

## HSM Small Group 2022 Spring Schedule-Sophomore

January 12	First Week Back! Get Reacquainted!!
January 19	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
January 26	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 2	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 9	<i>Practicing the Way</i>
February 16	10-4 Series
February 23	10-4 Series
March 2	10-4 Series
March 9	10-4 Series
March 16	SGL Training this week! (No Small Groups!)
March 23	Spring Break! (No Small Groups!)
March 30	ENCOUNTER
April 6	ENCOUNTER
April 13	Serve Week
April 20	ENCOUNTER
April 27	ENCOUNTER
May 4	Final Celebration!!



# Practicing the Way - week 1: The Basics

Adapted from Practicing the Way by John Mark Comer

## Read this overview:

In our over busy, digital, distracted world, the first challenge we face in silence and solitude is simply our lack of ability to slow down and focus. To “be ourselves with God,” we must first learn to center our mind and body.

The goal of week one is to first identify a time and place that works well for you to practice silence and solitude, set a modest goal, and then start with the basics: begin with a breathing prayer and then just spend some time abiding.

It sounds easy, but, like all good things, it takes practice. So be patient with yourself and God, and enjoy the journey.

## Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief the week: 10-15 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life... then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Is silence and solitude a regular part of your walk with Jesus? If yes, what does that look like in your life rhythm? If no, why not? (Note: The point of this question is honest conversation, not guilt or shame. Work hard to create a safe place in your community for people at every stage of spiritual maturity.)
2. How does the idea of silence and solitude make you feel? Excited? Scared? Too busy?

If you have time, tell a story of something cool God said or did in your life through an experience with silence and solitude.

## Open the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read Luke 4:42 and another person read Luke 5:15-16.

Talk about the following questions:

1. Why do think Jesus would regularly slip away to “lonely places”?
2. What role do you think the regular practice of silence and solitude played in Jesus’ emotional health and spiritual life?
3. What challenges would Jesus have faced to carve out time to be alone with himself and God? Do you face any similar challenges?

## Talk about the coming week's practice as a community: 5-10 min

Here's the practice for the coming week: ***make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this Spiritual Discipline at least 3 times in the next week.***

First...

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you.
  - Time: For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is after school, before dinner or before bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.
  - Place: Find a place that is quiet and as distraction-free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.
2. Set a modest goal
  - It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week. If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.

Then, for the practice...

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable!
  - For many people, finding a comfortable place and position to sit on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
  - Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer
  - Close your eyes.
  - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
  - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
  - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
  - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, "Father..." and come back to your breathing.
  - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.
3. Spend a few minutes "abiding in the vine"
  - Transition from your breathing prayer to "the practice of the presence of God."
  - Notice God's presence all around you, in you. For some people it's helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.
  - Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.
  - If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God's voice, or get something off your chest in prayer.

- But the main goal here is simply to “be with Jesus.” Don’t feel like you have to “do” anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.
4. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father.

A few things to note:

1. You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. All you can do is show up. Be patient. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “This isn’t for me.” Don’t judge yourself, especially if you’re an overachiever type.
2. If sitting still is just too difficult for you, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction-free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.

### **Work through these discussion questions: 10 min**

1. How does the idea of a breathing prayer hit you? Does it sound appealing? Stupid? Uncomfortable?
2. What challenges do you face in carving out time for silence and solitude? (Ex. Overall busyness, work schedule, lack of privacy, extroverted personality, etc.)
3. What is your deepest fear and greatest hope for this coming week’s practice?

### **Close in prayer**

# Practicing the Way - week 2: Emotional Health

Adapted from Practicing the Way by John Mark Comer

## Read this overview

Human beings are emotional creatures. We feel deeply at times. Sadly, American church culture can be quick to write off “feelings” or “emotional health.” However, Jesus puts on display a high level of emotional awareness. For Jesus, emotions - positive or negative - are places to meet with God. The goal of week two is to get in touch with your feelings and process each one with the Father. After a short time for breathing prayer and abiding, we encourage you to let yourself feel whatever comes. Naming our emotions is often the first step toward hearing from God.

This week will be easy for some and very hard on others . That’s okay. You’re safe with the Father.

## Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it’s hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief last week’s practice in small groups: 5-10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. What was the best part? The hardest part?
3. What did this practice reveal about your relationship with the Father? (Positive or negative. Remember, work hard to create a safe place for honest conversation.)

## Open to the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read Luke 22:39-46

Talk about the following questions:

1. What did Jesus do with his overwhelming emotions of sorrow and dread? What kind of example does that set for us as Jesus’ apprentices?
2. What was the result of Jesus “getting in touch with his feelings” and then giving his emotions over to the Father in prayer?
3. What are some of the reasons that we, like Jesus’ apprentices in the story, have a hard time meeting God in our emotions - specifically our negative emotions?

## Talk about the coming week's practice as a community: 10 min

Here's the practice for the coming week: *Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this spiritual discipline during the next week.*

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable.
2. Begin with a breathing prayer.
  - Close your eyes.
  - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
  - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
  - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
  - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer, like "Father..." and come back to your breathing.
  - In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.
3. Let yourself feel.
  - What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, or any number of positive or negative emotions.
  - Name "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of your emotional state.
  - Don't run away from what you're feeling. In the Father's presence, face each emotion head on. Let yourself feel it, deeply.
  - Remember: emotional pain isn't something to avoid. Instead, think of it as a place to meet God and open yourself up to him in new ways.
4. Ask yourself: Where are you at with yourself and God right now? Is there anything God is trying to say to you through these emotions?
5. Pray: Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest.

Different emotions call for different kinds of prayer.

  - If you're happy - celebrate! Sing! Dance!
  - If you're grateful, tell God what for with specificity.
  - If you're anxious, give your worry over to the Father and ask for his peace in return.
  - If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unsolved in your heart.
6. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit everything you're feeling to the Father.

Note: After a few days of this practice, or toward the end of the week, we recommend you do two things:

- Set aside a little time to write out your experience in a journal.
- Go share your experience with a close friend, parent or adult leader.

Remember: Continue to resist the urge to say, "I'm bad at this" or "I didn't get anything out of it." Just practice. And be patient.

### **Work through these discussion questions: 10 min**

1. Would you say you are "in touch with your feelings" in a healthy, Jesus-like way? Or is that hard and difficult for you? Explain why?
2. Was emotional awareness a part of your upbringing? How does your family deal with emotional pain? How has that shaped your life today?
3. We all face emotional pain in life. In those times, what happens when we use coping mechanisms other than prayer?
4. What is your coping mechanism of choice? (Ex. escapism, denial, overwork, busyness, church activity, etc.)

### **Close in prayer**



# Practicing the Way - week 3: Casting Care

Adapted from Practicing the Way by Bethany Allen

## Read this overview

Most people, whether they are aware of it or not, are living with some form of low-grade anxiety. Between digital distraction, relational pain, and daily stress, many of us are carrying burdens much larger than we often choose to acknowledge.

This week we want to extend our practice of silence and solitude and focus on casting your cares and burdens on Jesus. We'll do this through the practice of release. It involves five movements. 1) Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God, 2) Invite the Holy Spirit, 3) Write, 4) Imagine and 5) Release. The goal is not to rush or to simply complete an exercise, but to find freedom in entrusting yourself more fully to Jesus.

## Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

## Debrief last week's practice in small groups: 10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult to "let yourself feel"?
3. Were there any specific things you heard from God?

## Open to the Bible together: 10 min

Have somebody read the following texts:

- 1 Peter 5:7
- Psalm 62:8
- Philippians 4:6

Talk about the following questions:

1. In 1 Peter 5:7 we are told to cast all of our anxiety on him (Jesus) because he cares for us. Name 1-2 things you are currently anxious about. Do you ever question God's care for you? If so, why?
2. Psalm 62:8 tells us we are to "pour out our hearts to God", what do you think the writer means by this? If you have done this before, what did it look like?
3. We are told over and over that God wants to take our anxiety and bear our burdens. For many people, this is hard to do. Identify and share two reasons this may be difficult for you.

