



RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

SIX WEEK SERIES
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyardyouth

RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

WELCOME!

to Vineyard Youth Curriculum

Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposely designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you - the in-the-trenches leader to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each Lesson Will Include:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to live and reveal the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions.
- Times for you as the leader to tune into what God is doing in you and your students' lives.
- Times for students to hear from God for themselves.

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It's important, it's needed, and it's laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!

Why This Topic?

At the core of Christianity is our personal relationship with Jesus. In this curriculum we will dive into the difference between religion and relationship. We will look at how to foster our relationship with God, and how to receive the love that God has for us. The speakers work hard to build an excitement and a joy around growing in relationship with Jesus, rather than a burden or a “to-do” list of religious duties. They also address some of the hard work that goes into relationship if we really want to see a relationship grow. Our hope is that your teens will be inspired, and find some tools, to invest in a lifetime journey of growing closer to Jesus.

Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader

In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we’d like to keep in mind:

Plug in your stories wherever you can. These are bare bones here, you add the meat!

Experiential learning lasts. We’ve tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out. Take some risks!

Humor is key. It’s hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor!

Context matters. We don’t know what’s going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray/think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers! How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

These Lessons Are on Video!

Go to vineyardyouthusa.com/curriculum to view the video teaching for this series.

RELIGION VERSUS RELATIONSHIP

BIG IDEA

GOD WANTS RELATIONSHIP, NOT RELIGION.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

What are some practical ways you have been abiding in the vine? How have you nurtured your relationship with Jesus lately? Have you felt anything in your Christian life become a routine or a chore that doesn't engage your heart? Have you been spending time with Jesus out of delight or out of Christian duty? Religion is motivated by duty and discipline. Relationships are motivated by delight and desire. If you have felt your motivations shift to obligation and duty, ask for forgiveness from the Holy Spirit and invite him to ignite your heart with fresh passion once more.

STARTER

Video, Game, Icebreaker

Game: Telephone

Getting started: Players must sit in a circle or stand in a straight line. They need to be close enough that whispering is possible, but not so close that players can hear each other whisper.

The first person in the line or circle whispers a word or phrase into the ear of the person sitting or standing to their right. Players whisper the phrase to their neighbors until it reaches the last player in line. The last player says the word or phrase out loud so everyone can hear how much it has changed from the first whisper at the beginning of the circle or line.

After the game, you can share how previous generations, traditions, and religious practices can have an impact on the ways the original heart of God is conveyed.

LESSON

Set up & Engage:

- What do you think the difference is between religion and relationship?
- As a group, read John 15:1–17. (Popcorn style)
- (if using video, start now)

Main Point: God desires relationship, not religion.

We were designed to have relationship with God. In the beginning—Genesis 1–3 shows how God’s original intention for us was to be in relationship with him. People were created into a relationship with him, and they worked in relationship with him, not for it. God taught them everything they needed to know and provided everything they needed (Genesis 3:15–16). God walked and talked with them on a daily basis (Genesis 3:8).

The Fall—Genesis 3 highlights the events that began to drive a wedge between mankind and God, which then set the stage for religion. Jesus came to restore the relationship between God and mankind, doing away with religion.

DISCUSS

- Why do you come to church?
- Why do you read your Bible? If you don’t, why not?

LESSON

Religion versus Relationship

What’s the difference? Religion looks like reading my Bible, praying, and/or engaging in Christian activities like going to church because an external source tells me to (my parents, my pastor, my community, etc.) or because I feel it is my duty as a Christian. It’s about trying to be good enough. Sin is scary and easy to succumb to. With religion I do what I do not desire to do and never feel truly free.

Religion is motivated by obligation, duty, striving, guilt, and condemnation. It’s focused on attaining salvation and being good through external actions and works.

Relationship looks like reading my Bible, praying, and engaging in Christian activities because I genuinely desire to know Jesus in a deeper way and take delight in my life-giving connection to him. I ask him questions to interact and engage his heart in ever deepening ways and seek to understand Him more deeply. He made me worthy and qualifies me. Salvation is a free gift—not one I have to work for. Sin is undesirable and conquerable. His grace, that flows from my

connection to him, empowers me to live a life progressively free from sin. Who the Son sets free is free indeed (I am free).

Relationship is motivated by desire to know him in a deeper way, hunger for more of his heart. Whatever I do, I do because I delight in him. It is focused on the relationship that comes after salvation. (Salvation is entrance into the kingdom, not the focus of the Christian life, but the start of it. We are saved unto something.)

Immigrant Analogy

Imagine you are an immigrant in the 1600s with your family on a boat to the Americas, eager to start a new life in a new world of endless possibilities and opportunities. Religion is the equivalent of arriving in the harbor of this new world, disembarking from the ship, and then setting up your campsite on the dock—and living out the rest of your days there, never going inland, staying at the point of arrival. Relationship is the equivalent of arriving in the harbor, disembarking, and then setting off to explore on a grand adventure full of wonders, delights, and discoveries in this wild uncharted new land.

