COMMIT
COMMIT
COMMIT

RESURRECTION
STUDENTS

MENTOR GUIDE
YEAR 2

[Mentor Curriculum Guide]

Year 2

[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 15-20 minutes.
- Always ask for help. Staff and other mentors may have strategies that may address exactly what you need.

YEAR 2 Curriculum Overview

OBJECTIVE OF COMMIT DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

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.

UNIT 1: IDENTITY
Session 1: Community Building
Session 2: Discovering Your Uniqueness
Session 3: Recognizing the Image of God in Others

UNIT 2: IN FAMILIES
Session 1: Family of Origin
Session 2: Genealogy
Session 3: Chosen Family

UNIT 3: UNITING A DIVIDED WORLD
Session 1: Politics – Listening to Others
Session 2: Finding Value in All Ages
Session 3: Engaging Prejudice

UNIT 4: DEFINE YOU
Session 1: Clarify Values
Session 2: Gratitude vs. Entitlement
Session 3: Core Beliefs
Session 4: Pulling Personal Beliefs Together
Session 5: A Personal Belief Statement

UNIT 5: DISCERNMENT
Session 1: God's Call
Session 2: Vocation - Following Jesus
Session 3: Global Eschatology – Closing the Gap
Session 4: Choosing and Being a Mentor

UNIT 6: DIFFICULT SCRIPTURES
Session 1: Hell
Session 2: Salvation
Session 3: Christianity and Government

UNIT 7: DIGGING DEEPER
Session 1: Other World Religions
Session 2: What Bothers You Most?
Session 3: James Says

SEASONAL
Advent: Acting on the Unbelievable
Lent: In the Wilderness

YEAR TWO

UNIT 1 Identity

Session 1: Community Building
Session 2: Discovering Your Uniqueness
Session 3: Recognizing the Image of God in Others

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Think about this. It took Jesus 30 years to discover who he was and fully live into who God created him to be. We always wonder about those "in between" years and why it took so long. We remember him as a pre-teen, being left by his parents in Jerusalem after the Passover feast, only to be found three days later in the temple. I'm sure the foreshadowing of the Passover and 3 days in Jerusalem doesn't escape you. The point is that nothing is written about his teenage years or his young adult 20s, the "in between" years.

So, here you are. You are mentoring a group of students smack in the middle of the "in between." They know enough to be dangerous and not enough to be, well, dangerous. They think they know it all. Yet, they know they have a lot left to learn.

Most importantly, they don't fully know themselves yet. Identity, according to psychologist Erik Erikson begins to form at this point in their life, spanning into their mid-20s. You have the opportunity to be on the cusp of their identity formation, when they begin to engage really big ideas and find their standing in the midst of them.

Unit One asks the question, "Who are you?" We will use a several tools to unpack a conversation around their identity and the identity of those around them. Most of the tools are not religious or Christian. It's okay. They don't have to be. At the center of all of our identity is God, the creator. God created each of us in God's image. God made us unique. God made us to be in relationship with each other. This is central to our experience as human beings. We spend most of our life discovering who God made us to be. So, we will use a few secular tools to uncover the holiness of our existence. Simple.

Oh. One last thing. This unit and the one following will help you learn more about your students than you may ever have the opportunity to ask. It will give you some common language around the essence of each person in your group. You will have the opportunity to be a more informed mentor for the students you care most about, the ones in your group. And, you will have the opportunity to speak truth into their lives, about their identity as a follower of Jesus and God's intention for their lives.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 1 | SESSION 1

Identity: Community Building

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Well, this is the first session and you may or may not know your students. Chances are there are a few new people as well. Be sure to focus on relationship building and bringing the group together. Sharing goals for the year and the process the group will go through to get there will be important in setting a positive and directed tone.

>> 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

Prompt the group. What did you do this past Summer? Tell them to name as many things as they can in 30 seconds. Assign a timekeeper and someone else who counts the number of things they did last Summer without repeating.

>> SCRIPTURE

The early church wasn't called a church like we know it today. It was a movement called "The Way." Amazing things were happening and happening quickly. This scripture tells part of the story about what was happening in Antioch. Antioch is 450 miles north of Jerusalem in what is now Syria. That's a long walk (at least two weeks). Imagine the amount of enthusiasm that existed for news to travel to Jerusalem and then for Barnabas to walk to Antioch from Jerusalem. After Barnabas arrived (probably over a month later) even more "committed" their lives to Jesus.

Acts 11:21-23

21 The Lord's power was with them, and a large number came to believe and turned to the Lord. 22 When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw evidence of God's grace, he was overjoyed and encouraged everyone to remain fully committed to the Lord.

Acts 4:32-33

32 The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, "This is mine!" about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. 33 The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be committed to something according to Acts 11?
- How do you show your commitment?
- What does it mean to be in community according to Acts 4?
- What does it look like to commit to being in a community that follows Jesus?

This Discipleship Group will be your community for the year. A community is as good as the commitment of its members. Describe the topics that will be covered and other expectations and hopes each person has for the year.

>> ACTIVITY #2

Do You Love Your Neighbor?

Being committed to community means that you know and love your neighbor. Play this fun game to get everybody moving around and learning about each other in the process. Here's how to play.

- Put chairs in a circle with one less than the number of people in the group.
- One person stands in the middle and asks one person in the circle, "Do you love your neighbor?"
- If the person answers, "yes," then the person on either side tries to change seats while the person in the middle tries to sit in one of their seats. No moving the chairs. The remaining person is in the middle and asks a different person, "Do you love your neighbor?"
- If the person answers, "no," they have to qualify it by saying, "No, but I love people wearing shoes with laces," or something like that. Only one rule here. Don't single one person out in the qualification. Everyone who matches the description has to move to a different seat while the person in the middle also tries to sit in a chair. The remaining person is in the middle and asks a different person, "Do you love your neighbor?"

Play as long as you like.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Make a commitment to attend this discipleship group as much as possible this school year.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

What do you hope this community will be for you this year?

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 1 | SESSION 2

Identity: Discovering Your Uniqueness

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Identity is complicated. We discover new things about ourselves all of the time. We have learned how to self-assess as adults. Students are just beginning this process. They are certainly different physically, intellectually, mentally and spiritually than they were ten years ago. As they grow into the person they are becoming, it is important to give them tools and language that will help them to clearly understand who God made them to be. Students will take a short personality assessment using the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator at https://my-personality-test.com/ This will give them some talking points on how to evaluate their God given personality and how they are unique.

>> 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 has taken some sort of online personality test? Which ones have you taken? Do you like particular ones? What have you learned in taking these tests?
- While these assessments claim to be scientifically proven, the results can change depending on your particular place in life, current circumstances or simply the way you view yourself because that can change from time to time. So, why would we take them?
- Self-awareness is critical to your ability to be a healthy person in relationships. It helps when you have a job. And it is always a good idea to continue to discover who God made you to be. You may discover some helpful things about yourself that, for whatever reason, you didn't know before. What have you learned about yourself in the last two years that you didn't realize before?

Note to mentor: Maybe hang a little bit on the phrase "Discover who God made you to be." What are some discoveries you may want to share from your teen years that helped you understand who God made you to be? Did you discover these things by accident? Or by purposefully seeking a better understanding of yourself and God's purpose in your life? Or maybe this came later in life. Be encouraged to share your thoughts around this. Even better if your thoughts are short and to the point with a compelling story.

>> SCRIPTURE

King David, Israel's 2nd king, wrote many of the psalms (songs) we have in the Bible. He was known for expressing deep emotion, from grief to love to anger to praise to sadness to thankfulness. If there is an emotion, we can find it somewhere in the Psalms. In this Psalm, King David is expressing that God made us unique from one another and knows us well. He also expresses how close God is to us.

Psalm 139:13-18

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts,[a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you believe that God knows you that well? Why or why not?
- If God knows you that well, why might it be important for you to know yourself?
- How might it be strange to consider that you don't know yourself even though you spend all your time with yourself?
- How do you get to know yourself better?

Note to mentor: Feedback from others is very important to our growth as humans and as Christians. We can only see so much. We have our own blind spots where we rely on others to give us feedback so that we can be better friends, better employees, etc. Think of a time when a friend or co-worker gave you helpful feedback. Consider sharing that briefly.

>> ACTIVITY #2

- Take the Personality Test at https://my-personality-test.com/ This should take less than ten minutes and will give each person a four letter personality type and a description of the type. There are a total of 16 different combinations for types of personalities.
- What do you agree with in the description given to you?
- What things did you learn about yourself? Some of these items may just draw some aspects of your personality into question for you. Remember, this can change depending on your stage of life.
- Let's briefly walk through the personality types. They are four paired types on a continuum between two extremes. Most people are somewhere on the continuum, not completely over at one extreme.
  - E or I
    - Extravert – Receives energy from being around other people. Seen as outgoing.
    - Introvert – Receives energy from being by themselves. Seen as quiet.
  - S or N
    - Sensing – Draws on previous experience (details and facts) to make connections to current experiences. Seen as a concrete thinker.
    - Intuitive – Draws on an inner sense in gathering information. Seen as innovative and interested in future possibilities.
  - F or T
    - Feeling – Motivated by emotions and what feels right when making decisions.
    - Thinking – Motivated by facts and logical conclusions when making decisions.
  - J or P
    - Judging – Sequential, structured and strategic.
    - Perceiving – Free flowing and spontaneous.
- After hearing these, which might you lean closer to the other that wasn't your personality type?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Be observant this week and test out your personality assessment to see if the your type fits you. Discover if there are some examples where it is spot on. And find out if there are some misses.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write your personality type in your journal and any observations you might have.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER: STANDARD TEXT

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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 1 | SESSION 3

Identity: Recognizing the Image of God in Others

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Understanding only ourselves limits us. We can potentially make excuses for who we are not. Or our insecurity causes us to be critical of those different from us. We fail to see those around us as having distinct and unique abilities that can complement us. Sometimes students can become hyper-focused on themselves and not others. In this session students will develop observational skills and consider how different personality types most effectively interact with one another.

>> 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

- Organize students into groups of 3-5 with other students of a similar personality type. If students weren't there the previous week, have them quickly take the assessment and join the group that fits best 10 minutes into their discussion. https://my-personality-test.com/
- The task will be to create a student ministry experience and space that caters exclusively to the personality type of those in your group. Think of the full experience. What happens when students arrive? What do they see? What do they hear? What is the overall experience? Be as detailed as you think is necessary for other students that have the same or similar personality type.
- Have each group share. Invite others to ask clarifying questions so that everyone can understand the reasons why this group of students is suggesting a particular student ministry experience.

Note to mentor: Be sure to draw everyone's attention to the parts of each personality type their ideas will be most attractive.

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul is giving some instructions to the church in Corinth. It appears they needed a reminder on why certain practices were important to becoming a community that cares for one another. In this section he is describing spiritual gifts in specificity. He wanted people to know that while they were all different personalities (with varying and different gifts), they originated from the same God for the same purpose of creating a community of believers who serve one another.

I Corinthians 12:4-6
4 There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; 5 and there are different ministries and the same Lord; 6 and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does Paul mean when he is talking about spiritual gifts, ministries and activities?
- What does he mean when he is saying that all of these things come from the same source?
- How are spiritual gifts, ministries and activities the same as our different personality types?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Have students get into pairs with someone who was not in their previous group and has a personality type that may be quite a bit different from theirs. Have each student share with their partner their personality type and what they learned about themselves so far. Have them reflect on these questions:

- How might their personality types complement one another? Discuss 2-3 concrete examples on how each will type will help make a better student ministry experience.
- Reflect on what other activities (school, home, sports, etc.) where your they might be open to a different personality type that might enhance someone else's experience.

Note to mentor: This is where you can think of a time when someone else's very different personality enhanced something in your life (in a relationship, at work or on a sports team). Share this as an example if there is time.

Have each partner share with the whole group about their partner's personality type and how they both discovered how it might enhance the experience of others.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Think of others you know. Guess what their personality type might be and how they can enhance the experience of others. Pray that God will open you up to observing and encouraging those around you.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write down your partner's name for the last activity, their personality type and how their type complements your personality type and how they might enhance the experience of 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 2 In Families

Session 1: Family of Origin
Session 2: Genealogy
Session 3: Chosen Family

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Yes. We are still talking about identity. Why? Because it is really important to the students you are mentoring. Don't ask them, though. Some will say they have it figured out. Some would say "You don't understand." And maybe you don't. But regardless of their response they are still trying to figure it all out. What they usually miss is what is right in front of them. We all do.

