

## Perseverance In Youth Ministry with Bill Winton

### Season 2 | Episode 20

## Opening

**Josh Yates:** Welcome friends to the Sonlife everyday disciple makers podcast, where we get the joy to spend time with everyday disciple makers. And one of those decision makers I love serving with is Wayne. So Wayne's great to have you a cohost with me on another episode of today's podcast.

**Wayne:** Yeah, I am excited to be in the studio with you, Josh. And it is, it is early February. And I have watched a little bit of the sporting event that comes out every, every four years or so. It's called the Olympics. Have you heard of.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah, actually my son and I four years ago, we decided to pick one sporting event and just follow it through it's from the beginning to end and a sporting event that we didn't know nothing about. So we watched curling and that was the year that the U S actually this team's ragtag team called the rejects, came back to win gold.

And so that was a fun year.

**Wayne:** Yeah, I've watched, I've watched a little bit of Kirlian. I'm a big fan of watching those guys hurl the rock down the ice as it wore. I was reminded today that there is and in addition to the singles luge, there's a, there's a double luge. Two full grown men, lay on one sled and go 80 miles per hour down the ice.

And I, I think that's pretty pretty crazy to do. I mean, the one guy do it by itself as crazy, but to stack two men on a sled and send them down the hill seems pretty crazy. and I was wondering, we've got four years, which seems like plenty of time to train for the next winter Olympics. And I want to know Josh Yates.

What event are you going to be competing in in 2026?

**Josh Yates:** and 20, 26. You know, when you look at those guys who are. I just don't think I have the that drone Rushville to do that. I just don't know w with my chin only

inches from the ground going 80 miles an hour head first, I think I'm gonna pass. You know, I definitely, I think skating or figure skating is definitely out.

But I think snowboarding doing the half pipe that, that sounds like a sport that I'm definitely gonna be working towards. So thanks for the inspiration way. And that's why I'm working on.

**Wayne:** I think I would, I think it would want to be a curler. And I feel like it's like cool to light curly. Now. I don't think I actually liked curling before. It was cool to like curling, but, but of all the things in the winter Olympics, I think I would, I would want to just, you know, it's, it's like corn hole.

It's like shuffleboard. It's, it's all those things wrapped up and thrown on the ice. And that just seems like a real good time to

**Josh Yates:** I got it. It is really interesting. How do they get these sports to become official Olympic sports? I mean, your thought about that.

**Wayne:** Right.

**Josh Yates:** I mean, Let me really sledding is an Olympic sport. I mean, I thought that was just the fun thing. You do get the inner tube. You just slide to go down the hill, but now we've made that an Olympic sport, like even the idea of curling becoming an Olympic sport.

I mean, are there sports that we played me? It was a kid that maybe they were missing out on. Like could, could hide and seek be a Olympic sport. Could lawn darts be an Olympic sport?

**Wayne:** Right. I think those would probably both be summer games that they were I don't play a lot of science seek in the wintertime. I guess if you're inside, maybe cause it gets dark earlier so you can play some good insight heightened state, like at the church

**Josh Yates:** Yeah, good insights, good insights there. But yeah, it is, it is fascinating how they, how they come up with these games how they come up with an action making that, not an Olympic sport that can, the competitiveness of sledding is

interesting and concept, but but I'm glad that. Tuning in, because we're not talking about Olympic sports, which is a good thing.

We're talking about everyday disciple makers

I'm really looking forward to today's conversation with seasoned ministry leader Bill Winton. And so today's conversation, we're going to dive deep into middle school ministry. So here's my conversation with Bill.

## Conversation with Bill Winton

**Josh Yates:** Bill, it's a great pleasure to have you on the podcast today. We're going coast to coast today, Portland to Jacksonville, Florida. So Bill, it's, it's a great joy to have you on today's.

**Bill Winton:** What a privilege for me.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah, Bill, you've been serving in student ministry a number of years. But primarily focusing on kind of middle school ministry, maybe just kind of give us a quick yeah. Story of getting to know who is bill and his ministry.

**Bill Winton:** Well, I am a middle school pastor. I've been doing youth ministry since I graduated from Bible college in 1989. 33 years ago, I found this wonderful church that I'm at now. Christian Family Chapel started attending there in 98 and in 2000 they said, Hey, would you be our middle school pastor? And so that's two weeks ago was 22 years here.

