Sierra Service Project



Weekend Leader Guide

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A Note to Leaders from SSP Staff:

Dear Group Leader,

Welcome to your journey of fostering spiritual development in young people! Thank you for trusting the Sierra Service Project to provide tools and resources that will be beneficial to your group's spiritual reflections during your weekend service experience.

We know every group is different, with unique context and resources. You might be approaching this guide as a paid staff person for a church. Alternatively, you may be a volunteer or parent. Either way, you likely have some degree of experience and support in your ministry work, guiding people on their spiritual journeys, and helping people navigate meaning-making in their lives. That already sets you up for success in enacting the enclosed program activities.

This packet includes resources and activities to use when running your Weekend of Service. As weekend sessions are short and can feel rushed, you might not incorporate every part of this program. Feel free to use as much or as little as time permits!

Remember, it is okay not to have all the answers. Your role as a leader is simply to guide and encourage volunteers to think critically, consider how service relates to faith, and seek ways they can live out their faith in their everyday lives. Please note scripture selections have been taken from the New International Version (NIV). If you find a different translation that resonates more with your group, we encourage you to use it.

Whether weekend service is a new endeavor for you and your group, or a tried-and-true part of your programming, we hope the tools in this guide support the growth you aspire to see within your community. If you have any questions on the implementation of any of these activities, please give us a call.

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Sierra Service Project (SSP)'s Mission Statement

"Building faith and strengthening communities through service to others."

This mission statement reflects SSP's work during the summer and throughout the year, alongside indigenous, urban and rural communities, with youth and young adults.

SSP's Theology Statement

We know God to be a giver of wonderful gifts. The work we do at Sierra Service Project is an extension of the Divine Invitation into a relationship with God. Like God, Sierra Service Project can only invite but cannot control the response of those invited. Like grace, Sierra Service Project offers service freely without judging if the receiver merits our love. We as participants in Sierra Service Project's work are the receivers of God's grace. We extend that same grace to our hosts by putting our faith into action repairing homes.

We respond to God's invitation to open ourselves up to the possibility of a transformational experience. In community, we begin to recognize our dependence on God and interdependence on each other. As a community, we strive to grow in being led by the Spirit. We choose to serve, believing that through our humble acts of love, we can learn about God's character and love for us. We seek to accept people as they are from the moment they stand before us, as the first step toward relationship. We seek to remain open – an openness of hand and of heart that we might give, receive and understand.

Through our acts of service, we allow the grace of God to flow into and through our lives. We understand that all people are valuable, carefully fashioned in God's image and we are freed to accept the essential humanity of each person we meet. In reaching out to others, we follow the example of service set forth by Jesus Christ.

As with Christ, we serve people whose lives will benefit from our service. We believe that God lives with us and the work we do with our hands and heart. We realize that, despite the differences in culture, values, history and geography, we are all brothers and sisters of worth. Let us accept the Sierra Service Project invitation. "Let us rise up and build."

SSP's Inclusion Statement

SSP is an affirming and welcoming community that celebrates the lives and love of all people. We welcome LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color who have too often been excluded from leadership and full participation within traditional communities of faith. We are rooted in the unique experiences and identities of all members of our community, which form the foundation of our work.

As people of faith, we strive to live in tandem with creation, rather than in opposition to it. To do so means welcoming all people to be a part of our community as their authentic selves, regardless of race, socio-economic status, gender and its expression, sexual orientation, or ability. Our passion for justice, love, and equality has no limits. Together we seek to be bearers of goodness, so we might truly open minds, hearts, and doors.

Fostering Safe Community

Sierra Service Project is committed to creating and maintaining safe environments, especially for young people. We advocate that even for projects and programs you might implement independent of structured SSP-led spaces, groups select mature, committed, and responsible adults when choosing leaders who can foster space for youth to grow.

We encourage all members of the Sierra Service Project community to read and become familiar with our **Safe Community Policy**, aspects of which you might choose to apply to your own group context.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

In your program implementation, you may encounter youth struggling with mental health - whether their own, a friend's, a family member's, or someone else important to them. As a trusted person dedicated to facilitating community care and wellness within your group, you have an opportunity to respond with love and support to youth facing these challenges. These principles apply to adults and colleagues you work with as well.

While you may not be a trained mental health counselor, you do have resources at your disposal to be a first responder to someone struggling with their well-being. The "Mental Health First Aid" national program recommends the "ALGEE" method in responding to mental health crises:

A: Assess for risk of suicide or harm
L: Listen non-judgmentally
G: Give reassurance and information
E: Encourage appropriate professional help
E: Encourage self-help and other support strategies

For more resources, training, and information on being a mental health first aid "first responder" to youth and the general public, visit MentalHealthFirstAid.org.

Who Are Mandated Reporters?

Mandated reporters **must** submit a report to the appropriate state's Child Welfare Services if they have **reasonable cause** to suspect a child is a victim of abuse or neglect. If you interact with youth by way of a leadership role at a school, church, sports team, or otherwise, you are **likely a mandated reporter**.

As a program leader, your role facilitating dynamic discussions with youth about faith, purpose, and life's challenges also makes you most likely to encounter scenarios of concern in a youth's home, school, or social life. If you have other staff or volunteers on your team, they might encounter these as well.

Each state has unique laws and processes for mandated reporting. As the bulk of our participants reside in California, SSP utilizes MandatedReporterCA.com as a training resource and reference to ensure youth safety and care. For resources and training on mandated reporting in general, as well as California-specific requirements, we encourage all youth workers to visit MandatedReporterCA.com, in addition to the relevant entity for the state in which they reside.