There is nothing more important to the formation of our faith than our family of origin, the family one grows up in. Unfortunately, in the latter teenage years, students tend to disengage from their family of origin in our Western culture. We literally teach them to separate and become self-sufficient. There is a backlash, however, the helicopter (or lawnmower) parent, which may still result in a student running towards self-sufficiency. Regardless, students have a strong urge to differentiate from the very family that instilled what will become lifelong values.

All of that to say, it is difficult to get students to reflect on their family of origin without creating a safe space to do so. That's where you come in, expertly formulating questions that will allow them to deconstruct their experience in a purely objective manner. Well, okay. Not quite that. But you will get them talking about their family, the history of their family and their church family (the family they have chosen) and how it has shaped them into the person they are today and how they might use that to become the person they will be tomorrow.

These influences are powerful in the lives of students. Owning their origin story and being able to identify the building blocks of faith within all of that will be helpful to students in building a lasting faith that they might pass on to their heirs. And, by the way, there is no shortage of family origin stories in the Bible. Plenty of material to assert that this is an important topic.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 2 | SESSION 1

In Families: Family of Origin

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Our family of origin shapes each of us in positive, negative, and, sometimes, in surprising ways. Whatever influence our family of origin has on us, it is lasting. The impact will have life-long effects. In this session students will explore their family of origin while also examining why family is so important to the person they are becoming.

>> 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 ACTIVITIES (SELECT ONE)

- Share a classic childhood memory. It can be something that was fun, meaningful or life changing (positive or negative).
- Hand out a sheet of paper. On the left side list all of the things you have learned from your family that will shape you as a person. On the right side list all of the things that you may have to unlearn (things you learned not to do). Get with a partner and share those that you are comfortable sharing.

>> SCRIPTURE

Abraham and Sarah traveled far from their home country late in life to raise a family, one that will become a nation of people known as the Israelites. Their son, Isaac, and his wife, Rebekah, will give birth to twins, Jacob and Esau, who are very different from one another. Eventually God will change Jacob's name to Israel and his sons will form the twelve tribes of Israel, thereby fulfilling the promise made to Abraham. These stories follow the complicated dynamics of Jacob's family of origin.

In the first passage, the writer of Genesis gives us a preview of how these twins will interact with one another. Since Jacob is the younger twin, the next passage details the aftermath of his scheme to steal the birthright and blessing from his older brother by tricking his nearly blind father. This act drives a wedge between him and his brother and Jacob moves away as a result. In the third reading God is asking him to return to where Esau lives. Jacob is understandably afraid for his life. And the final passage shares the result of Jacob and Esau's meeting, sealing the family dynamic.

Genesis 25:21-23
21 Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, since she was unable to have children. The Lord was moved by his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 But the boys pushed against each other inside of her, and she said, "If this is what it's like, why did it happen to me?"[c]
So she went to ask the Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her,
"Two nations are in your womb;
two different peoples will emerge from your body.
One people will be stronger than the other;
the older will serve the younger."

Genesis 27:30-35
30 After Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and just as Jacob left his father Isaac, his brother Esau came back from his hunt. 31 He too made some delicious food, brought it to his father, and said, "Let my father sit up and eat from his son's game so that you may bless me."
32 His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?"
And he said, "I'm your son, your oldest son, Esau."
33 Isaac was so shocked that he trembled violently. He said, "Who was the hunter just here with game? He brought me food, and I ate all of it before you came. I blessed him, and he will stay blessed!"
34 When Esau heard what his father said, he let out a loud agonizing cry and wept bitterly. He said to his father, "Bless me! Me too, my father!"
35 Isaac said, "Your brother has already come deceitfully and has taken your blessing."

Genesis 32:6-8
6 The messengers returned to Jacob and said, "We went out to your brother Esau, and he's coming to meet you with four hundred men."
7 Jacob was terrified and felt trapped, so he divided the people with him, and the flocks, cattle, and camels, into two camps. 8 He thought, If Esau meets the first camp and attacks it, at least one camp will be left to escape.

Genesis 33:1-4
33 Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants. 2 He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother. 4 But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

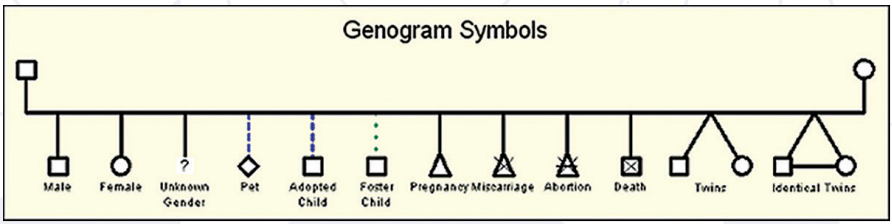
- Describe the family dynamic in Jacob and Esau's family of origin.

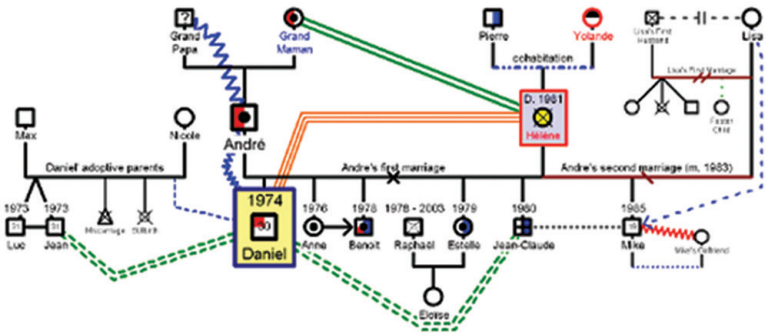
Note to mentor: You may want to describe how Rebekah (the mom) put Jacob up to steal the birthright because she liked him most while Isaac (the dad) liked Esau best since this wasn't part of the reading.

- What are the positive things they learned that shaped them?
- What are some things they had to unlearn (or learn not to do) as a result of their family of origin?

>> ACTIVITY #2

- Either use the back side of the list made earlier or on a new sheet of paper, create a genogram. These are geometric shapes that represent your family and the relationships between family members (see example).
- Describe your genogram to your partner.
- As a group discuss the discoveries you made regarding your family of origin, the relationships and the things you have learned or might have to unlearn.





>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

This week ask someone in your family about their experience with their family of origin and what they learned or, maybe, what they had to unlearn as a result.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write a letter to future you about your family right now. What do you appreciate and want to hold onto? What do you hope becomes resolved? Lift this up as a prayer to God when you are finished.

Example: Dear Me, I really had a great time my junior year. I remember my trip to North Carolina. But I regret that I'm not talking to my best friend afterwards who didn't go on the trip.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 2 | SESSION 2

In Families: Genealogy

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Our heritage can give us insight as to the basis of our faith and identity. Sometimes, Christian practice can go back for generations. Some students are first generation Christians but may have other spiritual or moral influences. Students will explore their ancestry and its significance as well as understanding the ancestry of Jesus and its importance.

>> 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

Say, "You may not know Kevin Bacon or care who he is. He became iconic in the movie "Footloose" and after that when people concluded that there were no more than six degrees of separation from him. In other words, someone knew someone (1) who knew someone (2) who knew someone (3) who knew someone (two more times) who knew him (6th time)."

- Google "The Oracle of Kevin Bacon" and have someone name a famous person to determine how many degrees of separation there may be between Kevin Bacon and the named famous person. Do this as many times as it is fun or until you find someone with over 5 degrees of separation (hint: a former United States president).

>> SCRIPTURE

Today's scripture will be tracking Jesus's ancestry from the father of the Jewish faith, Abraham. We will only read halfway through the full genealogy (it is long). When reading, listen for names of people that you don't think would normally be in an ancient lineup of ancestors (ex. women, spouses, etc.) Instead of reading the Scripture you may just want to read the six names (Tamara, Zerah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and wife of Uriah).

Matthew 1:1-6
A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:
2 Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar.
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Aram.
4 Aram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
5 Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.
Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.
Obed was the father of Jesse.
6 Jesse was the father of David the king.
David was the father of Solomon,
whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is it unusual to see the names of women in an ancient ancestry lineage?
- What is the significance of these particular women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba who was Uriah's wife)?
- Who are some people that might show up in your ancestry that have had a significant impact on your life today? Possibly these are people whose name you don't know. They may have immigrated or taken a great risk at some point for their family. They may have been incredibly faithful people or somewhat legendary in your family, most likely not famous outside of your family.

Note to mentor: You may want to have an example of someone in your family that made an impact. Or you may want to share your family tree if you illustrated it ahead of time.

- How do you think their story impacts you and your future?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Do some ancestral research this week. Ask a parent or grandparent who made an impact in your family. See if you can get a story that can be shared with others.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Think about your life and how you might want it to impact others in your family that aren't born yet. What do you hope to be remembered for?

Example: I hope to be remembered for the way I treat people when I first meet them.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 2 | SESSION 3

In Families: Chosen Family

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Our family of origin is the first place that influences our life while school or work is the second place that impacts who we are. There is also a third place. It can be church, a sports team, club or a place where we hang out. Students will consider their third place and how they are shaped. This is their chosen family. Students will also consider how the church might be a third place.

>> 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 ACTIVITIES (SELECT ONE OR BOTH)

- Develop a free style icon or graphic that represents a value held by the church you feel is most important. Share it with the group.
- Is this a value you hold as being important?

>> SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:42-47

In the years following Jesus's resurrection, communities of people formed to begin to behave in the ways Jesus taught. Luke describes this early community of believers sometime following the sharing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This description is the blueprint for Christian community.

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. 43 A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. 44 All the believers were united and shared everything. 45 They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. 46 Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. 47 They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you choose your friends? What is most important in choosing friends: shared classes, common interests, common goals or common values?
- This scripture describes the beginning of church communities after Jesus's death and resurrection. What are some of the values they held as important according to the scripture?
- Which of those values are similar to what you experience at Resurrection?
- Which of these shared values are most important to you today?
- How has this church shaped you? What activities have been most impactful? How did they change you or what did they teach you? Consider the trips, retreats and groups you have been involved in, including this one.
- What other activities and groups have shaped you?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Talk with others about how an experience has positively shaped you. Be specific in how you tell stories of your experiences. Share humorous anecdotes and meaningful stories equally as easily.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

List as many activities and groups as you have been involved in. Then go back through and think of how each activity or group has made you into the person today. Be specific. Pray over them and thank God for shaping you in meaningful ways.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 3 Uniting a Divided World

Session 1: Politics – Listening to Others
Session 2: Finding Value in All Ages
Session 3: Engaging Prejudice

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

All right. We are diving into the deep end over the next three weeks. These are heavy topics that may elicit a great deal of conversation or crickets. These subjects will require students who are awake and on their A game. So, the challenge will be in making these topics relevant to their lives. Because they are important.

So, why do these heavy topics matter? Well, politics, ageism and racism live at the intersection of our relationships with one another and how we attempt to live in community. Homogeneous communities, ones where everyone believes the same things, root for the same teams and value the same moral idioms. Everyone who thinks similar to one another might not have any need to discuss such weighty issues. We don't live in the world just described even when we attempt to surround ourselves with like-minded people. To function in the society in which we live, we need to have the skills to navigate complex topics that have the potential to both unite and divide people.

Guess what? We don't often have the skills to have these more intense discussions. So, let's work on those skills here, grounded in a Christian faith and world view. So, let's get at it.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 3 | SESSION 1

Uniting a Divided World: Politics – Listening to Others

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Politics is literally the way we interact with one another when making decisions for our communities. There is no way to avoid politics. As long as we live in community, and not on some desert island, we will engage with one another politically. The first movement in this session is to establish a posture of listening to one another. This is the basis of communication and community action. With listening comes collaboration and sometimes compromise to get to a greater good. Lastly, students will look specifically at how the Bible says something about how people of faith create norms, values and the concepts that may influence our choices on how we might all function together in community.

>> 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 ACTIVITIES

Share in pairs an important belief you have about the world. It can be religious, social or political (examples: I believe Harvard is the best school. I believe we need to focus all of our medical knowledge on curing cancer. I believe the worst thing is never the last thing.) Have students share why you believe what they believe with their partner. After sharing in pairs, have each person share what they heard their partner say with the rest of the group. And, then, ask the group the following questions:

- Why is it important to listen to each other well?
- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your listening ability? How might you rate your partner's listening ability?
- What is a strategy you can adopt in order to listen better to the ideas of others?

