

Workshop Guide
Love Well
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Introduction

Our students live in a world where everyone and everything is competing for their attentions. Culture is preaching to them and they are listening. The problem is, most everything the culture says is right goes against what God has said in His Word to be true. In a world of competing voices, students need to hear the voice of God and we can help them hear it by ministering to them. What if we, as student pastors and leaders, could focus our student's attention on what is most important by loving them well. Effective ministry can be a spring board for helping students know Christ and how to live for him by living lives of obedience and holiness.

Charles Spurgeon says, "I wish that our ministry, mine especially, might be tied and tethered to the cross. I have no other subject to set before you but Jesus only."¹ Loving well means we point others to Jesus and help them follow him. Our students do not need another pep talk, they do not need a quick fix, they need Jesus. They need to see the gloriousness and goodness of Jesus that makes them want to flee what the world has to offer them. Give them Jesus by ministering well to them. Care for them in a way that points them to Jesus. Pray for them in a way that points them to Jesus. If you want to love others well, give them Jesus.

In this session, we will focus on how to love well in three distinct areas. How do we love well in prayer? How do we love well in ministry? And how do we love well in gospel conversations? While there are certainly other ways to love well in the church, these three areas will provide a solid framework to help students, parents, and leaders know that they are loved well.

Loving well is often unseen. Prayer is unseen. A lot of ministering you will do will be unseen. That does not mean that it is not important.

Loving well is an important part of any ministry. Students need to know they are loved before they will start listening to you. But the goal of loving well is not just to have students listen to you, the goal is to help students live for Christ and begin loving others well. In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul says, "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." This is the goal as student pastors and leaders. We are to minister to others by equipping them to minister. You cannot do this alone. You cannot effectively minister to every student in your group. You cannot effectively minister to every parent in your group. You need to equip them to minister as well. Loving well encourages students to love well.

1. Prayer

E.M. Bounds says, "Nothing is well done without prayer for the simple reason that it leaves God out of the account."²

¹ Charles Spurgeon, Sermon from John 4:48 entitled, "The Best Bread." October 28, 1886.

² E.M. Bounds, *Weapon of Prayer*.

Prayer is perhaps the easiest thing for us to do, yet often the most overlooked. When you understand that everything you seek to do in ministry depends on the work of the Holy Spirit, it should drive us to pray. We pray for ourselves, we pray for our sermons and lessons, but how often are you praying with and for your students, parents, and leaders? Prayer changes things because we pray to a God who can change things. Do you have a system or strategy in place where you are regularly praying for your students and families? When was the last time you prayed with a student or group of students?

Prayer for Students

Opening Question: If every student in your church had 1-2 adults other than you and their parents praying for them, what difference do you think that would make in their lives? Take 5 minutes and answer this question.

Everything we seek to do in ministry is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit. If we believe this, then prayer must be a vital part of our everyday work as student pastors and leaders. The thing is, most students will never see you praying for them. They won't know this is something you do regularly.

There are four specific things I want to challenge you with in regard to prayer for students.

1. Write down prayer request.

This is super simple to do. I use the note app on my phone to help me with this. Every week, I write down the prayer requests I hear and spend the week praying for them. Having them on my phone helps me pray more regularly for them. I can quickly pull my phone out when I am at a red light, at the doctor's office, or just going about a busy day and spend time praying for my students. Since this has become a habit in my life, I can more easily follow up with students about their requests. Following up about prayer requests helps students see that you love them well.

2. Pray for your students immediately when they share a request for you. This will mean the world to them.

Have you ever had a student come to you asking you to pray for them? They give you the request and then you say you will pray for them and you forget to pray for them? Just me? This has happened more times than I would like to admit in my ministry. I often forget what people ask me to pray for. One way to fix this issue is by stopping whatever you are doing in that moment and pray for that student then and there. At first, it was awkward. I thought it was weird, the students thought it was weird. But once you begin to do this, it becomes a part of the culture. Students now think it is weird if I do not stop and pray with them when they share a prayer request. Stopping and praying for your student shows that you love them well.

3. Pray for your students weekly.

Print out a roster of the students in your ministry and pray for them. Depending on the size of your student ministry, you may not be able to pray for every student every day, but every week we need to be praying for our students by name.

