

How to Help Kids Grow: Making Disciples Through Young Life

**by
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Before We Begin

Welcome to the How to Help Kids Grow handbook! This handbook is designed to help Young Life leaders sharpen our efforts and focus our energy for the important work of making disciples. Here are a few things you need to know before we begin:

- 1) We use the term “Campaigners” interchangeably with “disciples,” “discipleship discussions” and/or “discipleship meetings” in this handbook.
- 2) The term “Campaigners” comes from the 1940s when Young Life was called “the Young Life Campaign,” and kids who met for discipleship were called “Campaigners.” Notice that “Campaigners” is a proper noun that starts with a capital “C”!
- 3) The handbook is divided into 14 sections: 13 based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20; and a 14th resource section that includes a 14-week Bible study series for kids who are beginning to follow Jesus.
- 4) We’ve included questions for discussion and/or reflection at the end of each chapter.
- 5) If possible, we suggest you work through this handbook with your leadership team during leader training times. Then keep it within reach as a resource as you work to make disciples of kids.
- 6) If it’s not possible to work through this handbook with your team, we still recommend that you work through the questions for discussion. The questions will help you process what you’ve read and integrate it into your thinking. Consider keeping a journal and writing your reflections in response.

One last word before we begin: variety. Discipleship meetings look different from place to place in Young Life. You might find a large group of kids meeting in a living room with a team of leaders for worship and teaching. You might find two leaders meeting with a small group of kids around a table in the back room of a restaurant with their Bibles open, talking about Jesus. You might find one leader meeting with one kid once a week to pray and examine Scripture.

Likewise, some meetings might be called “Campaigners,” and some might be called by another name chosen by the group. Some might be co-ed and some might be one gender. Some might be full of kids who are whole-heartedly committed to following Christ; some might be full of skeptics; some might be a mixed bag.

Some discipleship meetings might involve food; some might involve worship; **but all involve leaders meeting with kids, opening the Scriptures, listening to and talking with Jesus and learning what it means to follow Him.** And all are just one part of our effort to make disciples. As we will see, making disciples requires more than just a meeting with our friends.

Here are some questions we hope to explore in this handbook: How do we help kids encounter Jesus through Scripture? How do we help kids learn to listen and talk with Him and then act upon His word? How do we share our lives as well as our words with kids? How do we make disciples through Young Life?

We hope you find some useful answers and insights to those questions in these pages. Thank you for your leadership in this mission. God bless you as you introduce kids to Jesus Christ and help them grow into disciples who follow Him.

Matthew 28:16-20

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

— New International Version

“Now the eleven disciples came to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus commanded them, and when they saw him they worshiped him, though some had their doubts. And Jesus stepped forward and spoke to them, saying,

*‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
So move out and disciple all nations,
Baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Teaching them to keep absolutely all that I commanded you;
And look! I myself am right there with you all the days, to the consummation of history.’”*

— Dr. Dale Bruner
Matthew: A Commentary

“Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally.

“Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: ‘God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the three-fold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.’”

— Eugene Peterson
The Message

Chapter One

Completing Our Call

“My Campaigners leader would show up at all of our soccer practices. Then we’d also hang out one-on-one all the time. Every time we got together, he would ask, ‘How are you and God?’ He made it a point to go there. He also took me to different churches to try to figure out what might work for me.

“I don’t remember the flow or content of our group, but it was a small group gathering where we opened our Bibles and studied. It was instrumental to have that foundation.

“It was my introduction to a personal relationship with Jesus. And nobody had any idea why it was called Campaigners.”

— *Brian Ray, Executive Administrative Assistant*
Young Life Finance

Completing Our Call

“How many kids came to club last night?” It’s a common question in Young Life with a fairly easy way to find the answer: just count. In contrast, there’s a less common question with an answer that eludes us: “How many of those kids will be following Jesus Christ when they are adults?”

If the first question is about reach, then perhaps the second is about grasp and reveals the full heart of who we are in Young Life. “We exist to introduce adolescents to Jesus Christ and *help them grow in their faith*,” (emphasis added). The second half of our mission statement is not an add-on or an afterthought. It’s the completion of our call as men and women who are seeking to follow Jesus. “Therefore go and make disciples,” Jesus commanded, as He made the final hand-off of His mission to His friends. Two thousand years later, Young Life leaders around the world are working to carry out His Great Commission in the lives of kids today.

Certainly we want kids to meet Jesus, but we want more than just a passing introduction. We want kids to linger with the Lord; to learn to recognize His voice; to listen to Him; to put His words into action; and to discover that surrendering to Him is the true secret to our tagline: You were made for this.

We believe kids were made for a life-giving connection with Jesus Christ that transforms them into His likeness from the inside-out. This transformation takes time, energy, effort and the full resources of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit unleashed in the lives of kids. It takes dedicated leaders who understand that the cost of discipleship may be great, but the cost of non-discipleship is even greater. And that’s a price we can’t afford to pay if we truly care about kids.

It’s a pricey privilege, then, partnering with the triune God in the life-changing process of making disciples. And it’s not just the kids who will be changed. Leaders will be asked to take up our crosses first and follow Jesus. Only then can we invite kids to join us on the journey and follow along.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Let’s count the cost. What might it cost you as a leader to make disciples of kids who come to club? What might it cost kids if they don’t become disciples of Jesus Christ?
2. It has been said, “Jesus didn’t command us to go and make converts; He commanded us to go and make disciples.” In your opinion, what’s the difference?
3. Before you begin reading this handbook, take inventory of your own experience. What have you already learned from experience (good or bad) about making disciples?

Chapter Two

Flawed Friends

“We had Campaigners at 6:30 in the morning. I’d go pick up my friend Joe. I was a senior and he was a sophomore. He’d often sleep in, so we worked it out where he’d tie a rope around his ankle and thread it out his second-floor window. I’d pull on that rope and wake him up.

“Our Campaigners leader was the essence of uncool. He was an older man, a lawyer who put Campaigners studies together like they were legal briefs. But he loved us, and he had his Bible studies typed up with blanks that we’d fill in while we ate breakfast and talked. It was like nothing I’d ever done. It’s 40 years later and I still look forward to him speaking into my life.”

— *Ray Donatucci, Divisional Training Coordinator
Midwestern Division*

Flawed Friends

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them ... ” (Matthew 28:16-18).

There is the echo of an ache in the word “eleven.” It’s a word laced with loss, betrayal and failure. Someone was missing from the group — a disciple Jesus had chosen, loved and entrusted with His life; a close companion who had sold out the Savior and his own soul for a bag of silver.

If that weren’t disappointment enough, the eleven who remained were deeply flawed. Each had fled from Jesus in the face of danger only days before. Now, face to face with the resurrected Lord, they still doubted.

This is good news.

It’s good news that Jesus called His flawed friends to the mountain and handed them His mission when they were still a mixed bag of faith and doubt. Because if you look around the room at your own team of leaders in Young Life, you’ll see we’re not much different than those disciples. We flee in fear; we fail the test; we worship and doubt Jesus at the same time. And still, He calls us to His mountain.

Some say the mountain in Matthew 28 may have been the same mountain where Jesus gave His first sermon in Matthew, chapter five. The sermon that began with the words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And now this bankrupt band of believers was about to be handed the keys to the kingdom: Go and make disciples. *I’m entrusting my kingdom to you.*

The message was clear. These men had not earned the right to make disciples for Jesus. They had earned the right to be dismissed, fired or flogged. They didn’t have a leg to stand on, and even the ground beneath their feet was a mountain of grace.

Make no mistake: Young Life leaders are, at best, a group of flawed friends. We haven’t earned the right to make disciples. We’re a bankrupt band of believers who stand on a mountain of grace. And on that sacred soil, Jesus hands us the keys to His kingdom:

Go and make disciples, and I’ll go with you. And by the way, as you make those disciples, don’t forget to tell them the good news: I come to those who fail me and are a mixed bag of both faith and doubt. I come and entrust them with my kingdom. The only friends I’ve got are deeply flawed.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Apparently, making disciples is a team sport. Jesus called the disciples as a group and entrusted them with His mission. He didn’t meet with them individually for private conversations. What are the advantages to working together as a team in making disciples? What are the hazards of going it alone?
2. What do you need from your leader team as you seek to make disciples through Young Life? What do you have to offer the team in this process?
3. Think of the kids you know who have met Christ through Young Life. As you consider these kids, talk about your mix of faith and doubt. Where do you see God at work? Where do you struggle to believe?

Chapter Three

A Compassionate Commander

The owners of the small restaurant looked worried. Seven-hundred pounds of real trouble just walked through the front door. Sure, the two Samoans and the big Norwegian seemed nice enough at first glance, but this was an all-you-can-eat buffet.

“This was the restaurant where we used to have Bible study,” explained Tom, the big Norwegian, and also the Young Life leader of the group. “The owners would always panic when we walked in.” Ten years later, not much had changed. The look of fear was still fresh, even if the fried chicken wasn’t.

There was one difference on this day, however. It was the Samoans who had called this meeting, not the Norwegian. “Can we have cabin time again?” they had asked Tom. “Cabin time” was what the men had called the meetings when they were in high school. It made sense. The conversations at the restaurant were simply a continuation of the discussions that had begun in cabin time at camp.

“That was the only time I ever felt safe,” said one of the Samoans. “We were family. We could cry, and no one would tease us.”

Ten years later, not much had changed. Certainly the content of the conversation had shifted. “Now we were talking about being good dads and loving our wives,” Tom said. But by the second plate piled with food, “We were three big dudes, crying in a buffet.”

This story was first shared through a letter from President Denny Rydberg. Tom Tryggstad is an Associate Regional Director in the Pacific Bay Region and the leader in the story.

A Compassionate Commander

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’”
(Matthew 28:18).

Jesus stands before His flawed friends and makes a mighty claim: *all*. All authority has been given to Him. It’s as if every police officer has turned his badge over to Jesus; every soldier his gun; every ruler his crown. There are no hidden pockets of power that have been overlooked. Even the powers and principalities in the heavenly realms now report directly to Jesus. He is the Commander in Chief. He is the CEO of All. It’s the kind of authority that only someone who has lived a perfect life, been crucified, buried and resurrected can rightfully claim.

Years later, one of those friends from the mountain in Matthew 28 would see Jesus again in a vision. The Apostle John had been banished to the island of Patmos because of his devotion to Jesus. He was cut off from the world, but he could not be cut off from his Master. Jesus revealed himself to John, and John described what he saw in astounding terms.

John would write about Jesus in the book of Revelation, “his eyes were like blazing fire” and “his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” And unlike that day on the mountain in Matthew, John would fall down like a dead man when he saw Jesus on the island. In return, Jesus would place His right hand on John and encourage him, *“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and Hades”* (Revelation 1:17, 18).

The keys to every kingdom have been handed over to Jesus, including the keys to death and Hades. But before Jesus reveals His authority as Commander in Chief to John, He reveals His heart of compassion: Do not be afraid. Likewise, on the mountain in Matthew with His flawed friends, Jesus is quick to qualify His character. He’s the commander who is full of compassion.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” Jesus said. Or, “I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age,” (The Message).

Jesus has all authority (He’s the commander), and He’s all in (He’s compassionate). He’s just the kind of leader we need in order to have the courage and confidence it takes to make disciples in His name.

In the fall of 2014, Young Life leaders in Africa faced a crisis of Biblical proportions. The Ebola virus killed thousands of men, women and children including Young Life leaders, kids and their families. People began to avoid contact with one another or meeting in groups for fear of contracting the disease. Yet in the middle of the crisis, the following note came in an email from a staff person:

“Leaders continue to meet in small pods of two or three for Campaigners. Kids are begging for more saying, ‘It’s the only contact and love we get most weeks.’”

“Victor King, our area director in Mount Barclay invited two boys over for Campaigners, and 11 showed up! Victor said, ‘They were so excited to pray and be together, what could I do? So I said, ‘Come in!’”

“They opened John 10:10. They talked about how they saw the enemy killing, stealing and destroying, but they needed to hold on tight to Jesus, because He will give life. And then they prayed for life.”

Victor King needed a Compassionate Commander as he faced down death in order to make disciples. Thankfully Jesus was sitting beside Victor in that huddle of hurting kids. With blazing eyes and a face shining like the sun, the One with all authority was all in.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Jesus is the Compassionate Commander. Which quality of His character are you most aware of lately? His commanding authority or His kind compassion?
2. Serving a Compassionate Commander offers us courage and confidence for our work. Where do you need extra courage or confidence in making disciples?
3. If Jesus were to place His right hand on you today, what would you like to hear Him say?

Chapter Four

Therefore Go

There's a list in Indiana that dates back 100 years. It's a list of boys' basketball teams that have won the state title. The Anderson Indians missed that list by four points in 1979, but forward Reid Estes learned plenty about winning from his Young Life leader, Ken Knipp.

Ken did for Reid what Young Life leaders do for kids across the country and around the world every day. He set him up for success. He offered to run with Reid early every morning before basketball season started, so Reid would be ready to win his position and make an impact on the team.

But what started out as a brisk sprint across the city golf course has turned into a marathon of more than 30 years.

"I thought I was winning," Reid said recently of those early morning runs (because he always finished first), "but really, Ken was winning me."

Ken was winning Reid to a lifetime of following Jesus and serving Him. One morning in particular stands out as a critical crossroads in Reid's mind. "We had just finished running and I asked him what he was going to do that day. He said, 'I'm going to go back, read my Bible, listen to Jesus and see what He wants me to do.'"

"That was a real gift to an 18-year-old kid," Reid said. "I didn't know anyone who read the Bible like that. That was my first picture of how to live my life."

This story was first shared in a letter from President Denny Rydberg. Today Ken Knipp is the vice president of Training and Reid Estes, the Vice President of Human Resources in Young Life.

Therefore Go

If there are two letters lodged at the heart of every Young Life leader, those letters are G-O. Leaders get up and go wherever kids are, earn the right to be heard and share the Good News about Jesus Christ. In fact, it's impossible to be a Young Life leader unless you leave the comfort of your own world and go into the world of those you hope to reach. Likewise, it's impossible to make disciples of all nations unless we get up and go. Here are three things to consider about the word "Go":

- 1) **As You Go.** Some theologians interpret Matthew 28:19 in this way: "As you go, make disciples" Others might consider this interpretation too passive. For our purposes, let's use both! Go and make disciples! Be proactive! Take initiative! Make a plan! AND as you go, make disciples. On your way to be proactive with a plan, keep your eyes open for every opportunity to make disciples along the way.

Myron Salisian is a retired attorney in Southern California and a Young Life leader extraordinaire. Myron is proactive with a plan, going to make disciples every day at Pasadena High School. And as he goes, he makes the most of every opportunity to introduce kids to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith.

For example, Myron took some football players to a local fast food restaurant after school one day. Myron was aware that this particular restaurant made a habit of printing Bible references on its paper goods. As Myron pulled away from the drive-thru window, he asked the players in his car to look at the bottom of their cups. "What does it say?" he asked the players. "John 3:16," the big kid in the front seat answered. That launched a conversation about God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus on the ride home from school. Myron is proactive with a plan, and as he goes, he makes the most of every opportunity to develop disciples who follow Jesus along the way.

- 2) **More Than Words.** A researcher from UCLA came up with some interesting data about what we receive and believe from other people. Dr. Albert Mehrabian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, offered these findings:

- Verbal messages account for 7 percent of what we receive and believe.
- Vocal and tonal messages account for 38 percent.
- Visual messages account for a whopping 55 percent.

In other words, if you really want to make a disciple, it takes more than just words expressed in a winsome way in a meeting. Kids need a visual aid. Making disciples requires leaders who act out a life of obedience and invite their young friends to a front-row seat. Making disciples means, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Making disciples means we go into a kid's world and act out the life of Jesus in his or her presence. It also means we invite kids into our worlds so they can see us act out the life of Jesus in that context as well.

In John 1:38–39, we find two curious disciples stalking Jesus. They had heard John the Baptist declare that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and now they were tailing him at a distance through the crowds. And then something surprising happened:

*"Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'
"They said, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'where are you staying?'
"Come," he replied, 'and you will see.'"*

Kids need a visual aid. As we go into their worlds and talk with them about Jesus, they may become curious about our lives. They may stalk us on social media or follow us around at football games or show up on our doorsteps unannounced. If we follow the example of Jesus, we'll surprise these kids with a spirit of hospitality and invite them to "Come, and you will see."

- 3) **Earning Never Ends.** Young Life leaders go into a kid's world, earn the right to be heard and share the Good News. But earning the right to be heard doesn't end at club or camp. It's an effort that continues as long as we are making disciples.

Earning the right to be heard isn't a gimmick we invented in Young Life. It's core to the character of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:6-7 is clear: Jesus didn't regard equality with God something to be grasped; but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. If ever there were a person with all the answers, it was Jesus. Yet He didn't demand an audience, and He didn't overpower people. He said of Himself, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

We're to have the same attitude as Jesus as we make disciples. We empty ourselves of power and privilege and with gentle and humble hearts we go where kids are and earn the right to be heard, even if those kids are already actively following Jesus. The character of Christ within us compels us to "go" and "earn."

Likewise, we don't simply earn the right to be heard with kids; we also earn the right to listen. In fact, earning the right to listen is often a pre-requisite for earning the right to be heard. When kids are convinced that they can tell us the truth about what they are thinking, feeling and wanting, then they may be willing to listen to us tell them the truth in return. Jesus came full of grace and truth. Grace precedes truth when we're making disciples of kids.

Some questions to ask ourselves as leaders as we make disciples:

- Are we going into the world of kids who are following Jesus? Are we continuing to earn the right to be heard with our disciples? Are we earning the right to listen?
- Are we acting out the life of Jesus in the worlds of kids? Are we inviting them into our worlds and sharing our lives as well as our words?
- Are we making the most of every opportunity to make disciples? Do we believe making disciples involves more than just a weekly meeting?

Making disciples is not something Young Life leaders only do on Tuesday nights or Friday mornings in weekly planned meetings with kids. Making disciples is not limited to conversations that take place in small groups or large groups we often call Campaigners. Making disciples is the aim of our every effort from the word "GO."

One more word about "Therefore go" You might ask, "What is the word 'therefore' there for?" It points back to the previous declaration from Jesus. "All authority in heaven and earth" has been given to Him. He is the man with all the answers. He is the compassionate Commander with the power to heal kids and make them whole. He has everything they need, and He wants to give them what they need without reservation. Kids are desperate for what Jesus has to offer. They need to know how this life works, and it only works if we're listening to Jesus and acting on His words. Therefore ... GO!

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Think for a moment of the kids you come across in the natural flow of your daily life. What might it look like for you to make disciples of those kids “as you go”?
2. Who lived out the life of Christ before your eyes when you first began following Jesus? Share an example of how they did that and what you saw. How did their examples have an impact on your life?
3. What might you do in the next week to invite one of your disciples to “come and see”? What could you do practically to give your kids a closer look at your life?

Chapter Five

And Make

“We were having ‘Bagels and Bible Study’ in our condo at 6:30 in the morning. I said ‘We’re all going to hold hands and pray a sentence prayer. If you don’t want to pray, squeeze the hand of your neighbor.’ Then I added, ‘But what better place to learn than right here?’

“One of the girls asked, ‘Can I pray first?’ When I asked her why, she said,
‘So nobody steals my sentence.’

“One girl had heard the other girls end their prayers with, ‘In Jesus’ name.’ When it was her turn, she ended with, ‘In everybody’s name.’ It was a great opportunity for a conversation.

“I’m pretty sure that 60 percent of the kids who come through our house have never prayed out loud. I learned to pray in Campaigners as a kid. It’s a privilege to help our Campaigners kids learn to pray today.”

— *Eve Sarrett, Associate Regional Director
Tennessee Region*

And Make

The word “make” implies process. Process takes time, energy and effort. “Make” also implies change. As we exert time, energy and effort making disciples, the hope and goal is that those disciples would begin to change. The hope and goal is that they would begin to look like Jesus from the inside out. Ultimately that change is the work of the Holy Spirit, but the generous mystery of God is that He invites us to help. In fact, He commands us to help: Therefore go and *make* disciples

Before we roll up our sleeves and get to work, however, it’s important that we understand our limited role in the process. God is the one at work in the hearts and minds of kids. “We are God’s workmanship ...” Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10. Then in his letter to the Philippians, “*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 1:6). Making a disciple is ultimately God’s work from within through the Holy Spirit, and it’s a work that will continue long after we’re gone from the lives of kids.