>> SCRIPTURE

Matthew's account of Jesus's life, death and resurrection builds to an increasing conflict with the Jewish pharissees. Jesus's stories become more challenging. His words become more direct. The pharissees continue to entrap him with their questions. Here is one such question and Jesus's answer. This statement by Jesus is ironic. Everything belongs to God. We are merely stewards of creation. Jesus may also be making a statement of the true value of manmade systems, like a monetary system set up by the government, compared with systems set up by God.

Matthew 22:17-21
The Pharisees, who are experts in the religious law, questioning Jesus said,
17 So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"
18 Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used to pay the tax." And they brought him a denarion. 20 "Whose image and inscription is this?" he asked.
21 "Caesar's," they replied.
Then he said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If in real time, you were listening to this conversation, what are you hearing each person saying? What are they implying?
- This verse is often used by some to encourage people to follow the governmental law while keeping it separate from one's faith. What do you think Jesus means by his last statement?
- What belongs to God?

>> ALTERNATIVE SCRIPTURE

Romans 13:1-7
13 Every person should place themselves under the authority of the government. There isn't any authority unless it comes from God, and the authorities that are there have been put in place by God. 2 So anyone who opposes the authority is standing against what God has established. People who take this kind of stand will get punished. 3 The authorities don't frighten people who are doing the right thing. Rather, they frighten people who are doing wrong. Would you rather not be afraid of authority? Do what's right, and you will receive its approval. 4 It is God's servant given for your benefit. But if you do what's wrong, be afraid because it doesn't have weapons to enforce the law for nothing. It is God's servant put in place to carry out his punishment on those who do what is wrong. 5 That is why it is necessary to place yourself under the government's authority, not only to avoid God's punishment but also for the sake of your conscience. 6 You should also pay taxes for the same reason, because the authorities are God's assistants, concerned with this very thing. 7 So pay everyone what you owe them. Pay the taxes you owe, pay the duties you are charged, give respect to those you should respect, and honor those you should honor.

>> ALTERNATIVE DISCUSSION

- Paul repeatedly fled towns fearing for his life because he was perceived by the Roman government as preaching against the Romans and was eventually imprisoned and executed by Rome. Why would he write this?
- Is Paul suggesting we have mandatory obligations towards the government at all costs?
- Who ultimately has the authority, according to Paul?

>> DEEPER DISCUSSION

Listening is a key strategy in building community. It helps us to connect with one another so that we can create the structure and values our community uses to guide itself. Our values and ideas are influenced by our family of origin, our ancestry and our chosen family. How does the church and, in particular, the Bible influence how our community interacts? Kaitlyn Schiess in "The Ballot and the Bible" proposes how the Bible has influenced community politics in both positive and negative ways. Read aloud some of her statements below and ask students to respond to each other's thoughts.

- "The Bible is directed to both individuals and communities." How is this true?
- "America is still not the chosen people of God and exists in a vastly different political and economic context than Israel. (But the Bible) does indicate how God desires human communities to function. The Bible describes perennial problems of human communities – unjust accumulation of wealth, dynamics of exploitation and abuse, moral decay – and God's desire for communal rhythms, structures and laws that address those problems." How relatable, then, is the Bible to how we conduct politics today in the USA?
- "The end of the story is not about individuals going to heaven but about a community reconciled to God, living together in a city: a communal life where humans have taken the good gifts of God's creation and collaborated to build something new." What does this statement say about the importance of politics in Christianity?
- "The clearest teaching in the Bible regarding politics is that we should treat our opponents fairly." Is this even possible? Why or why not?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Pay attention to the politics around you and how your Christian viewpoint might create a better more harmonious situation. This could be national or international political structures (ways that individuals and large groups – usually countries - interact with one another). Or it could be groups of people at your school or in your church. Find ways to communicate your desire for people to listen to each other well.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about how your Christian faith can positively influence the politics around you.

Example: I'm part of this club at school that has unfairly excluded people. Maybe I can talk to a few of my friends about how we can change that.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 3 | SESSION 2

Uniting a Divided World: Finding Value in All Ages

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Ageism is mostly framed in prejudice of people advancing to old age. It is also true that people are prejudiced regarding young people. It is probable that everyone has experienced some discrimination based on their age. The Bible is pretty explicit about the value of all people, including those at either end of the age spectrum. In this session students will be able to identify people that are important in their life and how others they don't know can be valued in their everyday interaction with 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

Describe to the group the characteristics of someone much older than you who had a positive impact on your life. Let the group try to figure out the person's relationship to you (ex. parent, teacher, neighbor). Reveal the name and relationship of the person once the relationship is guessed correctly and any story about them you would like to tell. Discuss the value these people have had to the person you are today.

Note to mentor: You may want to have a person in mind who was influential for you when you were in high school. Parents are an easy go to. It might be more impactful to choose someone who is not your parent.

>> OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

God worked through people of varying ages. But probably the most astounding examples are when God declared that old women were going to give birth. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was old. This was the thrust of this foundational story of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith. Their offspring would form the entire Hebrew and Arab nations and change the course of history.

Genesis 21:1-2

21 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- This isn't the only story about old people being important to society. What other instances can you think of where an old person has had an impact?
- Why do we tend to think old people can't contribute to society?
- What are ways that we can do a better job of inviting older people to contribute?

>> NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

Paul worked with a lot of people on his travels across the Mediterranean world. Timothy is a life-long adherent to the witness of Paul and the teachings of Jesus. Paul had what appears to be, many interactions with Timothy's family when he was growing up. Timothy also traveled with Paul and may have authored some of Paul's letters. Paul encourages Timothy in his letter to him.

I Timothy 4:12

12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Timothy needs to be encouraged?
- Why do we tend to think young people can't contribute to society?
- Name some young people who made a significant contribution to society?
- There are a lot of similarities with how older people and younger people are valued. How might we increase their value to others?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Using this website of Biblical characters who made an impact in the world as young people www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/young-and-remarkable-29-relevant-under-30-heroes-of-the-bible.html, which characters do the students in your group most identify? You may want to pick one or two to present. Or you may want to give them a list of all of the characters with a short description.

- How might you be encouraged by the lives of these people?
- Think about the particular circumstances these people had to overcome (public perception, tragedy, opposition, unfamiliar surroundings). What hurdles do young people face today?
- How might you encourage others based on the life circumstances these people had to overcome?

>> UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

The United Methodist Church has created and voted on a number of statements to express the church's support (or disagreement) for a variety of topics of causes. The church has a statement about everything. After reading these statements, what impresses you about what is written?

162 D The Rights of Young People

Our society is characterized by a large population of young people who frequently find full participation in society difficult. Therefore, we urge development of policies that encourage inclusion of young people in decision-making processes and that eliminate discrimination and exploitation. Creative and appropriate employment opportunities should be legally and socially available for young people.

162 E Rights of the Aging

In a society that places primary emphasis upon youth, those growing old in years are frequently isolated from the mainstream of social existence. We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and nondiscriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within existing communities. We urge social policies and programs, with emphasis on the unique concerns of older women and ethnic persons, that ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community. Further, we urge increased consideration for adequate pension systems by employers, with provisions for the surviving spouse.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Encourage an older person this week. Possibly write them a note or say something that will communicate how much you value them. Likewise, encourage somebody significantly younger than you. Tell them about the specific characteristics you see in them that bring value to other people. You may want to provide notecards so that students can write a note before they leave.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about a time someone encouraged you when you were young. How did that make you feel? Consider one person (either young or old) and write how you plan to encourage them in the same way.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 3 | SESSION 3

Uniting a Divided World: Engaging Prejudice

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Our first impressions always begin with what we see. Our sight begins to deduce situations way before our conscious brain kicks in with other inputs. So, it isn't surprising that the human struggle has included prejudice around issues of race – the way we look. Students face subtle and overt forms of racism somewhere in their many interactions. In this session students will begin to identify racial prejudice and where it might exist in their experience and how they might respond to it. Because this is a highly charged topic, be sure to be aware that students may have differing opinions. Some may be different from your own. This continues to need to be a safe place where they can share.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

Racism is a huge topic that might come with a lot of feelings and opinions. Let's try to get some agreement around a few things to begin with.

- How might we define "racism" as a group for our discussion today? Write this down so it is visible for everyone to see.
- In what ways are you observing racism in the world around you? How has this impacted you?
- In what ways does racism impact the particular targets of racism?
- Have you had a conversation with someone who has been a target of racism? What did you learn?
- How might racism be happening in the parts of the world in which you are not a part?

>> SCRIPTURE

The Good Samaritan is a familiar story told by Jesus to make the point that even the most unlikely person might offer kindness to one who is different. Jewish people in Jesus's day were prejudiced towards Samaritans because they were Hebrew people who intermarried with the Assyrians during their captivity hundreds of years prior to Jesus telling this story. In other words, their "different race" wasn't their fault. Their ancestors were captured and over time a "new race" was born out of the two races. Therefore, this story is ironic because the person Jewish people despised is the one who extravagantly helped a Jewish person in distress.

Luke 10:25-37
25 A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"
26 Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?"
27 He responded, "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."[a]
28 Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."
29 But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
30 Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. 31 Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 32 Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 33 A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. 34 The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' 36 What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"
37 Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."
Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does this form of prejudice exist in our world today? (ex. descendants of African slaves brought to America, immigrants from other countries, people marrying others from backgrounds different than theirs)
- Have you ever felt on the outside of society because of your heritage? Or have you known anyone who has felt on the outside? Describe what this feels like.
- Empathy is the choice to understand what it feels like to be in someone else's circumstances without ever having felt their circumstances personally. As you think about racism and its many forms, what are some ways you can exercise empathy?

Note to mentor: This can begin with thoughts and observations and eventually move to action. Allow students to express their particular place in regards to this topic.

>> ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

Look up these Scriptures in the Bible and the surrounding context. How might this help you navigate conversations about racial prejudice?

Genesis 1:26-27
Deuteronomy 10:17
Acts 10:34
James 2:4

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Ibram X. Kendi, in his book, "How To Be an Anti-Racist" says, "The source of racist ideas was not ignorance and hate, but self-interest." What do you think about this? Is this true or not? Why do you think so?
- Tell a story about racism that has impacted you and how it has. Why is it significant? How do you or might you use this story to motivate you to act in a manner that aligns more with your values?

>> THE UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

This is a statement packed with all sorts of items that could be discussed and expanded upon. It may be more for your knowledge to have it in case someone asks a specific question about what the church believes about racism. The second paragraph may be the best summary without going into detail. It is worth noting that this is the first item of 23 under the heading of "The Social Community," the longest section in the Social Principles. What impresses you about this statement?

162 A Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons
Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism includes both personal and institutional racism. Personal racism is manifested through the individual expressions, attitudes, and/or behaviors that accept the assumptions of a racist value system and that maintain the benefits of this system.

Institutional racism is the established social pattern that supports implicitly or explicitly the racist value system. Racism, manifested as sin, plagues and hinders our relationship with Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. In many cultures white persons are granted unearned privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. We oppose the creation of a racial hierarchy in any culture. Racism breeds racial discrimination. We define racial discrimination as the disparate treatment and lack of full access and equity in resources, opportunities, and participation in the Church and in society based on race or ethnicity.

Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access.

We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society. We assert the obligation of society and people within the society to implement compensatory programs that redress long-standing, systemic social deprivation of racial and ethnic persons. We further assert the right of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic persons to equal and equitable opportunities in employment and promotion; to education and training of the highest quality; to nondiscrimination in voting, access to public accommodations, and housing purchase or rental; to credit, financial loans, venture capital, and insurance policies; to positions of leadership and power in all elements of our life together; and to full participation in the Church and society. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within the Church and society.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Be aware of your initial judgements. In fact, expect yourself to judge a person on sight. Then, practice coming up with alternatives to your initial judgement. This will make you more interested in people and their particular story.

JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about a time you learned about someone who was very different from you. What did you learn? How has that shaped you?

Example: Henry moved here from Chicago and talked about some things I have never heard of. I learned that I would like to be more open to people's back story and ask more questions.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 Define You

Session 1: Clarify Values
Session 2: Gratitude vs. Entitlement
Session 3: Core Beliefs
Session 4: Pulling Personal Beliefs Together
Session 5: A Personal Belief Statement

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Think about the last picture a student took of themselves. It was probably sometime yesterday or last week. It would be silly to look at the picture and declare, "This is the way that this student will look forever!" Think about the other artifacts in the picture. Maybe they were in their house or with friends having fun. In the moment of that picture, the things around them helped to define them as well. Their house and the things in it, especially the items in their room, tend to be among those treasured items with meaning. Their friends and family helped to define them as well. But their friends will change. They don't really know this yet. The environments around them will change. All will add to the person they will continue to become.

