

Youth Strike for Christ 2010

Theme: Portable Faith

Scriptural Reflections for Sr. High Youth

Small Group Discussion

By Rev. Chris Waddle

Discussion 1

Activity: Sort it out

Have the youth stand up. Tell them that you are going to give them a classification (for example, shortest to tallest), and they war to put themselves in the correct order without speaking. Once everyone is in order, check to see how they did. Then have each youth introduce himself or herself to the person in front of them and behind them.

Notes: The first person in line and the last person in line should introduce themselves to each other. If more than one youth has the same answer, youth with that answer may line up in any order in the appropriate place in line.

Use the following classifications for this activity:

- Shortest to tallest
- Number of people in your family (from smallest number to largest number)
- Number of people from your church that came to youth strike (from smallest to largest number)
- Birthday (from January to December)
- Number of portable electronic devices that your family owns (e.g. cell phones, iPods, portable DVD players, laptop computers, ect.)

Have the youth look around and introduce themselves to anyone that they did not meet during this activity.

Psalm 1

Let the group members take turns reading a few lines of the Psalm at a time out loud.

Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Leader Teaches:

The Psalms were songs used in worship long before Jesus was born and during his own lifetime. This Psalm is about the goodness of the Law of God or what the Jews call “The Torah” or “The Teaching”. Knowing the Law of God is one of the ways we can carry faith with us as we live and relate to the culture around us.

Leader Asks:

When I say the word “law” what images or thoughts come to mind?

What feelings or personal stories come to mind when I say “law”?

Do you tend to have a positive association with the word “law” or negative? Why?

How do obeying laws help make life good?

Leader Teaches:

We might have gotten impression that the "Law" or "Torah" is a bad or oppressive thing from which Jesus saves us. However there is a difference between the life-giving Law of God that Jesus and other Jews celebrated, and legalism. Jesus was Jewish and Jews were very thankful for the law. The law reminded them that they belonged to God and guided them in right relationship with God and others.

There are some 613 Laws in the Torah, but Jesus said that all of the Laws of the Torah “hang” on this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:35-40).

Leader Asks:

What does it mean to say that all the laws of God “hang” on. . . “Love God, Love others, and Love yourself?”

Leader Teaches:

As I said earlier, Jesus had great respect for the Torah. Still, he realized that even the Torah could be abused and used to justify not being loving or compassionate. Other followers of Jesus, such as Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. rightly taught that some human laws (such as segregation laws) violated God’s fundamental law of love and should not be obeyed.

Leader Asks:

How does the fundamental Law of God (Love God, Love others, and Love yourself) help us decide whether or not a human law is just or loving?

How does “meditating” on the fundamental Law of God (Love God, Love others, and Love yourself) help us to recognize permissiveness (not obeying laws we should) and legalism (using laws to justify not being loving) in ourselves?

Leader Teaches:

The Law of God helps us to know how to act and what is right and what is wrong. Christians look to the example and teaching of Jesus to determine what is just and loving. This is important if we want to carry our faith into the world and live as followers of Jesus. Still, discipleship is about more than just knowing and following God’s Law. Next time we will talk about how God’s love transforms, not just how we act, but who we are.

Activity: Sentence Stories

Have the youth sit in a circle. Wad up one piece of paper into a ball.

Say: Keeping God's laws or rules in mind, think for a moment what life would be like if nobody followed God's law. We are going to tell a story titled "Life without God's Law". I will throw this paper wad to someone and that person will begin our story and one sentence. He or she will then throw the paper wad to someone else, who will add one more sentence. After everyone has added to our story at least once, we will finish our story.

Ask: How many people would like to live in the world we just described? Why or why not?

Say: Now think for a moment what life would be like if everyone followed God's law. We are now going to use the same method to create a story titled "The World According to God's Law". Throw the paper wad to one of the youth and begin creating a story.

Which world would you like to live in? Why or why not?

If you have time try this optional activity: Have the youth stand up. Teach the youth the following rhythm: four knee pats, four claps, five snaps, four stomps. Add the Youth Strike 2010 Focus Statement, allowing on syllable per pat, clap, snap, or stomp. (Rhythm changes are indicated by a /.) Wherever we / are in Life and / Faith, Jesus invites / us to follow.

Ask for a youth volunteer to close the session in prayer.

Scriptural reflection and small group discussion for High School lessons were provided by Rev. Chris Waddle.

Activities for the High School lessons were provided by Sally Hoelscher.

Discussion 2

Activity: Boom Chica Boom

Have the youth sit in a circle. Teach the group the call and response below by asking them to repeat after you. Say it through two or three times for practice, using your name for the last line.

Note to leader: There is no melody, just say it in rhythm. Use your own name in the last line for the practices.

