

How to start a youth ministry from scratch!

Part 1: Getting Your Foundations Right

You want to start a youth ministry at your church (or perhaps you've been kindly asked by your minister)? That's great! Youth ministry is an important ministry but where do you start?

There are probably a thousand different starting points for a youth ministry, many of which probably generate out of circumstance and a pressing need or demand ("ahh! what do we do with our young people?"). I don't propose to have all the answers for your situation but I do intend to equip you with some essential questions to help you get off on the right foot.

The first thing you need to do is work out what type of youth ministry you want to run based on your theological principles. This is where so many youth ministries come unstuck. There can often be such immediate pressure to get something up and running that your youth ministry is formed mostly around practical issues rather than thinking how your model of youth ministry might cultivate and grow young people into being more like Jesus.

Below is a table of 3 common types of youth ministry, the first 2 types are not exclusive to Christian youth ministry and can be found in secular youth work organisations as well (like the Police & Community Youth Clubs etc). The last column shows a type of youth ministry that is exclusive to Christian organisations (typically the church) and the model of youth ministry that you find resourced on this site fits into the "Bible Focus" type of youth ministry in this column.

I've formed a model of youth ministry shaped on this third column and have been using it since 2005 starting with a new youth group of 6 young people and up to (currently) 40. That's not to say that it's the best or only faithful model of a "Bible Focus" youth ministry, but I'm satisfied that it faithfully puts our theological principles into practice and is a consistent outworking of biblical values and evangelical beliefs.

As a side note: To be fair, there are many people who run the "let me entertain you" type youth ministry as a culturally comfortable way-in for non-Christian young people to hear the gospel. This type of youth ministry often looks like the way it's described in column 2 but with the introduction of a short gospel talk/explanation as part of the youth gathering and the further aim of moving young people on to a more Bible focussed youth group or Bible study group after they've heard the gospel. For a full assessment of this type of youth ministry strategy read "[Changing the World Through Effective Youth Ministry](#)" By Ken Moser.

Suffice it to say, the real draw backs of having this youth ministry strategy is that (1) it's incredibly resource heavy, taxing on both financial and human resources; (2) you often lose people with every transition; (3) people rarely "graduate" or "move on" from the "let me entertain you" type youth ministry into the Bible focused youth group/small groups; (4) the maturing of faith in your Christian young people is often stunted. It's a model of ministry akin to that championed by Willow Creek, which after 3 decades, has now abandoned as "a mistake" ([read something about it here](#)).

3 TYPES OF YOUTH GROUPS

TYPE:	The drop-in centre	"Let me entertain you"	Bible Focus
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Get kids off the street.▪ Give kids something to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A fun alternative for unhelpful social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Teach & study the Bible▪ Be Christian community

3 TYPES OF YOUTH GROUPS

TYPE:	The drop-in centre	“Let me entertain you”	Bible Focus
AIMS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get kids off the street. ▪ Give kids something to do. ▪ Provide a safe environment (ie. drug & alcohol free). ▪ Social welfare focus. ▪ Counsel and skill young people. ▪ Culturally comfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A fun alternative for unhelpful social activities. ▪ Get kids off the street. ▪ Provide a safe environment (ie. drug & alcohol free). ▪ Culturally comfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach & study the Bible ▪ Be Christian community ▪ Live out the values of Jesus ▪ Engage real life with real Jesus ▪ Counter cultural
OFTEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fitness and sports (eg. boxing, weights, basketball etc.) ▪ Computer gaming ▪ Lounging ▪ Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Crazy games ▪ Theme nights (eg. 70's night etc) ▪ Excursions ▪ Movies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bible study groups and/or talk ▪ Bible Games ▪ Sharing life with others ▪ Lots of Jesus
EXAMPLE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PCYC ▪ Local council ▪ Church youth groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blue light disco ▪ Youth council activities ▪ Student run school socials ▪ Church youth groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church youth groups
PERCEIVED AS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A “hang-out” place ▪ Access point for services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fun and games or... ▪ cheap and lame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boring or odd ▪ Unattractive for outsiders ▪ “Churchie” Group
WHY?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because you care about disadvantaged kids and don't want them to get up to mischief or miss life opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because you like organising and running events. ▪ You want kids to have fun without drugs, alcohol, trouble or bad influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because you want kids to know and trust Jesus & adopt his values. ▪ Because you believe this can only happen by God's Word. ▪ You want kids to “do life” with Jesus.
CRITICISM:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It's resource heavy: lots of time, equipment, money. ▪ Requires a convenient “centre”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can't compete with professional entertainment. ▪ Hard to come up with a “bigger & better” activity each week. ▪ It's resource heavy: lots of time to organise, events cost money. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If it's not done well, it will be boring.

