EXPLORE
EXPLORE
EXPLORE

RESURRECTION
STUDENTS

MENTOR GUIDE
YEAR ONE

[Mentor Curriculum Guide]

[DEAR MENTOR,]

Thank you for being a part of an Explore Discipleship Group for Middle School students! 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 Explore curriculum is designed as a two-year track, to help students explore and apply Biblical stories to their everyday life. They will journey through the Bible beginning with creation, exploring who God created them to be and how they are chosen by God to do amazing things and how God knows, sees and hears us. Then we will explore God's covenants with us and how God's promises are fulfilled through Jesus, which is where we finish the year, exploring Jesus' early ministry, inclusion of all people and parables.

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 explore their faith. Always be mindful of students' needs each week and how you (the mentor) can best encourage the group of students in their faith.

Thank you for mentoring students as they explore Scripture!

[The Purpose of Resurrection]

The Explore 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 take student from Kids Ministry into Student Ministry where they will read familar Biblical stories and explore them at a slightly deeper level. It is meant to be a safe place for non, nominal and developing Christians to learn the stories and apply their meaning to their lives.

[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 by age groupings. The Explore discipleship group, focused on middle school students, will have the following objectives.

[Specific Outcomes]

We see students potentially exploring their faith through their middle school experience in the following ways:

In their Expression

- Embrace the church as a safe and fun place where they can share the highs and lows of life.
- Learn how to be engaged in a small group discussion.
- Begin to appreciate inequities in how people are treated and how all people belong to God.
- Experience serving in meaningful ways.
- Experience worship in a way that connects them to God and others.

In their Faith

- Begin to discover who God made them to be.
- Know they are loved by God and others no matter what.
- Understand the Bible and be able to talk about the meaning of important stories or passages.
- Understand the impact of Jesus's life on people and the world.
- Rely on prayer as a way to connect with God.

In their Relationships

- Extend kindness to others without judgement.
- Establish friendships that are dependable where they feel safe in inviting school friends.
- Discern when to say "yes" when to say "no" when it comes to their relationships.

[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.

Explore is a two-year Discipleship Curriculum designed for students in middle school. Students will explore and apply Biblical stories in the Old and New Testament to their everyday life, focusing on how they were created, called and named by God. They will also explore the promises God makes to us and how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise through Jesus' early ministry, inclusion of others and his teaching using parables.

[Discipleship Group: Weekly Session Overview]

Each session will have a similar flow and rhythm. There may be more content than you will need for your group time, and you might not cover it all. That is okay! Figure out what works best for your group and adapt. The first section will give you a brief overview of the session and the video transcript. Review this in enough time to prepare for the session. It will include the Big Idea, which is the main point of the session, a summary, the scripture focus and a supply list. These things are helpful to read ahead of time and immediately before the session. There are two other items in this section that may need more preparation.

Parent Connection: Following your session, you may want to communicate with parents so they can engage in a conversation with their middle school student about the topic. These prompts are simple and can be included on handwritten card or an email.

Video Outline: There is companion video that you can access on YouTube. Begin your session with the video after brief introductions. You can also use the video outline as a starting point to teach your own lesson in person without the video. Your choice! If you decide not to use the video, you may want to decide how you might teach the content. You can choose to integrate it throughout the session, rather than all at once at the beginning. Again, your choice!

[Small Group Time]

This is where the session begins following the video or however you plan to integrate your own teaching based on the video transcript. Each session follows this basic outline.

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be themselves. If your group has new faces, share names and one fun fact that can be memorable. This will help everyone know them just a little bit better.

>> OPENING QUESTION

This prompt will get students thinking and focused on the big idea of the session.

>> ACTIVITY #1

This is always an introductory activity that allows students to engage more of their senses.

>> DISCUSSION

This is the central part of the session where students can share their reflection on Scripture and how it relates to their lives. This is where you will want to facilitate their connection to the big idea of the session.

>> ACTIVITY #2

This will often be an activity that summarizes and brings closure to the session.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE

This will be something active students can do or think about in the coming week so they can solidify what they learned in the session.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Have students share their joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests). You may want to refer to the highs and lows they shared earlier. You can close in prayer or invite a specific student to pray for the group. You may want to model this prayer for weeks before asking a student to pray.

>> CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

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

YEAR 1 Curriculum Overview

UNIT 1: COMMUNITY BUILDING (2 SESSIONS)
1. Get To Know Mentors and Parents
2. Community is Where We Begin

UNIT 2: CREATED (3 SESSIONS)
1. Created in God's Image
2. Creation is Good
3. Created for Community

UNIT 3: CHOSEN (3 SESSIONS)
1. Chosen for an Amazing and Scary Journey
2. Chosen by God
3. Chosen for Relationship with God

UNIT 4: NAMED (3 SESSIONS)
1. God Knows Our Name
2. God Knows Your Story
3. God Gives Us a New Identity

UNIT 5: DELIVERED (2 SESSIONS)
1. God Sees and Hears Us
2. God Serves Us

UNIT 6: COVENANT (3 SESSIONS)
1. God Keeps Promises
2. The Ten Commandments
3. Covenant with Community

UNIT 7: JESUS - EARLY MINISTRY (2 SESSIONS)
1. Baptism and Temptation
2. First Sermon and Calling Disciples

UNIT 8: JESUS – MINISTRY TO OUTCASTS (3 SESSIONS)
1. Healing Lepers and Others
2. Including Women
3. Including Children

UNIT 9: JESUS – FAMOUS PARABLES (3 SESSIONS)
1. Good Samaritan
2. Sewer and Seeds
3. The Banquet

SEASONAL
1. Advent – Good Tidings and Great Joy
2. Lent – Understanding Sacrifice

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 1: Community Building

It's the beginning of the school year and it's vital that small groups set a strong foundation based on a community centric atmosphere. So, this is where we begin. Why is building community so important? Because Jesus calls us to be in community and those communities are called to invite others into it. Use this unit to help build community as a group.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – Get to Know Mentors and Parents
In this session we will invite parents and mentors to get to know one another while reviewing the curriculum and the goals of the group.

2 - Community is Where We Begin
In this session we will intentionally begin to build community so that students and mentors begin to feel a connection to one another.

UNIT 1 | SESSION 1

Get to Know Mentors and Parents

>> MENTOR PROMPT

Hello Parents and Students! Welcome to LEAD. My name is _____, and my name is _____, and we are the mentors for your students Discipleship Group this year!

[Give a little background info about yourself, and why you serve. What you do for your work, how long you have been at this church, etc. This is a great time to give parents your emails if you are open to that]

This Discipleship Group, designed for 6th-8th grade students, is an introduction to the Bible and important themes. We know the Bible can be confusing. So, we want to help your student feel like they know it and understand it.

Parents, we want to partner with you this year. If there is something we should know, or a way to support your family, please let us know. Here is how you can be involved in our group and support us in this experience. [this is up to you, but we suggest inviting them to be substitutes for the classes, or signing up to send snacks, sending around a sheet of paper to catch their emails]

>> OPENING QUESTION

This is a question for parents AND students. Which Bible stories are you most familiar with? [write answers on the board]

>> MENTOR PROMPT

Great responses! We will be covering many of these stories and more. Pass out the scope and sequence for the year. Review the themes of each of the units.
While these are the main topics that we will cover throughout this year, other stories will come up as we learn and navigate each of them. Does anyone have any questions?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Close by sharing joys and concerns and praying together as a group. Share Joys first: Things you are thankful for or ways you've encountered God this week. Share Concerns second: Things going on that you want to lift up to God and share the burden of with others. Close your session in prayer. Encourage a student to pray or ask multiple people to pray.

>>

UNIT 1 | SESSION 2

Community is Where We Begin

>> BIG IDEA

Jesus had a small group and so should we!

>> SUMMARY

Jesus, the Son of God, did many things while here on earth. One of the most important things Jesus did before dying on the cross and coming back to life, was create a community of people around Him. One of the ways we follow that example in church is through small groups—a place where we can learn and grow in our faith together just like Jesus did with His disciples.

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Matthew 10:2–15 and Mark 3:13–19

>> MENTOR NOTES

Small Groups are a microcosm of Jesus' relationship with the disciples. While group facilitators are not perfect like Jesus—nor are they always trained teachers, like Jesus, the goal of these mini communities is to follow Jesus' example to discuss faith together, lean on and encourage each other, and serve others together. Your role is to provide leadership and guidance, not expertise. Growing up as a Jewish boy and later becoming a Rabbi, Jesus would have been familiar with what's called the rabbinic method of teaching. This style focuses not on lectures but the rabbi sitting and discussing the things of God with the people. In this method the goal isn't to just find answers to faith questions, but to learn from the journey of asking questions and wrestling with how to understand God. And that's what small group is meant to mimic.

>> PARENT CONNECTION

It is still the beginning of the year, and everyone is adjusting to new rhythms or new places and spaces with slightly familiar rhythms. It can be difficult to prioritize church

and small groups in the midst of it all but talking about why it's a priority can help everyone remember that why when life is super busy. Here are some connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Share why church and faith are important to you as an adult and why you hope to help instill similar values in your student.
- Ask your student about what makes them nervous about the beginning of the year and then discuss how having a church community might help.

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were before and in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their close friends or family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION

- People say that copying other people is a form of flattery, but some people find it really annoying—what's the most annoying example you've seen of someone copying someone else?

>> ACTIVITY #1

Put students into groups of 2-3 and give each group a mini Lego set to put together in 3-5 minutes. Give half of the groups the instructions and image of the finished project and the other half of the groups no instructions or pictures. See which groups finish fastest and most accurately (Small puzzles could work as well).

>> DISCUSSION

Say: Following instructions is a lot easier when you one, have the instructions, and two, have a team to help you to do it.

Ask:

- How can meeting regularly with other people who are curious about or trying to follow Jesus' example?

Read: Matthew 10:2-9

Ask:

- How many disciples did Jesus have at this point and how many more do you expect Him to get?
- Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to tell people, "The Kingdom of heaven is near?" Why should our small group work to share this message with others as well?
- This small group can't necessarily do the type of healing Jesus' disciples did, but what are some of the things we can do to help others in similar ways?

Read: Matthew 10:10-15

Ask:

- Why do you think Jesus' instructions to the disciples prioritized peace, blessings, and being welcoming?
- How can our group prioritize peace, blessings, and welcoming others?
- Read Mark 3:13-19

Say: With his disciples Jesus taught and trained them, showed them how to serve others, encouraged them to bring others into their community, traveled and ate together, and did everyday life activities together.

>> ACTIVITY #2: LEARNING STYLES BRAINSTORM

Everyone takes in information in different ways. Using the diagram on the following page and coinciding corners in the room, have students go to the corner that most reflects how they learn information. In those learning groups, give students 2-3 minutes to list the best activities that have helped them learn information that they think would be useful this year during small group time. Be sure to keep the list to use a cheat sheet for how to alter activities and lessons to help different students learn throughout the year.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

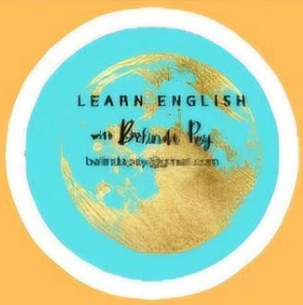
Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE

This week, try to remember all the names of students who have been in your group so far.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



The V.A.R.

BELIN

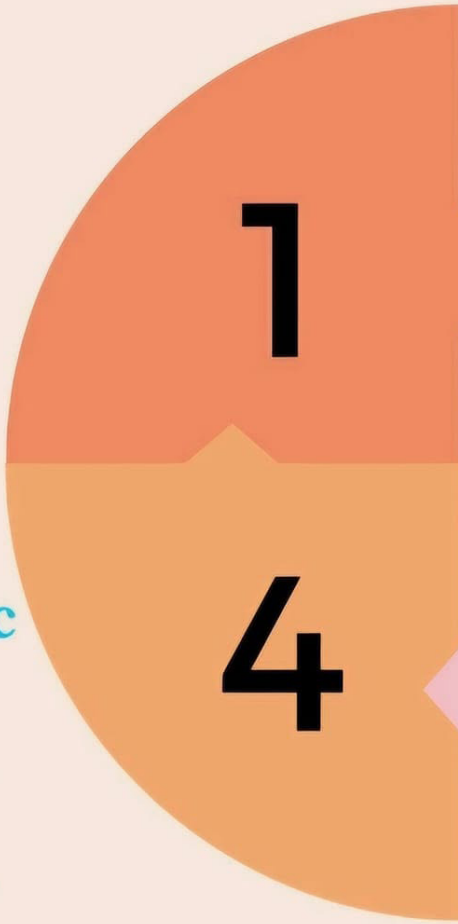
1 Visual Learners

Learning through graphic forms:

- mindmaps
- lists
- pictures with labels
- diagrams charts, graphs.
- infographics

4 Tactile/ kinesthetic Learners

Learning by doing, touching, feeling and manipulating with hands, body movement, role playing and demonstrations.



K. Learning Styles

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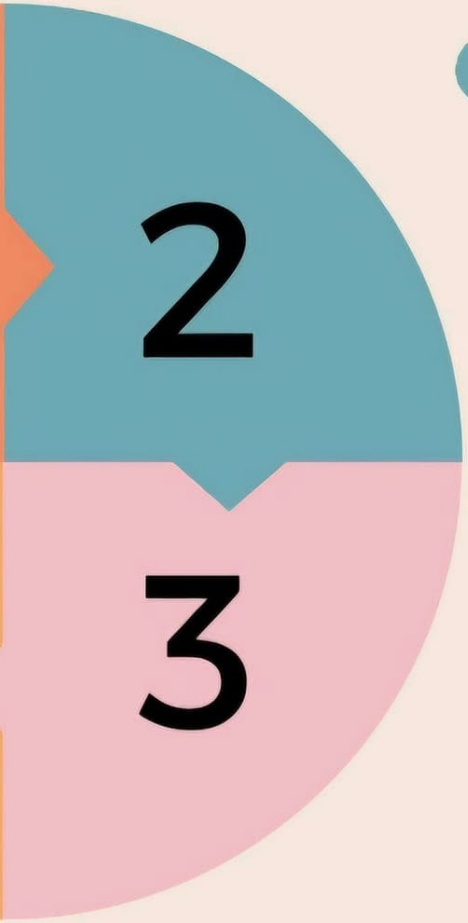


2

Auditory Learners

Learning by

- listening to stories and podcasts.
- watching videos
- discussions

3

Reading and Writing Learners

Learning through articles, books, handouts, writing assignments.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 2: Created

In the beginning...God created. Foundational truths for all of us are found in the Genesis story of creation. God created each of us uniquely in their image. What God created was good, very good – including us. God created us need each other, to grow in community, and to take care of creation. Our unique personalities, quirks, and point of view are necessary and valuable! Discover your role in all of creation in this series, CREATED.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – Created in God's Image

Everyone is created in God's image. We have the ability to be creative and imaginative like God. We can make decisions, think, use logic and reasoning. We use intellect, insight, and creativity every day to do amazing things! Being made in God's image also means that we belong to God and in community with one another.

2 – Creation is Good

When God said what He made was good, God was affirming all of creations design and intent: to reflect and display the good character, power, love, and nature of our Creator. And even after brokenness came into the world, with its corrupting power and influence, the fundamental goodness of creation remained! Sin might distort the goodness of creation, but it can't make what God has said untrue. Creation is still good in the hands of God, and it still serves its purpose of declaring God's goodness and love in the world. If God made creation and saw it was good, and of the highest caliber and purpose, then WE are a part of that good purpose.

3 – Created for Community

Since the beginning of time, we were never meant to be alone. God created us in community and for community. Relationships encourage us, challenge us, and help us grow. We are stronger together!

UNIT 2 | SESSION 1

Created in God's Image

>> **BIG IDEA:** Everyone is created in God's image.

>> **SUMMARY:** God created human beings in their image. We have the ability to be creative and imaginative like God. We can make decisions, think, use logic and reasoning. We use intellect, insight, and creativity every day to do amazing things! Being made in God's image also means that we belong to God and in community with one another.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 1:26-28

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

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

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, drawing paper, drawing supplies (markers, crayons, or pencils), Bible journaling worksheet, OPTIONAL – large sheet or blanket

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This session uses a lot of family/heritage heavy content to talk about how we are all made in the image of God - how we can see the characteristics of God reflected in us. Please be sensitive to those with unique family situations and even feel free to talk about how some traits are passed along through nurture rather than nature.

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students discussed how we are all created in God's image. We share God's characteristics of creativity, logic, and insight. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Share something from your ancestry or take time to look in the mirror together and find similar characteristics.
- Ask your student which of God's characteristics they feel best represents them and why (creative, logical, insightful, innovative, leadership, caretaking, community building, etc.).

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Seeing Our Image
- A. Observing traits from family
  - 1. Physical features (eyes, hair, skin)
  - 2. Personality and interests (teaching, reading, history)
- B. Influence of those who came before us
- C. Desire to know our origins and identity

II. Biblical Foundation: Created in God's Image
- A. Genesis 1:26–27
- B. All humans reflect God's image

III. Meaning of God's Image (Part 1: God's Qualities)
- A. Creativity and imagination
  - 1. Art, music, writing
- B. Ability to lead and make decisions
  - 1. Logic, reasoning, intellect
  - 2. Human achievements (technology, medicine)
- C. Capacity for relationships and community

IV. Meaning of God's Image (Part 2: Belonging to God)
- A. God claims and loves each person
- B. Identity as God's beloved children

V. Implication: Everyone Bears God's Image
- A. Includes all people
  - 1. Friends and strangers
  - 2. Difficult people and enemies

VI. Human Choices with God's Image
- A. Choice 1: Use our gifts
  - 1. For good (beauty, love, justice)
  - 2. For harm (pain, destruction)
- B. Choice 2: Treat others
  - 1. Welcome and include
  - 2. Reject and devalue

VII. Conclusion: Call to Action
- A. Live out God's image
- B. Recognize God's image in others

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were before and in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their close friends or family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION

- If you had a clone or an exact body double, what would you have them do?
- What is something you made or created (in an art class or for fun) that you are really proud of?

>> ACTIVITY #1: MIRROR NAME GAME

Go around and have everyone say their name. Split students into two groups. Divide the groups with a blanket/sheet and one chair on each side. Lift the blanket using it as a "mirror" between the groups. Have one student from each side sit on a chair and on the count of three drop the blanket. The first student to say the others' name earns their team a point. Continue until a team reaches 10 points, or you have gone through all the students. Send students up multiple times to throw the other team off. This activity will help students learn each other's' names at the beginning of the year. For an extra challenge, use first and last names, or even include middle names (after going around and saying them first).

>> DISCUSSION

Each of us has distinctive characteristics and personalities, and sometimes we can trace some of those things from our family.

- Who are you most similar to in your family?
- Who are other people in your life you are most like? Do you get along with them or do you butt heads?
- Who are the types of people that are the most different from you? Do you tend to get along with them?

Read Genesis 1:26-28 (CEB)

- How would you describe what it means that humanity is created in God's own image?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to believe that you are created in God's image? What characteristics of God do you feel best represents you and why (creative, logical, insightful, innovative, leadership, caretaking, community building, etc.)?
- Why is it important to recognize that others are also created in God's image?

Being created in the image of God, we have 2 options:

- We can use the image of God in our lives for Good: to create beauty and goodness and spread joy and love OR we can use our creativity to do harm and cause damage.
- We can choose to welcome others and give them a place to belong, just as God has welcomed us and said, "you belong to me!" OR we can choose to reject the image of God in others and forget to recognize that we are all created in the image of God.

- What are examples of people using the image of God in their life to create good?
- What are examples of people using the image of God in their life to do harm?
- When is a time that you felt like you belonged somewhere?
- What do you think it means to belong to God?
- How can we help those around us feel like they belong?

>> ACTIVITY #2: SELF-PORTRAIT

How does God see you? Draw a self-portrait as if you are being drawn by God. Even if you aren't a good artist, try to picture yourself through the eyes of your creator, God. If drawing isn't your thing, list words or phrases to capture your image or portrait. Remember, you are created in God's image, and God says, "You belong to me!"
Mentor – either use the Psalm 139 printout for students to read the scripture as they draw or simply use plain paper and read aloud Psalm 139:1-18.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE

Choose to create beauty this week! Spend some time living out the image of God in your life by making art, writing poetry, singing a song, playing an instrument, writing a story, dancing, or some other form of creating beauty in the world.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

139 Lord, you have examined me.
You know me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up.
Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.
3 You study my traveling and resting.
You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.
4 There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,
that you don't already know completely.
5 You surround me—front and back.
You put your hand on me.
6 That kind of knowledge is too much for me;
it's so high above me that I can't reach it.
7 Where could I go to get away from your spirit?
Where could I go to escape your presence?
8 If I went up to heaven, you would be there.
If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!
9 If I could fly on the wings of dawn,
stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—
10 even there your hand would guide me;
even there your strong hand would hold me tight!
11 If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,"
12 even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!
Nighttime would shine bright as day,
because darkness is the same as light to you!
13 You are the one who created my innermost parts;
you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.
14 I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.
Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.
15 My bones weren't hidden from you
when I was being put together in a secret place,
when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my embryo,
and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me,
before any one of them had yet happened.
17 God, your plans are incomprehensible to me!
Their total number is countless!
18 If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand!
If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.

