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GIRLS MINISTRY ESSENTIALS

A Short Practical Guide

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Where to Start...

Welcome to Girls Ministry! Whether it's your daughter, your niece, that group of girls that cornered you one Sunday, your granddaughter, or an entire ministry of girls...it happened to you. You found your heart awakened to the needs of girls around you or to a particular girl God placed in your life. You don't know what to do with that awakening, but you are taking notice and this ebook seems like a great place to start. I'm glad that you did not choose to ignore that "awakening" in your heart to the girls that are around you. It's somewhat scary to embark upon this calling to minister to girls, whether it be one or many. It is my prayer that this ebook will be a helpful guide for you as you accept the call to mentor, not only for today but for a lifetime.

I know that Girls Ministry is a hot topic and seemingly new niche in today's churches, but it's important to know that Girls Ministry isn't new. You can spot God's design for Girls Ministry all throughout His Story. You can see evidence of reluctant mentors like Naomi, who walked with Ruth in the Old Testament. You can read about Elizabeth who mentored Mary during the exciting miracle pregnancies that God orchestrated in their lives. Let's not forget that mentoring to girls in the New Testament church is clearly spelled out in Titus 2.

"Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us."

Titus 2:4-8

I have heard and seen a lot of things as I have worked with girls, parents of girls and girl's leaders. I am concerned with the quick fix mentality that some people have in the Church as a whole in regards to ministering among and to girls. If we see a modesty problem among our young ladies the quick fix is a suggested fashion show or an event that tells girls what they should wear. In my experience these seem like a good idea until you realize that you are creating a 3-D magazine of the "immodest" outfits that have simply been modified with leggings, layers, and larger sizes.

I have searched scripture to find out how women told girls how they are to dress and live their lives to honor the God they serve and follow. Ironically I have yet to find a scripture that says, "and so elder women gathered the girls to sit at the feet of the prettiest women in the village who had modified the fashions of the day to adequately cover their bodies in a trendier way." Instead I find scripture that says the following:

"train the younger women to..." Titus 2:4

The word "train" in this passage is the greek word: σωφρονίζω which means to "encourage, urge". That word encourage is one we use a lot, but when you look at a definition, it truly gives some insight into what Girls Ministry is about.

Definition of *encouragement*: To give courage to; to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; to raise, or to increase the confidence of; to animate; to enhearten; to incite; to help forward

I love that phrase, "to help forward". When you as the mentor and minister to girls understand what it is that you are to encourage your girls with and to help forward them in their journey in pursuit of that, then you will find that Girls Ministry doesn't get sidetracked with fads and shallow work. See Girls Ministry doesn't start with a fashion show, or handing out a tiara labeled with a sticker that says "God's little Princess". Girls Ministry starts with YOU knowing that YOU were created in His image and your identity is being transformed by the work of Christ in and through you. That is the message that is central to your work of encouraging and urging as you walk alongside of the girls God has placed in your life. And the work of Girls Ministry isn't accomplished in a weekend, but it is an intentional commit-

ment to crockpot with the girls He's called you to love, not just microwave with them.

And that mission has been at work within men and women for a lot longer than the niche title “Girls Ministry” has been in existence. In fact, even if the word "Girls Ministry and Girls Minister" has just shown up on the radar of your church, I guarantee that it has been at work somewhere in your church even if it's not officially identified. Find out where God is moving among the girls at your church and begin building the ministry there.

Here's a quick survey to help you begin to identify where Girls Ministry is already at work in your church:

Set up a meeting with your pastor and student minister to ask these questions:

- *What women in our church have historically been the women who have taken an interest in girls? What, if any, girls only experiences have you known about in the past?*
- *What informal mentoring have you been aware of among girls in our church?*
- *What Sunday School teachers have journeyed with girls especially?*
- *What Small group leaders have taken initiatives of their own to care for girls? What moms have been advocates for girls or have done events on their own informally for girls in the past?*

As you begin to excavate where Girls Ministry has seeds planted or roots growing in your church, I know you will begin to see where you can partner and begin the work of *encouraging* the girls God has called you to.

I feel certain that the idea in terms of ministering to girls in biblical times took a life long approach of journeying with young girls for longer than a couple hours or even a weekend event. It called for sacrifice. It called for investment. It called for a denying of self. It's hard to give up our lives and time for others. But I wonder what would happen to the lives we pour Christ into and I wonder what happens to our lives when we empty ourselves and welcome Christ to be poured through us into others? I'm thankful for the women who do this in my life—for the mom who loves me sacrificially...for the women who claimed me for their own to

mentor...for the women who saw something in me when I saw nothing in myself...for the girlfriends that even now hold my hand in prayer literally when my husband is traveling and can't be there to hold my hand...for the girlfriends I have who model for me what it looks like to love your family...for the co-workers I have who are women and teach me how to be a better nurturer...a better listener. Thank you to those of you who model who are committing to the opposite of a quick fix in ministry.

Prayer for you:

I pray that we may continually turn our heads from the Quick fix of ministry and choose instead the long obedience of pouring our lives in the lives of those around us. God I pray that more men and women in our church will see this as an opportunity and responsibility to journey alongside girls to encourage them to know and seek their identity in You. Help us as we walk through this guide to build intentional plans that are rooted in that mission. Amen.



The First Girls Minister

As you step into the role of ministering to girls, whether that be one girl or a ministry of girls, I urge you to recognize that not only girls ministry roots have been laid before you arrived, but also to recognize that every girl you pour into is someone's daughter, granddaughter, niece, or sister. She may not have any Godly women in her life, or she may have an abundant network of faithful women who have accepted the call to walk alongside of her.

Your role is not to replace the first girls minister in these girls lives.

Working alongside of mothers is key to a healthy girls ministry. As you work with their daughters, remember to communicate clearly with mothers from the beginning. After all, whether they recognize it or not, mothers have the opportunity to be their daughter's first girls minister. So be intentional to bring mothers into the vision setting of the work of girls ministry.

