

SERIES OVERVIEW FOR LEADERS**SERIES OVERVIEW**

Jesus spoke extensively about the kingdom of God, but it's a hard concept to understand, and perhaps even harder to live out. Despite these challenges, Jesus invites us into being kingdom citizens in the present, the here-and-now.

This four-lesson series is focused on helping your teenagers understand what the kingdom of God is all about, and how Jesus used parables to offer insight into the truths of the kingdom. This series will open your teenagers' eyes to see the role they are invited to play in the present, as we await the day when Jesus returns and makes all things new.

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SERIES OBJECTIVES

1. **WHAT:** Jesus desires that we live under and for his reign in the present.
2. **WHY:** The kingdom of God—and God's power in and through it—is a foretaste of Jesus' new creation.
3. **HOW:** Through understanding some of the essential elements of Jesus' kingdom, teenagers will begin to understand what it means to live as kingdom citizens.

A Word About Translations: It is important to choose a readable Bible translation to use in your groups. You don't want to add unnecessary confusion. You also don't want to spend all your time mastering pronunciation and trying to define unfamiliar words.

Although there are many great translations on the market (and your own church may have a chosen favorite), we've decided to rely on the easy-to-read, teenage-friendly translation called the New Living Translation (NLT). Editors for the NLT have done a great job making God's Word accurate and understandable.

Regardless of the translation you choose, it may be helpful for your own preparation to read the assigned passage(s) in a few different translations to get a broader depth to the text(s).

A Word About Media Clips: Some of our lessons include clips from movies, TV shows, and other media, including online sources. Please know that these are put here as suggested options—they aren't vital for the success of the lesson. If you choose to use them, **we strongly encourage** you to review each clip before use. We've done our best to suggest clips that will generate meaningful conversations, but we understand that using any type of media can be controversial. We trust that you understand the dynamics of your congregation better than anyone else and will discern if our media selection will work with your group.

If teenagers ask why you use certain media from people who aren't Christ-followers, it may be helpful to explain that even if not explicitly Christian, media can be used to share God's truth. Because all humans are made in the image of God, all people (even non-Christians) can be vehicles of truth to the world. Encourage students to learn discernment in their media habits, reminding them that your use of one song or video clip is not a promotion of a specific lifestyle or of all films, songs, or TV shows.

An important note on video clips: In general, federal copyright laws do not allow you to use videos or DVDs (even ones you own) for any purpose other than home viewing. However, your church can obtain a license from Christian Video Licensing International for a small fee. Just visit cvli.com or call 1-888-771-2854 for more information.

SECTION DESCRIPTIONS

Each of our lessons has two sections. These sections include the:

1. LEADER PREPARATION
2. LESSON GUIDE

Let's explore these in detail.

1. LEADER PREPARATION

The first section—LEADER PREPARATION—is designed to give you, the leader, tools to help prepare for each lesson. To create a meaningful, impacting experience for your teenagers, we encourage you to spend as much time as you can in preparation. No one better understands the value of a youth worker's time than the team at Simply Youth Ministry. Since day one we have been creating resources that save you time so you can spend more time with teenagers. We've designed each lesson to be easy-to-use, but you'll still benefit from spending some prep time with this curriculum. In fact, **your preparation is vital to your group's success.**

For you to be effective with this curriculum, we believe it's important to do four things:

1. Pray! Ask God to give you his wisdom for facilitating this material.
2. Read the LEADER PREPARATION section for each lesson (10 minutes).
3. Choose which teaching points and questions you want to use from the LESSON GUIDE (10-20 minutes).
4. Determine a specific way that you will end the lesson (10-20 minutes). We don't tell you how to wrap up each lesson—that's up to you and/or your youth ministry team.

Here are brief descriptions of each component in the LEADER PREPARATION section.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This provides a “big-picture” perspective for the lesson. It's a quick summary that will prepare you for what you'll be discussing and sharing with your teenagers.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

There are three objectives for each lesson.

- The first objective answers the “what” question: *What* content will my teenagers learn?
- The second objective answers the “why” question: *Why* is this content important to teenagers?
- The third objective answers the “how” question: *How* might teenagers live out the truths they're learning after they leave today's conversation?

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

This will be the main verse or section of Scripture used in each lesson.

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

This is a list of other selected Scriptures referenced in the lesson. All lessons will have at least one Secondary Scripture, usually found in the Extra Discussion section.

