

Clueless and Called Discipleship and the Gospel of Mark

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Sea-ing Is Not Always Believing	1	Mark 4:35–41	After a long day teaching the crowds, Jesus and his disciples took a boat toward the other side of the Sea of Galilee. When a great storm blew in and threatened to sink the boat, the disciples frantically woke a snoozing Jesus and questioned his compassion for them. After Jesus calmed the wind and the sea with a word, the disciples were left awestruck and nervously wondering who this wonder-worker really was.
Leaving Our Nets	2	Mark 1:16–20	Passing along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus abruptly called four ordinary fishermen to an extraordinary task—catching people into the realm of God! Just as abruptly, and with no apparent preparation or deliberation, they dropped everything to follow.
Getting to "the Good Life"	3	Mark 8:31–37	After rebuking Peter for tempting him to save his life rather than fulfill his mission, Jesus said in no uncertain terms that following him meant self-denial. He clued the disciples in to a baffling paradox: It is in losing one's life for the sake of Jesus and the good news that real life is truly found.
Traveling Light	4	Mark 6:6b–13	Leaving Galilee and returning to his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus taught in the synagogue, only to be treated with suspicion and contempt by people who were offended by his presumption. To supplement his own teaching, Jesus called the twelve disciples, gave them full authority to carry on his mission, and sent them out by twos. In so doing, he ordered them to take only the barest necessities to ensure their radical dependence on God.
The Healing River	4.5	NA	Extender session
More than Getting Wet	5	Mark 1:1–11	In fulfillment of ancient prophecy, John the baptizer came to prepare the way for Jesus, the one he declared would baptize "with the Holy Spirit" (1:8). Jesus then came down from Galilee and submitted to John's baptism in the Jordan River, establishing his identity as God's Beloved Son. The appearance of the dove at Jesus' baptism signified that the Spirit-famine was ended, the prophecies were fulfilled, and that God's Spirit was alive and at work in the ministry of Jesus.

**Do Miracles Happen
Signs and Wonders in the Gospel of John**

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Tales of Wonder . . . Fact or Fiction?	1	John 3:1–17	Nicodemus, a Jewish theologian, went to Jesus trying to find out for himself who Jesus was. In the Gospel of John, all “signs” that Jesus performed had to do with revealing who Jesus is, the Son of God. These signs and tales of wonder point to the miracle of incarnation—God sending Jesus into the world.
A Free Lunch?	2	John 6:1–15	In feeding the 5,000, Jesus fulfilled a physical need of people who also had hungry souls. Jesus’ graces shown through a physical, tangible gift. The key was for the recipients of that grace (here, the bread and fish) to recognize that this good gift was from God through Jesus.
Follow the Signs	2.5a, 3.5b	NA	Extender session
Faith, Healing, and Prayer	3	John 4:46–53	A royal official came to Jesus and asked him to heal his child. Though Jesus gave him a bit of a rough time about it, he nonetheless sent the man home with the assurance that the child would be healed. On his way home, the man met a servant who confirmed the promise Jesus made. The official’s son was alive and well, and the healing came at precisely the time Jesus had spoken the words. Can people today be healed by faith and prayer? What about those who aren’t healed with prayer? Do they just not have enough faith?
Dancing on the Water	4	John 6:16–21	When Jesus came walking on the rough water toward their boat in the middle of the sea, the disciples were completely shocked. They didn’t know what to make of this “sign.” But Jesus did not appear on the water in order to frighten the disciples. He appeared in order to calm their fears in the wind, to allow for their safe passage, and to remind them that God was, is, and always will be their rescue.
Looking for Resurrection	5	John 11:1–44	When his good friend became ill and near death, Jesus nevertheless stayed away until it was too late. Lazarus was dead before Jesus arrived, and the grieving sisters, Martha and Mary, took Jesus to task about his tardiness. Jesus assured the women that Lazarus would rise again. Even though Lazarus had been in the grave for four days, Jesus called him from death, and he came out of the tomb. This miracle of resurrection not only pointed to Jesus as the author of resurrection and life, but also foreshadowed his own death and resurrection.

