

*A Big Youth Ministry Topic
in a Single Little Book*

THE SKINNY

ON

DISCIPLESHIP



Katie Edwards

with Ken Castor

Group





The Skinny on Discipleship

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JESUS- CENTERED

Guide your entire ministry toward a passionate Jesus-centered focus with this series of innovative resources. Harness the power of these dynamic tools that will help you draw teenagers and leaders into a closer orbit around Jesus.

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— **Katie Edwards**

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BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

The book you're holding might be “skinny,” but that's because it's all-muscle. This means that Katie Edwards and Ken Castor have cut away the fat and focused on the “first things” that make discipleship in youth ministry powerful and long-lasting. In our Skinny Books series, we've paired a thought leader (in this case, Katie Edwards) with a master practitioner (in this case, Ken Castor) as a one-two punch. We want you to be challenged and equipped in both your thinking and your doing.

And, as a bonus, we've added an Introduction written by Duffy Robbins that explores discipleship through the filter of a Jesus-centered approach to ministry. Jesus-centered is much more than a catchphrase to us—it's a passionate and transformative approach to life and ministry. Duffy's Introduction to discipleship first appeared in my book *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*, and we couldn't think of a better way to kick off this little book. It's time to get skinny...

—RICK LAWRENCE

Executive Editor of Group Magazine

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INTRODUCTION

I'd been scheduled to speak at a large denominational event out West, and about two weeks before the event I received a phone call from a woman on the "design team" who wanted to review with me some basic details of the conference. All in all, it was pretty a routine conversation. But then she added, without any hint of irony, this additional word of direction: "Please, when you give your talks to the kids, we've decided as a design team to ask that you not mention the name of Jesus. We don't mind if you talk about God; in fact, we hope you will. But we hope you'll understand that talking about Jesus will offend some of our young people, and we don't want to do anything that will make them feel uncomfortable."

I tried to imagine a traffic cop who couldn't bring himself to ask the driver to please keep his truck off of the sidewalk because he didn't want the driver to think he was unfriendly. Please understand that I'm entirely sympathetic with the motives that led these good folks to "design" the Designer out of their youth event. After all, they wanted to make the conference a safe place for kids to ask questions and feel accepted and comfortable. I agree with that. But just because we want all patients—

no matter how sick—to feel welcomed into the hospital, that doesn’t mean that we hold back on the cure because we’re afraid of offending the virus.

Several years ago I heard that the archbishop of Canterbury said the Church of England was “dying of good taste.” I hope it’s not in poor taste to say so, but I fear the same may be happening to us in youth ministry. I think a lot of us have come to terms with the scary parts of our work: unruly kids, unhappy parents, bad food, lock-ins, church vehicles, the church board. Sure, it’s a storm, but we know these waters. What makes some of us uneasy is when Jesus shows up, walking on top of those storm-tossed waves.

I never agreed in that phone call to refrain from talking about Jesus. I couldn’t. First of all, that’s not me. And second, that’s not the gospel. I *did* do the event, and I *did* talk about Jesus (a little more than normal). And what we all experienced that weekend, once again, was Jesus Christ meeting the desperate yearnings of kids restless and helpless in their adolescent storms.

—Duffy Robbins

Professor of Youth Ministry, Eastern University



CHAPTER

1

*What
Is
Discipleship?*



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I started following Jesus at a summer camp when I was 14. I came home from that camp on fire for Jesus. But all I knew of what it meant to follow Jesus was what I learned there at camp. I had no idea where to go from that first step I had taken. And for a while I stayed in that same “camp high” place.

Until I met a leader in our youth group named Marcy. We became friends, and I started spending time with her after church on Sundays. One week I remember her asking me about my new friendship with Jesus. My response was “I think it’s great.” She said, “You think?” The truth was that I had no idea how my relationship with Jesus was. I just knew that I had placed my trust in him. But beyond that, I had no idea what it meant to *follow* him.

