

MtW: Equipped for Life!

Purpose

This five-session resource is designed to help youth, ages 15–18, explore what it means to follow Jesus in every day life. The 60 minute sessions can be used in the course of a week, for example for a week of Vacation Bible School, as a regularly weekly study course, or for a weekend retreat.

General Outline

Each 60 minute session includes the following components and sections:

- **Theme**
- **Scripture list** with focus (◊) and supplemental (◇) texts
- **Educational Goals or Learning Objectives** for the session
- **Session Preparation** (as necessary)
- **Commentary** that summarizes or gives background on the Scripture texts
- **Devotional** preparation for leaders
- **Session outline** with step by step instructions

Session Outline

Each session is divided into the following parts:

- I. **Welcome:** includes group-building activities (*15 minutes*)
- II. **Bible Study** (*20 minutes*)
- III. **Reflection and/or Discussion Time** (*15 minutes*)
- IV. **Closing** (*10 minutes*)

Supplemental Pieces

The following supplemental pieces are provided in the appendix of this outline:

- **A Group Guidelines Covenant** helps lay ground rules for interaction.
- **The Group Dynamics Supplement** provides insight for leaders on some of the issues and interactions that occur in the life of a small group.
- **Additional Activities** provides ice-breakers and alternative activities that can be used in your sessions or for adapting this study for other venues.

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Materials List

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- white board and markers or chalkboard and chalk
- markers
- crayons
- poster board
- masking tape
- note cards
- newsprint
- construction paper
- journals or paper and pens for writing responses: It might be a good way to start the study by giving each participant a journal and a special pen.

Session One

Theme: Dream big with God

Scripture Texts

- ◇ Luke 5:1–11
- ◇ Jeremiah 1:4–8

Educational Goals—participants will:

- ⇒ build community in the group
- ⇒ connect their personal stories with the Bible story
- ⇒ experience acceptance just as they are by leaders and within the group
- ⇒ recognize that we are all called to more in our walk with Jesus

Commentary

Luke 5:1–11

The sun is shining brightly on the shore of Lake Galilee. A crowd has gathered on the beach. At the center of it all is Jesus. As more people arrive, Jesus is pressed closer and closer toward the water. Trying to find the right place from which to preach, Jesus notices some boats a few yards away. Their owners, fishermen, are still cleaning their nets after a rather unsuccessful night at sea. Jesus asks one of the fishermen named Simon for help so that he can preach from the boat. After he is done, Jesus invites Simon to join him on the boat, to go back out into the lake and to risk lowering his nets deeper than ever before.

Go out again? Simon had been out all night and caught nothing. We can imagine he is tired and wondering about Jesus' suggestion, but he is willing to risk trusting Jesus, to leave the safe shoreline, and go back out into the water. The result? So many fish are caught that others are called to help haul in the nets. Simon's world changes. His eyes are opened to a new way of seeing the world.. He doesn't know exactly where he is going but he is ready to follow Jesus and start a new adventure in his life.

Jeremiah 1:4–8

Jeremiah unexpectedly heard a word from God about what he should do with his life. It was a plan that hadn't even entered Jeremiah's mind. God told

Jeremiah that he wanted him to be a prophet, not just to his own people, but also to all the nations of the world. “Me?” Jeremiah asked. “Get serious, God! That’s a lot more than I’m capable of. I’m young and unimportant.” But God knew Jeremiah better than he knew himself and promised, “Don’t get anxious about what to say. I’ll entrust you with my message and I’ll help you share it. Don’t be afraid, I’m with you to do more than you ever imagined.”

Devotional Preparation

Begin with your eyes closed, allowing yourself to relax enough to listen for the whisper of God’s voice. Carefully read Luke 5:1–11 taking special note of any word or phrase that catches your eye. God had much more planned for Simon and Jeremiah than perhaps they felt ready for. We are all more than what is on the surface. Jesus calls us from the shoreline of our lives and asks us to go where we haven’t gone before, to risk going deeper, to risk seeing ourselves as something more than we have ever imagined or others have anticipated from us. Open yourself up to what that “something more” is for you.

Prayer: Ever-present God, I know that you are with me as I begin this journey of leading young people, just as you have been with me every day of my life. I ask your blessing upon me as I seek to be your messenger. Help me to receive each person in my group with an open my heart, open my mind, and open my ears, believing that you have great plans for each of them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Session Outline

I. Welcome (15 minutes)

When all have gathered, sit in a circle. Welcome everyone and introduce yourself. If you’ve decided to, give out journals and pens, to be used throughout the study. Review the “Group Guidelines Covenant” in the Appendix.

- **Fishy Names:** On a piece of poster board, draw a fish  and print your name on the outline of the fish. Share one thing about you that will help people know you, for example “I have a dog named ‘Josie,’ who plays Frisbee with me.” Invite participants to print their names around the fish and share one at a time. If necessary, names can be written inside the fish.
- **Pocket Fishing:** Explain that the things we carry with us can tell us something about ourselves, what is important to us, and what fills our lives. Ask

participants to “fish” in their pockets (or backpacks or handbags) for one thing that they can use to tell a story about themselves (e.g. a food luck charm, photo or piece of gum). Explain that the items can be funny or serious, of sentimental value or no value at all—the point is to share in a casual way about ourselves and sometimes props can help us come up with what to say. After sharing, invite participants to think quietly for a few moments about what they have in common and uniqueness there is among them.

