



Exploring tough questions
facing youth today

HOW TO BE A TRUE FRIEND

The Bible Reveals Friendship's Heart



The Pastoral Center

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Bible-based Explorations of Issues Facing Youth

» OVERVIEW

When conversing online, the acronym IRL stands for “in real life.” The virtual world of social media, text chats, blogs, and more have the power to remove us from the real world. What we experience online can skew our perspective on what it means to be human. It can numb us, incite us, distract us, depress us, confuse us, and make us rude or impatient. Strangely, this supposedly “social” and “connected” technology can profoundly disconnect us from others.

Religious faith can also place us in a bubble, especially when it distances us from others. When we keep the prophetic message at a safe distance, obscured in theological language and abstractions, we are missing the whole point. And when we see our parish as an insider club that serves itself, we can forget the radically inclusive message entrusted to us: God’s love is for *everyone*, and God expects us to transform the *whole world* through that love.

Through the incarnation, God showed up in the real world to show us that our faith is not just about talking the talk, but also walking the walk. It can be risky. It can be confusing. It can hurt. But living out our faith can also bring us great purpose, peace, and joy.

This series connects the Bible with the tough questions that youth (and adults) encounter in their neighborhood, in school, among friends, and even online. This process will help you as a leader break open these issues in a fun and meaningful way, sparking conversation and the kind of life change Jesus invites us to embrace.

» THE ROLE OF PARENTS

As children enter middle school and high school, they become more independent, self-reliant, and, well, self-centered. This can bring parents to make assumptions that this is the time to step back, giving their child more space to form their identity. While there is truth to that at some level (adolescents definitely shouldn’t be smothered), this is a stage of life when parents should in fact *lean in*. The apparent confidence and bluster youth show on the outside can mask the insecurity and confusion on the inside. Youth need their parents to be involved more than ever.

» WHOLE FAMILY FORMATION

Parents are the primary teachers of their own children, and parishes are waking up to the fact that faith formation programs need to bring parents into the process if they hope to see faith passed on to the next generation. Recent studies give us more and more evidence that the role of parents is the most important factor in determining whether a child will embrace faith as they move toward adulthood. Research from the Center for the Applied Research on the Apostolate shows that parents who talk about their faith and show through their actions that their faith is important to them are more likely to have children who remain Catholic.

More about Whole Family Formation >>>

To learn more about how your parish can take a comprehensive whole family approach to faith formation, visit GrowingUpCatholic.com.



While whole family events with elementary-aged children are on the rise, the role of parents can be an afterthought in youth ministry. We have designed the sessions in this series to work with or without parents present, and we encourage you to offer them as parent-child events.

If you choose to involve parents, it is important to consider before each session how to best do so. Many of the activities in this series are high-energy, creative, or silly. Some parents may need some encouragement to get out of their heads and have fun with the group. A few activities involving physical contact would be inappropriate for parents and youth to participate together, and we have noted them as such.

There are a number of ways to approach discussions with parent participation. Unless you have a small group, you will likely want to break into smaller groups for conversation. Some youth may be self-conscious and unable to be completely honest and open in a group situation with a parent present. For this reason, you may choose in some cases to assign parents to different groups from their own children, or to have separate parent and child groups altogether. Be sure to cover expectations around confidentiality. It is inappropriate for a parent (or youth) to share with another parent what their child said in a small group.

Note that even if parents and their children do not share all conversations together in the session, they will still have a valuable shared experience and can have extended conversations about it later.

>> **THANK YOU**

The role you play in gathering, animating, praying with, and forming youth is a valuable one. Thank you for all you do to serve the church and its families!

Bible-based Explorations of Issues Facing Youth

» HOW TO BE A TRUE FRIEND «««

The Bible Reveals Friendship's Heart

» INTRODUCTION

Why do the youth at your church dress alike?

Why won't they go to church camp unless their best friends go too?

Why do they all sit together at the back of the church? Are they joined at the hip?

They're friends. And if they're all sitting together, they're very normal. The real question is—are there any youth hanging on the edge waiting to sit there too?

Friendship is very important to youth. A peer group supplies much-needed security, loyalty, and love. With friends being so important to them, youth want to figure out what to look for, and how to make and keep friends.

Each session in this unit focuses on a quality that can raise relationships to a new level. Each quality is modeled by Bible figures—David and Jonathan (trust), Ruth and Naomi (loyalty), the Samaritan woman and Jesus (taking risks), Paul and Barnabas (reconciliation), and Jesus and his disciples (servanthood and commitment). All of the sessions address this question—what is a true friend?

