

HSM Small Group 2022 Spring Schedule-Sophomore

January 12	First Week Back! Get Reacquainted!!
January 19	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
January 26	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 2	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 9	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 16	10-4 Series
February 23	10-4 Series
March 2	10-4 Series
March 9	10-4 Series
March 16	SGL Training this week! (No Small Groups!)
March 23	Spring Break! (No Small Groups!)
March 30	ENCOUNTER
April 6	ENCOUNTER
April 13	Serve Week
April 20	ENCOUNTER
April 27	ENCOUNTER
May 4	Final Celebration!!

Practicing the Way - week 1: The Basics

Adapted from Practicing the Way by John Mark Comer

Read this overview:

In our over busy, digital, distracted world, the first challenge we face in silence and solitude is simply our lack of ability to slow down and focus. To “be ourselves with God,” we must first learn to center our mind and body.

The goal of week one is to first identify a time and place that works well for you to practice silence and solitude, set a modest goal, and then start with the basics: begin with a breathing prayer and then just spend some time abiding.

It sounds easy, but, like all good things, it takes practice. So be patient with yourself and God, and enjoy the journey.

Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief the week: 10-15 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life... then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Is silence and solitude a regular part of your walk with Jesus? If yes, what does that look like in your life rhythm? If no, why not? (Note: The point of this question is honest conversation, not guilt or shame. Work hard to create a safe place in your community for people at every stage of spiritual maturity.)
2. How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

If you have time, tell a story of something cool God said or did in your life through an experience with silence and solitude.

Open the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read Luke 4:42 and another person read Luke 5:15-16.

Talk about the following questions:

1. Why do think Jesus would regularly slip away to “lonely places”?
2. What role do you think the regular practice of silence and solitude played in Jesus’ emotional health and spiritual life?
3. What challenges would Jesus have faced to carve out time to be alone with himself and God? Do you face any similar challenges?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community: 5-10 min

Here's the practice for the coming week: *make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this Spiritual Discipline at least 3 times in the next week.*

First...

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you.
 - Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is after school, before dinner or before bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.
 - Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction-free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.
2. Set a modest goal
 - It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week. If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.

Then, for the practice...

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable!
 - For many people, finding a comfortable place and position to sit on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
 - Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer
 - Close your eyes.
 - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
 - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
 - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
 - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." and come back to your breathing.
 - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.
3. Spend a few minutes "abiding in the vine"
 - Transition from your breathing prayer to "the practice of the presence of God."
 - Notice God's presence all around you, in you. For some people it's helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.
 - Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.
 - If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God's voice, or get something off your chest in prayer.

- But the main goal here is simply to “be with Jesus.” Don’t feel like you have to “do” anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.
4. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father.

A few things to note:

1. You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. All you can do is show up. Be patient. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “This isn’t for me.” Don’t judge yourself, especially if you’re an overachiever type.
2. If sitting still is just too difficult for you, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction-free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.

Work through these discussion questions: 10 min

1. How does the idea of a breathing prayer hit you? Does it sound appealing? Stupid? Uncomfortable?
2. What challenges do you face in carving out time for silence and solitude? (Ex. Overall busyness, work schedule, lack of privacy, extroverted personality, etc.)
3. What is your deepest fear and greatest hope for this coming week’s practice?

Close in prayer

Practicing the Way - week 2: Emotional Health

Adapted from Practicing the Way by John Mark Comer

Read this overview

Human beings are emotional creatures. We feel deeply at times. Sadly, American church culture can be quick to write off “feelings” or “emotional health.” However, Jesus puts on display a high level of emotional awareness. For Jesus, emotions - positive or negative - are places to meet with God. The goal of week two is to get in touch with your feelings and process each one with the Father. After a short time for breathing prayer and abiding, we encourage you to let yourself feel whatever comes. Naming our emotions is often the first step toward hearing from God.

This week will be easy for some and very hard on others . That’s okay. You’re safe with the Father.

Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week’s practice in small groups: 5-10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. What was the best part? The hardest part?
3. What did this practice reveal about your relationship with the Father? (Positive or negative. Remember, work hard to create a safe place for honest conversation.)

Open to the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read Luke 22:39-46

Talk about the following questions:

1. What did Jesus do with his overwhelming emotions of sorrow and dread? What kind of example does that set for us as Jesus’ apprentices?
2. What was the result of Jesus “getting in touch with his feelings” and then giving his emotions over to the Father in prayer?
3. What are some of the reasons that we, like Jesus’ apprentices in the story, have a hard time meeting God in our emotions - specifically our negative emotions?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a community: 10 min

Here's the practice for the coming week: ***Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this spiritual discipline during the next week.***

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer.
 - Close your eyes.
 - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
 - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
 - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
 - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like "Father..." and come back to your breathing.
 - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.
3. Let yourself feel.
 - What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, or any number of positive or negative emotions.
 - Name "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of your emotional state.
 - Don't run away from what you're feeling. In the Father's presence, face each emotion head on. Let yourself feel it, deeply.
 - Remember: emotional pain isn't something to avoid. Instead, think of it as a place to meet God and open yourself up to him in new ways.
4. Ask yourself: Where are you at with yourself and God right now? Is there anything God is trying to say to you through these emotions?
5. Pray: Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest.

Different emotions call for different kinds of prayer.

 - If you're happy - celebrate! Sing! Dance!
 - If you're grateful, tell God what for with specificity.
 - If you're anxious, give your worry over to the Father and ask for his peace in return.
 - If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unsolved in your heart.
6. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit everything you're feeling to the Father.

Note: After a few days of this practice, or toward the end of the week, we recommend you do two things:

- Set aside a little time to write out your experience in a journal.
- Go share your experience with a close friend, parent or adult leader.

Remember: Continue to resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “I didn’t get anything out of it.” Just practice. And be patient.

Work through these discussion questions: 10 min

1. Would you say you are “in touch with your feelings” in a healthy, Jesus-like way? Or is that hard and difficult for you? Explain why?
2. Was emotional awareness a part of your upbringing? How does your family deal with emotional pain? How has that shaped your life today?
3. We all face emotional pain in life. In those times, what happens when we use coping mechanisms other than prayer?
4. What is your coping mechanism of choice? (Ex. escapism, denial, overwork, busyness, church activity, etc.)

Close in prayer

Practicing the Way - week 3: Casting Care

Adapted from Practicing the Way by Bethany Allen

Read this overview

Most people, whether they are aware of it or not, are living with some form of low-grade anxiety. Between digital distraction, relational pain, and daily stress, many of us are carrying burdens much larger than we often choose to acknowledge.

This week we want to extend our practice of silence and solitude and focus on casting your cares and burdens on Jesus. We'll do this through the practice of release. It involves five movements. 1) Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God, 2) Invite the Holy Spirit, 3) Write, 4) Imagine and 5) Release. The goal is not to rush or to simply complete an exercise, but to find freedom in entrusting yourself more fully to Jesus.

Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Debrief last week's practice in small groups: 10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult to "let yourself feel"?
3. Were there any specific things you heard from God?

Open to the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read the following texts:

- 1 Peter 5:7
- Psalm 62:8
- Philippians 4:6

Talk about the following questions:

1. In 1 Peter 5:7 we are told to cast all of our anxiety on him (Jesus) because he cares for us. Name 1-2 things you are currently anxious about. Do you ever question God's care for you? If so, why?
2. Psalm 62:8 tells us we are to "pour out our hearts to God", what do you think the writer means by this? If you have done this before, what did it look like?
3. We are told over and over that God wants to take our anxiety and bear our burdens. For many people, this is hard to do. Identify and share two reasons this may be difficult for you.

Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community: 10 min

Here's the practice for the coming week: ***Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this spiritual discipline during the next week.***

1. Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God.
 - Set aside a modest time on a particular day to be alone with God. This should be an extended time (maybe 30 – 60 min or more). Find a time and place that is quiet and distraction free.
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to come.
 - Now ask Him to show you areas of personal or relational fear/anxiety. Next, ask Him to show you areas of fear/anxiety associated with the present or future. Take your time and wait on the Holy Spirit.
 - Ask the Father to reveal any areas of unbelief in your life where you don't believe the Father will care for you.
3. Write: Jot down and list these anxieties/fears down on a piece of paper. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have written.
4. Pray: Pray and visualize yourself with the Father, and then, one by one, imagine giving (handing) each anxiety to Jesus
 - This exercise should create a mental snapshot of Jesus doing exactly what He says He will do (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26). By handing Jesus your anxieties, you are expressing your trust in His ability to take care of you.
5. Release: Once you've given all of your anxieties to Jesus in prayer, rip up each anxiety you wrote down and throw it away. This symbolizes that the anxiety has been given to Jesus and that you are now released from the weight and responsibility of the burden.

Work through these discussion questions: 10-15 min

1. How do you feel about this long span of silence and solitude? Scared? Excited?
2. How could you incorporate this practice into your day-to-day rhythm?
3. What is the importance of acknowledging/naming your anxieties and giving them to Jesus?

Close in Prayer

Practicing the Way - week 4: Lectio Divina

Adapted from Practicing the Way by Joshua Porter

Read this overview

Week 5 introduces the ancient practice of lectio divina, or “spiritual reading.” Lectio divina is not a new method of Bible Study. Whereas study of the Bible sets its focus on learning, lectio divina is an ancient time-tested method of meeting God in the Scriptures. In doing so, the disciple allows the Scriptures (in cooperation with the Spirit) to lead the reader into further intimacy with God as they are shaped into the image of Jesus in the process. The practice consists of five distinct movements:

1. Preparing to meet with God
2. Reading (lectio)
3. Reflection (meditatio)
4. Response (oratio)
5. Rest (contemplatio)

Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together before spending a moment in silence. Hardness of hearing is an unfortunate side effect of the frantic pace in which many of us conduct our lives. When your community comes together in the hopes of speaking to and hearing from God, even a momentary measure of silence can work to slow and quiet the swirling chaos around us so that we might hear what God is saying in and through one another.

Debrief last week’s practice in small groups: 10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up before you discuss about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult?
3. What did you hear God say?

Open the Bible together: 10 min

Have someone read Joshua 1:7-9 aloud. Then consider these questions together:

1. What does the verse emphasize about the importance of scripture?
2. Discuss what verse 8 instructs us to do regarding the Book of the Law (the Scriptures).
3. Why do you think it’s so important to hold the Bible in such high esteem?

Talk about the coming week’s practice as a Community: 10 min

Here’s the practice for the coming week: *Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep*

Having established a time and place that are both quiet and free from distraction, set aside 3-5 times this week to practice lectio divina.

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 100
- John 15:1-17
- Romans 12

After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the five movements of spiritual reading.

1. Prepare to meet with God: Turn your phone off and leave it another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken, and to respond accordingly. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.
2. Read (lectio): Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily to reflect on them with specificity.
3. Reflect (mediatio): Upon completing the passage, return to the beginning and read again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance with your heart, your season of life, your person in this moment. Consider the following questions: What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?
4. Respond (oratio): Talk to God about your experience.
5. Rest (contemplatio): Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

Talk through the following discussion questions: 10 min.

1. Do you actually enjoy reading the Scriptures, or does it feel like a chore? Why?
2. When you read the Scriptures, do you feel as though you actually meet with and connect with God? Why or why not?
3. What makes lectio divina different than "bible study" or a teaching?

Close in prayer

10 – 4 Study: Leader's Notes

Hi leaders! The following study was designed specifically for the students in your small groups. A great deal of discussion, brainstorming, research and prayer went into the crafting these specific topics. They may not all be easy to talk about – but I believe they will each be worth it. Just so you're aware – there is A LOT of information in these studies. It was designed that way to give you lots to talk about, but also to give you a chance to choose which questions you think will be most beneficial to cover.

