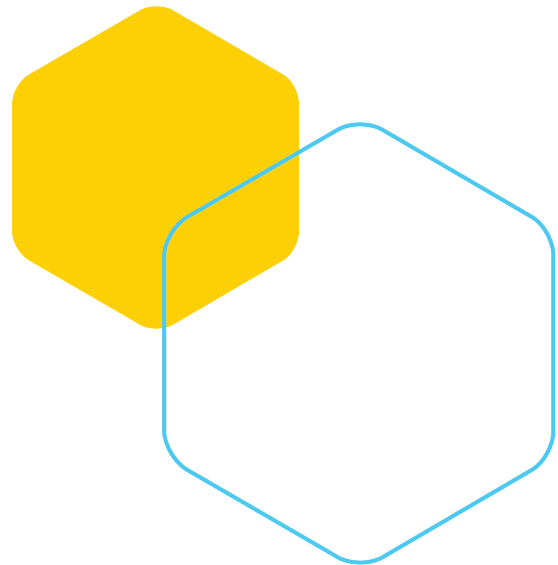




The Other Six

Mission is Life. Not just an Event.



A Curriculum For Youth Groups

THEREFORE 
MINISTRIES

Session 1: The Gospel is bigger than we ever thought

SPEAKER NOTES:

>> Key to Communicate:

As an opening session, spend time sharing how you and others have come into contact with a big God with big plans. You get to paint a picture of God's Kingdom tonight with big brush strokes. Include his people, his creation, his great love, his intimacy and his Jesus. Feel free to share how you have been on a journey towards seeing a bigger God. Be open and vulnerable about your own misunderstandings about God and the limits you've placed on God. Declare that you are not there yet either – that you are still on this journey of knowing more about this God. Invite the students to join you on this journey of discovery.

>> Question this Session Answers:

How can I remove some of the limits I place on God and his dreams?

>> In This Session, Students Will:

Hear about meeting a bigger God, a bigger plan and a bigger love than we perhaps thought before.

>> Introduction to Consider:

Open up with a story about a time when God blew the roof off. We all have that big “God showing up” story. Explain how you had placed limits on what God could or should do, but he showed up bigger than you could have imagined. Explain how God did this in love. Explain your personal shift in “theology” - how you came to a greater understanding of God through this moment.

>> Main Points:

- We place limits on God.
 - Humanity is prone to understand God in categories we can grasp. We like systems and laws. We like concepts and ideas. However, we have a tougher time admitting that we don't understand or grasp the fullness of something. Therefore, it is easier for us to grasp God in our small categories. It's just not right.
- God tends to remove the limits we place on him to stretch our faith.

- See the pattern in scripture as God continually removes limits: Genesis 1 and 2 – He revealed himself as Creator of the whole universe (consider that), Genesis 12 – God called a small and flawed family from a small and flawed area of the world to be a blessing to the whole world, 1 Kings 8:22-27 - Solomon declared that YHWH could not even be contained in the Temple.
- Unpack that similar pattern in your life.
- A weeklong mission trip can limit God.
 - Is a mission trip a check mark in a “things that young Christians do” list? Is it a “meet others and have a mission vacation”? Is a mission trip just what some might call a “Christian high”?
 - Or is missions a part of something bigger? Can this week be an introduction to a bigger God and a bigger love that lasts not for one week but the other 51 as well?

>> Illustrations to Consider:

This is about you and your God. You get to share how God has broken off some of the limitations you placed on him and the limitations you placed on yourself. In sharing your story, make sure you give permission for others to join in with their own story. Don't share as one who has arrived, turned around and is asking others to follow. Share in humility as one who has learned and is still learning. Invite others to join you in the journey of discovery.

>> Conclusion to Consider:

Are you ready to better know that kind of God? Perhaps you are not. That's ok. God loves you so much; he might (like Jacob) just wrestle you to the ground. He might (like Paul) shine a light and make you fall off a horse. He might (like Peter) invite you to walk with him on water. But all he does is in love. Now isn't that a God worth meeting?

THE PRACTICAL CHALLENGE:

As you go to your small groups:

What are the limits you have put on God? What are the limits you have put on yourself?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Leader's Note: Every small group takes time to warm up to each-other - even when everyone in the group is familiar with each other. This first small group time allows students to get to know each other a little better. . Set the tone for trust by encouraging students to: a) share what they

are comfortable sharing, b) listen well without interrupting, and c) avoid discouraging remarks.

As your time together progresses, you will probably see the students beginning to open up more and more. Some students may be hesitant to open up. The key with these students is to encourage them to stretch beyond their comfort zones while being compassionate about their discomfort. Other students may respond quickly and become very vulnerable in a short period of time. The key with these students will be to affirm their sharing even as you facilitate equal sharing among others (“Thanks, Tyler. Does anyone else want to share?”).

Take the first few minutes of your small group time to imagine what it would be like to be an apprentice of Jesus. Imagine Jesus bringing you into his “shop” to show you around, teach you what to do, what not to do and how he works. He will give you time to try things out, and you can always ask questions, but be prepared.

. Jesus wants to remove the limits you place on him. Perhaps more importantly, Jesus wants to remove the limits you place on yourself.

