

A large, white, stylized letter 'R' with a dark blue shadow. Inside the top curve of the 'R' is a dark blue arrow pointing upwards and to the right. The background is a vibrant blue and teal gradient with various geometric shapes like triangles, circles, and lines, along with small icons like plus signs and triangles.

# Reach

***Discipleship 101***

How to Follow Jesus

# Discipleship 101

## How to Follow Jesus

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# Welcome to **Reach**

## A Faith Formation Journey for Youth

**Reach** is a faith formation curriculum for youth in grades 9–12, designed to help young people explore the call of Jesus in every aspect of their lives. Through Scripture, story, discussion, and active practice, **Reach** invites youth to deepen their relationship with God, grow in community, and live out their faith with courage and compassion.

Each unit consists of six sessions on a biblical or life-topic theme relevant to youth today. Lessons are interactive and adaptable, providing leaders with options to meet the needs of diverse groups. Whether your group is meeting in a church building or gathered in a home or community space, **Reach** offers flexible guidance and creative approaches that encourage honest and engaging conversations.

### Faith that Crosses Generations

Faith is not meant to be formed in isolation, but in relationship with people of all ages. That's why **Reach** includes *FlexGen* sessions—intergenerational sessions where youth gather with children, young adults, and older generations to explore faith together.

*FlexGen* sessions create space for mutual learning; youth bring fresh questions and energy, while other generations offer perspective, stories, and encouragement. In these settings, faith is both caught and taught—shaped through prayer, conversation, and shared activities. We believe this kind of intergenerational interaction strengthens the whole body of Christ and helps young people see their place within the larger story of God's people.

### Mid-week Encouragement

Another feature of **Reach** is weekly text messages that leaders can send to youth. This content serves as a reminder of the week's scripture and emphasis and offers encouragement for youth as they live out their faith during the week. Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church's policy around safe technology usage with youth.

### Your Role as a Leader

This guide provides session plans, discussion prompts, background notes, and tips for adapting each lesson. As a leader, you are both a facilitator and a companion—someone who helps youth wrestle with hard questions, celebrates their insights, and models a life of faithful discipleship.

Our prayer is that **Reach** will inspire your group to take bold steps in following Jesus, trusting God's Spirit to lead the way. May you and your youth not only reach toward deeper faith but also *be reached* by the boundless love of God.

## SESSION 1

# Called to Follow

Luke 5:1–11

## Prepare

### Key Idea(s) for Youth:

- Jesus calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Discipleship begins with accepting his invitation.

### Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Enter</b>	
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Table tennis balls <input type="checkbox"/> Baskets or bins <input type="checkbox"/> Net or basket <input type="checkbox"/> Ribbons or strips of fabric <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent markers <input type="checkbox"/> Internet-connected device (optional)
<b>Empower</b>	

## Making Connections

The story in Luke 5 introduces us to Jesus calling his first disciples, fishermen who had been working all night with no success. In the midst of their ordinary, frustrating work, Jesus steps in and asks them to try something new. Their nets overflow, and suddenly everything shifts: Jesus calls them to follow, and they leave their boats behind.

For youth, this story matters because it reminds them that discipleship is not reserved for experts or the especially religious. Jesus invites us to follow in the middle of ordinary life. Many teens feel pressure to “be extraordinary” in academics, sports, or social life. Luke’s story reframes extraordinary not as achievement, but as trust: accepting Jesus’ invitation, even when it feels risky or countercultural.

Developmentally, adolescents are wrestling with questions of identity, belonging, and purpose. They long for lives that matter and to be part of something bigger than themselves. This story emphasizes that God cares about them just as they are and calls them to a purpose beyond themselves. It also opens space for honest conversation about what it costs to follow Jesus. Leaving boats and nets may look different for every youth: courage to speak up, willingness to change plans, or choosing peace when culture pushes violence.

Through today’s story, you can encourage your youth to see that following Jesus begins with simply accepting his invitation. Jesus calls us as we are and then sends us beyond ourselves, turning ordinary lives into extraordinary witnesses of God’s love.

*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

**What’s on their minds?**

**Who’s missing today?**

**My prayer . . .**



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Welcome youth (by name if possible) as they arrive. Once all are settled, invite sharing around the question, “What’s something ordinary about yourself that you secretly love?” Offer some examples to get them thinking: “I’m weirdly good at guessing what time it is without looking at a clock,” “I can fall asleep anywhere,” “I’m low-key amazing at making the perfect playlist,” or “I always know the fastest way through the hallways at school.”

Debrief by saying something like: “Our little quirks and talents might feel small or ordinary—maybe even unimportant. But that’s exactly the point. Jesus doesn’t wait for people to be impressive by the world’s standards before calling them. He calls ordinary people, right where they are. And when we say yes, God can use even our ordinary lives and gifts for something extraordinary!”

## Prayer

Invite youth to sit quietly and seek to calm their hearts and minds from wherever they’ve come from as they enter into this time together with each other and God.

Lead youth in a breath prayer: “When you breathe in, silently pray, ‘Jesus, you are calling me.’ When you breathe out, silently pray, ‘I will follow you.’ We’ll do this together for a few breaths.”

End with a group “Amen.”



### Teaching Tip

- Keep it simple. Spiritual practices work best when they’re short, concrete, and repeatable!

## Engage

Share with youth that Luke 5:1–11 takes place on the shore of Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee). Fishing was exhausting, physical work, and after a night with no catch, the fishermen would have been tired and discouraged. Yet this story is less about fishing and more about trust. Jesus chooses ordinary workers, not religious experts, to be his first disciples. The extraordinary begins with their willingness to say yes to his invitation to follow!

Ask for volunteers to help read Luke 5:1–11 out loud, breaking it into three parts: verses 1–3, 4–7, and 8–11. Encourage listeners to close their eyes and imagine themselves in the scene: hearing the water lap against the boat, feeling the ache of tired arms, seeing the sudden flood of fish.

## Dig Deeper

Invite reflection on the story by offering some of these questions for discussion or silent contemplation:

- What details in this story stand out to you the most? Why?
- The fishermen had already failed once that night. What do you think made them willing to listen to Jesus anyway?
- What do you think Jesus saw in these people that made him want them as part of his community?
- Think about Peter’s words: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (NRSVue). Why do you think he felt unworthy? What things might make us feel unworthy of God or others? What do you notice about the way Jesus answers him?
- Jesus called them to leave their nets and follow. What might “nets” look like in your life or lives of others you know today—things that hold us back or keep us from saying yes to Jesus?



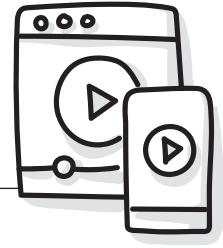
### Teaching Tip

- ▶ Don’t rush through silence. After you ask a question, count to at least 10 in your head before jumping in. Youth need space to think before they answer.

# Explore

## Media Connections

<b>Art</b>	<i>Jesus Calls His Disciples</i> by He Qi; <i>River of Grace (Peter's Miraculous Catch)</i> by Lisle Gwynn Garrity
<b>Music</b>	"You Have My Yes (feat. Naomi Raine)" by Maryanne J. George; "I Will Follow" by U2; "The Summons" by John L. Bell (all on YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	"the calling of the disciples" by Lucille Clifton
<b>Video</b>	"Francis Chan—How NOT To Make Disciples" by VergeNetwork (YouTube)



### option 1 Big Risk, Big Reward

Split the group into two teams. Each team gets 5 table tennis balls and a basket or bin. For each throw, they can choose either the safe option (stand 5 feet away—each ball in is 1 point) or the risky option (stand 10 feet away—each ball in is 10 points). After both teams finish, tally scores. Then debrief: “What made you choose the safe or risky throw? How did it feel when it paid off—or didn’t? Now think about Peter’s choice to risk listening to Jesus, even after failing all night. What are some real-life situations where following Jesus might feel risky or unpopular?”