UNIT 2 | SESSION 2

Creation is Good

>> **BIG IDEA:** God created the world and called it good.

>> **SUMMARY:** When God said what He made was good, God was affirming all of creations design and intent: to reflect and display the good character, power, love, and nature of our Creator. And even after brokenness came into the world, with its corrupting power and influence, the fundamental goodness of creation remained! Sin might distort the goodness of creation, but it can't make what God has said untrue. Creation is still good in the hands of God, and it still serves its purpose of declaring God's goodness and love in the world. If God made creation and saw it was good, and of the highest caliber and purpose, then WE are a part of that good purpose.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 1:24-31 (CEB)

24 God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. 25 God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. 26 Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

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

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." 29 Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. 30 To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. 31 God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.

There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

>> SUPPLY LIST: large poster paper or banner, magazines, scissors, glue, markers/pens, pencils, small pieces of cardstock

>> MENTOR NOTES: It's easy to get hung up on a few things when teaching the creation story: the order of creation, "be fertile and multiply," and "fill the earth and master it"—just to name a few. The point of this teaching is that ALL of creation is good and reflects the character of God and that we have a responsibility to care for it (which might be a better translation of "master"). When ALL of creation reflects the character of God and should be cared for, we include ourselves. How are you doing? Are you taking care of God's creation? Spend a little time this week preparing by being kind to yourself and doing one thing you have been putting off that is just for you.

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students discussed how all creation is created good, our responsibility to the earth and everything in it – including ourselves! Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Share a nature walk or some moments together where you have enjoyed God's creation.
- What is one thing we can do together to take care of the earth?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Leah)
- B. Review: All people are made in God's image
- C. Focus: Understanding "supremely good" creation

II. Biblical Foundation: Genesis 1:24–31
- A. God creates all living things
- B. Humanity created in God's image
- C. God gives humans responsibility over creation
- D. God declares creation "supremely good"

III. Meaning of "Supremely Good"
- A. God sees creation as very good
- B. Highest quality and purpose ("best of the best")
- C. Examples of awe in creation
  1. Nature (mountains, oceans, waterfalls)
  2. Universe (space, galaxies)

IV. Tension: Brokenness in the World
- A. Presence of pain and suffering
  1. Environmental issues, injustice, conflict
- B. Personal doubt about goodness

V. Theological Truth
- A. Creation reflects God's character and love
- B. Brokenness distorts but does not erase goodness
- C. God's declaration of goodness remains true

VI. Human Responsibility

A. Called to care for creation

1. Stewardship of the earth
2. Environmental awareness and action

B. Care for people

1. Self-worth: created good
2. Value and care for others

VII. Application and Challenge

A. Recognize God's good creation daily

B. Take action (serve, care, restore)

C. Affirm personal identity as God's good creation

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were before in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could create any type of animal that doesn't already exist, what would it be?
- Where is one place that you have traveled that you considered good and beautiful?

>> ACTIVITY #1: CREATIVE CREATION

Say: I want you to show me God's amazing, creating powers by using pictures in magazines or even drawing your own pictures or words. I want you to 'wow' me and leave us all with a sense of just how incredible God's creation is – the earth, plants, animals, humans, discoveries, little known facts... you can even use your phones to find cool facts about animals or interesting info about the world that God created.
Let your creative juices flow because today is all about creation!
Some students might need help getting started so be ready to give some ideas – such as making a collage of their favorite animals or suggest that they find a place in the world they'd love to visit.

Say: Let's take a couple of minutes and really check out what we've created.
As you do, imagine you are seeing all of these things for the first time. It can become so easy to get used to God's creation, and the world, and even focus on all that is wrong – but, right now, let yourself enjoy creation.
Imagine you are in these places or seeing these animals... for the first time.
Give the students plenty of time to experience this. Let them share what they are seeing.

Read Genesis 1:24-31.

>> DISCUSSION:

- What is your favorite thing in all of God's good creation?
- Why do you think God called creation "good"?
- In what ways do you see creation as good? In what ways do you see creation as not good?

Say: When we look at the world, we can sometimes be discouraged by all that we see around us. We can see hurt and pain, suffering, and brokenness in this world. We see global warming, racism, division, and wars.

- What are some small, practical things you can do to stay encouraged and hopeful when it feels like there is so much bad in the world?

God made us and saw that we are good. When I look in the mirror, when you look in the mirror the reflection coming back is God's creation, made with a supremely good purpose. You are not a mistake; you make a difference. You are God's good creation.

- Why is it important for us to remember that God is the Creator of us as individuals? Of the entire world?

God has entrusted us with this good creation. Genesis 1:28-30 indicates that we have a large responsibility to the earth and everything in it. If the earth is suffering and sick, we can care for God's creation by being more aware of environmental needs and how we contribute to it.

- What is our role in helping creation? What is something you can do to help heal the world around you? At home? At School? As you grow up?
- What ways can you recognize God's good creation and continue to take good care of it? (grow a garden, learn about taking care of the environment, recycle, serve in a food pantry)
- What about you? What ways can you recognize God's good creation in you and take good care of yourself? What would happen if you dedicated time in each day to reflect on God's creation, see that it is good and do something to love the world around you.

>> ACTIVITY #2: CREATION WALK

Give each student a small piece of cardstock and a pencil. Take students on a walk. As you walk with the students, have them point out/sketch/photograph the things they see that God created. Discuss how God was affirming all of creations design and intent: to reflect and display the good character, power, love, and nature of our Creator. How does nature reflect God's goodness? God's power? God's love?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Find at least one thing in creation that is GOOD! If you can, spend some time in nature and God's creation, and thank God for creating good things.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT 2 | SESSION 3

Created for Community

>> **BIG IDEA:** We were not created to be alone —we were created for community and relationships.

>> **SUMMARY:** Since the beginning of time, we were never meant to be alone. God created us to be in community. Relationships encourage us, challenge us, and help us grow. We are stronger together!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 2:18-22
18 Then the Lord God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him." 19 So the Lord God formed from the fertile land all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky and brought them to the human to see what he would name them. The human gave each living being its name. 20 The human named all the livestock, all the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. But a helper perfect for him was nowhere to be found.
21 So the Lord God put the human into a deep and heavy sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh over it. 22 With the rib taken from the human, the Lord God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work.10 If either should fall, one can pick up the other. But how miserable are those who fall and don't have a companion to help them up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they can stay warm. But how can anyone stay warm alone? 12 Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap.
e I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** large sheet of paper, markers, optional: multiple colors of string/ thread for making friendship bracelets

>> MENTOR NOTES: In 2023, the US Surgeon General wrote, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: An Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community" (link here: https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf). Humanity's need for community isn't just a concept in the Bible. It is statistically, empirically, scientifically true that we need each other. As we start out the year, this small group of students is just starting to grow together as a community. Theoretically, small groups will have another 6-7 years together. Take time in small groups to really encourage them to get to know one another. Begin to trust each other. And hopefully grow together. Also take some time this week to reach out to friends or family. You need community too!

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students finished our CREATE series! We discussed how we are created for community and stronger together. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Ask your student about their friends. What's the latest drama? Share a silly friendship story from when you were their age.
- What do you think makes a relationship/friendship strong?

Their weekly challenge is to invite someone to youth group or small group – especially if they notice someone that seems lonely. Talk to them about who they are thinking about inviting. Help them contact the parent if transportation is needed. Do what you can to help make it easy for them to invite someone that might need community!

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Todd Davidson)
- B. Series recap
  1. Week 1: Created in God's image
  2. Week 2: Creation is good
- C. Focus: Created for community

II. Illustration: Moving Story
- A. Many helpers → efficient system
- B. Fewer helpers → frustration and exhaustion
- C. Lesson: We function better together

III. Biblical Foundation: Genesis 2:18–22
- A. "It is not good for humans to be alone"
- B. God creates a companion
- C. Community is part of God's design

IV. Strength in Community
- A. We are stronger and more creative together
- B. Need others to thrive and survive

V. Supporting Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
- A. Two are better than one
- B. Help, support, and protection in community

C. “A cord of three strands is not easily broken”

VI. Real-World Example: Isolation

A. Pandemic experience

1. Initial comfort of isolation
2. Long-term negative effects (mental health, disconnection)

B. Rediscovery of need for community

VII. Application and Challenge

A. Recognize unhealthy isolation

B. Step into community with courage

C. Grow together as God intended

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they enjoy doing with friends.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is your favorite team and why? (sports team, team from a movie/book/video game like The Avengers)
- What is your favorite group game?

>> ACTIVITY #1: NEVER HAVE I EVER

Find out more about your community! Play this game two ways: either using chairs in a circle, or by holding up fingers and putting them down one at a time. If using chairs in a circle, one person stands in the middle and says, "Never Have I Ever..." and then something they have never done. (Examples: "Never Have I Ever Gone Snowboarding" or "Never Have I Ever owned a pet rabbit.") Everyone that has done that thing has to scramble to find a new chair, including the person in the center, until there is a new person in the center. If using fingers, everyone starts with 10 fingers up, and then you go around and take turns sharing a "Never Have I Ever..." Everyone puts a finger down until there is only one person left. (Ask students ahead of time to keep their examples "youth group appropriate"!

Say: It's so much fun getting to know you all better! I have one more question, stand up if you think you would survive on your own on a deserted island? For how long?

Optional Activity: Friendship Bracelets
Hand out at least 3 colors of string to each person to braid or offer other friendship bracelet patterns. Here is resource: https://sarahmaker.com/easy-friendship-bracelet-patterns/

>> DISCUSSION:

- [skip this if you did activity #1] Do you think you would survive on your own on a deserted island, like (Castaway, Robinson Crusoe, or the book Alone in the Woods)? For how long? Don't you think you would get lonely?
- Where do you find community or friends? (school, church, neighborhood, family) How long can you go without talking to your friends [**Mentor Note:** There's no right or wrong answer and introverts might have different answers than extroverts!]?

Read our scripture passage for today, Genesis 2:18-22.

- Why do you think God said it was not good for humans to be alone?
- Who are the people that help you when you need it—peers and safe adults?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

- Describe a time that you needed help or your community/relationships with others?

The wonderful image of 3 cords tied together, is that each one is unique and that TOGETHER they are strongest. (If you are making friendship bracelets, look at them together. Note the differences between each one that makes each bracelet unique.)

- How do you contribute uniquely to your team, your class, or your friend group? What role do you play?
- Why do you think God created us with differences and diversity—wouldn't it be easier to get along if we were all the same?
- How have you seen our church or youth group been a place of community?
- How can our church be a more welcoming community for others? (If you made friendship bracelets, ask students to give their bracelet to someone this week that might be feeling alone.)

>> ACTIVITY #2: COMMUNITY VALUES

As a small group community, come up with a list of Community Values that you want to hold onto throughout this year. Treat it as a covenant or a promise to one another. Hold each other accountable when you don't hold up to your values. Ask each other, "What do we want to be known for as a community? What is important to us as a small group community?"

Community Values Examples:

- As a Small Group Community, we will listen when others talk.
- We will pray together each week and pray for each other throughout the week.
- We will be welcoming and accepting of everyone.
- We will not make fun of each other.

Write your Community Values on a sheet of paper and hang it somewhere visible where everyone can see. Refer back to it regularly as needed. If you are in a mobile space that changes, try putting a copy of the values on the back of a clipboard or binder you use to facilitate the group so you can still refer to them as needed.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE

If you are not regularly a part of our student ministry community, we'd love to see you back! If you are already here most weeks, invite others! Who is someone that could really use community and friendship, but doesn't have it right now?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 3: Chosen

Unit Summary - Chosen is a 3-week series for middle school students addressing some of our basic needs and wants. We all want to be chosen. We all want a purpose. We all want meaningful relationships. Through Abraham's life, we see God's plan to meet those needs. Join us as we discuss God's invitation to relationship, adventure, and mission in this world.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – Chosen for an Amazing and Scary Journey

God chose Abram and invited him to do something difficult. Just like Abram, we are chosen by God, and invited to do difficult things too. Don't worry, you won't be asked to walk 400 hours without good snacks. But maybe you are chosen to show love to someone in your class – maybe someone who is mean, or maybe someone people are mean to. Maybe you are chosen to invite someone to church with you, or listen to your parents even when they are frustrating you. God chooses us all for great adventures and invites us to participate, but ultimately, he leaves the final choice to follow that call up to us. We can always say no, but saying yes will take us on a pretty amazing adventure. Will we answer God's call? Will we be a part of God's grand adventure?

2 – Chosen by God

God chooses each of us to carry out God's work and mission in the world. Sometimes we feel inadequate and like we are the unlikeliest choice, like Abram and Sarai. Yet we are each chosen to carry out our unique role in God's work in the world. Remember, God doesn't make mistakes, and God has an important role for each of us. Even when we seem like unlikely choices, God is choosing each of us to be a part of the great work God is doing in the world.

3 – Chosen for Relationship with God

God chose Abraham, and Abraham trusted God. Just as Abraham and his family were invited to be in relationship with God, we all now have the opportunity be chosen for a special and personal relationship with God through Jesus. We all now have the chance to be "friends of God" which was a phrase used to describe Abraham. God chooses all of us to do great things. Our response is to trust God!

UNIT 3 | SESSION 1

Chosen for an Amazing and Scary Journey

>> **BIG IDEA:** When God chooses us, sometimes it means being called to amazing but scary adventures.

>> **SUMMARY:** God chose Abram and invited him to do something difficult. Just like Abram, we are chosen by God, and invited to do difficult things too. Don't worry, you won't be asked to walk 400 hours without good snacks. But maybe you are chosen to show love to someone in your class – maybe someone who is mean, or maybe someone people are mean to. Maybe you are chosen to invite someone to church with you, or listen to you parents even when they are frustrating you. God chooses us all for great adventures and invites us to participate, but ultimately, he leaves the final choice to follow that call up to us. We can always say no, but saying yes will take us on a pretty amazing adventure. Will we answer God's call? Will we be a part of God's grand adventure?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 12:1-9 (CEB)

12-1 The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth
will be blessed because of you."
4 Abram left just as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, 6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites lived in the land at that time. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I give this land to your descendants," so Abram built an altar there to the Lord who appeared to him. 8 From there he traveled toward the mountains east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and

worshipped in the Lord's name. 9 Then Abram set out toward the arid southern plain, making and breaking camp as he went.

Hebrews 11:8 (CEB)
8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out without knowing where he was going.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** 6-9 pieces of paper per small group, white board, expo markers

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This week take some time to think about what God is inviting you to do here —mentor middle school kids! That is always a great adventure. Middle School students are quirky and trying to find their place in this world. You get to walk with them through the unanswerable questions and weird body odor. And most of all, you have an awesome opportunity to help them feel confident in their relationship with God. This journey is long and difficult, but completely worth it!

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** We started a new series in EXPLORE this week, Chosen. We talked about Abram's call and his decision to say, "YES" to God even when it was scary. Here are few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Share a time when you said, "YES" to God even when it was scary (could be making the decision to move, serving with people, your own baptism or confirmation etc)
- Ask your student if there is one thing they think God is asking of them that they can say, "YES" to this week and how you can help/encourage them. Then figure out the best way for you to remember and support them!

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Megan DelGrosso)
- B. Theme: Love/hate relationship with road trips

II. Road Trip Illustration
- A. Things she loves
  1. Snacks
  2. Audiobooks/stories
  3. Scenery and reflection
- B. Things she dislikes
  1. Long time in the car
  2. Discomfort and inconvenience

III. Biblical Story: Abram's Journey (Genesis 12)
- A. God calls Abram to leave home
- B. No directions or clear destination
- C. Requires great trust

IV. Scope of the Journey

A. Long and difficult route (Fertile Crescent)

B. Modern comparison

1. ~22 hours by car
2. ~384 hours walking

C. Emphasizes challenge and sacrifice

V. God's Promise

A. Blessing for Abram

B. Impact on all families of the earth

C. Purpose behind the journey

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have students share their name and someplace new they recently visited (restaurant, sports arena, city, friend's home, etc.)

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- Where would you go on your "dream road trip"?
- Who has traveled the farthest?

>> ACTIVITY #1: SLOW MOVERS

Supplies Needed: 3 pieces of paper for each team

Divide the group into 2 or 3 even teams. Give each team three pieces of paper. When you say "go," each team should move from one side of the room to the other side and cross the finish line, but they can only go across the room or space by standing on their pieces of paper. (Think, "the floor is lava!") The first team to get their whole group across wins!

>> DISCUSSION:

Read Genesis 12:1-3

- Would you be able to do what God called Abram to do: pack up and leave your home and your family, and go to a foreign place without knowing the way? Why or Why not?
- What is the scariest thing you have ever done?
- What is the longest amount of time you have spent away from home or from your family?
- Why would God choose someone to go on a journey like Abram?

Read Genesis 12:4-9

- What do you think would have happened if Abram had told God, "No"? Did Abram have a choice in the matter?
- How did God promise to help Abram on his journey?

Read Hebrews 11:8.

- Many, many years after Abram was chosen to go on this great journey, he was remembered and praised for it. Why do you think that was the case?
- How would you define trust?
- What does it mean to do something "by faith"?
- How did Abram demonstrate faith and trust in God?
- In what areas of your life do you need to have faith or trust in God? At school? At home? For the future?
- How might God be calling you to step out of your comfort zone in any parts of your life?

>> ACTIVITY #2: BLESSING OTHERS

Supplies Needed: whiteboard, markers

Abram was chosen by God to be a blessing to others. But this meant Abram had to get uncomfortable and leave his homeland. Sometimes being a blessing means doing hard things and getting out of our comfort zones.

Brainstorm a list of ways you can be a blessing to those around you this week. Think outside the box—and outside of your comfort zones—as you seek to show God's kindness and love to those you encounter.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Inviting someone new to church or youth group
- Sharing your lunch with a friend who doesn't have one

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE: Look for ways God might be choosing you to step out of your comfort zone! You might not have to travel to a faraway land, but God might be calling you to do something else hard and uncomfortable that will bless others. How will you respond?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT 3 | SESSION 2

Chosen by God

>> **BIG IDEA:** God chooses unexpected people to carry out God's work.

>> **SUMMARY:** God chooses each of us to carry out God's work and mission in the world. Sometimes we feel inadequate and like we are the unlikeliest choice, like Abram and Sarai. Yet we are each chosen to carry out our unique role in God's work in the world. Remember, God doesn't make mistakes, and God has an important role for each of us. Even when we seem like unlikely choices, God is choosing each of us to be a part of the great work God is doing in the world.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 17:1-8 (CEB)
17 – 1 When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. 2 I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." 3 Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. 5 And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. 6 I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you. 8 I will give you and your descendants the land in which you are immigrants, the whole land of Canaan, as an enduring possession. And I will be their God."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, pens, paper

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Think about a time when you stepped into a role that was an unlikely choice. This could be joining a serve trip when you don't feel physically the best, serving with teens when you feel old (no matter your age), or a job change that allowed you to be more generous with your money or time. Thank God for the invitation to trust God more!

>> PARENT CONNECTION: In week 2 of CHOSEN, we talked about how God chooses unexpected people to carry out God's work. Here are few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Ask your student how they feel about being chosen for a unique role in God's work in the world. What does this look like and mean to them? What is scary or uncomfortable about it?
- Share a time when you felt unlikely or uncomfortable in the role God invited you to fill.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Shannon Greene)
- B. Series focus: Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12–25)
- C. Context: Arrival in Canaan (Promised Land)

II. Illustration: "Easy Decisions"
- A. Examples of obvious choices (athletes in commercials)
- B. Contrast: God chooses unlikely people

III. Biblical Foundation: Genesis 17
- A. God's covenant with Abram
- B. Promise of many descendants and a great nation

IV. The Problem: Unlikely Candidates
- A. Abram (99) and Sarai (89) are too old
- B. No children
- C. Abram's response: laughter and doubt

V. God's Assurance
- A. Promise reaffirmed
- B. Son promised: Isaac
- C. God does not make mistakes

VI. Significance of Names
- A. Abram → Abraham ("father of many")
- B. Sarai → Sarah ("princess," marked by God)
- C. Isaac ("laughter") as a reminder of God's promise

VII. Fulfillment of the Promise
- A. Abraham and Sarah become ancestors of many
- B. Through Isaac and Jacob → Israelites
- C. Connection to the Promised Land

VIII. Application to Our Lives
- A. God chooses each of us
- B. We may feel like unlikely choices
- C. Temptation to doubt or resist

IX. Conclusion and Challenge
- A. God has a role for everyone
- B. God does not make mistakes
- C. Reflect: What is God calling you to do?

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Get to know each other a little better. As students introduce themselves, ask them to share 2 truths about themselves and 1 lie. The group has to decide which one is the lie. *Don't let siblings or close friends guess!

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could choose anyone in the world (alive right now) to eat dinner with, who would it be?

