



AMANDA MEJIAS

THIS IS GIRLS MINISTRY

YOUR RELATIONAL STRATEGY TO REACH TEEN GIRLS



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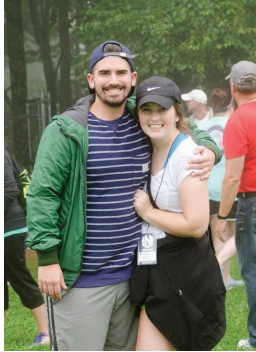
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Amanda Mejias serves as the Lifeway Girls Brand Specialist, which is just a super fun way of saying that she serves the parents and leaders of teen girls. After serving on church staff for many years, she is passionate about building relationships and creating resources that equip the local church. Amanda is wife to her wonderful husband, Brandon, and lives out her dream of being a working mom. If you ever want to find a way to her heart, ask to meet for coffee or send her a TikTok of a golden retriever.

TO KARIS:
YOU'RE SO
MUCH MORE
THAN A STORY
I GET TO
SHARE, BUT I
AM HONORED
TO SHARE
WITH THE
WORLD HOW
MUCH YOU
IMPACTED
MY LIFE AND
THE WAY YOU
CHANGED
GIRLS
MINISTRY
FOREVER.

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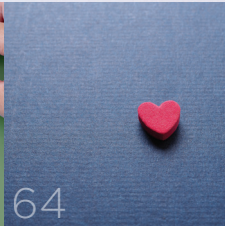
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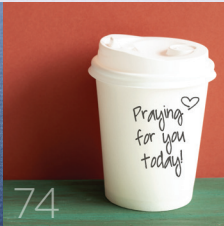
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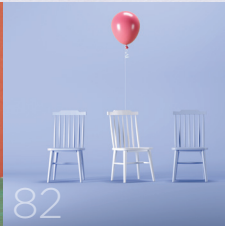
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PART 1

THE PURPOSE IT HAS:

**A PINK
SPRINKLE
DONUT**

Growing up I had a thing against birthday cakes. I don't know why I thought all cakes were gross or inedible, but I could not comprehend why cake was the dessert of choice for so many people on their birthdays. While my taste buds have since matured and I'd take a piece of chocolate cake over just about anything, I have always gravitated toward donuts. Anyone who has known me for any length of time knows this. I *love* donuts.

I love a good, hot donut that is rolled in cinnamon sugar, but one of my favorites is a plain, chocolate-iced from a local shop in Nashville. Growing up, however, I was “donut-sheltered” and only had access to a few places like Krispy Kreme and Dunkin' Donuts. So every year on my birthday, I requested the same donut as my celebration treat.

A pink sprinkle donut from Dunkin' Donuts.

I still crave that donut whenever I think about it, but it never quite hits the spot quite like it did when I was twelve. However, that pink sprinkle donut now represents far more than birthday celebrations or childhood memories. It represents what I have come to know and love as girls ministry.

In August of 2013, I began a full-time position at my church working with a small team to launch a multi-site campus. We didn't have a building or offices on that first day, but I remember walking into a room of cubicles and getting to meet Rebecca for the first time. This preschool director and complete stranger would soon become one of my lifelong best friends and matron of honor in my wedding. I could write a second book about all the ways she has changed my life and how so many of my ministry lessons were taught by and learned alongside Rebecca.

When you launch a church or campus with a small group of people, you instantly become family. You're around each other *all* the time doing *all* the things that no one ever sees but are one hundred percent necessary and required to make things happen. This is where I got to know Rebecca and her family.

Rebecca and her husband, John, have three hilarious, loving, and beautiful kids—Rendon, Aliya, and Karis. We won't talk about the fact that they're all high school graduates because that will just make me feel old. All three of them are so incredibly special to me; however, we're going to focus on Karis because she plays an important role in the pink sprinkle donut story that will completely change how you view girls ministry. At least, that's what happened for me.