Effective Relational Ministry

Group Facilitation & Leadership:

1. **Keep people at the center.** Activities, lectures, and group discussions are only as effective as they are digestible by the people participating. Always keep in mind who your audience is, what they need, and their context if you are aware of it. If you lack knowledge of their context, providing space for developing group norms is a great first step!

2. **"Discovery, not delivery."** Encourage and celebrate the process of faith development. While you may have specific desired outcomes for your participants, your role is to empower them to develop tools to make the connections themselves. When engaging in conversation and facilitating activities, promote "invitation" over "explanation," and "discovery" over "delivery." "Story" and bringing people along a journey is almost always better than "lecture."

3. **Make space for all to contribute.** Some personalities and identities will be more readily inclined to share their thoughts, while others may be more reticent. As group leader, it is your role to pay close attention to those who may need an invitation or opening to share, and ensure they have an avenue to do so in a way that works for them. We suggest the **process of mutual invitation** for groups that need guidance and structure on holding space that is balanced and fair for all.

4. **Be comfortable with silence.** Sometimes, the best gift you can offer is a moment for quiet reflection. Don't be too quick to give an answer or jump to the next question; some people need time to think, gather their reflections, and muster the courage to share.

5. **Less is more.** What is digestible will provide the spiritual nourishment you're seeking to offer. Resist oversaturating participants with too many messages, activities, or questions. Take your time going through a few points or pieces that resonate.

6. **Hold your plans loosely.** Be willing to move away from the planned topics, questions, or activities to let fruitful discussion flourish. What can feel like a detour in conversation might actually be the thing that participants need to acknowledge, explore, and unpack the most.

7. **Humor can be a gift.** People love to laugh, no matter what age they are. Some moments of heaviness call for added levity - as long as a joke doesn't come at someone's expense. If it feels right, lighten the mood with some SSP jokes or puns!

8. **You don't have to have all the answers.** Ultimately, young people just want to be seen, genuinely cared for, and empowered. They want to know you will stick with them and be reliable. If you don't know the answer to something, the best thing you can say is "I don't know, but let's find out together." Then find out together.

Making Group Activities Impactful

1. **Object Lessons: What are they, and how do we use them?** The official Merriam-Webster definition of an object lesson is "*something that serves as a practical example of a principle or abstract idea*." As you will see throughout the suggested activity portion of the guide, SSP's program activities often utilize object lessons, in order to invite participants into exploration of how abstract principles have practical application to their lives.

   When used correctly, object lessons have the potential to be powerful tools for a person's growth, development, and grasp of complex subjects. However, there is always the potential for object lessons to go awry or be misused. As a leader, some tips to use object lessons well are:

   a. **Know what you want to get out of the activity, and how it relates to the concept and program objectives.** Don't lose sight of where you hope participants will end up by the end of the activity. If you keep your eye on the end goal of the activity, it often helps the point land more substantially with participants.

   b. **Remain open to outcomes that are different from what you expect.** Even if you know what you'd like to achieve with the activity, participants might arrive at a totally different place than you intended - and that's okay! Resist the need to answer questions *for* participants, and instead engage them in reflection about why they ended up where they did. Curiosity can be your biggest asset.

   c. **Be prepared to rephrase, or put different language to the metaphor you are articulating.** Sometimes, what we understand to be very clear instructions or explanations simply need to be worded differently in order to resonate with everyone. Come prepared with alternatives to the phrasing you use in order to make concepts and activities accessible to all.

2. **Leading with learning styles in mind:** Everyone learns and digests information in their own way. Most people use several learning styles, which may overlap and support one another. We encourage you to incorporate activities that are accessible to all five of the learning styles below:

   a. **Visual:** Visual learners do well with material they can refer back to in order to digest information. Posters, slides, images, videos, and written instructions can hold a visual learner's attention and ensure they stay connected to the material.

   b. **Auditory:** Auditory learners pick up information through listening. Oral instruction, songs, and discussion groups can help them digest the material.

   c. **Written:** Written learners process information by writing their thoughts. They will be able to engage with things like journal prompts, sidewalk chalk activities, and notetaking for group discussion.

   d. **Verbal:** Verbal learners digest information by speaking out loud. They are virtually made for group discussions. Other things that work well include partner conversations, call and response activities, Socratic method, and full group sharing.

e. **Kinesthetic:** Kinesthetic learners do best with hands-on activities (learning by doing). These learners will thrive with the use of object lessons, single-step instructions, and integrating movement. Especially in lecture-heavy or speaking-heavy spaces, find an alternative to engage kinesthetic learners like having fidget & doodling options.

Many people have learned to navigate learning spaces that cater to visual and written styles (school), but fewer spaces in society foster the same level of engagement for people who are inclined to learn through hands-on or verbal methods. To ensure a balanced program that is accessible to everyone, refer back to this list of learning styles to see if any planned activities cater heavily to one style over another.

3. Adapting Activities to Scale

a. **Smaller Groups (1-15):**
   i. Spend time building individual connections between the whole group. With smaller numbers there is more opportunity for partner work, one-on-one sharing, and deeper group discussion.
   ii. Have the group sit in a circle and at the same height (all on the ground, all in chairs, etc.) for group discussions and activities, so everyone can see each other and pay attention to who is sharing.
   iii. Call into conversation: When necessary, invite quieter members of the group to share individually. Emphasize that it is always okay to "pass," but sometimes people just need the little extra push.

b. **Larger Groups (15+):**
   i. Break out into smaller groups for discussions and sharing.
   ii. When giving instructions, ask participants to give you a visual confirmation they understand (thumbs up, sideways, or down is a great indicator of how well they've heard the instructions).
   iii. Have a pre-established, agreed-upon way to refocus the group when they are broken into smaller groups, so you can return back to the main group. This might look like a call & response such as: "God is good" - leader; "All the time" - group.