Abiding

Abiding in relationship is the true intention of God, and Jesus invites us to abide in Him. To abide means to make one's dwelling place, to reside. Think of living in your house: you return there every day; it is a refuge, a sanctuary, a place of nourishment, and growth. Jesus intended us to live in deep connection and relationship with his heart, much like the way a branch is vitally connected to a vine.

In conclusion: The Christian life, and all of its activities, are meant to be motivated by desire to know him and the delight that comes from experiencing more of the wonders of who he is—not duty or obligation.

APPLY

- At some point this week, get alone with God and read 1 John 4:19: "We love, because He first loved us." (AMPC)
- Throughout your week, before diving into any Christian activities (Bible reading, prayer time, going to church, etc.) ask God why you are doing it, what your motive is. If it's not to know him better or because you love him, ask him to show you his love for you.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you God's love for you and help you rekindle your passion for him.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In your Christian life, do you find yourself more motivated by duty and discipline or desire and delight?
2. Do you see salvation as the point of Christianity, or the entrance to it?

FOLLOWING JESUS MODEL OF SONSHIP

BIG IDEA

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

JESUS IS THE BLUEPRINT FOR RELATIONSHIP.

Jesus protected his connection to the Father above all else and made sure to nourish and steward it well, as it was his source of life, identity, purpose, and grace. This was the “I have food you know not of” quote he spoke to His disciples. It was his daily manna that sustained him along his journey. He made sure nothing was allowed to obstruct, hinder, or diminish his connection to Abba. It was priority number one. It is usually when we let things accumulate or creep in that we begin to drift from purpose and passion.

How are you actively stewarding your connection to the heart of God on a daily basis? Are there any obstacles that have accumulated in your connection with him? If anything has snuck in, repent from it and take time to simply sit with the Father, in his presence, with no agenda other than to receive from his love.

STARTER

Video, Game, Icebreaker

Have your group play Simon Says. After a few rounds of traditional Simon Says, change the rules (and really, the whole game) to “What do you think Simon Says?” In “What do you think Simon Says?” everyone has their backs turned toward Simon. The Simon then poses questions with a 50/50 chance of getting it right. For example: Is Simon raising his left arm or his right arm? Is Simon sitting down or standing up? Is Simon patting his head or rubbing his belly?

Students have a 50/50 chance of getting it right, but when they get it wrong, they’re out.

You can play this as many times as you want, choosing a different Simon each round. Before switching to “What do you think Simon Says,” you can note the difference of how easy it is to do what Simon Says when you see him doing it, and how much harder it will be when you can’t see him! Note how even when people can see what Simon is doing, they can still make mistakes—just like when we are connected with God—but how much better to know what he is doing!

LESSON

Set up and Engage:

A blueprint is a reproducible, intricate pattern that guides the process of constructing a durable foundation that has capacity for endless growth. Jesus is our blueprint for life. Blueprints can only be reproduced if they are followed.

What are the implications of not following a blueprint? What would happen if a hundred workers working on the same building each followed different blueprints?

Main Point: The Father Revealed

Before Jesus, no one understood God as Father. “Abba” was a word for “Father” that typically toddlers and younger children would use to describe their dad. There was ZERO concept of God as a Father before Jesus came. The highest level of relationship in the Old Testament was being a “friend of God.”

John 17:25–26 says, “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

No one KNEW him. Of course, people knew OF him, but it was only in the context of religion, and not relationship. Jesus revealed God as Father by modeling relationship with him as a son—and he did this all as a man. He didn’t use cheat codes.

Jesus’ relationship with God was the first of its kind. Jesus had to do this fully as a man in order for the rest of mankind to have a model for how we are to relate to God. Operating fully as a man lets us know this relationship is available, not just for Jesus, but all mankind. We were “adopted” by God, through Jesus, meaning we become his sons and daughters and have access to the very same relationship Jesus had. Only as sons and daughters can we have the fullness of his love and relationship.

DISCUSS

- Do you think relating to God as Father is easy for everyone? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to be adopted?
- What are some examples in the Gospels that demonstrate the relationship between Jesus and God?

Let them answer before sharing these:

- John 5:19, NIV: "Jesus gave them this answer: 'Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.'"
- John 14:11, NIV: "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me..."
- Matthew 3:17, NIV: "...This is my Son, in whom I'm well pleased."
- Matthew 6:9-13, NIV: The Lord's Prayer, "Our Father..."

The key to sonship is connection.

Jesus lived fully aware that the resources of his Father belonged to him and that he had full access to his Father. There was no barriers or distance (John 16:15). He was fully established in his identity, lived a life entirely free from sin, and fulfilled the fullness of his purpose upon the earth.

How'd he do it? Jesus had a not-so-secret weapon he demonstrated for us—connection. He nurtured, stewarded, and protected his connection to the Father above all else and showed us that the same empowering intimate relationship is available to us as well. This is what it means to "abide" (John 15:4). When my heart is connected to God, it is as if a highway is established between us where love, life, and grace can freely travel from him to me.

Let's zoom in and tackle a common issue that hinders a lot of people, through a lens of sonship, and see how it dramatically changes the equation.

The sin issue

In religion, we are externally told not to sin, with the reasoning behind not doing it being that it is a command and it separates you from God. Interestingly enough, this is actually an Old Testament paradigm that isn't true of the New Testament.