### option 2 Net Release Ritual

Place an empty net (or basket) in the center of the group and invite everyone to sit in a circle. Tell the group that Peter didn’t just leave behind his actual fishing nets; he had to let go of invisible ones that weighed him down as well. What might these things have been for him? (If youth seem stuck, get them started by naming things such as fear, discouragement, perfectionism, and uncertainty.) Ask, “What are the things that get in the way of following Jesus as a teen, or even in the way of being fully yourself?” Let a few ideas surface.

Hand out ribbons or strips of fabric and permanent markers. Say, “Take a quiet moment to think of one net you’re personally dragging right now. You won’t have to share it, and no one will read these.” After they write, invite them to tie their ribbon/fabric onto the net in silence as a small act of release. Consider playing one of the suggested Media Connections songs as youth do this.

Once everyone is seated again, have youth turn to a partner and talk for a few minutes. Offer a couple of simple prompts like “What was that experience like for you?” or “What helps you remember you don’t have to carry everything alone?” After a short conversation, gently bring the group back together and invite any insights that feel safe to share with the whole group.

Close with a prayer:

**Jesus, you call us as we are: tangled, hopeful, overwhelmed, brave. Receive the nets we lay down today. Hold what we cannot carry alone. Lead us into trust, courage, and the next small step of following you. Amen.**

## Empower

Gather youth together and, if youth wish, invite sharing of phone numbers so you could share an encouraging text message or two during the week to help them continue thinking about today's session. No one is required to share, and make sure you are in line with your church's safe communication policies!

Send youth with a prayer:

**Jesus, you called fishermen on an ordinary morning, and you still call each one of us today. Give us courage to say yes to you! Take our ordinary lives and use them for your extraordinary work of love and justice. Amen.**

## Midweek Text to Send

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church's policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Think about this: what's one small way you could say "yes" to Jesus this week?
- ▶ Take a moment out of your day to read Lucille Clifton's brief poem, "the calling of the disciples." [Teacher: insert a direct link if able.] Text me back and tell me which line is your favorite or connects with you today!



## SESSION 2

# Count the Cost

Luke 14:25–33

## Prepare

### Key Idea(s) for Youth:

- Discipleship means choosing Jesus daily and trusting him with every part of our lives.

### Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Enter</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> LEGO® bricks or similar interlocking blocks
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Balloons inflated with air <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Pens <input type="checkbox"/> Internet-connected device
<b>Empower</b>	

## Making Connections

Today's story brings us face-to-face with one of Jesus' hardest teachings. Crowds gather around him, drawn by stories of healing and hope, but Jesus interrupts their enthusiasm with sobering words: "If you want to follow me, count the cost. Take up your cross. Do not begin building unless you are ready to finish" (paraphrase of Luke 14:26–30). He makes clear that discipleship is not casual or part-time. It is a whole-life commitment.

For youth, this may feel unsettling or overwhelming. Many are already weighed down by school, sports, activities, family expectations, and worries about the future. Adding "discipleship" could sound like just one more demand. Yet Jesus is not piling on guilt. His invitation is about freedom. When Jesus calls us to give him everything, he is not asking us to do more but to live differently. Following him means allowing his way of love and peace to shape every other part of life. It reorders priorities rather than adding to the list. This is costly, but it is also empowering.

One of the most confusing lines here is Jesus' statement that we must "hate" our family and even our own life. This is not a command to despise loved ones. In the cultural context of the first century, "hate" was a way of expressing ultimate loyalty. To follow Jesus may sometimes create tension with family or cultural expectations. For example, standing up for justice, welcoming people others exclude, or resisting harmful systems might sometimes disappoint or upset those closest to us. Jesus is naming this reality up front: discipleship asks us to trust him above every other claim on our loyalty.

Developmentally, teens are asking big questions about identity and belonging. They wonder: Who am I? What matters most? What do I want to give my life to? This passage offers space to wrestle honestly with those questions. Jesus' words do not sugarcoat things, but they also promise that following him gives purpose and meaning that other paths cannot. Helping youth see discipleship as a daily choice, both demanding and life-giving, will equip them to live with faith and courage in a complex world.

*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

**What's on their minds?**

**Who's missing today?**

**My prayer . . .**



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Welcome youth and, once all are settled, ask: “What’s something you’ve really wanted that took sacrifice or commitment to get? Maybe it was training hard for a sport, saving up for something expensive, learning an instrument, or working through a tough class. What did it cost you, and why was it worth it?”

After all who wish get a chance to share, point out that when something really matters, we’re willing to give something up for it. The effort and sacrifice don’t make the goal less valuable—they show how important it is. In the same way, Jesus says following him isn’t casual or easy. It costs something, but it’s so precious it’s worth giving our whole lives for.

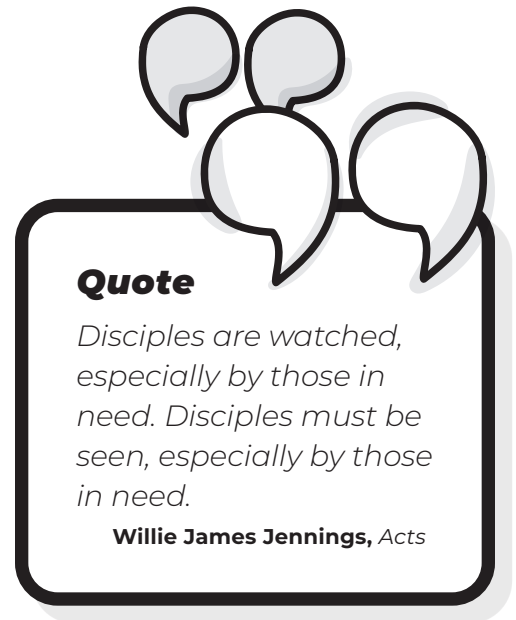
## Prayer

Give each youth several LEGO® bricks or other interlocking blocks. In smaller groups, be sure to give each youth enough pieces so that their combined tower feels significant.

Say: “Jesus said following him is like building a tower—you need to stop and count the cost before you begin. Think about the bricks you’ve been given as representing different parts of your life. Take a quiet moment to think about what each might stand for: your friendships, your time, your goals, or your privilege. When you’re ready, come join your block with others’ in the center to build a tower, as a prayer of offering each part of our lives to Jesus.”

Allow silence as youth place their blocks. Then close with a brief prayer:

**Jesus, we offer you these pieces of our lives. Teach us to trust you with everything we are, and help us to follow you each day, whatever the cost. Amen.**



## Engage

Share that months or even a year or two have passed between last week's reading from Luke 5 and this week's from Luke 14. During this time, Jesus has become very popular. Crowds follow him hoping for miracles, maybe even revolution. But instead of making it seem easy to join in his movement, Jesus tells them the truth. Using bold images, Jesus tries to help them see that discipleship isn't just a one-time decision. It's a daily practice of surrender—choosing again and again to trust God with every part of our lives, even when it's hard. This isn't meant to scare people away but to invite them to make a real choice. Just like building a tower requires planning or going into battle requires counting resources, discipleship requires serious intention.

Invite youth to take turns reading Luke 14:25–33, one verse each, around the circle. Be sure to give youth the opportunity to pass if they are not comfortable reading aloud. After the last verse, sit in silence for a brief moment to allow time to absorb what they've heard before moving into the time of discussion.

## Dig Deeper

Offer some of these questions to inspire conversation and deeper reflection.

