



The MAIN THING



Bible Study for Youth

Written By:
David Woody

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:37-39: NIV

The Main Thing—Loving God with all our heart and soul and mind. Simple words to read, but difficult to live out, especially for a teenager. Trying to do the Main Thing is a challenge for teens because they are pushed and pulled in so many different directions that losing focus of the Main Thing is easy. Instead of keeping the Main Thing the main thing, they shift their focus as quickly as the weather changes. This Bible Study uses four stories to help teenagers explore different themes to help them stay focused on God and live the Main Thing. They will learn about obedience from Noah; honoring God from Mary and Martha; persistence from Thomas; and living an extreme life for God from John the Baptist. Each of these biblical giants had to learn to focus on God. Their stories can help our teenagers keep the Main Thing the main thing!

The Main Thing Bible Study contains four sessions. It can be used in a four-week plan or on a weekend retreat. If used for a weekend retreat, an introductory session has been included that will help set-up the weekend and introduce the topic for the retreat.

Each session begins with a Materials List for that session. The list has been kept to a minimum of materials and includes items that are readily available.

Each session has an Opening Activity to get your teenagers actively engaged in the learning process. The Activities are suggestions of activities that have worked for other groups. If you have a different idea for an active learning experience, please use it! You know your group best. Use what will work with them.

Questions and conversation are important in these lessons. While there is a Main Theme for each session, the journey and process taken to get to the main theme is important. The questions in each lesson should encourage your teenagers to talk. Don't be afraid of silence and try to fill in the silence with your answers. Don't be afraid to go off on tangents if your group starts down a different path—but do bring them back to the story.

More than anything, have fun! You are a gift to your teenagers. Have fun teaching them, learning with them and growing with them!

My hope is that this study will get your students talking about God, their faith, and how God is at work in their lives. Blessings on you as you lead your group and walk with them along their faith journey.

Peace,
David Woody

The Main Thing Introductory Session for a Retreat

Materials

- Inquisitive Interview Sheets
- Pens/Pencils
- Cotton Ball Quiz
- Cotton Balls
- Lotion
- Bean bag, small toy, eraser, something to pass

As your group gets together for the first time, make sure everyone knows everyone else. A simple way to introduce everyone is to go around the room and ask each person to share their name, their grade, their school and their favorite meal/movie/song/color/etc.

Inquisitive Interview

After everyone has been introduced, ask your group to form pairs. This includes adults! Tell each pair they will be interviewing their partner and then sharing some (not all) of that information with the larger group. Pass out the **Inquisitive Interview** sheets and pens/pencils. Give everyone time to interview each other and when everyone is finished compiling information, begin the sharing process.

Cotton Ball Quiz

After the introductions, have everyone in the group sit in a circle. (Sitting on the floor works best) One of the adult leaders will be outside the circle with the bag of cotton balls and bottle of lotion. That person will have his or her back to the group and will call “stop” during the game.

Hand the beanbag/small toy/eraser/etc. to someone in the group.

Tell the group that at the word “go,” the object is handed to the person on the right and continues in that direction until “stop” is called. (Or you can play music like you would for musical chairs). The person with the object gets a cotton ball stuck somewhere on his/her face with the lotion. After the cotton ball is in place, that person must tell the rest of the group one fact about himself or herself. (It cannot be something already shared through their introduction or the Inquisitive Interview) After the time of sharing, the object is passed again. Once someone has three cotton balls on their face, they can then call on someone else in the group who does not yet have three cotton balls to share one thing about themselves (they also get a cotton ball!). Play until everyone has sufficiently shared with the rest of the group.

Question

After all the lotion is off the faces and the cotton balls are thrown away, ask each person to consider the question,

- Why are you here this weekend?

Give each person time to think, and then have each person share his or her answer. Answers can vary from “I don’t know” to “Because it’s a retreat” to “To get away from my parents.” Try to affirm each answer.

Overview of the Study

Close this first Bible Study group time discussing the purpose for this group and the time of study. The Bible Study group will attempt to learn some of the biblical story as we share our stories with each other and gain a new understanding and appreciation for what God has called us to be.

The overarching theme, The Main Thing, for this retreat/study is found in the scripture reference for Matthew 22:37-39: “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God will all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” NIV

We will examine four different stories that will help focus on The Main Thing. Share your own goals for the retreat.

Close your session with a prayer.

INQUISITIVE INTERVIEW

Your Partner's Name _____

Date of birth:

Favorite food:

Favorite movie:

Something risky you have done:

Three adjectives that describe yourself:

What do you do with your free time?

Favorite TV show:

Favorite color:

Best thing about school:

Complete the sentence: I want ...