>> ACTIVITY #1

Hard Choices

Have the group stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder. Ask them the following list of questions. If they would be willing to make that "hard choice," have them take one step forward.

- Would you: change your name to something else? (you don't get to know what it is ahead of time)
- Would you: transfer schools? (again, you don't get to pick the school)
- Would you: be homeschooled (or if homeschooled go to public/private school)?
- Would you: give up watching tv for the rest of the year?
- Would you: give up watching tv for the rest of your life?
- Would you: never eat dessert again?
- Would you: only eat tacos for the rest of your life?
- Would you: move to a foreign country?
- Would you: listen to only one song for a year?
- Would you: go back one grade?

(Feel free to think of any other "hard choices" you'd like to include!)

If anyone gets too far back from the rest of the group/line, allow them the option to catch up to the rest of the group by doing one of the following challenges:

- Cluck and act like a chicken for 30 seconds
- Sing a Taylor Swift song
- Do a TikTok Dance
- Spin around for 15 seconds with their eyes closed
- Skip around the room

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: We are in week 2 of Chosen. This idea of being chosen can sometimes bring up negative feelings or memories of when we weren't chosen for the team, class project, or show. This story of Abram and Sarai, shows us that God chooses unexpected people to carry out God's work.

- For you, what would be an example of a "no brainer" decision—like picking Derek Jeter to play on your baseball team or Taylor Swift to sing at your birthday party?
- What does it feel like to be chosen first for a team or a group project?
- When was there ever a time when you were an "unlikely choice" for something, but got chosen anyway?

Read: Genesis 17:6-8

Ask:

- What things did God promise Abram in Genesis 17:6-8?
- Do you believe God keeps the promises God makes?
- Why were Abram and Sarai unlikely choices to become parents of a great nation?
- How do you think Abram and Sarai felt, waiting their whole lives for God to fulfill the promise to make them parents?

Share a time in your life where you felt like God's invitation was too big or that you were an unlikely choice. This could be joining a serve trip when you don't feel physically the best, serving with teens when you feel old (no matter your age), or a job change that allowed you to be more generous with your money or time.

- In your view, why does God choose "unlikely people" to carry out God's work? Who are some other "unlikely people" God chose to work through?
- If you ever feel like you are an "unlikely choice" or inadequate for God to choose you, what can you do to encourage yourself or build confidence?
- What mission do you think God might be choosing you for?

>> ACTIVITY #2 - UNLIKELY CHOICES

Supplies Needed: Bibles, paper/pens (optional)

God is famous for choosing unlikely people to carry out important tasks and work. Let's look at a few more!

Split your larger group into 4 smaller groups and assign each group one of the following passages. Have them look up the passage, read it, write down their answers to these questions, and then report back their responses to the rest of the group.

Assign each group one of the following passages:

- Moses – Exodus 3:1-15
- Gideon – Judges 6:11-16
- David – 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- Esther – Esther 4:7-17
- Mary – Luke 1:26-38

Answer these questions about each passage:

- What made this person an "unlikely choice"?
- What was the task or mission that God was calling them to do?
- What was that person's response to God?
- Would you be able or willing to do what God asked this person to do?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week

>> CHALLENGE:

Learn to look at yourself (and others!) not as "unlikely choices," but as important people who each have a unique role to play in God's great work. It doesn't matter if you are old, young, short, tall, or whatever! God looks at each of us and says, "I can use you—I choose you."

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT 3 | SESSION 3

Chosen for Relationship with God

>> **BIG IDEA:** We are all chosen to be in a relationship with God.

>> **SUMMARY:** God chose Abraham, and Abraham trusted God. Just as Abraham and his family were invited to be in relationship with God, we all now have the opportunity to be chosen for a special and personal relationship with God through Jesus. We all now have the chance to be "friends of God" which was a phrase used to describe Abraham. God chooses all of us to do great things. Our response is to trust God!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 15:1-7 (CEB)
15-1 After these events, the Lord's word came to Abram in a vision, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your protector. Your reward will be very great."
2 But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you possibly give me, since I still have no children? The head of my household is Eliezer, a man from Damascus." 3 He continued, "Since you haven't given me any children, the head of my household will be my heir."
4 The Lord's word came immediately to him, "This man will not be your heir. Your heir will definitely be your very own biological child." 5 Then he brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have." 6 Abram trusted the Lord, and the Lord recognized Abram's high moral character.
7 He said to Abram, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

James 2:21-23
21 What about Abraham, our father? Wasn't he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. 23 So the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and God regarded him as righteous. What is more, Abraham was called God's friend.

>> SUPPLY LIST: Bible, sticky nametags with famous friends (activity 1), notecards, pens

>> MENTOR NOTES: Invest in your relationship with God this week. What does it mean to you to be a friend of God? Take some time to ask God if there are any areas of your life that you are struggling to trust God. Bring those areas of struggle to God in prayer and invite a trusted friend to help you build trust with God in this.

>> PARENT CONNECTION: In our last week of CHOSEN, we discussed how we are all chosen to be in relationship with God. Relationships need trust, truth, and time. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Ask your student how they choose to spend time with God (and share how you do too).
- Ask how you can help them trust God more.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Identity and Heritage
- A. Everyone comes from somewhere
- B. Personal ancestry story (German-Russian background)
- C. Importance of knowing family history

II. Ancestry in the Bible
- A. Family and generations matter
- B. God speaks to people in various ways
- C. Introduction to Abraham's story

III. Biblical Foundation: Genesis 15:1–7
- A. God promises Abram many descendants
- B. Abram's concern: no children
- C. God assures him of a biological heir
- D. Abram trusts God

IV. The Challenge
- A. Abraham and Sarah are old
- B. No children → uncertain future
- C. Seems impossible

V. God's Plan
- A. Abraham chosen because of faith
- B. Promise of a large family line
- C. Fulfillment beyond expectations (leading to Jesus)

VI. Connection to Our Lives
- A. Importance of understanding our own story
- B. God chooses us just like Abraham
- C. Invitation into relationship with God

VII. Trusting God

A. Example from ancestors (faith in difficult times)
B. Trust in God's strength, love, and plan
C. Trust even when life is uncertain

VIII. Conclusion and Challenge

A. We are chosen by God
B. Called to trust and follow
C. Live out faith by trusting God in all things

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have students introduce themselves. Remember, there can be new students each week. Creating the habit of introducing themselves every week allows new students to feel welcome since regular attenders will know it is simply a thing we do every week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- Who is your favorite famous friendship (Bert and Ernie, Captain America and Bucky Barnes, Harry Potter trio)?

>> ACTIVITY #1 FAMOUS FRIENDS

Supplies Needed: sticky nametags of the following "famous friends" (one name per nametag):

- Batman / Robin
- Mario / Luigi
- Harry Potter / Hermione Granger / Ron Weasley
- Han Solo / Luke Skywalker / Princess Leia
- Timon / Pumbaa
- Shrek / Donkey
- Sherlock Holmes / Dr. John Watson
- Frodo Baggins / Samwise Gamgee
- Thor / Captain America / Iron Man
- Falcon / Winter Soldier
- Mickey Mouse / Minnie Mouse
- Kermit the Frog / Miss Piggy
- Barbie / Ken

Without seeing their own nametag, place a nametag on every student's back. Then, without talking, they must find their "missing partner" or "missing friends." (This might be just one other person, or a small group of three.) See if students help each other out or focus just on finding their own group of "famous friends"!

Ask:

Say: Friendship is one of our most important relationships.

- Discussion: What makes a good friend? What are some things you do with your friends to maintain a solid relationship with them?
- How can you know that you trust your friends?
- Have you ever thought about being God's friend?

Read: Genesis 15:1-7 (emphasis on verses 1 & 6)

Ask:

- What kind of friendship or relationship did God have with Abraham?
- Abraham was someone who actually talked with God and was called God's friend. What do you think it was like for Abraham to have actual conversations with God?

- How did God support and care for Abraham? In turn, how did Abraham obey and follow God, knowing that he had God's support?
- Say: Friendship is a mutual give and take. With our friends at school or church, we all need trust, honesty, and time. Our friendship with God is similar.

Read: James 2:21-23

Ask:

- How was Abraham "chosen" to be in relationship with God? How are we also "chosen" for relationship with God?
- In James 2:23, we are told that Abraham "believed God." What are some things you know and believe about God to be true?
- How might seeing God as your friend change the way you relate to God?
- How can you know that you trust God and that God can be believed in and counted on?
- What sort of actions could you take to become a closer friend of God?

>> ACTIVITY #2 TEXT MESSAGE TO GOD

Supplies Needed: Notecards and pens for each student

How do you usually talk to your friends? If you are like most people, it's probably through texts and messages! Take a few minutes and write up a "text message" to God. What would you like to tell God? What would you like God to know about your day or week? Do you have any questions you'd want to ask God? Try to "text" to God just like you would your best friend! Bonus points for adding top tier (and appropriate) emojis.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Spend time this week working on your relationship with God. Set aside extra time to talk with God in prayer or through journaling. Talk to God like you would your best friend. God loves us and definitely wants to hear from us!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 4: Named

Discovering who we are is a life-long journey, and there are some things that never change. God knows our name, knows our story, and gives us a new identity through grace. Join us in this 3-week series as we dig into who God says we are!

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – God Knows Our Name
Throughout history, names have been important. Our names and stories of how we received our name carries weight. Even if we change our name or get a new name over time, God knows us and calls us by name. Through the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac we can share in the dread of waiting and feeling forgotten, the joy of being seen and known, and the promise that God is always with us.

2 – God Knows Your Story
We make mistakes, we mess up, we might even deceive others about those things. None of that is news to God. But God still calls us by name and knows our stories—just like God knew Jacob's story and still called to Jacob in his dreams. God loves us despite our messy pasts!

3 – God Gives Us a New Identity
Our identity can be in a lot of things, but the truest thing about us is who God says we are. God says that we are chosen, forgiven, named, and loved – no matter what! Jacob is an example of faith revealing that, as we wrestle with the things of God, we can trust God to know us, see us, and rename us because our true identity can be found in God.

UNIT 4 | SESSION 1

God Knows Our Name

>> BIG IDEA: God has called us by name and does not forget us.

>> SUMMARY: Throughout history, names have been important. Our names and stories of how we received our name carries weight. Even if we change our name or get a new name over time, God knows us and calls us by name. Through the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac we can share in the dread of waiting and feeling forgotten, the joy of being seen and known, and the promise that God is always with us.

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Genesis 21:1-7 (CEB)
21 – 1 The Lord was attentive to Sarah just as he had said, and the Lord carried out just what he had promised her. 2 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Abraham when he was old, at the very time God had told him. 3 Abraham named his son—the one Sarah bore him—Isaac. 4 Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old just as God had commanded him.5 Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born.6 Sarah said, "God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me." 7 She said, "Who could have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse sons? But now I've given birth to a son when he was old!"

Isaiah 49:15-16 (CEB)
15 Can a woman forget her nursing child,
fail to pity the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
but I won't forget you.
16 Look, on my palms I've inscribed you;
your walls are before me continually.

Isaiah 43:1-2 (CEB)
43 -1 But now, says the Lord—
the one who created you, Jacob,
the one who formed you, Israel:

Don't fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched
and flame won't burn you.

>> SUPPLY LIST: Bible, paper, pen

>> MENTOR NOTES: The story of Isaac's birth – he had been long-awaited and prayed for by his parents, Abraham and Sarah. Isaac's name means "laughter," Both Abram and Sara originally laughed at the idea that God could give them a son, but God did! Now they get to laugh with joy that they have Isaac in their lives in spite of their old age.

Fun fact: Isaac is one of only a few people in the whole Bible who was given their name by God before they were even born! Another one is Jesus.

At one point, Abraham believed he had to sacrifice and kill Isaac as a sign of his obedience to God. Yet even then, God did not forget about Isaac and saved him, providing a ram for the sacrifice instead. (Genesis 22)

Even when we are going through tough times, God knows our name and does not forget about us (Isaiah passages). Our names are engraved on God's hands —right where we might write important things to remember too!

Isaac went on to live a full life, got married to Rebekah and had two sons, Jacob and Esau – we will learn more about them next week.

>> PARENT CONNECTION: Explore students started a new series today, NAMED. We discussed the pain of being forgotten, the joy of being known, and promise that God is always with us. Continue the discussion at home:

- Ask your student if there are any nicknames they like or dislike being called.
- Share the meaning behind your name, their name, and your family name. If you chose your name or your student is choosing their own name, discuss the significance of what they have chosen.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Names
A. Speaker introduction (Todd Davidson)
B. Topic: The importance of names

II. Personal Story
A. Given a short name to avoid nicknames
B. Reality: nicknames still happen
C. Experience of teasing and hurt

III. Meaning Behind Names
A. Names often carry stories and significance

B. Family naming traditions
1. Honoring grandparents
2. Connection to family history

IV. Names in the Bible

A. Importance of lineage (e.g., son of, grandson of)
B. Connection to faith and God's promises

V. Connection to God

A. God knows us deeply
B. Sense of belonging through God

VI. Biblical Truth: Isaiah 49:15

A. God never forgets us
B. God's love is constant and personal

VII. Application

A. God knows everything about us
B. God loves us unconditionally
C. Extend that same love and grace to others

VIII. Conclusion

A. Names matter because of their meaning
B. Identity is rooted in God's love
C. Challenge: Accept and share God's love

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have students introduce themselves and share if they know the meaning of their name or any stories with their name.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you were a superhero, what would be your Superhero Name?

>> ACTIVITY #1 GOING ON VACATION

Have everyone sit or stand in a circle. The leader should start by saying their name, and "I'm going on a vacation and I'm taking...," then an object that begins with the same letter of their first name. For example: "I'm **Jenny**. I'm going on a vacation and I'm taking **jeans**." Here's the trick! Don't tell students that *they can only bring an item that starts with the first letter of their name.* See which kids can figure it out without telling others, and if someone says something different, the leader says, "I'm sorry, you cannot bring that item." For example, if a student says, "I'm Billy. I'm going on vacation and I'm bringing snacks," say that he unfortunately can't bring snacks, but he can take a Bible instead. For an added challenge, see if anyone can remember all the names and items at the end of the game (after everyone has had a turn).

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Today, we are talking all about names! Sometimes it's hard for me to remember everyone's name, which is why nametags are so helpful. Even if I've known you for a LONG time, I may say the wrong name or my mind goes blank when someone is directly in front of me.

- How easy or hard is it for you to remember people's names?
- How does it feel when someone forgets your name?

Read: Genesis 21:1-7

Ask:

- Do you think Abraham and Sarah ever felt like God forgot them? How do you think they felt when they finally had their son Isaac after so many years of waiting?
- What did Isaac's name mean? (Hint: "laughter") Why was that his name?
- Sarah said, "God has given me laughter." When is a time that God gave you great joy or even laughter?

Say: Sarah was so ecstatic to finally have a child! Do you think they ever forgot their son's name or called him by the wrong name?

Read: Isaiah 49:15-16
Ask:

- What tricks do you use to help you remember something important or someone's name? (Like writing it down or putting an alert in your phone?)
- When is a time that it felt like God had abandoned you or forgotten you?
- What does this passage say about God? What does God do to remember us? (It says that we are engraved "in the palms of God's hands.")
- How does it make you feel to know that your name is engraved upon God's hands?

Say: It's easy to forget God's promises in our everyday lives. Our challenge this week is to read, remember, and believe what God says in Isaiah 43.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-3
Say: Take a moment to listen to this promise and when I pause, add your own name in your head (or out-loud) - Leader read Isaiah 43 again with a pause not saying, "Jacob" or "Israel"
Ask:

- How can you remind yourself of the promise that God will not forget you and remembers your name?

>> ACTIVITY #2

Give everyone a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Have them trace or outline their hand on the paper. Then instruct them to write their own name in the middle of their drawn hand. They can decorate their drawing however they want. At the bottom, they can write, "My name is written on God's hand." They can put this drawing in place where they will be reminded that God knows their name.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Remember this week that God knows your name and does not forget about you. God wants to bring you laughter and joy! Re-read Isaiah 43:1-3 if you need a reminder of this promise.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT 4 | SESSION 2

God Knows Your Story

>> BIG IDEA: God knows all about our past and where we've been, and yet loves us anyway!

>> SUMMARY: We make mistakes, we mess up, we might even deceive others about those things. None of that is news to God. But God still calls us by name and knows our stories—just like God knew Jacob's story and still called to Jacob in his dreams. God loves us despite our messy pasts!

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Genesis 28:13-15 (CEB)
13 Suddenly the Lord was standing on it and saying, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will become like the dust of the earth; you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. Every family of earth will be blessed because of you and your descendants. 15 I am with you now, I will protect you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done everything that I have promised you."

>> SUPPLY LIST: Bible, air dry clay/dough, heart stickers or cut-outs, optional: paper, pens, simple drawings

>> MENTOR NOTES: Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was named "deceiver" because he grabbed his brother's heel when they were born and in Hebrew, grabbing someone's heel means to try and take over someone or to deceive them. When they grew up, even though Esau was the older son and was going to inherit Isaac's wealth and the blessing from God, Jacob "deceived" Isaac and tricked his father into giving him his brother Esau's blessing. Esau was so angry, he wanted to kill Jacob! So, Jacob ran away, but God still sought after and found Jacob. Instead of punishing Jacob for his deceit, God promised to protect Jacob and keep him safe.

What does all that mean for us? It doesn't mean we'll never face consequences for

unwise choices — we make mistakes, we mess up, we might even deceive others. None of that is news to God. But God still calls us by name—just like God called Jacob in his dreams—and cares for us. God loves us in spite of our messy pasts!

>> PARENT CONNECTION: Explore students in week 2 of "NAMED." We learned that God knows all about our past, our mistakes, and mess-ups, and loves us anyway! Continue the conversation at home:

- This would be a great week for a bonfire! Have everyone in the family take a piece of paper and write down ways in which they think they have messed up. Everyone take their piece of paper and throw it in the fire as a reminder of God's forgiveness and love (Or, with proper supervision and safety, use matches, paper, and a metal trash can).
- Use this week to show your student that you love them even when they make mistakes. Provide a safe space for them to share with you their own insecurities or missteps (and don't forget how important it is for adults to acknowledge missteps or overreactions with their students as well.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Leah Swank-Miller)
- B. Relatable question: sibling differences and conflict
- C. Theme: family drama and God's plan

II. Biblical Story: Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25–28)
- A. Twin brothers with conflict from the beginning
- B. Key differences
  1. Esau: older, outdoorsman, favored by father
  2. Jacob: younger, quiet, favored by mother

III. Birthright and Blessing
- A. Esau's birthright as firstborn (inheritance, leadership)
- B. Jacob tricks Esau
  1. Trades stew for birthright
  2. Esau acts impulsively

IV. Deception of Isaac
- A. Isaac prepares to bless Esau
- B. Rebekah and Jacob's plan
  1. Disguise Jacob as Esau
  2. Isaac gives blessing to Jacob
- C. Esau's anger → Jacob flees

V. God's Response to Jacob
- A. God appears in a dream (Genesis 28)
- B. Promises
  1. Land and descendants
  2. Blessing to all families
  3. Presence and protection
- C. Key truth: God still loves and uses Jacob

VI. Lesson from Jacob's Story

A. People make mistakes and act wrongly
B. God's plans are not stopped by our failures
C. Identity is not defined by mistakes

VII. Personal Story

A. Delayed college graduation (unfinished class)
B. Feelings of shame and avoidance
C. Redemption
   1. Returned to school years later
   2. Completed degree
   3. Continued calling (Master of Divinity)

VIII. Application for Students

A. God doesn't give up on us
B. We are still part of God's story
C. Don't let past mistakes define you

IX. Conclusion and Challenge

A. God forgives and restores
B. We can move forward with hope
C. Trust God's plans and future for your life

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

As students introduce themselves, have them share if they have any siblings, how many, and older or younger.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What's your opinion on practical jokes or pranks? What is the best prank someone has pulled on you or that you've pulled on someone else?

>> ACTIVITY #1: CUP GAME

Give students some air-dry clay/dough. Let them make a pinch bowl during the teaching. Like this...
Jacob deceived his brother with a bowl of soup. We will finish with this activity at the end.

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Let's open our bibles to Genesis 25. The story of Esau and Jacob is throughout Genesis 25-28.
Ask:

- If you have siblings, do you get along with them? What are some common ways that siblings irritate or annoy us?
- How would you describe the relationship between Jacob and Esau, the brothers in our story for today?
- What did Jacob's name mean? (Gen 27: 35-36, Hint: "Deceiver") In what ways was that name fitting for Jacob?
- How did Jacob trick or "deceive" his family? How did his brother respond?

Say: Sometimes we get labelled or named for something that we did or didn't do. Jacob lived into the label/name of deceiver with his actions.