II. Bible Study (20 minutes)

Invite the group members to think about what it feels like to be a part of this group. Explain that some may be excited to be there and others unhappy or anxious about it. Mention that some may have come of their own free will and with great expectations; some may be there because they have to and can't wait for it to be over. Emphasize that whatever their situations, whatever they feel, it is okay. There are no “shoulds” in feelings.

Invite them to take a few minutes to think quietly—no sharing at this point—about their dreams and hopes for life: If they could be anything, go anywhere, do anything, what/where would it be?

Read aloud Jeremiah 1:4–8 and explain: *God knows us completely! God speaks to us just as we are but also calls us to something more—God has created and gifted each of you with wonderful skills, hopes, and dreams.*

Read aloud (or ask a volunteer) Luke 5:1–11. Divide into groups of three. Assign one character from the story to each group and ask them to look closely at the words that describe their assigned character's perspective or experience. Ask them to imagine together what the experience of their character might have been. Give them few minutes and then invite sharing with the group.

Explain: *We have the opportunity to get out into deep water with Jesus, to journey with Jesus away from the shoreline where things seem to be safe or “just okay.” Like Simon, we must be willing to take a step forward, to open ourselves and our hearts to Jesus and to one another, being honest about what we feel and think. In that honesty, we can listen for God's voice.*

III. Reflection and/or Discussion Time (15 minutes)

Print the statements below on a white board or newsprint and ask participants to finish each statement in silently reflection or writing in their journals. Emphasize that they will be invited to share but there will be no pressure and no expectation to share unless they want to. As an alternative, have the participants discuss the questions in small groups.

- I am here in this group because . . .
- In order for me to go below the surface, I need this group to . . .
- If I leave the shore, I will leave behind . . .
- Right now I am feeling . . .

After a few minutes, invite everyone to reconvene and encourage sharing from those who want to share. Remind them that all responses are “good” because they represent what they feel and who they are.

IV. Closing (10 minutes)

Before moving to the closing, give participants the following assignment:

Pay attention between now and the next time we meet to what you hear about Jesus. When he mentioned on social networking sites, TV programs, in news stories, or even by TV and radio preachers, how is he described?

Gather around the fish poster. Remind participants: *We are accepted just as we are. Jesus calls people from ordinary places. Ask: What are you risking to be here? Write their responses on the poster. Ask: In your wildest dreams, what would you want to take away from being a part of this group? Write their responses on the poster.*

Invite everyone to complete the sentences in the following prayer:

Dear God, help us to let go of _____. Help us to receive something more than we ever imagined, such as _____. Close with In Jesus' name. Amen.

Session Two

Theme: Who is Jesus?

Scripture Texts

- ◇ Matthew 16:13–20
- ◇ Luke 4:16–32
- ◇ John 1:43–51
- ◇ Matthew 27:54

Educational Goals—participants will:

- ⇒ reflect on their understandings of Jesus
- ⇒ explore personal faith commitments
- ⇒ develop enhanced relationships in the group

Commentary

Matthew 16:13–20

We find Jesus and his closest followers on a retreat in the town of Caesarea Philippi, which was located on the southeastern slope of Mount Hermon. They have journeyed some twenty–five miles northward (and seventeen hundred feet uphill) from the Lake of Galilee to the source of the Jordan River near the ancient city of Dan. Jesus asks, “What are people saying about me?” In their responses, the disciples link Jesus to many of the characters who were beloved by the Jewish community—John the Baptist (Matt. 14:2), Elijah (Matt. 11:14; many Jews believed that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah), or a prophet of old, many of whom were associated with performing miracles.

Jesus then asks “Who do *you* say that I am?” Peter speaks up, “You are the Messiah!” And in that moment was a turning point for Jesus, Peter, and all the disciples. Peter was making a statement of faith. When they headed down the mountain, they had begun the journey toward Jerusalem—and the cross.

Luke 4:16–32

In this story, Jesus reveals his primary self–understanding as a prophet of the Kingdom. This is a profound claim and those who hear him are understandably

confused. They ask, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” (vs. 22)—how could one we’ve known since he was little be the One we are awaiting?

John 1:43–51

Jesus calls to Phillip: “Follow me.” Phillip says “Yes!” to Jesus, and then runs to find his friend Nathanael who asks, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nazareth was not a big town. There was nothing noteworthy about Nazareth. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament, the writings of the historian Josephus, or any of the rabbinic writings. Nazareth was in Galilee, which comes from a Hebrew word meaning “circuit, boundary, territory.” Jesus is not from Jerusalem, the city of David where many thought the Messiah would issue but from the sticks, the country, the edge of nowhere.

Matthew 27:54

The Roman Centurion’s witness to Jesus’ death allowed him to form his own opinion about him. The way in which Jesus suffered and died led the centurion to come to the conclusion that Jesus must be the “Son of God.” It is important to remember that this was a Roman, an “outsider” and an enemy to the Jewish community. Yet God is at work in his heart! Writing at a time when there is tension in the Christian community arising from the challenges of having Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus, the Gospel writer makes it clear the Way of Jesus is for all people.

Faith in Jesus is personal and requires freedom to claim for ourselves and our lives the truth of what we believe. Such decisions are ultimately between an individual and God alone, therefore we do not manipulate or control them. We can, however, provide the space for decisions to happen and offer support to those who are ready—and to those who are not ready—to make commitments.

The people in these stories were able to come to faith because they were allowed the freedom to explore the faith in ways that had meaning for them. When dealing with another’s faith journey, you are walking on holy ground, so walk tenderly and softly, with reverence for the work that God is doing there.

Devotional Preparation

Read Matthew 16: 13–20.