What Would Jesus Do?

Earliest memory:

Coke or Pepsi?

Favorite article of clothing:

Something you are excited about:

The Main Thing
Session #1—Obedience
We are called to be obedient to God.

Noah's Story
Genesis 6-8

Materials

- Bibles
- Pair of Dice
- Twister Card
- Butcher Paper
- Tape
- Markers
- Ark Cards
- Pens/Pencils

For Leaders Only

A part of growing up during the teenage years is pushing limits and stretching boundaries. Ever since they were born, teens have been under the control and influence of their parents or guardians. As school began, teachers became the authority figures and asked for obedience. When sports, music, or some other discipline became a part of the teen's life, the coach, instructor, or leader needed obedience. Even at church we ask teens to be obedient.

During the teenage years, the concept of obedience sometimes can be full of conflict. As teens struggle to create their own identity, some begin to rebel against the norm and structures of society. For many teens, the word obedience is not anywhere in their vocabulary. For others, it is an oppressive weight that restricts their growth and freedom. Still, some welcome the limits and responsibilities that accompany obedience.

Reading and interacting with Noah, an obedient servant of God, can help the teenagers realize that obedience can be a positive force in their life.

Opening Activity

Gather your group together and pick one or both of the activities to get your group moving and actively experience obedience. You know your group, so choose which activity will work better.

Middle School Suggestion: Simon Sez

Pick a "Simon" from the group and play Simon Sez. To refresh your memory, "Simon" stands in front of the group and calls out commands. Only when "Simon" says, "Simon sez" before a command, are the players supposed to do that command. For example, "Simon sez put your hands in the air..."

Everyone should put their hands in the air. If Simon says, “Jump up and down,” those who jump are out.

Play the game for as many rounds as necessary. Play each round until you have one person standing. Make sure everyone plays, including the adults. No one should be allowed to sit, unless Simon Sez sit!

After the game, ask the following questions to the group:

- How did it feel to play Simon Sez?
- What was fun about the game?
- What was frustrating about the game?
- Which role did you like better--Simon or a participant? Why?
- Is it easy for you to follow instructions from someone else? Why or why not?

High School Suggestion: Off-the-Mat Twister

This is a variation of the classic floor game, Twister. Instead of a plastic mat and a spinner, your group will use the space available and each other. Two dice are used for this game. Each number on the dice represents a different part of the body. 1=head, 2=elbows, 3=knees, 4=feet, 5=hands, 6=shoulders. You might want to write these numbers and body parts so that everyone can see them, or remember to call them out at each roll.

Have everyone mingle around the room. At some signal, everyone will stop, and grab a partner. When everyone has a partner, roll both dice and call out both numbers. Each partnership must assembly their bodies according to the numbers of the dice. For example, if a 2 and 5 are rolled, the partners must connect elbows to hands. Play slow for a few rounds to give everyone a chance to understand, then speed the game up and eliminate the last couple to perform each combination. Keep playing until you have one couple remaining.

After playing the game, ask these questions for discussion.

- How did it feel to play this version of Twister?
- What was fun about the game?
- What was frustrating about the game?
- Is it easy for you to follow instructions from someone else? Why or why not?

As a way to transition from the activity to the time of exploring the Bible story, ask these questions for conversation:

- How do you define the word obedience?
- Is obedience a good word or bad word?
- When have you been obedient? What was the consequence?
- When have you been disobedient? What was the consequence?

The Bible Thing

Depending on the number in your group, you might want to form smaller groups for The Bible Thing. Small groups of 5-8 usually work best for this.

Ask the group(s) to re-create the story of Noah and the Flood without using the Bible. They can start wherever the group thinks the story of Noah should begin and fill in the “blanks” all the way through to the rainbow. Give each group a big sheet of butcher paper or flip chart paper for them to record their time-line.

After all the group(s) is finished, post the sheet(s) so everyone can see.

Next, ask the group(s) to open their Bibles and read Genesis 6-8 and compare their time-line to the actual story. Ask them to correct their time-lines as they find discrepancies

Ask these questions after they have read through the “correct” story of Noah.

- What were the consistencies between the butcher paper story and the actual story?
- What got omitted from the pre-Bible recollection?
- Was obedience mentioned either on the butcher paper or in the correction?

Say something like:

At the most basic level, Noah, in order to survive, had to be obedient to God. If you or I were in a similar situation, we would probably do the same. But, there is more to the story and reason behind Noah’s obedience than basic survival.

- Why does Noah obey?
- How did he respond to God?
- What was his reward?
- What was the covenant made between God and Noah and what did it mean?