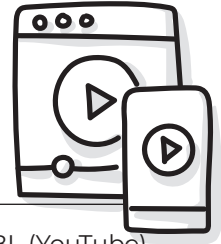
- What stands out to you most in what Jesus says here? How does it make you feel?
- Why do you think Jesus would warn the crowd about the “cost” of following him instead of making it sound easier?
- Jesus says to “carry the cross.” In his time, that meant shame and sacrifice. It meant being on your way to die, confronting the powers of violence and empire. What do you think that image means for discipleship today?
- Have you ever started something, then gotten into it and realized it was going to require *way* more from you than you anticipated? Have you ever started a project and never completed it? What kept you from following through? What things might keep us from following through on our commitments to Jesus?
- If following Jesus costs so much, what do you think we gain in return? What do we gain not just in the life beyond this one, but as we are following Jesus through this life?



### Teaching Tip

- ▶ Be honest about how hard this passage sounds. Youth will need space to wrestle with it. Remind them that Jesus names the cost not to discourage us, but to invite us into a deeper, freer kind of trust. Emphasize that Jesus is not glorifying suffering—he's asking for honest awareness before commitment. Jesus isn't asking those who follow him to disappear—he simply wants us to show up honestly.

# Explore



## Media Connections

<b>Art</b>	<i>The Saints of Selma</i> by Kelly Latimore
<b>Music</b>	“Build My Life (feat. Joe L. Barnes, Ryan Ofei & Jekalyn Carr)” by TRIBL (YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	“The Facts of Life” by Pádraig Ó Tuama
<b>Video</b>	“Oscar Romero Animation” by Romero Trust (YouTube)

### option 1 Balloon Juggle

Give the group a bunch of balloons and challenge them to keep them all in the air at the same time. Begin with just a few, then continue tossing in more until it becomes completely unmanageable and balloons are dropping everywhere. After a minute, stop and ask: “How did that feel? Could you actually keep them all up?” Then invite the youth to wonder: “Where in your life does it feel like too many balloons are in the air?” and “What do you think Jesus might be inviting you to let go of or trust him with?”

### option 2 Life Map Prayer

Give each youth paper and a pen. Ask them to draw a simple map of their week—school, sports, home, friends, social media, work, or anything else that fills their time. Play soft instrumental worship music in the background to create a reflective space. Invite them to mark a cross beside the places where they often notice Jesus’ presence. Then ask them to circle one area where they rarely think about him or where his presence feels harder to see. Close with a brief prayer:

**Jesus, you are already present in every part of our lives. Help us to notice you more clearly, especially in the places we often forget you, and open our hearts to trust you there. Amen.**

# Empower

Invite youth to join you in this closing litany, responding to each line you offer with the refrain, “We trust you, Jesus.”

Leader: **Jesus, you call us when life feels full of choices and expectations.**

All: *We trust you, Jesus.*

Leader: **You call us to your way of love, even when it costs us something.**

All: *We trust you, Jesus.*

Leader: **You lead us into the struggle for justice and peace.**

All: *We trust you, Jesus.*

Leader: **With our whole lives, today and every day.**

All: *We trust you, Jesus.*

## Midweek Text to Send

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church's policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Remember: Following Jesus isn't about being perfect. It's about trusting him with your real, everyday life.



## SESSION 3

# ***Be Salt and Light***

Matthew 5:13–16; Ephesians 5:6–14

## ***Prepare***

### **Key Idea(s) for Youth:**

- Disciples take Jesus' teachings seriously and allow them to guide daily living.

### **Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:**

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bible
<b>Enter</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Glow stick bracelets (one per youth)
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles <input type="checkbox"/> "Identity Cards" Reproducible Page, copied and cut apart
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Various flavors of chips <input type="checkbox"/> Brown paper bags labeled 1–6 <input type="checkbox"/> Paper and pencils <input type="checkbox"/> Blindfolds (optional) <input type="checkbox"/> Salt scrub (or see "Salt Scrub Recipe" Reproducible Page to make from scratch)
<b>Empower</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Glow stick chain from Enter activity

## Making Connections

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls his disciples “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Salt in the first century was more than seasoning—it preserved food and was vital for survival. Light meant safety, warmth, and direction in a world without streetlights or phone flashlights. By using these everyday images, Jesus showed ordinary people that their lives carried real purpose. To be salt and light meant living in ways that revealed God’s goodness and made God’s presence tangible in the world.

Youth are often told in one breath that they can change the world and in the next that they are “just kids.” They live in a culture where image often feels more important than substance, and where it is easy to feel small in the face of injustice or overwhelming need. Jesus’ teaching cuts through both doubt and pressure: you already are salt and light. The invitation is not to become something additional or different, but to live fully into who you already are.

The reading from Ephesians 5 echoes this vision. Discipleship is the process of waking up and stepping into Christ’s light. We do not create the light on our own; we reflect what Christ has already given us. To live as salt and light is to let God’s presence guide our daily choices so that others experience God’s love, justice, and hope through us.

Adolescents are deeply concerned with identity and belonging. They want to know who they are and how they matter. This passage gives a powerful theological answer: their identity is secure in God, not dependent on achievement or popularity. They already are salt and light, called to live with courage, to resist what decays and destroys, and to shine with Christ’s love in the world.

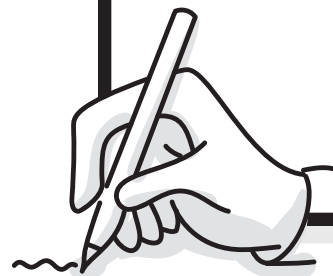
*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

**What’s on their minds?**

**Who’s missing today?**

**My prayer . . .**



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Begin by asking, “How does light make a difference in your daily life?” Offer up one or two initial suggestions to get youth thinking, like turning on your phone flashlight when it’s pitch black, or opening the blinds on a gloomy morning, or streetlights flickering on when you’re walking home. See how many different sources and functions of light they can come up with.

Then ask, “How does salt make a difference?” To get their imaginations working, invite youth to think about bland fries or popcorn before and after salt. Try to brainstorm as many things as possible, as you did with light.

Invite youth to pay attention throughout today’s session to the places salt and light show up and how Jesus uses these ordinary things to help us understand the extraordinary importance of discipleship.

## Prayer

Sit in a circle and give each youth a glow stick bracelet (the kind that connects into a ring). Keep the room dim. Invite them to think of one place in their week where they hope God’s light will shine through them. Go around the circle, allowing each youth to crack their glow stick to activate it, briefly name their place, then loop it through the person’s beside them so that, as you go around, you create a glowing chain.

When everyone has added theirs, hold up the chain or place it in the center of your circle. Point out that while each glow stick makes a difference individually, together the light is stronger. Close with a short prayer of thanks for the light God has already given and for courage to shine in the places named.



### Teaching Tip

- ▶ If your group meets during the day and the room isn’t very dark, the glow sticks may not look especially bright. That too can be a powerful teaching moment. Even in daylight, the glow is still there—just harder to see. In the same way, being light in the world doesn’t always mean dramatic or obvious actions. Often it looks like quiet, steady faithfulness that may go unnoticed until someone takes a closer look, or until the moment comes when that light is most needed.

## Engage

Today's readings—from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and a letter to a church in Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey)—were first spoken to ordinary people who probably didn't think of themselves as world-changers, people who came from all different walks of life.

Spread out the cards copied and cut apart from the "Identity Cards" Reproducible Page, inviting youth to think about all these different people, together in a group, listening to the words of Jesus on a hillside. Slowly read Matthew 5:13–16. Then read a second time, asking each youth to choose a card as an "identity" to take on, listening to Jesus' words from that perspective.

Do the same thing with Ephesians 5:6–14, putting all the cards back in the middle and reading first with the group imagining hearing the words as a diverse community, then again with each youth choosing a different identity and listening from that perspective.

## Dig Deeper

Offer some of these questions for discussion, reflection, and engagement around the text.

