

September 2014 — August 2015
Annual Theme Booklet

national 
girls
ministries

her heart ... her world ... His purpose



flourish
Psalm 1:1-3, NIV

Plus Girls Ministries
WRITING CONTEST **WINNERS**

National Girls Ministries Theme
PLANNING GUIDE

**4 WAYS TO HELP
GIRLS FLOURISH**



a note from ngm



Hello Friends,


Spring is a favorite season for many people. This is a time when trees begin to bud and flowers prepare for their first blossoms. It's quite amazing to see what happens when a long, steady rain saturates the ground around bare plants after a long winter. Seeing the difference that one day of rain makes is a snapshot of what God desires to do in the lives of the girls in your church.

The annual Girls Ministries theme for the 2014–2015 school year — Flourish — is taken from Psalm 1:1–3. In this passage, the Psalmist's counsel is to be selective in destination, time spent, and the company of friends. If readers follow these instructions they will flourish like a tree planted by water.

Set a time now to communicate some of the ideas and content within this booklet to your pastor to see how your church may be able to bring focus to the need of a healthy girls discipleship ministry.

Provided is a planning guide and prayer focus list to launch the Flourish theme during National Girls Ministries Week, September 14–20, 2014. Here are resources and ideas to help you continue to bring focus to this theme over the next year to encourage girls to flourish and help others see the vision for Girls Ministries in your church.

Much Love,
Your National Girls Ministries Team



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Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in
the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose *delight* is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is
like a tree planted by streams of water, which
yields its fruit [Flourishes] in season
and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

Psalm 1:1–3 NIV

what's online SEE WHAT'S CLICKING IN GIRLS MINISTRIES ON THE WEB AND ON THE GO

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why

we do what we do ...



... FOR A GIRL NAMED LUZ age 15

There are a lot of teenagers who feel lonely and desperate. They cannot trust their parents and even though they have friends, they do not know much about life or the difference between what is good or bad. I am truly grateful to be in the Girls Only Club. Being in that group has helped me recognize my values and learn how to be a better daughter, friend, sister, and a better person. Being a Girls Only member helped me realize that I am not alone, and that there is a group of friends that will be there for me whenever I need them. Girls Only has also taught me to be wise and how to give myself the value that I deserve and see myself as beautiful and precious as God sees me.

There has been a lot of activities we

have done that has impacted me tremendously. For example, last year we had a teen girl retreat with the theme of *Lost and Found* that impacted me in a really amazing way. The purpose was about the way we see people who are not Christian. We read about the Parable of the Lost Coin and how Jesus compared it to the people who were not Christians. During the retreat, I learned how to see people differently. Instead of seeing someone who was doing something wrong with hate and anger, I learned how to see them with love, how Jesus sees them, and to try to help them instead of criticizing them.

Being part of Girls Only is currently teaching me about relationships. I'm learning how to have high standards and to not

settle for less than what I deserve. I am also learning how to respect and honor God with my body and mind.

Every unit we start impacts me in ways that I cannot even explain. I hope I can continue to learn more and more, and try my best to put into practice what I learn. Thanks to Girls Only I have learned how to put God as my first priority and to put others' needs before mine. That is something I would have never done if it was not for that group of friends and teachers who continue to encourage me to give 100% to God and others.

Luz, Girls Only Club
Juan 3:16, NJ

... FOR A GIRL NAMED HALEY age 13

I have been in Girls Ministries since I was three or four. I started in the Rainbows Club at my church. My mom still has my Rainbows' vest and the sashes from the other clubs. I can't wear the vest now, but it is fun to look at it and remember all the fun activities we did for the different badges. Now I'm in the Friends Club. Girls Ministries (Impact Girls Clubs and Teen Girl Ministries) have taught me a lot, but probably the most important thing

that has impacted my life is developing integrity.

There was a kid in my class in elementary school. He has been in my class since first grade. This boy was a little different than most kids in my class. He wore his jacket all day long and sometimes even covered his head with the hood during class. No one wanted to be his friend.

At recess, I chose to play with him and I was his friend. It is hard being this boy's

friend because everyone made fun of him. Sometimes they made fun of me for being his friend. I know being his friend is the right thing to do.