So, it may be just as silly to write a personal statement about one's self if it will change sometime in the future, right? Uh, maybe. As we grow, capturing moments in time helps to give us perspective of where we have been and where we intend to go. We are able to memorialize and celebrate the moments that add texture to our lives. As we clarify our values and beliefs, this will inform the person we are becoming and become the bedrock that will sustain us throughout life.

So, let's be clear. How a student defines themselves today might not be the way they will define themselves tomorrow. But today's definition will certainly be part of the timeline of who they are becoming. Do your best to help students capture who they are today and the person they may grow into being. It will be fun and enlightening. They will be able to mark this moment in time, not just in their memory (which can become a little foggy as time moves on). They will be able to put words to feelings and thoughts that have floated in and out of their brain. It will be a great picture for them to reflect on later.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 | SESSION 1

Define You: Clarify Values

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Students care passionately about certain things at this stage of life – justice, fairness, personal rights. Often times this is a reaction to injustice, unfairness and having their rights limited. There are most likely core values at the heart of what they care deeply about that they haven't fully investigated. This session will allow students to identify the things they value most including characteristics of people, important experiences and people that have shaped those values (which may have already been shared in previous sessions).

>> 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

Take a stack of notecards and as a group list as many personality characteristics as the group can think of, one characteristic to a card (ex. Funny). Lay each card face up in the middle of the group so that everyone can see the characteristics. You can do this on a whiteboard as well. Have students write down or choose their top five characteristics, putting them in order of importance (ex. 1 honesty, 2 trustworthiness, 3 humorous, 4 organized, 5 caring).

- Either share in pairs the entire list or have each share their top characteristic with the group and why they chose it.
- After hearing everyone speak, ask if there are any characteristics that might be included in your list that was shared? Would you adjust your list after hearing everyone share?
- Are there other characteristics that came to mind that weren't shared that fit what you value?

>> SCRIPTURE

This is a familiar scripture from Paul to the church in Galatia. Paul is encouraging the people there to be guided by the Holy Spirit. And, if one is guided by the Holy Spirit, how would one know? A person will know by these resulting character traits or values. Paul is highlighting these characteristics so that it would be obvious to people who follow Jesus. He also meant it as incentive. If you follow Jesus, these are characteristics that you will value most. Write these characteristics down and put it with the other ones listed in the opening activity.

Galatians 5:22-23
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which of these characteristics (Fruit of the Spirit) would break into your top five you listed earlier?
- What do you think might be missing from the list that Paul offered?

>> ACTIVITY #2

EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPED YOUR VALUES

- We are people of stories, stories about ourselves and others. As you look at your top 5-7 values, what stories in your life do you think may have shaped one or two of your values?
- Tell about the important characters in your story. Have those same people shaped other values?
- Tell about a time when one of your values has been tested. How did you respond? How was it difficult or easy to hold onto that important value?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Practice your values this week.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Sometimes your values come into conflict. For instance, if you value honesty and friendship and you have a friend that has been dishonest with you, this can be difficult to resolve. Think of a time when your values came into conflict. What did you do? In looking back, how might you have resolved it better? Or write about a current experience where your values are coming into conflict. List what your options might be. Writing them down may make it easier for you to make a decision about what to do next.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 | SESSION 2

Define You: Gratitude vs. Entitlement

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Gratitude isn't always easy. It is especially hard when we expect something we don't receive. Maybe our hard work or our position in our friend and work groups makes us think we deserve something we don't get. Gratitude is hard in these situations. Students will explore Paul's response to difficulty and evaluate how he responds with gratitude.

>> 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

What is the hardest thing you have ever done? Did you choose to do it? Were you made to do it? Or did you have to do it to get your desired outcome? Share this with one other person in pairs. And then share with the entire group what you learned from your partner (not everyone has to share).

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul is the reason the message of Jesus was shared all over the first century world. He traveled extensively and wrote letters to the people he met. Paul is writing to the people in Corinth, attempting to encourage them. He doesn't want them to be discouraged. Evidently, something terrible has happened to change his plans and, most likely, their expectations. So, there is stress and disappointment. Paul is so good at showing gratitude even when things are rough.

II Corinthians 4:15-18

15 All these things are for your benefit. As grace increases to benefit more and more people, it will cause gratitude to increase, which results in God's glory. 16 So we aren't depressed. But even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day. 17 Our temporary minor problems are producing an eternal stockpile of glory for us that is beyond all comparison. 18 We don't focus on the things that can be seen but on the things that can't be seen. The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Shouldn't Paul expect everything to go as planned since he is such a loyal follower of Jesus?
- In what circumstances do we expect things to go our way? (ex. when we put out a lot of effort, when it seems fair, when we are obviously best qualified)
- If things don't go our way, what is Paul telling us?
- What is Paul saying about us when he says, "the inside is being renewed every day?"
- What does it mean to have a "stockpile of glory?"
- How might we focus on things we don't see?
- How can we change our perspective from "what we deserve" to "what we have?"

>> ACTIVITY #2

Have everyone stand up and stand, sit or lie down in a different place in the room. Pick an object for everyone to look at (this can be staged ahead of time). Ask people to describe what they see in detail. Do it again with a different object. Try to pick something that will be described differently depending upon your perspective. After doing this a few times with different objects or groups of objects, come back together to discuss.

- How does hearing other perspectives change how you see something?
- How might you look at difficult situations in your life differently?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Recognize when you feel entitled to something because of your hard work or your position in the world and choose humility and gratitude instead.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Make a list of what you have (tangible and intangible) and thank God for them.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 | SESSION 3

Define You: Core Beliefs

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Up to this point in life students have generally adopted the beliefs of others (parents and friends) as their own. In most instances students have not considered what is at the core of their beliefs. This may be difficult for students as it will push them to consider their beliefs in a more hierarchical structure. In this session students will have an opportunity to consider what their core belief might be and why it is important to have an unwavering view of what is most important in faith.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

- Name two things you believe to be 100% true?

Note to mentor: This will be a hard question. It is supposed to be. There are very few things we believe to be 100% true. This will set up the difficulty in finding a core belief.

- What are some things you believe in? (ex. God, Jesus, friendship, governmental officials, parents, the resurrection, the virgin birth, the immaculate conception, the Holy Trinity, creation of the world, the importance of Scripture)
- Why do you believe in the things you mentioned?

>> SCRIPTURE

Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead (this day is remembered as Pentecost), Peter, the disciple Jesus declares as "The Rock", delivers a speech. As a result of Peter's speech, 3000 people committed to follow Jesus and 5000 did the same a few days or weeks later. This represents 10% of the population of Jerusalem at the time. That's a lot of people. People were motivated by Peter and the other disciples. So, what happened? Did Jesus's life and teaching touch on something the Jewish people already believed as a core belief or did this form a new core belief for these early followers? What might Peter be saying that exists at the core of our beliefs? Here are the opening lines of his speech.

Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36

Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. 23 In accordance with God's established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. 24 God raised him up! God freed him from death's dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him. 32 This Jesus God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact. 33 He was exalted to God's right side and received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit. He poured out this Spirit, and you are seeing and hearing the results of his having done so. 36 Therefore, let all Israel know beyond question that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Imagine yourself present in the crowd during Peter's speech, how might your beliefs be affected?
- What is one thing you think is true about Jesus, God or your faith? Feel free to borrow from Peter's speech.

>> ACTIVITY #2

CORE BELIEF

Imagine a flat piece of ground that leads to a ledge or a cliff. The ground is what you know to be true. Beyond the ledge or cliff is the metaphorical unknown containing what you hope to be true. There's actually a great clip from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade that illustrates this. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFntFdEGgws You can send this to students ahead of time to watch on their phones or show it in class if you have the equipment to do so.

Anyhow, back to the cliff and the chasm below. All people of faith step out into the unknown of what they hope to be true at some point. They leave what is sure and true to believe in something that is miraculous, improbable and filled with hope for the future.

Think of this first step as a "core belief." What is a belief you hold that, if everything else you believed were to be found false, you would continue to rely on this belief? This belief will give you hope for the future.

Note to mentor: You may want to think of your core belief before this exercise and why it is your core belief. Don't share it right away as students may feel like they need to copy you. Remember, they may not have had as much time to think about one. As you think through your core belief, it may help to prompt students to think about their core belief. Consider the process you came to have your core belief.

Editor's Note: My core belief is "God as Creator." It is basic and doesn't involve Jesus. Jesus as the Christ is a belief that is built on this. In fact, if I later found out that Jesus was not the Christ, my belief of God as Creator would still be intact. It only all falls apart if God is not the creator.

Have everyone share and write down their core belief as this can be central to future discussions this year.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Think about your core belief this week. How does it influence your behavior and what you think about as being important?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write your core belief down. Describe why this is your core belief and how other beliefs you have rely upon 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 | SESSION 4

Define You: Pulling Personal Beliefs Together

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

At this age students form strong opinions about what is fair and what is not. They are great at expressing their personal views but are not typically making these connections to belief, faith and other moral teachings. Alignment with their beliefs and practices is difficult and, sometimes, students don't see it as necessary. In this session students will reflect on the units discussed this school year and how these different aspects help define who they are and what they believe, jotting ideas down in their journal. They will begin to make connections that will give them a clearer picture of their fully integrated self. To review, we discussed these topics so far:

- The Myers Briggs Personality Indicator
- Family of Origin, including our genealogy and the families we choose to part of.
- Views on our faith beliefs as it applies to politics, ageism and racism.
- Values and Core Beliefs

Note to mentor: Feel free to readdress those topics you feel weren't covered well or students weren't there to discuss or topics students have since forgotten about. This may take the whole time (which is fine). You may want to choose to do this after the Opening Activity.

>> 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 consider how they would describe themselves or describe other people in their group. Use one of these prompts. After one of the prompts ask for feedback from the other students on each student. It might be helpful for students to take notes on what others say about them.

- If someone who knows you well were asked to describe you in 2-3 words or a phrase, what would they say?
- Describe the person to your right (or left) in 2-3 words or a phrase.

>> SCRIPTURE

As we look at our whole self, using all the lenses we have talked about so far this school year, what might be our general purpose? Scripture often describes our purpose as human beings. Paul describes our purpose, in his letter to the people in Ephesus as "to do good things." King David in Psalms says that he needs to "learn your (God's) commandments," as a way of expressing God's design for his life. Help students to see the connection between what God intended as their purpose and the many other things that make up who they are, especially those aspects discussed in the group this school year.

Ephesians 2:10
Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

Psalm 119:73
Your hands have made me and set me in place.
Help me understand so I can learn your commandments.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- According to Paul and King David, what is the purpose of human beings?
- When King David talks about the commandments, what is he mostly referring to?

Note to mentor: The Shema is an often-quoted Jewish scripture which Jesus also referred as the greatest commandment. It says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength."

- What have you learned about yourself (in general and through discussion in this group) over the last six months?
- How have these things further defined who you are and what you believe?
- How does what you have learned align with God's purpose for humans as shared by Paul and King David?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Supplies Needed: Writing utensil and piece of paper or journal
The goal will be for students to write down their beliefs in an authentic and memorable manner. Allow them to wade into this activity by just writing words or phrases. Have them write some words or phrases that describe them based on all of the things they have discussed in this group over the past several months. Allow a significant amount of time (if you have it) for them to reflect and write.

- How do these things define your faith?
- What areas do you hope to grow into over the next six months?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Test some of your thoughts about yourself with other people (friends and family) you trust. Ask if some items that you have identified fit with other people's perception of you. Be prepared to listen well for insightful feedback.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Begin to write the beginnings of your personal belief statement. Start with a history about yourself to acknowledge the important influences on your life. Then, simply start each paragraph with "I believe..." Fill in the blanks and describe why you believe what you believe. You may surprise yourself with your own insight and the depth of your beliefs you didn't fully appreciate before.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 4 | SESSION 5

Define You: A Personal Belief Statement

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Sometimes we think we must be 100% sure of something to believe in it. That is rarely the case even when we want it to be true. We aren't ever 100% sure of our friendships, employment, the weather, etc. So, what allows us to get to a belief in something if we can never be 100% sure. Students will continue to explore their beliefs and why they believe in specific things. Specifically, they will consider a faith that relies on what we hope for as a basis for a strong belief. You may want to return to the review in the overview of Session Three to set up the opening activity. Feel free to spend time again in areas that weren't covered, or people missed or need more clarification. The goal will be for students to write coherent paragraphs about their personal beliefs.