Karis was only eight years old when I met her. A spunky fourth grader who could make you laugh or cry depending on her level of sarcasm that day, but she was an absolute blast to be around. Growing up with a parent in full-time ministry, she understood what it meant to serve and love others well—even if it was in her own Karis kind of way. (We try not to remind her of the times when she would bite and kick her small group leaders, but it was definitely her way of saying that she was secretly a big fan of you.)

Karis had (and still does) a way of reading people and determining whether or not she could trust them. Even at a young age, she wanted people to respect and validate her. Karis didn't want to be treated like a little kid or “the preschool director's daughter,” but she also didn't want people digging into her emotional or personal bubble because that would be a little too close for comfort. However, even at the age of eight, I believed that she would become the kind of Jesus follower who would change the world.

After several months spent getting to know Karis, I realized that like most pre-teen and teen girls, it was going to take more than a few conversations before she was ready to trust or confide in me. I can't tell you the first time Karis and I really clicked, but I do know it was a gradual process. It was hours of setting up kids ministry baskets together for her mom, going on Walmart runs, and grabbing Mexican for lunch after church each Sunday with her family.

I always looked for points of connection to help Karis know I loved and cared for her. And one day, I discovered we had a mutual love for something that would continue to help me find ways to intentionally build a relationship with her for years to come.



THIS PICTURE IS FROM
A SUNDAY MORNING IN
JULY 2014—OUR FIRST
OF MANY PINK
SPRINKLE DONUTS.

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A pink sprinkle donut from Dunkin' Donuts.

I don't remember when we discovered our similar affection for this subpar donut, but if you've ever worked at or attended church, you know donuts often find their way into ministry spaces. So every time I went to grab donuts for an event or passed by Dunkin' Donuts on an errand, I would always grab two extra pink sprinkle donuts for Karis and me.

Now let's fast-forward to 2016. After one year of marriage, my husband and I brought home our first baby: a Golden Retriever puppy named Coda. When you and your husband both work in ministry full-time, taking care of a puppy can get tricky, but 10/10 recommend getting a Golden Retriever. Wednesdays were my longest days—often at church until after 8 p.m., then grabbing a late night dinner with staff and students. That meant before student and kids activities began, I had to drive home to check on Coda.

One Wednesday, I extended the invitation to Karis to ride along with me. A puppy probably would've been enough motivation, but I threw in an extra bonus: "We can grab a sprinkle donut from Dunkin' after, if you want?" Karis was in!

For the next three years of the regular Wednesday night marathons, that is exactly what we did (as long as Karis had finished her homework). We didn't always get donuts. Sometimes, it was coffee or frozen yogurt, or we had just enough time to let Coda out and race back before programming began. But those Wednesday drives with Karis are some of my favorite memories.

It was during those drives that we connected and laughed and created our own inside jokes, but we also talked through the deep stuff. I always wanted Karis to know I cared about how she was really doing and who she was hanging out with. I tried really hard (probably sometimes too hard) to make her feel safe venting, asking questions, or just being real. And in return, I was always real with her.

Friends, *this is girls ministry.*

It wasn't some fancy event or manipulated way of getting Karis to spend time with me. It wasn't a fancy Bible study or a lecture about purity. It was just a simple invitation into my regular space and routine where I could give her a place to feel known, loved, and safe. The pink sprinkle donut wasn't the end-all, be-all of how I connected with Karis. It was just the method God used in that season for me to start building a relationship with her.

Whoever you are, God has provided your own pink sprinkle donut strategy for girls ministry. And let me just say, it's probably not an event or a mother-daughter weekend away or another sermon. While God can and will use those things to disciple and lead teen girls to Christ, the girls ministry strategy that I hope you will discover through this book is relational.

Imagine Jesus only ever preaching the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples but never actually spending time with them. Do you think the disciples would ever believe anything He taught without witnessing firsthand the miracles or the love and compassion Jesus had for them?