Share with your group:

A covenant is a promise, pledge, obligation, agreement, contract, pact, or treaty. The covenant between Noah and God is a divine pledge made to Noah, to all creatures, and even to the earth as whole. This was Noah’s reward for being obedient.

As we look at the story of Noah and think about Noah’s main thing--obeying God--the ultimate question of our obedience comes to mind. Whether we want to or not, we must talk about obedience.

Our Main Thing

Encourage your group to discuss obedience, especially in light of Noah's story. The following questions are good discussion starters. If your group is open to sharing in front of each other, ask the larger group these questions. If your group is not comfortable, ask them to form pairs.

- Do you want to be an obedient person?
- What type of authority are you comfortable obeying?
- When is it difficult for you to obey?
- Is obedience a sign of weakness?
- The teenage years are a direct contrast to Noah--agree or disagree?
- Is there any connection between us and Noah?
- How are we supposed to obey God? What do you think will be our reward?

We are called to obey God, and that obedience comes from the Bible. Below are some specific ways we can obey God and some rewards we are promised. This is a partial list as much of the Bible provides a blueprint for our lives.

Use these lists to help begin the discussion. It is not necessary, and would not be a productive use of time to go down the list and read each verse. Let the group brainstorm. If your group picks one and discusses it for a long time, great!

Do not feel the necessity to discover all the ways we are to obey God. It is interesting to note that most of these are "do's" instead of "don'ts."

Luke 6:27-36 and Mark 12:28-34: love one another
 Matthew 28:19-20: the Great Commission
 Galatians 5:22-23: the Fruits of the Spirit
 II Corinthians 8-9: Giving
 II Corinthians 2:5-11: Forgiving Others
 Exodus 20:1-17: the 10 Commandments
 Ephesians 6:1-4: Obeying parents
 Colossians 3: Rules for living

As your group discusses rewards, do not focus only on the rewards that are promised to us in heaven. We are also promised abundant life--and that life begins as soon as we accept Christ as our Savior.

Matthew 5:3-12: the Beatitudes
 Mark 10:29-31: eternal life; last shall be first
 I Corinthians 3:10-15: quality work in Christ will receive the reward
 John 10:10: abundant life
 John 3:16: eternal life

The Main Thing

Say this:

We have been called to obey God. Obeying God does not mean that God will speak to you and say that a terrible earthquake is going to happen and you need to build a blimp for all the animals.

