

DISCOVERY WEEKEND

THE UPPER ROOM®



**DISCOVER GOD'S LOVE
THROUGH THE CHURCH**
MANUAL SAMPLER

DISCOVERY

WEEKEND

THE UPPER ROOM®

**Discover God's Love
through the Church**

Manual Sampler

Discovery Weekend: Discover God's Love through the Church

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**For more information about the Discovery Weekend program and
for a downloadable copy of this Sampler, go to**

discovery.upperroom.org

► Why Discovery Weekend?

Discovery Weekend is a spiritual formation retreat in the local church for the age range known as middle school, junior high, or mid-high, which in most settings includes sixth through eighth grade and ages 11–14. This coeducational retreat provides an opportunity for middle schoolers to learn about and experience the love of God. High school students (usually ages 15–18), youth workers, other adult volunteers, and church staff lead the weekend. For the purposes of this manual, participants will be known as middle schoolers, and the older student leaders will be called high schoolers.

Discovery Weekend is intended to be holy and fun at the same time. The weekend experience creates an environment in which middle schoolers can better listen to God and be aware of God's presence. Discovery Weekend has produced amazing results in many settings.

The weekend celebration of God's love is designed to involve much of your church family in planning, leading, and providing resources:

- **High schoolers** work with small groups of middle schoolers (Disciple Groups), lead worship, share their faith stories, and provide leadership throughout the weekend.
- **Parents** share gifts of love and presence, attend the Prayer Service, and serve on the Leadership Team.
- **Youth workers and staff** provide overall leadership, direction, and supervision.
- **Sunday school classes and small groups** offer prayer support, snacks, and small gifts known as Clues.
- **Clergy** work with youth who are considering baptism, assist with worship planning, help with teaching and mentoring, and are available for spiritual guidance.
- **Additional adults from the congregation** serve on the Leadership Team.

Discovery Weekend encourages the entire church family to live out its baptismal covenant by surrounding young people with faithful examples of love and forgiveness. We invite your congregation to embark on this journey, a joint venture with God in developing young disciples.

The Upper Room's investment in Discovery Weekend represents our conviction that the age range we call middle schoolers is the most spiritually formative phase in the faith journeys of young people. Discovery Weekend is a grand opportunity to fulfill the vow all congregations make in some form with every service of baptism and confirmation that "We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life" (UMH, 35). Discovery Weekends are a great way for congregations to help young people discover "the way that leads to life" (Matthew 7:14).

For help, email discovery@upperroom.org or call:

- Geoffrey Parker, 877-899-2780, ext. 7227 or 615-340-7227
- Kate Dickinson, 877-899-2780, ext. 7230 or 615-340-7230

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Saturday

Theme: *Discover the Friendship and Forgiveness of Christ*

The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.

—John 10:10

Time	Main Activity
7:45 a.m.	Wake up middle schoolers
8:00–8:45 a.m.	Showers, off-site if necessary
8:45–9:30 a.m.	Breakfast, preceded by blessing
9:30–10:00 a.m.	Games, silly skits
10:00–10:30 a.m.	Welcome and Prayer Explain theme of day, building on Friday’s theme “Our Church Helps Others” Moment Explain Clues Friendship of Christ Skit Introduce <i>Friendship of Christ</i> Speaker <i>Friendship of Christ</i> Talk
10:30–11:15 a.m.	Disciple Group, Session 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute supply bags • Friendship games and exercises • Discuss <i>Friendship of Christ</i> Talk • Prayer partners
11:15–11:30 a.m.	Break
11:30–12:00	Music to gather group Ask: What have you learned today? Labels Skit Introduce <i>Labels</i> Speaker <i>Labels</i> Talk
12:00–12:30 p.m.	Disciple Group, Session 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute supply bags • Labels exercises • Discuss <i>Labels</i> Talk
12:30 p.m.	Lunch, preceded by blessing

► Notes to the Youth Pastor/Director

Your role is key to the success of Discovery Weekend in your church. You will introduce this weekend experience to the leaders in your youth ministry program and to the church staff to garner their support and participation. You will interpret the purpose of Discovery Weekend to the congregation: To help middle schoolers experience the life-changing love of God through the church and to encourage high schoolers to grow as spiritual leaders in your church. You will carry the vision for what can become an annual event for your church—one that gives young people the chance to experience Discovery Weekend throughout middle school and to serve as a leader throughout high school; one that engages your entire congregation in loving, serving, and walking in faith with young people. You will watch as the young people begin to discover that their own church is holy ground and that their church family loves them with the love of Christ.