Some of my very favorite people in ministry are moms I know. They are my friends and they are on “Team Amy-Jo”. They are people that I can count on to pray for me, with me, and sometimes they pray without me even knowing. These parents allow me to come alongside of them and co-minister. It’s a special bond. I get the unique vantage point of watching them love on their daughters through the teenage years, and I get to encourage both the daughter and mom as those times can sometimes be trying. I am thankful for the partnership we have. I am grateful for the friendship we have. I must say that I first learned this possible partnership from when I was a teen myself. My amazing mother took the time to allow some women to come into our lives to walk alongside of us. They are my mother’s friends, and they are my mentors. Even as some moved to places like Af-

rica or Mississippi, they remained in my life as my girl's minister's. Even to this day, these women hold a special place in our family. My husband affectionately calls them my Obi-wan-kenobi and my Yoda.

Here's what I've learned from them about partnering with moms to minister to girls:

1. Reinforce the values that the Godly parent is trying to encourage within their daughter.

I never received mixed messages from my mentors and my mom. They were on the same page. It made such a difference to hear something my mom had said to me, show up naturally in conversation with my mentor. I knew they were on the same page.

2. It's okay to hang out together with the mom and daughter.

Sometimes as a girls minister we may shy away from hanging out with students and their parents. However, if you can, try to schedule some girl time with both the daughter and the mom. It can be a healthy time of modeling a Christian friendship with the daughter. I loved hanging out with my mom and my mentors. It wasn't often, but we would sometimes invite them over for lunch or dinner after a church event.

3. Be present, not possessive.

The women that mentored me listened to what was going on in our family. They didn't overstep their bounds and so my mother was never threatened by their presence in my life. I think that came from their ability to listen and be present without being possessive. Now don't get me wrong, I knew I was their "girl" and I am shaped today because of their influence in my life, but they did not try to replace my mother. Instead, they worked alongside of her in a harmonious way that allowed me to see different role models during my formative years.

4. Call out the good things you see God doing in both the daughter and the mom.

The women that mentored me have been amazing at not only encouraging me and calling out the good things they see God doing in me, but also doing the same with my mom. I know they love us both. It was important for me especially because I had a difficult relationship with my father who didn't really know how to use his words to encourage. To hear my mentors talk to my mom about what they saw in me was so encouraging. And to hear them say things about my mother only reinforced the value of my mom in my eyes.

5. Create space for moms to come alongside of you in ministering to girls.

As I have served as a girls minister, I have really enjoyed bringing moms along to minister with me to not only their daughters but others as well. It has been an intentional shift of mine to ensure that in every small group and in every event we have, there are moms leading alongside of me. Even though I was not a mother for the first 10 years of my role as a girls minister, I still knew I was to celebrate this role for our girls and moms.

I know that it is imperative for a healthy girls ministry to have healthy role models of mothers serving within our girls ministry.

Here's some homework for you as you work to be that girls minister to the girls God has placed around you:

Ask yourself how many moms you know? If your relationships are dominated by moms and you are a mom yourself, then chances are you have a healthy understanding of the role of mothers in the lives of their daughters. For you, your homework is to sit down with a couple of other mothers and discuss how a mom can intentionally be a girls minister to her daughter. Do not make plans to do that yet, but simply as a group pray that God would lead you to celebrate that role of mom as the first girls minister in your home.

If you are not a mom and are not surrounded by moms, then I want you to begin praying for God to awaken your eyes to some women in your church that have been serving in the role as a mother. When you see those women, ask if you can take them to coffee. During coffee share how you are feeling God's call to mentor the girls in whatever capacity you are called to. Share with them that you have be-

come aware of how important it is to have mothers involved with that ministry to girls. Ask them what valuable insight they would have for you, and ask them to pray for you and with you as God takes you on this journey.

Prayer for you:

*God we are so thankful for the role of mothers. Help us as we minister to girls and their families to always be mindful of the ways to celebrate and encourage mothers so that girls know that the church and home is working towards the same purpose in raising girls to know their identity, purpose, and significance through Christ.
Amen.*



What's Your Message?

There are so many messages being communicated to girls everyday from peers, to popular tv shows, to Facebook ads, to magazines. Many of these messages are marketed to them over and over again. As much as you may think you can shout louder, you just can't. If you are a girls minister or volunteer worker, it may surprise you to actually add up the face time you have with students. It's pretty small compared to the face time they have with their peers. And Parents, you may have more face time, but unless you've been intentional with the messages they are hearing from you, you may just be white noise as well. So with the limited access to the girls you are ministering to, you need to be intentional with the messages they are hearing from you and seeing lived out in your life. So what's your plan to speak into their lives? What's your message to the girls God has placed in your life?

I'll share a little bit of my journey to discover this for the girls and ministry God called me to with the hope that it takes you to similar questions that begin to shape the intentional messages you share with girls.

It's crazy to think that this October marks my 11th year as a professional girls minister. I remember my first days on the job. In fact my very first day on the job was Fall Retreat 2002. The buses were waiting outside to take me to a campground where I would meet students for the first time. I walked away from the weekend excited and scared stiff of the new task I had taken on. I remember conversations ranging from people pointing out to me the girls who had eating disorders and needed counseling...all the way to leaders who were depending on me to make some traditions for some girls that had already experienced too many changes to mention in their high school career. I remember not being invited into

many conversations with girls, but having to figure out a way to get into their world. My fall-back phrase at the retreat when I couldn't figure out a way to start a conversation was: "Hey do you know where I can get a soda around here?"

When I left that retreat, It wasn't long after that I took a 6 hour drive back to my teenaged roots and spent some time with my 1st girls minister, who happened to be my mom.

I read a journal I had written as an 8th grader and I prayed that God would give me direction. I talked with my mom and we prayed as God began to reveal to us what were some key elements of my spiritual growth as a teen girl. We wrote down a list that was able to be summarized in 3 categories. As I spent the first year as a girls minister, I met with every grade of girls, with the leaders of those girls, and with several parents. I would listen to there stories about what girls ministry had been done before a professional girls minister had arrived on the scene.

And without revealing the categories that came of the prayer time my mom and I had regarding girls ministry, I would ask them to share with me what they believed a girls ministry should be about. In all the conversations, the responses would hit at least one if not all of the categories that I had written down.