This study has two additional goals. For one, this study hopes to encourage an intimate friendship with Jesus, the truest of friends. And second, most sessions (including the extender) incorporate smaller group settings where youth are encouraged to take off their masks—a level of vulnerability required for true and lasting friendship. Such sharing may be scary, but it's worth it.

Bathe the group in prayer. Expect a lot from them, and they'll give it to you. Ask questions. And have fun.



“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.”

St. Thomas Aquinas





EXTENDER SESSION

Most units include one extender session, which includes suggestions for special activities related to the issue of the unit. Extender sessions help accommodate the diversity of parish schedules. Since each unit is undated, participants may study units in their entirety and still participate in special events of the parish that get scheduled simultaneously with youth group time. Extender sessions can be used anytime, but, depending on the option you choose, the one for this unit best follows **Session 3** or **Session 6**. Calculate now whether or not you will be using the extender session.



THE SESSION PLAN: The parts of the session guide

- » **Faith story.** The session is rooted in this Bible passage.
- » **Faith focus.** This is the story of the passage in a nutshell.
- » **Session goal.** The entire session is built around this one goal. What changes—in knowledge, attitude, and/or action—do you

desire in your group?

- » **Materials needed and advance preparation.** This is what you will need if the session is to go smoothly. You'll feel more at ease if you've taken care of these details before you meet your group.

» FROM LIFE TO BIBLE TO LIFE

The teaching plan is called *life-centered*. However, when we write each session, we always begin with scripture. We ask, what does this particular passage say, especially to youth? Each teaching session moves from life to Bible to life. So the Bible is indeed at the center of this way of teaching.

In every session we try to hit upon a tough question that participants might ask. Find out what questions on this issue are important for your group. Feel free to bring your own input and invite your group members to add their own experiences.

» TEACHING THE SESSION

The five step-by-step movements will carry you from *life to the Bible and back to life*. Each session takes about 45 to 50 minutes. If there is a handout sheet for the session, take note of any complementary activities and stories.

1. **Focus.** Intended to create a friendly climate within the group and to *draw attention* to the issue.
2. **Connect.** Invites participants to *express* their own life experience about the issue, through talking, drawing, role playing, and other activities. Also uses memory, reason, or imagination to get the group thinking about *why* they view the issue the way they do.
3. **Explore the Bible.** What does the Bible *say* about the issue? With a minimum of lecturing, dig into the faith story and search for answers to questions raised in the first activities. The Insights from Scripture section will help
- clarify the faith story. Help participants discover how the faith community understands the Bible passage.
4. **Apply** the faith story. What does the Bible passage *mean* for contemporary life? This is the "aha!" moment when participants realize the faith story has wisdom for *their* lives.
5. **Respond.** Why does the Bible passage *matter*? What will the group do about the issue in light of what they have learned from their own experiences set alongside the faith story? How can we *live* the faith story rather than pass it off as a mere intellectual exercise?

» LOOK AHEAD

Here are reminders for what you need to do for the next session or two.

» INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE

Here is a resource for Explore the Bible. Don't try to use all the material given. Take what you need to lead the session and answer questions your group may have. Let the Insights section inspire you to think and study more about the passage for the session.

» HANDOUT SHEETS

Occasionally, there will be a handout sheet to complement your session. If you choose to use this, make enough copies for the group in advance of the session. These sheets may include questions, stories, agree/disagree exercises, charts, pictures, and other materials to stimulate thinking and discussion.

Generally, no participant preparation is required unless the session plan calls for you to contact selected group members for specific tasks.

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

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»» **SESSION 1**

TRUE FRIENDS CAN BE TRUSTED »»

»» **KEY VERSE**

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:3)

»» **FAITH STORY**

1 Samuel 18:1-5; 20:1-42

»» **FAITH FOCUS**

David and Jonathan were best friends. Jonathan was a son to King Saul, and David was the ever-growing threat to this king's popularity. When Saul threatened to kill David, Jonathan had to decide between family—his own right to the throne—and David. Jonathan proved to David his trustworthiness by making a covenant with him, creating a plan to warn him of danger, and by risking his own life for his friend.

»» **SESSION GOAL**

Encourage participants to build trust in their friendships through consistent acts of kindness and by being reliable.