You see, the Holy Spirit is a direct link to the heart of God and he lives inside you. He doesn't leave you when you sin. Usually it is our own sense of shame and feelings of unworthiness that creates feelings of separation or distance. It isn't on God's end. Sin doesn't separate a Christian from God, it damages your connection to God and grieves his heart.



Remember how I said that connection is a highway? Sin damages that highway. It puts up barriers and blockades to all the beautiful things that result from being connected to God. As for grieving his heart, he has actually made himself vulnerable to you in the sense that you can hurt and grieve his heart.

Why is this important? What's a greater incentive for not sinning—being told no by an external commandment or knowing that if you sin, it will deeply injure the heart of someone you love?

In sonship, the motive for not sinning is because you value the heart of God and know how it would grieve and injure him and damage your unobstructed connection with him.

DISCUSS

Think of your relationships with the people in your life. Are you more likely to do something that someone asks you if you are connected to them or disconnected? Why? How do you think sin affects God's heart?

APPLY

Jesus is the blueprint of relationship. His life modeled connection as the priority and essence of true relationship. As followers of Jesus, we follow his example of relating to God by building and stewarding connection with him.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

- If you have a worship team, have them play some soft, soaking instrumental music. (If you don't have a team, put on some soaking music to help foster a distraction-free atmosphere and help people connect to the Holy Spirit.) Have everyone close their eyes and focus on becoming aware of the Holy Spirit. You can choose to lead the ministry response time in any of these directions:
- Direct them to think about their relationship with their earthly fathers. Have them ask the Holy Spirit how that has had an effect on their relationship with God as Father.
- Have them ask the Holy Spirit to show them if there is anything in their life that is affecting their connection with God negatively. (This could be sin, lack of interest, other priorities, etc.). Invite them to ask the Holy Spirit how to address these issues to help them foster connection with God.
- Have them ask the Holy Spirit to show them something wrong they have done in the past and how it affected his heart. Did it change God's love for them? Lead them into a time of repentance.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why is connection so important?
2. Why is it important to protect our connection with God?
3. What is the byproduct of flourishing connection?
4. Why is connection to the heart of God a more powerful motivator to not sin rather than just external rules and commands?
5. How can we prioritize and protect our connection with the Father?

GETTING TO THE HEART OF RELATIONSHIP

BIG IDEA

MY CAPACITY FOR LOVE & INTIMACY IS DETERMINED LARGELY BY MY LEVEL OF SELF-AWARENESS

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

The Bible says to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and being. But how can you love with all of something if you haven't taken the time to explore and discover what you are supposed to be loving him with? How can I love with all the substance of what is inside the landscape of my heart if I have never taken the time to explore and discover the substance that resides there? The truth is, I can't give what I'm not aware of or haven't taken active ownership over. For example, just because someone has oil buried on land they own doesn't mean they know it's there, are profiting from it, or are able to enrich the world around them with it.

Jesus has invited us into a lifestyle of stewarding our own hearts because he knows that it is our hearts that will determine our capacity (Proverbs 4:23) to love fully, receive love richly, and thrive entirely. The Holy Spirit is amazing at connecting us to our hearts and helping us understand ourselves better. Dialogue with him and ask him some good heart questions like these: What does my heart need to thrive in my daily life regardless of what season or circumstance I am in? How can I better steward my heart? How can I better ensure that I get my needs met in healthy ways in my personal life?

STARTER

Video, Game, Icebreaker

Activity: The goal of this is to get the wheels turning inside them about how they actually perceive themselves and whether or not that perception lines up with how the Holy Spirit sees them.

To start, put on some relaxing music (soaking music works well). Have them close their eyes and relax. Tell them you will be asking them some questions and that they are to think about them and answer in their mind as honestly and authentically as possible. Give them a little space between each question to process.

LESSON

Who are you: How would you describe yourself? Do you like who you are? Are you who you want to be? What do you like most about yourself? What do you dislike? What character attributes do you wish you had? What kind of man or woman do you desire to be and be known for?

These types of questions often reveal that we have some negative mindsets or insecurities in our beliefs about ourselves. The goal here is to now connect them to the Holy Spirit by asking his perspective on how he sees them in regard to these questions. The Holy Spirit is redemptive and hope-filled. He sees the gold in people, not the dirt.

Reframe the questions like this and have them ask the Holy Spirit each of these: Holy Spirit who do you see me as? How would you describe me? What do you like most about me? What character attributes do you love in me?

Usually the Holy Spirit points out some extraordinary things that they didn't see before or brings a redemptive truth to a lie they believed about themselves. Encourage them to discard any lies, write down the truths the Holy Spirit spoke to them, and choose to believe it.

Set up and Engage:

A relationship is a two-way highway of giving and receiving love. Both are equally important. Jesus deeply, excessively loves us and taught that the focal point of our lives should be to "Love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind." But—how can I love with all of something, if I haven't explored, discovered, and taken ownership of it? How can I love with my whole heart if I haven't explored my heart and taken ownership of it? Conversely, how can I be loved in the areas of my heart I don't know exist or have never myself accessed?