I began to do some research of resources that were out on the market to help new girls ministers like myself shape an intentional ministry to girls. However, as I observed what resources were being created for girls at that time, I found it interesting that there were different categories being offered to teenaged girls. I began to see the same categories over and over again. I needed a phrase to capture what I was seeing so that I could talk with moms and other leaders regarding this phenomenon, so in the fall of 2003 it hit me. *Dating, dieting* and *dress* were the 3 topics that were constantly being discussed in resources and events for girls. I began to coin the phrase: "The 3-D's of girls ministry" and was excited to hear it was helpful to other ministry leaders as well. Since that time, I have continued to hear friends in girls ministry use my description of the often talked about topics but I would like to clarify what we should be offering instead. The 3 categories that God confirmed with my mom, myself, and later among the girls ministry where I serve, were "The 3 G's".

We began our girls ministry by clearly defining what we would be about. We would not be about “The 3 D’S”. We would be about the "3 G’s." Those “3 G’s” are what makes up our girls ministry name: Grl3: Girl to girl, girl to God, and Girl to go.

Those 3 G’s were key elements to helping me grow into the Christian woman I am today.

- ***Girl to girl is:*** connecting girls to Godly relationships with girls of all ages.
- ***Girl to God is:*** connecting girls to grow in their pursuit of God and His word.
- ***Girl to go is:*** connecting girls to their world to share God’s love.

The above intentional strategy of the 3G’s, impacts girls ministry by saying "This is what we are about" and reminds us of the mission instead of chasing the latest fad, trend, or "next big thing". Knowing the 3d's and how they impact a girls ministry is important too. Both have an impact, but unfortunately one leads towards a self-less journey and the other leads deeper into the Self-ish mindset.

I'm not saying to never mention the 3d's in your ministry to girls, but I am saying that they should not be what your ministry and message to girls is known for.

Once you have the overall structure of what the girls ministry seeks to accomplish, you can begin to put some meat on it. The above structure ensures that there is balance and direction instead of a feeling of drifting.

Homework

Spend some time praying with another person who shares this passion of girls ministry and pray that God would bring clarity regarding the direction you should lead these girls in.

Now that you have sought God and continue to seek His guidance, begin to think through what strategy, philosophy and over-all purpose God is guiding you to use to minister to the girls that God has placed in your life.

Can you explain it below in 1 minute or less? If not, you're not explaining the structure that holds up your ministry to girls, you're explaining the next layer. Get to the basic bones of your message, then add the meat.

Prayer for you:

God I pray for these mothers, girls ministers, and volunteers as they come before you to think through intentional plans to lead the girls you have placed in their lives. God you know exactly what direction will cause growth in the hearts of these girls, so God I pray that you will bring clarity, vision, and passion to the leaders you have called to lead. I pray that they will realize that a plan is not going to the local Christian bookstore and picking up the next "hot" bible study. Thank you for guiding us. Thank you for using us. We know that you love us and have given us an amazing adventure to serve you. Thank you. amen.



Recruiting

Finding leaders to pour into the lives of the girls you work with is not an easy job. There are many people who think they are called to work with girls because they lived through a particular story as a teen and have ordained that story to go and be told to any teen girl they know. Truth is, it takes more than an experience to work with teen girls. So how do you find leaders and be a leader who values God's transforming word? How do you find a leader who knows when to share a personal experience or when to simply listen and pray with a girl? How do you find a leader with pure motives of mentoring and not an agenda for personal gain? This chapter will walk you through some basics and tips to find, equip, and encourage the leaders God brings your way.

Recruiting

This may seem like a cheesy basic, but I want to walk you through what happens when you truly begin to pray for the type of leader you need in the ministry. Several years ago, I was looking at some leaders that were coming to us, and the many empty spots that needed leaders, and I determined that I was in a place where I was desperate for volunteers. We were growing, and I was finding myself in a state of mind that thought people who walked in the door saying they wanted to work with girls, and passed a background check, were all worthy of grabbing and putting in a spot.

It hit me that this was not a good place to be in. There is so much more to recruiting than finding a leader who says they want to work with girls. I can usually hear where a woman is coming from in her volunteer interview. I have seen volun-

teers fall into the following 4 categories during those interviews. These categories do not de-value the worth of the volunteer, but it does help me know if the volunteer is a right fit for working with teen girls at this time in their journey.

- **Category 1:** *women who are healthy, Godly women that have a call on their lives to journey with girls as mentors.*
- **Category 2:** *women who are healthy, Godly women who have experienced pain in their lives and have the scars to prove it but it's not what defines them.*
- **Category 3:** *women who are wounded, Godly women who have a call to mentor girls but need mentoring themselves as they work through some emotional triggers.*
- **Category 4:** *wounded unhealthy women who seek ministry with girls as a means of therapy, identity, or a faux relationship with God.*

As I hear a volunteer share their reason for wanting to serve and I hear them share what they feel they can bring to our girls ministry, it becomes pretty clear what category of volunteer I am working with. Sometimes, I still may not see red flags, but most of the time I can. Obviously, there are some categories that I listed above that have no business mentoring teen girls. Category 1 and 2 volunteers are the best volunteers for the task of working with girls. So where do you find them?

You pray for them. I realized that recruiting didn't start with picking up the phone and calling a list of names, it began with prayer. So several years ago, I told our church prayer team and my personal prayer team that I was praying that God would send Godly, Healthy women leaders to pour into the girls that God has given us to take care of. I realized I had not even asked The Lord on a regular consistent basis for this basic necessity. Have you asked The Lord to send these healthy leaders your way? I firmly believe that there was a time when I was trying to recruit all the girl leaders in my own strength. I barely had enough leaders and I was in danger of accepting leaders from category 3 and 4 because I wasn't taking the time to be picky and protective. It was then that I began to submit the recruiting process to God. And God began to answer the prayer for Godly, Healthy

women leaders. And when I have more leaders than spots, I am able to share with the new volunteer recruits to be patient because God must be up to something in the next semester. I ask them to participate in a group that I think may be ready to multiply in the next year, and I'm amazed at how many are committed to do just that. So when you move your mindset of recruiting to an on-going prayer throughout the year, it begins to change things. You truly begin to partner with God and celebrate the way He brings just the right volunteer to mentor just the right group of girls.

Volunteer Interview

Once you've prayed, it is important for you to set aside some time to interview the potential volunteer and share the vision for girls ministry at your church with her. Some people have asked what my process is with new volunteers. Some have asked "So what should you look for in an interview to know whether that volunteer is in a category 3 or 4 stage in life?"

