

GOD SO LOVED...

A student's guide to sharing Jesus at school

YOUTH SERIES

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WELCOME

Thank you for downloading the *GOD SO LOVED* Youth Series. This series will engage your group in missional discipleship, teaching them to share the Gospel in their everyday lives. God so loved the world, and the average student's world revolves around the school campus. Based upon the book *GOD SO LOVED...a student's guide to sharing Jesus at school*, this series will achieve the following goals:

1. Teach the core concepts of the Gospel and train participants in sharing the Story.
2. Call students to make a commitment as Campus Missionaries.
3. Train students to have powerful conversations that can lead to Jesus.
4. Establish the importance of serving others as a first step in sharing the Gospel.
5. Help students share Jesus contextually based on common interests, groups, and with the hurting.
6. Emphasize the primacy of verbally communicating the Gospel message in addition to serving.
7. Reveal the power of the testimony in God's mission and help students develop their personal story.

The *GOD SO LOVED* Youth Series was written by Youth Alive Missionaries from across the nation, all of whom are experts in missional discipleship. We all pray this series propels your ministry efforts and challenges your students to share Jesus like never before.

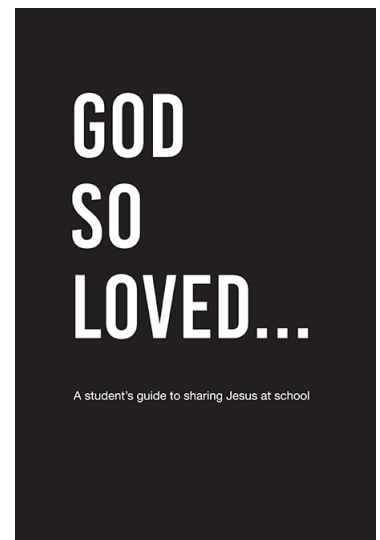
Blessings,

Lee Rogers, *PennDel Youth Alive*
Series Editor/Lead Author

THE BOOK

This series teaches and reinforces the principles and methods found in the book *GOD SO LOVED...a student's guide to sharing Jesus at school*. This book is the first of its kind, designed to help students share the Gospel contextually among the many different groups of people they encounter on an average school day. Middle and High schools are filled with diverse groups of people, all of whom need to hear about Christ: artists and athletes, academics and craftsmen, the hurting and the average, everyday teenager. *GOD SO LOVED* is designed to help Christian students share Jesus through serving and conversations with more than 30 distinct groups at school and beyond. This book is filled with real life stories, practical ideas, and powerful questions that lead to great conversations.

It is not necessary to have the book to participate in this series. However, both students and leaders alike will benefit greatly from owning this book, both during the series, and throughout their journey as they strive to share Jesus at school. *GOD SO LOVED...a student's guide to sharing Jesus at school* is available on Amazon.com, or can be ordered at a group/bulk rate at www.initiateconversations.com.



STUDENT GUIDE

A Student Guide is available to accompany this series and is free to download. It contains notes pages to accompany each sermon, reflection questions, worksheets and questions for the small group sessions, and provide reinforcement for the weekly challenges. While it is not necessary to utilize the Student Guide, some of the small group worksheets/resources are only available in the Student Guide, so be sure to download it for your own use. The Student Guide is free to download and print for your group at www.initiateconversations.com in the Sermons/Lessons area. Alternatively, pre-printed Student Guides can be ordered and shipped on the same site.

USING THIS SERIES

GOD SO LOVED is a 10-segment Youth Series comprised of 5 sermons/messages and 5 small group sessions. Each segment provides rich content while also providing the opportunity for customization through personal illustrations. Each sermon is followed up by a supplemental small group session, designed to be used in the same week. While the small group sessions provide some reinforcement of the weekly sermon, they largely contain new information, and each one provides a unique learning opportunity that is crucial to achieving the goals of the overall series.

Each segment of the series contains introductory information that will help you quickly grasp the purpose, takeaways, primary text, relevant chapters, and specific needs for that segment. An icebreaker or game is provided for each segment and serves as an illustration at some point during the meeting. Slides are available for the sermons and can be downloaded at www.initiateconversations.com.

Before each segment of the series:

- Read completely through the material to ensure you are familiar with it, have prepared adequately, or have tailored it to suit your context.
- Check the needs for the segment and obtain the necessary materials, or think through any personal illustrations that are required.
- If you are using the sermon slides, check to make sure they appear correctly in your media setup.

| | SERMONS | SMALL GROUPS |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Length | 30-40 minutes | 60-90 minutes |
| Form | Outline | Narrative with Questions |
| Icebreaker/Game | Use earlier in the meeting before sermon | Use at the beginning of the lesson |
| Slides | available for download | not provided |
| Illustrations | some provided/some personal | some provided/some personal |
| Conclusion | Altar/Prayer Time | Challenge and Group Prayer |

WEEKLY CHALLENGES

Each small group session concludes by issuing a practical challenge directly related to the topic of the session. The challenges are designed to reinforce and practically apply the teaching from each respective week. The Student Guide also contains each challenge, and serves to remind students of the challenge throughout the following week, in addition to providing reflection questions to be completed once the challenge has been completed.

WEEK 1

MESSAGE - GOD SO LOVED the world.

This is a foundational sermon to explain the gospel...that God so loved the world, including every student at school, that He gave Jesus so we could be reconciled to God. God loved us unconditionally, globally, sacrificially, and rewardingly. Students will gain an understanding of the basic big ideas of the Gospel, that it applies to us, and that it applies to everyone around them. This is a foundational message to help students understand God's love.

SMALL GROUP - GOD SO LOVED us.

This session will focus on John 3 and the redemptive aspects of the love of God. This session is designed to help students learn and memorize an easy way of presenting the Gospel story to others. The *Dare2Share* G.O.S.P.E.L./*Life In 6 Words* presentation tool will be taught, memorized, reviewed during this small group session.

WEEK 2

MESSAGE - GOD SO LOVED your school.

This sermon is a “call to action” for students to to share Jesus at school by committing to being Campus Missionaries. God so loved us, but God also loved our friends, our school, our neighbors—and God's love is shared through and by us. Encouraging them to not look to their own imperfections, this message will challenge students to recognize and respond to God's call on their lives. Students will be challenged to become Campus Missionaries—students who share Jesus—and to begin walking in that commitment.

SMALL GROUP - GOD SO LOVED through conversation.

Jesus spent a lot of time asking questions to start powerful conversations. This session focuses on having conversations as a way of sharing Jesus. It covers topics like “others-centered” conversations, asking powerful questions, and listening and responding. Students will practice having others-centered conversations, asking powerful questions, and listening and responding. They will walk away with a better understanding of how to get people to open up in conversation and how to guide a conversation towards Jesus by listening and responding.

WEEK 3

MESSAGE - GOD SO LOVED through serving.

This message establishes the importance of serving those with whom you want to share Jesus. Jesus didn't just proclaim the Kingdom of God, he also served those around him by meeting their practical needs. This message emphasizes the Scriptural mandate for serving those around us being ready for every good work. Students should understand that words are not enough in sharing the Gospel, we must also serve those we want to reach.

SMALL GROUP - GOD SO LOVED my group.

This session focuses on helping students share Jesus in the context of their interests and activities. God can use a Campus Missionary's presence on sports teams, arts groups, academic/school groups to share Jesus with others in the group. Students will learn how to share Jesus by learning to serve in relevant ways and have meaningful conversations within their current group.

WEEK 4

MESSAGE - GOD SO LOVED through words.

This message establishes the primacy of communicating the Gospel with our voices. It is never enough to *only* serve and be nice to others, we must also openly communicate the Gospel message with our words. This is a Scriptural mandate, and we are the ones who must speak the truth of the Gospel in love. Students should walk away understanding the importance of sharing the Gospel verbally—and understand it's necessary if the message is to be transmitted.

SMALL GROUP - GOD SO LOVED the hurting.

This session focuses on sharing Jesus with those in pain, in need, in special circumstances, or who are in desperate need for answers to the challenges of life. Students will gain compassion for the hurting, understand how to better love and serve them, and be challenged to start a conversation that can lead to Jesus.

WEEK 5

MESSAGE - GOD SO LOVED your testimony.

The message establishes the power of the testimony. God's story is expressed through our story—how He has worked in our lives. When sharing the Gospel, we should always talk about how God has changed and transformed us. Equally important is our non-verbal testimony—how we live our lives. The idea that we should expect and appreciate ridicule or suffering as we share the Gospel, and how we handle it, is also a part of the testimony and it is powerful. Students should feel encouraged to think about and develop their own testimony, and to share with others how God has moved in their lives.

SMALL GROUP - GOD SO LOVED my testimony.

This session will help students develop and share their testimony. It will emphasize the power of their story. Students will explore some of the questions and suggestions from Chapter 2 for developing a testimony. By the end of the sessions students should have an outline of their testimony, or be able to talk about significant moments in their walk with God.

GOD SO LOVED...

the world.

WEEK 1 // MESSAGE

By Forrest Rowell
Rocky Mountain Youth Alive

- Message Title:** GOD SO LOVED the world.
- Primary Text:** John 3:16
- Purpose:** This is a foundational sermon to explain the gospel...that God so loved the world that He gave Jesus so we could be reconciled to God. God loved us unconditionally, globally, sacrificially, and rewardingly.
- Takeaways:** Students will gain an understanding of the basic big ideas of the Gospel, that it applies to us, and that it applies to everyone around them. This is a foundational message to help students understand God's love.
- Relevant Chapters:** Chapter 1, Chapter 2
- Needs:**
1. Personal stories to illustrate the main points (see the message outline for details).
 2. "Something Amazing" video (This is included in the accompanying slideshows and downloadable materials).

Icebreaker/Game Idea

(Use this earlier in the service if you like. It will be used in the message as an illustration)

Divide your group up into teams of 5-9 people. Have a human pyramid contest. The team that forms their pyramid the fastest wins. Pay special attention to the pain/suffering those on the bottom of the pyramid endure. Their sacrifice will be used in an illustration later in the message.