I've been as the middle school pastor at Christian family.

**Josh Yates:** Do I love the longevity and particularly a student ministry, but middle school ministry, which is even more unique to be in that context. And so we think of middle school ministry and the things you could be doing with your time, things that can doing in ministry context. Why, why is middle school ministry stuck for you?

**Bill Winton:** huh? Well, it's how I started in middle school ministry. I did eight years of junior high middle school and high school. And then wore myself out and got empty. I was running on empty at the end of that eight years. And then one of my students had just left middle-school and got into high school, actually hung herself.

And it was running on empty and not knowing how to replenish myself. My wife would find me at one in the morning, walking the streets gone, what could I have done different? You know, this really matters. And so I took a little sabbatical from ministry for about a year, year and a half and saying, I want to get back.

I'd go to church. And I said, I'm going to get healthy again. So any every Sunday, whatever the application for the sermon was, I decided I'm not going back until I've done the application. Boy. That was a good challenge for me. Get me back to that. And then at one point, Hey, would you, you used to be a youth pastor, like a year ago.

Would you volunteer in our youth ministry? And the youth pastor said, I have middle-school I have high school. I have college. Which one do you want? And I said, man, I've done them all. I love them all you pick. I guess I could use help in middle school. I said glad. And it was like four months later, they said, how would you like us to pay you for it?

You know? And so January 10th, 2000, I became the middle school pastor. And and just strategically that, and I love it and had opportunities, but I just stay in here. It's a good field. Makes a difference. It's a very overlooked. People who love middle school, their wiring's different. And I think I agree with that.

We don't want everybody to work in our middle school ministry. There'll be miserable and then they'll make us miserable. We need people that are sorta wired that way and uh, have a great team of people that do it. That's part of the Y state long. I have, I think we have eight leaders now that have been on my volunteer team for over 10 years.

And we love each other. After youth group, every Wednesday night, they come to my house at eight 30 or nine o'clock and stay till 10, 11, 12 o'clock. And we sit around a campfire and just to have a great time. So you get a good team and good community and making a big difference. You want to stay there?

I want to stay and they want.

**Josh Yates:** Want to stay there. I love that for a number. I haven't. Ah, man, I have so many questions. I want.

to ask you from just my own personal thing, because I am a middle school youth leader as well. Been doing that for a number of years. I love middle school. So I think there are, I think I connect just that it is a different breed.

You got to think differently. You got to engage differently. People who love middle-school ministry have to put up with this, the ebbs and flows of the emotional maturity of middle school students. But that comes some unique opportunities to enter into their lives. I'm thinking of my sixth grade boys right now in my mind as last night as I'm running around playing wall ball, but he then talking about Jesus and, you know, opening up the good Samaritan story and then then eating, you know, snacks and then running around.

I mean, it was just like this crazy night of youth ministry, but I love the chance to, to come alongside the heart of, of, of middle school students.

**Bill Winton:** One of my favorite stories is my friend, Matt has been with me over 10 years. He was having his small group a while back and he poured himself out into John three 16 with these guys and sharing the gospel and they were tracking with him and he thought it was just going so good. And all of a sudden he said, anybody have any questions?

And one guy, little sixth grade boy raised his hand and said, I have a question. He's like, I'm so excited. I got a question in the book. I don't want everybody to answer this. Do you think that guy on the front of lucky charms is a little Irish, men are really a leprechaun and that was his big question.

Instantly the group divided in half we're on this side. It's like the book of acts and half were on this side and he realized my groups done for the night, you know, but and then this last week, Sunday night I had my small group of sixth grade. And there's a boy that revealed the week before I do not follow Jesus.

I'm not a Christian. So my heart is like, this is awesome. And we're going to do this as a group. And so they're with me and it's been a week and we said, we shared the gospel with you. Do you want it? Did you think about it this week? Yes. Do you want to do it this week? And let's review what the gospel is?

As I'm doing that right there with them. My boys start kicking each other with that's my place for my feet. That's my place for my feet. And like, totally missing that the gospel

of Jesus Christ is offered to their friend right there. Like he can say yes any second. And as just middle school ministry, they have their moments where they spike up spiritually.