This was showing integrity by being a good friend when others would not. Girls Clubs have helped me develop my integrity.

Haley, Friends Club
First Assembly of God, KY

... FOR A GIRL NAMED ASHLEY age 13

Being a part of Girls Ministries has greatly impacted my life in many different ways. I have experienced so many good and positive experiences and relationships while being part of this ministry. Out of all those experiences and relationships I would have to say that by far the most important thing that I will take away with me is the relationship I have developed with God. Through my studies with my Girls Ministries leaders I have learned how important my relationship with God is to my life. I know that I need to talk to God daily and trust in Him and the work He is doing in my life. I have also learned that I will not always understand everything that is going on in my life or why things happen the way they do, but I know with my faith in God that He has a plan for me and everything will be alright.

This relationship with God that the ministry has helped me form had impacted the way I live my life. I am working hard every day to live my life in a way that would be pleasing to God. I know that I will sin and God won't get mad at me for the sins I commit; I just need to ask for His forgiveness and try my best to not repeat the sin. I know that if I believe and follow God, He has promised me an everlasting life with Him in heaven.

Some of the other things that I have learned and have impacted my life is the importance of being respectful to my parents and elders. I have met many new friends in my classes at Girls Ministries. I know that I can go to these friends, my Girls Ministries leader, or any of the leaders in my church if I ever have a problem. Peer pressure can be really hard to deal with and these friends and leaders have given me someone I can turn to when I have a problem and need someone to talk to and I know that they will not judge me. Another great experience I have had is the opportunity to do community service with my ministry group. I have really enjoyed going to the local nursing home to interact with the residents and also serving meals at my church. I plan on continuing to do as much service as I can within my community long after I am done with Girls Ministries.

I am so grateful for all these ways that Girls Ministries has impacted my life by helping me to find God and opening my heart and mind up to Him!

Ashley, Friends Club
First Assembly of God, MO

... FOR A GIRL NAMED KAITY age 12

I'm Kaity, and Girls Ministries has had the best impact on my life.

My dad was in the Navy ever since I was born. Anytime Dad had to go somewhere, we all just packed up and moved. When I was 11, Dad retired. After twenty years of service, we finally moved to our forever home in WI. It was amazing, thinking about not having to move again. But, I didn't have any friends. For most kids, it's pretty easy to make friends. Just go to school, talk to someone, voila! Instant friend. But I'm home-schooled, making it a little bit harder.

After finding our church, New Life Assembly of God, I tried to go to the youth group, there were too many people in there for me. So, back to the drawing board.

My mom and I prayed for me to find friends. God answered us in a pretty literal way, through Friends Club. The next Wednesday, I went to Friends Club for the first time. My mom walked me in and said, "Have fun!"

"What's your name?" the teacher, Miss Coleen, asked. She had black hair in a bob style, and glasses. Just seeing her made me feel welcome.

"I'm Kaity," I said as she took me into the middle of the room. "Girls. This is Kaity. Tell her your names."

After the very crazy and giggly introductions, I sat down next to a girl with brown hair braided down her back, and a tan jacket. Her name was Cailyn, and she would become one of my best friends, along with a fun, crazy, super amazing red-head named Natalie, my geeky friend who will rule the world one day named Alyssa, Hanna, Hannah, and so many more. After

a lot of talking, we got to the lesson. It was perfect.

Two weeks later, we had a lesson where we went around and said something we like about the person chosen.

"I like how all of you made me feel like I was part of the group the first time I ever came," I said.

"Kaity," Miss Coleen said, "you are part of the group."

And that's when it clicked. I was a part of the group. I was one of them.

Girls Ministries was one of the best things that has happened to me. I have so many friends, so many people who care and look out for me. The club may be called Friends, but in it, I found family. A big, crazy, obnoxious, hilarious, and in every way, perfect family.

Kaity, Friends Club
New Life Assembly of God, WI

“
Girls Ministries
was one of the best things
that has happened to me.
I have so many friends, so
many people who care and
look out for me. The club
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... FOR A GIRL NAMED THANAIRA age 11

Girls Ministries has changed my life in many ways. There are some ways like spiritual, emotional, or even in life situations.

