

# Church uses Disciple Now to change worldview of youth

March 13, 2014

CEDAR HILL—Student minister Tommy Foster got tired of reading all the statistics about the youth who fall away from their faith after graduating from high school. He decided to invest a weekend to kick-start efforts to do something about it.



Shelby Bland from

Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill enjoys spending time with a new friend at a low-income apartment complex in Arlington. The Cedar Hill youth worked with Mission Arlington during a Disciple Now weekend. (PHOTO/Courtesy of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill)Research says the No. 1 reason teenagers who grew up in church abandon their faith is “a weak worldview,” said Foster, who serves at [Hillcrest Baptist Church](#) in Cedar Hill.

“The lens they look at life through is so weak and so small, when they are bombarded with a secular worldview and a different viewpoint, that faith

crumbles under the pressure," he explained.

To thwart that momentum, Foster invited Sean McDowell, founder of [Worldview Ministries](#) and the son of author/speaker Josh McDowell, as keynote speaker for the church's [Disciple Now](#) weekend.

"We wanted not only someone who really knew what they were talking about and someone who would connect with students, but also someone parents would trust," he said.

### **Need for stronger curriculum**

Foster felt the need for a strong curriculum for small-group study to undergird what the students heard. He decided to use the TrueU apologetics curriculum produced by [Focus on the Family](#).

The weekend also incorporated a 30-hour fast.

"One of the things that happens at Disciple Now is that you just eat, eat, eat—pizza, lasagna, soft drinks, midnight runs for ice cream. We're talking about changing your worldview. It isn't changing anyone's worldview for us to spend hundreds of dollars on salty, sugary, fatty food just to satisfy students," Foster said.

Instead, beginning Saturday morning, students only ate fruit, vegetables, bread and crackers, and drank only water. "They were able to eat them only when we gave it to them and the amount we gave them," he added.

Saturday's lunch was one banana, a celery stick, a slice of bread and water.



Ashley Wassawa from Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill enjoys recreation with a new friend at a low-income apartment complex in Arlington. The Cedar Hill youth worked with Mission Arlington during a Disciple Now weekend. (PHOTO/Courtesy of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill) "Through the weekend, they were hungry. They had headaches because of caffeine withdrawal and sugar withdrawal. They kept saying, 'You guys are starving us,' but in reality, their body was cleansing," Foster said.

The exercise reminded students fasting is a spiritual discipline and something they already should have been incorporating into their lives.

"That was eye-opening. Their worldview lens began to broaden that fasting is just as much a part of the Christian life as prayer, meditation and reading God's word. Probably 75 percent of our kids had never been exposed to the idea of fasting," he said.

Students also helped the [Mission Arlington](#) ministry provide recreation and Bible stories in lower-income apartment complexes.

“It was an expansion of their worldviews to realize, ‘Here’s a mission field; the people we should be reaching are living right here next to us,’” Foster said.

### **Stretch students’ worldviews**

He also wanted recreation to stretch students’ worldviews. He used games developed by World Vision to teach about the lives of people in Third-World nations. Students divided into groups named for actual African tribes.

“They competed in games that taught about unclean water, AIDS victims, lack of medical care, hunger, poverty. Again, we’re expanding their worldview. We’re getting them to see beyond themselves. We got them to see that not only is this a game, but this is a game about real-life situations people face every day.

“So, when they are running back and forth carrying water, they are not just carrying water and playing a game; they are learning that this is what people do every day. There is no indoor plumbing. There is no clean water. These people walk miles every day just to get to water to haul it back to boil it, just so they can have something to drink and fix their food every single day,” Foster said.

### **Standing up for hunger**

They also attempted to break a world record for people standing up for hunger. Participants sat in a circle cross-legged with their backs toward the middle, joined their arms and tried to stand up simultaneously.

“It was a lot more difficult than we thought,” he said, adding he is not sure their attempt would be certified by the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

“The point wasn’t necessarily to break a world record. The point was to widen their worldview. If we didn’t break a world record, but they walked

away thinking, 'Wow, world hunger is real issue; we need to stand together for this,' it broadened their worldview," Foster explained.

McDowell set the stage for the weekend with his Friday night opening. He told students he would pretend to be an atheist, and they were to convert him.

"Everything they came at him with, he would refute. By the end of it, our students were, 'Wow, I really don't know what I believe,'" Foster said.

That surprised many students who had considered themselves strong in their faith.

### **Knowing what and why they believe**

It also surprised many of their parents who acknowledged their children do not know why they believe what they believe.

"I told parents: 'You saw what happened when they faced Sean for one night. What if he was their philosophy professor, and they had to face him every week for an entire semester?'" Foster said.

The church subsidized the cost of each student about \$70, "because we didn't want anyone not to attend because of money," he explained. "We spent 15 percent of our annual budget on this weekend, but this wasn't just about a weekend."

"This was saying to our parents: 'We need to be better, not just this weekend, but the next and the next and the next. For the next four, five or ever how many years you still have them, you've got to get on the ball.'

"Educating our parents and educating our students that this is a real issue was worth the time and money."

"Our goal as a youth ministry is to partner with parents and for them to

disciple their student," Foster explained. "The church is being asked to do something it wasn't designed to do. The church was not designed to disciple your kid. The church was designed to equip and edify believers to do the work of ministry. Our role is to partner with parents for them to do the job God has placed them to do with their teenager."