## **Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community: 10 min**

Here's the practice for the coming week: ***Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep and challenge them to commit to practicing this spiritual discipline during the next week.***

1. Create for yourself a quiet space to meet with God.
  - Set aside a modest time on a particular day to be alone with God. This should be an extended time (maybe 30 – 60 min or more). Find a time and place that is quiet and distraction free.
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to come.
  - Now ask Him to show you areas of personal or relational fear/anxiety. Next, ask Him to show you areas of fear/anxiety associated with the present or future. Take your time and wait on the Holy Spirit.
  - Ask the Father to reveal any areas of unbelief in your life where you don't believe the Father will care for you.
3. Write: Jot down and list these anxieties/fears down on a piece of paper. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have written.
4. Pray: Pray and visualize yourself with the Father, and then, one by one, imagine giving (handing) each anxiety to Jesus
  - This exercise should create a mental snapshot of Jesus doing exactly what He says He will do (Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26). By handing Jesus your anxieties, you are expressing your trust in His ability to take care of you.
5. Release: Once you've given all of your anxieties to Jesus in prayer, rip up each anxiety you wrote down and throw it away. This symbolizes that the anxiety has been given to Jesus and that you are now released from the weight and responsibility of the burden.

## **Work through these discussion questions: 10-15 min**

1. How do you feel about this long span of silence and solitude? Scared? Excited?
2. How could you incorporate this practice into your day-to-day rhythm?
3. What is the importance of acknowledging/naming your anxieties and giving them to Jesus?

## **Close in Prayer**

# Practicing the Way - week 4: Lectio Divina

Adapted from Practicing the Way by Joshua Porter

## Read this overview

Week 5 introduces the ancient practice of lectio divina, or “spiritual reading.” Lectio divina is not a new method of Bible Study. Whereas study of the Bible sets its focus on learning, lectio divina is an ancient time-tested method of meeting God in the Scriptures. In doing so, the disciple allows the Scriptures (in cooperation with the Spirit) to lead the reader into further intimacy with God as they are shaped into the image of Jesus in the process. The practice consists of five distinct movements:

1. Preparing to meet with God
2. Reading (lectio)
3. Reflection (meditatio)
4. Response (oratio)
5. Rest (contemplatio)

## Begin with silence and prayer: 5 min

Gather together as a community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch or floor of a living room, etc.). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together before spending a moment in silence. Hardness of hearing is an unfortunate side effect of the frantic pace in which many of us conduct our lives. When your community comes together in the hopes of speaking to and hearing from God, even a momentary measure of silence can work to slow and quiet the swirling chaos around us so that we might hear what God is saying in and through one another.

## Debrief last week’s practice in small groups: 10 min

Spend a few minutes catching up before you discuss about the following debrief questions:

1. How did it go?
2. Was it easy or difficult?
3. What did you hear God say?

## Open the Bible together: 10 min

Have someone read Joshua 1:7-9 aloud. Then consider these questions together:

1. What does the verse emphasize about the importance of scripture?
2. Discuss what verse 8 instructs us to do regarding the Book of the Law (the Scriptures).
3. Why do you think it’s so important to hold the Bible in such high esteem?

## Talk about the coming week’s practice as a Community: 10 min

Here’s the practice for the coming week: ***Make sure they have a hard or electronic copy to keep***

Having established a time and place that are both quiet and free from distraction, set aside 3-5 times this week to practice lectio divina.

Any passage of Scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 100
- John 15:1-17
- Romans 12

After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the five movements of spiritual reading.

1. Prepare to meet with God: Turn your phone off and leave it another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken, and to respond accordingly. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.
2. Read (lectio): Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily to reflect on them with specificity.
3. Reflect (mediatio): Upon completing the passage, return to the beginning and read again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance with your heart, your season of life, your person in this moment. Consider the following questions: What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?
4. Respond (oratio): Talk to God about your experience.
5. Rest (contemplatio): Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

**Talk through the following discussion questions: 10 min.**

1. Do you actually enjoy reading the Scriptures, or does it feel like a chore? Why?
2. When you read the Scriptures, do you feel as though you actually meet with and connect with God? Why or why not?
3. What makes lectio divina different than "bible study" or a teaching?

