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IMPLEMENTING A STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM
AT PRESTONWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH
IN PLANO, TEXAS

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IMPLEMENTING A STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM
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To my godly wife, Erin Mick, who has lovingly supported me in life, ministry,
and throughout my research and writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
PREFACE.....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Ministry Context.....	1
Rationale.....	3
Purpose.....	8
Goals.....	8
Research Methodology.....	8
Definitions and Limitations.....	10
Conclusion.....	10
2. BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT LEADERSHIP.....	12
Student Vision Statement.....	14
Biblical Examples of Students Leading.....	15
The Attitude of a Student Leader.....	26
Philippians 2:1–18.....	27
John 13:14.....	32
The Equipping of a Student Leader.....	34
Conclusion.....	37
3. TEENAGE LEADERSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS IN LEADERSHIP.....	39
Alex Harris and Brett Harris.....	39

Chapter	Page
Joan of Arc	43
Malala Yousafzai	45
Student Leadership University.....	47
Growing Leaders and Tim Elmore.....	52
Challenges of Students Leading.....	54
Conclusion	59
4. DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND SURVEY ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT.....	61
Preparation	61
Research Findings and Analysis	63
Statements Measured by Level of Agreement.....	63
Open-Ended Questions	68
Conclusion	71
5. PRACTICAL STEPS TO BUILD AND IMPLEMENT A STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM	72
First Step	72
Team Responsibilities.....	75
Connect Team.....	75
Environment Team	76
Worship Team	76
Creative Team.....	77
Tech Team	77
MDWK	78
Second Step.....	79
Third Step.....	79
Fourth Step.....	80
Fifth Step.....	81
Sixth Step	81

	Page
Seventh and Ongoing Step.....	82
Evaluation of the Project.....	84
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose.....	84
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	86
Strengths of the Project.....	87
Weaknesses of the Project	89
What I Would Do Differently.....	90
Theological Reflections	91
Personal Reflections	92
Conclusion	93
 Appendix	
1. LIST OF CHURCHES PARTICIPATING IN SURVEY	95
2. PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS OF LEAD TEAM	98
3. STUDENT LEADERSHIP SURVEY	101
4. LEAD TEAM APPLICATION	104
5. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ASSESSMENT	110
6. LEAD TEAM INTEVIEW AND RE-UP INTERVIEW	117
7. POST-INTERVIEW HANDOUT	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
A1. Churches participating in survey	96
A2. Spiritual gifts survey.....	111

PREFACE

Praise God for his amazing grace, for the joy of my salvation, and the call he gave me to be a pastor. At the age of thirteen, God began instilling thoughts of leadership that have been tremendous in propelling me to serve and lead out in the church. I am thankful to God who continually does more than I could think, hope, dream, or imagine.

Second, I would like to thank my bride, Erin Mick, for spurring me on to pursue a doctorate and for encouraging me along the journey. Her countless words of encouragement mean the world to me, and I am grateful for the many sacrifices she made so that I could complete this project. She makes me better and makes our ministry together so much better. Thank you, Erin, for your steadfast love and for pointing me to Jesus.

Third, I extend a heartfelt thank you to our children, Joshua, Annaleigh, Elizabeth, and Joanna who all sacrificed so this project could happen. I am grateful for their continued prayers, words of affirmation, and encouragement. They are a great inspiration and I am thankful the Lord granted Erin and I the privilege of being their parents.

Fourth, to my mother and stepdad, Sammie and Ray Holden, who helped make this project a reality. I am tremendously thankful for your generosity and belief in me. You helped make what seemed like a far off and very utopian idea become obtainable. I pray that your investment impacts the kingdom of God now and for generations to come. Thank you for believing in me. In addition, I am grateful for the encouragement from my father and stepmom, Michael Mick and Leslie Denton.

Fifth, I am grateful for the commitment of the Prestonwood student staff who aspire to reach and make disciples of the next generation. Their passion and enthusiasm for Jesus is contagious.

Sixth, I would like to thank pastor Jack Graham and Jason Snyder for allowing me to pursue this degree, to serve as the NextGen Pastor at Prestonwood, and for affording me the opportunity to implement this project.

Chris Kouba, my project supervisor, thank you for your wisdom and guidance. You patiently answered my questions and helped push me toward the completion of this project. I am thankful for your friendship and partnership in ministry.

Dan Dumas, thank you for allowing me to be part of such a special cohort. Your teachings and exhortations have helped shape my character and I admire your drive to raise godly men and church leaders. I also want to thank additional cohort leadership, Beau Hughes and Josh Patterson. They are men who helped me think deeper and love better.

A sincere word of appreciation to Betsy Fredrick for being my project editor and her vast knowledge and experience.

With all sincerity, I hope this project serves local churches well and aids in the advancement of God's kingdom. When I first stepped into student ministry, I saw the potential of students serving, and I pray this project can better assist other student ministries. To God be the glory!

Jason Mick

Plano, Texas

December 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Christian teenagers are not just the future of the church; they are the church of today. Born-again students are fully capable of leading, serving, and making disciples. This project aimed to develop and implement a student leadership team to provide Prestonwood Baptist Church and other churches with a framework to raise students who actively serve as Christians.

Ministry Context

Prestonwood Baptist Church has a rich history of nearly forty years of ministering to the people of North Dallas and the ends of the earth. Prestonwood currently has three campuses: Plano, North (Prosper), and Español. The strategy of a multisite church stems from the strong missional conviction to reach people with the gospel and to make disciples. Prestonwood is one church with multiple locations. Locations share one united mission and are similar in execution of that mission. The original campus in Plano was relocated in 1999 from Dallas to its current location. The North Campus is located in the ever growing city of Prosper and is thriving as it is driven by the mission of the church and the current leadership in place. Prestonwood Español, which meets at various times on the Plano and North campuses along with a location in Lewisville, continues to reach the Hispanic community in a profound way. Many in the Hispanic culture are gravitating to the doors of Prestonwood. The Prestonwood Baptist Church mission statement is, “To glorify God by introducing Jesus Christ as Lord to as many people as possible and to develop them in Christian living using the most effective means to impact the world,

making an eternal difference in this generation and generations to come.”¹ Senior Pastor Jack Graham states, “The thing that drives our church is still and forever will be the Great Commission. For us, it is all about the Message—proclaiming it from the pulpit and getting it to as many people as possible.”²

The student ministry, referred to as “Prestonwood Students,” grades 7–12, exists to reach the community, the nation, the world, and every generation with the gospel, to learn to grow in authentic and visible faith, to love those around them with a biblically-based devotion to Jesus, and to multiply what God has done in their lives in the lives of others. The mission of Prestonwood drives the vision, culture, and core values throughout each ministry. The vision of Prestonwood, “reach, learn, love, and multiply,” shapes the direction of the student ministry.

Prestonwood Students desires to strongly emphasize serving others out of an overflowing relationship with Jesus to reach and point others to Jesus. Prestonwood Students has a rich history of student pastors who have laid the foundation of raising up the next generation of disciples. One of the primary ways the student ministry accomplishes this is through the church’s weekly multi-generational worship services. Students actively welcome and create an engaging environment where others can encounter God and grow in their faith. In addition to weekly worship services, the student ministry offers LifeGroup Bible studies, discipleship groups, and mission trip teams. These groups provide opportunities for students to connect with others in a more intimate setting and to receive personal discipleship and mentoring from adult leaders. Students are encouraged to participate in various service projects and outreach initiatives throughout the year, both locally and globally. These projects help students develop a heart for service and to put their faith into action by making a positive difference in their communities and the world.

¹ “Our Core Values,” Prestonwood Baptist Church, accessed February 24, 2023, <https://prestonwood.org/about/our-core-values/>.

² “Our Story,” Prestonwood Baptist Church, accessed February 24, 2023, <https://prestonwood.org/about/our-story/>.

The culture within Prestonwood Students desires to emulate seven characteristics that aid in fulfilling the mission and living out the vision. The characteristics of the culture are celebratory, rooted, passionate, community, selfless, excellence, and empowerment. Prestonwood Students wants to celebrate the big and the small, from someone experiencing salvation to a student reading the Bible and everything in between. Prestonwood Students enthusiastically support those committed to loving Jesus and others. The staff desires to see students rooted in the truth of God's Word, disciplined by the Bible and not the world. People are known to be passionate about much, but it can be misplaced passion. Prestonwood Students strives to be passionate about Jesus and the advancement of his kingdom. God designed everyone for community, but more specifically, biblical community. Prestonwood Students has the opportunity to gather in LifeGroups every Sunday morning, encourage one another throughout the week, and gather again on Wednesday nights for "MDWK."

During Wednesday night MDWK, high school students gather in homes across North Dallas for student-led Bible studies, while junior high students gather on each of Prestonwood's campuses for a gospel message and fun. Next, aspiring to take on the attitude of Jesus in Philippians 2, the Prestonwood Students staff and adult volunteer leaders exhort students to live selflessly. They are humbling themselves to look out for the interest of others and serve those around them to the glory of God. Prestonwood believes in excellence in all things to the glory of God. If something is worth putting time, energy, and resources into, then it is worth making excellent. Last is empowering. Prestonwood Students believes in raising the bar for students and empowering them to live out the calling of making disciples.

Rationale

With the established mission, vision, and culture of Prestonwood and within Prestonwood Students, it is necessary to strategically formulate and implement a student leadership team that serves within Prestonwood and seeks to serve outside the church's

walls. This project served Prestonwood Baptist Church and other churches to create and implement a student leadership team.

Located in North Dallas, there are ample opportunities to minister to students, but this comes with challenges. Notably, ninety-four thousand junior high and high school students live within a ten-mile radius of the Plano campus. Given that many public schools limit or in some cases restrict access to church staff on their campuses, it becomes crucial to prioritize the training, empowerment, and mobilization of student leaders. This emphasis is vital for witnessing an increased number of students embracing their faith in Jesus.

Student leadership is necessary and beneficial at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, for several reasons. First, involving students in leadership positions provides them with valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Students can practice communication, teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving skills in a supportive environment by taking on roles such as leading worship, greeting, setting up, cleaning up, teaching Bible studies, discipling other students, organizing events, and taking the gospel out into the community. Students need to “practice and take some risks if they want to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities.”³ These skills will serve them well in their future endeavors, whether in college, career, or ministry.

Second, through developing leadership skills together as a team, student leadership helps to foster a sense of community and connection among the students. When students have opportunities to work together on projects and activities, they can form deeper relationships with one another and build camaraderie. Serving can be significant for students who may feel disconnected or marginalized in other areas of their lives. Developing student leaders in their faith and leadership strengthens unity within the ministry and has a ripple effect amongst other students. When developing leaders, John Maxwell says,

³ Marcy Levy Shankman, *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 10.

The strength of any organization is a direct result of the strength of its leaders. Weak leaders equal weak organizations. Strong leaders equal strong organizations. Leadership makes the determination. If you lead a team or organization, no matter whether your goal is to grow your company . . . your success will be determined by the number of leaders you have and their ability to lead.⁴

It is imperative to develop student leaders.

Third, a student leadership team helps engage, empower, and delegate appropriate responsibilities to teenagers. Empowering student leaders through meaningful responsibilities sets the stage for a shared leadership dynamic between staff and adult leaders. Jesus gave his disciples an image of leadership that shapes the standard for student leadership.⁵ Matthew 20:25–28 says that Jesus called his disciples together and said to them,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.⁶

Warren Weirsbe writes, “Each generation needs to discover and train new leaders, not only to meet current needs but also to prepare for future challenges and changes.”⁷ As each student leader’s unique spiritual gifts are exercised, a collaborative spirit and environment of unity emerges, driving spiritual development, servant-leadership, creativity, excitement for the ministry, and enhancement of the overall effectiveness of the team. In this context, proper delegation becomes a natural extension of shared leadership, where tasks are strategically assigned to leverage individual strengths and ensure a well-coordinated effort.

Maxwell states,

What’s more powerful than a motivated, equipped, and empowered leader? A group of motivated, equipped, and empowered leaders. What’s more powerful than that?

⁴ John C. Maxwell, *The Ultimate Guide to Developing Leaders: Invest in People Like Your Future Depends on It* (Nashville: HarperCollins, 2023), 2.

⁵ Doug Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 182.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations from the English Standard Version.

⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Being a Leader for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 9.

That same group of motivated, equipped, and empowered leaders working as a team! When good leaders are gathered together, empowered by a leader, focused on a vision, and working together as a team, there's almost nothing they can't do.⁸

By giving students meaningful roles to serve, the church conveys that their contributions are valued and essential.

According to John Maxwell, one of the most powerful and impactful things student ministries and churches can do is “release and empower student leaders that are developed to reach their potential.”⁹ Empowering teenagers can have challenges, but in doing so students see that the church is not a place of perfection but a place for sanctification, growth, and opportunity to make a difference. Paul David Tripp writes,

The church is intended to be messy and chaotic, because the mess is intended to yank us out of our self-sufficiency and self-obsession to become people who really do love God and our neighbors. God puts broken people next to broken people (including leaders), not so they would be comfortable with one another but so they would function as agents of transformation in the lives of one another.¹⁰

Proper delegation not only lightens the task load for student staff and adult leaders but also empowers student leadership team members to take ownership of their ministry and the mission of God to make disciples. Maxwell says, “Leading well is not about enriching yourself—it’s about empowering others.”¹¹ This approach to leadership enhances accountability and encourages a sense of healthy pride in the contributions each student leader makes to the ministry. Delegating responsibilities also provides student leaders the space to focus on and collaborate with the staff on reaching strategic ministry goals and foster a more effective leadership structure. The value of empowering leadership, shared leadership, and proper delegation within the context of student leaders is immeasurable. By promoting a culture that empowers, collaborates, and strategically delegates, student

⁸ Maxwell, *Developing Leaders*, 138.

⁹ Maxwell, *Developing Leaders*, 105.

¹⁰ Paul David Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 136.

¹¹ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*, 10th anniversary ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 146.

leaders are prepared not only for successful ministry within their current church but perhaps also for future leadership endeavors. These efforts contribute to the flourishing of a new generation of leaders poised to fulfill the mission of God to reach people with the gospel and to make lifelong disciples.

Fourth, students becoming more invested can help bridge the church's generational gap and increase empathy amongst the various generations. Mark Oestreicher quotes D. Scott Miller,

This is what's needed: A church for young people that will know how to speak to their hearts and enkindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in them with the joy of the gospel and the strength of the Eucharist; a church that will know how to invite and welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence; a church that's not afraid to require much, after having given much; that does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of the following of the gospel.¹²

Kara Powell notes the church should be a place where students know they are seen, valued, prioritized, and regarded as integral participants of the church community "not just kids to be entertained."¹³ Students need to learn from older generations within the church that their identity in Christ sets the course for the activity they do for Christ. Powell further highlights that every teenager is searching for the answers to three questions, "Who am I? (a question of identity), Where do I fit? (a question of belonging), and What difference do I make? (a question of purpose)."¹⁴ By involving students in leadership positions, the church creates opportunities to work alongside older adults who provide opportunity for increased wisdom and experiences. This environment fosters an increased measure of empathy and opportunities where students can better learn from adults and adults can learn from a younger generation. This only aids in the future of the church. Powell notes, "Young people who are surrounded by empathetic adults often

¹² Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0: A Manifesto of Where We've Been, Where We Are and Where We Need to Go* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 26.

¹³ Kara Eckmann Powell, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 199.

¹⁴ Powell, *Growing Young*, 124.

become more empathetic themselves. When teenagers and emerging adults are appreciated, understood, and valued, they become conduits through which empathy flows.”¹⁵ Serving can help to break down stereotypes and promote understanding and respect across different age groups. Student leadership can help ensure the church’s long-term vitality and sustainability. By discipling and investing in the next generation of teenage leaders, the church prepares for the future, ensures its mission and ministry will continue for years, and combats the various cultural narratives.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to implement a student leadership team at the Plano Campus of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas.

Goals

The following four goals determined the success of this project.

1. The first goal was to define why student leadership is important and why there is positive value for youth to be seen as leaders.
2. The second goal was to identify sample churches that met the established criteria of church and student ministry size to evaluate their practice and value of a student leadership team.
3. The third goal was to describe what student leaders’ responsibilities include.
4. The fourth goal was to create a road map for implementing a student leadership team.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project was determined upon the four goals. The first goal was to define why student leadership is important and why there is positive value for students to be seen as leaders. This goal was measured by creating a vision statement demonstrating a biblical case for young people being involved in actively serving from an overflow of their relationship with Jesus. This goal was considered

¹⁵ Powell, *Growing Young*, 95.

successful when that vision statement is created and has unanimous approval by senior level church leadership.

The second goal was to identify sample churches that met the established criteria of church and student ministry size to evaluate their practice and value of a student leadership team. Churches were primarily identified through the Youth Pastor METRO organization, student ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention, that is comprised of churches that have at least one thousand members and a minimum of one hundred students in the student ministry. Once a church was identified, communication with their student pastor was made with an explanation of the project. Then, they were asked to participate in an online survey.¹⁶ The survey collected information and aided the development and implementation of a student leadership team at Prestonwood. This goal was considered successful when at least twenty qualifying churches have been identified.

The third goal was to describe what student leaders' responsibilities include. This goal was measured by completion of establishing responsibilities. The survey sent to the list of churches from goal 2 included open ended questions that reviewed the responsibilities and roles of student leaders, trainings, and outcomes that identified and assessed best and effective practices that student ministries have implemented. This goal was considered successfully met when key responsibilities and components have been identified and are utilized in at least ten of the churches surveyed.

The fourth goal was to create a road map for implementing a student leadership team. This goal was measured by defining the purpose, providing an application, creating roles and responsibilities, vision casting, and implementing ongoing training. The goal was considered successfully met upon completion of said steps and implementation of a student leadership team was established.

¹⁶ See appendix 3. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use. This project was limited to select churches that met the established criteria of at least one thousand church members and one hundred students in the student ministry

Definitions and Limitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project.

Student/youth. An individual between the ages of thirteen and nineteen.

Student leader. A student who serves in various capacities in a local church.

Servant leadership. Servant leadership is, in its essence, an attitude. Jeff Iorg explains, “Servant leadership is defined more by who you are than by what you do.”¹⁷ Nathan Eva et al. also state that servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.¹⁸

SLU. Student Leadership University is an organization that seeks to develop and equip student leaders to think, dream, and lead.

JHigh. This term refers to students in seventh and eighth grade and part of the Junior High ministry at Prestonwood.

This project was limited to select churches that met the established criteria of at least one thousand church members and one hundred students in the student ministry.

Conclusion

In the realm of student ministry, there is tremendous potential within Christian teenagers who possess the capability to lead, serve, and make disciples. Students are not just the future of the church, they serve an active role in the church right now. The mission, vision, and culture of Prestonwood Students lays a solid foundation for this project. The subsequent chapters and project sought to define why student leadership is vital, argue why youth should be seen as leaders, describe what student leaders responsibilities

¹⁷ John F. Iorg, *The Character of Leadership* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 117.

¹⁸ Nathan Eva et al., “Servant Leadership: A Systematic Review and Call for Future Research,” *Leadership Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (February 2019), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984317307774#s0010>.

should be, and examine the biblical framework for student leadership along with historical examples, reasonings, and challenges for students to lead.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT LEADERSHIP

The need to serve, equip, empower, and mobilize students to lead within Prestonwood and to the ends of the earth to advance the kingdom of God is critical. God wants to use students as an example to demonstrate what it looks like to know, love, and serve the Lord. Prestonwood is committed to seeing students discover their identity in Jesus, find biblical community, and understand how to use their spiritual gifts to make a difference in the world and for the kingdom of God.

This generation of students loves Jesus, are walking in a relationship with him, being transformed by him, and are being disciplined to tell others about him. Student leaders can serve in the student ministry and various ministries across the church by welcoming and greeting, setting up student LifeGroup environments, running media technology, telling the story of what God is doing via social media, leading worship, and leading their peers in Bible studies at the church, in homes, or on their school campuses. As parents and church leaders seek to guide students toward Christ-centered living, there must be an outlet and arena to exercise that faith where students are invited to take increased ownership and responsibility as torch bearers of the gospel.

Prestonwood has incredible pastoral and lay leadership who desire to invest in the next generation to help them see their place in the kingdom of God. This adult leadership is strategically poised to develop and unleash student leaders to lead in a variety of ways. Student leadership at its core is about discipling teens to become more like Jesus, and in doing so, serving like Jesus and telling more people about Jesus. Investing energy and resources into a student leadership team provides a driving mechanism for discipling a group of teenagers and thrusting them out of their comfort zones. Along the

journey of maturing in their character, they are forced to depend on Jesus in multiple ways and, in doing so, their relationship with Jesus strengthens. When a student leadership team is viewed as discipleship, Jesus naturally emerges as the quintessential example of leadership. Jesus did not lead with domineering power; rather, he demonstrated servanthood, setting a precedent for student leaders to follow suit.

Students have incredible leadership potential, and the church needs to see and speak that into them. If a student has come to faith in Jesus, has a relationship with him (John 3; Eph 2:8–9), has a mindset to learn and grow in their faith, has a desire to serve others, can handle being challenged, and wants to live for something bigger than themselves, then a student has what it takes to be a student leader. Student leadership is not a popularity contest or a holy huddle of spiritual elites. It is, however, a group of students desiring to humbly serve others out of the overflow of their relationship with Jesus. While making disciples is the directive from Jesus (Matt 28:19–20), servanthood is ultimately a bi-product of discipling students to be enthralled with Jesus and his kingdom. Despite not being *fully* matured in faith (Phil 3:12–14), teenagers who are dedicated followers of Jesus, are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are being disciplined by older leaders, and are seeking to glorify Jesus, should have opportunities for serve within the church. Biblical leadership is not about style, platform, or charisma as much as it is rooted in godly character. The next generation desires to contribute beyond themselves, and a platform for student leadership is necessary. Barna Group reports,

Committed Christian teens find joy, relevance in Jesus. Committed Christians are a minority who often have meaningful experiences of faith. Globally, three-quarters of committed Christian teens strongly agree their connection to Jesus brings them joy and satisfaction. In the U.S., the reported benefits of this rare relationship with Jesus are slightly less pronounced; 69 percent agree strongly that they experience this joy and satisfaction. As one might expect, nominal Christian teens in the U.S. are even less inclined to agree; they are nearly half as likely as their committed peers to say the relationship they have with Jesus is satisfying.¹

¹ “Over Half of Gen Z Teens Feel Motivated to Learn More about Jesus,” Barna Group, February 1, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/teens-and-jesus/>.