**Do the Right Thing
Ethics Shaped by Faith**

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Creator Worth Worshiping	1	Exodus 20:1–21; 32:1–8	While Moses encountered God on Mount Sinai and received the ten commandments, the Israelites grew impatient. They asked Aaron to make them gods and ended up worshiping a golden calf. The two incidents contrast two understandings of God: one phony and one worth bowing down to.
The Sword in the Garden	2	Luke 22:47–53	Jesus was arrested by an armed crowd while praying on the Mount of Olives. His disciples asked whether they should defend him. When one zealous follower cut off the ear of a servant, Jesus healed the man and said, “No more of this!” He was seized and crucified.
In Step with the Spirit	3	Galatians 5:13–26	The Church in Galatia was struggling with whether or not they needed to keep the laws their Jewish ancestors passed down to them. Some congregations required Gentile converts to be circumcised. Paul explained the nature of spiritual freedom and tried to help the Galatians “live by the Spirit.” While the presence of the Holy Spirit brings freedom from the spirit of the times, it also offers sound boundaries for behavior and for responding to other authority figures.
Death by Deceit	4	Acts 5:1–11	Ananias and Sapphira lied to their church community about the money they gained selling a property. When they were caught, both of them fell down dead. Honesty and integrity are essential to covenant relationships; if people cease to trust one another with the truth, they soon cease to be in relationship.
The First Stone	5	John 8:2–11	The Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus in order to test his loyalty to the law. Jesus said that anyone who was without sin could stone her. When her accusers left, Jesus set the woman free and told her not to sin again. But the story of the woman taken in adultery is not really a story about women or adultery; it is a story about Pharisees being pushed to think about their own sins instead of just pointing out other people’s.
The Needle's Eye	6	Mark 10:17–31	A man ran up to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus heard that this man had already kept all of the commandments, he told him to sell what he had and give it to the poor. The man went away sad because he was wealthy and Jesus’ disciples were left puzzling over this hard teaching.
Sharing Wisdom about Ethics	6.5	NA	Extender Session

Fight Right
A Christian Approach to Conflict Resolution

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Differences Make the Difference!	1	1 Corinthians 12:12–26	Conflict is a fact of life. Paul knew it, and so did the Christians in Corinth. For Paul, and for other writers of the Bible, the goal of the faithful life is not to eliminate conflict, but to deal with it in a positive way. In this passage Paul lays the groundwork for a positive understanding of conflict that can transform how we relate to each other. Using the image of the church as a body, Paul asserts (1) that the very differences that cause conflict are a necessary part of God’s creation; (2) that the conflict resulting from differences can be viewed not as something negative, but as a means whereby the Holy Spirit reveals God’s will and inspires growth; and (3) that the best way to transform unhealthy conflict into healthy conflict is to encourage differences for the good of the whole.
Truth and Love! Or Dare?	2	Ephesians 4:11–16	This passage tells us two things: First, we must speak the truth. That’s not easy when we find ourselves in conflict. We even convince ourselves that for the good of the relationship we must not be honest about how we feel or what we think of the conflict. But the passage goes on to say we can speak the truth in love. When love is present, truth-telling will not harm others or our relationship with them, but will instead be the foundation stone for rebuilding the relationship.
Say What!?	3	Ephesians 4:25–27, 29–5:2	Since the Tower of Babel, communication problems have caused and complicated conflicts. At the same time, the ability to communicate is a magnificent gift from God, and carries with it the potential not only for working through conflicts, but for creating ever deeper levels of human connection and unity. For the writer of Ephesians it’s clear: Poor communication is whatever tears down unity; good communication is whatever is useful for building up. Sometimes that means speaking, and sometimes it means listening.
Send the Very Best: Yourself!	4	Matthew 18:15–17	Jesus gives us the responsibility to take the lead in seeking reconciliation when we feel offended by another. Sometimes our efforts are rebuffed. Our reaction is often to feel more deeply hurt, to lash out in anger, and to give up. But Jesus tells us never to give up. Perhaps most importantly, he tells us that we don’t have to work through our conflicts alone. Our friends, our church, and Jesus himself are there to help.
Be a Friend: Mediate!	5	Philippians 2:1–5; 4:2–3	For Paul, unity depends on the ability of people to look beyond their own interests and attend to the needs of others. In this case at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche needed help resolving their conflict, so Paul called in his “loyal companion” as a mediator. As Christians we have a responsibility to be open to transform our own conflicts. But we are called to do more. Loving our neighbors sometimes means helping others resolve their conflicts.
Practical Mediation	5.5	NA	Extender Session