Young Life leaders, however, occupy a privileged place in the process of making disciples. We have the great privilege of walking with kids in the earliest stages of their development as disciples. We get to imprint kids in the formative years of their spiritual lives. It’s a great privilege and a great responsibility as well. We have the opportunity to develop patterns and habits in kids that may continue for the rest of their journeys with Jesus.

Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich co-authored a book called *The Critical Journey* that speaks to the developmental stages in the life of faith. Much like babies develop through predictable stages into toddlers then children, adolescents and then adults, Hagberg and Guelich identified stages of spiritual development as well. For example, they called the first stage of development *Recognition of God* and noted that people typically enter into this initial stage through a sense of awe or a sense of need.

In Scripture we see Abraham under the stars gaining a new awareness of God through a sense of awe and wonder. How many times at camp do kids gain their first personal awareness of God during 20 minutes of silence, when they see a shooting star? The glory of God in creation at camp serves a great purpose of helping kids recognize God for the first time and begin a life of spiritual development.

The leper who came to Jesus, on the other hand, came through a sense of need. Just as often, kids in Young Life come to Christ through a new awareness of their brokenness and need for a God who loves them.

Hagberg and Guelich point out that it’s possible to get stuck in the critical journey of faith. People in the stage *Recognition of God*, for example, need others who will help them move along to the next stage of development. They need leaders who will help integrate them into God’s family where they can begin to explore together the life that Jesus offers. Once kids become integrated into God’s family, they enter the next stage of development, *The Life of Discipleship*. (Don’t be confused by the name of this stage. The entire process of development is discipleship; but this specific stage is called *The Life of Discipleship* because of the distinguishing characteristics of growth during this period.)

If you were building a house called “spiritual development,” *The Life of Discipleship* stage of development would be the library. The learning curve is steep during this stage of development, and learning is equated with a download of information about faith and God. People in this stage of development have a strong sense of identity with “the group.” They also often look to their leader as THE person with THE answers.

In the life of Israel, Moses was the man with the answers, and the Israelites were in for a steep learning curve as they began to download the law from God. They also were forming a strong identity as a group. They were discovering their identity as “the people of God.” In broad strokes, this stage in the

development of Israel illustrates *The Life of Discipleship* stage of spiritual development in followers of Jesus.

Kids in this stage of development will eventually need Young Life leaders who will lead them at the appropriate time into the next stage, *The Productive Life*. In the spiritual development house, *The Productive Life* would be the workshop. This is the stage of development where people discover that they have God-given gifts and can contribute to the group. They are often motivated to give back in gratitude what has been given to them. They are glad to get to work in God's family.

In the life of Israel, after God gave them Moses and the law, He put them to work building the tabernacle and making all the priestly garments. It was very detailed and demanding work that required a wide variety of gifts. Again, in broad strokes, the life of Israel helps us understand the progression of development in a life of following Jesus today.

The Critical Journey identifies three additional stages of development: *The Journey Inward*, *The Outward Journey*, and the *Life of Love*. Each stage comes with its own distinguishing characteristics, and we can get stuck along the way. The goal is to keep moving, to keep growing. So why are we mentioning The Critical Journey in this handbook? We're not trying to sell copies; we're trying to sell care. Kids move through developmental stages in the life of faith. Kids need Young Life leaders who care for them according to their developmental stages. They need leaders who meet them where they are, then gently invite them to move forward.

You don't have to read *The Critical Journey* in order to be able to appropriately care for kids. You simply need to use common sense and good judgment. Are your kids newborn babies in God's family? Then they won't know how to feed themselves or talk to God. And they can't eat solid food yet; they need milk. Do you have kids who are toddlers in their spiritual development? Then you can expect them to fall down frequently and get banged up. They'll need leaders who can pick them up, dust them off and tell them everything is going to be OK. Should we put a newborn baby in the workshop and give it a hammer? Probably not. Should we be concerned when kids expect us to have all the answers? Not too much. It's a normal part of their development as disciples. Besides, the day will come when they discover that you have more questions than you have answers. At least we hope that day will come, because it will mean that both of you are continuing to move along in your critical journey with Jesus.

The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 that we are co-workers with God in the process of making things grow. Co-workers with God! But Paul is careful to clarify our roles. "*I planted the seed,*" Paul said. "*Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.*"

We are co-workers with God in the mysterious process of making disciples. We exist to introduce adolescents to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith. Our help is limited and temporary in their lives, but it comes at a time of great importance. We get to walk with them through their formative years of faith. We get to help them as they begin to form their first awareness of God, as they begin to find their identity in God, as they gather their initial information about God, and as they make their first attempts to work alongside God.

So how do we help? What is our part? We'll talk more later about the task of teaching, but before we get to that, let's get to this: It's our job to pay attention.

- We pay attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in kids' lives and cooperate with God as He makes disciples. What is He up to, and what is He asking us to do? What is our small part?
- We pay attention to the stages of spiritual development in kids' lives and act accordingly. Are they newborn babies in God's family? Then don't expect them to feed themselves or understand our language. Are they toddlers? Then don't give them a hammer and tell them to get to work.

We pay attention to the stages of human development in kids' lives as well. For example, kids in early to mid-adolescence will think in concrete terms. They will struggle with understanding abstract concepts. We need to communicate with and care for kids according to their stages of human development as well as their stages of spiritual development. It's beyond the scope of this handbook, but it would be a worthwhile training exercise for a leadership team to examine the basic characteristics of human development in adolescents. Explore the stages of adolescent development and then ask, "What are the implications for how we make disciples?"

In addition to gardening language, Paul used parenting language to talk about our roles in making disciples. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 he said, *"We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."* And in verses 11 and 12: *"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."*

The kids you come in contact with through Young Life are, in God's eyes, little children — very little children who are barely beginning to learn to focus their newborn eyes. Our job is to pay attention, to be gentle, and to encourage and comfort before we urge. God is calling them into His kingdom and glory. But they have to learn to walk before they can run. What a privilege to help kids take their first steps in learning to follow Jesus Christ.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Think back upon your own development as a new disciple. What did you need from your "leaders" in those early stages of your growth? What helped you grow? Was there anything that hindered your growth?
2. The Apostle Paul used parenting language to help describe his relationship with his disciples. Think of a newborn baby. What does that baby need from loving parents in order to thrive and grow? Who in your discipleship group are like newborn babies? What do they need from you?
3. Think now of a toddler. What does a toddler need from loving parents in order to thrive and grow? Who in your discipleship group are like toddlers? What do they need from you?

Chapter Six

Disciples

“Because of the way the world vies for the hearts and minds of kids, discipleship is critical. We’re in a battle. We have to build disciples who can stand.”

— *Barb Bowman, Vice President*
Mission Aviation Fellowship

Barb makes disciples through Young Life College at Boise State University.
She is married to J.C. Bowman, regional director for the Idaho region.

Disciples

“The word ‘disciple’ occurs 269 times in the New Testament. ‘Christians’ is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to disciples of Jesus — in a situation where it was no longer possible to regard them as a sect of the Jews (Acts 11:26). The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples and for disciples of Jesus Christ.”

— Dallas Willard
The Great Omission

And yet, Willard continues,

“For at least several decades, the churches of the Western World have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. ... So far as the Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship is clearly optional.*”

Maybe it’s time to clarify what Jesus meant by the word “disciple.” After all, it’s not a common word in the current conversation of our culture. If Jesus were to issue His Great Commission in today’s language, He might say something like this: “Therefore go and make an apprentice of everyone you meet.”

A disciple is an apprentice. A disciple of Jesus is a person who puts the words of Jesus into practice. Then, to paraphrase Dallas Willard: *The New Testament is a book about putting the words of Jesus into practice, by people who put the words of Jesus into practice, for people who are working to put the words of Jesus into practice. So far as the Christian institutions of our day are concerned, putting the words of Jesus into practice is not required.*

There was no doubt in the minds of the eleven men standing on the mountain in Matthew 28: Jesus was commanding them to go and teach others to put the words of Jesus into practice. Eugene Peterson helps us find more current language for the words of Jesus to His friends:

“Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the three-fold name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20, The Message).

“Train” and “practice” are terms that imply repeated action and movement. In Mark 8:34, Jesus clarifies what that basic movement looks like in the life of the disciple:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Unfortunately, it’s difficult to have a healthy understanding of the word “deny” today, especially in the world of kids. Kids live in a world where realities like eating disorders and emotional abuse can make words like “deny” sound dangerous or abusive. (Kids also may have a limited understanding of the word “-selves.” More on that later.) Yet when Jesus used the word “deny,” it was good news.

To deny one’s “self” meant we no longer had to answer to the ego-maniacal slave-driver within us. It meant we no longer had to pledge allegiance to the anxiety-ridden control-freak at our cores. It meant we no longer had to answer to the critical, condemning tyrant known as “self.” Jesus was inviting us to turn our backs on the misguided master inside ourselves and turn our face toward the Good Shepherd instead. In this case, to lose our “lives” meant we would actually gain our lives by following the Master Jesus and listening to only Him.

The cost of discipleship seems, at first, great. We must relinquish our rights, give up control and follow Jesus. But the rewards of discipleship make the cost hardly worth comparing. For example, the rewards of discipleship include stability in the storm.

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus said, *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock.”* Jesus goes on to describe a terrible storm that beats against that house, but the house did not fall. On the other hand, *“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”*

What is the difference in these two stories? In both stories, people hear the words of Jesus. In both, storms come and beat against their lives. But in one story, *the people put the words of Jesus into practice.* In the other, the people *do not put the words of Jesus into practice.* The first creates stability and staying power in the storm. The second leads to destruction and what Jesus calls a “great crash.” The cost of discipleship may be great; but the cost of non-discipleship is even greater: a life destroyed.

In John 8:31, Jesus offers more rewards of discipleship. “To the Jews who believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

“If you hold to my teaching” means — you guessed it — if you put my words into practice. And now it’s time for a pop quiz:

When will we know if the words of Jesus are true?

- A) When we hear his words.
- B) When we put his words into practice.

If you answered “B,” give yourself a doughnut, or a cookie, or whatever qualifies as a just reward. We know the words of Jesus are true when we act on them, and not a moment before. Now for the bonus question on this quiz:

When will we experience freedom?

- A) When we hear the words of Jesus.
- B) When we put His words into practice.

It’s not a trick question. We experience freedom when we put the words of Jesus into practice.

Unfortunately we’ve become confused about this passage in John 8. We’ve shortened it to say, “The truth will set you free.” It will, but only if you act upon it. Or we’ve misquoted it this way, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” But the fact is, you won’t really know if what Jesus says is true until you are willing to put your life in His hands and act on His words. And there is a depth of knowing that only comes from active obedience. Here’s the equation to remember:

Freedom follows faithfulness; not vice versa.

By nature, we want to know that what Jesus says is true, and we want to experience freedom before we have to act on His word and put our lives in His hands. But Jesus says we’ve got it backwards. When we act on His word, then we will know His word is true, and then we will experience freedom.

So far we’ve got three great rewards for putting the words of Jesus into practice: stability in the storm, the knowledge of the truth and freedom. Add to that, “Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it,” and the scales tip dramatically in favor of great rewards.

A few years ago, a group of high school students from an inner-city Young Life club took a trip to Mexico to build a house for a homeless family. These kids were not yet followers of Jesus, but they were about to put the words of Jesus into practice and receive a great reward.

The reward they had been promised was a day at Disneyland at the end of the week. So the kids rolled up their sleeves and went to work. They pounded nails; they sawed 2x4s; they bolted a wooden frame to a cement foundation. They hung drywall; they painted plywood; they covered the roof in asphalt shingles. They played with the children from the homeless family, and they tried communicating with the mom and dad. They worked from sunrise to sunset each day, and then listened to a Young Life leader at night talk about Jesus.

On the last day of the week, it was clear that the house would not be finished if the kids packed up and went to Disneyland as planned. The kids voted and unanimously decided they would rather stay and work.

That night their Young Life leader explained why Disneyland was no longer the happiest place on earth. He explained why working in a dusty field in Mexico had become its own reward. “You’ve been putting the words of Jesus into practice,” the leader explained. “You’ve been serving others. You were made for this.”

It was a wonderful introduction to Jesus followed by a natural invitation: Do you want life and freedom? Keep putting His words into practice; come with me and follow Him.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. As you reflect upon your own journey, can you think of an example when you’ve acted on the words of Jesus and experienced a good effect in your life? Share your example and your experience.
2. A disciple is someone who puts the words of Jesus into practice. Often we think first of words from Jesus such as, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” or “Ask and you shall receive.” But there are other words we can act upon as well. For example, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd.” What would it look like for you to act like Jesus is your good shepherd for the next 24 hours? What would you do differently if you acted like His claim was true?

(Bonus question: What if you asked kids to act on the words Jesus used to describe His character? You could spend an entire semester in Campaigners examining His eight “I am” statements in the book of John and inviting kids to act like what Jesus said about Himself was true.)

3. Jesus said a disciple is someone who denies himself, takes up his cross and follows Him. “Deny” may be a loaded word for kids who’ve experienced different forms of abuse. And “self” may be a difficult word for some kids to understand developmentally, if they do not yet have a clearly-defined sense of self. Yet this invitation from Jesus is for us all. How would you articulate or explain this invitation from Jesus to a young friend in a way he or she could begin to understand? (We confess; this is a hard question! But it’s one worth wrestling with together as leaders.)

Chapter Seven

Of All Nations

Sharzad believed that if she touched a Christian, she would become defiled. That's what her faith taught her. So she kept a safe distance from the Young Life leaders who came to campus each week. Still the leaders greeted her warmly, called her by name and offered her friendship — from a distance. And little by little, week by week, Sharzad grew closer to those leaders — from a distance.

Eventually, Sharzad made her way to Young Life club and even Campaigners, though she continued to separate herself and listen from the fringes. Then one evening she shocked her leader with a question. "May I hold the Bible?"

Sharzad's leader gladly placed the Bible in Sharzad's hands and opened it to John 3:16. As the leader read the verse to Sharzad, tears began streaming down her face. Sharzad asked with amazement, "You mean Jesus died for me?"

Not long after, Sharzad allowed someone to take her photo with her leader. They weren't standing at a distance; they were sitting side by side. The leader had her arm around Sharzad, and together they were reading God's Word. It was a picture worth more than 1,000 words. It was a glimpse of God reaching all nations.

This story was first shared in a letter from President Denny Rydberg. "Sharzad's" name has been changed for privacy and protection.

Of All Nations

Jesus wants people from all nations who are putting His words into practice, who are learning to follow Him. This has been the plan since the beginning. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham under the stars that all peoples of the earth would be blessed through him. And it will be the plan until the end. In Revelation 5, we are reminded that Jesus purchased people with His blood “from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Thankfully this is God’s plan and He’s the one who will bring it to completion. And thankfully, we aren’t the only ones at His disposal to make it work. This might be a good time to remember that Young Life in general and we in particular play a small part in God’s greater plan of making disciples. We occupy a humble space within the larger Church Universal — the body of believers who have been following Jesus Christ for more than 2,000 years. The Church was here before Young Life sprang up, and if Young Life should ever disappear, the Church will still be making disciples of all nations. This is one of many reasons Young Life leaders need to help integrate kids into local congregations of Christ’s Body.

We play a small part in God’s plan to make disciples of all nations. On the timeline of history, we occupy only a pinpoint as a mission. Yet we are grateful that God has been using Young Life leaders for more than 70 years to help make disciples. And we can see from our very limited experience that He increases our small efforts exponentially over time.

For example, Jim Rayburn was one man whom God called and equipped to reach kids for Jesus Christ. Some of the kids who came to the first Young Life clubs in the early 1940s became disciples of Jesus who faithfully followed Him. Through those first few faithful followers, a mission was launched that today reaches kids in every state of the union and more than 95 countries around the world. We have become a worldwide mission that is reaching kids from many nations. Many, but not *all*. Yet we are grateful for our part in God’s greater plan.

We are grateful that we have the opportunity to make disciples of kids of all kinds through Young Life. We are making disciples of kids in the cities and kids in the suburbs. We are making disciples of kids in small towns, kids in other countries, kids with disabilities and teen moms. We are making disciples of kids in middle school, high school and “kids” in college. In our brief time on the planet, God has granted us access to countless kids of all kinds. We are grateful.

So what does this mean for you and your local team of leaders? What does it mean that Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations? First it means, keep doing what you’re doing. Keep reaching the kid right in front of you and inviting him or her to follow Jesus. And then it means, take a look around.

Turn your head and take a look at the kids who aren’t naturally in your line of vision. Who are we missing? More importantly, what is the Lord telling you? Is there someone different that He is prompting you to pursue? It might be someone who doesn’t look like you or sound like you. But if the Lord is telling you to go, then, as His disciple, it’s imperative that you act upon His word. And if you are acting upon His word, then you can be confident that you’re helping Him complete His all-inclusive plan.

Finally, as we make disciples of all kinds of kids in Young Life, it means we have to make adjustments. The mission is still the same: we are working to develop people who put the words of Jesus into practice and follow Him. But our methods may be different. For example, we won’t ask middle school kids the same kinds of discussion questions that we ask high school kids or kids in college. Likewise, the methods we use to make a disciple of a kid who lives in Russia might look different than the methods to make a disciple of a kid who lives in Kansas. We will have different expectations of kids with disabilities than we have of kids who don’t have the same physical or developmental obstacles to overcome.

Thankfully, we have many resources at our disposal to help us flex and bend in Young Life. We also have specific staff and leaders who've been trained to understand the different cultures of kids we are working to reach through this mission. You can find those resources and staff names as well on the Young Life website. Don't hesitate to contact them or call to ask for help. They are wise men and women with expansive hearts who want to help us reach every kid of every kind. They want to help us make disciples of all nations.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Think for a moment about the population of kids at the school where you and your team are leading. Name as many different pockets of kids as you can think of: socially, economically, ethnically and racially. As you consider these different pockets of kids, what stirs in you? What are you thinking? Feeling? Wanting? Do you sense any tugging or prompting from God?
2. As you think of the kids in your discipleship group, who is most unlike you? With whom do you have the least in common? In what ways are you required to flex and bend in order to love this person in terms he or she can understand? Do you sense that God is doing anything in your own life in the process?
3. It's good news that Young Life is not the only tool at God's disposal to make disciples of all nations. Who else in your community is God using to reach and make disciples of kids? What are some practical things we can do as leaders to encourage these others in their work? What are some practical things we might do to collaborate with these others or enlist their help?

Chapter Eight

“ ... Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

His name was Nozm. At least that’s what his friends called him, because you could always count on “Nozm” to bring nitrous oxide to the parties so kids could inhale it and get high. Nozm had earlobes stretched large with gauge rings and multiple piercings on his face.

Until the day he decided to make a change.

Nozm was at a weekend Young Life camp when he took out his gauges and all his piercings and slapped them on the table in front of his leader. “That’s not me anymore,” Nozm told his leader.

“I want to get serious about Jesus. You can call me Javier.”

A year later, Javier served on work crew at camp, planting flowers, pulling weeds, mowing grass and keeping the property looking pristine. As he started his senior year, Javier was filling out the forms and finishing the training to become a WyldLife leader in his area. Javier had three goals as a senior: He was an avid skater and wanted to meet kids at skate parks who needed to know Jesus; he wanted to take those kids to WyldLife camp the next summer; and he wanted to return to serve on work crew one more time.

“My relationship with Jesus changed my life around,” Javier said. “I want kids from a bad community to know who Jesus is, so they can have faith that Christ will help them, too.”

As you might imagine, it was hard for Javier to make a change. It took an entire team of caring adults to clear his path, walk by his side and watch his back.

Quinn and Niccole Ryan were two of those adults.

Javier lived with the Ryans for six weeks his junior year. They continued to keep an eye on his homework and make sure he was taking school seriously through graduation. They grounded him in God’s word, connected him to the Body of Christ and trained him to serve others.