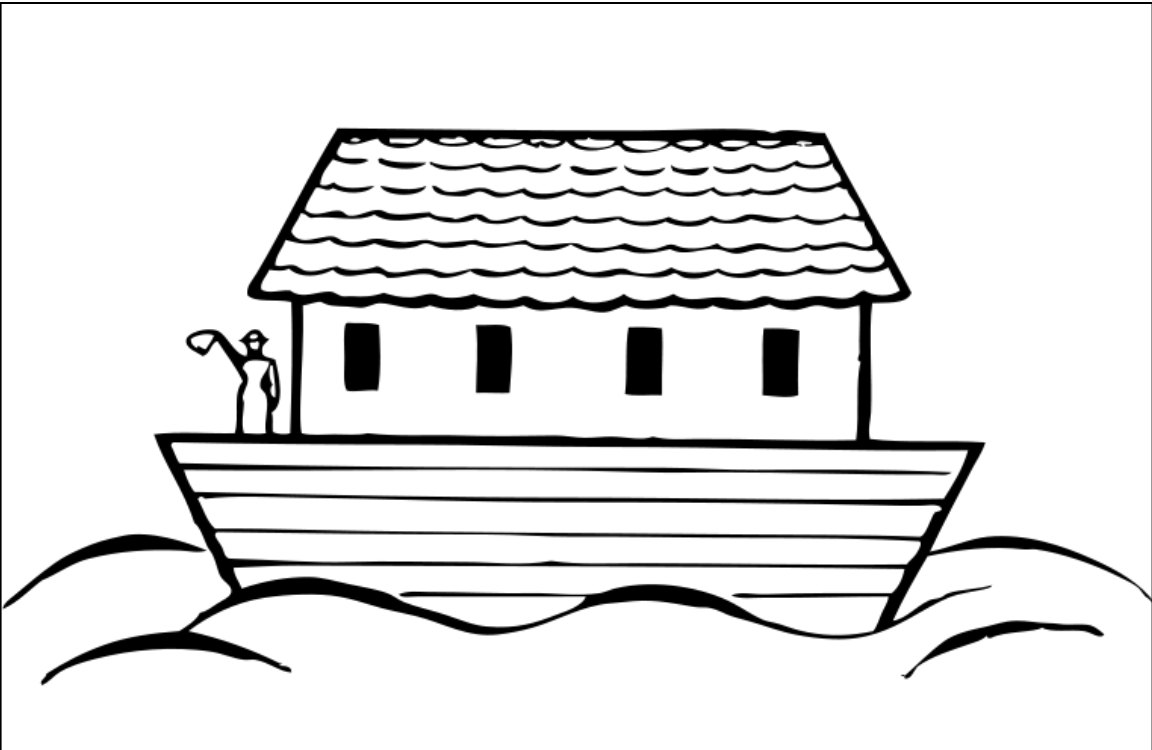
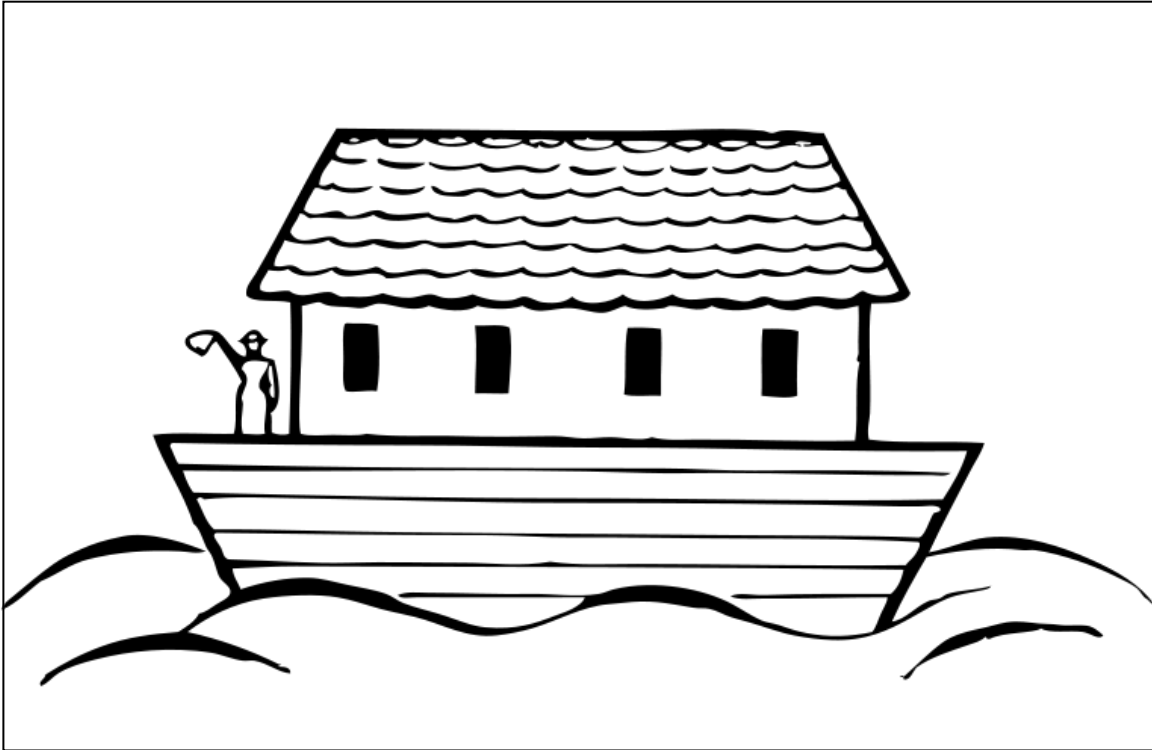
- What are some ways you can obey God in your life?

As a time of commitment and closure to this Bible Study, challenge each person to think of one way they can obey God beginning today.

Pass out the “Ark” cards and pens/pencils.

Ask each person to write down their commitment. When everyone has finished, form a circle and close in prayer. A powerful way to close this session would be for each person to pray about what they wrote on the card--out loud--in front of everyone and God--to help make the commitment real.

At the end of the prayer, ask them to keep the cards somewhere safe .



off-the-mat TWISTER

1—head

2—elbow

3—knee

4—foot

5—hip

6—shoulder

The Main Thing
Session #2—Honoring God
We need to focus and give time to do our best to honor God.

The Story of Mary & Martha
Luke 10:38-42

Materials

- Bibles
- 2 Sheets of Butcher Paper
- Markers
- “Face” Cards
- Pens/Pencils

For Leaders Only

Life is busy. Think of all the activities you do. Think back to your life as a teenager. Does it amaze you to think you survived all the busy-ness of growing up and of present day? The argument could be made that today’s teenagers are more involved and have more opportunities than any other group of pre-adults in history. School, sports, arts, music, church, jobs, hobbies, friends, etc. all want a chunk of their time. Unfortunately, the day is only 24 hours long, and the week still has only 7 days. Sometimes teens get lost in the sea of opportunities. It is easy for teens to lose focus on what is important.