In Sunday school, we learn that Jesus is the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins and that he loves us. Frequently, children are asked to come to faith based, not on their experiences of God, but on what others have taught them *about* God. It is not until we *experience* God in a personal way that we begin to develop a faith that belongs to us. Faith is no longer a concept that is apart from us, but begins to be woven into the realities of our daily lives and consciousness. We begin to take ownership of our own faith. We find a path that may be different from that of our parents, grandparents, pastors, or teachers. Jesus first asked, “Who do they say I am?” and then “Who do *you* say I am?” Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- When did you first hear about Jesus?
- When did Jesus become “real” to you?
- What are five adjectives the best describe your faith experience?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I am thankful for teachers, pastors, leaders, and friends who have shared their experiences of you. I pray that you will help me communicate your love to my students. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Session Outline

I. Welcome (15 minutes)

When all have gathered, review the Group Guidelines Covenant. Ask the participants to talk about where they heard Jesus spoken of during the week. Ask them to describe what “type” of Jesus was being presented, for example, the Jesus who makes us rich, the Jesus who solves our problems . . .

II. Bible Study (20 minutes)

Invite everyone to quietly read Matthew 16:13–20 and reflect on the following questions (posted on newsprint or white board):

- Why did people have all these different opinions about Jesus?
- What was significant about Peter’s statement?
- What proof did Peter have to make his statement?
- What was Jesus’ response to Peter’s statement?

After a few minutes, divide into groups of three and discuss answers. Have participants remain in the groups for the next activity.

Explain: *Your task is to create a description of Jesus in terms your friends can understand, even if they have never heard anything about Jesus. Imagine you are with a group of youth in the school yard and there are new students who have not heard about Jesus or Christianity. They would not understand the common terms we use to describe the person or role of Jesus, such as “Son of Man” or “Savior.” Use your own experience with God to come up with creative ways to describe who Jesus is. Your descriptions can be something visual, a poem, or a skit. Each group will have 3 minutes for presentation.*

Give them several minutes to work and then invite the groups to make their 3-minute presentations.

III. Reflection and/or Discussion Time (15 minutes)

Explain that Peter’s statement was a statement of faith; because he had been witness to Jesus’ life and ministry, he was ready to proclaim what he believed to be true. Invite participants to write in their journals or discuss their responses to the following questions:

- Who do I say with words that Jesus is to me?
- What things stop me from telling others who Jesus is to me?
- Who do I say with my life that Jesus is to me?

IV. Closing (10 minutes)

Gather in a circle, but do not insist on hand-holding—these are teens who may not be comfortable. Invite those who want to pray by completing the sentence: “Jesus, I say that you are _____ to me.” Remind them that it is okay not to speak aloud if they don’t want to and to repeat what someone else says—they don’t have to say something new. After it appears that all have spoken, close the prayer time with: *God, help us all to know you better day by day and to live what we believe. In Jesus’s name, Amen.*

Session Three

Theme: My desires/God's desires

Scripture Texts

- ◇ Matthew 16:21–26
- ◇ Exodus 4:10–17
- ◇ Jonah 1:1–17
- ◇ Matthew 19:16–22
- ◇ Luke 10:38–42

Educational Goals—participants will:

- ⇒ expand their understandings of discipleship
- ⇒ consider God's will and how it relates to choices in life

Session Preparation

- If you have chosen “Option Two” in the Bible study, write cites, one each on three slips of paper: Exodus 4:10–17, Jonah 1:1–17 and Luke 10:38–42.
- Print the following cites on a piece of newsprint, but do not hang it up until you get to Reflection and/or Discussion time in the session:

Exodus 4:10–17

Jonah 1:1–17

Matthew 16:21–26

Matthew 19:16–22

Luke 10:38–42

Commentary

Matthew 16:21–26

As the disciples follow Jesus through the district of Caesarea Philippi, things are looking up. They feel like they're finally getting to know the man who plucked them from their ordinary lives to follow him. But just when they think they may have Jesus figured out, something happens that forever changes the way they understand the call to discipleship.

The disciples learn that Jesus will be leaving them. Jesus explains that he'll undergo great suffering, that he will be killed and then raised from the dead. Peter won't hear of it, but Jesus responds that like it or not, his father's plan will be carried out. He explains to his disciples that if they are to follow him, they must be willing to give up their lives for his sake. Discipleship is more than about what *we* want. It's about what *God* wants.

Exodus 4:10-17

God has called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt and away from Pharaoh's persecution, but Moses is a reluctant servant who lacks confidence. He confesses his fear that no one will believe he has actually been sent by God. The LORD gives Moses three ways to prove to the people that he's telling the truth, but even then, Moses is unsure. He asks God to send someone else instead. God enlists Moses' brother Aaron to help, but Moses must still play a role in carrying out the divine will. Moses must learn to set aside his own desires and fears in order to answer the call.

Jonah 1:1-17

Jonah is on the run. The LORD has ordered him to go to the city of Nineveh to speak a prophetic word against their wickedness, but Jonah has other plans. He catches a ship heading to Tarshish in an effort to flee from the LORD's command. Jonah is forced to explain to his companions that he is the reason why the ship has encountered a mighty storm. Jonah jumps ship to save his companions and ends up in the belly of a large fish. As much as Jonah has tried to avoid God, God has found a way to capture his attention.

Matthew 19:16-22

While teaching and healing the crowds in Judea, Jesus is approached by a young man who wants to know what it takes to receive eternal life. Jesus tells him to keep the commandments. The young man explains that he has kept the commandments and asks, "What do I still lack?" Jesus replies telling him to sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor, and then follow him. The young man went away grieving, suggesting that he chose not to follow Jesus that day.

