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# Why I Do Middle School Ministry

Our Executive Pastor asked me, when we were in a transitional place in our ministry, at what level I wanted to do youth ministry: Middle School or High School. I had a choice and I continued to stay with Middle School ministry.

## Why?

I believe Middle School ministry is the most strategic place in youth ministry—more so than High School, and definitely more strategic than College. I've done all three in my 15 years in ministry and nothing beats the energy and the desire to reach out to their friends as Middle School students have. I think that if you work hard at connecting with Middle School students and their parents, the ride through High School and beyond will be sweeter. If you leave Middle School ministry up to a rookie, intern or volunteer and they blow it, you'll be dealing with the repercussions for the next 6-7 years.

## Why don't most people see this situation as I do?

I think many youth workers want to have deep meaningful conversations about God, sanctification and the Bible—and they can't fill that need with Middle Schoolers; at least they don't think so. My observation is that youth leaders attempt to fulfill their own needs—for relationships and for wrestling through tough moments in life and theology—with the kids they are ministering to. Unfortunately, that is not healthy for youth leaders or for kids. As youthworkers, we need to have healthy, fulfilling relationships outside of our youth groups—then we will see which area of ministry is most strategic and not gravitate toward that which makes us feel good.

Middle Schoolers are squirrely (all), theologically ignorant (most), and a lot of times still connected to the spiritual umbilical cord of their parents. In Middle School ministry, we get to help cut the cord and set the kids up as semi-responsible, healthy adolescents in the faith.

Another reason Middle School ministry might be such a struggle for some youth leaders is that youth ministers often don't feel very important within their church's leadership. This is a true hangup for many, because they feel Middle School ministry is not worthy of people with Bachelor's or Master's degrees. They think they should be elevated to more "important" responsibilities and be viewed as educated and wise. Trust me, I've been there. As someone who is working on a doctorate and still in Middle School ministry, I've realized that this is all pride. Middle School ministry keeps me humble, and I'm okay with that. Because of this attitude God has blessed my ministry and me immensely.

I do Middle School ministry because I choose to.