Main Point: God made you distinctively unique, a poem of heaven, a masterpiece. He didn't make a mistake. He made you in His image (Genesis 1:27).

If using the video, start here

Here's what Ephesians 2:10 says: "We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works[b] we would do to fulfill it!" (TPT)

Remember in a previous lesson how we compared God to an unending galaxy? Well, we are created in his image, so imagine for a second that your heart is also like a galaxy—an undiscovered frontier of multifaceted passions, dreams, desires, ideas, and attributes that collectively make you, you. God intricately crafted you into a breathtaking masterpiece. You might be asking, "Why don't I feel like that then?"

It is simple. Most of us go our whole lives learning how to be a human doing. Few of us ever learn what it means to be a human being. The first is a function, the second is an identity. Your doing is meant to flow out of your being. But for the most part as a society, we have elevated the doing (the function) over the being (identity). The function was meant to be a byproduct that naturally flows out of your identity. Think about God: He is the great I AM, not the great I DO. Because he is, he does.

Exploration requires effort and intentionality. Few of us have ever invested that effort and intentionality in discovering and exploring the galaxy that is actually inside our own hearts. As a result, we go our whole lives never living fully alive, with lots of unfulfilled and undiscovered areas in our heart

Here is an example to help explain: Imagine a huge garden tended by a gardener. The gardener stewards and nurtures the garden, and as a result, it grows healthily. Now, let's say the gardener decided he was only going to work on half the garden and ignore the other half for a year. What would happen? Only half the garden would be alive, the other half would be weeds, right?

What am I saying with this? Well, what if all this time you've been alive, your heart was actually a garden and you were the gardener? And what if all this time that your heart was a garden, you didn't know it was a garden so you didn't care what seeds were being planted in it, and you didn't know you were the gardener so you never nurtured the good plants and plucked the bad ones? What would happen? A lot of weeds: confusion, unfulfillment, depression, and chaos. You see, Jesus invites us to take ownership and steward our hearts.

Proverbs 4:23 talks about the fact that all the issues of your life—good and bad—actually come out of your heart. But in order to steward something, to make sure it is healthy and functioning well, you have to understand it to know what it needs to be healthy.

So much of us live in infancy when it comes to our level of self-awareness and understanding of our internal worlds. Why? Because we have never taken the time to actually pay attention to what is going on inside us or ever intentionally explore how we function, know what we need, and discover what makes us, us. As a result, we have a hard time ever coming into a place where we feel fully alive and fulfilled in our relationship to God, our relationship to others, and our destiny.

Jesus makes a pretty profound statement about this. He says, “Love others as you love yourself.” If I don’t love myself well (not in an unhealthy, narcissistic sort of way, but in a nurturing, stewarding, caring kind of way—like a gardener), the love I express to others is going to be incomplete, unsustainable, and even ineffective. I can’t give what I don’t have, nor can I sustain a lifestyle of giving a depleting resource. In the end, I will always end up treating the people in my life the same way I treat my own heart.

The truth is that your capacity for love and intimacy is largely determined by your level of self-awareness. Not only is this statement true in regard to giving love, but it is also true in regard to receiving love, both from God and people.

Paul prays a stirring prayer over the body of Christ in Ephesians (3:17–19) in which he petitions that we would know and comprehend the width, depth, and height of the love of God, not as a theology or head knowledge, but experientially. He prays that we’d actually come to experience all the dimensions of God’s boundless love. (Can you imagine being able to measure the dimensions of a galaxy?)

But he doesn’t stop the prayer there. He continues to say that we would experience an ever-deeper measure of God’s love and be fully filled with all the fullness of God. That’s HUGE: be filled all the dimensions of an infinite, eternal, endless God of love. It is mind-boggling to think about and pretty paradoxical.

Think about it. The Endless God, who is love, desires that his boundless love would be deeply and intimately experienced by you in the depths of your being and fill the entirety of your heart. It is never a question of whether God loves you, it is always a question of whether you have opened yourself up to receive his love and are abiding under the ever-flowing waterfall of his love.

Always remember you are God’s masterpiece poem, created in his image. He has invited you to steward your heart by exploring, understanding, and taking ownership of it as a faithful, intentional gardener. He wants you to nurture and grow all the beautiful seeds he has hidden inside you so that you can live a whole, healthy, vibrant life of giving and receiving love.

DISCUSS

- Paul's desire in his prayer is that we would know love of God in progressively deeper ways. But how can I receive greater measures of the love of God in the landscape of my heart if I haven't discovered or explored those areas that he wants to pour his love into? What are some practical things I can do to explore and understand my own heart better?
- In regard to taking ownership of my heart, what are some good seeds I should be nurturing in my heart's garden? What are some weeds that should be pulled?
- Why is it important to love yourself well?

APPLY

If you desire to understand or know something or someone better, what do you do? You ask questions! Be intentional with asking yourself questions throughout the next week. Pay attention to what goes on inside you throughout each day. If you find yourself doing unhealthy things, ask yourself why. If you find yourself feeling some confusing or negative emotions, ask your heart what's going on.