At the end of that conversation, Marcy invited me to be a part of a weekly small group Bible study at her house. I didn’t know it at the time, but this was a life-changing invitation for me. I knew I loved Jesus and wanted to follow him, but I had no idea how. This small group became the place where I began learning about the “how.” Through intentional relationships, time, and teaching I had my first exposure to praying, reading and studying God’s Word, learning alongside other followers of Jesus, and discovering how to take everything I was learning and live it out. Like I said, it was life-changing.

Marcy provided a safe place for me to ask questions and wonder and doubt. She was a patient teacher who gently nudged me toward next levels in my faith in Jesus. She started discipling me when I was 14, and she walked alongside me until I was 25.

Every teenager needs a Marcy.

Really, every human needs a Marcy.

I truly believe that every teenager needs someone who is intentionally walking with them through a discipleship process—someone who is helping them grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you are reading this, it looks like that someone could be you—even if your name isn't Marcy!

Let's talk about this word *discipleship*. What is it? There are many interpretations of the “who, why, when, what, and how” of discipleship. I asked three youth workers for their definition of discipleship, and while they have similarities, they're all a little different.

“Discipleship is building a relationship with a student, walking alongside them through the good and bad, and living a life of example for them to learn from.”

Bryce, SMALL GROUP LEADER

“Discipleship is the action of assisting our students to become more like Christ, promoting ownership of their faith and genuine relationship with Jesus.”

Emma, COLLEGE STUDENT/YOUTH MINISTRY MAJOR

“Discipleship is modeled not taught from the stage.”

Darren, YOUTH PASTOR

In my opinion, these are all great, accurate statements about discipleship. But for our time together in this book, I want to break it down and simplify it even more.

I believe that in youth ministry we need a little bit of a broader stroke. No two teenagers are alike. Sure, we can find similarities among our students, but each young person experiences an individual, personal relationship with Jesus. Getting too specific with a definition can limit what we can do as disciplers in their lives. So I am going to offer the simplest definition of discipleship as we examine this issue together:

Discipleship: helping teenagers become like Jesus

Too simple? Perhaps. But think about this definition for a moment. You can attach this statement to any part of the discipleship process with any teenager you are working with:

- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through beginning a personal relationship with him
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through reading and studying the Bible
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through experiences that expand their faith and trust in him
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through serving and being the church
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through living out the Beatitudes
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through letting the Fruit of the Spirit grow in their lives
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through an intentional relationship with a Christ-like mentor
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through modeling a devoted, passionate relationship with him
- Helping teenagers become like Jesus through helping them wrestle with their doubts about their faith

➔ A LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE *Ken Castor*

The simplicity of Katie's definition of discipleship is both profound and practical. In any particular moment the goal is to help teenagers become like Jesus in whatever step that person needs to take. By completing this statement in a number of ways, we are able to intentionally contextualize the discipleship process. Here are some more ideas:

- *asking them open-ended questions about their future*
- *taking them on a hiking adventure that serves as an analogy of their walk with God*
- *giving them significant, outrageous opportunities to serve others*
- *praying for them every day*
- *embedding Scripture in their minds*

While keeping in mind the teenagers that you know, take a moment to list at least five more ways that you could complete this statement "helping teenagers become like Jesus through...."

This list could go on for a while, so I'll stop here. This simple statement gives us the freedom to meet individual teenagers where they are and help them become like

Life-shaping discipleship isn't a random event. It's an intentional adventure, and teenagers need someone who's walking with them on the journey and helping them grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus modeled this for us through relationship with his closest disciples. He spent time with them, shared life with them, taught them to obey, shared experiences with them, gave them direction, and promised to be with them. This is what we are called to as youth workers—the model for us to follow.

The Skinny on Discipleship will become a practical guide in your role as a disciple-maker. You'll discover practical insights and powerful encouragement for knowing Jesus, loving him, and placing him at the center of your life—and then helping teenagers along on that same journey.

When it comes to discipleship, there are no shortcuts, there's no handbook for teenagers, and there's no timeline on what it will take to help each teenager draw closer to Jesus. But you can follow the model of Jesus, rely on the truth that he's with you, and remember that ultimately he loves teenagers even more than you do.



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