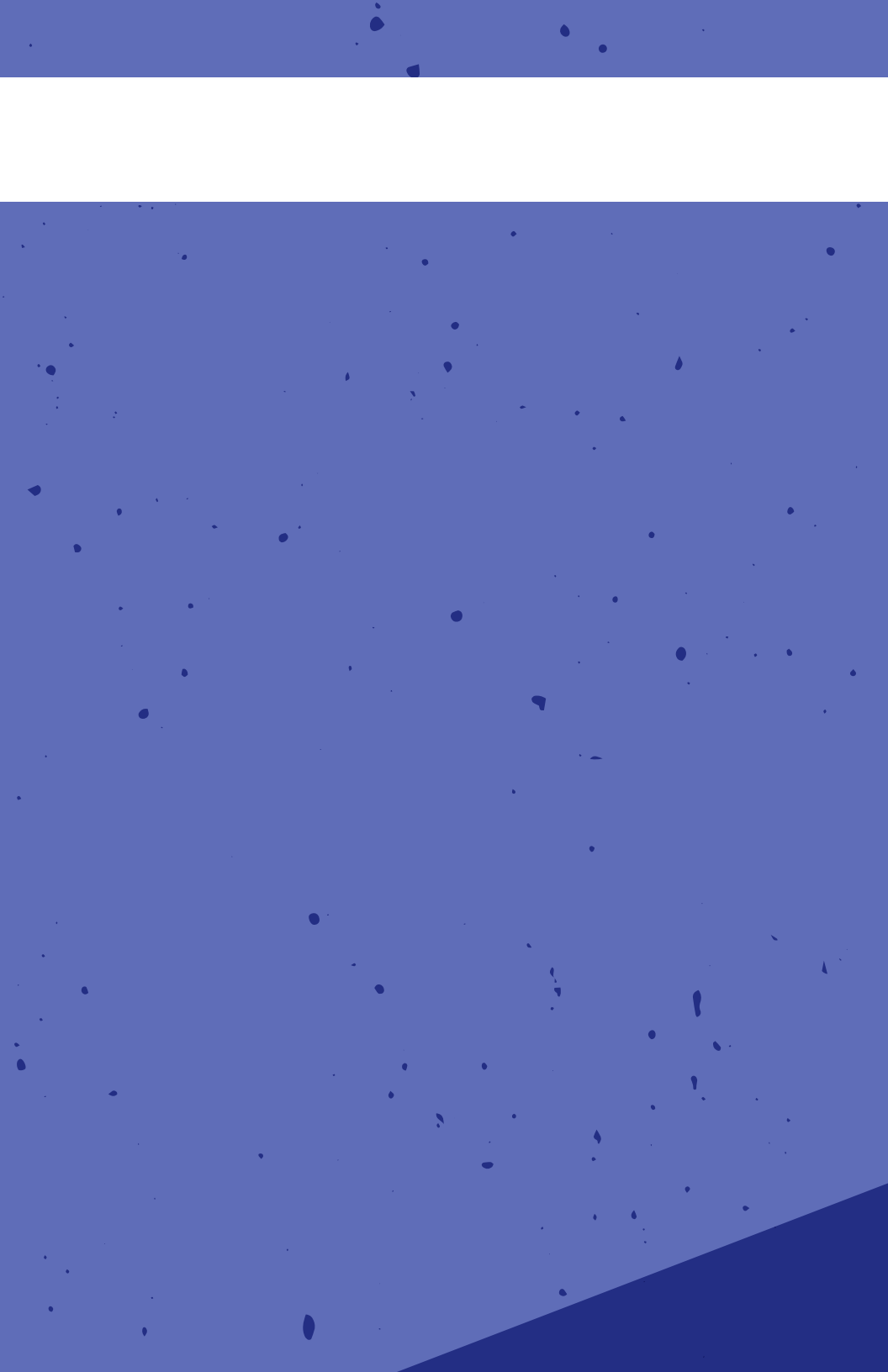


COMMIT
COMMIT
COMMIT



RESURRECTION
STUDENTS





[Mentor Curriculum Guide]

[DEAR MENTOR,]

Thank you for being a part of a Commit Discipleship Group for High School Juniors and Seniors! The purpose of Discipleship Groups is to engage students in an intentional faith community and encourage them in their spiritual journey. You play an instrumental role in this process. By your investment of time and compassion for students, you help provide a safe and welcoming space to dig deeper into faith. So, thank you!

The 11/12 Grade Commit curriculum is designed as a two-year track. It covers multiple topics ranging from identity, culture, decision making, and community. All of this is rooted in scripture and designed to be centered around small group discussion and dialogue. The discussion questions are a guide for discussion. You have the freedom as the mentor to dig deeper or omit certain elements you see fit for your group. The purpose of small groups is to create a safe and welcoming community where students can build community and deepen their faith. Always be mindful of students' needs that week and how you (the mentor) can best encourage the group of students in their faith.

Thank you for mentoring students as they journey toward becoming deeply committed Christians!



[The Purpose of Resurrection]

The Commit curriculum is fashioned around the church's purpose. Everything the church does points to some element of this statement.

Our Purpose is to build a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians.

The curriculum is meant to be the final capstone on a student's experience, helping them become "deeply committed Christians."

[Student Ministry Statement]

Students developed a statement that describes how they intend to live into the Resurrection purpose. It says this:

Resurrection Students will create a safe, authentic and inclusive community where everyone belongs and has the opportunity to choose to grow and live out their faith.

Our goal as students, mentors and parents is to continue to work towards creating a place where "students belong so they can choose to grow and live out their faith." It isn't always easy and formulaic. But we believe if we keep the Resurrection purpose and the Student Ministry statement in mind when we are interacting with students, planning programs and lessons, then we will move closer to these ideals.

[Desired Outcomes]

When a student graduates from student ministry and moves out into the world, we want them to understand the complexities of their faith as differentiated from others. We want them to express their faith in meaningful and empathic ways, providing tangible leadership to others. And we want them to be in non-judgmental caring relationships with their peers and mentors. We break this down into specific objectives. In other words, when they work through the curriculum in a Commit discipleship group, we hope they have developed the skills and posture in the world that mimic Jesus in profound and meaningful ways.



[Specific Outcomes]

We see students potentially living out their faith at the end of their high school experience in the following ways:

In their Faith

- Understand grace and redemption in all its complexity.
- Tell their story of faith by thinking for themselves and articulating a differentiated belief as their own, distinguishing truth from falsity.
- Continue to see their faith as a risk so that they experience the benefits of staying unstuck.
- Maintain a personal relationship with God, equipped with tools provided to them by the church.

In their Expression

- Express compassionate empathy for people who have less.
- Find a place to serve, utilizing their full knowledge of their gifts.
- Become aware that faith is bigger than self with a bigger kingdom impact.
- Become leaders in the church, community, and world.

In their Relationships

- Emulate the loving image of God by being kind to others.
- Remain curious, not judgmental, starting with healthy conversations with those who have different points of view.
- Discover their next community of faith by distinguishing communities that best fit them.
- Continue to seek out mentors as well as mentor others, understanding their role in discipleship and evangelism.

[How Does Curriculum Do These Things?]

It doesn't. Caring mentors do. The subject isn't math or history or reading or writing. The subject is the student. The curriculum will open doors that will reveal who students are and will allow them to explore who they are becoming. This doesn't mean we don't pay attention to God or Jesus's life, sacrifice and resurrection. In fact, we allow the student to view themselves through all of these lenses.

In a Commit discipleship group, students will learn more about themselves and why they believe what they believe in a world that may challenge faith beliefs formed at an earlier age. The objective will be for students to be able to articulate their faith in a way that aligns with who they are and what they value. And, as a result, students will be able to make decisions that align with their beliefs.



>> FLOW OF EACH SESSION

Each session will have a similar flow and rhythm. You may choose to mix it up if it gets a little dry and repetitive. You may find your group of students consistently respond to some parts of the session rather than other parts. It is okay to modify the curriculum in a way that fits your group of students best. Frankly, it is impossible to write the perfect curriculum. What works one week, may not work the next week with the same students. Welcome to student ministry!! Hopefully, there will be enough material for each session for students to have somewhat of a breakthrough in how they understand themselves, their faith and the world around them.

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

At the beginning of each unit will be an overview. This overview will describe why this unit is important to students and will occasionally contain some background information that might be helpful for the entire unit. Most of the needed background or contextual information will be provided in the session. Feel free to do some homework or ask a staff person if you need more information.

>> SESSION OVERVIEW

Why it Matters: Each session will describe the trajectory of the session and why this matters to the student.

>> OPENING

This is an opening question, activity, or icebreaker exercise designed to engage students and get them talking about the session's topic before you immediately dive into the scripture passage or discussion questions. The opening can also be a substitute for the next session element, the check-in. Feel free to combine them from time to time. The idea of a good opening is that it will encourage students to come slightly out of their comfort zones and will prepare them to open up for great conversations later on.

>> CHECK IN

Check in with your students. This is a chance for everyone to hear updates on one another. You will also be able to assess how students are doing mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Great opening questions include: Describe your past week? What was a high point or a low point this week? Describe this season of your life in one word? Be sure everyone has an opportunity to share. Students can pass if they aren't comfortable or don't have anything to share.



>> SCRIPTURE

Each session, there will be one or more Bible passages for the group to read together and discuss. Students can bring their own Bible or use a Bible app on their phone. We recommend You Version. Never force a student to read out loud if they are uncomfortable doing so. But encourage multiple people to read from week to week. In some cases, it may be most helpful to summarize a Bible passage, especially if it is long or particularly confusing.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is where your group will likely spend most of their time each session. Don't feel like you need to rush through these questions or hit every single one. If you spend 20 minutes having amazing conversations around only a few of the questions, that's great! At the same time, add your own questions or adjust the provided questions if you feel like we've missed something.

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION OR MORE ACTIVITIES

This may be the part of the session where additional activities and/or discussion may come in handy. You may use these as a substitute for an earlier activity or set of questions. You may also use these activities to take a deeper dive into the subject. While important, these aren't often going to be the necessary part of the session. But you are the judge. You know your group best.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

This is a spiritual practice, a group exercise, a practical application, or a self-guided activity that we might ask you to complete in your time together as a group. This may also be an activity that can be done individually or in one's own time. You make the call when to best introduce this from week to week.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Each session has one or more journal prompts for students to explore if they want to continue to process information. Around about the midway point in the school year or shortly thereafter, students will be invited to write some more expansive thoughts on their beliefs utilizing the content covered in the curriculum up to that point and other life experiences and reflections. The response to the weekly journal prompt may help them pull their thoughts together. Each week, encourage students to write in their journal.

>> JOYS / CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close with prayer. You spent the opening moments of the session checking in. This will be a good time to affirm you heard students and ask them if they would like prayer about what they shared earlier. Of course, open it up to additional prayer requests as well. Specifically invite someone to pray. If you need to follow up with a student regarding what they shared, the best time to do that is following the prayer.



>> HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

There are lots of challenges when it comes to reading and understanding scripture. It isn't easy. That's why people have discussed certain passages for thousands of years. Here are some tips that might be useful to you.

- Use the CEB (Common English Bible) translation of the Bible. This version is easy to understand and is used in many United Methodist circles.
- Get a Bible App. You Version is easy to use and has lots of translations if you want to compare how other scholars or people in different time periods interpreted the original Greek or Hebrew.
- Use a Study Bible. We recommend the Wesley Study Bible which comes in the CEB translation and has notes throughout to help understand scripture.
- Read Adam Hamilton's book, *Making Sense of the Bible*. It is a quick read and will give you insight on how to generally read scripture. Adam's insight into some frequently asked questions about the Bible is easy to understand and, well, makes sense!
- Always consider these things when reading the Bible.
 - **The Author** – Who is it? Why did they write it?
 - **The Audience** – Who was the author writing to? What were they trying to tell them?
 - **The Culture** – What do we need to know about the time period in which it was written? What were the customs that influenced the writing?
- Always consider yourself and your points of view. You are shaped by your culture, family of origin, ethnicity and many other influences. How might this adjust how you read scripture? Remember, the Biblical authors didn't have the 21st century in mind when writing the Bible.
- Prior to your session with the students, read the scripture several times. Then read the story leading up to this piece of scripture and what follows it to understand the context better.
- Use a commentary, which is a scholar's view of what the scripture means. These can be detailed. If you want to go this route, consult a pastor and ask what their favorite commentary is. Most of the time, a study Bible provides enough commentary for non-scholars.
- Ask someone for help when you don't understand. Our staff will always want the opportunity to help crack the code of difficult to understand scripture.
- Here are some fancy words you will never use. But they will make you feel like a Bible scholar.
 - **Exegesis** – The interpretation of Scripture. Another form of the word is "exegetical" or "exegete." Fully exegeting a scripture means to look at the original language and possible interpretations, the cultural context and the intent of the author.
 - **Hermeneutic** – The lens you are using when interpreting the Bible that includes your own experience and education. One's hermeneutic always includes one's limited and biased experiences and knowledge with the understanding that others come from a different hermeneutic.



>> CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Call everyone by their name. Ask when you forget.
- Know something about everyone – their interests, sports, etc. Take notes if it helps you remember. Refer to what you know about them on occasion in group and personal conversation.
- Make eye contact. Never turn your back on your students.
- Sit in a circle, if possible. Make sure the adults are evenly distributed.
- Sit close (or next to) students that have the most difficult time behaving. Conversely, always sit across from the best behaved and engaged students.
- Affirm and amplify good behavior and engagement often. Deal with bad behavior and lack of engagement more quietly.
- Use the words of students to ask the next question or to introduce the next topic or activity.
- Keep your questions simple and to the point, attempting to draw on a student's own experience to frame the question.
- Only ask one question at a time.
- Use fidget tools to keep the brains of active students busy. This will help them focus on what you and others are saying.
- Be sure to keep the session moving by using various types of activities and discussion. Don't stay on any one activity or discussion for longer than 15 minutes.
- Always ask for help. Staff and other mentors may have strategies that may address exactly what you need.



YEAR 1 Curriculum Overview

UNIT 1 IDENTITY

Session 1: Enneagram Introduction

Session 2: Enneagram Application

Session 3: Made in the Image of God

UNIT 2 IN COMMUNITY

Session 1: Culture and Geography

Session 2: Fairness, Privilege and Generosity

Session 3: Important Life Moments

UNIT 3 DECISION MAKING

Session 1: Moral Relativism

Session 2: Moral Therapeutic Deism

Session 3: Christian Lens on Society

UNIT 4 DEFINE YOU

Session 1: Early Beliefs and Influences

Session 2: Mission Statement

Session 3: Expressing Your Beliefs

UNIT 5 DISCERNMENT

Session 1: Discernment: How Do You Use It?

Session 2: Spiritual Gifts

Session 3: Personal Eschatology: Your Role in God's Kingdom

Session 4: What's Next? A Church Community

Session 5: What's Next? College, Trade School, Job or Year Off

UNIT 6 DIFFICULT SCRIPTURE

Session 1: Using Jesus to Interpret the Bible

Session 2: Using Culture and Context

Session 3: The Source of Scripture

Session 4: Why do Bad Things Happen?



YEAR ONE

UNIT 1 Identity

- Session 1: Enneagram Introduction
- Session 2: Enneagram Application
- Session 3: Made in the Image of God

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Personality tests are designed to help bring out positive traits and aspects of our personality, as well as provide deeper insight into how we think, respond, and act. No personality test can define a single person. Students are continually grappling with their identity, trying out different personas as they struggle to find what fits best. The Enneagram is just one assessment that will help students understand themselves better.

The purpose of this unit is to introduce the Enneagram as a tool to help students learn more about themselves and others. Here is a brief overview that can be used throughout the unit.

Adapted from <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions>

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER AND TYPE	OVERVIEW OF ENNEAGRAM TYPE
1 THE REFORMER	The Rational, Idealistic Type: Principled, Purposeful, Self-Controlled, and Perfectionistic
2 THE HELPER	The Caring, Interpersonal Type: Demonstrative, Generous, People-Pleasing, and Possessive
3 THE ACHIEVER	The Success-Oriented, Pragmatic Type: Adaptive, Excelling, Driven, and Image-Conscious
4 THE INDIVIDUALIST	The Sensitive, Withdrawn Type: Expressive, Dramatic, Self-Absorbed, and Temperamental
5 THE INVESTIGATOR	The Intense, Cerebral Type: Perceptive, Innovative, Secretive, and Isolated
6 THE LOYALIST	The Committed, Security-Oriented Type: Engaging, Responsible, Anxious, and Suspicious
7 THE ENTHUSIAST	The Busy, Fun-Loving Type: Spontaneous, Versatile, Distractible, and Scattered
8 THE CHALLENGER	The Powerful, Dominating Type: Self-Confident, Decisive, Willful, and Confrontational
9 THE PEACEMAKER	The Easygoing, Self-Effacing Type: Receptive, Reassuring, Agreeable, and Complacent

For a brief overview of the Enneagram check out Blake Thomas's video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Jly3lqBh-0>



Identity: The Enneagram Introduction

>> **SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS:** Students struggle with identity, often wanting to be their own unique self and part of a group or several groups at the same time. This can be confusing as they try out different personas to fit in. Helping students discover who God made them to be will help them have confidence in who they are, no matter which groups they are part of. Students will learn about their Enneagram and how it matches with their perception of themselves. They will be encouraged and affirmed in their identity. They will become curious as they experience differing points of view shared by others with a different Enneagram profile.

>> **CHECK IN:** Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> **OPENING ACTIVITY: WHO AM I?**

(adapted from <https://www.leadershipgeeks.com/who-am-i-icebreaker/>)

Supplies Needed: Blank notecards and pens

- Give everyone four blank notecards and a pen. Have everyone write four facts about themselves, one fact for each of their four notecards. (The more random and sillier the facts, the better!)
- The leader then collects all the notecards, shuffles them, and passes back four different notecards to each person.
- Have students get up, walk around, and try to return the cards to whom they belong. But here's the trick: they can only ask "yes or no" questions to reveal if a card belongs to someone. The game ends when everyone has their own original set of four cards.



>> DEBRIEF THE OPENING

- Was it easy or hard to come up with four random facts about yourself?
- Did any of the facts about someone else surprise you?
- Have any of you had experience in taking a personality assessment?
- Why is it important to understand people's personalities?

>> VIDEO

Together, watch the short introduction video that provides an overview of The Enneagram. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Jly3lqBh-0> Ask students which description sounds like them the most. Feel free to use the table provided in the unit overview.

>> SCRIPTURE

In most instances we will use the Common English Bible (CEB) translation. Today, we are using The Message (MSG) translation, which is closer to a paraphrase, meaning the translation isn't word for word, but translated into more modern colloquialisms we use in our everyday conversations in the United States. You may also want to read the CEB version as it may be more familiar.

This scripture is at the end of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, which scholars believe to be a compilation of his most critical teachings. Jesus is encouraging his listeners to look at themselves and their own shortcomings before being critical of others.

Matthew 7:1-5 (MSG)

Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why should you focus on yourself before focusing on others?
2. Our scripture speaks about not judging or criticizing failures or faults of others before looking inward. Do you find this is easy or difficult to do?
3. When looking at the Enneagram type you feel like fits you best, what are the challenges of this personality type?
4. What are you most encouraged by when looking at the personality type that best fits you?



>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Note to Mentor: You may want to share the following information in a group text (like Group Me) so that students will remember to complete it.

Here is where you will get a more objective view of yourself based on how you respond to the assessment.

Take the Enneagram! It should take you about 20 minutes to complete.

<https://www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test>

After you have done that, read more about your Enneagram number here:

<https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions>

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Spend some time writing down the results of your enneagram assessment. Consider writing about:

- What was surprising by your results?
- Where do you see parts of yourself/personality reflected in the other numbers?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Identity: Enneagram Application

>> **SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS:** Personality assessments are often only used to evaluate one's own personality. It is more difficult to consider how two different personalities might relate best to one another. Students will apply the Enneagram in their relationships with others. Students will be encouraged to be curious on how they can make connections on how their Enneagram number can be an active tool in all areas of their life.

>> **CHECK IN:** Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> **OPENING:**

Give everyone the opportunity to take the Enneagram if they have not done so yet. <https://www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test>. Reread the short description in the unit overview to refresh everyone's knowledge from the previous session and to bring those who weren't present up to speed. Feel free to begin the discussion as others are taking the assessment.

Have students share their Enneagram number, its short definition and how they feel like it does or does not match their personality.

- What number on the Enneagram would you say your best friend is? Your parents? Your siblings? Your favorite teachers?
- Knowing your Enneagram number and predicting the number of those close to you, how might you approach your friends, parents, siblings or teachers differently?



>> SCRIPTURE

These two Scriptures will work in tandem. The first is an often-quoted Psalm describing how God knows us well. The second is Jesus speaking to his disciples on how we need to know ourselves well so that we can lead others.

Psalms 139:1-6

LORD, you have examined me.

You know me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

3 You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

4 There isn't a word on my tongue, LORD,
that you don't already know completely.

5 You surround me—front and back.

You put your hand on me.

6 That kind of knowledge is too much for me;
it's so high above me that I can't reach it.

Luke 6:39-40

39 Jesus also told them a riddle. "A blind person can't lead another blind person, right? Won't they both fall into a ditch? 40 Disciples aren't greater than their teacher, but whoever is fully prepared will be like their teacher."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is the Psalmist describing God's knowledge of their self?
- In what ways do you think God knows you?
- How do you think God knows you better than you know yourself?
- What is Jesus trying to communicate in his riddle about a blind person leading a blind person?
- What do you think we are blind to?

Note to Mentor: *We are most likely blind to our understanding of ourselves.*

- What does it mean to be "fully prepared?" What might we be prepared for?
- How does knowing your Enneagram make you fully prepared and less "blind?"
- How does knowing someone else's Enneagram help you understand others and your relationship to them?



>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

Read the following and discuss how the Enneagram will help you understand yourself and others.

The Road Back to You (p. 13-15) by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile

On Monday morning I asked one of my professors whether he'd ever heard of it (The Enneagram). From the look on his face, you'd have thought I'd said pentagram. The Bible condemns incantations, sorcery, horoscopes and witches, he said—none of which I recalled being mentioned in the book—and I should throw it away immediately. At the time I was a young, impressionable evangelical, and though my gut told me my professor's reaction bordered on paranoid, I followed his advice—except the bit about throwing the book in the garbage. For bibliophiles, this is the unpardonable sin that grieves the Holy Spirit. I knew exactly which shelf held my dog-eared copy of Rohr's book in the bookcase in my study. "It's too bad your professor discouraged you from learning the Enneagram," Br. Dave told me. "It's full of wisdom for people who want to get out of their own way and become who they were created to be." "What does 'getting out of your own way' entail?" I asked, knowing how many times I'd wanted to do just that in my life but didn't know how. "It has to do with self-knowledge. Most folks assume they understand who they are when they don't," Br. Dave explained. "They don't question the lens through which they see the world—where it came from, how it's shaped their lives, or even if the vision of reality it gives them is distorted or true. Even more troubling, most people aren't aware of how things that helped them survive as kids are now holding them back as adults. They're asleep." "Asleep?" I echoed, my face registering confusion.

Br. Dave briefly gazed at the ceiling and frowned. Now he was the one searching for the right combination of words that would unlock the answer to a seemingly simple question. "What we don't know about ourselves can and will hurt us, not to mention others," he said, pointing his finger at me and then at himself. "As long as we stay in the dark about how we see the world and the wounds and beliefs that have shaped who we are, we're prisoners of our history. We'll continue going through life on autopilot doing things that hurt and confuse ourselves and everyone around us. Eventually we become so accustomed to making the same mistakes over and over in our lives that they lull us to sleep. We need to wake up." Waking up. There wasn't anything I wanted more.

"Working with the Enneagram helps people develop the kind of self-knowledge they need to understand who they are and why they see and relate to the world the way they do," Br. Dave continued. "When that happens, you can start to get out of your own way and become more of the person God created you to be."



After learning his afternoon appointment had canceled, Br. Dave spent extra time with me to talk about the importance of self-knowledge on the spiritual path. How, as John Calvin put it, “without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God.” “For centuries great Christian teachers have said knowing yourself is just as important as knowing God. Some people will say that’s feel-good psychology when actually it’s just good theology,” he said.

For a moment I thought about all the Bible teachers and pastors I knew who had done things that had blown up their lives and their ministries, often on an epic scale, because they didn’t know themselves or the human capacity for self-deceit. They studied and knew the Bible inside and out, but not themselves. I thought of how many Christian marriages I’d seen fall apart largely because neither spouse understood the inner splendor and brokenness of their own souls. Then I thought about myself. I had always believed I was more self-aware than the average person, but if the last three years had taught me anything it was that I had plenty of growing to do in the self-knowledge department.