Teen girls need to hear the truth, but they also need to watch how other Jesus followers live faithfully and love others well. They need safe places to be vulnerable and wrestle with hard questions. They need to know that you don't just want to preach at them or "change them," but that you love them unconditionally and truly want them to know and experience God's love. You can give one-hundred lectures or teach the best sermons of your life, but if you miss the relational aspect of discipleship, you will not reach the teen girls in your life.

And yes, this absolutely looks different for everyone. How a mom or dad has a relationship with their daughter will and should look differently from how a student pastor has a relationship with the teen girls in his ministry. And how a girls minister builds relationships with teen girls will look different from a soccer coach or grandma. But each of us has been equipped by God to play a role in girls ministry with unique stories, gifts, and personalities. This kind of girls ministry doesn't require anything fancy or expensive, and you most likely won't need a pink sprinkle donut for it. But it does require an obedient heart.



THE ONLY PICTURE I
HAVE TO REMEMBER
OUR WEEKLY
CAR RIDES.

My prayer is that this book will open your eyes to see how God has formed you uniquely in this season of life to reach teen girls for the sake of the gospel and His glory. I encourage you to put away any preconceived notions that you might have about teen girls or girls ministry in general as you read. May you read with open hands and willing feet to do whatever it takes to help teen girls feel known, loved, and seen by their God.

But before we move on, I want to clarify an important purpose of this book that is often unpopular and can cause confusion when assumptions are made about girls ministry.

There are numerous events I've attended while working for Lifeway where we set up a Lifeway Girls and Lifeway Students table to show off the resources that we are working on to better serve church leaders. It has happened more often than it should that someone begins questioning why we even offer something for Lifeway Girls.

I can always feel the questions coming as I watch them glance through the resources on the tables, while dropping lots of "hmms" as they not-so-quietly whisper to themselves. Finally, when they make eye contact with me, they'll say in a half-joking tone, "So, I see you have Lifeway Girls, but why is there no Lifeway Teen Guys?"

I mean, it's a fair question.

Why do we have more girls-only resources? Why do I need to write a book about discipling and reaching teen girls? Why is girls ministry needed when there isn't a guys ministry in most churches?

First of all, it has absolutely nothing to do with valuing teen girls over teen guys. Nothing you read in this book will say guys ministry isn't important, and you will not find a single sentence in this book telling you to prioritize ministering to teen girls over teen guys. Parents are called just as much to disciple their teen sons as they are to disciple their daughters.

Teen girls and teen guys are both created equal in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). However, while equal, guys and girls are also designed differently with unique gifts, desires, and needs. And when churches and student ministries are often more male-led, the unique needs of a teen girl can easily be overlooked or undervalued (and just plain scary to some). Therefore, we must honor and steward the emotional, physical, and mental differences God created.

This doesn't mean that the topics we talk about with teen girls, the Scripture that we study, or the goals of discipleship that we create will be any different than what we are called to do for teen guys. But throughout this book, you will learn how to take what you might do for all teens and mold it in such a way that will better relate to your teen girls.

I am praying that as you read each chapter, the Lord will give you eyes to see teen girls the same way He does. I pray He will soften your heart toward meeting girls where they are versus asking them to be something they're not. I pray that you will surrender any false versions of teen girl discipleship and that you will lean into how God might want to use you in the lives of the teen girls around you.

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DEBUNKING THE



YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE CRAFTS OR
PAINTING NAILS . . . OR OWN A SINGLE
PINK THING TO DO GIRLS MINISTRY. YOU
CAN TEACH GIRLS THE WHOLE BIBLE
WITHOUT GIVING CHEESY ILLUSTRATIONS
INVOLVING FLOWERS AND TEA PARTIES.

MYTHS OF GIRLS MINISTRY

I've talked to countless pastors, girls ministers, and parents about how they would define girls ministry. Almost every person would agree and acknowledge that girls ministry involves ministering to and discipling teen girls. What almost every person would disagree with is how that actually looks. While I would agree that girls ministry will look different for every single person in every single context, there are some general myths about girls ministry that are just wrong. I want to break down some of those misconceptions about girls ministry in order to help set a more accurate foundation of what girls ministry is and what it is not.