Luke 10:38–42

Jesus and his disciples enter a village and Jesus visits the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. While Martha's sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet as a disciple, Martha busies herself around the house. Frustrated, Martha complains to Jesus that Mary won't help her around the house, something that culturally she would be expected to do. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has made the wiser choice. Jesus presents a new role for women—one that is contrary to the culture—as he welcomes them as fully participating disciples.

Devotional Preparation

Read Matthew 19:16–22.

Imagine yourself as a participant in the story. If you witnessed this conversation between Jesus and the rich young man, how would you react? Would you agree with Jesus' demands? Would sympathize with the young man and the difficult decision he faced? What if you were the person to whom Jesus spoke? Would you be able to do what he asks? Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- Think about a time when someone offered you a piece of good advice or constructive criticism that you didn't want to hear. How did it feel?
- The Christian walk is about dedicating your whole life to following Jesus. What parts of your life are you committing to Christ? What parts of your life are you having trouble surrendering?
- What is your understanding of what God wants from you at this point in your life? What are some of your hopes for your group and for yourself as a leader/learner?

Prayer: *Dear God, there are so many things that I want—material things, aspirations for my life, to be comfortable and happy. Help me to cling to you instead of to my desires. As I prepare to lead this group, I open myself up to your Spirit. In your holy name I pray, Amen.*

Session Outline

I. Welcome *(15 minutes)*

When all have gathered, invite the participants to sit in a circle and ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 19:16–22.

Invite participants to imagine that Jesus has just said to them, “Come, follow me” and we need to see how far we could go in following Jesus with only what we with us. Ask everyone look into their bags and pockets and explore the room to identify one thing the group should bring with them. Ask participants to share about what they chose and then ask:

- Was it hard to choose your item?
- How far or how long do you think we could go with just the items we chose?
- Is there anything you would be sad to leave behind if Jesus asked you to leave your possessions behind to follow him?

II. Bible Study *(20 minutes)*

Provide paper and markers. Read aloud Matthew 16:21–26, this time asking participants to focus on the visual aspects of the story, as if they are watching a movie. Invite them to draw image cells (as in a cartoon strip) to illustrate the action of the story, explaining that the drawings can be literal or abstract, simple or complex—there are no rules. When everyone has finished, have participants divide into pairs and share their drawings with each other. Some questions they might consider are:

- Which parts of the story did you choose to illustrate and why?
- What emotions are captured in your drawing?

Divide into three groups, assigning each one text: Exodus 4:10–17, Jonah 1:1–17, or Luke 10:38–42 to reflect on, using the following questions:

- What does the main character (Moses, Jonah, Martha) want?
- In contrast, what does God want from that person?
- What emotions or attitudes interfere with the person accepting God’s direction?

Reconvene and invite volunteers to share from the group discussions.

III. Reflection and/or Discussion Time (15 minutes)

Hang the newsprint with the texts in a visible place, so participants can refer to the passages in their Bibles. Ask participants to discuss or write in their journals about any or all of the stories they studied today, considering the following questions:

- Which character (Moses, Jonah, Peter, the rich man, Martha) do you feel the most like at this point in your life?
- What kinds of things do you want/desire from life right now?
- What do you think God desires for you?
- Where do your desires and God's connect?
- What might stand in the way of you fulfilling your purpose in life and becoming everything you can be?

IV. Closing (10 minutes)

Stand together in a circle and invite the participants to think for a few seconds about what excites them or gives them hope about life and their dreams for the future. Begin the prayer by saying: *Thank you God for [insert something that excites you]*, then invite those who wish to add, out loud or to themselves, the things that they are thankful for. Close the prayer with a word of thanks for the young people in your group, such as *Thank you God for these young people. I am excited by who they are and the lives that lie before them. I feel such hope just seeing their faces and hearing their voices. Help me and all who claim to teach them to show them acceptance and love. Amen.*

Session Four

Theme: Finding holy space all around us

Scripture Texts

- ◇ Luke 10:38–42
- ◇ Philippians 3:12–14
- ◇ Psalm 61:1–8

Educational Goals/Learning Objectives—participants will:

- ⇒ explore God’s witness in creation
- ⇒ identify holy moments and holy spaces in their lives

Session Preparation

For this session, you will need to plan an outdoor (or creation-focused) activity. It can be as simple as a convening outside the church or elaborate as a hike in a nearby park. Keep in mind special needs and/or disabilities as you plan. If the weather is problematic, consider showing a Power Point or video of nature scenes or the wilderness around Israel and Palestine with instrumental music or playing a meditation recording of the rainforest or ocean. You may need to get permission and secure a helper if you are planning a walk off site.

Commentary

Luke 9:28–36

It was late morning, and the sun is warm, yet there was a crisp mountain breeze. Jesus Peter, John, and James were headed uphill climbing into the craggy hill country around their regular territory around Lake Galilee. Just a week ago, Peter had proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, and then Jesus began talking openly about suffering, trial, and even his own death . . . and also the challenges the disciples would face as they continued to follow him. Their path would soon lead to Jerusalem. When they reached the top, Jesus went off to pray as he often did. Suddenly Jesus’ appearance changed and he was joined by Moses and Elijah. Peter was so excited. “Let’s build tabernacles—one for you,

and Elijah, and one for Moses!” And then came a cloud and a voice, God’s own, saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him!”