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Have you worked out which model you want to run?

Ask: Why do I want to start a youth ministry? What's the aim?

Just to give you an idea of how your choice of youth ministry type affects your next step, if you chose:

1. **"the drop in centre"** type of YM, then your first step will be to secure a large space (eg. a hall), some community funding for equipment (eg. gym/sports equipment, pool tables etc), and link in with your local social services. Once that is set up, recruiting and training volunteers is next.
2. **"let me entertain you"** type of YM, then your first step is to secure an adequate budget (from your church or elsewhere) that will support the financial burden of creating and running new and exciting activities on a weekly basis. This model of youth ministry is quite resource heavy on youth leaders and so you will need to recruit quite a few very energetic and creative leaders to spread the load and keep things fresh.
3. **"Bible Focus"** type of YM, then your first step is to recruit some leaders who can commit to sharing the Bible with passion and creativity and who are not skeptical that the word of God is powerful to change lives.

This is just a taste of how the foundation of your type of youth ministry will affect the process in starting a youth ministry from scratch. Check out ["How to start a youth ministry from scratch! \(Part 2\)"](#) for more detail on beginning a **Bible Focus** youth ministry.



Some Discussion Questions:

- Is this true? Are there broadly speaking 3 types of youth ministry? What might you add or take away? Are the descriptions true and fair?
- What has been your experience of youth ministry in the past and where would it fit in on this table?
- What are the theological principles that are going to form the foundation of your youth ministry?
- Why do you want to start a youth ministry and what do you want it to achieve?

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Part 2: Recruiting leaders & looking after them

OK, given that this website is all about resourcing a "**Bible Focus**" type of youth ministry ([from these 3 choices](#)), we're going to follow the process for starting up a model for this type of youth ministry from scratch. (Haven't yet thought about what type of youth ministry you want to start? [click here](#))

The aims of a "**Bible Focus**" type of youth ministry are:

- To teach & study the Bible
- Be a Christian community
- Live out the values of Jesus
- Engage real life with real Jesus
- Be a counter cultural experience (a glimpse of heaven even!)

You do this type of youth ministry because you want kids to know and trust Jesus & adopt his values; you believe this can only happen by God's Word; because you want kids to "do life" with Jesus.

Your first step then is to recruit some leaders who can commit to sharing the Bible with passion and creativity and who are not skeptical that the word of God is powerful to change lives. You really need to start with a good group of committed leaders - this is **crucial!**

When choosing leaders remember that "Youth leader" does NOT mean "Young Leader". In fact, the Christian people in your church who are post-kids (probably in their 40's +) are possibly your best leaders. They don't need to be "young and hip" (their out-of-touch character probably makes them cooler). Your older leaders will provide stability, experience, Christian maturity and a wealth of perspective on young people - especially if they've already raised their own!

Make sure you give your prospective leaders clear expectations of what being a youth leader involves. [Here is an example.](#)

Priority #1: Once you have recruited your leaders and got together a team, your first priority is to make sure you [look after them](#).

Youth leaders are the engine room of any youth ministry large or small, be it of 6 young people or 600. The value of unity and sustainability in your youth leadership team cannot be underestimated. You want a team of leaders that works together, loves each other, is committed to each other, and can sustain an enjoyment of youth ministry that will last the next 20 years.