- What are some bad "names" we might give ourselves or allow others to give us based on our mess ups or shortcomings? (Stupid, ugly, useless, etc.)
- How do those names affect you? Why is it difficult to believe them and live into them, and hard to reject them?
- How did God respond when Jacob tricked his brother and father and then ran away? (Genesis 28)

Read: Genesis 28:13-15.
Ask:

- What things did God promise Jacob?
- Seeing God's response to Jacob's deception, do you think God truly forgives our past?
- What small mistakes that you have made are you letting define you today? How can you lean into God's forgiveness, grace, and love?
- How does it make you feel to know that our past doesn't define us or keep you from God's love?

>> ACTIVITY #1 - CONTINUED

Take a look at your bowl. It may have some imperfections, some mistakes. Just like Jacob messed up by deceiving his brother and father.

- Hand out the heart stickers or cut-outs.

Press your heart into your bowl. Inside or on the bottom or along the side. Take your bowl home, imperfections and all, to remind you that even when we make mistakes and mess up, God knows our story, cares for us, and loves us unconditionally.

>> ACTIVITY #2: (OPTIONAL)

Unlike the brothers, Esau and Jacob, we are going to be twinning for winning. Work together in pairs for the next two games.

Back-to-Back: Have students stand back-to-back with their arms hooked around each other's elbows. Students need to sit down and then stand back up while connected (back-to-back, with elbows locked together) without using their hands on the floor.

Back-to-Back Drawing: Hand one person a pen and piece of paper and show the other person a picture of something that's fairly simple to draw (e.g., a car, a flower, a house). This person now has to describe the picture to their teammate without actually saying what the item is so they can draw it. They're allowed to describe shapes, sizes, and textures but can't say, "Draw a lily." Once the blind drawing is finished, compare it with the original to see how well you communicated.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

This week make time to bring your mistakes to God. God knows your story and loves you through it all! Letting go of our past can help you say, "YES" to the things God has for you today.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT 4 | SESSION 3

God Gives us a New Identity

>> **BIG IDEA:** God gives us a new name and a new identity to live into.

>> **SUMMARY:** Our identity can be in a lot of things, but the truest thing about us is who God says we are. God says that we are chosen, forgiven, named, and loved – no matter what! Jacob is an example of faith revealing that, as we wrestle with the things of God, we can trust God to know us, see us, and rename us because our true identity can be found in God.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 32:22-32

Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32 (CEB)

22 Jacob got up during the night, took his two wives, his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed the Jabbok River's shallow water. 23 He took them and everything that belonged to him, and he helped them cross the river. 24 But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a man wrestled with him until dawn broke. 25 When the man saw that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he grabbed Jacob's thigh and tore a muscle in Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him. 26 The man said, "Let me go because the dawn is breaking."

But Jacob said, "I won't let you go until you bless me."

27 He said to Jacob, "What's your name?" and he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won."

29 Jacob also asked and said, "Tell me your name."

But he said, "Why do you ask for my name?" and he blessed Jacob there. 30 Jacob named the place Peniel, "because I've seen God face-to-face, and my life has been saved." 31 The sun rose as Jacob passed Penuel, limping because of his thigh. 32 Therefore, Israelites don't eat the tendon attached to the thigh muscle to this day, because he grabbed Jacob's thigh muscle at the tendon.

>> SUPPLY LIST: Bible, blank nametags

>> MENTOR NOTES: This week Jacob wrestles with God. It is believed to be an angel that he wrestles. We may not have angels here and now that we need to wrestle to understand and live into our identity in God, but we do have our own mental blocks, emotional walls, and social static that can get in the way. What holds you back from fully knowing and believing who God says you are? How do you wrestle with God? If God were to rename you like Jacob was renamed, what new name or meaning would you like to live into now?

>> PARENT CONNECTION: In the final week of NAMED, we discussed Jacob wrestling with God. After Jacob wrestles with God, he gets a new name, Israel. Keep the conversation going at home with this:

- Ask your student what they think it was like for Jacob to wrestle with God. Would they wrestle an angel, knowing they would be injured but would also get a cool new name from God?
- Share what finding your identity in God means to you and then ask your student what it means to them.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Names and Meaning
- A. Speaker introduction (Blake)
- B. Names have meanings and origins
- C. Examples of name meanings
- D. Importance of knowing your name

II. Story Context: Jacob and Esau
- A. Jacob deceives Esau and Isaac
- B. Esau's anger → Jacob flees
- C. Years later, Jacob returns home

III. Jacob's Situation
- A. Fear of facing Esau
- B. Sends family ahead
- C. Remains alone by the river

IV. Biblical Event: Wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22–30)
- A. Jacob wrestles with a man (angel)
- B. Struggle lasts all night
- C. Jacob is injured but persists
- D. Refuses to let go without a blessing

V. Name Change and Identity

A. Jacob → Israel

B. Meaning

1. Jacob: "deceiver"
2. Israel: "one who wrestles/strives with God"

C. Symbol of transformation and new identity

VI. Spiritual Lesson

A. Jacob moves from past mistakes to new purpose

B. Faith involves persistence and struggle

C. God is present through the struggle

VII. Identity in Our Lives

A. Identity shaped by many factors

1. Name, background, activities

B. Most important identity: in God

C. Evidence of faith

1. Love, service, worship, prayer

VIII. Application and Challenge

A. Seek God wholeheartedly

B. Consider what defines your identity

C. Live into identity given by God

IX. Conclusion

A. God knows and loves us

B. Identity is found in relationship with God

C. Challenge: pursue God fully

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have students introduce themselves every week. This week simply have them share their name before sharing their High, Low, Buffalo.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

If you could give yourself a "pen name" or a "stage name," what would it be?

>> ACTIVITY #1 STAGE NAMES

Many celebrities and actors choose to use "stage names," instead of their given names. Challenge your students and see if they can guess who these actors are:

- Thomas Vincent = Vin Diesel
- Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta = Lady Gaga
- Nicolas Coppola = Nicolas Cage
- Katheryn Hudson = Katy Perry
- Melissa Viviane Jefferson = Lizzo
- Onika Tanya Maraj = Nikki Minag
- Aubrey Graham = Drake
- Peter Gene Hernandez = Bruno Mars
- Samuel Timothy Smith = Tim McGraw
- Brianne Sidonie Desaulniers = Brie Larson
- Dwayne Douglas Johnson = The Rock
- Adam Richard Wiles = Calvin Harris
- Christopher Edwin Breaux = Frank Ocean
- Adam Hamilton = A-ham at the wood

Ask: "Why do you think these celebrities changed their name or chose to go by a different name? Would you change your name if you were famous?

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Our names help identify who we are, but our name doesn't make up the whole of our identity.

- Does changing your name change your identity? Why or why not?
- What are some of the different "identities" that you put on? (Examples: football player, video gamer, theater kid, etc.)

Read: Genesis 32:22-32

Ask:

- Does anyone remember why Jacob was afraid to reconnect with his brother Esau? (This was from last week.)
- What did Jacob's name mean before? What was the new name that God gave him and why was it significant?

- Do you think Jacob changed his attitude and identity before or after God changed his name to "Israel"?

Say: Jacob's new name, "Israel" means "to wrestle with God."

- What does it look like for us to "wrestle" with God or thoughts about God?
- What does it mean to shape your identity around God?
- What is a name or word that God might call you? (Examples: precious, loved, chosen, etc.)

>> ACTIVITY #2 NAMED BY GOD

Even when others try to label us or name us, God has given us a new name and a new identity. Like Jacob, we don't have to live in our pasts anymore. Take a few moments and reflect: what is a name that God has given you? It might be a word, a phrase, or even an image. Write this "new name" on your name tag and keep it as a reminder that God gives us a new name and a new identity.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Place your nametag somewhere you can see it all week. Keep it as a reminder that your identity is in God!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 5: DELIVERED

Delivered teaches us about the nature of God's attentiveness and intervention. These two sessions affirm that God is ever aware of our struggles and is continuously working to bring about salvation and relief, often through the actions of others. They also challenge us to be proactive in responding to the needs of those around us, embodying God's compassion and aid in our own lives.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – God Sees and Hears Us

In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel were enslaved by the people of Egypt. They cried out to God, and it probably seemed to the Israelites like God wasn't listening. We read that God had already begun putting a plan in place to rescue the people of Israel. Moses was born, and God had been working through Moses to prepare him for his time in leadership. God saw the people of Israel. God heard their cries and was working on a plan to rescue them from Egypt. Just like God heard the Israelites, God hears and understands you too.

2 – God Saves Us

Friends help carry us through tough times. Jesus is teaching in an over-crowded house as a paralytic man is lowered through the ceiling by his friends. His friends had carried him through town on this cot just to realize they would never get to Jesus through the front door. They knew their friend needed Jesus, the healer and bringer of hope. How far will you go to lift your friends up and bring them hope?

UNIT 5 | SESSION 1

God Sees and Hears Us

>> BIG IDEA: God hears us when we call out to God for help.

>> SUMMARY: In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel were enslaved by the people of Egypt. They cried out to God and it probably seemed to the Israelites like God wasn't listening. We read that God had already begun putting a plan in place to rescue the people of Israel, Moses was born, and God had been working through Moses to prepare him for his time in leadership. God saw the people of Israel. God heard their cries and was working on a plan to rescue them from Egypt. Just like God heard the Israelites, God hears and understands you too.

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

Exodus 1:8-14 (CEB)

8 Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, "The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. 10 Come on, let's be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land." 11 As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh.

12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. 13 So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. 14 They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

Exodus 2:23-25 (CEB)

23 A long time passed, and the Egyptian king died. The Israelites were still groaning because of their hard work. They cried out, and their cry to be rescued from the hard work rose up to God. 24 God heard their cry of grief, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God looked at the Israelites and God understood.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, earplugs or noise cancelling headphones, pens and paper

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** In this teaching we try to use people's first language. People first language places the importance of a person's identity on their humanity and not circumstances or conditions. This eliminates stigmas, stereotypes, and judgements that certain words might create. This looks like "people enslaved" rather than "slaves." This change may not seem like a big deal but as we continue to use people first language in our ministry, it creates a foundation for an environment that supports ministry with one another. Other examples of people first language: people experiencing homelessness, person with an addiction, people experiencing food insecurity.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students started the series, Delivered. We discussed how the enslaved people of Israel may have felt while waiting for God to save them. Continue the conversation at home with these questions:

- How can we encourage each other in our faith while waiting for God to answer our prayers?
- We want you to know that we love you, hear you, and are for you. How can we listen better when you are in need?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

D. Mike arrives with a plan and supplies

II. Biblical Context: God's People

A. Abraham's family → Israelites
B. Israelites move to Egypt بببس famine
C. Over time, they become enslaved

III. Israelites Cry Out

A. Suffering and hard labor
B. They cry out to God
C. God hears, remembers, and understands (Exodus 2:23–25)

IV. Tension: Waiting on God

A. Feels like God isn't acting quickly
B. Question: Where is the rescue?

V. Parallel to Mouse Story

A. Speaker frustrated with delay
B. Mike explains he was preparing to help
C. Help required time and a plan

VI. God's Plan in Motion

A. Introduction of Moses
B. Moses' rescue as a baby
C. God preparing Moses to lead

VII. Key Lesson

A. God hears and understands our struggles

B. God is working even when we don't see it

C. God's timing includes preparation

VIII. Application

A. Trust God even when answers feel delayed

B. Remember God has a plan

C. God sees, hears, and cares for you

IX. Conclusion

A. Just like Mike responded with a plan, God does too

B. Encouragement: God hears you and is at work

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- Would you rather lose your sense of hearing or lose the ability to see? Explain your choice.

>> ACTIVITY #1

Divide students up into groups of two or three. In each group, allow 1-2 minutes to have one person tell a short story in a whisper, while the others plug their ears. The two "listeners" then have to guess what the story was about, even though they probably couldn't hear it. The "storyteller" can even ask questions about the story to see if the listeners can answer correctly. Switch it around so everyone has a chance to be the "storyteller."

Then, in the same small groups, assign someone to act out an action without speaking or using sounds. (Think, charades.) The other person(s) in the small group needs to guess what that person is doing. Switch it around so everyone has a chance to be the "actor."

Ask these questions:

- Which was harder: guessing the story when you couldn't hear, or guessing the action?
- Was it more fun being the storyteller or story listener?
- Was it more fun acting out the action or guessing it?

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: We all have times when we feel misunderstood or like people are not really listening to what we are saying.

- When was a time when you were misunderstood, or it felt like no one was listening to you? How did it feel?
- What do you do when you are going through problems or tough situations? Who do you reach out to and talk to?
- How does it feel when you know someone is truly listening to you?

Say: As we read the story of the Israelites in the bible, think about why the Israelite people might think God didn't see or hear them.

Read: Exodus 1:8-14
Ask:

- Why do you think the Israelite people might think that God didn't see or hear them during this time?
- How did the Israelite people end up enslaved in Egypt?

Say: Next, we learn about Moses, his birth, his mother and sister's desire to save him by putting him in a basket on a river, and his acceptance into Pharoah's home through his daughter. The most exceptional part of his story is that he lived when he should have died. The enslaved Israelite people had no idea that God was preparing anything or anyone for their liberation. So, we continue to read in Exodus chapter 2.

Read: Exodus 2:23
Ask:

- Why were the Israelites crying out to God?
- How do you feel when you think your prayers to God go unanswered?
- How to you think the Israelite people felt at this time?

Read: Exodus 2:23-25
Ask:

- How did God respond to the Israelite people's cries for help? (Remember God was putting a plan into place – Moses. They just didn't know it yet!)
- Do you believe that God hears you when you pray, why or why not?
- When has God helped you or someone you know out in the past?
- In Exodus 2:25, we are told that God saw and understood the Israelites. What do you think it means for God to hear us and understand us? How do you feel knowing that God sees and understands you?
- Where in your life do you currently need God to see you, hear you, and help you out?

>> ACTIVITY #2 COMPASSIONATE CHARADES

In our lesson today, we read that God sees us, hears us, remembers us, and understand us. Pass out a piece of paper and pen to each student, and have them finish the following statements (write them on the board if needed):

God, one thing I want you to see about me is...

God, something I want to tell you is...

God, do you remember the time when...

God, one thing I want you to understand about me is...

At the end, remind students that God does indeed know and remember each item on this list and God loves each of them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Remember this week that God hears us and sees us, even when it doesn't feel like it. Write Exodus 2:24-25 on a note and place it where you'll see it every day this week to remember that God hears and understands.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

God Saves Us

>> **BIG IDEA:** God rescued and delivered the Israelites from enslavement, and God continues to save us today.

>> **SUMMARY:** Last session in EXPLORE, we learned that God heard and saw the Israelites when they cried out. They were slaves in Egypt, but God saw their suffering and responded. Through Moses, God worked to deliver the people of Israel. God often uses other people to help us in our times of suffering. When are we called to help others in their times of suffering and need?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Mark 2:1-12

Exodus 3:1-10 (CEB)

3-1 Moses was taking care of the flock for his father-in-law Jethro, Midian's priest. He led his flock out to the edge of the desert, and he came to God's mountain called Horeb. 2 The Lord's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up.3 Then Moses said to himself, Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up.

4 When the Lord saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

Moses said, "I'm here."

5 Then the Lord said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." 6 He continued, "I am the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, "I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. 8 I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that's full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. 9 Now the Israelites' cries of injustice have reached me. I've seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. 10 So get going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Exodus 14:13-18(CEB)
13 But Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand your ground, and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never ever see again.
14 The Lord will fight for you. You just keep still."
15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to get moving. 16 As for you, lift your shepherd's rod, stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it in two so that the Israelites can go into the sea on dry ground.17 But me, I'll make the Egyptians stubborn so that they will go in after them, and I'll gain honor at the expense of Pharaoh, all his army, his chariots, and his cavalry.18 The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord, when I gain honor at the expense of Pharaoh, his chariots, and his cavalry."

Exodus 15:1-18 (MSG)
15 1-8 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to GOD, giving voice together,
I'm singing my heart out to GOD—what a victory!
He pitched horse and rider into the sea.
GOD is my strength, GOD is my song,
and, yes! GOD is my salvation.
This is the kind of God I have
and I'm telling the world!
This is the God of my father—
I'm spreading the news far and wide!
GOD is a fighter,
pure GOD, through and through.
Pharaoh's chariots and army
he dumped in the sea,
The elite of his officers
he drowned in the Red Sea.
Wild ocean waters poured over them;
they sank like a rock in the deep blue sea.
Your strong right hand, GOD, shimmers with power;
your strong right hand shatters the enemy.
In your mighty majesty
you smash your upstart enemies,
You let loose your hot anger
and burn them to a crisp.
At a blast from your nostrils
the waters piled up;
Tumbling streams dammed up,
wild oceans curdled into a swamp.
9 The enemy spoke,
"I'll pursue, I'll hunt them down,
I'll divide up the plunder,
I'll glut myself on them;
I'll pull out my sword,
my fist will send them reeling."

10-11 You blew with all your might
and the sea covered them.
They sank like a lead weight
in the majestic waters.
Who compares with you
among gods, O GOD?
Who compares with you in power,
in holy majesty,
In awesome praises,
wonder-working God?
12-13 You stretched out your right hand
and the Earth swallowed them up.
But the people you redeemed,
you led in merciful love;
You guided them under your protection
to your holy pasture.
14-18 When people heard, they were scared;
Philistines writhed and trembled;
Yes, even the head men in Edom were shaken,
and the big bosses in Moab.
Everybody in Canaan
panicked and fell faint.
Dread and terror
sent them reeling.
Before your brandished right arm
they were struck dumb like a stone,
Until your people crossed over and entered, O GOD,
until the people you made crossed over and entered.
You brought them and planted them
on the mountain of your heritage,
The place where you live,
the place you made,
Your sanctuary, Master,
that you established with your own hands.
Let GOD rule
forever, for eternity!

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, paper, pens

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** God speaks to Moses through a burning bush to help save the Israelites from slavery. God may not speak through burning bushes today, but God communicates in various ways in our lives. What helps you connect with God? Spend some time this week connecting with God – through prayer, fellowship, worship, or

serving. Are there injustices in this world that move you to prayer or action like Moses? What might God be inviting you to do to help serve those in need in your community?

There is a lot of scripture to reference this week—perhaps pick a few students to act it out, so attention spans aren't lost (This can be done in place of one of the activities listed).

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week in Explore students learned that God saved the Israelites from enslavement through Moses. Moses was a simple, regular guy that was able to fight great injustice with an extraordinary God! Continue the conversation at home with these questions:

- The Israelites had to wait a LONG time for God to send Moses to help them. How do you feel when you have to wait a LONG time for something to happen?
- What are some things in your life or in our world that you would like to help get better? Is there any way we can help you with this?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Todd Davidson)
- B. Moses as a "celebrity" of the Bible
- C. Close relationship between Moses and God

II. Moses' First Encounter with God (Exodus 3)
- A. Moses tending sheep in the wilderness
- B. Burning bush that does not burn up
- C. God calls Moses by name
- D. Holy ground → remove sandals

III. God's Message to Moses
- A. God sees Israel's suffering in Egypt
- B. God hears their cries
- C. God's plan: rescue His people
- D. Moses is chosen to lead

IV. Moses: An Ordinary Person
- A. Not perfect (possible speech struggle)
- B. Still chosen and used by God
- C. Parallel: God uses ordinary people today

V. God Works Through Moses
- A. Provides for people (water from rock)
- B. Leads them through the wilderness
- C. Builds trust in God

VI. The Red Sea (Exodus 14)
- A. Israelites trapped and afraid
- B. Moses encourages them to trust God
- C. God parts the sea → dry land
- D. Egyptians defeated

VII. Key Lesson

A. God hears and responds to His people

B. God is powerful and faithful

C. God is with us in hard times

VIII. Application for Life

A. We face struggles (school, family, mental health)

B. Keep turning toward God

C. Notice how God is working (write it down)

IX. Identity and Calling

A. God uses ordinary people for great things

B. We can be used like Moses

C. Stay open to God's presence

X. Conclusion

A. God hears, knows, and uses us

B. Encouragement to trust God daily

C. Prayer and closing thought

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is your favorite superhero movie or character?

>> ACTIVITY #1 FOLLOW THE LEADER

God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Today, we are going to play "follow the leader" too!

Pick a student to be the Leader. Have everyone else line up single file behind the leader. Whatever actions the Leader does, the group has to mimic. (Walking, dancing, flailing arms, kneeling, etc.) Any players that fail to follow the Leader or lag behind are "out." Keep playing until there is only one follower left, and they become the new leader. Play as many rounds as time allows.

>> DISCUSSION:

Ask:

- From the teaching, what amazing things did God do in this story?
- When was the last time you saw something amazing?
- When you are suffering or going through a hard time, what do you do? Who do you talk to or ask for help?
- Recap from last week: What was happening to the Israelites? Why did they need to be rescued?

Read: Exodus 3:1-10

Ask:

- What were God's instructions to Moses?
- In the story, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. How does God speak to us today?
- Imagine you are Moses. How would you feel if God called you to do a big task? How would you respond?

Say: God uses ordinary people like Moses for extraordinary purposes!

- God said he heard the Israelite's "cries of injustice" (Exodus 3:7 & 9). What is "injustice"? Where do we see injustice in our world today?