- How did listening to these words from the particular identities you took on change the way you heard them? What do you think the person whose identity you took on would have felt or wondered hearing Jesus call them salt and light?
- Why do you think Jesus chose such ordinary things—salt and light—to describe discipleship?
- Jesus warns against salt that loses its taste and light that is hidden. What might that look like in daily life?
- Ephesians' imagery of "dark" and "light" has sometimes been misused in harmful ways, so it's important to be clear: this isn't about race or skin color. In the ancient world, darkness meant secrecy or harm that keeps people stuck, while light meant clarity, truth, and life. The writer urges disciples to "wake up" and let Christ's light guide their choices so they can reflect God's love and justice in the world. When in life have you received a wake-up call? When have you come to see something about God, yourself, or the world more clearly than before? What helped open your eyes?
- Jesus and the writer of Ephesians weren't speaking to individuals, but to whole crowds and communities. The word *you* in these passages is plural! How is discipleship not just something we do individually but that we live out together? How can a community "season" the world with God's love and shine light in places of injustice in ways that an individual cannot?
- Visualize your week ahead. Where might God hope you'll live into your identity as salt and light?

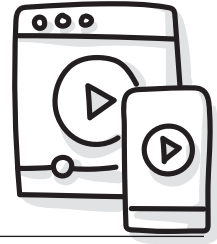


### Teaching Tip

- ▶ While the group may have discussed salt and light in their own modern lives during the gathering activity, consider providing a little background on the importance of these images in the ancient world. Salt mattered because it preserved food from decay, drew out flavor, and even healed wounds when applied. Light mattered because without it, the world was unsafe and uncertain. These were not flashy or glamorous images but everyday essentials. Jesus was saying: your life, as it is, has purpose. In God's hands, your presence preserves what is good, pushes back against what destroys, and reveals what is true.

# Explore

## Media Connections



<b>Art</b>	<i>Let Your Light Shine</i> by Cara B. Hochhalter; <i>Festival of Lights</i> by John August Swanson; <i>Salt of the Earth</i> by Steve Prince
<b>Music</b>	“Siyahamba” by Chorale Sainte Famille; “Let Your Light Shine” by Kate Rusby; “Salt and Light” by Amy Grant; “This Little Light” by Kermit Ruffins (all on YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	“Making Peace” by Denise Levertov
<b>Video</b>	“How Salt Shaped Society: From the Roman Empire to the French Revolution” by OTR Food & History (YouTube)

### option 1 Mystery Chips Challenge

Number six brown paper bags and fill each with a different flavor of potato chip. (Check allergies first, and keep a list of which flavor is in which bag.) Invite youth to taste a chip from each bag and write on a piece of paper their guess as to which flavor they think is in each one. To make it more challenging, blindfold participants and have them guess using *only* their sense of taste! Once all have tasted and written answers, reveal the correct flavors and see who got the most right.

Discuss: “Which flavors were easy to recognize? Which were harder to figure out?” Then connect to the day’s scripture: “Flavor makes food memorable. Without it, things feel flat or empty. Jesus says we are the salt of the earth—our lives are meant to bring out goodness, truth, and justice in ways people can actually notice. Discipleship isn’t about blending in; it’s about living with a flavor that makes a difference.”

With that in mind, invite youth to then imagine the “flavor” they bring to the world. If they were a bag of chips, what flavor would they be—and why? And what unique flavor do they think your group or church brings to the wider community? If your group is artsy, they could even design chip bags using brown paper bags and markers!

### option 2 Salt Scrub Prayer

Provide each youth with a small cup of salt scrub (a simple mix of coarse salt, coconut oil, and a drop or two of essential oil), or use the “Salt Scrub Recipe” Reproducible Page to let each youth create their own in a take-home container.

Gather around a sink or basin of water. Say: “Salt doesn’t just bring out flavor; it can also cleanse and restore. As you use this scrub, think of one part of your life that feels worn down or heavy, and ask God to bring renewal and strength there. Or, think of a place that seems weighed down or hurting in our community or world. Ask God how you can help bring renewal or strength there.”

Give each youth a chance to gently rub the scrub onto their hands, then rinse and dry. When all are finished, close with a prayer:

**God, may our hands be renewed by your love, and may they carry your healing and light into the world. Amen.**

## Empower

Bring out the glow stick chain the group created earlier in the session. Place it in the center of the circle. Say:

**At the start of today's gathering, we named places in our lives where we want God's light to shine. This chain then reminded us that together our light is strong. Now, as we go, each of us takes a piece of that light as a sign of carrying Christ's love into the world.**

Pass the chain around the circle. Each youth detaches one bracelet and puts it on their wrist to wear home. Close with this prayer or one of your own:

**God of light, you shine in us and through us. As we wear these bracelets, remind us that we are your light in the world, bringing hope, justice, and love wherever we go. Amen.**

## Midweek Text to Send

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church's policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Jesus calls us to stay salty and lit. How are you bringing flavor and light into the world this week?



## Identity Cards

Print, cut apart, and distribute one card to each youth before reading the Bible passages.

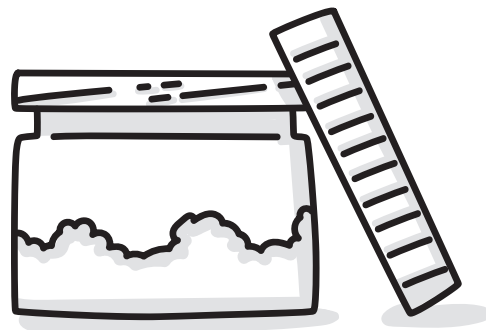
<b>Shepherd</b>	<b>Fisherman</b>	<b>Widow with two young children</b>
<b>Elderly widow</b>	<b>Teenager</b>	<b>7-year-old child</b>
<b>Person who cannot walk</b>	<b>Harvester in a wheat field</b>	<b>Owner of a vineyard</b>
<b>Person who is visually impaired</b>	<b>Religious scholar</b>	<b>Carpenter</b>
<b>Stonemason</b>	<b>Tax collector</b>	<b>Roman soldier</b>

## Salt Scrub Recipe

Follow these instructions to create your own salt scrub during Explore.

### Supplies (per youth)

- 1 small plastic or glass container with lid (2–4 oz / 60–120 ml)
- 3 T / 45 ml coarse sea salt or Epsom salt
- 2 T / 30 ml coconut oil
- Selection of essential oils (lavender, peppermint, citrus)
- Small spoon or craft stick for stirring
- 1 microwave-safe bowl (for group use)
- Permanent marker/labels (optional)



### Steps

1. Place enough coconut oil in a microwave-safe bowl for everyone (about 2 T / 30 ml per youth). Warm it in the microwave for 10–15 seconds until just softened—don't fully melt it.
2. Give each youth their container and have them add 3 T / 45 ml salt.
3. Have each youth scoop 2 T / 30 ml of the softened coconut oil into their individual container.
4. Add 1–2 drops of one type of essential oil.
5. Stir until the texture resembles damp, grainy sand.
6. If needed, adjust the texture: adding more salt if it feels too oily or more coconut oil if too dry.
7. Close lids securely and label if desired with “You are the salt of the earth.”

## SESSION 4

# Live in Community

Acts 2:42–47

## Prepare

### Key Idea(s) for Youth:

- Following Jesus isn't something we do alone—discipleship happens in community.

### Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bible
<b>Enter</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Index cards <input type="checkbox"/> Pens
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Copies of Acts 2:42–47 (CEB or NRSVue) from Bible Gateway or another website <input type="checkbox"/> Orange, pink, yellow, and green highlighters/markers
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Popsicle sticks <input type="checkbox"/> Playing cards <input type="checkbox"/> Duct tape <input type="checkbox"/> Toothpicks <input type="checkbox"/> Poster board <input type="checkbox"/> Magazines and newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Markers <input type="checkbox"/> Glue sticks <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors
<b>Empower</b>	

## Making Connections

In Acts 2, we see one of the clearest pictures of how the earliest Christians lived after Pentecost. These followers of Christ didn't see faith as a private commitment but as a shared way of life. They gathered daily to learn, pray, share meals, and care for one another. They even held possessions in common so that no one went without. Their discipleship was not hidden or abstract. It was embodied in the way they lived together.

