**Shannon Creamer**

**JAKE**: Welcome to LeadTime, my name is Tim Ahlman here with Jake Boessling. We are both husbands, fathers, sons, pastors and trying our best to follow Jesus with all our heart, mind and soul. **We believe eternities are changed when a leader grows.**

Today in the studio we are blessed to be storying and learning and growing with Shannon Creamer the Director of the East Valley Young Lives organization that reaches teen moms and dads too.

Many of you listening today are parents. You had your first child when you were in your 20s or even 30s. But can you imagine having a child at the age of 18, or 16, or 13? Think of how hard it is to care for a child when you have plenty of resources, and more life experience even at that raising a small child that depends on you can be daunting for any new parent. Can you even imagine if you were that teen mom or teen dad?

Our guest today not only mentors teen moms on a daily basis, she comes from a place of real life experience of knowing the struggles of being a teen mom and has given her life to bring the hope of Jesus and peace of Christ to teen moms.

Shannon Creamer, welcome to Lead Time!

**SHANNON**: Hi, thank you so much for having me! I am so excited to be here.

**JAKE**: Shannnon, you are a bubbly, and energetic soul, you bring a light, peaceful presence into the room, and you are a bold female leader in God’s church and community who I look up to for fighting for and with teen moms.

How did you come to be so passionate to help care for teen moms?

**SHANNON**: (tell us about your personal story with being a mom and then the move to being passionate for teen moms)

**TIM:** A lot of people have heard of **Young Life** - a global organization that ministers to millions of adolescents as they invite them to follow Christ, care for them unconditionally, and change lives in the process. Young Life is right here in Gilbert attracting many high schoolers to a fun party like atmosphere - clean and pure - music, food, and fun in a local home and then the night progresses to hear a quick testimony about Jesus. It seems to be a very non-threatening approach to invite adolescents to meet Jesus.

Now many of you probably don’t know about one of the arms of ministry that YoungLife has created - and it’s called **YoungLives.**

*Shannon, what is younglives and how did it begin?*

**SHANNON**:Yes, YoungLife has been around since the 1940’s. It was started by a presbyterian minister named Jim Rayburn.He believed that every kid had the right to hear the message of Jesus Christ and decide how to respond.YoungLife has grown into a College ministry, a Jr. high ministry called WyldLife, a special needs ministry called capernaum and a teen mom ministry which is YoungLives. YoungLives has actually been around for over 20 years. We have club once a month. We call this a party with a purpose. We invite teens who otherwise would not set foot in a church. First, the girls are able to drop their babies off in a safe loving environment. We have volunteers who come just to love on and play with these sweet babies. This gives moms a chance to have a little break and to have fun. We play games, do crazy skits and laugh a lot, we give them a chance to act like kids. At the end of the night someone will come up and give the club talk. These talks are progressive, every month they will hear a little more of the Gospel. We have 10 clubs a year. By the end of the year the girls will have heard the Gospel story starting with who God is and ending with Jesus’ death and resurrection. We always serve a meal afterwards. The girls will sit around a table with a leader family style and have a very intentional conversation about what they have just heard. We also dismiss them to go shop in our store. We collect gently used baby items all month long and then place them out for the girls to walk through and take whatever they need. The hope is to take care of the physical needs to then free them up to hear about the one and only person who can meet their spiritual needs. We have several leaders or mentors, these are women who have committed to coming a long side of these girls and walking through life without judgement. Women who have said life can be hard, being a mom can be hard, being a teen can be hard but we are willing to do this with you. You don’t have to do this alone. We provide a community where they are accepted and where they can meet other girls the same age going through a lot of the same things. We offer them a place to belong. We believe they belong wat before they behave. YoungLives is pro life. Like I said earlier, I was raised in a Chrisitian home and very involved in the church. I grew up knowing that life started at conception and that it was precious. I grew up in a church that shared the same belief, but when my parents found out that I was pregnant and that I was in this position to make the choice to parent my son, it was not any less heartbreaking. The amount of shame that I felt walking into church was almost unbearable. The truth is, We want these girls to choose life. But what then? So YoungLives celebrates these girls and their decision to parent these precious gifts from God. We are walking through pregnancies and motherhood with them and celebrating the perfect little lives they have brought into the world.