A lot of time heavy emotions are essentially our heart's way displaying the equivalent of a check engine light on the dashboard of a car, which tells us something isn't right and the hood needs to be opened to figure out what's going on. What need are you trying to get met? What is your heart really looking for?

If you have a worship team, have them play some soft, soaking instrumental music. (If you don't have a team, put on some soaking music to help foster a distraction free atmosphere and help people connect to the Holy Spirit.) Have everyone close their eyes and focus on becoming aware of the Holy Spirit. The idea is to teach them that the Holy Spirit desires to dialogue with them about what is happening in their life and what needs they may have. He is also there to help them understand who they are in a deeper way, which is what a counselor does (one of His names is counselor). Here are a few questions to have them ask the Holy Spirit:

- Holy Spirit, you invite us to love others as we love ourselves. Do I love myself? How can I love myself better? What do you find lovable about me?
- Holy Spirit, what are some practical things I can do to better steward my heart?
- Holy Spirit, what are some seeds you've put inside you that you are inviting me to take ownership and steward?
- Holy Spirit, what are some weeds that may have crept in that you are inviting me to pluck?

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do I normally do when my heart feels a confusing, uncomfortable, or painful emotion? Do I ignore it by finding something to keep me busy, like video games, movies, or social media? What is a healthy response to my heart experiencing a need or an emotion that is something painful, heavy, or confusing?
2. What role does self-awareness play in getting to know other people? What role does self-awareness play in getting to know God?
3. How does self-awareness help me build healthier and deeper relationships with the people in my life and God?
4. Do I see myself the way God sees me? Do I feel worthy of the love he has for me? If I don't, why not? How do you think God feels about you not seeing his masterpiece (you) as a masterpiece?
5. When you love someone, you want to explore their heart and traverse the galaxy of wonders contained within them. Yet people rarely search their own hearts or discover all the things that God has hidden in them that makes them uniquely them. Why do you think that is?

RELATIONSHIPS ARE HARD

BIG IDEA

RELATIONSHIPS TAKE WORK TO BUILD & MAINTAIN.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

In all the busyness of life, relationships can seem overwhelming at times. Having to take care of how someone else “feels” is not always the most enjoyable work. Even though relationships can be time-consuming and difficult to manage, people still seek them like “bread and water.” That’s because we were designed for relationships. Even though we need them, doesn’t mean we automatically value them. With busy schedules, it can be hard to find time to improve or even maintain relationships, and it’s the same for our relationship with God. Take some time right now, or before you lead this lesson plan and ask God a couple of questions:

- Did you feel loved by me this week?
- Is there anything I can do to make you feel more loved by me?

Take his answers to these questions, and develop a plan to do the things he has shared that will move his heart.

These are great questions to ask others you have a relationship with as well, and will show them that you are thinking of them and want them to feel loved.

STARTER

Starter: Video, Game, Icebreaker

Download and play the clip from the movie *The Other Guys*.

This is an over-dramatized fight between two co-workers who have to work closely together. You can share while this is a funny movie clip, in reality it is easy for the smallest things to have a huge impact on your relationships with people. If you’re not careful in how you manage that relationship, things can get pretty bad, or the relationship itself could end.

LESSON

Set up and Engage:

Experts say it takes an average of five to ten years for married couples to realize they didn’t marry the person they thought they did. That’s because we often project onto others, especially in marriage, who we want them to be instead of letting them self-define, and loving them for who and how they really are.

DISCUSS

- How do you let someone self-define in a relationship? Let them answer before giving some other examples. Examples include asking questions, listening, and experiencing their reactions to life.
- How does God self-define? Examples include the Bible, his voice.

LESSON

Main Point: There is no such thing as an easy relationshipship.

What makes relationships hard?

- Expectations
- Feelings
- Stress
- Time, sacrifice, commitment

It is possible to live our lives primarily concerned with ourselves. Giving your life to someone else is hard work.

Indicators of a good relationship:

- Intentionally learning who the other person is on a regular basis
- Constantly growing, because our interests, beliefs, habits, and needs change over time
- Regular communication
- Recreation
- Doing things together that you both enjoy
- Affection
- Going out of your way to ensure the other person has no reason to doubt you love them by doing things they like
- Service
- Making sacrifices in your personal life to do things for the other person to help them, love them.

Indicators of a bad relationship

- Very little or no time spent discovering the other person
- No time talking
- Not doing anything together for fun
- Constantly doubting the other person's love, and never feeling motivated to show them love
- Only doing what you want to do, and not spending any time addressing the other's needs

It's the same way in a relationship with God. God has feelings and preferences. He wants to be a part of your life, and for you to know Him.

DISCUSS

- Every relationship is different depending on the dynamic (i.e., parent/child, teacher/student, husband/wife). What are some other relationship dynamics that you have in your life?
- Should all the relationships you have look the same, require the same amount of commitment, and use the same methods for learning each other?
- How is a relationship with God the same and in what ways different?

LESSON

Main Point: Growing in relationships requires being real with where you are.

This requires you to define the relationship (DTR). To know how to get somewhere, you have to know where you are currently. To know what needs to grow in your relationship with God, you first need to decide where your relationship is. What is good about your relationship, and what is lacking? Understanding where you are now, helps shape your next steps in your relationship with God.