This vision directly challenges the individualism of our culture. We are often encouraged to be self-reliant, forge our own path, and measure success by personal achievement. But Acts 2 insists discipleship is never solitary. The Christian life is found in generosity, interdependence, and making sure no one is left out.

Seen this way, the passage is more than a warm portrait of friendship—it is a radical call to justice. The early church refused to let wealth, status, or power decide who belonged. In a world marked by inequality, this countercultural approach to community life became a sign of God's kingdom breaking in.

Most teens are asking deep questions about identity and belonging. They are figuring out who their people are, what it means to trust, and how to live for more than themselves. Acts 2 reminds us that discipleship is not just about a private, personal relationship with Jesus, but about living out faith in community and together making God's love visible in daily life.

This is a hopeful vision: the church as a community of radical belonging, mutual care, and shared purpose. Youth may not always experience church in this way, but Acts 2 invites them to imagine what could be and to begin practicing that kind of life together here and now.

*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

**What's on their minds?**

**Who's missing today?**

**My prayer . . .**



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Welcome youth warmly, chatting about their weeks as they settle in. Once the group is gathered, ask, “Tell us about a group you are part of or have been part of in the past, like a team, club, or friend circle. What do you love about being part of that group? What can be difficult or challenging about being part of that group?” Allow youth time to share. Point out how being in community is both a joy and a challenge—and how it helps us grow.

## Prayer

Give each youth an index card and a pen. Invite them to write the names of two to three people who make them feel like they belong—friends, family, mentors, teammates. Say: “Take a moment to thank God for these people silently. Now, think of one person who might not always feel included. Ask God to show you how you can extend belonging to them this week.”

After youth finish writing, invite them to keep their cards and place them somewhere they will see them often during the week, perhaps on a mirror, inside a notebook, or next to their bed. Encourage them to let the cards remind them of the ways they experience community and to inspire them to help others feel that same belonging. Close the practice with a short prayer, thanking God for the communities we are a part of, including this group!



### Teaching Tip

- ▶ Some youth may not feel a strong sense of belonging anywhere right now. Normalize that reality and remind them the church is called to be a community where everyone has a place, even when other spaces fall short.

## Engage

Before reading Acts 2:42–47 together, explain that this passage comes right after Pentecost, when the Spirit had just been poured out and thousands of new believers joined the Jesus movement. Pass around highlighters or markers of four different colors (orange, pink, yellow, and green) and copies of the reading printed out in either the Common English Bible (CEB) or New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue) from a website like Bible Gateway. As you read slowly aloud, those with orange should highlight/underline actions people take; those with yellow should highlight/underline things they think would have been fun or easy about being part of this community; those with pink should highlight/underline things they would have found challenging about being part of this community; and those with green should highlight/underline anything they find surprising.

## Dig Deeper

Engage the text together as a group as you discuss some of the following questions:

- What things did you highlight or underline? Let each color group share in turn, noticing common things everyone seemed to circle and places where people were drawn to or noticed different things.
- Verse 45 says, “they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (NRSVue). What does that reveal about how they understood discipleship?
- Meals show up twice in this short passage (verses 42 and 46). Why do you think sharing food was such an important part of following Jesus? How do meals shape belonging in your own life?
- This story ends by saying their way of life was so compelling that the Lord added to their number daily. What characteristics of a community make others want to be part of it today? What might push people away?
- Do you think it’s possible to fully follow Jesus as an individual without connection to a community? Why or why not?



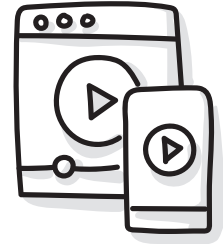
### Quote

*The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

# Explore

## Media Connections



<b>Art</b>	<i>School of Beauty, School of Culture</i> by Kerry James Marshall; <i>La Vida</i> by Martin Wong; <i>Eucharist</i> by Kirsten Van Mourick (all of these artworks depict community in different settings)
<b>Music</b>	“At the Table” by Josh Garrels; “FAMILIA [Official Live In Studio]” by Vineyard Worship (both on YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	“I Want” by Jordan Jace
<b>Video</b>	“What Is Community” by Grace House Ministries (YouTube)

### option 1 Building Community

Divide the group into pairs or small teams. At different tables, give each team one type of material: popsicle sticks, playing cards, duct tape, toothpicks, and so on. Challenge them to build the tallest or most creative structure they can in five minutes.

After the first round, stop and reflect briefly on what worked and what was frustrating. Then announce a second round. This time, groups may combine materials and collaborate to build one larger structure.

After they have finished, invite youth to compare the two rounds. What changed when the resources and ideas were pooled? Which structure was stronger or more interesting? Connect to today’s scripture. The early church grew not because everyone was the same or kept to their own smaller community, but because they brought what they had, shared freely, and let God’s Spirit shape something greater together. In the same way, discipleship is never something we were meant to do in isolation. Our gifts, perspectives, and strengths grow when we offer them alongside others. When we practice discipleship in community, listening, sharing, encouraging, and building together, God creates something far more beautiful than any of us could build alone.

### option 2 Collage of Community

Spread out magazines, newspapers, markers, and glue sticks around a large piece of poster board. Ask each youth to find and cut out images or words that capture what they need from community right now as someone trying to follow Jesus and what they can offer to others. Encourage them to add hand-drawn images or words if they don’t see what they want in print.

As youth place their pieces on the board, invite them to overlap, layer, and connect the images instead of keeping them separate. End by standing around the collage together in silence for a few minutes in a time of silent, contemplative prayer.

## Empower

Have the group form a circle. Invite each person to thank God out loud for one thing they appreciate about the person on their right. Continue until everyone has been named.

Close with this prayer:

**Jesus, you never called people to follow you alone. From the very beginning, discipleship has happened in community. Thank you for the ways we see your Spirit in one another. Strengthen us to follow you together so our community shows the world your love. Amen.**

## Midweek Texts to Send

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church's policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Discipleship happens in community, and you're a vital part of ours. Thinking of you with gratitude this week!



## SESSION 5

# ***Embody Peace and Justice***

Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:17–21; Micah 6:8

## ***Prepare***

### **Key Idea(s) for Youth:**

- Disciples of Jesus seek peace and justice.

### **Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:**

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bible
<b>Enter</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Markers <input type="checkbox"/> Two colors of embroidery thread, cut into 12 in / 30 cm lengths
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper and pencils <input type="checkbox"/> Simple abstract drawings <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nature morte aux grenades</i> by Mona Hatoum (either printed copies or projector and screen to display for the group)
<b>Empower</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Candle (wax or battery-operated)

## Making Connections

Most people say they want peace. But peace can mean very different things. For some, peace means “don’t rock the boat,” staying quiet so conflict doesn’t surface. For others, peace means safety and dignity for everyone. Youth are already learning to tell the difference. They’ve seen how “keeping the peace” in a classroom or family can sometimes protect unfairness, while real peace often requires courage and risk.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:9 bless the *peacemakers*, not the *peacekeepers*. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called out the danger of “negative peace,” the absence of tension, versus “positive peace,” the presence of justice. That’s exactly the difference Jesus is pointing to here: disciples are not called to silence or avoidance, but to action that heals and restores.

Micah 6:8 makes this concrete: discipleship means doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. As with the word *peace*, the word *justice* has lots of different meanings. Youth may associate it with criminal justice, or people “getting what they deserve” or “getting even.” But throughout the Hebrew Bible, justice is interpreted as holding leaders, communities, and nations accountable for the fair treatment of all people, especially the most vulnerable—the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. To “do justice” means continually asking why things are the way they are for certain groups, addressing root causes and systems that prevent flourishing.