>> 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 each person share something that you are not certain about. This isn't necessarily doubt. This is a belief that needs a little more evidence or assurance. For example, "I'm not sure that every person has good in them." Or "I'm not sure if God is actively involved in everything in the world." Or "I'm not sure if dessert should be eaten last."

>> SCRIPTURE

Hebrews is a book (or letter) written by an unknown author. It is meant to reaffirm the Hebrew people (Jewish) of their heritage and the alignment of Jesus with their

heritage. It reaches back into history to affirm that God was and is with us. This piece of Scripture is a lead-in to a detailed list of how faith was centrally relevant to the faith of God's people throughout history.

Hebrews 11:1
Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When considering the world, your life in the long-term, what do you hope for?
- How do we get "proof of what we don't see?"
- How does what we "hope for" and what we "don't see" translate into "faith?"

>> ACTIVITY #2

This will be a more intense writing session. Have students spread out to different parts of the room to write about what they believe. Have them start with a history about themselves to acknowledge the important influences in their life. Then, simply start each subsequent paragraph with "I believe..." Fill in the blanks and describe why they believe what they believe. Encourage them to surprise themselves with their insight and depth.

If there is time, and people are comfortable, have them read what they have written. If students are even more transparent and willing, ask them to type their statement into a document to share with others. We have published these in the past and are willing to do it again if students would like to do this. Primarily, we want this to be a personal statement, they can reflect upon as they grow in their beliefs.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Share your Personal Belief Statement with other people (family and friends). Ask what they think. Be willing to change your statement based on the input from others.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Type your statement into a document. Make it so you can return to it and expand on different parts of your statement in the future. Be sure to put the date you created the statement in your document.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 5 Discernment

Session 1: God's Call
Session 2: Vocation - Following Jesus
Session 3: Global Eschatology – Closing the Gap
Session 4: Choosing and Being a Mentor

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Discernment is a loaded church word. We don't use this word in many other places. At its basic meaning, it is a method of decision making that involves more than just personal experience and intuition. Discernment also considers the perspective of others to affirm or counter what our experiences and intuition tells us. Most importantly, discernment involves God. We begin to interpret our experiences through our understanding of God - God wants and desires for humanity and for us individually. If we begin to determine our role in what God wants, then this is discernment! It isn't simple. God doesn't often send a singular message that is completely understandable. Discernment takes place over time, considering many different perspectives and experiences while also learning more about what God desires in the world.

One can use a process of discernment to make small decisions. One can also use discernment to determine life-long decisions like vocations, relationships and ways we impact the world around us. Oh, and by the way, even if we do our best job of discernment, we may get it wrong simply because we misinterpret God's direction in our lives. Thankfully, there's always grace and opportunities for second chances. That's how God rolls. The key is to continually use discernment as a tool for making decisions. If we do this, then we will increase our chances of living into a life that honors our values and beliefs that align with God.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 5 | SESSION 1

Discernment: God's Call

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

We make decisions all the time. How many decisions include God in the process? If we are Christian, how do we include God, if we presume God wants the best for us? How does that work? In this session students will reflect on decisions they have made or are planning to make. They will consider a process of involving God in discerning upcoming decisions they might make.

Students will look at the example of Elijah (a prophet in the Bible whose story begins at I Kings 17), who had to make some difficult decisions at a life-or-death point in his life. Instead of hearing direction from friends or even some supernatural experience from God, Elijah heard God in a quiet place even amongst his personal chaos. Students will consider how they might find these quiet moments where big decisions can be made.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

- What are some important decisions you have made in the last two months?
- How have you made these decisions?
- Which decisions did you ask for God's direction? What does that look like for you?

>> SCRIPTURE

For context, read the entire 19th chapter in I Kings. There is a lot happening here. To summarize, Elijah is one of the most famous prophets in the history of the Hebrew people. At this point in his life, he is also the only living prophet. All of the rest have been murdered by Jezebel. Elijah is fearing for his life and is "on the run" for 40 days when he reaches Mount Horeb, the same mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments, centuries earlier. Elijah is afraid and is unsure of what to do next. He is returning to a traditional place where he knows God will be. But he has trouble finding God there. He does eventually, in the quiet.

I Kings 19:11-12

11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD. The LORD
is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the
stones before the LORD. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was
an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake, there
was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin.
Quiet. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood
at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We often want clear direction that loudly declares what we should do next whether it is choosing friends, a college, a partner or the type of job we should apply for. This story illustrates that it doesn't often work that way. Quiet voices that are difficult to hear may be our prompt. And sometimes, those voices don't tell us an answer. They ask us a question. Again, not what we are looking for.

- How did Elijah demonstrate patience in waiting for God's direction?
- What is the significance of Elijah being "on the run" for 40 days? Hint: 40 days equates to a very long time in Hebrew writing, not a precise number of days.
- What is the significance of the place Elijah chose to listen to God?
- Why are the words "Thin" and "Quiet" emphasized?

>> ACTIVITY #2 – YOUR NEXT MAJOR DECISION

Need: Notecards and Pencils or Journals

So, you most likely won't be confronted by a major life and death decision like Elijah. But you will make important decisions. Let's use Elijah's process as a model. Write down the next major decision you need to make. Include how you might use discernment Elijah modeled to help you make that decision? Think of these things:

- How often will you ask God for help?
- What is the length of time you will be open to direction from God? (Elijah spent a lot of time in the cave asking)
- What places you might go to seek God's guidance? (You can't get to the mountain where Moses found the Ten Commandments. But there might be other more accessible sacred places for you to use.)

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Develop a process where you will ask for God's guidance and how you might be open to God's direction including where you will look for God's prompting. Practice this process with small decisions, building a habit for how you will look for discernment from God. Remember, in the end, you make decisions. You're not asking for God to make the decision for you.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

List the decisions you plan to make in the next six months and how you might be open to God's direction.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 5 | SESSION 2

Discernment: Vocation - Following Jesus

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Students may already be thinking about what they will do to earn a living after high school. Most are not thinking about how their future profession will connect with their belief in Jesus. How do we begin to ensure that our values and beliefs begin to align with our chosen vocation? It doesn't mean that everyone becomes a pastor, does it? Of course not. Vocation is more about what we do, whether or not we are paid for it. In this session students will consider how God's calling influences vocation, whether it is paid or unpaid. Students will differentiate between believing in God and following God and how this difference influences our choice of vocation.

>> 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

Use your phone and find the most unusual occupation and share with the rest of the group.

>> SCRIPTURE

How we live our life matters. It doesn't make sense to believe one thing and live another thing. In the week leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus refers to his own death as necessary. He says that his death "bears much fruit," meaning that good things will result. Then he defines what it means to follow him, which is a step beyond simply believing in him. Following requires action. Vocation is the active choice to follow Jesus in what we do with our lives.

John 12:24-26

24 I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider that it is one thing to simply "believe" in Jesus, believing that he was a person and a representative of God in the world with incredible and motivational teachings. We can believe that he lived, died and even resurrected. However, to "follow" Jesus, his example and his teachings are a giant leap beyond belief. John quotes Jesus as saying that followers will need to "hate their lives" and serve Jesus. This seems extreme. Jesus may be using hyperbole here to make the point that we can become self-absorbed pretty easily and lose sight of what is important. Jesus is emphasizing sacrificing for others and serving others as a way to follow his teachings most effectively, resulting in "much fruit." The fruit is simply more people who feel loved and accepted.

- What do you think the practical differences might be between "belief" in Jesus and choosing to "follow" Jesus?
- How does Jesus characterize following him? What does it look like to follow Jesus?
- What does it mean to "hate your life?"
- What are the results (much fruit) of following Jesus?

>> ACTIVITY #2

When we think of following Jesus, we usually categorize them like this:

- General behavior and actions towards others
- Spiritual practices
- Vocational calling

We talk a lot about our general behavior and our spiritual practices in youth group and discipleship groups. These are important. But, for this discussion, let's talk about vocational calling. Vocation is a derivative of a Latin word that means "call." It came out of the church Reformation movement in the 1500s and 1600s. Vocation was used to describe what God might be calling you to do with your life. Vocation can mean a job we are paid to do. It can also mean a consistent practice we feel God is calling us to do whether we are paid for it or not. For instance, a high-ranking insurance executive (paid profession) may feel called to start and run a food pantry (vocation). That's a true story, by the way. Vocation is an expression of following and serving Jesus in a tangible and consistent manner.

- List some vocations that might be of interest to you. Compile this list so that everyone can see varying vocational choices.

Note to mentor: You may want to think of this ahead of time and come up with your own list to get the ball rolling. A church member recently began Pharmacy of Grace. Visit their website and read about the inspiration (vocational calling) for this.

- Which of the vocations listed seem interesting to you? Why?
- If you chose to pursue a vocation on this list, what would be some initial steps towards exploring this vocational possibility?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Spend some time investigating one of the vocations you identified. How might you pursue this possibility or get more information?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write your reflections on the vocations you may be interested in. What steps might you take to find out more information about these vocations? Who might you talk with? A pastor? A counselor?

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 5 | SESSION 3

Discernment: Global Eschatology – Closing the Gap

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

What are the "end times?" Popular Christian culture has messed this up and the church doesn't address this often or well. Therefore, students have no idea what God intends when we talk about the end times (eschatology) in Revelation (at the end of the Bible). Because this is sensationalized by some Christian sects as a cataclysmic end to the world, thereby providing motivation for one to give their life to Christ, the more scholarly and appropriate reading of Revelation is not promoted. And, to top it off, Revelation is a confusing book to read and understand because of its apocalyptic writing filled with unfamiliar imagery and symbols. This session will encourage students to reframe their understanding of the "end times" as written in Revelation, making it practical and applicable to their lives in helping to make the world as it should be, linking their observations to their vocation (as talked about in the last session).

Students will discuss the meaning of the new covenant, new creation and new heaven and earth as God's hoped for ending (eschatology) which is actually a new beginning. Students will also consider how to discern their role in the coming of a new heaven and a new earth and how that might be practically applied to their lives. Adam Hamilton refers this to as closing the gap between the way the world is and the world as it should be.

As with other deeper studies, there is a chance that students will have difficulty engaging in the discussion. Prepare them by saying, "This will be a little deeper today. You may have to think harder because these concepts may be new to you." Be satisfied with communicating portions, knowing that you can come back to it on another day.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

- What is your favorite Marvel movie?
- How do Marvel movies depict the metaverse and how the universe might come to an end?

>> SCRIPTURE

Eschatology is a theological word that means the study of end times or last days. It is associated with what has become known as "the final judgment" or "rapture." In some more evangelical Christian traditions, this is the focal point of faith, with the goal of giving your life to Jesus before some sort of cataclysmic end to the world and your own human life.

However, "rapture" also means joy and a state of high emotion. We are going to focus on this meaning in relation to eschatology and how when there is an end, there follows something new and hopeful. So, what is ending? Is it the end of the world? Or is it the end of something else because something new has begun?

Consider the following scriptures. The first scripture is how Jesus framed a shared experience (meal) on the day before he was put to death. We know this as communion. This is a foretelling of his ending and the new beginning he hopes for his followers.

The second scripture is Paul reflecting on how people who follow Jesus should view themselves, as a new creation. He refers to the old things ending.

And the last scripture is a description by John (possibly the only living disciple) near the end of his life. He is writing, in Revelation, to seven churches who are being persecuted by the Roman government. He writes about Jesus's redemption of the world and what that will look like. This is where the apocalyptic and highly symbolic (thus confusing) language comes in. Most scholars think that he is sending a message of hope for the future to these churches. We will focus on a tiny piece of this rather than tackling all of the complicated symbolism. We will be specifically looking at New Jerusalem as a symbol for God's desire for heaven on earth and the fact that God will dwell with humans. This imagery of God's intended outcome can bring hope to people for the future.

Note to mentor: You may want to give the above overview all at once or in sections before reading each related scripture below or both. Emphasize the word "new" in each reading.

Luke 22:20
In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, "This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you."