Let's consider vulnerability. The root word vuln is Latin and means "to wound." Vuln + ability = "the ability to wound." God is not scared of our emotions or even our sin. When we offer Him our real self, we give him something he can work with. He would rather you be real and mad at him than mad at him and pretend like it's okay. Vulnerability requires authenticity.

Scheduling time is another important aspect of a healthy relationship. When married couples struggle with communication, the most common counseling method is to schedule time for each other to connect. It's not romantic, it's intentional growth. You don't get someone's "best" overnight. You commit to discovering that person for the rest of your life. You go out of your way to do things the other person desires from you. Developing new healthy habits leads to healthy relationships.

DISCUSS

- Is it wise to be completely vulnerable with everyone you come in contact with?
- What types of things make you more comfortable in sharing parts of your life with someone?
- Would you rather someone pretend that everything is okay when they actually are offended or upset with you or come to you directly to resolve the problem? Why is that important?

APPLY

This week, choose one thing in your relationship with God that you know needs some work. Make a plan to “schedule” an action plan to work on that problem.

For instance, do you need to let God self-define? You could read your Bible or ask him to tell you things. Is it working on your communication with Him? Put down a time in your calendar, or on your phone to intentionally spend time with him and tell him about your day, what's on your mind, and so forth.

Have your students do a “DTR” with God. With light soaking music in the background, have your students get real with God and evaluate their relationship with him. Is it as good as they think?

Do they have excellent communication with him? Are they enjoying their days with him? Or is he an afterthought? Do they make sure he knows they love him?

When they get real with God, he has something to work with. Have them repeat this prayer:

Father, I want to have a better relationship with you. I'm sorry for not giving you my full attention. I will do better at holding up my end of this relationship, and I ask that you help me see you for who You really are so I can fall more in love with you every day.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How would you rank all of your relationships in order of most important to least important? (More than one relationship can have the same rank.)
2. What are some examples in the Bible where God self-defined?
3. How should we respond when we see God self-defining?
4. What are some questions you would love to ask God? Do you believe he would answer you if you asked him?
5. How would you respond when someone you know is being fake with you?

YOU DETERMINE HOW DEEP YOU DIVE

BIG IDEA

YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED TO EXPLORE THE UNENDING HEART OF AN ETERNAL GOD.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

It is easy to press into God when going through hardship, experiencing great personal need, or preparing to minister, but we can easily forget to pursue him simply for the sake of knowing him more when we don't need anything from him. When was the last time you sought the heart of God because you desired to know more of who he is with no agenda? We forget sometimes that the heart cry of God is relationship and connection, and that no healthy relationships are built on one-sided needs.

STARTER

Starter: Video, Game, Icebreaker

Diving Questions. Quality questions build relationships. Quality questions are shovels that unearth the heart of a person and make them feel known and understood. Have everyone take a few minutes to think about two or three questions that they, themselves, wish they would be asked. Then have them ask those questions to a few other students in the room. The goal is to engage people in learning how to be intentional with questions. There is so much about the people around them that they do not know, and it is only through intentionality that some of those things come out.

LESSON

Set up and Engage:

What lengths would you go through to get to know someone you were really, really, really smitten with? I imagine it would be a lot, you'd probably even be willing to embarrass yourself, or at the very least go through a lot of effort.

Did you know that God deeply desires to know you in a relationship, and he went through great lengths to make sure you would be able to have a relationship with him? So great was his desire that he sent Jesus to die to remove the veil of separation between God and man. Read this scripture and pay attention to the language it uses when it describes the way God desires YOU.

“Does the Scripture mean nothing to you that says, ‘The Spirit that God breathed into our hearts is a jealous Lover who intensely desires to have more and more of us?’” (James 4:5, TPT)

God intensely desires a relationship with you (not merely that you’d be saved) and paid a ridiculous price for you to be able to have the capacity for relationship. The question is this: What will you do with that capacity?

God is infinite, and desires to be endlessly known. In John 17 Jesus unveils his heart and puts it on display in this intimate and authentic conversation with the Father, wherein He reveals the following:

- He is one with the Father
- All things are his.
- He desires us to be one with him, as well, and have access to all of him.

Then in Colossians 2:3, Paul echoes this by saying that all riches of wisdom and understanding are hidden in Christ.

What picture is being painted of God in all these verses? He is an intimate, personal God who desires to be known by his people—and that his people could and should ravenously explore all the mysteries and secrets of who he is through relationship.

This is revolutionary. In the Old Testament they didn’t have the capacity to truly know God. Their relationship was always through a mediator, through a leader like Moses, a priest. In the New Testament the veil of separation is torn, meaning we now have unrestricted access to a personal relationship with God and don’t need a mediator.

The implications of this are both liberating and deserving of contemplation: Liberating, because we can go as deeply as we like—no external source can put a ceiling on our capacity to know God. Deserving of contemplation, because the proverbial ball is entirely in our court—we determine how deep we go. A parent, youth pastor, or pastor can’t build a relationship for us. We are the only one who

determines where the ceiling is placed in the architecture of our relationship with God.