PLEASE prepare ahead of time – this will make all the difference in the world! Here's how:

- Start preparing your group for this series **BEFORE IT STARTS!** Send your girls the “Open Up” questions of the Identity lesson to start chewing on **BEFORE** that evening. Then they'll already have some thoughts to share!
- Extend each lesson to the **FOLLOWING WEEK!** Each of these lessons ends with practical steps for follow up. Challenge the girls to reflect and work on the action steps during the next week then **check on any progress or questions** they have at the beginning of your next meeting! **This is IMPORTANT!!**

Here are a few specific tips and a brief summary of the next 4 weeks:

Week 1: Identity

- We all need to remember who we are – especially when we are plagued by experiences, memories and current relationships or situations that attempt to convince us of lies that rob us of our true identity: we are children of God.

Week 2: Relationships

- This was the one topic that came up most while brainstorming with students and leaders. Relationships are hard and our girls are desperately searching for ways to navigate every type of them – especially at this age when relationships become more important and complicated than ever.

Week 3: Pornography

- This one might freak you out a bit – but don't worry! **YOU CAN DO IT!** These girls trust you and they know that you love them and that you love the Lord. That's why I have no doubt this can be a beautiful discussion.

Here are a few tips that are vital to remember!!

- **HUGE thing #1:** ALWAYS lead from a place of vulnerability. (Is there anything from your life that would be *appropriate* and helpful to share?)
- **HUGE thing #2:** ALL NIGHT LONG - these girls need to know they are in a safe place.
 - Remember to **LIMIT THE SHAME! Affirm them!** No matter what they share – assure them by saying “thank you for sharing that. I'm so proud of you”.
- Prepare, prepare, prepare. I don't want you to be caught off guard by the discussion because you didn't take the time to check it out beforehand.
- Listen to the audio file I'll send you at the beginning of your lesson. It was prepared by a brave young woman who surrendered her past, present, and future to God a long time ago and has been granted freedom from this sin. She is an honest voice who can speak from experience and truth to these girls.
- FOLLOW UP about their Escape Plan or any other thoughts or questions the next week!!

Week 4: Wildcard Week!

- This last week is set aside for you to have the freedom to study and discuss whatever you think your group needs to touch on. What do your girls need to hear from you? Perhaps you have some bit of wisdom you've been waiting to share. Or maybe your group always seems to find themselves discussing a specific issue or concern that you can now set aside an entire night to talk about. You can decide on your own what material you want to cover, or you can ask for suggestions from your girls. We hand this week over to you wise and godly leaders. Please let me know if you need more guidance, but I have full confidence in you. I'm excited to hear how amazing the discussions are on this night!

10 – 4 Week 1: Identity

Read to the group:

From the very beginning, stories have been an incredibly formative part of life. History was passed down through stories from generation to generation. Wisely, Jesus often taught through parables (aka stories!) – can you think of some off the top of your head? In the book The Good and Beautiful God, James Bryan Smith reminds us that our life is made of a series of stories that weave together to form the narrative of your life. These stories are personal, ongoing and imbedded in our minds. They help form our values, beliefs and behavior. We are shaped by these stories – so it's extremely important to get the narrative right. The question is this: what do your stories – this narrative flowing through your mind – tell you about yourself? Satan would love to help you view your stories in a way that would make you believe that you are less than who you are – a child of God. Have some of your stories become poisoned by lies that the world has tried to convince you of – so that your narrative is altered and you believe that you are unworthy of love in some way? We can't change our history. But we can learn from it. In fact, we can retrain our minds to look for the redeemable truths from God in every experience. We can hold on to the precious goodness of our identity as a child of God. Maybe it's time to hold our narrative up alongside the truth of Jesus' narrative for us.