4. **Endings Matter:** Participants might look to you or other leaders to tie a neat bow around your program takeaways. This is a very human desire for closure, which we can't always offer. Remember, part of the magic of "discovery, not delivery" is in the challenging in-between spaces, when we don't have all the answers.

On a practical level, you as the leader do need to offer some sense of conclusion at the end of activities - more than a quickly-stammered "well, that's all for tonight." To offer some sense of closure around the endings of your programs and activities, you might opt to end with the phrase "if you take away anything from tonight, I hope it is _____." If you are drawing a blank on your version of that sentence, the program goals and objectives are a great place to start!

Using Scripture in Program

When reading through the program, you might come across a scripture that you either don't connect with very well, or you simply have an alternative selection you'd rather use. That's great! A program's life is only vibrant when leaders are connecting with the material. Be conscious that the scriptures chosen for this program were selected carefully to support the theme and be read **in context** of what the original author was most likely saying.

In applying scripture to the program, you can use these basic guidelines to evaluate whether the passage is being used in a **contextually appropriate** way:

1. **What:** Identify the type of writing (historical narrative or law, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, gospel narrative, epistles/letters, or revelatory)
2. **Who:** Identify the original author, as well as the audience the text is written to
3. **Why:** Identify the original intent of the author
4. **Where & When:** Familiarize yourself with the text (the full chapter) surrounding the passage or verse, as well as the place in global history it occupies

We believe there is value in drawing from a variety of translations (NRSV, the Message, ESV, NIV, NLT, Inclusive Bible Translation, etc.). Embrace utilizing various translations as appropriate.

Use welcoming language.

You might have folks participating in your group who don't identify as Christian, come from a variety of faith and cultural backgrounds, and may carry a lot of baggage about what "being a Christian" means. Please give consideration to these individuals and their experiences.

That said, all participants should be aware they are coming to learn in the context of a Christian service experience. Do not be afraid to ask questions that get them thinking, like, "What do you think about God?" and "Are you connecting with anything we've talked about?" Remember everyone is at a different place in their faith journey, and to extend patience to everyone you're serving.

You will likely encounter varying perspectives on theology, social issues, using God language, and the like when carrying out your version of the program. Embrace it! Find ways to focus on what connects you as a group, while celebrating what makes each individual unique.

Implementing the Program

Getting Fellow Leaders Involved

Your fellow leaders have varying personalities, backgrounds, and spiritual gifts – and that's a good thing! It is to your advantage to incorporate their contributions, skills, and stories in the program as much as possible. When extending the invitation, be sure you communicate your expectations clearly. Here are some tips to help you do this:

1. ***Ask how they want to be involved.*** Talk to fellow leaders from the beginning about their role in contributing to the program. Share the theme's goals and your plans with them. Once you know how they'd like to contribute, you can find ways to use their interests and gifts.

2. ***Know your leaders.*** The best way to integrate others is to understand what they have to offer - their stories, backgrounds, and insights. If you can find the right way to utilize their individual gifts, they will become an amazing asset in impacting participants.

3. ***Stay on message.*** There may be times when a leader wants to contribute something that does not fit with the program and its objectives. Meeting the objectives of the program comes first, though you may be able to collaborate to adapt their desired contribution. For story sharing especially, we like to ask staff to "speak from scars, not wounds." Generally, it is most impactful and productive for leaders to share lessons they have already learned and healed from, rather than painful experiences they are going through at the moment.

As in all things, remember to connect back to the general theme and the day's subtheme in particular. Participants should end the day understanding the goal of the day's program, and how it is connected to the theme at large.

Putting the Pieces Together

One of the biggest pitfalls to avoid is thinking of the "program" as simply being what happens at the end of the day. This is a point of view that can often lead to having an "inconsistent" or "uneven" feeling in a spiritual program. Outside of the relational time spent with participants, the structure we offer in this guide includes two distinct periods of time each day you might adapt to your context:

1. **Spiritual Sandwiches**
2. **Evening Program**

Rather than thinking of each of these as separate entities, consider them "pieces of the puzzle." If each of these periods of time conveys the program goals in a way that speaks to a variety of personality types and learning styles, a program can be well-rounded and fulfilling.

Spiritual Sandwiches

What is it?
"Spiritual Sandwich" lunchtime conversations are typically a time for small groups to develop a sense of camaraderie, share thoughts on their own spiritual journeys, and prime themselves for the topics covered in designated program time.

How do I do this?
Spiritual Sandwich discussion prompts are included in the Arise volunteer journal, but we have also included a few extras in this guide under each day's section. They are typically led by a youth (if the group is predominantly youth-focused). Having a youth (or another facilitator) who is comfortable leading these discussions can make or break a Spiritual Sandwich.

As you select which pieces you'd like to use for your Spiritual Sandwich discussions, we encourage you to include a mix of light-hearted team-building questions and thought-provoking questions that get participants to go deeper. Some questions will resonate more with certain personality types than others, so a blend of many types of questions will set you up for success.

Theme Discussions
The program outline lays out the themes each day's Spiritual Sandwich should cover. This is a really beneficial time for groups. It is their time away from the rest of programming to process what they think about the points that have been brought up. For this reason, you might want to open the discussion by getting groups to consider what was addressed in the program previously.

Team Building
If you are using this guide, you likely have some soft skills around how to get groups talking and learning about each other. For a little extra support, below are some team-building games and questions that can serve as great ice breakers, as well as help the group get to know each other and have fun.

Icebreakers:
- "Would you rather?" Questions (appropriate to the age groups you're working with)
- 20 Questions
- Facts about yourself (most youth enjoy these):
    - Siblings, Pets, 3 things about their school, Tell us about one of your scars, Etc.
- Two truths and a lie
- "If you really knew me, you'd know..."
- "Tell me a story" – this can be open-ended, giving youth a space to either share about themselves or have a bit of silly fun with their imagination.