While adults leading in the church have great significance, more times than not if a younger person is to be inclined and open to hearing or learning the gospel, it will be done by someone roughly their own age. Peer to peer relationships have a substantial impact and influence on advancing the kingdom of God. This chapter provides a vision statement for student leadership, unpacks the biblical evidence arguing for why students can lead, and illustrates what ways they can serve. Students do not simply want to have tasks delegated but want to be empowered to lead. This chapter will examine the examples of younger people God used in Scripture, the example of Jesus himself, and the exhortation of Paul found in some of his epistles. Tim Elmore and Andrew McPeak write, “It is time to equip and release students to take responsibility for their own lives. In doing this, we express the belief that they are capable of leading themselves.”²

This chapter contains three sections that examine biblical examples of young people who God called to lead, the attitude of a student leader, and the significance of equipping students to lead. It is noteworthy that the cultural expectations for young people during their lifetime are different than cultural expectations today.

Student Vision Statement

Prestonwood Students exists to reach the community, the nation, the world, and every generation with the gospel. To help students learn to grow in an authentic and visible faith, to love those around them with a biblically based devotion to Jesus, and to multiply what God has done in their lives into the lives of others. The role of student leadership is to disciple students to live on mission, think outside of themselves, and provide opportunities to experience servant leadership.

² Tim Elmore and Andrew McPeak, *Generation Z Unfiltered: Facing Nine Hidden Challenges of the Most Anxious Population* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener, 2019), 19.

Biblical Examples of Students Leading

Throughout the Bible and into today, God has used young people to shape culture. Richard Ross writes, “Teenagers are not just the church of tomorrow; they are also the church of today.”³ The same Holy Spirit who is alive in adults is the same Holy Spirit who is alive and at work in teenagers. While the world and society may place limitations on teenagers, the church can proactively equip and empower students to serve. Even in the Old Testament, at the age of thirteen a Jewish boy became obligated to observe the law (*Nid. 5:6; Nazir 29b*) and in more recent years has begun to be called a “son of the covenant—*Bar-Mitzvah*.”⁴ Within the church there are and have always been various opportunities for older people to serve—from pastors, full-time staff, deacons, adult small group leaders, children’s ministry, missions, and beyond. While adults serving is necessary, it can also be argued that teenagers have a unique role of serving. Richard Ross eloquently states, “Telling teenagers they can change the culture is essential but not enough. Moving young disciples into leadership roles in student ministry or the full church can enhance their confidence and skills. Leaderships in the broader congregation can give teenagers a lifetime love for the church and give church members a new appreciation for teenagers.”⁵

There are many character examples throughout the Bible, such as David, Josiah, Mary, and Timothy, to name just a few, where God chooses to use teenagers to lead and influence others. The Bible introduces David as a young shepherd boy, chosen by God to do great things. It is worth noting that in Numbers 1:3, Israelite soldiers had to be at least twenty years old to fight in the army.⁶ Yet David, despite being young and inexperienced, was called into battle. He went on to demonstrate his leadership skills through his bravery

³ Richard Ross, *A New Vision for SBC Student Ministry: Reaching, Baptizing, Discipling, and Sending Teenagers* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill, 2021), 67.

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 121.

⁵ Ross, *New Vision for Student Ministry*, 44.

⁶ Daryl Jones, *Youth Matter: Kingdom Development Kingdom Impact* (Miami: Point, 2021), 93.

and faith in God when he faced the Philistine giant Goliath and defeated him, thus giving the Israelites inspirational confidence and eventual victory over the Philistine army. Before his showdown with Goliath, God uses David as a youth by calling him to be the king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 16, God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king of Israel. When Samuel sees Jesse's first seven sons, God tells him that none of them are the chosen one. It is only when the youngest son, David, is brought before Samuel that God reveals he is the one who will be king. David's leadership at such a young age was not without its challenges, as he faced opposition. King Saul, who by all worldly standards had the looks, height, and charisma, despised young David for his youth. However, David, though he was young and had difficult circumstances around him, remained steadfast in his faith and continued to trust God. Soon after David's example of leadership came Josiah. Regarding Josiah's leadership as a youth, Daryl Jones highlights,

In 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35, there was a king named Josiah who began his rule in Jerusalem at eight years old. Yes, he was eight years old and sat on the throne as king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Not only that, but he reigned for thirty-one years. Josiah did great and mighty things for the Lord, but he did not wait until he was an adult to serve the Lord. He started as a child, and continued serving the Lord as a youth, and into adulthood. During the eighth year of his reign, when he was approximately fifteen or sixteen years old, he sought out the Lord regarding what kind of king he should be. Josiah desired to be a godly king, wanting to follow in the footsteps of King David. Because of this, he removed the idolatry—the worshipping and serving of false gods—that was running rampant in the land. He tore down the pagan places of worship and reinstated the true worship of the Lord. Josiah cleansed the Lord's temple, and during the process, the priests found the book of the law.⁷

Second Kings 22–23 along with 2 Chronicles 34 showcases more of Josiah's leadership as a youth. He was a significant figure as someone who led at a young age. He was the son of King Amon and ascended to the throne of Judah around the age of eight after his father's assassination, and he reigned in leadership for thirty-one years. Despite being sixteen years old, Josiah displayed remarkable leadership qualities and made substantial achievements and reforms. Second Chronicles 34:2 reads,

⁷ Jones, *Youth Matter*, 89.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images.

One of Josiah's most noteworthy achievements was his dedication to eradicate idolatry and pagan practices. As just a teenager, he began to cleanse the kingdom of its idolatrous influences. So thorough were his reforms that he even exhumed the bones of the dead apostate priests and burned them.⁸ He took on the ambitious task of restoring the temple and directed the repair ensuring its sanctity and proper function. Josiah's leadership at a young age was marked by a sincere desire to honor God and follow His commands. His actions showcased his willingness to make difficult and impactful decisions, demonstrating wisdom beyond his years. Much can be learned from Josiah's commitment to God, and the service of his people leaves a legacy for young believers to follow suit.

Mary is another biblical character that personifies God empowering students to lead. Demonstrated in Luke 1, God used Mary by choosing her to be the mother of Jesus. During this period, Mary was probably no older than fifteen years, possibly closer to thirteen, the typical age for betrothal.⁹ In the first century, betrothal customs allowed engagements to commence as early as twelve years old. Although Mary's exact age remains unspecified, it is within this betrothal period that Gabriel delivers the news.¹⁰ By faith, humility, and obedience Mary responds with what is known as "The Magnificat, or Song of Mary," which is recorded in Luke 1:46–56. Essentially, God in this moment reverses the roles commonly held in the culture; he exalts the poor, rejected, and oppressed, and humbles the rich, proud, and esteemed.¹¹ Mary's leadership as a youth was

⁸ Billy E. Simmons, "2 Chronicles," in *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1972), 248.

⁹ Stein, *Luke*, 82.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), Lk 1:26–28, Logos.

¹¹ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), Lk 1:46–56, Logos.

characterized by her unwavering faith and devotion to God. At a young age, she demonstrated the qualities of a strong leader by putting her trust in God and submitting to his will.

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul gives Timothy strong exhortation along with five specific areas in which Timothy should actively pursue his own growth and development to better serve as an example. There is clear evidence in this passage that God does not hold differing standards or expectations for followers of Christ to be examples for others. God calls all believers to set an example. The passage reads in the New International Version, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” By devoting himself to these principles, Paul is encouraging, reinforcing, and reminding Timothy that he has immense influence for Christ. Illuminating that he does not need to lead with a spirit of fear or timidity but of power, love and sound mind (2 Tim 1:7). He is telling Timothy to be bold in his faith. The passage in 4:12 is often used to encourage younger believers to faithfully live for God and serves as a powerful reminder that youth can be leaders and make a difference. The argument of “because you are young” is not without merit in that wisdom comes with age. However, young Christians should desire to submit to the lordship of Christ in all areas so no one will despise them in their youth. In the context of this verse, Paul is writing to his young protégé Timothy, who was much like a spiritual son to him, and who is a leader in the church at Ephesus. Paul is seeking to prepare Timothy to deal wisely with false teachers who were threatening the vitality of the Ephesian church and offers up strong encouragement for Timothy to fulfill his leadership. This passage highlights the importance of leadership qualities such as humility, integrity, and character, regardless of age or experience. It also emphasizes the need for young leaders to be given opportunities to exercise their gifts and talents in service to the church, even in the face of cultural resistance or skepticism.

Paul urges Timothy not to allow others to make his age a point of criticism. Estimating Timothy's age poses challenges due to not being specified at this specific point in the Scripture, but his position of leadership is noted and serves as a catalyst for why young believers today have opportunities to be servant leaders wherever God has placed them. Timothy's love for the Lord, calling, and giftings validate his leadership, not his age.¹² When it comes to the command, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young," Rick Brannan comments, "The phrase 'Let no one look down on' is a translation of the Greek word καταφρονέω along with μηδείς ('no one' or 'nobody'). The word καταφρονέω carries the sense of 'look down on,' 'despise' or 'treat with contempt.'"¹³ The word μηδείς is used here as a substantive with the meaning "no one" (Mark 10:20; Luke 18:21; Acts 26:4).¹⁴ Based on the present imperative, Timothy was being looked down upon and Paul is exhorting him not to be phased or pushed down. This is a reminder to Timothy that even though he is young, he is still a leader in the church and should be respected as such. It is also a reminder to all young believers that age should not be a barrier to serving and making an eternal difference for the kingdom of God. Paul is delegating authority to him and instructing him to make use of that authority despite the cultural resistance he may encounter. Therefore, Timothy can counter the people's inclination to look down on him by being someone they can look up to.¹⁵ George Knight writes,

The antidote given is to overcome the tendency of others to look down on youth by demonstrating a maturity in life and conduct. Thus Timothy is urged to be an "example" or "pattern" (τύπος, Pl.* 8x: Rom. 5:14; 8:17; 1 Cor. 10:6; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thes. 1:7; 2 Thes. 3:9; Tit. 2:7; in all the Pauline passages except the first two, the

¹² John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012, 2016), 1 Ti 4:12, Logos.

¹³ Rick Brannan, *First Timothy*, Lexical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (Bellingham, WA: Appian Way, 2016), 176.

¹⁴ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 205.

¹⁵ Douglas Mangum, *1 Timothy*, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), 1 Ti 4:12.

idea of a model or example for others is evident; see L. Goppelt, *TDNT* VIII, 248–50; De Boer, *Imitation*, 21–23, 86–89). Some think that the genitive construction τῶν πιστῶν following τύπος means that Timothy must be an example *of* believers (*NASB*: “an example *of* those who believe”). However, the parallel usage in 1 Pet. 5:3 (τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου), which requires the understanding “be examples *to* the flock” (so *NASB*), demonstrates that *to* or *for* is appropriate here (so *NEB*, *NIV*). The adjective πιστῶν is used in an active sense here (as in v. 10) as a substantive designating “those who believe” in Christ, i.e., “believers” (see vv. 3, 10). With the definite article (τῶν) it designates the specific believers among whom Timothy lives.¹⁶

Paul believed God wanted to use Timothy to advance the kingdom of God; therefore, Paul strived to disciple, teach, be an example for, and encourage Timothy. The same is true for church leaders and students today. Through godly examples of following Jesus and biblical discipleship, student leaders can increasingly mature in their faith, overcome any cultural resistance, and demonstrate to others they are capable and trustworthy to serve. Paul exhorts Timothy because he knows the importance of godly character and goes on to list five specific areas in which a young believer and servant leader should strive to grow, “but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” Timothy was to present his character and calling for leadership by his lifestyle and was to live exactly opposite of the false teachers.¹⁷ The five godly traits are not only for the young but should be exhibited by all believers to examine their character and to ensure their actions are consistent with their faith. These five traits demonstrate why they are capable of being servant leaders.

Student leaders should use their speech in a powerful way for the advancement of the gospel and to the edification of others. Other translations say “in word” but the overarching sentiment is the words students use, the way in which they use them, and what is being discussed are all significant to God. Speech is a critical witness for student leaders as they can have increased connection amongst peers and can be used to set an example for others. Ephesians 4:29 reinforces this principle and says, “Do not let any

¹⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

¹⁷ Robert James Utley, *Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey: I Timothy, Titus, II Timothy*, Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 9 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 59.

unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Additional supporting passages can be found in Proverbs 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” and Psalm 19:14, “may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Because students can readily speak into the lives of their peers and influence others, it is imperative church leaders showcase to students the gravity to which words matter and the effects they can have. Chris Kouba states, “The primary responsibility of Christian leaders is to study, know, and read the Scriptures and teach it to others (1 Tim 4:13).”¹⁸ Believers, regardless of age, should be careful to speak words full of truth, kindness, and grace. Brannan writes,

The Greek word is *λόγος* and here refers to the content of one’s speech or sayings. This phrase (*ἐν λόγῳ*) occurs 10 times in the New Testament, notably just a few paragraphs later in First Timothy:

The elders who lead well must be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor *by speaking* and teaching. (1Ti 5:17, emphasis added)

Timothy is not only to provide a model in preaching or speaking, but also in his speech in other contexts as well. This same prepositional phrase is used much more generically in Colossians: and everything whatever you do *in word* or in deed, giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus to God the Father through him. (Col 3:17, emphasis added)¹⁹

Speech encompasses the observable aspects of life. What people say reveals much about their character, experiences, and attitudes. Speech is how people conduct themselves and is a valid indicator of a person’s character, “for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34).²⁰ Furthermore, speech should always be honest and loving, “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).²¹ Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Words have power and can be exercised to speak life or destruction.

¹⁸ Christopher Barton Kouba, “Role of the Campus Pastor : Responsibilities and Practices in Multisite Churches” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 36.

¹⁹ Brannan, *First Timothy*, 179–80.

²⁰ Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 207.

²¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1996), 2:226.

Affording students the opportunity to teach amongst their peers increases connection, biblical understanding, leadership development, skill building, and discipleship. To allow students to use speech to serve others, a student leader can be given the opportunity in at least three specific ways: Sunday morning student leadership team devotionals, teach a lesson during LifeGroup Bible study, and lead an in-home Bible Study on Wednesdays. Often allowing a student to teach the Bible in each of these environments fosters an atmosphere of trust and openness where other students are encouraged to share their thoughts, doubts, and concerns because they know someone else can empathize with them. These moments of teaching serve as a catalyst not just within the student leadership team but carries over into student LifeGroup discussions and ongoing conversations throughout the week. Teaching allows student leaders to solidify their own understanding of Scripture as they pray, study, and prepare to share with others.

Student leaders are called to set an example in conduct (*ἀναστροφή* (1 Tim 4:12; Gal 1:13; Eph 4:20–24), having the general meaning of “way of life.”²² Specifically, student leaders can utilize their conduct, which is their behavior, to serve as role-models by setting up a small group environment on Sunday morning—a place where all students can engage with and experience God through Bible study, biblical community, and other various elements. They can arrive early and set up banners, signs, pens, notecards, promotional materials, and leader discussion guides, which all contribute to the overall environment. A student team dedicated to setting up environments exhibits faithfulness, humility, unity, and faith in action. The actions of a follower of Jesus should reflect biblical truths and beliefs, and a life that is pleasing to God. Brannan notes,

Paul notes areas in which Timothy is to be a positive example to the believers in Ephesus knowing that the example will provide a pattern for others to follow. This is reminiscent of a verse in the epistle to the Hebrews:

²² Brannan, *First Timothy*, 180.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you; considering the outcome of their *way of life*, imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7, emphasis added)

Timothy must be aware that he is to provide an example in the way he lives and physically interacts with the Ephesian community.²³

The conduct of student leaders not only reveals much about their godly character but influences the atmosphere and culture of the ministry.

A student leader can be part of creating a culture in which students, and others, feel comfortable and welcome to the church. Student leaders can hold doors open, hold welcome signs, offer high fives, fist bumps, and offer a warm and engaging smile as people walk into the building and into student spaces. Student leaders are to demonstrate and model the love of Christ. The word “love” in this context is *agapē*, which is a translation of the Greek word *ἀγάπη* and carries the sense of affectionate regard or benevolence toward someone.²⁴ This agape love of God is taught by Jesus in the second greatest commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Love is the Holy Spirit’s action in one’s life, the evidence of a relationship with the God who rules.²⁵ The term *αγαπάω* denotes a deep affection and sincere appreciation toward someone or something, characterized by genuine regard and care—it encompasses the notion of love, affection, and loving concern. As stated in John 13:34, Jesus commands his followers to love one another, emphasizing the importance of showing affection and care toward others. This love is often expressed through acts of service and selflessness, demonstrating one’s commitment to caring for and supporting one another in the community.²⁶ Loving others can be demonstrated by simply serving others. Jesus modeled servanthood throughout his life and calls believers to do the same (Mark 10:43–45). Students can showcase love inside

²³ Brannan, *First Timothy*, 181.

²⁴ R. P. Nettelhorst, “Love,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), Logos.

²⁵ Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 207.

²⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 292–93.

the church but also in their communities and schools. The love of God should compel students to share the gospel (Matt 28:19–20). “In love” points to the motivation of one’s life. Followers of Jesus do not obey God to be applauded by men (Matt 6:1); they do so because they love God and love God’s people.²⁷

Faith is a key building block of the Christian life. Faith is a person’s knowledge and confidence in Christ and deep reliance on what he has done. The author of Hebrews says, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (11:1–3). There are times in the life of every believer where it is difficult to walk by faith and with boldness. In this context, “faith” refers to the way someone lives their life, exemplifying Christ and Timothy’s personal faith or his general trustworthiness.²⁸ Paul is specifically talking about Timothy’s trust and confidence in God. The faith Paul mentions is a sincere faith. It is one of his goals for the Ephesian community, and Timothy is to provide an example of it.²⁹ In those moments Paul reminds Timothy to hold onto the hope he has in Jesus. Paul later authors in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that believers “live by faith, not by sight.” A student leader can cultivate a deep and authentic faith in God that entails actively practicing their beliefs, not just the people in their immediate friend group, but interacting and engaging with the world around them. This includes other students who show up each week to be part of the ministry in which these students serve. Faith leads to faithful serving.³⁰

Maintaining purity is crucial for upholding Timothy’s witness for the gospel, a concern relevant to many believers. The word translated “purity” is *ἀγνεία*, which has to do with “the quality of moral purity” or “*hagneia* from *hagnos*,” referring to being pure

²⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:226.

²⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Dallas: Word, 2000), 260.

²⁹ Brannan, *First Timothy*, 181.

³⁰ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:226.

from defilement, not contaminated.³¹ Paul uses this term to counsel Timothy to safeguard his purity. Paul instructs and advises Timothy to treat younger women like they are his sisters ἐν πάσῃ ἀγνείᾳ, “in all purity.”³² Recognizing vulnerability in this aspect, Paul highlights the importance of making it a priority. “In purity” is important as one lives in this present evil world. Ephesus was a center for sexual impurity, and the young man Timothy was faced with temptations.³³ For student leaders, the integrity of their purity is vital. Integrity is exemplified when students live in accordance with their convictions, upholding the truths and standards outlined in Scripture without yielding to the norms and temptations of the world. It is essential for student leaders to actively safeguard both their witness and their ability to serve faithfully. This involves a commitment to maintaining sexual purity and being vigilant against any harmful influences or activities that may pose a risk of moral compromise or cast doubt on their dedication. In essence, integrity encompasses a holistic commitment to values, moral conduct, and unwavering dedication to their responsibilities as leaders.

In conclusion, 1 Timothy 4:12 is a powerful reminder to young believers that age should not be a barrier to serving God and making a difference in the world. Paul authoritatively encouraged young Timothy to not allow himself to be taken for granted but instead serve as an example for all people on what it looks like to follow Jesus. Likewise, students are called to set an example in their conduct, regardless of their age. Thirteen to nineteen-year-old students have a unique opportunity to demonstrate godly conduct in their interactions with peers, teachers, family, ministry, and community. By serving as student leaders, showing love and kindness, displaying integrity, exhibiting faithfulness, practicing self-discipline, pursuing excellence, demonstrating humility, fostering unity, seeking wisdom, and living out their faith, students can have a profound

³¹ Brannan, *First Timothy*, 181.

³² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 260.

³³ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:226.

impact on those around them. Paul’s words to Timothy are a powerful reminder to young believers on setting an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity so that others will respect and respond favorably, whatever shortcomings may be.³⁴

The Attitude of a Student Leader

Students most suited for leadership are the ones who humbly surrender their life to Jesus, prioritize the needs of others over their own, and possess a serving mindset. Jesus’s model of ministry was marked with humility and sacrificial serving. Jesus set aside his throne and picked up a towel. God uses students in great ways when they are ready to minister to others. The Bible gives specific examples of the attitude modeled by Jesus (Phil 2:1–18; John 13:14). He exemplified selflessness, humility, and obedience to God through his love for others and his dedicated service to them. The attitude of Jesus challenges all believers, and particularly students, to put the needs of others before themselves, to work together in unity, and to serve God with joy and gratitude. A reason for students to gather with a student leadership team and at the church every Sunday is to serve the Lord with gladness. A student leader has immense influence, and with a Christ-like mindset and motive, can make a big difference. Paul Tripp says, “My passion for ministry is not about how I am being received; it flows out of the reality that I have been received by Him.”³⁵ When a student leader has a sincere heart for Jesus and a passion to serve, may they serve the Lord with gladness. When it comes to having a student leadership team, students need to view themselves as a kingdom ambassador (Eph 6:20). An ambassador has the attitude and mindset to proclaim the gospel to reach people. Richard Erickson describes the passion of Paul’s attitude:

He wishes for appropriate words to be given him by the Spirit so that he might openly and clearly make known the meaning of the once hidden gospel. Moreover,

³⁴ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 836, Logos.

³⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 123, Kindle.

since his work on behalf of the gospel has landed him in jail for the time being, Paul requests prayer for boldness in the continuance of his ministry and its attendant dangers to his person.³⁶

Philippians 2:1–18

Jesus stands as the paramount example of leadership. Service, in the context of student leaders, is not just a duty but a natural overflow and outpouring of the living presence of Jesus within believers. Jesus’s profound demonstration of humility serves as a compelling challenge for Christians, urging believers to embrace a lifestyle marked by selflessness and unity. In essence, the foundation of servant leadership, as inspired by Jesus, lies in the genuine and personal relationship with him. Paul writes about the attitude of Jesus in Philippians 2:1–18 and subsequent references outline an example for students to follow. The attitude Paul writes about in Philippians 2 is a calling for all believers to embody. The notion of selflessness and sacrifice is not designated to older believers but specifically for any aged follower of Jesus. Paul strongly emphasizes that unity is crucial for Christian community and for effectively defending the gospel. Additional concepts like humility and self-sacrifice are introduced not to detract from the central idea of unity but to illustrate that unity stems from humility and self-sacrifice arises from a readiness to prioritize the needs of others over one’s own desires.³⁷ Paul was speaking of this because not all believers who were indwelt with the Holy Spirit were living Spirit-filled lives. Pointing back to 1 Timothy 4:12, that is why a student leader must concentrate on their godly character and allow their service to derive from what God is doing in them.

Paul starts off in this passage (vv. 1–4) laying out and exhorting the church of Philippi to be united in their love and purpose, and to put the interests of others before their own. In Philippians 2:2, Paul writes about having the “same mind.” This idea of

³⁶ Richard J. Erickson, “Ephesians,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 3:1033.

³⁷ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Dallas: Word, 2004), 80–81.

united in spirit is the word *sympsychos*, *σύμψυχος*: pertaining to similarity of attitude and spirit— “harmonious, united in spirit, being one in spirit.”³⁸ Students are called to lead by practicing humility and putting the needs of others above their own desires. This mindset and attitude encourages effective servant leadership that focuses on supporting others and creating welcoming environments of hospitality where the gospel can be heard and shared.

Paul calls Timothy and himself servants of Jesus Christ. Notably, the Greek lacks a definite article, emphasizing their inherent nature as servants. The word is *doulos* (*δουλος*) and refers to one bound to another. For Paul, this binding to Jesus is characterized by an unwavering and compelling love. *Doulos* also implies a state of being born into servitude, and Paul contrasts his initial bondage to sin through his first birth with his subsequent birth into the role of a devoted bondsman of the Lord Jesus. This term further suggests an unbreakable connection that only death can sever, and Paul emphasizes that his previous association with Satan was terminated through his identification with Christ in his death. Now, Paul exists in a perpetual relationship with Jesus Christ, an eternal commitment as Christ is immortal, and Paul’s existence is intricately intertwined with Christ. In this context, *doulos* also conveys a surrender of one’s will to be wholly consumed by the will of another.³⁹ Servant, or an illustrative term “janitor,” can be used as a practical example for a student leader to grasp.

When students are growing up and asked, “What do you want to be or what job do you want to have when you grow up,” it could be highly likely that responses would vary between “lawyer, doctor, firefighter, etc.,” but few would respond with “janitor”—a respectful career field that does not receive much accolade, notoriety, or public appreciation but is highly vital. Janitor is a job done mainly behind the scenes with tasks that tend to be frowned upon. Student leaders need to be willing to champion the gospel

³⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 321.

³⁹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 5:26.

of Jesus in front of people but also understand that being a servant means their activity may never be seen by others nor always be glamorous. Their efforts may never be recognized. It could cost them time and energy when they wake up early or stay late to set up or clean up. Students that have this mindset may view any task, assignment, or ministry opportunity as having high eternal value and significance. They are part of a united team with a unified attitude that is setting out chairs, notecards, pens, check-in systems, sound checks, guests table resources, cleaning up trash and spills to create an environment with limited distractions and where the gospel can be shared and seen.

Matthew 6:1–4 also reinforces the correct motive needed:

Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.”

Student leaders must recognize the importance of practicing humility in their interactions and service towards others. Wuest writes,

After exhorting the Philippian saints in 2:2–4 to think the same thing, to have the same love, to be in heart agreement, and in lowliness of mind to consider one another as excelling themselves, Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” *This exhortation reaches back to 2:2–4 for its definition and ahead to 2:6–8 for its illustration.* Paul does not give all that is in the mind of Christ in these verses. He selects those qualities of our Lord which fit the needs of the Philippians at that moment. That which Paul speaks of as being in the mind of Christ and which the Philippians were to include in their own spiritual lives consisted of a spirit of humility and of self-abnegation and an interest in the welfare of others.⁴⁰

These virtues were exemplified in Jesus's decision to incarnate into humanity and serve as the substitute for sin. The conflict among the Philippian believers led to one of the most profound passages in the New Testament, known as the Kenosis passage. Philippians 2 examines the depths of the incarnation, highlighting the self-emptying of the Son of God as he took on human form, with “kenosis” referring to the act of emptying oneself. the

⁴⁰ Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies*, 5:60–62.

word *kenosis* (κενοσις) being the Greek word meaning “to empty.”⁴¹ In understanding the mindset of effective student leaders, it is essential to explore the depth of their thinking and the values they embody. This quote delves into the nuances of Greek word order and translation, particularly emphasizing the call for student leaders to reflect the mindset of Christ Jesus, characterized by humility and selflessness for the benefit of others, echoing the qualities outlined in Philippians 2:2–4. Wuest continues to write on the matter:

The Greek word order for the expression just noted is, “This be ye constantly thinking in you which also was in Christ Jesus.” The position of the pronoun “this” is emphatic and shows that the exhortation reaches back basically to 2:2–4, while the pronoun “who” in 2:6 connects the exhortation with the illustration in 2:5–8. The words “let mind be” are the translation of one Greek word which means, “to have understanding, to be wise, to direct one’s mind to a thing, to seek or strive for.” The word seems always to keep in view the direction which thought of a practical kind takes. The expression could be translated in a number of ways, each of which while holding to the main idea, yet brings out a slightly different shade of meaning. For instance: “Be constantly thinking this in yourselves;” “Be having this mind in you;” “Reflect in your own minds, the mind of Christ Jesus” (Lightfoot); “Let the same purpose inspire you as was in Christ Jesus” (Way). The sum total of the thought in the exhortation seems to be that of urging the Philippians to emulate in their own lives, the distinctive virtues of the Lord Jesus spoken of in 2:2–4. It is the habitual direction of our Lord’s mind with reference to self that is in the apostle’s thinking, an attitude of humility and self-abnegation for the benefit of others, which should be true also of the Philippians. This gives us the key to unlock the rich treasures of the great doctrinal portion of the letter we are now to study. . . . In the case of the Authorized Version, we have the word “was.” It could just as well be “is,” for the Lord Jesus still has that same mind. But the past tense verb “was” suits the context better since the apostle is speaking of the past act of supreme renunciation performed by our Lord in His incarnation and atoning sacrifice.⁴²

Student leaders are meant to point others to Jesus as a response of being saved by Jesus. Followers of Jesus are redeemed to serve and radiate, aiming for others to witness the power and presence of Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew 5:14–16, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Jesus gives a statement of identity when he says, “you

⁴¹ Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies*, 5:61.

⁴² Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies*, 5:62.

are.” The word “are” means *εἶμι*: to possess certain characteristics, whether inherent or transitory—“to be.”⁴³ Every individual is created in the image of God with the purpose of knowing and loving him and serving others as a result of their relationship with him. Religion is doing for God, relationship is doing things from knowing him, and serving is a response. Student leaders are called to “shine bright” and be the light of Jesus. Jesus says in John 8:12 and John 9:5 that he is the light of the world and that his followers will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. To be the hands and feet of Jesus means to shine bright and humbly serve. Jesus wants his followers to light up the environments around them. Zig Ziglar said, “Don’t be a wandering generality, be a meaningful specific.”⁴⁴ God has given student leaders significance and purpose by calling them to shine, serve, and share about the goodness and grace of God to those they meet to the glory of God.

Paul describes the ultimate example of a servant in the person of Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to become a man and to die on the cross for the sins of man. Christ’s humility is seen in his obedience to the Father’s will and his willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Philippians 2:2 reads, “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind,” and students can do so by fostering unity with others. This attitude of unity and harmony promotes a vibrant biblical community where students unite together in their faith journeys in walking with Jesus. Believers are called out in Philippians 2:5–8 to lead by example “in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.” Jesus, God in the flesh, humbled himself and became obedient to death. Brown explains,

⁴³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 148.

⁴⁴ Zig Zigler, AZQuotes, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/418181>.

The Christ hymn of Phil 2:5–11 is one of the most theologically weighty passages in the NT. Yet Paul’s main purpose for including it as part of his letter to the church in Philippi is practical. In particular, he presents Christ as an exemplary model of humility and self-sacrifice. In this sense, the incarnation of Christ functions for all believers as a model of what selfless love looks like. Christ possessed equality with God, but He willfully took the form of a servant for the sake of others. Although we do not possess the riches of Christ, all of us treasure certain rights and privileges that we dare not let go. The Christ hymn calls us to imitate Christ.⁴⁵

Mark 10:45 serves as a reminder and declares, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Christ embraced the role of a servant and humbled himself to the point of being willing to face death on a cross, like a common criminal; the same cross that Christ tells his followers to take up daily and imitate His example for the glory of God (Luke 9:23). Philippians 2:12–13 encourages student leaders to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. This empowers students to take their faith, responsibilities, and commitments as leaders seriously and to make intentional efforts to lead in ways that reflect their faith. By leading and serving with a sense of purpose and devotion, students can inspire others to do the same. Philippians 2:15–16 showcases how believers are called to shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life. This directive urges students to lead by example to reflect Jesus and the good news of the gospel. Lastly, Philippians 2:17–18 acknowledges that even if leadership involves challenges and sacrifices, there is reason to rejoice in the service rendered to others. Students’ efforts to lead with humility and selflessness are valuable contributions that bring joy both to themselves and those they serve.

John 13:14

John 13:14 says, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples on the evening just before being arrested and his imminent crucifixion. John 13 serves as an introduction to the entire “Book of Glory.” It also gives the immediate setting for Jesus’s

⁴⁵ Derek R. Brown, *Philippians*, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), Php 1:27–2:30, Logos.

Last Supper with his disciples.⁴⁶ Luke 22 parallels the same setting as John 13 and depicts that the disciples were arguing amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest. As with teenagers at times, they can be consumed with social status, popularity, and placing their identity in achievement. John 13 offers a profound illustration of humility, showcasing Jesus serving others by washing his disciples' feet. Through this humble act, he demonstrated his willingness to perform even the most menial tasks.⁴⁷ In Jesus's act of foot washing, two clear purposes emerge. In John 13:4–5, Jesus, seen by his disciples as the messiah and as a respected teacher and leader, humbly takes on the role of a servant by washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus's action is particularly noteworthy because washing others' feet was regarded as such a menial task that it was typically delegated to non-Jewish slaves.⁴⁸ Barclay Newman and Eugene Albert Nida note that Jesus "*Took off his outer garment* is more literally 'puts (aside) his outer garments.' The verb *took off* (Greek *tithemi*) is not the normal word used for taking off one's clothes, but it is used in 10:11, 15, 17, and 18 for the laying down of one's life. By 'laying down' his garments, Jesus foreshadows the 'laying down' of his life."⁴⁹ The passage assumes that Jesus's unwavering love for his followers is demonstrated through the impending cross, as well as through the act of humble service symbolized by the foot-washing, which foreshadows the sacrifice on the cross. It echoes the sentiment that there is no greater expression of love than sacrificing one's life for others.⁵⁰ When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he set an example of seeing people beyond social status. In the same way,

⁴⁶ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 426.

⁴⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2017), 1693.

⁴⁸ Köstenberger, "John," 1693.

⁴⁹ Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, 430, emphasis original.

⁵⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 461.

students can learn to see people with compassion and treat them with kindness regardless of their background or social status.

Jesus’s act of foot washing also revealed his empathy for his disciples and modeled how student leaders can move their compassion into action. Since Jesus was willing to humble himself to kneel, pick up a towel, and wash dirty feet, student leaders can also assert themselves into serving the needs of those around them. Not that they are capable of giving salvation to others but that they can demonstrate and point others to Jesus—the only one who can save people from their sin and into a relationship with God. Jesus prioritized his disciples’ needs over his own comfort. Student leaders need opportunities to serve so they can better learn to put the needs of others before their own desires and develop selflessness. Jesus did not just talk about serving, but he demonstrated it through his actions. Mark parallels this as well and mentions, “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Student leaders as well need to understand the gravity that their actions speak loudly and that they can influence others by their selfless living. This act of service teaches valuable lessons about humility, compassion, and the transformative impact of selfless actions.

The Equipping of a Student Leader

Prestonwood desires to equip student leaders to be gospel influencers. Paul distinguishes several spiritual gifts that edify the church and then, as laid out by Paul, the work of pastoral overseers is to equip the saints for the ministry of the church. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11–13). The word equip, *καταρτισμός, katartismos*, is “a preparing.”⁵¹ This teaching challenges the misconception

⁵¹ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, updttd. ed. (Anaheim, CA: Foundation, 1998), 2677, Logos.

that ministry is solely the responsibility of “professional” church leaders, whereas lay people are merely recipients of ministry. Harold Hoehner says it this way:

The purpose of the gifted men is to prepare God’s people for works of service. More literally, this purpose is “for the perfecting or equipping (*katartismōn*; cf. the verb *katartizō* in Matt. 4:21, ‘mending’ or ‘preparing’ nets; in Gal. 6:1, ‘restore’ for proper use; cf. 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21) of the saints unto the work of the ministry” (*diakonias*). Gifted people (Eph. 4:11) are to minister the Word to others so that they in turn are readied to get involved in ministering to others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). The goal of all this is the building up or edifying of the body of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:16). This shows that all saints and not just a few leaders should be involved in the “ministry.” All saints are gifted (v. 7) to serve others spiritually.⁵²

There cannot exist a chasm between the pulpit of the pastor and the people of the church. Equipping the saints, and especially student leaders, is fundamentally about relationships and discipleship. This takes pointed effort to invest into the lives of student leaders and to create a ministry for them to serve but is worth the time and energy. Paul asserts that church leaders are meant to empower active, faithful, born-again believers with ministry to serve others. Larry Osborne in *Sticky Church* writes, “Mentoring Myth—the ministers do all the work. The Holy man myth is the idea that pastors and clergy somehow have a more direct line to God. It cripples a church because it overburdens pastors and underutilizes the gifts and anointing of everyone else. It mistakenly equates leadership gifts with superior spirituality.”⁵³ The church must empower students to lead while equipping them with an appropriate platform and responsibilities. Executive Pastor of First Cleveland, Jeff Lovingood, said this regarding effective student ministry,

When the people in your ministry recognize their unique gifts and abilities and are provided with opportunities to serve in those areas, good things will happen. They’ll love serving because it meets a basic need in their life. Serving this way will also connect them with the purpose and the plan of ministry that will strengthen the principles you are working on. It all works together. This concept ties back to the main purpose of our ministry: to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. God

⁵² Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 2:635.

⁵³ Larry W. Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

is pleased when He sees His children working in their zones, and your team of leaders and students will be excited and passionate about it too.⁵⁴

Providing students with an opportunity to serve offers them a platform to engage in activities they might not otherwise consider, inspiring them to embrace a life beyond self-centered pursuits.

This notion of equipping is open to faithful teenage student leaders who have a love for Jesus, his church, and the mission of the church. The term “saints” encompasses all believers, irrespective of age. Saint connotes one who is ἅγιος (*hagios*). *Hagios* means to be holy, set apart, consecrated, dedicated, saints. It refers to the quality of God who is transcendently distinctive, unique.⁵⁵ The word saints includes students who are part of the church body and highlights that every member has a role to play in the service of the church. Student leaders are not participating simply to do the work that the church staff does not, but they are positioned to learn and execute serving in the ministry.

Equipping students with opportunities within their own ministry context gives them ownership of their ministry and the mission of God. Equipping students is not giving them the responsibility to set the vision and direction of the ministry, nor having adults completely step out so students can take sole responsibility. Equipping students provides life-on-life, uncomfortable ministry experiences that allow them to feel awkward enough to inspire their growth and effectively catalyze a mission-driven culture. It is worth noting that students have various personalities and readiness for leadership. Richard Ross says,

A team of adults can assist individual teenagers in moving into leadership roles that fit unique personalities. Teenage Christ followers:

1. Need to hear that their current service matters for the Kingdom today
2. Need to hear that their current service prepares them for a lifetime of influence on the culture
3. Need to hear that the Great Commissioning gives them a cause much bigger than themselves

⁵⁴ Jeff Lovingood, *Make It Last: Proven Principles for Effective Student Ministry* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2012), chap. 4, Kindle

⁵⁵ Hon-Lee Kwok, “Holiness,” in Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

4. Need to hear that their parents, pastors, and teachers believe in what Christ can do through them
5. Need to hear stories about teenage disciples who are shaping the culture in the U.S. and globally.⁵⁶

The equipping of student leaders is deeply rooted in the biblical understanding of ministry. The church, following Paul's guidance in Ephesians 4, should seek to empower and prepare saints, including teenagers, for active service in the ministry of the church. Contrary to the myth that professional leaders alone bear the responsibility of ministry, the goal is to involve all believers, emphasizing that every member, regardless of age, is set apart and dedicated for service. Equipping student leaders goes beyond mere delegation; it involves intentional investment, discipleship, and the creation of a ministry environment tailored to their needs and readiness. This approach recognizes the uniqueness of individual personalities and readiness for leadership, providing varied opportunities that inspire growth and contribute to a mission-driven culture. Ultimately, equipping student leaders is about instilling a sense of purpose, showing them that their current service matters, and preparing them for a lifetime of service and influence.

Conclusion

It is essential to reflect on the three key areas discussed: biblical examples of young leaders called by God, the characteristics and attitude necessary for student leadership, and the crucial role of equipping students for leadership. These elements highlight that while the cultural expectations for youth in biblical times differed significantly from those today, the timeless principles of leadership and discipleship remain applicable and vital. It is crucial to cultivate a culture where students are not only served, but equipped, empowered, and mobilized to serve both within and outside the church to advance the kingdom of God. Paul clearly outlines these biblical truths in his writings to Timothy and exhorted the same truths in his letter to the churches in Philippi and Ephesus that provide a biblical framework for student leaders today. The church must

⁵⁶ Ross, *New Vision for Student Ministry*, 45.

unwaveringly assist students to live on mission, encourage the attitude of Christ within them, and equip them for the ministry to make disciples.

CHAPTER 3

TEENAGE LEADERSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS IN LEADERSHIP

Over the course of history and in the present, the pages of human accomplishment have been illuminated by the remarkable endeavors of teenagers who defied convention and rose to heights previously thought unattainable. This chapter explores the captivating narratives of teenagers, along with various organizations, whose actions transcended age-related expectations, serving as examples of inspiration and catalysts for teenagers to accomplish great things. From young and bold visionaries of the past who altered the course of history to more recent trailblazers redefining leadership paradigms, this chapter explores the variety of exceptional achievements by teenagers. However, alongside these incredible examples and stories, it is imperative to acknowledge the persistent challenges students face as they navigate the complex landscape of leadership. As the torchbearers of a promising future, students bear the weight of both incredible potential and ongoing hurdles, and this chapter covers the dual narrative of their accomplishments and the obstacles they must confront in their pursuit of leadership.

Alex Harris and Brett Harris

Alex Harris and Brett Harris, twin teenage brothers, gained great recognition as authors and advocates for empowering teenagers to challenge societal norms and low expectations. In the realm of contemporary literature targeting youth empowerment, *Do Hard Things* has had a resounding impact. In 2008, at the age of eighteen, Harris and Harris became eager to explain to the world that teenagers were being underestimated and

that a whole generation of teens had bought into a cultural lie of low expectations.¹ They contend that modern culture had perpetuated a myth of adolescence marked by low expectations, apathy, and self-indulgence. The brothers note that the first documented use of the word teenager occurred in a 1941 issue of *Reader's Digest* and that the term was coined seventy-five years ago simply to allow marketers to pinpoint, study, and target this age group.² Harris and Harris fought for and argued that teenagers are not only capable of more but should aspire to achieve more during their teenage years. They believe teenagers can break free from limitations and actively pursue challenges, personal growth, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world.

Raised with a unique perspective on adolescence and potential, the brothers were raised in a home that encouraged them to venture beyond perceived expectations. In a brief timeframe they achieved significant influence. By the age of sixteen they interned for the Alabama Supreme Court, and at seventeen served as grass-roots directors for statewide political campaigns that spanned four states. Their book *Do Hard Things*, written at the age of eighteen by teens for teens, brought authenticity that resonated with students. The book and its challenges to teenagers push the boundaries of conventional teenage narratives and prompt students to redefine the limits for rising above societal expectations. The brothers held the conviction that teenagers possess the capacity to exert significant influence on the world. Therefore, they strategized to defy prevailing societal perceptions in creating a rallying cry. They called this plan of rebellion against low expectations the “Rebelution.” To better define *rebelution* the brothers write, “The word *rebelution* is probably new to you. To be honest, we made it up. We combined rebellion and revolution to form an entirely new word for an entirely new concept: rebelling against rebellion.

¹ Alex Harris and Brett Harris, introduction to *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations* (New York: Crown, 2008), Kindle.

² Harris and Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 29–30.

More precisely, we define *rebellion* as “a teenage rebellion against low expectations.”³ While the book is a story that starts with them, the brothers set out to ensure that their audience realizes it really is not about them, but rather something God is doing in the hearts and minds of their generation. The book’s central thesis and the authors’ attitude and influence struck a chord and offered a fresh perspective on the teenage years. Harris and Harris state,

Across the globe—from Parisian neighborhoods to Ivy League classrooms—a generation of rebels is rising through steady, one-foot-after-the-other, daily obedience to Jesus Christ. This is a quiet, worldwide revolution. . . . Our mantra is “do hard things,” and our mission statement is 1 Timothy 4:12, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. We were eighteen when we wrote *Do Hard Things*. Since then, we’ve been able to travel and speak in dozens of major cities in the United States, Canada, Switzerland, and Japan—reaching hundreds of thousands of teens, parents, and youth workers through live events and media appearances. We’ve been able to preach the gospel to our generation and seen thousands of bold professions of faith in Jesus Christ. We’ve written another book called *Start Here*, a field guide for putting the “do hard things” mind-set into practice. We attended and graduated from college (Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, Virginia), becoming the first in our immediate family to do so. We watched our mother bravely battle cancer and go to be with Jesus on July 4, 2010. We’ve fought our own personal battles against sin, wrestled through questions of calling, and for long stretches of time, stepped out of the limelight to just practice what we preach.⁴

Harris and Harris wrote *Do Hard Things* as a call to action for teenagers but its influence expanded to adults and educators across the world. Albert Mohler Jr. said, “In a culture where laziness and ease is often the order of the day for teenagers, *Do Hard Things* presents a radical and provocative alternative.”⁵ One of the most significant impacts of their book is the formation of a global movement. Having made such a splash, the boys and their efforts began making appearances in *ESPN The Magazine*, various films, and in

³ Harris and Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 11.