Open up:

- Can you think back to some stories (experiences or memories) in your life that have been positive and reminded you of what a masterpiece you are? Please feel free to share – it's not bragging, it's truth!
- Can you remember some stories (even if it's only a consistent tug of doubt that haunts you when you're having a bad day) that Satan can or could use to cultivate a lie that weighs you down?
- What are some lies that are buried in your narrative? (ex: I'm not good enough; I always mess up; I sin too much for God to forgive me; no one really likes me; if I wasn't here – no one would miss me...)
- Which of these types of stories - good or bad - are easier for you to believe? Consider the ongoing narrative of your life (what you believe about yourself based on your life's stories). How do you ultimately view yourself based on that narrative?

Jesus Narrative: TRUTH from the Word!

Give each student a scripture to look up and read on their own a few times so they can become familiar with that verse. If you don't have enough students for the number of scriptures, you can check them out ahead of time and pick your favorites!

Look up: Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13-16; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:10; 1 John 3:1; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Psalm 100:3; John 3:16; Romans 8:1; Romans 8:15-17; Romans 8:37-39; Colossians 3:1-3

- Some of these verses tell us how special God created us to be. If you have a verse that focuses on God's intentional design, love and purpose for you – please read it to the group. What does it mean to you? (probably: Gen 1:27; Ps 139:13-16; 1 Pet 2:9; Eph 2:10; 1 Jn 3:1; Jer 29:11; 1 Cor 12:27; Ps 100:3; John 3:16)
- Now consider how God intentionally uses our identity as Christians to conquer any doubt or lies this world tries to convince us of! Which scriptures teach us that truth and what do they mean to you? (probably: Romans 8:1, 15-17, 37-39; Col 3:1-3, Eph 2:10)

Changing Your Narrative:

- Think through what we just read. Which of these truths stand out to you as something you need to latch onto to help change how you view your own narrative? (ex: 1. Even though I mess up a lot – Failure is NOT FINAL! God loves me and forgives me NO MATTER WHAT or HOW MANY TIMES! NO ONE can take that truth away from me; 2. I am not unworthy – I am royalty; 3. My identity is not defined by my activities – my identity is in Christ!)
- How do the people you spend time with affect the truth you believe about yourself and your life narrative? Do you feel like you are influenced more positively or negatively by the people around you? Are there any adjustments you should make in this area?
- Now flip that. How do you feel you influence the narratives of the people around you? I'm guessing it's sometimes negative and sometimes positive. Can you share examples of each? Are you satisfied with that influence?

Now What?

- We all have moments that feel dark and difficult – where we might feel like our life narrative tells us we're weak, worthless, unloved, (fill in the blank). How can you develop a plan ahead of time to seek truth when those moments happen? (ex: memorizing one of these scriptures, having a friend you can call to help speak truth; listen to a song that reminds you of who you are)
- What is one thing you want to take away from today's discussion?

10 – 4 Week 2: Relationships

Get the Juices Flowing:

- Who are the five people in your life that have influenced you most? Explain why. On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you by the influence they've had on you?
- Let's flip that: who are 5 people that you think you've influenced most? Explain why. On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your influence on them?
- What are some of the qualities that you want the most in someone who is close to you? Why are those qualities so important?

Dig in:

- Consider your close relationships as you read each of these scriptures together. Then take time to reflect on these two questions for each verse. Here's an example:
 1. Read **Ephesians 4:2** out loud: "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love".
 2. Now ask out loud: "Do my closest friends/family demonstrate this for me? (everyone pause for reflection)
 3. Next ask: "Do I demonstrate this for my closest friends/family? (everyone pause for reflection)
- Now continue this exercise with each of the following verses (feel free to explain any of them, if necessary):

**1 Peter 4:8; Ephesians 4:29; Ephesians 4:32; Proverbs 13:20; Hebrews 10:24-25;
Proverbs 18:24; Romans 12:9-10; Romans 12:15-16**

Discuss:

