

Retreats Unlimited



A Practical Approach to Providing a Retreat Experience for your Students

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RETREATS — *AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION*

One of the most difficult problems a youth worker has, is that of exposing young people to the truth of Jesus and His Word. It is important for the youth worker to see that retreats provide a great setting for the development of life-changing convictions in the life of every student. Retreats permit you to be involved with teens over an extended period of time, giving opportunity for the needed exposure which, hopefully, will develop these life-changing convictions. This can happen through three channels:

1. Planned and prepared lessons and discussions. It is critical to choose lessons which seek to fulfill the four points found in **II Timothy 3:16** of teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. (Much more will be explained about the lesson format a small youth group can use which will save you the expense of having to pay for a speaker.)
2. The observations which teens will make about you regarding the practicality of your faith, love, and commitment (is a critical dimension that retreats provide). Your relationship with God is open for all to analyze. Don't forget that with youth, as much is caught as is taught; therefore, a leader must understand how to create opportunities which allows the "caught" aspect of youth ministry to take place. I believe that retreats and the small-group lesson-style format does more to provide that type of setting for youth than any other ministry program.
3. The struggle which the teens will experience as they seek to integrate (or at least evaluate) points 1 & 2 into their own lifestyle (again, a critical dimension that retreats provide). Over time and with a variety of leaders, youth will reveal the reality and the degree of this struggle in their own personal lives.

Understand the uniqueness of retreats as they provide the time and the opportunity to accomplish more in the lives of students than any other program can duplicate. But unless the leadership prays, plans, and prepares properly, the potential may never be realized. It doesn't just happen.

Several things to remember:

1. Retreats are for the students; gear it for them. Think about it: (Please do not forget the answer to the following questions.) *Are retreats made for the kids? Or are kids made for the retreat?*
2. Never expect the uniqueness of the location to carry your retreat. The location will determine the activities you do, but the activities do not insure a successful retreat.
3. What you are creating. You see, retreats provide you the opportunity to duplicate the style of ministry which was practiced most consistently by Jesus. Time, shared life experiences, teachable moments, actual lesson times, and traveling experiences all contribute to making the reality of God an everyday occurrence.

THIS EXPLAINS “WHY” YOU WOULD DO A RETREAT

YOUTH WORKERS: (Must always be thinking and asking questions.)

1. What was the style and form of ministry that Jesus had?
2. How do you develop/envision a youth ministry which incorporates the style and form of ministry that Jesus had?

JESUS — His style and form of ministry: *“Follow Me and I will make you...”*

- a. Relational—involvement in a life—develops trust. You earn the right to be heard like Jesus who was in the people business. He loved people and used things. He never used people and loved things.
- b. Involvement over Time—Jesus purposed to be with people, especially His disciples. This develops loyalty. People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.
- c. Modeling—follow me—imitate me—This teaches lordship, dependence on Holy Spirit, and all the practical principles of the Christian faith to those you share life with (like young people on a retreat). Modeling the Christian life doesn’t happen in a vacuum, it needs a relationship.
- d. Commitment of leadership to student—**1 Cor. 12:15; John 15:9** “Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”) For adults to choose to spend time with young people says something about the value those adults give to young people.
- e. Vision—Jesus saw their potential and was God oriented, plus He understood their worth from “follow Me,” through 2-1/2 to 3 years, to “Feed My sheep.”
- f. Team spirit & atmosphere—ownership of disciples in ministry. Jesus had his disciples help feed the 5000, the 4000, and even go out in twos to minister to others. Retreats give you an opportunity to play, work, eat, sleep, and learn together.
- g. Instructional—content, message. A messenger has to have a message. Jesus spoke and taught as He lived with His disciples.
- h. Best return for investment. The whole concept of impacting a young person for eternity—WOW! That’s just like Jesus did with His disciples.
- i. Establish patterns for future ministry. “Do as I did with you.”
- j. Frequency & repetition (Once is not enough.)
- k. Creates awareness of need. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray and why they couldn’t cast out demons and the like. As they spent time with Him, they knew He was different.
- l. Motivated by Love. Jesus lived before people in a way that caused them to know that He loved them. He loved them by serving them as well as by teaching them.

Conclusion:

A youth ministry patterned after the type of ministry Jesus had needs to incorporate the principles listed above. I believe that **Retreats** are the practical means by which a higher degree of Jesus’ style and form of ministry can be duplicated, especially in youth ministry.

Retreats: *A TRANSFORMING TOOL FOR MINISTRY*

(by Tom Horton)

(This is additional material in understanding the value for having retreats)

A. The Advantages of Retreats

Retreats can do what it takes six months to a year to do, otherwise.