**God Is a Warrior?
Violence in the Bible**

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
All the King's Horses	1	Joshua 11	Following their exodus from Egypt, the Israelite people entered the land of Canaan, the land promised to them by God (Deuteronomy 6:22–23). But this area already had a name and it was already inhabited—by the Canaanites. If the Israelites wanted the land for their own, they would have to expel the original inhabitants by force. The kings of Canaan massed together against the invaders (Israel), but were soundly defeated by a military captain who ruthlessly followed the battle instructions of his God. How do we today understand God's seeming approval of violence as the primary means for the Israelites to take over the land of Canaan?
Military Build-Down	2	Judges 6, 7	With God's assistance, the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan. The book of Judges is a reminder that the "conquest" of Canaan was not as complete or as easily achieved as the book of Joshua portrays it. In Judges, the people relied on a series of charismatic leaders to provide leadership in crisis situations. These charismatic leaders were specially chosen by God, as opposed to a king who rules because he is from a royal family. The story of Gideon is an example of the whole book's theme that obedience to and trust in God is the only guarantee of success for God's people.
A Room with a View	3	1 Kings 21:1–19	This story depicts another kind of violence in the Bible, and God's response to it. After King David and King Solomon, Israel divided into two nation-states, and Israelite leaders were often guilty of apostasy—worshiping the other gods of the land. When Israel's leaders turned bad, violence was done to people, along with the kind of excesses warned of in the book of Deuteronomy (cf. chapter 17:14ff.). How did God react? Does God fight for the innocent? The story of Naboth prompts us to decide what we will do when weaker members of society suffer at the hands of unscrupulous leaders.
Cleaning House	4	Mark 11:15–19	In a fit of explosive anger, Jesus drove the money-changers and sellers of pigeons out of the Temple. While Jesus had on other occasions used very strong language in condemning the religious practices of others, this is the only story in the Gospels that indicates he used physical force to make his point. What does this action of Jesus mean for us, who try to follow his way?
When You Want to Hit Back	5	Luke 9:51–56	The willingness to destroy others who anger or threaten us is a disturbing facet of being human. In this episode, even Jesus' disciples showed that they were not immune to this tendency, as they wondered aloud whether they should destroy a village of Samaritans who had rejected them and Jesus. While Jesus rebuked them, they nonetheless showed that even within the inner circle of Jesus' followers, there was an active spirit of violence.
Gandhi or Dead Man Walking, or Is War Ever Just?	5.5	NA	Extender Session
Land for Sale	6	Jeremiah 32	In 587 B.C.E., the southern kingdom (Judah) was about to fall to the Babylonians. The prophet Jeremiah was under house arrest for predicting the defeat of Judah, which is not what King Zedekiah wanted to hear. While under arrest, Jeremiah's cousin offered to sell him a piece of family property. Jeremiah made the purchase, even though the city was about to be overrun by the enemy and the people taken into captivity. Some might say this was an unwise investment. The Lord, however, had told Jeremiah that, "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (v. 15). Thus, it was an investment in the future, showing confidence that the exiles would return.

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
What is Wisdom?	1	Proverbs 1:1–33	Wisdom literature holds a special place in the Bible. This is not the stuff of preachers, scholars, or genealogists; here is material written for (and by) teachers. These people were charged with teaching the young people of the faith how to avoid the “snare” of evil and the decoys of foolishness and, in so doing, come to a good life.
Is It True or Isn't It?	2	Proverbs 10–22	Proverbs that were written three or four thousand years ago are still relevant today. Some seem contradictory, yet if we watch carefully, we find that something can be “true forever” while not being “true for always”—being true for all time is not the same as being true for all times. The proverbs of old are not righteous in and of themselves, but they help us recognize the right path in a confusing world. It is tough to live in a world without ironclad answers. The Bible suggests that listening within a situation is just as important as collecting up answers ahead of time. Proverbs teach some specific answers but also teach about a world in which answers are to be learned along the way.
If I'm Good, Everything Will Turn Out, Okay?	3	Proverbs 3	If we are honest with ourselves, believers often face the question, “Does faith work?” Wisdom literature suggests that people who follow God’s path are blessed; people who do not follow God’s path open themselves to be cursed. A God-directed lifestyle has a deep reward.
Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?	4	Job 1–7, 38	A direct challenge to the heart of early wisdom is the story of Job, a totally righteous man who suffered unjustly. Unjust suffering is a frequent complaint of adolescents. Why does God allow suffering? What do we do when people are in pain? When we look at the suffering of innocent people in our world, we begin to challenge our assumption about God. What is discovered in Job’s story, however, is that it is from within our suffering that God becomes more clearly understood. Perhaps it is enough to know that God speaks to us from inside our suffering.
More on Proverbs	4.5	NA	Extender Session
Life's Not Fair So Why Bother?	5	Ecclesiastes 3:1–13; 8:10–15; 9:7–10; 12:1–7	When we spend all our efforts trying to figure out how the world works, whether life is just or unjust, we often miss the life within the moment. Ecclesiastes, after searching for the meaning of life, draws the conclusion that God will be in charge of the way the world works; we are charged of our joy. The joy of life comes from living out the fullness of each moment as it unfolds at God’s directing. This is not the same as living for the moment. Instead, we live fully within the moment but for the Creator.

