



Cinco Ranch, Katy, Morton Ranch, Seven Lakes, Taylor, and Tompkins High Schools currently have active Young Life clubs on campus

Photo by Aneetrus Wallace

Changing One Young Life at a Time

Young Life, a non-profit organization, commits to helping Katy teens through friendship and faith

Written by Kennan Buckner

Young Life (YL) is a global evangelical Christian ministry. Here in Katy, Cinco Ranch, Katy, Morton Ranch, Seven Lakes, Taylor, and Tompkins High Schools hold their own Young Life clubs and students from Mayde Creek, Faith West, and more are invited to attend any of the existing clubs. Students are finding fun-filled adventures; from weekly club meetings to week-long camps in Colorado; while learning more about the Christian faith.

What Young Life is All About

YL Katy Area Director, Derek Bonesteel, says their goal is simple: to create a comfortable atmosphere for lifelong friendships to develop, while sharing the gospel. "Our purpose is to give every high school person a chance to make an informed decision for themselves if they would like to follow Jesus or not," says Bonesteel. "We do that by building friendships with no strings attached."

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"It's basically the only reason I want to get out of bed on Mondays."

-Will McDaniel,

Cinco Ranch High School junior

"We believe that believing in Jesus Christ and pursuing a relationship with Him is the most exciting, healing, fulfilling, and adventurous life you could ever live."

-Andrew Packard,

Katy High School YL leader

"Come to Young Life! You will not regret it. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and try something new."

-Claire Kreiling,

Cinco Ranch High School senior

"You will build closer relationships with others."

-Ethan Glass,

Cinco Ranch High School junior

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YL began in Katy in 1996 when a group of adults, who were affected by YL as high schoolers, helped bring the organization to their hometown. YL groups meet weekly during the school year. High school sophomores, juniors, and seniors are welcome to attend at any time without having to sign up, and freshmen are invited in April. A typical club meeting will include singing, fun activities, and the message of Jesus. Campaigners meetings take it a step further and encourage those who are already Christians to grow in their faith through Bible study. Students also have the opportunity to attend Frontier Ranch or Wilderness Ranch camps in the summer.

Bonesteel and the YL team say even teens who seem to have it all together are struggling with real issues such as depression, eating disorders, pressure to succeed, suicidal thoughts, and many other things. That's exactly why YL is here. Bonesteel says, "Students need caring adults to walk through life with them."

Leading a Lifelong Legacy

Lou Gil helped start the Cinco Ranch program in 2001, and is now the director for the Cinco Ranch and Katy High School groups. Gil encourages teens sharing, "YL is a place that you will have some of the most fun you will ever have." As a YL leader for 15 years, he has helped students walk through high school, college, marriage, and their adult lives. "One of my greatest joys is to see a high school student so changed by Jesus that they end up marrying someone who loves Jesus, and they raise their kids to love Him as well," says Gil. Andrew Packard first joined YL as a student at Cinco Ranch High School. "It changed my life," he says. After high school, he became a volunteer and later joined the YL staff. Their goal is to reach teens who would not otherwise be involved in a church setting. "YL isn't an organization that fixes kid's problems," Packard says. "We focus on earning relationships with our high school friends and through those relationships, we point to the cross."

Katy High School senior Trevor Loftin agrees, "For me, YL is about growing my faith and building my personal relationship with God." As part of the Katy High School community, Packard has seen lives changed. "I've seen God work in tons of kids' lives; pulling kids who were suicidal, addicted, abused, or just worn down, out of their mess," he says. Packard points out that instead of policing teens' lives, YL tries to help them understand the Bible, pray, and see for themselves the journey their life could take with Christ. Katy senior Spencer Sterling relates, "YL leaders do a fantastic job at teaching and making the Bible understandable."

Helping the Lost be Found

Katy native Joel Scott is a YL leader at Seven Lakes and Tompkins High Schools, and grew up around YL where his parents were also

leaders. Scott's passion for the ministry is fueled by teens who experience life change. A student told him that he would not be here without his YL group. "I asked what he meant by that, and he told me that before coming to YL, he debated taking his life," says Scott. The student found hope after feeling the love of Jesus through the YL leaders and fellow students.

Tommy Brown, YL attendee at Seven Lakes, credits the ministry of Scott and YL for helping him grow in his relationship with God. "It's a great time every week to be around friends and study the Bible. Joel always does a great job making it a fun and welcoming environment."

Finding a Place to Belong

Katy born and raised, Mark Maxey has been a YL leader for eight years. He originally got involved as a student at Mayde Creek High School. "It has impacted my life in every way and has taught me how to be a better follower of Jesus, as well as how to love others as Jesus does," says Maxey. "Even those who do not decide to follow Jesus benefit from being involved with YL by having a place where they belong regardless of race, creed, nationality, or beliefs."

At YL, they talk about Jesus in a way that is relevant and makes sense. "This gives adolescents the ability to have accurate information to make an informed decision for themselves about who Jesus is. It is also just a ton of fun to be with your friends singing and playing games," Maxey says.

Texas Tech student and Taylor alumna, Amelia Flora, first got involved in YL after her oldest brother attended Frontier Ranch. "It changed his life, and he said his biggest regret was not getting involved sooner," shares Flora. She joined during high school and is now giving back as a volunteer leader. "The Lord has continued to show His provision for my life by the people He places in it through YL," she says. "If it wasn't for YL, I don't know where I'd be." **KM**

Students from Cinco Ranch High School having fun at Frontier Ranch