**Close in prayer**

# 10 – 4 (week 1)

## Sex, Lust & Porn

*\*\*TIP – downloading the audio ahead of group time may be beneficial rather than trying to stream it.*

To set up our series, share the following with students to let them know where we're headed:

We are starting 4-week series designed just for us. The series is called 10-4. It is titled 10-4 because we have 10<sup>th</sup> graders in mind while covering 4 topics we want you to have discussions about now...in hopes of you being better prepared for them as you navigate

- Tonight (week 1) we will talk about Sex, Lust & Porn
- Next week (2) we address Peer Pressure & the Anxiety that comes with it
- Week 3 we tackle Recreational Drug Use...is it wrong?
- Week 4 Making Faith a Priority & Time Management

The *on ramp* for tonight's discussion is very short! This may feel like we jump into *high-speed traffic* with our discussion as we start this 4-week series with tonight's topic of sex, lust & porn. Some of this conversation may make us uncomfortable. Can we try to push through our discomfort in effort to be better Jesus-following men & work together to defeat some of the lies of the enemy? Let's give it a try!

**ICE BREAKER:** Have everyone guess what the average age a is when a person is exposed to pornography for the first time? (Listen for the answer in the audio recording.)

I think it's mostly clear how we define sex, however we will hear some clarity on it in the audio recording. How might we define lust? How about defining porn?

**Listen to the Audio Recording** with Stuart Blade & Rich Beasley

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Did you catch the average age a (young) person is exposed to porn for the first time? Are you surprised by the age of 8-10? Do any of you remember seeing porn for the first time at a very young age?
- Did you hear anything in the conversation that surprised you? Anything you disagree with? Anything that just stood out that got your attention?
- You (hopefully) defined lust earlier. How close were your definitions to this?
  - Lust: Feeling a strong desire for someone or something, especially of a sexual nature.
- How close were your definitions about pornography?
  - Pornography: A representation of sexual behavior in books, pictures, statues, motion pictures, and other media that is intended to cause sexual excitement.
- I think we can agree porn is all around us in many forms from a very young age on and can contribute to the sin of lust. Stuart mentioned 3 things that are contributing

factors to our battles with porn that started with the letter, "A". Can you recall the 3 things?

- **Porn is – Available, Affordable & comes with Anonymity**
- Read 1 John 2:16
  - This scripture seems to allude to the idea that we are not going to escape being exposed & tempted with lust of the flesh...which we clearly are - with the availability, affordability & perceived anonymity of indulging in porn.
- As with any big battle, isn't it a good idea to make some preparations and have a plan in place before we find ourselves in the middle of the battle? Isn't this why we have dress rehearsals, team practices, fire & tornado drills?
  - How can you plan and prepare for this battle ahead of you?
    - (allow time to answer)
    - Maybe have a "go to" outlet when tempted – running or working out, reading, working on cars...
    - Have some trusted guys in your life that will encourage you and also call you out and ask tough questions (dad, pastor, small group leader, solid mature friends)
- Another thought about life-long impact of pornography:
  - We hope every man participating in this study will eventually have a wife (and sex will be almost certainly be part of the marriage)!
  - Pornography may feel exciting in the moment but can eventually rob its victims of the ability to bond with a live person.
    - Do any of you think it possible you wouldn't be able to love your future wife and bond with her appropriately within the context of marriage?

## Oxytocin and Mindset

There is some science to be considered here too...and this should concern us.

God designed sex to be the glue in a committed and steadfast loving relationship. He designed a progression that goes from friendship to exclusivity, to commitment and finally covenant. To seal the deal, He created a bonding chemical, oxytocin, that's released during sexual experiences. Sex truly renews the steadfastness in a relationship biochemically.

- As a husband, do you want your sexual desire, arousal & behavior to be chemically triggered by porn? Or would you prefer to be triggered by your future wife? It's time to make a plan to defeat this. What is our plan?

Read the following verse and then close out in prayer.