⁴ Harris and Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 210.

⁵ R. Albert Mohler Jr., endorsement of Alex Harris and Brett Harris, *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations*, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://www.therebellion.com/books/do-hard-things/>.

the speeches of Senator John McCain and President Barack Obama.⁶ The following are the key themes, chapters, and message summaries of *Do Hard Things*.

Harris and Harris's ongoing impact has been substantial and far-reaching. *Do Hard Things* has empowered teenagers and inspired them to reevaluate their potential and look to create and live out ambitious goals. A unique and tangible impact and outcome of *Do Hard Things* is the creation of *The Rebelution* website that has created an online community and ongoing catalytic movement.⁷ The website serves as an extension of the book's message, connecting teenagers who are committed to challenging cultural norms and pursuing extraordinary accomplishments. Reading through various sections on their *rebelution* website, it is apparent that many teenage readers have reported that the book transformed their outlook on life, motivating them to step out of their comfort zones, embrace challenges, and become proactive in their personal growth. The *rebelution* movement has united and connected teenagers from across the world where they share a common interest, share stories, ideas, and initiatives that continue to showcase that teenagers can set a positive example in life and leadership. Educators have found value in the book's message, as it dares them to set higher expectations for their students and create environments that foster personal development and holy ambition. Parents have been influenced by their message to support and encourage their teenager's aspirations. It has invigorated parents to become advocates and cheerleaders for their teens to accomplish daunting challenges. Years after the publication of *Do Hard Things*, their influence and writing remain relevant and continues to impact new generations of readers. Their message is timeless and speaks powerfully to the nature of cultural challenges and opportunities faced by teenagers today.

⁶ Harris and Harris, introduction to *Do Hard Things*.

⁷ The Rebelution. <https://www.therebelution.com/>.

Joan of Arc

In the heart of medieval France, a thirteen-year-old teenage girl's unwavering determination and audacious faith would shatter the cultural confines of her age and gender, propelling her country to victory. Despite cultural odds, Joan of Arc emerged as an extraordinary figure whose courage, conviction, and strategic brilliance altered the course of French history. Born in 1412, Joan was considered a peasant girl who did not attend school or receive proper education, as formal schooling was deemed for the wealthy and well-born, but was educated through the church.⁸ Despite being poorly educated and not having the ability to read or write, Joan created a pivotal change in the destiny of three nations of Western Europe and caused the English and Burgundians to be pushed out of France. As a result, Joan united France as a nation and altered her destiny.⁹ Joan's life was tragically brief and ended at the age nineteen, yet her impact reverberates through the centuries. Joan of Arc's remarkable achievements as a teenager not only defied societal norms but also laid the groundwork for her transformation into a national icon and symbol of unwavering resolve.

Joan's journey to greatness began at the age of thirteen, when she began communicating a strong belief in a divine mission from God: to aid the Dauphin, Charles VII, in reclaiming the French throne from English domination during the Hundred Years' War. In an era where women were seldom acknowledged as political or military figures, Joan's bold decision to seek out Charles VII and convince him of her divine mandate was an unprecedented act of bravery. Her meeting with Charles VII in 1429 was a pivotal moment that showcased her determination and strategic insight. Helen Castor describes Joan's age, condition, resolve, and mission:

Amid the luxury and ceremony of the court, she was an utterly incongruous sight: a village girl, not yet out of her teens, dressed in clothes that no reputable woman

⁸ Matt Clayton, *Joan of Arc: A Captivating Guide to a Heroine of France and Her Role during the Lancastrian Phase of the Hundred Years' War (The Medieval Period)* (self-published, 2019), 10, Kindle.

⁹ Bradford Judson, *Joan of Arc: Joan of Arc in Light of Anthroposophy & Spiritual Science* (self-published, 2022), 17, Kindle.

should ever have worn. But the guiding hand of Yolande—unseen but unmistakable in the very fact of her arrival—brought her to the presence of the king, and, though their meeting was witnessed only by his chief counsellors, the clarity of her message and the conviction with which it was delivered meant that news of her mission soon raced from the castle through the town and beyond. It was as startling as the girl herself. Joan, it seemed, had been sent by God not simply to instruct the king, but to help him in the recovery of his kingdom. If Charles—whom she sometimes addressed as “Dauphin,” because he was not yet God’s anointed—would give her an army, she would drive the English out of France, and lead him to Reims for his coronation.¹⁰

Joan transformed doubts into determined action and inspired the French army.

Endowed with the mantle of military leadership, she rallied troops and took to the battlefield, displaying exceptional military prowess that contradicted the cultural expectations of her age and gender. She took on risks to pursue the mission and her inspired leadership guided the French forces to several victories, effectively altering the course of the war and elevating her to a position of extraordinary influence.¹¹ Undeterred by skepticism and societal constraints, Joan exhibited a resolute commitment to her divine calling. Her faith, which remained steadfast in the face of skepticism and danger, underscored her unwavering conviction that her mission was not her own, but ordained by God.

Joan of Arc’s remarkable achievements transcended the battlefield. Her steadfast dedication to the cause of French unity transformed her into a strong symbol of national identity. In her rallying cry, “I do not fear men-at-arms; my way has been made plain before me. If there be men-at-arms, my Lord God will make a way for me to go to my Lord. For that I come,” she encapsulated her role as a conduit for divine intervention in the service of her nation.¹² Joan’s enduring legacy lies not only in her victories but in her willingness to pay the ultimate price for her convictions. Captured by her enemies, she faced an unjust trial and was condemned to death. Even in her darkest hour, Joan’s courage did not waver. Refusing to renounce her mission, she marched bravely to the stake,

¹⁰ Helen Castor, *Joan of Arc* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 90–91, Kindle.

¹¹ Castor, *Joan of Arc*, 113.

¹² Anatole France, *The Life of Joan of Arc* (Frankfurt, Germany: n.p., 2020), 97, Kindle.

becoming a martyr for her beliefs and an enduring symbol of sacrifice and unwavering commitment. Joan's impact extended far beyond her own time. It was said of Joan,

Joan's name still remained on every pair of lips in the kingdom, even though her ashes had long since dissolved into the Seine. While the war was won by good military command during the later years of Charles's reign, no one could deny then—or can deny now—that the appearance of Joan of Arc brought about what could be considered a miraculous change in the war. Before she arrived at Chinon, France was undoubtedly losing the war; to the English and to Charles himself, it seemed to be only a matter of time before France would be lost. Yet France didn't lose. It won the war, and it only started winning when a strange teenage peasant girl arrived in the court of the king and convinced him that God had sent her to save his country. Despite the fact that Joan remains one of the most well-studied figures from the Middle Ages, scientists still have not been able to pinpoint a cause for her visions. Whatever their cause, they made her one of the most legendary figures in France, a symbol of the country's national identity, and one of the first warrior women who would begin to turn the tide in a world dominated by men.¹³

Joan of Arc's teenage years were marked by audacity, faith, and exceptional leadership. Her resolute faith and leadership left an unforgettable mark on history and continue to inspire generations. Her story challenges conventional perceptions of teenagers' capabilities and serve as a valuable reminder that youth is not synonymous with inexperience or uselessness. Joan's ability to lead, inspire, and create change at a young age defied societal norms and resonates with the potential within every teenager. Her unwavering determination to fulfill her divine mission, coupled with her strategic brilliance and military acumen, elevated her from an ordinary peasant girl to an extraordinary historical figure. Joan's story serves as a testament to the power of youthful determination, and the capacity of teenagers to defy limitations and create lasting change. Her legacy serves as a reminder that age is not a barrier to greatness and that the fervent belief in one's purpose can alter the course of history.

Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai, a more than ordinary teenager who transcended the typical teenage narrative, gained widespread recognition as a courageous fifteen-year-old Pakistani

¹³ Clayton, *Joan of Arc*, 96.

girl who fearlessly championed the cause of girls' education in defiance of a culture where the Taliban had strong prohibitions against females. *Time Magazine* named her one of the most influential teens of 2014, and later included her in its list of one hundred most influential people.¹⁴ Yousafzai's significance as a teenager is marked by her resilience and courage in the face of adversity. In 2012, at fifteen years old, she survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban on her way home from school. She was targeted specifically for her outspoken advocacy for girls' education. She writes in her autobiography,

While I was hovering between life and death, the Taliban issued a statement assuming responsibility for shooting me but denying it was because of my campaign for education. "We carried out this attack, and anybody who speaks against us will be attacked in the same way," said Ehsanullah Ehsan, a spokesman for the TTP. "Malala has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism. . . . She was young but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun areas. She was pro-West; she was speaking against the Taliban; she was calling President Obama her idol."¹⁵

However, the attack did not thwart or derail her determination. Following the assassination attempt, Yousafzai became increasingly steadfast to continue her campaign, and her voice became amplified across the world. In recognition of her courageous efforts, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, and became the youngest-ever recipient.

Yousafzai's autobiography, *"I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,"* further amplified her message and provided insights into her commitment. She continued her advocacy for girls' education on the global scale. She co-authored the memoir, *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World*, sharing the experiences of displaced girls and emphasizing the importance of education for refugees. Yousafzai has inspired people worldwide with her dedication to promoting education as a fundamental right and her determination to overcome the obstacles imposed by Taliban extremists. Her significance lies not only in her personal story but in her ability to inspire and influence a broader cause of education,

¹⁴ Time Staff, "Malala Yousafzai Turns 19 Today and Look at All She Has Done," *Time*, July 12, 2016, <https://time.com/4402630/malala-yousafzai-accomplishments/>.

¹⁵ Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (New York: Little, Brown, 2016), 216, Kindle.

especially for girls in regions where access to education is limited or actively opposed. The specific teenagers referenced in this chapter are cultural outliers, and it is not assumed that each student will be just like these, but they serve as great examples of high expectations where students are capable of setting new cultural expectations.

Student Leadership University

Student Leadership University (SLU) has emerged as a transformative organization dedicated to shattering the limitations society places on teenagers and equipping them to be Christian leaders in all arenas of life. With a resolute conviction in the potential of teenage minds, SLU has equipped, empowered, and elevated teenagers into confident, influential leaders, and to give a student a fifteen-to-twenty-year head start on how to dream, think, and lead. The core principles that drive SLU's mission, the methodology they employ, and the profound impact they have on developing teenagers as the next generation of leaders are inspiring.

At the center of SLU's student leader development philosophy lies a profound belief in the untapped potential residing within teenagers. Founded by Jay Strack, current SLU President, and led by an amazing team that includes, Brent Crowe, SLU Vice President, and Jeff Wallace, SLU Chief Strategic Officer; SLU is grounded in the conviction that teenagers possess the capacity to effect meaningful change within their communities and beyond. Strack's vision, inspired by the transformational power of mentorship and education, aims to provide young minds with the tools and experiences that shape them into compassionate, visionary leaders. The organization's principles are deeply rooted in the belief that leadership is not solely about positions of authority, but a character forged through adversity, humility, and service. Crowe states in one of his writings that is referred to and recommended through SLU, "As the disciples of old would sit at the feet of a teacher, so disciples of today should seek to live their lives at the feet of Jesus. If this is where the disciple spends his or her time, then this is where our leadership

finds its meaning and motivation. Leadership begins at the feet of Jesus.”¹⁶ SLU’s curriculum encourages teenagers to adopt a holistic approach to leadership that encompasses personal growth, community engagement, and a commitment to values-based decision-making. By focusing on these foundational principles, SLU lays the groundwork for the development of leaders who lead with authenticity and integrity.

According to the SLU website, their mission, values, and vision are:

Student Leadership University’s mission is to develop and equip student leaders to think, dream, and lead. We strive to instill future tense thinking; character-driven decision making; ownership of biblical values; and a commitment to influence through service.

Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you. (Josh 3:5)

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the LORD, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9–10)

But sanctify the LORD God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. (1 Pet 3:15)¹⁷

SLU operates from their mission but they are also driven by a culture that has strong values. Their values reflect an unwavering dedication to God’s Word, commitment to servant leadership, a passion for students, a pursuit of excellence, and providing amazing experiences in leadership for students and experiences that aid in the success of student pastors who pour into the lives of students. The vision for SLU revolves around answering God’s call to prepare the upcoming generation for profound thinking, dreaming, and leadership. They achieve this by implementing a rigorous series of leadership training processes designed to cultivate a Renaissance Mind, The Heart of a Patriot, The Soul of a Saint, The Discipline of a Champion, and The Influence of a Leader. This vision is realized through top-tier, interactive events, continuous curriculum and learning resources,

¹⁶ Brent Crowe, *Sacred Intent: Maximize the Moments of Your Life* (Franklin, TN: Worthy, 2015), chap. 1, sec. 3, para. 10, Kindle.

¹⁷ “About,” Student Leadership University, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://slulead.com/about/>.

recommended reading materials, innovative communication methods, value-centric relational capital, efficient systems, active funding efforts, and an unwavering commitment to introducing new students to SLU 101.¹⁸

SLU's approach to developing teenage leaders is multifaceted and immersive. Through a variety of events and primary source experiences, SLU creates multiple environments where teenagers are challenged, mentored, and introduced to inspiring viewpoints. One of the organization's flagship initiatives is the SLU 101–401 program, a series of intensive leadership trainings that build on each other and combines interactive sessions, hands-on activities, and experiential learning to foster personal and leadership development. Through each of their engaging speakers, real-world case studies, and collaborative projects, teenagers are encouraged to step outside their comfort zones and cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. SLU offers teenagers international exposure to different cultures, global challenges, and the transformative power of servant leadership. These immersive experiences instill in participants a broader perspective, a heightened sense of responsibility as citizens of the world, and aids in the effort for students to have an ethical and moral approach to life and leadership. Each of the tiers encompasses a specific goal, focus, and unique destinations.

SLU 101, known as “The times have changed, but we believe students can change the times,” is held in Orlando, Florida or San Antonio, Texas. SLU 201, themed as “Mind of Patriot. Heart of a Leader,” takes place in Washington, DC, offering students an opportunity to explore Christian perspectives on contemporary moral and ethical issues while fostering gratitude, respect, and an appreciation for the cost of freedom. SLU 301, titled “Inherit the past. Shape the future,” transports participants to London, Oxford, and Normandy, where they delve into history, inherit valuable lessons from the past, and empower themselves to transform the future. The final stage, SLU 401, “Leadership begins at the feet of Jesus,” unfolds in Israel and Jordan, inviting attendees to explore the

¹⁸ “About,” Student Leadership University.

birthplace of Christianity, gaining new insights into Scripture and deepening their faith journey.¹⁹

The impact of SLU's approach is profound, with an estimated seventy thousand SLU participants and countless testimonies of teenagers who have undergone personal transformations and emerged as confident, compassionate leaders. The organization's emphasis on mentorship and the cultivation of a supportive community fosters an environment where teenagers feel empowered to explore their passions, voice their ideas, and embrace their unique strengths. Teenagers who engage with SLU's programs consistently report increased self-awareness, improved decision-making abilities, and enhanced communication skills. Furthermore, SLU nurtures a sense of purpose by encouraging young leaders to serve their communities, amplifying their sense of agency and the belief that they can make a tangible difference. A student pastor and two teenagers offered their personal experiences and impact of SLU. Student pastor Chase Allen says,

Partnering with SLU has been one of the greatest blessings to my student ministry. Over the last several years I have seen many begin SLU journey and had the pleasure of watching them graduate from SLU in London, UK. Its been an honor to have a front row seat to seeing students learn the nuts and bolts of leadership and truly begin to think, dream and lead at the feet of Jesus. SLU 101 is vital to our students because it teaches them that the hardest people they will ever lead are themselves. If they can do that, then they can garner their influence to impact others and accomplish what they were called and created to do for the Kingdom of God. SLU 201 truly teaches students how to think on a larger scale. Not only can they impact where they live, but they can impact their country. 201 helps them understand they can have the heart of a patriot while being a citizen of Heaven. For these students seeing Washington, DC through the lens of a Biblical world view is a game changers. SLU 301 is an experience of a lifetime. To be able to study world and church history while standing in the streets and buildings you are learning about is something that cannot be replicated. 301 really teaches our students that it's bigger than you! That we play a role in the much larger story that is God and His glory. I cannot recommend the SLU journey enough. Every student ministry should be partnering with SLU and showing their students how to think, dream and lead at the feet of Jesus.²⁰

¹⁹ "Home," Student Leadership University, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://slulead.com/>.

²⁰ Chase Allen, email interview by author, January 23, 2024.

Joseph Tucker, a seventeen-year-old junior in high school, said,

“Leadership begins at the feet of Jesus” -Brent Crowe. I see this quote every day, engraved on a wooden cross that sits on my desk. I received it from SLU 101 in 2020. From the beginning of my journey with Student Leadership University, this program has always pointed me back to Jesus. SLU has impacted my walk with Christ and my view of our country in many ways. During SLU 101, my favorite session was “Swallow the Big Frog First,” meaning to accomplish your bigger goals or tasks first. I use this principle every day, whether I am making tough decisions or working out. I have learned if we do the harder things first the rest will seem easy. At SLU 201, I learned how valuable our freedom is in America. When we visited the Arlington Cemetery, it was put in perspective for me for the first time. My most recent experience was In Europe at SLU 301. Being able to witness the history I’ve read about my entire life from Big Ben to Omaha Beach was truly amazing. SLU has shown me how to lead like Jesus and the value of our freedom. Overall, I can say SLU made me not only a stronger Christian but also taught me to have the heart of a patriot.”²¹

Madi Phillips, a nineteen-year-old who just graduated High School, said,

Student Leadership University has been the best learning experience for me. I have completed the first three levels of SLU including 101 Reimagined in 2020, 201 in Washington, d.c., and 301 in London, Oxford, and Normandy. Throughout these experiences I have learned many skills for becoming a leader for the next generation such as avoiding procrastination, giving God my best so I can lead others for Him, and even things as simple as how to be a good friend. SLU has had such a major impact on my life because I have been taught not only how to be a leader, but how to be a leader with Christian values that has the desire to point others to Christ. I have grown closer to the Lord through these experiences, and they will always have a lasting impact in how I lead others and myself.²²

SLU’s commitment to developing teenagers into impactful leaders reflects a visionary understanding of the potential residing within teenagers. By embracing a comprehensive approach that combines education, mentorship, and experiential learning, SLU has succeeded in redefining leadership for teenagers. Through their transformative programs, SLU has effectively shattered the barriers that society often imposes on young individuals, demonstrating that age is not a limitation but an opportunity for leadership to flourish. As they continue to equip and empower the next generation of leaders, SLU stands as a beacon of hope, inspiring teenagers to embrace their potential and make lasting contributions to their communities and the world.

²¹ Joseph Tucker, email interview by Chase Allen, forwarded to author January 23, 2024.

²² Madi Phillips, email interview by Chase Allen, forwarded to author January 23, 2024.

Growing Leaders and Tim Elmore

Growing Leaders, founded by Tim Elmore and current CEO, serves as a noteworthy organization for teenage leadership, development, and optimism. Elmore's work grew out of twenty years of serving alongside John C. Maxwell. He has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Psychology Today*, and has been featured on CNN's *Headline News* and *Fox and Friends*.²³ Growing Leaders's philosophy is not merely about instructing or guiding; it is about believing in the inherent capabilities of the emerging generation and providing them with the tools to flourish. Elmore brings a wealth of experience in leadership development and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by teenagers. His vision extends beyond imparting knowledge; it focuses on developing qualities like resilience, empathy, and critical thinking that are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world. Elmore passionately advocates for viewing teenagers not as a phase of problems but as a period of immense possibilities. He states,

Youth are not the problem, they are the solution. . . . When adolescents have nothing meaningful to do, they'll create their own meaning. This can be good news or bad news, depending on what they come up with. For too long, parents, teachers, and coaches have only offered facsimiles of real-world experiences to teens. We've been afraid our kids will get hurt, be unsafe, be unready, and fail; and consequently, we've sheltered them from the very experiences that matured and developed past generations of adolescents.²⁴

This foundational belief informs every aspect of Growing Leaders programs and resources. Central to this approach are "Habitudes," a term coined by Elmore to encapsulate the fusion of "habits" and "attitudes" that shape a teenager's character and leadership abilities. Rather than focusing solely on theoretical education, Habitudes aim to instill practical life skills, resilience, and leadership qualities in teenagers through the power of storytelling to convey essential leadership principles. By blending images, relatable stories, and

²³ See also "Dr. Tim Elmore: Millennial Expert & Founder of Growing Leaders," Growing Leaders, October 2019, <https://growingleaders.com/tim-elmore/>.

²⁴ Tim Elmore, "Changing the Way We See Our Students," Growing Leaders, February 8, 2022, <https://growingleaders.com/changing-the-way-we-see-our-students/>.

discussion questions, Habitudes provide a vivid and engaging platform for teenagers to absorb leadership lessons. This storytelling approach resonates with the experiential learning preferences of today's youth. According to their website,

We believe all students have the capacity to become authentic leaders and rise to the challenges the emerging generation will face. A great place to start developing these critical leadership skills is within middle and high school students already exhibiting an interest in leadership, like those in student government, student ambassadors, and other leadership clubs. Habitudes isn't just another high school leadership program. Grounded in extensive research, our courses utilize language, images and stories specifically designed to resonate with today's emerging generation, teaching life skills and leadership characteristics in a fresh, engaging way.²⁵

They also note,

Habitudes for middle and high school students is a curriculum that trains up the next generation of leaders by equipping educators to speak the language of today's middle and high school students, kick-starting conversations and inspiring memorable experiences that instill valuable leadership and life skills. Tailored specifically to resonate with today's teens and grounded in research, the Habitudes middle and high school curriculum utilizes real-life imagery and stories to engage students in a creative and relevant way. This flexible, research-based leadership curriculum is adaptable for any school's program and has been proven to spark a positive shift in the school's overall culture.