The average turnover for a youth minister or leader is something like 2 years (*someone have the exact stats?*) and you wonder at the damage inconsistency like that causes... A lesson worth knowing is that even the most average youth minister/leader can do extraordinary things over enough time (or extraordinary damage with the wrong foundations!), so choose the right leaders and hang on to them for the long haul. A stint of 6 years, seeing a group of new high schoolers (year 7) through to the end (year 12), should be the bare minimum.

How do you look after your youth leaders?

- Design a "good enough" year program so your leaders know what's happening and when. (A year program is not just about what's on & when, but more about planning what you'll be teaching throughout the year. Think strategically about your teaching series for the year. [Here are some ones I've used.](#)
- Keep their role clear (ie. keep to the "leaders expectations" document).
- Each term, give them a current term program that is more specific than the year program. [Here are some examples.](#) There's more on this in Part 4: "*Structuring the main Youth Group Gathering*" but if you use the resources on this site, then putting together the term program doesn't have to be a committee process (tedious!), because each week you do at least the same 5 things:
 1. Interactive Bible teaching
 2. Prayer time
 3. Sharing time

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4. An activity that helps them know God or their peers better (or both!)
5. And Supper

- You just do these same things in different ways each week. In that way the program has the safety of familiarity and the excitement of the unknown by being predictably unpredictable for your young people. So just do the term program yourself or nominate 1 person on your team to do the term program for everyone.
- Schedule leader's meetings often enough that you are able to keep good communication, but not so often they become meaningless and burdensome.
- Plan the agenda of your meetings so they don't go overtime and they stay on track.
- Train them and/or be trained together.
- As far as you are able, don't schedule things in holidays. Give your leaders 2 weeks rest each term.
- Do some social things together. Have dinner, watch a movie, a live-in for a week (!), a retreat, whatever...

Next step: "[How to start a youth ministry from scratch! \(Part 3\): looking after your families](#)"



Some Discussion Questions:

- What qualities would make up your ideal youth leader?
- Do these stack up with God's ideals of leadership?
- Who are the people in your church who have the godly character, Christian maturity, faithfulness, availability and teachability to be a youth leader?
- What are your expectations of a youth leader? What are you asking them to commit to?

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Part 3: Looking After Your Families

If you chose the “**Bible Focus**” youth ministry model based on your theology, values and principles ([part 1](#)), and you've recruited the right leaders and have the systems in place to look after them ([part 2](#)), then here is step 3: **look after your families!**

If you're wondering why this is the next step, it's because this type of ministry (in fact all youth ministry) is based on these 3 foundations:

Firstly, young people are people. You don't do youth ministry because you have a passion (“a heart for”) young people but because you have a passion for people. Youth is a temporary phase of life, and we must love people regardless of age, as children, adolescents, and adults. Youth ministry begins much earlier than adolescence and endures far beyond the teenage years.

Secondly, young people come attached with families. To think that youth ministry is just about teaching and engaging with young people is a focus too narrow. Ministry to young people must include ministry to their parents and the family unit as a whole in whatever form it comes (eg. As a single parent family, foster family, adopted family etc).

Thirdly, the youth minister/leader does not replace the role of the parents in raising their children in the Christian faith, as if the teaching and instruction of children is sub-contracted to the youth minister/leader. The role of the youth minister/leader is to partner with parents and aid them in their responsibility by modeling godly living, teaching the Bible, and training young people to act rightly. This even applies to young people with non-Christian parents, who even though they're obviously not raising their children in the Christian faith are still responsible for it, something that by the grace of God they will come to understand as they hear the gospel (ironically, probably through their children).

This is why **looking after the families of your young people** is the next step before anything else. (for a well argued view of families and youth ministry read "[Perspectives on Family Ministry](#)" by Timothy Paul Jones)

So how do you care for the families of your young people?