The Ryans immersed Javier in God’s family and in God’s love.

This story was first shared in a letter from President Denny Rydberg. The names have not been changed, but have been shared with permission. Niccole (Baldi) Ryan is an area director in the Greater Los Angeles region.

“ ... Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Here we come face to face with our limits in Young Life. Jesus commanded His disciples to go and make disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Yet in Young Life, baptizing believers is beyond the scope of our authority as an organization. Young Life commissions staff people; but we do not ordain them. We do not confer upon our staff or leaders the authority to baptize believers. We defer to the Church Universal and its different denominations when it comes to this sacrament.

However — and this is a significant “however” — Young Life staff and leaders are fully free to immerse kids in the loving presence of the Triune God. And in this way we help fulfill the Great Commission.

Dr. Dale Bruner, in *Matthew: A Commentary*, notes, “We could appropriately translate ‘baptizing them’ by saying ‘immersing them — into the companionship of the Father, the education of the Son, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.’”

Dallas Willard would agree. In his book, *The Great Omission*, Willard writes, “I hope you will agree with me that He (Jesus) didn’t just mean getting them (the disciples) thoroughly wet as we say the words over them, but rather ‘baptizing them in the name’ refers to surrounding them in the reality of the Trinitarian community.”

So we defer to the Church Universal in the sacrament of baptism; but we are free to give our disciples a good soaking! We are free to immerse them in the loving presence of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. We are free to remind them that they belong to a good family with a Father who loves them; a Brother who sacrifices for them; and a Counselor who comforts and corrects them.

We talk a lot about Jesus in Young Life, but Jesus talked a lot about His Father and the Holy Spirit. It’s good news to kids that their true family of origin is those First Three. It’s good news that this family is a loving family who welcomes kids warmly into its circle. And it’s good news that our family is so close, sometimes it’s hard to separate us from one another.

Jesus said, “*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you,*” (John 14:20). And He said of the Holy Spirit, “*The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you,*” (John 14:17). That’s full immersion in the First Family. That’s a good soaking in God’s love.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. As you consider the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which of the three are you most comfortable talking with kids about in your discipleship discussions? What makes it easiest for you to talk about this person? Which of the three are you most uncomfortable talking with kids about? What makes it difficult to talk about this person?
2. It's good news to kids that their family of origin is the "First Family": Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the family who conceived them and brought them to life, first through creation and then through re-creation. We talk most about the Son in Young Life. What basic facts do you think kids need to know about the Father? About the Holy Spirit?
3. What has helped you become more familiar with the Father and Holy Spirit in your life? What are some simple and practical things we can do to help kids become more familiar with the Father and the Holy Spirit?

Chapter Nine

Teaching Them: Part I

“We never had more than 15 kids at Campaigners. That’s the most Jim Dyson could fit into his van. He would go around the neighborhood picking up kids. Jim would have to tell some kids they couldn’t come because they would be too disruptive. I don’t know how he navigated that, but he did. Campaigners was not open to all kids like club was.

“I can remember one of our times together like it was yesterday. We were at Jim’s house, and he had pictures on the wall of a fireman, a policeman, a grandmother and a judge. He wanted to know, ‘How do you see God?’

“I thought everyone saw God like I did, but we were all so different. We went through the entire Gospel. And it was different than any other group I had been part of. Jim didn’t preach at us. He asked questions. And not yes/no questions. It was interactive and fun. He planted some deep seeds in my life.”

— *BeBe Hobson, Field Ministry Vice President*
Young Life

Teaching Them: Part I

Is there any sport more intimate than wrestling? Is there any other sport where two people get tangled up like pretzels to the point where you can't tell which limb belongs to whom? Is there any other sport where so much sweat from your opponent ends up slathered on your own skin? If there is, then that's the sport we should use as a parable for our discipleship discussions in Young Life. If there's not, then wrestling will have to do.

In our discipleship discussions, we want kids to wrestle with the Truth. We want kids to get so tangled up with Jesus, we can't tell whose limb belongs to whom. We want kids to walk away from our discussions slathered with sweat from the Savior. We want them to be happily exhausted, slightly sore and smelling at least a little bit like Jesus. We want kids to have an intimate experience with Him.

Of course it's not what we want that matters. It's what Jesus wants. And apparently He wants His disciples to learn to wrestle. Jesus never handed His disciples truth on a silver platter. Instead he handed them shovels and asked them to dig. And though we're mixing metaphors like milkshakes at the moment, wrestling and digging have a lot in common. They both require energy, effort and active engagement to succeed.

What's up with Jesus? Why does He want us to struggle and wrestle and dig? Why did He ask so many questions and speak in riddles and tell stories? Why didn't He simply give us a three-point lecture and call it done?

Do you remember what Jesus said was the most important commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37). That's active engagement. That's sweaty entanglement. That's throwing the full weight of who we are into our shovel to break the soil. Jesus is the buried treasure, after all, and He's waiting with great expectation to be found.

What are the implications for us as we lead discipleship discussions? How do we promote active engagement with the Truth? For starters, instead of giving easy answers, we ask skillful questions. Questions are the invitation into the wrestling ring. Questions are the shovels we hand to kids so they can dig.

Following are a few key questions to ask ourselves as we learn to ask good questions in our discussions. After that you'll find a few examples of questions that invite kids to throw the full weight of who they are into digging.

1. **Do kids feel safe?** The goal of our discussion is to promote full engagement of the whole person with the Truth. But kids won't step into that wrestling ring unless they believe it's safe. Not "safe" as in, "This is going to be easy," but "safe" as in, "I'm not going to be humiliated or harmed."

Have we roped off the wrestling ring with good boundaries? Are we asking questions in a way that creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust? Have we clarified the ground rules for wrestling? For example: 1) There are no stupid questions; 2) What we say here stays here (unless we learn that someone is in danger of being harmed); 3) We actively listen to others with respect.

One other question regarding safety: Have we earned the right to ask questions of these kids?

2. **Do kids feel successful?** Part of making kids feel safe is making kids feel successful. One fleeting moment of failure can cause kids to quickly withdraw. Create questions that set kids up for success. Make kids the experts.

For example, consider this question: "What do you think Jesus meant when He said, 'Feed my sheep;'" That question immediately makes kids the experts. Only they know what they think. They

are guaranteed success. On the other hand, the question, “What did Jesus mean when He said, ‘Feed my sheep?’” is less inviting. It appears that the leader is looking for a specific answer. Kids run the risk of failing if they don’t find it. For many kids, that’s a risk they aren’t willing to take in front of their friends.

If, however, a question asks for a specific answer that is clear on the page in front of our face, kids can still be set up for success. For example, “Who was Jesus talking to when He said, ‘Feed my sheep?’” asks for a specific answer, but it’s an answer that kids can successfully find.

3. **Do kids feel included?** Not every kid will have access to the same vocabulary, experience or background to answer every question. For example, not every kid can answer, “What was it like to grow up in a loving family?” And not every kid can answer, “What does the Old Testament say about sacrifice?” It’s important that we understand our audience well enough to form questions that are accessible to all. That doesn’t mean that we talk down to kids or insult their intelligence. Well-placed questions are always within reach, but they invite us to reach “up” to find the answer.
4. **Are my questions clear?** Ask one question at a time. Compound questions create confusion. Also, avoid using words that require a dictionary or a commentary for your audience to understand. Finally, before we can be clear with kids, we have to be clear with ourselves. What is the purpose of our question? What do we really mean to ask? Make a list of questions in advance and practice asking them out loud. It takes practice to ask clear questions. It’s easier to ask complicated and confusing questions than questions that are clear and simple.
5. **Are my questions fair?** It’s not fair to ask, “Don’t you think ... ?” That’s called leading the witness. It’s also not fair to ask, “How are you like the rich young ruler?” That’s assuming kids are like the rich young ruler. Unfair questions put kids on the spot, in a box or back kids into a corner. Unfair questions make kids want to cry, “Unfair!”
6. **Are my questions stimulating or stifling discussion?** Ask open-ended questions that invite at least one sentence for an answer. Avoid yes/no questions, as a rule. Also, ask clarifying and follow-up questions to keep the conversation flowing. Say, “Tell me more,” or, “Elaborate on that.” Ask kids who are conspicuously quiet what they’re thinking. Ask kids in the group to comment or respond to what their friends are saying.

As leaders, we want the discussion to look more like a game of pinball than a game of ping pong. We want conversation bouncing off of everyone in the room, not just a back and forth between us and a few kids. We want all kids fully engaged with the Truth and with one another. It’s a lofty goal, but one that is deeply gratifying in the moments that we reach it. Those are sacred moments where kids begin to be transformed.

7. **Are my questions inviting the whole person into the wrestling ring, or just an arm or a leg?** As we said in the beginning, the goal of our discussion is to promote full engagement of the whole person with the Truth. There are at least five aspects of the “whole person” to consider when asking questions: Engage the **senses**; engage the **mind**; engage the **emotions**; engage the **needs and wants**; engage the **actions**. In the next chapter, we’ll explore a basic tool that can help us invite the whole person into the ring.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

Instead of discussion questions, have some fun with the pop quiz below. Examine the questions below and determine which guideline is violated by the question. Then see if you can re-write the question to be kid-friendly!

Pop Quiz

Examine the questions below. According to what we've read in this chapter, determine what is wrong with each question. Then, re-write the question to be more kid-friendly.

- a. What are some examples of arrogance from your own life?
- b. What did Jesus mean when He said, "I have food to eat that you don't know about"?
- c. What was it like to grow up in a loving family?
- d. What are the cultural implications of gender usage compared and contrasted with the reference to age?
- e. How long did Jesus look for the lost sheep; what did He do when He found the sheep; and what does this tell you about Jesus?
- f. Does the word "submissive" make you feel rebellious or cooperative?
- g. Wouldn't you agree that humbling yourself before God is really difficult for most of us to do on our own?
- h. Do you think humility is an important attribute in a person?
- i. This week, what are four things you can do to serve other people?

Chapter Ten

Teaching Them: Part II

“Campaigners started at 6:30 p.m. when I was a kid, and club started at 8. At 7:30 we’d all leave and go pick up our friends for club and come back at 8. It wasn’t just a Bible study, there was always mission associated with our time together. It was about our growth in Christ, but was also always about people beyond us. It felt very balanced. It never felt like it was about building Young Life. It was always about our friends knowing Christ.

“Campaigners was the first place I read Scripture out loud, the first place I prayed out loud and the first place I discussed Scripture out loud. It was a safe place. We saw older folks doing it, and we could jump in because we saw other people doing it.

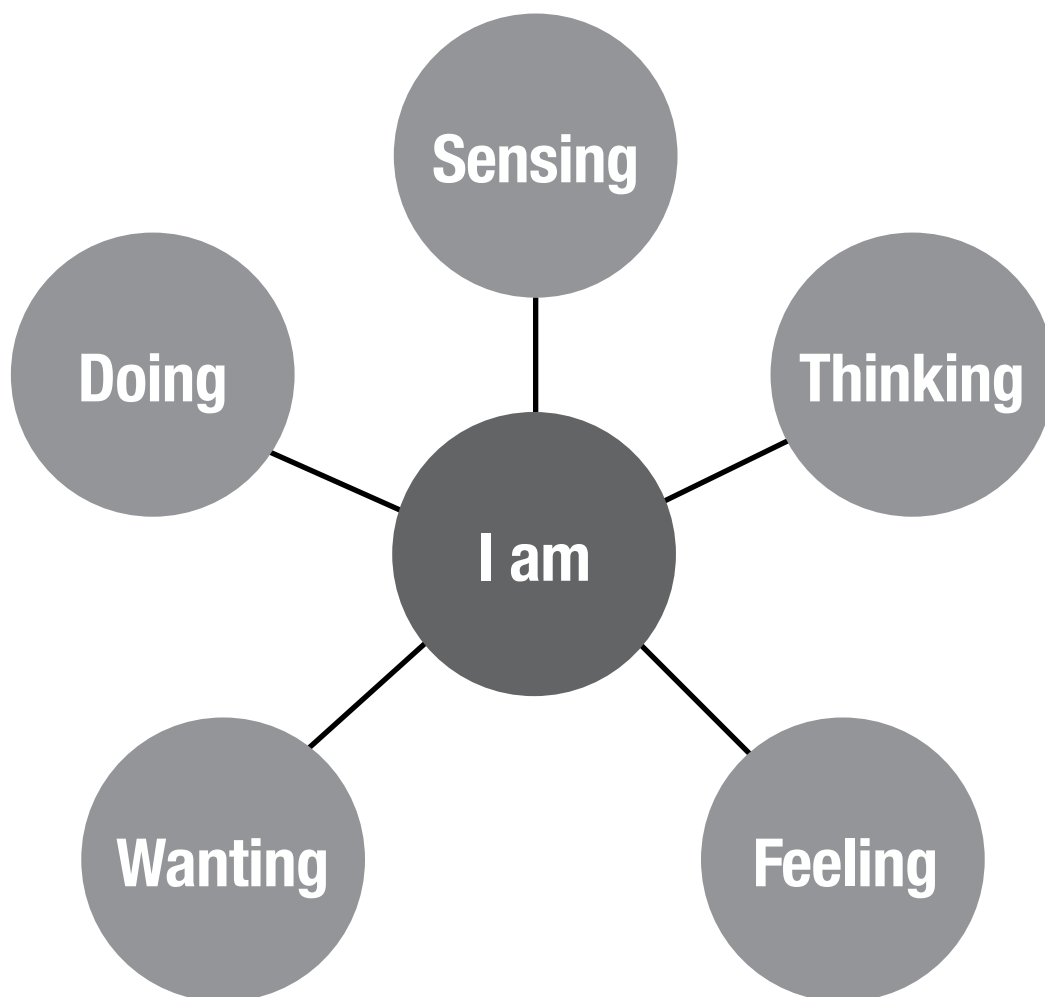
“Every Campaigners lesson answered three questions: How does this inform my relationship with God? What does this say about my understanding of myself? What does this have to do with my relationship with others? It was always upward, inward and outward.”

— *Mike Cramer, Divisional Training Coordinator
Eastern Division and The Greater New York Division*

Teaching Them: Part II

The Awareness Wheel is a simple tool that can help us create questions that invite the whole person into the wrestling ring. It's a tool that can help us engage the whole person with the Truth. First, let's start with a diagram of the wheel:

The Awareness Wheel



And now for a brief explanation. The Awareness Wheel is a wheel with five spokes and the words “I am” in the center. “I am” is a statement of being. The Awareness Wheel is a tool that defines the realm of our “being.” Every moment of every day, we are sensing, thinking, feeling, wanting and doing. The wheel is constantly turning. We may only be aware of one or two spokes of the wheel at any given moment, but all the spokes are constantly in motion, even when we are sleeping.

We can help kids fully engage with Jesus by creating questions that connect with every spoke of the wheel. So let’s look briefly at each spoke.

I am Sensing: This spoke of the wheel represents our five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. We are constantly receiving input from our environment through our senses. We can ask kids questions that help them engage their senses as they read Scripture. As they engage their senses, they will begin to be drawn into the written word. As they are drawn into the written word, they are in a good place to encounter the Living Word, Jesus.

Here are some examples of questions that could help kids connect with Christ through their senses:

- What do you think the disciples’ feet smelled like as Jesus washed them? What do you think their feet looked like?
- Imagine that you are Zacchaeus sitting in a tree. What does the world look like from your perch? What do you see? What does it physically feel like to be sitting in that tree?

Those questions ask kids to engage their senses through the use of imagination. There are also “sensing” questions that ask kids to engage their actual, physical eyes to see what is on the page in front of them. For example:

- How many times does Jesus ask Peter to feed His sheep?
- Who was sitting at the table with Jesus?

I am Thinking: This spoke of the wheel includes our thoughts; our interpretations; our conclusions; our opinions. We can invite kids to engage with Jesus through Scripture by asking questions that require them to think. For example:

- Scripture says that Jesus showed His friends “the full extent of His love” by tying a towel around His waist and washing their feet. If you were writing the dictionary, based on this passage, what would you write beside the word “love”?
- Can you think of any reason why Jesus might ask Peter three times to feed His sheep?

I am Feeling: It’s important that we help kids connect with Christ with their feelings as well as with their thoughts and their senses. “Feelings,” in this case, means emotions (not the physical sense of touch). Some feeling questions could include:

- Imagine you are one of the four friends who has just torn a hole in the roof and lowered your paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. What feelings are stirring in you as you lower your friend onto the floor?
- What feelings do you have when Jesus says to your friend, “Your sins are forgiven?”

As we help kids enter the scene and identify their feelings, we again put them in position to encounter the Living Word.

I am Wanting: This spoke of the wheel includes our wants, needs and desires. It’s very important that we help kids connect with Christ through this spoke (more on this later). Here are some examples of questions that invite kids to engage with Jesus through their wants, needs and desires:

- Imagine you are one of those four friends peeking down at Jesus through the hole in the roof. What do you want to hear Jesus say to your paralyzed friend? What do you want Jesus to do?
- If you could put yourself on a mat on the floor in front of Jesus today, what would you want Jesus to say to you?

I am Doing: This is the spoke of the wheel where choices are made and action takes place. Ultimately, this is where our “will” is involved. It is where we decide, “I will do this,” or “I will not do that.” Again, we will look at the importance of this spoke in a few pages but, for now, here are some examples of questions that invite kids to engage with Jesus through “I am doing”:

- Zacchaeus enjoyed the company of Jesus in his home. As a result, he decided to give away a lot of money and make things right with people he had wronged. As you have experienced the presence of Jesus, can you think of anything unexpected it has caused you to do?
- Jesus washed His friends’ feet, and then He said they would be blessed if they followed His example. What would it look like for you to follow the example of Jesus in the next few days? What would it look like for you to serve someone in a very practical way? Are you willing to try an experiment? Are you willing to serve that person for the next few days, and then report back to us how it affected you?

Asking good questions is a skill that takes time and practice to develop. But it’s a skill that is essential if we are going to invite full engagement of the whole person with the Truth. Here are just a few remaining thoughts about asking questions of kids in our discipleship discussions:

Story-Telling Questions: Often we begin a discipleship discussion with a story-telling question. Story-telling questions build trust and goodwill in a group by inviting us to share some of our own personal experience — past, present or future. The safest story-telling questions invite us to share something from the past. For example, “Who was your best friend in fourth grade, and what did you do together for fun?” Talking about the present takes a bit more courage. For example, “What was encouraging about your week? What was discouraging?” Finally, sharing our hopes, dreams or fears for the future involves the most risk. “Imagine you are 25 years old. What do you hope your life will look like at 25?” Answering a question like that requires tried-and-true trust.

Story-telling questions give kids the chance to answer a few unspoken questions of their own: Is this a safe group? When I share who I am, how will I be received? Will I be received with respect and love?

Until kids get satisfactory answers to those questions, they won’t be willing to fully engage with one another or with Jesus in this group.

Good story-telling questions also help prepare the group for the Scripture the group is going to explore together by leading the way. Here are two examples:

- Can you think of a time when you shared a meal with someone important? Who was the person? Tell us a little bit about your experience. (Story-telling questions designed to introduce the passage on Zacchaeus)
- Have you ever felt betrayed by someone you thought you could trust? Tell us a little bit about that experience. How did it make you feel? (Story-telling questions designed to introduce the passage of Jesus washing the feet of Judas)

Feeling Questions: Feelings are like flashlights that illuminate our thinking. Feelings do not arise out of nowhere. They are always the result of something we are thinking. If we can help kids identify their feelings, then maybe we can shed some light on the thoughts that generated those feelings. Feelings are also like fuel that drives our engines. If we can help kids tap into their feelings, they might be able to harness that energy to follow Jesus. Either way, feelings are an important part of the whole person. Feeling questions help engage that part of the whole person with Jesus.

This might seem self-evident, but the words, “I feel” are meant to be followed by a feeling. For example, “I feel frustrated.” Or, “I feel perplexed.” To say, “I feel Jesus is being unreasonable in this passage,” is a misguided statement. The person means, “I THINK Jesus is being unreasonable in this passage.” The phrase “Jesus is being unreasonable” is not a feeling. Maybe the person means, “I feel angry with Jesus for saying what He said.”

