally are facing at different times. Being intentional in our youthwork/ministry/discipleship alongside a young person also allows us to discern where they are at in terms of any faith context, and for us to consider how we can best see them explore and develop their own faith, one step at a time.

Three important factors within developing intentional relationships with a young person / group of young people are:

- **Time** - it can be costly as it takes time to think, consider, and plan for growth and input / journeying with them in all areas
- **Prayerfulness** - this is essential in our discipleship of young people as we recognize it is God who ultimately walks with them and guides them in their day-to-day challenges and circumstances.
- **Celebration** – We need to be Encouragers – able to chart and spot the good and the bad (in terms of the situations a group of individual might be facing) but also to celebrate all that

is good, positive, worthy of encouragement in their lives in whatever way that might be most welcomed or meaningful for them.

THEOLOGY

Jesus modelled intentional relationships all of the time. He formed a group of young people around him and he journeyed with them intentionally in the every-day nature of life, exploring elements of faith, God's words in the scriptures, and God's heart for His people, through the natural hum-drum things of life that they were facing – jobs, family, fishing, loss, money, love, relationships, truth, honesty, commitment etc.

Jesus also chose to surround himself by young people – those that had a lot to learn, were keen, emerging leaders, full of energy and hope, and he invested time in them.

This was often sacrificial time – demanding love, nurture, teaching, mentoring, training, rebuking, challenging, comforting etc. His vision was to equip, train and release them into the God-given roles that they were called to fulfil.

Other examples – Moses & Joshua, Eli & Samuel, Elijah & Elisha, Mordecai & Esther etc.

PRACTICALITIES

Developing intentional relationships demands time in various ways:

- **Time to pray** about your individual young people and discerning the best ways of discipling them, engaging with them at their current point in their journey of life and/or faith
- **Time to meet and gather**
- **Time to plan** the best use of time spent together i.e. programmes, activity, study, service, leadership development etc.

The Discipleship Scale:

Whilst 'Mapping' sounds like a Business-tool, use of a Discipleship scale or similar can really help Leaders to consider the needs of their young people and where they are at in their faith-journey – from accepting, to belonging, making a commitment, to peer to peer evangelism.

The challenge is to then allow this to help shape the youthwork programme or journey over the course of that term, year etc.

It may be that the following are then worth considering:

- Mentoring links
- Rallying the Church to pray for your young people
- Developing a Youthwork Strategy for the coming 1-2 years
- Planning a Residential – to help develop relationships and fuel the input your young people receive

REFLECTION & LEARNING

Try the following exercise to help you reflect on your intentional relationships with your young people:

- Put some time aside to sit down quietly. Make a list of the names of all of your young people.
- Consider each individual against the backdrop of the **Discipleship scale** (one example – Write down the words *SEEKER*---*BELIEVER* --- *FOLLOWER* --- *LEADER* and use these as a mapping-guide, or there are others to suggest here...)
- Pray over that individual and chart where you feel they are at in their discipleship journey

ASK:

- How is my current Youthwork programme/outreach meeting the current needs of this individual young person?
- How can I look to encourage them onto the next steps in their journey of faith?
- How can I increase aspects of challenge, leadership, serving around them?
- Where are there emerging leadership skills etc.?

Allow these outcomes for the individuals and the group to effect and alter your ongoing Youthwork programming!

DEVELOPING PRACTICE

Developing on further in Intentional relationships and drawing young people together and into the Church family – **Consider**.....

- How do we profile and encourage prayer for young people within the Church family?
- How do we value them and listen to them?
- How do we connect them to other Christian young people?
- Where can they serve? Lead? Input and share?
- How can we stay in contact with them 1) if they 'drop us' (let us NOT drop them!!) and 2) if/when they go off to university or move away for work purposes etc. ?

How can we join them in Mission activity and outreach?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- 'Discipleship starts where people are':

<https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/discipleship/starts>

- <http://youthministry360.com/blog/five-characteristics-healthy-discipleship-your-youth-ministry/>

Youthwork Mentoring guides: <https://www.premieryouthwork.com/Resources/Mentoring>