How to Be a True Friend
The Bible Reveals Friendship's Heart

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
True Friends Can Be Trusted	1	1 Samuel 18:1–5; 20:1–42	David and Jonathan were best friends. Jonathan was a son to King Saul, and David was the ever-growing threat to this king’s popularity. When Saul threatened to kill David, Jonathan had to decide between family—his own right to the throne—and David. Jonathan proved to David his trustworthiness by making a covenant with him, creating a plan to warn him of danger, and by risking his own life for his friend.
True Friends Are Loyal	2	Ruth 1:1–18	Naomi and her family moved from Bethlehem to Moab because of a famine. Her husband died there, and her two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Then they died, leaving all three women widows. When the famine was over, Naomi set out to return to Bethlehem. Ruth and Orpah followed, and Naomi begged them to turn back, for their own sakes. Orpah returned, but Ruth, out of loyalty to Naomi, remained.
True Friends Take Risks	3	John 4:1–26	Jesus stopped by a well in Samaria. There he asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. This was culturally taboo, because their ethnic groups hated each other and because they were not the same gender. But Jesus, in taking this risk, offered her “living water.” She accepted this new abundant life.
Option A	3.5	NA	Extender Session
True Friends Fight	4	Acts 4:36–37; 9:19–28; 11:21–24; 15:36–40; 2 Timothy 4:9–11	Barnabas and Paul were two key players in the growth and nurture of the early church. Barnabas sponsored Paul when he was a new Christian, when other believers were still suspicious of him. The two were partners in ministry until there was a sharp disagreement over Mark, who had earlier deserted them. Paul and Barnabas parted ways, but later reconciled, and Mark was able to travel with Paul again
True Friends Serve Each Other	5	John 13:1–17	It was their last supper together. Jesus, knowing his death was approaching, wanted to show his love for his friends and to help them with one more lesson on humble servanthood. He washed their feet, the most menial job of a slave. Peter couldn’t bear the thought of his Teacher doing this, but Jesus convinced him of his need for this gift. Afterward, Jesus told his disciples to follow his example of service
True Friends Commit Their Lives	6	John 15:9–17	Jesus taught that abiding in him and loving other people are closely connected. When one abides in Christ, as a branch is connected to the Vine, one has the ability to love others. Jesus gave us the example of this love by laying down his life for us, his friends. When we abide in him, and commit to loving one another, we will be better at friendship, and will have joy.
Option B	6.5	NA	Extender Session

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
When There Was No Bible	1	Genesis 12:1–7; 15:18–20; 17:15–22	This is the story of how Abraham became aware of God and God’s promise. Even before there was a Bible, Abraham came to know God because he responded to God’s promises in faith and trust. Thus, beginning with Abraham, a people with no Bible came to know God. Eventually, people wrote about their experience of God’s revelation. Some of those stories became the Bible. Though Abraham’s story is ancient history, God is interested in communicating with us at all times. It’s up to us to be open to hear and respond to God.
What Makes a Story Holy?	2	Acts 3:11–26	The promises made by God to Abraham and through Moses were still remembered in the time of the early church. They were the basis for understanding what God was doing in their own time. In Jesus’ coming they saw the promises made to Moses and to Abraham fulfilled. Knowing the stories and history of God’s people, they could understand the working of God in the present.
How Do You Hear?	3	Psalm 119:105; Micah 6:1–8; 2 Timothy 3:10–17	Paul did not hesitate to refer to his life as exemplary for other Christians. He knew the books, first as a trained rabbi and then as a follower of Jesus Christ. He knew that the Bible spoke in many different ways to many different situations in life. The biblical writers wanted to make sure that their message about God was heard and understood, so they chose different literary forms for different messages. Those forms would tell the reader how to interpret the message.
What’s in It for Me?	4	Colossians 3:1–17; 1 Peter 1:13–16	Peter and Paul have given us a way of thinking about right and wrong, good and evil. They start from the premise that humans were created in the image of God, and created to be morally responsible persons in accordance with the righteousness of God. The Bible reveals to us the character of God shown in God’s acts and as embodied in Jesus, and then indicates that we are to become God-like and Christ-like in character. That is what Peter told the early Christians, but he used a passage that goes all the way back to the law of Moses.
The Bible Shapes People	5	Acts 8:26–40; 2 Peter 1:20–21	Even the Bible writers interpreted scripture. In fact, there were real arguments about who interpreted correctly. In interpreting the Bible we will need to overcome two hurdles. The first is translation. The books of the Hebrew Bible were written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament in Greek, so they need to be translated for those of us who do not know the biblical languages. The other has to do with interpretation, with how we hear the message. Why do we not all hear or understand the same thing? How can we understand what the word of God is saying to us today?
So Many Choices . . .	5.5	NA	Extender Session

