Juvenile Institutional Ministries Bible Discussion Sheets

VOLUME I

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FORWARD

This manual provides some basic material we have used in conducting Bible discussion groups for incarcerated youth in juvenile institutions. It is not intended to be a complete work, but rather merely an outline from which one can begin. Although this material is geared more for groups, it is easily adaptable for use with individuals on a one-to-one basis.

The meetings work best in a group of up to fifteen youth in one-hour sessions. Discussions are topical and cover such subjects as friendship, habits, hurts, love, self-image, anger, making decisions, etc. (See “Table of Contents” for complete listing). Ground rules for each meeting should be set and should include:

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. Each person’s opinion is respected.
3. No one in the group is allowed to talk about people who aren’t there.

The format of each meeting generally consists of:

* + Opening Discussion: To solicit general conversation on the topic to create a non- threatening environment where it’s clear that all input is welcomed and appreciated. The

discussion should lead toward establishing a “question” or “problem” that is common to all. The conclusion reached by the youth should be: “I can’t handle this area of my life on my own.”

* + Story: This serves to further state the problem illustrated in the opening discussion. It helps create the need for a solution.
  + Scripture: This is where a solution is introduced.
  + Wrap-up: This is where the leader transitions from an open discussion format into one of bringing the meeting to a close. Be sure to re-emphasize Scripture’s answer to the

problem/question which was introduced in the opening discussion, and how God can help us deal with that area of our lives. Close by asking for prayer requests, and then by praying.

Ministering to juvenile offenders in institutions is an exciting and specialized ministry. We encourage you to read thoroughly the Orientation Manual included in the following pages preceding the Bible discussion sheets, before launching such a ministry.

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**STRAIGHT AHEAD MINISTRIES BIBLE STUDY LEADER ORIENTATION**

**Overview**

Thank you for becoming a part of an outreach to young people who are often outcasts or who view themselves as outcasts from society. As a small group leader, you have been called into an exciting and important ministry. You work in a system that cannot, by law, promote religion. You minister to young people who have little understanding of the Gospel, yet who are hungry for the Lord’s presence in their lives and meaningful relationships.

Straight Ahead Ministries' mission is to see Jesus Christ transform the lives of justice involved youth. It’s our vision to create an international movement whereby every young person in the system has the opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ

Your involvement in this ministry is an answer to many prayers. You will be tested, discouraged, and elated, most likely, all in the same week. You will not be alone in those feelings, as that is the nature of this ministry, but know that over eighty percent (80%) of our volunteers stay for longer than the one-year, minimum commitment we ask for.

There are quite a few “dos and don’ts” in this manual for a reason; it’s designed to be a resource, covering many issues that may arise, but which you will rarely encounter. Please use this manual as a reference point, but also, please use the staff at Straight Ahead, the leaders of your own local ministry, and your fellow volunteers to assist you in areas where you need advice.

By following these principles, by sticking to the basic message of the Gospel, and by relying on one another, you will be effective, you will love the youth you serve, and you will grow deeper in your own love for Christ.

**Interactions within Institutions**

Contrary to what some would have you believe; we do not have the right to lead Bible studies at the detention and treatment centers. So long as states provide opportunities for spiritual guidance, they are in compliance with various statutes and Constitutional requirements. When we’re allowed into the centers, we are guests; therefore, it’s important we know the rules of the institutions and we keep a servant/guest attitude.

Since 1987, Straight Ahead Ministries and our affiliates have had few Bible studies shut down due to problems that arose at the small groups. But even one study is too important to lose. By following some

basic rules, understanding the system in which you serve, and keeping a servant attitude, you will become an integral part of the institution where you volunteer.

# Staff Relationships

The facility staff and your relationship with them, play a significant role in how effective your group will be. Each facility is different in how its staff view the groups. Most staff are receptive to what you are doing and see you as helpers and support for their work. Some, however, are suspicious of anyone coming in, as they have seen too many come in, start programs, and then leave when things get a little tough.

Most are protective of the youth and that’s something we should have in common with the staff. Once they see your commitment, they can be a great asset to get through to the youth.

There are many staff who are suspicious of Christians in general. What they know of us is what they hear from others or see on the news. They may view Christianity as being the exclusive domain of those with conservative views and as being an exclusionary religion.

Our faith should be the most inclusionary of all and you can be a witness and a catalyst for that. To the staff, you may be the only Christian with whom they have regular contact. Be open to their concerns and be available for their needs. Many staff members have come to faith because of the Bible studies and the interaction they have with the volunteers.

Despite your best efforts, there may be times when you encounter someone who is hostile to what you are doing. If their hostility is interfering with your outreach, go to that person to see what is behind the behavior; it may have nothing to do with you, but something you represent. This can be a good place for open dialogue and a place where you can work through the difficulty. Also pray for that person and for the situation.

If, after you’ve tried to talk through the situation, you still have difficulties contact your ministry supervisor for advice. It’s possible that you will need to speak with someone else at the program to remedy the situation. Only do that if the problem cannot be resolved one-on-one as this can cause even deeper problems.

Once you’ve become established at the institution, the staff will come to look at you as the “God- Person.” Many will come to you with questions and concerns, or they may look to you for prayer. The staff will often view you as someone with a more direct connection to God. Be available to help them through struggles and you’ll effectively show them the Gospel.

# Institutional Rules

To foster good relations within the institutions, it’s important we familiarize ourselves with their rules. Some programs rely on a behavioral modification model of treatment, where youth are rewarded and penalized points for following or disobeying the rules. Other programs are *seemingly* looser with the rules, as they rely on other treatment models. In either case, we need to become a part the established system of the institution by knowing the rules and living within them during our time there.

The best way to get information on the program is to ask a supervisor for an overview of how things work. Many programs have manuals they give to new volunteers or staff. Ask for one of those and familiarize yourself with the philosophy of the program.

In addition, many programs offer or require their volunteers to go through training sessions. These sessions are informative and can give a good overview of the program and the youth it serves. By asking, you are showing an interest in something they are committed to doing.

One of the most effective ways to avoid problems is to find the right person to go to if questions or situations arise. When you want to try something new (such as bringing in food, books, a guest, etc.) make sure you run it by the staff person in charge at least a week or two beforehand. Never assume you can bring something for the youth, can bring someone as a guest or can even show movies or have music.

Such seemingly harmless things can violate policies and can get the study shut down. Our respect for the program is essential if we are to minister effectively.

The most important aspect of maintaining an effective outreach is to know the program’s rules concerning interaction with youth. Can you shake hands? Can you stand and pray holding hands? Seemingly small interactions can become significant if they are not allowed.

For ministry leaders: your organization should have abuse prevention training in place for your volunteers and staff, have rules concerning interaction with the youth and policies on how to handle allegations of abuse. You should also know whom to contact in case of any issues arising in this area.

The bottom line is we must avoid even the appearance of impropriety while still being able to minister in an effective, personal way. Those two goals are not mutually exclusive and can be achieved with well-thought-out policies.

Though not exhaustive, the following rules that apply at each institution and to each Straight Ahead volunteer:

1. Do not be alone with a young person. If they want to speak with you, do it in an open area within view of a staff person.
2. Do not give or take anything from a resident without first getting permission from staff.
3. Do not promise the youth anything you cannot deliver.
4. Do not take sides in staff/resident, parent/child disputes.
5. Do not ask why a youth is incarcerated – they may share this information, but that should be at the youth's discretion.
6. Do not promise confidentiality (more on this in the following section).
7. Be wary of physical contact with the youth (see below).
8. Do not give residents your telephone number or address or take theirs without prior permission from the institution. If the institution allows you to give your address and telephone number and you do not feel comfortable doing so, you can give the youth your ministry address and the ministry can pass messages on to you.
9. Do not contact people outside of the institution for the youth. They may ask you to call a friend or a relative, but there are rules as to whom they can contact. Outside contact may only be done through the program and its staff.
10. Do not say anything negative about the program, staff or methods used at the program. The residents may try to get you to take their side when they put down the program. Even if you think that something may not be fair, do not voice that opinion to the residents. There are usually reasons behind seemingly unfair methods, and you do not know what happens during the time when you are not there. If you do have concerns, ask a supervisor if you can bring up something you are unsure about.
11. Do be courteous to staff.
12. Do follow protocol and directives from the staff.
13. Do keep to time guidelines-if you have an hour, don’t go over without permission.
14. When taking prayer requests to pass on to the prayer chain, do not use last names or other identifying information, such as where the kids are from.

If you have a question about any situation you do not know how to handle, contact a Straight Ahead staff person or your ministry supervisor.

**Physical Contact with Residents-**Some institutions do not allow any physical contact between residents and volunteers; others do not have set guidelines. You need to learn, up-front, the institution’s rules on physical contact and strictly adhere to them. To avoid difficulties, there are some basic issues that you need to consider:

* + Many of the youth with whom we work have been abused, neglected, or maltreated. Seemingly innocent gestures, such as a pat on the shoulder, can be difficult for some youth to interpret. They may pull away or get tense, they may not know how to react, or they may misinterpret the gesture as one of an aggressive or sexual nature. Always err on the side of caution.
  + You need to use your discretion. Try to get a sense of the youth with whom you are working. If you perceive the young person is uncomfortable being close you, do not try to get closer. Show your concern with words and prayer and don’t try to push to “help” the youth. This can do more harm than good.
  + Never be alone with any of the residents. If they hug you, having a staff person around can verify the innocent nature of the gesture. If they want to show you something, make sure a staff member comes with you or your ministry partner is there. Also, if you are uncomfortable with how a young person is relating to you, ask your co-leader what they think. Your partner will often see things you may miss. If you are still concerned, ask the supervisor in private and share your concerns. Be careful how you do this, as you do not want to create problems where they don’t exist.

**Staff Participation-**Another area that can cause tension is having staff in the small group. Programs will differ on whether a staff person sits in on the study or whether they will be nearby, but accessible. If a staff member will be present, ask if they want to sit in on the study or would rather sit off to the side. Either way works, as the kids won’t really notice the staff once things get started and the staff will often participate in a helpful way.

Finally, at some programs, a staff person may come in until the program is comfortable that you can control the participants. Again, many staff members have come to faith through sitting in on studies.

# Confidentiality and Privileged Communications

Youth in the juvenile justice system are protected by strict **privacy/confidentiality** laws. Those laws are designed to protect them and their families from public exposure and ridicule. In theory, the laws give the juveniles a chance not to be branded “criminals” for the rest of their lives. The basic rule surrounding confidentiality is **all personal information about the young people, even their names, should be kept between you and your ministry staff. Period.**

Unfortunately, confidentiality can be easily, though unintentionally violated. Here are a few examples:

* + When information about the youth is discussed in casual conversations with colleagues, friends, church leaders, spouses, or other family members.
  + When conversations about the youth may be overheard by others in public places, such as restaurants.
  + When prayer requests from youth contain too much personal information that may identify the youth to others—even when those requests are made to your church or to your prayer team. To maintain confidentiality, use only first names when giving prayer requests and leave out other identifying information.

The world can be a small place at times and someone who knows the youth, their families, or the victims may recognize the person you are talking about. *Any* breach of confidentiality can stop the work you do in the institution, can lead to a loss of faith in the ministry from both the staff and the young people, and can cause the youth to be less open with personal information.

The second area of concern is with **privileged communications**. Sometimes youth want to get something off their chests or confess something that they’ve done. This can get tricky, as in most states, you do not have what the law calls “privilege.” Privilege is where something confessed does not have to be disclosed to authorities or testified to in court. It often comes up in priest-penitent, attorney-client, or counselor-client relationships.

Unless you fit into one of those categories, when a resident tells you of crimes they’ve committed, for which they’ve not been fully adjudicated (when all legal appeals are over), you could be required to testify against the youth or to disclose what they’ve said to authorities. You should check with someone familiar with the laws of your state to determine the boundaries of privilege in your state.

The best way to avoid problems is to be up front and tell the youth that you cannot discuss past crimes unless they are ones for which they have been committed and fully adjudicated. This will take away any chance of you having to become a witness against the youth.

Inform all the residents at the beginning of the Bible study that you are required to share with the staff any threats to commit crimes, threats they make against other residents or staff, or any threats to harm themselves. Explain that you must do that out of concern for them. You also need to be up front and tell them you will have to report any kind of abuse that they share.

This is a serious issue, though one that does not often arise. If a kid asks a question such as, “If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone?” you must tell them you cannot make that promise. Explain you will help them as best you can and, if there’s a staff person they trust, you will go with them to talk to that person. Explain why you are taking that position, as you never want to break a trust that has developed.

# General Guidelines for the Bible Study

We believe that each Bible study should have its own character, drawing on the strengths and gifts of the leaders. The following guidelines are set out in general terms and are suggestions based on the years of experience. They work so try to incorporate as many of them as you can.

# Effective Bible Study Formats

* 1. Before the study, take some time to mingle with the staff and residents. If there are new residents at the program, introduce yourself and invite them to the study. Try to remember names and if they don’t come to the study, invite them to come to the next time you see them.
  2. Set up the room in a way that facilitates a good, open discussion. With the permission of the program, move the furniture into a circle or semicircle. This will be a subtle way of showing you are in control of the group and sitting in a circle is a great way to facilitate discussion, shows you are all part of one group, and helps you see what is going on in the group. If you have more than one leader, sit opposite each other, so as not to have an “us and them” situation.

If someone doesn’t want to sit in the circle, explain to them that it would be easier for you if they were closer. If they refuse, don’t push the issue during the study. Afterwards, try to find if there was a reason for the refusal (they may be having trouble with others in the group).

If there is a problem between the kids or if the youth feels uncomfortable, tell them to sit next to you during the next Bible study and explain that it’s just easier for you when everyone is in the circle.

* 1. Start out by mentioning you are a volunteer, and you’re not being paid to be there. Explain you are there out of your love for the Lord and out of your concern for them. Incarcerated youth are not used to people helping them or caring for them for nothing. They will respect you for that and they will be more open to what you are sharing.
  2. Open with prayer. This will set the tone for the time together and can often calm down the residents before you get into a discussion. If you have some new kids, ask the group if they know what prayer is. They may not know so you can share that prayer is simply talking with God, who is present in the room.
  3. Make the study a safe place for all who come. Often, residents will see the Bible study as a break from the hassles and the fear they may experience in the institution. The study should be a place where all feel welcome and safe. To make this a reality, you need to always maintain control, make sure to include in the discussions all who attend, and prevent any verbal or physical bullying.
  4. Follow a general format of starting a study with a story, having questions and answers about the story, reading applicable Scripture, reviewing what it means, discussing how it applies, and wrapping it up with a good summary. Be mindful that the youth will often have limited attention spans, so try to keep things moving. DO NOT preach at them, as they need to participate and be heard! The best studies are the ones where the kids speak most of the time.
  5. Make sure to leave time to take prayer requests from the residents. You can either have them verbally tell you what they want prayer for or have them write requests down. Sometimes the kids have a hard time writing so offer to do that, without embarrassing them. When taking the requests, you should write down only the first name of the youth (if there is more than one person with the same name, use a last name initial). Tell the residents that you will be sending the requests to people who have made a commitment to pray for them. And make sure you contact the prayer chain coordinator with the requests that night or the next day.
  6. End the study with a time of prayer. If there’s time, ask the kids in the group if they want to pray out loud. If some do not want to pray, then tell them they can say, “pass.” Many have never prayed out loud before, so this is a good opportunity to remind them God is present and prayer is simply having a conversation with God. Many residents look forward to this time of prayer. When you pray, keep it relatively short so you do not lose them.