The story of Mary and Martha is a great example of two people struggling with priorities and the important stuff. Martha wanted so much to honor Jesus when he came to her home, but she got lost with what was truly important. Studying the story of Mary and Martha will help us put our priorities in their proper place. By learning from Martha, we can learn to keep our focus on the Main Thing.

Opening Activity

Create-A-Teenager—both age group

Form smaller groups of 3-5 and give each group markers and a sheet of butcher paper. Take the sheet of butcher paper and spread it out the paper on the floor. Select one of the students to be the model for your teenager. Ask the model to lie down on the sheet and have someone trace him/her. Then, give each smaller group 5-10 minutes to create a teenager. Ask them to draw or write all the things that make a teenager a teenager—certain style or brand of clothes, activities and the stuff that go with it, personality traits, activities, home-life, types of friends, etc. At the end of the exercise, each group should have a good 2-dimensional teenager.

After each group has finished, have them present their 2-dimensional teenagers to the other groups.

Then, ask questions like these for discussion.

- How did you decide who your creation would be? What is his/her name?
- Which traits and activities are most important to your character?
- What do the clothes say about your teen?
- What kind of music does he/she listen to?
- How does your teenager spend his/her time?
- What does your creation do really well?
- What does he/she need to improve?
- Where does God fit into this teenager's life?

The Bible Thing

Make sure everyone has a Bible and ask them to open it to Luke 10:38-42. Have the Youth follow along as you read from your Bible the story of Mary and Martha. This story is well-known and most of your class has probably heard it before.

After reading it, have the small groups gather back together and have them to create a Mary-Martha-Jesus story using their Create-A-Teenager creation as the main character. Ask them to create a short skit where their teen is either distracted by one of the traits he/she has been given; or the distraction is present, but he/she decides to honor God. Honoring God can be in many different forms--listening in church, helping someone, reading the Bible, making the right choice, etc.--it does not have to be sitting "at the Lords' feet and listening."

After each group is finished, ask each group to perform. Discuss each presentation.

Ask questions like these to help them understand the passage.

- Did the teenager honor God or get distracted?
- Is this scenario a true representation of your life as teenager?
- What can we learn about ourselves from this skit?

Say something like:

Martha thought she was doing the right thing by doing her many tasks, but she was distracted. We sometimes have the wrong impression that being busy is better than "sitting and listening." I am sure that each of you have been distracted in your life. Your parents might have been talking to you, but your favorite TV show was on and you tuned them out. Or, you might be on social with a friend and you are trying to play a video game. Whatever the situation, we have all been distracted.

God calls us to worship and honor Him. It is easy for us to say, "I'm too busy to go to church," "I am tired," "I have too much homework," "I never listen to the sermon anyway," etc. Those distractions separate us from God and keep us from Him.

We are busy people. God has given us different talents and gifts and abilities. We need to make God our Main Thing and not get distracted by other stuff.

Our Main Thing

To help understand Jesus' idea of the one thing that is needed, the small groups are going to create another teenager. Get the other sheet of butcher paper. This time, ask your groups to create a realistic teenager with talents, gifts, abilities, friends, family, etc.—much like the first teen they created; but whose Main Thing is God. Trace someone in the group, and “decorate” their teen in the same manner they did before. Challenge them to create someone who would fit in their school. Do not let them create "SuperChristian" with WWJD everywhere, carrying a Bible in one hand and a hymnal in another, and wearing sandals. Encourage them to make this person “real,” and someone who would be accepted in their church youth group, school, and circle of friends.

Give them 5-10 minutes to re-create. After the new teenager is complete, place the new teen next to the original teen. Compare the two.

- How are the two similar? How are they different?
- Could this person really exist in your school? In your church? In your circle of friends?
- Which characteristics do you share with your teen?
- Which characteristics do you need to work on to "not be distracted" and keep your focus on God?