Keeping the Garden
A Faith Response to God's Creation

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Once Upon a Time . . .	KG	NA	Extender Session
A Mess in God's Kitchen	1	Genesis 1:1–31	The story of creation in Genesis 1 is a primer about who God is and how created beings interconnect. Most importantly, it affirms God as creator of the world and all that is in it. God began with chaos and, in time, invited a life-giving order to take shape. We do not need any reason to hold and protect creation other than that God is embedded in this treasure. If we believe God made the world, our relationship with God's good gift of creation means ensuring that it continues to function according to God's design.
Babbling on Babel	2	Genesis 11:1–9	The descendants of Noah had received God's blessing to multiply and fill the earth. Instead, the people gathered into one place and found their own goal to live for: a tower reaching high into the heavens. But God responded by mixing up their languages, scattering them over the earth, and giving the human race some much-needed diversity. God created a variety of life, and values differences in plants, animals, and people.
What's in a Name?	3	Genesis 2:4b–9, 15–23	The Genesis 2 account of creation is concerned primarily with humanity and its place in the world. The passage recognizes a strong kinship between humanity and every other living thing in the garden since they are all made out of the ground. The connection is also recognized in the vocation given to humanity. The task of naming invokes an integral, caring relationship between humanity and the environment.
Pushing God's 'Legal limits'	4	Genesis 3:1–19	When God placed humans in the Garden of Eden, they were allowed to eat the fruit of many trees, and forbidden to eat of only one. But then they ignored this one limitation. Our covenant with God establishes limits on human behavior, but when we refuse to accept those limits, the whole world suffers.
Sufficiency	5	Genesis 4:1–16	When Cain saw that God had rejected his offering but had accepted that of his brother Abel, he murdered Abel. We expect that Cain deserves to die. But instead God gave him what he needed, not what he deserved—grace. He was disciplined, but spared from death. God placed humanity in the world with what they needed to live full and healthy lives. When we try to take the abundance for ourselves, others are robbed of necessities and the whole world suffers.
Faith in the Rain	6	Genesis 6:5–9:17	Noah lived in a time when the world was disintegrating. Things were so bad that God decided to flood the world. But Noah lived a righteous life and followed the direction God gave him. Through him, God restored the earth and made it rich and fertile once again. When we respond faithfully to God's calling, God works through us to bring about the restoration of the earth.

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
Which Way to God?	1	Acts 17:16–34	The apostle Paul went to Athens to “reason with” those he found in the local synagogue and in the marketplace. When certain philosophers questioned him about his teachings, Paul was ready with answers. In gaining a hearing, he started where his hearers were, referring to their worship of an un-known god. With his usual logical precision, Paul attempted to persuade them that the God they called “unknown” was in truth the Creator of all—the One who had already risen from the dead. Some in the audience wanted to know more. For others, however, talk of a resurrection was too much. They sneered and turned away.
Hinduism—Try, Try Again?	2	Ephesians 2:1–10	The apostle Paul wanted the Ephesian faith community to be sure of one thing—they had been blessed by God with great spiritual riches by the divine action of grace, an incomparable gift from God. Now they could live in gratitude and holiness. In one way of thinking, such an approach to life is “unfair.” Our old slate of misdeeds, based on “the passions of our flesh,” is wiped clean, and we don’t need to keep scrubbing. For Hindus, such unfair-ness does not exist in reality; justice is always done—through the infallible workings of karma.
Buddhism—How Do We Handle Suffering?	3	1 Peter 4:12–19	The apostle Peter addresses a church filled with non-Jews who may well be shocked at the prospect of suffering persecution. (This would not have been surprising to the Jews!) Peter tries to assure them that, for a Christian, life involves the possibility of pain as they share in the suffering Jesus endured as a result of his teachings and manner of living. Yet suffering is redeemed—fiery ordeals can test faith and make it stronger.
Judaism—Is the Promise Alive?	4	Genesis 3:6–9; 12:1–4; 13:14–18; Romans 4, 11	Abraham, a Gentile living in the desert, heard the call of God: “Move your family to another place to live!” Along with that challenge came some marvelous promises: Abraham would be given a land for his own, his family would eventually grow into a countless multitude, and his people would be blessed by God and become a source of blessing to others through the ages. So Abraham headed off for this promised land and its blessing. The Christian story connects followers of Jesus with Abraham and Sarah as their spiritual descendants. But does that mean that we take over where the Hebrews left off, as though the Jews now have no place in God’s plans? “By no means!” states the apostle Paul. “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” (Romans 11:1–2)
Islam—Is Doubting for Believers?	5	Mark 9:14–24	When Jesus confronted the disciples with “you faithless generation” (v. 19), he was emphasizing the critical role of faith in confronting evil in the world. Yet even a man who struggled with faith was granted the healing of his son. Struggle with doubt can deepen faith. For Muslims, perhaps the most important religious concept is obedience to the guidance of Allah. Mohammed, the last of the prophets, established his example and the tradition of the community as a guiding light. True faith offers a series of specific directions for life. Thus in any situation there will be no doubt about what to do.
Question and Answer	5.5	NA	Extender Session