TEACHING PREP

We offer some ideas and insights for each lesson that may help you gain a deeper understanding of the passage. Pick and choose what you will share with your group. Or don't share any of it and simply digest it for your own benefit.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Use these ideas to get your teenagers thinking about the lesson *before* your meeting and families talking *after* the group experience.

TEXTS OR TWEETS

These messages can be sent *before* the group time to get students thinking about something that will be discussed during your time together.

PARENT EMAIL

This is a short email the youth pastor or leader can send to parents *after* the lesson. It provides an overview of the lesson along with a few questions parents can ask at home to get students talking about what they learned that particular week. You're encouraged to personalize and modify this email to fit the needs of your ministry.

2. LESSON GUIDE

This is the content part for your lesson. Please feel free to (1) personalize the illustrations, (2) rephrase the teaching points, and (3) pick and choose what content you believe you will be able to use during your particular time.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND: We provide more material than you can probably use during your group time. **You will need to be the editor of the content.** Don't try to use all of it. [NOTE: If you're a volunteer leader, we recommend you adhere to the teaching strategy/desires of the lead youth worker. He/she may or may not give you the freedom to make changes within the lesson. Please seek unity and support his/her leadership.]

Review the LESSON GUIDE before each of your meetings to get a clearer idea of the activities, teaching points, discussion questions, and overall purpose of the lesson. In each LESSON GUIDE you'll find the following:

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

This includes a quick illustration, an activity, or a few opening questions to warm up, prepare, and focus your group time. You understand the dynamics of your teenagers better than we do, so please adapt this section, modify it, change it, delete it, or use as is. Some of the ideas require a little extra preparation prior to your gathering; lists of supplies or necessary preparation will be found at the top of this section.

You'll also notice that the GETTING THINGS STARTED section sometimes isn't included in a lesson. We've only included it when we believe it's beneficial.

TEACHING POINTS

This part of the lesson provides you with an intentional interactive component. We don't believe groups should be lecture-driven. The best groups are the ones where the teenagers are talking and the leader is facilitating conversation and discovery. When teenagers talk more than adults, that's a good thing!

Please understand, **this material is NOT intended to be lecture.** We've included questions designed to generate conversation. You'll quickly notice that we aren't fans of closed-ended questions—ones that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Instead, we believe in the power of questions that cause students to think, discuss, and debate. We encourage you to insert your own insights during this discussion time, but primarily as a facilitator who is challenging teenagers to learn/think. It's sort of like a dance—let students lead the discussion a bit by wrestling with the teaching point, then insert your own insights to help convey the main teaching point. There may be times when it's best NOT to give your own insights. Your group doesn't have to be like a sitcom where all the problems are solved in 30 minutes.

Most of the questions don't have right or wrong answers but will serve as a platform to help teenagers learn better and consider how to make a beeline to Jesus.

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

This is an opportunity to continue the conversation by asking more open-ended questions about selected Scripture or themes for this lesson. Or if you have a more spiritually mature group, you could send your teenagers home to think about and/or journal and/or message board their answers to these questions. [NOTE: Most groups won't have time for all of these questions because we've already provided multiple questions during the teaching points.]

LIVING IT OUT

We have provided some "first step" ideas and/or questions that will challenge your teenagers to put what was discussed into immediate action (or in the days following). The retention of a lesson and the deepening of faith can be dramatically increased when participants move into action immediately following your gathering.

SUMMARY

We have intentionally designed this curriculum to be so flexible that the summary or the close of each lesson is dependent on the facilitator/leader. We believe that good curriculum provides a foundation for healthy dialogue, but that the summary or take-home challenge relies on the insight and wisdom of the facilitator who (1) knows the content, (2) has heard all the dialogue, (3) knows the hearts/issues/struggles of the teenagers involved, and (4) understands the big picture of the youth ministry and what the leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching/discussion time.

THIS IS BIG! We've given you a lot of material and questions to ask, but the most important part in all of this is narrowing down the questions you'll ask to those that best fit your group. This is where the caring, spiritually sensitive, personally growing leader really makes a difference in teenagers' lives. After doing this a couple of times, it becomes easier, and when this curriculum has been used in real, live ministry settings, this proved to be the leaders' favorite part: feeling empowered to figure out a way to close out the session with wisdom, sensitivity, and challenge.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

This is a selected Scripture that students can be challenged to memorize following the lesson. We encourage you to return to these verses throughout the series to facilitate long-term memorization. We also encourage you to join students in committing the verses to memory. They'll follow your lead. Again, because this curriculum is adaptable and editable you may choose to have them memorize a different Scripture—that's great.