GOD SO LOVED the world.

Introduction

Peyton Manning ***(or substitute a quarterback of your choice)***: Like him? Love him? Hate him? He had the privilege of calling his own plays on the field. Did you know that God has given you and me the same privilege? We are able to make our own decisions in life; we call our own plays. On the field, sometimes Peyton makes the right choice and sometimes he makes the wrong choice. Just like Peyton, we sometimes make the right choice and other times we make the wrong choice in life.

Let me tell you a story about a young man who straight BLEW IT! He's known as "The Prodigal Son." ***(The Prodigal Son parable is found in Luke 15:11-32. Paraphrase the story for your audience.)***

In the end the son found out that his Daddy still loved him! I dare say that God, our Father, is not mad AT you, but rather He is mad ABOUT you! You may be asking, "So how do you know that God the Father still loves me?" It's because the GOSPEL screams of His love for you and me!

Scripture

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 ESV)

Body

I. God's love is UNCONDITIONAL.

- A. "God so *loved*..."
 - 1. There are several types of love—the New Testament uses four different Greek words that mean love to distinguish between them.
 - 2. The word for love in John 3:16 is the Greek work *agapao*, which we say today as *agape*.
- B. Agape means unconditional love.
 - 1. It's not the same as romantic love (*eros*), the love between family members (*storge*), or love between friends (*phileo*). All of those loves can change as we change and as people change.
 - 2. *Agape* love is a love that exists regardless of circumstances, feelings, or actions. It's always going to be there. It "is the most rational kind of love...it means to value...hold in high esteem...it puts itself on display...accompanied by contentment...it is joyful."¹
- C. ILLUSTRATION—This is a crazy kind of love that loves even when it's not loved back! (***Tell a personal story of experiencing this type of God's love.***)
- D. TRANSITION—Now that we understand that God's love is unconditional, we need to understand the extent of God's love

II. God's love is GLOBAL.

- A. "God so loved *the world*..."
 - 1. This is the most inclusive statement of God's love.
 - 2. This means that God loves every single person on earth—people from Africa, South America, Asia, Europe—EVERYWHERE!
 - 3. Let's make it even more local—God loves every single person in your school! Athletes and artists, student leaders and everyday students, the hurting and the healthy. God loves every student!
- B. No one is exempt from the love of God.
 - 1. Even people who reject God's love are still the subject of it.
 - 2. Even those people *you don't like* are contained in God's love, including those people in your school you may have challenges with. God loves them, period!
- C. ILLUSTRATION— (***Tell a personal story of experiencing the extent of God's love. This could be a story from a missions trip, from your school days, or about an experience of the Holy Spirit's conviction on you for not loving your enemies.***)
- D. TRANSITION—God's love is UNCONDITIONAL, it's GLOBAL, but it's also very unique in it's nature.

III. God's love is SACRIFICIAL.

- A. "God so loved the world that He *gave*..."
 - 1. Our God is the only one on earth who *sacrifices* for His people.
 - 2. Not only does he sacrifice, but he pays a heavy price in doing so.
- B. Romans 5:8 "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (ESV)
 - 1. We were of no value to God, but He sacrificed His Son for us—His most precious valuable prize.
 - 2. Would you be willing to sacrifice something valuable in order to gain something that isn't valuable? Of course not. But God did this for us.

¹ "ἀγάπη" in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Volume 1, page 8.

- C. ILLUSTRATION—Remember the Human Pyramids we made earlier in the service? Who was on the bottom of their pyramid? What did that feel like? How about those of you who were on the top of the pyramid? What did that feel like? No one can get to the top of the pyramid without stepping on the bottom rows. And the lowest row in the pyramid always has to sacrifice their body through pain, pressure, and discomfort, in order for one person to reach the top. In the pyramid of eternity, Jesus does the hard work on the bottom so that we can reach the top.
- D. TRANSITION—God gave it all. He gave the best, His Son, as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And for what?

IV. God's love is REWARDING.

- A. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him *should not perish but have eternal life.*"
 - 1. There is a great result or reward to God's love—eternal life!
 - 2. But in order to gain this reward we must believe! Belief is more than just acknowledging God's existence. True belief should also shape how we live.
- B. The opposite of eternal life is to "perish."
 - 1. Heaven is real, but so is Hell. You can't have one without the other.
 - 2. This is true for you, and it's true for your classmates at school. It's true for EVERYONE.
- C. ILLUSTRATION—Show the "Something Amazing" video (this is included in the accompanying slideshows and downloaded materials).

Conclusion/Altar

God's love is UNCONDITIONAL, it is GLOBAL, and it is SACRIFICIAL. All of those are true—unconditionally true. But God's love is also REWARDING...but only if we believe in Him. God's love is *unconditional*, but the reward is conditional. We must respond to His love with belief! 2 Corinthians 5:15 states, "He (Christ) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." Have you placed your belief in God? Are you no longer living for yourself, but for Christ? **(Give students the opportunity to respond to the Gospel for the first time or as a recommitment).**

Looking Forward

- The small group session for this week also focuses on God's love by teaching the *Life In 6 Words* tool by Dare2Share. Student's will work together to learn and memorize this powerful Gospel presentation/explanation tool.
- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED your school," and will be a call to action for student's to begin sharing Jesus at school.

GOD SO LOVED...

us.
WEEK 1 // SMALL GROUP
By Kimmy Campbell and Lee Rogers
PennDel Youth Alive

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Session Title: | GOD SO LOVED us. |
| Primary Text: | John 3:1-8, 16 |
| Purpose: | This session will focus on John 3 and the redemptive aspects of the love of God. This session is designed to help students learn and memorize an easy way of presenting the Gospel story to others. |
| Takeaways: | The <i>Dare2Share</i> G.O.S.P.E.L./ <i>Life In 6 Words</i> presentation tool will be taught, memorized, reviewed during this small group session. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapter 1, Chapter 2 |
| Needs: | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Several rolls of wrapping paper and tape, or several rolls of toilet paper for the icebreaker/game.2. One personal story about sharing the Gospel in the “Personal Story” section. |

GOD SO LOVED us.

Review

Consider opening the session by reviewing the main ideas from the Week 1 message, GOD SO LOVED the world. Reviewing will help your students commit what they have heard to memory.

Icebreaker/Game Idea - The Birthday Wrap

Start out by dividing your group into 2-3 smaller teams. Give each group a roll of wrapping paper or toilet paper.

We are gonna start out by wrapping up one person on each of our teams like they are a birthday present. Choose one person to wrap up and work together to wrap them using your entire roll of paper. The first team to finish wins!

After the game:

Birthdays are great - What are some of your favorite parts of having a birthday?

What if we could have two birthdays? Jesus talked about the importance of being “born again” in John 3. In fact, this is an important part of the Gospel message.

Personal Story

Leader, share a personal story about the first time someone shared the Gospel with you, or about the first time you tried to share the Gospel with someone. Was there a time you needed to explain the Gospel, but struggled to get it all out adequately? That would also be a good story to set up the topic. Transition your story with the following:

The Gospel is the greatest story ever told! And as followers of Jesus, it's our job to tell it! But sometimes it's difficult to find the words when we're stressed or nervous. But we've got to do our part to learn and memorize the Gospel so that we are ready to explain it when the opportunity comes. We need to be able to explain the Gospel for ourselves.

Introducing the Topic

Ask the following:

- 1) Who can tell me what the Gospel is? What is the Gospel about?
- 2) What is most challenging about trying to explain the Gospel?

We have all heard the Gospel and are familiar with it to some extent, but sometimes it's difficult to explain it on the spot. Some would say the Gospel is just words, or just a collection of books (The Gospels), and some would explain it as the story of Jesus' life on earth, etc. While these explanations are all true, the Gospel is also so much more. It's more than words, more than a collection of books, and it is even more than just a story. It's a living testament of the love and redemption of Jesus Christ. It is the eternal story of God's saving grace through Jesus Christ.

The Word

Have a student, or students, read John 3:1-8.

In John 3 Jesus was talking to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was Jewish by birth and was considered an upright man, but Jesus told him he must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven. Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying, because he took Jesus literally. But Jesus was making a spiritual point. Nicodemus was a moral man, a teacher, and he understood what was right in the sight of the law, but that wasn't enough. He had to be spiritually reborn.

Sometimes we are like Nicodemus, we consider ourselves morally upright and above other people. But our morality doesn't make us better than anyone else; God loves us all the same.

- 1) Why was Nicodemus' morality not enough to save him?
- 2) Have you ever felt like Nicodemus? Like your morality made you better than others?
- 3) What is the danger in thinking that way? (*Ultimately, we cannot save ourselves no matter how moral we are. Only Jesus can save us.*)

The truth is, it doesn't matter where we come from or how moral we are, Jesus came to save us. We still need Jesus because our morality cannot erase our sins.

Have a student read John 3:16.

And John 3:16 says "whoever believes." God so loved the world! Everyone! He loved you and He loved everyone in your school.

- 1) How should this affect your viewpoint on those around you at school?
- 2) Who needs Jesus more? You or them? (We all need Jesus in the same way—to save us from our sins.)

Going Deeper—G.O.S.P.E.L.

God so loved you. God so loved me. God so loved them. Part of our responsibility as followers of Christ is to proclaim this love to those around us. Over the next few minutes we are going to work together to memorize the Gospel story through an easy tool called *Life in 6 Words*.

Leader, explain the G.O.S.P.E.L. acrostic below one time through with your students. You can have students take turns reading each section, or the Scripture verses that are referenced throughout. They should fill in the blank spaces in the Student Guide as you learn together.

Life in 6 Words- G.O.S.P.E.L.²

God. Our. Sins. Paying. Everyone. Life. (Read this aloud together a few times)

God created us to be with Him.

“Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His.” Psalm 100:3a
God created Adam and Eve in perfect fellowship with Him and with the environment.
They walked hand and hand with God.

Our sins separate us from God.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23
Adam and Even sinned and became corrupt, depraved and selfish.
Their sins corrupted all of humanity.

Sins cannot be removed by good deeds. (Remind them of the story of Nicodemus.)