4. Create a prayer strategy for your students that involves the church.

This will be one of the most beneficial things you can do in ministry. Involving your senior adults in praying for your students will help them feel like they are investing in the next generation and it allows all of your students to be prayed for regularly by people other than you and their parents. The way I do this is by creating a yearlong prayer strategy with a prayer point for each week. The great thing about this prayer strategy is that you can customize it for your group. We have senior adults praying for salvation among our students, holiness, that our students would make disciples. When we go to camp over the summer, the prayer point for that week is praying our students would have a great week at camp and experience the Lord in a real way.

Group Time Question: If you were to create a prayer strategy, what would you include in it? Take 5 minutes to discuss what a prayer strategy would look like and the benefits of having one.

Prayer for Parents

According to the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, parents are to be the primary disciple maker in their child's life. This is a tough job even for parents who are well equipped to disciple their children. Parents spend more time with their children than you ever will and because of this, they need to know we are praying for them and their student. One of the easiest ways to pray for parents is praying for them when you pray for their student. This will help you learn names and put families together in your mind.

Another helpful way to let parents know you are praying for them is by texting them when you think of their student. Often times, I will have a student on my heart and I will reach out to the parents just to say I am praying for them as they parent their child. I have had so many parents let me know that they appreciate me reaching out to pray for them, and this a very easy aspect of loving well that you can add to your ministry. This doesn't require training to do, it just requires us to love well.

Prayer for Leaders

Finding and equipping good leaders is the key to any successful ministry. Without leaders in place, you cannot do all that God is calling you to do. While you may be the one casting the vision, they are the ones helping carry it out. Loving them well is an important part of ministry and something to strive to improve in. How can you systematically pray for your leaders in a way that makes them know you love them well? One of the most loving things you can do is reach out to a few leaders every week and ask them how you can pray for them and then follow up with them about their prayer request. Sunday and Wednesday can be busy and the majority of your time is focused on the students, but our leaders need focus as well. I try to reach out to five leaders every week so that in a month, I have reached out to all my leaders and they know I have been praying for them. This little task goes a long way in helping leaders know they are cared for and appreciated and not just a body to help with crowd control.

2. Ministry

Opening Question: Take 5 minutes to discuss some of the ways you have seen fruit from ministry to students, parents, and leaders. Share some ministry ideas of things that have worked well for you and things you tried that did not work well.

Ministry to Students

The majority of your ministry is going to be based on students. In order to minister effectively to them, you must be present. Show up to the games, the concerts, and the plays. We can fall into the trap of only ministering to students at the church and this is not a good trap to be in.

Ministering to your students outside of a church setting will help them see that you care for them on a personal level. It helps you connect with them and ministry to them becomes more natural.

Ministry simply means to attend to the needs of someone. You will spend time ministering to physical needs, emotional needs, relational needs, and spiritual needs. Each need has a different complexity to it, but you must be prepared to meet students where they are to minister to them and point them to Jesus.

One of the greatest things you can do in ministry is to equip your students to minister to others. Give them opportunities to lead small groups. Give them the opportunities to invest in other students. We have high school students leading some of our middle school groups on Wednesday nights and it has been beneficial for both high schoolers and middle schoolers. We are called to equip the saints for the work of ministry by first ministering to them.

Ministry to Parents

If you are lucky, you will get 2-3 hours with a student each week at church. Most churches do not have Sunday night services anymore, students have practices and games on Wednesday's now, and if a student is on a travel ball team, there is a good chance that they have games on Sunday. In 2021, 28% of people attended church regularly. Regularly attending church means attending once or twice a month.³ If you get a student who comes twice a month to both Sunday and Wednesday night, you will get them for about 4 hours a month, which means you will get a "regular" attender for 48 hours a year.

Now, if you look at how Gen Z uses their time in different areas, you will see the importance of parent ministry and the need to equip them to disciple their children. Gen Z spends, on average, a little over an hour a day watching tv. 42% of Gen Z spend 1-3 hours on social media while 30% spend 3-5 hours on social media.⁴ If a student watches 1 hour of tv and spends 2 hours on social media, they will spend 1,095 hours a year on those things. The things that students are exposed to on tv and social media are shaping how they view the world and how they live their lives.

The issue is that 48 hours of church is not going to combat 1,095 hours exposed to the culture, and this does not include what they are being exposed to at school. Parents are with their children far more than you can ever be and if you want to help students follow Jesus, you have to minister to parents and equip them to minister to their children. Perhaps, the greatest way you can love your students well is by loving their parents well.