# Avoiding Problems

For the most part, you will have few issues during the small groups, especially after you have earned the trust of the youth. There are, however, some steps you can take to makes sure things go smoothly:

* 1. Bullying is a big issue, so pay attention to what is being said and how it’s being said. Don’t let the discussion turn to the putting down or making fun of staff, administrators, clinicians, other kids, their families or even gangs.

Sometimes, a youth will have an issue with another resident or staff, and they’ll try to bring the discussion to a personal level against the other person. You need to be firm in telling the youth we are there to support each other and not to put people down. If you start to see some issues, remind them they agreed not to do that. If they persist, again remind them they all agreed to follow the rules and they’re not doing that. If that doesn’t work, you may have to end the group early or ask the offending youth to step out and then follow up afterwards.

* 1. Don’t take sides on parental or staff issues or conflicts between youth. Often, the residents will present scenarios where the other person looks like the bad guy, but we don’t know the whole story. When a discussion involves someone who’s not in the room, end it and point out that it’s not fair to the other person to talk about them when they can’t put in their side. Leaders can share how the Bible asks us to pray for those with whom we have trouble, the Lord wants us to respect others, and speaking of others who are not there is gossip.
  2. Use the same version of the Bible as the residents use. We encourage the use of contemporary versions of the Bible, written at an understandable reading level. Some translations designed for people who have English as a second language are helpful as many of our young people have difficulties reading. It is tempting to use our favorite translation of the Bible while we let the kids read in another version, but when a kid gets stuck on a word or asks about a phrase that’s not in the leader’s, you cannot help them, and they may get embarrassed.

Sometimes youth will have their own Bible and it may be a different translation from what you are using. This can lead to a good discussion on why there are so many different Bible translations, as many of the kids have no clue as to its origins. You can explain Scripture was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic and as language has changed, so have the translations to reflect the original meaning of the Scripture.

* 1. Avoid embarrassing the residents. Nothing will stop a kid from returning to a Bible study quicker than an embarrassing moment, no matter how innocently it starts. Ask for volunteers to read and never call on individuals to read or to pray out loud. Many of the youth cannot read or read poorly. If a young person wants to read, but is having difficulty, help them along (but do not be overly helpful – let them try to work through a tough word), do not let other residents make fun of the reader, and encourage them with praise when they’re done.
  2. Give everyone a chance to respond. Let the group know that everyone present has something to offer, and that you would like to hear their perspectives and insights. Sometimes one or two youth will want to dominate the conversation, and while you let them know that you appreciate their responses, you can also invite others to respond so that everyone is included.
  3. Affirm each young person when they respond. Look for something positive to reinforce in their response. We are not looking for “right” or “wrong” answers, we are encouraging their genuine responses. This is not always easy, but many more in the group will be involved if you can encourage them this way.
  4. Be careful *how* you say things. Do not use words that are over the youths’ heads or are not understood by the younger generation. Above all, remember that many Christian terms we use regularly have **no** meaning to the kids. They will usually not ask you what a word means, as they’re too embarrassed. It’s okay to use Christian terms, but make sure you explain them or ask the group if they know what you are saying. Keep checking in with them to make sure they’re following the discussion, especially after reading from the Bible.
  5. Stay focused yet be flexible. Often, we prepare a study only to find the kids need something else. Be prepared to respond to those needs, but be careful not to be led down a rabbit trail by one or two kids, as you may lose the rest of the group. Gently try to get them to focus back on the discussion. If they persist, tell them you can talk about their subject after the study. If you don’t do this, you will spend every lesson discussing demons and end times and you’ll lose the attention of the others in the group.
  6. If you don’t know the answer to a question, tell the group you’ll do some research and get back to them at the next time. We often feel we must know everything by rote, but we don’t and the kids don’t expect us to know everything. Young people will respect you for saying you don’t know something and you’ll investigate it, rather than trying to wing it.
  7. There will be a time when, for the sake of the group, you’ll have to ask one or two youths to leave as they’re not following the rules and are distracting others. This is a difficult thing to do, but will rarely happen if you keep control of the group. When this happens, make sure the staff know the young person is leaving the group. Ask if you can speak with them after the study to explain why you had them leave. Many of the kids aren’t used to having people explain themselves and this could be a good learning moment for them. You can invite them to come back next week. If the problem persists, some people have found that asking the youth not to come back for a week can help them refocus.

**Controversial Areas**

# In General

The young people will have many ideas, attitudes and life experiences which probably aren’t what you’re used to finding in other small groups. They’ll share things that will take us out of our comfort zone, which isn’t a bad thing. If they’re willing to share, they’re showing you trust and how you respond is paramount to deepening relationships.

When you go through the Bible studies, you’ll notice they keep to basic, applicable themes relating the Gospel to every-day life for the youth. Many of them have a difficult time with basic Christian concepts, such as faith, grace, and salvation. Keeping to those basics will keep us away from areas that are divisive. A general rule is if something divides the church, it is something to avoid in your small group.

When we look for new Bible study leaders and others to work with the youth, we look for those who are good teachers and those who are teachable. Those people can readily understand there are many areas the Lord left "gray" and for which He gave us the Holy Spirit and our own minds to investigate.

There are areas where Christians can disagree and still be on the same side. We need to be able to discuss issues, acknowledge when there are disputes amongst believers, and remember the Holy Spirit is the One who will do the convicting. Again, we need to keep in mind why we are in the institutions, that many attendees will be either new to the faith or will have no faith at all. Many of the issues that seem important to us, will be irrelevant to them.

With all that said, inevitably, areas that stir up debate will arise. In those situations, a few general guidelines can assist in resolving them:

1. If youth have a controversial matter they wish to discuss, see if you can talk about it one-on- one (again, within view of staff) outside of the Bible study. Otherwise, such a discussion can disrupt a whole group. Others in the group may misinterpret what is said or may not have any idea what you are talking about. It only takes one resident telling the administration “The Bible study leader says that all (fill in the blank) are going to hell” or are “evil” to have the group shut down – even if that was never said.

Also, be aware a youth in your group could be struggling with the issue and could be hurt or misled by what is said. Others may be trying to subtly “get” that person by bringing things out at the study. How you handle the subject will affect the young person’s perception of God and their perception of how God views them.

Find out why the young person wants to discuss the matter and find out where they stand on the issue. They could be dealing with what they’re asking about. You can point out we all have struggles, all fall short, God loves us as we are, Jesus came for those who struggle, and He will help us deal with our issues as they arise.

One way to connect with the youth in such situations is to share some of our own present struggles, but in a non-threatening, non-burdening way. If we refer to all our problems as being in the past, we can give the false impression believers do not have any trouble in their lives. If we come across that way and the new believer starts to have a bad week, they may think, "I must not be a Christian".

The more transparent we are, the deeper our relationship will be with the youth. But again, before sharing a struggle, ask if it will benefit the youth or if it’s for your benefit. Keep in mind the youth look to you as a representative of Jesus. While sharing your struggles be sure to share the victories. Show them hope.

1. When youth are exploring controversial issues, let them know that Christians hold different positions on many matters. Listen to the young person’s concerns and to their point of view. Encourage them to openly ask God for direction on the matter.
2. Again, let the Holy Spirit do the convicting. We are there to present the love and hope of the Gospel and introduce a relationship with Jesus. We can and should share our core beliefs and the basis for those beliefs. In the end, however, it is the Holy Spirit who brings knowledge and discernment.
3. In general, stay away from political discussions as they are divisive and detract from the Gospel message. Jesus focused on bringing hope and Salvation during turbulent political times. Follow His example and stick to the Gospel of Hope.

# Some Specific Issues

* 1. Sexual and relationship issues are probably the most common ones you will face. Most of the youth are in their early to mid-adolescence and are struggling with their developing sexuality, experiences, and relationships. Be aware that many have been emotionally, physically, and sexually abused and such abuse will affect their thoughts on faith, guilt, forgiveness, and issues surrounding sex and relationships.

Their thoughts and behaviors, which may be less than healthy, are most likely based in the pain that they’ve experienced. The most effective response to this pain-based behavior is caring, gentle and empathetic. Let your response be compassionate, with an emphasis on God’s love and care for them.

* 1. Issues of sexual and gender orientation have become much more prominent in the last several years and have led to both heartfelt discussions and, unfortunately, deep divisions. The leaders of the institutions in which we serve are protective of all the young people they serve, especially those who are LGBTQ, who make up a higher percentage of incarcerated youth as opposed to the general population.

We’ve seen several studies shut down and chaplains and volunteers banned from institutions because of insensitive discussions with the youth. Because of this, Straight Ahead has instituted a specific policy in which we agree not to discuss the issue in the small groups. Your response to questions about sexual and gender orientation should simply and clearly be as follows:

*“What I can tell you is that God sees you and who you are and loves you deeply. We have committed to DYS that anything else regarding sexuality and gender is talked about with your therapist.”*

* 1. Substance abuse is another difficult topic to talk about. Many young people have discovered that substances can work to numb a lot of their pain. One young man said marijuana was “Novocain for the soul.” He used it so he wouldn’t hurt. Here is where you could open a discussion on hos such pain relief is temporary and fails to get at the root source of the pain.
  2. Be aware that you will be meeting young people whose life experience and worldview may be very different from yours. If we go into a program and talk badly about what, to adolescents, is the center of their lives – their culture, friends, gangs, and family – then we will build barriers to the Gospel.

A well-meaning visitor once went to a Bible study and said she thought wearing make-up was wrong based on her view of Scripture. When the Bible study leader came back the next week, several kids were upset and one asked if his grandmother was going to hell because she wears lipstick. Sharing an opinion on a cultural issue can do a lot of harm.

Some of the youth may bring up seemingly shocking behaviors or statements as a test, to see if you will turn on them or away from them. They do this to protect themselves from the hurt of another rejection. Listen, do not judge, and be open.

Finally, many of the kids will use colorful language and not even know what they’re saying could be offensive. Some staff may correct the kids, but many will not. Don’t be offended and don’t take it as a sign of disrespect. Many have grown up with such language as the norm. You can draw a line and explain why, but don’t be insulted. Again, this can be a time of teaching.

* 1. We do not need to speak negatively of other religions while sharing our faith, so never put another faith, tradition or religion down.

The best way to encourage young people to explore a faith relationship with God is by sharing the positive aspects of your faith and letting young people know what it means to you. Explain there are going to be differences, even within a church, that these differences have divided the Church for centuries, but those differences do not affect our own personal relationship with the Lord. Stick to the basic Gospel message of love and hope and acknowledge that God can work through other belief systems to bring people to Himself.

**Following up With Youth**

One area that often discourages leaders in institutions revolves around what happens to the youth once they leave the programs. Young people who have grown in their relationship with the Lord in great ways often fall back into old behaviors once they get back home. They do not want to go to a church youth group, and they often end up back with their old friends. They have changed, but their environments have not.

There are ways to help. First, if a young person wants to stay in touch with you once they leave a program, ask someone in the administration if you are allowed to have contact outside of the institution. Some states have laws against such contact while others welcome it. If you are allowed to have such contact, ask if you can take the youth’s address and telephone number. If you cannot, ask if

you can give him your address and number. Again, you can use the Straight Ahead or your own ministry address if you want.

If you cannot make a commitment to contact the young person, do not take the information. They do not need another adult letting them down.

Most likely, the youth will not contact you and you’ll have to make the first contact. You may find the youth’s family is open to such contact, indifferent or even hostile to it. It may require several attempts before the young person reaches back. It’s worth it to stay in.

If you do make contact, try to set up a casual meeting. You do not need to do anything exciting, or church related. A meal, biking, playing ball, or hanging out are all great events for the youth. Oftentimes, you will get to meet their friends, as they want to show you off.

In general, keep the discussion light. The young person may be feeling guilty about not praying or about wandering away from the Lord. Remind them that God is still there and still loves them.

One thing to be prepared for is the youth not showing up for a meeting. This can be difficult, but do not take it as a personal put-down. The young person may be testing you to see if you will keep trying to see them.

Also, commitments are often something new for the kids. They may never have needed to keep an appointment (outside of court!) and may do something else if a better opportunity comes up. Call later to explain that you were at the meeting spot as planned. See if you can get together some other time. Your commitment is a new model for them.

Young people with whom you’ve been in contact may stop returning your phone calls or may try to avoid you. This often happens when they’re starting to mess up in some way. You are a reminder of what God wants them to be and they may be feeling guilty about that. When that happens, a message, a card, or a letter from you can help to break the ice.

Today, all our kids have a social media presence so find out which platforms they hang out on. There will be ones you’ve never heard of, but most will have some you can contact them on. When you do see their profiles or what they write or whom they follow, you’ll see another side of them. That’s a good thing, as you’ll know them better. It may shock you a bit, but they are letting you in.

Something else to keep in mind is that you are starting to develop a healthy relationship; they may try to sabotage it. Again, most have never had a healthy relationship with an adult or they’ve had ones where the adult leaves. Subconsciously, they want to protect themselves from the hurt that comes with such abandonment, and they pull away. If that happens, point out to them what you are seeing and feeling—they often don’t see it. Then reassure them that you are in this for the long haul, which often results in a deeper level of commitment.

Also, a young person will act differently on the outside than when locked up. Many of the young people will not show affection in the same way or may act as if they don’t want you to be around.

Remember, they may not be comfortable at first or they may be less demonstrative with their affection.

One leader met a young man near his home and they went to the mall where the young man talked with all his friends and all but ignored the leader. The leader did not follow up with the young man after that and several months later he got a letter from the young man asking why he stopped contacting him after they had such a great time together at the mall! They reconnected, with the leader understanding the limited nature of the young man's showing of affection and several years later, the leader was an usher at the young man's wedding.

One of the most difficult aspects of aftercare is trying to get a young person involved in a church. They, like most of us, are intimidated by new things, especially church. By the time they leave the program, they will have built up a relationship with you, not with another person or church. If you live near the youth, invite them to come to church or to an adult Bible study with you.

If they are looking for a church in an area that is not near to you, contact someone you know from a church in the kids’ neighborhood. Find someone who is willing to meet with you and the youth and who is willing to commit to taking them to church. If you do not know of a good church or

contact person, contact Straight Ahead or your local ministry supervisor and we can try to help.

Many of our kids have survived by manipulating those around them. They’ve gotten what they’ve needed that way for years so they may try to manipulate you, which never feels good.

Most of the time, they will respect you enough not to try this; however, they are used to getting things through manipulation and they don’t always see it as being wrong. Fifteen or seventeen years of learned behavior does not usually go away overnight. If a youth asks for money, do not give it to them. Find out what the need is and see if you can help in some other way (like filling out job applications). This can be hard to do, but it will keep your relationship on a solid foundation.

You should also check out what aftercare programs the youth is involved with through the state agency that has custody of the youth. Many organizations, such as Straight Ahead, have aftercare or job training programs and you can plug that youth into one of those programs.