MYTH #1: GIRLS MINISTRY IS FOR “GIRLY” THINGS.

When I began thinking through the cover of this book, I only knew two things I did *not* want on the front: flowers and anything pink. As a girl who hates shopping and spends about five minutes getting ready every day, I am not the poster child for “girly girl.” Never in a million years did I think someone would hire me to do girls ministry—let alone write a book on it. But here I am in my neutrals and Nike high-tops, please still love me.

While I think culture has gotten a lot of things wrong about what is defined as “girly,” I believe the church has missed it for decades. You can probably name a few girls ministry events that you’ve been to or heard of, as well as resources specifically designed for girls. Let me guess some of the topics you’ve covered:

- Find Beauty Within
- You Are a Princess of God
- Modesty Is Hottest-y
- Purity Rocks!

I’m cracking up even as I write these topics because I know you’ve heard of these things too. You may have even hosted an event with one of these themes. And honestly, that’s okay. I’m not here to say we shouldn’t talk about a girl’s self-image or God’s design for sex. We should and need to talk about those things with teen girls. They’re asking us for conversations like that.

But want to know a little secret? Girls ministry involves the entire scope of Scripture—not just the cultural issues we want to address with teen girls or our made-up interpretation of the Proverbs 31 woman.

This myth of girls ministry is one of the biggest barriers I have seen in building effective discipleship with teen girls. We cannot and will not do girls ministry if we are only focusing on identity or telling girls not to wear two-piece bathing suits.

Girls ministry must include showing girls how to study the Bible and how to live out the gospel. Girls ministry needs to include the teaching of both men and women in Scripture. Girls ministry should help girls learn to be better friends and to discover what repentance actually looks like.

And you know what else? You don’t have to like crafts or painting nails. You don’t even have to know how to make a charcuterie board or own a single pink thing to do girls ministry. You can teach girls the whole Bible without giving cheesy illustrations involving flowers and tea parties.

I hope this offers many of you, like me, a sigh of relief. You don't have to be classified as girly to do girls ministry. And for the rest of you who love pink and sparkles, that's more than okay. God created you to reach girls with your girly self and to create the most beautiful events and have endless chats with girls about their self-worth. Just don't stop there! Girls want and need more. We all have such an important role in girls ministry.

Girls ministry is not just about purity, beauty, or modesty. If you want to teach teen girls what it means to be "girly" as a follower of Jesus, show them what it looks like to take up their crosses and lay down their lives to follow Him.

MYTH #2: GIRLS MINISTRY IS RESERVED FOR GIRLS MINISTERS.

There is a GroupMe text of almost one hundred girls ministers that I was added to when I first started my role as the Girls Brand Specialist at Lifeway. I have never been more obsessed with or intimidated by a group of women in my entire life. These women are incredible followers of Jesus, and they are stellar at ministering to and discipling teen girls in their ministry, in addition to all the other duties that come with working in student ministry (IYKYK).

But do you want to know what issue I see these women face almost every day in their ministry? They have been given the sole responsibility of discipling every single teen girl in the ministry. Most of these women work at larger churches with student ministries ranging from fifty to one thousand students. Can you imagine the weight of being handed a list of 25, 50, 75, or 500 teen girls and saying, "These girls are your responsibility. Do whatever it takes to care for their souls. Oh, and you may or may not have a budget to do so."

Yea, it's no wonder why so many of them feel isolated or burnt out. It's a lot for any one person to shoulder. Let me correct that. It's impossible for any one person. (And all my girls ministers say, amen!)

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I know that one-hundred girls ministers sounds like a lot at first. I mean these women are truly outstanding and pour out their lives to minister to the teen girls God has entrusted them with. But when we scale back and see the number of churches and teen girls that exist inside the United States alone, this number is teeny tiny. If the whole premise of girls ministry rests on these hundred women alone, we have failed as the body of Christ to reach teen girls effectively.