2 Corinthians 5:17
So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

Revelation 22:1-3
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them as their God."

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the new covenant?
- What does God agree to do for people?

Note to mentor: The new covenant is God's promise to all people to be redeemed by God (including forgiveness of sin or separation from God) and to begin eternal life with God while we are still alive in a new relationship that has a lasting positive impact on the world, making the world as it was intended at the moment of creation.

- How might the new covenant be different from how we normally view the world?
- What does the imagery of Jesus's blood (in communion) lend itself to understanding the new covenant?

Note to mentor: Animal sacrifices during Jesus's time demonstrated the Hebrew people's willingness to give up their best livestock to God to honor God. Jesus is offering his sacrifice, demonstrating God's willingness to give up God's best to human beings. It is a role reversal and probably not fully understood by the disciples at dinner that night.

- When Paul speaks about a new creation, it seems to be personal. What does he mean? What old things might go away? (ex. jealousy, meanness, prejudice)
- If you choose to go from believing in Jesus to following Jesus, what old things might go away? (ex. treating other fairly and kindly)
- Jesus talked a lot about heaven on earth and equated that with the "Kingdom of God." Based on what John is describing, what does it look like to have a new heaven on earth?
- God is described by John as "dwelling here with humankind." How does this change the idea of people going "up to" heaven? Or how does this change how you perceive the "end times" as sometimes described in popular culture?

>> ACTIVITY #2
Closing the Gap

Adam Hamilton describes eschatology (end times) as closing the gap between the way the world is and the world as it should be. Let's think about that. Make two lists as a group. On one side of the list, write your observations of the world as it is (ex. partisan politics, war, genocide, me first attitudes).

Next, across from each item, write the way the world should be according to how you understand Jesus's desire for a new covenant, Paul's idea of a new creation and John's concept of a new heaven and a new earth.

Finally, select a few items on the list and discuss how we can close the gap. This is where discernment comes in. Where do you think God might be leading you to close the gap. Consider this from four points of view.

- Individually – What can we do personally to close the gap?
- Communally – What can we do with friends and/or family to close the gap?
- As a Church – What can we do as a church to close the gap?
- Vocation – How does our choice of vocation help us close the gap?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE
Choose something that was discussed today and begin to make a plan to close the gap. Keep it simple. Consider a step towards closing the gap, not necessarily bridging the whole gap in one action. (ex. smile at people)

>> JOURNAL PROMPT
Write any new understanding you have about how God sees the end as a new beginning. What does that look like to you? How might you communicate this hope for the future to 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 5 | SESSION 4

Discernment: Choosing and Being a Mentor

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

It is important to have mentors as we grow, so that we can benefit from the wisdom of others who have been there and done that. It is also critical to mentor people who are younger than us. In this session students will begin to consider the role of mentors in their lives and how they might be a good mentor to others. Mentors are critical in helping us to discern God's call, vocation and how one might make a difference in the world. They can be motivational and act as life-long role models even if the mentor relationship is short-lived. Remembering how mentors shaped us continues to provide a guideline for future behavior and interaction with others we might mentor.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

- Describe your first best friend.
- What characteristics are important to you in a friend?
- How are these same characteristics important to you when considering trusting a possible mentor (older friend, teacher or coach)?
- Do you exhibit any of these characteristics to people younger than you?

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul is largely responsible for spreading the news of Jesus throughout the Roman empire. His letters to churches make up most of the New Testament. Paul began as an enemy of "The Way," the Jewish movement who followed Jesus's teachings initially. Therefore, when he changed his allegiance, he needed help. Barnabas is a

nickname that means "The Encourager." Barnabas brought Paul, then called Saul, to the apostles to give him credibility. And then, many years later, Paul writes a letter to the Philippians, introducing Timothy, a young follower of Jesus's teachings, to give him credibility to the people in Philippi.

Acts 9:27-28

27 Then Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and told them the story about how Saul saw the Lord on the way and that the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them about the confidence with which Saul had preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus. 28 After this, Saul moved freely among the disciples in Jerusalem and was speaking with confidence in the name of the Lord.
Philippians 2:19-20

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to see you soon so that I may be encouraged by hearing about you. 20 I have no one like him. He is a person who genuinely cares about your well-being.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why was it helpful to Saul/Paul for Barnabas to tell the story of how Paul came to know Jesus and preach about Jesus?
- What is significant about the meaning of Barnabas's name, "The Encourager?"
- How is Paul presenting Timothy to the Philippians? Why will this be important to Timothy?
- How important is it to gain credibility among your peers? What does that look like?
- If someone has encouraged you in front of others, share what happened and how it made you feel.

Note to Mentor: This might be a good time for you to recall someone who gave you credibility. It may be someone who you worked or a friend who introduced you to a new group of people or future spouse.

>> ACTIVITY #2

Somebody in your life may have given you credibility. As a result, they have become a mentor to you. Or you may not have found a mentor, yet. In pairs share one person who has been a good mentor for you or a person you hope will become a mentor to you? What characteristics do they exhibit? Introduce your partner to the rest of the group and the characteristics of their mentor to the rest of the group. Look for commonalities in what others are sharing.

- How do you exhibit some of these characteristics to those that are younger than you?
- What other instances have you been a mentor to someone younger than you?
- What might be your next step in finding a mentor or becoming a mentor to someone else?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

If you don't have a mentor, consider who might be someone you can get to know better that might fill that role. In addition, seek someone younger to mentor. Start by asking them lots of questions to get to know them well. Then, follow up with questions about what you learn about them.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write the names of older people who have impacted you so far and the ways they have impacted you. Read back over the list when you are finished and identify those same things you may have done for someone else younger than you. Highlight or mark these in a way that will remind you of the characteristics you are already using to mentor younger people.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 6 Difficult Scriptures

Session 1: Hell
Session 2: Salvation
Session 3: Christianity and Government

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

There isn't a set of Christian doctrines that get more abused than the concept of heaven and hell. They often become framed in the afterlife when our human bodies die. They conjure up images of wings, pitchforks, harps, and fire. Why are these our predominant images? Often, culture defines our Christian belief system before we even know there is another point of view that may be more closely tied to the Biblical and theological understanding of heaven and hell.

In addition, human beings have a great deal of concern about their own mortality. We want to live longer and not die if we can help it. So, our fascination with an afterlife of some sort gives us reassurance that this life is worth something beyond our lifetime especially if it means we live forever in another realm.

So, what does the Bible really say about heaven and hell? When we talk about heaven, we will consider verses about "salvation" and what is meant by that term. It is often linked to heaven because of the view that once we are "saved" then the reward is an afterlife in heaven.

Students will explore their beliefs on heaven and hell and why it matters when they are discussing their beliefs with others.

Our Christian beliefs also become confused and sometimes intertwined with our beliefs about the government. Students will discuss how this is possible and what scripture says about it.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 6 | SESSION 1

Difficult Scripture: Hell

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

We all have a particular image of hell as a place. What if it isn't a place, but rather a state of being? Students and most adults may have never explored the concept of hell and its existence. Students will explore the different theories about hell and whether God intends for anyone to go to hell for eternity after death. It might be helpful to watch this two-minute video of Adam Hamilton talking about hell.
https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-hell

>> 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

Needed: Markers and Paper

Sketch a picture of hell. Use markers or just a pen or pencil to sketch what you think hell looks like. Share with the rest of the group as you are drawing. Encourage informal conversation around the drawings.

>> SCRIPTURE

We will look at two concepts of hell when considering Scripture. Sheol is translated into Hell from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Hades and Gehanna are translated into hell in the New Testament. Hades aligns with Sheol. Gehanna is actually a burning trash dump outside the Jerusalem city walls. It is the meaning behind these concepts that are critical to the discussion. Focus on the definitions of these three words and how the people who lived at the time of these writings were hearing these words used. The scripture gives some context (but not much).

Sheol is the Hebrew word for hell used most often in the Old Testament. According to Hebrew tradition, Sheol is where all people, both good and bad, go when they die. It is thought of as silent and dark. It is not a place of suffering or torment. This understanding of Hell may mess with our present-day cultural understanding of Hell. Before diving into the scripture, share with students this concept of hell, a place where everyone goes when they die that is not a place of suffering and torment. Ask for their feedback. Then, read this English translation of Psalm 139 where the word "grave" is translated from Sheol. King David is writing this Psalm to God.

Psalm 139:7-8
Where could I go to get away from your spirit?
Where could I go to escape your presence?
If I went up to heaven, you would be there.
If I went down to the grave,[a] you would be there too!

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does David describe God's presence in his life?
- What other words might you use to describe what he is communicating about God (ex. persistent, omni-present, inescapable)?
- What does this tell you about hell? Is God present in hell?

Hades and Gehenna - In the New Testament, the Greek words translated to Hell nearly equally as often are Hades (10 times) and Gehenna (11 times). Hades was generally thought of as a place like Sheol. In more recent times Hades is associated with the current cultural view of Hell, a place of punishment. Gehenna was an actual place in the first century. It was a trash dump in the Valley of Hinnom on the southern slope outside of Jerusalem. It notoriously burned constantly. Gehenna is the place where Satan was thrown in Revelation 20.

Matthew 10:28
Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but can't kill the soul. Instead, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Consider the imagery Matthew was attempting to use when referring to hell (Gehenna). What was he trying to communicate?
- What does this verse tell you about hell?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

Some scholars believe that hell is an actual place. Others believe it is a state of mind with no tangible location. We will use two writings after the canonization (compilation) of the New Testament Bible (397 AD) to explore these ideas. The first is Dante's Inferno. The second is the Apostles' Creed. We won't read all of them in their entirety as this may be more confusing than helpful. Instead, we will deal with the concepts they present and how that formed our understanding of hell.

1. **Dante Aligeheiri's Inferno** (Italian for Hell) is the first part of his epic poem, Divine Comedy, where he describes hell as nine concentric circles of torment located within the earth. This is where we get our modern-day imagery of hell with a caretaker, a giant demon. By the way, the Biblical accounts of Sheol and Hades don't mention a caretaker (Lucifer, Satan or Devil).
    - Without reading Dante's Inferno, how do you suppose Dante describes hell as a place?
    - In what ways do you suppose we confuse our cultural understanding of hell with what the Bible says?
2. **The Apostles' Creed** says Jesus "descended into hell" after his death and then rose from the dead. This part of the creed is often left off when some types of Christians recite the Apostles' Creed. They leave it off either because it is thought to have been a late addition to the creed or not aligned with their understanding of Jesus. Most scholars say that this phrase simply acknowledges that he was dead explaining the time between his death and resurrection, aligning with the idea of Sheol. The Greek and Hebrew understanding of death resonated more with death being a state of being rather than a place.
    - Describe what you think the difference is between a place and a state of being?
    - How do you think the Apostles' Creed describes death as a state of being?

>> CONSIDER THESE THOUGHTS

Adam Hamilton says, "God doesn't force us to experience heaven. God doesn't force us to do his will, he allows us. It seems that there is a natural and logical corollary that there must be a place (hell) for those who don't want to do God's will." And C.S. Lewis adds, "The doors of hell are locked from the inside!"

- What do you think about Adam's statement? Could hell simply be a place for people to go who don't choose God?
- If God wants people to love God, do you think God wants people to go to hell for eternity?
- How does the earlier pieces of Scripture support Adam's view of hell?
- What does C.S. Lewis mean by "the doors of hell are locked from the inside?"

Note to Mentor: This means we have the choice to unlock the door to leave hell.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Ask other people (friends and family) what they think about hell. Is it an actual place or a state of being? Can God punish people to hell or do we get a choice?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about how your concept of hell aligns with your other beliefs about God and Jesus. Write about what is consistent and what is not. How would you explain your concept of hell to 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 6 | SESSION 2

Difficult Scripture: Salvation

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Salvation is often communicated as "saving us from sin" so that we can "go to heaven." Students absorb these messages in our culture, but it is not completely accurate. This is confusing for students. These views misinterpret Jesus's primary intent. Students will discuss the three views of salvation, the merits of each and if they align with how God is portrayed in John's Gospel. Students will also discuss heaven being a present reality that God intends for the world, not just an afterlife experience. For this session, salvation, eternal life and heaven may be used interchangeably.

>> 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 DISCUSSION

Describe a time when you didn't have a ticket to something you wanted to go to (ex. concert, movie) or you didn't have enough money for the entrance fee.