**TIM:** YoungLives are all meeting all over the country. We host the group on our campus a few times a month. Share with us your **monthly rhythm** of what goes on in this ministry.

**SHANNON**: We are so thankful that you allow us to meet on your campus. We meet 3 times a month, the 2nd Thursday of every month we have club, the 1st and 4th Thursday we have a smaller more intimate meeting. This is our Bible study, we want the girls who are interested in knowing more about Jesus and the Bible to have a place where they can do that. The girls sit together and read the Bible together with their leader. We still provide childcare and a hot meal at these smaller meetings.

**TIM:** It appears like being a teen moms has been glorified over the last decade since the creation of the show “Teen Moms” in 2009 on MTV. *Do you see this as true, the teen mom life as glorified?* Is that what the teen moms you work with are feeling? If it is glorified, how do you help the teen moms see real true life?

**SHANNON**: I think you are right it has been glorified a little bit. I have not watched too much of it but I can definitely remember when it came on and became popular. It’s very hard to say exactly what the girls may have been feeling about it before they became pregnant but I do know that we seem to have a very jaded idea of what love is and how it should be demonstrated. Unfortunately, we do see way too many girls that have been hurt, neglected and even abused by the very people who are supposed to love them. We have a few girls who have been sexually abused by family members and even gotten pregnant by their own fathers. I would say that more often we are faced with the question, “Why does God let bad things happen?” Sometimes when I hear the heart wrenching stories, I sit with a broken heart and wonder how these things happen myself.

**JAKE:** My wife Nicolette and a few others women from our church have absolutely loved supporting this ministry by offering to cook a meal, serve a meal and say hi to the ladies. We love having you and the 30 or so teen moms here. But to take the leap from serving a meal to mentoring the actual teen moms is a huge jump in time and energy but absolutely worth the commitment.

Let’s talk mentorship. I think mentorship is something really lacking in our culture. We isolate ourselves from others. We want to glorify ourselves as gods of the universe who have it all figured out. “Don’t tell me how to live!” “I can do this myself” - How important is mentorship in the lives of the teen moms you minister to? How important is that in their lives?

**SHANNON**: We absolutely adore your wife Nicolette. She and her team bless us so much and we are so lucky to have them be so involved. Yes moving from making a delicious meal or serving one to becoming a leader and a mentor is a huge leap. Our volunteer leaders are the backbone of this ministry. I think you are right, mentorship is so very important to the ministry. YoungLives is a relational ministry. We are all about relationships. Just like Jesus had 12 disciples but was very close to just a few of them, we believe that when you are intentional and really pour into a few girls that that is where the changes happen. Jesus was relational. He spent a lot of time discipling and that is what we are doing. We are making disciples. Anyone can walk up to you and give you parenting or relationship advice and tell you how they think you should be doing something but it is the people who you look up to,the people you trust, the people who have shown you that they love you and want nothing but the best for you who will actually have some influence on your life. Someone who not only tells you that you are known, loved and worth it but shows you, will be the one who you can trust to help you make some of the hard life choices. Actions are also caught not taught. We can tell the girls whatever we want but when they see an older person actually living it out it speaks volumes. The time commitment is a huge piece of mentoring but also loving Jesus and living your life in a way that glorifies HIm.

**TIM:** Mentorship must bring lots of challenges, opportunities and ups and downs as you walk alongside teenagers in general. You are a leader of leaders. You pour into your team so well each month and see that as one of your primary relationships. You are apprenticing them.

*What is your biggest struggle as a leader of other leaders?*

**SHANNON: I have to love my leaders, They have to feel heard and needed. I have to make sure that I am pouring into them so that they are then able to pour into the girls. I think that one of the biggest struggles is just to stay focused on why we do what we do. We have to keep our eye on the prize. It is really easy to want to focus on the funnest games at club or making sure that we have as many girls there as we can, those things are important but we get to tell the greatest love story ever told to girls who have never known what love is. We get to introduce and invite girls into a relationship with Jesus, keeping that as our focus is the most important thing we could ever do.**

**JAKE:** What are **three training** tips you you tell your mentors as they mentor teen moms? (include the main goal of mentorship in your answer)

**SHANNON**:

1)To be grounded in Christ, without a solid foundation everything else will crumble. The whole idea behind mentoring is to bring them closer to Christ.