Some discussion questions:
- If aliens were to land in a [bowling alley, high school, church service, etc.) and move about undetected, what do you think they would deduce about who earthlings are?
- If someone met you for the first time, what would you like them to know about you?
- Category questions: Is a hot dog a sandwich? Is cheesecake a type of cheese, cake, or pie?

Evening Program

As you select activities from the guide or build your own around our suggestions, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Try to find a balance at each gathering of lighter, fun things and more serious elements. They can be worked together, but think through how you'll do this and use transitions wisely. It may be hard to move into a serious quiet time if participants have just been moving around during a game and their adrenaline is pumping!

- Try to find a balance between sitting and moving around. Even a quick stand and stretch to get the blood recirculating helps fidgety youth and stiff adults.

- Remember everyone has different learning styles and will respond to activities in different ways. You'll need to select a balance of activities and formats so it's accessible to auditory, visual, written, verbal, and kinesthetic learners at various times.

Experiential activities: These take some creativity on the part of the participant - something they can create to remember their time together: friendship bracelets, word rocks, etc. Consider:

- Will it be accessible to all participants, and include materials available to everyone present?

- How much program time will it take? Does it play an important part in the message?

- Will it physically survive and retain meaning beyond the weekend?

Music is important to people and resonates deeply. When integrating music that pertains to the theme, this can become something that, when heard after the fact, serves as a reminder of the time your group has spent building community together.

Visual aids help create a welcoming, accessible atmosphere. You may consider adding a visual component each day as subthemes progress and culminate for your final gathering.

Children's books can be fabulous tools for speaking huge truths about people and the world.

Journaling each evening can stimulate excellent introspection. The SSP Arise journal includes prompts for each day and blank pages for freeform writing.

Time your program. Practicing the elements you lead in advance is always beneficial to the leader. Remember to time transitions and instructions, and account for group size.

Don't over-program. When it comes to running a meaningful program, less really is more. Allowing time to process and explore the events of the day is highly beneficial. If we're giving participants the time and space to process their experience, it's vitally important we don't attempt to give them all the answers. Our job is just to get them thinking.

Getting Centered Around Program Objectives:

We have identified **five key objectives** or takeaways of the SSP experience, which you might consider using in your own context. You might notice that some of the language in this guide is youth-centric, which reflects the general composition of SSP's programs. That said, these tips do not exclusively apply to youth, and can also be applied to intergenerational groups.

1. ***The joys of community.*** The power of sharing and listening in an intentional Christian community of peers and strong role models, who love and accept youth right where they are.

2. ***Youth empowerment.*** Giving young people the tools and confidence to be leaders at home, in their schools, churches, or communities. The model of equipping young people to take informed, healthy risks allows them to build resilience by overcoming challenges in a safe space.

3. ***Greater self-esteem.*** Rather than focusing on how young people *should* look, act, feel, perform, and think, which is often society's dominant narrative, everything we do must build youth up, affirming who they are right here and now, as well as the potential they have. Building youth up might even mean moving away from your planned activity, message, or discussion to practice being *present with* them.

4. ***A better understanding of our faith journeys and the application of biblical stories to our lives.*** Youth, young people, and adults all have different backgrounds and stories. A critical component of making the story of Jesus accessible to youth is moving away from "preachy" and instead towards "thought-provoking" - carried out by the SSP model of "**discovery, not delivery**." By providing youth with an open-minded place to explore their faith, they will be in a better position to explore important but tough questions like, "What do I really believe?" and, "Who is Jesus to me?"

5. ***Strengthening local connections.*** Sierra Service Project is about providing a space for transformative relational ministry to happen, through the methodologies introduced above. Remember that as leaders who spend the full year working with youth and young people, you have so much agency in providing safe and affirming spaces year-round. An active and thriving youth group has endless benefits to not just teenagers, but also the greater community.

Theme-Specific Program Objectives:

The next section summarizes the **theme-specific goals** you can refer back to when carrying out your program. As a leader carrying out program, ask yourself periodically:

- **How well are the activities, processes, and discussions in our group meeting the goals?**

- **Is there anything about our activities, process, or discussions that could better meet the goals?**

Theme: "Rise Up and Answer the Call"

Goal: Invite participants to explore some of the ways Jesus called people to action, and in turn how Jesus calls us to follow his model of servant leadership and community care.

Scripture: Matthew 4:17-23

> *"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."*

Leader Note: It is advised that you prepare personal samples of the activities enclosed prior to guiding participants through them. This will help you troubleshoot as well as set you up with a template to offer if participants are feeling stuck or confused about the activities.

Leader Reflection:

As you prepare to guide young people and adults through this theme, consider how your response to these questions informs your personal approach. Reflect on your response to the content below:

- **How do you envision yourself 'answering the call' to follow Jesus' model of servant leadership and community care?**

- **Who or what is in your own 'circle of influence'?**

- **What is your hope or vision for the participants in your group? What do you want them to walk away with?**

Day One: Orientation & Program

Orientation:

- Introductions
- Set community norms (as appropriate for your group)
    - This might include establishing a group covenant, sharing love languages, etc. Spend some time building trust together.
- Introduce the context of the community where you are serving
- Announce and divide into work teams (small groups)

Introduce Theme & Goal: Rise Up and Answer the Call

- **Goal:** Invite participants to explore some of the ways Jesus called people to action, and in turn how Jesus calls us to follow his model of servant leadership and community care.

Small Group Discussion: Invite work teams to read the scripture and discuss the questions below. Not all questions need to be answered, just the ones that stand out to the group.