1. You **Build Relationships** with young people, other leaders, and parents faster. You:
 - a. Get acquainted
 - b. Become aware of needs
 - c. Develop trust
 - d. Share experiences (build on experiences)
 - e. Establish lines of communication
 - f. Remove preconceived ideas that youth may have of Christianity and Christians
2. Retreats Provide **Multiple Christian Experiences**
 - a. Many lesson times, both small and large group
 - b. Prayer opportunities
 - c. Firesides, singing, sharing, testimonies — Youth Worship Times
 - d. Counseling both direct and informal
 - e. Christian Fellowship
 - f. Practical Theology: forgiveness, caring, sharing, witness, unity
 - g. Models of the Christian life
 - h. Creates a young person's awareness of their need for a closer walk with the Lord.
3. **Best Return for the Effort**
 - a. Higher percentage of conversions of non-Christians
 - b. Higher percentage of converts followed-up
 - c. Higher percentage of converts/follow-up people involved in church
 - d. Provides good leadership training opportunities and evaluation

B. A Vision for Retreats (Some "how to do Retreat" ideas)

1. Develop retreats around personal interests and abilities.
(See page #38 of the "Volunteer Leadership Manual," point #2)
2. Develop retreats around attractions and events: Go-carts, wake-boarding, etc.
3. Develop retreats around goals and projects:
Work Camp, Ministry Camp, Leadership Camp, Spiritual Life Camp, Evangelism Camp
4. Advantages Outweigh Problems and Hard Work
The kids are worth it. *Retreats are for the kids, not the kids for the retreat.*
5. Goals for the year (when it comes to retreat planning)
 - a. Every non-Christian on the roster to go on one retreat
 - b. Every non-committed Christian to go on two retreats
 - c. Every nominally committed Christian to go on three retreats
 - d. Every committed Christian to go on every retreat
 - e. Improve the good and discharge the bad when it comes to the planning for the activities for the next retreat.

C. The Essentials of Retreats—5 Key Essentials

1. Good **Food** (plenty of it). Good cook (adequate help)
2. Excellent **Lessons** (meaty content)
 - a. Prepared lessons and booklet study guide
 - b. Small Group discussions, large group wrap-up
3. Good **Leadership**, 1 to 4 ratio if possible, at least 1 to 7.
Helper—practical/physical needs
Leaders/counselors—sleep with kids, do small group and one-on-one times
4. Good **Plan** in light of Facilities/Retreat Attraction
5. **Students**—A real essential for a quality retreat is to determine what your numerical limits are, like what are the high and low head counts necessary for the camp.

D. Some Helpful Hints for Successful Retreats

1. Pray and Plan Well
2. **Start Small**: develop retreat capabilities and skills
confidence comes as you build on past experiences and as you see the faithfulness and the blessing of the Lord.
3. Always have a Plan B. Be flexible and ready to change plans
4. Have simple and clear rules and responsibilities
 - a. Pre-determine disciplinary steps/stages
 - b. Make sure leaders know how the discipline works
5. Excellent communication between leaders and helpers
 - a. Delegation of responsibilities
 - b. Leadership roles clarified
 - c. No lone ranger approach here. Have a team ministry attitude.
6. Eliminate as many surprises as possible and anticipate the unexpected
 - a. Have a nurse or a good first-aid person
 - b. Predetermine who will take people to the hospital
 - c. Throw in a few surprises yourself, like a midnight stroll through a cemetery (you can talk about where people go when they die) or letting the kids sleep in an extra 45 minutes one day.
7. Good PR. Retreats are a good reason for visitation. Most parents want to know who it is that is taking their teen on this outing.

SOME PRACTICAL *RETREAT IDEAS* (

THE SMALL GROUP STUDY FORMAT: (check out www.rbc.net)

The booklet "My Heart Christ's Home" was used many times at the church where Tom was Youth Leader. He used them successfully by adding scriptures to each section of the booklet, in small study groups with both middle and high school youth. The lesson concept which was used most extensively was the booklet or study guide lesson format used within the context of small groups.

The small study groups were led by either an adult volunteer leader or a college-age leader using study guides or a portion of a booklet with 5 or 6 teens in their group. Each study group would have the members read (if they would, it was voluntary) from their own study guide or booklet. Each person could mark it as they desired (with a pen or pencil) and then share their thoughts (while still in the small group) after the reading time.

When the small group study time is finished, which includes the reading of the materials and its discussion, all the groups would come together (if there are enough young people to have more than one group) for a large group wrap-up done by a leader for a conclusion (approx. 10 minutes) of that particular study time. The whole study time takes around 45 to 60 minutes depending on any pre-lesson singing time and how well the discussion goes in the small groups.