Cron, Ian Morgan; Stabile, Suzanne. The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery (p. 13-16). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Explore the Enneagram deeper! Check out one of these resources:

- Website: <https://enneagramexplained.com/>
- Instagram: @enneagramandcoffee
- Book: The Enneagram by Richard Rohr
- Book: The Road Back to You by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile

>> JOURNAL REFLECTION

Spend some time reflecting on your current relationship to God and others. Answer the following questions:

- How does my personality, based on my Enneagram number, connect to God best?
- How are my relationships with others affected by Enneagram number? What can I do to improve my relationship with others?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.





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Identity: Made in the Image of God

>> **SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS:** It is easy for students to compartmentalize. What might be learned in one area may not fully translate into another area. The purpose of this lesson is to continue to make the connection of how our Enneagram number and faith can be connected. It is important to remember that no person or personality test can define exactly who we are. We are all created in the image of God and our identity is grounded in who God created us to be. It is in this awareness where students can develop empathy for others who are likewise created, but different. Students should feel encouraged that the Enneagram is a tool to affirm their identity and a way to raise awareness on how they can live out their faith. Students will appreciate how everyone is made in God's image and what that means practically.

>> **CHECK IN:** Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> **OPENING QUESTIONS:**

1. In our discussions about the Enneagram, what continues to surprise you about yourself? About others?
2. In addition to your Enneagram number, what identity markers would you give yourself? Examples: musician, athlete, Kansan, etc.
3. How do these markers match your Enneagram number?
4. How would you say you best live out your faith by your Enneagram number?



>> OPENING ACTIVITY:

Supplies Needed: Copies of the Enneagram Overview and Writing Utensils
Print out the Enneagram overview found in the unit overview for each student. Even though each student has a designated Enneagram number, there are traits we all share in each Enneagram number. Have students identify what parts of themselves or traits they have fit into each Enneagram number by circling the traits in the description. Ask students:

- Why do you think you have other traits in other descriptions? Shouldn't you be just one number?
- In what ways, based on these personality descriptions, are we like one another?

>> SCRIPTURE

This Scripture describes creation (one of two stories about creation) of people. The concept of "Image of God" or "Imago Dei" in Latin is a foundational doctrine of Judeo-Christian belief. While it does not characterize a physical likeness. It can be found in shared traits. For example: Human DNA is 99.9% the same as all other Human DNA. Students will discuss other similarities and, thus, our shared image of God.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

27 God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does this say about God's relationship to humans?
- How do you typically make an assessment about someone's image?
- What might it mean to be made in the image of God?
- If we are all made in the image of God, how might it shape how we treat and view others?



>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

It is important to remember that no person or personality test can define exactly who we are. We are all created in the image of God and our identity is grounded in who God created us to be. This week, practice seeing others as made in the image of God. Allow your perspective to change how you treat and see others.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Spend some time writing a letter to yourself as if you (the student) were God. What do you think God would tell you? How would God say you are created in God's image? What is a promise God can give to you?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Close your session in prayer considering these items from students and then close with this prayer from the Road Back to You by Ian Morgan Corn and Suzanne Stabile.

"May you recognize in your life the presence, power, and light of your soul.

May you realize that you are never alone, that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe.

May you have respect for your individuality and difference.

May you realize that the shape of your soul is unique, that you have a special destiny here, that behind the façade of your life there is something beautiful and eternal happening.

May you learn to see yourself with the same delight, pride, and expectation with which God sees you in every moment."



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UNIT 2 In Community

Session 1: Culture and Geography
Session 2: Fairness and Privilege
Session 3: Important Life Moments

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Individuation is a Western goal as we raise children to young adults. We want them to be independent, be able to think on their own and thrive as confident young adults. This may be somewhat of a fallacy. In reality we spend most of our life in community, in interdependent relationships. We value family and a work environment with teamwork ideals. So, it stands to reason that community not only supports us as we grow into adulthood, it shapes us.

In this unit we will explore different aspects of how we are shaped by the community to which we are born and raised. We will look at culture and geography. How does the part of the country and the people who live there create a set of default values that we adopt early in our development? In the same vein, we will look at fairness and privilege from the standpoint of social status and how that shapes our view of the world and how we might effectively address privilege in a way that levels the playing field, much as Jesus tried to do. Talking about fairness and privilege can be a difficult topic for some people to navigate. We encourage you to read the room, check in with students, and be mindful of the group dynamics as you frame this issue well.

Finally, we look at our life up to this point, drawing on the important life moments that have shaped us into the people we are today. We will look to the future and envision the people we are becoming. All of this while understanding that our community has helped to shape all of it.



In Community: Culture and Geography

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Now that students have explored personal identity through use of the Enneagram, they will now have the chance to think about how their identity is impacted by the community they live in. Each community has its own culture, even if slightly different from others. The culture in which we are raised impacts who we are and our faith. Often times, students translate the culture they experience growing up as the default culture for everyone. They simply haven't had enough experiences outside of their own community to give them a different perspective. Students who grow up in the Midwest will have a different life experience compared to students who grow up in the South based on race, economics, opportunities, and other factors. There is no "right" culture to live in and we do not choose what culture we are born into. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge aspects of the culture and geography that surrounds us and how it has an impact on who we are becoming. In this session, students will identify who they are as a person in their community and how that translates into what they believe to be true.

>> CHECK IN: Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> OPENING

Look up the following facts on your phone about the city you live in or a particular city or part of the country you are interested in living sometime in the future. You can use a cost-of-living calculator at bestplaces.net or nerdwallet.com to find information. Although more complicated, you can research the data from the census.

- Median Income
- Ethnic Backgrounds
- Average price of a house
- What would you say are some characteristics of the area you live in?
- What are some common values of people in the area where you live?
- How would you describe the culture of the area you live in?
- How would you describe faith and religion in the area you live in?
- How does the culture of the area where you live affect your personal values? How might it be slightly different from other places?

>> SCRIPTURE

This is an excerpt from a longer story about Jesus's encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well in the middle of the day. While there is additional meaning in this story, especially at the end, we will be looking at why Jesus was there in the first place and the perceived cultural and geographical difference between where Jesus and his disciples were from and where the Samaritan woman lived. Samaria was a country situated between Jerusalem (to the south) and Gallilee (to the north). Thousands of years ago these three areas were part of the same Hebrew nation, Israel. At some point the north was exiled. In 722 BC the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel, exiled a large segment of the population and moved others into the region from across the Assyrian empire. Therefore, it became a mix of ethnicities with whom Jewish people avoided. They even avoided traveling through Samaria even though it was a shorter route for people traveling between Jerusalem and Gallilee. Jesus made a decision to travel through Samaria, intentionally making a stop at Jacob's well, for whom the country was named after when God changed his name to Israel. Jacob, therefore, was a common ancestor for Jewish and Samaritan people.

John 4:3-12

3 Therefore, he left Judea and went back to Galilee. 4 Jesus had to go through Samaria. 5 He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." 8 His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food. 9 The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.) 10 Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How comfortable is it to enter into someone else's culture? How might the disciples have felt spending time in Samaria?
2. If the Jewish and Samaritan culture didn't mix, how might that create judgements they might have for one another and each other's culture?
3. Jesus chose to stop at Jacob's well. Jacob is a common ancestor of Jewish and Samaritan people. Why is this significant?
4. Why is it important to find common ground when beginning to understand culture?
5. What should we be mindful of compared to other parts of the United States or the world?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

When you hear about other parts of the country or the world (or meet people from other places) and what their cultural influences might be, practice not reacting with your own perspective. But, rather, react by asking more questions to understand their culture.

>> JOURNAL REFLECTION

Reflect on the community you live in. What about it is unique? What are the strengths? What are the weaknesses? What do you wish people would recognize about your community? How has your community impacted you?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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In Community: Fairness, Privilege and Generosity

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Students have a strong desire for fairness. While fairness allows students to form ethical conclusions, it can also lead to privilege when they are evaluating whether or not they are being treated fairly or not. It is important for people to understand how fairness and privilege impacts people. For this session, students will define privilege and how it interacts in their world developing empathy for those they perceive not being treated with equity. In addition, students will understand what it means to be generous with so little.

>> CHECK IN: Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> OPENING ACTIVITY

Have students line up in the middle of the room. Tell the students that "privilege" is an advantage a person has only because of their position in society due to ethnicity, economic social status and connections to those who have status. The following statements will represent either privilege or a lack of privilege. Recite each statement and have students step forward, or backwards, if the statement applies to them. If your group is a homogeneous group, you may want to ask one or two students to assume a role that isn't represented in your group. Take care in not stereotyping a role, while also being able to select differentiated personal backgrounds.

STEPPING FORWARD

- If one or both of your parents graduated from college, take one step forward.
- If you ever attended a private school or a summer camp growing up, take one step forward.
- If you were told by your parents that you were beautiful, smart, or successful, take one step forward.



- If you have known since you were a child that it was expected of you to go to college, take one step forward.
- If you have immediate family members who are doctors, lawyers, or work in any graduate degree-required profession, take one step forward.
- If you studied the history and culture of your ethnic ancestors in elementary and secondary school, take one step forward.
- If you grew up with people of color or working-class people who were servants, maids, gardeners, or babysitters in your home, take one step forward.
- If you or your family never had to move due to financial inabilities, take one step forward.
- If you almost always see members of your race, sexual orientation, religion, and class widely represented on television, in the newspaper, and the media in a POSITIVE manner, take one step forward.
- If you were to walk into a business and asked to speak to the person “in charge” you will see a person of your race, take one step forward.
- If you almost always feel comfortable with people knowing your sexual orientation, take one step forward.
- If walking alone at night, you never have to worry about anyone feeling threatened because of your presence, take one step forward.

STEPPING BACK:

- If you might be the first person in your immediate family to graduate from college, take one step back.
- If you started school speaking a language other than English, take one step back.
- If you have ever been the only person of your race/ethnicity in a classroom or place of work, take one step back.
- If you grew up in an economically disadvantaged or single-parent home, take one step back.
- If you were ever discouraged from any personal goal or dream because of your race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, or physical/learning disability, take one step back.
- If you have ever had to sacrifice personal interests for the responsibility of others or other circumstances, take one step back.
- If you have ever been called names regarding your race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, or physical/learning disability and felt uncomfortable, take one step back.
- If you or someone you know has ever been mistrusted or accused of lying, stealing, or cheating without sufficient evidence, take one step back.
- If you were ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, or car and wished to change it to avoid being judged or teased, take one step back.
- If you have ever been hesitant to speak to avoid being ridiculed because of your accent or speech impediment, take one step back.
- If you have ever skipped a meal or went away from a meal hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one back.
- If anyone in your immediate family has ever been addicted to drugs or alcohol, take one step back.



>> OPENING VIDEO

Watch this video together as a group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVOL8lNojTM>

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the activity, what did it feel like to see others in a different position than you?
- You most likely didn't have any control of the situation that caused you to step forward or backward. How does this represent fairness or a lack of fairness?
- How would you define fairness?
- In the video, Megan says that people seem to be born with an innate sense of fairness and justice. In what ways do you feel that is true?
- In what ways are people born into situations where there may be an inherent lack of fairness (ex. born in a poor country, born to a mother who is addicted to drugs, parents divorced)?

>> SCRIPTURE

In this scripture passage, Jesus is a dinner guest at a Pharisee's home. Pharisees were well thought of teachers in the Jewish culture of Jesus's time. They greatly influenced the Jewish people by interpreting and debating the scripture, often determining who was "ceremonial clean." It is safe to assume that the woman who shows up at dinner to wipe Jesus's feet with her tears and hair is unclean since she is referred to as a "sinner." Jesus is attempting to call out his host for not treating him or the woman with the courtesy (washing their feet) afforded to others whom he sees as socially equal. Feel free to use the short parable (v. 40-43 not included here) to emphasize the point of the story.

Luke 7:36-39, 44-48

36 One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee's home, he took his place at the table. 37 Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee's house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster. 38 Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. 39 When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner.

44 Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn't give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You didn't greet me with a kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. 46 You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet. 47 This is why I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little." 48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who would you say is privileged in this story? In what ways are they privileged?
- Where do you see fairness in this story?
- What is your impression to Jesus's response to this woman?
- What is your impression on Jesus's response of the Pharisee?
- How did the woman demonstrate generosity?
- How would you contrast the generosity of the Pharisee with the generosity of the woman?
- In what ways are you privileged?
- How might you encourage fairness when you observe injustice?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Recognize your privilege when it exists. Say it out loud when it is helpful. For example, if you are male, you could acknowledge the ideas of your female friends instead of or before sharing your own ideas. Or simply say, "I agree with (your friend's name)," without giving an explanation.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Reflect on a situation where you witnessed unfairness due to someone else's privilege. If you were able to get another chance at that experience, what would you do differently? How would you acknowledge the injustice and encourage a more equitable solution?