The connectedness of Jesus and his first followers with creation was part of every day. Today’s young people are part of the first generation to be raised in near isolation from the natural world. With their busy schedules, demanding lifestyles, and techno-centered world, we need to be deliberate in helping them become comfortable with quiet and stillness and to experience connectedness with nature.

Philippians 3:12-14

Endurance. Pressing on toward the goal. The words of Paul to the church in Philippi are words of encouragement. Many athletes know these words by heart, and they provide a metaphor for the journey of faith being more like a cross country run than a sprint.

Psalms 61:1-8

We are moved by the majesty of God’s creation. In Scripture, we find many references to mountains as holy and mysterious places where people felt closer to God and also where risks were present:

- the mountain where Elijah experienced God’s presence
- the mountain where Moses received the commandments
- the mountain where Jesus encounter temptation after his baptism

The Psalmist speaks of a mountain as a place to get away from his struggles and “enemies”; — a place to be safe in God’s presence and to breathe in peace and renewal. *Holy*, in the Old Testament, meant set apart or “other”—a place, person, or object dedicated to a special purpose. God was called “holy” because God is totally other, a reality that we can point to, but not entirely understand. Ordinary spaces and encounters can become holy when if they cause us to pause and open up to the wonder of the world and the presence of God.

Devotional Preparation

Take a few minutes reflect on the questions below.

- What has been a holy moment in your life?

- What has been a holy space in your life?
- Why would you call it “holy?”
- Read Luke 9:28–37. What is Peter trying to do by building tabernacles? When have you felt like Peter and wanted to capture a moment?
- Jesus and those who were with him were called to go back into the world. How can you help prepare the youth in your group to go into their daily lives, taking a bit of the holy with them?

Pray for each person in your group by name, for the journey of faith that you are sharing during this study and specifically for this session.

Session Outline

I. Welcome *(15 minutes)*

Once all have gathered, explain the activity for the day and set down ground rules, especially if you are going off site.

Assign volunteers to be prepared to read: Psalm 61 and Philippians 3:12–14.

Take your walk in silence or spend a few minutes seated outside, looking around and listening to your surroundings. As an alternative, show a video or Power Point of nature scenes or play a recording of nature sounds.

II. Bible Study *(15 minutes note shorter time frame)*

Once you have reached a resting place or stopping point, gather the group into a circle. Read together Luke 9:28–37.

Explain the meaning of “holy” found in the commentary on Luke 9 above. Give the participants a few minutes to think about a holy moment or holy space they have had in their lives. Then have them pair up and share their responses to the following questions with one another:

- What made that moment or place “holy” to you?
- What impact did that moment or place have on you?
- What situations in your life make it hard for you to hold onto the feelings you had in that moment or place?

Reconvene and ask the participants to discuss together what things in their lives keep them from experiencing holiness in the everyday. They may, for example, talk about their busy schedules or the pressures they feel to compete with others.

III. Reflection and/or Discussion Time (15 minutes)

Explain to participants that many of them live lives far removed from one of the most powerful witnesses to God—creation—and with little time for one of the most important aspects of spirituality—stillness and silence.

Invite them to take 3 long, slow breathes and give them 5 minutes to experience quiet. Ask them to work at listening to their inner selves by paying attention to their breathing. When they are done, invite them to write about or discuss the experience of stillness.

IV. Closing (10 minutes, *note longer time frame*)

Explain that the world has become loud with too many words and competing voices all around us. Ask them to name the ways that information comes to them (telephone, e-mail, TV, movies, text messaging). Explain that we experience more input of information in one day than a person in Jesus' day would experience in his or her entire lifetime; we are on information overload and find it difficult to open our minds to God's voice. Explain also that, although we immediately think about words when we think of prayer, prayer can be done in silence and with movement.

Invite the group to develop and participate in a prayer without words. Ask them to identify 4 things we usually say in prayer (for example, "thank you," "help us," "teach us," "Amen") and then select a movement to "say" each one of those without words. Once the movements are selected and known by everyone, invite them to pray the prayer of movements.

Session Five

Theme: On “The Way”

Scripture Texts

- ◇ Acts 3:1–10
- ◇ Matthew 10:5–16 (Luke 9:1–6)
- ◇ Luke 10:1–9
- ◇ Luke 22: 17–19 and John 21: 15–19 (for Communion)

Educational Goals—participants will:

- ⇒ be introduced to the concept of “close reading” of Scripture
- ⇒ connect their personal faith journeys and the sending of the disciples
- ⇒ share in the communion ritual as closure to this study experience
- ⇒ set goals for next steps in their walks with Jesus

Session Preparation

Prepare for Communion ahead of time by marking Luke 22:17–19 and John 21:15–19 in your Bible and gathering juice, a cup, and an uncut loaf of bread. Participants will be serving one another communion. If you are uncomfortable with this practice or the method of intinction, make other arrangements. If your church restricts communion to baptized persons and you have some who have not yet been baptized, prepare an alternative ritual for closure.

Commentary

Acts 3:1–10

The earliest followers of Jesus continued the regular Jewish practices of daily hours of worship and regular prayer. We also see them participating in a radically communal congregation and preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. On the way to the temple for one of the regular hours of prayer, they encounter a man who is disabled, marginalized by society and reduced to begging for survival. Peter and John meet the man eye to eye. Peter reaches out with his *right* hand and lifts the man up, pronouncing him healed in Jesus’ name. The man is treated like an equal. In first century Palestine, the left hand was

considered “unclean,” for example when Jesus tells his followers to “turn the other cheek,” they are forcing the hitter to use their right hand, the hand of equality and honor, making them equal with their oppressor. The belief in that day was that the man was “unclean,” because he had a disability. As such, he would not have been allowed in the temple to worship. This story is not just about physical healing or about one man. It is about changing the man’s status and challenging the oppressive structures of the day by proclaiming the Kingdom of God as a Kingdom of equality.