You are the core leader for the weekend, but you will have lots of help. Before you began planning or recruiting leaders, decide what role *you* will play in the leadership of the weekend. Typically, the Youth Pastor/Director serves as the High School Coordinator, building on existing relationships with high schoolers in the youth program. If you have a youth ministry staff person who can fill that critical position, you may prefer to serve as a Weekend Coordinator. In either position, you will serve on the Leadership Team as one of the two or three primary leaders responsible for the overall event. Be strategic about this decision, weighing your gifts and strengths in relation to those of the people you consider for the other primary leadership positions.

Once you choose your role, recruit one or two adults to serve as Weekend Coordinators and a youth ministry staff person to serve as High School Coordinator if you chose a different position. These people will work with you as the core team for the event. Look for people with energy and vision, with gifts and talents that complement one another's, and with a deep love for God, young people, and your church!

When your Weekend Coordinators and High School Coordinator are on board, work with them to recruit other members of the Leadership Team; then work with the Leadership Team to recruit the rest of the volunteer leadership (youth and adults) for your Discovery Weekend. The Job Descriptions that follow (pages 43-75) will give you a clear picture of the responsibilities of each leader and volunteer.

You will recruit a clergyperson to serve on the Leadership Team, but you can strengthen the overall experience by engaging the other clergy and staff of your church in leadership and planning. Also be sure to invite laypeople of all ages to participate. Children and older adults often get excited about working with the youth! Discovery Weekend gives you the chance to ease people into working with youth in nonthreatening ways so they can experience the fun of it!

This manual's design makes it easy to give pertinent pieces of information to each person serving on the Leadership Team or in other leadership or volunteer positions. Be sure to give each person you recruit a copy of his or her Job Description and any related handouts for the position he or she has accepted. Also, adapt the Sample Cover Letter for Leaders and

Volunteers (page 94) to express your gratitude and convey initial information to those who will work with you to make your Discovery Weekend a success.

The Discovery Weekend team at The Upper Room holds you and your team in prayer as you plan and lead this spiritual formation weekend in your church. Please let us know if we can be of help along the way—and we would love to hear how your weekend goes!

Discovery Weekend is a curriculum that was formed for middle school students, is lead by high school students, and is supported by adults. It is a wonderful mosaic of the body of Christ through a retreat experience in your home church.

Caroline Hare

Director of Youth Ministry
Destin United Methodist Church

Discovery Weekend changed me. I now have a better and stronger relationship with God because of it. Also, it has changed our church because people from all grades got closer.

Kate Bourlakas

Age 13, Discovery Weekend Attendee

► Job Descriptions *(a few samples)*

Leadership Team

A loud trumpet will be heard. Then the people of Israel who were dragged away to Assyria and Egypt will return to worship the LORD on his holy mountain in Jerusalem.

—Isaiah 27:13

Under the direction of the Youth Pastor/Director and the Weekend Coordinators, the Leadership Team includes the following positions:

- The High School Coordinator (Youth Pastor/Director or staff member who works with high schoolers)
- Clergy
- The Worship Coordinator
- The Music Coordinator
- The Skit and Video Coordinator
- The Setup and Cleanup Coordinator
- Several high schoolers who commit to the planning process
- Several middle schoolers who commit to the planning process

The Leadership Team meets several times, starting six months before the event and continuing at least monthly until the Discovery Weekend. This team will also meet after the weekend to evaluate the event. The Leadership Team sets the tone for the weekend and recruits the leaders and members of the subcommittees who will carry out specific responsibilities for the weekend.