>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Include all of these in a prayer and close with this prayer written by Michah for the 6th Grade Kansas City Serve Trip in 2022.

Today, in this place, we see You.
In the families that don't have
enough to eat....
In the pain of broken relationships...
In the work of humans who are
overshadowed by labels...
We see You.

With our hands as we try:
To love like You.
To work like You.
To help like You.
To be like You.
We see You.

In the homes that aren't fit for Your
children...
In the cars that pass by those in pain...
In the humans walking in the heat...
We see You.

With our voices, as we try:
To love like You...
To pray like You...
To tell the truth like You...
To be empathetic like You...
We see You.

In the organizations that center the
margins...
In the people who give their time...
In the stories that bring dignity to the
unseen...
We see You.

With our bodies, as we try to:
Stand up for those who have been
oppressed by the systems we can't see...
Take up space in the places marginalized
humans aren't allowed...
Serve the people who have been
expected to serve us...
We see You.

So, today/tonight we ask that you remove
our guilt and replace it with empathy,
Open our eyes to see those who have
been invisible,
Give us a sense of peace where fear has
been,
Remind us that we are ALL created in
Your image, despite the privilege we have
been born into,
And give us understanding where
ignorance has been encouraged.

In it all, we see You.
Amen



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In Community: Important Life Moments

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Most of our life is rather mundane and routine. However, there are certain experiences that cause us to begin to look at life from a different perspective. Students may not have lived long enough to have experienced many of these life-defining moments. This session will allow students to consider what might be considered as they look back on their life so far. Students will reflect on important moments in their life and how they were shaped by them.

>> **CHECK IN:** Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> OPENING ACTIVITY

Supplies: Ledger pieces of paper, markers, color pencils
Students will each take a piece of paper and markers/color pencils and map out their life. A life map tracks your journey through life and is a way to point out the significant events that have happened along the way. The events on the map are what is important to you.



Each map should include:

- A minimum of 10 events that represent your past (ex. family trips, births, deaths, school experiences, joining a club or sport, going on a serve trip, retreats, friendships)
- A minimum of 3 events that you imagine in your future (ex. college, career, family)
- A clear understanding of why you have selected these events

Sample list of items to include in a life map:

- Day and location you were born
- Your earliest childhood memory
- A special trip you have taken
- A significant injury
- A time when you cried
- Your first bike ride
- A funny memory
- A memorable/favorite book
- A memory at church

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When students are done have each student share their map by talking about the most important experiences and why they chose them.

- What values do you notice reflected in important events?
- What would you change about your life map, if you could?

>> SCRIPTURE

Saul was a well-educated Jewish person and also a Roman citizen. Prior to this experience, he was convinced the followers of The Way (the early followers of Jesus after Jesus's death and resurrection) were a threat to Rome and to Jewish people. These followers were upending both social orders. So, Saul committed to eliminate the threat. This story finds him heading to Damascus to arrest men and women who were following Jesus.

Acts 9:1-9

Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, 2 seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?" 5 Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. 6 "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do."

7 Those traveling with him stood there speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 After they picked Saul up from the ground, he opened his eyes but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind and neither ate nor drank anything.



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If Saul were drawing out his life map, why might this experience be included on it?
- This is a dramatic experience. Can you think of something similar in your life or someone else's life that caused them to make an abrupt change?
- Initially Saul's experience seems pretty bad. He hears a voice and doesn't see a person (maybe he's crazy) and he is blinded (how will he do his work as a blind man?). How might what we initially think of as negative experiences shape our lives in positive ways?
- Most of our life experiences are not as dramatic or negative initially. How might these more subtle experiences shape us? How do we look for God's nudges as well?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Seek out life experiences that might potentially shape your life. Sign up for a retreat or serve trip. Attend a Bible study. Make friends with someone who might need a friend. Pick a local service opportunity and commit to spending the next four months helping them do their thing. Decide to smile and greet everyone you see.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

You have already drawn out your life map. Choose one life experience from the life map and write the details of the experience and how it shaped you. Reflect on the emotions you feel and the resulting decisions you have made as a result of the experience.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 3 Decision Making

Session 1: Moral Relativism

Session 2: Moral Therapeutic Deism

Session 3: Christian Lens on Society

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Decision making is a key skill for students as they move through adolescence. From a development perspective, they are making most of their decisions using the limbic system of their brain, where emotions drive their actions. They are literally not thinking through all of the decisions they will need to make. It doesn't mean that their rational thoughts aren't developing neural pathways. They are. That's why this unit is critical as they continue to align their spiritual and moral beliefs with their actions.

There are some difficult, yet common, concepts we will introduce to students. Moral relativism is the hallmark of the post-modern society in which we live. Modern thinking evolved with the Enlightenment of the 1700s. This way of scientific thinking created an environment where if you could prove it through hypothesis and testing, then it was true. In our post-modern environment, it doesn't matter what somebody else can prove, it only matters what I experience. My personal experiences form the truth in which I believe. Therefore, my decisions about morals, and, consequently, faith, are limited to my experiences. This makes it more difficult to pass on faith as experienced by others without creating an analogous experience.

Moral Therapeutic Deism is a term that has been around for over 20 years, first appearing in the largest study of American teenagers on religion, The National Study of Youth and Religion in the early 2000s. It is simply a belief in a God that wants people to be good (well behaved) with the intention of helping people be happy and feel good about themselves. This doesn't sound all bad at first glance. The concept begins to break apart when difficulty arises that isn't connected to our behavior. And it doesn't explain the sacrifices people have made throughout history for their faith. In fact, Moral Therapeutic Deism doesn't align with Jesus's death on the cross at all.

These concepts are widely accepted and practiced in American culture and in the Christian church. So, this unit will acknowledge them and begin to reconstruct our understanding of how God intends for us to make decisions through an analysis of the life of Jesus.



YEAR ONE

UNIT 3 | SESSION 1

Decision Making: Moral Relativism

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Students are confronted with moral decisions constantly. They draw largely on an internal sense of right and wrong based on their own experiences, moral relativism. Understanding these decisions using the experience of others is more difficult. Yet, they are developing empathy and other significant emotional muscles connected with rational thinking and reasoning. Students will determine what is right or wrong relative to their beliefs and the beliefs of others. In determining what is right and wrong, they will also discover how to utilize grace and all of its complexity.

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> OPENING

Assign students into small groups and give one scenario to each group. Have them read the scenario and reflect on the questions. (adapted from Teen Sunday School Place: <https://www.teensundayschool.com/lessons/life-applications/truth-or-dare-part-1/ethics-and-morality-part-1>)

Scenario #1

You are hiding an innocent group of people in your home who are fleeing some gangsters. Gangster Leo knocks on your door, and when you open it, he asks if the group is in your house. What should you do? Should you tell the truth or lie?



Scenario #2

You are passing through an impoverished country carrying a large amount of money. You know that if you are found with valuables, you will be killed, and your valuables stolen. However, if you disguise your money in a worn-out backpack, you can get away with carrying it as you pass through. Is it wrong to disguise the truth to save yourself? Or should you be honest and trust God to protect you?

Scenario #3 You and a partner are working on a project at school. Your partner approaches you two days before the project is due and shows you that he has completed it on his own. The guidelines were that the two of you work on the project equally. He tells you not to worry about it and to just go along because “no one will ever know.” Are you wrong to skate by, letting your partner do the work, even if he is okay with it? Is it still the right thing to do?

>> SCRIPTURE

“The Way” was the name of the movement that immediately followed the death and resurrection of Jesus. People in Jerusalem were still Jewish. They simply saw Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy of a Messiah and this was “The Way” they were choosing to live their lives, by following Jesus’s example and teaching. In this story, Paul and Barnabas have returned to Jerusalem to report about starting churches in the Gentile (Greek and non-Jewish) part of the world. They were advocating that these new followers of The Way not follow some of the Jewish customs, namely circumcision. This would be a huge departure from the previous 2000 years of following God. This was a big deal. And a decision needed to be made. If the Jerusalem Council made a decision based only on their experiences, then it would come out one way and, quite possibly, these new converts to The Way would be lost. If they listened to new information, then they had the possibility of changing long standing tradition in exchange for more people following Jesus.

Acts 15:1-21

Some people came down from Judea teaching the family of believers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom we’ve received from Moses, you can’t be saved.”
2 Paul and Barnabas took sides against these Judeans and argued strongly against their position.

The church at Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas, and several others from Antioch to go up to Jerusalem to set this question before the apostles and the elders.
3 The church sent this delegation on their way. They traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling stories about the conversion of the Gentiles to everyone. Their reports thrilled the brothers and sisters.
4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders all welcomed them. They gave a full report of what God had accomplished through their activity.
5 Some believers from among the Pharisees stood up and claimed, “The Gentiles must be circumcised. They must be required to keep the Law from Moses.”



6 The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. 7 After much debate, Peter stood and addressed them, "Fellow believers, you know that, early on, God chose me from among you as the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe. 8 God, who knows people's deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, but purified their deepest thoughts and desires through faith. 10 Why then are you now challenging God by placing a burden on the shoulders of these disciples that neither we nor our ancestors could bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we and they are saved in the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus."

12 The entire assembly fell quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through their activity. 13 When Barnabas and Paul also fell silent, James responded, "Fellow believers, listen to me. 14 Simon reported how, in his kindness, God came to the Gentiles in the first place, to raise up from them a people of God. 15 The prophets' words agree with this; as it is written,

16 After this I will return,
and I will rebuild David's fallen tent;
I will rebuild what has been torn down.
I will restore it

17 so that the rest of humanity will seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who belong to me.

The Lord says this, the one who does these things[a]

18 known from earliest times.

19 "Therefore, I conclude that we shouldn't create problems for Gentiles who turn to God. 20 Instead, we should write a letter, telling them to avoid the pollution associated with idols, sexual immorality, eating meat from strangled animals, and consuming blood. 21 After all, Moses has been proclaimed in every city for a long time, and is read aloud every Sabbath in every synagogue."



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the moral dilemma here? What is Paul arguing? What is Peter arguing?
- Moral relativism is making moral choices based on your own experience. How is this happening in this story?
- What did the Council of Jerusalem hear that convinced them to change the long-held Jewish law for the Gentiles?
- What are some moral convictions you hold as most important to you?
- Are there morals that some people hold that are not aligned appropriately with a larger, more important objective? What are they?
- How might your own moral relativism get in the way of making good moral choices?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION OR MORE ACTIVITIES

If students are stuck on this concept, check out this video explaining the concept further: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3L8wde86wg>

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Consider your morals and what morals matter to you the most. Why do you value these? How did you choose them?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Read the following description about Moral Relativism: "Moral relativism is the view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others." How would you rephrase this definition? List your morals and how they might be relative only to your experience. How might your morals come from sources other than your own experience?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 3 | SESSION 2

Decision Making: Moral Therapeutic Deism

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Our culture's understanding of Christianity tends to stop at being good with God rewarding those who are good. A much deeper viewpoint reveals that Jesus's message was much deeper and more complicated than that. How might we extend our understanding of "being good" to the ways in which we view the world and our interaction with it? Students will discover that being "good" isn't the end goal of what God intends. They will begin to distinguish the shallowness of simply "being good" from following Jesus.

>> OPENING

- Do you think God is nice?
- Does God want you to have a good life and be happy?
- Does God reward you for doing good things?
- Is God involved in the lives of people? In what ways?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

The Sermon on the Mount in the first few chapters of Matthew is thought to be a compilation of Jesus's best teachings and sayings. Luke reports some of the same teachings and sayings after Jesus comes down from the mountain in the Sermon on the Plain. This section challenges our natural sense of right and wrong, reward and punishment. Jesus is drawing his listeners to consider the extra effort God encourages if we want to follow him. Consider what this might say about sacrifice and suffering and how it might be in opposition to living a good life.

Luke 6:32-35

32 "If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in full. 35 Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- This seems like a lot when Jesus encourages us to love our enemies. Why is he asking us to do that?
- Does loving your enemies require sacrifice? What does that look like?
- In what ways do the concepts of sacrifice and suffering go against the concepts of happiness and a good life?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION ON MORALISTIC THERAPEUTIC DEISM

Moral Therapeutic Deism is a term that came out of the National Study on Youth and Religion and was coined in a book about the study called *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton. It is a term used to describe the religious and spiritual experience of the vast majority of teens involved in the study and how they view God. Here are the five main points:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.