Habitudes for secondary schools will help your students:

- Break free from peer pressure and influence others in positive ways.
- Experience greater empathy and minimize bullying among students.
- Embrace a growth mindset that values hard work and resilience.
- Capitalize on personal strengths to be career-ready upon graduation.
- Develop critical thinking skills that produce better life choices, such as choosing healthy friends, improving study habits, and setting goals.²⁶

Growing Leaders recognizes understanding the dynamics of contemporary culture is crucial for effectively reaching and influencing teenagers, and under Elmore's guidance, ensures that their programs remain culturally relevant. This relevance enhances the impact of Habitudes, making the leadership principles applicable and relatable to diverse groups of teenagers. Growing Leaders does not view teenagers as passive recipients of knowledge but as active contributors to shaping their futures. Through their programs,

²⁵ "Habitudes Leadership Curriculum for High School & Middle School," Growing Leaders, accessed October 2, 2023, <https://growingleaders.com/habitudes/habitudes-for-middle-and-high-school/leadership/>.

²⁶ "Habitudes for Middle School and High School," Growing Leaders, accessed October 2, 2023, <https://growingleaders.com/habitudes/habitudes-for-middle-and-high-school/>.

the organization instills a sense of responsibility and empowerment in teenagers, fostering a generation of leaders who are not just prepared for the present but equipped to address the challenges of tomorrow. Believing in teenagers transcends geographical boundaries for Growing Leaders. The organization has made a global impact by reaching young minds across various cultures. This global outreach underscores the universal nature of the principles embedded in Habitudes and Elmore's vision.

Growing Leaders, driven by Tim Elmore's unwavering belief in the potential of teenagers, is a trailblazer in leadership equipping and empowerment. Through the innovative concept of Habitudes, the organization not only imparts leadership principles but also fosters a mindset of belief, resilience, and practical application. Elmore's vision extends beyond education; it encompasses the cultivation of character and the nurturing of future leaders who are equipped with the essential qualities to thrive. Growing Leaders is not just shaping teenage leaders; it is inspiring a generation to make a positive impact on the world.

Challenges of Students Leading

There is a distinguished need and opportunity for teenagers to engage in leadership roles and responsibilities. Yet, empowering teenagers to lead can be complex and challenging. Jeff Iorg states, "We are sinful people leading sinful people. The devil is real and working hard to oppose us. Our world system is sin cursed. This means bad things will happen to good people, including well-meaning Christian leaders. Life happens and it's often messy."²⁷ Teenagers may see themselves as too young to take matters of spirituality seriously. They may avoid spiritual responsibility or spiritual decisions. There can be the challenge of sympathy with teenagers who delay spiritual commitments, are

²⁷ Jeff Iorg, *The Painful Side of Leadership: Moving Forward Even When It Hurts* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 15–16, Kindle.

hesitant to participate, or resist ministry that would push them into leadership.²⁸ Amid teenagers leading, there are issues, not an exhaustive list, such as a youthful folly, the tendency toward exclusive cliques or “holy huddles,” the possibility of favoritism, and the intricacies of various family dynamics. Additionally, the demands of rigorous school schedules, extra-curricular activities, part-time jobs, the relentless pace of busyness, and the delicate matter of identity. Navigating these hurdles requires an awareness and understanding that teenage leadership is not merely a task but a journey requiring a strategic approach of compassion, discernment, and resiliency.

There is no denying the challenge that teenagers have when making the best decisions because they have yet to reach their full maturity and cognitive development. Their character is ever transforming, and they face every temptation and have personal struggles. Due to their life stage as young adults, teenagers have the propensity to make immature and impulsive decisions, even when they are trusting and following God. There is much to know about the development of a teenage brain. Paul Kelly writes,

As a young person matures, the prefrontal cortex is developing quickly. As a child reaches puberty, the rate of synaptic pruning in the brain greatly increases. The elimination of these unused connections paves the way for more efficient cognition. The brain also begins rapid myelination, a lubricant that promotes faster brain function. The prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to complete this process; myelination may not be complete until about age thirty. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that controls reasoning and is responsible for sound decision-making. In addition, hormones active in the emotion centers of the brain “contribute to an appetite for thrills, strong sensations, and excitement.” Together, these processes in brain development can create a heightened tendency for young people to be impulsive. As Wolfe writes, adolescent brain development “suggest[s] that teens may have difficulty inhibiting inappropriate behaviors because the circuitry necessary for this control is not fully mature.”²⁹

God has beautifully and wonderfully created humans for relationships and community. However, a caution with any context of friendships is having a group of friends that are so tight knit that they might unintentionally and inadvertently seclude

²⁸ Paul Kelly, *Being Young: A Biblical Theology of Youth* (San Diego: Youth Cartel, 2022), 109, Kindle.

²⁹ Kelly, *Being Young*, 100.

themselves and become a negative influence on others. This can be referred to as a “holy huddle” or a “clique.” Familiarity breeds complacency and teenagers can potentially focus on those who are closest to them at the cost of forsaking the blessing of serving others and becoming careless.³⁰ New, disconnected, or insecure teenagers can perceive this as unwelcoming, disingenuous, and off-putting. Typically, teenagers who are not included in the group experience discomfort as they desire to be involved in the activities but find it challenging to muster the courage to take the initial and intimidating step required to connect with their peers. Certainly, teenagers need to have an inner circle of friends who they can have fun with and who will build them up, encourage, and care about the condition of their faith, but a circle of friends building one another up should not be self-preserving but challenging to serve others in unity. Fostering a sense of unity and cultivating a team of student leaders should never undermine a hospitable and welcoming environment for other students; rather, student leaders can and should enrich any situation through their expressions of love and care. Occasionally cliques are positive. Jesus modeled how to successfully navigate the potential hazards and negatives associated with such groups. While he had his inner circle of friends and his twelve disciples, His intention was never for them to prioritize self-interest. Instead, he aimed for them to assimilate his teachings and subsequently share and serve others. Even in contemporary sports events like football, team members come together in a huddle to strategize before dispersing to implement their plans.

Providing specific opportunities and inviting student leaders to serve in various capacities may be interpreted as showing favoritism. Certainly, ministry leaders should not pick favorites but also need to distinguish between favoritism and faithfulness. This showcases and further fuels the need for full transparency in the student leadership process and the opportunities all students have to serve. Ministry leaders should consider casting

³⁰ “Familiarity Breeds Contempt,” Collins Dictionary, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/familiarity-breeds-contempt>.

a large vision for the entire ministry, making opportunities available to anyone interested in serving. The choice to engage with the student leadership team process is now in the hands of each student and minimizes perceived favoritism. Having the awareness of this potential challenge allows ministry leaders to invite others along to serve and at the same time continue to provide unique service opportunities due to their faithfulness. If a student is faithfully walking with Jesus, consistent with the expectations of being part of the student leadership team, frequently engaged in ministry activities, and an advocate for living on mission, then that student should be given more opportunities.

An additional challenge is the family dynamics of a student leader. This encompasses their dependency upon parents, as well as the potential diverse biblical worldviews within the home. Student leaders who do not have a driver's license and are unable to independently provide transportation for themselves are reliant upon their parents to travel to and from church and ministry activities. In some cases, a parent may not be available or willing, thus leaving that student leader in a perplexing situation where participation becomes challenging necessitating them to seek alternative transportation. In some instances, there could be parents who are Christians but are disengaged or disinterested in the church and its activities. In addition, due to some student leaders in the ministry being first generation Christians, they may have parents or a parent who do not believe or want any affiliation with the church. These various family dynamics pose a real challenge to student leaders.

There is a high demand for students' time and energy. Their daily and weekly schedules are occupied with school, homework, spending leisure time pre-occupied with technology, and even perhaps extra-curricular activities and part-time jobs. The demands of high school have increased significantly. Today's teenagers devote twice the amount of time to homework compared to students in the mid-1990s, resulting in fewer

opportunities for socializing.³¹ Even social media and various companies vie for their time through marketing campaigns and efforts to keep them attached to their devices for extreme amounts of time. According to Pew Research, teenagers currently allocate over five and a half hours to leisure activities each day (5 hours, 44 minutes). The majority of their leisure time is dedicated to screen-based activities, averaging 3 hours and 4 minutes daily. This screen time, encompassing activities such as gaming, browsing the internet, watching videos, and television, has remained consistent over the last decade. On weekends, screen usage extends to nearly four hours daily (3 hours, 53 minutes), while weekdays see teenagers spending an average of 2 hours and 44 minutes engaged with screens.³² Nevertheless, the hectic nature and overall pace of their lives present a challenge to a students' ability to serve consistency. The demands often result in physical fatigue, and students find themselves yearning for precious extra minutes of sleep. Given the expectations for students to show up early and invest additional energy in their service roles, the temptation to prioritize sleep becomes an option. The constant busyness can also lead to mental exhaustion, as the pace, cognitive processing, and emotional demands become overwhelming. These factors collectively contribute to the possibility of student leader facing challenges in maintaining consistent participation and service.

Lastly is the challenge of students serving with wrong motive or from a spiritually unhealthy place, where actions are driven more by a sense of duty rather a joyful choice and a genuine maturation in their faith. With regard to students serving by choice, Ben Trueblood says,

As you celebrate and encourage leadership from students, it may be a temptation for people to become prideful about their place of leadership. It could also unintentionally

³¹ Abha Bhattarai and Lauren Kaori Gurley, "Gen Z Is Bringing Back the Part-Time Job," *Washington Post*, January 21, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/01/21/teen-jobs-pandemic-wages/>.

³² Gretchen Livingston, "The Way U.S. Teens Spend Their Time Is Changing, but Differences between Boys and Girls Persist," Pew Research Center, February 20, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/02/20/the-way-u-s-teens-spend-their-time-is-changing-but-differences-between-boys-and-girls-persist/#:~:text=Teens%20today%20are%20spending%20their>.

lead students to place more importance on their personal giftedness than on the One who gave them their gifts. You can avoid both of these by connecting their leadership and influence to a reliance on Christ and personal transformation through Him, rather than on the skills and talents of the leader. They need to understand the most important part of being a leader is their own relationship with Jesus.³³

The paramount focus for a student involved in serving should be their relationship with Jesus Christ. This signifies salvation in Christ by grace through faith, initiating the ongoing process of sanctification that demonstrates continual spiritual growth. It is imperative for students to be committed to their spiritual development. Without effectively leading themselves through various spiritual disciplines that fortify their faith, they will encounter difficulties in leading and serving others. They can fake it for a while, but they will simply be whitewashed tombs. Being approachable, accountable, and teachable in serving from an overflowing relationship with Jesus is crucial. If a student's actions deviate from their professed beliefs or the commitment they made to serve, students should be open to correction. Humility is vital as well; students should avoid perceiving themselves as superior to their peers. Falling into the comparison trap may lead individuals to feel inferior or, conversely, sensing superiority, fostering an unhealthy mindset of being better than others.

Conclusion

Throughout history and today, teenagers have achieved remarkable feats, defying norms and reaching heights once considered unattainable. The stories mentioned in this chapter offer inspiration as teenagers and organizations transcend age-related expectations, serving as sources of inspiration for student leadership. From visionaries reshaping history in the past to modern trailblazers redefining leadership today, this chapter highlighted a diverse range of exceptional achievements by teenagers. However, amidst these extraordinary tales, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges students face in navigating the complex landscape of leadership. As bearers of a promising future,

³³ Ben Trueblood, *Student Ministry That Matters* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 113.

students balance incredible potential with ongoing hurdles, embodying the chapter's dual narrative of their accomplishments and the obstacles they encounter in their pursuit of leadership.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND SURVEY ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to implement a student leadership team at the Plano Campus of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. Previous chapters gave the biblical and theological framework for students leading and examined various teenagers through history, organizations that focus on developing student leaders, and the unique challenges that arise with student leaders. The focus of this chapter is to outline the preparation for this project and analysis of the survey data collected by churches that helped complete goal 3 of having established roles.

The preparation stage of this project included developing the vision for students serving, organizing a process, gathering information from other student ministries on their values and best practices on student leadership, and creating specific responsibilities within Prestonwood Students. The implementation involved student staff, leaders, and parents getting the LEAD team started and running. The results and specific steps of implementing a student leadership team are found in chapter 5.

Preparation

Having worked in full-time ministry for eighteen years, the need for capable and empowered student leaders had been made evident to me. Preparation for this project began many years ago after being burdened to see students take ownership of what they believe and their student ministry, and actively live out their faith in leading people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. A few books were instrumental in the inspiration of embarking on this project of implementing a student leadership team: *Do Hard Things* by Alex and Brett Harris, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* by Doug Fields, *Student Ministry*

That Matters by Ben Trueblood, and finally, *A New Vision for SBC Student Ministry* by Richard Ross.¹ These authors and books provided a strong inspiration for establishing a student leadership team. More importantly, the Scriptures examined in chapter 2 were pivotal to providing further insights as to what the Bible has to say regarding young people making a difference. The Scripture and much time in prayer were the foundation pieces for producing and implementing the student leadership team. In addition, several churches were researched to examine what they currently have in place for a student leadership team. The student staff at the Plano campus of Prestonwood was instrumental in creating staff ownership, articulating the various roles and structure of the student leadership team, and execution of implementation into the ministry.

In August 2023, I brainstormed and created the vision, purpose and expectations of LEAD team.² This was pivotal in understanding the “why” behind what and how students were going to be serving. As a result, key passages such as 1 Timothy 4:12, Philippians 2:1–18, John 13:14, and Ephesians 4:12 became cornerstone passages to drive the student leadership team. Using 1 Timothy 4:12 emphasized the affirmation and value Paul placed on young Timothy and provided additional exhortation needed for other younger believers today. Next, because believers are called to model their lives after Jesus Christ, I chose Philippians 2:1–8, where Paul writes about the attitude of Jesus. Then, Jesus modeled what servant leadership looks like in John 13:14; this passage served as the actions believers are to take in serving others. Finally, Ephesians 4:12 recognized the need to equip young believers for the work of the ministry. The framework for LEAD

¹ Alex Harris and Brett Harris, *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008); Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: One Step Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Richard Ross, *A New Vision for SBC Student Ministry: Reaching, Baptizing, Discipling, and Sending Teenagers* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill, 2021). These books were selected because they contained informative and inspirational material surrounding student leadership. Various resources were used, but these were highly influential.

² See appendix 2. These expectations were created to establish clarity around the purpose of the student leadership team.

team was mapped out with (1) affirmation and value of students leading, (2) attitude of Jesus, (3) actions of Jesus, and (4) equipping of the saints.

In March 2024, additional research was conducted with several churches from across the country to evaluate the need, their status of student leadership teams, and how they already empower and equip their students. These churches and ministries were primarily identified through the student pastor METRO organization. Fifty-seven student pastors were contacted via text message, fifty-two responded to the text message and were sent the survey link that was hosted on Survey Monkey, and forty-eight participants qualified based on the limitations of a church one thousand members and a minimum of one hundred students who attend.³ The following research findings aided in the formation of creating the implementation road map of a student leadership team at Prestonwood.

Research Findings and Analysis

The Student Leadership Survey, sent out to other student ministries, aimed to gather insights into existing leadership structures, challenges, and opportunities. The survey consisted of Likert-style statements that allowed participants to rate the level of agreement and provided open-ended questions for increased elaboration.⁴ By engaging with fellow ministry leaders and their experiences, this project was able to identify common needs and tailor the student leadership team implementation at Prestonwood accordingly. The following is a review and analysis of some key statements in the survey.

Statements Measured by Level of Agreement

The survey sent to student pastors provided a stronger justification for why a student leadership team at Prestonwood was necessary and achievable. Statement 2: “You see students/young people in Scripture given responsibilities and making a difference.”

³ See appendix 1.

⁴ See appendix 3.

This statement was offered to justify the numerous instances in the Bible where young individuals were entrusted with significant tasks and were part of fulfilling God's purposes. Of those surveyed, 88.24 percent noted they strongly agreed with the question, while 7.84 percent agreed, and 3.92 percent said they somewhat agreed. No one selected any of the disagreement options. The responses here showcased a biblical argument that students have been given responsibilities and have been shown to make a difference in the Bible.

Statement 3: "Our student ministry currently has a student leadership team where students have responsibilities that contribute to the overall mission and vision of the church." This statement was posed to inquire of an existing framework for student involvement and leadership within their ministries currently existed. Of respondents, 54.9 percent strongly agreed, 25.49 percent agreed, 11.76 percent somewhat agree, 7.84 percent disagreed. This data indicated a generally positive belief and implementation of student leadership within student ministries. The relatively low percentages of disagreement suggested that the majority of the ministries recognized the value of empowering students to contribute to the overall mission and vision of the church through leadership roles.

Statement 4: "Our student ministry has allocated budget towards developing student leaders." Asking this statement provided enhanced clarity on the financial investments and prioritization of student leaders. It provided insight into the ministry's commitment to equipping and empowering students for leadership roles, indicating whether resources are being designated to trainings, leadership development materials, resources, retreats, and other relevant initiatives. Of respondents, 43.14 percent strongly agreed, 35.29 percent agreed, 13.73 percent somewhat agreed, 5.88 percent somewhat disagreed, and 1.96 percent disagreed. The responses reveal a significant level of agreement and suggest that a considerable portion of student ministries surveyed prioritized investing financial resources aimed at equipping their student leaders. Overall,

the data suggests that these student ministries recognized the significance of allocating budget toward their student leadership teams.

Statement 6: “Our student ministry has a process/system of application, training, equipping, empowering, and mobilizing student leaders.” This statement sought to assess the depth of the ministry’s approach to leadership development, examining if there are formal procedures in place for recruiting, training, and developing student leaders. Of respondents, 31.37 percent strongly agreed, 41.18 percent agreed, 21.57 percent somewhat agreed, 1.96 percent somewhat disagreed, and 3.92 percent disagreed. The responses to this question indicated a generally positive trend, with a majority of respondents expressing a minimum level of agreement regarding the existence of a structured process. This suggests that many of the ministries have established formal procedures. In addition, the small percentage that indicated they disagreed on some level to having a structure in place highlights a gap and opportunity for improvement in creating a more structured process.

Statement 9: “Students in our ministry believe that involvement in church responsibilities enhance their sense of belonging to the church community.” Understanding how students’ involvement in church responsibilities influenced their sense of community provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the ministry’s engagement strategies. It also allowed staff to assess whether students feel connected and valued in their student ministry. Of respondents, 56.88 percent strongly agreed, 33.33 percent agreed, and 9.8 percent somewhat agreed. The overwhelmingly positive responses indicated that most of these student ministries believe their students perceive student involvement with church responsibilities enhanced their sense of belonging. This statement helped student ministries analyze how they engaged students with various responsibilities and activities that fostered greater connection and sense of belonging. This statement underscored the importance of ongoing assessment and adaptation of engagement strategies to ensure students are and feel connected.

Statement 10: “Serving in the church fosters a stronger connection for students in living out their identity as a Christian.” Understanding this connection helped gauge and shine a light on whether students perceive serving as an integral connection to their identity as followers of Jesus. Of respondents, 92.16 percent strongly agreed, 5.88 percent agreed, and 1.96 percent somewhat agreed. The absence of any disagreement suggested a widespread acknowledgement of the connection between serving and students living out their identity as a follower of Jesus. The high level of agreement solidified the importance of incorporated opportunities for students to serve.

Statement 12: “Students serving and taking responsibilities in the ministry helps develop communication and time management skills, and accountability.” This statement assessed if student pastors believed ministry responsibilities are valuable beyond spiritual and character growth but also personal skill development. Understanding these benefits informed and aided student ministries to intentionally cultivate and promote these skills that contribute to their students’ holistic development. Of respondents, 70.59 percent strongly agreed, 25.49 percent agreed, and 3.92 percent somewhat agreed.

Statement 16: “Students are given opportunities to serve outside of just the student ministry.” The emphasis here was to seek to understand if their church encouraged and facilitated avenues for students to serve in various capacities beyond their immediate peer group. This suggested that there has been collaboration amongst multiple ministries across the church to better fulfill their mission and purpose. Of respondents, 54.9 percent strongly agreed, 35.29 percent agreed, 7.84 percent somewhat agreed, and 1.96 percent disagreed. The data indicated that many of the student ministries have engaged with other ministries to integrate students into the broader mission and activities of the church.

Statement 17: “Our church believes in equipping and empowering students to serve outside the walls of the church.” This was an imperative statement to ensure the mission of the church was fulfilled and not having students solely serving those who are

already inside the walls of the church building. This statement assessed the churches' commitment to launch students for service beyond the confines of the church's walls and activities. It also provided insights into whether the church prioritized outreach and community engagement as part of its overall mission and vision. Of respondents, 47.06 percent strongly agreed, 37.25 percent agreed, and 15.69 percent somewhat agreed. This statement was a strong indicator that the churches have a strong alignment between the church's beliefs and actions regarding equipping and empowering students to serve beyond the church walls. This statement suggested an emphasis and commitment to launching students to evangelize and serve those around them in various situations and places.

Statement 18: "There are challenges with asking students to take on responsibilities to serve." This statement highlighted the need to identify and understand the complexities, challenges and barriers that may hinder students' willingness or ability to serve effectively. Of respondents, 31.37 percent strongly agreed, 41.18 percent agreed, 21.57 percent somewhat agreed, 1.96 percent somewhat disagreed, and 3.92 percent disagreed. There seems to be a widespread acknowledgement of various challenges and the need to tailor their student leadership methodology to best foster an environment where students can serve despite challenges, while still being sanctified. A correlating statement, 19, followed suit: "Challenges to students serving exist but don't prohibit us from giving them responsibilities." Of respondents, 47.06 percent strongly agreed, 39.22 percent agreed, 9.8 percent somewhat agreed, and 3.92 percent disagreed. Overwhelmingly, the research indicated a recognition of the challenges, but despite their existence student ministries believed in the strong value of empowering students.

Statement 20: "Our student ministry currently does not have a student leadership team, but I am now more intrigued or compelled to start one." Most of the student ministries indicated they already had a student leadership team in place, but 22 percent indicated that just by engaging with this survey they wanted to explore options of implementing a student leadership team in their ministries.