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Isaiah 64:5a
People have always tried to seek God’s favor through righteous good deeds, but it’s impossible.
All of our righteous acts are like filthy rags to our perfect, holy God.

Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.

“But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8
Jesus died on the cross for all our sins, taking our place for the penalty of our sins.
There is not a sin that wasn’t nailed to the cross.
Sin brings death, but through Christ we have life.

Everyone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16
It is by faith alone in Christ alone.
He who believes has everlasting life.

Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.” John 17:3
It’s not just the quantity of life, it’s also the quality of life.
It’s eternal, but it is also a personal relationship with God as our Father

² *Life in 6 Words/The G.O.S.P.E.L.* is copyrighted by Dare2Share. Used by permission. See more resources on this model at www.lifein6words.com

Learning the G.O.S.P.E.L.

Leader, now that you've explained the G.O.S.P.E.L. one time through, repeat the key sentences below for each letter of the acrostic as a group. Keep on repeating it over and over again until they can say it without looking at their papers. This will take 5-10 cycles, but you are helping them memorize it. After they can say it without looking, have them record it in the Student Guide without looking at the original.

God created us to be with Him.

Our sins separate us from God

Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.

Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.

Everyone who trust in Him alone has eternal life.

Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

Concluding Challenge

Now that you've learned this today, commit it to memory by reciting and practicing it everyday this week. I challenge you to share *Life in 6 Words/The G.O.S.P.E.L.* with at least one person this week.

(Close out the time together with prayer. Pray specifically for opportunities to share the G.O.S.P.E.L.)

Looking Forward

- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED your school," and will be a call to action for student's to begin sharing Jesus at school.
- Next week's small group is called "GOD SO LOVED conversation," and will focus on helping students start powerful conversations that can lead to Jesus.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Message Title: | GOD SO LOVED your school. |
| Primary Text: | Genesis 18:13-15 |
| Purpose: | This sermon is a “call to action” for students to share Jesus at school by committing themselves as Campus Missionaries. God so loved us, but God also loved our friends, our school, our neighbors—and God’s love is shared through and by us. Encouraging them to not look to their own imperfections, this message will challenge students to recognize and respond to God’s call on their lives. |
| Takeaways: | Students will be challenged to become Campus Missionaries—students who share Jesus—and to begin walking in that commitment. |
| Relevant Chapters: | All Chapters |
| Needs: | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Personal stories to illustrate the main points (see the message outline for details).2. “We Are the Leaders” video (This is included in the accompanying slideshows and downloadable materials). |

Icebreaker/Game Idea

(Use this earlier in the service if you like. It will be used in the third point of the message as an illustration)

Play a good old fashioned game of “Simon Says,” but instead call it “Pastor _____ Says,” and insert your name. This seems pretty elementary, but you can make it interesting by giving away a great prize like a gift card. Create a list of actions that students have to complete (or not complete) when you give the proper clues. This game is meant to emphasize the idea of taking action at the right time.

GOD SO LOVED your school.

Introduction

(Consider taking a few moments to succinctly review the big ideas from last week’s sermon and small group session. Reviewing each week will help your students commit what they are hearing to memory, and refresh them on the direction you are leading them.)

Every school day you are spending several hours on one of the greatest mission fields in the world. Is it surreal to think that on this mission field, you might be the only representation of Jesus that some classmates see? What a calling, what a responsibility, what an opportunity!!

- Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20 NIV11)
- He also said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NIV11)

For the disciples back then, Jerusalem was their immediate surroundings, and it was where they would be witnesses first. For us, as disciples right now, Jerusalem is our neighborhoods and our schools. This is where we are to share Jesus first. *We are the ones, this is the place, and now is the time!*

We are going to look at someone in the Bible—Sarah, who was married to Abraham—and was told by God that she was going to have a child. The key here is that they were both very old and past the child bearing age. Sarah literally laughed when she overheard a conversation that in one year she would have a child. She figured she was too old for this to happen. Or in other words, Sarah was saying *I am not the one, this is not the place & now is not the time!* Have you ever told God that? Have you ever offered God excuses? Let's jump into the story & see how God responded to Sarah's lack of faith in her ability.

Scripture

"Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But He said, "Yes you did laugh." (Genesis 18:13-15 NIV)

Body

I. We are the ones.

A. Sarah laughed, "*Will I...?*"

1. Sarah did not believe God could bless her, but she was the one in the eyes of God.
2. Sarah believed she wasn't good enough to have a child because of her age; she couldn't fathom that God could do this miracle through her. But God answered, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
3. In the same way, sometimes we have a hard time believing God can use us—that we are not the one, but God says otherwise!

B. God's plan for you started before birth

1. Jeremiah 1 says "Before you were formed in the belly, I knew you, Before you came forth from the womb of your mother I sanctified you. I ordained you to be a prophet to the nations".
2. God's call on your life is clear - you are THE ONE to walk out His plan for your life.

C. God's hand is on you

1. In Psalm 139 David said "I am fearfully & wonderfully made"
2. Think about the detail that God put into your earthly body:
 - Our eyes have 1 million receptors
 - Our ears have 24 thousand fibers that vibrate
 - The human body has 500 muscles, 200 bones & miles of nerve fibers that give you agility
 - The human heart beats 36 million times
 - Our lungs have 600 million pockets
 - The human brain has 4 million sensors
3. *If God would pour so much into your natural body that is going to die & decay, how much value has He put into your spirit that's eternal?*

D. Illustration—***(Tell a brief personal story here about something you knew you were supposed to do but felt unworthy or unqualified. Even your call to preach, or to be a youth pastor, could make a good illustration for this point).***

E. Transition—I'm thankful we serve a God who believes that WE can be the missionary to our school campus. That HE created us to do far greater things than we can imagine. No matter what that place might look like...

II. This is the place.

- A. Sarah laughed, “Will I really *have a child*?”
 - 1. Sarah did not believe this was the place in her life to have a child.
 - 2. Again, God answered her, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”
- B. There are so many places in the Bible where conditions didn’t look very favorable. Lets just look at one—the famine in Genesis 26:
 - 1. There was a great famine that had hit. Isaac wanted to leave but God said to Isaac, “I will help you and I will bless you in this place”
 - 2. To bring relief Isaac decided to instruct the people to dig wells that would bring water. The Philistines continued to attack and at one point even stepped back to basically mock them.
 - 3. God did bless them and they found water. Isaac named that place “*Rahobath*” which means, “God has given me room to be fruitful.”
- C. God will bless you “in this place.”
 - 1. I am sure your school seems spiritually dry at times, almost like the famine we just talked about. Remember God’s presence is still there! You can be fruitful there!
 - 2. He will still bless you despite the conditions
- D. Illustration—Show the “God So Loved” video (This is included in the accompanying slideshows and downloadable materials).
- E. Transition - This truly is “the place”—your school, your family, your community! God is calling you to reach out with His love. What are you waiting for?

III. Now is the time.

- A. Sarah laughed, “Will I really have a child, *now that I am old*?”
 - 1. Sarah believed that God’s timing was way off. In the eyes of nature, what He promised was impossible. Again, God answered her, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”
 - 2. You may not feel that this is the time—maybe you think you’re too young, or that you’re not ready, or that it’s too difficult. But I ask you the same thing, “Is anything hard for the Lord?”
- B. This is surely the time! If you focus only on the past, or only on the future, you will miss it!
 - 1. John 11 tells the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. Martha, his sister, was focused on what was or what might be to come. Martha said “If you would have been here he would not of died” (vs 21). She focused on the past. Then she said, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection” (vs 24). She focused on the future.
 - 2. But Jesus said - “I AM the resurrection.” Meaning I am RIGHT NOW! Jesus was saying I am here—present tense! The time is right now! Pay attention to what God is doing NOW!
- C. Illustration—Remember when we played “Pastor _____ Says” earlier? If you moved at the wrong time, you were out. But also, if you didn’t move when you were supposed to, you could be out. Let me tell you something—God is crying out through His Word and through the Holy Spirit, “NOW IS THE TIME!” But it’s not “Simon Says,” and it’s not “Pastor _____ Says,” it’s “GOD SAYS” and “THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS!” And they say that now is the time to share Jesus at school!

Conclusion/Altar

Remember that baby that Sarah was supposed to have? Well she did—his name was Isaac and we even talked about him some earlier. God promised her and He delivered that promise even though she didn't think it would happen because of who she was, where she was, and when it was. God is calling you to share His love at your school. WE are the ones, THIS is the place, NOW is the time! ***(Give every student the opportunity to commit to be a Campus Missionary—a student who shares Jesus. If they've already made that commitment, invite them to recommit and to begin to pray for their school at the altar).***

Looking Forward

- The small group session for this week focuses on sharing God's love through conversations. Students will learn how to have powerful conversations that lead to Jesus, and they will practice having conversations together.
- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED through serving," and it will focus on earning the right to be heard when sharing Jesus at school.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Session Title: | GOD SO LOVED through conversation. |
| Primary Text: | Matthew 16:13-16 |
| Purpose: | Jesus spent a lot of time asking questions to start powerful conversations. This session focuses on having conversations as a way of sharing Jesus. It covers topics like “others-centered” conversations, asking powerful questions, and listening and responding. |
| Takeaways: | Students will practice having others-centered conversations, asking powerful questions, and listening and responding. They will walk away with a better understanding of how to get people to open up in conversation and how to guide a conversation towards Jesus by listening and responding. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapters 3-32 |
| Needs: | One personal story about sharing the Gospel in the “Personal Story” section. |

GOD SO LOVED through conversation.

Review

Consider opening the session by reviewing the main ideas from the previous sermons and sessions. Reviewing will help your students commit what they have heard to memory.

Icebreaker/Game Idea - The Question Game

The object of this game is to have a conversation by asking questions only.

Start out by having everyone in the group pair off.

We are going to begin by pairing off, so everyone needs to find a partner. This game is about asking questions. In fact, everything you say must be in the form of a question. Each pair will begin with one person asking their partner a question. The partner must respond by asking another question. If, at any time, someone responds without asking a question they are eliminated and the other person wins.