This type of study plan gives a smaller attended church youth retreat quality lessons without the cost of a retreat speaker. There are many small, helpful, Christian booklets which could be used as the lesson material for a middle school, high school, or college age retreat. All Christian bookstores have them, and the booklets from the Daily Bread Publishers, called "Critical Concerns," are an excellent resource. These booklets are not necessarily geared for young people, yet young people can rise to the challenge of understanding the Christian content in them (materials written for adults can be used successfully with youth).

ADDITIONAL IDEAS for small groups and for short one- or two-night retreats.

FOOD Make the meals as easy as possible on your leadership. Have the kids bring a sack lunch and provide cold cereal, rolls, and fruit for breakfast. Grilled cheese sandwiches and soup or sub sandwiches for lunch with barbecued hamburgers or spaghetti for dinner works out fine. Even meals prepared ahead of time, which just need to be heated, can be a big help. Munchies or homemade cookies for snacks will be great every time you need a little extra to eat. Just make sure you have plenty to eat and drink.

LODGING Try to find a cabin or a camping arrangement that gives you a unique setting for a retreat opportunity if you need a place different to go to. Since your group is small, you can be very creative regarding location. Arrangements can be made at a motel, for instance, where you could have 5 young people in a room with 1 leader and have the TV unplugged (in two rooms you could have 2 leaders, up to 10 kids, a kitchen, and a pool). You could also use a cabin of a church member which would house the girls for sleeping and the boys could sleep outside in a tent or even under the stars.

ACTIVITIES Use table games that your kids are interested in playing, or bring some interesting puzzles, which allow you to have group times together. Be sure to take advantage of what is in the surrounding area as part of the activities for your retreat. You can play the part of a tourist with a group of young people as they will enjoy it. Depending on where the retreat is located, find out if there are bowling, swimming, roller

skating, video game room, or other attractions close enough to include in your camp's schedule (even if it's as far as one hour away). You could even plan a retreat where you would attend a Christian concert, go to a sporting event, or see a play. Be sure to choose activities that young people would be interested in, not just what you want to do (although if you are interested in something, some young people are probably interested in it, too). Retreats should be structured where the activity or the location of the camp is the main attraction, like water skiing, wake boarding, snow skiing, or going to the ocean. They are like the bait which gets them hooked on going on the retreat for you to bring them to Jesus but remember they are not what makes the retreat successful, Jesus is.

TWO MORE ADDITIONAL IDEAS:

One - If you are aware of a church that does retreats as described in this chapter, it would be a good idea to meet up with the youth leader there to hear how they started doing these types of retreats to help you in getting started doing them yourself. Or you may want to piggyback on the retreat that a "Kindred Spirit Church" is having with their youth to learn firsthand help it all works.

Two - I cannot over state this, you can keep costs down by going to a State Park and camp in tents, this gives your students an outdoors experience that has been an extremely useful ministry setting for us for 28 years. Providing students with Bible lessons plans and dividing up into small group was so effective that students and leaders alike preferred this type of running a summer camp over going to a conference or retreat center.

ATTEMPT RETREATS THAT ARE SMALL IN NUMBER (OF Students) AND THAT ARE 2 OR 3 DAYS LONG WHEN YOU BEGIN DOING YOUR OWN RETREATS IN ORDER TO DEVELOP RETREAT *EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS*.

AGAIN, BY DOING YOUR OWN RETREATS, YOU WILL KEEP THE COSTS DOWN, WHICH ALLOWS YOU TO DO THEM MORE FREQUENTLY. PLUS, YOU WILL ALSO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE THAT OFTEN LASTS A **LIFETIME**.

*THEN, WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE COMMITMENTS TO THE LORD, YOU ARE THERE AND YOU COME HOME WITH THEM, HAVING SHARED IN THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH GOD. **WHAT AN AWESOME PRIVILEGE!!!***

Then, hopefully you will have a better idea of how to build on what the Lord did in the lives of those students while on the retreat when you get back home.

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES:

When you realize the benefits of doing your own retreats, you can expand the size, the length of days, and the kinds of camps which you can do. For instance, you might envision a 10-day high school Traveling Water Ski or Wake Board Camp which moves to three State Parks that are close to lakes or rivers for skiing and swimming. Spending 3 nights in tents at each park, traveling 2 to 5 hours between camps, and using a study guide through the book Romans. By doing something like this you would give a group of young people a retreat experience they would never forget. Once you get the confidence needed for doing your own retreats, the possibilities are almost unlimited, and you may even surprise yourself.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND IDEAS ON HOW TO DO YOUR OWN RETREATS /
CAMPS – contact Tom Horton at 206-954-4100**