- Why does God often work through people to help rescue or save others?
- How has God worked through others to help you?
- How can God work through you to support others who are hurting?

>> ACTIVITY #2 SONG OF VICTORY TO GOD

After God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians, they broke out into a song of victory and praise. Read that song of victory out loud from Exodus 15:1-18.
Then, either as a group or individuals, write your own song of victory to God! Here are some questions to help guide your thinking:

- How has God helped you in the past?
- What are ways that we usually praise or thank God?
- What "awesome deeds" has God done in the world or in your life?
- Who is God to you?
- Who or what is your "enemy"? How can God help you overcome your "enemy" or tough situation?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

This week, if you are feeling down or discouraged, re-read the Israelite's Song of Victory to God in Exodus 15:1-18. Remember that God rescued others in the past, and God delivers us still today!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 6: Covenant

Unit Summary - In the Covenant unit, students will explore the nature of covenants in the Bible and understand how they reflect God's promises and expectations. We will connect biblical covenants to our own faith practices, focusing on God's promises and the call to live out these promises in our relationships with others.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 – God Keeps Promises

God creates covenants with his people all through-out the Bible! In this session we are looking at the first covenant made in the Bible: The Covenant God made with Noah and Noah's family. God saw that the world was not how it was created to be, so God decided to recreate it. Now it came at a cost with loss and destruction, but what we have is new birth and another chance at getting it right. After the great flood, God made a covenant with humans: that no matter how bad things get or what terrible things we might do in the future, God would never flood the earth again and we can live at peace knowing God will never give up on us.

2 – The Ten Commandments

As we look at the Ten Commandments, they may seem like just a strict set of rules. Yet through these commands, God was calling the Israelites (and us today!) to follow God alone. We should not put anything else in the way of our relationship with God: not "idols," or the desire to steal, kill, or lie, not our material possessions or goods. God's covenant with us calls us to follow and obey God only.

3 – Covenant with Community

So far in EXPLORE, we've learned about the different covenants that God has made with humans: God made covenants with Noah, with Abraham and Sarai, with Isaac and Jacob, and then with all the people of Israel. But we are also called to be "in a covenant" with other followers of God: to love and support one another. Ruth is a great example of the type of covenant we are meant to have with other people. The covenant God makes with us, and asks us to make with other people, can be summarized in the two greatest commandments: Love God and Love others.

UNIT 6 | SESSION 1

God Keeps Promises

>> **BIG IDEA:** God promises never to give up on us.

>> **SUMMARY:** God creates covenants with his people all throughout the Bible! In this session we are looking at the first covenant made in the Bible: The Covenant God made with Noah and Noah's family. God saw that the world was not how it was created to be, so God decided to recreate it. Now it came at a cost with loss and destruction, but what we have is new birth and another chance at getting it right. After the great flood, God made a covenant with humans: that no matter how bad things get or what terrible things we might do in the future, God would never flood the earth again and we can live at peace knowing God will never give up on us.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Genesis 6:13-22 (CEB)
13 God said to Noah, "The end has come for all creatures, since they have filled the earth with violence. I am now about to destroy them along with the earth, 14 so make a wooden ark. Make the ark with nesting places and cover it inside and out with tar. 15 This is how you should make it: four hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. 16 Make a roof for the ark and complete it one foot from the top. Put a door in its side. In the hold below, make the second and third decks.
17 "I am now bringing the floodwaters over the earth to destroy everything under the sky that breathes. Everything on earth is about to take its last breath. 18 But I will set up my covenant with you. You will go into the ark together with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. 19 From all living things—from all creatures—you are to bring a pair, male and female, into the ark with you to keep them alive.20 From each kind of bird, from each kind of livestock, and from each kind of everything that crawls on the ground—a pair from each will go in with you to stay alive. 21 Take some from every kind of food and stow it as food for you and for the animals."
22 Noah did everything exactly as God commanded him.

Genesis 9:8-17 (CEB)
8 God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "I am now setting up my covenant with

you, with your descendants, 10 and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you. 11 I will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by floodwaters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."
12 God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. 13 I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures.16 The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth's creatures." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I have set up between me and all creatures on earth."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, paper, pens, pre-printed MadLib (link: https://biblecraftsbyjenny.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/1/2/101295324/noahs_ark_madlib_pdf_3.pdf)

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** In the biblical world, uncontrolled floodwaters were the primary symbol of chaos. After The Great Flood, God re-establishes order and recreates the world through a covenant. A covenant is an agreement that establishes a committed relationship between God and human beings, between God and the world, or between one human and another human. For more in-depth and fun reading, check out "Making Sense of the Bible" by Adam Hamilton, chapter 21.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students started a new series, "Covenant." We discussed how God promises never to give up on us. Through God's covenant with Noah after the great flood, we can have peace knowing God keeps his promises. Keep the conversation going at home with these questions:

- What does the word "covenant" mean to you?
- How do you feel knowing that God keeps his promises?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction & Recap
- A. Review: Abraham and the Israelites
- B. God's covenant promise to Abraham
- C. Moses leads Israelites out of Egypt

II. What is a Covenant?
- A. Definition: promise/contract between people or groups
- B. Everyday examples
  1. Marriage
  2. Sports contracts
- C. God also makes covenants with people

III. Story of Noah (Genesis 6)
- A. World filled with sin and violence
- B. God plans to restart (flood)
- C. Noah obeys God and builds the ark
- D. Animals and family saved

IV. Un-creation → Re-creation
- A. God resets the world to restore it
- B. Illustration: controlled burns in nature
- C. Application: removing sin for new life

V. God's Covenant with Noah (Genesis 9)
- A. Promise: never flood the earth again
- B. Applies to humans, animals, and all creation
- C. Sign of covenant: rainbow

VI. Meaning of the Covenant
- A. God keeps promises
- B. God chooses to communicate with people
- C. Shows God's love and care

VII. Application for Students
- A. Reflect on areas needing change (new life)
- B. Trust God's promises and protection
- C. Live fully in the world God created

VIII. Conclusion
- A. God's promises continue today
- B. Encouragement to explore other covenants
- C. Reminder: God loves, communicates, and protects

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you had to kick one animal off Noah's ark, which one would you remove?
- What's your favorite exotic animal? What animal would you most want to see in real life?

>> ACTIVITY #1: NOAH'S ARK MADLIB

Using the attached Noah's Ark Madlib, work together with your group of students to fill in the blanks using the prompts provided. Be silly with your answers! Once you have filled in all the blank spots, read the story out loud.
Link: https://biblecraftsbyjenny.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/1/2/101295324/noahs_ark_madlib_pdf_3.pdf

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Today, we start a new series, Covenant.

- What is a covenant?
- What types of covenants or promises do you make in your life?
- What are symbols or signs of the covenants we make with other people? (Examples: rings in marriage, a pinky promise, a handshake, etc.)
- Which promises are easy to keep? Which ones are more difficult to keep?
- How does it feel when someone breaks a promise?

Say: Let's open our bibles to Genesis chapter 6.

- Can you find anything in Genesis chapter 6 that tells us why God chose Noah to build the ark? (Hint: look at verses 8-9)

Read: Genesis 6:13-22

- Why did God want to send a flood on the earth?

Say: If the story ended there, it would be horrible! But let's continue reading in Genesis 9:8-17

- What was the covenant that God made with Noah and his family?
- Would you describe this a "two-way" covenant, or a "one-sided" covenant? Why?
- What did God create as a symbol of the covenant or promise to never again give up on humanity?

- When do we see rainbows in the sky today?
- What storms of your life are you going through and need God to help you with?
- How else can we know that God never gives up on us?

>> ACTIVITY #2 PROMISES OF GOD

In Noah's story, we learn that God promised never to give up on humans. What other promises does God make? Look up these passages and write down other promises that God has made. You can do this as individuals or in smaller groups.

1. Exodus 14:13-14
2. Deuteronomy 31:8
3. Psalm 34:17
4. Psalm 50:15
5. Isaiah 41:10
6. Matthew 11:28
7. Romans 8:37-39
8. Revelation 21:3-4

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

When you are facing "storms" in your life, look for the rainbow of God's promise! Write down one or two promises of God and put them in a place you see often as a reminder that God will never give up on you.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

NOAH'S ARK, a mad lib

In Noah's time, the people were _____ and _____.
(verb + ing) (verb + ing)

When God saw what they were doing, he was _____ and decided to send a flood.
(emotion)

But God wanted to save Noah, so he told Noah about the flood and gave him _____ that
(plural noun)

would help him build a _____ _____ called the ark.
(adjective) (noun)

The ark was made from _____and was big enough to hold a/the _____.
(something brown) (something huge)

It took Noah and his sons _____ years to build the ark.
(a number)

When they were done, God sent _____ of every animal to enter the ark.
(a number)

There were _____, and _____, and even _____!
(an animal, plural) (an animal, plural) (an animal, plural)

They also took food on the ark, like_____ and _____for the people,
(a food) (another food)

and _____ and _____ for the animals.
(a food) (another food)

Then God closed the _____ of the ark and _____ started to fall from the sky.
(part of a house) (a liquid)

It rained for _____days and nights. Everything was flooded, but the ark floated high and dry.
(a number)

After it stopped raining, God sent a _____ to help dry everything off.
(something that starts with "W")

After many days, Noah sent out a _____. The second time he sent it, it came back
(kind of bird)

with a _____ in its beak! And the third time it did not come back.
(something green)

Then Noah knew that it was time to leave the ark, so he opened it and let out all the animals.

God promised Noah that he would never send a flood again, and he put the _____
(something with lots of colors)

in the sky as a sign of his promise.

UNIT 6 | SESSION 2

The Ten Commandments

>> **BIG IDEA:** God's covenant calls us to follow God only.

>> **SUMMARY:** As we look at the Ten Commandments, they may seem like just a strict set of rules. Yet through these commands, God was calling the Israelites (and us today!) to follow God alone. We should not put anything else in the way of our relationship with God: not "idols," or the desire to steal, kill, or lie, not our material possessions or goods. God's covenant with us calls us to follow and obey God only.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Exodus 19:1-6 (CEB)
1 On exactly the third-month anniversary of the Israelites' leaving the land of Egypt, they came into the Sinai desert. 2 They traveled from Rephidim, came into the Sinai desert, and set up camp there. Israel camped there in front of the mountain 3 while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, "This is what you should say to Jacob's household and declare to the Israelites: 4 You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to me. 5 So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. 6 You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites."

Exodus 20:1-17 (CEB)
1 Then God spoke all these words:
2 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
3 You must have no other gods before me.
4 Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the Lord your God, am a passionate God. I punish children for their parents' sins even to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. 6 But I am loyal and gracious to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance; the Lordwon't forgive anyone who uses his name that way.
8 Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. 9 Six days you may work and do all your tasks, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. 11 Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
12 Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you.
13 Do not kill.
14 Do not commit adultery.
15 Do not steal.
16 Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.
17 Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, phone or computer to play a song, lyric sheet

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** God makes a covenant through Moses with the Israelites. A covenant is an agreement in a committed relationship. These Ten Commandments are the most important of all the instruction that God gives at Mount Sinai. They are the first set of expectations that God gives to Moses on that mountain. These commandments are the only instruction that God speaks directly to the people in writing. God gives all other instructions to Moses, and then Moses passes them on to the people.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** In Explore this week, students discussed the covenant of The Ten Commandments. Help your student with their weekly challenge by working as a family to memorize The Ten Commandments. There are fun YouTube videos and hand motions to learn that might help.

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Caitlyn)
- B. Return to Moses and the Israelites after leaving Egypt

II. Setting: Mount Sinai
- A. Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai (Horeb)
- B. Same place Moses met God in the burning bush
- C. God reaffirms covenant with His people

III. God's Covenant (Exodus 19)

A. God reminds them of His rescue from Egypt
B. Promise: Israelites will be God's special people
C. Condition: obey God and keep the covenant
D. Identity: "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation"

IV. The 10 Commandments (Exodus 20)

A. Given as part of the covenant
B. Key commands
   1. Worship only God
   2. No idols
   3. Honor God's name
   4. Keep the Sabbath holy
   5. Live rightly (no stealing, lying, killing, etc.)

V. Meaning of the Commands

A. Not just rules, but guidance for living
B. Call to put God first
C. Remove anything that takes God's place

VI. Application

A. Examine what might be "idols" in our lives
B. Focus on relationship with God
C. Choose to follow and obey God

VII. Conclusion

A. Covenant is a two-way relationship
B. God leads, protects, and calls us
C. We respond by trusting and following Him

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could create a law that the whole world had to follow, what would it be and why?

>> ACTIVITY #1: SILLY LAWS

Throughout the United States, there are so many silly laws that are still on the books but cannot be enforced. Read each of these silly laws out loud, and have students guess which state that law came from.

Which State has this silly law?

- It is illegal to wake a sleeping bear to take a photo (Alaska)
- It is illegal to ride a horse while drunk (Colorado)
- Slippers are not to be worn after 10:00 pm (New York)
- It is illegal to send anyone a surprise pizza (Louisiana)
- It is illegal to drive with an uncaged bear (Missouri)
- It is illegal to wash your neighbor's car without permission (California)
- It is illegal to share your Netflix password (Tennessee)
- Women must get permission from their husbands to wear false teeth (Vermont)
- Coins are not allowed to be placed in your ears (Hawaii)
- It is illegal to keep Christmas decorations up after January 14 (Maine)

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: We are in week 2 of our Covenant series. Let's just have a real quick recap...

- What is a covenant?
- In our EXPLORE sessions so far, what other covenants did God make with people? (If the students cannot remember, it's okay to simply move on to this week's covenant.)
- At first, God made covenants with individual people (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, etc.). In our story today, God made a covenant with ALL of the people of Israel. Why do you think God did this?
- Moses and the Israelites encountered God in a special way at Mount Sinai. Where are places that you find or encounter God?

Read: Exodus 20:1-17

- Do any of these seem strange or not make sense to you?
- Does this list of commandments seem fair or too strict?
- Which of the Ten Commandments is the easiest for you to follow and hwich is the most difficult to obey?
- Do you think there is anything missing from the Ten Commandments? Something else that should be included as a command?
- Which commandment seems to be the MOST important to you?
- What things do we tend to "idolize" or prioritize instead of God?
- How do these commandments help us stay in a covenant relationship with God? How do these commandments help us stay in a covenant relationship with other people?

>> ACTIVITY #2: LAW OF LOVE

Several years ago, the Church of the Resurrection's worship band—COR Worship Collective—wrote a song about the Ten Commandments called "Law of Love." (YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/fqv90OdkYEk) Pass out the lyric sheets to students and play the song or watch the video.

After playing the song, discuss the following questions:

1. What is a boundry?
2. Why are boundaries important in our lives?
3. What do you think "law of love" means?
4. Do you view God as a kind father or a cruel judge or something else entirely?
5. How do commandments help us know, love, and serve God better?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Challenge yourself to memorize the Ten Commandments! Here's the list in a simplified version to help get you started:

1. Worship and follow God alone.
2. Don't put other things in place of God.
3. Respect God's name.
4. Remember to take time to rest.
5. Respect your parents.
6. Don't kill.
7. Married couples should stay faithful to each other.
8. Don't steal.
9. Don't lie.
10. Don't crave what doesn't belong to you.

>> LAW OF LOVE BY COR WORSHIP COLLECTIVE

VERSE 1

Lord reveal who you are to me
Lord reveal what you've done for me
Lord reveal who I am to you
And who you are in me

CHORUS

Your boundaries fall in pleasant places
To guard us all from broken spaces
In the goodness of the father, Not the cruelty of a judge
Write on my heart your law of love

VERSE 2

Lord instill a mind of self-control
Lord instill your joy that overflows
A faithful heart, one of peace and patience
And a love that overwhelms

CHORUS

BRIDGE (x 3)

To know you. To love you, To serve you Lord

CHORUS (x 2)

TAG

Write on my heart your law of love
Write on my heart your law of love
Write on my heart your law of love

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT 6 | SESSION 3

Covenant with Community

>> **BIG IDEA:** As followers of God, we are called into covenant with other people.

>> **SUMMARY:** So far in EXPLORE, we've learned about the different covenants that God has made with humans: God made covenants with Noah, with Abraham and Sarai, with Isaac and Jacob, and then with all the people of Israel. But we are also called to be "in a covenant" with other followers of God: to love and support one another. Ruth is a great example of the type of covenant we are meant to have with other people. The covenant God makes with us, and asks us to make with other people, can be summarized in the two greatest commandments: Love God and Love others.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Ruth 1:11-18 (CEB)

11 Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters. Why would you go with me? Will there again be sons in my womb, that they would be husbands for you? 12 Turn back, my daughters. Go. I am too old for a husband. If I were to say that I have hope, even if I had a husband tonight, and even more, if I were to bear sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters. This is more bitter for me than for you, since the Lord's will has come out against me."
14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth stayed with her. 15 Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law."
16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do this to me and more so if even death separates me from you." 18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it.

Matthew 22:36-40 (CEB)
36 "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
37 He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your

being, and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, index cards, pens/pencils, paper

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This week's covenant is really all about how we love others. We see Ruth refusing to leave Naomi in her time of grief. And we see Jesus summarize all the other laws and commandments and covenants into a very simple concept, Love God and Love Others. What does it look like to love others well? What sacrifices are we willing to make to live in a covenant community with others?

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** In our final Covenant week with Explore students, we learned about Ruth's commitment and love for her mother-in-law Naomi. Jesus summarized this idea with the two greatest commandments, "Love God. Love Others." Continue the conversation at home with these questions:

- What does it look like to simply "Love God. Love Others." in your life?
- Have you ever had to give something up for a friend like Ruth?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Leah)
- B. Song reference: "You've Got a Friend in Me"
- C. Theme: friendship and promises

II. What is a Covenant?
- A. A powerful, relational promise
- B. Different from a contract (more personal)
- C. Focus: commitment to others

III. Biblical Story: Ruth and Naomi
- A. Tragedy: loss of husbands and family
- B. Naomi urges Ruth to leave
- C. Ruth's response: chooses to stay

IV. Ruth's Promise
- A. Loyalty and commitment to Naomi
- B. "Where you go, I will go..."
- C. Example of true friendship and covenant

V. Lesson from Ruth & Naomi
- A. Standing by someone in hard times
- B. Keeping promises through challenges
- C. God blesses faithful relationships

VI. Real-Life Application

A. Examples of keeping promises

1. Supporting friends
2. Helping family
3. Showing up consistently

B. Importance of commitment

VII. Jesus' Teaching on Love

A. Greatest commandments

1. Love God
2. Love your neighbor
3. Love yourself

B. Love as the foundation of covenant

VIII. Key Takeaway

A. Promises matter to God

B. Be a faithful friend to others

C. Live out love in relationships

IX. Conclusion

A. Encourage making and keeping promises

B. We need each other in life

C. Reminder: "You've got a friend in me"

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS

- Which friend would you choose to go on a road trip with? Where would you go?

>> ACTIVITY #1: PARTNER PICTURES

Each student is assigned a partner and sits back-to-back. One member is given a word or phrase from the Bible written on an index card (see list below for examples). They must describe the contents of the card to their partner without using any part of the word (like Catchphrase). You can give all groups the same phrase to guess or mix them up. Set a timer and once the time is up, share the answers.

Answer ideas:

- Jesus
- Mary, Mother of Jesus
- Cross
- 12 Disciples
- Moses
- Abraham and Sarah
- Ten Commandments
- Israelites
- Egypt
- Noah's Ark
- Resurrection

>> DISCUSSION:

Read: Ruth 1:11-18

- What was the covenant that Ruth made with Naomi?
- Why do you think Ruth stayed with Naomi instead of going back to her parents' home?
- How was Ruth faithful to God? How was she faithful to Naomi?
- How would you describe Ruth as a person?

Ask: Hopefully, we all have one friend in particular that comes to mind when we hear the song, "You've Got a Friend in Me."

- Who do you turn to in tough times? How do you support your friends when they are going through hard situations?

- What types of promises do we make to ourselves? (Example: New Year's Resolutions) What types of promises or covenants do we make with other people?
- What does it mean to be "faithful"? How can we be faithful to God? What does it look like to be faithful to other people?

Say: When you make these promises, know how important they are to people and what a difference it makes when you keep those promises and see them through.

Jesus knew the importance of letting others know that they have a friend in you. One that is willing to make a powerful promise, a covenant to go through all the ups and downs on the road trip of life and be there for one another in community.

Read: In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it. You must love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets depend on these two commands."

- Which is easier: to love God or to love others?
- Why is it important to have a community? How does your community support and encourage you?
- What sacrifices might we need to make for others in our community?