Some of this may seem like basic information, but hopefully it will be helpful as you begin to meet with new leaders.

When I meet with a potential volunteer, I first send them an pdf application that extracts the following information before we even meet:

- *Basic personal information*
- *Spiritual testimony*
- *Their personal experience with teaching (this is a great way to determine if they stick with a position or if they have the desire but not the follow-thru).*
- *The reason they are applying to volunteer with girls ministry*
- *A background check form*

They turn this application in before we meet and I can use it to communicate to the rest of my team regarding this new volunteer. We place this form in their personal file as well so we can pull from it should we ever need to.

Then depending on the time frame, I will either have the potential leader observe a small group before we meet or I'll meet with them first and then have them sit in on a small group after we meet. It's been very healthy to have them observe a small group in action, because they can see and interact with real live small group leaders. Often times, I'll place a new volunteer in a small group that is on the verge of getting ready to multiply because new volunteers do tend to get attached quickly to groups they are placed in to observe.

Red Flags

I am so thankful to not have to decline many small group volunteers, but there are sometimes when red flags begin waving during the interview process and I have to determine if it's best to recruit this leader or not.

When I interview a potential volunteer, I have the opportunity to hear from all different ages and spiritual stages. One statement that usually concerns me when a potential leader comes to me about serving in girls ministry is when it is evident that she values her life experience as the prime transformational tool she has to pour into girls. It sounds like this, "I made _____ (insert unwise choice, or addiction) and I would love to share this with girls so they don't do the same thing I did. I really feel like I have a ministry to girls to share this with them."

Now, I don't dismiss this person's heart or call, but I do make sure that this person is partnered with a leader who knows the important equation to use when pouring into another's life. That equation is: Speak God's truth + live it out consistently = a life worth imitating.

Volunteers, don't forget that the reason we have an opportunity to pour into another isn't to share our experiences, it's to share God's transforming truth. It's as we walk life with them that we can let them know how God has transformed us and redeemed us, but these girls need to hear HIS truth and His Word first. Our stories may be amazing, but that's not what Hebrews tells us is the thing that people are to cling to.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7).

The most important thing is putting women in and around the girls ministry that get God's word in their lives and girls can see the outcome of that in the way they live their everyday lives. Don't let your past experiences become your primary girls ministry tool.

Some questions to ask yourself and your volunteers regarding when to use a life experience:

- *Am I sharing this to bring attention to myself?*
- *Are there parts of this experience that do not need to be disclosed? Too much information for a certain age group to hear?*
- *Am I sharing this experience because it has been healed, redeemed, transformed or is this possibly a therapy session for me?*
- *Sharing an experience brings a certain level of authenticity at times so I'm not saying never share personal stories, just ask yourself—what spiritual truth does this experience reinforce as I mentor this sister in Christ?*

When to Recruit

The new year is a great time to look for new leaders and invite them into the girls ministry even if every “slot” (for lack of a better word) is filled. I have found myself scrambling for leaders at the beginning of a school year, because I wasn't actively looking for potential leaders in the midst of the previous school year. The beginning of a new year, is the middle of our small group year so we're not having to make a mad dash for new leaders. We are simply looking at the groups to see if there are groups ready to multiply and if there are, we need to move leaders into those spaces in order to grow a new group. So how do you go about recruiting a new leader and growing a group?

At the beginning of a new year I have found that people's schedules may have changed, so look back through your emails or notes and don't hesitate to ask some-

one who originally had been interested months ago but couldn't due to prior commitments.

If you have a retreat coming up, they are great opportunities to invite someone you think would make a great leader to come and just give it a try for a weekend. (Of course you need to ensure that they receive a background check prior to the retreat) I try to put the new volunteer with a group of girls that may be growing and needs to be multiplied into a new group. If the volunteer connects with the girls, guess which group she'll be interested in serving with on a weekly basis—VOILA!

At the beginning of a new year, take some time to look at the size of your groups. If one group is hovering around the 10-15 mark, it's time to begin moving a new "apprentice" leader into that group. Once you move a new apprentice leader into that group, it gives the group time to get to know that person before you multiply the group into 2. It also allows you time to "train" that new leader and they begin to feel comfortable with the girls before they have to officially teach the class. When the new school rolls around, you have already built in a leader that knows the girls, and "voila" you are ready to birth (multiply) a new group.

Train & Praise

Last year our student ministry began something we call our "Spring Meetings" with volunteers. Our 3 ministers took all the names of every volunteer small group leader and Sunday School teacher, then we divided the list up among the three of us. This will be a intentional 45-60 minute check in with every leader asking them key questions so that we can know how God is at work in and through their volunteer position. In addition, it allows us to know if they will be a leader in the fall, if there are dynamics that have cropped up during the last few months that they haven't had a chance to let us know about, it helps us know how to pray for them personally, and to hear those stories that are victories God has done in their group that we may not have had the chance to celebrate with them.

As a girls minister, it is my job to check in with all of our girl groups regularly and encourage our girls leaders specifically. I try to schedule ongoing coffee's, lunches, and breakfasts with our leaders all throughout the year, but there are

times when it is difficult to get to everyone. Knowing that we have 3 weeks to connect with all of our leaders regarding the same questions will truly be healthy and give us a pulse of what has been going on that we may not be seeing. It's one more way to care for our leaders and really care for our students.

So what do you talk about during Spring meetings?

Our team came up with some questions that we will use with all of our volunteers:

Check in with them to find out how their “7 ports of life” are doing. What are the 7 ports of life?

- *Family, Recreation/entertainment, Spiritual, Work, Social/friends, Self development, Community/civic duty*

We then walk through a series of questions to help better understand our leaders.

- *What are some of the victories you have experienced this past year in your volunteer position?*
- *How is your group doing in welcoming/ contacting members and guests?*
- *(Open chair principle)*
- *Do you have an associate teacher/ apprentice? Do you have any you can recommend?*
- *How can we help you be a better small group leader/ volunteer. what are the needs?*
- *Are there any natural “healthy clusters” in your group that could help us identify how to multiply your group into another smallgroup? (Multiplication)*
- *Do you feel led to lead a group next year?*
- *Were you able to get to know the parents of your smallgroup students?*
- *What were the most effective lessons and curriculum studies for your age group?*
- *What studies would you recommend changes or adaptations or remove from the curriculum plan and why?*
- *Were you able to cover all the curriculum in your notebook? If not, what was left?*

- *How can we pray for you?*

And then at the conclusion of the spring meeting, we will pray for that leader and encourage them.