You can have multiple rounds by having the winners pair off against one another until you find the best question-asker in the group.

After the game:

A conversation made up entirely of questions is difficult to carry on. But nearly every great conversation is started when someone asks one powerful question. Sometimes it's difficult to come up with questions, but it's easy to learn.

Personal Story

Leader, share a personal story about a great conversation you had and that you remember. What made the conversation great? It's likely that someone took an interest in you, asked you questions that got you talking, respected your point of view, and wanted to hear more.

Introducing the Topic

Ask the following;

- 1) How many of you have a Facebook? Twitter? Instagram?
- 2) On average, how many hours a day do you think most teenagers spend on some type of media?

CNN reported that the average teenage spends 9 hours a day in front of screens; whether it be your cellphone, laptop or television.³ The majority of this time is being spent on social media. Social media is a great way to stay updated on the things and people around you. But how many of the people that you call “friends” or “followers” do you actually have a meaningful relationship with? How many do you actually have meaningful conversations with?

The truth is, “Where there is no meaningful conversation, there is no meaningful relationship.”⁴ Sure, it is easy and important to post Bible verses on your page; it's easy and important to let people know you believe in God. But most people come to Jesus or to Church because a friend invited them through a conversation. In fact, up to 90% of new Christians make lasting commitment to Jesus through a friend who explains the Gospel on an individual, conversational basis.⁵

- 1) If that's true, what does that mean for us, as people who want to share Jesus with others? (*Hint: We've got to learn how to share Jesus through conversations, and we've got to learn how to develop meaningful friendships.*)
- 2) What's the best way to become better at having conversations? (*Practice!*)

The Word

Jesus loved talking with people, having conversations, and often asked questions to get the conversation going. The point is, Jesus didn't just post signs that told people who He was. He simply saw the people around Him and started a conversation.

Have a student, or students, read Matthew 16:13-16.

In this passage Jesus asks His disciples: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Let's take a minute and think about what Jesus did here, and about the conversation that followed.

- 1) First, if you were one of the disciples that day, what would you have said?
- 2) Secondly, what would make Jesus ask a question like this? If Jesus is God, He already knew the answer to the question. So what would make Him ask a question instead of just telling the disciples the truth?

³ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/health/teens-tweens-media-screen-use-report/>

⁴ *Initiate: Powerful Conversations That Lead to Jesus*, Chapter 5.

⁵ *Initiate*, Chapter 1.

Jesus asked questions because He wanted the disciples to think about the questions, and to come up with the answer on their own. The disciples replied to Jesus with a list of who others thought He was. It didn't matter that the answers were wrong at first—He asked the question to get the conversation started. Jesus knew the truth would come out as he continued to ask powerful questions like, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The greatest confession is when we exalt Christ as the Son of God.

Jesus took the time to ask questions and have conversations even though He already knew the answers and didn't need to converse with anyone. He listened to the opinions of others, even when He knew they were wrong, because He knew the truth would come out eventually. Jesus started conversations by asking questions, listening to what others said, and responding by asking more questions. It wasn't long until they realized who Jesus was. We can also help others realize who Jesus is through asking questions and having conversations.

Going Deeper—Learn and Practice⁶

Conversations usually start by asking questions: How are you? What's up? How is your day? BUT, *great* conversations start by asking *powerful* questions. That's the first thing you need to know about having great conversations like Jesus did. It is important to remember that you are not teaching, you are letting the other person talk and discover. In Matthew 16, Jesus did not tell Peter who He was, He let Peter answer for himself.

Secondly, great conversations are “others-centered.” That means you have to ask people about themselves. Maybe you are really good at talking about yourself, but that's not a great way to have a conversation. In order to build a relationship, we must ask questions that focus on others rather than ourselves. When we do this, we earn the right to be heard. If you show them that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say, you will have a greater chance at having frequent and deeper conversations. Ultimately, you will be able to have conversations that lead to Jesus. The key is to focus on them and not you.

Leader, the session will now focus on having the participants practice conversations.

Let's pair off again. This time, partner up with the person you know the least in this group. We are going to practice asking powerful questions and having “others-centered” conversations. Pick from some of the questions listed in the Student Guide and have a conversation with your partner. One of you start by asking the questions, and then we will switch. As you have the conversation, listen for things that are interesting, that spark an emotion in your partner, or things that refer to their past.

Let the conversations begin. After a certain period of time, have them switch roles so that the other person is asking the questions. When the conversations have gone on long enough for them to get the idea, stop and bring the group back together. Ask the following:

- 1) What was that like? Was it easy to get them talking?
- 2) What did you learn about your partner that was interesting to you?

The third key to having great conversations is listening and responding. Remember that I told you to listen for things that are interesting, that spark an emotion in your partner, or things that refer to their past? This is called active listening, and it means that you listen for things in the conversation that can lead to more questions. Part of active listening is paying attention to their emotions—are they sad? Are they overwhelmed? Are they excited?

⁶ The principles in this section come from *Initiate: Powerful Conversations That Lead to Jesus*, Chapter 5.

Respond by asking them about it! Do they refer to their past or their personal history? Respond by asking them about it!

All of those things are keys to deeper conversation. Listening will also help you discover their true need. Maybe it's not a just a conversation they're looking for, maybe they need help with a project, or a family situation, or they're struggling in school. Whatever it may be, active listening can help you uncover it. The key is to focus on them and not you. Along with listening and responding to your conversation partner, you've got to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in your conversation, and may give you ideas or questions to ask your friend. The Holy Spirit may also help you connect the conversation to Jesus and give you an opportunity to share the Gospel.

Leader, the students will not continue practicing conversations, but this time put an emphasis on listening and responding.

We are going to pair off again with the same partners. What did you hear last time that you could ask more questions about? Respond and ask. As you have the conversation, listen also for the Holy Spirit to guide you into deeper conversations. If you need more help getting started, refer back to the list of questions we started with, but try to keep the conversation going by responding to what you hear.

Let the conversations begin. Again, have them switch roles after a while so that the other person is asking the questions. When the conversations have gone on long enough for them to get the idea, stop and bring the group back together. Ask the following:

- 1) What was that like? What did you hear that you were able to respond to?
- 2) Did you hear from the Holy Spirit? Could you detect or sense the Holy Spirit working in the conversation? Tell us about it.

Concluding Challenge

Practice makes perfect! It may be difficult to have a conversation now, or maybe it isn't, but you will get better at it as time goes by if you practice. It takes time to get really good at most things in life, and having great conversations is no different.

I challenge you to start at least one conversation this week, listen and respond, and see if God guides you and the conversation towards Jesus. As we close out, let's all think of one person we can have a conversation with this week—someone who needs Jesus. Let's pray together that God would help us to start great conversations, that we can learn to ask powerful questions, and that we can listen and respond through the Holy Spirit.

(Close out the time together with prayer. Pray specifically for opportunities to start powerful conversations.)

Looking Forward

- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED through serving," and we will focus on earning the right to be heard by practically helping those around us.
- Next week's small group is called "GOD SO LOVED my group." It emphasizes the importance of serving and sharing the Gospel within the various groups your students belong to at school (teams, bands, clubs).

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Message Title: | GOD SO LOVED through serving. |
| Primary Text: | Titus 3:3-7 |
| Purpose: | This message establishes the importance of serving those with whom you want to share Jesus. Jesus didn't just proclaim the Kingdom of God, he also served those around him by meeting their practical needs. This message emphasizes the Scriptural mandate for serving those around us by being ready for every good work. |
| Takeaways: | Students should understand that words are not enough in sharing the Gospel, we must also serve those we want to reach. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapters 3-32—each of these chapters contains ideas for serving others. |
| Needs: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal stories to illustrate the main points (see the message outline for details). 2. For the Icebreaker/Game: A few bowls of Jello, and an equal number of 4 foot dowel rods with a spoon taped to the end (like it's a spoon with a really long handle). |

Icebreaker/Game Idea

(Use this earlier in the service if you like. It will be used in the third point of the message as an illustration)
We need a few volunteers to come forward for this game. The rest of the audience will watch and cheer, or give advice. ***(Give each volunteer a small bowl of jello and a 4 foot dowel rod with a spoon taped on the end).*** Each bowl of Jello must be eaten, and it must be done using the dowel rod spoons, but you must keep your hands at the end of the dowel rod without the spoon. Each one who gets their bowl completely eaten wins! ***(It will be impossible for the volunteers to feed themselves. The only way to get the Jello in their bowls eaten will be to feed it to the other volunteers. After a while, if they don't figure this out on their own, start dropping hints).***

It was impossible for the participants to feed themselves. They could only get what they needed by serving others around them. We'll talk more about this tonight.

GOD SO LOVED through serving.

Introduction

(Consider taking a few moments to succinctly review the big ideas from the previous weeks' sermons and small group sessions. Reviewing each week will help your students commit what they are hearing to memory, and refresh them on the direction you are leading them.)

Today we are talking about how God's grace in our lives leads to good works in the lives of others around us. The Apostle Paul, in the Book of Titus, emphasizes that what he is saying is trustworthy. He was talking about the Gospel. Today, when we share the Gospel, we've also got to do it in a way that makes it trustworthy.

There are trustworthy sayings today that you live by. “What goes up must come down,” or, “there are plenty of other fish in the sea.” I recently heard this one, “It’s OK to be weird. It’s not OK to be an idiot.” (**Consider adding your own**).

If you are around church a lot you might hear people say, “God is good,” and the answer, “All the time!” The saying has been repeated so much that it has become common among us; it’s a trustworthy saying. In Titus, Paul gives a few sentences about ourselves and God that he says we can count on. These words have to do with how God loved us, and how he chooses to love others through us.