Likewise, the question, “What do you feel Jesus meant in this passage?” is a misguided question. The leader is actually asking, “What do you THINK Jesus meant?” It’s a small thing, but keeping our feelings separated from our thoughts maintains integrity and paves the way for full engagement with the Truth.

One last word about feelings. Some kids may have a very limited vocabulary when it comes to feelings. It can be helpful to provide a printed list of feeling words and have it on hand for kids to reference. Middle school kids might even benefit from looking at photographs or drawings of faces showing different expressions of emotion. They may need a concrete expression of feelings to help them identify their own. You’ll find a tool that helps kids identify their feelings in the resource section of this handbook.

Doing Questions: Karen Lee Thorp, in her booklet, *How to Ask Great Questions*, says, “Instinct tells me that people who are asked to take drastic action too often and in too many different directions eventually go numb in order to survive.” In other words, we need to be sensitive and aware regarding how often we ask kids to do something specific in response to what they’re learning. Remember, in God’s eyes, we are helping small children to learn to eat, talk and walk. Let’s not ask too much of them too early or too often. Let’s be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and follow His lead.

Take 20 seconds. Educational research suggests that it takes a person at least 20 seconds to form an answer to a question. Yet most teachers only allow students an average of five seconds to respond. If we are to become skilled at asking questions, we will need to become comfortable with silence. We will need to give kids time.

If you’re still reading this section, then something has become increasingly clear. It’s not just the kids who are going to walk away from our discipleship discussions happily exhausted, slightly sore and smelling a bit like Jesus. Before we can invite kids into the wrestling ring, we have to take to the mat first. Sure, we could print out a ready-made Bible study from the Internet or compose a quick “lesson” on a napkin at McDonald’s, but where’s the fun in that? Jesus wants to swap sweat with us. He’s inviting us to become intimately entangled with the Truth. He’s inviting us to dig for buried treasure. And He’s waiting with eager expectation to be found.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

Instead of discussion questions for this chapter, we offer an exercise. Read Mark 4:35-41. Using the Awareness Wheel as your guide, brainstorm at least one question for each spoke of the wheel that would help kids connect with this passage. If you are doing this exercise as a team, take one spoke per person, then share the questions you’ve created with one another. Practice answering your questions as well. When we practice answering our own questions, it helps us learn to ask questions that kids will want to answer.

Chapter Eleven

Teaching Them: Part III

Andy Ogle takes the saying seriously, “Begin with the end in mind.” About once a year, he takes his Campaigners kids to the cemetery and sends them out for 20 minutes of silence and contemplation. Then he calls them together to talk about dates and dashes.

“Every stone here has two dates,” Andy tells the kids, “but only one dash. The question I have for you is, what are you going to do with the dash between your dates?”

The kids have only to look at their leader to get a few good ideas. You can typically find Andy on the sidelines of the football field in the fall, encouraging kids and offering them unconditional love. You can find him once a week standing up front at club with a Bible in his hand talking passionately about Jesus. And sometimes you can find him sitting in his driveway praying with a young friend who is ready to surrender to the Savior. Those are just a few examples of Andy redeeming the dash between the dates and making a lesson of his life in front of kids.

This story was first shared through a letter from President Denny Rydberg. Andy Ogle is an area director in Lenoir City, Tennessee.

Teaching Them: Part III

It's helpful for a teacher to understand the internal processes of students. In this section, we'd like to take another look at The Awareness Wheel and explore the process of transformation that takes place inside of kids as they begin to become disciples.

Here is a basic explanation of how The Awareness Wheel turns: We **sense** something from our environment (We see it, hear it, smell it, touch it or taste it.). We **think** something about what we have sensed. Our thoughts evoke **feelings** and stir **wants**. And then we **do** something in response. And our feelings and wants give us the energy to do it.

For a simple example: You walk into the house and you smell (you sense) the intoxicating aroma of chocolate. You think, "Someone is baking a cake!" Suddenly you feel hopeful and hungry. You want a piece of that cake! So what do you do? You go peek into the oven and see if the cake is done yet. Or maybe you look for the bowl in the sink to see if there is any batter left to lick.

(Are you hungry now? God has given us powerful imaginations that can work for us or against us. It's worth considering, how do we help kids use their imaginations to experience the loving presence of Jesus Christ?)

That's a simple example of what happens every moment of every day in your Awareness Wheel. You sense something from your environment. You immediately think something as a result, whether you are aware of that thought or not. Your thoughts evoke feelings and stir wants. Then you decide to do something in response. Most of the time, this chain of events happens instantly and without much of our awareness. But the more we learn to pause between what we are sensing and what we are doing, the more likely Jesus will be able to speak into our lives and shape us.

Let's take a moment to see what Jesus might have to say about each spoke of the wheel.

I am Sensing: "The eye is the lamp of the body; if the eye is good, the whole body will be full of light," (Matthew 6:22). Making disciples means we help train kids' eyes to see Jesus. We help kids turn their eyes toward the Light who gives light to every person (John 1:9). This, too, is a discipline, a practice. It isn't our nature to look for Jesus. Jesus also said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear," (Mark 4:9). Making disciples also means we help kids begin to use their inner ear to listen for God's voice.

I am Thinking: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind," (Romans 12:2). Right away we begin to see the importance of what we are thinking. What we think, we eventually become through our actions fueled by our feelings and our wants. Making disciples means we help kids begin to develop the mind of Christ. We help kids begin to examine the thoughts of Jesus and integrate His thoughts into their own thinking.

I am Feeling: There aren't a lot of Bible verses that tell us what to do with our feelings. Apparently God expects us to feel our feelings and express them in appropriate ways. For example, "Shout to God with cries of joy!" (Psalm 47:1) "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep," (Romans 12:15). "Be angry, and do not sin," (Ephesians 4:26). (Are you surprised? God is instructing us to be angry! There is a difference, however, between feeling our feelings and acting on our feelings in a destructive fashion.)

Notice that Romans 12:2 does not say, "Be transformed by the suppression or manipulation of your feelings." This is important as we begin to understand the mechanics of transformation. We work with kids to help them change their thinking. We don't focus on changing their feelings. If they change their thinking, their feelings will eventually follow. In the meantime, we help kids become aware of their feelings and use them like flashlights to illuminate their thinking. (See the previous section, "Teaching Them: Part II.)

I am Wanting: Jesus understood the importance of the spoke, “I am wanting.” This is the spoke that helps keep us moving. If someone is stuck (stuck in a relationship, in a trap, in an unhealthy situation), it probably means one has lost touch with what one really wants. If we can help the person gain clarity about what he or she wants, he or she will experience movement and freedom.

In John 5:1-9, Jesus came upon someone who had been stuck in his situation for 38 years! For almost four decades the man had been lying by a pool, waiting for someone to carry him into the water for healing. Do you recall what Jesus asked the man? “Do you want to get well?” Jesus knew that the secret to getting this man unstuck was the man telling the truth about what he really wanted.

We want to keep kids moving in the journey of following Jesus. It’s important, then, that we help kids gain clarity about what they want.

I am Doing: This is the spoke where decisions are made; it’s where we exercise the conscious act of our will. At least we hope it’s a conscious act! Too many times we act without examining our thoughts, our feelings and our wants. We act “unconsciously” and often get into trouble.

Jesus said, “Follow me,” more than any other invitation to His disciples. He invited them to do something active and intentional. Jesus knew, however, that following Him was about more than just external actions. He knew that, if we tried to follow him, it would force us to examine our thoughts, our feelings and our wants. In fact, we won’t be able to follow Jesus without shifting our focus (sensing), changing our thinking, and being honest about what we’re feeling and wanting. But as we exercise full engagement of our whole selves with Jesus and begin to connect with Him at every spoke, He will begin to shape us and transform us. We will begin to look like Jesus from the inside out.

And now for the all-important part of The Awareness Wheel:

The Pause: The Awareness Wheel can be found in a book called *Connecting with Self and Others* by Wackman, Nunnally, Miller and Miller (1988). The authors of the book make a statement worth remembering:

“Real freedom is the ability to pause between stimulus and response, and in that pause, to choose.”

When we pause between what we are sensing and what we are doing and become aware of what we are thinking, feeling and wanting, then we can make a conscious and free decision about what to do.

When we fail to pause and move from sensing to doing without gaining awareness, we are simply reacting. Moving from sensing to doing without pausing is at the heart of addiction, compulsion and all kinds of destructive behaviors and disorders.

But if we can learn to pause and become aware of each spoke of our wheel, instead of reacting, we will be responding. Pausing, then, makes us “response-able” — responsible. And responsibility and freedom are two sides of the same coin. You can’t have one without the other.

Consider This: If we can help kids learn to pause between what they are sensing and what they are doing, if we can help them gain awareness of what they are thinking and feeling and wanting, then we can help them become response-able — responsible. We can help them grow up into responsible disciples who experience freedom.

And here is the million dollar secret to spiritual development that you won’t find in the Connecting book: “Real freedom is the ability to pause between stimulus and response, and in that pause, to choose” — but only when we choose the cross of Jesus Christ do we find the increasing freedom that Jesus offers. It is in that very moment — the moment when we internally choose the cross of Jesus — that spiritual transformation takes place. Little by little, bit by bit, as we pause and choose the cross of Jesus, we begin to look more like Him. We begin to be transformed from the inside out.

Here is Where We Find Our Challenge: How do we help kids pause and internally choose the cross of Jesus Christ? How do we help kids, little by little and bit by bit, surrender their wills to the Savior's? After all, He is the One who lives at the center of their souls and invites them to "follow" Himself.

As we've mentioned previously, some kids in early or mid-adolescence may not have a defined sense of self, so asking those kids to deny themselves might not make sense to them developmentally. Instead, it might be more helpful to ask those kids to trust Jesus.

Instead of asking, "What does it mean to deny yourself?" the question might be, "What does it look like to trust Jesus in this situation?" As kids take steps to trust Jesus, even the smallest steps, they will be choosing the cross of Jesus at the same time. Whether or not they can understand the concept of taking up His cross, they will experience the reality of the cross, and they will enjoy increasing freedom as they choose to take steps of trust in Jesus Christ.

The Awareness Wheel is about self-awareness. It's not about self-indulgence or self-promotion. The fact is: We need to gain self-awareness before we can offer an authentic self-sacrifice. We have to become aware of what we are sensing, thinking, feeling, wanting and doing before we can choose to lay it all at the feet of Jesus and ask Him to transform us. As leaders, we have the privilege of helping kids gradually gain greater self-awareness. It is a slow and delicate process that requires kindness, patience and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was asked to identify himself in John 8:58, He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am." It was a statement about His eternal being. Helping kids grow in their faith means helping kids learn how to gradually surrender more and more of themselves to Jesus. We help kids surrender their small "I am" to the great "I AM." In the process of that surrender, kids will gradually become transformed.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. The Awareness Wheel is in constant motion. Take a moment to take inventory of your own wheel. Start with "I am wanting." Make a list of at least three things you are wanting where discipleship is concerned right now.
2. What are you feeling? Make a list of at least three things you are feeling as you consider this chapter. Look at the list. What are your feelings trying to tell you about what you are thinking?
3. If you were going to describe the internal mechanics of transformation in your own words, what would you say?

Chapter Twelve

To Obey

“My first memory of a group that I led was in San Diego. There were six freshmen girls who had never darkened the door of a church, yet they were so hungry! They went to camp and met Christ. When we got home, we started meeting and they called themselves ‘the Inner Beauties’ based on 1 Peter 3:3-4. We did a lot of Bible study, but they wanted to read *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster! They wanted to know how to be disciplined in their walk with Christ.

“We just did life together. We went on retreats and overnights. We were close to Oakbridge, so we would do work crew all the time as a group. And I spent a lot of time at the ice cream shop by their school, meeting with them one-on-one. I’m still in touch with them today, and they’re all walking with Jesus.”

— Pam Moore, Director of Training
Young Life

To Obey

Sometimes “obey” seems like a bad word. It has collected too many negative connotations over the years like crusty barnacles on a boat. It’s been tagged in too many mental photos of an angry parent shaking a pointed finger in the face of a fearful kid. After all, isn’t “Obey!” what a dictator barks at his subjects as they march mindlessly and salute? Much like its close cousins “Deny” and “Disciple,” “Obey” needs some help restoring its image.

Eugene Peterson says “practice” and Dale Bruner says “keep.” *“Then instruct them in the practice,”* Peterson translates in *The Message*. *“Keep absolutely all that I commanded you,”* translates Bruner. “Act on the words of Jesus” is another option. But there’s something valuable that we risk losing when we omit the word “obey.”

Strip away all the barnacles and bad photos from the word “obey,” and you still have a word that’s somewhat offensive but worth keeping. Buried in the word “obey” is the assumption that we’re not the ones in charge. We’re the ones taking orders from another. Buried in the word “obey” is the word “deny.” If we’re going to take orders from another, we have to deny the control freak at the center of our selves who is barking out orders of its own. There is a pointed truth in the word “obey” that gets slightly blunted when we opt for softer words like “practice.” It might be possible to still be the person in charge when we practice. It’s not possible to be the person in charge when we obey.

It’s a slight difference, and not one worth mentioning any further. The fact is: Jesus is the Only One with all the answers. He’s the Only One who really understands how life works from the inside out. He’s the Only One with all the authority. And so when He tells us to do something, we need to practice what He’s preaching. When He directs us, we need to keep all of His commandments. When He instructs us, we need to act on His words. We need to relinquish our rights to call the shots and obey the Compassionate Commander.

But here’s the key question for this section: How can we obey Jesus if we can’t hear Him? Or, for our purposes in this handbook, how can we teach kids to obey Jesus if they’ve never learned to recognize His voice?

Here are three ways we can help kids learn to listen to Jesus and obey:

- 1) We can help kids begin to develop the disciplines of solitude and silence.
- 2) We can help kids begin to develop an inner ear.
- 3) We can help kids begin to differentiate the voice of Jesus from all others.

First, We Can Help Kids Begin to Develop the Disciplines of Solitude and Silence. Without solitude and silence, it is impossible to hear God. He speaks in a still, small voice (I Kings 19:12). He whispers through the Holy Spirit in the center of our souls. Let’s consider some insight from some others who practiced solitude and silence for many years.

“Our deepest contacts with God are so gentle because they are all that we can bear. We need quiet to experience them. They do not come as an earthquake of mental upheaval or in the scorching fire or rushing wind of emotion. In the silence, there is nothing devastating or sensational, but only a still, small voice.”

— Evelyn Underhill
The Ways of the Spirit
circa 1925

“Solitude is being with God and God alone. Is there any space for that in your life?”

“Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It’s important because it’s the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you ‘my beloved daughter,’ ‘my beloved son,’ ‘my beloved child.’ To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.”

— Henri Nouwen
“Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry”
Leadership Journal
Spring 1995

Kids need to be fully immersed in the deep well of God’s love. They need to hear His still, small voice from the center of their souls whisper the truth about their identity and His affection. In order to hear that voice, kids will need to begin to practice the disciplines of solitude and silence. How do we help them begin this practice?

First, we remember that they are newborn babies or, at best, toddlers, so we take very small steps. Here are some possible examples:

- Ask kids to put their cell phones on airplane mode during Campaigners or discipleship meetings. Or collect cell phones at the beginning of meetings and keep them in a basket until the end. Explain the need for us to disconnect from distractions in order to connect with the One who loves us.
- Take three minutes each week during Campaigners or a discipleship meeting to become completely silent together. Invite kids to sit with their backs straight, close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Explain that God speaks in a still, small voice from the center of their souls, and we need silence to hear Him. Explain that we are simply “practicing” a habit that we will want to expand and develop the rest of our lives. After a few weeks, increase the number of minutes to four, five and, if possible, work your way to 10.
- Invite a disciple to spend time away with you for a period of solitude together. Find a quiet place where you can be physically apart yet generally near one another. Before you go your separate ways, talk about the importance of solitude and silence. Then part ways for 20 or 30 minutes, simply to sit in silence and become present with God. Perhaps you choose one simple verse to meditate on during the time. For example, “Be still and know that I am God,” (Psalm 46:10). Or, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” (Psalm 23:1). When you regroup, talk about your experience together. Encourage your friend that this is a discipline that takes time and practice. Congratulate your friend on making the effort to be present with God alone. (Note: There is a sample solitude guide for kids in Chapter 14 along with instructions for leaders on how to use the guide.)
- Remind kids that we are not “earning God’s favor” by practicing solitude and silence. We are simply “exerting the effort” needed to create space in our lives where we become completely present with Him.
- Consider reading a book about solitude and silence together with a more developed disciple or with a group. *An Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton is a good starter. But check around. You probably have friends who could suggest an appropriate book.

Second, We Help Kids Begin to Develop an Inner Ear. Young disciples need help understanding that the Holy Spirit is a living person who has come to dwell inside them. They need help understanding that the Holy Spirit will counsel them and correct them and remind them of everything God wants them to remember (John 14:17, 26; 16:7-15). It takes practice to pay attention to the voice of God within. It takes practice to develop our inner ear. Here are some examples of how we might help:

- In Campaigners or in your discipleship discussions, occasionally ask kids, “Do you sense God is saying something to you? Your heart has ears. What is your heart hearing from the Father?”
- Encourage kids that God is always speaking to them. He is fully present in them and in constant communication with them. Encourage them that, with practice, they will begin to be more aware of His ongoing conversation from within.
- When kids are listening to a message or a sermon, encourage them to take notes on what they are hearing. (This is slightly different than taking notes on what the speaker is saying.) Then invite them to share those notes with you later and talk about what they heard. Help them identify what they might have heard from God.
- As an exercise at Campaigners, in a discipleship discussion or during a time of shared solitude with a disciple, print out a passage of Scripture for your disciple to read. A good example would be Psalm 103:1-5 or Psalm 139:1-5. Ask your disciple to read the passage slowly, more than once. Then ask your friend to write himself or herself a love letter from God, inspired from the passage. (Note: This is different than writing a love letter TO God.)

Third, We Can Help Kids Begin to Differentiate the Voice of Jesus From All Others. Jesus said:

“The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice,” (John 10:2-5).

One of the most important disciplines we can begin to develop in our disciples is the discipline of actively identifying the voice of Jesus and turning away from the voice of “strangers.” This is not a passive exercise; there is a muscle in our inner ear that we have to work regularly in order to train our ear to Jesus and Him alone. Here are a few examples of how we might help kids learn to identify His voice:

- Remind kids that the voice of Jesus is the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is the voice of loving belonging. And acting in response to His voice will have a good effect in their lives. Jesus said He came to give His sheep life, and life to the full (John 10:10).
- Help kids identify the voice of the enemy. The voice of the “stranger” is the voice of a thief and a robber. When we act on the voice of the stranger, it has a destructive effect in our lives. *“The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy,”* (John 10:10).
- Help kids connect the dots. When kids experience the destructive work of the enemy in their lives, help them begin to follow the path of destruction back to specific thoughts or ideas that they acted upon. If we can help kids connect the dots between destructive thoughts and destructive behavior, it will help them begin to identify the voice of the stranger and ignore it in the future. Likewise, we can help them connect the dots between the promptings of Jesus and their experience of life and freedom. When we act upon the truth, it sets us free.

- Train kids to take a moment to pause. Remember the Awareness Wheel. Help kids learn to place a PAUSE between what they are sensing and what they are doing. In that pause, we can help kids become aware of what they are also thinking, feeling and wanting. And we can help them begin to listen for the voice of Jesus. We can help them play out different scenarios in their minds. The scenarios that lead to life and freedom are the ones inspired by the voice of the Good Shepherd. The scenarios that lead to destruction can be traced back to a stranger whispering a lie.
- Finally, we can remind kids that *“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”* (Romans 8:1). If kids can learn to exercise their inner ear and listen for condemnation, it will help them identify the voice of the thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy. And according to Jesus, when they hear that voice, it’s time for them to run. Kids are invited to run away from the voice of condemnation, and run into the arms of the Good Shepherd who holds them close and reminds them that they are forgiven, loved and free.

Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me,”* (John 10:27). Consider this: One day the voice of the Good Shepherd will call each disciple to “Come forth!” like Jesus called to Lazarus in the grave. Lazarus obeyed Jesus. He got up out of his grave and came forth. Hopefully, by the time Jesus calls us to come forth from the grave, we will have had plenty of time to practice recognizing His voice and acting in obedience to His command.

Let’s end this section on obedience with one more piece of input from Henri Nouwen from his book, *Making All Things New*, pp. 314-315.

From an Absurd to an Obedient Life

From all that I said about our worried, over-filled lives, it is clear that we are usually surrounded by so much outer noise that it is hard to truly hear our God when He is speaking to us. We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction He calls us.

Thus our lives have become absurd. In the word absurd we find the Latin word ‘surdus,’ which means ‘deaf.’ A spiritual life requires discipline because we need to learn to listen to God, who constantly speaks but whom we seldom hear.

When, however, we learn to listen, our lives become obedient lives. The word obedient comes from the Latin word audire, which means ‘listening.’

A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow His guidance.

When we create space in our lives for God to speak and act — when we practice the disciplines of solitude and silence — we will begin to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, who reminds us that we’re forgiven and free. He reminds us through the Holy Spirit within us that we are the Father’s sons and daughters who are deeply loved. And when we are immersed in the loving presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we lose all our pre-conceived ideas about the word “obey.” Obedience becomes the glad response of a grateful heart to the voice of the One who says, “I love you. You belong to me.”

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. In your own journey, what has been your experience with the spiritual disciplines of solitude and silence? Are these disciplines that you practice? If so, what has helped you in this practice? What has been a challenge?
2. There were a few examples of simple steps we might take to help kids begin to develop the disciplines of solitude and silence. Were there any that seemed appealing to you? What else might you do to help kids develop these disciplines in their lives?
3. Jesus said His sheep recognize His voice and follow Him. What has been your experience in learning to discern the voice of the Good Shepherd? What practices or habits have helped you? Is there something you can take from what you've learned and impart it to your Campaigners kids? What would that look like? How would you do it?

Chapter Thirteen

All That I Commanded You

“I remember there were three of us who met with our college-aged volunteer. She gave me a Living Bible. I had never read the Bible on my own in my life. I would look in the Bible and say, ‘No way is this in here! I was blown away!’

“I don’t remember what we studied specifically, but it was the first time God’s word became alive to me. I couldn’t wait to go to bed at night because I couldn’t wait to read my Bible and see what it was going to say. Our leader just loved us. It was the first seed of beginning to love Jesus and love God’s word.”

— Pam Moore, Director of Training
Young Life

All That I Commanded You

If you're paying close attention, you'll notice a deviation in the title of this section. We swapped the word "everything" for "all." The NIV version of Matthew 28:20 translates, "and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." We're opting for the Bruner and Peterson translations instead:

"... teaching them to keep absolutely all that I commanded you ..."
— Bruner

"Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you."
— Peterson

The word "all" shows up at three critical junctures in this passage — and four if you read Bruner: Jesus has *all* authority. He commands us to make disciples of *all* nations. He wants us to teach them *all* He has commanded. And He will be with us through it *all*.

Two of those references are comforting and encouraging. And two are a little overwhelming. *All* nations? We've already covered that in a previous chapter. (Thankfully, it isn't *all* up to us.) But *all* that He has commanded? There aren't enough weeks in four years with even the most consistent Campaigner kid to cover *all* that Jesus commanded His disciples. Or are there? According to Jesus, we only need two lessons.

In Matthew 22:35-40, a teacher in the law asked Jesus a question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

Jesus is both brilliant and kind. He has the ability to take the word "all" and make it "small". *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you for hanging the fruit on a branch that we can reach. We still have to reach up, but even the shortest among us can reach up and take hold of the two commandments that Jesus offered. And when it comes to making disciples, our curriculum is clear: we help kids grow in their love for God and for one another.

There is a lesson within a lesson in this passage. Not only does Jesus tell us what to teach our disciples, but he models how to teach them as well. We take "all" and make it "small". Jesus reminded us in Matthew 11:30 that he is a good teacher who doesn't overwhelm his students. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me," Jesus said, "for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." He takes the word "all" and makes it "small". Jesus lightens our load.

We'd like to lighten your load as well. In the final section of this handbook, you will find 14 weeks of discipleship discussions to help you get started. As you work through the series, you will notice that the discussions are designed to help us deepen our love for God and for one another.

Before we can begin to deepen our love for God and for other people, however, we need to take one step back and remember, "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). Since we're working with babies and toddlers who are just beginning to say their first words and take their first steps, they need to see clearly the beaming face of the Father who loves them. They need to feel safe and secure in His loving arms. They need to begin to recognize His kind and compassionate voice. They need to know that He loved us first. The discussions are designed to reflect this reality as well.

Jesus was always full of good news. And it's good news that we don't have to cover all the Law and the Prophets in our discipleship discussions. We can simply focus on helping kids grow in their love for God and their love for one another. We can take a deep breath and be grateful. Jesus is a kind and compassionate teacher. His yoke is easy. He loved us first. And He will be with us through it *all*.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Jesus takes “all” and makes it “small.” He is a gentle and humble teacher who lightens our load (Matthew 11:28-30). As you think about your own experience in leading discipleship discussions, what would it look like to lighten the load on kids? What would it look like to make the burden light?
2. He loved you first. When were you first aware of God's love for you? Share something about that experience.
3. Talk about a time in recent history when you've been most aware of God's love for you. What helped you become aware? What difference did it make in your life?
4. What are some simple and practical things we can do to help kids discover how deeply God loves them?

Toolbox to Help Kids Grow

Welcome to the resource section of this handbook!

On the pages that follow, you will find these tools and resources:

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Discipleship Discussions

An Important Introduction

Before you begin, here are a few things to keep in mind.

- 1) **Our Goal:** The goal of our discussions is to help kids become present in the written word so that they might encounter the Living Word. The goal is not to discover principles (although you may discover principles along the way). The goal is not to get through the passage or answer all the questions (although you may do both). The goal is to help kids become present and encounter Jesus.
- 2) **Our Method:** Review the guidelines for asking good questions in chapters 9 and 10. Notice that each discussion will contain questions that engage every spoke of the Awareness Wheel. Feel free to improve the questions, add or subtract questions or adapt them for your personal leadership style and for your group.
- 3) **Our Leader:** Become familiar with all the questions before you meet with kids. Then be ready to flex and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. The more your discussions feel like a conversation among friends, the better. But this takes preparation and practice, even when you have a printed guide. Do your part and prepare, then expect the Holy Spirit to do His part and lead.
- 4) **Our Posture:** Pray with kids and help kids learn to pray. Model a prayerful posture in both preparation and in leading the discussion.
- 5) **Our Memory:** There will be a list of possible memory verses offered at the end of this section. If you choose to ask kids to memorize these verses, allow time at the beginning or end of the discussion for kids to recite the verse. Consider tools or strategies for helping them remember (printing the verse on cards for kids to take, for example). You will notice that we allow two weeks for kids to memorize one verse, and the verses are relevant to the discipleship discussions for those weeks. This allows one week for memorizing and one week for reviewing the verse. Consider asking kids to review all the previous memory verses on a review week.
- 6) **Our Options:** Included in the lesson plans will be some Creative Ideas for leaders to use (if you choose) in the discussion. There will be Leader Helps spelling out the need for specific materials or special preparation (for example, this week bring a large pad of paper for making a list). And there will be Leader Hints regarding answers to certain questions in the discussion. Be sure to check the “Leader’s Helps and Hints” as you prepare each week.
- 7) **Our Gift:** The discipleship discussions may include too many questions for the time you have available with kids. That’s good news! That means, with just a little tweaking, you can divide one discussion into two and multiply the number of discussions from 14 to 28! Use these discussion guides as a gift to you. Take them and mold them to your style, divide and multiply them, edit and improve them! Young Life leaders are some of the most creative people on the planet. Here is your lump of dough; take it and make it into something that works for you.

Note: Kids will benefit from having a journal as they walk through these discipleship discussions with you. A spiral notebook will do, or maybe you’d like to give your kids a special journal. Whatever the case, there will be many opportunities for them to record their thoughts and experiences throughout the next 14 weeks. It will be helpful for them to have a journal by week two.

God bless you as you help kids encounter the Living Word through the written word. God bless you as you introduce adolescents to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith.

Discipleship Discussions

Week One: Jesus Welcomes Us as We Are

Luke 15:1-2

1. If you were going to have a dinner party at a restaurant, where would you have it and why? Present company excluded, who would you invite to your party? Who would you want to hang out with over a meal?

Today we're going to begin to look at an account of Jesus from Luke 15. Luke is the third book of the New Testament and is called "the Gospel of Luke." "Gospel" means "good news." So as we read from this book, let's keep our eyes and ears open for the good news. Today we're going to look at the first two verses of this chapter. Let's read Luke 15:1-2.

2. Let's make some observations about what we've read. In verse one, who was gathered around to hear Jesus?

Tax collectors were despised people in the community. They were often corrupt and took more than was required from people. But what about this other group, the "sinners"? Who do you think might be included in that crowd?

3. Besides the tax collectors and sinners, who else is mentioned in these two verses? And what were those people doing?
4. If you were painting a picture of this scene, what would it look like? Where would you put the tax collectors and sinners in relation to Jesus? Where would you put the people who were muttering?

What facial expressions and body language would you paint on the faces of the tax collectors and sinners? What facial expressions would you paint on the Pharisees and teachers of the law?

5. If you were to interview one of the Pharisees or teachers of the law and ask, "What is it that bothers you about Jesus?" What answers do you think you might hear?

If you were to interview people at your school and ask the same question, what answers might you hear?

6. If you were to place yourself in this scene, where would you be situated physically in relation to Jesus? What would you be thinking? What would you be feeling?

7. Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. If Jesus were having a dinner party, who would He invite from your school?

If you were sitting at the table at that party, what would you want Jesus to say to the group?

What do you think He might actually say?

8. Can you think of a time when you have felt welcomed by Jesus? Tell us a little bit about that experience.
9. This is the Gospel of Luke. As you consider the two verses we've read, what is the good news for you today?

As you consider this good news, is there anything it makes you want to do in response?

Next week, we'll look at what Jesus does in response to the muttering and grumbling. Between now and then, let's try an experiment.

Take-Away:

Take a few minutes each day to imagine Jesus welcoming us and inviting us to eat with Him. Here is a suggestion. When you stop to eat one of your meals each day, take a moment to imagine Jesus sitting next to you, smiling. Whether you say it out loud or silently, take a moment to thank Him for welcoming you and loving you as you are.

Memory Verse

"But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Week Two: Jesus Never Gives Up on Us

Luke 15:1-4

1. Have you ever lost something that was valuable to you? Tell us the story. (What did you lose? How did you lose it? How did you feel when you realized it was lost? What did you do once you knew it was gone? Did you ever find it?)

Today we're going to continue reading the passage from Luke that we started last week. It's a passage where Jesus talked about losing something very valuable. Let's read Luke 15:1-4. Remember, we are listening for good news.

2. Let's think back to what we talked about last week. Someone re-cap for us: What was the good news?

Did anyone try our experiment at meals last week? If so, how did it go? Give us a brief report.

3. Picking back up with the passage, according to verse 3, how did Jesus respond to the muttering critics? What did He do?

You might have to think a little harder on this one, but what did Jesus not do in response to the grumbling and complaining?

What does this response tell you about Jesus?

4. In this story, you and I are the sheep, and Jesus is the one who owns the sheep. He says He is willing to leave 99 sheep in the open field to go and search for one lost sheep. What point do you think Jesus is trying to make with this statement?

On a scale of 1-100 (1=worthless, 100=priceless), how much value does Jesus put on that one lost sheep? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=not very; 10=a lot), how valuable do you feel personally? Help us understand your rating.

5. According to verse 4, how long does Jesus look for the lost sheep?

What insight does this give you about the heart of Jesus?

What words would you use to describe His character?

6. Imagine that you're a lost sheep, stuck in some thicket somewhere, unable to get out. Then you hear Jesus coming in the distance. He is searching for you. You hear Him calling your name. You hear His footsteps. You hear Him shaking bushes and pulling back limbs.

As you think back over your life, do you see any signs that Jesus was looking for you? Do you recall any moments when you heard Him "calling your name" or "shaking bushes"? Any moments when He was trying to get your attention? Tell us about one of those moments.

7. What feelings stir in you when you think of Jesus searching for you until He finds you? Complete the statement, "I feel _____."

8. Can you think of a moment when it felt like Jesus had found you? Tell us about that moment.

Or, maybe you'd rather tell us about what it feels like to be lost, to be stuck out in the bushes on your own. You can share that experience if you would rather.

9. It seems that Jesus wants us to know that He never gives up when it comes to caring for His sheep. Can you think of a specific situation in your life where you need Jesus to not give up? What do you need Jesus to do for you in that situation?

Next week we will finish this passage in Luke. Between now and then, here's our next experiment:

Take-Away:

Before you go to bed at night, think back over the day. Can you recall any moments when you felt lost? Any moments when you felt found? Record those moments briefly in a journal. (Here is a prompt to help you: I felt lost when I felt found when) Thank Jesus that He loves you so much that He never stops searching for you. Take a moment to say, "Here I am, Jesus. I'm ready to be found." Even if you aren't able to do this every night, give it a try when you can.

Memory Verse

"But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"
(Romans 5:8).

Week Three: Jesus Throws a Party in our Honor

Luke 15:1-7

1. Tell us about a time in your life when you were excited about something and happy. What did you do with your excitement? How did you celebrate?

Today we're going to finish the passage in the Gospel of Luke that we started two weeks ago. We're going to see what Jesus does when He is excited and happy. Who can recall what the word "Gospel" means? And what are we looking for as we read?

Before we read the passage, who is willing to summarize for us what we've discovered in the past two weeks from reading this account?

2. Let's read Luke 15:1-7. According to verse 5, what does Jesus do with the sheep when He finds it?

Back to our imaginary painting hobby. If you were painting a portrait of Jesus with a lost sheep on His shoulders, what expression would you paint on His face?

3. Jesus carries the sheep home. What do you think Jesus is doing on the journey home? Is He scolding the sheep? Is He lecturing the sheep? Is He singing a song or whistling? Maybe He turns His head every once in a while and gives the sheep a kiss on the cheek? How do you see it?
4. Imagine for a moment that you are the sheep on the shoulders of Jesus. Except you're not just an ordinary sheep. You can think and speak like a human. What are you thinking as you ride along on the shoulders of Jesus?

When you get back to the other sheep, how would you describe your experience to the others?

5. You might notice that Jesus takes the sheep home. He doesn't take the sheep back into the open field with the other 99 sheep are waiting. Can you imagine having a sheep in your house? What problems might that create?

What do you think Jesus might be trying to tell us about Himself by telling us that He takes the sheep home?

6. What does Jesus do when He gets home with the sheep?

What do you think Jesus is trying to reveal to us about Himself?

7. Read verse 7 again. "Repent" may be an unfamiliar word. Here is one definition: Repent means to feel regret for thoughts, attitudes or actions and make a change. Have you heard any other definitions that you could share?

Can you think of a time when you repented — when you felt regret and made a change? What led you to feel regret? What did your change look like?

8. In this passage, the sheep got lost and then allowed Jesus to find it. We're really good at getting lost. Jesus is really good at finding us. It seems like our main job might be to call out to Jesus, "Help me! I'm lost!" Is there any area in your life where you feel lost right now? Any area where you'd like to call out to Jesus for help? You don't need to answer this question out loud. But you can if you would like to.
9. As you think back over the past three weeks and this passage, what has Jesus revealed to you about Himself?

What has He revealed to you about yourself?

Take-Away:

As you go through this next week, when things get tough, remember that Jesus is joyfully carrying you across His shoulders. Take a moment to stop and listen for what Jesus would like to say to you as He carries you, especially in tough times. Ask Him to give you ears to hear what He has to say. Record anything you think you hear from Jesus in your journal.

Memory Verse:

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32).

Week Four: Jesus Gives Us a Great Gift

John 14:15-17

A Creative Idea: Find an empty shoe box. On the outside, write “Build Your Own Best Friend Kit.” Inside put a long piece of butcher paper with a large, stick-figure human drawn on it. Also include several colored markers. Wrap up the box like a gift. Have the kid whose birthday is closest to that day unwrap the gift. Then lay the stick figure person out on the floor or a table and ask all the kids to write words on or around the stick figure that describe a best friend. (For example, around the eyes, a person might write “Sees the best in me.” Or around his feet, “Walks beside me, not in front of me.”)

1. If you were writing a “Help Wanted” ad for a best friend, what would you ask for in your ad?

For the next three weeks, we’re going to look at a gift that Jesus gave us when He left us to return to His Father’s side in heaven. It was the gift of a very close friend. The Bible has several names for this friend, including the Holy Spirit and the Advocate. Let’s look at John 14:15-17 and see what we can discover about this gift.

Before we read the passage, let’s consider the context of what we are reading. Jesus has spent three years living with and working with the friends He is talking to in this passage. They are a very close-knit group — a true band of brothers. These are His best friends. Jesus, however, knows that His time is short. In a few hours, He will be arrested, beaten and then crucified. So He has gathered His band of brothers around Him to have one last important conversation before He dies.

They are probably beginning to get the idea that Jesus is getting ready to leave them. He has been predicting what is going to happen and preparing them for His death for a while now. Still, like people tend to do, His friends are in denial. They don’t want to believe that Jesus is going to leave them. They don’t want to believe that He is going to die. They are probably feeling a mix of emotions as they lean in and listen to what Jesus has to say in this passage.

What are some of the emotions that you think the friends might be feeling as they listen to Jesus?

2. Let’s read John 14:15-17. We’ll come back to verse 15 at another time. For now, let’s start with verse 16. From this one verse, we can discover at least four things about this gift from Jesus.
 - a. Who is actually going to give us this gift?
 - b. What is Jesus’ role in the gift-giving process?
 - c. What will this advocate do for us?
 - d. How long will He be with us?
3. If you were one of the disciples gathered around Jesus, leaning in and listening, you might have some questions for Jesus after just this one sentence. What questions do you think might be stirring in the minds of the disciples as Jesus speaks?
4. Jesus said this gift would be our advocate. Does anyone know the definition of the word “advocate”? If not, let’s look it up in the dictionary. (Read the definition.)

The Holy Spirit is someone who sticks up for us, almost like a lawyer in a court of law. But Jesus said the Holy Spirit is “another” advocate, which implies we already have an advocate, and the Holy Spirit is Advocate Number Two. Imagine again that you are one of the disciples gathered around Jesus. You interrupt Him and say, “Jesus, you make it sound like we’ve already got an advocate. Who is the first advocate? Who else is sticking up for us?” What do you think Jesus would say to you in response?

5. How does it make you feel to think that you have two advocates sticking up for you? (Jesus and the Holy Spirit)

Can you think of any stories you've heard from the Bible where Jesus stuck up for someone? What do you remember?

Leader Hints: the woman caught in adultery [John 8:1-11]; the leper [Matthew 8:1-3]; the invalid stuck by the pool for 38 years [John 5:1-9]; the man with the withered hand [Mark 3:1-6]; the demoniac in the tombs [Mark 5:1-17]

Can you think of any situations in your own life right now where you would like Jesus to stick up for you?

6. In verse 17, we discover another name for this gift. What is His name?

According to this verse, where are two places the disciples would find "the Spirit of truth"?

If we start putting the pieces of this puzzle together, we begin to realize, Jesus is saying that the Spirit who is in Him will soon be in His friends as well. He is giving them a going-away present. They have been a close band of brothers, but now they will be even closer, because Jesus will put His Spirit in them.

7. Let's turn two chapters over to John 16:6-7. What emotion does Jesus see welling up in His friends as He talks in verse 6?

Jesus offers some surprising words in response, "It is for your good that I am going away." What could possibly be good about Jesus going away? What explanation does Jesus give for His claim?

Apparently, in order for Jesus to put His Spirit in us, He first has to return to the Father. Recall what we read in John 14:16. When Jesus returns to the Father, what is Jesus going to ask the Father to do? And what will be the Father's response?