- ***Materials Needed:*** *Print a copy of the prompt/questions for each work team.*

    - What are the fishermen being asked to do?
    - What would it have been like for the fishermen to just drop their nets and follow Jesus?
    - How do you think Zebedee felt about this?
    - What do you think it was about Jesus that convinced them to follow?
    - Have you ever felt like Jesus was calling you to something? If so, what?

Large Group Discussion: Discuss responses as a full group. Beyond sharing their thoughts on the above prompts, some questions you can ask of the group are:

- What are some traits of leaders you respect? How do you see those traits in Jesus?
- What about this passage challenged you?
- Did anyone else's reflections inspire you to think about risk-taking differently than you did before?

Closing: Conclude with a question for volunteers to consider throughout the weekend:

- How are you called to love and serve this weekend?

  OR

- Where do you think you'll see Jesus calling us this weekend?

Day One Materials: Discussion

(Print one copy for each work team)

Matthew 4:17-23

"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."

Discussion Questions:

- What are the fishermen being asked to do?
- What would it have been like for the fishermen to just drop their nets and follow Jesus?
- How do you think Zebedee felt about this?
- What do you think it was about Jesus that convinced them to follow?
- Have you ever felt like Jesus was calling you to something? If so, what?

Day Two: Program

Spiritual Sandwich Discussion: Invite work teams to read the scripture and discuss the questions. Not all questions need to be answered, just the ones that stand out to the group.

- ***Materials Needed**: Print a copy of the prompt/questions for each work team.*

Leader Notes:

- *These activities could be implemented directly following the other, or as a multi-day activity (#1, followed by #2 at a different time).*
- *You may need to skip one of these activities, at your discretion, to ensure volunteers have enough rest after the workday.*
- *Encourage volunteers to keep their circle of influence (activity #1) nearby if you'll have time to implement both. The following activity utilizes these! It is up to you whether you'd like to hint at this, or share it explicitly with the group.*

Activity #1: Circle of Influence

- **Purpose:** To help each participant reflect on their own lives, and better understand the places and people they spend their time with.
    - ***Materials**: Circle template for each participant, guide for each team, and a pen or pencil for each person.*
- **Leader Script:** We are going to draw a "circle of influence." Following the exercise we will discuss our results as a whole group. You will not be required to share specific information but will be asked for your general impressions about your own circles.
    - **Step 1:** Put your name in the center of the paper. Then write the names of the people in your life who you are both closest to and spend the most time with (see figure 1) in a circle around your name. These, for most people, are immediate family or those with whom they live.
    - **Step 2:** Make the next layer of names. These are people whom you are still emotionally close to, but perhaps not quite as close as the inner circle. These tend to be very best friends or other close relatives (see figure 2).
    - **Step 3**: Continue making rings of names going out from the center. Each layer represents people you have relationships with, but the relationships are less and less consistent or strong as the names move further from the center. **Some examples:**
        - ***Layer 3*:** School friends, but less significant than best friends.
        - ***Layer 4*:** People you spend lots of time with at school but perhaps are not as close to (classmates, teachers, teammates, club members, acquaintances, etc.).
        - ***Layer 5*:** Include a final layer of people you see on a regular basis, but don't have much of a relationship with (school janitor, barista, school office administrator, librarian, etc.).

Once you've done these steps, the circle of influence is complete. You don't need to write every person you know; just the first people who come to mind.

- **Step 4:** Put a line under the names of each person in your circle that ***differs*** from you in each of these categories. Each person can have more than one line under their name. A finished paper could look like figure 3.
    - Gender identity
    - Age (generation)
    - Socioeconomic level (often difference in family income, zip code, etc.)
    - Languages spoken
    - Religion or faith identity
    - Race or ethnicity
    - *Include various other demographics as you feel appropriate*

- **Step 5.** Take a moment to look at your finished paper.
    - What impressions do you have?
    - Did anything surprise you? Why or why not?
    - Were there more or fewer underlines than you thought there would be?
    - What can this tell you about the way you spend your time, and who you spend it with?

- **Closing thought:** "Some of us may have a very diverse circle of influence that comes about completely naturally. Others may have a much less diverse circle. Neither is good nor bad - just information about how we exist in our community at this moment.

  If we want to increase the diversity in our circle, sometimes we have to make very conscious choices about how we spend our time, going out of our usual comfort zones to foster new relationships and connections."

Day Two: Program Continued

Activity #2: WWJB? (Where Would Jesus Be?)

Leader Note: *This background information may help to introduce the activity.*

Jeff Lowery developed the idea for this Bible study when he heard a pastor from Nashville, Janet Wolf, speak at a youth convention. She talked about the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) fad in the 90's on bracelets and bumper stickers, etc. Janet said WWJD was a perfectly fine question to ask ourselves, but an important companion question, if we truly want to be followers of Jesus, might be WWJB: Where Would Jesus Be? If we studied the life of Jesus and saw where and with whom he spent his time, we might find places and people God is calling us to be with as well. That might mean we are called to go outside our comfort zones.

Introduce the concept of WWJB as a complement to WWJD. Most youth have heard of WWJD, so ask them to explain what it means as an opener, then ask what they think WWJB might stand for.

Purpose: To help participants explore scriptures to get an understanding of where Jesus spent some of his time, and who people he spent that time with.

- **Materials:** Bibles and space for small group discussion/large group sharing. Print the verses and discussion questions for each story. If you have more than four work teams, print duplicates.

Activity Steps:

- **Step 1:** What does WWJD mean? What do you think WWJB might stand for? We are going to explore some of the places where Jesus spent his time, and the kinds of people he spent his time with.

- **Step 2:** Divide into work teams. Each group will receive one of the scripture stories below (see materials section for printouts), read the scripture together in their work teams, and discuss the questions (below for reference).