>> ACTIVITY #2: LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS

All of the covenants that we've talked about so far can be summed up in two basic agreements: We are called to **Love God** and **Love Others**. On your sheet of paper, draw a vertical line down the middle. On one side, write "God" and on the other side write "Other people." Then, below each column, list the ways we can show love—to God and to others around us.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Throughout this week, lift each other up! Send out a text, write a note, or say a prayer for someone else in your group. As a church and discipleship group, "covenant" together to love God and others.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 7: Jesus - Early Ministry

We love a good and relatable origin story! These two sessions covering Jesus' early ministry invites us to be a part of what God continues to do in our world today. Jesus chose to follow God and not give into temptation. We are invited to be baptized just as Jesus was baptized. We will face temptation just at Jesus was tempted. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit to share God's love just as Jesus taught others about God's love. Jesus invites us all to follow him.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Session 1 - Baptism and Temptation

Jesus starts his ministry with his baptism where God declares that Jesus is beloved and part of God's kingdom! After this powerful moment, Jesus is isolated and tempted over and over again in the desert. Jesus chose follow God and not give into temptation. That's HARD. Just like Jesus, we have a choice to follow God. We are invited to get baptized, and confirmed, and make a commitment to follow God. There will be times we are tempted to do things we shouldn't, and times when the wrong thing, will seem like the right thing. We have a choice! No matter what choice we make, we are not alone.

Session 2 – First Sermon and Calling Disciples

After Jesus comes out of the wilderness, he begins preaching and is well loved, until he says the prophecy from Isaiah has been fulfilled through him. People had been waiting years and years for the Messiah, and Jesus was saying that it was him! Not everyone was happy about that, and not everyone believed him. But Jesus continued his ministry, even though people didn't understand what he was doing. He began inviting people to follow him, who would become his disciples, his closest friends and followers. The cool thing about Jesus' disciples is that they were all so different from each other. They had different jobs, socio-economic classes, and backgrounds. Despite that, Jesus sought them out to follow him. Just like Jesus' disciples, we are all different, and Jesus invites each one of us to follow him. It doesn't matter who we are, or where we come from. God can use us in big ways!

UNIT 7 | SESSION 1

Baptism and Temptation

>> BIG IDEA: You are never alone.

>> SUMMARY: Jesus starts his ministry with his baptism where God declares that Jesus is beloved and part of the kingdom of God! After a time of celebration of being a part of the community of God, Jesus is isolated and tempted over and over again in the desert. Jesus made a choice to follow God and not give in to temptation. That's HARD. Just like Jesus, we have a choice to follow God. We are invited to get baptized, be confirmed, and make a commitment to follow God. There will be times when we are tempted to do things we shouldn't, and times when the wrong thing will seem like the right thing. We have a choice! No matter what choice we make, we are not alone.

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Matthew 3:13-17, CEB

1At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. John tried to stop him and said, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." So John agreed to baptize Jesus. 16 When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. 17 A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him."

Matthew 4:1-11 CEB

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God." After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone." Jesus replied, "Again it's written, don't test the Lord your God. "Then the devil brought him to a very high

mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me." Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him." The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

>> SUPPLY LIST: Bible, candy (or something hard to resist)

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students discussed Jesus' early ministry – his baptism and temptation. Continue the conversation at home with these questions:

- What is something that has tempted you in the past year?
- Remember that you are never alone! How can we help when you feel tempted?

* If your student has not been baptized yet, this is a good week to start that conversation.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Beach Story
- A. Family jumping into cold ocean water
- B. Hesitation vs. going "all in"
- C. Connection to baptism

II. What is Baptism?
- A. Symbol of going "all in" with God
- B. Acknowledging sin and new life
- C. Beginning of a life of purpose

III. Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3)
- A. John the Baptist hesitates
- B. Jesus insists
- C. God's affirmation: "Beloved Son"
- D. Holy Spirit descends

IV. John's Doubt → Imposter Syndrome
- A. Feeling unworthy to baptize Jesus
- B. Relatable feeling of self-doubt
- C. Jesus affirms calling and identity

V. Meaning of Baptism
- A. More than repentance → also "turning toward" God
- B. Entrance into community
- C. Joining the body of believers

VI. Community and Belonging
- A. Church promises to support one another
- B. Baptism = never alone
- C. Shared faith and encouragement

VII. Jesus' Temptation

A. Follows immediately after baptism
B. Jesus faces lies and challenges
C. Stands firm in truth and identity

VIII. Key Lesson

A. We will face temptation and doubt
B. Remember who we are in God
C. Lean on faith and community

IX. Application for Students

A. Consider baptism and commitment to God
B. Live out calling (peace, justice, love)
C. Trust you are never alone

X. Conclusion

A. God calls us into extraordinary lives
B. Jesus walked this path too
C. Encouragement: stand firm in faith and identity

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS

- If you were trapped in the wilderness, what is one thing you couldn't live without?

>> ACTIVITY #1: TEMPTATION PART 1

Have students stand up. As you read each would you rather question assign each point to the left, or right, of the room. Have them go to the side that corresponds to their answer.

Would you rather...

- Be imprisoned for over 2 years or be swallowed by a whale?
- Have a plague of locusts of a plague of frogs?
- Have heard one of Jesus' sermons or seen one of his miracles?
- Name the animals or build the ark?
- Face Goliath with only a stone and a slingshot or wander in the desert for 40 years?
- See Jesus walk on water or see him heal a blind man?
- Turn water into wine or rule over all kingdoms?
- Turn stones into bread or have 5 loaves and two fishes feed thousands of people?

>> ACTIVITY #2: TEMPTATION PART 2

At the beginning of the lesson, give each student a piece of candy. Students must unwrap the candy and place it in front of them for the entire class. The challenge is to resist eating it until the lesson is over! Any student who still has their candy at the end of class will earn three extra pieces of candy as a reward. Good luck resisting the temptation!

>> DISCUSSION:

Read: Matthew 3:13-17

- If you watched someone getting baptized and started to hear God talking, how would you react?
- Why do you think John wanted Jesus to baptize him?
- Why do you think Jesus wanted John to baptism him?

Read: Matthew 4:1-11

- Option 1: Choose a mentor to read the scripture. As you read each temptation, pause before you get to Jesus response. Have students guess what Jesus' response will be.
- Option 2: Choose a mentor to read the scripture. Give each student a piece of paper. On one side, have them write YES, and one side write NO. As you read each temptation, pause before you get to Jesus response. Have students vote what Jesus' response will be before you read it.

Ask:

- Vote by a raise of hands. Would it be easy or difficult for you to have God's powers and not use it? Ask two or three students to share why they voted the way they did.
- Jesus was tempted three times. To make food. To jump off a cliff and show that he wouldn't die. And to be given all the kingdoms and powers to rule. Which would be the hardest for you to say no to?
- What are things that other middle schoolers are tempted by?

>> ACTIVITY #2: TEMPTATION

For students who made it through the whole class without eating or touching their candy, offer them three pieces as their reward.

Ask: How easy was it to resist the temptation to eat the candy? Would there be a candy that was harder for you to resist?

WHO WAS TEMPTED?

Jesus isn't the only person we read about in scripture who was tempted. Have students brainstorm together different people who were tempted. Take time together to find their stories in scripture and talk about what their temptation was, and what they did.

Some examples:

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)
- Jonah and the Whale (Jonah 1)
- David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

Questions:

- What were they tempted with?
- What was their response?
- What could they have done differently?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

What is one way this week you can expand your community of trusted people? Examples: connecting with relatives, trying youth group, getting to know someone new, checking out a new-to-you club at school

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT 7 | SESSION 2

First Sermon and Calling Disciples

>> BIG IDEA: Jesus invites all of us to follow him.

>> SUMMARY: After Jesus comes out of the wilderness, he begins preaching and is well loved, until he says the prophecy from Isaiah has been fulfilled through him. People had been waiting years and years for the Messiah, and Jesus was saying that it was him! Not everyone was happy about that, and not everyone believed him. But Jesus continued his ministry, even though people didn't understand what he was doing. He began inviting people to follow him, who would be his disciples, his closest friends and followers. The cool thing about Jesus' disciples is that they were all so different from each other. They had different jobs, socio-economic classes, and backgrounds. Despite that, Jesus sought them out to follow him. Just like Jesus' disciples, we are all different, and Jesus invites each one of us to follow him. It doesn't matter who we are, or where we come from. God can use us in big ways!

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Luke 4:14-30 (CEB)

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?"

Then Jesus said to them, "Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum.'" He said, "I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet's hometown. And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah's time, when it didn't rain for three and a half years and there was a great food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed."

When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was filled with anger. They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way.

Luke 5:1-11(CEB)
One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch."

Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets."

So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner!"

Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, paper, pens/pencils

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students talked about Jesus' first sermon and calling his disciples. Even though all the disciples were very different, they were all equally called to follow Jesus. Continue the conversation at home with these questions:

- Why do you think it's important to have different types of people in a group together?
- What is different about following Jesus today rather than as one of the original disciples?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Recap: Jesus' baptism and time in the wilderness
- B. Reality: we all face temptation
- C. Transition: what happens next in Jesus' ministry

II. Doing Life Together
- A. Jesus didn't do ministry alone
- B. Some things are done alone vs. together
- C. Examples: sports, music, daily life

III. Personal Stories
- A. Biking story (challenge)
- B. Camping story (teamwork & different roles)
- C. Lesson: we need others

IV. Bible Story: Luke 5:1–11
- A. Jesus teaches by the lake
- B. Tells Simon Peter to fish again
- C. Huge, miraculous catch of fish
- D. Jesus calls them to follow Him

V. Key Point 1: Jesus Calls Everyone
- A. Invites all kinds of people
- B. Not just the "perfect" or expected
- C. Shows grace, love, and belief in everyone

VI. Key Point 2: Big Things Happen When We Follow
- A. Peter's failure turns into abundance
- B. Jesus works in powerful ways
- C. Real-life examples of transformation

VII. Living in Community
- A. Jesus lived and worked with disciples
- B. We are called to do life together
- C. Faith grows in community

VIII. Application
- A. Say "yes" to following Jesus
- B. Be open to who God brings into your life
- C. Expect God to do big things

IX. Conclusion
- A. Invitation to follow Jesus
- B. Question: what could your life look like?
- C. Encouragement: trust God with the journey

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Who is one person you would go anywhere with, no questions asked?

>> ACTIVITY #1 COPY CAT

Have students sit in a circle. Choose half of the group to close and cover their eyes. While their eyes are closed, a leader should quietly choose one student to be the "movement leader."

The movement leader will begin doing simple actions such as touching their elbow, clapping, making a silly face, or tapping their head. The rest of the students with their eyes open should copy the leader's movements without making it obvious who the leader is.

Once the movement leader has been chosen, have everyone open their eyes. The students who had their eyes closed must now watch the group carefully and try to figure out who the movement leader is while everyone continues copying the movements.

QUESTIONS:

- Was it easy or difficult to identify who the leader was? Why or why not?
- Were there moments you didn't like what the leader was doing and didn't participate?
- How did it feel to be a part of the group trying to figure out who the leader was?

>> DISCUSSION:

Read: Luke 4:14-30

- How would you react if someone random came into our church, got up on stage, and said "I am the one the Bible is talking about" and walked out?
- How would you react if someone you KNEW said that?
- How did the people react when Jesus did that?

Scripture Activity: Luke 5:1-11

- Option 1: Break students up into two groups of 6-10. Have them prepare a 'skit' based on the scripture. They can use the following roles. (Narrator, Jesus, Crowd, Simon Peter, James, John, extra fishermen help). Have each group perform their skit.
- Option 2: Select a few students to act the scripture out as you are reading using the following roles: Jesus, Crowd, Simon Peter, James, John, extra fishermen help. The 'audience' can be instructed to 'ooohhhh' 'ahhhh' and clap.

Discussion Questions:

- Fishermen typically weren't rich or famous, often they couldn't even read or write. Jesus still invited them to be disciples. Why would Jesus invite them to follow him?
- Jesus chose some pretty different kinds of people to be disciples. Why might Jesus have invited so many different kinds of people to follow him?
- Jesus invites all of us to follow him. What does that mean?

>> ACTIVITY #2: WHO ARE THEY

Option 1: Elijah and Elisha

Jesus references Elijah and Elisha. Who are they, and why does Jesus reference them. Take some time to learn about them by watching this video from the Gospel Project. The whole video is great, but it is long, consider watching it from 4:00-6:00 minutes.
>> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cY2s2IUq2T4 <<

Option 2: Disciples: Who were the people Jesus called disciples?

For this activity, split students into groups of two or three. Assign each group a disciple to research using a Bible.

Give students 5-10 minutes to look through a Bible to try and find as much as they can about their assigned disciple. This is a great time to practice using the concordance in the back of their Bible! Invite students to share what they learned with the rest of the groups. After each group shares, go through the discussion questions.

Discussion Questions:

- What is one thing that surprised you about the disciples of Jesus?
- What is one question you have about the people who followed Jesus?
- Did you notice anyone missing from Jesus disciples?
- What are some characteristics of people who might be a disciple of Jesus TODAY, if Jesus were on Earth right now?

>> ACTIVITY #2: (BONUS CONTENT) - THE DISCIPLES

There are some disciples we know a lot about, and some disciples we don't know much about at all! Think about why that might be.

Simon Peter was a fisherman, and Simon means rock. He walked on water, was the father of the church, and very close to Jesus.

James the Elder was son of Zebedee and the brother of John. He was a fisherman. John was also a son of Zebedee. The brother of James, banished to an island because of his ministry, called son of Thunder. He was a fisherman.

Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. He was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, but began to follow Jesus.

Bartholomew/Nathanael was from noble birth/royal blood.

James the Younger was the brother of Jude,

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and was the treasurer of the disciples.

Thaddeus was brother of James the younger.

Matthew was a tax collector.

Philip was probably a fisherman.

Thomas is sometimes known as Doubting Thomas because he asked Jesus to see the nail holes in his hands after resurrection.

Simon the Zealot was Jewish Nationalist (a zealot is someone fanatical about their religion) who followed Jesus.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

What is one step you can take to follow Jesus this week? Ex: pray, read the Bible, talk to a trusted person in your life about faith, go to church or youth group.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

Unit 8: Jesus – Ministry to Outcasts

One of the things that made Jesus so unique is that he ministered to all kinds of people, but we see Jesus spend a lot of time with people who were considered to be outcasts. For this unit, we will talk about three sets of people that Jesus spent time with, or spent time talking about, even though culturally, it didn't make sense. Lepers were often sent away from their communities and seen as unclean; however, Jesus went to them and healed them. Similarly, women were not seen as equal members of society; however, Jesus included them in his closest group of followers, and women are used to share the message of Christ with others. And Jesus makes a point to tell us that children have value, so much so that He even says that we should have childlike faith. Through this series we will learn stories that share the character of Jesus, and the love he had for all people.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Session 1 – Healing Lepers and Others

Today when we fall ill, we can go to the doctor, we can get medicine from the store, or we can take time to rest. In Biblical times, when you fell ill, it often meant losing your job, your home, and your family. Lepers were people who had leprosy, a highly contagious disease, and those individuals were often left alone and unable to be touched (remember COVID quarantine anyone?!). It was a very isolated place to be. People did not go near them because it would make them unclean. But Jesus did go near them. Not only did Jesus go near them, but he touched them. He healed them. He showed up for them. Jesus went to extraordinary lengths to let people know they were loved. Jesus' healing was a miracle in and of itself, but the other miracle was giving these people their lives back, after being sick and isolated from this disease. Not even illness can separate us from the love of Christ.

Session 2 – Including Women

Women are an integral part of Jesus ministry, even though women were not considered equal during the time that Jesus was teaching on Earth. We see Jesus include women as disciples, we see him show compassion to women, and we see Jesus reveal himself as the Messiah to women first.

Session 2 – Including Children

Often children are told they should be 'seen and not heard', but that isn't what Jesus said. As the disciples pushed the children away from Jesus, Jesus told them to let the children come to Him. Jesus made time to be with the children and show them that His love was there for them, and they were just as valuable to him as the adults. Jesus even shared with the disciples that we should have faith like a child. What does that mean, exactly? When we think about children we often think about optimism, joy, and love. Children have absolute faith in their parents, total and complete trust. Can you imagine what our lives would look like if our faith modeled those things? That total trust in God, and a life filled with optimism, joy, and love? What are things that we can do each week to make our faith, more childlike? Our age doesn't limit our relationship with Jesus.

UNIT 8 | SESSION 1

Healing Lepers and Others

>> BIG IDEA: Illness cannot separate us from the love of Christ

>> SUMMARY: Jesus went to extraordinary lengths to let people know they were loved. Jesus' healing was a miracle in and of itself, but the other miracle was giving these people their lives back, after being sick and isolated from this disease. Not even illness can separate us from the love of Christ.

>> SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19, John 5:1-18

John 5:1-18 CEB

After this there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.2 In Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate in the north city wall is a pool with the Aramaic name Bethsaida. It had five covered porches, 3 and a crowd of people who were sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed sat there.[a] 5 A certain man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing that he had already been there a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" 7 The sick man answered him, Sir,[b] I don't have anyone who can put me in the water when it is stirred up. When I'm trying to get to it, someone else has gotten in ahead of me. 8 Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. 10 The Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It's the Sabbath; you aren't allowed to carry your mat." 11 He answered, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" 12 They inquired, "Who is this man who said to you, 'Pick it up and walk'?"13 The man who had been cured didn't know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away from the crowd gathered there. 14 Later Jesus found him in the temple and said, "See! You have been made well. Don't sin anymore in case something worse happens to you." 15 The man went and proclaimed to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the man who had made him well. 16 As a result, the Jewish leaders were harassing Jesus, since he had done these things on the Sabbath. 17 Jesus replied, "My Father is still working, and I am working too." 18 For this reason the Jewish leaders wanted even more to kill him—

not only because he was doing away with the Sabbath but also because he called God his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

Matthew 8:1-4 CEB
Now when Jesus had come down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with a skin disease came, kneeled before him, and said,
"Lord, if you want, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched him,saying, "I do want to. Become clean." Instantly his skin disease was cleansed. 4 Jesus said to him, "Don't say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them."

Luke 8:43-48 CEB
43 A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spenther entire livelihood on doctors, but no one could heal her. 44 She came up behind him and touched the hem of his clothes, and at once her bleeding stopped. 45 "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When everyone denied it, Peter said,"Master, the crowds are surrounding you and pressing in on you!" 46 But Jesus said, "Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me." 47 When the woman saw that she couldn't escape notice, she came trembling and fell before Jesus. In front of everyone, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. 48 "Daughter, your faith has healed you," Jesus said. "Go in peace "

Luke 17:11-19
Jesus heals a Samaritan

11 On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, 13 they raised their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, show us mercy!"

14 When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they left, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. 16 He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus replied, "Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?" 19 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, Writing Utensils, Index Cards, Sharpies, Coloring Utensils

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This session talks about how Jesus heals people who were sick. Many of our students have, or have had, someone in their life who is sick and this could be difficult. Help them remember that just because someone wasn't healed, doesn't mean they aren't loved. And it doesn't mean that God doesn't hear our prayers.

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students discussed how Jesus ministered to lepers and outcasts. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Why can it be difficult to befriend someone who is different than you?
- How can we show love to someone else this week?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Being Sick & Isolated
- A. Examples of sickness and staying away from others
- B. Personal story: COVID-19 isolation
- C. Feeling lonely and disconnected

II. Biblical Context: Leprosy
- A. Serious, contagious skin disease
- B. People were cast out of society
- C. Forced to live in isolation ("unclean")

III. The Reality of Isolation
- A. No contact with others
- B. Feelings of shame, fear, and loneliness
- C. Life on the margins

IV. Jesus Heals One Man
- A. Man asks Jesus for healing
- B. Shows faith: Jesus can heal
- C. Jesus touches him and heals him

V. Why This Matters
- A. Jesus chose to touch the outcast
- B. Shows compassion and care
- C. Values the person, not just the healing

VI. Jesus Heals Ten People
- A. Group calls out for mercy
- B. Jesus responds and heals them
- C. Pattern: Jesus seeks the outcasts

VII. Key Lesson
- A. Jesus does not avoid the broken or sick
- B. He sees, loves, and restores them
- C. Nothing separates people from His love

VIII. Application
- A. We all experience isolation or struggle
- B. Jesus sees and cares about us
- C. Bring struggles to Him

IX. Conclusion
- A. Jesus bridges the gap of isolation
- B. Encouragement: be bold and open with Him
- C. Reminder: you are never alone

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If you have new students, considering opening with an extra question like, 'what is your favorite candy?'

>> OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

- If you could stay home with your family for two weeks with nowhere to go, what would you do?
- If you could create a cure to any illness, what illness would you cure?

>> ACTIVITY #1(PART 1): USING OUR HANDS

Supplies : Paper or Index Cards, Writing Utensils, Coloring Utensils
Have students trace their hands and then color them in. Let them know that later they will need to write something on their hand.

Discussion:
Sometimes people are treated differently because of their life choices, appearances, or because they are sick.

- When someone is sick, how do people respond? Why do you think they respond that way?
- When you are feeling sick, and alone, what are some things to help you feel better? (they might answer things like soup or ginger-ale, the doctor, but help them get to the place that having someone care about them might help)

Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19

- What did Jesus do to show the lepers love? How was that different than how other people treated him?
- What do you think the lepers were thinking when Jesus told them to go get examined by the priests, but they hadn't even been healed yet?
- How did the lepers respond to Jesus after he showed them love?
- Jesus didn't heal every sick person in every city--what do you think it looks like to have faith in Jesus even if healing hasn't happened yet?
- How can you show love to people you know that are sick?
- The lepers asked and hoped for healing, what do you hope Jesus will do in your life?