8. Let's look at one last verse in the Bible. Let's look at Proverbs 18:24.

9. Jesus has gathered His closest friends together to comfort them and encourage them. They are a close-knit band of brothers. But now they are discovering that Jesus is a friend who sticks closer than even a brother. He is going to put His very own Spirit, His very own life inside of them. That's a closeness we can only understand by experience. When we trust Jesus with our lives, He trusts us with HIS life in return. He puts His Spirit in us. He sends us an internal helper.

Have you noticed any evidence in your life that Jesus has put His Spirit in you?

Can you think of anything specific that you'd like Jesus to help you with this week?

Take-Away:

Over the course of the next week, pay extra attention to the Spirit of Jesus within you. Remind yourself that He is an advocate that the Father has sent to help you. Make notes in your journal of any evidence you see of His Spirit in you. And don't hesitate to ask Him to help you at any moment. That is why He came. (Here is a journal prompt to help you: These are some signs I see of Jesus living in me)

Memory Verse:

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Week Five: Jesus Welcomes Us into His Family

Romans 8:14-17

1. Think about your family, the people you live with at home. Imagine you decided to adopt a new member into your family. You're not adopting a baby, but a 10-year-old child. It's your job as the older brother or sister to give this new family member his or her first introduction to the family. What are two or three things this new adopted child would need to know in order to survive or maybe thrive in your family?

From the very beginning, God has existed as a very close family: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Last week we began to get a glimpse of how this family operates together. This week we're going to look a little bit more at how this close-knit family works together on our behalf.

But first, who can tell us what you remember from last week? What did we learn about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Are there any words you remember or any pictures that come to mind?

Did any of you record something in your journal this last week that you would like to share? Did any of you make notes about what you were noticing about God's Spirit in you?

2. Let's read another passage that gives us a glimpse into this family. Let's read Romans 8:14-17. Romans is a book written by a man named Paul to the followers of Jesus who were living in Rome not long after Jesus died and was resurrected. According to verse 15, what did the Spirit of God bring about in our lives?
3. Last week, we read where Jesus used the word "advocate" to describe His Spirit in us. An advocate could be a lawyer in a courtroom. Or an advocate might be a witness on the witness stand speaking up for a person who is on trial. According to Romans 8:16, what is one of the things the Spirit of truth does in us?

According to this verse, who is it that needs to be convinced that we are God's child?

On a scale of 1-10 (1=very difficult; 10=not difficult at all), how difficult is it for you to believe that you are a deeply loved child of God? What makes it difficult — or easy — for you to believe?

4. As your big brother, it is Jesus' job to help you understand what it means to be adopted into His family. Let's look at some of the benefits or "rights" of being a deeply loved child of God. Let's make a list of what we find.

Leader Help: If possible, have a big paper pad or a white board for making the list.

- Romans 8:1 (*There is no condemnation for us.*)
 - Romans 8:11 (*We will be resurrected after we die.*)
 - Romans 8:26 (*We have help in praying.*)
 - Romans 8:28 (*God works in all things for our good.*)
 - Romans 8:31 (*God graciously gives us all things.*)
 - Romans 8:34 (*Jesus is interceding for us.*)
 - Romans 8:38-39 (*Nothing can separate us from His love.*)
5. This is a great list, and that's only one chapter from the Bible! There is so much more to discover regarding the benefits of belonging to God's family. As you think about your life right now, what on that list is most meaningful to you? Tell us about your answer.

Take-Away:

This week, write out the verse or verses from Romans 8 that are most meaningful or encouraging to you right now. Write them on a notecard or a piece of paper. Then keep that notecard or piece of paper with you or in a prominent place where you will see it daily. Take a moment each day to simply say, “Thank you, Father, that I belong to you. And thank you that this means ... ” — then fill in the blank with your verse(s).

Memory Verse:

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

Week Six: Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

Matthew 6:5-8

1. When you were a kid, did you ever make a fort or have a secret hiding place? Tell us about it.

Last week we explored the benefits of belonging to the family of God. Can you remember any of the benefits we read about in Romans 8? What are some of the benefits of being adopted into God's family?

Today we're going to talk about another benefit of being a deeply loved child of God. We're going to read Matthew 6:5-8.

Before we read the passage, here is a little background. This takes place near the beginning of Jesus' public work. People are really beginning to take an interest in Jesus, and crowds are beginning to follow Him and listen to Him. So Jesus goes up on a mountainside where there is plenty of room, and crowds of people gather on the mountainside to hear Him teach. The words we are going to read today are a small part of a much bigger message that Jesus spoke to the people listening on the mountain. In fact, it comes from three chapters that are called, "The Sermon on the Mount."

2. Let's read Matthew 6:5-9. Jesus is teaching about prayer. "Prayer" is simply another word for "conversation with God." What is the first thing Jesus tells us about prayer in verse 5?

What are some things people from your school do to get attention?

What do you think Jesus means when He says people who pray just to get attention "have received their reward in full?"

3. In verse 6, what does Jesus encourage us to do instead?

What do we learn about the Father from Jesus in this verse?

4. Judging from the words of Jesus, the Father wants time apart with you, away from everyone else. How does it make you feel to hear this?

What do you think Jesus means when He says the Father "will reward you"?

Have you experienced any time apart, talking with God on your own? Tell us a little bit about your experience.

What was rewarding about that time?

5. In verse 7, what else does Jesus tell us to avoid when we are praying?

What is the flawed logic of those Jesus is talking about?

6. What do we learn about our Father from Jesus in verse 8?

7. Let's look for a minute at a chapter from the book of Psalms. Let's look at Psalm 139:1-6.

According to Jesus and to this Psalm, how would you describe the Father's relationship with you?

8. You have a very attentive heavenly Father who knows you very well and loves you completely. When you hear that truth, what feelings stir in you?

What would it look like for you to act like you have an attentive heavenly Father who knows you very well and loves you? How would that knowledge change the way you talk with Him?

9. Let's read one last verse, Psalm 32:7.

How does the person who wrote this verse describe God?

Can you imagine God hiding you in His big arms and singing songs about how He is going to protect you and take care of you? Are there any songs you've heard or sung that have helped you feel loved or protected by God? What are those songs?

Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine yourself hiding in the arms of the Father. He is your fort. Imagine Him singing a song to you. Maybe the song you mentioned.

Leader Hint: Allow a moment or two of silence. Then ask: Is there anything you would like to say to Him in response? You don't need to say it out loud. But you can say it silently to Him in secret.

Leader Hint: Allow another moment or two of silence, and then close in prayer.

Take-Away:

Sometime during the next week, find a secret place where you can spend some time apart with the Father. Take your journal. Read Psalm 139:1-6 again and Psalm 32:7. Thank Him for knowing everything about you and loving you completely. Listen for what song He might be singing to you. Consider writing Him a letter in your journal.

Memory Verse:

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

Week Seven: Jesus Points us to the Father

Matthew 6:9-13

1. Think of the fathers you have known, either personally or through TV, the news or the movies. Who has been an example of a good father? What makes this person a good father?

According to Jesus, you have a very good Father who loves you. What have we learned about the Father's love so far?

Did anyone take some time apart with the Father since last week? Would you like to share with us what you did and what it was like for you?

2. The past few weeks, we've been learning that we have been adopted into God's family. God is our Father and Jesus is our big brother. As a good big brother, Jesus is teaching us everything we need to know in order to thrive in this family. He even teaches us how to talk and communicate with the Father. Today we're going to look a little bit more at what conversations with our Father might look like. We're going to read Matthew 6:9-13.

This passage is another passage from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is talking to crowds of people on a mountainside. In these verses, Jesus gives us an example of what a conversation with the Father might look like. Let's look at the pattern Jesus gave us. Let's read the passage.

3. Who is Jesus pointing us to in verse 9? To whom do we pray?

Can you think of any reason Jesus might use the words "Our Father" instead of "My Father"?

Who do you think the word "our" includes?

4. What are some images that come to mind for you when you think of heaven?

The fact is, we don't know much about heaven. And some of the ideas we have are skewed, built on images that aren't mentioned anywhere in the Bible. (For example, you might be surprised to learn that heaven is never depicted as a place where angels float on clouds playing harps.) But here is one way to think of heaven: Heaven is where we experience the full presence and goodness of God without anything getting in the way.

As you look around at the world today or at your life, where do you see or experience the goodness of God?

What gets in the way of us experiencing God's goodness?

Can you imagine a world where nothing gets in the way? That's a hint of what heaven is like.

5. Let's look at one glimpse the Bible gives us of heaven. Let's read from the last book of the Bible, and the next-to-last chapter. Let's read Revelation 21:1-4.

A Creative Idea: As you read through the verses from the book of Revelation, give kids paper and markers and ask them to draw what they are hearing. Read the passage a couple of times with silence in-between, to give them time to draw. Ask them to explain their drawings.

A Creative Idea: Have kids sit back-to-back. Give Kid One a piece of paper and markers. Give Kid Two a paper bag with an object in it. (For example: a salt shaker, a stapler, a hammer.) Kid Two has to describe the object in the bag to Kid One without using any actual words in the name of the object (for example, if

it is a salt shaker, the kid can't say "salt" or "shaker"). Kid One draws the object according to what is heard. This helps kids think about how hard it must have been for John to describe what he saw in his visions, especially because he was seeing things no one had ever seen.

Before we read, here is something to know about the book of Revelation. It speaks often in metaphors and symbolic language. Heaven is beyond our ability to comprehend. So God uses images we understand to give us a glimpse of something we can't grasp. Imagine trying to explain to a baby in a womb what the world outside the womb is like. That's a little bit like God trying to explain heaven to us. (Read Revelation 21:1-4.)

Sometimes in the Bible, the word "sea" is a metaphor for "chaos." According to this verse, what has happened to all the chaos in the world?

What other metaphors or symbolic language do you see in these verses?

What do you think God might be trying to communicate to us through these images?

6. The bottom line is in verse 4. What does God tell us clearly, in plain language, about heaven?

Think of the statement, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes." What does this statement tell you about the heart of our Father in heaven?

7. Let's look for a moment at Psalm 34:18. What do we learn about the heart of our Father from this verse?

The good news is: Our Father has a tender heart. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes one day. He draws close to us when we are brokenhearted. He saves us when we feel crushed. Who in your life needs to hear this good news?

What about you? How is your heart these days? What do you need to hear from the Father?

8. Matthew 6:9 finishes with the phrase, "hallowed be your name." Let's look up the word "hallowed" in the dictionary. (Read the definition.)

If you were going to define the word "hallowed" in your own words, what would you say?

Remember, this is our big brother Jesus teaching us how to have a conversation with our Father. Apparently, He thinks it's a good idea for us to begin by remembering who our Father is. Let's make a list of words that describe our Heavenly Father. What words would you use?

Leader Help: Have a large pad of paper or a white board for making the list.

9. Let's read one more thing Jesus had to say in His sermon on the mountainside regarding talking with our Father. Let's read Matthew 7:9-11.

What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us about the Father in these verses?

With three words, Jesus is inviting us to use our imaginations when we think about our Father in heaven. Jesus says, "... how much more ..." It's as if Jesus is inviting us to think of the best father we can think of, and then imagine "how much more" is our Father in heaven.

Take-Away:

This week, take some time apart with the Father (in secret). Here are a couple of ideas of how to use that time. 1) Re-read Matthew 7:9-11. Take time to imagine "how much more" is your Father in heaven. Here is a prompt for your journal: "Thank you, Father, that you are better than the best father I can think of. That means you are ..." 2) Read Psalm 62:8. Take time to examine your own heart. If it helps, draw a picture of

your heart in your journal that reflects the current condition of your heart. Take time to pour out your heart to your Father who loves you.

Memory Verse:

“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23).

Week Eight: Jesus Shows Us How to Love

Matthew 6:10; John 14:15; John 14:23-27

1. Think about the music that is popular right now. Let's make a list of our favorite playlist. (Make the list.)

Leader Help: Have a white board or large pad of paper for making the list.

As you think about each of these songs, what do their lyrics tell us about love? For each song, complete the sentence, "Love is ..."

Leader Hint: Write beside each title what the song tells us about love.

Today we're going to explore what Jesus tells us about love. We're going to read again Matthew 6:9-13. Then we're going to look mainly at verse 10.

2. Let's read Matthew 6:9-13. What request does Jesus teach us to make of the Father in verse 10?

What images come to mind when you think of a kingdom?

Who do you think the king is in this kingdom?

Who do you think we are in this kingdom?

In a kingdom, how do "subjects" in that kingdom show their allegiance to a king?

3. A couple of weeks ago, we read John 14:15-17. We said we would look at verse 15 "at another time." It is now that time. Let's look at John 14:15.

According to Jesus, how do we show our love for Him?

Notice Jesus didn't say, "If you love me, keep my suggestions." In your opinion, what is the difference between a command and a suggestion?

Let's also read John 14:23-24. Again, how can we tell if someone loves Jesus?

According to these verses, if we obey the teaching of Jesus, who else are we obeying? Where do the words of Jesus come from?

We have seen over and over again the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together. From all you've heard, how would you describe Jesus' relationship with His Father?

4. The way we demonstrate our love for Jesus is by obeying His teaching. Let's keep reading in John 14. According to John 14:25-26, who will help us in this process? Who will be our teacher?

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit "teaching" you from within lately? Tell us about your experience.

Some people talk about the "prompt" and "check" of the Holy Spirit. In other words, at times we can sense the Holy Spirit prompting us to do or say something. At other times, we can sense the Holy Spirit checking us to NOT do or say something. Can you recall any experience of the prompt or check of the Holy Spirit lately? What was that like for you?

5. Let's read Matthew 6:10 again. Let's think about the word "will" for a moment. When someone dies

and leaves a will, what kinds of things are usually included in that will?

Why do you think we call that last document a “will”?

When Jesus says to the Father, “Your will be done,” what do you think He means by that statement?

6. Does anyone remember how we defined “heaven” last week?

Leader Hint: Heaven is the full expression of God’s presence and His goodness without anything getting in the way.

Another definition of heaven might be: Heaven is where God has His way; and God’s way is very good. “Your will be done,” is another way of saying, “God, I want you to have your way.” Is there any area in your life or situation where you would like to experience more of the goodness of God? What would it look like for God to have His way in this area of your life?

7. What are the last seven words of Matthew 6:10?

Think back to what we read last week in Revelation 21. God gives us a picture of heaven coming down to earth. Apparently it is God’s desire and plan for heaven to invade earth. He wants us to experience His goodness here on earth without anything getting in the way. Jesus used the word “kingdom” to describe this reality.

Loving Jesus means we listen to the Holy Spirit who is teaching us from within, and then we act according to what He is teaching us. As we do this, little by little and bit by bit, God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. God’s goodness will be revealed more and more without anything getting in the way.

As you have been listening to and following Jesus in the past few weeks, have you seen God’s goodness revealed in any particular ways? Tell us about that.

8. From your experience, what makes it sometimes difficult for us to obey the teaching of Jesus?
9. Jesus seems to know that what He is asking of His friends might be difficult or feel overwhelming. What encouragement does He offer them in John 14:27?

One way we can tell if we are listening to and following Jesus is the peace we experience within us as a result. If you were writing the dictionary, how would you define “peace”?

Have you experienced the peace that Jesus talks about? How would you describe it?

Take-Away:

This week, remember to pay attention to the Holy Spirit who is teaching you from within. Notice when you sense the “prompt” or “check” of the Holy Spirit. Make a note in your journal of what you are hearing from your teacher. Remember some of the words we used to describe our Father in heaven. It will be important to remember how good our Father is so that we grow to trust Him and let Him have His way.

Memory Verse:

“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23).

Week Nine: Jesus Invites Us to Ask

Matthew 6:9-11; Mark 46-52

1. What's one of the biggest things you've ever asked someone to give you or to do for you ("big" in terms of what it cost the other person in time, money, social standing)? Tell us a little bit of the story.

We've spent the past two weeks looking at the prayer Jesus taught His disciples. We sometimes call this "the Lord's Prayer." Jesus, our big brother, is helping us learn how to talk to our Heavenly Father.

What do you recall from the past two weeks? What have we learned so far from Jesus?

2. Today we're going to learn how to ask our Father for what we need. Let's look at Matthew 6:9-11. What are the first two words of verse 11?

Notice Jesus didn't instruct us to say, "Please give us," or "Would you please consider maybe giving us."

What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us about our relationship with the Father?

How does it make you feel, to think of asking God to give you something with such direct language?

3. Let's look for a moment at an account from Mark 10:46-52. This is an account of someone asking very directly and specifically for something from Jesus.

A Creative Idea: Have kids act out the scene with blind Bart.

Someone paint the picture for us. What is happening in the beginning of this scene, in the first two verses?

How many people are with Jesus?

Where is the blind man? (We'll call him "Bart.")

What do you think the blind man looked like?

4. Imagine that you are Bart. You're sitting in the dirt; you can't see anything or anyone. You think it's going to be just another hot and dusty day of begging beside the road. Then suddenly you hear the crowd coming, and you hear the rumor that Jesus is in the crowd. You can't see Him or hear Him, but you start shouting, hoping He will see and hear you.

What are you thinking as you are shouting?

What are you feeling?

Now people from the crowd are telling you to keep quiet, to shut up. But you just shout louder.

What would be your reasons for shouting louder?

5. What does Jesus do in Mark 10:49?

Continue to imagine you are Bart sitting in the dirt. Suddenly you hear people from the crowd say, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you!" NOW what are you thinking and feeling?

In verse 50, Bart threw his cloak aside. Bart's cloak might have been his only possession. It protected him from the weather. Maybe he slept under it at night. Throwing his cloak aside might have been like you or me jumping out of our car and leaving it running with the keys in it. It might not be there when we returned. Bart was taking a big risk. But apparently he believed Jesus was worth the risk.

What do you think Bart believed about Jesus?

6. What did Jesus ask Bart in verse 51?

Imagine that you are Bart, standing in front of Jesus. You still can't see Him or anyone else for that matter. But you can hear His voice as He says to you, "What do you want me to do for you?" How long do you think it took Bart to come up with his answer?

7. Jesus asks Bart a very direct question. Bart gives Jesus a very direct answer. What happens next?

Again, Bart was taking a risk, telling Jesus the truth about what he wanted in front of all of those people, the people who had been telling him to be quiet. Now imagine that you are one of the people who told Bart to be quiet. You see Jesus give Bart his sight. What are you thinking and feeling?

8. According to Jesus, what was it about Bart that led to his healing?

Let's read Hebrews 11:1. (Hebrews is near the end of the New Testament.)

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for" What did Bart hope for from the beginning when he realized Jesus was walking by?

What did he seem sure about as he yelled out to Jesus?

Let's look back at Matthew 6:11. What confidence does it seem Jesus wants us to have when we are talking with our Father in Heaven? What does He want us to be sure of?

9. **Leader Help:** Have cards and pens on hand.

There is much more we could dig into from this simple verse, Matthew 6:11. That's the wonderful thing about God's Word. You never come to the end of all that God has to say to us through it. But for now, let's settle on this: Jesus wants us to come to the Father with confidence and ask Him for what we need. Let's notice one other thing about verse 11.

What is the second word in the verse?

Notice again what the verse doesn't say. It doesn't say, "Give me this day my daily bread." What do you think Jesus is inviting us to do?

Jesus is giving us a picture of a very good Father who loves us. We can come to Him directly and with confidence and ask for what we need. And we can also ask Him to meet the needs of others. (Give us ...) But like the blind man Bart, asking our Father honestly for what we need involves a risk.

What are some things we risk when we ask the Father honestly for what we need?

10. In Matthew 7:9, Jesus instructs us to remember everything good there is to know about our Father in heaven. ("Hallowed be your name.") In Matthew 7:10, He instructs us to line up our hearts with the Father's heart. ("Have your way, Father.") Once we have our minds and our hearts connected rightly with the Father, then He instructs us to ask with confidence for what we need, and for the needs of others.

Let's end with reading one more encouraging word from Jesus. Let's read Matthew 17:20.

A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds in nature. What encouragement is Jesus giving us with His words?