Here is an adapted summary from Christian Smith On Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as U.S. Teenagers' Actual, Tacit, De Facto Religious Faith.

"First, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about inculcating a moralistic approach to life. It believes that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, and responsible; working on self-improvement; taking care of one's health; and doing one's best to be successful. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is also about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents. This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etc. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people... Finally, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about belief in a particular kind of God, one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in our affairs—especially affairs in which we would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance..."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are your initial reactions to this concept? Do you believe the main points to be true? Why or why not?
- Christian Smith says that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism does not include "religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice." How do the things he says are excluded create a deeper faith?
- If God doesn't reward us for being good, how do we know we are doing the right thing?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Next time you find yourself thinking or saying out loud that God must have been involved because it turned out to your liking OR God must not have been involved because it didn't go the way you wanted it to go, stop and remind yourself that God is involved in everything and is present in all of your situations, good or bad. Remind others of the same thing.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

List the many ways you currently feel God's presence. Then, list times or situations you can choose to look for God's presence where you currently don't.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 3 | SESSION 3

Decision Making: Christian Lens on Society

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

This final session may seem like a departure from the previous two sessions. Instead of looking at ways the world has confused the Christian message and how we are influenced to make decisions, we will look directly at Jesus and what he said about himself. We rarely do this when making decisions. Students will connect Jesus's description of himself as a way of seeing themselves in the world.

>> OPENING

If you had to describe yourself with a word or a phrase, what would it be? Begin your statement with "I am..."

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

John is the only Gospel writer to record Jesus saying definitive statements about himself. These are analogies and require the reader to interpret Jesus's (and John's) intent. The statements help us to see Jesus differently, and thus ourselves, if we attempt to follow his example. Read the following passages one at a time, and then ask the questions following the statements.

- John 6:35 - Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."
- John 8:12 - Jesus spoke to the people again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life."
- John 10:9 - I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture."
- John 10:11-16 - "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. 13 He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him. 14 "I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd."
- John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die."
- John 14:6 - Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- John 15:1-5 - "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. 2 He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do these statements say about Jesus?
- How can you view Jesus this way in the world?
- If you are following Jesus's example, how can you view yourself in this way?
- If you view yourself this way, how might it affect the decisions you make?



>> **RESPONSE EXPERIENCE**

Pick one of the I AM statements, memorize it (its short), and say it as an impromptu prayer throughout the week. Say your prayer silently or out loud, in class or in your car, before practice or after school. Say it enough so that you begin to say it out of habit, reminding you that Jesus is what you are saying and you are empowered to be the same as his follower.

>> **JOURNAL PROMPT**

Spend some time reflecting on the I AM statements that were discussed. Read through the statements again and write about areas in your life where you have seen these statements lived out, or you desire for them to be real to you.

>> **JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER**

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 4 Define You

Session 1: Early Beliefs and Influences

Session 2: Mission Statement

Session 3: Expressing Your Beliefs

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Arguably, the most difficult thing for students to do is to define themselves when they are in the midst of identity formation. They don't know who they are. As a result, they are trying on different personas to help them understand more fully who they are.

Maybe the best approach is to speak with students about who they are becoming. Thinking of their lives on a continuum without a finished product may help students see themselves in a better light. In fact, they won't identify hardships and mistakes as negative. They will see them as events that are part of future events and people who will shape them into the person they are becoming.

To bring clarity to this point in time, it will be helpful to create some mile markers. A mission statement will help do that. It isn't a forever statement. It is a statement of how they perceive themselves right now and how they might impact the world by using the values and skills they recognize presently.

And in the last session, students will be encouraged to express their faith comfortably using mediums and strategies that align with the person they feel they are becoming. This is also a chance for experimentation, to find out which strategies are most comfortable.



Define You: Early Beliefs and Influences

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

We all are profoundly shaped by experiences that happen early in our lives. Many times these experiences consist of a moment where we can vividly see the place and the people involved. We can also identify our feelings at that moment. We may have thought about that time in a particular way that shaped our future opinions. We may have interpreted it correctly. And we may have been inaccurate in our interpretation because we may have been too young to fully understand the moment. Or we simply may have misinterpreted what was going on. Regardless of all these things, these moments form us in ways that we can't fully explain. But we know they do because of how vivid the memory and feeling are. Students will explore their early understanding of their faith and the people who influenced them, their early mentors.

>> OPENING

What is your earliest childhood memory (see if you can remember something without the help of pictures or videos that you have seen)?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul gives the people of Corinth some insight into his strategy for helping them grow in their faith. He wanted them to know that he gave them just what they needed when they were younger in their faith. He sounds as if he is frustrated because they have not grown spiritually at the rate at which he expected by evidence of their divisions and allegiance to differing leaders.



I Corinthians 3:1-5

Brothers and sisters, I couldn't talk to you like spiritual people but like unspiritual people, like babies in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink instead of solid food, because you weren't up to it yet. 3 Now you are still not up to it because you are still unspiritual. When jealousy and fighting exist between you, aren't you unspiritual and living by human standards? 4 When someone says, "I belong to Paul," and someone else says, "I belong to Apollos," aren't you acting like people without the Spirit? 5 After all, what is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants who helped you to believe. Each one had a role given to them by the Lord:

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you know if you have grown? Physically? Intellectually? Mentally? Spiritually?
- There are a lot of people who give you feedback on your growth: teachers, parents, coaches, mentors. How do you hear that feedback positively?
- Reflect back on experiences when you were younger. What experiences and/or people shaped you into the person you are today?
- When you reflect on positive spiritual growth experiences, what comes to mind?
- How do these spiritual growth experiences relate to the "spiritual milk" Paul is talking about with the Corinthians?
- What ways do you think you might grow into the future?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Look at your own spiritual growth. Where do you think you need to grow? Seek out a mentor to give you feedback on where they think you might grow.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write a list of people who have influenced you in your life so far. Think about each of them. Thank God for their involvement in your life. If you feel motivated, write out specifically how they helped you grow.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Define You: Mission Statement

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Our social order seems to dictate the purpose for a teenager. Do well in school. Be involved in an extra-curricular activity, preferably a sport. Be nice to others including your parents. If students follow these three ideals, they will function well in our society. Even though we support this line of thinking, we also know there is much more to life than these three items. In some ways, these items may not even be the most important things (heretical thinking, huh?). Students need more purpose than this. And, more importantly, they need to own their purpose so they stay motivated. In this session, students will develop a mission statement taking into account the roles they perform and the traits they value most. In this way they will differentiate their beliefs and values from one another.

>> OPENING

What is the one thing you are most proud of accomplishing?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> SCRIPTURE

This is the part of the story when things are ramping up for Jesus. In the chapter before Jesus feeds thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish. King Herod discovers that killing John the Baptist is not going to be enough to quell the apparent uprising among the Jewish people. Jesus tells his disciples that he is the Messiah and tells them not to tell anyone. He is transfigured on a mountain top with images of Moses and Elijah, two of the most famous patriarchs in Jewish history, Jesus tells his disciples he will eventually be murdered. He heals a boy. And he begins the journey to Jerusalem for the last time. So, Jesus has a plan and a mission to begin to spread the good news of God. Here it is.

Luke 10:1-11

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. 3 Go! Be warned, though, that I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don't even greet anyone along the way. 5 Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' 6 If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7 Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don't move from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'God's kingdom has come upon you.' 10 Whenever you enter a city and the people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 11 'As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God's kingdom has come to you.'

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the mission of the 72 people Jesus is sending out?
- Why is he asking them to do all of these things?
- How do you think these people felt about the mission they were given?
- When you are excited about doing something, how does that change the results of what you are doing?
- What causes you to be excited about accomplishing something?



>> MORE ACTIVITY

Spend some time crafting a mission for yourself. This isn't just one activity for you to accomplish. Instead, think about your overall life mission. Don't be too specific. Be general. For instance: "I want to help people who are unhappy." After you have that, then list all of the roles you have (ex. student, brother, sister, daughter, son, friend, etc.) Finally, list the character traits you value most (ex. humor, helpfulness, honesty, etc.). When you are finished, share your mission statement, the roles you have and how you might accomplish this through the character traits you value most.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Get feedback on your mission statement, roles and character traits you value. Ask several friends and/or mentors of they think what you have written accurately reflects you. See if you can incorporate their feedback in what you have written.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Take the final activity and write it into a 3-5 sentence statement about yourself. Try to keep it simple enough so that you can remember it.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Expressing Your Beliefs

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

It may be difficult or uncomfortable for people to share what they believe. It may be because they aren't entirely sure of their beliefs. Or it may simply be because they feel there is only one way to share, verbally, with others. Over the course of this discipleship series, students have explored topics related to their identity and community, in addition to digging into scripture, ethics, and multiple other topics. This is the chance for students to combine this work together while considering creative ways to share that with others.

>> OPENING

What is your favorite story? In what way is it told (through a book, song, movie, tv show, poem, orally by friends or family)?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> SCRIPTURE

Peter, one of Jesus's disciples, is writing to the believers in Greece, encouraging them in their faith. He wants them to be brave and integrous. His words are pretty straight forward.

1 Peter 3:15-16

13 Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? 14 But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don't be terrified or upset by them. 15 Instead, regard Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. 16 Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you.



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is Peter encouraging the people who live in Greece to do?
- In what ways is Peter encouraging people to share their faith?
- In what ways is it difficult to share faith?
- In what ways is it easy to share faith? Should it always be comfortable?
- Think of the many forms of creative expressions (poetry, music, etc.) What are some ways you may not have previously considered where you can share the story of your faith with others?

>> MORE ACTIVITY

- Write some statements about your beliefs using the following prompts.
- Be Brief: Name how your beliefs were challenged, pushed, or encouraged: Write a 1-2 sentence statement on what you believe to be the biggest takeaway from your experience.
- Be positive: Write about what you do believe, not what you don't believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.
- Be personal: Write about you; speak in the first person. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we." Tell a story from your own life; this is not an opinion piece about social ideals. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Read what others are saying or writing about their beliefs at thisibelieve.org or themoth.org.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write a story about you. Be specific! Consider moments when a belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that are unique to your story. Your story doesn't need to be heartwarming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be real. Share your faith and your beliefs in that story. Note how your beliefs have shaped your life, and how they will continue to shape your future. Consider other expressions of your beliefs like poetry, drawing, graphic art or music.

>>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 5 Discernment

Session 1: Discernment: How Do You Use It?

Session 2: Spiritual Gifts

Session 3: Personal Eschatology: Your Role in God's Kingdom

Session 4: What's Next? A Church Community

Session 5: What's Next? College, Trade School, Job or Year Off

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Discernment is the ability to see yourself for who God sees you. Then, take that perspective and begin to think what God might want you to do from day to day, especially when it comes to the big decisions. This educated guessing is from a spiritual perspective. We can't claim to know exactly what God wants us to do when it comes to seemingly mundane decisions, like choosing what to wear for the day. But, the more we study God's character, God's desires for humans and in what ways God gifted us specifically, the more we can predict what God might have intended for us when he created us.

Students will be making life altering decisions in the next 5-8 years. In a short while, they will have decided a career direction and may have selected a life partner. They will decide where their first home will be independent of their parents. This is a big stepping off point that carries with it a lot of anxiety and, sometimes, fear of making the wrong decision. Being clear on what God wants for them can be a settling force that will allow them to focus on what is most important.



Discernment: How Do You Use It?

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Students will be making a number of significant life decisions over the next several years. Discernment is the process of making decisions using prayer and spiritual contemplation, connecting with God and God's intention for a person's life. This session invites students to use discernment as a tool to decide what to do next in life. Students will practice different types of discernment.

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> OPENING

Describe a major decision you have made or have coming up soon.

READ THE FOLLOWING TO THE GROUP:

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch-born Catholic priest who is considered one of the most influential spiritual writers of our time. He started the L'Arche Daybreak, which was a school and community for people with intellectual disabilities. In his book *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (Harper Collins: 2015), he discusses how Christians can embrace the practice of discernment and learn to listen to God's voice. Read the quotes and then discuss the following scripture passages.

“Discernment is a spiritual understanding and an experiential knowledge of how God is active in daily life that is acquired through disciplined spiritual practice. Discernment is faith living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.”