- What are some of the most important qualities that jumped out at you from those Scriptures? Why are they so important to you? (By the way – there are lots more great scriptures that we didn't even mention!)
- How would you describe the relationships you have based on these guidelines we just heard? Remember – no relationship is perfect – but to obey these commands is our goal!
- The teaching in these scriptures can apply to all relationships: friends, boyfriends, siblings, parents, authority figures... In your experience, do you agree with that? How can they specifically apply to all these types of relationships?
- Even though it's difficult sometimes – why is it worth working towards these relationship goals? What type of groundwork are you laying for the future of your relationships?
- Do you feel like you expect too much from people you love? Do they expect too much out of you? How can Ephesians 4:2 speak into that?
- Now reread Ephesians 4:32: How important is forgiveness in your relationships? Tell us about that.
- Relationships are really difficult sometimes – for everyone. Do you have any relationships that need work to refocus on these biblical principles? How can you do that? Can you share a time when you had to work on a relationship and it grew stronger?
- What can you do if you're in a relationship that's not good for you? How can your healthy relationships (close friends or family) help you work on unhealthy ones?

Moving Forward:

- What is one thing that stood out to you from today's discussion?
- Before you leave, make a plan to incorporate that truth into your relationship(s). Share that plan with someone and pray about it together.
- Take time this week to continue to reflect and pray about your relationships. Pay attention to any healing conversations God might be urging you to have. Ask for help and accountability from your group as needed!

10-4 Week 3: Pornography

****Start the night off by listening to the audio file provided for you. ****

Easing into the Discussion:

- What was the first thing that popped into your mind when you found out we were talking about pornography tonight?
- Were you surprised that the average age of kids exposed to porn for the first time is 8-10 years old? What about that college aged girls are the fastest growing demographic involved with porn?
- Many young people are exposed to pornography whether they want to be or not. Without sharing details right now – how many of you know someone who has been affected by this problem in some way?

What God Says About Sex:

- Read Genesis 2:24-25 and 1 Corinthians 7:4-5. God made sex to be awesome. Your body is wired to have desires and feelings – emotionally and physically – that are intended to lead to sex. That's normal and created to be good – between a husband and wife.
- However, Satan likes to twist what God makes and use it against us. Sexual sin is NOT new. We didn't even make it past the second book of the Bible before God had to write a commandment about it. Read Exodus 20:14.
- Now read Matthew 5:28. Sexual sin takes many forms. Lust leads to much of that sin. Remember - it isn't just the guys that struggle with it! Also remember – like pornography, there are many other sexual sins that don't actually involve the act of sex (masturbation, oral sex, anal sex...).
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 John 2:16. While we're in this world, we're going to be tempted. It's just the way it is because sin is part of our world. But the good news is – you're not alone. God is with you – loving and redeeming every step of the way. Also – you have a family, small group community and leader that are ready to walk alongside you as well.
- Finally, read 1 Corinthians 6:18. God has an escape plan for you when it comes to sexual sin. FLEE from it! We're going to talk about how to make an escape plan tonight!

Discussion:

- Why do you think God makes such a big deal about staying away from sexual sin?
- What do you think this statement means: "You don't need to seek pornography. Pornography is seeking you"? Do you agree or disagree with that? Why?
- There are so many reasons why porn is easy to run to when we need an escape. Here are 3 big reasons why:
 - It's Available: How is this true?
 - It's Affordable: How is this true?
 - It's Anonymous: How is this true?
- It is said that isolation leads to pornography, instead of pornography leading to isolation. Can you explain what that means? How can you free yourself from isolation? (community!! Opening up to someone!)
- Why is community so important when struggling with addictive behaviors? How can allowing someone to ask you hard questions lead to freedom from such sins?

Escape Plan:

- The best offense is a good defense! An escape plan is important to have – whether you currently struggle with pornography (or other similar destructive sin) or not. Just like we talked about earlier – this is a temptation that can attack you when you are least expecting – so let's be prepared.

- Make a plan. Work the plan:
 - First – remember you're NOT ALONE
 - Second – TALK to SOMEONE (preferably a trusted adult!)