Peter and John had no money to give. The church they were a part of was impoverished but they had a power far greater than money. The world considers money to be the most powerful tool and Christians are too often inclined to think that too. The reality is that justice and the love of Jesus are more powerful than the powers of this world. Offering the love of Jesus slaps the world in its oppressive face and reveals a dramatically different way of being together, a way in which *all* people are valued and those who are on the margins are raised up and given special consideration.

Matthew 10:5–16 (Luke 9:1–6) and Luke 10:1–9

Matthew 10 and Luke 9 and 10 tell of Jesus sending his students (disciples) out into the world on their own. Jesus advises them to travel light. Willing people are the only equipment God needs to do this important work of sharing the Kingdom. Yet, even Christians are often encumbered with the things of this world in ways that interfere with effectively going out into the world. Churches are preoccupied with survival, have budgets weighed down by buildings, and struggle to keep no longer useful programs afloat. Individual Christians follow the ways of the world rather than The Way (the earliest term for faith in Jesus), valuing property, fashion and worldly success over the values of the Kingdom. Young people are forming their values now and it is crucial that they see a different way modeled in their churches and by their church leaders.

Luke 22: 17–19

Jesus—the “Bread of Life,” the “Living Water,” “the “Way”—has guided the disciples to Jerusalem and is preparing them for a tough road ahead. The path for those who know and love Jesus is not easy. Now, as they share life together around the dinner table, Jesus takes the bread and the cup and offers them to

his friends in a transformative way—a symbolic way to *remember* him and to be nourished for the journey. The word for “communion” is the same as the word for “fellowship” in Greek. Paul also uses the word to speak of the Lord’s Supper. Its fundamental meaning is to participate in and to have in common. The point is clear: we share Jesus in common with one another and as we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we participate in Jesus—a shared experience that makes it possible for us to have fellowship (a radical form of community) with one another.

John 21:15–19

The story comes around full circle. The risen Jesus appears on the shore to call to his followers just as he had first called them. Asking Peter three times if he loves him parallels the three times Peter denied Jesus. Jesus offers restoration to those who love him, regardless of the times we stumble. And even though we make mistakes and are clumsy in our walk with Jesus, we can be assured that our faith will have an impact and when the important stuff comes along, we will have the strength to stand firm. Verse 19 hints at the type of death Peter will experience. The parenthetical remark reflects the Gospel writer’s knowledge of Peter’s martyrdom on his own cross. The walk with Jesus is not fodder for a happy-ending, feel-good novel or a television preacher’s “success gospel.” We are not promised worldly goods or an easy life. We are promised forgiveness and restoration—priceless.

Devotional Preparation

The study is drawing to a close. Spend some time considering what lasting impressions you want to leave with your group.

Read Acts 3:1–10. We are called to amazing opportunities in our ordinary lives. What are some of the opportunities you have had to share the life-and world-changing love of Jesus? How will you continue to be a friend and guide to those who have participated in this study.

Perhaps you feel like you’ve stumbled sometimes during your teaching. Remember that few stumbled as much as Peter. He was restored by Jesus’ love. He stumbled because he was bold, but it was that same boldness that made it

possible for him to walk the Way of Jesus, even to the point of martyrdom. What holds you back?

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for examples like Peter's who remind us that you call us in all our human frailty and foibles to be the presence of your Kingdom. Help me to communicate to the young people the depth of your love, which restores us, even if we deny you. Give us all the boldness to reach out to others, to challenge the values of this world, and to walk The Way of Jesus, no matter where it leads. Amen.*

Session Outline

I. Welcome (15 minutes)

Once all have gathered, begin with some information. Remind them that this is the last session of the study and explain that you have prepared Communion (or another ritual) as a way of closing this particular study. Make sure they understand that they need only participate in the ritual to the extent that they feel comfortable.

II. Bible Study (15 minutes, *note shorter time frame*)

Ask everyone to open their Bibles and read together Acts 3:1–10. Introduce Explain that the power of Bible stories is often found in their details. Ask them to review the story and make note of any details that seem odd or interesting—what does it seem like the writing is wanting to stress?

Point out that the story emphasizes that Peter and John made eye contact with the man. Talk together about the significance of eye contact. Ask, for example, what it means when one person looks down as someone speaks to him or her—what sort of relationship does that indicate? Draw their attention to verse 7 where it says that Peter reached out his *right* hand to the man. Explain as follows:

- *In first century Palestine, the left hand was considered “unclean.” When Jesus tells his followers to “turn the other cheek,” they are forcing the hitter to use the right hand, the hand of equality and honor. By reaching out to the man with his right hand, Peter is calling him an equal.*
- *The belief in that day was that the man was “unclean” because he had a disability. He would not have been allowed in the temple to worship. This story*

is not just about physical healing or about one man. It is about changing the man's status and declaring that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of equality.

- *Peter and John had no money to give. The church they were a part of was very poor and the people only survived by putting all that they had into communal ownership. They had a power far greater than money—the love of Jesus, which makes us all equal, and a belief in a Kingdom of God as a kingdom of justice.*

III. Reflection and/or Discussion Time (10 minutes *note shorter time frame*)

Ask participants to discuss or write in their journals their responses to the following questions:

- In what ways are people marginalized in our culture?
- What could you do to challenge the values of the groups you are a part of that keep some people “in” and others “out?”
- What would make it hard for you to do those things?