“The purpose of discernment is to know God’s will, that is, to find, accept, and affirm the unique way in which God’s love is manifest in our life. It has nothing to do with passive submission to an external divine power that imposes itself on us. It has everything to do with active waiting on a God who waits for us.”

“Finding ourselves in a relationship with God is prerequisite to discernment of God’s will and direction. As in any relationship, there will be feelings of rejection as well as attraction, resentment, as well as gratitude, as well as love. There will be ups and downs in faithfulness as we discover new things about ourselves and God. In our dynamic relationship with God, we can be sure of one thing: “If we are faithless, God is faithful still, for God cannot disown his own” (2 Timothy 2:13).”

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul, in the opening to his letter to the Colossians, is describing the process of faith they have journeyed so far and what he hopes will happen for them as they stay faithful to what God is doing in their lives. In the next verse, James is making a matter-of-fact statement about how God wants the best for us and is willing to provide us direction. It simply makes sense for us to ask and seek God’s wisdom.

Colossians 1:9-10

9 Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we haven’t stopped praying for you and asking for you to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. 10 We’re praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.

James 1:5

5 But anyone who needs wisdom should ask God, whose very nature is to give to everyone without a second thought, without keeping score. Wisdom will certainly be given to those who ask.



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have any of you ever had to make a big life decision? What was your process of trying to come up with an answer?
- What are the decisions you are trying to discern and figure out right now?
- In Paul's letter to the Colossians, what is Paul hoping for them?
- How do you think the Colossians will know when they have knowledge and spiritual understanding?
- James talked about "wisdom." What does wisdom look like for you? How do you know when you are being wise?
- How does the "discernment" that Henri Nouwen wrote about connected to knowledge, spiritual understanding and wisdom?
- Nouwen differentiated between "passive submission" and "active waiting." What do you think the difference is between these two? How might you actively wait for God's wisdom?
- Active waiting could mean praying, meditating, taking a break (sabbath), or asking for people in your community to help you discern God's wisdom for you. Which of these seem like they might be helpful to you?
- Nouwen says, "God cannot disown us." How might that give you reassurance when you are trying to make a decision?

>> MORE ACTIVITIES

More about Henri Nouwen can be found at henrinouwen.org.

Richard Rohr is a Catholic Priest and a prolific writer, helping people understand faith in a way that is actionable. His non-profit, the Center for Action and Contemplation at cac.org is a great resource for helpful daily readings and podcasts. In his book, *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation*, he writes:

Silence is not just that which is around words and underneath images and events. It has a life of its own. It is a being in itself to which we can relate and can become intimately familiar. Philosophically, we would say being is that foundational quality which precedes all other attributes. Silence is at the very foundation of all reality—naked being, we might say. Pure being is that out of which all else comes and to which all things return.

To live in this primordial, foundational being, which I am calling silence, creates a kind of sympathetic resonance with what is right in front of us. Without it, we are just reacting instead of responding. The opposite of contemplation is not action, it is reaction. We must wait for pure action, which always proceeds from a contemplative silence.

We have to be awake right now and we can be through silence. It is not a matter of being more moral but of being more conscious—which will eventually make us more moral!



>> DISCUSSION:

1. Are you a person that enjoys sitting in silence?
2. Richard Rohr states, "The opposite of contemplation is not action, it is reaction." What do you feel like this means? How can you apply this to your life?
3. What spiritual disciplines and practices do you follow the most?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Connect with someone older who you trust. Discernment can be hard to figure out alone, and often other people's insight and wisdom can help us figure out big life decisions. Go out of your comfort zone and ask a trusted adult friend or mentor for insight into the things you are trying to discern in your life.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about what you are trying to discern in your life. What scares you about this? What excites you about this? Are there spiritual practices you can do to better discern this?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Discernment: Personal Eschatology: Your Role in God's Kingdom

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

It is difficult for people to fully grasp how their actions fit into a larger movement. Often, we feel our efforts are pointless. Now that students have explored discernment on a personal level, they are invited to discern what their role is in God's larger kingdom and the world. The phrase "Kingdom of God" is one a student has probably heard but isn't necessarily familiar with using on a regular basis. Students will articulate what the Bible means by "Kingdom of God" and consider how they can participate in it. They will see their expression of faith larger than themselves with a bigger kingdom impact.

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> OPENING

Share a time when you looked for something that was either right in front of you, in your hands or in an obvious place, but for some reason you thought it was lost.

>> SCRIPTURE

Jesus is speaking in both of these scriptures. In the first one, he is responding to Pharisees. In the second, this may seem like a familiar line (in a different translation) from the Lord's Prayer. In both, Jesus is suggesting that the God's kingdom is here or will be here soon.



Luke 17:20-21 - God's Kingdom is already among us.

20 Pharisees asked Jesus when God's kingdom was coming. He replied, "God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. 21 Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's kingdom is already among you."

Matthew 6:10 - Your Kingdom Come

10 Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven.

MORE ACTIVITY

Read the article below or the entire article online at:

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-kingdom-of-god>

The kingdom of God is a way of describing the reign of God. United Methodists, with other Christians, recognize that the reign of God is both a present and future reality. John Wesley recognized both of these aspects of God's reign: "The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are but two phrases for the same thing. They mean, not barely a future happy state, in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth. ... In some places of Scripture, the phrase more particularly denotes the state of it on earth: in others, it signifies only the state of glory: but it generally includes both."

Early Christians believed that God's kingdom had come in Jesus. When the Pharisees asked when God's kingdom was coming, Jesus replied, "God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's kingdom is already among you." (Luke 17:20-21, CEB)

We believe that wherever God's will is done, the kingdom or reign of God is present. It was present in Jesus' ministry, and it also is present in our world whenever persons and communities experience reconciliation, restoration and healing. "Wherever persons are being made new creatures in Christ, wherever the insights and resources of the gospel are brought to bear on the life of the world, God's reign is already effective in its healing and renewing power." Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God when he taught the disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) Wesley writes that in this prayer, we implore, "May Thy kingdom of grace come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth!" That hasn't happened yet. The kingdom is still to come. Early Christians anticipated the fulfillment of the kingdom when Jesus returned. (Revelation 11:15)

Christians today continue to look to the end time in which God's work will be fulfilled. "Living in a covenant of grace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we participate in the first fruits of God's coming reign and pray in hope for its full realization on earth as in heaven." Rev. F. Belton Joyner Jr. sums it up, "One can almost open the Gospels at random and find some image, some forecast, some announcement of the kingdom. And the kingdom does not look like business as usual! The values and systems of the world are turned upside down." These various biblical references to the kingdom lead to the conclusion that the kingdom's life could be seen in Jesus Christ, that even now in the 21st century we get glimpses of God's reign, and that in a time that seems good to God, the full reign of God will restore a future that we have already seen in Christ. "Death and evil will not only have lost their power but will be destroyed."



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the Kingdom of God according to the article and scriptures?
- The article we read states, "The kingdom of God is a way of describing the reign of God. United Methodists, with other Christians, recognize that the reign of God is both a present and future reality." What do you think this means?
- Where is the Kingdom of God according to Jesus as recorded by Luke and Matthew?
- What is your role in ensuring that God's kingdom is here?
- How can you invite others to experience God's kingdom?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

Watch the TedTalk: How to Create a Sacred Space? by Siamak Hariri
https://www.ted.com/talks/siamak_hariri_how_do_you_build_a_sacred_space?referrer=playlist-the_emotional_impact_of_archit&autoplay=true

- This is a TedTalk on how someone created sacred space for the Bahai faith. How do the methods mentioned help you to envision creating the kingdom of God on earth?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

See the world differently this week. Imagine that you are part of making sure that God's kingdom is here. What will you do differently this week as a result?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Spend some time reflecting on God's kingdom and what it means for you to participate in it. Write down your thoughts about what it would look like for you to participate more intentionally in God's kingdom.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Discernment: Spiritual Gifts

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Students know what they like, but sometimes don't know what they are naturally good at doing. A spiritual gift inventory allows students to discover how God has uniquely gifted them to be good at certain things. Students have been exploring the idea of discernment and how it is a tool to help us make decisions faithful to God's desire for us. This session invites students to discover their spiritual gifts. Students will learn their spiritual gifts and how they might be used as a way of further discerning God's desire for them, thereby having the full opportunity to express their faith through their gifts.

>> OPENING

What do you think you are good at doing? Do you think God has made you good at that particular thing?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, is outlining eight of the spiritual gifts here. Other spiritual gifts are outlined by Paul earlier in this chapter, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. His point is that we are all different with a common purpose.



1 Corinthians 12:8-11 Spiritual Gifts

8 A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, 9 faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, 10 performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues[a] to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another. 11 All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person.

Spend 10 minutes asking students to complete the Spiritual Gifts Inventory at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en>

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11? Did you have these gifts in your Spiritual Gifts Inventory?
- What are your top three gifts?
- Why do you think God intended everyone to have a different gift?
- How do your spiritual gifts connect with your Enneagram number from Unit 1?
- How is knowing your spiritual gift helpful to you?
- In what ways do you currently use your spiritual gifts?
- How do you think you can use your gifts this week, this month, and this year?

>> MORE ACTIVITIES

Here are some additional resources:

- Sacred Rhythms: Ruth Haley-Barton
- Practicing Our Faith: Dorothy Bass
- Exploring your gifts further: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/exploring-your-spiritual-gifts>

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Find resources or experiences that are unique to your spiritual gifts. For example, if you have the spiritual gift of prophecy, then spend some time reading about the prophets in the Old Testament. If you have the spiritual gift of service, spend time identifying a service outlet for you this week.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about your three spiritual gifts. How are these helpful in discerning what decisions you might make regarding your career, hobbies or interests?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Discernment: What's Next? A Church Community**>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS**

Making the transition out of high school to the next phase of life is difficult. There are a lot of factors for students to consider: making new friends, finding a job, trying to figure out what it means to be an adult. Finding a church is sometimes further down on the list. Ironically, the right church community may be supportive and help students with all the transitional elements. So, how will they choose their next faith community? The purpose of this session is to give students the tools and thought process on how to find their next spiritual community, one that best fits them.

>> OPENING

- What was your first experience at this church? Were you born into this church? Did someone invite you?
- What are the things you love about your church? What are some things you think are important to experience in a church?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

The writer of the book of Hebrews is unknown. A small minority of scholars think it may have been Paul. Here, he is encouraging, what is thought to be, Jews living in Rome at the time when Emperor Nero was persecuting Christians by feeding them to the Lions and other dreadful acts against those that followed Jesus's teachings.

Hebrews 10:24-25

24 And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. 25 Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If these people were being persecuted and their lives at risk, why was it important for them to continue to meet together?
- What does the author of the letter mean when he is encouraging them to spark "love and good deeds?"
- Why is it important for you to continue to meet with people who believe in Jesus?
- What might cause you to get out of the habit of meeting together?
- How does your church community communicate your personal beliefs about the world and how the world should be?

>> MORE ACTIVITIES

Supplies needed: Phones, tablets or computers

Divide the group up into two and give these instructions:

Group 1: There are 7 Social Principles of the United Methodist Church. Read the summary of "Our Social Principles" at <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/what-we-believe/our-social-positions>. Consider clicking on one or two social principles to read more about how the United Methodist Church positions itself on these issues.

Group 2: There are 25 Articles of Religion originally adopted by the Methodist Church at its first conference in 1784. John Wesley abridged them from the 39 Articles of Religion from the Church of England. Read through some of them at <https://www.umc.org/en/content/articles-of-religion>

After both groups are finished reading, invite them to spend 4-5 minutes summarizing as a group what they have read. After each group has finished summarizing bring both groups together. Invite one person from each group to report the items that stuck out to the group either because they aligned generally with the beliefs of the students in the group or they were unusual.



>> DISCUSSION

- In what ways are statements like these important for a church community?
- What would you say is specific to being a United Methodist?
- How are non-Methodist denominations different or similar?
- Which statements align best with your beliefs?
- How do you determine if a church will help in growing your faith or harm you in your faith?
- What criteria might you use in choosing your next church community?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Pay attention to the other churches in our community. Even though you are currently at this church, which churches do you feel like you might align with? Which ones would not be a good fit for you? What reasons cause you to feel one way or another?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Imagine you moved 500 miles away and are trying to find a new church community. Answer the following questions:

- What do you want to experience when walking into a church?
- What do you want your new church to believe about the Bible?
- What do you want your new church to believe about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
- What do you want your new church to believe about justice?
- What other things will be important to you in a new church community?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Discernment: What's Next? College, Trade School, Job or Year Off

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

The purpose of this lesson is to help students identify what is next for them in their faith journey whether that is going to college or trade school, taking a break from school, or starting a job. Students will explore the next steps after high school and how they might continue to lean on their faith to make these decisions as they enter into the world.