You see, Jesus purchased our capacity to know him and has opened the door to his heart. I use the word capacity intentionally. Just because we have access to something does not mean we actually access it.

Let's say I give you a fishing pole. Now you, as the owner of a fishing pole, have the capacity to fish. However, if you never actually go out and fish, then all it will ever be is an unutilized capacity, an opportunity you never acted upon that wastes away in some neglected corner of your room. Unfulfilled potential. You may have a fishing pole, but you never become a fisherman.

Capacity requires intentionality and personal ownership. The question isn't IF you can know him, it is WILL you know him? Will you take personal ownership of your relationship with God and intentionally pursue his heart?

In the end, the only ceiling is the one you create.

A spiritual truth/guarantee is that the one who seeks finds (Matthew 7:8). I'd like to propose that the one that continues to seek continues to find deeper treasure.

In the physical realm, if you get hungry, you eat and are filled. But here's a kingdom principle: In the spiritual realm, the more you eat, the hungrier you become (you get hungry as you eat). The more you taste of the wonders of Jesus, the greater your desire and hunger to know him becomes.

Remember how I said God is infinite? Here is an illustration to describe just what he has invited you to explore. The closest sense of scale to compare God to is the vast, ever-expanding universe around us, filled with mysteries, wonders, and staggering beauty. You are given the capacity to be an astronaut with unlimited resources to explore the vast, expansive unknown frontier of the heart of God. But an astronaut who doesn't leave Earth and never explores space is not actually an astronaut. Don't be content to stay on Earth. Explore the galaxy that is the heart of God.

DISCUSS

- A lot of Christians never engage with God past what they need. Why do you think that is?
- How will you be intentional in moving beyond using God just for self-help and need, and actually progress into intimacy?
- Why does capacity require intentionality and self-ownership in order for it to become realized/utilized?

APPLY

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

Relationships require conversations and questions to get to know the other person. Take time to ask God questions and engage with him throughout the day. Be active in your relationship with him. No one else can do it for you. You determine how deep you dive.

Believing lies restricts us and imprisons us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth who leads us into truth—and the truth sets us free. With this in mind, have an activation time of asking the Holy Spirit to show you any lies you are believing about your connection with God. After he shows you, it is important to then ask the Holy Spirit what the truth is and to replace the lie. Lies can be quite subtle sometimes, sometimes not, but they always feel restrictive, limiting, and without hope in the area they pertain to. Here are some lies we commonly believe:

- God is hard to connect with.
- I don't know how to hear his voice.
- He doesn't speak to me.
- He doesn't really want a relationship with me.
- He doesn't really love me.

Here are some questions to ask:

- Are there any lies I'm believing about my connection with God? Holy Spirit, what is the truth?
- Are there any lies I'm believing in regard to how loved and valuable I am to you? Holy Spirit, what is the truth?
- Are there any lies I'm believing in regard to your intense desire to have a relationship with me? Holy Spirit, what is the truth?

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think it is so easy to live in a one-sided self-focused relationship with God?
2. How do you think it makes his heart feel to only be talked to when you need something?
3. What do you think his desires are in a relationship?
4. How can you make the relationship a two-way street and not a one-way highway?

LOVE LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING

BIG IDEA

REAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH JESUS ACTIVELY PRODUCE FRUIT.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Examine your life. When was the last time God did something so incredible in you that you could not stop yourself from talking about it? Was it yesterday? Last week? Last month? Last year? Maybe even longer? God is extraordinarily willing and eager to do something good in your life again, whether it's help you break a sin habit, think more positively, grow in your emotional well-being, learn to love yourself more, or grow as a leader. You name it! Jesus came to bring you abundant life. This should affect your entire reality. As Christians, we should never have too much time between God's amazing works in our life. It should be a continuous flow of growth throughout our entire relationship with him. If God has done something amazing in your life recently, take this time to admire him and thank him, but then ask him what's next. If it's been a while since fruit has grown in your life, tune in to his voice and invite him to come and make something in you beautiful again.

STARTER

Starter: Video, Game, Icebreaker

Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Have them write down an experience in their life that meant something to them. This could be something they did, a place they visited, something someone else did, an event, or the like. Split the group into pairs, and have each person share what they wrote down.

Then, have them ask each other these questions:

- Why was the experience you picked so meaningful to you?
- What was the most important part of the experience?
- Name one thing you would love to experience at some point in your life.

Regather the group and explain to them how there are many elements that help create memorable experiences in our lives. Everyone experiences things differently, and the enjoyment you get out of them is according to what makes you happy and what you enjoy.

In contrast, negative experiences are formed by compiling elements we DON'T enjoy together.

LESSON

Set up and Engage:

Begin with a discussion about these questions:

- What is the evidence of love?
- Is it a feeling? An action?
- How do you prove you have a relationship with another person?

Main Point: All relationships have evidence.

If you look at any relationship you have, there is evidence of that relationship. People see you together, hear you talk about each other, and there are things you know about one another.

When you spend a lot of time with someone, you start to act like each other and sound like each other. You also do things for your friends that you wouldn't necessarily do for just anyone.