We have gone over some units and one of them was an Attitude unit. This unit really helped me in life, it taught me to respect and honor my parents. The Holy Spirit shook something within me about how I am suppose to be an example with my attitude and how I react towards life

issues, friend conflict and family problems.

Girls Ministries (Mpact) has also taught me how not to judge someone by how they look or speak. It has helped me initiate friendships and become closer to them. It has also helped me become closer to my family by bonding more and loving them with their flaws and virtues.

My relationship with God has been stronger. I understand the Bible more and I really

think I understand more about the end of times, how we will all be with the Lord and the signs and wonders we will see and experience before God calls His children. I am looking forward to this with excitement!

That is why I love being in Girls Ministries!

Thanaira, Stars Club
First Assembly of God, MD



... FOR A GIRL NAMED MILLIE GRACE age 9

Girls Ministries has made an impact in my life in many ways. The first way is when I first came to my church I really did not know much about being close to God. Since being a part of Girls Ministries, my faith in the Lord has grown so much. I gave my heart to the Lord during a Stars Club meeting. At the time I was saved we were studying about Communion and I learned what the bread and wine symbolized. As Sister Donna explained the meaning of the bread and wine I knew it was the time for

I knew it was the time for me to give my heart to the Lord.

me to give my heart to the Lord. On that Wednesday night, two other girls also gave their hearts to the Lord. I felt great because I got saved. I could not wait to tell my mom, dad, and brother my good news! I know I will spend my eternal life with my Lord and Savior! My sins are forgiven and forgotten. It was the best decision I will ever make in my life. I am looking forward to being baptized very soon!

A second way Girls Ministries has made an impact in my life is the way we study

about the Lord. I look forward to the next badge we earn to see what else I will be learning about. The third way it has impacted my life is that it challenges me to read my Bible more and more. Reading my Bible has inspired me to seek the Lord more every day and share all I know with my other friends. I want others to be saved like me. I am so thankful for Girls Ministries at my church. I love being able to meet new friends and learn more about God and how to serve Him!

Millie Grace, Stars Club
First Assembly of God, AL



her heart ... her world ... His purpose

YOUR GENEROSITY HELPS COVER ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS AND ENABLES US TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE QUALITY MATERIALS AND SERVICES.

The 2014 theme, “Flourish” is supported by Psalm 1:1–3. The national Girls Ministries Department offers resources to help church leaders mentor girls with God’s definition of beauty in the midst of our sexually driven culture, teaching girls to take time to develop their relationship with and identity in God.

The national Girls Ministries Department guides the overall vision and direction of Girls Ministries. Our mission statement is threefold:

1. To provide effective discipleship tools and support to districts and local churches

2. To enable leaders to accomplish the fivefold purpose through women mentoring girls

3. To believe God for a harvest of girls — fulfilling His perfect plan for their lives

The annual National Girls Ministries Week offering, collected during local National Girls Ministries Week services, assists the national department in fulfilling this mission statement. The national Girls Ministries staff provides field ministry, develops new materials and products, provides training and leadership materials, processes training certificates, and

processes orders for materials and offerings for national projects.

The annual offering taken during National Girls Ministries Week in the local churches is a means of support for the national department. Your generosity helps cover administrative costs and enables us to continue to provide quality materials and services to more than 200,000 girls and sponsors involved in the Girls Ministries program. The national Girls Ministries Department thanks each one who participates in this offering, and we pledge ourselves to be faithful to our mission of enabling leaders to disciple girls.

Here is our offering for the support of the nationwide ministry to girls.

Amount Enclosed: _____ (279051-0200469) Church Account #: _____

Name of Church: _____

Church Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Give Online at: <http://ngmevents.ag.org/nmw/>

A return envelope has been provided in the Theme/Sleepover packet for your convenience.

**Please make checks payable to *National Girls Ministries* and mail to:
1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802**



national **girls week** ministries
September 14–20



GIRLS MINISTRIES (GM) WEEK IS THE SECOND WEEK OF SEPTEMBER AND IS THE OFFICIAL KICKOFF OF THE ANNUAL THEME FOR THE 2014–2015 SCHOOL YEAR. THIS IS A DESIGNATED OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE AWARENESS, VISIBILITY, UNDERSTANDING, AND ENTHUSIASM FOR GM IN YOUR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY. THIS MAY BE A GOOD WEEK TO HAVE A MOTHER-DAUGHTER BANQUET, A GIRL’S NIGHT OUT, OR OUTREACH. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED:

2 MONTHS BEFORE NGM WEEK

- Check with your pastor about placing a National Girls Ministries Week service on the calendar, the possibility of presenting Girls Ministries during a service, and/or a directed Girls Ministries prayer time.
- Another option if you are unable to have a service is to see if you can set up a booth outside the sanctuary promoting Girls Ministries and discipleship to girls.