    - **Scriptures**
        1) Luke 19:1-10
        2) John 4: 1-18; 25-29
        3) Luke 8: 26-39
        4) Luke 8: 40-56
    - What happened in the story?
    - Where was Jesus spending his time and who was he with?
    - From what you know about the culture of Jesus' time, why is question #2 significant?
    - Is there anything in this story you don't understand? Anything that doesn't make sense?

    Leader Note: *Some youth will be familiar with the scriptures and the culture of Jesus' day, while it will be completely new to others. Leaders should make their way around to groups to help out with "tidbits of knowledge" where needed (historical context below). If you have over four teams, give the same story to multiple groups. It may be interesting to see what they come up with!*

Scripture Notes *(Also on the material printouts; see here for reference)*

Luke 19:1-10 It is important to know why tax collectors are so hated by the Jews. Israel was occupied by the Romans in this time period. Zaccheus was a Jew, but as a tax collector worked for the Romans. Therefore, his own people looked upon him as a traitor. In addition, it was standard practice for the tax collector to collect extra taxes to supplement his salary. This is what Z is talking about when he says he will give back 4 times what was stolen.

John 4: 1-18; 25-29 Jesus crosses many boundaries in this passage. In that time, Jews and the Samaritans were sworn enemies. It is also against the customs of the day for a man, especially a single man, to be talking to a woman in public. It is also important to note that the woman went to get water at *noon*. When one lives in the desert, this is not the ideal time to be out at the well, and the woman probably gets water at this time because she is involved in some unsavory activities and doesn't want to run into anyone else. The reaction of the disciples shows us how taboo and revolutionary Jesus' actions were in that culture.

Luke 8: 26-39 The scripture begins by noting that Jesus is in the country of the Gerasenes, reminding us he is not in Israel. The man he meets there is said to have a "demon." Since this topic is rarely discussed in Western culture outside of horror movies, you may consider taking a moment to let youth explore what the story is talking about. The demon's name is "legion," denoting there are likely an army of voices bouncing around in his head. It's possible that what is seen as demon possession in Biblical times could be equated to mental illness in our day. "Legion" may be schizophrenic. It's less important that youth focus on the details of how to define a demon/mental illness than arriving at the understanding that because of whatever is wrong with the man, he is isolated from the rest of his community. As a result of his encounter with Jesus, he becomes open to healthy relationship again.

Luke 8: 40-56 The story begins with Jairus, an important man of the Jewish synagogue whose daughter was dying. Jesus agrees to go see her, and on the way is interrupted by a woman who touches his garment as he passes through a crowd. The woman (who interestingly is never named) has been bleeding for 12 years. In Bible culture, people can be isolated from the larger religious community for a number of reasons, one of which being illness, particularly involving body fluids (as in the case of the woman). The temple priests and entire culture judge these people to be "unclean." They were not only not allowed to touch or be touched by anyone who is "clean," but also generally forced to live in remote areas of their villages to avoid "infecting" others. If a "clean" person had contact with an "unclean" person, they were also considered unclean. To become "clean," one must go to the temple and participate in a ritual that would restore them to community again. They cannot be considered "clean" until they are fully healed. This woman had not been "clean" for 12 years, and was so desperate to become healed that she abandoned regular social practice to force her way through the crowd (touching many people in the process) just to reach Jesus. You can imagine how happy she would have been after she was healed, because it meant much more to her than merely being physically well; it meant being restored to community. (Note: while physical symptoms of being "unclean" often did have to do with hygiene and sanitation, their cultural and spiritual significance was solely being "right" with God or not, in the eyes of the religious leaders of the day.) By the time Jesus makes it to Jairus' home, the daughter had already died. Jesus raises her from the dead, restoring a second person in this story to community; someone who had been written off as entirely lost.

Short conclusion discussion (in work teams):

If the people in these stories were here today and did the "circle of influence" activity with us, what would their drawing look like before they met Jesus? After? If Jesus were here today, what would his drawing look like?

Leader Note*: If you skip the "Circle of Influence" exercise, simply alter your closing discussion to include questions like:*

- *"Who would the characters/Jesus be spending most of their/his time with?"*
- *"Would their closest relationships be with people different or very similar to themselves?"*

Closing Thought:

Many of the characters in the stories are people who are isolated and cut off from community. Their encounter with Jesus in each of these passages allows them to be restored to community with others again, and enveloped in a reciprocal, collective care.

Close with prayer and/or by singing/listening to:
"Where Would Jesus Be?" by Jeff Lowery

Day Two Materials: Spiritual Sandwich

Print one copy for each work team.

Revisit/summarize Matthew 4:17-22 (previous day's scripture), and continue with reading Matthew 4:23-25.

Matthew 4:17-25

Summarize (17-22): *"From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."*

Read (23-25): "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him."

