Leading A Small Group

Huron Classis Fall Retreat

First and foremost, THANK YOU!!! You have answered God's call to mentor youth for this weekend and we know that can be no small task! Please know the Lead Team is here for you! We have also been praying for you to join this weekend and we are continuing to pray over you as the weekend continues. We are so excited for you to engage the youth you brought and lead them closer to Christ! You are a blessing and here on purpose for a purpose!

Small Group Support

We have heard your request for more connection and help between leaders. We again hope this year to host a **leader social!** If our plans change, we'll let you know, but find your way to the **Backyard between 7:00- 8:30 am right before worship**. We hope this will be a time we can help with any questions, frustrations, ideas, creativity etc. LITERALLY ANYTHING! If we can manage, we would love to pop into your small group during the weekend if you think it would be helpful.

About Small Groups

Small groups are split by gender and local church. Small groups meet after each worship session to debrief and dig deeper, learn more and journey together! **You, the leader, are** responsible to decide how this looks for your church this weekend, where to meet and communicate this with other leaders and your youth!

Depending on when the speaker finishes off the small group questions for each of his sessions, we will send them to you before the weekend or give them to you at registration. The small group questions are there as a helper, don't feel the need to use all or any of them, you can do whatever you think is wise and best for your youth.

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How To Do Small Groups

(*If you are already an expert at leading and connecting with Youth you can skip this section.*)

- You are here to **be present.** Even if you feel like you aren't connecting or youth aren't engaging well, they will notice that you took time to be here with them and for them. That communicates that they are important! Which is so cool!
- BRING CANDY, COOKIES, CHIPS TO SHARE!
- Sometimes it can be helpful when all youth and you are on the same elevation. You can see everyone, no one gets lost in the corner or in the back row. Sit in a circle on the floor, grass, top bunks in cabins. Think kindergarten style, lol.
- It can be helpful to set a precedent right from the beginning. I often say a bit like "I am so excited to be here with you this weekend, to see God show up and to walk with you. When we are in small groups we are in a safe place. We are here to journey together. God often shows up when we are out of our comfort zone, so I am not afraid to sit in silence, to listen, correct, learn and grow too. When I ask a question, we will go around the circle and everyone will answer. It helps us learn and grow with each other. Let's quickly pray over our time together."
- Try to not read the questions off the guide, they are more here to guide you through the sessions, take notes and support if absolutely needed.
- If this is your first time leading small groups, start with sharing who you are, a bit about you. Then get the youth to do the same. Go around the circle and ask a few direct questions ex. What is your name, grade, what are you looking forward to this weekend, silly would you rather…
- On the first night do not stress too much about the questions. Relationship building is a great first night activity! Pull out some snacks and start out with everyone sharing a high and a low from the day! Validate each answer or ask something deeper. At the end just spend some time in prayer over your small group, pray over them by using all their names. "God, I pray for _____, _____, _____, thank you so much that you brought them to fall retreat. May you show them you are here this weekend, comfort them, engage them as they seek to know you, continue to help them build a relationship with you. In Jesus we pray."

Praying

Prayer is an important part of your small group sessions. Need some ideas on how to pray with your group or what to pray about? We've shared some ideas below!

- **Take turns praying and tap a knee** when it is the next person's turn. Youth are often starting to explore praying out loud. It can be intimidating, so keep it simple with one thanksgiving and one prayer/ help request. They could pray for the person next to them or for themselves.
- **Pray short statements** and have the youth repeat you.
    - "Lord, I thank you for the gift of…."
    - "Jesus, I praise you for…"
    - "Lord, I confess I don't always…."
    - "God, I ask you for…"
- **Ask openly for prayer requests.** If someone shares, gather around and lay hands and pick one youth to open and one to close, hold quiet space for others who maybe want to pray.
- **Write down prayer requests** and leader pray for the anonymous requests
- **Guide students in prayer.** Say statements of:
    - Thanks
    - Confession
    - Praise
    - Petition
    - allow for silent prayer
- **Get into smaller groups** of 2-4 and pray for each other
- **Try praying standing up,** on your knees, head bowed, hands raised

What to Pray About?

- Pray on a theme: God and his power, salvation, mercy, grace etc.
- Thank God for forgiving their sins.
- Ask for blessings.
- Pray about families, schools, or the future
- Select a verse from the bible or a few.
- Pray Scripture back to God, like thoughts and prayers.

SMALL GROUPS QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to start discussions for this weekend. Feel free to pick out a few you think would work best with your group. The hope is that many options for questions might allow you to take the conversation in ways that may work better for your specific group.

Session #1 - John 1:43-51 - Nathanael: Jesus Knows Us

Nathanael begins as a skeptic about Jesus. Rather than arguing with him, Philip simply says, "Come and see." When Nathanael encounters Jesus, he discovers that Jesus already knows him far more deeply than he expected. Jesus sees Nathanael completely and still welcomes him.

Jesus then describes Himself as the true connection between heaven and earth. We often think we need to somehow climb our way toward God - by becoming better, behaving better, or proving ourselves worthy. But the good news is that God has come down to us in Jesus. We are invited to stop hiding, stop climbing, and come to the One who already knows us and invites us to follow Him.