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
No Fair!	1	Matthew 19:27–20:15	Just after Jesus told a rich young man to sell his possessions in order to have treasure in heaven, Peter asked, “What’s in it for us, who do leave everything to follow?” Jesus responded with the parable of the vineyard workers. In our relationship with God, our acceptance is not based on how hard we work. It is based purely on God’s desire to show us divine love. No one has more access to the love of God than another, and people can do nothing to earn that love. For youth, who are competing on many fronts, this parable can be an important insight into the unconditional quality of God’s love.
The Great Feast	2	Luke 14:15–24	In the parable of the great feast, Jesus confronted the human tendency to ignore a gracious invitation from God. We find other needs and desires to be more pressing. We make excuses and go our way. Yet the moment of decision for the Way of love keeps confronting us: Will we throw our lot in with Jesus, or will we be drawn off by the temptations of the world? The call to this dinner speaks primarily to our freedom to either hold on to, or let go of, what we have planned for our own salvation.
The Sinner’s Club	3	Luke 15:1–10	When the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus for eating with sinners, he told two short parables to show that God searches for us like a good shepherd would search for a lost sheep, or like a determined woman would search for a lost coin. The climax of both parables ushers us into the realm of heaven, where we encounter great rejoicing, because of God’s wealth of acceptance and love for those society rejects. Our way of reckoning worthiness is not God’s way. No lost person is unworthy of being found by God.
Stick with Me	4	John 15:1–7	The image of the vine and branches gives us yet another view of God—as the source and the sustainer of our being. Why can’t we go it alone, as society tells us we can? Because without God we have no life and no meaning. Moreover, when we reach out and serve from the true vine’s power, we bear fruit. “Bearing fruit” is sometimes interpreted as works righteousness, but this is a foundational Bible passage. We bear fruit not in order to be grafted to the vine, but because we are already part of the vine.
Against the Grain	5	Luke 18:9–14	This is one of several parables that teaches how to live in accordance with God’s “upside-down” reign of God. By contrasting the Pharisee’s attitude with that of a sinful, but humble, tax collector, Jesus showed that the true nature of salvation goes against the grain of accepted “works theology.” Instead, God saves according to divine mercy rather than human merit. This parable highlights the “upside-down” nature of the gospel, the subversion of the usual order: the wealth of poverty, humility instead of pride, love of enemies, the power of powerlessness, and losing our lives to save them.
Love Is an Action Word!	6	Luke 10:25–37	When the expert in the law asked who his neighbor was, he was looking for a way to make sure that he was righteous. Jesus made it harder on him than expected! It would not be a simple matter of picking out the people towards whom he should show kindness. Rather, Jesus said he must be ready to show compassion to whoever needs help. He must also be ready to receive mercy at the hands of the least lovable one who offers it.
The Good Shepherd	7	John 10:1–18	Extender Session