This on-going interview with our leaders has been very helpful in keeping communication fresh and truly allowing some leader care that doesn't happen naturally in the margins of ministry. It also allows a natural time of finding out what areas of difficulty or improvement may need to be addressed.

If you don't have a regularly scheduled time of check-in with your current volunteers, I highly encourage doing something like this as soon as possible.

Pecking Order & Toxic Nurturing

Regular training and encouragement is something to keep on your radar as a leader of leaders. That's right, I used the phrase: Leader of leaders. It's a hard concept to remember, but it's important to remember that a primary function of a girls minister is caring for the girls that God has placed in her care and in order to do it well, you will need other volunteer leaders that are encouraged, equipped, and released to do girls ministry. I remember the first time I realized that as small groups of girls grow, I would become less involved with the majority of girls and more involved with the leaders and parents of those girls. I had to deal with the nagging feeling of pride and ego that rose up on a regular basis within my heart when I heard a leader say, "my girls told me...". I had to learn how to drop territorial lines when girls started connected more with their small group leader than they were connecting with me as their girls minister. I didn't know everything that was going on in their life, and I had to be okay with that. It didn't mean I was a failure, it meant that our team had successfully maximized their ability to do what God had called them to do, and that girls felt like they belonged within our student ministry.

It can be a hard reality if you believe you are only effective when you are only mentoring teen girls themselves. But when you figure out ways to continue to pour into a small group of girls on a regular basis and come alongside leaders to train and equip them, I think you will find that you are maximizing your effectiveness in

ways you may never have imagined. If you have 100 girls under your influence, it may still be that you are able to keep up with them, but there may come a time when that number quadruples and you need to have an in structure in place to support that growth and care needed for those girls. Begin to think through the expectations you are placing on yourself. Are you expecting yourself to be present at every single event and be available to every girl 24 hours? Obviously, you are setting yourself up for failure as you cannot sustain that pattern of care for very long. That's why sharing girls ministry leadership with volunteers is necessary. It's necessary because girls need to hear from other women other than just yourself. It's necessary because God has gifted more women in your church than just you to mentor girls, and you may be robbing another woman of her chance to serve. It's necessary because you cannot do it all on your own.

So take just as much time to plan and create volunteer leader fellowships and coffee talks as you would for the girls they work with.

Text your leaders throughout the week to encourage them and let them know you are praying for them. Be present for them when they experience losses and be willing to step in for them when they are experiencing a burnout from the junk of life. For training times, create some topics that will help equip them more in their ongoing leadership. Recently we had a counselor come in to walk through some questions they had regarding counseling. Was it information we've covered with them or given them in resources? Yes. But it was a great reminder and it brought some things to the surface that helped us to know that many leaders feel continually ill equipped in dealing with the crisis counseling that make drop in on them in the middle of a small group. This was a great example of a useful training and encouraging time for leaders.

Our middle school minister does a great job of creating some on going fellowships for our leaders like a cereal night or a pasta party to immediately follow small groups once a quarter. It's a great time of fast fellowship and we get to hear what went on in groups that night. Don't make leadership training and encouraging an after thought. It is a key means of caring for the girls that God has entrusted to your ministry.



Identity, Significance, Purpose

It's no surprise that girls have specific needs. The problem for us as girls ministers, moms, and volunteers is that sometimes we may look at these teenaged girls like they are gremlins. They seem precious at some point in their life, but then all of a sudden someone must've fed them after midnight or thrown some water on them because "BAM!", we now have a room full of little monsters and they only seem to be getting worse. It's important to remember that yes while teenaged girls are emotionally, physically, and spiritually under-construction, they are not to be feared, dismissed, or looked down on. God can and has done amazing things with teenaged girls. We just need to have Christ's compassion and wisdom when loving the girls God has brought to us. It may be helpful to keep these three words in the back of your mind as you work with girls.

Identity, Significance, and Purpose are the words that give a quick checklist to the spiritual and emotional needs a teenaged girl is looking for. Is she going to come to you and ask for these things? Of course not! However, she will show you she's needs these things when she walks into the church each week trying on a different "identity". One week a girl walks in with a band instrument. Next month that same girl walks in wearing 80's paraphanelia and quoting movie lines to some of your favorite flix. The next couple of weeks, she begins to die her hair and talk about obscure indie bands and how much she loves them. This girl is trying on different "looks" and trying to determine who she is. This happens all the time. It's their search for Identity. Girls want to know the answer to, "Who am I?".

Another search they are on, is the search for significance. What is significance? Webster says it's, "The quality of being worthy of attention; importance." She

wants to know, "if I'm not here, will someone miss me?" "Am I worthy to be here?" What does that look like in a girls ministry? It's the girl who has fixed her attention on this one boy. She talks about him all the time. He hasn't given her the time of day, but for some reason she is fixated on him. She's willing to do "anything" to get him to notice her. Or maybe it's the girl who mocks the popular girls, and while she says she hates them, she sure knows everything about them. Truth be told, she really wishes she was in their group. Or perhaps it's your soccer girl who eats, sleeps, and breathes soccer. She's going to be a collegiate athlete for sure, and she oftentimes misses church events because "she has this soccer thing." It could be the girl who is always there when the doors open to the church. She wants to do everything "just right", and is quick to point out others who haven't quite lived up to the label of Christian. Each of these "girls" are taking them down roads for significance that will leave them feeling disappointed and lost if that thing or person is constantly expected to give worth to her. The last search these girls are on is the search for purpose. They want to know, "what was I made for?" and "Why am I here?".

These questions may come up for them while serving on a mission trip where they are able to utilize their "gifts" to bring someone to The Lord. They begin to get a glimpse of something more to living. Or maybe it's the popular girl who has been spinning out of control to host the biggest party every year and maintain her reputation when she finds herself hungover looking at the mirror wondering "is this all that I'm here to do?".