1. What stood out to you most from the story of Nathanael or from the talk? Why?
2. Nathanael is skeptical when Philip first tells him about Jesus. What kinds of doubts or questions do people our age sometimes have about Jesus?
3. Philip doesn't try to win an argument with Nathanael. He simply says, "Come and see." What do you think it could look like for someone to genuinely "come and see" who Jesus is?
4. Jesus knew Nathanael before Nathanael really knew Jesus. How does it make you feel to think that Jesus knows everything about you - the good, the bad, the confusing, and the things nobody else knows?
5. Why do we sometimes try to hide parts of ourselves from God or from other people?
6. The talk described how we often try to "climb" our way toward God by being good enough or impressive enough. Where do you notice that kind of thinking in yourself?
7. What difference does it make that Christianity is ultimately about God coming down to us, rather than us finding a way to climb up to Him?
8. Is there one way you could "come and see" Jesus more honestly this weekend through prayer, Scripture, asking questions, or talking with someone?

Session #2 - John 4:1-26 - The Woman At The Well: Jesus Satisfies Us

Jesus intentionally moves toward someone many others would have ignored: a Samaritan woman at a well. He knows her life, her brokenness, and her deepest needs, yet He does not move away from her. He offers her living water - a picture of the life and satisfaction that can ultimately only be found in Him.

All of us have things we look to for happiness, identity, comfort, approval, or purpose. Those things may be good things, but they cannot carry the weight of satisfying our deepest longings. Jesus invites thirsty and exhausted people to stop endlessly chasing satisfaction and to receive life from Him. Ultimately, He can give living water because at the cross He gave Himself for us.

1. What surprised you about the way Jesus treated the woman at the well?
2. Why do you think it matters that Jesus was willing to talk with someone whom many other people would have avoided?
3. Jesus talks about physical thirst to describe something much deeper. What are some things people look to in order to feel happy, important, secure, loved, or satisfied?
4. What are some signs that we've started expecting something good - friends, sports, grades, relationships, popularity, our phones, success - to give us something that only God can ultimately give?
5. Think about the past week. When you've felt lonely, stressed, insecure, bored, or upset, where have you usually turned first?
6. Why do the things we chase so often leave us wanting more?
7. Jesus already knew this woman's story before she told Him. How is that similar to what we saw with Nathanael?
8. What do you think it practically means to look to Jesus for satisfaction rather than constantly running to other things?
9. Is there an "empty well" in your life that you think God may be asking you to recognize or loosen your grip on?What was it from the sermon that struck you the most?

Session #3 - John 6 - Bread Of Life: Jesus Is Received, Not Earned

After Jesus feeds thousands of people, the crowds come looking for Him again. But they are focused on the bread He provided rather than the One the bread was pointing toward. When Jesus tells them about the food that lasts forever, their immediate question is essentially, "What do we have to do?" That is often our instinct too. We want a checklist. We want to earn, achieve, perform, and prove that we're enough.

But Jesus says the Bread of Life is given. Salvation isn't something we earn by becoming impressive enough for God. Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life, and we receive Him by faith. The Christian life begins with grace and continues by grace: we obey God not to earn His love, but because in Christ we are already loved and accepted.

1. Why do you think the crowd was so interested in what Jesus could give them while missing who Jesus actually was?
2. Where do you see the pressure to earn things in everyday life - approval, popularity, worth, success, love, or respect?
3. Which comes more naturally to you: receiving help or proving that you can handle things yourself? Why?
4. The crowd asks, "What must we do?" Why is it sometimes difficult to believe that God's grace really is a gift?
5. What's the difference between knowing facts about Jesus, being impressed by Jesus, and actually trusting Jesus?
6. The talk said: "You don't have to become enough. You receive the One who is." What do you think that means?
7. Christians can sometimes start believing the gospel by grace but then live as though God will only be happy with them if they perform well enough. Have you ever felt that pressure?
8. How would your relationship with God change if you really believed you weren't obeying Him to become loved, but were obeying Him because you already are loved in Christ?
9. What might it look like for you to stop trying to prove yourself and simply receive what Jesus gives?

Session #4 - John 11:17-44 - Lazarus: Jesus Gives Life

Mary and Martha are grieving the death of their brother Lazarus. Both come to Jesus with the same painful words: "Lord, if You had been here…"

Jesus responds with both truth and compassion. He tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life," and then He stands with Mary and weeps. Jesus is not distant from suffering. He cares deeply about the pain and brokenness caused by sin and death.
But Jesus doesn't only sympathize. He walks toward Lazarus' tomb and calls a dead man back to life. Lazarus contributes nothing; Jesus speaks, and life comes. This becomes a picture of grace and of what Jesus has ultimately come to accomplish through His own death and resurrection.

Jesus then asks Martha the question that brings the whole weekend together: "Do you believe this?"

1. What do you notice about the different ways Jesus responds to Martha and Mary?
2. Why do you think it's important that Jesus both speaks truth and weeps with them?
3. What does this story show us about how Jesus responds when life is painful or confusing?
4. Jesus knows that He is about to raise Lazarus, but He still weeps. What does that teach us about sadness and grief?
5. Lazarus can't contribute anything toward being raised from the dead. Why is that a powerful picture of God's grace?
6. Jesus doesn't say, "I can tell you about resurrection." He says, "I am the resurrection and the life." What's the difference?
7. Across the weekend we've seen:
    - Jesus knows us
    - Jesus satisfies us
    - Jesus gives what we cannot earn
    - Jesus gives life

    Which of those truths about Jesus do you most need to hear right now? Why?
8. Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" How would you answer that question right now?
9. What questions or uncertainties about Jesus or Christianity are you still carrying?
10. When you go home and the feelings of the retreat eventually fade, what could help you continue trusting Jesus?