2)Contact work- contact work is going to where they are and getting to know them. It is much less intimidating to get to know them where they are comfortable. Once they know us and trust us we are able to invite them to come to club and to cabin time.

3)

**JAKE:** Wow, it seems like with this type of impact that mentors can have on teen moms, many would be lining up to serve in this way. A lot of people hear their stories and want to come volunteer. Is that the case that you have an overabundance of mentors? Why or why not?

**SHANNON**: I have an incredible team but we are not bursting at the seams with mentors.I think that it is really the time commitment that is the biggest reason. We get together every Thursday and that doesn’t include contact work or mentoring outside of our normally scheduled events. We also go to camp twice a year and that is something that mentors have to commit to. The other reason I think that we don’t have a huge amount of leaders is just that people can be intimidated by some of the hard stories or the background that some of the girls come from. I meet with anyone who may want to become a mentor and I am as transparent and upfront as possible with what it takes to be a mentor.

**TIM:** Leader, listen to shannon’s heart. There is so much need in our church and community. Shannon’s white hot why is…

What **white hot why** do you have to help serve people who need your help? Get involved. Be a leader. Serve the brokenhearted. m

Shannon, your **husband** is a champ. He is a good Father, good Husband, and good supporter of you in this ministry. *How has your husband and wife relationship struggled and been strengthened from your service with YoungLives?*

**SHANNON**: Josh and I have been married for 18 years and he is the most amazing man I have ever met.When I started leading and mentoring he was not as supportive as he is today. My kids were younger and when I first started leading he felt like it took too much time away from my family.Eventually, he realized that it is God’s calling on my life and him supporting me was just as much a service to the kingdom as me being involved. Now he has seen the work that God has done in me by me being involved in the ministry and has come to appreciate it. He even comes to winter camp and stays in the cabin with any of our dad’s that we bring. Anytime you serve in a ministry it ends up blessing you as much as it does the people you serve. Even my boys have come and been a part of helping out with the ministry.

**TIM:** *What young leader are you currently apprenticing? How is it going? What does it look like?*

**SHANNON: I am so excited to answer this question! Leading up to this school year I really felt that God was asking me to pour into our Jr. leaders. This is a group of girls that have aged out of our program but have made the decision to walk with the Lord in their own lives and who have shown interest in helping girls younger than them. We currently have 4 girls who have been in our jr. leader program. It is so exciting to have girls rising up and taking the steps to be leaders. It is so much fun and I have enjoyed every minute. These girls and I have been meeting twice a month. Last week we were talking about the trinity. You can’t even imagineSitting around a table watching them read the Bible with their eyes lighting up as they ask questions and process the information together. They are hungry for the word of God and so eager to learn more. It has been one of the highlights of my year so far. I cannot wait to come back and report of the growth and how God is using them in this ministry. Janae, Mitzi, Adavaley and Alyssa are there names if you would like to keep them in your prayers.**

**JAKE:** *What book are you currently reading?*

**SHANNON: I am reading Traveling Mercies by Aaron Lamott and I just recently got the Power of a praying Wife by Stormi Omartian off of the shelf to read again. I think that one of the most effective tools as Christians, wives and mothers is prayer and I have been reminded that the place we should start in any situation is on our knees.**

**TIM** *What is your primary word of advice for young leaders?*

**SHANNON: The most important relationship you could ever have is your relationship with Jesus and to show up. Showing up is half the battle. Pray, Pray, Pray the most effective tool is prayer**

**JAKE**: Shannon, what a joy to have you with us today. You excite us as ministry leaders to be partners in ministry to help young teen moms.

Once again, please share if you enjoyed this podcast with your friends via text or on social media.

Enjoy leading today and always.

See you next time on **“Lead Time.”**

**Peace!**