The Leadership Team's responsibilities are as follows:

- Pray for the Discovery Weekend and for all who will participate in it.
- Carry the vision that your Discovery Weekend will focus on helping middle schoolers experience the love of God and will encourage high schoolers to grow as spiritual leaders.
- Review all the job descriptions and brainstorm a list of volunteers to recruit for each position or committee. Determine who on the Leadership Team will invite each volunteer to serve.
- Include as many youth as possible in planning the weekend and in leading the event.
- Establish a planning timeline. (See Planning resources on pages 85–103.)
- Work with the Worship Team to ensure all worship services fit the flow of the weekend.
- Help to plan the Friday night activities, Saturday's long break, and the Saturday night Party.

- Decide how Disciple Groups will function. Select and train high schoolers and adults to be Disciple Group Leaders. (*Disciple Group Guides will be sent to test churches in September.*)
- Recruit high schoolers to give Talks. Serve as coaches to assist and encourage speakers as they write and rehearse their Talks. Prepare for their coaching role by reviewing the How to Write and Present a Talk handout and the Talk Guide for the Talk assigned to the Speaker they will mentor (see page 30).
- Discuss and determine safety policies, including the use of [Safe Sanctuaries](#) guidelines.
- Evaluate the weekend to determine changes and improvements for next year.

Discovery Weekend is a breath of fresh air for the youth ministry in local churches. I was impressed with the way it invited both spiritual maturity and committed leadership from our older youth as they served. Of course, the younger youth received so much as well.

Rev. Dale Cohen
North Alabama Conference
of the United Methodist Church

Disciple Group Leaders

Who serves in this role: Two high schoolers and at least one adult for each Disciple Group
Attendance requirement: Preparation and training before the weekend, attend the entire weekend

*Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples.
 Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

—Matthew 28:19

Disciple Groups offer a setting in which middle schoolers can grapple with the scripture, theme, and message of each Talk. Disciple Groups consist of four to five middle schoolers, a high school D-Group Leader, one or two other high schoolers, and at least one adult. The Weekend Coordinators and the Youth Pastor/Director assign the D-Groups, making sure each middle schooler is placed in a group with at least one friend and creating high school Disciple Groups with an adult leader for high schoolers who are not serving as Disciple Group leaders.

Disciple Group Leaders' (high schoolers) responsibilities are as follows:

- Receive a copy of the Disciple Group Leader Guides, which contains exercises and questions for each D-Group session; participate in Disciple Group Leader training during pre-weekend Leadership Team meetings and at other times as scheduled.
- Pray before, during, and after the weekend that all who participate will experience God's love.
- Agree to be present and to participate in the entire weekend in order to facilitate Disciple Group conversation about the Talks as well as other experiences during the weekend.
- Act as friends and mentors to the middle schoolers in their Disciple Group.
- Ask questions, guide discussion, and provide energy for their D-Group, making sure each middle schooler is included in all group activities and that all needed supplies are available.
- Spend the night away from the church with Overnight Hosts or in their own homes.

Adults in the Disciple Groups will do the following:

- Take responsibility for a primary goal of the Discovery Weekend—forming high schoolers into stronger servant leaders. Each adult will mentor one or more high schoolers in his or her faith journey during the pre-event planning and training as well as during the weekend.
- Serve as a gentle leader, organizing group time, maintaining focus and discipline, and helping middle schoolers work through any emotional responses or difficult experiences.
- Spend the night in their own homes and return to the church for breakfast each morning.

Church Groups Coordinators

Who serves in this role: One adult and one high schooler to work as a team

Attendance requirement: Preparation before the weekend, attends when needed during the weekend

I thank God in the name of Jesus Christ for all of you. I do this because people everywhere in the world are talking about your faith.

—Romans 1:8

The primary goal of the Discovery Weekend is for middle schoolers to realize God's love for them and to discover that the church as the body of Christ conveys God's love and care. Involving as many church groups as possible in the weekend enables youth and adults to practice loving one another.