We heard how big this gospel of Jesus actually is. We heard about a God who wants to push aside the limits we place on him.

Think of a tuna can. A tuna can is a few inches across and about an inch deep. It is a small cylinder, but is it a tuna? A tuna can reach lengths of 8-10 feet, and a full-grown tuna can weigh a few hundred pounds. Why did something so big get placed into something so small? The answer: we needed to carry it around. We often do that with God. We need to “carry him around” so we put him in small categories and small manageable ideas. The Creator of the universe is anything but small and God will not be contained! He desires to be released and worshipped in the fullness of his being.

As you begin to consider what it looks like to serve as Jesus’ apprentice, realize that he wants to remove limits you have placed on him. He doesn’t just want you for an hour on Sundays. He doesn’t just want you when you are at church– Jesus wants your whole life.

- How would you describe an apprentice?
- What might it mean that you are Jesus’ apprentice?
- Where might you see and hear Jesus in order for him to teach you?
- What limits have you discovered that you have placed on God through your life? Perhaps you thought God could only work through certain people. Perhaps you thought he was only concerned with a few things (our morality, if and how we pray, church attendance, etc.).
- What pictures of God has he shifted along the way? (Have you pictured God as an angry old man in the sky or Jesus being meek and mild?)

TAKE HOME #2

Let's be honest for a minute. Why do you attend church? Don't worry about what's "right" to say. Don't worry about what others think. Write some of your honest reasons down. Did you hear it would be cool? Are you just trying to hang out with your friends? Are you hoping to learn more about God? Look at your answers. Are they true? Re-write or add to your answers if you need to be more truthful. These are your expectations. That's all you have right now. The experience is still before you – ready to unfold. What will happen?

Now, let me ask another question: Do you think God can use you no matter what you wrote? Do you think God can take your expectations – whether they are good or not so good and use you for his mission?

Read Mark 9:40: "But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us.'"

Look back at your list of reasons for being here. I think if you're honest, you will have some reasons that are quite good and maybe some that are not. That's okay. God can use all those reasons for his glory. The question, then, is - how willing are you to let God in?

It's been said that you are becoming an apprentice to Jesus. Jesus wants to remove the limits you place on him and the limits you place on yourself. If God were to use you, what do you think you could do? Are there limits? We can be silly at this point and say "Well, I can't fly," or we can be honest about our limitations. If we are honest, God might just take those limitations away.

Let me share an example with you.

A few years ago, I went to a homeless shelter for the first time. It was mealtime and our youth group was there to serve. I was the leader of a small youth group of eight young people. We had come on this mission trip to serve the city and meet Jesus.

This soup kitchen was new for me. Hundreds of people were all looking down at their food. There were rows of tables and few open spots. It scared me. I looked quickly at their faces; lost, broken, hurting and obviously hungry. I'd never met a homeless person before – not that I could recall. I had a heart for justice though, so I was happy that we were there that night to make a difference. We were there to serve the meal.

The lady in charge of the soup kitchen met us near the door and I stepped forward.

"We are here to help!" I proudly declared.

"Great! Grab a tray of food and sit down with the people," she responded.

"No," I corrected her, "We're with the church. We're here to serve."

“I know,” she said with loving and knowing eyes, “Grab a tray and sit down with the people.”

The youth looked back at me. I motioned for each of them to move forward, grab a tray, and sit down with some of the homeless folks. The youth dutifully did as they were told. On their own or in pairs, they sat down. I watched for a bit and grabbed my tray. I turned to face the group. Hundreds of homeless people were before me and I did not want to sit with any of them. I liked to speak with “normal” people. Not homeless folks. I didn’t know what to say, and then I saw my way out. A table in the corner was empty. I made a plan to walk over to the table, sit down, eat my meal, and look “spiritual”. If any of the youth asked what I was doing later that night, I would lie and say, “I was praying for you.”

I had to make a decision. I could sit on my own – rationalizing away why I didn’t get involved, or I could sit with someone. You know what I did. I sat with someone.

After opening with a discussion about pro football, he looked me in the eye and asked, “Are you a pastor?”

“Sort of...” I didn’t like the title. I preferred to just use my name.

He continued, “I was studying Romans earlier. Can we chat about some of the things I saw in that book?”

For the next hour or so, I learned and shared and opened up. Over scripture and a chicken burger, he shared some of his past, his life and his struggles. I spoke of big dreams I had for the church. He shared his hopes and dreams for his life, and we concluded the evening together in prayer.

In under an hour, God had blown away some of the limits I had placed on him. More than that, God had broken apart the limits I had placed on myself. I saw humanity in the other person that day. I learned each one of us is a child of God. Not just in theology – but in reality. Let’s also be honest though, it’s not perfect for me yet, though it is getting there.

That lesson is a stark one. We are often placed in situations as I was - standing there with my tray. We can get involved or rationalize it away. That’s your challenge this coming week. You will be in many circumstances that will challenge you. You have a choice. Get involved and realize you may never be the same again, or rationalize it away.

Prayer

Write down your prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank-you for:

I know I have limited you in these ways:

I know I have limited myself in these ways:

>> Pray freely, or use the prayer below.

o Help me to lean on you that I may know the fullness of your love and your big, amazing plans that I can join in.

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