And then there's all the time where they're they're wondering about the lucky.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah. Yeah. And if you've ever traveled places in in like India, you see this, the, the roads are just as chaos of cars and trucks and bikes and someone riding a horse. And it's just this chaos, but also it comes as beautiful moment. Everything comes aligned . Like, this is beautiful and all of a sudden goes back to chaos again.

And I feel like that's middle-school moment. It's like, it's just chaos. And all of a sudden, there's this beautiful window with all aligns and then you can speak and plant the seed and all of us chaos again. And so as you have for the last number of years been discipling students, how would you encourage maybe other, a youth pastor or other leader?

Who's just like. I'm just tired. I'm discouraged and burnout is it's even worth it. Why stick it out with, with middle school ministry? What kind of hope can you, can you give us

**Bill Winton:** Yeah, actually this is the walk of faith for a middle school pastor. Yeah. I can tell you, I've been doing middle-school ministry specifically since 2000. That's 22 years, and then eight years before that that's a long time. And. When students leave, they say, thank you. They give you hugs. Sometimes there's tears.

Sometimes they write notes. Sometimes their parents tell them the write you notes, but beyond two weeks after they're promoted and all those years I've had one student come back and go, Bill, thank you for investing in me. And so it's a, it's a thankless ministry. Are we making a difference? Yes, we know we are.

We're building disciples. But we're walking my faith. We're living for the Bema seat where Jesus says, well done, good and faithful servant. And but if we're looking for all the strokes, I would say go to high school or college ministry. Sometimes they recognize it more. But that's not why we should do middle school ministry.

Middle school ministry. When I think of training people. And making disciples. I usually think in three sections, there's introduction, there's competency and there's expert

level like let's use evangelism for it. I don't expect middle-skill students to be competent at sharing their faith, but I do want to introduce them to it.

So we teach them how to do their testimony. We teach them John three 16 and different methods for sharing the gospel. We tell them to go share it with their friends and we've had lots of success. But rarely have I heard a student come back and say, Bill, I did it. I did it. Tell me the story. And after they tell me the story, I don't crunch somewhere.

And I'm like, no, God wasn't lonely. So he created us, but that's what they told their friend when no matter how much we trained them, no, but you gotta be introduced. So that in high school, when they're learning, they just get much more competent, you know? And then sometime by the end of that, you can get them to start teaching.

Because they might not have a level of expertise. So everything's introduction in middle school.

**Josh Yates:** so then do you have, you know, yo, you kind of have these DDPs, Hey, this is what I need to have description of a disciplined middle school student, you know how does that look like in terms of it then intentionality in terms of what you do and introducing them.

let us in to your philosophy of ministry a little bit, if you could

**Bill Winton:** And the w I love Sonlife, it's my favorite of everything out there. Sonlife is my best. It's my favorites, my go-to. I want all my leaders involved in it. And back in the, in the nineties, when I was first introduced, we were learned win build equip, multiply. That was that's the important part. We've actually renamed those things in our church to coffin crib table stove.

So the coffin is for those that are dead in there. And then once they get saved, they moved to the crib where you need to do everything for them. In my mind middle school students are between in the coffin or in the crib. Once students start coming out of the crib, they need to go to a table like a dining room table, where you fellowship, you serve a little passing the salt and you enjoy each other.

And then you move from the table to the stove, which, who works at the stove when people do in ministry. And so that would be, that would represent the multiply. So

coffin, crib tables, stove, and. The wins are when somebody moves from one to the other. So when somebody gets saved, boy, they're now in the crib, but man, let's, let's baptize them.

Let's celebrate, let's scream and yell. This is awesome. When somebody moves from the crib to the table and there's real fellowship, and you're not just holding their hand all the time, but you're they're learning to be a Christian without you a little, that's a big win. And though teaching them to ministry.

That's always fun too.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah, I love that. Do you have any stories around that that would help maybe kind of walk through that process? Maybe you've seen a student come through, but maybe you were at part of that crib, but you've seen you pass the baton to somebody else and you've seen them then move forward in terms of the high school ministry or college ministry, or just how you've seen that process.

Maybe just kind of have the impact in your ministry.