Phil 4:8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise

Some references and definitions originated in part or full from articles or info found at:

[www.britannica.com/topic/pornography](http://www.britannica.com/topic/pornography)

[www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/seven-strategies-to-combat-teen-porn-use](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/seven-strategies-to-combat-teen-porn-use)  
[yourdictionary.com222](http://yourdictionary.com222)

## 10 – 4 (week 2)

# Peer Pressure & the Anxiety that comes with it

*\*\*TIP – downloading the audio ahead of group time may be beneficial rather than trying to stream it.*

**ICE BREAKER:** Try to think of something (dumb) you have done or been a part of that was a result of peer pressure.

- If your group is having trouble remembering poor decisions, maybe ask them if they've made poor choices related to toxic conversations or group chats, drugs or alcohol, and maybe just risky behavior.

**Listen to the Audio Recording** with Brett Beasley, Josh Jacobs & Rich Beasley

### GROUP DISCUSSION

- Brett & Josh shared some of the things that contributed to building peer pressure for them. Can you identify some of the sources or areas, maybe specific friends, groups or teams that cause you to feel the burden of peer pressure?
- Peer pressure might be harmful to us for the simple reason of making bad choices. Can you see how peer pressure might directly lead you to suffer from anxiety? Discuss. Is there any chance your anxiety may negatively impact those around you?
- Read Romans 12:2
  - Does this scripture appear to be telling us anything in regard to peer pressure?
- Consider this: When **peer pressure** leads us to act in ways we are not comfortable, it **can cause** us (particularly teens) to suffer from low self-esteem, **anxiety**, and depression. Teenagers often feel very strong emotions, leading to noticeable extremes in mood...often feelings of guilt or self-hatred.
  - Can you recall times when you've experienced some of the side effects mentioned above? If so, can you tie them to feeling peer pressure?
- Often a good way to defeat things we do battle with is to have a plan rather than hope we make the right decisions in the heat of the moment. Are there things we can do or plan (ahead) to help us when peer pressure builds in a situation?
  - Here are a few thoughts about planning ahead:
    - Listen to your gut. If a decision feels wrong, it probably is.
    - Plan for possible pressure situations. If you're going to a party but you believe you may be offered alcohol or drugs there, think ahead about how you'll handle this challenge. Decide ahead what you'll say and do. *Maybe if you're holding a bottle of water or a can of soda, for instance, you're less likely to be offered a drink you don't want.*
    - Learn to feel comfortable saying, "no." With good friends you should never have to offer an explanation or apology. But if you feel you need an excuse for, say, turning down a drink or smoke, think up a few

lines you can use casually. You can always say, "No, thanks and that you wish to take good care of your body & your health."

- Blame your parents: "Are you kidding? If my mom found out, she'd kill me, and her spies are everywhere."
  - If a situation seems dangerous, don't hesitate to get an adult's help.
- Do any of the thoughts or suggestions above seem like a good idea and likely would be helpful and easy to do?
- So far, we've discussed peer pressure with negative nature. However, peer pressure can have a positive side.
  - First, it's not often easy to resist negative peer pressure, but when you do, it is easy to feel good about it afterward. And you may even be a positive influence on your peers who feel the same way — often it just takes one person to speak out or take a different action to change a situation. Your friends may follow if you have the courage to do something different or refuse to go along with the group.
    - Can you recall a situation when you resisted peer pressure and it had a positive impact for those around you?
  - In addition to praying for each other, how can the guys in your group help each other when it comes to doing battle with peer pressure?
    - What will it take for each of you to feel more confident when trying to do what is right amid the anxiety of dealing with peer pressure?

*Many situations can be opportunities to figure out what is right for you. There's no magic to standing up to peer pressure, but it does take courage — yours!*

Some references and definitions originated in part or full in articles or info found at:

Nationalreview.com

[https://www.google.com/search?q=anxiety%2C+peer+pressure%2C+fear&rlz=1C1GCEU\\_enUS821US821&oq=anxiety%2C+peer+pressure%2C+fear&aqs=chrome..69i57.9000j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=anxiety%2C+peer+pressure%2C+fear&rlz=1C1GCEU_enUS821US821&oq=anxiety%2C+peer+pressure%2C+fear&aqs=chrome..69i57.9000j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)  
headsup.scholastic.com/students/peer-pressure-its-influence-on-teens-and-decision-making  
kidshealth.org/en/teens/peer-pressure.html