Romans 12:17–21 shows what peace and justice look like in practical living. Paul calls the church to resist the cycle of retaliation and “overcome evil with good.” This doesn’t mean being passive or letting harm continue. It’s a radical vision of discipleship that embodies peace through nonviolent, creative action that points toward reconciliation and God’s kingdom.

Taken together, these passages form a consistent picture of discipleship as a commitment to peace and justice. For youth, this is both challenging and hopeful. Teens care deeply about fairness and integrity, and they long to make a difference. At the same time, they may feel powerless in the face of systemic injustice or personal conflict. These scriptures remind us that discipleship is not about fixing everything at once, but about choosing daily faithfulness, acts of kindness, resistance to harm, and courage to do what is right, thus embodying God’s peace and justice.

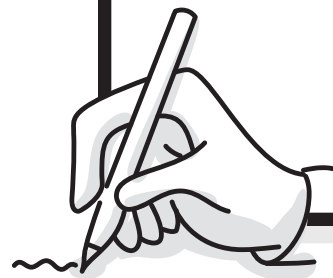
*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

### What’s on their minds?

### Who’s missing today?

### My prayer . . .



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Give each youth a sheet of paper and some markers. Say: “When you hear the word *peace*, what picture comes to mind? Maybe it’s a place, like beside a calm lake, or a feeling, like the relief when a fight ends. Take a minute to sketch a simple drawing representing what comes to mind for you. Now do the same for justice. Maybe you picture a courtroom, a protest march, or someone stepping in to defend a friend. What does justice look like to you?”

After a few minutes, invite youth to share their drawings. Ask: “What do you notice about the difference between peace and justice in your pictures? How do the two connect—or not connect—in your life?”

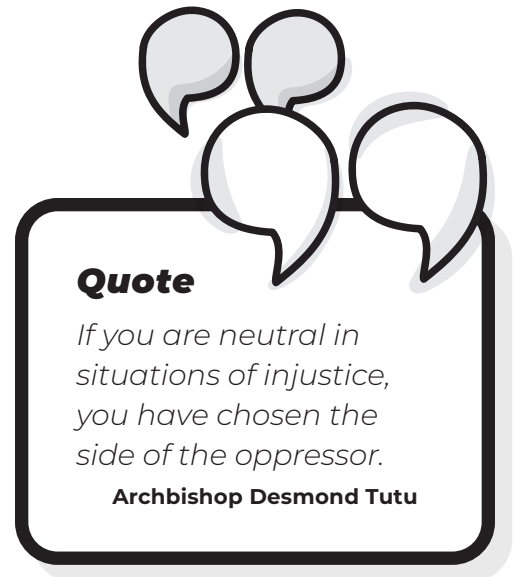
## Prayer

Give each youth two pieces of embroidery thread cut into 12 in / 30 cm lengths, a calm color for peace and a bright color for justice. Say: “Peace and justice aren’t separate ideas in Scripture. They’re meant to be woven together in the way we live.”

Invite youth to hold the two threads side by side. Ask them to think of one place in their own life or in the wider world where they long for peace, and one place where they long for justice.

Then say: “Tie the ends of each string together and then slowly twist the two threads into one. As you do, imagine God weaving peace and justice in you, giving you the courage, compassion, and steadiness to follow Jesus in both.”

Once the threads are twisted, have youth tie the ends together to make a simple bracelet. Encourage them to pair up and gently tie the bracelet onto each other’s wrists. As they tie, they can offer a short blessing to one another: “May you walk in peace and justice.”



## Engage

Divide into three smaller groups. Give each group one of the passages—Matthew 5:9, Micah 6:8, or Romans 12:17–21—and ask them to read it aloud together. Encourage them to talk briefly about what stands out most to them: a word, phrase, or idea. After a few minutes, bring everyone back together. Have each group read their passage aloud to the whole circle and share one or two insights from their discussion.

Share some context with your group before continuing into the rest of the discussion: “These verses come from different parts of the Bible, but they all reveal that peace and justice are at the heart of discipleship. In Matthew, Jesus blesses the peacemakers—not people who avoid conflict, but those who step into it with courage to bring healing. In Micah, God’s people are told what discipleship looks like: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. And in Romans, Paul gets practical: don’t retaliate or ‘get even,’ but overcome evil with good. Together, these texts help us understand what it means to follow Jesus’ way of peace and justice in daily life.”

## Dig Deeper

Enter into further conversation around these scriptures using some of the following questions.

- Jesus says *peacemakers* are God’s children. What’s the difference between making peace and just keeping peace?
- Micah 6:8 talks about justice, mercy/kindness, and humility. Which of those three feels most natural to you, and which feels hardest?
- Paul challenges Christians to “overcome evil with good.” What might it look like to test that out this week in your own life?
- When you put all three passages together, what do they reveal about what it means to follow Jesus? How might our lives or churches look different if we believed peace and justice were at the center of discipleship?

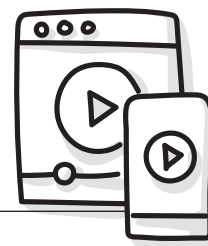


### Teaching Tip

- ▶ Conversations about peace and justice touch real experiences of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and power. Be mindful that youth may come from very different places. Some may carry personal experiences of violence or injustice, while others may only know these issues from a distance. Pay attention to your own social location and privilege as you guide discussion.

# Explore

## Media Connections



<b>Art</b>	<i>Nature morte aux grenades</i> by Mona Hatoum
<b>Book</b>	<i>Jesus and the Disinherited</i> by Howard Thurman
<b>Music</b>	“We Will Make No Peace with Oppression” by The Porter’s Gate (YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	“Making Peace” by Denise Levertov
<b>Video</b>	“Shalom: Peace” and “This Justice Is Not Revenge” by BibleProject (both on YouTube)

### option 1 Hidden Drawing

Divide the group into pairs. Have them sit back-to-back so they can’t see each other’s paper. Give one youth in each pair a simple abstract drawing you made in advance (a page with a few lines, circles, squares, and other shapes) and ask them to describe it to their partner. Their partner must use only their verbal instructions as they try to recreate the drawing on their blank page and cannot speak or ask clarifying questions. After a few minutes, compare the drawings and then switch roles with a new image.

Once all have completed the activity, talk about what made this hard and what helped the groups that had success. Connect the experience to peace and justice: building understanding across differences is rarely perfect, and communication can break down. But when we listen carefully and stay committed to one another, we come closer to creating something beautiful.

### option 2 Visio Divina

Visio divina (Latin for “divine seeing”) is an ancient form of prayer that invites us to encounter God through intentional, contemplative looking. It grows out of the sixth-century Benedictine practice of lectio divina, which is based on slow, prayerful reading of scripture. Visio divina extends that same rhythm of reflection to visual imagery, allowing a work of art to become the text we meditate on.

Project or share printed copies of the artwork *Nature morte aux grenades* by Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum and guide youth slowly through these steps:

1. Look: Spend a minute in silence just noticing what you see.
2. Reflect: Ask, “What stands out to you? What emotions does this image stir?”
3. Listen: Invite youth to connect this art to today’s scriptures—“How does this image speak to peace, justice, or the lack thereof? Where do you see God’s call in this artwork?”
4. Respond: Ask each youth to share one word or phrase aloud as a prayer for peace and justice inspired by this art.

## **Empower**

Stand in a circle. Pass a candle (battery-operated is okay!) around. When holding it, each person is invited to say either “I will seek peace by . . .” or “I will seek justice by . . .” in their own words.

When the candle has gone all the way around, pray:

**God, help us shine your peace and justice. Amen.**

## **Midweek Text to Send**

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church’s policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” What’s one way you can live Jesus’ blessing out with the people closest to you this week?



## SESSION 6

# ***Sent to Serve***

John 13:1–17; Matthew 28:18–20

## ***Prepare***

### **Key Idea(s) for Youth:**

- Discipleship leads to mission and service.