Now focus on these 3 areas: (give them a paper and pen and encourage them to take notes. They can draft a specific plan as you go, if they want to)

- Triggers:
 - What is it for you that triggers destructive behaviors? (loneliness, anger, fear, isolation...) Remember that the underlying issue often isn't sex, but something totally different.
 - How can you avoid these triggers?
 - How can you recognize them before they get overwhelming?
 - Decide what you will do to avoid sliding into sin once you recognize a trigger? (call a friend or leader, go for a walk, listen to your favorite song, play with your dog...)
- Access: How easy is it for you to access porn?
 - What social media do you use? Do you need to make any changes with that?
 - Do you have people around you that encourage you to participate in pornography?
 - What can you do to limit access to these images? (Covenant eyes or other filters, don't have your phone in your room at night, etc.)
- Accountability: The opposite of addiction is connection.
 - Remember that Satan wants you to stay quiet, isolated and full of shame. But true freedom can only come with openness with God and with your community.
 - With whom can you take your mask off with and be real? Think of a trusted adult in your life that you can open up to.
 - Set up a way to connect with your community when you feel isolated or triggered.
 - Spend time outside of those triggered moments to connect and share your struggles regularly. Pray and check in with each other often.
- Consider Shame Vs Conviction: Shame is something that isolates and drives us deeper inward. It keeps us from being free and usually leads to more sin and, therefore, more shame. Conviction – God impressing upon you that what you are doing is wrong and urging you to bring it into the light – is a gift from the Holy Spirit. When we are convicted, we should reach out and CONNECT with someone!
- Finally, remember that- even when we fall down – there is grace. Nothing can separate you from God's love. (Romans 3:23-24, 8:38) You can leave your shame at the foot of the cross.

*Source: International institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals

10 - 4 Week 4: Wildcard Week!!!

Welcome to Wildcard Week!! Tonight, we'd like to provide the space and opportunity to give you a free night to use as you choose – and we couldn't be more excited! We hope you will take the time to think through a number of possibilities that might help form the discussion for the evening.

Here are a few directions you might consider:

- If, as a leader, I could share anything with my group – what would it be?
- When I was the age of the students in my group – I really needed to hear (fill in the blank). So here goes!
- When we get off track during group – our conversation always seems to drift towards (fill in the blank). So, let's take time to really discuss it.
- We always talk about wanting to have a lesson about (fill in the blank). So, tonight's the night!

No one knows your group better than you do – so here's your chance to have a night tailored specifically for your students! Please use the time to pray and prepare ahead of time (and let us know if we can help!). We can't wait to hear how it goes!

Encounter Week 1: Jesus Restores

Bottom Line: Grace > Guilt

Scripture Reference: (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

John 21:15-19

GOAL FOR THE NIGHT: To help the students understand that when they sin and stumble, God's grace is enough and will lead them back towards him.

Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.

GETTING STARTED:

- How would you define guilt? (*Leaders, there is a difference between healthy conviction and unhealthy guilt. Please help the students understand that God uses conviction as a tool to refine us. Satan uses guilt as a tool to destroy us.*)
- What are some of your normal reactions to guilt?

FROM THE WORD:

- When Jesus came back after his resurrection, he was kind to Peter. Why was that so surprising?
- What is the significance of Jesus asking Peter three times if he loved him?
- How does Jesus respond to us when we mess up? And how is that different than what we expect?

WORK IT OUT:

- Jesus had every right to disown Peter after his denial, but he chose to restore him in grace. What guilt in your life do you need Jesus to restore? (*perhaps take some time to spread out and reflect and pray individually about this question*)

NEXT STEP:

Leaders, encourage your students throughout the week to bring their guilt before the Lord and to seek him grace and restoration. God's grace is for EVERYONE, ANYTIME.

Encounter Week 2: Jesus Encourages

Bottom Line: Jesus is okay with our doubt.

Scripture Reference: (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

Matthew 14:22-33

GOAL FOR THE NIGHT: To help the students understand that having doubts can help develop their faith when they address them instead of hiding them.

Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.

