



*"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers" - 1 Timothy 4:12-16*

*"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." - 2 Timothy 2:15*

Nikki and Gene went to a large public magnet high school, walking to their neighborhood bus stops, riding a first bus to their geographically assigned high school, then a bus from there to their magnet school, which drew a diverse student body with a wide variety of backgrounds from all over the city. There were very few Christians at their school, and though Nikki and Gene were in different grades, they went to the same church.

No matter how busy Nikki and Gene were, they never missed Wednesday night youth Bible study. One night, Nikki explained why Wednesday nights were so important to her: at her school, everyone knew she was a Christian but not everyone understood her faith. Nikki and Gene both knew that they were representatives of Christ at their school. They were frequently asked why they still went to church, and why they still believed in their childhood faith. Nikki and Gene, more than any other students in our youth group, needed Wednesday nights. Half-way through their school week, they could reconnect with their church community and their peers who share the faith unifying faith.

"It's like Sundays charge us up for school, and then when my friends ask me questions about my faith, I can answer them. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday drain me, but Wednesday nights charge me back up for the rest of the week, and then I can make it to Sunday again," Nikki told me.

Re-read the passage from 1 Timothy above again. Paul invested in young Timothy and nurtured his growing faith and guided his ministry. Paul saw potential in Timothy and led him to serve God's church. (For further reading about Timothy, read 1 Timothy 4-5 and 2 Timothy 1-2.) Paul's word to Timothy guiding him in church life are applicable to all Christians, but especially to the teenagers in a congregation.

Jesus works through your congregation and your youth ministry to lead you in faith and help you continue to grow up. We receive God's gifts in worship and in Bible study together. God gives you elders, old men and women, mentors, guides, pastors, children and even people you don't like, to walk beside you empowered by the Holy Spirit in your vocations.

He also gives you to your congregation. You are a gift to your church, an important part of your church that would be missing without you. Like a puzzle piece that ruins the whole puzzle when it falls off the table onto the carpet, you are integral to your congregation. If even 499 pieces are perfect, all you notice is the hole. God wants to work through you at this place and at this time with these people to share the good news of Jesus.

Paul's words to the church in Ephesus are instructive to our life in the church as well. Ephesians 4:2-6 says,  
"(Walk) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

We walk together in one Lord and one faith, even when the world around us challenges us. Love and use your congregational community to support you as the Holy Spirit uses you throughout the week.

### **Discussion/ Journal Questions**

- How does Bible study with Christian friends prepare you and charge you up for your week?
- How can my behavior at church help older adults respect teenage Christians in our congregation?

### **Prayer**

Jesus, you unite me with my Christian friends at church. You also unite me with my whole congregation. Thank you for giving us unity that we cannot achieve on our own. When others see our unity, help them to see You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.