### **Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:**

<b>Prepare</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Enter</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bowl of water <input type="checkbox"/> Towel
<b>Engage</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles
<b>Explore</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Chairs, cones, or tables (for obstacle path) <input type="checkbox"/> Pitcher of water and cups <input type="checkbox"/> Blocks or small stackable objects <input type="checkbox"/> Blindfolds (one per pair) <input type="checkbox"/> Invite church members engaged in ongoing service to join the group and share about what they do.
<b>Empower</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Small cards <input type="checkbox"/> Pens

## Making Connections

Today's stories give us insight into Jesus' last interactions with his disciples before his death, and some of his first interactions with them after his resurrection. Both stories help us picture what it will mean to be disciples of Jesus even when he is not physically with us any longer!

On the night before his death, Jesus surprised his disciples by washing their feet. In the ancient world, this was the job of the lowest household servant. By kneeling before them, Jesus turned social expectations upside down. He wasn't just being kind; he was redefining discipleship itself. If the teacher serves, so must his followers.

In Matthew 28, the risen Jesus expands this vision. He sends his disciples to make disciples of all nations, promising, "I am with you always." What makes the "Great Commission" so radical is not its scope, but its method: disciples are sent to serve, not dominate. What Jesus models in the upper room becomes the pattern for disciples everywhere: leadership through service, mission through humility.

For youth, these stories can feel both inspiring and intimidating. Many already feel pressure to "make a difference" but aren't sure where to start. These passages remind them that discipleship isn't about being impressive, it's about showing up in small, faithful acts of service. Washing dishes at home, helping a classmate, or speaking up for someone left out can be as much "mission" as traveling overseas.

Adolescents long for purpose and want their lives to matter. At the same time, they often feel powerless in a world of big problems. This session gives them a practical and spiritual framework: discipleship is not about fixing everything, but about serving with humility and trusting that God is at work through their small acts of love.

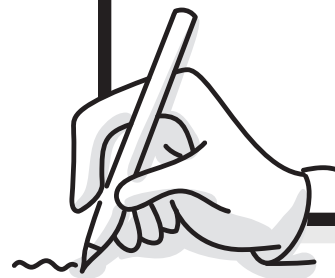
*Take note of the vibe in the room and follow up during the week if needed. Say a prayer or send a text.*

### Highs and Lows

**What's on their minds?**

**Who's missing today?**

**My prayer . . .**



# Enter

## Gathering Activity

Ask: “What’s the least glamorous job you’ve ever done? Cleaning up after a sibling, picking up trash, scrubbing a toilet, babysitting, feeding a pet? How did you feel while doing it?”

Let a few share. Then, briefly discuss the quote from Dorothy Day on this page, letting youth share what they think it means. Connect: “Sometimes the jobs that feel the least important are actually the most needed. Jesus showed that real discipleship looks like service and practical love for others—even when it’s not glamorous.”

## Prayer

Place a bowl of water and a towel in the center of the group. Invite a youth to join you at the bowl. Slowly pour water over their hands and dry them, saying, “As Jesus served, I serve you.”

The youth who was served by you should stay at the bowl, while a new youth comes forward to receive their service. Continue until everyone has shared in both roles. End by returning to the bowl yourself to be served by the last youth, completing the circle.

Close by praying:

**Jesus, you showed us that true discipleship is love expressed through service. Teach us to follow your example with humility and courage. Amen.**



## Quotes

*“Everyone wants a revolution, but nobody wants to do the dishes.”*

**Dorothy Day**

*“Jesus envisions a community of learners, going out together, becoming and making disciples as they journey through the normal trials and joys of life. Discipleship is not something that is only happening when we are tucked safely away in the confines of a church compound. Discipleship is happening every moment, every day, and in every encounter of our lives.”*

**Michael Adam Beck and  
Stephanie Moore Hand,**  
“The Great Omission”

## Engage

Offer brief background that connects the two passages for today:

**The Gospel of John tells us that on the night before his death, Jesus shocked his disciples by getting down on the floor, taking a towel, and washing their dirty feet. Feetwashing wasn't a symbolic ritual, it was a necessary task—think about it, they walked *everywhere!* In *sandals!* Usually, this job was delegated to the lowliest servant—but Jesus shocked his followers by doing it himself. Later, the risen Christ sent these same disciples into the world, commissioning them to share the good news and teach others to follow his way. What can we learn about discipleship when we read these two passages together?**

Divide into two smaller groups. Give one group John 13:1–17 and one group Matthew 28:18–20. If you have more than 10 youth, consider splitting the John reading into two parts (13:1–11 and 13:12–17) and dividing into three groups. Each group should read their passage, talk for a couple of minutes about what stands out to them, and choose three words to describe their passage. They should also choose a representative to read their passage to the larger group. After each group reads, invite them to share their three words along with one or two insights from their discussion.

## Dig Deeper

Continue making connections with and between the texts by discussing some of these questions.

- How do these passages highlight different aspects of how Jesus wants his followers to live in the future? What common themes do they share?
- Why do you think the disciples resisted Jesus washing their feet? How do you imagine you would have responded or felt in that situation?
- In our culture, what are the “feetwashing” tasks—things everyone needs, but no one wants to do? How does Jesus' example challenge us to see those tasks differently?
- How is service different from pity or charity? What does it look like to serve in a way that affirms someone's dignity?
- Where do you see examples today of leadership that looks more like domination? Where do you see leadership that looks more like service?
- Share the quote about Matthew 28 by Michael Adam Beck and Stephanie Moore Hand on the previous page. How is discipleship something that doesn't just happen at church, but out in the world?

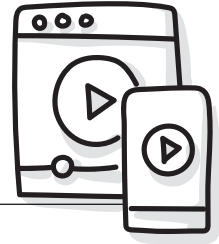


### Teaching Tip

- ▶ The “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18–20) has often been misused to justify colonization, forced conversion, and imposing Western culture on others. This painful history is important for youth to know, because it contrasts sharply with Jesus' example of humility and service. Invite them to reflect: how does mission look different when rooted in feetwashing rather than domination? Consider sharing honestly about your church's or denomination's history with missions and invite youth to imagine new ways of living out the call to make disciples. If this is a new idea to you, see Media Connections for some teacher resources for consideration and reflection.

# Explore

## Media Connections



<b>Art</b>	<i>Jesus Washing Peter's Feet</i> by Ford Madox Brown
<b>Music</b>	"Form Us" by Vineyard Worship (YouTube)
<b>Poem</b>	"a blessing for the kind of love that costs something" by Kate Bowler
<b>Video</b>	"Jesus Washes Feet" clip from <i>The Chosen</i> (YouTube)
<b>For Teachers</b>	<i>A Just Mission: Laying Down Power and Embracing Mutuality</i> by Mekdes Haddis (book); "Why Is the 'Great Commission' Controversial?" and "Great Commission Religion Versus the Way of Jesus" by Wendell Griffen (articles on Good Faith Media website); "Indigenous Communities: Challenges for the 'Great Commission'" by Dalia Eunice Juárez Fernández (article on Alliance of Baptists website)

### option 1 Service and Trust

Set up a short obstacle path in the room using chairs, cones, or tables. Place a few simple "tasks" along the way: pouring a pitcher of water into a cup, placing a block on a small stack, or arranging objects in a certain order. Separate youth into pairs. One partner wears a blindfold and must move through the course and complete the tasks. The other partner can only give verbal instructions to guide them. When the blindfolded partner finishes, they switch roles so each person has the chance to serve and to guide.

Afterwards ask, "What was it like to rely completely on your partner's voice? How did it feel to guide without stepping in yourself? How can this activity remind us of what discipleship is truly about?" After hearing youths' ideas, note that like washing feet in John 13 or being sent in Matthew 28, discipleship is about humility and relying on God's presence more than our own power. It is not about knowing more than others but working with others to grow in Jesus' way of justice and love.