³ Lifeway Research, "5 Current Church Attendance Trends You Need to Know," February 2, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/02/02/5-current-church-attendance-trends-you-need-to-know/>

⁴ Insider Intelligence, "How Gen Z consumes media in 5 charts," Sara Lebow, December 21, 2022. <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/how-gen-z-consumes-media-5-charts>

How do we love parents well? We have to come alongside of them and resource them and equip them with the tools they need to disciple their children. Maybe this means providing books for them to read. Perhaps you need to host a parent workshop once or twice a year to address “hot topics” is student culture right now. One helpful tool is knowing solid biblical counselors that they can see as a family or send their student to. We cannot expect the few hours we get with students to make the most impact, we must equip parents for this. Talk to their Sunday school leaders and try to spend time with the class once a month or go to their socials to meet the parents.

Group Time Question: Take 5 minutes to discuss helpful resources you have used to help parents to disciple their kids.

Here is a list of helpful resources for parents.

1. Feeding the Mouth that Bites You: A Complete Guide to Parenting Adolescents and Launching them into the World by Kenneth Wilgus.
2. Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles that can Radically Change Your Family by Paul David Tripp
3. Gospel Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting by William Farley
4. The Intentional Father: A Practical Guide to Raise Sons of Courage and Character by Jon Tyson
5. Prayers for your Children: 90 Days of Heartfelt Prayer for Children of any Age by James Banks

Ministry to Leaders

I have been fortunate to have very good leaders in the churches I have served at. They were faithful men and women who love Jesus and love investing in students. However, most of my leaders wanted to serve with me on both Sunday and Wednesday’s. I was thankful to have them helping and needed them there. But I began to sense that I needed to do more to minister to them. They were sacrificing their time to serve in student ministry and I needed to minister to them. They sacrificed being in adult life groups so that they could teach students. They lacked that community. Ministering to your leaders is key.

Minister to your leaders by creating a space for them to build community with other leaders in the student ministry. There are many easy ways you can minister to your leaders.

- Reach out to them regularly. Send a text or make a call telling them you are praying for them.
- Host socials for your leaders where they can build community with one another.
- Take them for coffee or lunch and ask them how they are doing spiritually.

You cannot minister to every student in your ministry by yourself. You need leaders who can help you love well. The greatest thing you can do for your leaders is love them well by ministering to them.

3. Gospel Conversations

One of the reasons you are in ministry is so that people will come to know Christ. It is the call of all Christians to go and make disciples by telling others about who Jesus is, what he has done, and helping them follow Him for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, in the Bible belt, I have seen many students who think they are saved be lost after having conversations with them. In the Bible belt, everyone knows Jesus, but everyone doesn't have a relationship with Jesus. How can you as a leader love well by having gospel conversations with your students?

Opening Question: Take 5 minutes to discuss. What would be the benefit of having a gospel conversation with each student in your student ministry?

Gospel Conversations with Students

One of the most loving things you can do with your student is have a gospel conversation with them.

- It helps you understand where they are at in their spiritual lives.
- It helps you formulate a plan to help them grow in their walk with Christ.
- It helps you know if they are saved or not.
- It helps you with the next steps. By having gospel conversations with students, I have found many students who have put their faith in Christ but never been baptized. Without having a gospel conversation with them, I would not have known that. It allowed me to point to their next step which is baptism.

Another thing we must do as leaders is equip our students to have gospel conversations with other students. The most effective person to reach Generation Z is Generation Z. Students can handle learning how to share the gospel. Equip them to do it and then give them opportunities to love other well by sharing the gospel.

Gospel Conversations with Parents

As we have already mentioned, parents are to be the primary disciple makers in their home. Because of this, we need to help parents know how to have gospel conversations with their students. As a parent, I want to lead my children to the Lord. I know the church plays a role and God can use whomever he wants to lead them to himself, but I want to be the one who does it. There is no more special moment than parents leading their children to the Lord.

How can we help parents have gospel conversations?

- Give them evangelism tools that they can use. 3 Circles, Romans Road, Testimony, etc.
- Let parents know when their students have questions.
- Encourage parents to talk regularly about the gospel. We never outgrow the gospel; we grow deeper into the gospel.

Gospel Conversations with Leaders

Depending on the size of your group, it may not be possible for you to have a gospel conversation with every student. This is why equipping leaders on how to share the gospel is so important. Give them opportunities to sit with students and have a gospel conversation with them.