Scripture

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” (Titus 3:3–8 ESV)

Body

I. God so loved FIRST through serving.

- A. “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” (Titus 3:3)
 - 1. This list does not reflect the the kind of lives God wanted us to lead for ourselves.
 - 2. Given this list, we were incapable of showing love, so God would have to make the first move. God served us by showing us love first.
- B. We must serve others by loving them first, or it will never get done!
 - 1. When we lead with love, we are serving others.
 - 2. When we serve, we are truly leading, because leadership *is* service.
- C. ILLUSTRATION—Our culture is a “get what you pay for” culture. When we don’t get what we paid for, we all want make it right. (There is a word for this: justice). If the company is a good company, they will want to make it right too. This is called customer service. (**Tell a customer service story, where the company tried to get it right, or never did... and maybe vent a little.**) As followers of Jesus, we are offering up the Gospel. But do we have good customer service? Are we truly representing God well by loving and serving first?
- D. TRANSITION—God sets the example by loving and serving first. It’s in His nature to do so, and it’s a special characteristic that enables this: *selflessness*!

II. God so loved SELFLESSLY through serving.

- A. “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness,” (Titus 3:5)
 - 1. God didn’t take initiative toward us and love us because of how lovable we are (let’s be honest).
 - 2. We are undeserving people, with hearts completely oriented toward doing wrong—the word for this is *sinful*.
 - 3. Amazingly, God’s response to our sin was one of serving—selflessly serving his own creation.
- B. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...according to His own mercy” (Titus 3:4/5b)
 - 1. God shows up on the scene with *mercy*. Mercy is when we don’t get the punishment we deserve.

- a) John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
- b) He saved us—as in, not letting us “PERISH”—from a Greek word “*apollumi*” that means to be lost, or to go to waste.
- 2. Instead of allowing us to suffer like we deserve, as something worthless, God loved us selflessly by serving up mercy.
- C. ILLUSTRATION—There is something extra difficult about loving people who do not appreciate it. We all want people to get what they deserve, which is what makes mercy so unique and special. Mercy requires that we be selfless! Just as God loved and served us selflessly, we’ve got to selflessly serve those around us. **(Tell a story about selflessly serving others around you).**
- D. TRANSITION—Loving and serving selflessly means we love and serve completely, just as God does with us.

III. God so loved COMPLETELY through serving.

- A. “He saved us,...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).
 - 1. God washes us clean from our sin, regenerating and renewing our whole selves & we become heirs.
 - 2. God so loved that he sent his Son. Jesus was the only person in the New Testament deserving of everything God has—the hope of eternal life—but this passage says that we can become heirs of eternal life. We gain the same thing that the Son has, we are co-heirs with Christ, because God loved us completely.
 - 3. He loved us not only with words, but with deeds. We’ve got to do the same!
- B. ILLUSTRATION— God didn’t just mail us a letter containing nice words and a spiritual check we could cash for eternal life. I’m not sure we would have believed it anyway. Instead, He came and served all of mankind, in person, healing people, eating with them, listening to them, letting them know the love of God firsthand—right from God in the flesh. **(Tell a personal story about moving beyond words and serving others practically).**
- C. TRANSITION—God Loved us first, selflessly, and completely by serving all of us through action. We’ve also got to love first, selflessly, and completely through action.

IV. God so loved by serving us, and we must so love by serving others.

- A. “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.” (Titus 3:8a)
 - 1. If we believe in God, we should devote ourselves to doing good works.
 - 2. Doing good works means serving those around us, just as God served us. This is an important first step in sharing Jesus.
- B. “These things are excellent and profitable for people.” (Titus 3:8b)
 - 1. Paul says good works are profitable for people, but doing good works is not the same thing as proclaiming the Gospel. After all, plenty of organizations and companies claim to serve people, but they aren’t telling people about Jesus in the process.
 - 2. So how are they excellent and profitable? Why is it important to serve others? Because good works reflect who God is! He loves and serves first, selflessly, and completely! Serving in this way paves the road for us to share Jesus.
- C. ILLUSTRATION—Remember the game we played earlier with the really long spoons and the bowls of Jello? It wasn’t until the participants started serving others that things started happening. When they

started to serve one another the Jello, it was profitable for everyone. When we serve others around us, it is profitable for them, but it is also profitable for us, because we are sharing the Gospel!

- D. TRANSITION—God so loved by serving us so that we could know Him; we must also love and serve others so that they can know God.

Conclusion/Altar

The Apostle Paul opened up this chapter, just before the verses we've been studying, by giving these instructions: "Be ready for every good work, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, and show perfect courtesy toward all people" (Titus 3:1b-2). What would it look like if we were ready for every good work? We would be light in the darkness! We would help our friends thrive in life. We would stand for injustice. We would care about every person in this world, all of them who have God's image stamped on them by God himself.

The Gospel is the reason we must be ready for every good work, the reason we must serve those around us! God so loved us, so we love others. It is not enough to just share the Gospel, we must start by serving those we want to reach. Have you considered how you can serve your friends at school? Have you considered how you can serve your team or your band or your club? Have you prayed to God for opportunities to serve, or ideas for serving? ***(Invite students to pray at the altar for God to give them a heart of love; to transform them through the Holy Spirit so that they are ready for every good work. As they continue to pray, guide them in praying for God to help them realize ways to serve their friends or groups they are involved with at school).***

Looking Forward

- The small group session for this week focuses on sharing God within the different groups students belong to at school. Serving is a key part of this, and the upcoming small group session will dive deeper into the topic.
- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED through words," and will focus on the necessity of sharing the Gospel verbally in addition to serving.

- Session Title:** GOD SO LOVED my group.
- Primary Text:** 1 Corinthians 9:19-23
- Purpose:** This session focuses on helping students share Jesus in the context of their interests and activities. God can use a Campus Missionary's presence on sports teams, arts groups, academic/school groups to share Jesus with others in the group.
- Takeaways:** Students will learn how to share Jesus by learning to serve in relevant ways and have meaningful conversations within their current group.
- Relevant Chapters:** Chapters 3-11, 13-17, 29-30, 32
- Needs:**
1. For the icebreaker/game: Icebreaker Bingo cards/worksheets. These are located in the Student Guide.
 2. Personal story/illustration (optional).

GOD SO LOVED my group.

Review

Consider opening the session by reviewing the main ideas from the previous sermons and sessions. Reviewing will help your students commit what they have heard to memory.

Icebreaker/Game Idea

We are going to start by playing a game called Icebreaker Bingo. Turn to the Icebreaker Bingo page in the Student Guide and, without letting anyone else see what you are writing, fill out the information about yourself in each of the squares.

(Once they have their Bingo cards filled out, continue) Now, the object of the game is to find as many people in the room who share the same interests, or common ground, with you. When I say "go," try to find anyone who wrote the same answers as you, and have them initial the square. The first to get a "bingo" wins, or the person with the most squares wins in case no one gets a bingo. Go!

(Once the game is over) Now, how many of you discovered that you have something in common with someone else in this group? Do you feel like you know each other a little better now?

When we discover common interests, or common ground, with others, it makes it much easier to start conversations that can lead to Jesus.

Personal Story

Leader, share a personal story about a time you were able to share Jesus with someone because you had common interests. It could be a teammate from a sport you were in, a member of a club you were in together, etc.. If you are having a hard time coming up with a story, use the story in Chapter 4, page 36 of GOD SO LOVED...

Introducing the Topic

Ask the following:

1. What are some things you're interested in?
2. How many of you are involved in a group at school that had to do with your interest? (sports, the arts, academics, clubs, etc.)

Beginning is hard. Whether you're beginning to play a sport or an instrument, beginning to break a habit, or even beginning to clean your room. There's always a question of "Where do I begin?" You've probably asked yourself this question on multiple occasions. And I'm sure many of you have asked yourself this question when it comes to sharing Jesus in your school. "Where do I begin?" Sharing Jesus begins in your everyday activities. It begins with your team, in your band, with your group or club, it begins at your lunch table. Sharing Jesus doesn't mean going out of your way to find the lost, it means starting right where you are.

1. What does it mean to share Jesus in your everyday activities?
2. What are some ways you could begin sharing Jesus in your group or among your friends at school?

The Word

Have a student, or students, read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

Paul begins this passage by defending his freedom in Christ. This is not the type of freedom that allows him to do whatever he wants; but rather a freedom to be who God created him to be. He is free to have his identity in Christ, and he belongs to no one. But Paul also knows that he has a responsibility to share Jesus with others as much as possible, and that one of the best ways to share Jesus is to find common ground or share common interests with others. That's why Paul says, "I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." He goes on to say, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."

1. How does sharing common interests with others help us share the Gospel with them?
2. Paul describes himself as a servant to all. In what ways are we serving others when we find common ground?

To the Jew, Paul became a Jew. To the Gentile, a Gentile. Now don't misinterpret that, it does not mean that he proclaimed to believe everything they believed. It simply means he took an interest in their interests. He lived as they lived; he met them where they were. He knew that in order to communicate his beliefs, he first needed to understand theirs. He found or created common ground with them in order to share the Gospel.

1. Do you think it was easy for Paul to change himself for the sake of the Gospel?
2. In what ways did Jesus do this same thing? (He became like us, walked among us, took our sins upon Himself)

Going Deeper

Almost everyone is involved in some kind of group at school. Even if you're not in a formal school group, like a sports team or club, you probably have a group of friends you hang out with at lunch, or people you are naturally drawn toward.

1. What is it that puts you in the groups you're in? (usually common interests, common ground)
2. In what ways does already being a part of this group give you a head start on the Apostle Paul's strategy?

Just like Paul, we can meet and serve people right where we're at. We have the most influence when people know that we can connect with them. Your common interest puts you in a good position to start conversations (which is what we focused on last week). But you can really move the Gospel forward by considering yourself, as Paul did, a servant to others.

Let's go back to the question, "Where do I begin?" You begin by serving! Your school is filled with opportunities to serve, and the best place to start is right within your own group.

(Leader, if you've purchased GOD SO LOVED... for your students, now is a good time to have them find a chapter associated with a group they're a part of. Have them skim the chapters and identify the ideas for serving their respective groups. Lead a discussion about some ideas for serving.)

1. What happens when we serve others selflessly?
2. In what ways does our service prepare the way for us to share the Gospel?
3. What are some ways you could serve your group? What would they love? What do they need? What would really bless them?