1 MONTH BEFORE NGM WEEK

- With your pastor’s approval, arrange for a speaker for your NGMW service.
- Provide the devotional and Flourish theme verse (Psalm 1:1–3) to the speaker as a suggested sermon topic or the *Girls Ministries promotional video*.



2 WEEKS BEFORE NGM WEEK

- Pray with your girls and sponsors concerning the NGMW service and offering.
- Display the *NGMW Poster* included on this DVD in the Posters folder.
- Girls can decorate offering containers to be used to receive the NGMW offering.
- Select girls to be greeters and ushers.
- Print the order of service and/or other pertinent NGMW information in your church bulletin. Basic NGMW information is on page 8.



BEFORE THE SERVICE

- Girls can serve as greeters, distributing a printed program listing all participants in the service along with their club level and perhaps a short bio. A Girls Clubs bulletin (item 08MY8275) is available from *Gospel Publishing House.



ENTERING THE CHURCH

- The children can enter to various club or Girls Ministries (“Honor You”) theme songs, each club carrying a club banner. (Club banner posters are available from *Gospel Publishing House.)

*Order Product Online at www.myhealthychurch.com/girlsclubs

SPECIAL PRESENTATION SUGGESTIONS

- Allow each club (or just one club) to sing its club theme song. A Theme Songs CD (item 28MY5084), recorded in English and Spanish, is available from *Gospel Publishing House.
- If you want to tie in the Sleepover theme and Coins for Kids (CFK) project, a video about the current project, *China Orphan Care*, is at <http://ngmevents.ag.org/cfk/current.cfm> as a free download. You can also find reproducible handouts on the Sleepover DVD.



IDEAS FOR RAISING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Let girls receive the National Girls Ministries Week offering. Use the information on pages 5–7 as an example of how the offering benefits ministry to girls. Consider asking the congregation to walk to the front and place their offering in the containers the girls have prepared.



AFTER NATIONAL GIRLS MINISTRIES WEEK

- Mail the NGMW form on page 8 along with your offering (in the envelope provided in your Theme/Sleepover packet) to the national Girls Ministries Department, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802. To submit your offerings online, go to: <http://ngmevents.ag.org/nmw/>.
- Send an e-mail with comments, suggestions, testimonies, and pictures of your NGMW service to ngm@ag.org with National Girls Ministries Week in the subject line or post on social media using #NGMWeek.

Resources in *italics* can be found at ngm.ag.org and on the 2014 Sleepover DVD.

Find **FREE** Downloadable Promotional Resources at

ngm.ag.org

Share your #NGMWeek stories
Facebook: /NationalGirlsMinistries
Twitter: @NationalGirls

national girls ministries week

PRAYER

TOPICS

Sunday 9/14

Topic: Our Pastors and Church Leadership

Pray specifically for:

- Protection, physical strength, and provision for them and their families
- Vision and guidance as they lead
- Hearts receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit

Monday 9/15

Topic: Girls In Our Community

Pray specifically that:

- All girls would have a godly role model in their life
- Girls would have boldness to share the gospel with others
- Opportunities happen for young ladies to be discipled

Tuesday 9/16

Topic: Homes and Families Where Girls Live

Pray specifically for:

- Biblical examples of godly marriage
- Homes to be filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit
- Encouragement and love so girls grow and flourish
- God's peace to fill each home

Wednesday 9/17

Topic: Girls Ministries Leaders

Pray specifically for:

- Encouragement for the leaders who invest in girls
- Leaders to have creative ideas to combat the culture that attacks girls
- Blessing on their homes for their sacrifice and prayers for the girls
- God to speak to the hearts of more women to be involved in ministry to girls

Thursday 9/18

Topic: Girls Worldwide

Pray specifically for:

- Godly homes for the millions of orphans around the world
- Godly women in national churches who will invest in the next generation
- The Church to rise up in places where women are not respected and valued

Friday 9/19

Topic: God's Voice to Be Heard

Pray specifically for:

- Girls to hear God's voice regarding their value and purpose
- Leaders to respond to God leading them to invest in the next generation
- Girls who are seeking hope to hear and respond to a relationship with their Heavenly Father

Saturday 9/20

Topic: Coins for Kids (CFK) Project / Nationwide Sleepover

Pray specifically that:

- The children of China Orphan Care would see God's love in the caregivers
- The caregivers will take the gospel back to the people in their homes
- The Nationwide Sleepover would be an opportunity for evangelism ♦



4 ways to help
GIRLS
flourish
in the faith

#NGMflourish

Girls are wildly and wonderfully different from boys. Thankfully that's no longer politically incorrect to acknowledge. In fact, catering to these differences can make a tremendous difference when discipling girls and seeing them flourish in the faith.

Girls and boys do not differ in their ability to love God, respond to His Spirit, or grow in relationship with Him. But how we as Christian leaders foster those end goals should look different.

Since we have so little time in which to compete for the attention of the hearts and souls of these girls on a weekly basis, we must maximize our time. One powerful way to do that is in single gender environments. It's a simple shift that brings profound benefits.

Here are four ways to help your girls flourish:

Dive into the details. Did you know girls can hear better than boys? Females can hear tones ten times softer than their male counterparts, according to research cited in *Why Gender Matters*, by Dr. Leonard Sax. That's just the beginning. Because male and female brains process differently, leaders would do well to differentiate instruction. The same content can be taught, but a girls' leader should spend more

time thinking through the environment (color, light, sounds, seating) and social arrangement (seating and time set aside for questions and conversation). Any attention to detail will not go unnoticed.

Model the way. Research shows girls learn more quickly and deeply when they are taught by a role model. Girls need a real-life example. They benefit from seeing a flourishing faith being lived out by someone they respect; they're more apt to repeat that behavior. Girls can learn the art of hospitality by watching their Girls Ministries leader decorate their classroom and how they keep it organized. They can watch how the leader makes each girl feel welcomed and noticed as she walks in the room. Girls take cues from how the leader presents herself in dress, body language, and conversation. If she feels she can look up to her, she'll want to be like her.

Go deep in discipleship. Girls become risk-takers in single-gender environments — and that's a good thing. Learning theory shows us that learners are risk-takers; they ask questions, make guesses, and process their thoughts out loud. Asking questions and digging into what-ifs are an important part of spiritual de-

velopment. Single-gender rooms led by skilled teachers promote an environment where girls can have these conversations and safely ask questions that will lead to a deeper, flourishing faith.

In the study "The Role of Mentoring," which examined the effect of single-gender mentoring programs, researchers found that girls in these programs reported significantly better grades, greater academic self-esteem, more positive feelings about school, better teacher relationships, and a greater likelihood of attending and completing college. Their needs were better met in the context of gender specific programs. Titus 2 validates this truth in our environments that build faith.

Research shows girls learn more quickly and deeply when they are taught by a role model.

Fueling a Flourishing Faith. One of the main predictors of a student maintaining the faith after high school is having quality adult relationships within their home and church, according to the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI). Providing single-gender environments where these relationships can flourish and provide friendship, support, and discipleship could be the single-most important act leaders can do for the youth in our churches.

Separating boys and girls in a spiritual growth environment can foster a deep foundation for a life-long, flourishing faith. ♦

Share your #NGMWeek Prayers
Facebook: /NationalGirlsMinistries
Twitter: @NationalGirls

her heart ... her world ... His purpose

CHINA

Orphan Care



2014 Coins for Kids Project



How can we show Jesus' love to orphan babies who live in China? The Infant Care Unit is a place where babies' lives are saved, and wonderful doctors and nurses take care of their special medical needs. But they still need something even more important—love.

That's where we come in. Our 2014 *Coins for Kids* offerings will provide caregivers for the babies at the Infant Care Unit. The caregivers will hold the babies in their arms, sing to them, and even speak words of blessing over them. With love, the babies thrive! And after a few months, the babies are ready to be placed where every child belongs—into a caring family.