- Each term, give the parents a version of your term program that outlines the basics: what you're teaching, what you're doing, where you're doing it and when. They should know what they're sending their kids to.
 - If the group is small enough and you've got the time, hand deliver the programs each term and visit the parents for a chat.
 - Communication with parents is paramount!
 - A tip I learnt early on is to address anything sent by mail to the parents and not the young person. Young people sometimes forget to pass on things to their parents (ever seen teenager leave a note from school in their bag? Ah ha). Send it to the parents and they can pass on the info to the kids.
 - If you're doing a Facebook group for your youth ministry then add the parents into that group as well.
- Don't over-program events. 2 extra social activities a term is plenty on top of your regular main youth group gathering each week of term.
- Work out a system to keep track of your young people. Make a database and implement a system like 'If they miss 2 weeks send them a "we missed you" postcard' etc...

The next step in “How to start a youth ministry from scratch!” is ([Part 4a](#)): **Structuring the regular Youth Group Gathering**

Some Discussion Questions:

- Are these 3 foundations true? What would you add or subtract?
- In your mind, how do youth ministry and families connect?
- Imagine you are the parent of a teenager, how would you like to be involved? What would you like youth ministry to achieve for you and your teen? What are your expectations?

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Part 4a: Structuring Your Regular Youth Group Gathering

If you chose the “**Bible Focus**” youth ministry model based on your theology, values and principles ([part 1](#)), and you’ve recruited the right leaders and have the systems in place to look after them ([part 2](#)), and have designed a program that looks after your families ([part 3](#)), then step 4(a) is to **structure your regular youth group gathering**.

The first image that usually pops into someone's head when the term “youth group” or “youth ministry” is mentioned is that often chaotic gathering of overly energetic, socially awkward, and sexually frustrated teenagers on any given Friday night of school term... It seems inevitable that any gathering of young people will have to contain a mix of chaotic games (often messy) and activities that are thinly veiled attempts to make teenagers flirt with each other for the entertainment of the onlookers (E.g., “[Honey if you love me give me a smile](#)”, “[Straws and Rubber bands](#)”, etc). But the good news is it doesn't have to be that way!

Because young people are people first, and they need what all people need - the transforming power of God’s Word in his son Jesus by the Spirit -then the regular youth group gathering should be centred around God's Word. This is why the aims of a “**Bible Focus**” type of youth ministry are:

- To teach & study the Bible
- Be a Christian community
- Live out the values of Jesus
- Engage real life with real Jesus
- Be a counter cultural experience (a glimpse of heaven even!)

This is really about your theology of church, what you believe Christian gathering is all about, what Christians do when they're gathered together, and why they meet in the first place. If you don't know what your theology of church is, here is a really helpful place to start: www.bettergatherings.com.au (and you can have a crack at this article if you want to be pushed a little further: “[knoxrobinson-for-today](#)”)

While you work out what your theology of Christian gathering is, I think a good biblical and simple working definition is “**God's people gathered around His Word**”. This means that your Sunday church meetings, your Bible study groups, your kid's club, and your youth group all count as type of Christian gathering if their primary purpose is to meet around God's Word, that is, to know him in the way he reveals himself by his Word and ultimately in the “Word made flesh” - Jesus. A Christian gathering is a representation of the heavenly church and should contain the things that Christians do when they gather:

- Teaching from God's Word
- The public reading of God's Word
- Singing to God and to each other about God
- Prayer for each other and the world
- Opportunities to share the Christian life together, to know each other better and encourage one another
- Fellowship around food, eg. supper, morning tea, dinner, etc.

A Christian gathering doesn't have to look like a typical Sunday church service, and given that young people are open to experimental learning, you should take the opportunity to be creative with how the Bible is taught and how you create the opportunities to share the Christian life together, to know each other better and encourage one another. This website is an attempt to share some of the creative ways that you can do these various components of Christian gathering: [Resources Link](#).

The Christian gathering isn't limited to these components/segments of Bible Teaching, Singing, Prayer, Sharing Life, and Fellowship over Food. Apart from Bible Teaching and Prayer, it's not necessary to either have all of them or be limited by just these, having a regular memory verse time is quite a good addition for example.

Of course, there's now a big question pushing it's way into your mind isn't there...?

If the main youth group gathering is ordered around *Christian* gathering then **what about non-Christian young people?**

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Excellent question! Here you need to go back to your foundational [theological principles](#).