Serving opens the door even more for us to have conversations that lead to Jesus. This is important, because your common interests aren't just a way for you to serve others, but a way for you to start conversations, build relationships, and share Jesus in the process. The message of the Gospel is not shared by your presence or your service, the message of the Gospel is shared when you begin to talk to others about Jesus.

1. Serving is good, but serving alone cannot connect others to Jesus. Why is that? (Because the Gospel message is communicated through words.)
2. What are some simple ways you can begin communicating your belief in Jesus once you've earned the right to be heard through serving? (write encouraging notes, pray for your team, invite teammates/group-mates to youth group, etc.)

(Leader, if you've purchased GOD SO LOVED... for your students, they can find great conversation starters for the people groups they're involved in at the conclusion of each respective chapter.)

Concluding Challenge

I challenge you to become a servant. Serve your friends. Pick a place and start. Connect with your group and find a way to serve them. Take note if your service leads you to having a conversation about Jesus!

(Close out the time together with prayer. Pray specifically for opportunities to serve.)

Looking Forward

- The message in Week 4 is called "GOD SO LOVED through words," and it establishes the Scriptural mandate for verbally communicating our faith.
- Next week's small group session is called "GOD SO LOVED the hurting," and it will focus on serving and sharing Jesus with students going through difficulties.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Message Title: | GOD SO LOVED through words. |
| Primary Text: | Romans 10:13-17 |
| Purpose: | This message establishes the primacy of communicating the Gospel with our voices. It is never enough to <i>only</i> serve and be nice to others, we must also openly communicate the Gospel message with our words. This is a Scriptural mandate, and we are the ones who must speak the truth of the Gospel in love. |
| Takeaways: | Students should walk away understanding the importance of sharing the Gospel verbally —and understand this is necessary if the message is to be transmitted. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapter 1, Chapter 2 |
| Needs: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Several packs of dominos (A Dollar Store is usually a good place to find these). 2. A personal story to illustrate the final point (see the message outline for details). |

Icebreaker/Game Idea

(Use this earlier in the service if you like. It will be used in the second point of the message as an illustration)

Form several teams amongst your group, and give each team a pack, or several packs, of dominos. Set a timer of 2 to 3 minutes, and challenge each team to construct the most elaborate and creative domino pattern. When the timer is up, each team will take turns setting their dominos into motion. Give each team a point if:

- They use all the dominos in making their pattern.
- All of the dominos fall, especially the last one.

You can also give one point for the most elaborate/creative pattern. Award the winning team(s). This game is meant to emphasize cause and effect; that certain things have to occur before the last domino can fall.

GOD SO LOVED through words.

Introduction

(Consider taking a few moments to succinctly review the big ideas from the previous weeks' sermons and small group sessions. Reviewing each week will help your students commit what they are hearing to memory, and refresh them on the direction you are leading them.)

Tonight we are going to talk about one of the most important keys to sharing Jesus with your friends and family. It's really quite simple, but we often overlook it. The reason we shouldn't overlook it is because the Bible takes the time to talk about it and emphasize its importance. The simple truth I want you to receive tonight is this: In order for anyone to accept Jesus into their lives, they must be told about who Jesus is and what He has done. Our words communicate the Gospel message, and words are the *only* way the Truth about Jesus can be communicated.

Scripture

“For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” (Romans 10:13–17 NIV11)

Body

I. God is ready to save anyone who calls upon Him.

- A. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13 NIV11)
 - 1. God is ready and willing to reach out to anyone who calls out his name.
 - 2. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,” (Titus 2:11 ESV)
 - 3. God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9 NIV11)
 - 4. It’s the same for your school now as it was when these Scriptures were written down. God is not willing that anyone in your school should perish. It doesn’t matter what group they fit into, how rich or poor they are, or whether or not they are going to college—God will respond to the students in your school when the students in your school call out to God!
- B. Words are powerful!
 - 1. When someone calls upon the Lord to save them, God hears them and answers!
 - 2. The words of a person calling out for salvation makes God move.
 - 3. Someone crying out, “God save me!” is one of the only things that forces God to act! He can’t help it! It’s promised in His Word! He gives salvation to every person when they call for Him.
 - 4. That means the worst behaved student in your school—the one nobody seems to believe in—could make God move by uttering a few simple words, “God save me...”
- C. ILLUSTRATION—God is like a firefighter at the fire station waiting for the call for help to come in. When that call comes in, the sirens blast and the firefighter rushes out of the station with lights blazing, moving to the rescue! In the same way, when that call for salvation comes to God, he acts with lightning speed and comes to the rescue.
- D. TRANSITION—Although God will save everyone who calls upon Him, not everyone *can* call upon Him, because not everyone *knows* about Him.

II. No one can call *upon* God until they’ve been told *about* God.

- A. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15a NIV11)
 - 1. The Apostle Paul is using a very simple logic here. It’s not complicated.
 - 2. Unless someone tells the lost about Jesus, the lost cannot hear about Jesus. And if the lost cannot hear about Jesus, the lost cannot know about Jesus. And if the lost cannot know about Jesus, the lost cannot call upon Jesus to save them.
 - 3. Now think about this as if it were the students at your lunch table: Unless someone tells your lunch table about Jesus, your lunch table cannot hear about Jesus. And if your lunch table cannot hear

about Jesus, your lunch table cannot know about Jesus. And if your lunch table cannot know about Jesus, your lunch table cannot call upon Jesus to save them.

4. So who is the best person to tell your lunch table about Jesus? It's you!
- B. Words are powerful!
 1. Your words, as Campus Missionaries, have the power to point your classmates to eternity. Your words can lead them to Jesus!
 2. However, if you withhold your words about God, you withhold Jesus from them. This is also powerful, but not for good. It is only powerful for darkness.
 3. Use your voice in the way God intended—to let your school know about Jesus!
- C. ILLUSTRATION—Remember the dominos game earlier in the service? You couldn't win unless the last domino fell. But in order for the last domino to fall, every other domino had to fall. It's the same with your friends calling upon Jesus. Calling upon Jesus is the last domino before salvation, but before that domino can fall, your school must first believe in Jesus, and before that they must hear about Jesus, and for that to happen someone must tell them about Jesus, and for that to happen YOU have to open your mouth and speak the truth about God. **Your words are the the first domino!**
- D. TRANSITION—We are the first domino. We must share the message to get things moving. And what message do we share? And how do we share it?

III. We must share the message through words about Christ.

- A. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” (Romans 10:17 NIV11)
 1. Faith is the result of hearing the message of the Gospel. Although serving others is important, serving others alone is not enough to generate faith in our friends.
 2. Faith in Jesus can only result when someone hears the message about Jesus. The bottom line is this—if you want to share Jesus, you've got to talk about Jesus, not just represent Him by being nice or serving others.
- B. Words are powerful!
 1. Some people believe that living a moral life, being kind to others, and simply being a “living witness” will lead others to Jesus. Those things are important and we should be doing all of those things if we are truly representing Jesus.
 2. However, being a living witness only leads others to Jesus when it is combined with telling others about Jesus. That's because being moral and being kind only communicates that you are a good person. If you want to communicate the source of goodness, kindness, and ultimate morality, you must use words to talk about your relationship with Jesus.
 3. Serving others is good, but not good enough. Faith comes from *hearing the message*, not from being treated nicely.
 4. Your actions of serving others open the door for them to receive the message about Christ, but the message itself is communicated through words!
 5. Those words about Jesus can result in faith in Jesus! This is powerful!
- C. ILLUSTRATION—***(Tell a personal story here about a time you verbally shared Jesus with another person and faith resulted, or talk about how you personally heard the Gospel and how it drove you to respond in faith.)***

Conclusion/Altar

Talking about Jesus can be intimidating, but that's why we learned the *Life in 6 Words/G.O.S.P.E.L.* acrostic a few weeks ago. You know the Gospel story, the hard part can be finding the courage, or the right time, to open our mouths and communicate it. But we must! We are the first domino to fall! So we've got to pray for the Holy Spirit to give us courage, calm our nerves, and remind us of the message so that we can share the Gospel with others.

(Invite students to the altar for prayer. You can challenge them to share the Gospel with at least one person this week, and pray for that opportunity. You can also invite them to begin praying for a person they want to share Jesus with, and guide them in asking the Holy Spirit for courage and opportunities and discernment.)

Looking Forward

- The small group session for this week focuses on sharing God's love with the hurting around us.
- Next week's message is called "GOD SO LOVED your testimony," and we will focus on the power of our testimonies in accomplishing God's mission.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Session Title: | GOD SO LOVED the hurting. |
| Primary Text: | 2 Corinthians 2:3-8 |
| Purpose: | This session focuses on sharing Jesus with those in pain, in need, in special circumstances, or who are in desperate need for answers to the challenges of life. |
| Takeaways: | Students will gain compassion for the hurting, understand how to better love and serve them, and be challenged to start a conversation that can lead to Jesus. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapters 18-24 |
| Needs: | 1. For the game: peanut butter, two slices of bread, butter knife, blindfold, timer. 2. Personal story/illustration (optional). |

GOD SO LOVED the hurting.

Review

Consider opening the session by reviewing the main ideas from the previous sermons and sessions. Reviewing will help your students commit what they have heard to memory.

Icebreaker/Game Idea - Make Me a Sandwich!

Gather your small group and blindfold one member. Hide the peanut butter, bread, and knife from the blindfolded person. Challenge the blindfolded person to make a peanut butter sandwich in three separate rounds as follows:

You will have up to three rounds to make me a peanut butter sandwich. The blindfold must stay on and cover your eyes at all times. In this first round, you have 90 seconds to find the ingredients and make me a sandwich! Go!

Once the round is over hide the ingredients again: Okay time for round two. You still have 90 seconds and must remain blindfolded, but this time the rest of the group can instruct you or give you directions toward the ingredients, etc. The group cannot touch you or the ingredients or the knife, they can only talk to you. Ready? Go!

Once the round is over, be prepared to have more bread on hand in case they successfully made the sandwich. Hide the ingredients one final time: Okay, now for round three! Once again, you must keep your blindfold on and make a peanut butter sandwich in 90 seconds. However, this time the group can do anything in their power to help you. Ready? Go!