»» **Materials needed and advance preparation**

- Blindfolds (*Option C in Focus*)
- Bibles
- Pencils/pens, writing paper
- Copies of the handout sheet for Session 1



TEACHING PLAN

1. FOCUS 6-10 minutes

»» **Option A: Safe Hands.** Gather the group and pair up. Each pair holds hands in lines facing each other. One participant then lies on the hands of the others. They try to raise that person in the air, lower to the ground, shake, roll from one side to the other, swing front to back, etc. The goal is that the single participant feels safe and secure even with all the movement. Encourage others to be carried before asking, *How did it feel to have to trust these people to hold and carry you?*

» **Option B: Trust Circle.** Instruct the group to stand in a circle except for one volunteer who stands in the middle. (Make two circles if the group is too large to get close enough to catch the person falling.) The person in the middle stiffens her body, keeps feet together, and begins to fall, trusting the group to catch her. The group catches her and then gently pushes her to another part of the circle. The catch-and-push cycle continues for up to five times. Repeat the exercise until everyone has had the opportunity to be in the middle. Debrief by asking several of the participants how it felt when they were in the middle.

» **Option C: (if you have access to an outdoor area).** Pair up, and blindfold one person in each pair. The sighted person must find ways to communicate with the partner in a way that builds trust, as they navigate either a wooded area or natural obstacles. Switch roles after 3-5 minutes. Debrief by asking what worked best to build trust, and what threatened trust. **Option:** Lead the partner through a forested area to a particular tree, and encourage the blindfolded one to get familiar with it, through touch, smell, and any sense other than sight. Then lead the blindfolded one back to the starting point, remove the blindfold, and have the person try to find the tree.

2. CONNECT 6-8 minutes

Have everyone sit in a circle, with backs to the center. Sitting on the floor may be easiest, but in chairs is fine too. Then say, *Think for a minute about these three questions:*

- *Whom do you trust in real life?*
- *Do your friends trust you? Why?*
- *What is the hardest trust issue you've had to face?*

Then invite anyone who is willing to turn toward the center of the circle and share their answer to *one* of the questions. After someone responds, they remain facing the center of the circle. Don't worry if there is a long silence, and don't be disappointed if no one shares. The experience may have been an intense one. Have everyone turn to the center of the circle when more than 30-45 seconds has passed since anyone shared.

3. EXPLORE THE BIBLE 8-10 minutes

Shift to this activity by saying: *It's important to know whom you can trust. There's a story of a guy named Jonathan who staked his whole future for his friend David.*

» **Option A:** Have the group brainstorm all the facts they know about David and Jonathan. Fill in whatever pertinent details they leave out (see Insights from Scripture).

Then go to the scriptures, first 1 Samuel 18:1-5 and then all of chapter 20, asking them to look for ways Jonathan proved himself trustworthy. Challenge them to find seven things. (Answers might include: made a covenant, handed over his royal robe and armaments, promised to tell David of any plots on David's life, expressed his love for David, made a plan to save David's life, stood up for David even against his father Saul, was willing to give up his place on the throne, risked his life for David.) Have several volunteers read the passages, then ask these questions:

- *What is the significance of Jonathan giving away his sword and tunic and other things?*
- *In chapter 20, who does Jonathan trust at first—David or his father Saul? What did it take for Jonathan to catch on to what was really going on?*
- *What do you think angered Saul more and why—David's absence from the table or his own son's loyalty to David?*
- *Why did Jonathan risk death by going back home (v. 33)?*
- *Do you think Jonathan did the right thing to remain loyal to David? Did he betray his father?*

» **Option B:** View a video (or make and show one of your own!) that summarizes Jonathan and David's plan to save David's life, such as: https://youtu.be/qUzPlwmz_jw or <https://youtu.be/pZ2hRq-ei0U>. Then use the questions above to discuss the story.

4. **APPLY** 10-12 minutes

Summarize the story, emphasizing the covenant between two friends and the concrete ways that they (especially Jonathan) lived out their commitment to each other. Say, *These acts of friendship and consistency helped David trust Jonathan with his own life—even though that meant Jonathan would have to betray his father. That's a lot of trust. How do you get someone to trust you that much?* (allow responses). *The old saying goes, "The only way to have a friend is to be one." How does that relate to trust in friendships?* (allow responses).

Distribute copies of the handout sheet and pencils and give everyone 5 minutes to fill out the three sections of the trust quiz, working alone. Stress honesty; answers won't be shared.

When everyone is finished, ask: *What does trust have to do with parents? What does trust have to do with God?* Now ask them to use the back of their sheets to make three lists with the headings:

- PEOPLE I TRUST WITH MY LIFE
- PEOPLE WHO TRUST ME WITH THEIR LIVES
- THINGS I CAN DO TO BUILD TRUST WITH MY FRIENDS

Give them 3 minutes. Ask if anyone would like to share ideas from the third list.

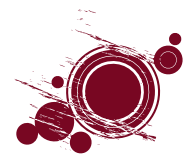
5. **RESPOND** 7-9 minutes

True Friends Can Be Trusted. Ask everyone to *write a message* (on paper or use a favorite social media venue) to one of their friends that includes a covenant of trust; they are to tell that friend how they want to be trustworthy in the future. Have everyone find a place to be alone, either in the room or spilling into other places, if they're available. Give them 4 minutes. Participants may choose individually whether or not to send the message.