>> ACTIVITY #1 (PART 2): HELPING HANDS

Supplies : Sharpies

In the scriptures we read today, Jesus reached his hands out to the lepers, and those who needed healed, when no one else would. Just like that, God uses us to be God's hands and feet in the world. There are people in our lives, every day, who are feeling left out,and alone. How can we reach out to them, just like Jesus did? Help students to consider people in their world who might need someone to reach out to them as well as ways they can do that. Once you think of someone, write their name in the palm of the hand you decorated earlier.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Do something kind for someone in your life. Make them cookies, send them a note that you are thinking about them, draw them a picture. Let them know that you care about them, and they are not alone.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

Including Women

>> **BIG IDEA:** Our gender doesn't define how God can use us.

>> **SUMMARY:** Women are an integral part of Jesus ministry, even though women were not considered equal during the time that Jesus was teaching on Earth. We see Jesus include women as disciples, we see him show compassion to women, and we see Jesus reveal himself as the Messiah to women first.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Luke 10:38-42
Jesus visits Martha and Mary

38 While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. 40 By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me."

41 The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. 42 One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her."

John 20:11-18
Jesus appears to Mary

11 Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. 12 She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. 13 The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him.”
14 As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I've seen the Lord.” Then she told them what he said to her.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bibles, Index cards, Writing Utensils

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Gender equality is something that everyone has different opinions on. The important thing to remember is how different the culture was during the time of Jesus. Women were treated as second class citizens, and for Jesus to include them in roles of leadership was significant!

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students discussed how Jesus ministered to women, which was unexpected during this time in history. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- Share about a woman you admire, and why you admire them.
- Ask your student what field they would like to go into, in the future. Together, research some women who are leaders and innovators in that field.

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction

A. Childhood question: Were there women disciples?
B. Wondering: Could women follow Jesus too?

II. Key Truth

A. Yes—there were women disciples
B. Jesus did not limit people by gender
C. Disciples = followers of Jesus

III. Women in Jesus' Ministry
- A. Named women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna
- B. "Many others" followed Jesus
- C. Supported His ministry with time and resources

IV. Example: Mary (Sister of Martha)
- A. Sat at Jesus' feet like a disciple
- B. Unusual for women in that culture
- C. Jesus affirms her choice

V. Example: Mary Magdalene
- A. Healed and transformed by Jesus
- B. Faithful follower and leader
- C. Present at crucifixion
- D. First to witness and share the resurrection

VI. Key Lesson
- A. Women were active, important disciples
- B. Jesus valued and included them
- C. God uses all people

VII. Today's Application
- A. Women continue to lead in the church
- B. Following Jesus is for everyone
- C. Gender does not limit your calling

VIII. Conclusion
- A. Jesus welcomes all to follow Him
- B. Everyone has a role in God's story
- C. Encouragement: step into your calling

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If you have new students, considering opening with an extra question like, 'what is your favorite candy?'

>> OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

- If someone were to write a book on important faithful figures today, which women would be included? Why?
- Who is a woman in your life who has made an impact? How or why?

>> ACTIVITY #1: FAMOUS WOMEN

Supplies : Paper or Index Cards, Writing Utensils

Pre-make index cards or sticky notes with the names of famous women for students to hold up to their foreheads (they shouldn't look at what is written on the card!). Have students walk around asking yes/no questions about the name of the person they are holding up to try to guess who is on their card.

Examples of Famous Women

- Beyonce
- Taylor Swift
- Freya Skye
- Annabeth Chase
- Katniss Everdeen
- Moana
- Lo'eau LaBonta
- Ilona Maher
- Chappell Roan
- Gracie Abrams
- Olivia DeanMichelle Obama
- Caitlin Clark
- Hermoine Granger / Emma Watson
- Princess Leia
- Olivia Rodrigo
- Alysa Liu
- Billie Eilish
- Ariana Grande
- Miley Cyrus
- Sabrina Carpenter

>> DISCUSSION:

During the time that Jesus was alive, women weren't always treated with the same respect as men were.

- What is something new that you learned about women in scripture from the teaching time?
- Where have you seen women in roles of leadership or teaching within our church community? How might our church look different if there weren't any women in leadership?

Read Luke 10:38-42 and John 20:11-18

- If you had to choose between sitting and listening to you teacher, or preparing food in the kitchen and cleaning, what would you choose, and why?
- Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, just like the male disciples, while Martha was in the kitchen preparing. What was Jesus' response? Why do you think he responded this way?
- Who was it that saw the resurrected Jesus first? How do you think Mary felt when she saw Jesus alive again?
- Why might it be important that scripture tells us the name of the person that saw Jesus first?

>> ACTIVITY #2: BIBLE EXPLORE

Break students into groups and give each group a Bible. Challenge students to race to find how many books of the bible are named after a woman. (Hint, there are two! Ruth and Esther) Have students show you the open page number!

Although three are only two books in the Bible named after women, we see women woven into the story of God from the very beginning. There are 188-205 women named throughout scripture (depending on the Bible translation you're reading). Throughout the story of God, God uses all kinds of people to impact the world, and the people. God used people of all ages, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. God used people who were sick, well, and people who didn't always make the right choices. Gender doesn't define how God can use us!

- Why do you think there are only two books named after women?
- How many women from the Bible can you name?
- How can we be more intentional about lifting up everyone in our community?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Send a note to a woman in your life that is important to you!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT 8 | SESSION 3

Including Children

>> **BIG IDEA:** Age doesn't limit our relationship with Jesus.

>> **SUMMARY:** Jesus shared with the disciples that we should have faith like a child. When we think about children we often think about optimism, joy, and love. Children have absolute faith in their parents, total and complete trust. Can you imagine what our lives would look like if our faith modeled those things? That total trust in God, and a life filled with optimism, joy, and love? What are things that we can do each week to make our faith, more childlike? Our age doesn't limit our relationship with Jesus.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Luke 10:38-42
Matthew 19:13-14
Jesus blesses children
13 Some people brought children to Jesus so that he would place his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded them. 14 "Allow the children to come to me," Jesus said. "Don't forbid them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children."

Matthew 18:1-4
Greatest in the kingdom

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 Then he called a little child over to sit among the disciples, 3 and said, "I assure you that if you don't turn your lives around and become like this little child, you will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Those who humble themselves like this little child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** none

>> MENTOR NOTES: Students mature at different rates. Some students might still act like children at home, play with toys, and have the same childlike faith they did when they were younger. Some students might reject things about childhood seeing them as 'baby-ish'. Help them to understand that having childlike faith isn't about being a child. It is about how we perceive and experience the world around us!

>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week Explore students discussed how Jesus invites us to have a childlike faith and experience joy and love as fully as we did as a young child. Here are a few connection points to keep the conversation going at home:

- What brings you the most joy in your life?
- Share about a time where you had to trust God. What happened? How did you feel?
- Look at baby pictures together and share your favorite memories of your child as a baby.

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction
- A. Speaker introduction (Caitlyn)
- B. Personal story: oldest of 9 siblings
- C. Relating to how kids can feel "in the way"

II. Bible Story: Jesus Welcomes Children (Matthew 19:13–14)
- A. Children brought to Jesus
- B. Disciples try to send them away
- C. Jesus says: let the children come
- D. Message: children matter to Jesus

III. Key Lesson #1
- A. Kids are not less important
- B. Their relationship with Jesus matters
- C. Age does not limit faith

IV. Personal Connection
- A. Caitlyn's struggle with feeling "too young"
- B. Learning that she is enough
- C. Encouragement for students

V. Bible Teaching: Faith Like a Child (Matthew 18:1–4)
- A. Disciples ask who is greatest
- B. Jesus points to a child
- C. Calls for humility and childlike faith

VI. What Childlike Faith Looks Like
- A. Trust in God
- B. Joy, optimism, and love
- C. Going to God for needs

VII. Application

A. Your age does not limit your faith
B. You matter to Jesus right now
C. Live with trust and joy like a child

VIII. Conclusion

A. Jesus values everyone, including kids
B. Childlike faith is powerful
C. Encouragement: pursue Jesus fully

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If you have new students, considering opening with an extra question like, 'what was your favorite vacation?'

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is your favorite childhood memory?
- If you have siblings, what are the best and most challenging parts of having siblings? If you're an only child, what do you think might be the best and most challenging parts of having siblings?

>> ACTIVITY #1: BIRTHDAY LINE UP

Have students, without talking, get in Birthday order. Once the students are all in order, have them go one by one to share their birthday to see if they are in order.

- Was it difficult to figure out what order to go in? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt like, or been told, you couldn't do something because you were the youngest? How did that feel?
- If you could be any age, forever, what age would that be?

>> DISCUSSION

During the time that Jesus was alive, women weren't always treated with the same respect as men were, and children were often overlooked

- Who are some adults you know who have done incredible things to change the world?
- Can you name some children and teens who have done incredible things to impact the world?
- Was it easier to come up with names of adults who have impacted the world, or teens? Why?

Review the lists of teens who have impacted the world in the links below. Pick two or three to share that you think might resonate with your group.

Read about *Teens who Make the World Better*
https://www.forbes.com/sites/meimeifox/2022/09/28/6-teens-who-make-the-world-a-better-place/?sh=1b659cb076f9

Read about *Teen Titans*
https://www.forbes.com/sites/meimeifox/2023/11/05/teen-titans-13-young-people-making-an-outsized-positive-impact/

Read about *Resurrection Student, Sammie Magee!*
https://www.kmbc.com/article/kansas-city-teen-donate-toys-children-uvalde-texas/45826942

Matthew 19:13-14, Matthew 18:1-4

- When you think about children, what are some things that you think about?
- When Jesus tells us to have faith like a child, what do you think he means? Think about the characteristics we just talked about.
- What did Jesus do in the story, to show the disciples that the children were valued? Why did that matter?
- What does the word 'humble' mean? What did Jesus mean when he said to humble himself like a child?

>> ACTIVITY #1: TRUST FALL

For this activity, students will participate in a simple trust fall exercise. Partner students up and have them decide who will go first. One student will stand with their arms crossed over their chest while their partner stands closely behind them in a stable stance, ready to catch them safely. The student falling should keep their body straight and fall backward slowly, trusting their partner to catch and steady them. After one turn, students should switch roles. Remind students to be respectful, focused, and careful so everyone feels safe and supported during the activity.

- Let's talk about the experience! Was it good? Bad? Easy? Difficult?
- Who is someone in your life you would trust without a doubt that they were there? How do you know you can rely on them?
- Make a list: What are some things that children trust parents to do when they are little? (When children are little, they rely a lot on their parents and guardians to take care of them. When that is done healthy, there is a deep level of trust between a parent and a child. We know that not all students will have a healthy level of trust with their families)
- Looking at the list of things we trust our parents with, is there anything that we could trust God with?
- Why might it be easier to trust our parents, or people in our lives, before we trust God?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Think about ways that you can serve children in your faith community.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 9: Jesus – Famous Parables

Jesus told many parables that we continue to learn from. The three in this unit emphasize the concept: Go, Be, Go. The first, is about going and following Jesus' example, the second is about creating a specific state of mind, and the last is once again about living a life that matches Jesus' words. Go, Be, Go. We've got work to do!

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Session 1- Good Samaritan
Many of us are familiar with the parable, but do we live like we're familiar with it? After Jesus shared this parable, He said to those listening, "Go and do likewise. "How is being a "Good Samaritan" a part of your daily lifestyle? In what ways do you need to incorporate more actions in your life that compel you to get up and "Go" as Jesus instructed us? What does "likewise" look like in your life?

Session 2 - Sewer & Seeds
We've all got different learning styles, and listening can be tough, but we are called to "Be good soil" and that's the kind of soil that can take a seed and produce a good crop. That means we have to take the seeds of knowledge and wisdom that Jesus gives us, listen and absorb them, and then make something of them in our lives. "Being good soil" is a state of mind, it's something we become before we can do. What will "be"-ing look like for you?

Session 2 - The Banquet
In the parable about the banquet, Jesus shares a story about a rich man who had to reevaluate his idea of a party when his friends didn't show up for the party. In the story, the host ends up saying, "Go out...and compel people to come in!" That's our job, to invite people into the wonderful party we live in as followers of Christ! What will it take for you to live an invitational life where it's part of your lifestyle to "go out and invite?"

UNIT 9 | SESSION 1

Good Samaritan

>> **BIG IDEA:** Go and Do Likewise

>> **SUMMARY:** Many of us are familiar with the parable, but do we live like we're familiar with it? After Jesus shared this parable, He said to those listening, "Go and do likewise. "How is being a "Good Samaritan" a part of your daily lifestyle? In what ways do you need to incorporate more actions in your life that compel you to get up and "Go" as Jesus instructed us? What does "likewise" look like in your life?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Luke 10:25-37 (CEB)
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."

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."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Paper, pens, markers

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Parables are a very specific type of story that Jesus used often to communicate concepts. Who Jesus is telling the parable to, matters just as much as what Jesus is sharing within the parable. Be sure to spend time identifying why that specific parable would matter to the specific audience that would have been hearing it.

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction
- A. Leah shares a scene from a favorite show
- B. Rivals become compassionate in a moment of need
- C. Theme: showing love when someone is hurting

II. Real-Life Struggles
- A. Examples: bullying, illness, anxiety, isolation
- B. We all face or witness difficult situations
- C. It can be hard to know how to respond

III. Bible Story: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10)
- A. Man is beaten and left hurt
- B. Priest and Levite ignore him
- C. Samaritan (an unlikely helper) stops and helps

IV. Key Teaching from Jesus
- A. "Go and do likewise"
- B. Be a true neighbor to others
- C. Show mercy and compassion

V. What "Go" Means
- A. Live with awareness of others
- B. Notice people in need
- C. Don't ignore or avoid them

VI. What "Do Likewise" Means
- A. Take action to help
- B. Give time, care, and kindness
- C. Be willing to be inconvenienced

VII. Key Lesson

A. Help others "even if..."

1. They are different
2. They've hurt you
3. They're not popular

B. Everyone deserves love and care

VIII. Personal Story

A. Leah was bullied growing up

B. Someone unexpected helped her

C. That act of kindness changed her life

IX. Application

A. Look for people who need help

B. Show love through actions

C. Small acts can make a big difference

X. Conclusion

A. Be a "Good Samaritan" in daily life

B. Ask: Who needs my help?

C. Challenge: Go and do likewise

>>

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Who is your favorite villain from TV, books, movies, or comics? Why?
- Tell us about a time you saw two enemies work together.

>> ACTIVITY #1 (SCRIPTURE):

Turn your group into a troupe of storytellers! Assign all the roles (but make sure everyone commits and gives it their all): The expert, Jesus, the Narrator, Good Samaritan, The man who was attacked, the robbers, a priest, a Levite, the Inn Keeper, and of course, the audience.

Act Out: Luke 10:25-37 using your Narrator, actors, and audience (mentors, you're the directors and executive producers!).

>> DISCUSSION:

- What were the two things The Expert knew already? How should these two things fit into our lives?
- What do you think The Expert expected Jesus to say when he asked Him who his neighbor was?
- How does the story of the Good Samaritan do what's described in Luke 10:27?
- What is a priest and what is a Levite? Why is who those characters are and their jobs significant to this story?
- What do you think the Inn Keeper was thinking when the Samaritan brought in the man in need? How would you have reacted if you were the Inn Keeper?
- Jesus said that the Good Samaritan showed mercy, so what IS mercy (feel free to have the students use phones to look it up)?

>> ACTIVITY #2: P. O. P. (PEOPLE ON PATH)

Supplies: Paper/Pens/Markers

Each student should design a one-week calendar. Once students have designed their calendar, instruct them to write down their regular routine for each day—where they usually go, and what they usually do.

After they've filled in their individual details, have them highlight, start, or otherwise identify which items include opportunities for them to come across people in need or People on their Path (P. o. P.). Have them write "Go and do likewise" on their pages. If they struggle to identify those items, have them switch with someone else to use their eyes and perspective.

Your path is wherever God has already placed you — your school, team, lunch table, friend group, neighborhood, and family.

Here are some examples of how they can support people on their path. Encourage them to come up with ways they can engage with P.o.P (People on their Path) :

- Sitting with someone new at lunch
- Including someone who is left out during games or group work
- Encouraging a friend who is having a hard day
- Helping a younger sibling or neighbor
- Listening to someone instead of just waiting to talk
- Standing up for someone being picked on
- Thanking teachers, coaches, or bus drivers
- Praying for friends and asking how they can support them
- Showing kindness online instead of joining negativity
- Offering to help someone with homework or a project
- Talking to the student who always seems alone
- Being patient and respectful with parents or siblings

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think made the Good Samaritan stop in his tracks and help the person on his path who was hurting and in need?
- We might not always come across people on our paths who are physically hurting but what are some of the other needs people around us might have?
- What are the ways people have helped you or your friends in the past?
- What are some ways you can be a Good Samaritan in your life? Write them down on specific days on your calendar!

The next time you drink your favorite soda pop, keep the bottle or can, rinse it out and place it somewhere you can use it to remind yourself to keep People on your Path on your mind! Use a sharpie or a sticky note to add people's names on the can as you encounter them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Make a list in your phone or on a sticky note of people on your path you can be a "Good Samaritan" to.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT 9 | SESSION 2

Sewer & Seeds

BIG IDEA: Be Good Soil.

SUMMARY: We've all got different learning styles, and listening can be tough, but we are called to "Be good soil" and that's the kind of soil that can take a seed and produce a good crop. That means we have to take the seeds of knowledge and wisdom that Jesus gives us, listen and absorb them, and then make something of them in our lives. "Being good soil" is a state of mind, it's something we become before we can do. What will "be"-ing look like for you?

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Matthew 13:1-8 (CEB)
1 That day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he climbed into a boat and sat down. The whole crowd was standing on the shore.

3 He said many things to them in parables: "A farmer went out to scatter seed. 4 As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep. 6 But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. 7 Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. 8 Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one.

Matthew 13: 22-23 (CEB)
22 As for the seed that was spread among thorny plants, this refers to those who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the false appeal of wealth choke the word, and it bears no fruit. 23 As for what was planted on good soil, this refers to those who hear and understand, and bear fruit and produce—in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one."

>>**SUPPLY LIST:** Check the weather to see if a walk outside is possible with the forecast. If not, use a phone to google famous gardens as imagery for your discussion.

>>**MENTOR NOTES:** Look up a brief summary of learning styles. Identify which you feel is your learning style and brief examples of what it looks like for each learning style to actually absorb information.

>>**PARENT CONNECTION:** Encourage parents to share with their student a time when they struggled to thrive or understand a concept.

>>**VIDEO OUTLINE:**

I. Introduction: Gardening Story

A. Blake started a garden last year and faced challenges (squirrels, birds, poor growth)
B. Learned to improve with research, fences, and compost
C. Key idea: Environment and care impact growth

II. Connection to Faith

A. Just like gardening, our faith grows best in the right environment
B. Participating in worship, prayer, and Bible reading helps our spiritual life flourish

III. Bible Passage: Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9, 19-23)

Farmer scatters seeds in four types of soil:

1. Path – seeds eaten by birds → purpose comes and goes
2. Rocky ground – seeds sprout but die quickly → purpose is short-lived
3. Thorny plants – seeds choked → purpose not strong enough
4. Good soil – seeds grow and produce fruit → purpose is understood and lived out

IV. Main Message of the Parable

A. People respond to God's Word in different ways
B. Our goal: be good soil – understand God's purpose and live it out
C. Distractions and shallow focus can prevent growth

V. Illustration: Band vs. Math Example

A. Band = good soil → engaged, rooted, and productive
B. Math = scattered seeds → unengaged, little growth
C. Choosing how we engage with God's Word affects the fruit in our lives

VI. How to Be "Good Soil"

A. Remove distractions – focus on God's Word
B. Read the Bible – learn wisdom and guidance
C. Connect with others – support and be supported in faith

VII. Conclusion / Application

A. Being good soil allows God's message to impact your heart and life
B. Your life can produce goodness when rooted in Jesus' teachings
C. Challenge: Notice God's work around you and choose to grow in faith

[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>>OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

- Anyone who has any gardening experience, share your best tips/tricks and what types of plants you've grown.
- Share your favorite fruit and vegetable versus your least favorite fruits/veggies.

>>DISCUSSION

What is something you learned from the teaching time, that was brand new, or you heard in a different way?

Read Matthew 13:1-7; 22-23
Select one or two students to open to these passages and read them (from a Bible if you have some in your group or have them find it on their phones).

1. What's the first place the seeds fell in the scripture and what happened to those seeds (Path/Birds)?
2. Where's the second place the seeds fell (Rocky/not enough soil)? What happens to seeds that don't have enough soil to grow? What happens to plants that grow in shallow soil when the sun comes up?
3. Where's the third place the seeds fell and what happened to the plants that did grow there?
4. Where's the last place the seeds finally grew?