Most likely, you're reading this book because you don't have a girls minister at your church, and you're wondering how in the world you and your church can do a better job ministering to teen girls. Let me encourage you by saying that you don't need a girls minister. You don't even need a budget.

Those things are incredibly life-giving to the teen girls within your circle of influence, but girls ministry is so much more than the people your church employs. We need them, but we also need you.

If you do have a girls minister at your church, know that you are so incredibly blessed to have that kind of leadership in your student ministry. It truly is a rare gift inside the church. Make sure to thank her and show her how much she is valued. This might include making sure she is paid well, has opportunities to grow as a leader, and has the full support of her church family.

And as you continue to read this book and discover how you can intentionally disciple teen girls, please know that the greatest gift you can give to any girls minister is to faithfully live out your role in girls ministry.

MYTH #3: GIRLS MINISTRY IS NOT FOR MEN.

One of the first training events that I led for Lifeway as the Girls Brand Specialist was for a group of student ministers. I was tasked with presenting a quick training and overview of what girls ministry is and how this group played a role in girls ministry. At this point, my own view of girls ministry was still skewed, and I was really trying to figure out how I even ended up in this position. But here I was, standing in front of

a room full of student ministers that were primarily male and giving my best speech on girls ministry.

I taught them why discipling teen girls is unique and important. I shared how they could find room in their budget to offer girls-only events at their churches. I explained the importance of setting up female leaders from the church to disciple, and I even made a joke about how student ministers shouldn't take girls out for coffee so find someone who can. Overall, it felt like a good first attempt at a girls ministry training.

Zac Workun, the training specialist who hosted the event, came by my desk later that day to check in on how I was feeling after. I thought it was okay overall, but I asked him for some feedback since it was my first time. Zac is now one of my good friends and someone I seek for ministry advice often, but at that point, I didn't know him very well and had no idea that he was the kind of person who wouldn't hold back from the truth.

Zac graciously told me, "You gave them lots of good tips and tricks on getting girls ministry going and recruiting leaders. But what about all the things they can do as male student pastors to disciple teen girls?"

I didn't like his answer. (Sorry, Zac!) I was honestly irritated after he walked away. He's a guy, so what does he know about girls ministry? I mean, male student ministers shouldn't go get coffee with a girl or send encouraging texts to girls throughout the week. Men shouldn't be having one-on-one conversations with girls. How could they disciple teen girls without those things?

I wrestled with his feedback for a few weeks. I felt like Rehoboam going to my friends for advice on something I probably already knew how to handle (see 1 Kings 12). But I just couldn't get past what I did know about girls ministry.

So I'd ask friends, "Should I actually listen to Zac?" "He's not right, right?" "That's just unwise advice!" I was looking for someone to affirm how I felt about girls ministry, but, instead, I found myself uncovering layers of girls ministry that I didn't know existed.

One of the conversations that helped shift my perspective was with my friend and boss, John Paul. John Paul was a student pastor for many years and was someone I trusted to speak truth over the situation. Instead of giving me what I wanted to hear, John Paul shared his own stories and struggles of discipling teen girls as a student pastor. He told me that one of his regrets as a student pastor was his lack of intentionality in ministering to teen girls. (I'm going to share more of his story in Chapter Six for the faithful men in ministry reading this book.)

I was really humbled that day by my conversation with John Paul, and I tell Zac all the time how much he impacted my entire outlook on girls ministry. Because after both of these godly men lovingly challenged me to invite men into girls ministry, I began to see the many ways that men played an important role in my own story of discipleship.

It was my male student pastors in high school who developed my love of theology and the study of God's Word. It was the husbands of my small group leaders who were incredible examples of love, service, and fun. It was my best friend's dad who helped me find my first car, taught me how to change my oil, and introduced me to the art of the potato gun. It was my uncle who would give me driving lessons, talk for hours about life and ministry, and then walk me down the aisle one day.