I have some good friends named Melissa Trevantham and Sissy Goff that have written some amazing resources for girls through their ministry called Daystar Counseling. They have talked with me about a concept called well-worn paths. They talk about the necessity to walk teen girls repeatedly down the same spiritual paths so that they are familiar with the path much like a hiking trail in the woods has well-worn paths that lead you through the dark forest. I think this is a great picture of how we should help these teen girls who have the questions of "who am I?, what makes me worthy?, and why was I made?". This chapter will hopefully help you as a girls minister, mom, or volunteer to walk your girls down these well-

worn paths that have them journeying with Christ to find their identity, significance, and purpose in Him.

Friendship Connecting

Remember that story I shared in chapter two about my first day on the job as a girlsminister? I was surrounded by cliques of girls and I couldn't figure out how to get inside of one of those circles. They all seemed to be looking at me—the new girl—and sizing me up. Didn't they realize I was an adult and the girls minister?! I think I thought there would be instant connection like there was when I worked summers at the large Christian camps. Just because I was camp staffer, I often had students come up and start talking with me about some pretty heavy things. But, this was not how it was on my first day on the job. There were some sweet people that tried to come over and introduce themselves but mostly it was cliques. Then on Sundays and Wednesdays there was a hallway that I renamed “The Gauntlet”. It was a horrible hallway because you had to walk down it to get into the sunday school room and lining every square inch of wallspace were groups of girls that weren't talking to me but to each other. Very intimidating! I'm very thankful for the gauntlet and for that first fall retreat because it reminds me of what it feels like to be new in our student ministry. It's scary!

That's why I worked with some leaders and some girls to have a strategy to receive new girls into our student ministry. The idea is the 1-2-3 CLICK! method. Now understand that we don't just go around saying “hey new girl...this is how we're going to get you connected in three clicks.” This is just something that I have used to explain to students or leaders to help them understand how to continue reaching out to new people that have been introduced to our student ministry.

Here's the basic premise:

1. Meet a girl who is unconnected and introduce her to her peer group.
2. Take her to have coke/coffee or introduce her to a peer or leader which will take her to coffee to get to know her.

3. Get her connected to a lifegroup of girls who have hung out with her or introduce her to a relationship building catalyst like a Girls Retreat or a mission trip AND CLICK! She's in.

I have observed that typically after 3 intentional relationship connections from you the leader, to a healthy peer group, to a bonding event or small group and the student will click into a place they feel welcomed and known within your student ministry. How do you get girls connected and help them feel safe, loved and known in your student ministry?

Mentoring

Earlier I made reference to the well-worn paths that we need to be walking girls in our ministry down on a regular basis. As you commit to become a mentor in the life of girls, you need to determine what paths you are taking girls down. You then need to ask yourself if you are willing to commit to this for the long haul because it seems fun to do this for a weekend retreat but mentoring happens over years. I have been in a mentoring relationship in varying forms with my girls ministers Bonita and Robin since I was 8 years old. I use the picture of a crock pot and a microwave when I talk with leaders about mentoring. I can't reiterate enough the fact that ministry to teen girls is like cooking in a crockpot—it takes time, consistency, intentionality and preparation. A microwave is something that is spontaneous and a quick finish. The question for you is: "Am I willing to journey with a crockpot and leave the microwave mode of ministry?"

So often we think if we just spend a retreat weekend or a camp week with a bunch of girls that we have earned the right to speak into their lives. Remember—they are not microwaves. They may think you are cool and worth getting to know if you spend a camp week with them but they will guard their hearts until they know you are not going anywhere. They want to trust their hearts to a crockpot leader—not a microwave leader.

So if you've decided to be a crock pot, what are your plans for mentoring?

What do you do as a mentor? You lead them to God's truths. It's that simple. You walk alongside of them and point them to Him by the way you live your life,

by what He's teaching you in scripture, and by sitting down with them and learning His word together. Now mentoring can look different in different situations, but I would think through some key scriptural truths that you want to continue to "walk down" with a girl or group of girls. A good resource is "Table for Two" by Amy Pierson. Amy is a good friend of mine and has developed some mentoring resource guides to use with girls. These are also resources you could have older girls use with younger girls.

I have adapted a principle I learned while on sabbatical in Southeast Asia. In this particular area of the world, the missionaries are always in danger of being kicked out of the country for their faith, so they are constantly reproducing mentoring strategies that can quickly be learned and then used. The strategy that they taught me was called S.P.E.C.K.A

S.P.E.C.K.A. is an acronym used for a participative Bible Study. You can use this with any passage in scripture. You have the group read it together and then you work through the acronym to begin studying together.

- *S = Sin (Is there any sin to be found in this passage? What is it?)*
- *P = Promise (Is there a promise from God to be found?)*
- *E = Example (Are there any positive or negative examples for us to see?)*
- *C = Commands (Are there any commands to be found? Many of the commands in the New Testament are followed by "one another" - love, pray, forgive, bear, this involves the community and body.)*
- *K = Knowledge (Is there any knowledge to be applied to us today?)*
- *A = Accountability (As a group how can we keep each other accountable to what we just read and learned? When we get together next week we start by saying "were we obedient to what we learned last week?")*

If you are a mom, I created this sample mentoring moment for you to use as a template for future moments.

Oftentimes you don't have a lot of time to sit down with your daughter to have those conversations that you really want and need to have. Sometimes we find our-

selves waiting for just the right moment and that moment doesn't seem to come. What if instead of having a list of "MUST HAVE" conversations with your daughter, you simply made the most of the time you do have with her and when a mentoring moment happens, you're ready. This is what mentoring moments is all about. Helping you to have some special moments in the margins of life that create a stronger relationship between you and your daughter that help build to those "MUST HAVE" conversations.

Put a blanket in the back of your car for just the right moment. When you are sensing a window moment (one of those times when your daughter is open to talk) grab a coke or coffee, and the blanket. On a starry night, take your daughter, the blanket, some starbucks, and make a moment under the stars come alive. Read aloud Isaiah 40:26-28 NLT.

Look up into the heavens.

Who created all the stars?

*He brings them out like an army, one after another,
calling each by its name.*

*Because of his great power and incomparable strength,
not a single one is missing.*

O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles?