**Bill Winton:** Well, let me tell you our process. Our, our church has some uniquenesses to it. I love our church here. Great pastor. He's a mentor to me and he was a big Sonlife youth pastor back in the nineties. So our church has that DNA, but for we, we break stereotypes. We're not a trendy church. We break rules all the time.

We, we to follow the Bible. What some big churches doing down the street really doesn't have much bearing on how we do it. The big thing it seems to me in the last five or 10 years is a one-stop shop youth ministry. Hey, come once a week and we'll fully disciple you, you know, and we'll do everything and we just break that rule and we actually have 4 meetings.

A week for our middle school students on. And so let's walk through the journey of a disciple, the ones that are in the coffin that we need to win, lost kids. We have a program on mid on Wednesday nights where we tell our Christian kids come, but bring your floss friends. Cause we're going to be sharing the gospel on a regular basis.

And then when we're not sharing the gospel, we're doing Bible studies that will help them. And then we throw a lot of balls at each other on these nights, because middle



school students, as long as I've been doing it, they love to throw balls at each other. So a lot of fun with the gospel share that's on Wednesday nights on Sunday mornings is for the people that are in the crib.

Hey, I'm saved now, what do I need? Well, what you, biggest thing you need is Bible. And so we have our Bible training on Sunday mornings for the crib kids. This is building a. And I try to get the best Bible teachers I can for middle school students to teach them once they're in that Sunday morning, they've moved from Wednesday nights and joining Sunday mornings, they start here in advertising for our Sunday evening programs, which is small groups and that's for the table.

That's for we say, do not sign up for a small group unless you're. To grab your leader by the shirt and say, help me grow. You're my consultant. I'm hiring you to help me grow. And so that's where that's our, that's our three main programs, but a program for the lost kids, a program for the crib kids, a program for the growing kid.

And then we have lots of ministry, like a ministry team. We'll have those. Big summer, we go out and do ministry all over Jacksonville. We have mission trips sometimes, and that's the teach them to be ministering.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah. Yeah. So what's a Mo what's a missions trip look like for a middle school.

**Bill Winton:** Man, when I first was at this church, I begged and pleaded, please let me take kids out of the country. And the clear answer was no. And I was like, well, let's talk about it again. No, well let's wait a month and talk about it again. No, and one day. I said, I got an idea. What if I took middle-school students out of the country, but everyone brought a parent with them and instantly they go, we love that idea feel free.

So we started taking our middle school students to Peru and and they bring a parent with us. We had no idea what we're getting into. It was a huge home run because if you've ever been on mission trips, junior high, senior high college students come home. And their parents say, Hey, tell me about it.

Well, we, we did this and we shared the gospel and this person got saved and there's really a very short window of excitement. And by the time they get home, get to their

bedroom, it's over. And the next morning, tell me more about your trip. I'm going to watch TV today. And, but when we take their parents, their parents are just as excited.

They take pictures, they make some book of pictures for the coffee table. It's still there 15 years later. Remember when we went to Peru and, and and the long lasting effects are so much better when they have a parent there, because it's a shared expense.

**Josh Yates:** that's a powerful nugget right there. So I love that. I'm in fact, actually with my 14 year old son we're trying to figure out a shared experience, this coming summer on a missions trip. So if you have any slots and Parul join him. But, but but outside of the context of those programs, what does disciple-making look like just in everyday.

Opportunities. What are some ways that maybe you're, you're taking, you know, students and walking beside them encouraging them outside of those, those regular scheduled programs?

**Bill Winton:** man. When I think discipleship, I think of those four categories, the lost the ones that need the are saved, but they need to. The ones that are learning, but they need to grow and the ones that are growing, but they need to learn to do ministry. So it's hard for me to do a broad answer, you know, but when I think of let's just do what the loss for a minute.

When I think of loss, we have two strategies are one strategy is we'll train you to share the gospel with your friends on the bus or in the cafeteria table. It's again, it's introduction, but here's how you do your testimony. Here's how you share the gospel so they can respond. Somewhat effective with middle school students introduction though.

And then the other strategy is, Hey, why don't you trust the professionals us? And so you bring, we think every middle school student can be highly competent and inviting their friends to come to Wednesday night. There's no lacking in my confidence that they can invite their friends as long as we make the program that they love it.