Once the round is over clean up, or eat a sandwich, then transition:

1. In the first round, was it likely for the blindfolded person to complete the sandwich in time?
2. What made it possible in the next two rounds? (the blindfolded person had help.)

Almost everyone needs help sometime in life, even when it comes to the simple things.

Personal Story

Leader, share a personal story about a time you were hurting and someone helped you, or about a time you helped a hurting person. What was it like? Were you able to connect to the Gospel or share some encouragement? If you are having a hard time coming up with a story, use the story in Chapter 21, pages 137-138 of GOD SO LOVED...

Introducing the Topic

Ask the following:

1. How many of you remember a time when you were in need of something serious? *(Have someone volunteer to share their experience)*
2. What is like when you don't fit in? How about when you feel depressed? Or when you have emotional pain? What is it like to be bullied?

The truth is, we have all had a need at some point in our lives. And most of you have probably experienced some type of pain, whether it be physical or emotional. There may have even been times where you have felt alone. Whatever it was, whether we admit it or not, most of us know what it's like to be hurting. So do a lot of the people we see everyday at school. Most people hide their pain, but it's there.

The Word

Have a student, or students, read 2 Corinthians 1:3-8.

1. What does it mean to share in Christ's sufferings?
2. How many of you have experienced receiving comfort from God? What was that like?

Paul is thanking God, not only for His comfort, but also that he can use that comfort to help others. As Paul wrote about the sufferings he faced, he was able to identify in a stronger way with the Corinthians because they were sharing in the same sufferings. Paul was also telling them to look at their sufferings as a blessing, and to remain steadfast.

1. What does it mean to look at your suffering as a blessing?
2. What makes it possible for us to have this point of view?

It's easy to get discouraged when you go through times of hurting, but one advantage we have as Christians is knowing God will get us through it. However, many of the people at your school do not have this hope. This passage is challenging us to take our experience and use it as a tool to bring comfort to others and to share Jesus with them.

Going Deeper

God sent His Son to rescue a broken world. He came to meet needs, to bring healing, and to mend broken hearts. As Christ's ambassadors, we should be loving the hurting around us in the same way. Pay attention when you walk down the halls of your school, or when you sit in your classroom. You will see so many people who are hurting or who have a serious need.

1. What are some of the hurts you see in your school? What are some of the deep challenges and needs?
2. What is a great first step to help meet those needs, or to bring healing to those hurts? *(Pray, have a conversation, take an interest in the hurting)*

Your school is filled with hurting people who need to hear the comforting news about Jesus Christ. God often makes Himself known in our times of hurting, and when you see hurting students around you, it's a great opportunity to reach out to them with the love of God. GOD SO LOVED the bullied, the hurting and the broken, the loner and the lonely, the cutter, the LGBT student.

Jesus knew suffering on this earth; He knew loneliness, rejection, and pain. He knew what it was like to be bullied. Christ is very relevant to the hurting. Just as Christ has comforted us, we can now use that comfort we have to comfort others.

Ultimately, healing is found in the Cross, and our goal should be to help those who are in need by pointing them to Jesus. But it's also important to realize that sharing Jesus with hurting students is the same as sharing Jesus with everyone else: we must serve them, take an interest in them, and start conversations that can connect to Jesus.

1. What are some ways you can cheer up a friend who is going through difficulties?
2. What is something you can do to help those who are feeling lonely or bullied or outcast?

Ways you can help those in need:

- Bullied and hurting people want someone who can stand up for them.
 - Lonely people need someone to listen to them and spend time with them.
 - Become a friend by taking a genuine interest in them.
 - Everyone needs someone to be faithful in love and actions.
 - Be accepting and invitational towards everyone.
3. How many of you know someone in your school who is in need right now?
 4. In addition to serving, what are some ways you start sharing your faith with them? (*pray together, share encouraging Scriptures with them, invite them to hang out with you and others from your youth group, invite them to church*)

Concluding Challenge

I challenge you this week to talk to a person in need, a person who is hurting. Take an interest. Start a conversation. Become a friend, and show them you care. Hurting people want to know that someone is willing to invest in them. When you begin helping them on the road to healing, sharing Jesus becomes much more natural.

(Close out the time together with prayer. Pray specifically for opportunities to help those who are hurting)

Looking Forward

- The message in Week 5 is called "GOD SO LOVED your testimony," and it addresses the power of our own story when sharing Jesus with others.
- Next week's small group session is called "GOD SO LOVED my testimony," and it will help students discover and develop their own testimonies and stories about God.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Message Title: | GOD SO LOVED your testimony. |
| Primary Text: | Revelation 12:10-11 |
| Purpose: | The message establishes the power of the testimony. God's story is expressed through our story—how He has worked in our lives. When sharing the Gospel, we should always talk about how God has changed and transformed us. Equally important is our non-verbal testimony—how we live our lives. The idea that we should expect ridicule or suffering as we share the Gospel, and the way that we handle it, is also a part of the testimony and it is powerful. |
| Takeaways: | Students should feel encouraged to think about and develop their own testimony, and to share with others how God has moved in their lives. |
| Relevant Chapters: | Chapter 2, Chapters 3-32 (these chapters all encourage students who share their own story with others in one way or another) |
| Needs: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal stories to use as illustrations (optional, see the message outline for details). 2. Lists of descriptions/characterizations for the icebreaker/game. 3. Candy for the game winners. |

Icebreaker/Game Idea

(Use this earlier in the service if you like. It will be used in the third point of the message as an illustration)

Everyone stand up! This game is called “Sit Down If...” and here’s how it works: I’m going to read a list of items one at a time. If anything I read is true for you, you must sit down. Be honest!

(You will need to come up with a list of descriptions or characterizations to read off. Don’t be afraid to make it fun or interesting! If you come up with a few lists, you can have multiple rounds. If you need help coming up with a list, just google the phrase “sit down if”. Give out candy to those who are still standing after each round).

Believe it or not, you just gave a testimony about your life by playing that game. We know more about you now than we did before we started. God loves testimonies, and God loves your testimony!

GOD SO LOVED your testimony.

Introduction

(Consider taking a few moments to review the big ideas from the previous weeks’ sermons, and from the small group sessions. Reviewing will help your students commit what they are hearing to memory, and refresh them on the direction you are leading them.)

Our life is a story and each new day is like a new chapter being written! It is a perfect story of God’s love. He is the Author of our lives, and He is writing our story—our testimonies! We are part of a great story and we must share our story with others that do not know Jesus! In the book of Revelation, John writes about the power of our stories—the power of our testimonies!

Scripture

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.’” (Revelation 12:10–11 NIV11)

Body

I. Your testimony is a powerful weapon.

- A. “The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”
 1. We are in a spiritual war. The Apostle Paul talks about this war in Ephesians 6, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world **and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**”
 2. The accuser of the brethren is Satan, the devil. In the Book of Job, Satan accused Job of lacking true devotion to God. In Zechariah 3:1, he accused Joshua the high priest. Peter warns us that Satan is prowling around like a lion, seeking anyone to devour.
 3. Satan’s weapons in this war are accusations—accusing us of sin and shortfall. His accusations are true and powerful, for we have sinned and fall short (Romans 3:23). But we have weapons too!
- B. “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb...”
 1. John lists three weapons in the battle against our accuser: the first and most powerful is the blood of the Lamb—Jesus’ death on the cross for us!
 2. It’s true that we’ve sinned and fallen short, but the blood of the Lamb covers our sins so that God cannot see them.
 3. That’s why Paul wrote, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:33–34 ESV)
- C. “...and by the word of their testimony...”
 1. The second weapon John lists is the testimony of the brothers and sisters. That’s you and me—we are the brothers and sisters. The power of our testimony is second only to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross!
 2. When we confess our shortfall, and testify to how God has changed and transformed us, Satan is defeated and the power of the testimony is felt.
- D. **ILLUSTRATION**—Almost everyday people are brought to stand trial before courts of law all across our nation. They are accused of a crime, or of some other wrong doing. But there is something that will almost always set the accused free—when someone honestly testifies as a witness and can provide proof of the accused innocence. In the courtroom of eternity, Satan is our accuser, but we have the opportunity to testify, not of our innocence, but of Christ’s sacrifice that sets us free. **(If you have a story about being a witness in a court of law that would illustrate this further, feel free to use it here.)**
- E. **TRANSITION**—The only catch is this: a testimony has to be shared in order to be effective.

II. The power of your testimony is only experienced when shared.

- A. “They triumphed over him...by the **word** of their testimony...”
 1. A testimony is something that is given publicly.
 2. “Word” here is *logos* in the original Greek, and it means something that is spoken.

3. It is only when the testimony is spoken, shared, or given that the power of it is fully felt.
- B. God chooses to use our testimonies in the spiritual battle, because God loves our testimonies.
 1. We know that it is only Christ who saves us. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).
 2. Even though we are saved by Christ, we overcome our accuser by our testimony.
 3. God uses our testimony—the story of how Christ has shaped us—to defeat the accusations of the enemy. Our testimony is the real life illustration of the power of the blood of the Lamb.
- C. Like all weapons, the power our testimony is only felt when it is used.
- D. ILLUSTRATION—Imagine you’re an enthusiastic hunter, and you’ve saved up your money to buy a new hunting rifle, a powerful one that will help you get the deer you’ve been dreaming about. You get the rifle, practice shooting it, sighting it in, and you have it cleaned and ready to go for the first day of hunting season. On the first day of deer season you get up early, head out into the woods to your favorite hunting spot, and wait patiently. After a short period of time the biggest buck you’ve ever seen comes walking through woods and pauses just a few yards away from you. You slowly reach for your weapon, only to realize you left it back at home. You saved all that money, got the weapon ready to go, but when the time came it was useless because you didn’t bring it along with you. That’s what a testimony can be like. It’s powerful, but unless you bring it with you and use it, it is useless.
- E. TRANSITION—The word of your testimony is powerful, and so is your lifestyle.