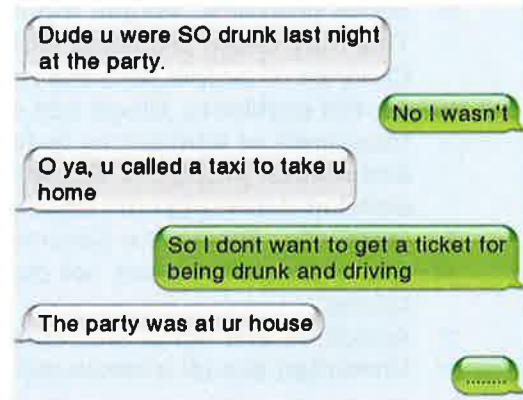
# 10 – 4 (week 3)

## Recreational Drug Use...Is it Wrong?

*\*\*TIP – downloading the audio ahead of group time may be beneficial rather than trying to stream it.*

### ICE BREAKER:

What is the dumbest thing you have ever seen anyone do or most ridiculous you've seen someone act as a result of being intoxicated?



**Listen to the Week 3 Recording** with Gonzo Sugai, Matt McClane & Rich Beasley

### GROUP DISCUSSION

- What are some of the reasons you and/or your peers may choose to use recreational drugs at such a young age (or any age)?
- *(Below are a few reasons students may or may not suggest)*
  - Friends are doing it, and we don't want to feel left out, or not cool.
  - Get pressured into trying it.
  - I/we may be interested in experimenting with the effects, seeing what happens when we take drugs.
  - We may feel drugs give us new experiences or perspectives.
  - Drugs make us feel more relaxed, or more confident when relating to others.
  - We may feel drugs help forget our worries or problems.
  - We may feel drugs make us feel happier.
  - We want to be rebellious.
  - We simply enjoy the effects.
- What is your personal feeling about recreational drug use – is it ok? Is it wrong?
- Can we acknowledge and list some potential negative impacts that could result from using recreational drugs?

- All drugs can have dangerous effects. Many can be unpredictable and have variable effects. There are numerous side-effects or problems the use of drugs can cause. Here are a few:
  - Addiction. Most recreational drugs can become addictive, and the person can be dependent on having them regularly.
  - Cost. A regular drug habit is expensive; obtaining the money for it can lead to crime, especially when the person is addicted and cannot stop.
  - Social problems. People regularly using drugs may behave in different ways. This may cause problems with their relationships or they may lose their job. Children of people who use drugs can be greatly affected.
  - Mental problems. Drugs can cause people to have bizarre behavior. There are thousands of admissions to hospitals each year for drug-related behavioral and mental problems. Drugs can cause people to develop depression or anxiety.
  - Overdose. People can become very ill or die from drug overdose.
  - Illegal drugs are often not pure, and people don't always know what they are taking.
  - Accidents and fights are more likely after taking drugs.
  - Unwanted sexual intercourse is more likely under the influence of drugs.
  
- Much of this discussion may relate back to last week - peer influence or peer pressure. Are the people around you pointing you toward the light of Jesus?..or toward darkness? Do you have friends that pressure you to use recreational drugs?..If yes, can you see how those relationships could be labeled as toxic?
  
- Choose students to read:
  - 1 PETER 1:13
  - 1 PETER 5:8
  - 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17
  
- In the audio discussion, intoxication was described as when the brain function is effected and one does not think (as clearly) as normal.
  - As men, most us of like the idea of being in control. If we like to be in control, why would we allow ourselves to become intoxicated and not think clearly?
  - The Bible commands us to be alert and of sober mind, because the enemy is on the prowl. The Bible also commands we take care of ourselves as God's temple. How can each of you, and your entire group encourage each other, care for and hold each other accountable as we navigate the temptation of using recreational drugs?