The Church Groups Coordinators' responsibilities are as follows:

- Work with Weekend Coordinators to determine what supplies or donations are needed for the weekend and which Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, and other small groups within the church will be asked to donate particular items. Include groups of all ages on the list.
- Visit each church group in person, if possible, to explain the goal of the Discovery Weekend for middle schoolers and for your church family (see above). Invite members of these groups to support the weekend with their prayers as well as their involvement as a group in specific ways, such as donating snacks or money for Clues, preparing and serving meals, writing letters of love and encouragement to middle schoolers, attending the Prayer Service, praying for individual participants, or covering the weekend in prayer for a specific block of time.
- Invite children's classes or groups to make placemats and note cards for the weekend or to come up with other creative ways to show their love for the youth who will attend.
- Follow up with a representative from each class or group to learn how the group wants to be involved. Provide details about when to deliver donated items and/or times when volunteers need to be present during the weekend.
- Assign each group that has agreed to pray for the weekend a block of time to be in prayer: Friday evening, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, Sunday morning, or Sunday afternoon. Encourage members of each group to create a sign-up sheet so that one or more persons are holding the weekend in prayer during the group's assigned time. Prayers may be offered from home or in the Prayer Chapel at the church.
- At least two to three weeks before the weekend, provide the groups who have agreed to write letters of affirmation or to pray for individual participants a list of names of the middle schoolers (and high schoolers, if you wish) who are participating in the weekend.

Meals Coordinator

Who serves in this role: One adult

Attendance requirement: Preparation before the weekend, attends for meal service during the weekend

You shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you.

I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat."

What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help?

—James 2:16

Meals can be served in the fellowship hall or another large space, featuring simple menus planned by the youth. Make the setting casual; begin each meal with a blessing; and introduce those who help prepare and serve. If other Discovery Weekend events are also held in the dining space, you may need to add a break before and after each meal to give servers time to clear and set up for the next event.

The Meals Coordinator's responsibilities are as follows:

- Involve middle schoolers and high schoolers in developing menus.
- Work with the Snacks Coordinator and the Medications/First-Aid Coordinator to review registration forms and to plan menu alternatives for any participants who have food allergies.
- Create a list of food items and supplies that the Church Groups Coordinator can invite classes or groups in the church to donate.
- Work with the Church Groups Coordinator to recruit people to help prepare and/or serve meals during the weekend. Options include the church kitchen staff, volunteers from various classes and groups in the church, the Snack Team, high schoolers, college students, or some combination of these groups.
- Recruit high schoolers and Disciple Groups to rotate cleanup duties, if necessary.

MEAL SCHEDULE

- Friday, 5:30 p.m. Dinner for Leadership Team
- Saturday, 8:45 a.m. Breakfast
- Saturday, 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- Saturday, 5:30 p.m. Dinner
- Sunday, 8:45 a.m. Breakfast
- Sunday, 12:00 p.m. Lunch

► Overview of Talks

All of the Talks during the Discovery Weekend are given by high schoolers (with the exception of the You Are Loved Talk, which is given by a parent or other adult from the church). This Overview briefly describes each of the Talks so that each Speaker can see how his or her Talk fits into and supports the theme of the entire weekend: Discovering God’s Love through the Church.

The topics covered in these Talks call for spiritual maturity on the part of the Speakers, and yet each Speaker is encouraged to share his or her personal experience in a way that middle schoolers will understand. Individual Talk Guides that follow include several pages to help the Speaker prepare mentally and spiritually for the task of writing and presenting a Talk. In addition, the Weekend Coordinators and the High School Coordinator will assign to each Speaker a member of the Leadership Team to serve as a coach, who will meet with the Speaker several times to mentor him or her through the process of preparing, writing, and rehearsing the Talk.

Each Talk Guide includes basic information about the aim and context of the Talk, a deeper exploration of the theme, and reflection exercises to help the Speaker prepare to weave together ideas from scripture, study, and personal experience. Each Speaker may use these resources in whatever ways he or she finds most helpful.