You know, we tell them, Hey, if you'll go out on. And bring your friends. We won't cut the limb off behind you. Like, they'll go home excited. So we throw balls at each other.

We have great fun teachings. We do prizes, we do skits. So that's, and, and you never know where they're coming from. I shared the gospel with the middle school student.

He had no knowledge of the Bible or anything it's sometime last year. And I remember saying. Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want to have a relationship with Jesus? Yes. How do you think you do that? He goes, I don't know. I said, oh really? How do you think you do that? And here's what came out as well.

I really don't know. Don't you have to like get naked and jumping up. I'm like what? And he kept saying it, finally, I realized you're talking about baptism. And I said, no, that's not how you get to heaven. That's something you do after you get saved. But no, we don't get naked when we get baptized. When he said, I think I saw that on the Simpsons one time.

So that was his best effort to how you get to heaven.

**Josh Yates:** I mean, this is the real stuff. This is awesome.

**Bill Winton:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Josh Yates:** that's why I love it because it's unfiltered the tell you as it is, and you can't get around that.

**Bill Winton:** Yep. I got stories for Bible training. I got

**Josh Yates:** Sure. Yeah.

**Bill Winton:** We actually came to the conclusion that our, we teach the Bible for 40, 45 minutes on Sunday mornings. You add that up. That's less than 50 hours a year. And then I thought that just doesn't make sense because we think they need 45 minutes of science, five times a week.

They need 45 minutes of math, five times a week. And then we think 45 minutes once a week for Bible. Oh, that's good enough. That's what the average Christian thinks . So we decided this is a matter of minutes. So I told you we break rules. Most people saying when you teach middle school students, you should stop at 13 minutes.

And I'm like, well, that's true. If you're in a gymnasium full of. You know, but that might be too long, but if you have kids that want to study the Bible, that rule doesn't apply.

So we actually do Bible intensives and so four or five, six times a year, we tell our students say, if you really want to study the Bible, come to this Bible intensive.

And for three days, we'll, we'll. 5 45 minute lessons a day. So we might go through the whole book of Genesis in three days are exited as our sermon on the Mount lots of books and we do that every year and sometimes 40 show up, sometimes 80 show up, but they sit there and when we advertise it, we do truth in advertising.

Hey, if that doesn't sound good to you studying the Bible five times. Don't come, you'll be miserable and then you'll make us miserable. But if it sounds good or you're not sure if it does check it out and come. And we've been doing that many years and students come, they take notes and they love it again.

We never ever get a bad boring teacher. That'll sink the ship. We only get good speakers that are Bible teachers, not Rob, Rob retreat speakers.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah. Yeah. It does a difference. Yeah. Yeah. And then what about some of these other pieces of this, the table and the stove?

**Bill Winton:** Yeah. Table is your small groups where you're serving, you're growing them. You're you're like their personal consultant and growing it's sort of what Jesus was with the disciples. You know, he, he told those 12 guys, Hey, let's go camping, fishing, and hiking for three years. And you'll changing thing.

You'll change the world. And so that's the method for making disciples. So we try to spend as much time with them. It again, it's middle-school they don't always get it. My son, my number two son, I have three sons and a daughter, but I gave him, well, I gave him my, my, one of my best leaders. Matt. Who's been doing middle-school ministry for, with me over 10 years, and he's done it over 20, 25 years as a volunteer.

And Matt poured his life into him for three years, every Sunday, small group. And then my. Graduated from middle school ministry went to high school ministry and three months into the high school ministry. He comes home from their first retreat and he goes, dad, guess what we did? We opened the Bible as a small group of guys.

We sat around in chairs, rocking chairs, and we just talked about it for hours. On end. You want to try that in the middle school? I'm like, what do you think we did every Sunday night? And you know, what I learned from that is middle-school students,

everybody blossoms at a different rate and they do physically and they hit puberty at different times will.

Same thing spiritually. I think girls tend to blossom spiritually earlier in the middle school ministry than the guys do. And my son just blocked. When he finally got to ninth grade, but I don't remember him going, dad, you want to try this in middle school. This would solve your problem. Like every Sunday night you had the cream of the crop guy and it's like, he doesn't remember, but that's.