We don't just get to show love to babies. We also get to help the caregivers. Most of these young women come from places where they have never heard of Jesus and how much He loves them. As they care for the babies, other workers will begin to share the story of Jesus with them. Many of these women invite Jesus into their lives. Then when they go back home, they share His love with others.

Join Girls Ministries clubs everywhere as we partner with BGMC* to make our coins count. Just \$5 per day provides a loving caregiver for the babies in the Infant Care Unit. Set a goal of **how many days or weeks of care you can give.**

Make an eternal difference by sharing the love of Jesus with orphans and their caregivers when you give to *Coins for Kids* in 2014. Just bring your offering to your Girls Ministries club leader or donate online at ngmevents.ag.org/cfk.

To view a video of this project visit ngmevents.ag.org/cfk/current.cfm

*Churches who give to *Coins for Kids* through the national Girls Ministries Department will get both BGMC and World Missions giving credit.

NGM.ag.org NGM@ag.org
Phone: 417.862.2781 x4074
/NationalGirlsMinistries
@NationalGirls

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After December 31, 2014, find the new CFK project information at www.ngmevents.ag.org/cfk/current.cfm

USING THE annual theme

Share your #NGMflourish Stories
Facebook: /NationalGirlsMinistries
Twitter: @NationalGirls

Flourish is defined as to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment. Other synonyms include: thrive, prosper, increase, multiply, blossom, and bear fruit. When we think about the girls we minister to each week, these are all the characteristics we pray they will obtain as they grow in their walk with the Lord. So as you are preparing for the 2014–2015 year of Girls Clubs, how will you help your girls flourish?

Keep this theme at the forefront throughout the school year by using it in different ways. Wouldn't it be great at your Celebration in 2015 to talk about all the ways your girls have flourished throughout the year? Here are some ideas on how to use the Flourish theme:

SET A GOAL: Each week give girls a benchmark for how they will focus. The following week take a few minutes to talk about how they flourished in that benchmark. Repeat each month. Give the Flourish theme reproducible cards to your girls as a reminder of what they should be focusing on.

- Week 1: Reading your Bible
- Week 2: Praying
- Week 3: Worship/Praising God
- Week 4: Encouraging and loving others
- Week 5: Friendships and family

EVENTS: The Flourish theme isn't just for National Girls Ministries Week events; it can be used all year. Host a Girls Ministries retreat, worship and devotion night, or outreach event using Flourish as your theme.

COINS FOR KIDS (CFK): Use the CFK project to help your girls flourish in giving to others. Remind them how they can make an eternal difference by sharing the love of Jesus with orphans and caregivers when they give to CFK and the China Orphan Care project.

NATIONWIDE SLEEPOVER: Help your girls grow and flourish in personal evangelism by inviting friends to your Exploration China Sleepover. Use the Outreach Preparation (found on page 12 of the *Sleepover Planning Guide*) for steps to help girls get started.

CELEBRATIONS: Use the Flourish theme during your annual Celebrations service. Take time to talk about how each girl flourished in her relationship with God this year.

Resources in *italics* can be found at ngm.ag.org and on the 2014 Sleepover DVD.



flourish



it starts WITH me

BY: CASEY GIBBONS

I could feel the young teen's negative attitude in the air. In fact, I could see it and hear it. The slouched posture, folded arms followed by the deep obnoxious sigh of boredom demonstrated her lack of excitement to be a part of the event. She was not engaged mentally or emotionally to any aspect of the special night we had planned at the church. I thought to myself, "Doesn't she appreciate anything we have done for her to have this? The trendy promo handouts? The creative décor? The cool video? The touching music? ANYTHING?"

Honestly, no, she didn't appreciate anything. We had done all I knew to make the event a success, but this girl didn't care. She was in her own world with her own issues. At first, I felt anger over her obvious pride and the selfish mind-set she displayed. Then, I felt disappointed that the event wasn't perfectly reaching every girl. But surprisingly, I felt compassion. Yes, compassion. And this is when everything changed.

Not that the teen changed, but I certainly did. Instead of focusing on my frustrations over her behaviors, I began to think, "What would cause a young girl to be uninterested in a night that was full of fun and inspiration? How can I help her warm up and be open to all God has for her?" Basically, I went from being judgmental to being like Jesus.