You chose the “**Bible Focus**” type of youth ministry because you want kids to know and trust Jesus & adopt his values. Because you believe this can only happen by God’s Word. And because you want kids to “do life” with Jesus and see what this looks like in practice. These are not merely discipleship reasons but missional ones too! The wise [Jodie McNeill](#) calls this “*Dual Action*”. What he means by this is that you can disciple people and mature them in the Christian faith while evangelising and gospeling non-Christians at the same time, it doesn't have to be either one or the other.

The Christian church has actually been operating this way for millennia.

(you can skip this next little indented bit if you don't care for the Biblical references)

The Bible paints a picture of God’s people as a diverse community of believers (Rev. 7:9-12) united in the cross (Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:12-13) with each member of the body of Christ gifted to build each other up into the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Therefore, the first priority of the church is to maintain the fellowship (Eph. 4:1-6), and edify the community of believers (1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12, 17, 26), as Jew and Gentile, Slave and Free, and Young and Old relate to each other by their common unity found in Jesus.

The function of the community of believers is to be both passive and active in evangelism. Passively, the church is a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16), a witness to the world and heavenly principalities through their unity and gathering in Christ (John 17:20-2; 1 Cor. 14:23-25; Eph. 3:8-10). Actively, the church is to continue the apostles commission in bringing the good news of Jesus to “all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). It is in this way that the church exercises the ministry of God’s Word to it’s members *and* the world.

The main youth group gathering can do the same.

Of course, the criticism is that **young people won’t come along to youth group that is all about God, Jesus and the Bible.**

Perhaps that's true enough. The world is, not surprisingly, quite resistant to the message of the gospel, and as much as people like the idea of Jesus (like Gandhi) they don't like him to tell them what to do. But the answer is not to then try and coax in non-Christians with worldly bait so you can then gently introduce a very other-worldly way of life (this is often the trick of the salesman “*free hotdog and drink if you come to our store on Saturday*”). The world doesn't need the church to mimic the worldly ideas of what a fulfilling life is (but with a much poorer budget and minus the sex and alcohol).

No, the answer is to hold out a way of life that the world will not and indeed *cannot* offer. The world needs the church to be the church, the bride of Christ, the members of his body. The world needs the church to proclaim the gospel and teach the Word of God in all its fullness. The world needs to see Christians gathering together because of their common unity in Jesus and not because of their common age or race or gender.

It’s for this reason that I believe it’s important that the main youth group gathering include both junior and senior high age young people and both genders because young people, like all people, need to learn the value of loving and relating to those different to them in age, sex, taste etc., and junior high age young people need to have senior high age young people to look up to. My aim is to never split them no matter how much we grow in number and especially no matter how much the senior high might complain about the immature juniors or the juniors complain about the boring seniors, if anything that’s the perfect reason to keep them together!

Surely when a non-Christian young person (or any person) walks into this type of Christian gathering they will be like the unbeliever in Corinth who sees God at work in His people gathered around His Word and exclaims “God is really among you!” ([1 Cor 14:24-25](#)).

Read on! This post is continued in How to start a youth ministry from scratch! ([Part 4b](#)): [The HOW of youth group gathering and activities](#)

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Some Discussion Questions:

- What has been your experience of regular youth group gatherings?
 - How effective do you think they were in maturing Christian young people?
 - How effective do you think they were in bringing young people into the Christian faith and growing that faith?
- What challenges do you perceive will come from structuring a gathering that both disciples Christian young people and evangelises?
- What challenges do you perceive will come from structuring a gathering that seeks only to make an environment comfortable for unbelievers and then introduce the gospel?
- What's your definition of church? What is your theology of Christian gatherings?
- What components do you think should be part of the Christian gathering? Do you think these are the same for gathering Christian young people?