GETTING STARTED:

- Why do you think most people tend to keep their doubts about God to themselves?
- Share some doubts you have about God or your faith.
- In what ways can doubt make our faith feel like it's sinking?

FROM THE WORD:

- When Peter was sinking, he called out to Jesus. Have you ever talked to God about your doubts? Why or why not?
- Jesus "immediately" caught Peter when he started sinking. What does that tell you about the way Jesus handles our doubts?
- Jesus is okay with our doubts. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?

WORK IT OUT:

- We've been challenged before to "question well" – meaning: let yourself have doubts and questions, but make sure you share them with people who are wise and who love both Jesus and you. Why do you think that would be so important?
- In what way do you think a person can grow and learn through their doubts? (Peter probably trusted Jesus more than ever after his swim that night!)
- What are some things that you KNOW to be true about God? Why is it important to recall those things when you are experiencing doubt?

NEXT STEP:

Have your students go to the Bible and make a list of attributes/truths about God that they can cling to during times of doubt. Have them share these ideas with the group tonight or in a group chat throughout the week.

Encounter Week 3: Jesus Pursues

Bottom Line: It's important to remember that everyone is on their own journey with Jesus.

Scripture Reference: (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

Acts 10:27-28, 34-48

(Note: This scripture includes the Gospel. Take a minute to focus on this for anyone in your group that needs it)

GOAL FOR THE NIGHT: To help the students understand that people both inside the church need grace, just like people outside the church.

Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.

GETTING STARTED:

- Do you expect Christians ("church people") to act kinder than the rest of the world? Why or why not?
- Why do Christians sometimes make it tough to have faith in God?
- Who is easier for you to forgive when you are wronged: Christians or non-Christians?

FROM THE WORD:

- Why is it better to focus on Jesus than it is to focus on other people and their behavior?
- In the book of Acts, God shared with Peter that the Good News of Jesus was for everyone – not just Jews. This was a huge shift from what the Jews had been taught before that. God accepts everyone – no matter who they are or where they come from.
 - How can this truth challenge us to love everyone around us – not just people that think and act like us?
 - What does it mean to see people in the church as "works in progress"? To remember they are also on a journey with Jesus? What about people outside the church?

WORK IT OUT:

- Practically speaking, what does it look like to show grace to someone else? How has someone shown grace to you in the past?
- Jesus died for you – just as you are. Consider a past or current situation where someone has been harsh towards you or someone you care about. What next steps can you take to move towards offering them grace – realizing that Jesus died for them, too.

NEXT STEP:

Leaders, spend some time praying. As God for grace, patience, strength and faith when it comes to loving and pursuing other people.

ENCOUNTER 4: JESUS EQUIPS

Bottom Line: When you have Jesus, you have everything.

Scripture Reference: Have students FIND and READ the passage in their BIBLE (not on a screen)

Acts 5:12-16 2 Peter 1:1

GOAL OF THE NIGHT: To help students understand that powerful faith isn't just for Bible figures and super-Christians—it's for ANYONE who believes in Jesus.

Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.

GETTING STARTED:

- Do you find it easier to believe that God has a plan for *other people*, but not you? Why or why not?
- What do you feel is the #1 thing that sometimes holds you back from growing in your faith?

FROM THE WORD:

- What caused Peter's faith to go from shaky (denying and doubting Jesus. You can check out Matt. 29:69-75, if you want!) to powerful (leading the church movement)?
- Read Acts 4:8-13. What difference did the resurrection make in Peter's life? What does it mean in your life?
- In what ways can our faith grow when we focus on Jesus and His resurrection?

WORK IT OUT:

- How does knowing you have access to the *same faith* as Peter (the faith that does miracles and changes lives) change the way you view yourself? Also read Ephesians 1:18-20 – that power is made available to US!! Wow!
- If you were 100% confident that God could use you in a powerful way, how would that change your view of your purpose and everyday life?

NEXT STEP

Leaders, encourage your students to step out in faith this week and ask the Lord to give them powerful, unwavering faith like the apostles. Hebrews 13:20-21. 2 Timothy 3:17.