Open-Ended Questions

Question 1 reads, “What do you believe the goal of creating a student leadership team is and why?” Noteworthy answers included:

Our goal for the student leadership team is what Ephesians 4:12 calls us to do. The team exist so that we can equip the Saints to do the work of the ministry. We believe that when students get involved in a leadership capacity they are more inclined to have a growing relationship with Jesus, as well as continue to stay involved in a local church.⁵

In order to help students grasp the vision of your student ministry, as well as help create retention, while the students have a sense of belonging each week rather than just be attenders.⁶

Our goal is to share the responsibilities of the Gospel ministry with our students. God has strategically placed our students in our ministry to make disciples of all nations and our leadership team is one opportunity to position our students to be effective in the Great Commission.⁷

Question 2 reads, “What roles and specific responsibilities do you have for student leaders?” Noteworthy answers included:

Serving as volunteers (we call Dream Team) to help set up and tear down on Wednesdays, work the snack shack, lead small groups, creative input for planning, evangelism.⁸

Within Student ministry - Prayer, hospitality set up, set up environment, first impressions, check-in, announcements, worship. outside Student min - kids min, greeting, hospitality, parking.⁹

We have 10 teams... Hospitality - welcome new students, Food Service - serve food in cafe on Sundays and Wednesdays, Social media - Post on their personal social media accounts about church events, Fun Zone - create the hype wherever we go, and also runs games on Wednesday Nights, and runs accountments, Set Up Team - show up early to set up and leave late to break down for any events, Party Planning Committee - Plan the parties!!!, Worship - lead students in worship, Tech - run audio/lights/and visual, Missions - find ways for student ministry to serve in the community and run those service projects, and Follow Up - a group of students that stands near the front of the room after an alter call.¹⁰

⁵ Student Pastor, First Baptist Church Woodstock, GA.

⁶ JHigh Pastor, Second Baptist West Campus, Katy, TX.

⁷ Student Pastor, Second Baptist North Campus, Kingwood, TX.

⁸ Student Pastor, Cross Church Fayetteville Campus, AR.

⁹ Student Pastor, Family Church, FL.

¹⁰ Student Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, GA.

Question 3 reads, “What is your process for a student to serve, responsibilities given, and the ongoing plan for training and equipping your student leaders?”

Noteworthy answers included:

Students are interviewed and given a survey to help determine their gifting, students are given responsibilities based on their area of gifting and their passion, and we have weekly/monthly meetings with leadership teams for equipping.¹¹

We have an application that each student completes and guidelines that they agree to follow. We meet with our leadership students every Sunday morning for a short bible lesson led by a student. After the lesson we pray and prepare for our Sunday programming. We will have other meetings throughout the course of a year to train students in evangelism and also to plan student ministry activities at church and in the community.¹²

We have a conversation, application, and assimilation process for our students to serve. We have two trainings a year to speak culture and put tools in their tool belt. They are required to rally every week on Wednesday’s at 6p.¹³

Question 4 reads, “List at least three positive outcomes of having a student leadership team” Noteworthy answers included:

Development of leaders, service within ministry, evangelism.¹⁴

Students get bought in and involved in your ministry. It’s an active way to equip students for ministry down the road. It also helps attract student to your ministry because having students involved makes it easier for them to invite their friends.¹⁵

(1) Ownership - students feel like they are a part of the ministry. (2) Growth in their relationship with the Lord. (3) Community - it has helped the students grow together as a community.¹⁶

Question 5 reads, “How does your ministry disciple and develop students to serve?” Noteworthy answers included:

Making small groups a priority and giving their small group opportunities to roll up their sleeves to serve somewhere. Trainings help with their leadership develop. Constantly communicating culture, vision, mission, and values in our group chat.

¹¹ JHigh Pastor, First Baptist Church Trussville, AL.

¹² Student Pastor, Second Baptist North Campus, Kingwood, TX.

¹³ Student Pastor, Together We Church, OK.

¹⁴ Student Pastor, First Baptist McKinney, TX.

¹⁵ Student Pastor, Bethlehem Church, GA.

¹⁶ Student Pastor, Second Baptist Woodway Campus, Houston, TX.

Empowering students first when I see opportunities rather than a staff or volunteer.¹⁷

Monthly meetings at my house to discuss Bible readings, the assigned book of the month, Q&A, and prayer time over student ministry activities.¹⁸

Question 6 reads, “What characteristics or qualifications do you see necessary for a student to serve?” Noteworthy answers included:

We want students who are eager to follow Jesus and make the Gospel known. We have a list of guidelines that we ask our students to adhere to. Some of those expectations are that our leadership students maintain a consistent time in God’s word, attend weekly church programming, abstain from any immoral behavior that would hinder the work of the Lord in their life, and maintain healthy boundaries on social media as well.¹⁹

We have different layers to the student leadership team. We have team leads... those students are strong in the Lord, have leadership skills, and are able to relate well to other students. They are voted in by their peers. But other than that, we try our best to allow any student to serve that has a desire. Each team has a different level of relationship with the Lord required. For example . . . the set up team doesn’t really require a student to know anything about the Bible, where the Missions team leads our spiritually in a lot of situations. We also only have 11th and 12th graders on our student leadership teams for maturity purposes.²⁰

Question 8 reads, “How can the church effectively communicate the importance and value placed on the contributions of students serving?” Noteworthy answers included:

Our Pastor has mentioned several times from the pulpit the names of our students that have served the church and community in some capacity. This is encouraging to see and hear. The biggest way value can be communicated is by financially helping in the development of student leaders.²¹

The church as a whole has to see the importance of everyone serving. When student parents are serving then that pushes the student to want to serve as well.²²

Question 9 reads, “What feedback or insights have you received from students regarding their experiences in serving and having responsibilities within the church?”

Noteworthy answers included:

¹⁷ Student Pastor, Together We Church, OK.

¹⁸ Student Pastor, Hickory Grove Baptist Church, NC.

¹⁹ Student Pastor, Second Baptist North Campus, Kingwood, TX.

²⁰ Student Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, GA.

²¹ JHigh Pastor, First Baptist Woodstock, GA.

²² High School Pastor, Burnt Hickory Baptist Church, GA.

Students love to serve and they love to be a part of something bigger. I've been in my church for 17 years and I've had so many students thank me for letting them play in the band or teach a lesson /testimony. Students get to see a sneak peek at their potential in student ministry. Serving is shaping them to continue serving later in life. Serving stirs up the call to ministry. They love to be used and valued now. They don't want to sit. They want to actively engage in the body. Students in this generation are movers and shakers. They don't want to sit and wait. They want to do what God has for them now! They are thankful for the opportunity! Those who serve want to learn and grow! Students who are given the opportunity will many times take it and grow into a leader. They are hungry to serve!²³

They love it! I think the greatest feedback we haven't heard but seen is that this year alone with the changes in place we have seen 5 students within our student serve team be called into full time ministry.²⁴

Question 10 reads, "What do you want students who leave your ministry to take with them to the next stage of life?" Noteworthy answers included:

I want them to have a growing relationship with Jesus, firm foundation in scripture, a knowledge of their spiritual gifts, a desire to see the lost come to Jesus, and have had the opportunity to make mistakes and grow from them while they were in the student ministry!²⁵

We pray each student carries an understanding of who they are in Christ, a desire to reach the lost, and the responsibility to contribute to the local church.²⁶

The survey provided increased confidence and aided the development and implementation of a student leadership at Prestonwood.

Conclusion

The preparation for the student leadership team at Prestonwood involved strategic planning and practical research. The preparation and research process helped increase confidence but also laid a foundation for implementing the student leadership. This groundwork set the stage for the next chapter, where details of the actual implementation and integration of the student leadership team at Prestonwood occurred.

²³ Student Pastor, Frisco First Baptist Church, TX.

²⁴ Student Pastor, Central Baptist Church-Jonesboro, AR.

²⁵ Student Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, GA.

²⁶ Student Pastor, Broadmoor Baptist Church, LA.

CHAPTER 5
PRACTICAL STEPS TO BUILD AND IMPLEMENT
A STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM, AND AN
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The Prestonwood Baptist Church mission statement is “to glorify God by introducing Jesus Christ as Lord to as many people as possible and to develop them in Christian living using the most effective means to impact the world, making an eternal difference in this generation and generations to come.”¹ The purpose of this project was to implement a student leadership team at the Plano Campus of Prestonwood Baptist Church. This chapter will lay out the practical steps used to build and implement a student leadership team at Prestonwood and additionally purposed to be used for other student ministries. This chapter also provides reflections, what I would do differently, strengths, weaknesses, and various thoughts while completing this project. After the completion of the vision, purpose, research, application, and steps of implementation, the Disciple Pastor reviewed the process and provided approval for the execution of the project. The following steps of implementation are also designed as a road map and can be adjusted for other student ministries who would seek to implement a student leadership team in their context.

First Step

The first several steps were completed internally within the student team before communicating with students, leaders, and other departments. The first step was to ensure LEAD team was under the umbrella of the mission of the church, had a clear

¹ “Our Core Values,” Prestonwood Baptist Church, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://prestonwood.org/about/our-core-values/>.

purpose, and defined responsibilities. Everything the church does needs to work toward accomplishing the mission, and the LEAD team is an effective means to do so.

It was imperative to have a clear vision and conviction to raise the bar for students to serve. This was created in August 2023. Without vision the people perish (Prov 29:18). LEAD team is an opportunity to disciple students up, call them into serving in their giftedness, and to exercise their faith for the glory of God. The vision for the student ministry is, “Prestonwood Students exists to reach the community, the nation, the world, and every generation with the gospel. To help students learn to grow in an authentic and visible faith, to love those around them with a biblically based devotion to Jesus, and to multiply what God has done in their lives into the lives of others.” The role of student leadership is to disciple students to seek Jesus, find their identity in him, live on mission, think outside of themselves, and provide opportunities to experience servant leadership. The expectations are raised for students that are entrusted with the title of “leader.”

The LEAD Team has two primary purposes of discipleship and development. LEAD Team is an opportunity for students to engage and be disciplined to love Jesus and developed to be equipped, empowered, and mobilized to live on mission. Through serving on LEAD Team, students will leverage their God-given gifts and talents to fulfill the mission and vision of the church. With the vision for Prestonwood, “Reach the community, the nation, the world, and every generation with the love of Christ. learn to live out an authentic, visible faith. Love those around us with a biblically based devotion to Jesus. Multiplying what God has done in our lives into the lives of others.” Students will participate in LEAD Team Training sessions, which includes a mini training on the first Sunday of every month and more in-depth training sessions each August and January. Each Sunday morning, students will have a LEAD Team gathering before serving that day. Students will also go through Starting Point, a six-session discipleship curriculum,

with a staff member or adult leader.² The goal of Starting Point is to ensure unity in theology, mission, vision, and terminology, as well as to provide each student with an opportunity to learn or be reminded of God’s calling on their life to make disciples. Additionally, students are encouraged to consistently participate in a discipleship group and have more personal time and interaction with the Prestonwood Students staff.

The next part involved creating a comprehensive system that included several key components of mapping out responsibilities, expectations, an application process, and the formation of sub-teams: (1) Environments; (2) Connect; (3) Creative; (4) Tech; (5) Worship; (6) Apprentice; (7) MDWK Hospitality and logistics. It was necessary to have a comprehensive application that communicated the mission, vision, purpose, and elevated level of commitment. A comprehensive application was created for this project. The application and expectations were crafted with a foundation of love rather than strict rules, and it is crucial to communicate this clearly.³ The motive is to teach accountability and to help students live out their “yes” to the Lord. The intent is never to have students serving just to serve or do so based on any measure of performance. Mapped out in detail within the application is a healthy framework and guidance for student leaders to be committed to a relationship with Jesus Christ, actively participate in a Sunday student LifeGroup, and attend one of the worship services. In addition, student leaders are expected to model a life that is above reproach, and be committed to Prestonwood Students and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

The LEAD Team is an opportunity for Prestonwood Students to love and know God more and make him known, as well as leverage their God-given gifts and talents to impact the world around them for Christ. The LEAD Team encompasses various positions of leadership. While each position has differing descriptions and expectations,

² “Starting Point,” Prestonwood Students, accessed April 5, 2024, https://prestonwoodstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/StartingPoint_StudentEdition_2021.pdf.

³ See appendix 4.

the goal is the same: to make disciples of Jesus Christ as they live out their walk with Christ in the mission field where he has placed them.

Team Responsibilities

This project implemented sub teams and would suggest to other student ministries to consider dividing up responsibilities to engage a wider range of students. Students through the sub-teams have weekly ministry responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, Midweek services (MDWKs), Sunday LifeGroups, and special events. Additionally, students are responsible for working alongside the student staff to dream, plan, develop, and carry out ministry opportunities inside the walls of the church but also in the community. These opportunities will take place on their school campuses, such as organizing prayer groups, distributing cards, and serving. At home, students are encouraged to engage family members in prayer and Bible studies. By doing so, students will also contribute to the overall ministry of Prestonwood Students as a whole. Now that the mission, vision, responsibilities, and expectations have been created, the specific teams and action items are formed. Additional members of the student staff of Prestonwood were integrated into this process and helped craft the teams. This brought tremendous buy-in on their part and aided in the overall implementation as various staff were tasked with overseeing one of the student leadership sub teams. A position not listed is “Captain.” Captains are upperclassmen that staff members identify as those they can trust, meet with for discipleship, and empower to communicate to their peers. There are a couple of student captains for each sub team. It is noteworthy that if a student captain cannot be identified or designated, a student staff member can seek to raise one up.

Connect Team

Connect team responsibilities involve creating a culture in which students feel comfortable and welcome. Connect Team members specifically connect with guests, first-timers, families, or anyone who needs to be connected into the life of the church.

Students on the connect team aid with greeting, student guest central and check-in, and follow-up. Students engaged in conversations with various students and leaders, using high-fives, fist-bumps, and smiles to allow everyone to feel like they are connected and belong. They held doors open at major entrances, including the worship center, atrium, student ministry building, and sports and fitness center. Additionally, as new students walk into the student ministry building there is identifiable signage for first time guests and connect team students are there to greet first time students and connect them with a grade and gender specific LifeGroup. Each week connect students aid the staff by setting up the check-in system and first-time guest stations. The check-in system and guest connection are critical to the ongoing and intentional follow-up of the student staff.

Environment Team

Environment team students create and establish an environment where students can engage with and experience God through the teaching of the Bible, biblical community within their LifeGroups, and various elements. This team served logistically with a focus on the student ministry building and sports and fitness center set up. The Sunday morning set up included informative pop-up banners and signage, arranged table toppers for each LifeGroup, and ensured each LifeGroup was equipped with notecards, pens, and other promotional materials.

Worship Team

The worship LEAD team provided an opportunity for students to lead worship through music. The worship team exercised their gifts and talents in leading their peers in weekly worship through songs at JHigh MDWK programming and high school students on most but not at all Sundays. Members of this team also encourage other students to engage in corporate worship by attending the services in the worship center. The worship LEAD team had several key responsibilities. They managed the distribution and collection of sheet music and iPads, ensuring everything was organized and set up efficiently. The

students assisted the student worship associate with confirming vocal or instrumental assignments on planning center, arrived on time for Sunday rehearsals, and helped students in the room engage with the Lord through music. On weeks when a student was not scheduled to lead on stage, they served on another team. The worship LEAD team also planned and organized worship for children in the elementary and preteen ministries of Prestonwood.

Creative Team

Using various types of social media and creative content to keep students engaged with the student ministry, church, community and each other, the Creative Team drives much of the outward facing aspect of the student ministry. The creative team re-posted and assisted in creating social media content for Prestonwood Students. The team interacted relevantly with students through social media platforms to increase teenage engagement. During Sunday morning LEAD gatherings, creative team students collected a catalog of images, posts, and other media to share, and consulted with staff for trends and best practices to ensure their content remained current and effective. In addition, the creative team took and edited photos of LifeGroups that have been posted on various social media platforms.

Tech Team

The tech LEAD team provided an avenue for students to be engaged through various types of media, exercising creativity by developing, producing, and implementing content that occurs on the screen and in the student ministry building and sports and fitness center. These students facilitated all necessary systems for the environments in both LifeGroup venues. This team was responsible for video camera setup in the student ministry building, conducted sound checks, and performing media tests and run-throughs. They set up lighting and cues, programmed, and ran *ProPresenter* and *ProVideoPlayer*.

MDWK

The responsibilities of JHigh students during MDWK included assisting the student staff in connecting first-time guests and participating in on-stage activities such as worship, games, announcements, and testimonies. LEAD team High School students had three primary responsibilities for MDWK. The role of an apprentice, logistics, and hospitality. The High School MDWK apprentice (designated for grades 11 and 12 only) supported the adult facilitator in leading the lesson each week and assisted in facilitating conversation. Responsibilities for them included assisting with leading discussing surrounding weekly Bible study lessons, being prepared to guide discussions, challenged their peers with life application questions, and presented the gospel at the end of each MDWK. This role was best suited for those who had the spiritual gifts of shepherding, teaching, and strong abilities of listening and communicating. Additionally, expectations included attending required training meetings such as *Summit*, *Winter Huddle*, and additional equipping trainings determined by the student staff at Prestonwood.

High School MDWK logistics responsibilities involved overseeing all the details of the weekly in home gatherings. Responsibilities included taking weekly attendance via an online form given by the staff, completing guests forms for new students, and communicating announcements provided by the student staff. It was emphasized that this role was best suited for those who had the gifts of administration and/or leadership.

High School MDWK hospitality leaders served alongside the host homes to provide a welcoming environment for students each week. Responsibilities included jointly organizing snacks and refreshments on a weekly rotation with the host home. In addition, they helped the logistics leader with ice breakers at the beginning of discussions and making announcements.

Second Step

The next step was to create and establish a LEAD Team website by April 1, 2024, where details about LEAD Team were available and helped create a visible pathway for a student to see what LEAD team is about and how to apply. This included photos of students serving, the purpose, how to become a LEAD Team student, team responsibilities and descriptions, and the application. Prestonwood Students website for the LEAD Team is <https://prestonwoodstudents.org/lead-team/>.

Third Step

The next step taken and suggested for other student ministries is to vision cast to the people. The student staff began vision casting on Sunday, April 7, 2024, and each Sunday morning following during LifeGroups to clearly communicate the goals, purpose, values, and application process of the student leadership team. In this phase communication to students, leaders, parents, and other ministry leaders occurred. In the week leading up to the initial vision casting with students, the student staff sent a video to the LifeGroup leaders, adults serving in the ministry, to communicate the vision, purpose, and briefly explain responsibilities and expected outcomes of the student leadership team before informing the students. The aim was for the student staff to compel the adult leaders on how they can leverage their influence with students and encourage their group to pray about and consider joining LEAD team. It is vital to multiply the mission and vision into the adult leaders who can be an additional level of reinforcement and effective communications. Sharing information about the LEAD team should go beyond a simple announcement and instead serve as an opportunity to cast a compelling vision to the audience. What needs to be articulated for the stage is the why and how to become a LEAD Team student. We want students to pray about this decision and create time for them to actually pray that morning. There is a strong necessity for students to discuss the opportunity to serve on LEAD team with their parents, trusted friends, a LifeGroup Leader, and any other mentors who serve as godly counsel. The student team diligently

aimed to properly inform students and parents where the application can be located and encourage them to complete it.

The student staff needs to vision cast for several weeks through various methods to ensure everyone is aware of and has time to ask questions about the mission, vision, purpose, and discover more. Vision casting by the staff can occur on stage, in LifeGroups through LifeGroup leaders, through e-mails, videos, social media, texts, and through personal conversations. The student staff with the assistance of LifeGroup leaders can also identify students on an individual basis and through conversations. These are opportunities for sharing with a student the potential they have and invites them into the process of applying and completing an interview. The initial vision casting, application, and interviewing process can be done over several weeks to build a quality list of candidates who can go through the application and interview.

Fourth Step

Next began the application process, which took place throughout the weeks of April and May 2024. The process allowed students to express their interest and commitment. It is worth noting that following the parent letter, the application began with a brief introduction addressing the “why” and purpose followed by a box to check verifying prospective participants have read it.⁴ Interviews were then conducted by the student staff to assess each applicant’s readiness, fit for the team, and clarity on the expectations. Once the application was submitted, a confirmation e-mail was sent to the student and parent e-mail addresses provided. The e-mail thanks them for completing the LEAD Team application and notifies them that a staff member will reach out directly to set up an interview.

⁴ See appendix 2.

Fifth Step

The Prestonwood student staff incorporated a spiritual gifts assessment to ensure students were placed in roles that best aligned with the student's unique strengths and passions.⁵ When a student staff member follows up on a student's application, they send over a spiritual gifts assessment via e-mail for the student to complete and bring to their interview. During the interview, the assessment is discussed and reviewed in detail. The Spiritual Gifts Assessment, provided by and approved by senior leadership, helps ensure each student's placement is both purposeful and effective.

Sixth Step

The interview with each student, helps ensure there is quality in the relationships and commitments as opposed to just having nominal commitments.⁶ The beginning portion of the interview engages and encourages. A minimum of two staff members conduct the interviews and they go over specific items and ask specific questions. The interview extends the opportunity not only to better assess where the student may be in their faith journey, how they are maturing and growing in their faith, but also to foster open communication, mutual encouragement, and a shared understanding of LEAD team expectations. By engaging in meaningful conversations during the interview, both students and staff can clarify goals, address concerns or challenges, and reinforce the importance of commitment and dedication to the LEAD team. The interview is also the time where the student staff and student discuss and determine which sub-team the student will serve on and dialogue over the specific responsibilities. The interview fosters greater accountability between the staff and students, and between students themselves as they share the same purpose. The initial interview and re-up interview completed after each year and before a new year of serving

⁵ See appendix 5.

⁶ See appendix 6.

begins, serve as crucial mechanisms for nurturing a stronger relationship between students and staff.

Before the completion of the interview, the student staff pray over the student and provide a handout with next steps and key dates for trainings and events.⁷ Each year there will be an additional interview for each student who is already part of LEAD team. This is designed to formally touch base and to ensure they still have a desire and commitment to be part of the LEAD Team. The interview is also a great “off-ramp” and pruning if a student no longer desires to serve. While there is a maintained relationship throughout the year between staff and students, the interview serves as a formalized time to check in and ensure the student is still fully committed to being part of LEAD team.