Part 4b: The HOW of Youth Group Gathering & Activities

We use this table (below) as the framework for each of our term programs. All the rows down the left represent the weeks and dates of the school term to be programmed. All the columns across the top represent the segments that make the weekly youth group gathering. The essentials are **Bible Teaching** and **Prayer** (see the previous post on this: [structuring your regular youth group gathering](#)), but we have also added: **Bible Game/Mixer**, **Sharing Time**, **Memory Verse**, and **Supper**. We also have a youth group band and do singing at our youth group but they have a separate roster that complements the term program. The other columns, as you can see, are for things like teaching theme, special notes, and who's doing what.

[illegible]

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These regular segments at our regular youth group gathering mean there is an element of comfortable predictability for our young people as they come to youth group week after week, and yet because the segments are done with different activities each week and are arranged in a different order most weeks, there's an exciting element of unpredictability that keeps it fresh. The advantage of this predictable structure is that young people know what they're inviting their friends and gain confidence in the youth group gathering and what they can expect to happen when their friends are there.

The term program really starts at the beginning of the year when I put together the year's teaching program ([2005-2012 examples here](#)) and then at the start of each school term I put the term program together by slotting in that term's teaching program and then fill out the rest of the table by inserting the various activities which are found on this website ([download the complete segment activities document here](#)).

In the Game/Mixer column I try to have a mix of Bible games and mixer games throughout the term so we're doing activities that help us learn about God and each other throughout the whole term - these are 2 main aims of Games/Mixers in our regular youth group gathering and they provide another layering of Bible teaching that is creative and enjoyable. Ultimately I try to pick activities for all the segments that will dovetail well with the teaching or create a good spread of variety over the term.

Once the term program is complete, it is then up to the MC (one of the youth group leaders) to put together a running sheet of how those segments will be arranged for the gathering and to nominate/ask other leaders to run those activities. All the leaders know what is expected of them at any given youth ministry gathering because of the "[Leader Expectation & Leader Roles](#)" documents [here](#).

Below is an example of a running sheet for week 1 using the above example term program (you can download the running sheet template as a Word document on the [Download page](#)). You can see how the various segments have been arranged and delegated to different leaders. Each segment has the description of how it's run cut from the segments.doc ([here](#)) and pasted into the right hand column of the running sheet so that everyone knows what they're doing and when.



Sunday night running sheet

Date: 03/02/2013

Time		What	Who	How
4.00	5 min	Welcome and opening prayer	Mike	Gather everyone together. Welcome everyone, especially new people. Ask that God will bless our time together. * Ask if anyone knows the memory verse 2x Songs:



Sunday night running sheet

Date: 03/02/2013

Time		What	Who	How
4.00	5 min	Welcome and opening prayer	Mike	Gather everyone together. Welcome everyone, especially new people. Ask that God will bless our time together. * Ask if anyone knows the memory verse
4.05	10 min	Singing	Salt band	2x Songs: * Rock of Ages * Hallelujah to the King of kings
4.15	20 min	Mixer: Find your twin & swap	Erin	This game is played in rounds, and in each round members of the group need to find their twin and ask 3 or 4 set questions. The leader of the activity gives direction for how each person is to find their twin in each round ie. Round 1- find someone the same height as you, round 2- find someone who is in the same year at school, round 3- find someone who like the same type of music, etc. When everybody has found their twin they ask each other the 3 or 4 set questions (ie. What's your name? How would you spend your last \$10.00? What's the best thing about youth group? Etc.). <u>Variation: Swap.</u> After finding you're twin and asking the questions for that round, swap one item with each other (ie. shoe, sock, necklace, hat, keys, etc.) and then move on to the next round. At the conclusion of all the rounds you should have a collection of items from the people you met. Ask a few people in the group to stand up and share what items they have, who they're from, and the answers to the questions, then return the items to their owners. After a few people have shared, make sure everyone returns the items.
4.35	35 min	Bible Teaching: Why we pray	Mike	
5.10	5 min	Singing	Salt band	1x Song * Take my life
5.15	10 min	Prayer Time: Prayer Card Shuffle	Alison	Prayer card shuffle is designed to help people who don't usually pray (or have never prayed), to pray out loud. Give everyone a card and ask them to write a prayer for themselves in the 3 rd person (eg. Mike writes on his card "dear God please help Mike..." etc). Then shuffle the cards and redistribute them. Pray out loud by going around the group one after the other, so that everyone ends up praying for another person. Ask the youth group to hold onto the cards and pray for that person during the week. <u>40+ NOTE:</u> If there's more than 40 people then after the cards have been shuffled and given out, just allow 5 minutes for people to pray through their card in silence rather than out loud.
5.25	5 min	Singing	Salt band	1x Song * See him coming
5.30	10 min	Sharing Time: LiT report back	Mike	Interview LiT campers. LAUNCH THE SALT VII!!!!
5.40	5 min	Notices	Mike	↳ Giving ↳ Bible Study groups... TBA ↳ Invite your parents next week
5.45	10 min	Supper Upstairs/outside	Dora H & Ben H	Move upstairs/outside to eat food and hang out.
6.00	166 hours till next week	Home	Everyone	This is where everyone goes home...