O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights?

Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

*The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.*

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

Isaiah 40:26-28

After you read it, say: Hey let's think of some pretend names that the stars could be called. What do you think that one might be named? (Scotty.) What if that one had your name? Call it out loud. Shout the names out loud and encourage creativity. Then remind your daughter that just like the stars, God knows her name. He knows what she's going through and wants to be involved in her life. Pray for each other under the stars and thank God for creating her.

This mentoring moment biblical truth is: We are cherished creations.

Hopefully this section gave you some samples and ideas about how to go about mentoring with a strategy. No matter how you set up your mentoring opportunities, you cannot subtract Scripture or time from the equation.

Girl Tribes & Cliques

Cliques aren't necessarily bad. It speaks to our longing for community. We desire to be with people that are like us...that get us...that we can relate to. Why? Because we all want to be known. That's why Jeremiah 29:11 and Psalm 139 speaks so deeply to each of us...God knows the plans and purposes He has for us. He knew us before we were even breathed our first breath of air.

We want to be known.

It's when the cliques we choose to be in become our identity and even change the way we think and act. It's when they begin to battle against other cliques that we have to step in and help students understand that the clique has become unhealthy.

So what do you do when you have two groups of girls that are battling each other?

I had a chat with our pastoral care minister awhile ago and he had some amazing insights that I think would be great to pass along to you.

I have had groups not get along before...typically they are middle school girls. When this happens, I will usually address each group separately and then eventually bring the groups together. Sometimes, it is a little miscommunication that is causing a rub between the two groups. However, there are times when two groups really just don't get along and begin to act on it. At this point, the groups move into something called **GROUP THINK**.

If I were to sit the two groups down, they may tell me what I want to hear but there will be no breakthrough.

I discovered from our pastoral care minister that the girls who were a part of these two groups may not really want to act the way they are but they also don't

want to lose the comfort, community, and safety of The GROUP...so they begin to put aside their individual responses and think the way THE GROUP would think.

It is when this begins to happen that it is important to help restore the individual's ability to think, act, and feel.

One way of doing this is to bring a girl from each group together to have a conversation where the GROUP is not able to tell her how to think, act, and feel. Each girl has to do that for themselves. Allow each girl to share how they have felt when the other group behaved a certain way about them. This will help each of the girls begin to have some empathy and realize that their actions have an impact. Allow the conversation to progress so that the girls have an opportunity to make a difference. End the conversation with the girls determining consequences for when they themselves behave a certain way against the other group. This will hopefully allow the two girls to begin to work together to bring about a change for good.

The question I get asked by leaders and moms alike is, "shouldn't we force the girls to be in the same group?" It's a great question. It's definitely a strategy but not one that I employ after no success in the past. This year in our girls ministry we have observed a clear division happening within a certain grade. Some of the leaders were aching to figure out a way to "mend" this grand canyon of a gap that they said was never there when they were in elementary school. So I was talking with a friend who is also a leader of one of our girl groups. She has great insight and also some of the most unique ways of looking at a situation. It was our desire to have a get together for this entire grade, instead of just lifegroups. As we discussed it, the following illustration was used:

"maybe this is like "back in our history" when you knew certain indian tribes didn't get along. And if they ended up in the same space, war would take place between the two and scalping would be the evidence of the battle."

I laughed at her interesting observation, but I knew there was some truth in what she said. I absolutely agreed that if we mixed these two groups, that we'd see history repeat itself and these groups may try anything to attack each other. Each group is a different organism with different personalities, quirks, strengths, and

weaknesses. I believe that it is important to continue to build healthy all-grade opportunities of fellowship, but be aware that for some middle school groups, it may be “best for the rest” to keep them in their small group habitat until around 9th grade. If you have observed that two groups don’t mix well and you’ve tried it unsuccessfully then move into different strategies.

- *Talk to them about being sisters in Christ with other girls through some bible study series on friends and relationships.*
- *Help them to become other’s focused through service projects.*
- *Look for girls who can be a bridge into the other group.*
- *Teach them to pray for the other group, by ending every lesson and having the group pray for a specific girl from that group each week.*

These are some of the things we’ve seen happen for some girl tribes that didn’t mix well at first. Remember that this is like a spiritual lab. Don’t get frustrated, but take heart in knowing that you have the opportunity to help girls know what to do when they don’t like someone. Help them to look for value in that person and help them to know that God changes our hearts towards people by changing our heart about people. What about you? What have you seen work or not work with tribes?

Friendship Hierarchy Tornado

This past week I had a great conversation with a mom regarding her daughter. Even though I had not talked with this mom before regarding this particular situation, the conversation itself is one I’ve had several times before with different moms. I thought it might be helpful to walk you through a case study of this popular conversation.

The conversation may contain this phrase:

My daughter doesn't want to go to _____

(a) church

(b) her small group

(c) the retreat or event

Ask these question:

Have you noticed any changes in her relationships?

Are there any girls that she used to hang out with and now she doesn't?

Has she mentioned any experiences that may have caused her to feel less confident?

If they answer yes to any of the above questions, then it's possible that she has had a friendship hierarchy tornado hit her life. It's a part of girl world life. If she hasn't had it happen yet, it's probably coming.

What's a hierarchy? The definition is as follows: A hierarchy (Greek: hierarchia from hierarches, "leader of sacred rites") is an arrangement of items (objects, names, values, categories, etc.) in which the items are represented as being "above," "below," or "at the same level as" one another.

So what does this mean in girl world? It means that what was at the same level as the girl has either become more important or less important. Or the girl herself has dropped or risen in the hierarchy herself.

When I was in middle school, I had a group of nine girl friends. We would sit together at lunch and always attend every social gathering together as a clump. But if you dug deep enough you would realize that there was a hierarchy even in our clump. And sometimes I came home from school excited because I was in the "inner circle", and other times I came home discouraged because it was my turn to be the odd girl out. My mom says it was like clockwork when it was my turn to be out of the inner loop. I didn't see it, but she did. My mom did a great job of not meddling but calling out things in my friends that she thought were good, and when I got hurt or treated poorly, she would ask "do you think that was something

you deserved or were they being a good friend to do that to you?”. We had good talks, albeit the length and depth of the conversation were in my hands when it came to talking about friends. But when I was ready to talk, mom was always there.

