

Empowering young people. In some ways it's the holy grail of youth work, but sometimes we just don't know how to do it, where to start or about the Biblical precedents!

### **How Do I Do Empower / Train / Mentor young people?**

I'm sure there are hundreds of articles and books on this very subject, but my answer to this question is very simple and I'd build a relationship informally rather than formally, any day!

But the answer to the question is: Firstly, find out how God naturally uses you. Second, think about the young person and equally importantly, pray and ask God for the right connection with the young person. It may not even be you that ends up mentoring the young person - it could be God places someone else in their life who ends up being a great mentor / friend / support for them.

Case Study: I once had a debate with a youth worker about a young person in their youth group who they wanted to attend their youth work more often. They had a fair point, but for that young person at that time, playing in the band was far more important and valuable to them. God was using the musicians to relate to and support the young person far more at that time. So don't always think it will be you 'mentoring'.

One of the most powerful ways that God uses me with young people is simply a friendship / respect relationship. I've watched some youth workers give people roles, have 'mentoring times' and set up sessions specifically with young people. This may work for some, but I have personally found that simply being yourself and involving the right young people in the right areas and ways naturally, is far more effective. If you build a right kind of friendship / relationship (with appropriate boundaries) then when things need to be challenged, you are generally in a far stronger position than without this in place.

Case Study: When working as a personal adviser for Connexions (an agency designed for careers and supporting young people), I was told to make a record of any meeting with a young person, to give them a copy and then meet with them later to go over what they had 'achieved' since the last meeting. We would then re-record it, with the young person (of course) readily having their record of our last meeting to hand and always having stuck to the agreed 'plan of action'... Or not. In fact, the whole concept would only ever work with a highly motivated articulate student.

Most of the ones I worked with had chaotic lives and would never stick to any kind of plan or keep their 'record'. So a new system had to be found by me. I recorded the meetings on laptop, but spent as much time in school encouraging them, getting alongside, and even doing out of hours activities as possible to model some of this. Of course, it didn't always have as much of an impact as I'd have liked, but it was more effective than non-relational formal meetings and 'targets' !!

Throughout the Bible we see different ways God connected people together. Sometimes this was a slightly more formal arrangement, but often God used a (usually) older person to naturally and organically train a younger person. We see this in examples like Elijah and Elisha, or Jesus and his disciples. The example we'll look at briefly later is Moses and Joshua.

## **Connecting**

So how do you connect with young people? Well mostly it happens naturally as you do sessions, events, clubs, Bible studies and more with the young person. Many times a young person naturally comes to you, or another youth leader and a right relationship is formed which can be developed as God leads.

One of the most powerful 'support' tools in your arsenal is often the lift home, or a journey somewhere. Without doubt these have been some of the most powerful times with young people. It's often on a journey, in a car or bus, that they open up. Many times I have given lifts (in accordance with child protection policies!) and then chatted for an age while the young person opens up just before getting out of the car!

Another idea is to actively involve young people in what you do / your life / your Christian work. Sometimes as a single person this can be more tricky, so be careful to keep your boundaries, obviously respect child protection and think creatively. But without doubt these are where a lot of the memories are created.

Case Study: As one example, I always use young people in worship bands and work with them. The 'band practice' has become legendary and the place where they often have a great laugh, learn, talk about God and grow musically and spiritually. The fun part is then leading and releasing young people, leading to countless funny moments...

Case Study: I always invite young people to be part of youth work events we take part in or lead. One time this involved taking a young person to help DJ (he was learning how to DJ, often coming round to practice). Other times I have taken musicians. Once when shopping for a weekend away, we took young people shopping who enjoyed that kind of thing! At a recent major outreach event, I used a 15 year old and a 10 year old on live cameras! I then credit them on online videos and DVDs etc. We still talk about one youth event with one car, 5 of us, 3 guitars, a cajon drum and a full PA somehow squashed together!

A further way to connect and build is to do weekends away or days away where the young person is taken out of their comfort zone. The weekend away is an incredible place to get to know each other, build strong friendships with youth workers, relate to young people and build incredible memories. Even the bad stuff often is amusing later (like the one weekend away where everyone got food poisoning...)

Or alternatively to take the young person to something they want to go to. For example, we took a young person to the Worship Central worship conference in London. Next year we will take more young people. Another time, we paid for a young person to go on a DJ course at NGM in Bristol; another went for a taster course at the Message Trust in Manchester.

### **Numbers 11.24-29 (The Message)**

God came down in a cloud and spoke to Moses and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy leaders. When the Spirit rested on them they prophesied. But they didn't continue; it was a onetime event. Meanwhile two men, Eldad and Medad, had stayed in the camp. They were listed as leaders but they didn't leave camp to go to the Tent. Still, the Spirit also rested on them and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!" Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' right-hand man since his youth, said, "Moses, master! Stop them!" But Moses said, "Are you jealous for me? Would that all God's people were prophets. Would that God would put his Spirit on all of them."

### **Numbers 13.1-3, 7-8, 16 (The Message)**

God spoke to Moses: "Send men to scout out the country of Canaan that I am giving to the People of Israel. Send one man from each ancestral tribe, each one a tried-and-true leader in the tribe." So Moses sent them off from the Wilderness of Paran at the command of God. All of them were leaders in Israel, one from each tribe. These were their names: ... from Judah: Caleb son of Jephunneh; from Ephraim: Hoshea son of Nun... These are the names of the men Moses sent to scout out the land. Moses gave Hoshea (Salvation) son of Nun a new name—Joshua (God-Saves)

## **Numbers 14.6-9, 38 (The Message)**

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, members of the scouting party, ripped their clothes and addressed the assembled People of Israel: "The land we walked through and scouted out is a very good land—very good indeed. If God is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land that flows, as they say, with milk and honey. And he'll give it to us. Just don't rebel against God! And don't be afraid of those people. Why, we'll have them for lunch! They have no protection and God is on our side. Don't be afraid of them!" ... Only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh were left alive of the men who went to scout out the land.

