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Relevant Religion Classes for Junior High

by Angelica Young

In a fast-paced world hungry for the attention of our teenagers, creating religion lessons that both engage and equip them is one of the biggest challenges teachers of the faith encounter. Not only are we competing against the world, but we also are competing against the expectations of our schools. Most likely if you teach a religion class, you are expected to use a curriculum and give your students a grade. How do you, then, create relevant religion lessons that reach out and grab the hearts of adolescents and strengthen their faith under such competition and constraints?



Strength from God's Word

"So faith comes from hearing the message, and hearing through the word of Christ."
—Romans 10:17

One way to strengthen faith is through personal devotion time with God and His Word. Teaching teenagers how to manage personal devotion time is key to training them in the way they should go.

For devotions once a week try using "15 MwG" (15 Minutes with God). Here's

how it works:

Students will need to grab a Bible, a journal, and a pen/pencil. If applicable, encourage students to find their "quiet place" in the classroom. In other words, a place that's comfortable and doesn't have any distractions.

Instruct the students that the 15 MwG will be broken down into three parts: five minutes to read God's Word, five minutes to respond to God's Word, and five minutes to pray about God's Word.

Call out the first five minutes by telling the students to read any book or chapter or part of a chapter in God's Word. Instruct them to copy down in their journals any verses that stand out to them and to read for the full five minutes.

When the first five minutes are over, tell the students for the next five minutes to write in their journals their response to what they've just read. The response can be what the verses mean to them, how the Scripture reading applies to their lives, why they wrote down the verses they did, or any other kind of reflective thoughts they may have on those verses.

When the second five minutes are over, call out to the students and tell them for the last five minutes to pray about what they read and/or what they heard God speak to them in His Word. Encourage them to write their prayers in their journals, draw their prayers, silently pray, or any other way they choose to pray but to pray for the full five minutes.

Let them know when time is up, have students return to their seats, and choose about five students to share with the class what they read and what it meant to them. (Some students may not want to share due to personal reasons, so what I do is at least have them read the Bible verse(s) they copied down.)

Finally, share what you, the teacher, read and responded to during the 15 minutes with God.

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Review, Reflect, Resolve

How can sharing your devotional experiences help students to grow in their devotional experiences? Have you provided personal testimony to your class? How did they react? If you haven't included personal testimony, what prevented or obstructed your doing so? What opportunities for service will you pursue for next year? Whose help will you need?



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **Shaping theFuture:**

Relational Ministry: A Ministry of Presence by Lois Giordano
([EncourAGEnet](#))

Finding Purpose in Your Prep by Eric Smith ([SECnet](#))

Strength from Personal



Testimonies

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” – Colossians 2:6-7

Adolescents today want to know God is alive and real and relevant. Sharing personal testimonies of God’s Work in our lives and in the lives of others is a powerful way to teach and strengthen faith. The

personal testimonies of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Jonah, Peter, and Paul (to name a few) are all solid foundations on which to build. Add to those stories recent stories of personal testimonies, and you’ve got teenagers tuned-in to a God, who is indeed the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

For example, if you are teaching about Joseph forgiving his brothers because he knew all that had happened, had been done because God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20), then you could tie-in some video testimonies of people today exemplifying this kind of forgiveness. A great video testimony for forgiveness is the back story to [Matthew West’s song “Forgiveness.”](#) The back story is about a mom who forgave the man who took her daughter’s life because he was driving while intoxicated. This mom not only forgave him, but also helped him get out of jail earlier than he was originally sentenced to serve. She embraced the man and now travels around teaching about the power of forgiveness.

Of course, no testimony is as real and relevant as the one you, the teacher, tells. Teachers who share evidences of God’s work in their lives are the most effective and influential teachers for the faith development of their students. The beauty of a testimony is that you don’t need to embellish, elaborate, or exaggerate. Stay true, stay applicable, and stay appropriate (keep in mind your audience and your message) when giving your testimony. Most of all, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide and nudge you on when and how to give a testimony.

Finally, allow opportunities for your students to share their own testimonies. Prompt them with journal writing by keeping track of God moments or times they have seen or experienced God in action. Faith talk is effective for strengthening a faith walk.



Strength from Service

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” – James 2:17

Adolescents strengthen their faith when they are able to put it into action. Young adults today desire to reach out, especially when they see something unfair or someone treated unfairly. Giving your students opportunities to serve in their local communities activates their faith.

Collecting offerings for worldwide organizations, bringing in cans for a food drive, making cards for nursing home residents, and reading stories to

younger kids at school are all wonderful service projects, but they don’t have as much impact on the faith development of teens as service projects where students actually go out into the community and serve. Look into hands-on service opportunities such as outdoor maintenance at a park or camp, sorting food or clothing at donation centers, serving at soup kitchens, or creating a service project to meet a need in your local community. Serving in this capacity not only gives adolescents a lasting memory but also a real life experience of God at work. Faith in action is strengthened faith.

Strengthening the faith of today’s pre-teens and teens goes beyond teaching biblical stories. Yes, to be rooted in faith begins in the Word of God, but to see the fruit of that faith, works must take place. Devoting time to God with prayer and application of His truths, living out His Word by experiencing and noting His work, and serving God firsthand in the community around us are all ways to develop that faith fruit. Therefore,

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” – Galatians 6:9

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