The Main Thing

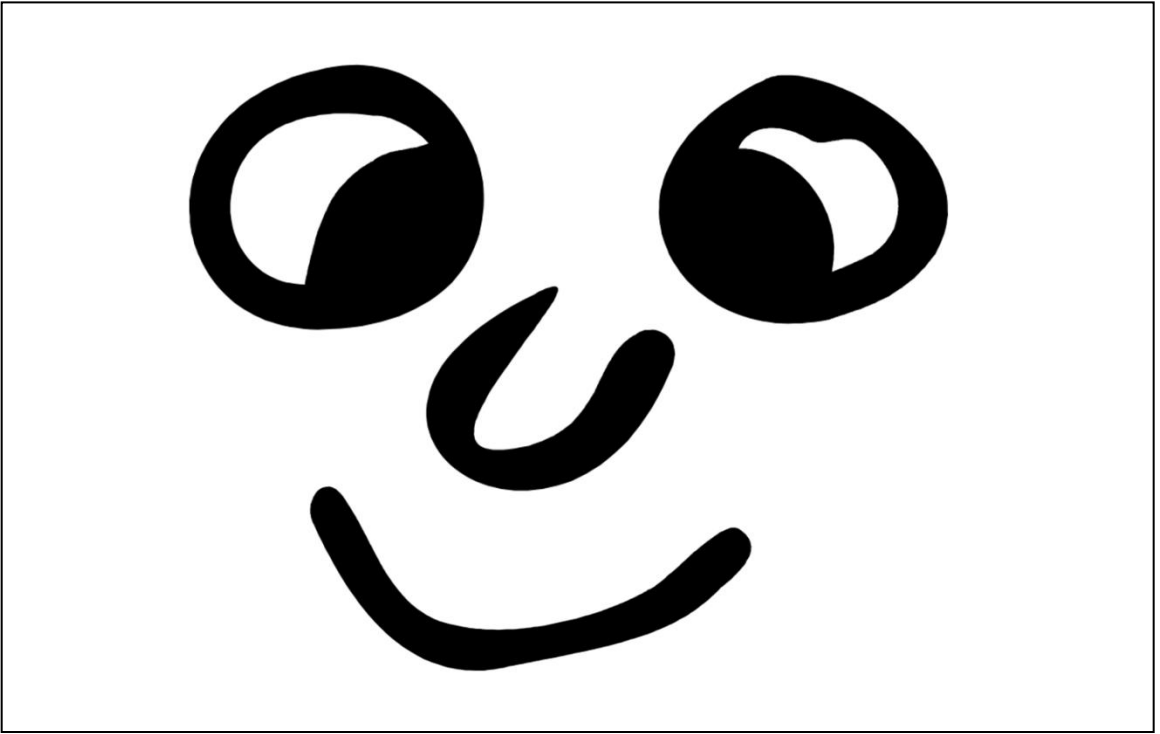
Say something like:

We have seen through this story of Martha that Jesus does not want us to be distracted with other stuff when it comes to spending time with him. He wants, desires, and requires our full attention. But, we must be aware of those distractions around us and ask for God's help in getting past them.

As a time of reflection and commitment, pass out the “Face Cards.” One side has a frown and the other, a smile. On the "frown" card, ask each person to write down the different distractions in their life that keep them from focusing on God. On the “smile” card, ask them to write a prayer to God asking for God's help in overcoming those distractions.

Encourage them to take their cards and keep them somewhere safe where they will look at it often.

Close with prayer. Begin with silence, allowing each person to silently ask God for help with their distractions. Then, you voice a closing prayer for your group.



The Main Thing
Session #3—Persistence

We must look to God and remain faithful as we grow on our journey of faith.

The Story of Thomas
John 20:24-28

Materials

- Bibles
- Empty Bottle (or something that spins and points)
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils

For Leaders Only

“I have a friend at school and she showed me a book the other day that had actual pictures of the gods her religion believes in. I thought there was only one God and no one really knows what he looks like. I want to know what God looks like and I have a lot of questions for him, but my friend says her gods can answer all of my questions. What should I do?”

More than likely we have all had some type of similar experience. Whether it is a personal encounter with someone who believes in a different religion, or talking with a teenager with this question--this is real. We live in a time where information is everywhere. We want to know everything, and we want to know it now. This is especially true of religion.

Thomas did not deal with the “other religions.” He dealt with his own insecurities of hearing and knowing the truth. As your group explores Thomas’ story, think about the times you want(ed) specific answers from God. Encourage your group to do the same.

Opening Activity

Spin for Truth or Doubt

Have your class sit in a circle. Place a bottle or pencil or something pointy in the center of the group. Instruct your class that the game is called, "Spin for Truth or Doubt." The object of the game is to tell something about yourself and have the group guess correctly whether or not it is true. The game will allow you and your students to know each other better and will help teach the lesson on Thomas.

To begin the game, ask someone to spin the bottle. Whoever the bottle points to must then tell the group something about him/herself or something they did. They have the choice to either tell the truth or make something up. Then, the rest of the group must decide if he or she is telling the truth. After everyone guesses, the person tells them if it was true or false. Then he/she

spins the bottle for the next round. Continue playing until everyone has gone at least once. The bottle cannot land on someone twice. If it does, then that person gets to choose someone to tell something.