If you call someone a friend and there is no evidence, you probably aren't that close.

Our relationship with Jesus is no different. There is either evidence or a lack thereof. But since we can't physically see him or be seen with him, what does relationship with Jesus look like? And how can we say we love him if our life has no evidence of it?

In John 15, Jesus says we are his friends if we do what he commands; and if we do what he commands, then we remain in his love, and if we remain in his love, we will bear much fruit. So Jesus says that relationship with him looks like two things: to have relationship we do what he commands, and because of our relationship we bear fruit.

We've already talked about the first part, figuring out what makes him happy by spending time with him and asking questions or by reading the Bible, and then doing those things. That's how we develop relationship with him, but today we are going to talk about what the results are, the evidence of our relationship, or as Jesus likes to put it, the fruit.

John 15:16 says we were chosen and appointed to bear much fruit. Fruit is the point. But what is fruit? And how do we "bear it"?

Fruits are things that are grown from small seeds that, when mature, taste very

sweet and look beautiful. When fruit is produced in our life, the “taste of life” is sweeter and our lives become more and more beautiful. But fruit doesn’t automatically grow into mature fruit. In order to produce fruit, you need two elements: seeds and stewardship.

God provides the seed, as he is the only one with fruit worth producing. Different seeds produce different fruit. Apple seeds produce apple trees, orange seeds produce more oranges, and with God’s seeds, the fruits we produce look like him.

Things usually happen one seed at a time. God loves working on specific things in our lives, but not all at the same time. The main way he plants seeds is through his voice. We know this because Jesus said, “My words are spirit, and they are life,” and “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

The way to hear his voice is to spend time with him. We engage in conversation and wait on his voice. We read the Bible—his written word. He also speaks through prophecy, dreams, and visions.

To grow, seeds require stewardship. We are the soil and the care, the environment in which the fruit is able to grow. Seeds must be nurtured with the proper care and environment or they will never grow.

Here are some verses from the Parable of the sower in Matthew 13:

Verse 4: “Some seed fell along the path, but the birds came and ate them up.” This is when you never let his seed enter you. You put up barriers from letting anything influence you as a way of defending yourself from being hurt.

Verse 5: “Some fell on rocky places that had little soil.” This is when the seed does enter, but the soil of our heart is not healthy and cannot provide the nourishment required for the seed to grow and sustain itself.

Verse 7: “Other seed fell among thorns which grew up and choked the plant.” Thorns are plants from a different seed, from another kingdom. These are things in our lives that we have allowed to grow, that will always adversely affect the seeds of God.

Here are some truths the parable of the talents shows us:

- We are expected to do with what we are given in order to see it grow and mature.
- Everyone is given a different-size seed.
- To whom much is given, much is required.
- You do not get points for “safely” sitting on the sidelines of life. Investment involves risk.

Ninety percent of millionaires have gone bankrupt by choosing bad investments at some point in their life. But they don't see failure the same way we do, and neither does God. That's why they're still millionaires. We have to learn to fail well and use it for our benefit. God never seeks to shame us for making mistakes; instead, he teaches us when we make mistakes.

DISCUSS

- What is fruit? (Let them answer first before expounding on this: fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Anything that makes you and others fall in love with Jesus more. Examples are growing healthy relationships with others, such as being a better son/daughter, parent, spouse, student, employee, co-worker, and so forth. Other fruits are growing in wisdom and growing in our gifts. Now would be a great time to share your own personal story of how fruit has grown in your life.)
- What are some things He has asked of us?
- What has God done already for us that proves his love and shows how much he desires to be with us?
- What do you think are some of God's interests and preferences?
- What are some things He has asked of us?

APPLY

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

This week, choose something you know makes God happy and do it. Just like when people do things for us to show they care, God feels so loved when we think of him and do things because we love Him. When you intentionally partner with him, expect many seeds to be planted and fruit to be produced. He will never let you out-do his goodness!

Put on some soaking music in the background (or have a worship team play softly in the background). Have the group get alone with God and ask him what he enjoys about their life already. He will begin to show them! These do not have to be things they intentionally did for him—he just loves that they do it! Knowing that he delights in certain things can actually motivate us to do them more. Have them invite God into those activities and give him permission to participate.

1. What is something in your life that you think God already enjoys? How could you involve him in that?
2. What are some examples of seeds in your life?
3. What can you do to steward these seeds into fruit?
4. How can you “reproduce” your love of God?
5. How can we be used to help God plant seeds in other’s lives?

WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson includes:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to reveal and experience the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions each week.
- A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.
- Planned activities to help students hear God for themselves.

Why This Topic?

At the core of Christianity is our personal relationship with Jesus. In this curriculum we will dive into the difference between religion and relationship. We will look at how to foster our relationship with God, and how to receive the love that God has for us. The speakers work hard to build an excitement and a joy around growing in relationship with Jesus, rather than a burden or a "to-do" list of religious duties. They also address some of the hard work that goes into relationship if we really want to see a relationship grow. Our hope is that your teens will be inspired, and find some tools, to invest in a lifetime journey of growing closer to Jesus.

About the Authors

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