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You'll notice that there are other elements in my example term program and running sheet which I haven't described. We'll get to these later when we talk about how to include young people in serving at your youth ministry (that's what the Salt VII is about) and how to partner with parents and families as they raise their children in the Christian faith.

You'll also notice that there are activities included in the program and running sheet which aren't listed on this website or in the segments.doc, and that's because these are things which have to do with our youth ministry context and history and aren't universally applicable. You get the general gist though right?

These tools are not meant to be rigid expressions of what a regular youth group must be like but a helpful tool in getting yourself started off in a good direction.

The next post is "How to start a youth ministry from scratch! [\(Part 5\): Organising weekly youth Bible study groups](#)



Some Discussion Questions:

- What are the components/segments that you will use to structure your regular youth group gathering?
 - Why these and why not others?
- What do you think of the 2 goals for youth group Games/Mixers, ie., (1) to help people know each other better, and/or (2) to know God better?
- What challenges do you perceive will come from trying to make every Game/Mixer activity meet these 2 aims?
- What is the place for meaningless games at the regular youth group gathering?

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Part 5: Organising Regular Mid-Week Bible Study Groups

If you chose the “**Bible Focus**” youth ministry model based on your theology, values and principles ([part 1](#)), and you’ve recruited the right leaders and have the systems in place to look after them ([part 2](#)), and have designed a program that looks after your families ([part 3](#)), and have structured your regular youth group gathering and how put it together ([part 4a](#) & [part 4b](#)), then step 5 is to **start some regular mid week Bible study groups for your young people**.

These groups form the back bone of youth ministry and you should strongly encourage every teenager to attend a group for the year. It's a great mix of bible study, social activity, accountability, and fun, but on a more personal level than the main youth group gathering. The groups are user friendly, and a great place to invite friends!

My experience has been that we get more young people attending weekly Bible study groups than we get at the main weekly youth group gathering. It's also the place where our young people invite most of their non-Christian friends. That might seem a little counter intuitive given that it's a small group of young people meeting together around the Bible, but I think that's the appeal! It's a smaller group of people and therefore somewhat less intimidating for a newcomer, it provides a more intimate and personal setting to ask questions and explore the Bible, and it's not just for Bible study but also for sharing life together and building friendships.

You can organise a weekly Bible study group in any way you choose, but here's a couple of tips:

1. **Arrange your Bible study group around 3 components: Social/sharing time, Bible study time, and prayer time.**

Use these 3 components to arrange your Bible study group time roughly into thirds, let's say 30 minutes for each component with a total Bible study group time of 90mins. 90 minutes is long enough to cover the essentials and shorter enough to not be a weekly burden on the family time of young people.