- How did that make you feel?
- Could you have planned better?
- Were you hoping for someone to gift you the ticket or entrance fee (even though it might be a long shot)?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Split into three groups and discuss who might "get into heaven" given the following criteria listed below. Give each group a copy of one of the criteria. What are the pros and cons of the criteria your group is considering? How does this align with how you view God?

- Pluralism or Universalism View – Everyone gets into heaven. God won't allow anyone to be lost.
- Exclusivism or Particularism View – Only those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior will get into heaven.
- Inclusivism View – Jesus is the source of salvation (one way to heaven). But God can give the gift of salvation to anyone God chooses (other ways to heaven).

Have each group present their point of view to the rest of the group. Ask for feedback after each presentation. Equate these different views with the opening activity and having a ticket to get into a place one wants to be. Talk briefly about salvation as a way to feel God's constant presence and reassurance and not in terms of being "saved from" something else.

>> SCRIPTURE

We are going to look at two Scriptures that are used to describe salvation. The apostle John quotes Jesus in a conversation with his Disciples the day before his death. He is giving them reassurance that their time with him wasn't wasted. They spent nearly three years with Jesus, listening and watching him. Paul writes to the Ephesians decades after Jesus's death and resurrection about grace (God's love) and how it is available to anyone. Look for alignment between these two pieces of Scripture. Consider the context of who Jesus and Paul are addressing to fully understand what they were intending to communicate.

John 14:6-7
6 Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

Ephesians 2:8-10
8 You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. 9 It's not something you did that you can be proud of. 10 Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean for Jesus to be THE way, THE truth and THE life? Is the emphasis meant to be personal with the disciples he has been leading for the last three years? Or is he intending it for everyone including his disciples?
- What way, truth and life are Jesus describing? What does it look like to follow Jesus using these three nouns as guiding principles?
- Paul is talking about God's gift of grace NOT being something a person possesses. What does this mean? Might it be a gift?
- Which comes first, our action to follow Jesus or Jesus's gift of grace? Why does this matter?

Note to Mentor: God's gift of grace (love) exists before we know it (prevenient grace) according to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

- Adam Hamilton describes this phrase in John 14:6 "No one comes to the Father except through me," as "No one comes to the Father except through my saving work." What are your opinions about Adam's description? How might this change the meaning of this verse for you?
- When Paul says we are created "to do good things," how is this related to the grace God is giving us earlier in the same text?
- Is salvation or eternal life or heaven meant to be a destination or a present reality? If it is a present reality, how could this change the way we live?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Spend some time this week in contemplation and prayer about the meaning of salvation. What are you being saved from? What life is God intending for you (and everyone) to live?

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write a list of people you know are not practicing Christians yet follow the example of Jesus (maybe without knowing it). List all of the qualities and characteristics you think God sees in them.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 6 | SESSION 3

Difficult Scripture: Christianity and Government

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Let's be honest. Christianity has historically been wrapped up in the politics of governing people. It is difficult to untangle the two. The Christian ethos involves community and embracing others, treating them as one would treat oneself. When the government is at odds with or aligned with this ethos, people have opinions. And those that are in governmental positions have the power to express their opinions in laws that affect people. So, how should we look at this when we are discussing our government and our faith? Students will grapple with what Jesus says and the varied ways people have interpreted the meaning behind his words.

>> 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

Talk about your student government. What do you see them doing at your school? Why do they exist? How does your student government look like your city, county, state or federal government?

>> SCRIPTURE

Matthew, Mark and Luke record this same story. In Matthew's version the Pharisees, who were likely not in favor of Roman occupation of Israel, and supporters of Herod, the Roman appointed governor of Jerusalem, ask Jesus this political question. The coin they used most likely had the likeness of Caesar on it with an inscription that declared Caesar as God. Jesus was drawing a distinction between Caesar, the ruler of the Roman world, and God, the creator of the entire world. Be sure to remind each other of this as you discuss.

Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then the Pharisees met together to find a way to trap Jesus in his words. 16 They sent their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to him. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are genuine and that you teach God's way as it really is. We know that you are not swayed by people's opinions, because you don't show favoritism. 17 So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" 18 Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used to pay the tax." And they brought him a denarion. 20 "Whose image and inscription is this?" he asked.

21 "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." 22 When they heard this they were astonished, and they departed.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does it matter that two groups who were likely on different sides (Pharisees and supporters of Herod) came to Jesus to ask this question? How do you think they were both threatened by Jesus?
- How might religion, Christianity in particular, be a threat to a government?
- How might the government be a threat to Christianity?
- How can government and Christianity co-exist?
- If the subtext of Jesus's answer is, "Caesar only temporarily rules over the Roman empire and Jesus rules over everything," how would people of that time make that happen in everyday life?
- You probably have political opinions. In what ways do you make God the ruler of everything in your life regardless of what opinions you hold?
- Soon after this conversation Jesus declares that he will tear down the temple and build it back up in three days. What does this say about who he is? What does this say about the power of the government compared to his power?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Look up on your phone the latest political or governmental decision. Discuss how Jesus might respond to it based on what was discussed today.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Reflect on something that is currently happening in your government (or politics) that concerns you. How can you use Jesus's response to reframe what is happening? (ex. God will use this for good even if it seems bad now.) How can you talk positively about God when confronted with government decisions or politics?

Write about what most concerns you and how you can invite God into that space.

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.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 7 Digging Deeper

Session 1: Other World Religions
Session 2: What Bothers You Most?
Session 3: James Says

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

These lessons are stand-alone lessons and can be used at any point during the year. We are addressing two important topics: World Religions and What Bothers You Most. They are different from one another. World Religions will give a brief overview and help students differentiate between the five major religions in the world. What Bothers You Most is meant to be used near the end of the year to help students go one step beyond vocation and the discussion on eschatology.

The book of James doesn't pull any punches about how we should live our life. These challenging passages will cause you to dig deep.

YEAR TWO

UNIT 7 | SESSION 1

Digging Deeper: Other World Religions

Most of the material for this session is extracted from Christianity and World Religions: Questions We Ask About Other Faiths by Adam Hamilton

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Students encounter people who adhere to other religions occasionally and aren't able to engage them in conversation about their religion. This session will give students common language they can share in conversation. While engaging others in conversation, it is also helpful to know the differences and similarities of other religions when compared to Christianity. This session will allow students to explore other major world religions and compare and contrast them to Christianity.

Note to Mentor: Catholicism is Christian and not another world religion. The difference between Christian religions will be considered in Confirmation. If your students haven't had that discussion, we can reproduce it for 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.

>> OPENING ACTIVITY

Split students into four groups and give each group a different overview of a world religion. Their group becomes the experts in this specific religion. Then, play a game where each group tries to get as many answers correct. The only catch is they can't answer if their team has the answer on their overview (ex. The Islam group can't answer: What is Islam's holy text?) Once the correct answer is given or the rest of the group is stumped the expert group can answer. The group with the correct answer wins the point. If unanswered, the expert group wins the point. If you want to make it easier, have each group read their overview out loud before beginning.

Hinduism

Holy Texts:

- The Rig-Veda are epic poems passed down through oral tradition and written down around 1000 BC
- The Upanishads are believed to be inspired by the Gods (800 BC – 50 AD)
- The Mahabharata described epic battles. The Bhagavad-Gita is the most prominent of the stories in this collection and would most likely be found in a Hindu home.

Central Figure: None

Founder: Not known

Name of God: Brahman is one God manifested in multiple gods and goddesses, representing the character of Brahman.

Core Beliefs:

- The human soul, which is God within us (Atman), longs to be reunited with God.
- Humans don't have sin which keeps them from God. Humans are simply ignorant, not fully understanding what it means to be human.
- Dharma are the good works we do as a result of more knowledge (less ignorance) eventually leading humans to Nirvana.
- Karma is the result of the good and bad thoughts and deeds we do.
- Reincarnation is what happens to Atman (our soul) after death. It jumps to another human being. If we have good Karma, we move up the caste (society) ladder in our new life. If we don't, we move down.
- Nirvana happens when we attain enough knowledge, gained good Karma and exercised the bad Karma out of us to be united with God (Brahman).

Additional Information:

- Hinduism is the longest active religion, having its start with the Aryan people who occupied Iran and Ireland and all points in between from 3800-2200 BC. It currently is the largest religion in India. All three countries can trace the name of their country to Hindu and Aryian root words.
- The Hindu stories and myths are closely aligned with the Greek and Roman stories and myths of their Gods.
- The Aryian language developed into Latin.

Buddhism

Holy Texts: The Pali Cannon (collection of Buddha's sayings)

Central Figure: Siddartha Gautama (586-483 BC) – The Buddha

Founder: Siddartha Gautama (586-483 BC) – The Buddha

Name of God: There is not a God in the Buddhist religion

Core Beliefs:

The Four Noble Truths

- Life is characterized by suffering.
- Suffering is caused by attachments.
- We can overcome our attachments.
- The Holy Eightfold Path is the way to overcome suffering.
  - Right views
  - Right intention

- Right speech
- Right action
- Right livelihood
- Right effort
- Right mindfulness
- Right concentration

Adoption of Hindu Beliefs

- Karma is reliant on good and bad deeds and will determine the realm you will progress or regress to once you are dead.
- Samsara is the idea that after your death you are reincarnated in another human in the womb (good karma) or in an animal (bad karma)
- Nirvana is when, upon death, you have reached the end of your journey because of all the good karma and your life energy is united with all other energy.

Additional Information:

- Siddartha Gautama was born into a noble warrior caste in India. His father was the prince of a small kingdom. Siddartha was privileged and protected from suffering until he was a young man. Suffering had a profound impact on his beliefs.

Islam

Holy Texts: The Quran which are the messages from the angel, Gabriel, to Mohammed when he would retreat into a mountain cave for prayer and meditation. Since he could not read or write, he would dictate Gabriel's message to him. The Quran is viewed as the definitive and revelational words of Allah.

Central Figure: Mohammed (570-632)

Founder: Mohammed (570-632)

Name of God: Allah who is the same God of Abraham

Core Beliefs: Islam means "peace through submission to Allah." There are Five Pillars of Islam.

- Belief by saying, "I bear witness to this truth. There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet (servant, slave)."
- Prayer five times per day.
- Fasting once per year at Ramadan.
- Charity by paying (2.5% of income) their "purity of wealth."
- Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

Additional Information:

- Islam thinks of Jesus as the greatest prophet next to Mohammed. When Muslims say Jesus's name, they add, "Peace be upon him," just as they do when they say Mohammed's name.
- Islam began in Mecca, a commercial crossroads where dozens of Pagan religions were practiced. Mohammed lost his parents at a young age and was in quest for deeper spiritual meaning.

Judaism

Holy Texts:

- The Torah are the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. Jewish people read through The Torah annually on giant scrolls.
- The Tanak which is largely the Christian Old Testament
- The Talmud which began as an oral tradition in interpreting the law in the Torah.

Central Figures: Abraham, Moses, and others

Founder: Unknown

Name of God: YHVH (pronounced Yawae) meaning "I Am"

Core Beliefs:

- One God
- God is in a covenant relationship with human beings meaning God makes promises to remain faithful and constant.
- God reveals God's character and intentions through many different kinds of people including the Hebrew people who were the chosen people in the beginning of the Torah.

Additional Information:

- Following Jesus's death and resurrection one-third of the Jewish people living in Jerusalem remained Jewish and followed Jesus's teaching. They called themselves "The Way."
- Today's Jewish people can be found in three different kind of groupings
  - Orthodox – those who follow the early laws in The Torah and Talmud most closely.
  - Conservative – those that follow The Torah closely, but not necessarily The Talmud.
  - Reform – those that hold The Torah as written by humans through the inspiration of God.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is Islam's Holy Text?
- Who is the founder of Hinduism?
- Which religion is the oldest?
- Which religion believes in a more personal relationship between humans and God?
- What is the name of Buddhist god?
- Which religions believe in Jesus as an important prophet?
- Which religion holds suffering as an important part of its belief system?
- Who is the founder of Buddhism?
- Which religion holds their text in the highest regard?
- Who is the founder of Islam?
- How are the intentions of God revealed in Judaism?
- What is the goal of Hinduism and Buddhism?
- What is the holy text for Judaism?
- What is the importance of good and bad deeds in Buddhism and Hinduism?
- What are the Five Pillars of Islam?
- What are the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism?
- Describe the human relationship with God in Hinduism.
- You can make up your own questions as well or have students make up questions based on their overviews.