After a few times through, stop and explain that this time you will say someone else's name. That person will then become the leader, and name another person at the end who will become the leader, and so forth. Play the game until everyone has had an opportunity to be leader and/or time permits.

Optional: If your group is up to it, choose one (or a combination) of the following variations!

- Add actions: boom = pat knees; chica = two snaps; rocka = two claps.
- Silly Voices: Allow the leader to lead in a silly voice of their choice (e.g. baby voice, squeaky voice, British accent, ect.) and have the players repeat it.
- Speedy Chica Boom: Challenge the youth to get faster on each round.

Leader: Boom chica boom

Leader: Alright

Players: Boom chica boom

Players: Alright

Leader: I said-a boom chica boom

Leader: One more time

Players: I said-a boom chica boom

Players: One more time

Leader: Boom chica rocka chica rocka chica boom

Leader: (Name)

Players: Boom chica rocka chica rocka chica boom

Players: (Name)

Leader: Uh huh

Players: Uh huh

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Let the group members take turns reading a few lines of the text at a time out loud.

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,* says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Leader Teaches:

The last time we were together we talked about the Law of God. We talked about how it helped us live a more loving life and taught us right from wrong. We also talked about how the essence of all of God's Law could be summed up in the fundamental law of love: "Love God, love others, and love yourself"

Now let's go a little deeper. The scripture we read today is from the prophet Jeremiah.

Leader Asks:

When I say the word "prophet" what do you think of?

Leader Teaches:

Often the first thing people think of when they hear the word "prophet" is someone who predicts the future like a fortune teller. While the prophets often spoke about things to come, they were not exactly fortune tellers. To prophesy means to speak God's word to God's people. This usually involves the present and the future. The prophets called the people to faithful relationship to God and each other so that their future could be better than their present. Often they used poetic images to talk about this future relationship. This is what Jeremiah is doing in our scripture today.

The Hebrew people are captives in a foreign land (Babylon) and they want to go back home. They are wondering if God still cares about them and they are forgetting why God's Law (Torah) is important.

Jeremiah tells the Hebrew people that even though they had forgotten the ways of God and why the Law is important God has not forgotten about them. He tells them that, in time, God will write the Law on their hearts. This is a poetic way of saying they will not only know the Law and follow it; they will also have such an intimate relationship with God that their very natures will be transformed by God's power and love. Christians believe that this is what God has done through Jesus.

Note to discussion leader: You are about to ask participants to consider their most significant relationships and to reflect on whom it is that loves and cares for them. Respect participant's right not to share if they choose. For most participants, parents and family members will come to mind. Still, do not assume that this will be true for everyone. If someone in your group shares (with you or the group) that they do not feel there is anyone who loves them, listen to them. If they are willing, take some time to visit with them one on one in a public but confidential space and let them share more with you. If you feel you need support talk confidentially with a minister at Youth Strike.

Leader Asks:

Can you think of an example of how people obey rules and laws mainly out of fear of punishment?

What happens in these cases if people know they won't get caught?

Can you think of any people you have obeyed mainly because you were scared of them?

Did you obey them even when they were no looking? Why or why not?

How do you feel about them now?

Now, think of a person in your own life that you love and who loves you that has taught you right from wrong. (pause)

How is that relationship different from the one with the person you obeyed out of fear?

How does experiencing love from someone and loving them back transform our hearts?

How is this also true of our relationship with God?

Does it matter whether we follow God out of fear of punishment or out of love? why or why not?

Leader Teaches:

Following Jesus is about more than believing beliefs and following rules. We believe that we enter a real and loving relationship with our Creator. We believe that when we nurture this relationship, God transforms, not just our behavior, but our hearts. We become more and more like the God who loves.

God never stops loving us, but we have the choice to allow God to transform us or to resist it. The next time we gather we will talk about how we can allow the love and power of God to shape us.

Activity: Flying Promises

Give each youth a piece of paper.

Say: God has promised to always love us and to forgive us when we do something wrong. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, in this case God and God's people. (That would be us.)

Invite each youth to think about what he or she promises God and to write it on the piece of paper. (They do not need to write their name on the paper.) Have each youth fold his or her paper into a paper airplane. When all of the planes have been made, have the youth throw their paper airplanes and retrieve one that is not their own.

Note to leader: You might need to set some parameters on where the planes may be thrown, depending on your location.

When all the planes have been retrieved, have each youth unfold the plane he or she retrieved and share the promise with the group.

If time allows: have youth stand up. Remind them the youth of the rhythm learned last session (see discussion 1) and say the Youth Strike 2010 Focus Statement together: Wherever we / are in Life and / Faith, Jesus invites / us to follow.

Ask for a youth volunteer to close the session with prayer.