Finally, never give up hope. We don’t know what impact a card, a call or a visit will have on a kid. One leader sent a Christmas card to a young man he had not heard from in over a year. Several months after Christmas, that young man sent a note to the leader saying that the card was the only Christmas gift he had received. Through that seemingly small act, the leader was able to reconnect with the young man and the young man’s faith began grow. God gives us the opportunity to plant seeds, but He is the one who makes them grow.

**Concluding Remarks**

If we keep mindful why we are doing this, to show young men and women that the God of all creation, loves them, cares for them, and wants to have a relationship with them, then we cannot fail. We need to let God work through us to bring these young people into a relationship with Him.

*This orientation section was written by John Kinsley, Director of International Outreach for Straight Ahead Ministries*

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# TOPIC: Anger

## Opening Discussion

* What kinds of things make you angry?
* How do you act when you get angry?
* Do you think everyone gets angry?
* Is it a sin to get angry? [No. Jesus got angry too] Is anger ever right? [It can be]
* Who do you affect the most when you get angry? [self]
* Do you think there are ways to handle anger in a better way? What are some ways?

## Scripture

* The Bible talks a lot about anger:
  + Proverbs 14:17,29 What are some foolish things you have done when you were angry?
  + Proverbs 15:1 How have you seen this to be true?
  + Proverbs 29:11
  + Ephesians 4:26-27, 31
* What does holding a grudge do to you?
* Do you ever act out of anger and then “stop and think about it?” What usually happens then?
* Someone once said that when you hold a grudge or are angry at someone, that person takes up a lot of space in your head. What do you think that means?
* So, based on all of this, how do you think God can help *you* with *your* anger?

## Wrap-up

When we are angry at someone, we think more about that person than we should. He or she has done something to us and they end up inside our heads! They keep getting to us. When that happens, ask God to help you let it go, to move on and let God deal with that person so you can be free of them.

# TOPIC: Dealing With Bad Days

## Attention-getter.

* Read the story, “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.”

## Opening Discussion

* Do you ever have days like that – when it seems like nothing goes right?
* What do you do with days like that?
* Do you think God can make a difference on those days? How?

## Scripture

* Read Acts 16:16-24 (about Paul and Silas being arrested for doing good)
  + How do you think they felt about their day?
  + How would you have reacted?
* Read Acts 16:25-36
  + What do you think made Paul and Silas able to sing?
  + Do you think they knew what was going to happen as a result?
  + Do you think God could ever give you an attitude like that?
  + What was the result of their actions? What happened to their guard?
  + What if they had reacted like most people would have reacted? What could have happened?
  + Read Philippians 4:12-13 Talk about Paul’s life and how through all those different situations he had learned to be content.

## Wrap-up

God can give us a peace on the inside that will give us strength to handle even the toughest situations. On the very bad days we can come to God and know that He understands and cares and will be with us through the whole situation.

**Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day**

I went to sleep with my gum in my mouth and now there’s gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

At breakfast Anthony found a Corvette Stingray car kit in his breakfast cereal box and Nick found a Junior Undercover Agent code ring in his breakfast cereal box but in my breakfast cereal box all I found was breakfast cereal.

I think I’ll move to Australia.

In the carpool Mrs. Bigson let Becky have a seat by the window. Audrey and Elliott got seats by the window too. I said I was being scrunched. I said I was being smushed. I said, if I don’t get a seat by the window, I am going to be carsick. No one even answered.

I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

At school Mrs. Dickens liked Paul’s picture of the sailboat better than my picture of the invisible castle. At singing time, she said I sang too loud. At counting time, she said I left out sixteen. Who needs sixteen? I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

I could tell because Paul said I wasn’t his best friend anymore. He said that Philip Parker was his best friend, and that Albert Moyo was his next best friend and that I was only his third best friend.

I hope you sit on a tack, I said to Paul.

I hope the next time you get a double-decker strawberry ice cream cone the ice cream part falls off the cone part and lands in Australia.

There were two cupcakes in Philip Parker’s lunch bag and Albert got a Hershey bar with almonds and Paul’s mother gave him a piece of jelly roll that had little coconut sprinkles on the top. Guess whose mother forgot to put in dessert?

It was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. That’s what it was, because after school my mom took us all to the dentist and Dr. Fields found a cavity just in me. Come back next week and I’ll fix it, said Dr. Fields. Next week, I said, I’m going to Australia.

On the way downstairs the elevator door closed on my foot and while we were waiting for my mom to go get the car Anthony made me fall where it was muddy and then when I started crying because of the mud Nick said I was a crybaby and while I was punching Nick for saying crybaby my mom came back with the car and scolded me for being muddy and fighting.

I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I told everybody. No one even answered.

So, then we went to the shoe store to buy some sneakers. Anthony chose white ones with blue stripes. Nick chose red ones with white stripes. I chose blue ones with red stripes but then the shoe man said, we’re all sold out. They made me buy plain old white ones, but they can’t make me wear them.

When we picked up my dad at his office, he said I couldn’t play with his copying machine, but I forgot. He also said to watch out for the books on his desk, and I was careful as could be except for my elbow. He also said don’t fool around with his phone, but I think I called Australia. My dad said please don’t pick him up anymore.

It was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

There were lima beans for dinner, and I hate limas. There was kissing on TV, and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad-train pajamas. I hate my railroad-train pajamas.

When I went to bed Nick took back the pillow, he said I could keep, and the Mickey Mouse night light burned out and I bit my tongue. The cat wants to sleep with Anthony, not with me.

It was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia.

*Judith Viorst, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (New York, Aladdin Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972)*

# TOPIC: Can One Person Make a Difference?

## Opening Discussion

* Who is the most important person in your life?
* Did this person make a difference in your life? How?
* Can you think of a time when you made a difference in someone else’s life?

## Story

Read the story of Miss Thompson

## Scripture

* What did Jesus give up to make a difference in our lives?
* Read John 15:9-17 (Living Bible)

Discuss the passage. Explain what Jesus did in dying for us on the cross. He showed his love for us by laying down his life for us.

* How does being loved that much by someone change us?

## Wrap-up

* How does being loved that much by someone change us? In what ways will it change how we love others?
* Jesus laid down his life and showed his love for everyone. Now everyone can receive that love. Jesus invites you to accept his love for you in a way that you experience his full of acceptance of you.

**The Special Story of Miss Thompson**

I know of a schoolteacher named Miss Thompson. Every year when she met her new students, she would say, “Boys and girls, I love you all the same. I have no favorites.” Of course, she wasn’t being completely truthful. Teachers do have favorites and, what is worse, most teachers have students that they just don’t like.

Teddy Stallard was a boy that Miss Thompson just didn’t like, and for good reason. He just didn’t seem interested in school. There was a deadpan, blank expression on his face and his eyes had a glassy, unfocused appearance. When she spoke to Teddy, he always answered in monosyllables. His clothes were musty, and his hair was unkempt. He wasn’t an attractive boy, and he certainly wasn’t likeable.

Whenever she marked Teddy’s papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure out of putting X’s next to the wrong answers and when she put the Fs at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy’s records, and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The records read:

1st Grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.

2nd Grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.

3rd Grade: Teddy is a good boy, but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

4th Grade: Teddy is very low, but well-behaved. His father shows no interest.

Christmas came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson’s class brought her Christmas presents. They piled their presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Among the presents, there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift, but he had. Teddy’s gift was wrapped in brown paper and was held together with Scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, “For Miss Thompson from Teddy.” When she opened Teddy’s present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The other boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy’s gifts, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting on the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said, “Doesn’t it smell.

lovely?” And the children, taking their cue from the teacher, readily agreed with oohs and “ah’s”.

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind.

He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, “Miss Thompson . . . Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother . . . and her bracelet looks real pretty on you too. I’m glad you liked my presents.”

When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher; she had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones, and especially Teddy Stallard. By the end of that school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement. He had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

She didn’t hear from Teddy for a long time.

Then one day, she received a note that read:

*Dear Miss Thompson:*

*I wanted you to be the first to know, I will be graduating second in my class.*

*Love,*

*Teddy Stallard*

And four years later:

*Dear Miss Thompson:*

*As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.*

*Love,*

*Teddy Stallard*

Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy’s mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there; she had done something for Teddy that he could never forget.

*Who Switched the Price Tags?, Tony Campolo, Copyright 1986, Word Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee (pp. 69-72).*

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# TOPIC: Coming Clean

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to “come clean?”
* Have you ever “come clean” on something on your own? What were the results?
* Do you think it’s always best to “come clean?” Why or why not?
* Are there some things that you can never “come clean” on?
* What do you think God’s opinion is on “coming clean”?

## Scripture

* Read the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9). [Explain how tax collectors would collect more than people really owed and pocket it for themselves.]
* What made Zacchaeus want to come clean?
* What were the results?
* Why do you think Zacchaeus would want to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times what he stole from people?
* Do you think Zacchaeus was better off coming clean or not? Explain.

## Story

Read “The Chuck Colson Story”

* What happened as a result of the “foolish” coming clean Chuck Colson did?

## Wrap-up

God honors us when we come clean on things we’ve done wrong. Even when it doesn’t make sense to us, God will always use our honesty for the very best in our lives.

**The Chuck Colson Story**

Chuck Colson was head legal counsel to President Nixon. He had gotten where he was by mowing over a lot of people, perhaps that’s why they had nicknamed him the “Hatchet Man.” People knew to stay out the way of Chuck Colson or get hurt. That is exactly why President Nixon wanted him as his head lawyer. Colson knew how to get things done, whatever it took.

In the early 1970’s, Nixon’s schemes began to unwind. It climaxed at the famous “Watergate” Hotel where many of the conversations of the Democratic presidential re- election plans were secretly taped.

Over the course of the months following, the television news began to report on much of the corruption that was going on in the White House. Chuck Colson was in the thick of it. For the first time in his life, he saw the very real possibility of losing everything he had spent his entire life building.

One night when he was filled with anxiety, his name regularly being run through the muck on the evening news, Colson went to visit a friend who he knew was a Christian. Up until now Chuck had displayed no interest in God, but at this point in his life he knew he needed more than himself. His friend led Chuck to Christ that evening.

The transformation in Chuck Colson was like night and day. People said they could hardly tell it was the same person. But they were sure it wouldn’t last. They had known the “Hatchet Man” for a long time, and he was always up to something corrupt.

As the media unraveled more and more of the “Watergate Scandal”, President Nixon resigned from office. Many of his aids went to trial for their part in the illegal activities. One by one they got off through the services of the country’s best lawyers.

When it came time for Chuck Colson to go to trial, he decided to go a different way. He was a Christian and serious about his faith, and so he confessed to all the illegal activities he had been involved in while working for the President. He wanted to “come completely clean”. As a result, Chuck was the only one of the entire group who was sent to prison. Everyone commented on what a fool Colson was.

While in prison, Chuck began to lead a Bible study for some of his fellow inmates. Through him, many of them grew in their faith. Chuck also saw how little there was for spiritual programming in prison.

When Colson was released, he intended to just live a quiet life with his family, but God had other plans. He couldn’t get his friends on the inside of the prison out of his mind. He began praying fervently for them and God gave him the vision for beginning a prison ministry.

Today Prison Fellowship is the world’s largest prison ministry with programs in hundreds of prisons throughout the world. God will never waste any of our experiences when we turn them over to Him.

*Adapted from the move, Born Again, Thomas Nelson Entertainment, Nashville, ©1982.*

# TOPIC: Compassion

## Opening Discussion

* Who would you be the most upset about hearing that he/she had gotten hurt really bad?
* Are there some people who you wouldn’t care about if they got hurt?
* What kinds of things have you done to help someone who really needed your help?
* How do you feel after helping someone out?
* Have you ever helped someone who really didn’t deserve it?
* What are some of the things that help us decide whether or not we should help someone? [Who

they are . . . if I have enough time . . . can I afford it . . . have they ever done anything for me . . ]

## Scripture

* Jesus said to a group of people that the most important thing is to “love God and to love your neighbor as ourself”. What do you think that means?

The people wanted to know what Jesus meant by “your neighbor” “Who is my neighbor” they asked.

Jesus responded with a story.

* Read the story of The Most Important Commandment and of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). (Explain why Samaritans were despised)
* If Jesus had told the story today, who do you think He might have used as the characters?
* Who are the people Jesus might be asking you to have compassion for?
* Are there some people, while you are in here, that need your help?
* What specifically could you do for them?
* What are some ways in the future God might want to use you to help others?
* How has God shown His compassion to us?
* How did Jesus show compassion for us?

## Story

* Read the story about Trevor

## Wrap-up

* God had compassion on us by sending His Son to die for us. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. He had no reason to come down and be poor for us other than the fact that He loved us. We can turn to Him

and accept His love. With Himself as an example, He is asking us to do good to others. Read Matthew 10:39 and 42

**Trevor**

In December of 1983, eleven-year-old Trevor Ferrell felt disbelief while watching a news program about the street people of Philadelphia. Unable to understand how people could live without a home just miles from his own suburban community, he coaxed his parents [Frank & Janet Ferrell] that very night to take him to the inner city where the dispossessed live.

This is part of a letter found in Frank Ferrell’s car on February 9, 1984:

*Last night in my loneliness, poverty, and utter despair I could have ended it all. It was freezing cold and pouring rain. I had reached the dregs of human suffering, having lost both my wife and son. After I had long since given up, there I was, a street person. A person I had often looked upon with uncaring eyes. Suddenly there in front of me stood a little boy with a face of spring, who gave me a respectful, “here sir, I have a blanket for you.” He had given me more than a blanket, he gave me new hope. I could not keep back the tears. I fell in love with that little boy named Trevor and at the same time I fell in love again with life.*

Trevor started going to the streets every night with blankets and other things for the street people. Now in Philadelphia, there is a mission for the homeless called “Trevor’s Place.”

*Taken from the hardcover book jacket of Trevor’s Place, Frank and Janet Ferrell, Harper & Row, NY, ©1985.*

# TOPIC: Contentment

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be content?
* What things do most people think will make them content? [money, power, things, relationships]
* What would make you content?
* Who is the most content person you know?
* Do you think God wants you to be content?

## Scripture

* Read Ecclesiastes 11:8
* Why is this so hard?
* What do you think it means to “wish your life away?” Do you have a problem with this?
* Most people share this same problem. There’s a bumper sticker that reads: “Life is what happens to you while you’re making other plans.” What do you think that means?
* Read Philippians 4:12 (Paul writes this from prison.)
* What do you think is the “secret” of being content?
* Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 – *Give thanks in all circumstances.*
* What things can you be thankful for?
  + - Knowing God sees me, knows me, and loves me.
  + Knowing God is always there . . . He’ll never leave me.
  + Knowing God has a purpose for my life.
  + Knowing God can bring good in your life even when bad things happen.

## Story

**Chinese Pastor Story**

There was a man in China who had been in prison for thirty years because he was a pastor there. Under Communism it was illegal to teach about Jesus. After he was released, he was asked what it was like to be in prison. Certainly, the pastor could recount numerous stories of beatings and torture. Instead, he responded, “God has been very good to me.”

(From experiences of Scott Larson while smuggling Bibles into Communist China in 1984.)

## Wrap-up

You may feel that you could never be content in the situation that you’re in right now. Both Paul and this Chinese pastor found the secret of contentment even while they were in prison. If you learn that secret now, you will be content in any situation.