### **Moses and Joshua**

In Numbers 11.28 we find out that Joshua had been Moses' right-hand man since his youth. Often in the Old Testament the word 'youth' is a relative term, but nevertheless the term used is always translated as 'youth' or 'young manhood' by the Bible. So we can be fairly sure he was a young guy.

What does this tell us? It tells us that there was something about Joshua that Moses saw and highly respected and wanted to develop. We don't know a huge amount about the specifics of Moses and Joshua and their friendship. But for Joshua to have been the right-hand man to Moses since he was young, there must have been a Godliness and character in Joshua that Moses saw. Of course, much of this character would have come from Joshua's father, Nun. It is always important to build relationship with the family and support them, while being a friend to the young person. Young people also need various positive influences in their life. As we'll see, Caleb would probably have been another great older role model for Joshua.

Back to Joshua - by being Moses' right-hand man, he would have seen the inner workings of leadership, the sad reality of politics in leadership, or serving, knowing and meeting God. What incredible and very natural training Joshua would have got. In Exodus 24.12, we see that only Moses and Joshua were allowed to go near the mountain of the Lord. None of the other leaders were permitted by God to get close...

God said to Moses, "Climb higher up the mountain and wait there for me; I'll give you tablets of stone, the teachings and commandments that I've written to instruct them." So Moses got up, accompanied by Joshua his aide. And Moses climbed up the mountain of God.

So for you - are there young people who show the potential to be invested into in a special way? I've definitely met young people like this: from leaders, to active people, to worship leaders. It's always worth the risk and nothing you do for God is ever wasted (1 Corinthians 15.58). In Numbers 11, Joshua became upset that other people were prophesying

apart from those who God said would prophesy. Moses spoke with him and said, "Are you jealous on my behalf? Don't be - I'd be happy if everyone prophesied and had God's Spirit!"

Sometimes we do need to confront and work with the passionate and sometimes misguided words of young people. But Moses didn't put him down and was probably slightly touched that Joshua was so zealous for his mentor. But Moses showed Joshua another way, a better way and a more important priority - God. Moses explained that he wanted to see God's glory more than anything. He also demonstrated a very humble attitude to Joshua (something Joshua would have seen regularly, with the Bible telling us in Numbers 12.3 that Moses was the most humble man on earth!) Moses also demonstrated a care for others and a desire to see God move and touch more people.

### **The results of supporting / empowering / mentoring**

The Bible makes it clear that we must leave the 'results' (not the best choice of word LOL!) to God alone. We are the ones who God uses and he is the one who makes things happen and develops character. It's great because this way the pressure is off us in many ways! Often parents complain to youth workers about their children. Aside from perhaps taking a look at themselves first, the parents could well be reminded to consult the Bible and know that God is the one in charge of their offspring!

Case studies - some of the Christian young people I've worked with have gone to Bible college / headed up Christian Unions / gone to work in Israel / developed into great worship leaders and more. Other Christian young people have fallen away. I don't know about the ones in school I worked (and work) with, but you get to hear about the ones who sadly end up involved in serious incidents. But our job is to continue to invest into those God puts in our paths, pray and let God worry about the rest. If we play our part in God's plan, we can be satisfied.

Moses would one day hand over the reigns of leadership to Joshua who would prove to be an incredible leader with only one small 'blot on his copybook' (not destroying the people of Gibeon, having not consulted God and been tricked by them - but even then remaining faithful to his promise of protection to them). Apart from this, Joshua's life is remarkable for God's hand over him and in Joshua we see some of the characteristics that Jesus would one day fully demonstrate, with Joshua a 'foreshadowing' of Jesus (sharing even the same name in Hebrew / Aramaic - Joshua meaning 'God saves').

When Moses came to choose someone from each tribe of Israel to go and spy out the land of Canaan, from the tribe of Ephraim he naturally chose Joshua, giving him a real responsibility. And Joshua, along with Caleb, did

not disappoint Moses. In Numbers 13 and 14, we find how only Joshua and Caleb came back to Israel with a faith-filled report of how God would help them take the land, despite the 'giants' they may face. As J John says, there's 2 ways to look at a giant. Firstly - wow he's so big I'll never beat him. Or - 'wow he's so big, how could I miss'... Joshua and Caleb (unlike the other spies) fell into the believing category and were zealous for God's power and glory. Later (Exodus 17:8-16), Joshua would become the military commander appointed by Moses who defeated the evil Amalekites.

Caleb was likely 20 years older than Joshua according to Joshua 14.7 where Caleb testifies to the fact that he was 40 years of age when he went to spy out Canaan (and remained faithful to God for the next 45 years at least). According to [neverthirsty.org](http://neverthirsty.org), research shows Joshua was 60 when he entered the promised land. God said the people would wander for 40 years in the wilderness after they disbelieved God was able to help them take the land of Canaan (Number 14.34) and the fact that Joshua must have been twenty or just over (Numbers 14.29).

Why all this research? Well, Caleb was another great role model in the life of Joshua. No doubt they were both a great influence on each other when they went to spy out the land - with both of them believing God and receiving their reward for trusting God.

So youth worker, if you're 40 or even 85, you are still a great asset to God and can still be a great servant, mentor, example and friend to young people. So whatever your age, be hugely encouraged because God wants to use you!!

## **Ending Thought**

These are just some real-life examples and a Biblical precedent / lessons for working with young people. Just be yourself; love God and love young people. The rest will follow if God has called you!