God Loves You Talk

Friday 8:15 P.M.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. —John 3:16 (NRSV)

This Talk reinforces that God loves everyone in the world and wants to have a relationship with each one of us. The Speaker explains how he or she experiences God’s love.

Friendship of Christ Talk

Saturday 10:00 A.M.

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” —John 15:15 (NRSV)

This Talk explains that Christ wants to be our friend and that we can help nurture and grow that friendship. The Speaker tells how he or she knows and experiences Jesus as a friend.

Joyful Christian Talk**Sunday 12:45 P.M.**

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” —John 15:11 (NRSV)

This Talk invites participants to reflect on the entire weekend experience and to consider how they will respond to God’s love. The Speaker explains how participating as a middle schooler in previous Discovery Weekends (as well as this one) has given him or her opportunities to go into the world and to share with others the love, friendship, belovedness, forgiveness, hope, and joy of a life with God.

NOTE: As the Leadership Team chooses high schoolers to present the Talks, consider how their personal stories will reflect and/or reinforce the particular themes of the Talks. Sometimes you may find it helpful to invite two or more high schoolers to give a single Talk, which allows them to work together and to learn from each other as well as to offer middle schoolers different perspectives of the topic. If your group doesn’t include enough high schoolers to give all the Talks, some may be given by returning college students who are participating in the weekend.



Discovery Weekend helped me get to know students in other grades, and it encouraged us to share diverse thoughts in our groups.

Connor Edwards

Age 12, Discovery Weekend Attendee

► Talk Guide for GOD LOVES YOU

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
—John 3:16 (NRSV)*

CONTEXT

Friday's Theme: Discover God's Love

Speaker: A high schooler: _____

Schedule: Friday 8:15 P.M. (Meet in the Prayer Chapel at 7:45 P.M.)

Setting: This 7-8 minute Talk is the opening Talk of the Discovery Weekend.

THE AIM OF YOUR TALK

This Talk sets the stage for the first Disciple Group discussion by conveying the core message of the “Discovering God’s Love Through the Church” weekend: God loves you. Your assignment is not to give a sermon or a lecture, but to bear witness. That means to share what you’ve seen, heard, and experienced of God’s love. The best way to do this is by sharing your own story of what God’s love means to you and what difference it makes. Look for the ways God has loved you and touched you since before you were born and along the way—through nature, people and relationships, and the church. What you discover will be the richest content for your Talk.

BE SURE TO INCLUDE:

- John 3:16
- Ways that you experience God’s love (Tell 1-3 stories about personal experiences.)
- What difference it makes to know that God loves you
- How you see God’s love at work, being lived out, or being shared in the church
- Remind the middle schoolers that God loves them—each and every one of them.
(Be as real and genuine as you can.)

NEXT STEPS

On the following pages you will find resources to help you discover the ways your own story and experience connect with the theme of the Talk. These are not intended to be an outline or a script for your Talk, although they may spark ideas that you will incorporate once you begin to write. Instead, view these ideas and exercises as mental and spiritual preparation for your Talk.

Before you even think about writing, spend several weeks “Exploring the Theme” and “Engaging Your Spirit.” You may want to invite your Leadership Team coach/mentor to do this with you. Take notes or journal about insights and personal experiences that arise; these will be helpful as you begin to create your Talk. For now, simply open yourself to God’s love and pay attention. See what happens!

EXPLORING THE THEME

1. Does my life matter?

At some point, we all begin to wonder: Does my life really matter? And who cares anyway? We may look to our classmates for answers. If we have lots of friends, we feel loved and worth something; if not, we may feel unloved and that we don’t matter much. We may also look to our achievements (or lack of them). The great discovery of the Christian faith is that our value is not based on what other people think of us. It’s based on something much deeper and more lasting than the shifting sands of popularity, accomplishments, and even our own feelings. It’s the discovery of God’s love: God loves us.

2. How do we know God loves us?

God says “I love you” in words. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, “You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you” (Isaiah 43:4a, NRSV). Try putting your name in this verse: “[*your name*], you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.” How do you feel hearing God say those words?