Don't answer this out loud, but think for a moment: Is there anything today that you would like to ask the Father for with confidence? Maybe you only have a mustard seed of confidence, but Jesus says that's enough.

Write on a card or in your journal right now what you would like to ask the Father for today. Write what you would like to ask Him for yourself, what you'd like to ask for someone else, or both.

Take-Away:

This week, take time apart with the Father to talk with Him about what you've written. Be honest with Him about what you are thinking and feeling and wanting. Take some time to read Matthew 7:7-11 and journal about what you are hearing from Jesus and what you'd like to say to Him in return.

Memory Verse:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Week Ten: Jesus Teaches Us About Forgiveness

Matthew 6:12; John 8:1-11

1. Can you think of a time when you were little and you got caught doing something wrong? Tell us the story. What did you do? How did you get caught? How did you feel? What happened to you?
2. Today as we continue to look at the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, we're going to focus on verse 12. Let's read Matthew 6:12.

If someone owed you \$500, what would it mean to "forgive" that debt?

Jesus is instructing us to ask the Father to forgive us our "debts." What debts do you think He is talking about? What are some things we might owe the Father that we have not given Him?

The second part of the sentence is tied to the first: "as we also have forgiven our debtors." Jesus is talking about the people in our lives who need forgiveness from us. What are some things other people in our lives might owe US that they have not given to us?

3. As we continue to follow Jesus, we will often find Him making a direct connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. For example, let's read 1 John 4:19-21.

How is our love for God and our love for other people connected?

4. Jesus did more than just tell us to forgive other people. He showed us how to do it. Let's look for a minute at an example of Jesus showing us how to forgive. Let's read John 8:1-11. Let's start by reading verses 1-6.

Someone recap for us what we've just read. Describe the scene and tell us what happened in these verses.

There is a good chance that this woman was not fully dressed. She had been pulled out of a bed with a man and thrown into the temple courts, a very crowded place. She was being used by the religious leaders to set a trap for Jesus. "Adultery," according to the Bible, is having sex with someone who is not your spouse. According to the "law," what is the punishment for adultery?

When Jesus stooped down and started writing in the dirt, if you were the woman, what would you be thinking or feeling?

What if you were one of the religious leaders? What would you be thinking or feeling?

The Bible doesn't tell us what Jesus wrote in the dirt. But as He wrote, what do you think the people in the crowd were doing? If you were painting a picture of the scene, how would you paint the people in the crowd?

5. Let's read verses 7-11. The religious leaders kept questioning Jesus. What did Jesus say in response?
Then what did Jesus do?
How did the people in the crowd begin to respond? What did they do?
6. Now there are only two people left: the woman and Jesus. What question does Jesus ask the woman?

Jesus could have simply pointed out that no one condemned her. But instead He asked a question. Can you think of any reason why Jesus might have asked the woman a question?

7. There was only one person in the crowd that day who had the right to throw a stone at the woman. There was only one person who had never done anything wrong. Let's read Hebrews 4:14-16.

A "priest" is someone who makes a case on behalf of a guilty person. (Kind of like the Advocate we've read about before.) What kind of priest is Jesus? According to these verses, how would you describe Him?

Because of the kind of priest Jesus is, what are we invited to do in verse 16?

There was only one person who had the right to throw a stone at the woman. But Jesus chose not to throw a stone at her either. He forgave her.

Now this woman has a new lease on life. She is forgiven. It's as if she had a death sentence and Jesus has set her free. Before she leaves, Jesus gives her clear direction on how to live her new life. What is the last thing Jesus says to her?

8. There is a lot we can learn about forgiveness from the example of Jesus in John 8. First, when someone has done something wrong, it can be hard to stop focusing on that person and what he or she did wrong. But Jesus invites us to look at Him instead. When Jesus bent down to write in the dirt, all the eyes in the crowd shifted from the woman to Jesus. You can bet they were intently looking at Him and what He was writing.

Let's imagine that someone in your group of friends has done something wrong, and your group of friends can't quit talking about it or thinking about it. Practically speaking, what are some things you could do to turn the attention elsewhere?

What are some things you could do to turn the attention to Jesus?

Now let's imagine that someone in your group of friends has done something wrong to YOU. Practically speaking, what are some things you could do to help turn your own attention toward Jesus?

What makes it difficult for us to stop focusing on the failure of others?

9. Another thing we learn about Jesus, forgiveness and focus from this passage: When someone has done something wrong, take a good look at your own life. Think about the things you've done wrong instead.

What are some things that happen inside of us when we stop thinking about what someone else has done wrong and start thinking about what we've done wrong instead?

10. Here is a powerful picture of forgiveness: We are getting ready to throw a rock at a guilty person, but instead we open our hands, let the rock drop to the ground and walk away.

As you think about your own life right now, is there anyone you'd really like to hit with a "rock"? Anyone who has done something wrong and you'd like that person to be punished and feel pain? If you were to write one word on that rock, what word would you write? You don't have to share this out loud, but you can if you would like to.

On a scale of 1-10 (1=easy; 10=very hard), how hard would it be for you to let go of your rock and forgive this person?

Jesus helped the religious leaders in the crowd let go of their rocks and walk away. He can help us, too. Let's take a moment in silence to ask Jesus to help us forgive someone who has wronged us.

A Creative Idea: Bring smooth, clean stones for kids to write on at the end of the discussion. Have black markers on hand that will write on the stones. Ask kids to write on one side of the stone something they would like to accuse someone else of (for example: cheating; back-stabbing). On the other side of the stone, ask kids to write a word that they have been guilty of lately. Go somewhere safe at the end of the discussion and have kids throw away their stones. (You can't experience forgiveness if you aren't willing to forgive. Our sin is written on the other side of the "condemning stone.")

Take-Away:

This week, in your time apart with the Father, read Psalm 103:10-12. Then write those verses across the top of a page in your journal. Next, take some time to thank the Father for forgiving you for very specific actions and attitudes. Here is the prompt for your journal: "Father, thank you for forgiving me for" Complete that sentence with at least five answers. Ask the Father to cultivate His forgiving heart in you.

Memory Verse:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Week Eleven: Jesus Offers Us Protection

Matthew 6:9-13; Matthew 4:1-11

1. If you could star in your own superhero movie, what would be your name and what would be your special power?

Today we're going to take a look at how Jesus did battle with an enemy who wanted to defeat Him. But first we're going to see what Jesus said about this enemy in the prayer we've been looking at the last few weeks. Let's read the whole prayer again today, including the last verse. Let's read Matthew 6:9-13.

Jesus instructs us to ask two things from the Father in verse 13. What are those two things?

2. Some translations of the Bible end verse 13 with the words, "deliver us from evil." The most recent translation of the New International Version ends with "deliver us from the evil one." Another name the Bible uses for the evil one is "Satan."

What images or ideas come to mind when you think of the word "Satan"?

Sometimes we have the same problem when we think about Satan that we have when we think about heaven. We've picked up images from our childhood that are not actually in the Bible. For example, it might surprise you to know that the Bible doesn't mention any character dressed in red and carrying a pitchfork. Let's look up some other names we find in the Bible for the evil one.

What names do we find in these verses?

- a. John 10:10
- b. John 8:44
- c. Matthew 4:5

As you look around at the world today, where do you see the thief at work destroying people's lives?

If we were going to make a list of the top ten lies that the devil whispers to your friends at school, what is one lie that would be included on that list?

Can you think of anything the thief has stolen from you personally?

3. Jesus is telling us that not only is there evil in the world, but there is one who is behind all that is evil. Not only are there lies, but there is one who is father of all those lies. Let's look for a moment at an experience in the life of Jesus where He faced the evil one — the liar — directly. Let's read Matthew 4:1-11.

Before we read, here is a little background. This scene unfolds at the very beginning of the public work of Jesus. Jesus has just been baptized by His cousin John. In fact, before we read Matthew 4:1-11, let's read Matthew 3:16-17.

What happens in the moment Jesus comes up out of the water? What does Jesus hear from His Father in heaven?

Keep these words from the Father in mind as we read Matthew 4:1-11.

4. What happens immediately after the Father declares from heaven that He loves Jesus and is pleased with Him?

It's important to realize that Jesus is not being punished; He is being prepared. He isn't sent to the wilderness as a "time out" for bad behavior; He's being led into the wilderness to demonstrate that what the Father just declared about Him is true: Jesus is the Father's deeply loved Son.

5. Imagine for a moment the scene in Matthew 4:1-11. The wilderness in the Middle East is not like the wilderness we often think of in North America. It's not a lush forest with streams and trails. What do you know about the landscape of countries like Israel or Iraq or Iran? What do you think the wilderness was like that Jesus was led into?

How long did Jesus go without food in the wilderness?

What's the longest period of time you've ever gone without food? How did you feel physically during that time?

6. What new name do we see for the devil in verse 3?

The Bible doesn't tell us what the tempter looked like or sounded like, but it does tell us what words he spoke to Jesus. What did the devil tempt Jesus to do?

What did Jesus say in response?

7. Jesus is comparing the words of His Father in heaven to food. What are some things that are true about us and food?

Think back to what we read in Matthew 3:17. What words had Jesus most recently heard from the Father in heaven?

Imagine Jesus "digesting" those words from the Father for the past 40 days. He had been literally living off the loving words of His Father. Those words were like superhero food for Jesus. They gave Him power. But instead of using His power to change rocks into bread, what did Jesus use His power to do?

8. Jesus shows us how to protect ourselves from the evil one. We recall our Father's words and our Father's deep love for us. We remember that we belong to our Father, and that we can trust Him completely. We will continue looking at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness next week. For now, let's look at one other thing Jesus said about bread in John 6:35.

What does Jesus call Himself in verse 35?

What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us about Himself?

Look back at John 6:32. Who gives us this bread?

Jesus said we "live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus is the Living Word, given to us by the Father. He is the visible expression of the Father's love for us. In your opinion, what would it look like for us to "digest" Jesus on a daily basis?

A Creative Idea: Serve some really good bread at the end of the discussion. Serve it during the last question about "digesting" Jesus. Talk about the qualities of the bread you are serving. Talk about the qualities of Jesus.

Take-Away:

Take time apart with the Father this week to digest His love for you. Read Ephesians 3:14-19. Read it more than once, and slowly. Try this exercise: Write a letter from the Father addressed to you. In this letter, allow the Father to describe His love for you, His love “that surpasses knowledge.” Let His Spirit guide you from within. At the end of your letter from the Father, write a simple response: Thank you, Father, for loving me. Thank you that I am your deeply loved child.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him” (Psalm 28:7).

Week Twelve: Jesus Shows Us How to Trust

Matthew 4:1-11

A Creative Idea: Have kids practice a “trust fall” with one another. (One kid stands straight, closes his eyes, crosses his arms across his chest and falls backwards with a stiff body while the other kids stand behind him, put their arms out straight and catch him. Look it up on YouTube if you’ve never seen a trust fall.)

1. Can you think of a time when you had to trust another person to physically protect you from harm? Maybe a fun time like on the ropes course at camp, or a serious time when you were in real danger? Or even a time when you had to trust your mom or dad as a little kid? Tell us about your experience. What happened, and on a scale of 1-10, how hard was it to trust the other person? (1=easy; 10=extremely hard)

We’re going to pick up reading about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness again today. But first, who can recall for us what we read or learned last week? Let’s do a one-sentence, rapid-fire recall.

2. Let’s read the whole passage again, Matthew 4:1-11.

If you were directing a movie about the temptation of Jesus, how would you stage the scene in verse 5? Describe it for us.

The Bible doesn’t tell us how the devil managed to get Jesus from the wilderness to the highest point of the temple. It leaves some room for our imagination. What do you think might have happened?

3. What words did the devil speak to Jesus in verse 6?

Compare what the devil said in verse 6 to what he said in verse 3. What do you notice about his approach?

What did the Father declare about Jesus in Matthew 3:17?

And now what is the enemy asking Jesus to prove?

Have you ever been challenged to prove yourself, either in a positive or negative way? Has anyone ever said to you, “If you really are _____, then prove it by doing this: _____”? What was that like for you? How did you feel, and what did you do?

4. What did Jesus say in response to the challenge from the enemy?

How difficult do you think it was for Jesus to say what He said?

If you were going to paraphrase what Jesus said in verse 7, how would you put it into different words?

5. Compare the response of Jesus in verse 7 to His response in verse 4. What do you notice?

Last week we talked about our superhero selves. If Jesus were a superhero, according to verses 4 and 7, what would be His secret weapon?

6. Let’s read Hebrews 4:12. How does this verse describe the Word of God?

Have you felt the activity of God’s Word in you in the past few weeks? Tell us about your experience.

7. Jesus is not the only one who said, “It is written” in this passage. The enemy quoted Scripture to Jesus to try to get Jesus to act. Let’s revisit verse 4 from last week.

Where did Jesus say the word you could trust (and digest like it was food) would come from?

8. Even though the enemy is quoting God’s Word, the words are not coming from God’s mouth. Let’s look for a moment at Luke 6:45.

What do we learn about the connection between the heart and the mouth?

When we are listening to God’s written Word, we need to consider the heart of the person quoting the Word. We need to ask questions like:

- What are the intentions of the person quoting Scripture?
- Is this person trying to scare us or control us?
- If we act on what this person is saying, will we be acting out of fear or faith?

In your opinion, what is the difference between acting out of fear and acting out of faith?

9. What Scripture does Jesus quote in response?

The enemy wanted Jesus to test God. Jesus chose to trust God instead. The enemy wanted Jesus to question whether God really loved Him and would protect Him. But Jesus knew how good His Father was and how deeply His Father loved Him. The enemy wanted Jesus to act out of fear. But Jesus acted out of faith instead.

Think about your life right now. Do you recognize any situations where the enemy would like you to act out of fear?

What would it look like for you to act like you have a very good Father who loves you? What would it look like to act out of faith instead?

Take-Away:

This week, at the beginning of each day, ask yourself, “What would it look like for me to trust God? What would I do differently?” Pay attention throughout the day to any moments when you are tempted to act out of fear. Pay attention to any moments when you are able to act out of faith. Make notes in your journal of your experience throughout the week.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him” (Psalm 28:7).

Week Thirteen: Jesus Shows Us Our Purpose

Matthew 4:1-11

1. Young Life has a tagline: You were made for this. Can you think of a time in your life when you were doing something and it seemed like, truly, “you were made for this”? What were you doing? Tell us about your experience.

We’re going to finish our discussion of Matthew 4:1-11 today. But first, does anyone have anything to report to us about your faith vs. fear experience this past week? Did anyone have an opportunity to act out of faith instead of fear? Tell us about it.

2. Let’s read Matthew 4:1-11 one more time.

Again, if you were directing a movie about this passage, how would you depict the scene from Matthew 4:8-9? Describe it for us.

How is this scene different from the scene from last week?

3. Compare what the devil said to Jesus in verse 9 to what he said previously in verses 3 and 6. What do you notice this time around?

The Bible doesn’t tell us, but in your opinion, what might be a reason the enemy changed his approach?

4. In verse 3, the enemy appealed to Jesus’ human hunger for food. In verse 6, the enemy appealed to Jesus’ human instinct for self-preservation. What part of human nature is the enemy appealing to in verses 8-9? What is the enemy hoping Jesus is “hungry” for as He looks out from the mountain?

What does Jesus have to do in order to have what the enemy is offering Him?

What would the physical act of bowing down to the enemy communicate?

If you were writing the dictionary, how would you define the word “worship”?

Let’s look in an actual dictionary and see what it says.

5. What does Jesus say to Satan in verse 10?

What is different about the words Jesus begins His response with this time around?

What is the same?

6. Jesus points to two things God created us to do in verse 10. What are those two things?

Next week we’ll talk about serving God. This week let’s talk about worship. From all you know and what you’ve experienced in life, what does it mean to worship God?

What has been your personal experience of worship, good or bad?

7. Let’s look again at the book of Revelation. Remember, this is a book that uses symbols and images to give us a glimpse into heaven and life in the future with Jesus. Let’s read Revelation 4:1-11.

Before we read, keep in mind, we could spend the next 10 years discussing all the possible meaning of the words in this passage. Right now, we want to get a general picture of what worship might look like in heaven.

What are some of the images you see in this passage?

If we were going to make a list of adjectives (descriptive words) to describe this passage, what are some of the words that would be on the list?

8. What do the elders do in verse 10?

What does their physical posture tell you about the attitude of their hearts and minds?

Let's read aloud together what they say in verse 11.

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”

What are some feelings that stir in you as you read this passage and as we read those words?

9. Worship could be described as anything we do to give glory and honor and power and praise to God. It is an attitude of the heart that works its way out into our physical posture and action. The more we learn to worship, the more we begin to realize, we were made for this.

If you were going to make a plan to spend time worshipping God this next week, what might your plan include?

Are you willing to give your plan a try?

A Creative Idea: Invite any kids who don't have a church to come along with you to worship. Take them out for lunch afterward and talk about the experience.

Take-Away:

This week, if you haven't already, come up with a plan for worshipping God. If you need help coming up with a plan, ask your Young Life leader for help. Then put your plan into practice. Make notes in your journal about your experience.

Memory Verse:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1).

Week Fourteen: Jesus Shows Us How to Serve

John 13:1-17

1. What's the dirtiest work you've ever had to do? What motivated you to do this work?

Today we're going to read about some dirty work that Jesus did. But before we start, here is a little background. It is the night before Jesus is going to die. He has gathered His closest friends together in a special room to enjoy a last meal with them. It is a special holiday time in Jerusalem, the city where they have gathered. Jesus knows this will be His last meal with His friends before He dies.

His friends are not as sure about this as Jesus is. They are still a little confused about what is going to happen. They are still in denial. But Jesus knows that this is His last chance to show His friends how to love one another. So let's look at what He does.

2. Let's read John 13:1-5 for starters. Someone recap for us what has just happened in these verses.

Which disciple is mentioned by name in these first verses?

What is this disciple already known for in these verses?

Can you think of any reasons why the author might point out that Judas was at the table?

3. In those days, people walked everywhere and their feet got very dirty. Washing the feet of dinner guests was dirty work typically left for the lowly servants of the home. I wasn't for someone like Jesus, who — these disciples still believed — was soon going to become a powerful, political ruler. Let's read John 13:6-11.

There is a lot we could learn from this conversation between Jesus and Peter. But for now, how would you describe Peter's general attitude toward Jesus washing his feet?

Put yourself in Peter's place for a moment. What are you thinking and feeling?

4. According to verse 11, what did Jesus already know?

Have you ever had to do something kind or good for someone who was treating you poorly? Tell us about it. How did it make you feel?

Imagine the expression on the face of Jesus as He washed the feet of Judas. What expression do you imagine?

What do we learn about Jesus from this example?

5. Jesus was a big fan of "Show and Tell." He would often show His friends what to do and then tell them how and why to do it. Let's read John 13:12-17. What does Jesus tell His friends after He washes their feet? Put it in your own words.

6. Let's turn back to Mark 10:43-45. In this passage, two of the disciples, James and John, asked Jesus if they could sit on His right and His left when he came to power as a ruler. When the other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they became indignant. In other words, the other disciples said something to James and John like, "How dare you grab power for yourselves like that?"

Can you think of a time when you felt like saying to someone, "How dare you ... ?" What was the person doing, and how did it make you feel?

In the middle of this argument, Jesus called His friends together. Let's read what He said to them in Mark 10:43-45.

According to Jesus, how do we become great?

7. Let's look now at John 15:12-13. Jesus is talking again to His disciples, the night before He died. What "command" does He give them?

Jesus didn't say, "I'd like to make a suggestion." How is a suggestion different from a command?

8. Jesus literally laid His life down for His friends. He sacrificed Himself on the cross. Very few people will have the opportunity to literally lay their lives down for another person. But we all have opportunities every day to serve other people, to put other people first, and to do "dirty work" that no one else wants to do on behalf of others. What encouragement does Jesus give us in John 13:17?

Can you think of a time when you served another person by doing dirty work or putting someone else first? Tell us about the experience. What impact did it have on you?

What are some practical things we might do on a daily basis to serve our family members?

Our friends?