Close in group prayer, asking for God's help when trusting and being trustworthy gets tough.

»» **LOOK AHEAD**

For **Session 2**, contact four volunteers to participate in the **Oprah Meets Orpah** talk show (see Explore the Bible).



INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE

They were unlikely friends. Jonathan was the son of the first king of Israel, and David was just a shepherd boy, the youngest of a common family in Bethlehem. But, with David's dramatic introduction into Saul's royal court, they met and bonded in a friendship for life.

According to 1 Samuel 18:3, Jonathan made a covenant with David, because *he loved him as his own soul*. This voluntary covenant, made in the presence of the Lord, was regarded the same as a blood relationship. They pledged themselves to each other; they knit together their souls. Jonathan sealed the covenant with the gift of his armor, robe, and weapons. While a common way to seal a new relationship, it was nonetheless a weighty gesture on the part of a prince.

» THE COVENANT IS TESTED

David and Jonathan's friendship was tested, however, by the jealousy and insecurity of Jonathan's father, Saul. As 1 Samuel 18:12 describes it, "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul." David, the poor shepherd boy, was successful in everything he undertook, and was winning the hearts of Israel away from the king. That infuriated Saul.

Saul's threats on David's life (19:1; 18:11; 19:10; 18:25) drove David to seek out his friend Jonathan. Yet Jonathan had already defended David to his father once (19:1-5), and was in a sticky situation himself. Would Jonathan side with father or his friend?

David won out. Jonathan swore allegiance to him, whatever the cost or outcome. And so David, fully trusting Jonathan, laid out a plan to test whether or not David was safe at the royal court.

The plan was sealed with a renewal of the covenant (20:12-17). Both young men had much to lose in this situation. David wanted reassurance that he would be warned if Saul plotted against him. Jonathan, on the other hand, knew that if open conflict erupted between Saul and David, he could lose any claim to the throne. In such a case, he wished David well (20:13). He asked that if he survived such a battle, the covenant would still be remembered, even if they fought on different sides. He was especially concerned for his children. The two walked away, realizing that the covenant they made could cost them their very lives.

» WHEN A MORAL MAN CANNOT BE KING

From Saul's point of view, he was doing Jonathan a favor. He could see that as long as David lived, Jonathan would never become king. He was desperate to preserve his royal line. But Jonathan, perhaps sensing that God had already chosen David to be the next king, would not ascend the throne at David's expense. He, unlike Saul, was able to appreciate greatness without feeling inferior.

If Jonathan lacked the leadership skills to be king, he well made up for it in moral character. It was he who initiated the covenant, and he who upheld it at the risk of losing everything. Jonathan sacrificed his entire future for his friend, because he was trustworthy in everything he said he would do. True friends can be trusted. So David placed his very life in Jonathan's hands.

On the morning they enacted their plan with the arrows, David and Jonathan had to part, not knowing if they would see each other again. Though it was life-threatening for both young men to be seen together, David ran to Jonathan when the messenger boy was gone. He bowed three times, and acknowledged the good services done him by his friend. But it was more than that. Jonathan had risked his own life to save him. No wonder he "wept the more" (20:41). In this touching final scene, the two friends pledged kindness and faithfulness to each other and to their families "from generation to generation." It was a promise they both would keep.

TRUST QUIZ???



"WHAT? Of course my friends TRUST me! I'll do anything for 'em!"

"WHAT? My PARENTS? Can they TRUST me? Honestly? WELL...."

"WHAT? GOD? Do I trust God? Can God trust ME? Hey, this is getting a little personal, isn't it?"

FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING QUIZ, honestly, AND GET SOME ANSWERS!

How to Be a True Friend : Session 1

My Friends

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't think about building trust				I work to build trust					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
It's hard not to talk				I keep all secrets					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I tell them what they want to hear				They know I'm brutally honest					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I'm careful about what I lend				I share my possessions					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I freak when someone is more talented than I am				Someone's success doesn't mean I'm inferior					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I risk my life for no one				I would risk my life for my best friend					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I take credit when it's due me				I honor my friends before myself					

Parents

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I fudge on house rules				I keep house rules					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My life is my business				I'm totally honest with my parents about what's happening in my life					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My parents are in outer space				I try to listen to my parents					

God

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I'm in control of my life				I trust God to be in control					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I do my own thing				I try hard to hear what God is telling me					



Permission is granted to photocopy this handout for use with this session.