

Lunch Table Outreach

(By Pastor Josh)

A significant part of my ministry as Grace Community's Youth Pastor is spending time with our students during their school lunch breaks. Having the chance to enter a high school cafeteria as an adult has given me a unique perspective into the atmosphere and culture of teens in Fayette County and an understanding of God's calling to every Christian in today's world.

You may not remember the time you were in school, but things have only slightly changed since then. There is still gossip to be heard, cliques to describe, people scrambling to finish homework due in 15 minutes, and there is, and probably always will be, the loner table. The biggest difference is probably the technology. Technology has amplified distractions and caused issues to drag on for weeks, which in the past would have been squelched by dinner time.

This is a ministry field wrought with desperation and hopelessness. What better weapon to bring into a school than Truth. This goes for your workplace as well. And what better time to be the Light that people need to see, than around a meal, where fellowship is already taking place.

The majority of adults have the same opportunity as youth do in the lunchroom, it just might look a little different. Your job has a culture all of its own, but there are some characteristics that are shared between all "breakrooms". There is drama, there are cliques, there is structure, and there is a language that is common to all in your work place, but possibly may not translate between other companies.

This is where we start. It is all well and good that I enter a lunchroom, but without a relationship with at least one person it is almost impossible to create conversation. I need to know the language. If I don't know the language it helps to have a person translate for me. This makes you important in God's plan. "He has placed you in an area in which I cannot go". This is what I tell young people and I am telling you now. This makes you possibly the only Light of Christ a person will see before he dies. How brightly does your light shine?

I do not pray openly in the lunchroom. I don't pull my Bible out and start reading it either. Instead I listen, I joke, and I am available. I listen to teens about their day, which shows that I care. We laugh often; this is proof to them that Christianity is not stale. And I make myself and my schedule flexible to take the time they need when they want to dig deeper.

How can you start a lunch table ministry where God has placed you? Simple. Be willing. Be willing to listen to people gripe without joining in, but instead point them to Truth. You don't need to quote Scripture to unbelievers, but encourage them with Godly wisdom. Be willing to laugh and have fun (As long as it's at no one's expense, shared laughter and grief are the quickest ways to create bonds). Be willing to be available. Don't stop at listening or laughing, but reach out to co-workers outside of work.

My goal for attending school lunches is not to befriend as many youth as possible, but rather to see individuals (which prayerfully translates into families) attend churches because they see Christ in me. That is a long jump from the lunch table, but it is possible. Here is a quick snapshot of the path I usually take.

I enter the lunchroom and find youth in my youth group ...

I connect with familiar faces. This allows youth group teens to interact with their clique.

Each visit allows me to expand beyond my previous connections and gives the youth group kids courage to talk more openly.

Constant contact allows me to dig deeper into the lives both the unsaved teen and the saved teens.

Then an invite happens; not to church, but rather to my home (a comfortable non-threatening location) or a youth group activity.

This allows me to pray before the meal,
to discuss problems and Scriptural answers,
to simply have fun in a safe environment,
and allows me to meet the parents and understand the home situation better.

This is when the youth group kids have the chance to invite their peers to youth group and eventually church.

I have always tried to have the teens personally invite other teens to my house because it gives them ownership in the outreach.

When was the last time you connected with co-workers outside of work or had the neighbors over for a meal? We are all called to share the Gospel with people and God has called you to an area in which I cannot go.