So what can you do as a girls minister to help moms that come to you with concerns regarding their daughter not wanting to come to church?

Share with the mom that in this GSI (Girlworld Scene Investigation—what? Too cheesy?! Sorry) you both may need to observe her daughter and ask some key questions to begin to determine the cause behind her change in wanting to be at church.

1. Encourage her to encourage her daughter to keep attending. This is one of the big battles she needs to fight. If this isn't solved, it's possible that she will not see church as a welcoming place in the future. It will be painful to tell her daughter she has to go somewhere she doesn't feel comfortable but this is a prime opportunity for you as girls minister to ease this situation. Offer to the mom to meet the daughter for a coke or coffee talk to “get to know her” or “catch up”. See if the daughter will share with you regarding why she is not wanting to go to church anymore. If there is another group of girls you can introduce her to than the previous group she may have been hanging out with, it may help her feel more open to trying church again. I have found that forcing girls to “work it out” has not been very successful. But creating some new friendship opportunities often times can help out greatly.

2. Ask the mother to ask her daughter what it would take to get her to feel more positive about attending?

Would a friend buffer be an option? (A friend buffer is someone that is a neutral friend who comes to an event to secure that the girl will not be alone) PS don't use the term friend buffer as this is not a recognized term but merely one that I've made up for our use behind the scenes of girls ministry.

3. Encourage the mom to pray for her daughter during this difficult time. She may not be able to find out what's actually going on, but God is fully aware and is

able to work in her heart and the heart of others unlike girls ministers, moms, and volunteers.

These are just some starter options that I would offer if this case scenario were to appear on my doorstep. What about you? What else would you do in this situation?

Leadership

One of the ways to develop a girls understanding of her purpose is to have her serve in a leadership position within the student ministry. For the past 10 years, we have created a girls ministry lead team. The team consisted of girls from high school and adult female leaders. We will have a vision casting for the girls retreat where I will share the direction of the weekend retreat. Then through various brain storming, prayer times, and team meetings, the girls will be responsible to come up with the entire worship production, the bible studies, the fellowship activities, and 1 prayer experience. It has been a blessing to watch girls come awake to their giftings and also recognize the giftings of other individuals. Is it easy to release the retreat to teenaged girls? No. I could get the retreat done so much quicker, but I have seen God do some amazing things through allowing these girls and leaders to work together to put together the retreat. I would have been more apt to put a retreat together in my own power, but through sharing the responsibility with these girls, I'm equipping them for the future and seeing how God will move when I release the task to Him.

Missions

Another way to reinforce the truth that Christ is where we find our purpose, is through creating opportunities for girls to serve together on a missions trip. One of my favorite moments was watching a group of 8th grade girls bond and share stories from their mission site. I loved seeing them make connections to little moments and realizing that God was at work In that moment. For these girls, they were assigned an inner city daycare library that had no system in place to find books. One girl felt that they should group the books by topic. She told the other girls that she would find all the dinosaur books and put them together. At the end

of the day they found out that a teacher needed all the dinosaur books because she was beginning a dinosaur series with her class. The students were ecstatic. Wow! How cool that God prompted them to do something that they had no idea would give them an opportunity to point that teacher to God. Matthew 5:16 says “Let your light so shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in Heaven.”

Make sure you are providing opportunities for your girls to let their light shine. And as you do, place adults around them calling attention to those moments and helping the girls see How God is orchestrating moments they sometimes can't even see. Miss Chris is one of the leaders that poured her life into these girls that week. She served in the role of Eli that week by helping these girls to identify God's voice and respond to it. As a result, we had a group of 8th grade girls on fire to make Him known.

Your turn:

What are some mission activities you have done to help your girls to Let their light shine?

What has been the result?

Girls Events

It is important to create some girl specific events in your ministry with girls. These events are not just a fellowship without intentionality, they are to help reinforce a "well-worn" pathway for the girls. Girls need to know how to build healthy relationships with girls of all ages. Bringing girls together without boys is a necessary environment at some point in a student ministry. As we have grown larger, we have made the decision to outsource regular girl nites to be handled through our girl specific small groups. We host one girls retreat a year called Snowball.

Snowball will focus on a biblical truth for the weekend and have loads of opportunities for girls to fellowship and worship together. We did have a missional component in the early years, but some years we are in a location that is conducive to that opportunity and others we are not. In addition to Snowball, we are testing out a girls worship and bible study night during the summer. We noticed during

our last Snowball that there was something unique that happened when girls of all ages came together to worship and study God's word as a large gathering. Make sure that your time with girls includes environments for large gatherings and also small group gatherings.

Homework

Here's some homework for you to do. First, I want you to remember what it was like to be a teenaged girl. I'm going to list several random questions to lead you to open up that mental filing cabinet of teenaged girl memories. Please think through these. Some of these questions are so specific it will unlock memories you haven't thought about in a long time. Some may not do anything for you, but this exercise is intended to help you remember so that you can identify somewhat with the girls God has placed in your life.

- *Do you remember your group of friends that you hung out with in middle school?*
- *Did you have a nemesis or someone that you dreaded being around?*
- *Did you have any nicknames?*
- *Did you have a favorite teacher?*
- *Did you have a favorite class?*
- *Think about a group assignment you did in middle school or high school. What did you like or dislike about that experience?*
- *Think about a time you got in trouble with your parents.*
- *What was the outcome of that experience?*
- *What was your level of involvement at church during your teenaged years? What role did adults from church play in your life?*

Being a teenaged girl is both wonderful and painful at times. As you conclude today with memories that are fresh on your heart from your time as a teenaged girl, what insight does it bring to you regarding girls you work with? Take time today to determine one way you can walk girls you work with down a well worn

path to remind them that their identity, significance, and purpose comes from Christ.

Prayer for you:

Father, I thank you that we have the opportunity to point girls to you and help them find their Identity, Significance, and Purpose in you. We know that there are a lot of things and people trying to fill those roles in their lives, but we also know that there is a lot of heartache that comes along with putting anything other than You in those spots. Help guard those spots in their hearts. Help us know how to guide, equip, and pray for girls regarding their Identity, significance, and purpose.

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