God says “I love you” in action. Jesus acts as if every individual is important and loved by God. In story after story, Jesus loves people the world rejects. For example, Jesus heals a leper (Matthew 8:1-3). People with leprosy were called “unclean,” no longer welcome. By touching and healing the leper, Jesus showed this man God’s love. Have you ever felt like an outcast and experienced God’s acceptance?

God says “I love you” through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. In John 3:16, we see the supreme demonstration of God’s love: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . .” (NRSV). Read this verse again from *The Message*.

God says “I love you” through the church. The church is the community of people who have experienced God’s love and accepted the call of helping you and others discover that you are God’s beloved.

3. What does “God loves you” really mean?

Each of us has to discover God’s love for ourselves before it’s real. But here are a few things it means.

- a. God loves you as only God can love. “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us” (St. Augustine). God’s love is that personal. God loves you, not on the outside as many people do, but on the inside as only God can (see Psalm 139:13-14). And there’s

nothing you can do about it. God loves you whether you like it or not. Nothing you do can make God love you less; nothing you do can make God love you more. God's love is unconditional and everlasting.

- b. God is with you. "God loves you" is not just words; it's a presence. God is not a voice from far away, but a divine companion very near you. Reflect on Psalm 23: "Even when I walk through the darkest valley. . . you are with me" (23:4a, NRSV). No matter how badly we sin or mess up, no matter how dark a place we are in, God is with us; we belong to God. We are not alone. (See Romans 8:38).
- c. God wants a relationship with you. Love is a relationship. It starts with God reaching out to us. "We love because God loved us first" (John 4:19). But God longs for it to be a two-way relationship. It's not enough for God to say, "I love you," and to leave it at that. God longs for the day we accept that love and say in return, "And I love you." God does not give up on us; God pursues us because God wants the best for us. "Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life . . ." (Psalm 23:6, CEB; also see Psalm 139:7-10).

ENGAGING YOUR SPIRIT

What's the story of your relationship with God and God's ways of reaching through life to you? These reflection exercises will help you prepare spiritually to give your Talk. Explore your questions and answers about human life and why God cares. Discover the sources of God's love in your life that have made a difference and how they might contribute to what you say in your Talk. Reflect on what other teens have written in devozine about their experience of God's love. Capture your thoughts and responses in a notebook.

Read Psalm 8

"What are human beings that you are mindful of them . . .?" (8:4a, NRSV).

- What situation do you imagine might have caused the psalmist to ask these questions?
- Just for fun: If you could have been created as something other than a human being, what would you have wanted to be? Why?
- Have you ever wondered about why you were born, what you're here for, or whether your life matters? Write your questions and the answers you've discovered, if any. Take a few minutes to be quiet and to ask God your questions. Listen and write down what you imagine God answering.

"God loves us with a love greater than any person will ever have for us. Nothing we do will make God love us less or more. God's love is unconditional. It has no beginning and no end. The Creator of the Universe loves us forever, and God's constant love is what compels us to love, trust, and obey God in return. God's love may be difficult to comprehend, but we never have to wonder if it's true. God loves us—it says so right there in the Bible. In fact, in Isaiah 43:4, God flat out says, "I love you." That's a promise I'll never forget." —Anna Dembowski, New York*

Read Mark 1:9-11

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (1:11b, NRSV).

- During his baptism, Jesus wakes up to God’s love and presence in his life in a big way. What do you think these words meant to Jesus? Write a paraphrase of Mark 1:11b as you think Jesus may have heard these words from God.
- God wants to speak to you as well through Jesus’ experience. So imagine standing by Jesus in the water, overhearing God speaking the same blessing to you. How would you paraphrase or say the blessing in your own words?
- What is the main way you have discovered God’s love for you? What difference does it make to know that God loves you and is pleased with you?