Some references and definitions originated in part or full in articles or info found at:  
[maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-today-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs](https://maps.org/news/media/7744-christianity-today-from-marijuana-to-magic-mushrooms-weighing-drugs)  
[danapointrehabcampus.com/blog/2019/12/top-9-dangerous-and-most-popular-recreational-drugs](https://danapointrehabcampus.com/blog/2019/12/top-9-dangerous-and-most-popular-recreational-drugs)  
 A Global Drug Survey By *Dana Point Rehab* | December 04, 2019

## 10 – 4 (week 4)

# Making Faith a Priority & Time Management

*\*\*TIP – downloading the audio ahead of group time may be beneficial rather than trying to stream it.*

**ICE BREAKER:** What do you think is the one thing you spend the most time each week doing (other than sleeping)?

**Listen to the Audio Recording** with Cooper Smith, Jim Karch & Rich Beasley

### GROUP DISCUSSION

- Go back to your responses to the Ice Breaker - Do you feel any conviction about how much time you spend on what you identified?
- Continue thinking about the what you spend the most time on: Is there something different you wished you spent the most time doing...or at least substantially more time doing?
  - Think again about the thing we spend the most time doing. Is it safe to assume we could give up a little time there to allow us to spend more time on the thing we wished we spent more time on (maybe making our faith a priority)?
- Let's read a couple scriptures. Have students read:
  - **Matthew 6:33** *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
  - **Colossians 3:2** *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*
- What changes do you know you should make to help adjust your time spent on things or maybe even consider giving something up to be obedient to the commands in the above verses?
- In the audio discussion, Cooper mentioned an, "aha moment – that started a slow process". Have you had an "aha moment" that spurred a strong conviction to improve your relationship with the Father and build up your faith?
  - How about the convicting side of an "aha moment" that Cooper mentioned, have you had moments where you knew you had to make immediate changes to stop or correct some destructive behavior?
- Jim & Cooper asked us to consider who we're doing life with...and also asked us what we're doing to support each other. From their words, could they be suggesting that while our faith is "our own", it is something than can be at it's strongest and deepest when we have support and encouragement from others?
  - Read **Philippians 2:4** *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

- Let's go back to the Ice Breaker and the thing you spend the most time on. Let's add to that and share a few other things that you invest much time in.
- These things that you spend most or much of your time on...Could you use any of them to connect with others and still be God-honoring with that time? Or, could you potentially gain a platform that you can eventually use to tell others about Jesus?
  - If the above question didn't trigger fruitful responses, (let's get specific) how could you use gaming, sports, your job, your marching band involvement, your fantasy league, your biker gang...or whatever you like to spend time doing with friends – how could you still enjoy that time but also use it to encourage others to have a relationship with Jesus?
- To conclude tonight's study, share or review what changes each of you should or needs to make to allow our faith to become a daily priority? Also share how you might use the things we find ourselves spending much time on to honor God and/or encourage others? Then pray for one another...and take some bold steps!

# Encounter Week 1: Jesus Restores

Bottom Line: Grace > Guilt

**Scripture Reference:** (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

**Mark 14:27-31, 66-72**  
**John 21:15-19**

**GOAL FOR THE NIGHT:** To help the students understand that when they sin and stumble, God's grace is enough and will lead them back towards him.

**Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.**

**GETTING STARTED:**

- How would you define guilt? (*Leaders, there is a difference between healthy conviction and unhealthy guilt. Please help the students understand that God uses conviction as a tool to refine us. Satan uses guilt as a tool to destroy us.*)
- What are some of your normal reactions to guilt?

**FROM THE WORD:**

- When Jesus came back after his resurrection, he was kind to Peter. Why was that so surprising?
- What is the significance of Jesus asking Peter three times if he loved him?
- How does Jesus respond to us when we mess up? And how is that different than what we expect?

**WORK IT OUT:**

- Jesus had every right to disown Peter after his denial, but he chose to restore him in grace. What guilt in your life do you need Jesus to restore? (*perhaps take some time to spread out and reflect and pray individually about this question*)

**NEXT STEP:**

*Leaders, encourage your students throughout the week to bring their guilt before the Lord and to seek him grace and restoration. God's grace is for EVERYONE, ANYTIME.*

# Encounter Week 2: Jesus Encourages

Bottom Line: Jesus is okay with our doubt.

**Scripture Reference:** (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

## Matthew 14:22-33

**GOAL FOR THE NIGHT:** To help the students understand that having doubts can help develop their faith when they address them instead of hiding them.

**Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.**

### GETTING STARTED:

- Why do you think most people tend to keep their doubts about God to themselves?
- Share some doubts you have about God or your faith.
- In what ways can doubt make our faith feel like it's sinking?