IV. Closing (20 minutes, *note longer time frame*)

Have the group form pairs. Assign half to read Matthew 10:5–16 and half Luke 10:1–9 with the following question in mind: What do you think it was like for those first disciples as they are sent out into the world by Jesus? Ask the pairs to imagine that they were a “disciple team” and write down two “road rules” that would keep them on track as they walk the world for Jesus. Invite volunteers to share their rules with the whole group. Write the road rules on newsprint and post it near where you will be holding Communion or your other ritual.

Have the group form a circle. Ask for a volunteer to hold your Bible open to Luke 22 for you. Pour the juice into the cup, raise the cup and read Luke 22:14–18. Set the cup down. Take the bread and break it and read Luke 22:19.

Invite each member of the group to pass the bread around the circle, taking a piece and then passing it to the next person saying: *Jesus said, “This is my body, which is given for you.”*

Explain that those who prefer not to take Communion may simply cross their arms over their chests and the person will then give the bread to the next person. Explain that crossing your arms over your chest is a sign of being

blessed and assure them that if they opt not to receive the elements, they are still a part of the group and held within the blessing of this ritual. Hold the bread out to the first person in the circle and say: *Jesus said, "This is my body, which is given for you."*

Once the bread has come back to you, invite each member of the group to pass the cup around the circle, dipping their bread and then passing it to the next person saying: *Jesus said, "This is the cup that is poured out for you for forgiveness."* Advise them to hold the dipped bread until all have received it. Explain that those who prefer not to take Communion may simply cross their arms over their chests and the person will then give the bread to the next person. Explain that crossing your arms over your chest is a sign of being blessed and assure them that if they opt not to receive the elements, they are still a part of the group and held within the blessing of this ritual. Hold the cup out to the first person in the circle and say: *Jesus said, "This is the cup that is poured out for you for forgiveness."*

Once the cup has come back to you, say: *Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of me"* and eat the dipped bread.

Read John 21:15–19. Remind the group that Peter had betrayed Jesus three times but Jesus reached out to him with love. Point to the road rules and explain that as each of you walks in the Way of Jesus, each of you will stumble, just like Peter did. Assure them that they must never think, no matter how ashamed or sad they feel that Jesus rejects them. All they need to do is say, "Yes Lord, I love you," and keep walking with Jesus.

Ask the participants to close their eyes. Go around the circle and lay a hand on each person saying, "Thank you God, for [name]. Help him/her always remember how much you love him/her." When you come to the end of the circle, simply say "Amen."

Appendix: Supplemental Materials

Supplement One Group Guidelines Covenant

As a member of this group, I agree to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Respect the rights and opinions of other persons.
2. Participate fully in the study, recognizing that participation does not have to include talking out loud.
3. Listen to others when they speak.
4. Speak openly, but allow time for others to speak.
5. Follow directions for activities.
6. Use “I language,” such as “I think differently about that” instead of “You’re wrong!”
7. Respect those who choose not to speak.
8. Respect others’ space and physical boundaries.
9. Report hurtful, destructive, or dangerous behavior to the leader.

Supplement Two

Group Dynamics

The Forming Stage

Each person will enter the group experience with a certain set of skills, attitudes, feelings, and challenges. As you move ahead, you will start to discover what some of these are, but for now everything is new and everyone is in a new environment and situation, even if they have participated in youth gatherings before. Keeping things relaxed and yet enthusiastic will go a long way to getting your group off the ground.

Your group's experience might include:

- A sense of uncertainty, awkwardness, tentativeness and even anxiety—the norms and standards of your group have not yet been established and so participants are trying to find out what is okay and not okay and may be unsure of what to do and how to act.
- Most people will be eager to fit in and will be cautious in presenting themselves.
- Some participants will jump right in from the start, while others will hang back and observe. It is important to respect how each member reacts during this time. To build trust and model acceptance, don't push too hard for interaction from someone who hesitates, but affirm their way of being there.
- Some initial friendships will begin to form as group members discover things they have in common. Your job is to maintain a healthy level of interaction within the entire group and encourage a whole group spirit.

The Developing Stage

As your group develops, members will feel freer to be themselves and may take more risks in asserting their personalities. Each member will want to feel a sense of individual influence on the group, searching for

his or her own “niche” and thus members then may begin sharing on a deeper level. However, as the group becomes closer, it can become a little unstable and conflict may arise. Your group’s experience might include:

- More cohesiveness, using language such as “our group” and “we.”
- Some deeper interaction among some with others remaining or becoming increasingly detached in response
- Moments of tension or conflict as members continue to decide how identified with the group they want to be; Some may be wondering, “Do I *want* to trust these people?”
- Shifting of friendships

It is important to affirm your group and to keep an eye on their—and your own—level of comfort in sharing and respond accordingly.

The Maturing Stage

A group that is at this phase will be considerably closer than when you first began. Members will have a sense of bonding and will take responsibility for each other in the group, expressing concern, support, and encouragement. Here are some things that may be part of your group’s experience:

- Some group members will show a high level of enthusiasm and eagerness to help you out in creating a positive experience.
- Sharing will be deeper and more meaningful yet some group members may feel uncomfortable with this increasing.
- A desire to spend time together outside group. This may be a good time to plan a meal or other unstructured time together.