# TOPIC: Daily Time with God

## Opening Discussion

* If there is someone who you really look up to and you had an opportunity to get to know him/her, how would you go about it?
* What kinds of questions would you ask?
* Do you think you would ask for advice?
* How much time do you think it takes to really get to know someone? Spend time together once a month? . . . once a week? . . . once a day? . . . for how long?
* Once you really get to know the person, how much time would you want to spend with him/her? more? less? why?
* Is Jesus someone you would look up to and want to get to know? why?
* How do you think you would go about that?
* If you had the chance, what things would you want to ask Him about?

## Scripture

* Read Mark 1:35

Why do you think Jesus needed to spend time with His Father?

* Read Psalm 143:8-12

What will we receive by spending daily time with God? [direction, rescue from enemies,

know God’s will, His leading in my life, protection from trouble]

* How can we spend time with God?

Even if we pray, how does God speak to us? (Bible, Holy Spirit, Others, Circumstances) How do we know it is God? (will not go against God’s nature of Love)

## Wrap-up

If you wanted to spend time with your favorite musician or sports here, it probably wouldn’t be possible. But God, the Creator of everything, wants to spend time with you every day!

# TOPIC: Dealing With Uncertainties

## Opening Discussion

* What are some things you fear about the future?
* Are there some of these things that you know will happen? [most things uncertain] Which ones? Which ones are you not sure will happen?
* What are some of the ways you deal with the fear of what might happen to you?
* If you could have anything about your future guaranteed, what would it be?
* Do you think God has any guarantees for your future?
* What might they be?

## Scripture

* Read the story about Abraham and Isaac:

Genesis 15:5-6 What is God promising Abraham? [He is giving him a guarantee.] Explain

why it was hard for Abraham to believe he was going to have a son. [He and Sarah were over 90.]

Genesis 22:1-18 Read and talk through the story. Talk about why it would be hard to understand that God’s promise for Abraham’s future still would happen. Why would God have had Abraham go through all this?

## Wrap-up

* God has many promises for those of us who trust Him with our lives. We may right now be really uncertain about our future, but He knows all about it.

John 3:16 He promises eternal life with Him in heaven. Joshua 1:5 He promises you that He will never leave you. John 10:10 He promises abundant life.

Romans 8:28 All things will work together for good.

* Whatever you are facing right now, God is going to walk through it with you. He wants to develop you as a person while you are going through tough times. You are going to be alright with Him at your side.
* If you have never trusted God with your life, you can do that and He will be there for you and help you with the things you are facing.

**TOPIC: Drugs and Alcohol**

## Opening Discussion

* What are some reasons why people use drugs and alcohol?
* Would you say that most people who use drugs would like to quit? Why?
* Do you think there are any positive reasons for using drugs?
* What would be some negative ones?

## Attention-getter

* If you had the opportunity to speak about drug and alcohol abuse to a group of third graders, what would you say? [Have different ones in the group actually pretend they are making the speech.]
* What would you want to teach your kids about drugs?
* How could you best teach them? [by example]

## Scripture

* Many people say that since many drugs are from plants that God made, then it must be okay to use them to get high. Read Genesis 1:9-13, 27-31.
  + Like most things in life, plants can be used for good or for bad. Hemp for marijuana or for clothing and medicine. Coca for Novocain or crack. Poppies for morphine or heroin. It is

how we use them that makes them harmful.

* Read John 10:10
  + What does Jesus want to give us? Who is the thief? What does he want?
  + Drugs and alcohol are like the thief: he promises everything—you will feel good, you will have no worries or pain, you will be liked, you will fit in—but he will take everything, fast or slow, he is killing the person you are or the one God says you can be.
* Read Proverbs 23:29-35
  + What can you relate to in this passage?

## Wrap-up

God wants us to feel good inside permanently. Drugs and alcohol are a temporary solution to deal with pain that only causes more pain. Ask God to fill the emptiness inside of you with Himself and to help you be free from the pain of alcohol and drug abuse.

# TOPIC: Failure

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be a failure?
* Does everyone fail?
* When have you felt like you failed?
* What does it feel like to fail?
* Is there a difference between someone who fails and a “failure”? What is the difference?
* Does it sometimes feel like it is not even worth it to try again?
* Do you remember your failures more, your successes more, or both equally?
* Why is it important to remember both? What happens if you only remember the successes? What happens if you remember only your failures?
* Are there times when it seems more comfortable to fail than to succeed? Why? [people already expect me to fail . . . people will have high expectations . . . it’s easier . . . it feels more familiar]

## Scripture

* Read Luke 22:31-34, 54-62 – discuss all that was going on that night about Peter’s denial of Jesus after walking with Him for three years.

How do you think Peter felt?

* Read John 21:15-19 on what happened when Jesus saw Peter after the resurrection. [Jesus’ only concern was if Peter still loved him, not that he had failed Him. Jesus never brought it up to Peter

again]

* How many times did Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him? [Three – once for each time he failed. Jesus restored him for each failure.]

Why was it important for Jesus to do this three times for Peter?

* What did Jesus tell Peter to do? [Feed My sheep.]

Why? [Gave him responsibility; showed He trusted Peter even when Peter failed.]

* What was the result of this forgiveness and showing of trust? [Peter became a leader of the apostles and three years later, refused to deny Jesus and gave his life for His faith, which helped

others to keep strong].

## Wrap-up

Jesus knows we have failed many times. Just like Peter, we have made bad choices that lead to failure. In the middle of our failures God wants us to turn to Him. He does not condemn us. He

wants to tell us He still loves us, and He wants to use us. We choose what we do when we fail.

# TOPIC: Fears/Trusting Jesus

## Opening Discussion

* Has there ever been something that you would really like to try doing, but you never have because you were too nervous? [Example: skydiving]
* What held you back?
* What’s scary about trying something new?

## Attention-getter

* Read “The Amazing Story of Henry the Ice Cube”
* What was Henry’s fear?
* Was Henry happy with his life in the freezer?
* Why was it so hard for Henry to change when he was so miserable anyway?
* Have you ever wanted to change the way your life is going, but have been worried about what would happen to you if you changed?

## Scripture

* Read Matthew 14:22-33 (Peter walks on the water)

Could all the disciples have walked on the water if they had wanted to?

Why was Peter the only one who got to? What happened to Peter after a while?

What made him sink?

What kept him from drowning? [Focus; Peter sank when he turned from Jesus; When he came back, Jesus rescued him.]

How long did Jesus wait before he helped Peter? [Peter cried out and Jesus immediately helped him]

What takes our focus from Jesus? How do we get it back?

## Wrap-up

* Jesus invites us – like He invited Peter to come out on the water – to come and walk with Him through life. If you are feeling miserable the way things are going now, He wants you to take a

risk with Him. He says, “I have a better life for you! But you will have to trust me, like Peter had to.”

* Sometimes we decide to trust Jesus with our lives and all of a sudden, we start to look around at the circumstances and we feel like there is just no way we can make it. That’s when things start to

fall apart. But Jesus is there for us, as He was for Peter, to pull us up so we can keep our eyes on Him instead of our circumstances.

**The Amazing Story of Henry the Ice Cube!!!**

Henry was an ice cube. He was a miserable ice cube. He felt frozen, as you can well imagine! And he wanted to be warm and comfortable.

But he was afraid, for somehow, he sensed that if he was warmed up he would never be the same again!

So Henry managed to slip out of his tray and hide in a far corner. He was miserable, but in his own way he was safe, and for a while he convinced himself he was comfortable and happy. At times, though, when the door opened and he had to slink in behind a package of meat or under a corn package, he would think: “What a miserable existence! Why can’t I be free? Why must I hide and shiver in this cold? If only I could pop out of this freezer and let happen what may!” But he was afraid, and he kept hiding for weeks and months on end.

Then one day he got so miserable he just couldn’t take it any longer. He worked his way out past the meat and ice cream to the very edge of the freezer. He was determined not to be taken by whoever it was that took ice cubes, but he decided to expose himself to the outside world whether for better or for worse.

Now his shivering and trembling was out of fear. He even worked up an agonized ice cube type of sweat, for this was a terrifying moment! What happens to an ice cube that wants to be warm? Henry didn’t know, but he was going to find out!

Then suddenly the door opened. It came when he didn’t expect it. In fact, he was just getting ready to pop back into the far, inner recesses of the freezer. But there he was, all exposed. He would surely be taken as the first ice cube if he didn’t do something in a hurry. So without a second thought he popped out of that freezer in a flash, slithered down the leg of this strange creature who used ice cubes, and plopped gently down on the floor. He wasn’t even noticed! Home free! Now he was on his own, fearful though his moment of freedom was for Henry.

He had hardly gotten settled on the floor when the leg moved and a bright sunbeam coming through the window caught Henry full on. How beautiful that sunbeam was, Henry thought! Henry shone and glistened. But he also, as you can well imagine, started to melt! That was, in fact, what made him glisten and shine so brightly.

Nobody really noticed him there as Henry became a glob of cold water, and then a patch of warm water, and then evaporating moisture, and of course nobody noticed him until he became part of a cloud, and then a raindrop (which, of course, most people noticed, although they never really picked Henry out from the rest!) So Henry began a life of great satisfaction. He wasn’t cold and frozen anymore, and as he began to realize how much more meaningful life was out here that it had been frozen up into an ice cube . . . well . . . he was just mighty glad he had had enough courage to get out of that freezer in the first place. Things were much better once he had gotten out into the sunshine.

*Hubert F. Beck, Fantasies for Fantastic Christians, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1977). Used by permission.*

# TOPIC: Forgiving Others

## Opening Discussion

* What do you think is the hardest thing to forgive someone for?
* What makes forgiveness so difficult?
* Do you think forgiveness is necessary?

## Story

* Read the story about Jonah
* What made forgiveness the “most powerful force” in the world to Jonah?
* How hard do you think it must have been for that father to forgive Jonah?
* Why would he do it?

## Scripture

* Read Matthew 18:21-35 The story of the unforgiving servant
* What did Jesus mean to forgive 70 x 7 or 77 times? [each time]
* What did the servant who was forgiven do to the other? Why?
* What ended up happening to him?
* This seems harsh, but what was the point Jesus was making? [use it to stress the importance of forgiveness both for the person needing it and the person needing to give it—that gives us freedom.]
* Read James 5:15-16

What does forgiveness do for the person who’s agreeing to forgive?

* Read Mark 11:25-26

Why would God not be able to forgive us if we won’t forgive others?

(if we want to hold on to a grudge, we are hindering God from working in us)

## Wrap-up

* Forgiveness is something that we can’t do in our own strength. Yet there is nothing more freeing to both the person being forgiven and the person who is doing the forgiving. It is truly the “most

powerful force in the world.”

* Because it is impossible for us to do this by ourselves, we need God to work in our hearts. First, we must confess that we can’t forgive this person in our own strength. Then, we must ask for

God’s power to even want to forgive them. Lastly, we can say, “God, I forgive him/her and I ask You to forgive them, too.”

**The Story About Jonah**

Jonah had finally been caught. Ever since he was a boy on the streets of New York City his life had been full of violence. As a teenager he became deeply involved in the Mafia . . . as a hit man.

By his mid-twenties Jonah was finally convicted on three counts of murder and was sentenced to Attica State Prison. While he was there, the violence continued. Jonah did all that he knew about . . . hurting people. Jonah grew up in an abusive family where his father beat him, his mother, and his siblings. This was the only life Jonah knew.

One Sunday morning in Attica, one of the prison guards woke Jonah up and said he was on the list to go to church. Jonah said, “What? I’ve never been to church . . . I don’t want to go to church . . . I’ll never go to church. Get out of here!”

“Your name is on the list,” the guard said. “You signed up and you have to go.” They argued back and forth for several minutes until Jonah finally got out of bed saying, “Alright, get off my back!”

When Jonah walked into the chapel his mouth dropped. He recognized the guest preacher as the father of one of the guys he had killed. He had seen him every day during the trial in which Jonah was found guilty.

Immediately Jonah thought he had been “set up”, that this man was going to kill him. So when the preacher stopped preaching and walked over to Jonah, he panicked. When the preacher got to him, he said, “Jonah, I love you and I forgive you for what you did to my son.” And then he hugged Jonah.

When Jonah went back to his cell that day his head was spinning. But, it was that phenomenal act of forgiveness from that preacher that brought Jonah to give his life to Jesus Christ. He became active in at least five Bible studies a week. All that mattered to Jonah was getting to know Jesus Christ more and more.

Within a few years, Jonah was released from prison. He spent the first night in a burned- out car along the highway in the Bronx. But he knew that if he stayed there even one more day he’d end up right back in the same old stuff. The only phone number Jonah had was that of a Christian from Massachusetts who came into the prison chapel once a few years earlier. Jonah called him up and he told Jonah he could come up and live with them until he got on his feet.

God began using Jonah to go into some of the Massachusetts juvenile detention centers to share his life with kids.

Truly, forgiveness was the most powerful force Jonah had ever encountered.

# TOPIC: Forgiving Yourself

## Opening Discussion

* Have you ever had a time in your life when you knew others had forgiven you, but you couldn’t forgive yourself?
* Did it matter at all that the other person forgave you?
* What are the things that make it hard to forgive yourself?
* How does it affect you when you can’t forgive yourself?
* What problems can come up when someone cannot forgive him or herself?

## Story

* Read “Duane’s Story”

## Scripture

* Read Acts 8:1-4.

[Tell about how Paul had ordered the death of many Christians.]

[Tell about Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-28).]

* Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

What made it possible for Paul to forgive himself?

Do you think God would do the same for you?

* Read Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34 and 1 John 1:9.

## Story

* Read the story of “Repeated Sins”

## Wrap-up

* While it is hard to forgive others, sometimes forgiving yourself is even harder. Yet it is essential if we’re going to move on with our lives. Someone once said, “Seventy percent of people in

mental institutions could go home tomorrow if they knew they were forgiven.”

* If God, who is perfect, can forgive and forget our sins, we need to ask Him to help us forgive ourselves, too.

**Duane’s Story**

Duane had been having nightmares while he was in detention. It was the first time he had time to think about what he had done.

Every night he would see his victim and how he hurt him so badly. No matter how hard Duane tried to block it out of his mind, the nightmares wouldn’t go away. He dreaded when he would have to go to sleep.

*\*Duane was in a detention center Bible study that Scott & Hanne Larson led in Massachusetts.*

**Repeated Sins**

There is a man who has been involved in some sinful pattern for longer than he cares to think about. How many times he has confessed this miserable sin to God, promising that he would never do it again? And how here he is again, confessing the same thing: “Lord, I could die with shame. Again and again I have done this thing. I confess it to you, and promise that I will never, ever sin this way again. Will you forgive me?” From heaven come words, “I forgive you. It is all forgotten. You are clean to start over again.”

So that man feels wonderfully free. God has forgiven him. What more can he ask? All afternoon he revels in the belief that he will never fall into that same sin again. And then, that very night, temptation comes to him and he fails.

Well, he can hardly pray. Wasn’t it just that morning he fervently promised God he would never sin that way again? He almost makes up his mind not to pray at all because he is so embarrassed. He will just ignore it, and maybe God won’t notice. But his guilty conscience gets to him, and finally he begins to talk to God.

“God, I’m so embarrassed I can hardly talk to you. I did it again.”

“Did what?”

“That sin. The one we talked about just this morning.”

“That’s funny. I don’t remember any sin.”

*Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford, Unhappy Secrets of the Christian Life, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 199), p 60.*

# TOPIC: Friendships/Friendship with Jesus

## Opening Discussion

* How many new people do you think you meet each year?
* How many of those do you consider friends?

One statistic says that the average person meets 2,500 new acquaintances per year, and out of

that only seven would be considered as friends.

* Do you think there are different levels of friendship?

John Powell’s five levels1 (each one is more meaningful and risky):

1. *Hey, how are you doing? What’s up?*
2. Share basic information: *Did you see the Bull’s game last night?*
3. Offer opinion: *I don’t agree with what you’re doing.*
4. Share feelings: *I feel hurt by what you said.*
5. Complete openness; share everything.

* What’s the deepest friendship you’ve ever had?
* What are the necessary qualities of a good friendship? [trust, able to share openly, common interests, etc.]
* What are the benefits of having a really good friend?
* Do you think Jesus would make a good friend? Why or why not?
* Do you think that Jesus would want to be your friend?
* At what level is your friendship with Him right now?
* What do you want it to be?

## Scripture

* Let’s look at some of the qualities of friendship Jesus has: John 14:6 – *truthful*

Isaiah 25:9 – *trustworthy*

Proverbs 18:24 – *always there*

Psalm 139:1-4 – *knows me completely*

*John 15:9-17—what does Jesus say about Friendship? Why is He our friend? If you have time, start with the story of Jonathan and David, 1 Samuel 20*

## Closing Story

* Read the story about Joe.

## Wrap-up

* Have the hard times in your life served to strengthen your friendship with Jesus or hurt it?
* How could Jesus be a friend to you now?
* How does a friendship with Jesus begin?
* Read Romans 10:5-13 [explain the Gospel]

1 John Powell, Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I am? (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1969)

**The Story About Joe**

Joe grew up in Roxbury, Massachusetts, always in trouble as a kid. Alcohol, drugs, violence, in and out of juvenile halls. These were just the normal ingredients in Joe’s life.

When he was seventeen, Joe’s girlfriend caught him cheating on her. This made her furious. Finding a way to get Joe back became her motivation for living. One day in Roxbury, a murder was committed. The police had no suspects in the case and were pleading on the television for anyone with information to please call in. “This is it!” thought Joe’s ex-girlfriend. “This is how I can get him back.”

She called the Boston Police Department and said she knew who had committed the horrible crime. “It was Joe,” she said. Later that day Joe was arrested. The trial went quickly.

With one eyewitness to testify about the crime, Joe was quickly convicted and sentenced to life without parole.

After several miserable years of bitterness and anger in prison, Joe began attending chapel services in the prison. It was there that he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

Over time Joe was able to forgive his ex- girlfriend for what she had done to him. He even

began to have a desire in his heart for her to come to know Jesus Christ herself. One day he asked the Bible study leader who had led him to Christ if he would go and share the same message with her. He agreed and went to see her. That night she also received Jesus into her heart.

A couple of months later she called the Bible study leader and confessed that she had made up the entire story about Joe committing the murder in Roxbury. She said she now wanted to come clean and tell the truth. He told her that doing so could mean that she could serve time for perjury. She said she knew, but wanted to do what was right.

That happened several years ago, and up to now, no judge has been willing to re-hear the case. But the amazing thing is that Joe, after nearly twenty years in prison, says about the years he has served: “They have been the best years of my life. This is where I found Jesus, and because of Him, my life has been full for the first time. He’s my best friend, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything.”

*\*As told by Don Moberger of Burlington, MA, who led Joe and his girlfriend to Christ.*

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# TOPIC: God’s Plans vs. Our Plans

## Opening Discussion

* If you could do anything with your life, what would you want to do?
* How much time do you spend planning for the future?
* If “hope for the future” was on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being “no hope for me” and 10 being “I have great, great hope for the future”, where would you rate yourself right now?
* Do you think God has any plans for you?
* What do you think they might be?

## Story

* Read “A Little Boy and His Dream” story
* Why wouldn’t Billy’s dad give him the red wagon he wanted? [he had something much better in mind]
* How is that like our relationship to God? [we think we really know what we need and want, and don’t trust that God has the best for us]

## Scripture

* Read Jeremiah 29:11

What does it say about God’s plans for you? [to prosper you; not harm you; give you hope.

Give you a future]

Why is it so hard to just trust God’s plans instead of trying to rely on our own?

* Tell the story of Moses:

What do you know about Moses? Read Exodus 2:11-15

What was Moses’ plan? [to free the Israelites] How did he go about it? [killed an Egyptian]

Where did it get him? [running for his life in the wilderness for forty years] Read Exodus 3:1-11

What was God’s plan for Moses? [free the two million Israelite slaves]

How did He want to go about it? [Moses opening Red Sea and doing miracles] How was God’s plan compared to Moses’? [much greater]

* How do you think we can find out what God’s plan is?
  + Proverbs 3:5-6
  + Psalm 32:8
  + Psalm 73:24

## Wrap-up

God’s plans often make ours look small by comparison. To know God’s plan requires spending time with Him, reading and praying, so He can show us what they are.

**A Little Boy and His Dream**

Billy had seen the greatest thing today. He saw one of his friends on a little red wagon. Oh, he wanted a wagon like that!

What he couldn’t do with a wagon like that!

Every day he would ask his father for such a gift as that red wagon. His father didn’t respond to Billy and his requests.

Finally, Billy asked him point blank, “Dad, are you going to get me that red wagon or not?” His father said, “No, I’m not going to get you that red wagon, Billy.” Billy got so mad at his father, that he wouldn’t even speak to him anymore. His father had denied him the one thing that he really wanted most in life.

When Billy’s birthday came a few months later, Billy wasn’t even excited about what gifts he might receive. All he knew was that he wasn’t going to get that red wagon. Billy’s dad brought out his present, and as Billy opened it he was shocked.

No, it wasn’t a red wagon, it was a brand new beautiful red bicycle! He couldn’t believe it! None of his friends had anything like that! He wouldn’t even think of asking for such a gift.

# TOPIC: God’s Way, Not Ours

## Opening Discussion

* Do you think God would ever ask a person to do something that was not humanly possible? Why, or why not?
* Can you think of anything in your own life that God might be asking you to do or give up which seems impossible for you to do in your own strength?
* Why would God do that to you?

## Scripture

* Read about Gideon in Judges 7:1-22.
  + Why do you think God kept asking Gideon to make his army smaller?
  + Do you think it was humanly impossible to beat the enemy?
  + How do you think our own strength sometimes could get in the way of God doing things?
  + What would be some situations where God might ask you to trust Him, when it otherwise seems foolish to do what He’s asking you to do?

## Wrap-up

* Read and discuss Proverbs 3:5-6

God gives us a promise that it always pays off for us to do things His way. God

doesn’t always give us the proof up front. We can trust him even when we can’t see the outcome.

# TOPIC: Habits

## Opening Discussion

* What is a habit? What habits do people have?
* Have you ever had a habit you have tried to break?
* What is hard about breaking a habit?

## Story

* Read “Creatures of Habit”
* Why didn’t the animals go into the new barn?
* What’s so hard about changing?
* Are there times when you’ve wanted to change [behavior, attitudes] and have known it would be better, but have still chosen the old way? Why?
* The Apostle Paul who wrote most of the New Testament talks about this struggle, and he is talking about himself.

## Scripture and Wrap-up

* Read Romans 7:21-25 Discuss this very real struggle an how you can relate to it.
* Then read Romans 8:1-2 and talk about what it means to have the power of Christ’s life-giving spirit at work in you.

**Creatures of Habit**

Hiram was a good man – a good farmer, too. The crops had paid off well at the last harvest, and he and his wife felt quite snug and secure in their little home now that winter was coming on.

Only one thing bothered Hiram – the old barn. Its roof was leaky, there were a few boards rotted off the sides, and the dirt floor was uneven so that puddles collected when it rained. Hiram was a sensitive soul who really loved his animals, and he winced to remember last winter when the worst storm blew sleet right through the old barn from one end to the other. The horses’ water froze solid, and the little calves had ugly yellow icicles hanging from their muzzles.

Rising from his chair so quickly that he startled his wife, Hiram went to the phone and called Moco Edwards. “That new barn I was talking to you about?” he reminded Moco. “I want it. Start right away so it’ll be finished before real cold weather sets in.”

Nothing had pleased Hiram so much in a long time as watching that new barn go up. It pleased Moco, too, because Hiram had insisted that nothing, but the best materials and workmanship go into it. He and his wife were going to be mighty comfortable this winter in their house, Hiram reasoned, so why shouldn’t his animals be comfortable, too? He had even had a thermostatically controlled heater installed.

As it happened, the finishing touches on the new barn were completed just the day before the first cold snap was due to hit. An orderly man who liked to do things one clear step at a time, Hiram had Moco’s workmen tear down the old barn that very day, leaving nothing but the outline of the old foundation.

That night Hiram proudly ushered his animals into their new home and pulled the doors shut, warm and tight. In his warm bed Hiram enjoyed not having to worry about his animals, and not feeling guilty about them being in a cold, drafty barn while he was in a snug house.

Next morning Hiram and the Mrs. set out early for town, leaving the barn doors open for the animals in case it should turn bad. While they were in town the wind began to blow, it began to rain, and the temperature dropped to freezing, turning the rain into sleet. Hiram didn’t feel a bit uneasy though, thinking of his cattle and horses filing into the new barn.

When they returned to the farm early that evening, Hiram went out to the barn. When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness of the warm inside, he saw that there wasn’t a single animal there.

Puzzled and frightened, he ran outside to scan the fields, seeing nothing. Then behind the barn he saw all of his animals. Miserable, huddled together with drifts of sleet and snow heaped upon their backs, his cattle and horses stood within the vague outline of the foundation where the old barn had once stood.

*Author Unknown*

# TOPIC: Hardened Hearts

## Opening Discussion

* Do you know anyone who you would call a “hard” person?
* Do you think that person was always that way?
* What kinds of things make a person hard?
* Are there some experiences in your life that have made you hard?
* How can you tell from the outside that a person is hard? [actions, attitudes]
* Do you know a soft-hearted person? What is that person like?
* Have you ever had an experience that softened you?
* Do you think people’s hearts ever get hardened toward God?
* What kinds of things make people hard toward God? What softens them?

## Story

* Read the story about Bob Erler

[Discuss what made Bob Erler soft toward God, and how that changed his life.]

## Scripture

* Read Hebrews 3:12-15 [explain and discuss]

## Wrap-up

There may have been a lot of things in your life that have caused your heart to get hardened. Jesus really loves YOU and wants to soften your heart like he did for Bob Erler. As you allow yourself to be loved by God, some of the walls you may have felt you needed to protect yourself, will begin to come down. God can be trusted, even when people have let us do.

**The Story of Bob Erler**

Bob Erler was on escape from Florida State Prison where he had been serving time for being convicted of a double murder. He had changed his name and was now involved with organized crime in Florida. One day, while he was living in a small town waiting for a package to arrive containing a semi-automatic rifle, things began to unravel.

When he went to the post office, things looked suspicious. It turned out that the package had broken open and the gun had fallen out while they were sorting the mail. The post office called the police, and they were waiting for Bob to pick up the gun.

Suspecting something was up, Bob quickly walked out of the post office and took off in his car. Soon, a fleet of police officers were trailing him. It turned into a 100-mile-an-hour chase. The police shot over 100 bullets into the car before Bob finally hit an embankment and rolled the car.

He got out of the car and continued to run, and the Chief of Police chased him on foot, yelling for him to stop. Bob began a string of profanities telling him to kill him. Finally, the Chief shot him with a bullet to stop him.

Back in the jail cell, the Chief told Bob, “I love you and Jesus loves you” and gave Bob a Bible. He just swore at him and told him, “If you want to say something to me, come in and fight me like a man!”

After several months in an isolation cell because of repeated suicide attempts, a group of professional Christian athletes came to the jail to put on a program. Two of the men, Roger Staubach (former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys) and Paul Andersen (the world’s strongest man) had heard about Bob Erler (the

notorious “Catch-Me Killer”). They asked the warden if they could talk to Bob.

The warden said they could, but that he was a dangerous man and would have to be shackled. The two men asked the warden to make an exception, and the warden reluctantly agreed.

They told Bob how God had a plan for his life, and if he gave his life to Christ, He would turn it around. Miraculously, that day Bob prayed to receive Jesus.

When he went back to his cell, nothing really felt any different. He began to read his Bible, but he didn’t understand it. He prayed for the first time in his life, “God, if you’re really there, all I ask of you is that you let me see my son, Bobby. He’s fourteen years old now and I haven’t seen or heard from him since he was a baby.”

The next day it was announced that Bob had a visitor. It would be his first visitor since being locked up. When he went to the visiting room, he saw the image of himself as his son, Bobby, stood there before him. He began to cry loudly, hugged his son and thanked Jesus for how He had shown him that He was real.

Bob began to grow in faith. Eventually he finished Bible college through correspondence courses, became an ordained minister, and baptized over 600 other inmates. He knew he would die in prison, for he was serving a sentence of 99-1/2 years, but he was committed to living every day of his life in service to Jesus.

Some years later, Bob received a full pardon from the governor, citing “a complete change of character” as the reason. Today Bob travels around the world speaking in prisons and churches about the power of God to soften a hardened heart and change a man forever.

*Taken from the video Bob Erler Testimony, Cons for Christ Prison Ministries, Inc., Fredericton, CA, 1989.*

**TOPIC: How to Follow Jesus**

**Opening Discussion**

* What do you think it means to be a follower of Jesus?
* Who do you know, who you can tell by their actions, they follow Jesus?
* Have you ever tried to live the Christian life and felt like you failed at it?
* Do you agree or disagree with the statement, “It’s impossible to live the Christian life”? Why or why not?

**Scripture**

* Read Galatians 2:20
* Read John 15:1-15 (the vine and the branches)
* What do you think these verses mean? [The Christian life can only be lived by Christ. Our part is to allow Him to live His life through us.]
* Why do farmers prune branches? [to produce better crops]
* How is this different than trying to be a good person?
* What are some ways that we can stay connected to Jesus?
* What does loving each other have to do with being a Christian and staying connected with Jesus?
* How is being a Christian different than other religions? [Others are based on *what you do to get to God.* Christianity is based on *what Christ did for you so you can get to God. In other religions, people are doing things to reach God. In Christianity, it is God who reached down to us through Jesus.*]

**Wrap-up**

Sometimes we get so frustrated trying to live the Christian life that we don’t even realize we’re trying to do it on our own. Jesus never intended for us to try doing what’s impossible. Instead, He wants us to turn to Him and ask Him to live His life through us.

# TOPIC: Hurts

## Opening Discussion

* What kinds of things hurt people?
* How have you been hurt?
* How does getting hurt affect us and how we relate to people?
* Do you sometimes feel like no one understands?
* What are some things people do to forget about their hurts?
* Do you think it makes a difference that God says He cares?
* And if Good cares, what do you think he can do about it?

## Scripture

* Read John 4:7-18, 25-30, 39-42 [explain about the woman most likely being an outcast since she was there by herself, and explain the story as you go along, Jesus knew she was hurting.
  + Explain in verse 13 how getting thirsty again relates to our attempts to get rid of our hurts [only temporary solutions]
  + Explain in verse 14 that God’s solution brings lasting results.
  + Explain in verses 16-18 that Jesus knows her need for love, and that she’s been trying to get it through men, but it hasn’t worked.
  + What are some ways you’ve tried to fill your needs, but it hasn’t worked?