I mean, that's, I think Jesus felt that way at times with his 12.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. So as you are spending time with your students what have you found to be maybe some best ways discipling them particularly kind of using some, a business plan with landscaping. Tell me a little bit more about how you've been using that in terms of discipling students.

**Bill Winton:** oh, well at my church, I'm the middle school pastor. I'm also one of our biblical counseling. And I'm also one of the trainers for biblical counseling. And then a year ago they added on to be the mission pastor. So I'm the mission pastor for our church. And it's all fun. And I just get a pour out for Jesus all day, every day.

But I was I'm off on Fridays and Saturdays I'm like, how could I maximize this for the Lord? How can I make disciples? So 10 years ago, my oldest boys were around 12 or 13 years old and I said, I want to disciple. And I figured out when I'm playing video games, I'm at my worst as a parent. Cause I get frustrated, you know, I want to throw the controller.

My kids are now beating me at games that was new to me. They're actually impatient with me on the video games. So I used to do lawn maintenance many years ago. So I said, Hey, what if we got some lawn mowers? And we've got some yards and we started mowing yards together. And Hey, it grew And so it's Oregon, we have a full organization now went in lawn care.

Sometimes we have five or six employees. We just mow on Fridays and Saturdays, but the intent is Hey, and it just started my family. But at blossom, beyond that, if you want to work for Winton Lawn Care, you want to be this, you got to admit, you want to be disciplined. And so we go mow about 30 yards every Friday and Saturday.

But the deal is. When we stopped for lunch and we got this place, great place called rib shack. And so we stopped for rib shack. We sit outside on the picnic tables. I tell them when we're at lunch, I'll keep you on the clock. So the clock doesn't stop. They love that. And then I tell them, I'll buy you lunch.

And so they get whatever they want on the menu. The deal for them is they have to bring a question, you know, what do you think about when you put your head on the pillow? So, Hey, I'm making all this. How should I spend it? What would honor Jesus or I've had some some of my youth leaders actually work for me now.

And so I'm getting married. And so it's almost like we're doing premarital counseling and now they're married. So it's marriage counseling, but they bring the questions. And so I don't have to do any preparation. I just sit there with them eating ribs or sausage or whatever, and then answering their questions.

And that's just sort of our practice. that's one of the effective tools to me. That's as close as Jesus saying, Hey, come live with me. Let's go camping, fishing, hiking for three years. That's how it can give them. What's wonderful is we have this big conversation and maybe. People don't understand or they have questions, then we get out and we go back and we mow the next lawn.

Then as soon as we get in the van, they go, Hey, what about this? And they have a follow-up question, which makes it a day long conversation, not just a Sunday night for an hour, hour and a half conversation. And so pretty rich times the Lord has been, has done a lot through that.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah, I love the fact that you using ribs and something physical to go work together. So work getting paid and eating ribs. I mean,

**Bill Winton:** . Emerson. He was in my sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade, real life group. And now he works for me and he just got married. He still works for me, ask me questions every week, but he says, Bill, that's so cool to be in a discipleship group where I get paid to be discipled. That's the best thing ever.

You should have done this in middle school. Yeah, he he's actually headed to the mission field. And so we're going to send them away this fall to a one-year missionary training skill, then it be picking his mission organization and he and his wife are going

to be heading to hopefully one of the unreached people, groups to translate the scripture, to build a church, evangelize people, tell them the story of the Bible.

And, and so that's just the way, cause I remember him in sixth grade boys, I had to call them out. These guys were, they were I'd move out of the room and they would run and they jump on Emerson. He would stand up and flip them over. So they land on the couch and they broke our junior high couch, you know, but that was sixth grade Emerson.

And now I'm seeing heading to the mission field Emerson. So good. I also remember the time with Emerson where I said, I'm going to spend money on these guys when they're, I think they're in seventh grade. So I had like five guys in my group. I went across and bought wings for everybody. We put them out in the middle of the table, we're ready to dig in.

And somebody said, Hey, we need napkins and plates and can we get some water? And I said, I'll run in the kitchen. I'll get it. And by the time I got the napkins, the plates and a pitcher and cups of ice for the drinks and got back, there was two wings left. I could have killed them that day 80 wings, and they just lift them up like that.