>>ACTIVITY: TAKE A HIKE

If the weather is nice, head outside. Take a moment to discuss the ideas Jesus shared in the parable (Bonus points if you and the students can find areas that are similar to what Jesus described in scripture):

- Why do plants grow best in gardens/grass and not gravel?
- What do you think should be planted in the perfect garden?

(Feel free to experience the rest of your group outside or head back inside to keep the students in motion)

>> DISCUSSION

Re-read Matthew 13:22

- What are the "worries of this life" that can distract us from hearing and understanding God and God's Word?
- Why can having a lot of money be a distraction from our relationship with God? How can people use wealth for good?

Re-read Matthew 13:23

- What does it mean to "be good soil?"
- How can being good soil produce good things in your life and the lives of others?
- What's one thing you can do this week to "Be" good soil?

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> CHALLENGE:

Snap a picture of your favorite flower/plant out and about and save it as the home screen on your phone as reminder to Be Good Soil

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

>>

UNIT 9 | SESSION 2

Sewer & Seeds

BIG IDEA: Go out and invite

SUMMARY: In the parable about the banquet, Jesus shares a story about a rich man who had to reevaluate his idea of a party when his friends didn't show up for the party. In the story, the host ends up saying, "Go out...and compel people to come in!" That's our job, to invite people into the wonderful party we live in as followers of Christ! What will it take for you to live an invitational life where it's part of your lifestyle to "go out and invite?"

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Luke 14:15-24 (CEB)

15 When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus' remarks, he said to Jesus, "Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom."

16 Jesus replied, "A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. 17 When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, 'Come! The dinner is now ready.'18 One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, 'I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19 Another said, 'I bought five teams of oxen, and I'm going to check on them. Please excuse me.' 20 Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' 21 When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.' 22 The servant said, 'Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.' 23 The master said to the servant, 'Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

SUPPLY LIST: Pens, markers, paper

>>MENTOR NOTES: In this day and age, it can be difficult to balance being safe with being able to extend invitations to others. Before your group time, brainstorm some safe ways students can extend invitations in their context so you can help them brainstorm or share those ideas with them.

>>PARENT CONNECTION:

Encourage parents to think about how they might help facilitate their student

- Safely having an inviting spirit with others and
- How they might help their student bring a friend to church.

>>VIDEO OUTLINE:

I. Introduction: Invitations & Excuses

A. We all experience:
   1. Not wanting to do something and making excuses
   2. Wanting others to join us, but they decline

B. Personal story: Watching KU Jayhawks championship game alone at Buffalo Wild Wings

II. Bible Story: Luke 14:15-23

A. Jesus at a Sabbath party:
   1. He heals someone; guests question Him
   2. Guests argue over places of honor

B. Jesus tells a parable instead of directly scolding:
   1. A man throws a party, invites friends → all make excuses
   2. He then invites everyone else, even outsiders → the point is inclusion

III. Main Message: Invite Everyone

A. Everyone deserves an invitation → makes people feel valued

B. Deeper meaning: God invites everyone to His "party"
   1. Verse 23: "Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in..."
   2. God includes everyone, and we are called to invite others too

IV. Personal Example: Extending Invitations

A. After KU game, Steve created a social media invite for anyone to join

B. Invited someone sitting alone → built new friendships

C. Lesson: Inviting others is rewarding and inclusive

V. Application for Students

A. Look for people around you who might need an invitation:
   1. Lunchroom, classes, clubs, sports teams

C. See people like God sees them → worthy of inclusion

D. Action: Go out and invite → be the person who includes everyone

[Small Group Time]

>>INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>>OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

- If you could throw the most incredible party ever, what would it look like? What musician would play—what activities would you do for fun?
- What is the last event you had to bail on and what was your reason?

>>DISCUSSION:

Read or paraphrase the following to students:
There are two important parts to a parable, the audience and the story.

Here the audience is a group of holier than thou religious people who really focused on doing the right things to look and be religious more than doing it to have a better relationship with God. In your context, this would look like going to church/youth group, getting confirmed, being an acolyte, showing up for serve projects...but not using those opportunities to connect to God or know God better. Even though all of those things are great, and they help you grow in your faith, faith isn't just about doing a bunch of religious things. It's about accepting God's love, and then sharing it with others.

Ask:

- Why can it be tough to keep things real vs just being real religious? How can you tell the difference between the two?

That brings us to today's story—Jesus watched all of those religious folks attempt to be the most honorable and most honored person at a dinner table. They argued over whom should get the main seat of honor and then argued over who should sit next to that most honored person based on how honorable they were...and on...and on...so basically the person they determined deserved the least amount of respect was all the way at the end of the table.

Ask:

- What are some ways we determine who should be shown honor in our culture?

Jesus watched all that go down and then told a story about a guy preparing a great big feast. He invited all of the proper people that you'd expect him to invite to a feast, but when he started getting all the RSVPs back everyone made excuses.

Read: Luke 14:15-24 (Have a few students take turns reading the passage)

- What are the various excuses people made for not attending the party? Do you think those excuses were valid or flaky? Why or why not?
- What are ways that people can disappoint us, in this day and age, by not showing up?
- What are some ways people can deal with that kind of disappointment?

The host rethought what it means to have a party—because sometimes, it's better to show kindness to those who rarely experience it.

- If your life and faith all make up one big party, who can you invite to join in (Someone who hasn't gotten a chance to experience the kind of love God offers...)?
- What can you do in your life to make sure you are always welcoming and honoring others?

>>HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>>CHALLENGE:

Identify someone who you should invite to experience kindness this week and brainstorm three ways you can invite them in!

>>JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.

UNIT OVERVIEW

Seasonal

Use these sessions whenever they work for your team's schedule.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Advent – Good Tidings and Great Joy
In this session, students will use ***A Charlie Brown Christmas*** to discuss key passages from Luke and John as they explore God's love and resulting joy. This session uses a lot of family/heritage content to talk about how we are all made in the image of God and how we can see the characteristics of God reflected in us.

Lent - Understanding Sacrifice
Sacrifice can be a topic that's difficult to understand, because why would someone give up their life for someone else? But students have likely witnessed sacrifice in their lives. Their parents giving up something for them, lives sacrificed in movies—it isn't a foreign concept. What made Jesus' sacrifice different is that usually sacrifices are for people you know and love. Jesus didn't know us at all. Help students to understand that the reason Jesus did this was out of an enormous amount of love and care for us.

SEASONAL

Advent – Good Tidings and Great Joy

>>BIG IDEA: We don't have to fear because God's love bring great joy.

>>SUMMARY: In this session, students will use ***A Charlie Brown Christmas*** to discuss key passages from Luke and John **as they** explore God's love and resulting joy. This session uses a lot of family/**heritage** content to talk about how we are all made in the image of God **and** how we can see the characteristics of God reflected in us.

>>SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Luke 2:8-14

2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to
their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family
line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem,
in Judea. 5 He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in
marriage and who was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for Mary
to have her baby. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly,
and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.
Announcement to shepherds 8 Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding
their sheep at night. 9 The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone
around them, and they were terrified. 10 The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring
good news to you— wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11 Your savior is born
today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord.12 This is a sign for you: you will find a
newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great assembly
of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 "Glory to God in
heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

John 3:16-17

16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in
him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to
judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

>>SUPPLY LIST: Whiteboard & dry erase markers/sheet of paper/writing utensils, Electronic device to watch a YouTube video, comic strip activity print outs.

>>MENTOR NOTES: This session uses a lot of family/heritage content to talk about how we are all made in the image of God - how we can see the characteristics of God reflected in us. Please be sensitive to those with unique family situations and even feel free to talk about how some traits are passed along through nurture rather than nature.

>>PARENT CONNECTION:

Ask parents to encourage their student to:

- Share one unique item of joy each day. It can be something that brings them joy or something that brings others joy.
- Causes someone to be joyful by helping them or complementing them sincerely.

>>

[Small Group Time]

>>INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>>OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

1.What's your favorite Christmas tradition and why?
2.Which Christmas movie is your favorite?

>>SESSION OVERVIEW:

The 1965 Charles Schultz special A Charlie Brown Christmas features the beloved character Linus reciting straight from the book of Luke. He rattles of six verses in an effort to help his friend Charlie Brown learn "what Christmas is all about." In Luke we read of angels bringing tidings of good news and great joy to a group of shepherds at night. The shepherds were afraid at first--a normal reaction we experience in our world today--fear. We fear our troubled times, our futures, our circumstances, and much more. But the angels quickly told the shepherds to set aside their fear in place of the Good News they had to share. The Good News is summed up in chapter three verse 16 of the Gospel of John: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

In the classic Christmas tale, A Charlie Brown Christmas, the Peanuts character Linus famously tells Charlie Brown what Christmas is all about.

Linus doesn't tell him about Santa or reindeer, he doesn't tell him about Hallmark stories or about having the best Christmas decorations. rations. Linus takes the stage and quotes--from memory--Luke 2:8-14.

Now if you don't know much about the character of Linus, he's the youngest in his friend group and still walks around with his security blanket or what many kids nowadays would call a "lovey."

In the peanuts crew, Linus is young but very wise. He still has some little kid tendencies, but he also understands and thinks really big thoughts. Sometimes the other kids in the crew make fun of him for sucking his thumb or being attached to his security blanket, but he always has something smart to contribute to whatever situation they find themselves in.

Linus uses his wisdom to help Charlie Brown understand what Christmas is all about by sharing a story straight out of the Bible. In the cartoon movie, Linus stands up, still holding his "lovey," takes his thumb out of his mouth and starts off by reciting verses 8 and 9 of chapter 2.

Read Luke 2:8-9
It's pretty likely that Linus knew a little bit about being afraid, especially being someone who carries a security blanket as a kid.

Discussion Questions:

1. What item were you or kids you knew attached to when you were younger?
2. What were some of the things you were scared of as a little kid?
3. Why do you think the angels told the shepherds not to be afraid?
4. What are some things you think people were afraid of during Bible times?
5. [Use a whiteboard or sheet of paper to jot down:] What fears do you think people struggle with in this day and age?

Read Luke 2:10

Discussion Questions:
1.What about this verse do you think helped give Linus the confidence to drop his security blanket even though he was speaking in front of a group of people?
2.How is it possible for good news to overtake our fears?
3.What is a time when you've received good news, and it helped you look past or overcome fears you've had?

Read Luke 2:12-14
The good news that the angel had to share with the shepherds was about Jesus being born. Linus confidently shared this good news with his friends as well:

>>ACTIVITY #1
Take a moment to pull up the Linus clip on youtube and watch it as a group. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eff0cqYefYY

Read John 3:16-17
There are some familiar verses that help us understand the significance of the good news that the angels shared:

Discussion Questions

1. How do these verses explain the good news of Christmas?
2. How is the world saved through Jesus Christ coming to earth?
3. What are some of the fears that middle school students experience currently? What are some of the fears you see in the world today?
4. What are some of the ways we cope with our fears in this day and age (like Linus' blanket)?

5. How can we experience the joy of Christmas in spite of the fears that are all over the world today?
6. How can the message of Christmas help you set aside any of your fears and move in confidence instead?

>>ACTIVITY #2: CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST COMIC

Using the template sheets on the last pages, instruct students to draw their own Christmas comic strip. Include these details in the comic:

- A middle schooler putting aside fears and moving in confidence because of the Good News of Christmas.
- Include the verse Luke 2:10-12 somewhere in the comic strip.
- An item that serves as a "lovey" or security item (Like Linus' blanket).
- At least 1-2 other characters
- One pet that everyone loves (like Snoopy!)
- A happy and Christmassy story ending, bonus points if it includes the cast of characters singing your favorite Christmas song at the end!

>>HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

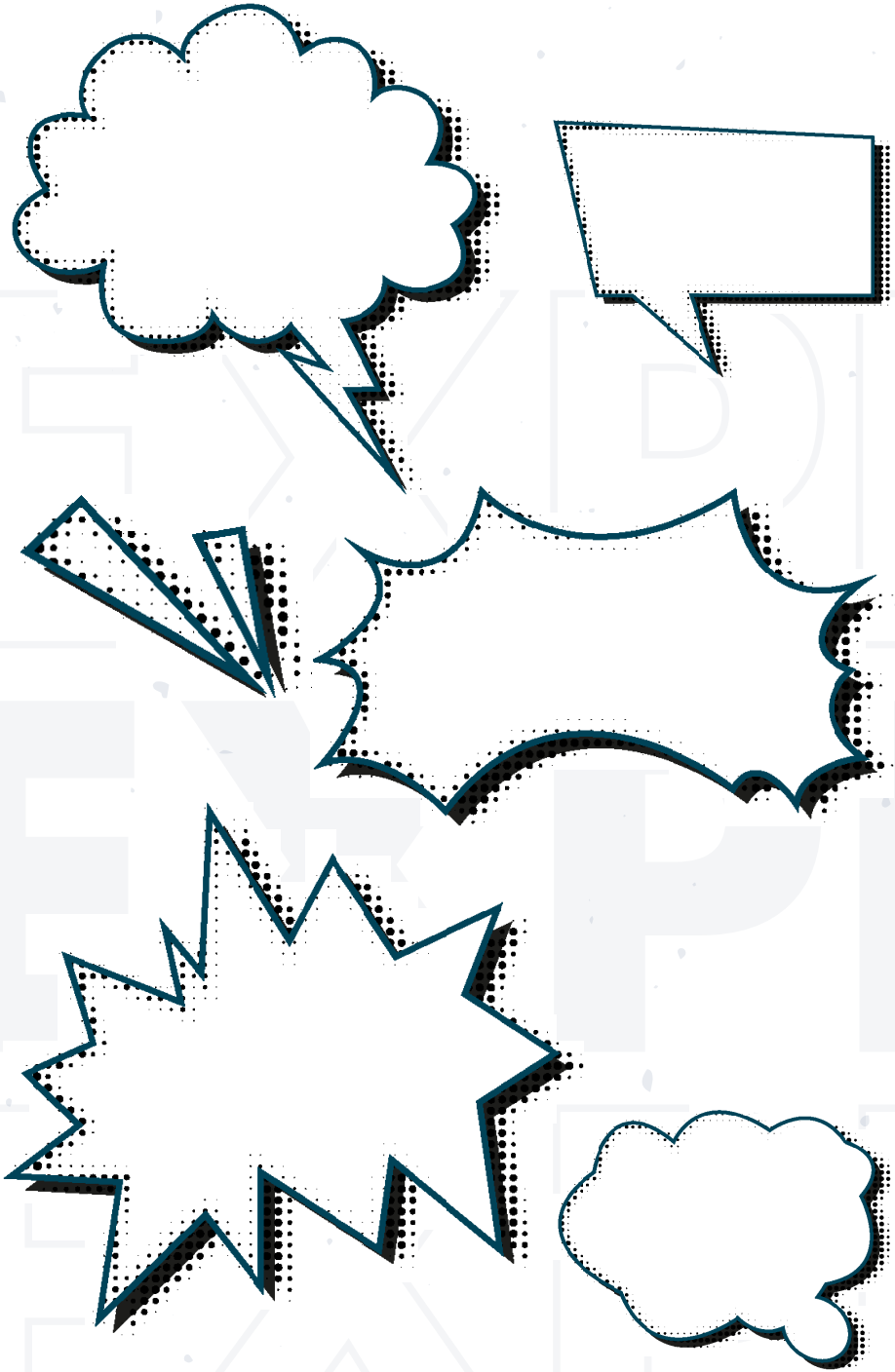
Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>>CHALLENGE

Find joy in ordinary activities this week.

>>JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Have students share their joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests). You may want to refer to the highs and lows they shared earlier. You can close in prayer or invite a specific student to pray for the group. You may want to model this prayer for weeks before asking a student to pray.



SEASONAL

Lent – Understanding Sacrifice

>>BIG IDEA: Because of Jesus, we know the worst thing is never the last thing.

>>SUMMARY: Sacrifice can be a topic that's difficult to understand, because why would someone give up their life for someone else? But students have likely witnessed sacrifice in their lives. Their parents giving up something for them, lives sacrificed in movies—it isn't a foreign concept. What made Jesus' sacrifice different is that usually sacrifices are for people you know and love. Jesus didn't know us at all. Help students to understand that the reason Jesus did this was out of an enormous amount of love and care for us.

>>SCRIPTURE FOCUS: John 3:16
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

>>SUPPLIES: painter's tape, Post-it notes, plastic tablecloth cut in half

>>PARENT CONNECTION:
Encourage parents to discuss with their student

- The concept of sacrifice and what that means in their family history.
- How students might sacrifice something for someone else.
- How students might receive gratefully the sacrifice of others.

>>SESSION OVERVIEW
Lent is a season of the Church Calendar where we are preparing to celebrate Easter. It is a 40-day period where we reflect, repent, and fast. The season kicks off with Ash Wednesday, a time where we are invited to remember our mortality, and draw closer in relationship to God, remembering the sacrifice of Jesus. Many people fast as a

spiritual practice to draw them closer to God. Giving up something we are used to, to make more space for our relationship with God. That might look like a television show, social media, or something else, and then replacing the time we would have done that thing with something that draws us closer to God.

Although fully God, Jesus still came to live among us, and chose death on a cross to save us from our sins. A story we hear a lot, but it is pretty confusing. People don't often sacrifice them with the hope of getting nothing out of it themselves, but we see it over and over again in media. In Harry Potter, in Avengers End Game, and lots of other movies and books. The concept is fascinating because it is hard to grasp. So, how much must Jesus love us that he is willing sacrifice himself, for those of us who aren't even born yet?! Luckily, there is a whole season in the church we have to reflect on this sacrifice Jesus made for us.

>>

[Small Group Time]

>>INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>>OPENING QUESTION (PICK ONE):

What is something you couldn't live without?
If you could change anything in the world, what would it be?

>>ACTIVITY 1: UNDERSTANDING SACRIFICE PART 1

Prep: On a flat tile/concrete surface, tape out a long rectangle. Put a poster board that says, "heaven" at the end of the rectangle. Keep a tablecloth the length of the rectangle to cover it up.

On one posterboard write "This represents the world we live in." And on the other write "this represents heaven, the world we hope for."

Discuss:

- Who has gotten in trouble for tracking mud into their house? Why?
- How do you think your parents would react if you tracked mud into your house and it could never be cleaned up?

>>ACTIVITY 1: UNDERSTANDING SACRIFICE PART 2

Prep: In the middle of the students, have post-it notes, pens/markers available. Take a minute and think about some things that would be a sin (sin is something that does not honor God) and write them on the sticky side of a post-it note. Have students place post-it notes sticky side up in the rectangle. Make sure they are able to write enough to cover the inside of the taped rectangle. After they complete that, have a couple students try to get to the end without stepping on "sin", but staying in the rectangle. After they try and realize they cannot...

Say: Before Jesus, there was no way of getting into heaven without bringing sin with you. Just like we track mud into our house, sin is a part of life, and it came with us in heaven. That was true, until Jesus died on the cross for us.

Do: Bring out the tablecloth and place that overtop of the sin post-its.

Say: When Jesus dies, it created a way for us to live around sin, and still be with God in heaven. Almost like a bridge. We are still impacted by sin sometimes, we see it, it's

around us, and sometimes we even participate in it, but now, God gave us a bridge to get on so that we can still go to heaven without bringing sin with us. That's like never tacking mud into your house ever again!

Read John 3:16
When we read this scripture, this is what it means: that becasue of Jesus, we get to heaven with God and live alongside God, without tracking our sin into the house.

>>MENTOR NOTES: Sacrifice can be a topic that's difficult to understand, because why would someone give up their life for someone else. But students have likely witnessed sacrifice in their lives. They're parents giving up something for them, lives sacrificed in movies, it isn't a foreign concept. What made Jesus sacrifice different is that usually sacrifices are for people you know and love. Jesus didn't know us at all. Help students to understand the reason Jesus did that it out on an enormous amount of love and care for us.

>>DISCUSS:

- What does the word sacrifice mean? Have you ever seen anyone make a sacrifice? (maybe giving up your cookie at dinner so someone else could have it)
- Why do people sacrifice things? (help them to understand that often sacrifice comes out of love or compassion)
- What are some movies where you see sacrifice displayed? (Harry Potter, Chronicles of Narnia, Star Wars, Moana, Avengers, Hercules, Frozen) Ask students if they remember anything about that scene - what did it make them feel, how did it change the movie?

Read John 3:16

- Why would Jesus sacrifice himself?
- What is different from sacrifices in the movies and the sacrifice of Jesus? (In most movies, people sacrificed themselves for someone they knew. Jesus sacrificed himself for people he didn't even know.)
- Why might Jesus sacrifice himself for us, who he doesn't know, and weren't born yet? (Love!)

>>HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>>CHALLENGE

Remember this week, that even when something seems completely overwhelming, the worst thing is never the last thing.

>>JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Have students share their joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests). You may want to refer to the highs and lows they shared earlier. You can close in prayer or invite a specific student to pray for the group. You may want to model this prayer for weeks before asking a student to pray.

>>