## Wrap-up

Jesus comes to you as He did to the woman at the well, not expecting your life to be perfect. He knows exactly what you need. The living water, his love for us can touch and heal the deep hurts inside each of us

# TOPIC: Is God Fair?

## Opening Discussion

* Have any of you ever been blamed for something you didn’t do?
* Were you punished for it?
* How did that make you feel?
* Whose fault, was it? [Who did you blame?]

## Story

* Read Part A of the “Harold Morris Story”
  + If you had a relationship with God, do you think things like that would happen to you?
  + Do all things go well for godly people?
  + Then what difference would it make to give your life to God?

## Scripture

* Read Genesis 39
  + What do you think made Joseph not go to bed with Potiphar’s wife? [vs. 9]
  + What did God do for Joseph?
  + How do you think Joseph felt about God while he was in prison?
  + How could he have reacted? [Briefly explain what happened while he was in prison: he never turned his back on God or blamed Him.]
* Read Genesis 41:37-43 [Explain how God honored his obedience even when things didn’t look good for him.]
* Read Part B of the “Harold Morris Story”

## Wrap-up

* God promises in Romans 8:28 that if you trust God, He will produce good things in your life even through the worst situations.
* We always have a choice in how we react to our situation. We can become bitter, or we can trust that God will work in any situation.

**The Harold Morris Story**

Part A

Harold Morris grew up an OK kid. Sure, he partied more than he should have, was never too faithful to any one girlfriend, didn’t care much about school . . . but he wasn’t much different than any of his other friends, and in fact, he was better than most of them.

After getting through high school, he was with a couple of party friends when one of them told Harold to pull his car over at a convenience store. They told Harold to stay in the car while they held up the small story for some cash. After several minutes, the two guys came running out yelling, “Drive! Drive!!”

“What’s going on?!” Harold demanded after they’d gotten a ways out of town. He knew from the looks on his friends’ faces that something had gone wrong.

“The jerk wanted to be a hero. He went for the alarm to call the cops. I pulled a gun on him and told him stay away from the alarm, but he wouldn’t listen to me.”

“What?! You shot a guy? Are you crazy?!

Harold screamed. “Is he dead, or what?”

“No, no he’s fine, I just shot him in the leg.

Keep driving.”

Shortly after that Harold moved to Atlanta, ditched that crowd and tried to start over. Before long he found himself right back with the same old stuff. Parties every night, not able to hold down a job, a string of girlfriends . . .

One night Harold received a call from an old girlfriend who had caught up with him.

“Harold, what’s going on? I just saw your picture on the front page of the newspaper.

You’re wanted for murder!” “What?! That convenience store worked must have died. Wait a minute. I had nothing to do with it. I was in the car. It wasn’t even my idea . . .”

“Well, you’re in a lot of trouble, Harold.” Within a couple of days the police arrested

Harold. At the trial, both of his so-called friends testified to the fact that Harold shot the man.

Harold was given two consecutive life sentences at Georgia State Prison, while his buddies walked.

Part B

After serving twelve years in Georgia State Prison, Harold Morris knelt in a roach-infested cell and gave his life to Jesus Christ. God began to do a great work in Harold.

Sometime later, the prison began allowing him to speak at local high schools about the negative effects of drugs, sex, and crime. Harold had committed to serving Christ in that prison and to being God’s light there for the rest of his days. But God had other plans.

In 1984, the Governor of Georgia signed a full and complete pardon for Harold Morris, freeing him from prison and from even having a criminal record. Since that day he has been serving Jesus Christ with his life, speaking to thousands of youth about how God can take a life that was going nowhere and change it forever.

*Taken from Twice Pardoned by Harold Morris (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1986).*

# TOPIC: Lasting Change

## Opening Discussion

* How many of you have said to yourself while you were in here or at another treatment center, “I really want to change when I get out” or “I really want things to be different”?
* How has it worked so far for you?
* What’s so hard about changing?
* Do you ever feel frustrated about it?
* What about God, do you think He can make a difference?
* Some people say, “I’ve tried God, but it didn’t work for me.” What do you think they mean by that?
* What does it mean to have it work?

## Scripture

* Tell about Paul. He loved God and was spending his life telling others about Jesus and the life he has for people, yet he wrote Romans 7:15-8:1-2.
* Have you ever felt like Paul?
* Can you think of a time when you really wanted to do the right thing, but ended up doing just the opposite?
* What do you think it means “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?”
* Explain how the Spirit of life in Christ sets us free.

**Wrap-up**

Sometimes we get so focused on trying to do better and we get frustrated. Paul experienced that because of God’s forgiveness and love, with no judgment or condemnation, he could be free to live a new life. That same new life is available to us. Let God’s spirit do the work in you to give you the power to live free.

## 

# TOPIC: Loneliness

## Opening Discussion

* Do you know someone who is lonely?
* What makes that person feel lonely?
* Are there times in your life when you have felt lonely?
* What does that feel like?
* When you feel lonely, what is your greatest wish?
* Have you ever felt lonely in a group of people?

## Story

* Read the story about Nicky Cruz. [Explain how he was a gang member in New York City.]
* What made Nicky Cruz feel lonely when he seemingly had a lot of friends?
* Have you had similar feelings? When?
* The preacher kept saying, “Jesus loves you.” How can that make a difference for a person who is lonely? [Tell about how Nicky Cruz experienced the love of Christ and how it gave him a new

purpose to live and a feeling of never being alone.]

## Scripture

Read Psalm 139:3-12, 17-18

## Wrap-up

We have all had times in our lives when we felt lonely and empty inside. As we just read in the Bible, God is there all the time even when we feel the worst. We have to choose, just as Nicky did, whether we want God to be personally involved in our lives so He can fill the emptiness with His love. Once we have a relationship with Him, we will never be completely alone again.

**Nicky Cruz Story**

I tried to stare him down, but he kept talking. “Nicky, I’m not scared of you. You talk tough, but inside you’re just like all the rest of us. You’re sick of your sin. You’re lonely. But Jesus loves you.”

Something clicked. How did he know that I was lonely? I didn’t know what he was talking about when he said sin. I was afraid to admit my fear. But how did he know I was lonely? The gang was always with me. I had any of the girls I wanted. People were afraid of me – they would see me coming and move off the sidewalk and into the street. I had been the leader of the gang. How could anyone think I was lonely? And yet I was. And now this preacher knew it.

I tried to get smart. “You believe you are going to change me just like that?” I said, snapping my fingers. “You think I’m going to hear you and pick up a Bible and walk around like a preacher and people are going to start saying Nicky Cruz – angel – saint?” But I realized that he meant business. That he was sincere.

“Nicky, you didn’t sleep much last night, did you?” Again, I was amazed. How did he know that I hadn’t slept?

Wilkerson continued, “I didn’t sleep much last night either, Nicky. I stayed awake most of the night praying for you. But before I did, I talked to some of your boys. They tell me that no one can get close to you. They are all afraid of you. But Nicky, I’ve come to tell you that somebody does care. Jesus cares. He loves you.” And then he looked me straight in the face, “One day soon, Nicky, God’s Spirit is going to deal with you. One day, Nicky, you are going to stop running and come running to Him.”

I said no more. I got to my feet and turned my back on him and walked back into my apartment, shutting the door behind me. I climbed the steps to my room and sat on the side of the bed looking out the window. His car was already gone when I looked down. In the east, the sky was beginning to turn a rosy hue. The huge building across the street that housed Brooklyn Tech blocked my view of the horizon. But suddenly, like catching a whiff of the sea when you’re still miles up the river, I had a feeling there was more to life than this. More than these towering concrete buildings – these prison walls of glass and stone.

I thought of his words, “One day you will stop running, and come running to Him.” I didn’t even know who He was. But I thought, sitting there on the side of my bed looking out over the trash-filled street with the sound of the trucks grinding and roaring down the thoroughfare, that He must be something like the sun rising out of the ocean on a cloudless day.

Or maybe something like the morning star that still hung in the dawning sky.

Maybe . . . Someday . . .

The time was closer than I knew.

*Nicky Cruz, Run Baby Run (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1964), pg. 114-115.*

# TOPIC: Looking Back/Moving on With God

## Opening Discussion

* Have you ever had an experience where God really did something for you, or where you really felt He was real?
* What were your feelings about God right then?
* Have those first feelings changed? How?

## Scripture

* Read Exodus 15:19-24.
  + What are some things that have happened to you that made you doubt God or think that what He did for you wasn’t real?
  + Do you sometimes feel that things were easier before you met God?
* Read Exodus 15:25-27.
  + What did God do for the people?
  + Why do you think God told Moses to throw the wood into the water instead of just turning the water sweet right away?
  + Are there things you think God might be asking you to do for you to see Him work in your life again?
* Read Exodus 16:1-3.
  + Do you ever look back and think that the old life was much better, before you let God start changing you?
* Read Exodus 1:11-14.
  + How was it different than what they remembered?
  + When we look back, how do we remember things differently than they really were?
  + What were some things God wanted to teach them in the desert?
  + What are some things God might want to teach us when the feelings aren’t as strong as at first? [trust]
  + What do you think it could cost them for not trusting God?
* Read Numbers 14:2-4, 20-23.
  + What prices do you think we might pay if we don’t trust God?

## Wrap-up

God has great plans for all of us. We need to learn to trust Him even when things are tough. He never forgets about us even when we don’t feel Him as strong as we have in the past. If we keep looking back and not trusting God in the situation we are in right now, we may never see all the great things God has ahead for us.

# TOPIC: Love

## Opening Discussion

* What do you think about when you hear the word “love”?
* What are some definitions for the word love?
* How would you define love?
* Do you think that everyone needs love?
* Are there different kinds of love?

“IF” Love If you make me feel good . . .

If you look good . . .

If you do what I want you to . . .

“BECAUSE” Love Because you are my mother . . .

Because you have the same interests that I do . . . Because you hang around with me . . .

“ANYHOW” Love No matter what you do, I still love you!

This is what real love is.

This is what we all really need.

## Scripture

* God loved us before we even considered loving Him. 1 John 4:10
* 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a [Discuss]
  + Have you ever been loved like that?

## Story

* Read “Tom’s Story”

## Wrap-up

* It seems impossible to get that kind of love, so we lower our standards for love and we end up never really being loved or loving others. If we have never received real love, we will have a hard

time really loving others.

* You can receive real love from God if you want it. He has already extended it to each of us. It’s there whether you believe it or not, but to experience it in your life you must accept it like any

other gift.

**Tom’s Story**

Tom had been in and out of trouble all his life. At fifteen he joined a local gang. Problems at home, problems in school, problems with everyone . . . It seemed nothing and no one could reach Tom.

One week a Christian singing group came to Tom’s town. They were doing concerts in different churches throughout the city. Tom learned where their first concert was and was determined to disrupt it. He drove his motorcycle around the church, roaring the engine so loud that people could hardly hear inside.

The second night Tom sat in the back of the church and disrupted the group as they gave testimonies about their lives. When the concert was over, one of the musicians came over to Tom. Tom was looking forward to a big argument. The musician instead thanked Tom for coming and asked if he would like to go out for something to eat with the group when they finished packing up their equipment. Tom

quickly said, “No way. I don’t want anything to do with you religious fanatics. Leave me alone!”

This same routine continued all week. Wherever the group was performing, Tom would be there trying to disrupt it. And the group would be loving Tom in return, trying to reach out to him . . . and praying for him, as well.

By the end of the week, when the band gave an invitation for anyone who wanted to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, guess who walked in the back door and down to the front of the church? They hadn’t even seen Tom that night . . . but he had been sitting outside listening.

Tom said, “No matter how much I tried to get you guys to hate me, you only kept loving me more. There must be something to this Jesus you keep talking about.”

*Taken from Feeling Good by Tom Eggum (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979).*

# TOPIC: Making Decisions

## Opening Discussion

* How many times per day do you think you have to make a decision? [the average person makes over 2,000/day]
* What are some of the toughest decisions you have to make?
* What are some decisions you have made that you have regretted?
* How could you have avoided making that wrong decision?
* What are some of the things you look at, or should take into consideration, when you have to make a tough decision? [consequences, who will be affected, etc.]

## Attention-getter

* Point to a span on the wall that’s about seven feet long [see example below]

{age 15-20} {. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . rest of your life }

➚

* Every decision you make in this small section of time now, directly affects the rest of the line (rest of your life).
* What consequences are you experiencing now which are the result of decisions you made earlier in your life?

## Scripture

* Read Proverbs 13:20. How have friends influenced your decision making?
  + Do you think God could play a role in your decision making? How?
* Read Psalm 16:7-8.
  + How can God counsel us?
  + How can we know if it is God we’re hearing?
* Read Isaiah 30:21.
  + Have any of you ever experienced that?
  + Do you think God gives direction to everyone?
  + Who does He give direction to? Proverbs 3:5-8

## Wrap-up

* We can choose to trust God with our lives so we won’t have to keep making so many poor decisions.
* God knows the future and knows today which decisions would be best for us to make.
* God wants to be a friend to us, who can help us live one step at a time in the best possible way.

# TOPIC: Money

## Opening Discussion

* What are some of the advantages of having a lot of money?
* How would your life be different if you were really rich?
* Would it make a difference to you how you became rich?
* How do you feel differently about money you worked hard for vs. money that came real easy?
* What do you think this Proverb means?

*Money made in haste grows wings and flies away.* (Prov 23:5)

* How much money do you think it would take to make you happy?

## Story

Read the story of John Rockefeller.

## Scripture

* Read Proverbs 23:1-8.
  + What are these verses talking about?
  + What does it mean that evil men’s kindness is a trick?
  + Have you ever experienced being tricked by evil men? How did it turn sour?
* Read Luke 12:15-21 (the parable of the rich fool).
  + Why does the story say that real life and real living are not related to how rich we are?
  + Why does God call the man a fool?
  + What does it mean to get rich in heaven?
  + Do you think God is saying it is wrong to make a lot of money?
* Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
  + What does God tell those who are rich not to do?
  + How does a person put his trust in money? How would that affect his/her life?
  + What does God promise us if we trust Him?
  + How should the rich spend his/her money? Why is that better than spending it all on yourself?

## Wrap-up

* God is saying to us that we are fools if we think money will bring us the happiness we are looking for. It’s almost like a trap that looks good on the outside but will disappoint us again and again. Trusting God with ourselves and our money, frees us up to use the money we have for good.

**The Story of John D. Rockefeller**

They say that John D. Rockefeller was the richest man to ever live. He was a billionaire. Do you know how much a billion dollars is? If you received a billion dollars 2000 years ago and spent $1,000 ever hour, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, you still to this day would not have spent one billion dollars!

They asked him a very important question. How much money is enough? Surely, if anybody would know the answer to that question, John D. Rockefeller would know. Would he say one hundred thousand dollars? One million dollars? Ten million dollars?

He thought about it for quite a while. Then he replied, “Just a little bit more.”

# TOPIC: Obedience

## Opening Discussion

* When do you have trouble doing something someone else wants you to do? [When I don’t agree with what is being asked of me, or when it seems stupid.]
* Are there times when you have no trouble doing what you’re asked to do?
* Does it matter who is asking you to do something?
* What if God asked you to do something that seemed crazy to you?

