

KIDZ CAMP

Lanecia A. Rouse

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for June 6–12, 2016.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children. —Khalil Gibran

“Some of my fondest memories as a pastor of youth are the ones in which the youth were in relational ministry with children both in and outside our church. One summer, we studied Matthew 25 together to discern how the Spirit was inviting our group to use our resources and gifts to love others. At the end of the summer we discerned that we were being called to be intentional about building relationships with the children who were refugees from Burma and members of a fellowship that met in our church building.

“I encouraged the youth to imagine what their relationship with the children would look like and to work together to make it happen. Eventually, we found ourselves at the apartments across town where most of the children lived. We played sports, created art, laughed, played with hula hoops, and got to know one another. It was a privilege to watch relationships bloom and the love of Jesus chip away at the cultural and racial walls that tend to fracture community. It was a delight to watch as youth who had said they were not “children kind of people” quickly became the best volunteers. A couple of the youth even began to name what they believed their life’s work would be through these moments of Saturday Sacred Play; and six years later, they are still working to influence the lives of children for the better.

“Eventually our Saturday Sacred Play days led to the youth imagining, creating, implementing, and leading a week long sports, arts, and tutoring camp for the children. It was so beautiful: the kingdom taking on flesh and providing a vision of truth that another world is possible and the youth have all that is necessary to lead the way.” —Lanecia

MEET THE WRITER

Lanecia A. Rouse is my name. I am a creative (photographer, artist, writer, speaker) living in Houston, Texas. Before becoming a full-time creative, I served as the Project Director of The Art Project, Houston, a therapeutic art and self-empowerment project of the Bread of Life, Inc., with men and women living on the streets of Houston, Texas. Prior to the move to Houston, I served in youth ministry for thirteen years, most received with the brilliant, bursting, beautiful youth of Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Learn more about Lanecia at www.larartphotography.com.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- paper
- pencils and pens
- candle and matches or a lighter

PLUGGED IN

These books and resources will be helpful in enabling and empowering youth to be leaders and volunteers in ministry with children.

- + *Project Transformation: Transforming Lives Through Relationships* is a non-profit organization whose mission is to engage young adults in purposeful leadership and ministry, to support underserved children and families, and to connect churches to communities in need. Project Transformation has chapters in Texas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. Its website offers great resources for thinking through the importance of engaging young people in ministry with children and empowering young people as leaders.
(<http://projecttransformation.org/national/>)
- + *Kisses from Katie*, by Katie Davis, is the personal memoir of a teenager whose life was turned upside-down and transformed, in true kingdom of God fashion, through her relationship with children in Uganda. Before suggesting it to the youth to process, read the book for theological and social perspectives that may need further conversation.
(<http://www.amazimastore.org/products/kisses-from-katie-paperback>)

CHECKING IN

Once everyone has arrived and been welcomed, invite group members to discuss:

- What is the name of one person who made a positive impact on your life?**
- What difference did he or she make in your life?**
- Who, as a child, looked up to you?**

Explain to the group that during this time together you will be looking at scripture and engaging in conversation about what Jesus says about our relationship with children.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Matthew 19:13–15

Matthew 19 begins with Jesus' leaving Galilee and traveling to the coasts of Judea. Crowds of people, wanting to be healed, follow him; and Jesus heals them. Pharisees challenge him about divorce and the law. Then Jesus talks with his disciples, who are trying to keep the children away.

Read through Matthew 19:13–15 twice, then ask the following questions:

- What do you find interesting about this interchange between the disciples and Jesus?**
- What does Jesus say about children?** (“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” —Matthew 19:14, NIV)

Why are the disciples trying to keep the children away from Jesus? How do we do the same today?

From your experience interacting with children, what do you believe Jesus means when he says, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”? (For example, Jesus might be talking about the children’s innocence, dependence, joyful abandon, curiosity, simplicity, humility, playfulness, creativity, imagination, hope.)

What are some ways we can create space for children to encounter Jesus today? (Guide group members in thinking of ways they can participate in helping children to encounter and experience the unconditional, abundant love of Jesus Christ and to grow in the love and knowledge of God.)

If you have worked with or spent time with children, what have they taught you about God?

What kind of world would be like the kingdom of God?

Activity 1

Lead the group in a series of games (such as Tag or Duck, Duck, Goose) that they played as children. If you have time, encourage unstructured play as well. One of the gifts of having youth volunteer with children is the gift of play in the midst of a stress-filled and high-expectation world.

Activity 2

Have group members write a letter to someone who helped them know the love of Jesus when they were children and made a positive impact on their lives. They may choose to deliver the letters, or you can mail them.

SHARING IN PRAYER

Ask group members to sit in a circle around a lit candle that symbolizes the presence of Christ. Pass the candle around the circle, inviting each person to answer the following question:

When did you experience God this week?

If a person chooses not to speak, he or she should simply pass the candle to the next person.

Offer this prayer:

“Loving God, thank you for the gifts you have given us and for the ways you provide for us to use them to make life better. Keep our eyes open to the needs of children and the ways you can use us to make a positive impact on their lives. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.”

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Lead the group in imagining, creating, and leading a camp or day program for children in the community. Let this be an experience the youth design and lead. Help them by providing resources, wisdom, and the adult support needed to shape and implement a top-notch experience for the children who attend. After the experience, guide the youth in reflecting on these questions:

When did you encounter God this week?

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about God?

- You could also research ministries or non-profit organizations that work with kids and welcome teen volunteers. Create a list for the youth so that they can choose ways to offer their gifts to improve the lives of children in the community.

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