9. Last week we finished reading about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Let's revisit what we read in Matthew 4:10.

According to Jesus, whom do we serve?

Let's look briefly at Matthew 25:40.

In this verse, Jesus is talking about Himself, the King. What do we learn about serving God and serving others from this verse?

A Creative Idea: At the end of the discussion, get a tub of water, tie a towel around your waist and wash the feet of kids at Campaigners.

Take-Away:

Who in your life is most difficult to serve? This week, ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to serve this person in a very practical way (to do some dirty work for this person or to put this person first). Keep your eyes open for the opportunity and remember the words of Jesus, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do likewise." Remind yourself that you are serving Jesus as you serve this person. Record your experience in your journal: Whom did you serve? What did you do? What did it make you think? How did it make you feel?

Memory Verse:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1).

Printable Take-Away Pages

If you are interested in handing kids a printed copy of the take-aways offered at the end of each discussion, then simply make multiple copies of the pages below (as many as there are kids in your discipleship discussions). Cut the weeks apart and be ready to hand them out to kids at the end of your discussions.

Week One: Jesus Welcomes Us as We Are

Take a few minutes each day to imagine Jesus welcoming us and inviting us to eat with Him. Here is a suggestion. When you stop to eat one of your meals each day, take a moment to imagine Jesus sitting next to you, smiling. Whether you say it out loud or silently, take a moment to thank Him for welcoming you and loving you as you are.

Week Two: Jesus Never Gives Up on Us

Before you go to bed at night, think back over the day. Can you recall any moments when you felt lost? Any moments when you felt found? Record those moments briefly in a journal. (Here is a prompt to help you: I felt lost when ... I felt found when ...) Thank Jesus that He loves you so much that He never stops searching for you. Take a moment to say, “Here I am, Jesus. I’m ready to be found.” Even if you aren’t able to do this every night, give it a try when you can.

Week Three: Jesus Throws a Party in our Honor

As you go through this next week, when things get tough, remember that Jesus is joyfully carrying you across His shoulders. Take a moment to stop and listen for what Jesus would like to say to you as He carries you, especially in tough times. Ask Him to give you ears to hear what He has to say. Record anything you think you hear from Jesus in your journal.

Week Four: Jesus Gives Us a Great Gift

Over the course of the next week, pay extra attention to the Spirit of Jesus within you. Remind yourself that He is an advocate that the Father has sent to help you. Make notes in your journal of any evidence you see of His Spirit in you. And don’t hesitate to ask Him to help you at any moment. That is why He came. (Here is a journal prompt to help you: These are some signs I see of Jesus living in me ...)

Week Five: Jesus Welcomes Us into His Family

This week, write out the verse or verses from Romans 8 that are most meaningful or encouraging to you. Write them on a notecard or a piece of paper. Then keep that notecard or piece of paper with you or in a prominent place where you will see it daily. Take a moment each day to simply say, “Thank you, Father, that I belong to you. And thank you that this means ...” — then fill in the blank with your verse(s).

Week Six: Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

Sometime during the next week, find a secret place where you can spend some time apart with the Father. Take your journal. Read Psalm 139:1-6 again and Psalm 32:7. Thank Him for knowing everything about you and loving you completely. Listen for what song He might be singing to you. Consider writing Him a letter in your journal.

Week Seven: Jesus Points Us to the Father

This week, take some time apart with the Father (in secret). Here are a couple of ideas of how to use that time. 1) Re-read Matthew 7:9-11. Take time to imagine “how much more” is your Father in heaven. Here is a prompt for your journal: “Thank you, Father, that you are better than the best father I can think of. That means you are ...” 2) Read Psalm 62:8. Take time to examine your own heart. If it helps, draw a picture of your heart in your journal that reflects the current condition of your heart. Take time to pour out your heart to your Father who loves you.

Week Eight: Jesus Shows Us How to Love

This week, remember to pay attention to the Holy Spirit who is teaching you from within. Notice when you sense the “prompt” or “check” of the Holy Spirit. Make a note in your journal of what you are hearing from your teacher. Remember some of the words we used to describe our Father in heaven. It will be important to remember how good our Father is so that we grow to trust Him and let Him have His way.

Week Nine: Jesus Invites Us to Ask

This week, take time apart with the Father to talk with Him about what you’d like to ask Him for, for yourself and/or for others. Be honest with Him about what you are thinking and feeling and wanting. Take some time to read Matthew 7:7-11. Journal about what you are hearing from Jesus and what you’d like to say to Him in return.

Week Ten: Jesus Teaches Us About Forgiveness

This week, in your time apart with the Father, read Psalm 103:10-12. Then write those verses across the top of a page in your journal. Next, take some time to thank the Father for forgiving you for very specific actions and attitudes. Here is the prompt for your journal: “Father, thank you for forgiving me for ... ” Complete that sentence with at least five answers. Ask the Father to cultivate His forgiving heart in you.

Week Eleven: Jesus Offers Us Protection

Take time apart with the Father this week to digest His love for you. Read Ephesians 3:14-19. Read it more than once, and slowly. Try this exercise: Write a letter from the Father addressed to you. In this letter, allow the Father to describe His love for you, His love “that surpasses knowledge.” Let His Spirit guide you from within. At the end of your letter from the Father, write a simple response: Thank you, Father, for loving me. Thank you that I am your deeply loved child.

Week Twelve: Jesus Shows Us How to Trust

This week, at the beginning of each day, ask yourself, “What would it look like for me to trust God today? What would I do differently?” Pay attention throughout the day to any moments when you are tempted to act out of fear. Pay attention to any moments when you are able to act out of faith. Make notes in your journal of your experience throughout the week.

Week Thirteen: Jesus Shows Us Our Purpose

This week, if you haven’t already, come up with a plan for worshipping God. If you need help coming up with a plan, ask your Young Life leader for help. Then put your plan into practice. Make notes in your journal about your experience.

Week Fourteen: Jesus Shows Us How to Serve

Who in your life is most difficult to serve? This week, ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to serve this person in a very practical way (to do some dirty work for this person or to put this person first). Keep your eyes open for the opportunity and remember the words of Jesus, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do likewise.” Remind yourself that you are serving Jesus as you serve this person. Record your experience in your journal: Whom did you serve? What did you do? What did it make you think? How did it make you feel?

Memory Verse Schedule

Weeks One and Two:

“But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Weeks Three and Four:

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32).

Weeks Five and Six:

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

Weeks Seven and Eight:

“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23).

Weeks Nine and Ten:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Weeks Eleven and Twelve:

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him” (Psalm 28:7).

Weeks Thirteen and Fourteen:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1).

DIY Discipleship Discussions (Do It Yourself)

An Important Introduction

In this section, we work to develop our own discipleship discussions. Here are a few important things to keep in mind as we prepare our discipleship discussions:

1. We maintain a posture of prayer from the beginning to the end of our discipleship discussions. Spend time with the Father as you prepare, listening for His leading. During our discussions, we keep one ear to the Father and one ear to the kids we are leading. In many ways, we are facilitating a conversation between the Father and His kids. Afterward, we continue to come before the Father with what we've heard and learned and what needs have come to our attention.
2. Choose a passage of Scripture for the discussion. If you are having trouble deciding on a passage, consider working your way through the Gospel of Mark, one passage at a time. Prayerfully read and meditate on the Scripture and ask God to speak to you from the passage first. Ideally you will have meditated on this passage for a few days before moving forward. Remember that our goal is to help kids become present in the written Word so that they might encounter the Living Word. But we can't lead them where we haven't been.
3. Consult one or two reliable commentaries to gather background information, context and special insights on this passage.
4. From what you've read in the commentaries, choose two or three important pieces of information that you want to weave into your discussion with kids.
5. Begin to brainstorm questions. Brainstorm story-telling questions as well as questions that connect with each spoke of the Awareness Wheel. Write out as many questions as you can come up with over the passage.
6. Prayerfully review your questions. Practice asking them out loud. (You might be surprised to hear how they actually sound.) Refer to chapters 9 and 10 to recall guidelines for asking good questions. Make any needed adjustments to your questions.
7. Organize your discussion. Choose the questions you plan to use. Put them in order. Make notes regarding what transition statements you will need to make and what insights and added information you will need to offer (from the commentaries or other helps).
8. Keep praying!
9. Arrive early to the location. Prepare to welcome kids and create an atmosphere of hospitality. Remember we need to create a safe place for kids to tell the truth and receive the truth in return. Follow the lead of the Holy Spirit throughout the discussion. Make notes afterward regarding what you heard and learned. Make notes of what you want to remember for next time. Keep praying!

Preparing Yourself: A Process

Make copies of the next two pages and use them as your worksheets and brainstorm sheets as you prepare. Then transfer what you've come up with to the template that follows.

Passage of Scripture:

Personal Reflections: What is God revealing to me as I prayerfully meditate on this passage? What am I noticing? What am I hearing from Him?

Context and Outside Input: What have I learned from reading commentaries, other books, sermons or footnotes on this passage?

Possible Questions: Brainstorm as many different questions as you can come up with over this passage. Do not disqualify or edit your questions right now. Just get them on paper. Keep the Awareness Wheel and story-telling questions in mind to guide you.

Preparing the Discussion: A Template

Refer to your worksheets from the previous section. Refine, select and organize information from those sheets and transfer them to this template. This will be your outline for your discipleship discussion. Make copies of these two pages and use them each week as you prepare. Then keep them in a binder for future use.

Story-telling Question: (Ask a question that helps kids reveal a little bit of who they are and prepares them to connect with the passage.)

Introduction of Passage: (Build a bridge from the story-telling question to the passage. Give important background information or context that kids need to know for understanding. Keep this short and simple.)

Passage to Read:

Organization of Questions: (Edit and organize your questions from your brainstorm notes. Practice saying them out loud until they are clear and easy to understand.)

Questions (continued):

Integration Exercise: (What will you invite kids to do to help integrate what they've heard and learned into their lives? Remember: Jesus' yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Don't make too many demands on kids too often. Keep it simple, and set them up for success.)

Practicing Solitude and Silence

A Guide for Leaders

Dear Leader:

In the following pages you will find a guide for solitude and silence that is designed for you to use with one or more of your disciples. Here are some suggestions for maximizing this experience:

1. Invite one (or more) of your disciples to come away with you for a time of solitude and silence. Allow 30-45 minutes for the actual “Time Apart With God.” Then allow another 30 minutes to an hour to debrief afterward.
2. Print off copies of the guide for each person. For this exercise, they won’t need a Bible. All the verses are printed for them. You may, however, want them to bring Bibles and look up the verses for themselves. You decide.
3. If possible, provide a clipboard for the guide, so kids will have a solid surface on which to write. You can often find inexpensive clipboards at dollar stores.
4. Choose a quiet location free from distraction that is conducive for contemplation. You might choose a park or a sanctuary that is open for visitors. If you choose a park, you may need to provide mats or towels for kids to sit on.
5. Before handing out the guide and sending kids out for Time Apart With God, give them a brief explanation of what you are doing. Encourage them to take their time and not rush through the words. The goal, as the guide says, is not to get through God’s Word, but to allow God’s Word to get through us.
6. Ask kids to remain silent for the next 30 or 45 minutes. (You decide.) Ask them to return in silence to the starting spot at the end of the time. Ask them to put their phones on airplane mode, or possibly turn their phones in to you.
7. Pray together, and then send everyone out for Time Apart With God.
8. Afterward, consider debriefing over coffee or a meal. Congratulate your friends on making this effort. Acknowledge that it is a discipline that takes practice over time. Ask questions such as:
 - On a scale of 1-10, (1=easy; 10=almost impossible), how difficult was it to disconnect? What made it difficult? Was there anything that was helpful?
 - Of the different verses that we read, was there a verse or verses that seemed most meaningful to you? What was meaningful about it?
 - Did you sense the presence of Jesus? If so, what was that like for you? What did it feel like?
 - Did it seem that you heard something from Jesus? If so, if you are willing to share it, what did you hear?
 - As you think about your experience today, are you aware of anything you want in the future when it comes to Time Apart With God?
 - Ask, “How can I pray for you this week?”
9. Close the time together with prayer.

A Time-Apart Guide for Kids

Date:

Location:

- **Creating Space for God**

It has been said that a spiritual discipline is anything we do to create space in our lives where God can speak and act. Today we are going to practice creating space through taking time apart with God in solitude and silence.

- **Disconnecting**

The first step in taking time apart with God is to find a quiet place that is free from distractions. Before we can fully connect with God, we need to disconnect from other people and our technology. This means putting our phones on airplane mode; closing our laptops; and even turning off our music. (We may want to begin our time apart by listening to music that helps us turn our attention to God, but eventually we need to disconnect even from our music and sit silently in His presence.)

Think for a moment about the example and words of Jesus:

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

When we begin to get silent, we soon discover the silence is very noisy. Our thoughts can get very loud. That’s normal. The key is to realize that God is sitting with you in the middle of your noisy thoughts. The key is to become more and more aware of His presence with you and in you.

Think for a few moments about these words from Jesus:

“And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age” (Matthew 26:20).

“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20).

Read those words again, this time more slowly. In our time apart with God, we want to slow down and linger over His words. The goal is not to “get through” His word, but to allow His word to “get through” us.

“And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age” (Matthew 26:20).

“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20).

The good news is, even as we think we are creating space for God, He has already created space in us where He makes Himself at home and waits to greet us with open arms and a warm welcome. He has created that secret room where we can steal away to meet with Him, where He will reward us with His love.

Take a moment to simply thank Jesus that He is with you and in you. Thank Him that He has created a sacred space within you and fills it with His presence and love. If you would like, write your thanks to Him in the space below.

- **Releasing our Cares and Concerns to God**

As we continue to disconnect, it can be helpful to use our imaginations. Imagine you are holding a bunch of helium-filled balloons. In fact, you have a bunch of balloons in each hand. There are words written on those balloons. These words represent the cares and concerns and thoughts that might be calling for your attention right now. What would be some of the words written on those balloons today? If it is helpful, write some of those words in the space below:

Now imagine opening your hands, gradually, and letting each balloon escape your grip and float into the blue sky. Begin releasing your cares, concerns and distracting thoughts to God. It might take a few moments to let go of your grip. There are some words from the book of Psalms that might help. Think for a few moments about these words. Let Jesus speak them to you from deep within:

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Another way to interpret those words is:

“Let go of your grip, and know that I am God.”

Jesus is encouraging you from deep within to let go of your grip and release your cares and concerns into His hands.

Take a few moments to simply sit in silence and release your grip.

Move to the next page.

- **Turning to Jesus**

In the time that remains, your cares, concerns and distracting thoughts may float back across your mind, like balloons floating through the air. That's OK and normal. Instead of reaching out and grabbing those balloons, however, make a choice to gently turn your attention to Jesus. You can do this by simply saying His name or saying something like,

“Jesus, thank you that you are with me and in me.”

Or, “Thank you, Jesus, that I belong to you.”

Keep your “spiritual hands” open so that you can receive whatever Jesus would like to give you during this time. It might help you to actually keep your physical hands open with your palms up as you sit in silence. Sometimes our external physical posture can help us experience an internal spiritual reality.

- **Connecting**

With our hearts and hands open, aware that Jesus is with us and in us, listen to these words from Him. Listen as He speaks them from deep within:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;

Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Jesus said, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Linger over His words as if they were a special meal prepared just for you. These words are not fast food; they are fine dining. Read His words above again slowly.

In the space below or in your journal, write a letter from Jesus to you. It doesn't have to be long, but write yourself a letter from Jesus, expressing His love to you. After you've finished, take a moment to let His words sink in. Then write Him a brief letter in response, expressing your gratitude and love for Him.

Leader Resources

Caring for New Family Members

A young friend of yours has just informed you that he or she has decided to follow Jesus. Now what? How do you respond? Here are a few ideas:

- **Discuss your friend's decision** with him or her right away. Seek to understand what he or she is thinking, feeling and wanting. Welcome him or her to God's family and pray together.
- **Give your friend a Bible.** Take some time to walk your friend through the basics of the Bible. The Young Life Journey Bible has some articles at the front and back designed specifically for helping a new believer begin to follow Jesus. Read the articles together.
- **Make a plan for growth.** Help your friend begin to read the Bible regularly. Share some of your favorite passages. Consider reading a Gospel together over the next few months. Introduce him or her to discipleship materials that your friend can work through on his or her own or with you. Connect him or her to other members of God's family. Invite your friend to Campaigners and/or to church.
- **Keep in close contact.** New babies need constant care and attention. New members of God's family need special care as well. Plan on calling or spending time with your new brother or sister frequently, especially at first.
- **Pray for your friend daily.** Ask other people to be praying for him or her, too.

Evaluating Our Meetings

It has been said, we don't learn from experience. We only learn from evaluated experience. Here is a form to help us reflect upon and learn from our discipleship discussions.

Date:

Location of Meeting:

People Present:

Prayer Requests:

Focus of Discussion:

Two or Three Things That Went Well:

One or Two Things That Need Improving:

Comments Kids Made or Questions Kids Asked That I Need to Follow Up On:

Ideas for the Future:

A Leader Self-Evaluation

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; then answer the questions below:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=gentle; 10=forceful), rate the tone of your leadership in your discipleship discussions. Give a brief explanation of your rating.
2. In what concrete ways have you shared your life with your disciples lately?
3. On average, how often do you spend time with Campaigners kids outside of meetings?
4. Paul uses “holy, righteous and blameless” to describe himself to his disciples. What are three adjectives your disciples might use to describe you?
5. “Encouraging, comforting and urging.” Paul devotes two-thirds of his effort to lifting up and one-third to pushing out. How does this compare to your efforts in Campaigners?
6. Good parents have realistic expectations of their children. What are realistic expectations for the kids in your discipleship group?
7. Reflect on your answers above. As you evaluate yourself, what is going well? What would you like to do differently?

Practical Ways Campaigners Kids Can Learn to Lead and Serve

- Pray for their friends. Keep a journal of prayers prayed and watch the faithfulness of God at work.
- Meet with a prayer partner during the week to pray for each other, common concerns and club.
- Bring new friends to club.
- Bring underclassmen to club.
- Introduce their friends to Young Life leaders.
- Welcome new kids at club and sit with them. Help them feel at home.
- Engage with enthusiasm during club. Pay attention during the talk.
- Help clean up after club.
- Look for opportunities to share with their friends what Jesus means to them.
- Make friends with the “friendless” at school.
- Get involved with a local church and ask a church leader how they can serve.
- Look for opportunities in their community to help others.
- Look for opportunities at home to serve family members.

A List of Feeling Words

Sometimes kids have limited vocabularies when it comes to expressing feelings. The list below might be helpful to have on hand for discipleship discussions. Or consider printing some of these words on cards and having them available for kids to choose from.

Pleasant Feelings

OPEN

understanding
interested
receptive
kind

HAPPY

great
joyful
thankful
cheerful

ALIVE

playful
energetic
free
thrilled

GOOD

calm
relaxed
peaceful
encouraged

LOVE

loving
considerate
devoted
close

POSITIVE

eager
inspired
hopeful
confident

STRONG

sure
tenacious
bold
secure

Difficult/Unpleasant Feelings

ANGRY

irritated
annoyed
enraged
infuriated

DEPRESSED

disappointed
discouraged
powerless
miserable

CONFUSED

upset
doubtful
skeptical
perplexed

HELPLESS

alone
paralyzed
vulnerable
distressed

AFRAID

fearful
anxious
worried
scared

HURT

crushed
heartbroken
offended
rejected

SAD

tearful
unhappy
lonely
grieved

More Discipleship Resources

For more resources, visit the Young Life website at younglife.org and search for “Campaigners” and the “Campaigners Library.”

In addition, check the website or ask your local staff person about these discipleship opportunities within Young Life:

- Work crew.
- Summer staff.
- Student Leadership Project (summer program).
- Young Life Expeditions (service trips in the United States and abroad).
- Serving at a Capernaum camp.
- Serving at a YoungLives camp.
- Helping with childcare at a local YoungLives club.
- Young Life discipleship opportunities for college students at Silver Dollar City and Dollywood Theme Parks in Missouri and Tennessee, respectively.
- Regional or divisional discipleship camping opportunities.

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