Scriptural reflections and Small Group discussion for High School lessons provided by Rev. Chirs Waddle.
Activities for High School lessons provided by Sally Hoelscher.

Discussion 3

Activity: Two Truths and a Wish

Instruct each youth to think of three statements about himself or herself. Two statements should be true. The third statement should be something that the youth wishes to be true but is not (yet). For example if I wished that I could travel to the Grand

Canyon, I might say, "I went to the Grand Canyon last year on vacation." Let each youth share his or her three statements with the group, presenting the statements in any order. Have the group vote on which statement is the wish. After the vote is in, have the youth who shared reveal the right answer. Give each person an opportunity to share!

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Let the group members take turns reading a few lines of the text at a time out loud.

Leader Asks:

Ok, do you remember what we talked about the last time we were together?

Let the group respond for a while.

Leader Teaches:

We talked about how God's love and power shape our hearts when we enter into a loving relationship with God and allow God to work in our lives. Now we are going to talk about how we grow in our relationship with God and how we allow God to shape us into the people we were created to be.

Leader Asks:

What is happening in his passage we read today?

Let the group respond for a while.

Leader Teaches:

This passage of scripture comes just before Jesus begins his ministry. He is out in the wilderness alone praying about what his life and ministry is to be about. Christians disagree about whether Jesus literally interacted with the devil, whether he was having a vision, or whether this story is a creative way that the writer of Matthew shares the temptations that Jesus resisted. However, Christians agree that Jesus was human just like us. He got hungry when he did not eat. He felt heat and pain. He got lonely. He experienced temptation, and he even had to spend time in prayer in order to be faithful.

There is a lot we could look at in this text but our time is limited. For now let's focus on Jesus response to the temptation to use his power to turn stones to bread and serve his own physical need and give up his prayerful fasting.

Fasting is a form of prayer. To give up his fast would mean that Jesus would stop praying before he discerned what his life and ministry was to be about.

Leader Asks:

How did Jesus respond to this temptation? (See verse 4)

What do you think Jesus is saying?

Just as the body needs food, relationships need nourishment. How do we grow in relationship with the people we love?

How is this similar to growing in our relationship with God?

Leader Teaches:

We grow in relationship with others by spending time with them and learning more about who they are and what it means to be devoted to each other. The same is true with our living relationship with God. We grow in relationship with God through something called "means of grace" some of these involve being alone with God (As Jesus is doing in this passage) and some of them involve being in relationship with others. One thing they all have in common is that they move us out of the center of the universe and remind us that only God is God.

Leader Asks:

What are some ways that we can relate to God while alone?

Some examples: Praying (in many different ways), reading the Bible, fasting, reading a devotional book alone. There are many different examples.

What are some ways that we can relate to God with others?

Some examples: Worship, Bible studies and prayer groups, Holy Communion, caring for others' needs. There are many different examples.

Leader Teaches:

Just about anything that is not destructive to our relationship with God and others can be a way that God transforms us. Still, there are some ways or "means of grace" that Christians throughout history have found transforming. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley talked about them.

Here is a handout that lists them that you can put in your Bible to think and pray about. They are not magic. It is not that we do them and we make things happen, but if we do them and we are open to listening to and being shaped by God; we might be surprised by how God changes us.

Leader Prays:

Give each group member a handout one by one and say to each,
"Name my prayer is that you will be nourished and transformed by God's grace."

or similar in your own words if you prefer

Scriptural Reflections and Small Group discussion for the High School lessons provided Rev. Chris Waddle.

Activities for the High School lessons have been provided by Sally Hoelscher.

Means of Grace

According to John Wesley

John Wesley taught that "means of grace," include both "works of piety" (instituted means of grace) and "works of mercy" (prudential means of grace).

Works of Piety

Experiencing the Love and Power of God

- Prayer
- Searching the Scriptures (*Bible study*)
- Holy Communion
- Fasting (*If we can do it healthily*)
- Christian Conferencing (*Talking and listening prayerfully with other Christians*)

Works of Mercy

Reflecting the Love and Power of God

- Doing Good
- Visiting the Sick and Prisoners
- Feeding and Clothing People
- Earning, Saving, Giving all one Can
- Opposition to Slavery (*and other forms of unjust treatment of others*)

(Italics comments added by Rev. Chris Waddle)

Discussion 4

Activity: Pass the Clap

Have the youth stand in a circle. Explain that you are going to pass a clap around the circle. The person who starts the clap will turn to the person on his or her left. These two people will make eye contact and clap; the goal is to clap at the same time. The second person will turn to the person on his or her left and pass the clap. The process will be repeated until the clap makes it around the circle.

Choose one person to begin the clap and pass it all the way around the circle.