Salt, Light, and the Good Life
Blessings and the Sermon on the Mount

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
The Blessings— Invitation/Conversion	1	Matthew 5:1–5	Jesus starts the instruction of the disciples by highlighting how they can “enjoy the bliss of heaven”—these are the Blessings (aka the Beatitudes). The message is, if you feel hopeless (v. 3), full of sadness (v. 4), beaten down or crushed (v. 5), Jesus invites you to come to him for nurture, love, and the reward of a relationship with God. These three qualities—poverty of spirit, mourning, and meekness—tend to be preconditions for conversion. People who experience life this way are ripe for a relationship with God. The Beatitudes offer Jesus’ understanding, which says, in essence, you can go through it and come out blessed on the other end.
The Blessings— Foundation/Preparation	2	Matthew 5:6–8	The three Blessings—hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, and being pure in heart—correspond with three fundamental spiritual disciplines that help us grow in knowledge, in heart, and in spirit. Having a strong desire for God’s truth; internalizing God’s grace, love, and mercy; and keeping one’s eyes on God are not only excellent preparations for ministry, but are experiences of faith in and of themselves.
The Blessings— Commission/Ministry	3	Matthew 5:9–12	These Beatitudes/Blessings focus on peacemaking and the fact that doing the right thing could invite persecution and false charges. However, the rewards—full adoption by God and full access to and use of heavenly resources—are enormous.
Salt and Light	4	Matthew 5:13–16	Jesus says that disciples are to be the ingredient (salt) that gives life flavor. But like all flavoring, it isn’t worth much if it can’t be tasted. If the disciples lose their “saltiness,” they are of little use. He encourages them to be prominent and active with their witnessing and ministry, so that people will notice God’s activity in their midst.
Jesus and the Law	5	Matthew 5:17–48	Contrary to some rumors about his teaching, Jesus emphasized that his aim was not to challenge the laws given by God to Moses, but to fulfill them. He meant to recover them for their original intent—that biblical laws be rooted in love. He demonstrated that it is not simply what we do or say in worship, but what we do in our daily life that determines how well we are abiding by these laws.
Heavenly Teachings—Do the Right Thing	6	Matthew 6:1–7:29	Jesus says religious practices such as giving to the poor, praying, and fasting are for God, not for public recognition. In a series of rigorous ethical teachings, he also puts money and worry in their places. He concludes by providing pointers on how to stay on course on the rocky, but ultimately satisfying, road with God.
More on the Good Life	6.5	NA	Extender Session

A Speck in the Universe
The Bible on Self-Esteem and Peer Pressure

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
A Crown of Honor	1	Psalm 8	God created the heavens and the earth, and trusted human beings with the care of the world. Out of the expanse of the universe, God chose people—us—for relationship. Therefore, we must have great worth. Our significance is rooted in being creatures of our awesome Creator and we, too, are proclaimed “good.” It is not only who we are that gives us significance, it is “whose” we are—God’s children.
Community Stargazing	1.5	NA	Extender Session
Love for the Unloved	2	Luke 19:1–10	Riches could not buy respect for Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector. Therefore the locals were dismayed when Jesus asked to be a guest in Zacchaeus’ home, for the tax collector was a swindler and a sinner. But in Jesus’ presence, Zacchaeus turned from his cheating ways and experienced the longarm of God’s love, which reaches to all who feel unloved.
On Being Holy	3	Judges 13–16; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8	Samson was given great strength as long as he remained true to God’s instructions, and God dwelled in him during his faithfulness. Samson’s strength, as well as his healthy self-esteem, was dependent on his being indwelt with God’s spirit. Like Samson, we are called to be holy. But there’s no room for God to dwell if a person is filled up with other junk.
The 'In' Crowd	4	Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 7:36–50	Simon, considered righteous because he was a Pharisee, found from the example of a sinful woman what it meant to be forgiven and accepted into God’s family. Jesus spent a lot of time eating, talking with, and healing people who were considered outsiders, and they responded with gratitude and love. Jesus treated them with love and respect, resulting in changed lives. Even when we feel outside of God’s love and cast off by peers, we too can be restored to God. When we respond to God’s love, God showers us with love.
Contents Under Pressure	5	Daniel 3:10–30; 6:7–28	Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego underwent the ultimate in peer pressure; they faced death because they would not betray their God and follow King Nebuchadnezzar’s religious laws. Each time God kept them safe because of their faithfulness. Pressure comes on us from many directions, yet Daniel and his friends were able to resist the pressure and remain true to their values and their God.
Humility and Self-Confidence	6	Luke 1:26–56	Mary, a young girl, was visited by an angel who told her she would get pregnant with the son of God. Though perplexed, Mary accepted the task of being the Messiah’s mother, submitting herself to God’s plan. Mary’s story is about strong self-esteem as well as about humility. Her trust in God and her healthy self-esteem allowed her to be strong through the whole ordeal of being the mother of a misunderstood Christ.