Seventh and Ongoing Step

Communication is an essential piece of LEAD team. The student staff uses the GroupMe app for each team. GroupMe texts are the primary mechanism for weekly communication and enables ministry safe transparency amongst the group and staff, while ensuring everyone can be informed. Any texting or direct message communication outside of the GroupMe must contain the appropriate staff to student gender. Monthly e-mails are sent to parents giving them a quick glance at all God did in the last few weeks, what is currently taking place, and a couple of items to anticipate. Weekly gatherings occur each Sunday there are LifeGroup Bible studies, and are primarily held at 8:45 a.m. Gatherings include a staff or student devotional, concise reminders, announcements, or instructions, and time to pray over the morning. On the first Sunday of each month, students are asked to show up at 8:15 a.m. for additional training and equipping. Students are also participants in the church-wide leader trainings, *SUMMIT* and *Winter Huddle*, that occur each August and January. Subject matter and staff member assignments are

⁷ See appendix 7.

coordinated between the NextGen Pastor, minister of NextGen discipleship Pastor, Minister to High School, and Minister to JHigh.

LEAD Team students are occasionally asked to help promote LEAD Team amongst their peers through individual conversations, video testimonies, on-stage vision casting moments, or interviews. Engaging LEAD Team students in the vision casting process empowers them to influence their peers while also valuing their involvement. Students often better receive opportunities and announcements from their peers than from adults.

In addition to student participation, parents are a cornerstone to a strong student leadership team. It is necessary for parents to be on board and supportive. Their involvement is essential for success and sustainability. The staff communicates clearly via the parent letter contained in the application, a phone call before a student has an interview, and monthly e-mails. Parents are the primary disciple makers for their children and the student staff desires to fuel that divine calling. Trust between the staff and parents is essential and parents should be able to count on the staff to properly disciple and guide their student. Doug Fields says, “We will MODEL Christian leadership for your student. We will MENTOR them in their leadership development. We will MONITOR their growth as student leaders. We will MOTIVATE them through encouragement and feedback. We will encourage them to MULTIPLY their effectiveness by sharing their skills with others.”⁸ From the outset, clear and effective communication with parents is paramount, starting with the initial introduction of LEAD team and the application process. Ensuring parents understand the purpose, goals, and expectations of the LEAD team lays the groundwork for their buy-in and aiding in their student’s active participation. Once students complete the onboarding process, ongoing parent engagement is crucial. This includes keeping them informed about upcoming activities,

⁸ Doug Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 190.

events, gatherings, trainings, and other ministry endeavors related to LEAD team, as well as providing regular updates on their students' involvement. Fostering a strong partnership with parents involves asking for their feedback, addressing any concerns or questions they may have, and actively seeking their input on the direction and development of the LEAD team. By actively involving parents in the journey, students and families are united with the empowerment of students serving.

The majority this chapter was designated to provide a road map and practical steps of implementation. Upon implementing a major idea into the ministry, it is imperative to properly evaluate the steps taken. The remaining portion of the chapter will evaluate the project and examine its effectiveness. This evaluation will not only aid the Prestonwood Student ministry but perhaps other student ministries as they seek to engage and implement a student leadership team in their church.

Evaluation of the Project

Evaluating this project is essential not only to reflect on its effectiveness for Prestonwood Baptist Church but also to offer valuable insights for other student ministries aiming to initiate or enhance their student leadership team efforts. First, a brief examination of the project's purpose and goals will be covered. Second, the strengths and weaknesses will be evaluated to aid the future strengthening and adjustments made for LEAD Team. The final portion of this chapter will include theological and personal reflections as I journeyed through this project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to implement a student leadership team at the Plano campus of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. The desired purpose originated from a strong conviction and observation of seeing students capable, willing, and ready to be called upon to take their faith seriously and begin living it out. This project aimed to infuse a stronger culture of servant leadership into Prestonwood and at

the same time cut through any perceived or unknown barriers between ministries to strengthen the multi-generational culture of the church. This purpose originated at Prestonwood Baptist Church out of a need to have students begin thinking of and serving others. One desire of this project was to help students gain a greater understanding that a deeper faith is not necessarily just with knowledge but also with faithfulness to serve others as Christ modeled to his followers. Through the beginning stages of implementation, students have already verbalized their appreciation for the opportunities to serve. Parents have also made comments to the student staff about their gratitude for calling the students into action. The church, across various ministries, has noted that the visibility of students serving and greeting has been a joy to see. Another desire of this project was for students to see how followers of Jesus before them and the teachings of Jesus showcase the necessity for them to serve. Chapter 2 of the project examined biblical examples of young people God chose to use, including David, Josiah, Mary, and Timothy, while primarily examined the biblical texts of Philippians 2:1–18, John 13, and Ephesians 4:11–13. This project was rooted in with these passages of Scripture and staff, students, parents, and leaders were continually reminded that the service of the students stems from the overflow of their personal relationship with Jesus. Thus, another intention of this project was to aid in the discipleship of students as they grow and mature in their faith and serve out of that maturation.

Chapter 3 paralleled with the biblical characters of chapter 2 with additional historical and non-biblical individuals who did great things of significance despite their youthfulness. This chapter showcased that modern students are making a difference and students within Prestonwood can rise to making a difference for the kingdom of God. Equipping, empowering, and mobilizing students to serve is not always the easiest or smoothest. The end of the chapter outlined the various challenges that accompany engaging students to actively serve. From their personal folly, family dynamics, business, and

cultural circumstances, various aspects of teenager's lives must be accounted for and considered.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project contained four main goals and each of the goals will be examined in this section.

Goal 1

The first goal was to define why student leadership is important and why there is positive value for students to be seen as leaders. Based on this importance of a student leadership team, a vision statement was created and approved by senior leadership at Prestonwood. The vision statement reads, "Prestonwood Students exists to reach the community, the nation, the world, and every generation with the gospel. To help students learn to grow in an authentic and visible faith, to love those around them with a biblically based devotion to Jesus, and to multiply what God has done in their lives into the lives of others." The purpose of student leadership is to disciple students to live on mission, think outside of themselves, and provide opportunities to experience servant leadership. Based on this written purpose and approved by the Discipleship Pastor for implementation, the goal was successful.

Goal 2

The second goal was to identify a sample of churches that meet the established criteria of church and student ministry size to evaluate their practice and value of a student leadership team. Churches were primarily identified through the Youth Pastor METRO organization, student ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention, and comprised of churches that have at least one thousand members and a minimum of one hundred students in the student ministry. Once a church was identified, communication with their student pastor was made with an explanation of the project, and they were asked for their participation in an online survey. A survey was sent to collect information and analyze

said information to aid the development and implementation of a student leadership team at Prestonwood. This goal was considered successful when at least twenty qualifying churches have been identified and completed the survey.

Goal 3

The third goal was to describe what student leaders' responsibilities include. This goal was measured and informed by the information collected in the survey that included open-ended questions that reviewed the responsibilities and roles of student leaders, trainings, and outcomes that identified and assessed best and effective practices that student ministries have implemented. This goal was considered successfully met when key responsibilities were identified and utilized in at least ten of the churches surveyed and responsibilities for the student leadership team were written.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to create a road map for implementing a student leadership team at Prestonwood Baptist Church. This goal was measured by defining the purpose, identifying potential student leaders, providing an application, creating roles and responsibilities, and implementing ongoing training. The goal was considered successfully met upon completion of implementation of the seven steps mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Strengths of the Project

A considerable amount of strengths have already been identified with the implementation of LEAD Team at Prestonwood Baptist Church. The first strength of the project was the empowerment of students that involves them in leadership roles that allow them to take ownership of their faith and ministry. This approach allows students to take ownership of their faith and ministry, fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment. By actively participating in leadership, students develop critical skills such as decision-making, teamwork, and communication. This empowerment not only enhances

their personal growth and spiritual development but also contributes to the vitality and advancement of the ministry. As students take on more significant roles, they bring fresh perspectives and energy, benefiting both the Prestonwood Baptist Church and potentially serving as a model for other student ministries seeking to cultivate strong, engaged leaders.

A second strength of the project was the increased skill development from communication, time-management, and personal holiness. By engaging in leadership roles, students had the opportunity to refine their ability to effectively convey ideas through the interviews and gatherings, better learn to manage their schedules and having to prioritize and determine what takes precedence on their calendars, and prayerfully strength their spiritual growth as they now see they must serve out of their walk with Jesus. These skills are invaluable, not only within the context of ministry but also in their everyday lives and future endeavors. Improved communication skills helped students articulate their faith and collaborate more effectively and authentically with their peers. Enhanced time-management abilities ensured they could balance their responsibilities and commitments effectively. Furthermore, a focus on personal holiness encouraged students to deepen their spiritual practices and integrity. These ongoing developments collectively contribute to creating a more well-rounded students who are better prepared to lead and serve, thus benefiting both the students, the student ministry, church, their schools and class work, and where applicable, their job.

A third strength of this project was the significant influence student leaders wielded with their peers, stemming from their genuine desire to serve rather than simply holding the title of a “student leader.” These student leaders embodied the principles of servant leadership, leading by example with humility and a commitment to others so that more people would see and hear about Jesus. This approach not only enhanced their credibility and relatability but also fostered a stronger sense of connection and community among the students. The LEAD Team effectively cultivated an environment where all students felt more connected and valued, resulting in a deeper sense of belonging within

the group. This dynamic encouraged more meaningful relationships, collaboration, and mutual support, which are essential for the thriving of any student ministry.

A fourth strength of this project was its ability to provide the student staff with clear opportunities to further disciple and invest in students who demonstrated a sincere desire for spiritual growth. By closely engaging with these motivated students, the staff could identify those who were particularly eager to deepen their faith and leadership skills. This visibility allowed for more targeted and effective discipleship efforts, ensuring that these students received the guidance, support, and mentorship they needed to flourish. As a result, the overall environment and culture of the student ministry improved, fostering a more dedicated group of student leaders who were well-prepared to make a positive impact within their community and beyond.

Weaknesses of the Project

While this project was tremendous and marked with several strengths, it did not come without weaknesses. The first weakness of the project was the unexpected challenge in convincing the student staff to fully relinquish certain tasks to better equip the students. This transition required significantly more time and persuasion than initially anticipated, as the staff needed reassurance and adjustment to embrace this new approach. The hesitation stemmed from a natural inclination to maintain control over established responsibilities and a concern for ensuring tasks were completed to a high standard. Overcoming this hurdle involved extensive discussions and demonstrations of the long-term benefits of empowering students. Despite the initial resistance, this process ultimately highlighted the need for clear communication and support to facilitate change within the team.

A second weakness of the project was the difficulty in recruiting some of the most influential students due to their already busy schedules. For many, joining the LEAD team meant adding yet another commitment to their calendars, which was initially met with reluctance. To address this, vision casting and intentional discipleship were

employed to help these students understand that being part of the LEAD team was not just another activity, but an integral aspect of their identity and calling as followers of Jesus. This approach gradually improved participation as students began to see the value and purpose behind their involvement. However, balancing their numerous commitments remained a challenge.

A third project weakness that I did not initially consider was the ongoing implementation for smaller churches who may lack staff or resources. While key lay leaders can step in and cost-effective means can be used, I recognize that my context helped shape much of the implementation. Despite that weakness, the steps of implementation can be viewed as a blue-print and adapted to other student ministries context.

What I Would Do Differently

There are a few things that I would do differently to enhance this project. First, I would have interviewed and surveyed senior pastors to get their vantage point and perspective on investing in the next generation of leaders in their churches. Though adding the survey of senior pastors could have breached the goals and purpose of this project, it could have aided the argument that pastors desire to see students engaged and actively serving in their churches.

A second change I would implement would be to develop and install a system of ongoing accountability rather than relying solely on the annual re-up interviews. Although accountability is a core value shared by the Prestonwood student staff, it could be significantly improved by articulating accountability more clearly and documenting it comprehensively. Establishing a well-defined, continuous accountability system would ensure that both staff and students understand their responsibilities and expectations consistently throughout the year. This would enhance transparency, promote sustained engagement, and facilitate regular feedback and support, ultimately leading to more effective leadership development and stronger student ministry outcomes.

Theological Reflections

Through the research, study, and application of this project, I was challenged in my own theology. This project afforded me the opportunity to deeply examine key passages of Scripture that speak to the heart of a servant. As a result of creating and implementing this project, a few theological reflections come to mind.

First, the nature of Christ's servanthood. Through this project I have come to a deeper understanding of the nature of servanthood as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. The Gospels, particularly the account of the Last Supper in John 13 where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, illustrate the profound humility and selflessness that defines true servanthood. This passage challenges me to adopt a more sincere attitude of service, not for personal gain or recognition but as an expression of genuine love and obedience to God. The act of washing feet becomes a powerful metaphor for the sacrificial and humble service that should characterize the life of every Christian. This reflection has led me to reevaluate my motivations and actions, striving to embody the same servant-hearted approach in all aspects of my life.

Second, the transformative power of servant leadership. Examining key passages of Scripture related to leadership has revealed the transformative power of servant leadership. Jesus's teachings in Mark 10:42–45, where he contrasts worldly leadership with kingdom leadership, highlight that true greatness in God's eyes is found in serving others. This project emphasized the importance of leading by example, demonstrating compassion, and prioritizing the needs of others above my own. By embracing this model of leadership, I can better foster a staff and ministry culture of compassion, trust, kindness, mutual respect, collaboration, and spiritual growth. This theological reflection has inspired me to pursue leadership roles with a servant's heart, aiming to uplift and empower those around me.

Third, the spiritual growth that comes through serving others. The practical application of this project has underscored the significant role that serving others plays in personal spiritual growth. Philippians 2:3–8 speaks to the attitude of Christ, who, though

being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Instead, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Engaging in acts of service, as Christ did, nurtures humility, compassion, and a deeper reliance on God. It creates opportunities for personal reflection, repentance, and a greater understanding of God's love and grace. This reflection has encouraged me to seek out more opportunities to serve, recognizing that through serving others I am also being spiritually transformed and drawn closer to God.

Personal Reflections

This project has stretched me beyond what I could have imagined or thought I was capable of. Here are a few personal reflections. First, there is power in dreaming big and working toward great things. This project has shown me that dreaming big, dedicating time, and maintaining consistency can lead to remarkable achievements in life and ministry. Initially, the scope and challenges of this project seemed daunting, but by setting clear goals, creating a structured plan, and committing to regular effort, I was able to make significant and consistent progress throughout the process until completion. This experience has reinforced the importance of perseverance and strategic planning in accomplishing great things. It has also taught me that with determination and a clear vision, seemingly insurmountable tasks can be tackled successfully.

Second, I need to trust and empower others around me even more. Delegating implementation responsibilities into the ministry and relying on the strengths and skills of my team not only alleviated my workload but also fostered a collaborative environment. By entrusting others with significant roles, I witnessed their growth and contribution to the overall project's success of implementation. This reflection has emphasized the value of teamwork and the need to build a supportive network that can collectively achieve more than an individual alone.

Third, without the constant encouragement of my wife, Erin, it is nearly impossible to live out my calling in ministry. Her belief in my abilities and her constant

prayers and emotional and practical support provided the foundation I needed to pursue and complete this project. Erin's encouragement has been a source of strength and motivation, reminding me of the importance of having a supportive wife who shares in the vision and calling. This reflection has deepened my appreciation for her and underscored the significance of mutual support in fulfilling one's calling in ministry.

Fourth, this project has made me a better follower of Christ and pastor. The challenges and insights gained have deepened my faith, refined my character, and enhanced my pastoral skills. Engaging deeply with Scripture, applying its teachings, and seeing the tangible results of this work have strengthened my relationship with God and my commitment to serving others. This reflection has confirmed that the process of overcoming obstacles and achieving goals is transformative, making me a more effective and faithful servant of Christ.

Through the process of reading the Scriptures, praying, and consulting wise counsel I was able to learn and grow. The journey of this project and the steps taken afforded me the opportunity to be reminded that Jesus has called me to be a servant leader. That I may have a specific title in my church, but my title does not define my leadership. Christ has called me to humble myself and serve those around me so that he may be glorified and so that his kingdom can grow. None of that was new but was and remains a convicting reminder to take the posture of a servant daily.

Conclusion

Implementing and establishing a student leadership team was not merely a practical endeavor but a spiritual journey guided by God's wisdom and grace. By aligning the efforts of the Prestonwood Students staff with biblical principles and seeking the input of fellow ministry leaders, a solid foundation was laid for empowering young leaders to rise above cultural expectations and embrace their God-given potential. Undoubtedly, there will be continued adjustments along the way, but this project has already impacted a positive change in the overall culture of Prestonwood Students. May

God continue to work through the student staff to raise up a generation of servant-hearted leaders who impact their world for his glory.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF CHURCHES PARTICIPATING IN SURVEY

This appendix includes a list of participating churches who responded to the survey. Churches were primarily, but not limited to, identified through the Youth Pastor METRO organization, student ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention. They had at least one thousand members and a minimum of one hundred students in the student ministry.

Table A1. Churches participating in survey

Church	Position	Church Membership	Size of Student Ministry
Second Baptist Church, Houston	Youth Pastor	100,000 +	650
First Baptist church Trussville	Minister to Middle School students	4000	500-600
First Baptist Church Corinth	Student Pastor	350	50
First Baptist Church Forney	Pastor of Student Ministry	1500	150
BattleCreek Church	Lead Student Minister	3,500+	400+
Frisco First Baptist	Minister to Students	2,200	350
Thompson Station Church	Next Generation Pastor	1,800	400
Second Baptist Church Houston	Student Pastor - North Campus	90,000+ (Globally)	400+ (North Campus)
Cross Church	Lead Student Pastor	3000	190
Bellevue Baptist Church	Middle School Pastor	25,000	800
Family Church	Pastor to Student and Families/ Gardens Campus	9000	300/Gardens, 1500/FC Network
Hickory Grove Baptist Church	Student Pastor	4,000	400
Quail Springs Baptist Church	Student Pastor	6000	275
Prestonwood Baptist Church	Minister to High School Students	55,000	600
First Baptist Church Woodstock	Middle School Pastor	4,000	250
New Hope Baptist Church	Student Pastor	4,000	250
Cottonwood Creek Church	Student Pastor	6,000+	600
Burnt Hickory Baptist Church	High School Pastor	5,000	450
Second Baptist	Junior High Pastor	80,000	400
Together We Church	Student Pastor	3,150	275+
FBC Wichita Falls	Global Student Pastor/College Pastor	4,000	450
Northland Church	Executive Pastor of Next Gen	2000	200
Olive Baptist Church	Minister of Middle School	2800	270
Central Baptist Church-Jonesboro, AR	Student Pastor	6000	350 (wednesdays) 200 (Sundays)
Cross Church Springdale	Student Pastor	Springdale Campus - 2500+	200
First Baptist Church of Opelika	Student Pastor	5000	400+
Sandals Church	Youth Director	10,000	800
First Baptist Woodstock, Ga	High School Pastor	19000	500+
First Baptist Church	Next Gen Pastor	1,700	250
First Baptist Rogers	Student Pastor	4500	350
Cross Pointe Church	Middle School Pastor	1,300	100+

Church	Position	Church Membership	Size of Student Ministry
Green Acres Baptist Church	Student Pastor	18,000+	500+
Mobberly Baptist Church	JH Minister	5000	550
First Baptist Pasadena	Junior High Youth Minister	9700	250
Cottage Hill	Next Gen Pastor	7,000	300
FBC Broken Arrow	Student/Next Gen Pastor	5000	300
Sagemont Church	Student Pastor	3000+	300+
Second Baptist Church	Student Pastor	80,000+	1,000+ (across all 6 campuses) 300+ at Woodway
Bethlehem Church	Student Pastor	5,000	500
First Baptist Trussville, Alabama	Minister to High School Students	4,000	500
Cypress Baptist church	Lead associate pastor	7000	400
Brentwood Nolensville Campus	Next Gen/ Student Pastor	6,000 all campuses/ 1000 Nolensville	160
Fellowship of Montgomery in Montgomery, TX	Youth Pastor	1000	260
First Baptist McKinney	Minister with Students	5000	900
BattleCreek	Senior Director of NextGen	7500	800
Rolling Hills Community Church	Central Student Pastor	4000	400
Broadmoor Baptist Church	Minister to Students	2000	300
First Baptist Church of Arnold	Next Generation Pastor	7,000	560

APPENDIX 2

PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS OF LEAD TEAM

This appendix articulates the purpose and clarifies expectations for staff, students, and parents.

WHY SHOULD I DO IT?

LEAD Team is an opportunity for Prestonwood Students to know God more and make Him known, as well as leverage their God-given gifts and talents in order to impact the world around them for Christ. LEAD Team encompasses various positions of leadership. While each position of leadership has differing descriptions and expectations, the goal is the same: for student leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ as they live out their walk with Christ in the mission field where He has placed them.

LEAD Team has 2 primary purposes:

1. Discipleship that leads to personal evangelism
2. Gain leadership experience

DISCIPLESHIP

- Students will participate in weekly LEAD Team training sessions.
- Students will go through Starting Point with a staff member or adult leader.
- Students will be encouraged to consistently participate in a discipleship group.
- Students will have more personal time and interaction with Prestonwood Students staff.

LEADERSHIP

- Each student will have weekly ministry responsibilities including, but not limited to LifeGroup weekends, and special events.
- Students will have the responsibility of dreaming, planning, developing, and carrying out ministry opportunities on their school campus, in their homes, and for Prestonwood Students as a whole.

I have read the Purpose of LEAD Team. *
(Check box) Yes!

Following the “why” is the “Heart of LEAD Team” and agreement. The following expectations are intended to communicate the motive and intent of LEAD Team.

HEART OF LEAD TEAM

Why is LEAD Team expected to be the most faithful and consistent participants in Prestonwood Students? Leaders are present! Rarely does decreased attendance and involvement produce increased devotion. While noting that there are times when one cannot be present, LEAD Team students are expected to faithfully attend and lead out.

I have read the Heart of LEAD Team. *
(Check box) Yes!

To best communicate the expectations and what students are agreeing to, there are twelve statements to read and twelve boxes to check. Each statement stems from

Scripture and indicates that a student is agreeing and affirming their alignment.

Check each box below, indicating that you have read each point and understand what is expected of you.