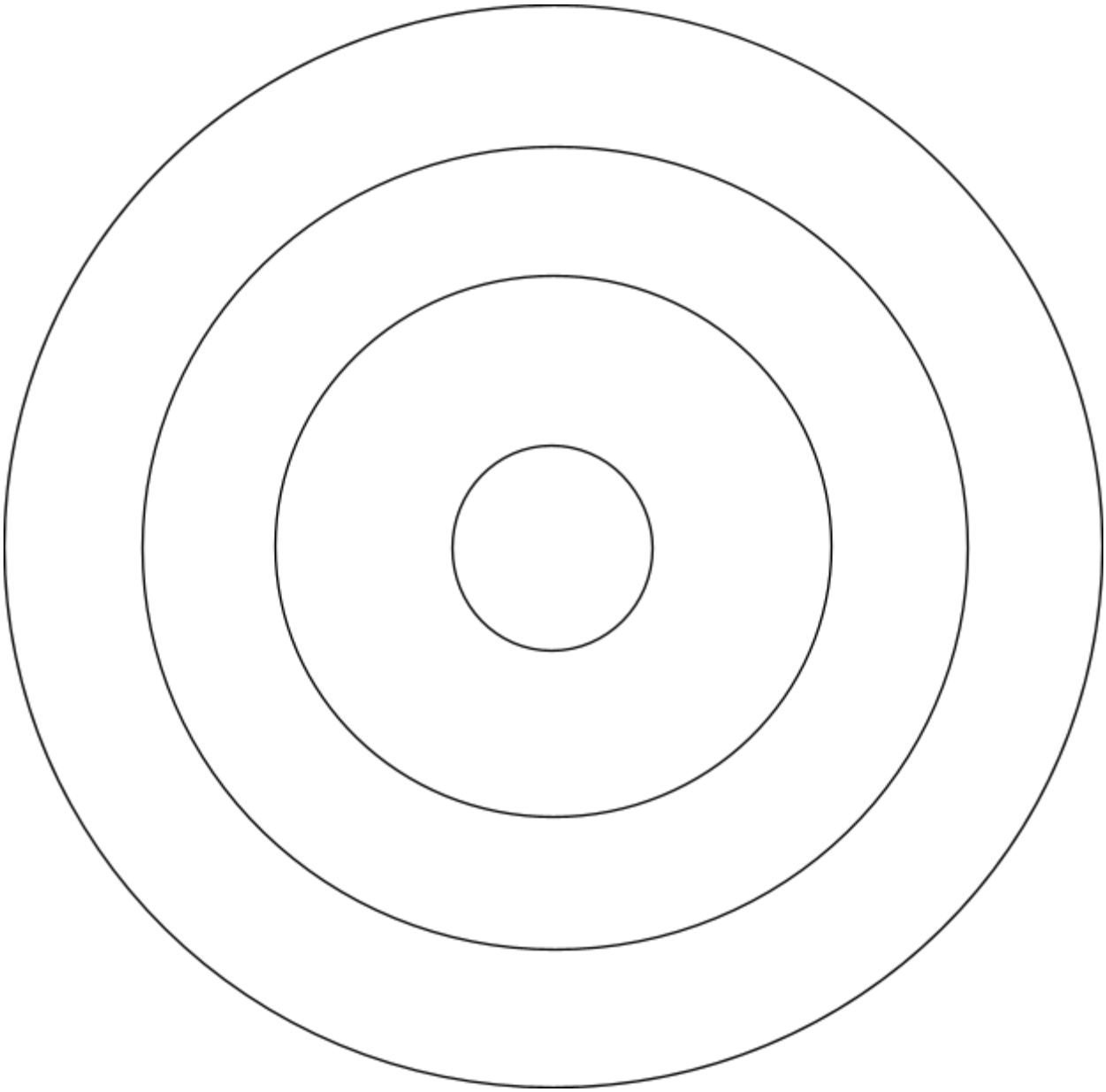
Context: This takes place directly after Jesus asked the fishermen to follow him in the verses we read yesterday.

Discussion Questions:

- Based on what you hear in this verse, what do you think the fishermen's lives looked like right after they left their nets and went with Jesus?
    - How do you think they may have reacted to that change? How would you react to everything Jesus was doing?
- Jesus had great crowds following and listening to his call. Does everyone with a crowd have a message worth following?
    - How can we tell the difference between the two?
- What does it look like to follow Jesus in modern times? In your life? Right now, this week?

Day Two: Materials for Activity #1

Activity #1: Circle of Influence Template
(Print one copy for each person)



Activity #1: Circle of Influence Step-by-Step
(Print one copy for each work team)

Fig 1



Fig 2

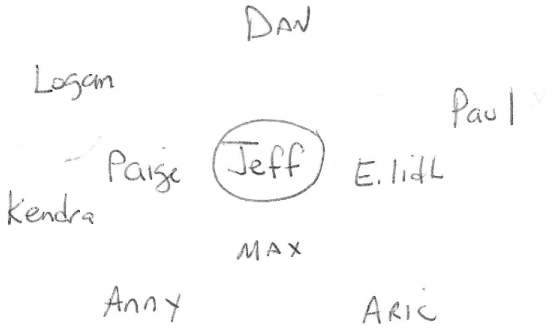
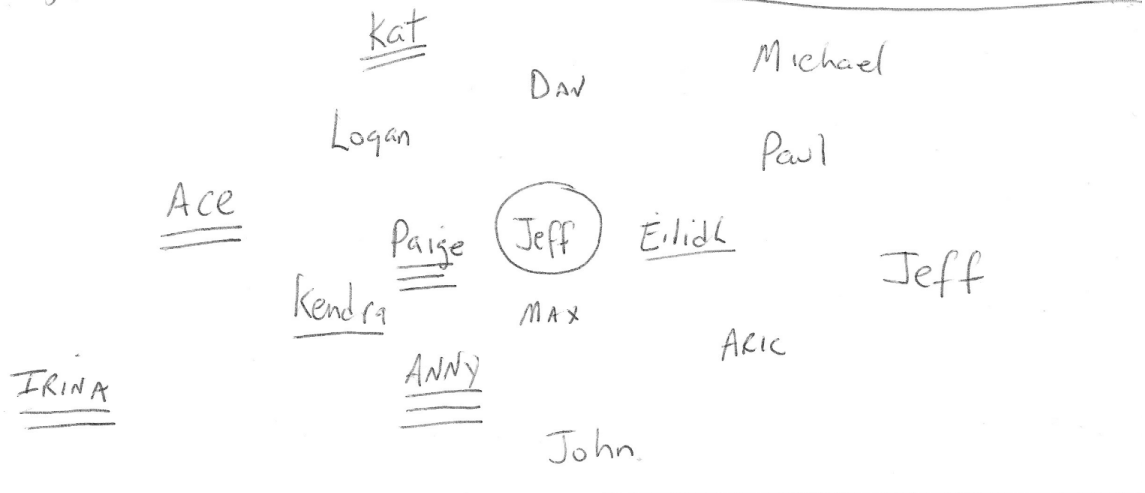


Fig 3



Day Two: Materials for Activity #2

Activity #2: Scripture Story 1 of 4

Print one copy of each story. Print multiple copies if the number of work teams will require duplicates.