These are just a few examples of how men played a significant role in ministering to me as a teen girl. I can honestly say that I would not be the same person without them. I needed those men in my life (and I still do), and I know that every single teen girl today needs men just like them as examples of godliness, strength, and fun.

In case you haven't heard this before, let me say it for you loud and clear:

Men have a place in girls ministry.

Men can be girls ministers.

We need men in girls ministry.

MYTH #4: GIRLS MINISTRY ISN'T FOR ME.

I've addressed three of the excuses I hear about why people don't think girls ministry has anything to do with them. But if you aren't someone who thinks you have to be more girly, or a girls minister, or a woman to do girls ministry, I want to know, what's your excuse?

What's holding you back from discovering the role God has given you in discipling and ministering to the teen girls that He has entrusted to you? Is it one of these excuses?

- I don't have enough time in my schedule to add anything else.
- I don't know how to teach girls the Bible.
- I don't know how to relate to teen girls.
- I don't know many teen girls.
- I don't want them to know my mistakes from when I was a teen.
- I don't want them to see how I'm struggling.
- I don't even like talking to teen girls.
- I don't have it all together.

To be honest, I have used almost every single one of those excuses in my own life. I have come up with all the reasons I think someone else should be leading that particular small group, or talking to a girl about her struggles, or inviting girls into her home. My life is messy most days. I am far from having it all together, and I have never felt more out of place than when an eighth-grade girl is telling me about her love for *Dungeons and Dragons*.

On my way to church on Sunday to lead my small group, I'll often pray something like, "God, use someone else. You've got the wrong person for this. I can't do it. I don't want to do it."

It's then that I remember Exodus 3, when God reveals Himself to Moses at the burning bush. After God tells Moses that He wants to use him to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, Moses says, "Who am I?" (v. 11), a.k.a. "Wow, God, cool offer. I think that's great, but I am pretty sure you've got the wrong guy!"

GIRLS
MINISTRY
IS NOT
ABOUT YOU.
BUT GIRLS
MINISTRY IS
FOR YOU.

Kind of sounds like the prayer I pray to Him before meeting with my girls. But I love how God doesn't respond to Moses with the list of qualifications that make Moses awesome for the job. He doesn't say, "Well, Moses, you have all this free time, and you've met all My requirements to tell Pharaoh to let My people go. So I just know you will do great!" Instead, God says, "I will certainly be with you" (v. 12), and "I AM WHO AM" (v. 14).

It had nothing to do with Moses. It had everything to do with God.

I want to encourage you to not believe the myth that Moses believed about being the wrong person for God's calling. You might be thinking there is no reason for God to use you to disciple teen girls. You might be thinking that this could not come at a worse time for God to be asking you to do anything else. You might think that you are the least qualified, but here's what you have to know:

Girls ministry is not about you.

But girls ministry is for you. Because the God who has called you to make disciples of every nation is for you, He goes before you, and He will be with you wherever you may go.

Because of who God is, He can use every spare minute and broken piece of your life for the sake of discipling teen girls. He isn't seeking perfection or even people who look like they have it all together. He is just looking for someone to surrender to His call to obey.

ELLIE & CAROLINE

In December 2020, my student pastor asked me to disciple two girls, Ellie and Caroline, so we scheduled a coffee meetup. I loaded up my two-year old, which if you're a parent, you know is a whole thing. We were finally driving that way when my car's transmission unexpectedly went out.



Perfect. This has to be a sign that God definitely has the wrong person to disciple these teen girls.

I sent a text to Ellie and Caroline to fill them in on my situation, and I told them I'd be in touch when or if I could meet again. And that's when I discovered that these girls were exactly who I needed. They immediately responded, "I'm so sorry! We are coming to you right now and bringing you and Blakely Chick-fil-A!"

Those two girls who were strangers when we ate Chick-fil-A on my living room floor in 2020 are now like family. God used them to show me that it wasn't how they needed me, but how I needed them.

Girls ministry isn't just about what God can do through you; it's what God can do in you because of your teen girls.