I don't remember that Emerson, but comparing them to now, you know, how worthwhile, where those 78 wings that I bought.

**Josh Yates:** Yeah. Yeah. Wings and ribs. Being spending time together, Bill, I love, I love your just honest, real raw entering the relationships. So now in the years of ministry you've had, if you look back to yourself, what advice would you give? You know you know, your 25 year old self.

**Bill Winton:** I would, I would 12 tell 25 year old boy. To learn how to replenish himself. Remember I told you about my, that girl that sort of put me on a hiatus for awhile because I was empty. Back then my S my thought for replenishing myself was there's this great youth pastor conference that came about every April.

And that's when I'll replenish myself and what a stupid strategy. I mean, it's just young and. I really need to replenish myself every day. And so our pastor encourages us, do not live a life that you need a conference, you know, if you never go to a conference, you'll be okay. If you learn to replenish yourself and so replay learn to replenish

yourself, bill, I'd say that I would I heard Sonlife when build, equip, multiply multiple times and it ended up a courage issue for.

Like I knew it. If you'd give me a test, I could answer it, but I could not pull the trigger and say, we're going to do a program for the loss. We're going to do a program to build believers. We're going to build a program for equip. I just thought every time I meet, we need to do everything. And I knew the answer, but I, to my shame, I probably went four or five more years where I said, all right, I'm just going to implement what I think Jesus did.

And so. There's a courage issue. I believe the Bible is the answer. That's what our students need. That's our answer for how to make disciples it's right from the gospels. And so I would I would tell 25 year old bill get into the word more and wrestle the Lord for answers about all that's happening in my life and in my ministry.

And let him give the answer.

**Josh Yates:** Well, that's really good. And just kind of wrapping up here, Bill. Just, I'd love to ask this question. Just what has God what's, God's saying to you now in this moment what's something that's more fresh. You're processing learning doesn't necessarily to be directly related to the middle schools ministry, but what's, what's God saying.

**Bill Winton:** culture of church has some things wrong. The church in general, where, what you get in trouble for in youth ministry, shouldn't be what you get in trouble for like things aren't safe. You get in trouble for that. I mean, there's validity there. Kids aren't having fun. My kids are quitting. You get in trouble for that.

But I think most youth pastors, if they don't do evangelism, they're not going to get their hand smacked. If they spend too much money out of their budget, they're going to get their hand smacked. But if they spend their money poorly, they're not going to get their hand smacked. You know, it's there's some key if you're not making disciples.

I really think in our culture, you're not going to get in trouble as a youth pastor, especially if you have the number. But I think someday we stand before the Lord and he's not going to be asking about, did everybody have their seatbelt on? He's going to say, Hey, how many gospel shares did you do? How many times did you get the



Bible open and say, pour out your heart to the students saying this scripture is all we need for life and godliness.

And there's some questions about, in my mind, we got a. We ought to listen to our leaders. That's for sure. Our pastors and our elders, we should say, what do you think is ideal and work towards their plan, not ours, but then also, Jesus, what's your plan? What are you pleased with them? What are you not pleased with?

Or what do you not care about and follow his priority?

**Josh Yates:** Wow. Bill, that is a, an incredible truth . I appreciate you sharing your heart, sharing your stories, your longevity in ministry, and looking forward to continue connecting with you in the near future. But bill, thank you for, for your time today's podcast.

**Bill Winton:** Cool. I had a blast doing it with you.

## Closing

**Wayne:** Well, it is still amazing to my brain that with technology, we can have conversations with people who are across the country, three hours ahead of us in sunny, Florida, while we are in the overcast and cold Pacific Northwest. Josh, I really enjoyed that conversation with you and Bill. One thing he said he was talking about the mission strips and kept asking the church and kept asking the church and then his.

His idea to have a missions trip where every student had to bring a parent. I just thought that was so, so great. Instead of just giving up or being upset that he couldn't do the mission trip. He thought of a way that the church loved it and that it worked and it found probably an even greater impact on those families.

Able to invest in students and their parents. You know, parents were able to experience with their students serving together, and it probably gave the students a chance to see their parents doing something that they probably weren't used to. You know, a lot of middle schoolers there, their parents go to work or they take you to church and they might have a great relationship, but to be able to go for an extended time and serve together is such a cool thing.