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
No title	TW	NA	Extender Session
Your Basic 'Way Out' God	1	Exodus 15:1–21	Having experienced the drama of being saved from the Egyptian army, both Moses and Miriam sang songs of praise to God. Their two songs shout out the story of God's saving grace, of God's liberation. They highlight a basic tenet of our faith—that God is a liberator, one who provides a way out. For Jews and Christians alike, this event of liberation is a pinnacle in the story of faith (salvation history). It is an event not just of the past, but one that accompanies the faithful throughout life.
Your Basic Covenant	2	Exodus 20:1–17	God gave a set of summary commandments to establish boundaries and goals for positive living. God initiated this covenant to bring about right relationship between God and the people. To establish the covenant, however, God wants a response from the people. Basic to Jewish and Christian faith is the notion of covenant, the heart of which is represented by these "ten words" of God.
Your Basic Salvation	3	Mark 2:1–12	When people began realizing that Jesus had something to relieve their sufferings, they followed him in droves. Jesus wasn't just healing bodies, however, but also souls. How? By forgiving sins. Jesus offers us the hope of salvation by accepting us as we are, and inviting us to healing and wholeness by connecting to his way of sacrificial love.
Your Basic Baptism	4	Acts 2:38–42	Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–40) ends with three thousand people getting baptized, a public welcoming of God's message of healing and hope in their lives. Baptism is a sign representing both God's faithfulness to the covenant with us and of our commitment to respond to that faithfulness. It's one of the basics of faith.
Your Basic Radical Discipleship	5	Luke 9:18–27	Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about him, and then let out the inconceivable: that the Son of Man, whom some were calling the Messiah, would suffer and die. He was very up front with all his would-be followers, telling them to count the cost of discipleship. But in his blunt challenge was also a heady, tantalizing promise: that some would not taste death before they saw God's loving realm. Framed by the stories of Peter's declaration and the transfiguration, this invitation to radical discipleship living is only reasonable when we understand and experience who Jesus is.
Your Basic Community	6	Romans 12:3–21; 1 Corinthians 12:4–27; James 1:19–2:17	Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to describe the kind of relationships God wants us to have with one another when we commit to following Jesus Christ. These books are all about figuring out how to work together, worship together, meet each other's needs, and still respect individual identity and responsibility.

**Who Is God?
Engaging the Mystery**

Generation Why

Session Title	Session #	Scripture (Faith Story)	Faith Focus
God Creates	1	Psalms 104:10–32; Romans 1:19–20a	In this passage, Paul admonished the Romans for denying knowledge of God while at the same time saying they had seen and experienced the wonder of nature. According to Paul, if the Romans had seen the world God created, they had also seen God, the Creator. What can be known about God, in addition to divine revelation to Israel, through the Bible, and in Jesus Christ, can be known by looking at what the Creator made. At the very least, creation reveals that God is loving, awesome, beautiful, and powerful.
God Keeps Promises	2	Exodus 6:1–8	When Moses and Aaron first demanded that Pharaoh free the Israelite slaves, Pharaoh only tightened his grip. So Moses complained to God that the divine plan for freedom had gone awry. God assured Moses that divine authority still honored the promises made to previous generations. God liberated the Israelites and gave them a way out of bondage, revealing that God keeps promises even after hundreds of years—even when God’s children betray the covenant, God is faithful.
God Is Present	3	Psalms 139:1–18	The psalmist understood that God creates humans in a wonderful, mysterious way, knows them intimately, and is present in all places and circumstances. This knowledge came from the psalmist’s personal experience of God in the ups and downs of everyday life. Immersed in an intimate relationship with the divine Presence, the psalmist describes a model for youth who desire a close relationship with God.
God Is Like . . .	4	Psalms 23	The psalmist compared God to a shepherd, which emphasized God’s care for people in both joy and tragedy. The psalmist also said God was like a gracious host who exhibited lavish hospitality in the face of enemies. The psalmist used metaphor and simile to describe God. There are both strengths and limits to describing God through figures of speech.
God is Trinity	5	Matthew 28:18–20; John 1:1–8; 14:25–26	John said that the Jesus who entered historic time was also the Word who was with God in the beginning at the creation. In Matthew, Jesus told the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Considering these books, the early church councils created a doctrine that said God is a triunity: three-in-one and one-in-three. God is Creator, Word, and Spirit; but above all, God is a mystery beyond our complete comprehension.
God in Music/Ways of Knowing	5.5	NA	Extender Session