“You are God’s beloved. God’s love does not depend on what you think about yourself or on what others think about you. It does not depend on your culture, your gender, or your age. Nothing about you can change God’s love for you. Scripture tells us that God knows us and delights in us, that God will never forsake us. God loves us a thousand times more than we can imagine.”
—Merle Mills, Virginia*

* (from *devozine*. Copyright © by The Upper Room. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

WRITING YOUR TALK

Now that you have spent some time “Exploring the Theme” and “Engaging Your Spirit,” read through your notes again and pay attention to the ways you have discovered that “God Loves You.” Allow the things you have learned and the experiences you have remembered to point to ideas and stories that will help you outline your Talk and begin writing.

The idea of writing a Talk—and presenting it—can be scary. But you are not alone. A member of the Leadership Team will serve as a coach/mentor as you prepare your Talk. He or she will be available to listen to your ideas and questions, to help you write and refine your Talk, and to give helpful feedback as you rehearse. As you work together, enjoy building a friendship that can last beyond the weekend.

Your Talk will be 7-8 minutes in length. You will want to speak from the heart, to be honest and real. Your target audience will be middle schoolers, so try to share your experiences of discovering God’s love in a way that middle schoolers can understand and that will help them discover God’s love as well.

As you write, continue to remain open to God’s love and presence in your life. Let writing your Talk become a spiritual practice, a creative exercise that engages both mind and spirit to help you tell your own story and to discover the ways it is woven into God’s story.

For details and tips about how to write, rehearse, and present your Talk, please refer to the attached “HOW TO WRITE AND PRESENT A TALK” handout. If it is not attached, be sure to ask the High School Coordinator or your Youth Pastor/Director for a copy.



Disciple Group Leader Guides

Games, Activities, Scripture, and Discussion Questions

Notes to the Disciple Group Leaders

As Disciple Group (D-Group) Leaders, you will have a significant amount of time to interact with the middle school students during the Discovery Weekend. Many middle schoolers will describe D-Groups as their favorite part of the weekend. As High School and Adult D-Group Leaders, you will be guiding the conversations and activities that invite the middle schoolers to think through issues and questions about God and faith as they relate to the Talks and the daily themes.

You are not alone in this work. The Leadership Team has carefully paired the D-Group Leaders so there is at minimum one high school leader and one adult leader in each D-Group. Whenever possible, the high school D-Group Leaders should be the facilitators of the D-Groups, leading the games, the activities, and the discussion times. It's important for the high school D-Group Leaders to make sure that everyone is included and that the middle schoolers are engaging in both the learning and the fun. The adult D-Group Leaders will be present during the D-Group sessions to deal with behavior issues that arise and to be available to middle schoolers who experience deep feelings that they don't understand or are not ready to share with the group.

Prior to the weekend, Disciple Group Leaders should review the games, activities, and discussion questions for each D-Group session. The recommended games and activities will help the middle schoolers have fun, get to know one another, and express themselves creatively. These games and activities can be used as written or can be adapted to better fit the culture of your youth program. Each D-Group session also has recommended discussion questions to help group members reflect on the Talks they have heard and the lessons they are learning. The questions in the D-Group Guide are generic and apply to the general theme of each Talk. Whenever possible, D-Group Leaders can add questions that apply more specifically to the message of the Talks presented during your weekend. You will want to find a balance between trying to keep the discussion moving and allowing times of silence for group members to think about how they will answer the questions. You will find that not everyone answers every question. As D-Group Leaders, be aware of who is talking, and make sure each group member has time and space to engage in the discussion.

During some Disciple Group sessions the members of each D-Group will be encouraged to have a prayer partner. Consider the culture of your group to decide if it would be better to assign prayer partners or to allow group members to select their own prayer partners. The prayer partners can be grouped in pairs, or you might choose groups of three if you have an uneven number or if you feel the middle schoolers would be more comfortable. Be sure that

those who are new to your youth group or who have few friends in the D-Group do not feel left out. Prayer partners may stay the same throughout the weekend or change with each prayer partner time.

Remember, the D-Group is a time for learning and fun. You have the privilege of spending the weekend with your group members and helping them discover how much God loves them. Pray for the students and leaders in your D-Group before, during, and after the Discovery Weekend.