After the game, ask some questions like these to begin the conversation on doubting and believing;

- Which stories in the game were most convincing? Why?
- Were there any stories that sounded too fake to be real? Why?
- Has there ever been a situation when you doubted (not believed) something even though the evidence was pretty strong? What was it?
- What has to happen for you to believe something?

Say something like:

Thomas, one of the 12 disciples, faced a situation where he wanted absolute proof of something before he would believe. After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared before most of the disciples. They saw and believed. (Read or paraphrase John 20:19-23) Thomas was not with them and doubted.

The Bible Thing

Make sure everyone has a Bible and ask them to open them to John 20:24-29. Ask someone to read the passage as everyone else follows along.

The story is short and to-the-point, but in these 6 verses is a powerful message of faith. Ask your group simple questions to discuss the passage.

- What did the other disciples tell Thomas?
- Why do you think he did not believe them?
- What kind of proof did he want?
- How much time passed before Jesus appeared again?
- What do you think Thomas did during that week? How about the disciples?
- How did Jesus appear to the disciples? (See also 20:19)
- What did Jesus ask Thomas to do? (Thomas did not ask Jesus!)
- What did Jesus say to Thomas in v. 29? How would Jesus say it in this year?

To go deeper in the story, and to begin some discussion about faith and persistence in believing, ask some of these questions.

- Why do you think Thomas wanted/needed physical proof of the resurrection?
- If you were one of the disciples, what would it have taken for you to believe?
- How is Thomas' attitude like so many people today?
- What can we do to give others "proof" so they will believe?

Say something like:

One major lesson we can learn from Thomas is that he kept searching for Jesus. Thomas had the luxury of being able to actually place his fingers and hands on Jesus. That is an incredible story to be able to tell. We do not have that luxury. We have had to rely on the stories from the Bible, our parents, our Youth leaders, our churches, our friends, and others to give us the type of

"proof" that Thomas sought. We are all searching. Our faith will show us the treasure.

Our Main Thing:

Have your group form small groups of 4-5. Ask each group to create a story where someone's faith is tested. The stories should be true-life and not a re-creation of Thomas' story. Depending on the amount of time, either have your groups perform or tell their stories. After each story, debrief with three simple questions.

- Could you relate, or do you know someone who could relate, to this story?
- What does this story mean to you?
- What could you do to help the main character(s) in this story?

Say:

Having faith and believing in God is a must for Christianity. We must be persistent with our faith--we must constantly be looking and searching for ways to strengthen it. Asking questions is fine. Doubting, like Thomas, is expected. But we must keep searching for answers and for the Truth. If we do not, we will have an easier time not believing, or turning our backs on God.

Right now, maybe more so than at any other point in history, you have the opportunity to hear so many different stories of faith in other religions that Christianity can become cloudy. Thomas went straight to the source to seek the Truth. His faith grew stronger from that experience. Although we have not yet had the opportunity to place our hands on Jesus, we can still seek the Truth--and we must!

Jesus tells Thomas that the ones who have not seen and yet have come to believe are the ones that are blessed. We are in that category. That should make us feel awesome!

The Main Thing

As a time of commitment and closure to this Bible Study, get the bottle back out from the "Spin for Truth or Doubt" activity. Get back in a circle and have someone spin the bottle.

This time, when the bottle points to someone, ask them to share one way they plan to be persistent with their faith journey. Each person only answers once. Leaders also need to share. When the bottle points toward someone for the second time, they get to choose someone else to answer. Allow time before the game for the group to think of answers.

After everyone has had the opportunity to share and make a commitment, close in prayer.

The Main Thing
 Session #4—Living for God: An Extreme Life
 We are all called to live for God--that command calls us to an extreme life.

The Story of John the Baptist
 Matthew 3; Matthew 11:1-19; and Matthew 14:1-12.

Materials

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils
- "Cross" Cards

For Leader's Only

This study will examine the life of John the Baptist as it is found in Matthew 3, 11, and 14. Familiarize yourself with these chapters before the session.

The life of a teenager is full of extremes. It seems everything in their world is pushed to the edge. Clothing has to be more than classic khakis and a shirt. Piercings have moved way beyond the ears. Music has more categories than the "top 40" has songs. TV and movie themes constantly push the line of decency. Everywhere teens look, the envelope is being pushed.

One person who pushed the envelope (long before envelopes existed) was John the Baptist. He was a simple man who knew what it meant to practice self-denial. He dressed in simple clothes--camel's hair; and ate simple foods--locusts and honey. The words he used were plain. Yet, his message got him killed. He simply lived for God to the extreme.