## Scripture

* Read Genesis 6:8-7:24, or tell the story of Noah in your own words.
  + What do you think Noah thought when God first told him to build the boat?
  + What do you think other people thought when Noah began building the boat?
  + What made Noah keep going?
  + Would you have gone into the boat if you were there before it even started to rain?
  + Do you think God would ever ask you to do something that seemed crazy?
  + What would you have done if you had been Noah?
  + Do you think God would come through for you like he did for Noah?

## Story

Read the story about Tom.

## Wrap-up

In order to completely obey someone, you would need to really trust they had your best interest in mind. God can be trusted to always have your best interest in mind. God even knows what’s good for you more than you do yourself. When we obey God, we can also be sure that He will step in on our behalf like He did for Noah and for Tom.

## The Story About Tom

Several years ago, Tom was with a friend in Europe. The two of them split up for a while and began to share their faith in God with people as the Lord directed them.

Tom had been talking with a young man for a while when suddenly a big brute of a guy interrupted their conversation. He had overheard Tom speaking about God.

“Are you a Christian?” he retorted in an angry voice. Tom, being a small man, and seeing the size and hatred of the intruder, thought it might be best to just make his way out of that part of town. After all, even if he did say “No”, nobody would ever know the difference. Even his friend was nowhere in sight. Anyway, it looked like this guy was looking for a fight, and that was one thing that Tom didn’t want.

But he remembered the words that Jesus spoke in the Bible, “If you deny that you know me before men, I’ll deny that I know you before my Father in heaven.”

Nervously, Tom said, “Yes, I am a Christian.” The man responded, “Well, I hate Christians.” The idea of quickly leaving that neighborhood was seeming more and more appealing to Tom.

Then the man continued, “I heard that in the Bible it says that if somebody punches you on one cheek, you’re supposed to turn the other cheek and let him punch that one, too. Is that true?” Reluctantly, Tom said, “Yes.”

With that, the man punched Tom in the face as hard as he could. Tom went down on the ground, stunned. As he pulled himself off the ground, the brute said, “So, are you going to be a good Christian and let me hit you again?”

Now Tom had grown up as the leader of a gang in the Midwest. He was not accustomed to letting anybody hit him and get away with it. Yet, after but a brief pause, Tom answered, “Yes, you can hit me again.”

He could hardly finish the sentence before the man laid into Tom’s face again. Tom fell to the ground. Even more dazed this time, he got up slower, wiping the blood from his cut lip.

As he pulled himself together and looked up, the big man began to cry. By the time Tom was standing he was crying even more. “I want what you have,” he said. “I want to be a Christian.”

*Story as told by Tom Eggum, Peoria, Arizona*

# TOPIC: Our Value to God

## Opening Discussion

* Have you ever lost something that was special to you? [Something you made? Something you were really proud of?]
* How did you feel? Did you find it? How did you feel?
* Are there some things, that if you lost them, you would feel like you could never replace them?
* What about it would make it irreplaceable?
* Have you ever been lost?
* How do people feel when they are lost? [lonely, insecure, afraid, confused, etc.]

## Scripture

* Read Luke 15:3-7 (lost sheep)
  + Why was it important for the sheep to be found?
  + How would it have survived alone?
  + Who is the shepherd and who are the sheep? [God is the shepherd; we are the sheep]
* Read Luke 15:8-10 (lost coin)
  + Explain how the ten coins most likely were on a chain around her neck. The necklace was incomplete without the one coin.
  + According to this story, how does God feel about us? [we are valuable to Him]
  + Why would one lost person be so valuable to Him when He already has so many others?

## Wrap-up

* Just as the lost sheep, we need to be found by the Shepherd so He can lead us through life. We will get lost and hurt on our own.
* You are valuable to God and He is searching for you because He deeply loves you. Sheep are found by “baa-ing”. In the same way, we can call out to Jesus, if we want to be found.

# TOPIC: Prayer

## Opening Discussion

* Do you ever pray to God? Why? Or why not?
* Have you ever had your prayers answered? [Have them share answers.]
* Have there been times when you felt like God didn’t hear you or answer your prayer?

## Scripture

* Things to consider about prayer

1. Must have faith (James 1:5-8). Why is that important?
2. Jesus’ friends asked Him how to pray, this is how He answered them.
3. Read Matt. 6:9-13
4. What are some things Jesus is saying about how to pray?
5. What do you think it means, “Your will be done?”
6. Read Matt. 6:33. What’s required for us to receive from God all we need?
7. Read Matt.7:7-11

* God is good, he is not trying to trick us and wants what is the very best for us
* Why do you think God would have us pray and ask when he already knows what we need?
* If you ask for something very specific, what are different ways God could answer that? [Yes, No, Not yet]

## Wrap-up

One of the most important things about prayer is that it is taking time to talk with God, get to know Him and get to know the good things He has for you. The more time you spend praying to Him the more you learn to trust Him. It’s developing your relationship with Him.

# TOPIC: Priorities

## Opening Discussion

* Are there some things that are more important than others?
* How do you decide what things are most important?
* What are the most important things to you right now?
* Does it seem that other things get you sidetracked and keep you from focusing on what’s most important?
* What kinds of things sidetrack you most?

## Story

* Read C. S. Lewis’ “Principle of First and Second Things”
  + What is this talking about?
  + Have you ever experienced putting a second thing first, and losing both? [Example: Putting one day of fun over a job, and losing both the job and freedom to have fun]

## Scripture

* In God’s opinion, what do you think OUR first priority should be?
* Read Matthew 6:33.
  + What is of first importance in this verse?
  + What does God say about the things of second importance? [He’ll take care of them.]
* What do you think God’s first priority is when it comes to us? [That we come to know Him better.]

## Wrap-up

If the most important thing in life is to know God better, then even something as bad as being locked up could be seen as being of *second importance* when compared to what is of *first importance.* Think of ways in which being locked up has actually helped some of the things you said were most important to you.

**Principles of First and Second Things**

Things have different values, some greater than others. Whenever we reverse this order of values and treat a lesser value as though it had a greater value – whenever we sacrifice a first thing for a second thing – we not only lose the first thing, but the second thing as well.

For instance, when we treat a hobby or a pet as more important than a person, we not only sacrifice the person, but we also spoil our enjoyment of the hobby or pet, making it an addiction, an obsession. When we treat our bodily health as more important than anything else, we worry ourselves sick.

For most people, if they were given the choice of being crippled either physically or mentally, they would choose to be crippled physically. The physical is of lesser importance than the mind. To lose your mind is to lose yourself.

*Taken from a lecture by C. S. Lewis titled, “We Are Dwarfs Standing on the Shoulders of Giants”*

# TOPIC: Real Freedom Has Rules

## Attention-getter

* What do you think would happen if the mayor of your city decided to eliminate all the traffic laws – no speed limits, no traffic lights, no stop signs?
* Would people feel free to drive?
* Do traffic laws give people more or less freedom?

## Opening Discussion

* What do you think this place would be like with no rules?
* What are some rules in here that give you more freedom than if the rule was eliminated?
* Do you think God has any rules for us? What are some of those rules? [Ten Commandments, etc.]
* Did God give us these rules to punish us, or to protect us?
* Do these rules give us more freedom, or less freedom?

## Scripture

* Read Proverbs 3:1-6 What benefits come from keeping God’s commands?
* Read Matthew 22:36-40 What do you think it means that all the commands are covered under the first of love?

## Wrap-up

* God intended for us to experience life to the fullest and with the ultimate freedom. If we were left with no rules or restrictions, we would destroy ourselves and others, much like it would be in your town with no traffic rules.
* There is no true freedom without rules.

# TOPIC: Rejection

## Opening Discussion

* What kinds of things make you most angry?
* How does your anger affect you?
* Has anger ever been the reason you got into trouble?
* What are ways you’ve tried to deal with your anger?
* Someone once said, “All deep-seated anger is caused by feelings of rejection.” What does that mean? Do you agree with it?

## Attention-getter

* Imagine that you have an “anger thermometer” inside of you that goes from one to ten. One is “no anger” and ten is “out of control.” Where would you say your anger level is right now?
* What kinds of rejection have you experienced that might have contributed to your present anger level?
* What’s the opposite of rejection? [acceptance]

## Story

* Tell Raoul’s story

What made Raoul’s anger level go down?

## Scripture

* Read and discuss Psalm 36:5-9

How do you think God’s love and acceptance of you can help lower the “anger thermometer” in you?

## Wrap-up

Deep anger, the kind that comes through rejection, can only be relieved through acceptance. Just like with the chaplain and Raoul, Jesus wants to hold us in our anger and pain, and longs for us to give it to him. In exchange, we receive all of God’s acceptance. If God – who knows us better than anyone – accepts us, then we can experience his love and the anger level will go down.

## Raoul’s Story

Raoul had been a part of an escape attempt where he was locked up. As a result, he and all the other guys in the detention center were locked in their rooms for three weeks.

During that time Raoul tried to commit suicide. This resulted in all of the furniture being taken out of his room except for his mattress. He also got two more weeks of lock-down in his room.

One night he asked for the Bible study leader to come to see him in his room. When the He got there, Raoul was so full of anger that he couldn’t even acknowledge that the someone was there. Instead, he just continued hitting his hand against the wall, his face full of rage.

The Bible study leader knew that there was nothing he could say that could reach Raoul in this condition. He just walked over to him and put his arm around him.

Raoul then began hitting the Bible study leader in the chest, in the same way he had just been hitting the wall. The Bible leader let Raoul continue hitting him for several minutes.

After a while Raoul’s blows became less and less hard. And then he started to cry. He cried for a while. When he finally looked up, Raoul said, “Please pray for me. I’ve blown it so bad.” The Bible study leader said, “Just say to God what you said to me. He understands.” Raoul prayed one of the most beautiful prayers ever prayed.

*Raoul is a boy that Scott and Hanne Larson met in a detention center in Massachusetts.*

# TOPIC: Rip-offs

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be ripped off? [expecting one thing and getting another]
* What are different ways people get ripped off? [drugs, crime, thinking that a thing will make you happy]
* What are ways that you have been ripped off?

## Story

Tell the story about Marc

## Scripture

* God has created us with genuine needs, which He wants to fill. We are often tricked into accepting a counterfeit to the need. (ways that meet the need maybe for the short term but end up feeling like a rip off in the end.) Some examples are:

1. The need to “feel good”
   * Genuine from God (Ephesians 5:18):

*“Do not get drunk on wine . . . Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”*

* + What are other counterfeits ways to feel good? [get drunk and take drugs to feel good]

1. The need for “power”
   * Genuine from God (Acts 1:8):

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you . . .”*

* + What are some counterfeits for power? [guns, violence, abuse]

1. The need for “love and acceptance”
   * Genuine from God (Ephesians 1:4):

God *“chose us in Him before the creation of the world . . .”*

* + What are some counterfeits to love and acceptance? [sex, following the crowd, latest fashion]

## Wrap-up

Jesus says in John 10:10 that He came “that [we] may have life and have it to the full.” Sometimes we think we know what it means to really live, when in fact we’re really being ripped off. Tell God you’re tired of being ripped off, and that you’re ready to accept all that He has for you.

**Marc’s Story**

Marc (not his real name) had just joined a gang. He did it for logical reasons. He wanted acceptance and a sense of power. He wanted to belong to something; and in his neighborhood you had to be in a gang if you really wanted to go places. Besides, the gang he was a part of never did really bad things anyway. It was more

for protection from others who were *really* bad.

One day, Marc’s gang was playing basketball in the neighborhood. Marc had sprained his ankle and so he couldn’t play. He was sitting on the sideline next to several of the guns owned by his friends. Suddenly a rival gang came over the hill and someone with a knife came running toward Marc. Out of instinct, Marc grabbed one of the guns and shot the kid in the chest.

Everybody ran. A couple of days later Marc was arrested . . . for murder. The kid had died.

Now as he sits in detention, he re-thinks the situation – over and over and over. He never expected that this would have happened to him. Joining the gang just seemed like the logical thing to do. Now he feels he’s been ripped off.

*\*Scott and Hanne Larson met Marc while he was locked up in a detention center in Massachusetts.*

# TOPIC: A Second Chance

## Opening Discussion

* Have there been times in your life when you have wished you could “start all over?” Share some of these times.
* What would it be like to have your record wiped totally clean?

## Attention-getter

* Read “Marty”
  + Why didn’t things change for Marty in junior high?
  + Was his record really wiped clean?
  + Marty still had the old stories running in his mind. What were some of the old tapes saying?
  + What are some of the old tapes you have in your mind? [You’re just like your father . You’ll never amount to anything. You’ll always be in trouble]

Scripture

* Read John 8:3-12 [woman caught in adultery] Discuss what Jesus did for this woman.

Wrap-up

* Just as the woman caught in adultery, we all need a second chance.
* We have all blown it in one way or another. Sometimes we feel like if we only could move away to a place where no one knew our past, we could start all over. But then the same old tapes would

still go with us. Jesus forgives the things that are on these tapes that we feel are unforgivable.

* He has a new story for us to play in our heads.
  + I have great value in God’s sight (Matthew 6:26).
  + God sees me as His son (Galatians 3:26).
  + When I mess up, His forgiveness is there (1 John 1:9).
  + God has good plans for my life (Jeremiah 29:11).

## 

**Marty**

When I was in the sixth grade about to graduate to junior high, Mr. Melella gave our whole class a speech. He said we were all gong to get a second chance. We would arrive in junior high with our records wiped clean. None of the old teachers’ remarks which had a accumulated in our files would go on to tip off our new teachers. “If you want, you can be totally new people next year,” he said. “And that includes you, Marty.”

Marty was always in trouble for smarting off or fighting. To teachers and parents, he was the Kid Headed for Trouble. We kids knew that if there was trouble, Marty would get blamed. It occurred to me then that everything could instantaneously change. Nobody would know the old Marty.

But it wasn’t long into the next fall before Marty had obviously failed again. He’d been sent to the principal’s office, and it was to happen half a hundred times before we graduated from high school. The fresh start hadn’t worked.

Somehow, I doubt Marty got a truly fresh start. His “record” had been forgiven, but not the record that ran in his own brain. A truly fresh start would have to erase not only the official records, but also all those built-up expectations of trouble that existed inside Marty. Without that, he didn’t stand a chance.

But wouldn’t it have been wonderful if Marty had really had a new beginning?

*Tim Stafford, Do You Sometimes Feel Like A Nobody, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), P. 64*

# TOPIC: Self Image

## Opening Discussion

* How do you think most people your age feel about themselves? [9 out of 10 don’t like themselves]
* What are the reasons they don’t like themselves? [ugly, dumb, no friends]
* What do most people think it takes to really make it? [money, good looks, intelligence, athletic, popular]

## Attention-getter

* Show them a framed picture.
* Take the picture away and ask them to recall what they saw. [Most likely, none will mention the frame. Ask why?]
* Just as the frame is only what holds the substance of the picture, so our bodies are only the frame of who we really are on the inside.