Order of importance for *Heart of Lead Team*: *

- Love Christ first above all in life, including in relationships, church, and school [Matthew 22:37]
- Maintain a daily prayer and devotional time [Mark 1:35, Colossians 4:2-4]
- Set an example in all things, including your actions, speech, and thoughts [1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Corinthians 10:31]
- Humility! I will have the heart of a servant [Philippians 2:1-18, John 13:14, Mark 10:45]
- Attend LifeGroup Bible study, MDWK, and weekly worship services [Acts 2]
- Be regular and punctual in attendance; LEAD Team meets every Sunday at 8:45am [1 Corinthians 4:2]
- Set an example on school campus and my home by giving your best in all that you participate in [1 Corinthians 10:31]
- Maintain and practice biblical standards in relationships [1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14]
- Make thorough preparation of given responsibilities [2 Timothy 2:15]
- Open yourself to accountability, correction, and instruction [1 Timothy 5:7]
- Support and pray for the pastors, staff, student leaders, volunteers, and other students [1 Timothy 2:1-2]
- Think, plan, and dream for the future of the student ministry (events, creative elements, etc.) [Ephesians 3:20, Proverbs 29:18]

APPENDIX 3
STUDENT LEADERSHIP SURVEY

The survey included in this appendix consists of twenty statements and ten open-ended questions completed by youth ministries.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP SURVEY

This survey is given in attempt to conduct research to assess the practice and value of a student leadership team within student ministries. This research is conducted by Jason Mick for the purposes of his DMIN project under the direction of the Professional Doctoral Studies office at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This research is designed to be introspective in which you will assess student leadership within your student ministry. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By completing the survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name:

Date:

Name of church:

Position or title:

Membership of church:

Student Ministry size:

Directions: Answer the following questions by selecting the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

Term: Students/teenagers- 13–19-year old's that are born again believers.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

#	Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1	Our church has at least one thousand members and a minimum of one hundred students who attend.						
2	You see students/young people in Scripture given responsibilities and making a difference.						
3	Our student ministry currently has a student leadership team where students have responsibilities that contribute to the overall mission and vision of the church.						
4	Our student ministry has allocated budget towards developing student leaders.						
5	Unique trainings and/or retreats with student leaders are important.						
6	Our student ministry has a process/system of application, training, equipping, empowering, and mobilizing student leaders.						
7	Students in our ministry believe that involvement in church responsibilities enhances their sense of belonging to the church community.						

#	Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8	Leadership responsibilities contribute to the discipleship of students knowing they play a role in serving the church.						
9	Students in our ministry believe that taking on responsibilities within the church positively influences their relationships with peers.						
10	Serving in the church fosters a stronger connection for students in living out their identity as a Christian.						
11	Students serving helps them discover and develop their unique spiritual gifts and passions.						
12	Students serving and taking on responsibilities in the ministry helps develop communication and time management skills, and accountability.						
13	Students serving within the church encourages a sense of responsibility to serve others in the community.						
14	Students taking on ministry responsibilities provides opportunities for building meaningful relationships with adult church leaders.						
15	Students in our ministry can clearly articulate the gospel.						
16	Students are given opportunities to serve outside of just the student ministry.						
17	Our church believes in equipping and empowering students to serve outside the walls of the church.						
18	There are challenges with asking students to take on responsibilities to serve.						
19	Challenges to students serving exist but don't prohibit us from giving them responsibilities.						
20	Our student ministry currently does not have a student leadership team but I am now more intrigued or compelled to start one (If your church does have one, simply select strongly agree).						

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

1. What do you believe the goal of creating a student leadership team is and why?
2. What roles and specific responsibilities do you have for student leaders?
3. What is your process for a student to serve, responsibilities given, and the ongoing plan for training and equipping your student leaders?
4. List at least three positive outcomes of having a student leadership team?
5. How does your ministry disciple and develop students to serve?
6. What characteristics or qualifications do you see necessary for a student to serve?
7. From your perspective, what challenges or barriers might hinder students from actively serving, and how can these be addressed?
8. How can the church effectively communicate the importance and value placed on the contributions of students serving?
9. What feedback or insights have you received from students regarding their experiences in serving and having responsibilities within the church?
10. What do you want students who leave your ministry to take with them to the next stage of life?

APPENDIX 4

LEAD TEAM APPLICATION

This appendix lays out the online LEAD team application.

Application

By providing your contact information, you consent to mail, email, phone, and text communication from Prestonwood Baptist Church. This form will time out at 3 minutes which resets for every key stroke. It starts timing out when you stop typing completely. To confirm that you've completed this application make sure you received the confirmation email.

Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your interest in your student being involved in our Prestonwood Students LEAD Team. Please know that it is not the desire of Prestonwood staff to create more activities in which your student can be involved. Life is busy. There is always an activity to occupy our time. We recognize that busyness does not equate to growth and growth should not come at the sacrifice of family time and commitments.

However, I want you to know that a commitment to this team involves much support - from you first, as well as our staff here. We are here to help your student grow as a godly young man or woman by providing opportunities for them to joyfully serve and exercise their spiritual gifts.

We firmly believe God is raising up students to be servant leaders and a catalyst in reaching a generation with the Gospel of Jesus.

In order to be a part of LEAD Team, we require students to consistently attend:

- Weekend Worship in the Worship Center
- Prestonwood Students LifeGroups
- LEAD Gathering every Sunday at Plano Campus at 8:45am
- Prestonwood Students MDWK activities
- All major events, i.e. Freedom, Beach Camp, Fall Evangelism, etc. (Scholarships are available and we never want finances to be a reason someone can't serve and/or participate)

Additionally, we are asking LEAD Team members to attend a half-day LEAD Team training at the beginning of the school year and new year (details will be communicated later), and have weekly ministry responsibility. If this is a commitment to which you feel your student can pledge, we would love for them to fill out our LEAD Team application

Finally, all LEAD Team students are required to go through Starting Point (discipleship curriculum) with a Prestonwood Students staff member or adult leader.

We are grateful to walk alongside you in raising disciples, Kingdom servants, and eager to see how God uses these students to reach a generation with the Gospel. You are vital to the growth of a spiritually maturing young adult!

In Him,

Jason Mick

NextGen Pastor

My parent has read the Letter to Parents. *

(check box) Yes!

WHY SHOULD I DO IT?

LEAD Team is an opportunity for Prestonwood Students to know God more and make Him known, as well as leverage their God-given gifts and talents in order to impact the world around them for Christ. LEAD Team encompasses various positions of leadership. While each position of leadership has differing descriptions and expectations, the goal is the same: for student leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ as they live out their walk with Christ in the mission field where He has placed them.

LEAD Team has 2 primary purposes:

1. Discipleship that leads to personal evangelism
2. Gain leadership experience

DISCIPLESHIP

- Students will participate in weekly LEAD Team training sessions.
- Students will go through Starting Point with a staff member or adult leader.
- Students will be encouraged to consistently participate in a discipleship group.
- Students will have more personal time and interaction with Prestonwood Students staff.

LEADERSHIP

- Each student will have weekly ministry responsibilities including, but not limited to LifeGroup weekends, and special events.
- Students will have the responsibility of dreaming, planning, developing, and carrying out ministry opportunities on their school campus, in their homes, and for Prestonwood Students as a whole.

I have read the Purpose of LEAD Team. *
(Check box) Yes!

Following the “why” is the “Heart of LEAD Team” and agreement. The following expectations are intended to communicate the motive and intent of LEAD Team.

HEART OF LEAD TEAM

Why is LEAD Team expected to be the most faithful and consistent participants in Prestonwood Students? Leaders are present! Rarely does decreased attendance and involvement produce increased devotion. While noting that there are times when one cannot be present, LEAD Team students are expected to faithfully attend and lead out.

I have read the Heart of LEAD Team. *
(Check box) Yes!

To best communicate the expectations and what students are agreeing to, there are twelve statements to read and twelve boxes to check. Each statement stems from Scripture and indicates that a student is agreeing and affirming their alignment.

Check each box below, indicating that you have read each point and understand what is expected of you.

Order of importance for *Heart of Lead Team*: *

- Love Christ first above all in life, including in relationships, church, and school [Matthew 22:37]
- Maintain a daily prayer and devotional time [Mark 1:35, Colossians 4:2-4]
- Set an example in all things, including your actions, speech, and thoughts [1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Corinthians 10:31]
- Humility! I will have the heart of a servant [Philippians 2:1-18, John 13:14, Mark 10:45]
- Attend LifeGroup Bible study, MDWK, and weekly worship services [Acts 2]
- Be regular and punctual in attendance; LEAD Team meets every Sunday at 8:45am [1 Corinthians 4:2]
- Set an example on school campus and my home by giving your best in all that you participate in [1 Corinthians 10:31]
- Maintain and practice biblical standards in relationships [1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14]
- Make thorough preparation of given responsibilities [2 Timothy 2:15]
- Open yourself to accountability, correction, and instruction [1 Timothy 5:7]
- Support and pray for the pastors, staff, student leaders, volunteers, and other students [1 Timothy 2:1-2]
- Think, plan, and dream for the future of the student ministry (events, creative elements, etc.) [Ephesians 3:20, Proverbs 29:18]

LEAD team responsibilities and descriptions

Whatever your interests and giftings are - there's a place for you! You have the chance to make an eternal impact due to your leadership and oversight of Prestonwood Students' ministry. Below, you will see what different opportunities there are to serve, and a little about each team's responsibilities. Each team listed has staff oversight and is further led by Team Captains.

Note: In order to serve on the Worship Team or a MDWK Team, you must serve on an additional team on the weekends.

The teams are as follows:

SUNDAY LIFEGROUPS (JHigh and HS students)

Connect Team
Environment Team
Worship Team
Tech Team
Creative Team

WEDNESDAY HS MDWK

Apprentice (11-12th grades only)
Logistics
Hospitality

WEDNESDAY JHigh MDWK

General MDWK

Next, the student fills out simple information and answers questions to allow the staff to gain a better perspective of where the student is in their faith journey and to get to know some fun facts about that student.

- First Name
- Last Name
- Student Cell Phone
- Student E-mail
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Names(s)
- Parent Cell Phone
- Parent E-mail
- Age
- Grade (2023-2024 School Year)
- School
- Instagram username (type 'N/A' if you don't have one)
- How long have you attended Prestonwood Baptist Church?
- Are you a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church?
- Attach a photo of yourself (choose file option)

Please indicate by checking the box for the roles in which you are most interested to serve. In order to serve on a Secondary Team, you must serve on a Primary Team.

Primary Team:

- Creative
- Connect
- Tech
- Environment

Secondary Team:

- Worship
- MDWK: Apprentice (11/12th grade only)
- MDWK: Hospitality Leader (HS)
- MDWK: Logistics Leader (HS)
- JHigh MDWK Crew

Open-ended questions:

- Tell us about when you were saved and when were you baptized. Then tell us what the Lord has taught you in the past month?
- Tell us about one person you have attempted to share Christ with in the last month.
- List any extracurricular activities in which you participate, including clubs, sports, and church. Include if you have a job and if so, where? How many hours per week do you work?
- Why do you want to serve on Lead Team?

- Is there anything that would hinder you from consistently attending Sunday morning Worship, LifeGroups, MDWK gatherings, key events, and weekly LEAD gatherings?
- Who is your LifeGroup Leader?

Fun facts about you. What is your favorite?

- Coffee or Energy Drink?
- Breakfast item or Snack?
- Candy?
- Music Group?
- Worship Song?
- Bible verse or story?

LEAD Team Agreement

Student: By typing my name below, I firmly acknowledge the goals, purposes, and heart of LEAD Team. I pledge to faithfully and consistently attend the programs and ministries of the Prestonwood Student Ministry. Inappropriate attitude, actions, and excessive absences may result in my dismissal from LEAD team.

Parent: By typing my name below, I acknowledge that my student is applying for the Prestonwood Students LEAD Team and give my permission and full support to them doing so. I will support my student in his/her leadership role in Prestonwood Students. I recognize that involvement on the Student LEAD Team will require extra time for my student, as well as their participation in ALL major Prestonwood Students events, including Freedom and Beach Camp.

Student Name:

Parent Name:

Confirmation response: Great! thanks for completing the lead team application! A staff member will reach out to you directly to schedule your interview and talk next steps! Have questions? E-mail us! planostudents@prestonwood.org

APPENDIX 5

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ASSESSMENT

The following is a spiritual gifts assessment given to students to complete after the completion of their interview and to discuss with a Prestonwood Students staff member during their interview.

Table A2. Spiritual gifts survey

5	—Highly characteristic of me/definitely true for me
4	—Most of the time this would describe me/be true for me
3	—Frequently characteristic of me/true for me—about 50 percent of the time
2	—Occasionally characteristic of me/true for me—about 25 percent of the time
1	—Not at all characteristic of me/definitely untrue for me
1	I have the ability to organize ideas, resources, time, and people effectively. . .
2	I am willing to study and prepare for the task of teaching
3	I am able to relate the truths of God to specific situations.
4	I have a God-given ability to help others grow in their faith.
5	I possess a special ability to communicate the truth of salvation.
6	I have the ability to make critical decisions when necessary
7	I am sensitive to the hurts of people.
8	I experience joy in meeting needs through sharing possessions.
9	I enjoy studying.
10	I have delivered God’s message of warning and judgment. _
11	I am able to sense the true motivation of persons and movements.
12	I have a special ability to trust God in difficult situations.
13	I have a strong desire to contribute to the establishment of new churches.
14	I take action to meet physical and practical needs rather than merely talking about or planning to help.
15	I enjoy entertaining guests in my home.
16	I can adapt my guidance to fit the maturity of those working with me.
17	I can delegate and assign meaningful work.
18	I have an ability and desire to teach.
19	I am usually able to analyze a situation correctly.
20	I have a natural tendency to encourage others.
21	I am willing to take the initiative in helping other Christians grow in their faith.
22	I have an acute awareness of the emotions of other people, such as loneliness, pain, fear, and anger
23	I am a cheerful giver.
24	I spend time digging into facts.
25	I feel that I have a message from God to deliver to others.
26	I can recognize when a person is genuine/honest

27	I am a person of vision (a clear mental portrait of a preferable future given by God). I am able to communicate vision in such a way that others commit to making the vision a reality.
28	I am willing to yield to God's will rather than question and waver.
29	I would like to be more active in getting the gospel to people in other lands.
30	It makes me happy to do things for people in need.
31	I am successful in getting a group to do its work joyfully.
32	I am able to make strangers feel at ease.
33	I have the ability to plan learning approaches.
34	I can identify those who need encouragement.
35	I have trained Christians to be more obedient disciples of Christ.
36	I am willing to do whatever it takes to see others come to Christ.
37	I am attracted to people who are hurting.
38	I am a generous giver.
39	I am able to discover new truths.
40	I have spiritual insights from Scripture concerning issues and people that compel me to speak out.
41	I can sense when a person is acting in accord with God's will.
42	I can trust in God even when things look dark.
43	I can determine where God wants a group to go and help it get there.
44	I have a strong desire to take the gospel to places where it has never been heard.
45	I enjoy reaching out to new people in my church and community.
46	I am sensitive to the needs of people.
47	I have been able to make effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group.
48	I often am consulted when fellow Christians are struggling to make difficult decisions.
49	I think about how I can comfort and encourage others in my congregation.
50	I am able to give spiritual direction to others.
51	I am able to present the gospel to lost persons in such a way that they accept the Lord and His salvation.
52	I possess an unusual capacity to understand the feelings of those in distress.
53	I have a strong sense of stewardship based on the recognition that God owns all things.
54	I have delivered to other persons messages that have come directly from God.
55	I can sense when a person is acting under God's leadership.

56	I try to be in God's will continually and be available for His use.
57	I feel that I should take the gospel to people who have different beliefs from me.
58	I have an acute awareness of the physical needs of others.
59	I am skilled in setting forth positive and precise steps of action.
60	I like to meet visitors at church and make them feel welcome.
61	I explain Scripture in such a way that others understand it.
62	I can usually see spiritual solutions to problems.
63	I welcome opportunities to help people who need comfort, consolation, encouragement, and counseling.
64	I feel at ease in sharing Christ with nonbelievers.
65	I can influence others to perform to their highest God-given potential.
66	I recognize the signs of stress and distress in others.
67	I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries.
68	I can organize facts into meaningful relationships.
69	God gives me messages to deliver to His people.
70	I am able to sense whether people are being honest when they tell of their religious experiences.
71	I enjoy presenting the gospel to persons of other cultures and backgrounds.
72	I enjoy doing little things that help people.
73	I can give a clear, uncomplicated presentation.
74	I have been able to apply biblical truth to the specific needs of my church.
75	God has used me to encourage others to live Christlike lives.
76	I have sensed the need to help other people become more effective in their ministries.
77	I like to talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him.
78	I have the ability to make strangers feel comfortable in my home.
79	I have a wide range of study resources and know how to secure information.
80	I feel assured that a situation will change for the glory of God even when the situation seem impossible.

LEADERSHIP	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 6}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 16}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 27}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 43}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 65}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
ADMINISTRATION	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 1}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 17}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 31}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 47}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 59}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
TEACHING	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 2}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 18}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 33}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 61}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 73}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
KNOWLEDGE	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 9}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 24}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 39}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 68}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 79}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
WISDOM	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 3}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 19}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 48}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 62}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 74}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
PROPHECY	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 10}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 25}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 40}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 54}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 69}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
DISCERNMENT	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 11}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 26}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 41}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 55}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 70}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
EXHORTATION	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 20}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 34}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 49}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 63}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 75}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
SHEPHERDING	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 4}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 21}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 35}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 50}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 76}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
FAITH	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 12}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 28}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 42}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 56}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 80}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
EVANGELISM	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 5}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 36}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 51}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 64}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 77}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
APOSTLESHIP	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 13}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 29}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 44}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 57}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 71}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
SERVICE/ HELPS	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 14}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 30}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 46}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 58}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 72}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL
MERCY	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 7}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 22}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 37}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 52}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM 66}}$	=	<input type="text" value="0"/>
											TOTAL

GIVING	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	=	0
	8		23		38		53		67		TOTAL

HOSPITALITY	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	+	$\frac{0}{\text{ITEM}}$	=	0
	15		32		45		60		78		TOTAL

LEADERSHIP	=
ADMINISTRATION	=
TEACHING	=
KNOWLEDGE	=
WISDOM	=
PROPHECY	=
DISCERNMENT	=
EXHORTATION	=
SHEPHERDING	=
FAITH	=
EVANGELISM	=
APOSTLESHIP	=
SERVICE/HELPS	=
MERCY	=
GIVING	=
HOSPITALITY	=

APPENDIX 6

LEAD TEAM INTERVIEW AND RE-UP INTERVIEW

This appendix is the format of a LEAD Team interview and re-up interview.

LEAD TEAM INTERVIEW

Engage / Encourage

- Excitement / Relax
- Tell us about your salvation!
- When were you baptized?
- Why do you want to be a part of LEAD Team?
- Why do you want to be a part of _____ team?
- How would you explain the Gospel to someone?
- What is God teaching you right now?
- Who is your LifeGroup leader / Who is discipling you?
- Have you been through Starting Point? Who took you through it?

LEAD TEAM Info

WHY LEAD TEAM? We believe God is raising up students to be servant leaders and a catalyst in reaching a generation with the Gospel of Jesus.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING? Your personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

HEARTBEAT OF LEAD TEAM

- Philippians 2:1-11 (v.3) selfless, (v.7) servant, (v.8) humble + sacrificial
- Biggest cheerleader - For Christ, the Gospel, the Church, etc.
- Biggest janitor - Being ok with working really hard behind the scenes.

EXPECTATIONS

- Live out of your relationship with Jesus, not legalism
- Live in a manner worthy of the Gospel - above reproach
- Open yourself up to accountability and spiritual check-ins
- Be present by attending worship, LifeGroups, and serving each week Be at 2/3 of Prestonwood Student big outreach events (Freedom, BC, Dodgeball).
- LEAD Training 1st Sunday of the month @ 8:00 am LEAD Gatherings all other Sundays 8:45 am
- Communicate - If you cannot make it to LEAD Team, let our staff know as soon as you know!
- Influence - God has given you influence and we want to help you use it to make an impact in all your spheres of influence; your home, school, friend groups!
- Pray - Faithfully ask God to do great things in and through you!
- Complete Starting Point (by next major outreach event)

COMMUNICATION

- Text your staff leader if you cannot make it to LEAD Team gathering
- Be involved in GroupMe Make your parents aware of LEAD Team events

WHAT'S NEXT

- Serve!
- Mark your calendar! PRAY

APPENDIX 7

POST-INTERVIEW HANDOUT

This appendix is an example of what is handed to a student at the completion of their interview.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MONTHLY TRAININGS

- September 1, October 6, November 3, December 1, January 5, February 2, March 2, April 6, May 4 8:00 AM High School Lobby

SUMMIT

- August 11 / 4:00 PM / Student Ministry Building

DODGEBALL

- August 28 / 6:00 PM / Championship Field (Plano Campus)

FIELDS OF FAITH

- October 9 / Hebron High School

WINTER HUDDLE

- Jan. 5 / AM / Location TBD

FREEDOM '25

- January 31 - February 2 & February 5 Prestonwood Baptist Church Plano Campus

BEACH CAMP '25

- June 8-13 / Fort Walton Beach, FL

Check List

- Parent Phone Call
- LifeGroup Leader Phone Call
- Send Spiritual Gift Test
- Interview
- What team are they on?
- Have they completed starting point?
- Add to GroupMe

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING A STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM AT PRESTONWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH IN PLANO, TEXAS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
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This project aimed to develop and implement a student leadership team to provide Prestonwood Baptist Church a framework to construct and raise students who actively serve and live out their calling as a Christian. Chapter 1 introduces the context, goals, and importance of equipping and empowering students to lead within the context of Prestonwood Baptist Church. Chapter 2 examines the biblical framework and significance of students serving in their local church, community, and to the ends of the world. Chapter 3 covers historical reasonings as to why students are capable of leading as well as the challenges. Chapter 4 evaluates and analyzes other ministries implementing a student leadership team. Chapter 5 provides practical steps to build a student leadership team and an evaluation of the project.

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EDUCATIONAL:

BA, Oklahoma State University, 2006

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MINISTRY

Youth Intern, LifeChurch, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2007

JHigh Associate Pastor, Second Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, 2007–2009

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