The Performing Stage

As the study nears its end, most groups will be well into the performing phase, during which members are working well together and show

concern that all members of the group are supported and contributing. Here are some things that might be a part of your group's experience:

- One or more of your group members may be ready to make significant commitments in their walk with Jesus. Find ways to celebrate those while being sensitive to others who may not be in the same place.
- Some friendships will continue to form while others may already be shifting as group members prepare for the end of the study. Care needs to be taken to keep them connected.

The Closure and Transference Stage

As the study draws to a close, some participants bring in personal issues sensing the opportunity soon to be passing. Others may become. All feelings are valid as people bring experience and process endings differently. Powerful or intense emotions may arise. It is important to keep things from becoming over emotional. "Group-think" can come into play with people's emotions playing off each other. In the midst of closure, it is important to give sense that this is a beginning also. The study was designed to give them skills for the days ahead.

It would be helpful to give them an opportunity to anonymously give you feedback on the study and your teaching efforts. Also, consider ways you can do follow up with the members of the group.

Additional Activities

I. Ice Breakers

Circle Talk

This activity provides the opportunity to quickly meet and get to know many people. Ask everyone to listen closely and review the instructions below:

- For this game we need space, so put your bags, Bibles, and journals on the outer edges of your space.
- Form pairs and face each other.
- Create two large circles with the pairs. One circle will be inside the other with the people on the inside circle facing their partners on the outside circle.
- Explain that they will be engaging in 1 minute conversations in which each person has 30 seconds to share as follows: introduce yourself, say where you are from, and answer the question that is called out; be sure to only take 30 seconds then let your partner go.
- Explain that you will be yelling at 30 seconds and 1 minute [or blowing a whistle or dinging a bell (once for 30 seconds; twice for one minute)]. On one minute, the inner circle moves one person to the right.

Once the two circles are formed, stand on a stable chair in the middle of the group so that you can be heard by everyone. Give the first question. Yell, whistle or ding a bell after 30 seconds. After a minute, signal again and once the inner circle has moved, giving everyone new partners, yell out a new question. Below are some sample questions, however it is good to come up with others that fit your group:

1. If you could have any job, what would it be?
2. If you could have any food available to you 24/7, what would it be?
3. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be?
4. If you could spend \$10,000 anyway you wanted, what would you do?
5. If you could have one super power, what would it be?
6. If you could meet anyone from history, who would it be?

Connections

This activity is designed to get your group moving around. It requires touching, so be sure your group is comfortable enough to engage in this type of activity.

Invite participants to stand. Explain that you are going to call out two body parts, and they need to run to find someone to connect with on that body part. For example, when you say "Shoulder to shoulder!" they need to touch shoulders with another participant. You can use combinations of different parts, such as foot to knee and let them work out who does which part. Call out 5 or 6 other combinations before asking everyone to return to their seats. If you have any persons with disabilities in the group, be sure to select body part connections that do not exclude them.

II. Group Builders

Fishy Fishy

This gentle, group-building game requires that everyone participate, communicate, and move into a new kind of community. Introduce the game as outlined below, then select or ask for a volunteer to be "The Fish," and begin.

Imagine for a few moments that you are a fish in a dark wide open sea of possibilities. If you were a fish, alone in the sea, what would you do? You would probably look for more fish! That is what this game is all about.

Everyone stands in a group, closes their eyes, and starts wandering around looking for the one person who has been designated as "The Fish." The Fish keeps his or her eyes open, but doesn't talk. When you bump into someone, without opening your eyes, shake his or her hand and ask, "Fishy?" one time. If the other person asks "Fishy?" back, then you have not found The Fish. When someone bumps into The Fish and asks, "Fishy?" there will be no response. If that happens, ask "Fishy?" a second time, to make sure. If there is still no answer, you have found The Fish! When you find The Fish, open your eyes and take his or her hand to become part of The Fish, making The Fish grow! When people

bump into any part of The Fish, if you feel clasped hands, make your way to either end of The Fish to find a free hand to shake and join.

After the game is over, form a circle and say something like:

About 80% of fish that live in the ocean swim together. Whether they are small or large, swimming in a group reduces friction in the water and provides safety in numbers. This is what Christian groups are all about: providing for us a sense of community and a safer place in the world.

Create a Group Covenant

This activity could be included after a Bible Study or before a closing during an opening session. The covenant can consist of a list of 3–5 simple, mutually agreed upon guidelines to help your group function better. These guidelines can be developed around

- *values* such as: everybody is accepted as they are or we choose to be cooperative and therefore do not engage in competition in our activities
- *practices* such as: listening to each other without interruption, honoring each person's right to share or not to share; or reading the Bible in a variety of translations

III. Discussion Starter

So I Heard Improv

This skit will require some preparation and some improvisational acting. Select one person to be the new kid and begin by providing the following information to participants:

Set up as if you are at your lockers in the hallway in small groups. The new kid walks down the hallway and the others begin to talk about him or her. Things like: "Have you heard about the new kid?" "I heard" Then one person breaks from the small group and goes up to the new person and says, "Hey, I heard that you . . . ". The new person will respond with "No, that's not true, but let me tell you a little more about

myself.” The two will then have a short conversation about the things they have in common. Then the one who stepped out will go back to the group and say: “I know him/her now, I am so glad I took the time to get to know him/her personally. Some of the things we thought about the new kid were not right. Let me tell you about the real person. The group will respond, “Wow! You actually talked to him/her,” and walk (to class).

After the improv skit, invite the group to discuss the following:

- When a new person arrives at school, how do people treat them?
- Why do we often concern ourselves with rumors?
- What’s the best way to know the facts about someone?