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Notes for context:
It is important to know why tax collectors are so hated by the Jews. Israel was occupied by the Romans in this time period. Zaccheus was a Jew, but as a tax collector worked for the Romans. Therefore, his own people looked upon him as a traitor. In addition, it was standard practice for the tax collector to collect extra taxes to supplement his salary. This is what Zaccheus is talking about when he says he will give back 4 times what was stolen.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happened in the story?
2. Where was Jesus spending his time and who was he with?
3. From what you know about the culture of Jesus' time, why is question #2 significant?
4. Is there anything in this story you don't understand? Anything that doesn't make sense?

Activity #2: Scripture Story 2 of 4

Print one copy of each story. Print multiple copies if the number of work teams will require duplicates.

John 4:1-18; 25-29 Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

1-18 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John – although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you – I am he."

25-29 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

Notes for context: Jesus crosses many boundaries in this passage. In that time, Jews and the Samaritans were sworn enemies. It is also against the customs of the day for a man, especially a single man, to be talking to a woman in public. It is also important to note that the woman went to get water at *noon*. When one lives in the desert, this is not the ideal time to be out at the well, and the woman probably gets water at this time because she is involved in some unsavory activities and doesn't want to run into anyone else. The reaction of the disciples shows us how taboo and revolutionary Jesus' actions were in that culture.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happened in the story?
2. Where was Jesus spending his time and who was he with?
3. From what you know about the culture of Jesus' time, why is question #2 significant?
4. Is there anything in this story you don't understand? Anything that doesn't make sense?

Activity #2: Scripture Story 3 of 4

Print one copy of each story. Print multiple copies if the number of work teams will require duplicates.

Luke 8:26-39 Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Notes for context: The scripture begins by noting that Jesus is in the country of the Gerasenes, reminding us he is not in Israel. The man he meets there is said to have a "demon." Since this topic is rarely discussed in Western culture outside of horror movies, you may consider taking a moment to let youth explore what the story is talking about. The demon's name is "legion," denoting there are likely an army of voices bouncing around in his head. It's possible that what is seen as demon possession in Biblical times could be equated to mental illness in our day. "Legion" may be schizophrenic. It's less important that we focus on the details of how to define a demon or mental illness than arriving at the understanding that because of whatever is wrong with the man, he is isolated from the rest of his community. As a result of his encounter with Jesus, he becomes open to healthy relationship again.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happened in the story?
2. Where was Jesus spending his time and who was he with?
3. From what you know about the culture of Jesus' time, why is question #2 significant?
4. Is there anything in this story you don't understand? Anything that doesn't make sense?

Activity #2: Scripture Story 4 of 4

Print one copy of each story. Print multiple copies if the number of work teams will require duplicates.

Luke 8:40-56 Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore." Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Notes for context: The story begins with Jairus, an important man of the Jewish synagogue whose daughter was dying. Jesus agrees to go see her, and on the way is interrupted by a woman who touches his garment as he passes through a crowd. The woman (who interestingly is never named) has been bleeding for 12 years. In Bible culture, people can be isolated from the larger religious community for a number of reasons, one of which being illness, particularly involving body fluids (as in the case of the woman). The temple priests and entire culture judge these people to be "unclean." They were not only not allowed to touch or be touched by anyone who is "clean," but also generally forced to live in remote areas of their villages to avoid "infecting" others. If a "clean" person had contact with an "unclean" person, they were also considered unclean. To become "clean," one must go to the temple and participate in a ritual that would restore them to community again. Note: while physical symptoms of being "unclean" often did have to do with hygiene and sanitation, their cultural and spiritual significance was solely being "right" with God or not, in the eyes of the religious leaders of the day.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happened in the story?
2. Where was Jesus spending his time and who was he with?
3. From what you know about the culture of Jesus' time, why is question #2 significant?
4. Is there anything in this story you don't understand? Anything that doesn't make sense?

Day Three Materials: Spiritual Sandwich

Print one copy for each work team.

Discussion: As a team, reflect on and discuss the prompts below. You can write, doodle, or draw your responses.

- Reflect on our acts of service, the community we have built, and the discussions we have had the last few days. In what ways did we follow Jesus during our time together?

- What would Jesus say about or see in the people we have served? How would he engage with them?

- How might you be called to serve, or follow Jesus, as you return home? Who do you feel compelled to invest in spending time with?

Closing Reflection:

Any program is only as impactful as how it is evaluated and adapted for the next time around. As you conclude each part of program, as well as finish out the full series, reflect as a leader on the following:

- **Program Organization:** How well have you done at preparing yourself and your team?

- **Program Impact:** How impactful has your program content and delivery been for participants? Is everything you're doing centered on 'discovery,' rather than 'delivery?'

- **Program Flexibility:** How have you applied feedback from both participants and leaders to modify and improve your program as needed?

- **Relational Ministry:** How well have you fostered space for meaningful connections among participants and leaders?

- **Goal Check-In:** Are you meeting the program goals? If so, what has helped you achieve these? If not, what can you do to get a little closer to reaching these?

Final Note:

We encourage you to reconnect with SSP's Central Office after going through this guide to share with us any takeaways you have! At the end of the day, if you show up and foster a welcoming space, you are well on your way to impacting young people and empowering them. Keep it up!