### option 2 Stories of Service

Invite one or two church members engaged in ongoing service—like food justice, working with the unhoused, refugee support, or other advocacy work—to join the group. Have these guests share what drew them to this work, what they've learned, and where they see God in it. Then allow time for youth to ask questions. If possible, include a small participatory element such as packing a few care bags, writing advocacy letters, or sorting donations. End by inviting youth to sit quietly for a moment and reflect on one thing they heard that challenged or inspired them, offering it to God in prayer.

## Empower

Hand out small cards and pens. Invite youth to take a moment to write a simple blessing—a few words someone might need to hear as they go out to serve others. Remind them of Jesus’ words to his disciples: “I will be with you always.” Encourage youth to think about the kinds of encouragement they themselves would want: “You are not alone,” “God’s love goes with you,” or “May you have courage to do what’s right.” Collect and shuffle the cards, then pass them back out so everyone receives a blessing written by someone else.

Close in prayer:

**Jesus, you showed us that greatness is found in serving. As we go out, give us humility, courage, and joy. Remind us that we never serve alone, but with your Spirit and one another. Amen.**

## Midweek Text to Send

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Before collecting phone numbers and sending texts, be sure to check your church’s policy around safe technology usage with youth.

- ▶ Jesus washed feet. What’s one small, ordinary way you can grow as a follower of Jesus by serving someone today?



# ***This Is My Story: An Intergenerational Open Mic***

## ***Prepare***

### **Session Goal**

Gather all generations for an evening of storytelling, song, and connection. Youth will host the event, creating a welcoming and creative space where people share real stories about what it means to follow Jesus in everyday life. Through laughter, honesty, and reflection, the congregation will celebrate how the Spirit is moving among them and will be encouraged to keep living out God's love.

### **Description of the Event/Session and How It Relates to or Extends the Unit**

This youth-hosted open mic night invites the whole congregation to gather and share stories of what following Jesus looks like in their own lives. Guided by simple storytelling prompts, the evening builds on the unit's discipleship themes and asks, "What does the way of Jesus look like in real life?"

Throughout the event, people of all ages are invited to share stories from their own lives. Participants will be seated by youth at mixed-age tables in order to spark intergenerational conversation and connection. Each table will include a youth "host" who welcomes participants and helps ensure everyone feels seen and heard throughout the event. A youth master of ceremonies (MC) will introduce a series of questions one by one, each based on each of the unit's subthemes. Anyone moved by a given prompt is then invited to come to the storyteller's chair to share a story of three minutes or fewer. Another youth quietly signals when one minute remains to keep the event flowing. Between stories, youth musicians may want to offer short reflective songs or instrumental interludes.

### **Who Will Be Involved Besides the Youth?**

People of all ages are invited to participate as storytellers and listeners. Though the event is intended primarily for congregation members, this could be a great opportunity to be invitational and share the good news, so guests are welcome too. Youth should personally share an announcement about this event in worship, and youth can visit several adult or junior youth classes to offer personal invitations and answer questions. Have them leave the storytelling prompts with these groups to "seed" storytelling and get people thinking ahead of time. Nursery care should be provided for infants and young children.

## Logistical Considerations and Supplies Needed

Hold this session in a space that can accommodate tables and chairs—such as a fellowship hall, chapel, or sanctuary with flexible seating. The youth should transform the space into a warm, café-style gathering with tables facing a small stage area with a microphone. Place several copies of the “Storytelling Prompts” Reproducible Page on each table. Decorate with simple items brought from home (area rugs, string lights, houseplants, art) to make it feel like an extended living room. Have two microphones (one for the MC and one for storytellers) available up front along with a comfortable chair to serve as the storyteller’s seat. Set up a table with snacks and drinks at the back of the space. If you would rather this event occur directly after worship instead of as a separate evening event, this could also serve as that day’s coffee hour with refreshments being provided in whatever way is customary. Coloring pages, crayons, and fidgets should be made available at the entrance for children to take and bring to their table. Have a timer/stopwatch for the youth designated as timekeeper.

## Enter

As people gather, have youth guide them to tables of diverse ages. The MC can offer a welcome:

**Welcome, friends of every age. Today we gather as disciples, learners in the way of Jesus. Discipleship isn’t only something we study; it’s something we practice and live together in community. Before we begin sharing stories of what that looks like in our own lives, let’s take a few moments to connect with one another. At your tables, share your name and, in a sentence or two, what comes to mind when you hear the word *discipleship*.**

Allow two to three minutes for sharing around tables, then have the MC or another youth offer an opening prayer:

**Jesus, thank you for inviting us to follow you. As we listen and share today, help us see how your Spirit is alive in each story and in each life gathered here. Make this time a place of learning, laughter, and love. Amen.**

## Engage

Have the MC offer this intro:

**We’ve been learning what it means to be disciples and exploring what it might look like to follow Jesus with our whole lives. We’ve talked about being *called to follow*, *counting the cost*, being *salt and light*, *living in community*, *embodying peace and justice*, and being *sent to serve*.**

**Today, instead of hearing stories from Scripture, we’re hearing the stories among us. Every person here, no matter their age, has likely experienced moments of following Jesus in ordinary life. When we share these stories, we remind one another that the same Spirit who called the first disciples is still at work in us.**

**This open mic will have six storytelling prompts. After each question, anyone who feels moved may come to the microphone to share a story (three minutes or fewer). Up to three people may share per prompt. Another youth will quietly signal when one minute remains to help us keep things flowing.**

The MC can then offer the prompts listed below one by one.

1. ***Called to Follow***: Talk about a time you sensed God inviting you toward something new—maybe a change, a challenge, or an opportunity you didn’t expect. What helped you take that step of faith?

2. **Count the Cost:** Share a story about a moment when following Jesus, choosing love, or standing up for what is right wasn't easy. What gave you strength to do it anyway?
3. **Be Salt and Light:** Share a story about a time when someone helped you experience God's love and goodness in a real, tangible way. How did that experience impact you?
4. **Live in Community:** Talk about a time when you felt deeply connected to others in faith. How did that community support you, challenge you, or help you grow?
5. **Embody Peace and Justice:** When have you seen or taken part in peacemaking or justice work? What did that show you about God?
6. **Be Sent to Serve:** Talk about a time you served or helped someone and it changed you. How did that act of service open your eyes, deepen your compassion, or reveal God's presence in a new way?

## Empower

Have the MC thank everyone for participating and encourage them to continue sharing their stories of following Jesus. A youth volunteer can then lead the group in the Responsive Sending found on the Reproducible Page, several copies of which should be on all of the tables in the space.



### Teaching Tip

- ▶ Adjust this event to fit the gifts of your youth and the personality of your congregation. Some groups may prefer one confident MC, while others might share leadership among several voices. If your community is hesitant to talk about personal faith stories, plan for a youth to share the first story for each question to break the ice and set the tone. In communities that love to share, consider having an adult quietly cue the MC when it's time to move to the next theme. The goal is simply to create a space where authenticity and connection can flourish.

## **Responsive Sending**

Youth: **We have gathered together as learners in the way of Jesus—listening, remembering, and telling the truth of our lives.**

All: *God has met us in every story.*

Youth: **We know that discipleship is not a destination but a way of being,**

All: *a rhythm of following, stumbling, and returning again to love.*

Youth: **Go now, shaped by the stories you have heard and the grace that has held you.**

All: *We go as disciples, to love what God loves, to serve where Christ leads, to live the next chapter of this story together. Amen!*

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## FlexGen Session Planning Template

<b>Session title</b>	
<b>Session goal</b>	
<b>Description of the event/session</b>	
<b>Who will be involved besides the youth?</b> <b>Where will the session meet and when?</b> <b>Time needed</b>	
<b>Preparation ahead of time</b>	
<b>Supplies needed</b>	