### FROM THE WORD:

- When Peter was sinking, he called out to Jesus. Have you ever talked to God about your doubts? Why or why not?
- Jesus "immediately" caught Peter when he started sinking. What does that tell you about the way Jesus handles our doubts?
- Jesus is okay with our doubts. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?

### WORK IT OUT:

- We've been challenged before to "question well" – meaning: let yourself have doubts and questions, but make sure you share them with people who are wise and who love both Jesus and you. Why do you think that would be so important?
- In what way do you think a person can grow and learn through their doubts? (Peter probably trusted Jesus more than ever after his swim that night!)
- What are some things that you KNOW to be true about God? Why is it important to recall those things when you are experiencing doubt?

### NEXT STEP:

*Have your students go to the Bible and make a list of attributes/truths about God that they can cling to during times of doubt. Have them share these ideas with the group tonight or in a group chat throughout the week.*

# Encounter Week 3: Jesus Pursues

Bottom Line: It's important to remember that everyone is on their own journey with Jesus.

**Scripture Reference:** (Have students read the passage from their Bibles, preferably NOT on a screen!)

## Acts 10:27-28, 34-48

(Note: This scripture includes the Gospel. Take a minute to focus on this for anyone in your group that needs it)

**GOAL FOR THE NIGHT:** To help the students understand that people both inside the church need grace, just like people outside the church.

*Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.*

### GETTING STARTED:

- Do you expect Christians ("church people") to act kinder than the rest of the world? Why or why not?
- Why do Christians sometimes make it tough to have faith in God?
- Who is easier for you to forgive when you are wronged: Christians or non-Christians?

### FROM THE WORD:

- Why is it better to focus on Jesus than it is to focus on other people and their behavior?
- In the book of Acts, God shared with Peter that the Good News of Jesus was for everyone – not just Jews. This was a huge shift from what the Jews had been taught before that. God accepts everyone – no matter who they are or where they come from.
  - How can this truth challenge us to love everyone around us – not just people that think and act like us?
  - What does it mean to see people in the church as "works in progress"? To remember they are also on a journey with Jesus? What about people outside the church?

### WORK IT OUT:

- Practically speaking, what does it look like to show grace to someone else? How has someone shown grace to you in the past?
- Jesus died for you – just as you are. Consider a past or current situation where someone has been harsh towards you or someone you care about. What next steps can you take to move towards offering them grace – realizing that Jesus died for them, too.

### NEXT STEP:

*Leaders, spend some time praying. As God for grace, patience, strength and faith when it comes to loving and pursuing other people.*

# ENCOUNTER 4: JESUS EQUIPS

Bottom Line: When you have Jesus, you have everything.

**Scripture Reference:** Have students FIND and READ the passage in their BIBLE (not on a screen)

## Acts 5:12-16 2 Peter 1:1

**GOAL OF THE NIGHT:** To help students understand that powerful faith isn't just for Bible figures and super-Christians—it's for ANYONE who believes in Jesus.

**Using the following questions: Create meaningful, Jesus-centered conversation. Adjust questions as needed and don't feel like you need to answer them all.**

### GETTING STARTED:

- Do you find it easier to believe that God has a plan for *other people*, but not you? Why or why not?
- What do you feel is the #1 thing that sometimes holds you back from growing in your faith?

### FROM THE WORD:

- What caused Peter's faith to go from shaky (denying and doubting Jesus. You can check out Matt. 29:69-75, if you want!) to powerful (leading the church movement)?
- Read Acts 4:8-13. What difference did the resurrection make in Peter's life? What does it mean in your life?
- In what ways can our faith grow when we focus on Jesus and His resurrection?

### WORK IT OUT:

- How does knowing you have access to the *same faith* as Peter (the faith that does miracles and changes lives) change the way you view yourself? Also read Ephesians 1:18-20 – that power is made available to US!! Wow!
- If you were 100% confident that God could use you in a powerful way, how would that change your view of your purpose and everyday life?

### NEXT STEP

*Leaders, encourage your students to step out in faith this week and ask the Lord to give them powerful, unwavering faith like the apostles. Hebrews 13:20-21. 2 Timothy 3:17.*