

Short Sheet # 11

Helping Young People Begin to Follow Christ

The sacred opportunity for leaders in many cases will be to help a teenager take that first step toward saying yes to Jesus Christ. Ultimately, this is a divine transaction between the Holy Spirit and the heart of the camper. To "over counsel" at this point would be a mistake. Effective leaders will know how to assist kids in beginning their walk with Christ but will not try to control the words, emotions and response. God has been building His family since the dawn of human history, using various methods, styles and people. Young Life does not have a corner on truth when it comes to leading someone to Christ.

Some guidelines to Consider

1. Help kids comprehend the centrality of Christ in the salvation process. Help them understand the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ is real and personal. He came, lived, died and rose for them! Use stories and verses from Scripture to underscore the importance of Christ (Colossians 1:15-20, Philipians 2:5-12).
2. Allow kids to grapple with the reality and severity of the problem of sin. Help them see how wide is the gap and vast is the division between God and people not united by Christ. Emphasize relational separation from God more than personal behavioural mistakes. Being lost (far) from God is more devastating than being "bad." Both, of course, are sin, but God fundamentally wants to restore a broken relationship, not simply improve one's behaviour. Kids need to know how lost they are before they will appreciate how loved they are. Scripture texts in Romans 1-3 and 7, Ephesians 2, Colossians 1:22-23 and the Gospels emphasize this truth.
3. Encourage the process of salvation more than the experience. Quite often overzealous leaders will press kids to feel something, say something or do something to make sure that the kids can point back to a conscious moment, feeling or place that will validate the exact time when God entered their life, Though the intentions of this type of counselling are usually noble, this has the tendency of reducing the mystery and sacredness of how God is working in a person's heart. Long before camp, God has been bringing people, experiences, attitudes and questions into a kid's life, shaping them to respond to Him. And long after the Young Life camp is over, God will continue to love, lead and mild the life of that kid. We have the privilege to participate in the process, but we do not have the responsibility to produce the experience!

Allow kids to feel, question and doubt. Encourage them to move at their own pace. Challenge them to entrust their life into Christ's care but do not rely on a particular formula to make it happen. God's spirit is quite capable of drawing kids to Himself. Encourage kids to spend time alone in quiet reflection. Ask them hard and challenging questions about Christ and spiritual things. Help them to know the implications of being a follower of Christ. But do not tell them exactly how to become a Christian or try to explain to them how to feel. We simply do not fully know (Ephesians 1:3-14).

4. Emphasize God's commitment to them as stronger than their initial commitment to God. Kids need to know and feel confident that God, not them, is really the author and creator of the salvation process. It is God's good decision about them that takes precedence over a kid's decision about God. Yes, the relationship is mutual, but kids need to know that God is actively working to draw them close to His heart and He will not run away if a kid stumbles, falls, doubts, sins. Romans 8 and John 17 are good places to direct kids in this issue.

5. Encourage kids to see that beginning with Christ is the start of a long and vast journey. They need to know that maturity and development will be gradual. Birth is important, but it is only a starting point. Many factors will contribute to strengthening one's relationship with Christ. Below are some aspects of the journey of faith.

- **The importance of Church** (the larger body of Christ). Help young Christians get started in some form of regular worship in their local community. Introduce them to people who could assist them in building an active and consistent love of worship and service.
- **The necessity of Scripture.** Point kids toward effective ways of making the Bible and its truths a regular part of their Christian growth. Personal reading, Bible study groups, verse memory and personal discipleship are some of the ways to help make Scripture central for kids.
- **The joy of service.** Very early in the faith journey of a young Christian, the challenge of service should be taught. The body of Christ is a giving, sharing and serving body. There are numerous ways to help kids begin to serve, but let them know that life in Christ will mean working with Him in His world.
- **The privilege and purpose of prayer.** Teach young Christians to pray! Let them know how vital a regular communication link is with God. Make sure they learn that prayer is more than figuring out our wants and needs and then putting together a request list. Teach them the joy and necessity of regular, intimate communion with God.
- **The responsibilities of membership in the Christian family.** Faith in Christ, though personal, is not a private experience. Fellowship, learning and sharing our life in Christ is a corporate experience. Provide environments or help kids find groups where authenticity, vulnerability, compassion and commitment are expressed between group members. Young people need Christian communities to grow and stay healthy.