Opening Activity

Extreme Acrostics

Pass out paper and pens to each person. Tell them they need to define the word "extreme" using their first or last name in an acrostic. They can use one-word adjectives or sentences to complete their acrostic. Help them get started with a dictionary definition of the word "extreme:" "going to great lengths or beyond normal measures." (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary) An example for my name would be:

D-aring
 A-dventurous
 V-ery willing to take risks
 I-ntense
 D-oing more than what is expected

Give about 5-10 minutes for everyone to finish. Then ask each student to share their acrostic. Ask for explanation if one of the words or phrases is unique.

After everyone has shared their definition, work as a group to create your own definition for the word "EXTREME." Try not to follow too closely the dictionary definition. Use the acrostics as a jumping-off point. Write the finished definition on the board and leave up for the remainder of the session.

The Bible Thing

Make sure each person has a Bible. For this activity, your group will break into three smaller groups. Each group will lead a section of John's story. Assign each group one of the three sections of Matthew that speaks about John the Baptist:

Matthew 3
 Matthew 11:1-19
 Matthew 14:1-12

Give each group 10-15 minutes to read their section. Ask them to think of a creative way to teach their section by answering these two questions.

- What does this section of Matthew say?
- How is this an example of extreme living?

Give each group 3-5 minutes to teach their presentation. Definitely have the groups go in the order they are found in Matthew.

After the "lessons," discuss in the large group some of the implications John has for us today.

- What do you think the Main Thing is for John?
- Can we learn anything about the Main Thing from John?
- Was it necessary for him to live on the extreme?
- Do you think it was necessary that he die for his faith?
- Do you know anyone who is "on the edge" in their faith and commitment to Christ?
- If you had to describe the way you live for Christ, which description best fits:
 - A. Not yet arrived at the swimming pool. (not yet involved with Christianity)
 - B. Sitting in the baby pool. (just beginning my Christian journey)
 - C. Swimming in the shallow waters. (Christianity is a part of my life-- and it shows)
 - D. Jumping off the high dive. (I'm dancing with God!)

Our Main Thing

Say this:

For the past four weeks/lessons/sessions, we have been exploring ways to keep the main thing, the Main Thing.

The Main Thing is found in Matthew 22:37-39: “He said to them, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

We have been learning about the first commandment through the stories of Noah, Mary & Martha, and Thomas. Now, with the story of John the Baptist, we focus on living it out, and loving others along the way.

The Blockbuster

Your entire group will work together to answer the question:

- How can we live extremely for God?

Tell your group that you are a powerful and rich movie producer from Hollywood. You have the seed of an idea for a movie, but you need a creative team of writers to make the movie come alive. Your group is that team. You are meeting with the head of the movie studio in 30 minutes and you need a better outline.

The idea for the movie is this:

- The time is present day.
- The setting can be anywhere and the characters can be male or female or both.
- You envision somehow telling the story of someone or some group living a real life, yet living on the extreme for God.
- Your main character(s) remain true to their faith in the midst of different struggles, challenges, and temptations.
- Along the way, others join the group.
- Eventually, their extreme living and its message become the core for society.

Tell them they have 5 minutes to “fill in the blanks of the story.”

Make sure they work together for this exercise. If necessary, form smaller groups for better group-work. Encourage the “quiet ones” to speak out. They might have better ideas than the ones who dominate the conversation.

When your movie ideas are complete, ask the group to critique it.

- Could this be a real-life story?
- Can you relate to the main character (group)?
- Is this movie at all like your life?

Say something like:

We have been called by God to live our lives for God. That is not an easy task. John did not have an easy task, either. He preached against the established religious leaders and did his best to seek the Truth. He was a simple man who did big things--all in the name of God. You have created a movie about someone or some group living on the extreme. The movie will probably be great, but it is just a made-up story. You created the characters, places, situations, and outcome. Life is a little different.

We have been given the tools for our story--main character, setting, and faith. The situations will be different for each of us. The outcome is dependent on our actions. The question that has to be asked is, "Are you ready and willing to keep the main thing, the main thing and totally live for God?"

The Main Thing

Pass out a Cross Card and pen/pencil to each person.

As a time of silent commitment, ask each teen to write down on the cross side of the card those "things" that stand in their way of living for God. On the other side, ask them to write, in their own words, their commitment to God. Ask them to silently pray for what they have written on their card and make a commitment to live for God.

After each person has finished, close with a group prayer. Pray that God will take away the "things" that stand in the way of living for God. And pray for God to work in their life. Pray for their commitment.