III. Your life is an unspoken testimony to those who see it.

- A. “...they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”
 1. The third weapon John lists in the fight against Satan is our lifestyle.
 2. How we live our lives is a testimony to how much we believe in Jesus.
- B. The brothers and sisters in Revelation were willing to give up their lives for the Gospel, and so should we.
 1. Jesus laid down His life for us. “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:17 ESV). As followers of Christ, we should also be willing to lay down our lives.
 2. It’s doubtful you’ll be called upon to physically sacrifice your life for the Gospel, but you always have the opportunity to sacrifice your lifestyle for the Gospel, as God calls us to do.
- C. The brothers and sisters in Revelation were not afraid to suffer for the cause of Christ, and we shouldn’t be afraid to suffer either.
 1. Our suffering is light, but should still be costly. We should sacrifice in kindness to others to the point of suffering. We should be giving of ourselves and our resources in a way that demonstrates the character of Christ—a sacrificial and humble character.
 2. When we suffer to serve others, our lives become a testimony that exemplifies Jesus. Our life becomes an unspoken testimony for all to see. When combined with our spoken testimony, it’s no wonder the accuser is defeated.
- D. ILLUSTRATION—Remember the game we played earlier, “Sit Down If...”? You didn’t have to say anything for us to know what has happened in your life. We knew it by your actions—whether or not you sat down. Your actions in life also give a testimony. Do they portray someone who is committed to Jesus? Are you sacrificial? Have you truly given up your life for the sake of the Gospel? **(Alternatively, or additionally, you can tell a personal story of sacrifice or suffering for the cause of Christ that became a powerful unspoken testimony for others to see).**

Conclusion/Altar

When was the last time you gave a testimony for the sake of the Gospel? It could be the story of how you came to Christ, or just a testimony of how God has been working in your life recently. Have you ever experienced the power of using your testimony? God has given you powerful weapons—your words and your lifestyle. They are powerful when they are used together. It's time that we become a people who tell the story of our testimony, and who live out the story of Gospel. Will you make that commitment tonight? Will you pray for opportunities to use your testimony?

Invite students to come to the altar for a time of commitment and prayer. Challenge them to commit to share a testimony at least once in the next week. Ask how God is speaking to them about the testimony of their life. Invite them to pray for opportunities to testify about God to their friends.

Looking Forward

- The small group session for this week focuses on developing personal testimonies and stories about God's work in our lives. Students will discover stories of God's work from their own lives, and begin to record them for use in sharing Jesus with their friends.

- Session Title:** GOD SO LOVED my testimony.
- Primary Text:** 1 John 1:1-4
- Purpose:** This session will help students develop and share their testimony. It will emphasize the power of their story. Students will explore some of the questions and suggestions from Chapter 2 for developing a testimony.
- Takeaways:** By the end of the sessions students should have an outline of their testimony, or be able to talk about significant moments in their walk with God.
- Relevant Chapters:** Chapter 2
- Needs:**
1. For the game: a ball of yarn or string (two if you have larger group), a list of “getting to know you” questions for each participant. See the instructions below to create the list.
 2. A personal story about sharing a testimony in the “Personal Story” section.

GOD SO LOVED my testimony.

Review

Consider opening the session by reviewing the main ideas from the previous sermons and sessions. Reviewing will help your students commit what they have heard to memory.

Icebreaker/Game Idea - Getting to Know You Web

Create a list of pre-written questions geared towards getting to know someone better. The questions should be thoughtful, but they also shouldn't take long to answer. If you're having difficulty coming up with questions, just google “getting to know you questions,” and you'll find a lot of ideas. You will need 30-40 questions.

Start out by forming a circle with the group. If there are more than twenty people, split them up into two groups. Pass out one ball of yarn or string to each circle.

In this game we will get to know each other, and our stories, better. One of you who will start out with a ball of yarn. You will hold onto the end of the string and throw the ball of yarn to another person in the circle. You must then ask that person a question from the list of questions I have given you. Once they have answered, they will hold onto their part of the string, throw the ball of yarn to another person, and ask a question. This pattern will continue this until the ball of yarn runs out.

After the game:

How did you feel sharing about your life? You'll notice each of you had different answers, because each of you has a different story.

Personal Story

Leader, share a personal story about the first time you shared your testimony, or a testimony someone shared with you that made an impact. What was it about that testimony that made it memorable?

Transition your story with the following: Each of our lives tells a story, and God is a major part of it. When our stories intersect with God's story, it's called a testimony. And a testimony is powerful when you want to share Jesus with others.

Introducing the Topic

Everyone has a story; our stories are what make us unique. If you think about it, it's really quite amazing that no two stories are the same. We may have things in common, but your story will never belong to anyone else! You may not realize it, but you need the Gospel in your life just as much as the football player or the Vo-Tech student in your school, and your story illustrates that. The first step to explaining to your friends how much God so loved them is explaining how much God so loved you.

1. What does your story say about God?
2. What does the way you live your life say about God? This is a non-verbal testimony.

The Word

Have a student, or students, read 1 John 1:1-4.

In this passage, John is declaring what he had seen and heard when he was with Jesus. He had an experience with Jesus, and because of that, he desired to lead others to Jesus. His experience with Christ completely changed him.

1. Have you ever had a powerful experience with God? Tell us about it.
2. How did that experience change or affect you?

When we have a true encounter with Christ it should motivate us to share with others what Christ did for us. This is our testimony. The way in which we live our lives is also a testimony. It is not enough to experience Jesus for ourselves, we must share our experience with others.

1. What makes it so important that we not just experience Jesus, but that we also declare Jesus?
2. What would have happened if John never shared his experience with Jesus?
3. What makes our actions just as important as our words? (*Actions often speak louder than words.*)

Going Deeper

We can drive people to Christ by how we live our lives, but we can also drive them away. For some people, your life will be the only testimony of Jesus they get, so how you live matters. But equally as important are the words you say. The message of the Gospel is not clearly communicated by our actions, even our nice actions. Being nice doesn't mean we've shared Jesus with others. The message of the Gospel is only communicated when we verbally share it with others. So what you say matters tremendously.

Still, most of us struggle with the concept of telling others about Jesus. At the same time, most of us have no problem with telling others about ourselves. But if we have surrendered our lives to God, we shouldn't be able to talk about ourselves without talking about God's impact upon us, or the things we are involved with for God. The two stories—our story and God's story—should be intertwined. We are who we are because God is who He is,

and He is living inside of us. And when He is living in us, our story will become a God-story. When you tell people your story, you should also be talking about Jesus, the Bible, the church, etc.. Your story can open the door for you to explain the Gospel.⁷

1. What was your life like before you came to Christ? How is it different now?
2. In what way is your story intertwined with God's story?

Discovering My Story

Leader, next you will guide your group through an exercise that will help them develop their testimonies and stories about God. Have the students turn to the page titled "Discovering My Story" in the Student Guide. Have the students work through the questions and write down their responses. Depending on how much time you have, you may pick a few questions for them to focus on, rather than the entire worksheet. When they have finished to your satisfaction, bring the group back together and have a discussion about what they discovered. How can they use these discoveries to share Jesus with others?

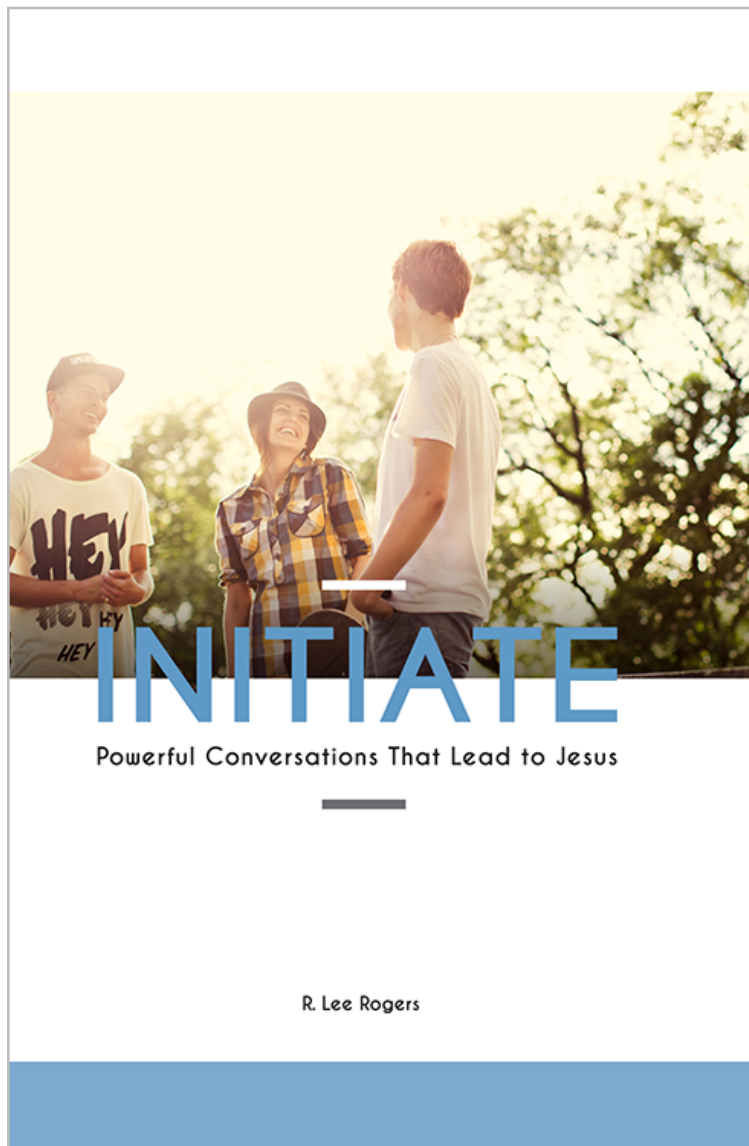
Concluding Challenge

I challenge you this week to share a testimony or God-story with at least one person. If they want to know more or seem curious, be sure to share *Life in 6 Words/The G.O.S.P.E.L.* with them.

(Close out the time together with prayer. Pray specifically for opportunities and courage to share testimonies this week.)

⁷ GOD SO LOVED..., page 21.

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