>> SCRIPTURE

Romans is a letter from Paul to the people of Rome, a place he didn't visit until he was jailed. Paul is writing to people who don't have a Jewish or any kind of a monotheistic (one God) background. Paul is attempting to make following Jesus easier for those who have been most likely following Roman gods previously.

Romans 8:28-29
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. 29 We know this because God knew them in advance, and he decided in advance that they would be conformed to the image of his Son. That way his Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What might Paul mean when he is referencing Jesus as the first of many brothers and sisters? Is he referring to biological siblings or, possibly others who might represent God to other populations?
- If we trust that "God works ALL things together for good for the ones who love God," how might that apply to those who believe in God, but follow different practices in a non-Christian religion?
- Assuming God is referring to all of humanity, how does Genesis 1:27 where it says, "God created humanity in God's own image," make sense with what Paul is saying to the Romans in the scripture just read?
- Does God put limits on who is included in God's creation?

>> FURTHER DISCUSSION

What are the important similarities and differences between the four world religions we have been talking about? Compare and contrast them to Christianity as well.

Some similarities that might be discussed:

- Mostly monotheistic (one God)
- Except for Hinduism, founded in the same 500 year time frame
- Holy texts communicate similar values

Some differences that might be discussed:

- The Holy Texts in Islam is elevated to be definitive while other holy texts are to provide guidance.
- God is personal in some and more removed and impersonal in other religions.
- God speaks to human beings in some religions and is mediated and/or silent in others.
- The final destination for human beings is very different from religion to religion.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Seek out someone who practices one of these world religions and ask them their thoughts and opinions on their religion. Be open to their perspective. You are not trying to win an argument as to which religion is best. You are trying to learn from a different perspective.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about how you can be more open to the beliefs of others without compromising your own beliefs. What does that practically look like when you are interacting with other people?

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 7 | SESSION 2

Digging Deeper: What Bothers You Most?

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Most students are troubled about something that is happening in their school, home, community or world. They want something done. It's not that they don't want to do it. They may not know what causes effective and lasting change in what troubles them most. Sometimes students simply need encouragement to act. In this session, students will go a little deeper to discover how they might take some risk in making a difference that matters.

>> 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

A lot of times we see risks as negative. "Don't be too risky or you might get hurt." We aren't talking about those kinds of risks today. We are talking about the kind of risk you take where others benefit as a result.

- What is a risk you have taken? Why did you take it? What was the benefit to you? What was the benefit to others?
- If you haven't taken a risk, what might be a risk you are willing to take? Why would you take it?

>> SCRIPTURE

Paul, in one of his letters to the people in Corinth, goes on a rant (which he does on occasion). This time he is talking about himself. It is actually strange. He appears to be bragging. In fact, he admits to bragging about all he has been through. He leads off by saying he is "a fool." In other words, he is willing to go through extreme difficulties

because of his strong belief that following Jesus is the right thing. Read what he says and reflect on what you might endure for a strongly held belief you might have.

II Corinthians 11:23-31
23 Are they ministers of Christ? I'm speaking like a crazy person. What I've done goes well beyond what they've done. I've worked much harder. I've been imprisoned much more often. I've been beaten more times than I can count. I've faced death many times. 24 I received the "forty lashes minus one" from the Jews five times. 25 I was beaten with rods three times. I was stoned once. I was shipwrecked three times. I spent a day and a night on the open sea. 26 I've been on many journeys. I faced dangers from rivers, robbers, my people, and Gentiles. I faced dangers in the city, in the desert, on the sea, and from false brothers and sisters. 27 I faced these dangers with hard work and heavy labor, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, and in the cold without enough clothes.
28 Besides all the other things I could mention, there's my daily stress because I'm concerned about all the churches. 29 Who is weak without me being weak? Who is led astray without me being furious about it? 30 If it's necessary to brag, I'll brag about my weaknesses. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, the one who is blessed forever, knows that I'm not lying.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What impresses you about what Paul has endured for his beliefs?
- Why does he call himself a fool (earlier in the chapter) and a crazy person?
- What potential results motivate Paul?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Consider the things in the world or your community that you see as not quite right. What bothers you? As a group make a list of particular movements you see people getting behind to make a difference (ex. homelessness, cancer research, suicide prevention, mental health). What specific organizations do you know that are addressing these things? Are there movements that need to be started because an organization doesn't exist?

If you had to choose one of these areas where you would make a difference, which one would it be? What potential results would you like to see?

Note to Mentor: This might be a great time to talk about organizations that have been started by church members like Nathan and Sylvia Harrell with Keep the Spark Alive, addressing suicide prevention.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Spend some time investigating issues and/or organizations that address the issues you care most about.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about the issue and/or organization you chose when you discussed this lesson as a group. Why are you motivated by this? What life experiences have you had that may have contributed to your motivation? What are some things you can actively do to begin to make a difference?

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

UNIT 7 | SESSION 3

Digging Deeper: James Says

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

James has a lot to say about how what we say can be damaging to others, our community and ourselves. Most of us speak more than we listen. Students will discuss how their words make a difference and how their words can be used for good.

>> 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

What is your favorite phrase or slang word? Why is it your favorite right now?

>> SCRIPTURE

James, the author of this letter, is thought to have been Jesus's brother. He is writing to followers of Jesus who are living outside of Israel. He is writing to encourage them and instruct them. James doesn't pull any punches. He is very direct. He writes about temptation, integrity, prejudice, the power of our words, conflict, the challenges of wealth, patience and how, when it comes to faith, our actions speak louder than our words. You probably could wander around this letter and choose any of the other topics. For this session we will focus on the words we use.

James 3:8-10

8 No one can tame the tongue, though. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings made in God's likeness. 10 Blessing and cursing come from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, it just shouldn't be this way!

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- James seems to know people pretty well. Does it surprise you when someone who generally says nice things, says something not so nice? Why does it surprise you?
- Why does James say that no one can tame the tongue?
- Why do you think James feels like we shouldn't both bless and curse out of the same mouth?
- How do our words affect others?
- What do our words (blessing and cursing) say about us?
- Do the words you use always match what you believe? Why or why not?
- What would it look like if we considered others listening to us before we speak?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Read James's other analogies for the tongue and decide which one is best. Try to decipher the meaning of the analogy. Then, make up your own analogies.

- Bridled horses – James 3:2-3
- Rutter on ships – James 3:4-5
- Flame – James 3:5-6
- Poison – James 3:7-9
- Comparing items – James 3:10-12

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Pay attention to what you say this week. Think before you speak. Be aware of how your words affect others.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Think about the words you say to others. Are there times when you might choose to use different words or not speak at all? Write about that and challenge yourself to do better.

>> 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.

YEAR TWO

SEASONAL

Advent: Acting on the Unbelievable
Lent: In the Wilderness

>> UNIT OVERVIEW

Every year we celebrate Advent and Lent. It is sometimes difficult to take a new angle on something that happens similarly every year. So, here are a few attempts.

In the Advent session we will focus on Mary and Joseph and the predicament they found themselves in. Joseph considers divorcing Mary before they are married. Before he does, an angel, God's messenger, gives him another solution. He takes the advice. Angels can come to us in many forms. And most likely we will see them as other people who speak wisdom into our lives right when we need it most.

In the Lent session we will focus on being in the wilderness, using the wilderness as a metaphor for feeling lost, confused and/or frustrated with the direction our life is currently taking. This can seem like a forever experience for people, especially students. Fortunately, there is hope at the end of a wilderness journey. Students will explore what this might look like for them.

Advent and Lent are seasons of preparation for our highest holy days. As you construct your schedule for the year, insert these where they logically fall in your calendar. You can choose the beginning of each season, the midpoint or the end. Your choice. Use these sessions in a way to prepare your students best.

YEAR TWO

SEASONAL

Advent: Acting on the Unbelievable

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

Advent is a time to prepare for the birth of Jesus. We tend to think about nativity sets when we think about the birth of Jesus. But in reality, this unmarried couple was in crisis. They were faced with some pretty tough decisions. Students are faced with difficult decisions from time to time. In this session, students will consider trusting in others, as messengers of God, to help them navigate situations that don't seem to be going their way.

>> 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

This may sound like a child's activity. It is. Provide a white sheet of paper and scissors. Invite everyone to make an angel. If you don't think it will work, don't do it. But it may provide a tactile activity that may allow everyone to discuss the following.

- What are our images of angels (wings, harp, etc.)?
- How do you think that might or might not be true?
- How are angels portrayed in movies, books and other media?

>> SCRIPTURE

Joseph had other intentions when he discovered Mary was pregnant. All the women listed in the Bible in Jesus's genealogy were not Hebrew like Jesus. These women are most likely there because they took great risks for other people. Being righteous like these women often involved addressing complex moral decisions and problems, seeking and listening for the voice of God, and then responding to what God is calling

us to do. Mary, Jesus's mother, and Joseph had a big problem. Mary was pregnant and they weren't married. An angel has words of wisdom Joseph chooses to follow.

Matthew 1:18-25
18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. 20 As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 22 Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

23 Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,
And they will call him, Emmanuel.[a]
(Emmanuel means "God with us.")
24 When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was Joseph and Mary's problem?
- What do you do when you have a problem? Do you solve it yourself? Or do you seek advice from friends, parents or trusted adults?
- What is the most difficult decision you have ever made? How did you do it? Did you get any input on the front end? Affirmation on the back end?
- What was Joseph going to do in response to this problem?
- What did Joseph end up doing? Why?
- Have you ever felt God's spirit calling you to move in a certain direction, perhaps with prompting from a human messenger, that represented a detour from your intended path? Did you recognize this as a "holy moment" or just become frustrated and confused?
- Have you ever made a decision where the outcome was uncertain, and you had to trust and hope more? What did that look like? What were your feelings? What did you do to attain more certainty?

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

On a notecard or a small piece of paper, write down a difficult decision you feel you have to make in the near future. Now write, "Listen for Angels." Keep this as a reminder to be open to others who may appear as angels in your life.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about a time in your life when someone gave you advice and it was super helpful. Write whether you consider them an angel, a messenger that gave you what you needed at just the right time.

>> 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.

>>

YEAR TWO

SEASONAL

Lent: In the Wilderness

>> SESSION OVERVIEW – WHY IT MATTERS

We can often feel alone and lost. Maybe friendships are fracturing or things aren't going right at school or work. When we are in the middle of these times, it feels like forever. As we prepare for Easter (during Lent) students will consider what it means to hope for something that may seem far away and how God can make that hope real in our lives.

>> 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

Name something that seems to take you forever to do? What does that feel like?

>> SCRIPTURE

In the Bible the number 40 doesn't actually mean 40. It represents a long time. So, when we see this number we can substitute "a long time" for 40. For instance, Moses and the Israelites most likely didn't wander in the wilderness for exactly 40 years (they may have). It just felt like they were there a long time, a very, very long time. As we prepare for Lent we think about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days, a long time! The wilderness can also be metaphorical (or real). When we are in the wilderness of life, we wander trying to find our way out of the wilderness, back to our home with friends and family. It is lonely in the wilderness. We are disoriented, frustrated, tired and confused. Moses and Jesus both experienced these feelings. But they eventually confronted these emotions and found their way out. This symbolizes hope for all of us. Lent is 40 days (not counting Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Easter. As we consider Jesus's wilderness journey, may we also identify our own wilderness and the hope that exists after what seems like a long time.

Luke 4:1-2, 13

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. 2 There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving.

13 After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

>> DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If we think about the wilderness metaphorically, why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus there? What are the good things about being in the wilderness?
- Doesn't it seem like forever when we are dealing with something super difficult? Describe why time seems to move slowly during these times of frustration.
- What is the benefit of having a lot of time in the wilderness?
- In what ways do you think Jesus (and Moses in another story thousands of years earlier) had clarity about his life mission after being in the wilderness?
- How can we use temptation to make us stronger?
- How can we remain hopeful when we are in the wilderness? What are some strategies?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Draw a personal timeline of your life up to this point. Pay special attention to the times you felt you were having difficulty finding your way and what the outcome was. Share it with a partner.

>> RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Share hope with others during Lent. Be aware of others that are going through wilderness experiences. Encourage them in some tangible way, like writing a note, having a conversation or just hanging out with them.

>> JOURNAL PROMPT

Write about something that is not going well currently. It can be a big deal or something small. Now write how you can plan to be hopeful about an outcome of some sort that may not even be the outcome you are currently planning for.

>> 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.

RESURRECTION
STUDENTS