## Scripture

* Read 1 Samuel 16:6-13 [David]

Emphasize verse 7 [God looks at the heart]

## Wrap-up

* Just as God had something for David, He wants to make something out of your life. He doesn’t look at outward things as people do, but He looks at your heart.
* Read Psalm 139
* Knowing that God knows who we really are and loves us deeply, can help us accept ourselves more fully. God also created each of us for a purpose like he did for David. Ask him to show you what he has for you.

# TOPIC: Son or Daughter vs. Orphan

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be an orphan?
* How might it feel to be an orphan? [Insecure. Have to take care of myself. Don’t trust anyone. No one’s watching out for me]
* What would the “ideal parent” be like?
* What would be the benefits of being a son/daughter of an “ideal parent?” [ know someone’s always watching out for me – feel secure – know I’m never alone]

## Scripture

* Read the story of the “Prodigal Son” in Luke 15:11-32
  + What are some of the things the father did that he wouldn’t have done if he weren’t the boy’s father?
  + Why do you think the father wouldn’t just hire him as one of the workers like the boy wanted? [he “belonged” to the father]
  + Why do you think God uses a parent image describe himself, and we his sons/daughters?
  + How is that different than Him just being a God to us?
  + In what ways do you act like an orphan in your relationship to God?
  + How would your actions be different if you were acting like a “true son/daughter of God?”
  + Do you think God would take you back the way the father in the story did if you behaved like the son did? Why? [You “belong” to Him]

## Story

* Read the story of “Anna from Calcutta”
  + Why do you think Anna still behaved like an orphan even though she was now a daughter?
  + What do you think it would take for her to start living into who she really is?

## Wrap-up

Most of us feel and act like orphans most of the time. God wants us not only to know we are His children, but for us to feel His love and protection. That love will give us the security to act as sons and daughters and experience all the benefits of that.

**Anna from Calcutta**

The Thompsons had wanted a daughter for a long time. They had applied through an adoption agency, but nothing ever worked out. That’s why they were so excited when they received the news that they would be getting a little five-year-old from India. Anna was an orphan who had lived on the streets of Calcutta.

They spent the next several weeks decorating the bedroom for little Anna. They day she arrived they made a beautiful dinner and gave her all new clothes.

At the dinner table they noticed Anna sneaking food from the table and putting it in her pockets and down her dress. Later when they went to her bedroom to say “goodnight,” they saw Anna wearing her old clothes and eating the foot she had stuffed in her dress while crouched in the corner of the room.

# TOPIC: Sticking Up for What You Believe

## Opening Discussion

* How do you feel about standing alone in a crowd?
* How big of an influence do you think peers have on most people?
* How do your peers influence you? Positive? Negative?
* Do you know someone who is good at standing alone without getting dragged down by his/her friends?
* How do you feel about this person?

## Scripture

* Read Daniel 3
  + Why wouldn’t they bow down to the statue?
  + Couldn’t they have bowed down and still believed in God on the inside?
  + How do you think they felt when they were told they were going to be thrown into the furnace?
  + How would you have felt about God, after sticking up for Him?
  + How did God pull through for them?

## Story

* Read the story about Russ Taff

## Discussion and Wrap-up

* Some of you have decided to follow God. How do you think your friends will respond to that when you get out?
  + Will they know there’s a difference in you? Should they?
  + Will it be hard to stick up for God?
* God will stick by you no matter what when you get out, and He will give you the power to stand for what is right. Follow Him even when it’s not the popular thing to do. It pays off.

**The Story About Russ Taff**

Russ Taff grew up as a rough kid in Texas. He was one of the leaders of a local gang. Both the kids and teachers were afraid of this group of people. Often it seemed that they ran the school.

That’s why people were so surprised when Russ came to a Christian camp the summer after his sophomore year. Everybody was kind of uneasy having Russ at the camp; he just didn’t fit in, and they were wondering what he thought of it all.

They were even more surprised when Russ stood up at the campfire the final night of camp. The place was silent as he said, “I just don’t know what to think of all this talk I’ve heard this week. I’ve never been into God, and don’t know much about Him. But if all that you’re saying is true, then I want to live the rest of my life for Him.” Then he just sat down.

Nobody said a word. By the next morning people were saying with skepticism, “Sure, he’ll follow God. We’ll just see.” With that, most of them forgot about Russ Taff for the remainder of the summer.

The first day of school, Russ’ old gang was going to be making trouble. People were quite surprised to see Russ show up at school, instead of hanging with the gang and skipping school that day. The gang was especially surprised, and when they came to school, they confronted Russ in the hall in front of everybody. Russ told them he cared about them but would not take part in some of the things they were doing. They beat him right there in the hallway. Nobody stepped in – no teachers, no students, not anybody.

For weeks, nobody would talk to Russ – not the gang, and not any kids at school. But he continued to trust God, saying to himself, “If God is really who He said He is, then I’m going to follow Him.”

Other kids began to watch Russ with a lot of respect. They had never seen somebody change so much and be able to stand up for something against so much opposition. By the time Russ graduated from high school, seventy percent of the students in his class had decided to follow Jesus Christ because of the example they saw in Russ.

He eventually became a famous Christian singer and songwriter who performed all over the world and received two Grammy Awards for his music.

*Taken from the personal testimony of Russ Taff.*

# TOPIC: Stress

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be “stressed out?”
* What are the things that stress you out the most?
* How do you think you are affected by stress?

## Attention-getter.

* Have a balloon available and designate one person in the group to be the balloon blower. Go around and have each person in the group mention one thing that could cause stress in someone’s life. One breath is blown into the balloon for each stress mentioned, until eventually the balloon

pops.

## Discussion

* What are ways that you might “pop” when you have too many stresses in your life?
* What are the side effects of stress in people? [anger, exploding, depression, ulcers, can’t sleep, sleep too much]
* What are the things that cause you the most stress?
* What is the biggest stress in your life right now?
* Can you think of any positive ways of dealing with stress? [talk with someone, exercise, pray]

## Scripture

* Read and discuss what God says can help us with our stress:
  + Proverbs 3:5-6
  + Matthew 6:33-34
  + Philippians 4:6-7
  + Galatians 6:2

## Wrap-up

We all have some level of stress in our lives, but unresolved stress can wear us down both physically and mentally. Stress needs to be dealt with. Sometimes stress can be our best friend if we let it draw us closer to God.

# TOPIC: Temptation

## Opening Discussion

* What does it mean to be tempted?
* What are the things that people are tempted by?
* What are the biggest temptations you’re facing right now?
* Do you think it’s a sin to be tempted? [It is not, as even Jesus was tempted according to Hebrews 4:15, and yet he didn’t sin]

## Scripture

* Where does temptation come from? Read James 1:12-16. [Their own evil desires]
* Read 1 John 2:16 and discuss the three types of temptations:

1. Lust of the flesh [sexual, drugs, over-eating, etc.]
2. Lust of the eyes [stealing, jealousy]
3. Pride [power, fighting, the need to always win]

* Which of these do you struggle with the most?
* How do you think God can help you with temptation? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

## Wrap-up

We can’t say *no* to temptation on our own, but Jesus has promised us that if we trust Him with our lives, He will provide a way out.

# TOPIC: Thankfulness

## Opening Discussion

* What kind of things are you thankful for?
* What are some things your parents or friends have done for you that you are thankful for?
* How did you show them you were thankful?
* Do you ever wish you could repay someone for what he or she has done for you?

## Attention-getter

* Read “The Story of Eddie Rickenbakker”
  + What was Eddie thankful for?
  + How did he express his thanks?
  + How often?

## Scripture

* Read Luke 17:12-19 and explain.
  + Did Jesus do the same thing for all ten men?
  + How did the one leper show that he was thankful?
  + Why do you think the other guys didn’t come back?

## Wrap-up

* Do you think Jesus has done anything for all of us?
* Read Romans 5:6-8.
* What are ways we can respond to that love?
* God didn't just tell us that he loves us, He showed us.

## The Story of Eddie Rickenbakker

Every morning in a park by the ocean in California a strange scene can be observed. An old man spends a good part of the morning feeding seagulls that gather. They seem to have a relationship together. People who observe it will often say, “Oh, that poor, lonely old man.” But now let’s hear . . . the rest of the story.

In 1940, Word War II fighter pilot Eddie Rickenbakker was flying his crew of four across the Pacific Ocean. Something went wrong and the plane caught on fire. In an emergency landing, all five managed to bail out before the plane exploded. They landed in the ocean with an inflatable lifeboat that they had thrown overboard with them.

Several days had gone by without food and water for the five men as they were battered around in the small boat. They were starving to death and their hopes of survival were dwindling. One morning, much to everyone’s surprise, a seagull came and landed on Eddie Rickenbakker’s head.

He grabbed it and broke its neck. Then the men had enough supplies in their survival kit to cook the gull and eat their first meal in many days. They also saved some of the meat, using it for bait to fish. Before long, they had caught a fish, and enjoyed their second meal. They continued this routine of eating fish and saving some for bait, until after a few weeks they were spotted by a plane and rescued.

The seagull in the ocean had given its life as a sacrifice so that Eddie and his crew could live. In appreciation, Eddie Rickenbakker now goes down to serve the seagulls by feeding those whose lives represent the one who gave its life for him.

*Taken from “The Rest of the Story” radio broadcast by Paul Harvey.*

# TOPIC: The Tongue

## Opening Discussion

* Which is harder for most people, to control their actions, or their words? What about for you?
* What do you think hurts worse: to be physically hurt, or to be hurt by someone’s words? Which heals faster?
* How have you been hurt by words?
* Can you think of a time when you have hurt someone with your words?
* What are some reasons people attack others with what they say?
* What are some different ways to attack verbally? [gossip, accusations, calling names, talk behind your back, sarcasm, etc.]

## Scripture

* Read James 3:1-13
  + How is the tongue like a horse’s bit or a ship’s rudder?
  + How is it like a spark that starts a forest on fire?
  + What is so fun about gossiping?
  + What is so hard about taming the tongue?
  + How do you think it is possible that good and encouraging words can come out of the same mouth as bad and negative words?
  + What kinds of things do you think would help us to have more positive than negative things come out?
  + How do you think God could help us?

## Wrap-up

The Bible says that no MAN can tame the tongue. That is why we really need GOD’s help with that. The more we are filled with Him on the inside, the more good things will flow out.

# TOPIC: Trials

## Opening Discussion

* What is the biggest problem or hard time (trial) you’ve ever had to go through?
* Looking at your life, what are ways you have seen good come from hard times?
* What are some ways hard times have changed *you* for the better?
* If you had never gone through trials, how do you think you would be different now? Stronger? Weaker?

## Scripture

* Read Romans 5:3-4.
  + Explain it as steps that go up over a problem (not around it), with God making us into a different person by the time we get to the other top.
  + Talk though each step. What does perseverance mean? [patience, endurance]
  + What does character mean? [becoming a stronger more trustworthy person]
  + And what is hope? [The assurance that everything is going to be okay because of God]

hope

character 

perseverance 

trials 

## Story

Read “The Bob Erler Story”

## Wrap-up

The trials in our lives can be used to either destroy us or to change us for the better. If we allow God to work in our lives, He promises to use them to change us for the better.

**The Bob Erler Story**

Bob Erler grew up trying to always be the best at everything. It earned him the titles of “Golden Gloves,” “Black Belt,” “Special Forces,” “Green Beret,” and eventually “Super Cop.” But inside, Bob’s life was more like a time bomb. Soon after his wife left him with their baby boy, Bob began working double shifts of police duty to cover up the pain in his life.

One night between shifts he was running on the beach to get some exercise when a woman came up and asked if she and her daughter could sleep on the beach, since they had nowhere else to go. Bob said “no” but added that he would be working that night, and they could sleep in his trailer house if they wanted to. When he brought them there the lady asked him for fifty dollars. Bob said, “No, I don’t have $50, lady.” The lady said, “How would it sound to the Chief of Police if I told him that one of his officers tried to rape me and my daughter?”

Bob snapped, “That sounds like a lie and a threat!” Before he had gathered his senses, he pulled his gun and shot both the mother and the daughter. Then out of desperation he called the police station to confess what he had done. As soon as someone picked up the phone he said, “I’ve just shot two people. Catch me before I kill again!” and hung up.

Bob put the two bleeding women in his car and headed for the hospital. On the way he reasoned, “What am I doing? If I tell them what happened, I’ll go to prison!” So he dumped them out of his car into a ditch where they both died. When he got to the police station, he decided to confess the whole thing to the Chief. But there was so much commotion over the telephone call that the Chief wouldn’t meet with him. Instead, he assigned Bob Erler as the head detective on his own murder case!

Eventually, Bob was convicted and sentenced to 99-1/2 years in prison. After several years there, Bob became a Christian. He knew he would never get out but had committed his life to serving Christ as His man in the prison. He went through Bible college by correspondence courses, became an ordained minister, and baptized over six hundred men inside the prison.

One day, Bob got word that it looked like he might be released from prison because they didn’t have enough evidence to hold him any longer. He couldn’t believe it! On the day he was to be released, he went into the prison chapel to thank God and pray. On the wall he saw the

Bible verse, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Bob knew he must tell the truth and confess to the crime.

After he did, he remained in prison serving out

his term.

After five more years of faithful service to God in the prison, the Governor decided to pardon Bob and overturn the case, so he could leave “clean.” Since that time Bob Erler, the famous “Catch Me Killer” has been traveling across the world speaking in hundreds of prisons and churches about the power of God to change a life.

*Taken from the video “Bob Erler Testimony”, Cons for Christ Prison Ministries, Inc., Fredericton, CA, 1989.*

# TOPIC: Wanting What You Can’t Have

## Opening Discussion

* What kinds of things have you wanted that you couldn’t have? Why couldn’t you have them?
* What are things people do to get what they want? [steal, cheat, lie, murder]

## Scripture

* Read the story about David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-17 and 26-27)
  + What did David want that he couldn’t have?
  + What did he do about it?
  + What should he have done?
  + What should you do when you are in a situation when you want something that you can’t have, or are feeling jealous?
* Read Psalm 51 and explain how David wrote this after he was confronted with sin, and how God completely restored him.

## Wrap-up

We all “want” things that we can’t have. In fact, James 4:1-3 says that all of our quarrels and fights come as a result of wanting what we don’t have. But God knows what we really “need” and He promises to give it to us as we ask and trust Him for it. In fact, He says that He’ll give us more than we could ask for or even imagine!

# TOPIC: Worry

## Opening Discussion

* What things do you worry most about?
* Why do people worry about things?
* Are there times when you worried that something bad would happen and it never did?
* Do you think it’s good to worry?
  + How does it help the situation?
  + How does it make it worse?
* How do you think worrying affects people physically? [ulcers, headaches, etc.]
* How does it affect us emotionally? [depression, paranoid]
* Do you think there is a difference between “worrying” and being concerned?” What is it? [Being concerned can lead to action while worrying is generally more destructive]

## Scripture

* Read Matthew 6:25-34 and discuss.
  + What things does it say not to worry about?
  + What is the reason we shouldn’t worry about those things?
  + How do you think God views “a worrier?” [someone who doesn’t trust Him]
  + Do you think this means we shouldn’t make any plans for the future?
  + What do you think Prov 16:9 means? *“A person makes plans, but God directs their steps*
  + What do you think it means to “seek God’s Kingdom first?”

## Wrap-up

* God wants to take care of us and all our needs. Rather than spending our time worrying, He says, “Trust me with your life and I will look after you.”