2. **Use your social/sharing time to run an activity that helps you get to know them and for them to know each other.**

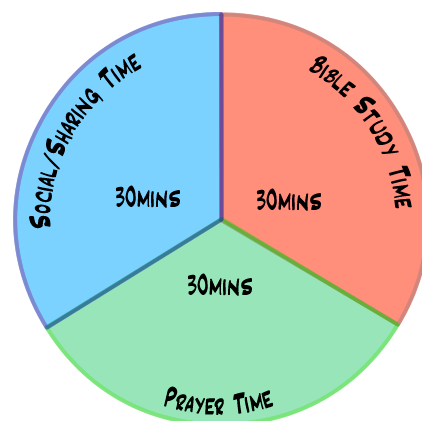
An example of a simple activity is to throw/pass around an item (like a ball or a cushion) and the person who throws the item gets to ask a question of the person who catches it, simple and effective. It's even better if you can use the social/sharing time to gain insight into their thoughts on the topic for the Bible study and a great lead in!

3. **If it's possible, use your home to host the Bible study group you run.**

A home is a much more relational environment to run a Bible study and more conducive to sharing life together than a church hall or meeting room. If your home isn't available (for space or whatever reason) then see if one of the young people in your Bible study group can host it at their house. This is an excellent option for involving parents and teaching hospitality. It's particularly valuable for young people who don't have Christian family or stable homes to be invited into the home of a peer and witness the love of their family. However, a church meeting room will do if that's what you've got! Don't let space prevent you from starting a weekly Bible study group, they're way to valuable.

4. **Start with single gender groups for junior high age youth.**

As far as you are able, I think there is an advantage of starting with single gender groups for junior high (years 7-9/10 in high school) age youth and then moving the groups to mixed gender by the time their of senior high school age (years 10/11-12 in high school). I think this avoids much of the competitiveness and awkwardness between guys and girls in their junior high years and moves them towards a more mature relationship to the opposite sex in their senior high years.



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I like to put all the names of our young people into a table that divides the columns into gender and the rows into school year and then use this method to work out how many young people we have for each Bible study group. Because the spread of age and gender is never consistent, the organisation of weekly Bible study groups changes from year to year. [Here's an example of the table and the method.](#)

5. Just start with what you've got.

It'd be great to have 6 groups start straight away with 5-12 people in each but the reality is you're just starting out so don't expect too much and don't wait until you've got a minimum of 5 or 8 or 10, if you've only got 2 boys then start a bible study with them. It's not ideal, but you need to start somewhere, so begin with just the 3 of you and grow it from there. Run the Bible study group at one of their homes with their parents around so that if only 1 boy turns up you can run the Bible study with the parents around - remember your safe ministry training: meet in an open visible place, and never alone.

6. Resource your leaders.

I think it almost goes without saying that your leaders need to be confident in running a Bible study group. They don't have to be trained seminarians, they just need to be able to guide a group of people through a study, facilitate a safe place for relationships, and be open to dialogue about the Bible. There's plenty of excellent Bible study resources for young people and leaders available out there (I've listed some below) so make the most of them, but most important however is that your Bible study leaders know the value of saying this one simple phrase "I don't know".

Young people are in an acute phase of testing and questioning all their previous held beliefs (not necessarily rejecting them) and they need a safe place where they can ask questions, doubt, and explore the Bible and life's mysteries without fear of being judged or rejected. A Bible study leader can do lots of good by openly saying "I don't know" in response to difficult probing questions, and a lot of harm in trying to answer questions they've not thought through. So give your leaders permission to not be the source of all Christian knowledge and either take the time explore the issue properly or defer to someone who can answer the issue with consideration.

Here's some great resources for weekly Bible study groups:

- For training your leaders to lead a Bible study group well (**Highly Recommended!!**):



["Leading Better Bible Studies" by Rod and Karen Morris](#)

- For material to use in youth Bible study groups:



["Studies 2 Go" and](#)



["More Studies 2 Go" by Julie Moser](#)

- Youthworks Australia has a tone of great Bible study resources for sale through their website here: <http://www.cepstore.com.au/c/101/youth-bible-studies>



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Some Discussion Questions:

- What has been your experience in being part of a regular Bible study group? What value have they been for you?
- How might regular mid-week Bible study groups add to the richness of your youth ministry?
- Why might you not run mid-week Bible study groups for your young people?
- What challenges do you perceive will arise from running mid-week youth Bible study groups?
- How confident and trained are you and your leaders for running mid-week youth Bible study groups?
- What training and resources are needed?

