

When Your Young Adult Is in Spiritual Triage

If you're parenting a young adult right now, you already know the job description has changed. Like me, you may not always be running spiritual development with a well-planned discipleship strategy. Instead, it can feel like you're patching wounds in real time. Young adults are exploring boundaries, making their own decisions, and testing the standards of holiness and community you've modeled for them. It can get messy.

As a longtime next-gen pastor, I've heard it all. Maybe your young adult child stumbles in drunk one night. Maybe they're experimenting with drugs. Maybe they're single and pregnant, or a pattern of poor choices is leading to long-term consequences. Maybe they've wandered so far from faith that you're not sure they can still hear God calling their name. It's triage, and it's exhausting.

But even in crisis, God hasn't checked out on them. And He certainly hasn't checked out on you. Here are a few practical ways to meet your young adult where they are and gently point them toward Jesus without pushing them further away.

1. Start With Grace, Not Shock

This is the miracle of the gospel—it is never a one-time offering. They already know they've blown it. They can feel the disappointment in the room before anyone says a word. So, take a breath and lead with, "I love you. I'm here." That doesn't mean you approve of every decision; they understand that. But grace opens doors that shame slams shut.

2. Keep Conversation Open and Safe

Instead of lecturing, get curious. Ask questions that show you want to understand, not control: "What's going on? How are you really doing? What's giving you anxiety? What are you excited about or looking forward to?" When young adults feel safe, they talk. And when they talk, God has room to move.

3. Live Your Faith in Front of Them

You don't have to preach a sermon. Let them see and hear you pray honestly, wrestle with Scripture, and trust Jesus in your own mess. Authenticity is magnetic. Your genuine faith becomes a homing beacon as their minds and souls search for stability. You can't fix every crisis, but you can be a steady, grace-filled presence that reminds them God is still calling—and they can still answer.