**Josh Yates:** yeah, yeah. There so many great things I can relate with just working with middle school students, myself, and just seeing the you know, the lucky charms moment you know, like and the reality of that.

**Wayne:** is he a leprechaun or is he just a little Irish guy?

**Josh Yates:** I don't know. I don't know. I think I always took it as, as he's a leprechaun, but I don't know. Yeah.

**Wayne:** cause thereafter his lucky charms.

**Josh Yates:** That's right. Yeah. So that would, that would, that would seem to make sense to me, but then again, the mind of a middle school student, and we says that, Hey, you know, this is, this is really a thankless job, but to know the, the, the critical importance of, and investing into lives of students, And just, it can be tiring, it can be discouraging, but then he gives just him working through the framework of what he's doing in his youth ministry was really inspiring.

And his last statement towards the end, he was saying that really, it's a courage issue to implement what Jesus said and how he, he kind of paused for a number of years, was trying to figure out how to do it. And finally just had the courage to step out and actually, start making disciples and doing that.

So for me, I was, I was really encouraged breath of fresh air.

**Wayne:** Yeah, it was so great. If you have any questions or want to reach out, you can send us an email at podcast at Sonlife dot com. Thank you so much for spending some time with us during this episode. And here is our disciple making moment.

## Disciple Making Moment

**Val O'Brien:** Hi everyone, this is Val O'Brien area coordinator in Cleveland, Ohio. And this is my disciple-making moment. You know, before I came on staff with Sonlife, I was working for a large church with a large student ministry, and I loved it. If you've ever been a part of a ministry like that it is, it is a wild and fun time.

It's really, really wonderful. Loved it loved the work that I got to do there, but it's crazy. It's crazy. And when I left there to join Sonlife I actually joined a small church. That's

close to my house. And I got my dream job there, which is being a youth ministry volunteer, which is, you know, what I've been after for years now is to be a volunteer.

It's like at my dream job as a youth ministry volunteer, but this church is so vastly different. The nights that we have, you know, youth ministry, it's usually somewhere between eight and 12 students and it is spontaneous and family, like, and it is also. Wonderful. And it's fun. And not too long ago, I was driving back from one of those youth ministry nights.

And this is just kind of my routine. I was thinking through the students that I had talked to that night. I was thinking about our conversations. I was kind of praying for them, praying through the, what we had talked about. And there were three students. That I had had great conversations with and talked about live and talked about Jesus.

And in the middle of this, you know, hour and a half family, like small group youth ministry, there are three kids that I had connected with. And in that moment I was, I was struck, you know, as I was praying. And as I was thinking about how different this youth ministry is than the one that I came from I was struck by the fact that if I were coming home from the large.

Crazy youth ministry that I had worked at before and on my drive home, I was praying through three students that I had talked with connected with, had conversations with about life and about Jesus. That would have been a really good night. And that was about my, my capacity. And I was struck by this fact that, you know, I have the ability to probably connect well with three students, make them feel seen, make them feel known, have a good conversation a night.

And it doesn't matter if there's another 80 kids there, or if there's another six kids there. Three students is a, is a good night. And that just further emphasized in my mind. What the model that Jesus has given us, he's not given us a superstar model. He's given us a model of multiplication. And as ministry leaders, we need to have a very healthy, deeply understood reality check of what our limitations are.

As leaders, we can't connect with every single student. We can't have deep, deep, meaningful a disciple-making relationship every kid that comes through our doors. But are we doing that with a few? And are we multiplying people to be able to do that with others? And that's our call, it's our call to be disciple makers and then as ministry

leaders to equip saints for the work of disciple-making also for the work of the ministry.

You know, so whether it is, you know, maybe you have more capacity than I do. I've realized that mine is about three for an hour and a half kind of crazy program. It's about three students. Maybe yours is more than that, but who are you personally intentionally investing in? And how are you multiplying other people to invest in?

Carry on disciple-making Jesus. Didn't give us a superstar mentality. He gave us a model. Of multiplication. And when we are realistic with ourselves about our limitations and we really embrace this model, Jesus has given us amazing and beautiful things happen because that's the way he's designed it to be.

So find your three, find your people pour into them like Jesus. And that is how we will start a movement of multiplication.