>> OPENING

What are the two or three possibilities you are considering for next year? This could be different schools, different careers, or different destinations.

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

Jesus was often times confusing to his disciples. Right when they thought they knew him, he would confuse them with a story or a question. This story takes place after Jesus's resurrection. Four of the disciples, including Peter are fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. They are not catching any fish after having fished all night. Jesus appears on the shore (his third appearance after the Resurrection according to John) and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. We know what happens. Lots of fish. They realize it is Jesus. And, then Jesus cooks them breakfast on the shore. After eating Jesus questions Peter knowing that this is his last appearance and wanting to be sure Peter understands his role moving forward.

John 21:15-19

15 When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." 17 He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." 19 He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Often times Jewish authors emphasized important points by repeating them. Why do you think Jesus was so persistent with the same question he was asking Peter? What was he emphasizing?
- Jesus uses the metaphor of tying your own belt or letting someone else tie it as you grow older. What does he mean by this? What happens to us as we grow older?
- Consider the metaphor of the belt means that we are able to trust in others to lead us as we get older. Who do you think you Jesus was asking Peter to trust?
- As you get older, who do you need to trust? Why?
- As you consider discerning your next steps after high school, what voices are you trusting?
- This story is in two parts: Jesus's persistent questioning and the belt metaphor. Put those two parts together. What is Jesus asking Peter to do with the rest of his life?
- How might you take care of others by loving Jesus while at the same time trust in God to lead you to the next thing?
- What is one big thing you would like to accomplish in your life? How do you feel like you can work towards that goal with God?



RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Consider what it will look like to be a faithful follower of Jesus in this next phase of your life. How will you treat others? What will you do for yourself that will remind you of your commitment to your faith?

JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about what's next. Imagine yourself four years from now. What do you hope you will be doing? What kind of person do you hope you will be?

JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

Unit 6 Difficult Scripture

- Session 1: Using Jesus to Interpret the Bible
- Session 2: Using Culture and Context
- Session 3: The Source of Scripture
- Session 4: Why do Bad Things Happen?

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Reading Scripture is difficult. Well, the words are easy to read. The meaning is tricky. The original manuscripts were written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. There are words in these languages where we don't have English equivalents. So, right away the meaning can be different from the English word we are reading. These texts are also pretty old, 2000 to possibly 4000 years old. A lot has happened in the last few millennia. Culture and customs are different. Therefore, ancient writings taken out of the context of the time they were written could have been intended to convey a different message than the one we are reading in our century.

We also have our own biases. Our life experiences, family of origin and culture we grew up in, influence how we receive and process information. This complicates matters and is entirely subjective from person to person. It is for all of the reasons above that we have so many versions of the Bible. People literally translate and read the words differently. Luckily, most of it is interpreted similarly. But there are always nuanced opinions. And then, when it gets to more difficult scripture, those opinions can become wider, thus the reason for many different expressions of the Christian faith. That's why we have different churches and denominations.



So, how might we begin to interpret scripture (this is called exegesis)? How might we use our own life experiences as a lens to interpret scripture (this is called a hermeneutic)? Luckily the Jewish tradition, by which our Christian tradition is birthed, valued debate and discussion over the meaning of scripture. The Talmud is a compilation of writings from the 3rd through 6th centuries where Jewish scholars debated the meaning of scripture. It is an exegetical text.

In this unit students will use some guidelines for interpreting scripture. Adam Hamilton, in his book, *Making Sense of the Bible*, gives some clear strategies on how to understand scripture. In short, he encourages readers to:

- Appreciate that scripture was written by people inspired by God. God didn't dictate the words. Often, the writers didn't know at the time they were writing, that these manuscripts would be regarded as scripture hundreds of years later.
- Understand that the Bible is a compilation of writings from a variety of authors and is not without error and discrepancies.
- Embrace that Jesus is the living and resurrected "Word of God." Using Jesus's life and teachings as the ultimate filter of other Biblical texts is important to how Christians understand the Bible.
- Know that the Bible is the recording by those that were closest to the events being reported. These are our earliest writings and reflections of God's work in the world. That is the reason we hold them more sacred.

Well, let's get at it, shall we?



YEAR ONE

UNIT 6 | SESSION 1

Difficult Scripture: Using Jesus to Interpret the Bible (ex. Slavery)

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

In this first session, we will work on the skills used to interpret scripture. As a way to understand that the Bible should not be taken literally all of the time, we will use a social issue that was acceptable for thousands of years, especially during the time most of the Bible was written, yet most recently (in the last 200 years) has been declared unacceptable in spite of scripture that supports it, slavery. Students care about what the Bible says and don't often understand when it is contradictory to their understanding of Christianity. Students will understand the complexity of interpreting scripture as it aligns with their beliefs.

>> OPENING

Give students some time to think about the following questions while you check in with them.

- What is the overall point or points of the Bible? What is it trying to communicate to the person reading it?
- What have you read in the Bible that doesn't line up with what you think the overall point of the Bible is?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> ACTIVITY

Supplies Needed: Three different sizes of cups or containers, Notecards or Post It Notes, and Pens

In part (19:25-25:42) of Adam Hamilton's sermon, Making Sense of the Bible <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVp39BbYYUk&t=1158s>, he uses a colander to describe how we can read the Bible through the lens of Jesus's life and teachings and filter out the things that don't always make sense. He also uses three cups of different sizes to demonstrate the impact and importance of certain parts of scripture. Watch this part of the video or explain the concept and discuss the following.

Imagine you have three cups of three different sizes (small, medium, and large). What scripture passages, stories or books of the Bible, do you think would fall into each "size" (category)? Use notecards or post it notes to write down parts of the Bible that fit into each size and place beside the corresponding cup or container. When done, reflect together as a group.

- Small: Deeply troubling and inconsistent passage to Jesus's message
- Medium: Passages that support Jesus' message, but are not Jesus's direct words or message
- Large: Passages that are centered on Jesus's message

>> SCRIPTURE

Jesus quoted the Shema, an ancient Hebrew prayer, when responding to a lawyer's question about what the most important law is. For Jesus, this was his colander that filtered all of the other laws. Jesus added the last phrase about loving your neighbor.

Luke 10:27

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- As you look at the scripture passages, stories and books of the Bible you placed by each cup or container, how might the Shema, Jesus quoted help you make sense of each of the items by different size cups or containers?
- How might the cultural norms and customs of the time help explain some of the scripture, stories or books that are more troubling?



>> DIFFICULT SCRIPTURE

Let's look at some scripture that addresses a social issue that was common when the Bible was written and one that in the last 200 years society (especially the church) has changed its opinion about, slavery. What follows are certain excerpts from Paul's letters about slavery and the relationship between the slave and the master. He writes first to the churches in Ephesus and Colossae and finally to Timothy, his young protégé. Keep in mind that in a separate story Paul sent back the slave, Onesimus, to his owner, Philemon, asking that Philemon release Onesimus from his servitude. In the time Paul was writing, slaves were common and accepted. There wasn't a known debate about the morality of owning slaves. However, Paul does have expectations that slaves and owners treat each other as human beings.

Ephesians 6:5-8

5 As for slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling and with sincere devotion to Christ. 6 Don't work to make yourself look good and try to flatter people, but act like slaves of Christ carrying out God's will from the heart. 7 Serve your owners enthusiastically, as though you were serving the Lord and not human beings. 8 You know that the Lord will reward every person who does what is right, whether that person is a slave or a free person.

Colossians 4:1-6

Masters, be just and fair to your slaves, knowing that you yourselves have a master in heaven. 2 Keep on praying and guard your prayers with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray for us also. Pray that God would open a door for the word so we can preach the secret plan of Christ—which is why I'm in chains. 4 Pray that I might be able to make it as clear as I ought to when I preach. 5 Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Your speech should always be gracious and sprinkled with insight so that you may know how to respond to every person.

I Timothy 6:1-2

Those who are under the bondage of slavery should consider their own masters as worthy of full respect so that God's name and our teaching won't get a bad reputation. 2 And those who have masters who are believers shouldn't look down on them because they are brothers. Instead, they should serve them more faithfully, because the people who benefit from your good service are believers who are loved. Teach and encourage these things.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does Paul say about the relationship between a slave and a master?
- Do you think Paul endorses slavery? Why or why not?
- Apply Jesus's life and teachings to slavery. What do you think he might say about slavery?
- How does the current cultural opinion about slavery influence your opinion about it?
- Why do you think slavery was a social norm for thousands of years? What changed?



>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

On 3-10-24 Adam Hamilton preached on how to interpret Paul's more difficult words. He speaks about slavery, LGBTQ inclusion and women. This sermon will be helpful in understanding Paul. Paul's letters are the first writings about Jesus, predating the four Gospels. The first 13 minutes gives an overview of Paul. At 12:44-14:39 Adam gives a strategy for reading the letters of Paul which includes reading him in the light of Jesus and reading him in the light of his own writings. At 14:40-22:07, Adam addresses the passages specifically about slavery. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6l1vAlf5rww&list=PL4j5HUKXHEMuUwPZv2wC4649h8wzs1ST3&index=4> Discuss the following questions in light of Paul's writings about slavery and the video.

- James 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." How do you make sense of what James is writing here with Paul's writings about slaves and masters?
- How do you know whose words in the Bible to pay attention to?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Be aware of people that don't look at scripture in the same we discussed today. How might you engage them in a way that might be helpful to their understanding without creating tension and anger?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Spend some time reflecting on how you might read scripture using Jesus as a filter. In what other situations might this strategy be useful?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 6 | SESSION 2

Difficult Scripture: Using Culture and Context (ex. LGBTQ)

>> SESSION OVERVIEW WHY IT MATTERS

One of the most controversial and relevant topics in Christianity is human sexuality. This becomes even more cloudy when discussing how it is talked about in the Bible. Students are in the process of understanding their identity. Of course, we want them to have an identity in Christ. But this is only part of their identity formation. There are confusing messages in our world and a great deal of cultural and social pressure for them to declare their identity, often before they are ready. In addition, while they are figuring out who they are, they may tend to have alienating opinions about others who are different from them. Jesus is clear about how we should treat others. Other parts of the Bible can confuse this when it comes to LGBTQ people. Students will study the scriptures used to marginalize LGBTQ people and how it can be interpreted differently using the culture and context at the time of the writing.

>> OPENING

What is something you might do in one setting that you wouldn't do in another (for example, something you would do at school that you wouldn't do at home or with your friends)?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

There are six scriptures throughout the Bible that mention same sex relationships in some manner. We will look at all of them including the story (context) surrounding them. There are important things to remember before reading the scriptures.

- Biblical authors did not understand sexual orientation as we know it today. They also expressed gender roles differently as a result of the culture of their time and region of the world.
- In the Greco-Roman world, there were adult males who tried to assert their power (sexually) with minors or other men as a way to show power and control.
- Jesus never brings up same-sex relationships. We don't know if this is intentional or not, but it is not included in the Gospels.

Divide the group into four groups. Assign each group on of the following passages:

Group 1

This is a story about two strangers that came into Sodom, a town where Lot, his wife and two daughters lived. The men of the town came to Lot's house and wanted Lot to hand over the men so they could have sex with them. (There is a similar story in Judges 19.) In ancient times, men would sexually victimize other men to assert their dominance and power. They didn't necessarily consider themselves attracted to the same gender but were aggressive and power-driven. Some would say that this story is more about the hospitality of Lot and his family and how they invited travelers into their home and protected them from people who wanted to harm them.

Genesis 19:1-5

The two messengers entered Sodom in the evening. Lot, who was sitting at the gate of Sodom, saw them, got up to greet them, and bowed low. 2 He said, "Come to your servant's house, spend the night, and wash your feet. Then you can get up early and go on your way." But they said, "No, we will spend the night in the town square." 3 He pleaded earnestly with them, so they went with him and entered his house. He made a big meal for them, even baking unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 Before they went to bed, the men of the city of Sodom—everyone from the youngest to the oldest—surrounded the house 5 and called to Lot, "Where are the men who arrived tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may have sex with them."