Disciple Group Leader's Guide

for Session 1

Friday Night 8:45-9:30 PM
following the God Loves Me Talk

Friday's Theme: Discover God's Love

Friday's Scripture:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. —John 3:16 (NRSV)

> Welcome

As the high school Disciple Group Leader, be sure to welcome each D-Group member as they enter the room. When everyone has arrived, offer an official welcome to the group. Introduce yourself, the adult D-Group Leader, and other high schoolers who are helping to lead the group.

Explain that this Disciple Group will meet together in the same place throughout the weekend. (If the location will change, be sure D-Group members know where the next meeting will be.)

Express your hopes that this Disciple Group will be a place where everyone can have fun, make new friends, and feel safe and comfortable sharing ideas, asking questions, and exploring faith.

> Get to Know You Game: Beach Ball Toss

[NOTE: Before the Disciple Group session, use a permanent marker to write a different question on each section of a beach ball. Examples might be, "What's your name?" "Where do you go to school?" "What's your favorite candy?" "What's your favorite pizza topping?" and so on.]

Tell Disciple Group members that you are going to play a game known as the Beach Ball Toss to help you get to know one another better. Explain that you will begin the game by throwing the beach ball to someone in the group. As that person catches the beach ball, you will call out a particular finger, such as “right thumb” or “left pinky.” The person who now holds the ball will say his or her name and then answer the question written on the section of the beach ball that the finger you named is touching. Then that person will throw the beach ball to another person in the group, calling out a finger as the person catches the ball. Play will continue in this way for 5-7 minutes or until everyone in the group has answered several questions.

In the first round of play, ask group members to throw the beach ball to someone who has not yet caught the ball and answered a question. After that, encourage group members to make sure everyone answers as many questions as possible. Also explain that the person throwing the beach ball may call out any of the 10 different fingers—either Right or Left Thumb, Pointer Finger, Middle Finger, Ring Finger, or Pinky. If someone catching the ball has already answered the question where the designated finger lands, he or she may choose another question.

When everyone understands the rules of the game, begin with the first toss. Call the game when everyone has answered a few questions or when the time allotted for the game is up.

> Heart Activity

Distribute construction paper, scissors, markers, and pens. Invite D-Group members to cut out heart shapes and to write on each heart one thing they know about God. (For example: God is love. God is with us. God never changes. God’s heart holds enough love for all of us.)

When everyone is finished, ask volunteers to share what they wrote on one of their hearts. Then invite group members to decorate the hearts as you discuss the scripture and the Talk.

> Scripture Review

Remind group members that the God Loves Me Talk was based on John 3:16. Read aloud this scripture before beginning the discussion time.

> Discussion Questions

The D-Group Leader will ask the questions below and/or make up some of his or her own. Be sure to allow group members time to think about how they will answer. (High schoolers in the group should have answers ready in case you need to get the discussion started.)

What part of the God Loves Me Talk did you connect with? Why?

What does John 3:16 tell us about God’s love?

What do you think God thinks of the world?

In what ways do you see God’s love being shared in the world?

In what ways do you see God’s love being shared in the church?

What do you think God loves best about us? about you?

What does it mean to you that God loves you and wants to have a relationship with you? In what moment or situation have you felt God's love? Can you describe how that felt?

> Close with Prayer

The high school D-Group Leader (or another high schooler in the group) will offer a prayer of thanks to God for loving each of you more than you can imagine, for the opportunity to make new D-Group friends, and for the chance to grow closer to God during this Discovery Weekend.

* * * * *

If you finish before Disciple Group time is over, here are a few extra fun questions to discuss:

- What is your favorite song about God's love?
- How do we show our love for God?
- Why did you come to this Discovery Weekend?
- What are you most looking forward to during this Discovery Weekend?

Wherever I'm appointed to serve as pastor I plan on encouraging our youth to participate in Discovery Weekend. Knowing that The Upper Room is a part of building the content I can trust it as a Wesleyan spiritual formation resource for our youth.

Whitney Mitchell

Associate Pastor

Cookeville First United Methodist Church

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