Say: Now let's make it more interesting. Let's start a rhythm going and see if we can pass the clap in time with the rhythm. Get the group started stomping in an even rhythm. Start with a fairly slow rhythm. Once the rhythm is established, choose a person to start the clap. The two people who are clapping do not have to stomp. The rest of the group will keep the rhythm going. Encourage the youth to try to pass the clap in rhythm with the stomping.

Each time the clap has almost made it around the circle, say, "A little bit faster" and increases the speed of the stomping rhythm slightly. See how fast you can stomp and still be successful in passing the clap in rhythm.

Optional: For an additional challenge, slow the rhythm back down and choose two people on opposite sides of the circle to start passing claps at the same time. Can you get three claps going around the circle at the same time?

Hebrews 4:12-16

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested⁷ as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let the group members take turns reading a few lines of the Psalm at a time out loud.

Leader Asks:

Well, this is our last time together; let's just take a moment to remember what we have talked about. What are some of the things you remember that have been helpful?"

Let the group respond for a while.

In your own words; summarize the main points of the last three discussions.

God's Law is a good gift to us that helps us know how to be faithful. Jesus taught that the heart of the Law can be summed up by the commandment to love God, love others, as we love ourselves.

Following Jesus is more than following a list of rules or laws; it's a living relationship with God that transforms our hearts.

We nurture our relationship with God by being open to God's love and power. One way we do this is by prayerfully participating in means of grace.

Leader Asks:

I want to read v. 12 and 13 again. Listen and tell me how you feel?

Read the passage

How do you feel when you hear this passage? Why?

Leader Teaches:

One of the good things about the law and our living relationship with God is that it teaches what is right and wrong and how to be faithful. But there is also a troubling side. The more we experience and learn about the love, justice, and goodness of God, the more we notice places in our lives where we do not live up to the high standards of God.

If God stopped here, it would be very **bad** news. But, Jesus lived and taught the "Gospel" of God's Kingdom . . . the word "Gospel" means "**good** news".

The bad news is bad. . . we often fail to be the people we were created to be. But the "good news" is so good that it overshadows the bad news.

Let's read how the book of Hebrews describes the good news again.

Read v. 14 - 16.

Leader Asks:

Who is the "High Priest"?

Answer: Jesus

What does this passage tell us about God and our relationship with God?

Leader Teaches:

God knows what it is like to be human and to be tempted and God is merciful and forgiving. God loves us and is on our side and wants to help us grow into the people we were created to be, not condemn us. We do not need to be afraid of God. God is for us.

Sometimes we may get the sense that God really has trouble trying to love us. In church we often say things like, Jesus loves us "in spite" of our sin. But this really falls short of what Jesus lived and taught. God adores us as a loving parent adores his or her child.

Yes, God cares about our behavior and who we are becoming, but this is because of God's love. Our behavior does not cause God to love us or prevent God from loving us. God's love for us is not dependent on how we act. Still, because God loves us, God expects us to grow into the loving and faithful people God created us to be.

Leader Asks:

How does knowing God loves us help us be faithful to what God expects of us?

How do we sometimes take God's grace for granted?

How do we sometimes turn God's Law into legalism?

If God's love and acceptance for us is not dependent on our behavior, what is the point of following God's law?

Why is this sometimes hard to accept that God loves us unconditionally and that we do not have to earn God's love or prove our worth?

Leader prays:

I want us to take some time in silent prayer together. I will start the prayer with just a few words and then I invite us all to pray silently together for a while. Remember that prayer is talking to God and it is also listening to God. Try to do some of each.

Let's pray. . . Loving God, we thank you for this unique time we have had together. We have never been together like this before and we will never be together like this again. Thank you for this time to learn from you and from each other. We come to you today each at different places in our lives and our relationships with you.

Now, as we pray together silently I want you to consider. . . What is the next step of faith God is calling you to make? It may be big, it may be small. What is it?

(slowly suggest the following and feel free to omit or include your own thoughts as the Spirit leads you :)

Do you need to let go of something or do you need to take something on.

Do you need to forgive someone or do you need to ask for forgiveness from someone.

Do you need to turn around and start following God again?

Do you need to remember God's acceptance of you?

Maybe you even need to accept God's acceptance of you

Whatever is on our heart, let God know and be open to what God might be saying to you.

Pray in silence for a few minutes and then end the time of prayer with a few sentences from your heart or simply and sincerely say "Amen".

Continue to pray for your group after Youth Strike and let them know you will be doing this. Also, let your group know you are available if anyone wants to talk or pray more before they leave.

Scriptural Reflection and Small Group Discussion for the High School lessons provided by Rev. Chris Waddle.

Activities for the High School lessons provided by Sally Hoelscher.