Group 2

These passages come from the purity laws of Moses. Some would look at the historical context and say that most of these laws in Leviticus are no longer practiced. Another law included in Leviticus are, “do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.” We do this all the time. Another view would say we follow these laws including avoiding incest, helping the poor, and being concerned for the poor. Still others would say that the all of the Hebrew purity laws were meant to establish a high ideal that justified the Hebrew people taking over the land after returning from slavery in Egypt with Moses and Aaron (because they were holier than the people who lived there).

Leviticus 18:22, 20:13

22 You must not have sexual intercourse with a man as you would with a woman; it is a detestable practice.

13 If a man has sexual intercourse with a man as he would with a woman, the two of them have done something detestable. They must be executed; their blood is on their own heads.

Group 3

These passages may be referring to male prostitutes and men that want to exert power over another person. One view says that in the Greco-Roman world, there were adult males that had tried to assert their power (sexually) with minors or other men and that this is what Paul is explaining. Another view would say that this instruction was intentionally broad and meant to be lived out. Another interesting fact is that prior to 1946, the Greek words that are translated here as same sex were translated as effeminate or violators of boys or depraved or persons of sordid morals or abusers of themselves and mankind.

I Corinthians 6:9-10

9 Don't you know that people who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom.

1 Timothy 1:8-10

8 Now we know that the Law is good if used appropriately. 9 We understand this: the Law isn't established for a righteous person but for people who live without laws and without obeying any authority. They are the ungodly and the sinners. They are people who are not spiritual, and nothing is sacred to them. They kill their fathers and mothers, and murder others. 10 They are people who are sexually unfaithful, and people who have intercourse with the same sex. They are kidnappers, liars, individuals who give false testimonies in court, and those who do anything else that is opposed to sound teaching.



Group 4

This scripture passage was written by Paul to the Romans (Greco-Roman world). One view would say the context of this passage talks about worshipping idols as the main emphasis, not the act of same-gendered relations. Another view would say that this passage was meant to be taken literally and would also look to Genesis 1 and 2 in comparison as a marriage ethic.

Romans 1:25-27

25 They traded God's truth for a lie, and they worshipped and served the creation instead of the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 That's why God abandoned them to degrading lust. Their females traded natural sexual relations for unnatural sexual relations. 27 Also, in the same way, the males traded natural sexual relations with females, and burned with lust for each other. Males performed shameful actions with males, and they were paid back with the penalty they deserved for their mistake in their own bodies.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Give a quick summary of the scripture or scriptures you read and what you discussed.
- Do the scriptures address same sex relationships or something else? What other factors were compelling for you to look at these scriptures differently?
- How do context clues help you in interpreting other situations (ex. conversations, books, TV shows, movies)?
- Last week, we talked about using Jesus as a colander, to filter our reading of other scripture. What can you use from his life and teaching that will be helpful to interpret these scriptures, especially since he never specifically addressed same sex relationships?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Identify people in the LGBTQ community that you might want to reach out to and befriend.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about where you are at in your understanding of how same-gendered relations are talked about in the Bible. Share how your church is or can become a more welcoming place for LGBTQ students and adults.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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YEAR ONE

UNIT 6 | SESSION 3

Difficult Scripture: The Source of Scripture (ex. Gender)

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Women continue to have lower average wages in our country and world. There are occupations that are gender affiliated. Often times, women are deferred in conversation. In a pluralistic society, both men and women have a great deal to do to even the playing field. How do our personal beliefs and those of the church factor into the solution? Students will study Scripture used to marginalize women and how it can be interpreted differently. Students will also examine how we have determined what is scripture and how that understanding may influence our understanding of it so that we might remain curious, not judgmental, starting with healthy conversations with those who have different points of view.

>> OPENING

- What is something you have a big opinion about?
- What does it take to change your opinion about that one thing?
- Do you find yourself generally open to healthy conversations?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.



>> SCRIPTURE

Paul is writing to Timothy. Upon first reading this seems harmless and easy to understand. We are holding the Bible, inspired words, and reading them. However, when Paul was writing this, he may have simply been referring to the Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) or the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible). He certainly wasn't referring to what he was writing or what hadn't been written yet (the Gospels). This scripture is often used as the basis for interpreting the Bible literally because God is inspiring the actual text, not the human being writing it. While United Methodist hold a high view of scripture, we also believe that it is written by fallible human beings who are influenced by the time and technology in which they are living.

II Timothy 3:16-17

16 Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, 17 so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What scripture do you think Paul is referring to?
- What is Paul trying to encourage Timothy to do?

>> MORE SCRIPTURE

Paul gives a lot of shout-outs in his letters to churches. While he admonished the church, he always encouraged the individual believers. In his letter to Timothy, Paul is giving some specific instructions for women. However, Paul valued women a great deal. He included them in areas where they were previously excluded. They were leaders in the churches he started as evidenced in the excerpts from his letters to the Philippians and Romans. Consider these points before reading the scripture that follows.

- The creation stories of Genesis tell of God making female and male in God's own image. God placed them in the garden to work in harmonious partnership.
- Old Testament prophets call for justice, speak out against inequities, and stand with the oppressed. Deborah was a judge. Ruth is a book in the Bible about her life. And there are many others like both of them.
- Jesus had women as friends, disciples and witnesses. Women were the first ones to discover and tell others Jesus was resurrected.
- Jesus challenged the conventional beliefs of his day that women were inferior, and men were superior.
- The Apostle Paul called the people of God to create a world where the gifts of both women and men are celebrated and used, where "there is neither male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).



From Commentary on Women in Ministry about I Timothy 2:8-15

"In the context of first century Judaism, a directive to let women learn was not only countercultural, but a revolutionary notion that would effectively double the number of witnesses of Jesus Christ to all the world. Whereas previously tradition forbade women from even being taught the scriptures, this text grants women the opportunity to learn in the same manner as men who previously had little knowledge of a subject. Some teachers then, such as Pythagoras (for those who know Greek teachers), even required long periods of silence probably as a form of moral discipline.

The Greek word translated as silence used in 1 Timothy is otherwise used to mean respectful attention or quiet demeanor rather than imposing total silence. The same word is used in verse 2 of this same chapter to exhort the whole church to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

Scholars are divided on the meaning of the warning again women teaching in such a way as to take authority, which could mean "to seize authority in an overbearing way" or "proclaim oneself originator or creator of the ideas." The restrictive meaning of "accepting a position of authority" 1) goes against the authority afforded Deborah, Phoebe, Pricilla, and Lydia; 2) categorizes the ministry of prophecy as less authoritative than teaching; and 3) regards spiritual instruction given privately to a man to be less authoritative than spiritual instruction given publicly to the general congregation. (also, considering the acceptance of women missionaries, Christians disregard the so-called mandate when sending teachers into all the world.) Further restrictive interpretations in this chapter have not been consistently enlisted in selecting elders, which would literally suggest all elders would be a married father whose disciplined children obey his teachings. It raises a question we don't have space to address that assumes (beyond the text), that Paul and Timothy were married men with children. Such assumptions beyond the text reflect the opposite bias of the assumption that the text literally means Junia was an apostle and Phoebe a deacon."

I Timothy 2:8-15

8 Therefore, I want men to pray everywhere by lifting up hands that are holy, without anger or argument. 9 In the same way, I want women to enhance their appearance with clothing that is modest and sensible, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes. 10 They should make themselves attractive by doing good, which is appropriate for women who claim to honor God. 11 A wife[a] should learn quietly with complete submission. 12 I don't allow a wife[b] to teach or to control her husband.[c] Instead, she should be a quiet listener. 13 Adam was formed first, and then Eve. 14 Adam wasn't deceived, but rather his wife[d] became the one who stepped over the line because she was completely deceived. 15 But a wife[e] will be brought safely through childbirth,[f] if they both continue in faith, love, and holiness, together with self-control.

Philippians 4:2-3

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to come to an agreement in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I'm also asking you, loyal friend, to help these women who have struggled together with me in the ministry of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the scroll of life.



3 Say hello to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life. I'm not the only one who thanks God for them, but all the churches of the Gentiles do the same.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Paul spends so much time talking about how women should dress and behave?
- What is the context of Paul's time that we should consider when reading what he writes about women?
- Given the other things we know about Paul, might he have written this differently today? What would he write today regarding the dress and behavior of people?
- How do you imagine Paul worked with Euodia, Syntyche, Prisca and Aquila?
- In using Jesus's life and teachings as a colander for filtering other scripture, what were the important roles of women in his group of followers.

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION AND MORE ACTIVITIES

- Adam Hamilton addresses women and the writings of Paul in this part of his sermon (22:08-26:01). What are the important points he is addressing? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6l1vAlf5rww&list=PL4j5HUKXHEMuUwPZv2wC4649h8wzs1ST3&index=4>
- Check out this UMC resources on women in ministry: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-why-does-the-united-methodist-church-ordain-women>
- Rachel Held-Evans is the author of numerous books, and unexpectedly passed away at a young age in 2019. For a whole year, she tried to live out all the Biblical purity laws related to women. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5_cad8gT9Y

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

What can you do to empower women of all ages?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about a woman who made an impact on your life. What did she do? How did you feel? What did her actions inspire you to do for others?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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Difficult Scripture: Why Do Bad Things Happen?

>> SESSION OVERVIEW - WHY IT MATTERS

Students have a wide range of emotions, going from joy to sadness in a matter of seconds. However, these outward displays of emotion can hide what is really going on for them. It is important to understand why bad (and good) things happen to everyone and what the Bible says about those times when people must go through difficulty. Students will explore why bad things happen, how to respond and how God is involved when that happens so that their faith can continue to grow through these times.

>> OPENING

What is the best or worst thing that has happened to you?

>> CHECK IN

Take several minutes to go around and check in with each student and the group! Questions you could ask include: How are you this week? What is new at school/ extracurriculars? This is also a great time to welcome new members to the group and share what the format of the group looks like, and where the discussion is headed during the session.

>> SCRIPTURE

The Bible is filled with all sorts of stories and words of instruction and encouragement. What is most surprising is that it is also filled with sadness, people literally calling out to God because of the pain of their present circumstances. These are called "laments." The Bible is full of people who lament. Job loses everything in what is thought to be an allegorical story about faith that endures the worst trials. David, even though he is king of Israel, writes his strongly worded laments recorded eloquently in the Psalms. Even Jesus asks God in the moments before his death, "Why have you forsaken me?"



Read the following Psalm from King David and Paul's reassurance to the persecuted followers of Jesus in Rome.

Psalm 6:6-9

6 I'm worn out from groaning.

Every night, I drench my bed with tears;

I soak my couch all the way through.

7 My vision fails because of my grief;
it's weak because of all my distress.

8 Get away from me, all you evildoers,
because the LORD has heard me crying!

9 The LORD has listened to my request.
The LORD accepts my prayer.

Romans 8:28

28 We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the Psalm, what do you think David is describing?
- Describe times when people your age might experience the kind of emotions David is describing.
- At the end of this passage, David says that the Lord has heard him crying, listened to his request and accepts his prayer. How do you think this makes David feel?
- What does Paul mean when he refers to "all things" working together for good?
- What is Paul encouraging the followers of Jesus in Rome to do?

>> MORE ACTIVITIES

Supplies needed: TV, phones, or computer

Watch part of Adam Hamilton's sermon, God and Suffering, from 4:53-19:35.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzWuPf2YzHg>

In it he describes suffering in three different categories:

- Natural Disasters
- Illness
- Acts of Cruelty like Murder, Abuse and War
- Later in the sermon he says, "The worst thing is never the last thing." This belief is expressed as hope.



>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think about Adam's explanations of why bad things happen?
- Do you feel like you have ever learned something from a challenging time?
- How do you find goodness in difficult things?
- How do you maintain hope when you are going through something difficult?
- How would you describe God's love to someone that is going through something difficult?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION AND MORE ACTIVITIES

The book of Job is the classic Biblical story of a man who has everything, loses everything and remains faithful to God. It is a long read and involves a lot of conversation between Job and his friends. The story is thought to be an allegory.

Teach student to write laments by using this process by Fuller Youth Institute <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/teaching-young-people-about-lament-practical-ideas-from-8-innovative-ministries>.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Practice lamenting this week. When something unexpected or bad happens, cry out to God and then follow it with words of assurance that God hears you and will be with you through the difficult thing you are lamenting.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Instead of saying your laments out loud, write them down. Share your honest emotions with God. Remember to write how you hope God will hear you, trusting that God will be with you.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by praying together as a group. Affirm what you heard students say during the check in or throughout the session. Allow students to share joys and concerns they may not have thought about earlier. Specifically invite someone to pray.



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RESURRECTION
STUDENTS