In Psalm 116:5, scripture gives insight into the Lord. It says, "The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." And we see how Jesus righteously demonstrated this gracious compassion with people such as when the woman was caught in adultery in John 8:

"⁷ Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then, neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Just like Jesus addressed issues without condemnation, so should we. As we are leading a generation of girls in their relationship with Christ, we must be compassionate. These girls need the grace and love that the Lord has shown to us. They need forgiveness and understanding despite what they are acting like or deserve.

This leadership approach of compassion is what will speak louder to them than any event we could plan. As I began to pray about the girl with the attitude that was seated close to me, the Lord spoke to me an idea to connect with her. During worship, I quietly moved forward to where she was standing. I gently placed my hand on her back, closed my eyes and began praying for her. Her body language was tense and I knew she was looking at me with annoyance but I kept praying. After a minute or two I leaned over to ask her if there was anything I could pray for specifically in her life. She abruptly answered "No." So, I decided I would pray what I felt the Lord wanted for her. I kept it simple and nonthreatening but spoke truth over her. After the prayer, there wasn't a visible change so I discreetly and with a smile asked her if she would come chat with me. We exited the auditorium and awkwardly sat down at a table in the foyer.

After introducing myself and assuring her she wasn't in trouble, I offered to purchase her a smoothie that she could enjoy while we talked. She looked a bit surprised but perked up. She answered with a slight smile, "Um, sure!" Over the next 25 minutes we talked openly. At first I talked a little about myself, then I asked much about her life. I listened intently and with many questions. Over time, her answers became longer and more in depth.

As I watched her talk, she evolved from being a snobby girl with an attitude to a vulnerable 14-year-old that was obviously insecure and uncertain. She said she was nervous to be there and didn't have friends at church. She talked about her parent's divorce and her older brother who was in deep trouble. She mentioned she wasn't sure about the Lord as she had been making choices she knew weren't right. On and on we talked until we needed to join the message in the service. As we left the table to walk into service together, she thanked me. I gave her a simple hug and told her I was glad to get to know

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her and looked forward to the next time we could get together. She agreed by saying, "Yeah, that would be cool."

I don't remember exactly what happened in her heart during the message that night, but I do remember that showing her compassion instead of criticism opened her heart towards the Lord. She came back to Wednesday nights and over time her attitude began to disappear. She would wave as she passed me with her new group of friends making sure that I saw her. We also connected on several more occasions just to chat. Truly, she was beginning to flourish.

You and I have the ability to bring out the God-given possibilities in the girls we lead or to burden them with our perspective of their behavioral issues. When it comes to influencing youth in the way Jesus did, we can remember, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them" (Matthew 9:36). Let's help them to flourish by showing them compassion in these simple ways:

See them as Christ sees them. When we view them with a belief in the potential God has for them, it begins the work of compassion in our heart.

Smile, listen, encourage, give gifts, write notes, and listen some more. We could have a love and concern for a girl but if all she sees is a distant leader who gets on to her behaviors but never connects in her world, she will not respond. However, using tangible ways of demonstrating our heart for her will begin the process of her opening up to us and ultimately the Lord.

Pray for them and with them. Only the Lord can change a heart and allow the blessing of flourishing in Him. The Lord will respond to our prayers, and the girl will grow in her understanding of God as she hears us pray for her.

What a joy it is to be a part of changing lives and seeing girls mature in their relationships with God! And perhaps seeing one turn from a negative attitude into a flourishing life begins with the leader loving her with a compassionate heart. ♦

Casey and her husband, Scotty, have served in youth ministry for over 20 years. Whether she is speaking to mothers, leading in youth ministry, orphan care, or raising her five daughters, Casey has a passion for girls of all ages!

A former Miss American Teen, she graduated from Evangel University and is the author of *A Girl's Life With God*. Casey thanks God that Scotty chose to marry her 13 years ago and she loves helping him lead people to Jesus! After all the housework and homeschooling, Casey writes the parenting column for *Springfield Lifestyle Magazine* and develops her blog at reallifecasey.blogspot.com while drinking peppermint tea and eating dark chocolate.

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