



the
struggle
is **REAL**

FOUR WEEK SERIES
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyardyouth

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

WELCOME!

Welcome to the Struggle Is Real Leader's Guide

I'm so glad you are taking the time to go through this crucial topic with your teens. Before we get started, I have a few disclaimers that are important to communicate both to you and to your teens.

First, I am not a professional therapist. I state this explicitly in every video as well. While I have experience with mental health issues both personally and professionally (as a pastor), I am not trained or licensed as a mental health professional. My advice in the series is simply practical application of biblical principles and some life lessons.

Second, this series is not exhaustive. It is meant to be an entry point for conversation and ministry around a crucial topic. Obviously there is much more to cover both in breadth of topics and in depth of content.

Third, it is important to realize that beginning these conversations may unearth some very real and deep feelings for people. I encourage you to communicate with parents before starting this series so they can be aware that you are addressing some sensitive topics. As always, we trust the Holy Spirit will be working in the teens' lives during these teachings and follow-up discussions. However as we all know, this won't be the end of these discussions, but the beginning. Sometimes as a result of looking at mental health issues honestly, people can experience aggravated symptoms. We need leaders, mentors, and parents to be engaged and aware if a teen begins to struggle in new or more profound ways as a result of honestly looking at these issues.

Fourth, in a couple of the videos I touch on self-hatred and self-harm. I don't specifically mention suicide, but obviously it won't be a stretch for kids to think of that. If you'd like to be better prepared in case it comes up, you can watch Session 8 "Suicide Prevention and Detection" in series 201 of our Download Youth Ministry University Training Videos. You access them through www.vineyardyouthusa.com.

Thank you for diving into this crucial topic with your teens. I pray that God uses this to bring some healthy discussion, freedom, and healing to the teens in your group.

Christian Dunn
National Youth Director

Why This Topic?

You don't have to look hard to find an article talking about how teens are struggling with mental health. Anxiety, depression, self hatred, and self harm are just a few of the ways that teens find themselves battling. The pandemic has only served to exacerbate an already seemingly ubiquitous issue. What help, solace, and hope does the Bible, and faith in Jesus, offer? In this four week teaching series, Christian shares from his personal experience of battling anxiety. He shares practical insights based in biblical truth that can be a daily help to each of us. Grab this curriculum today to start an honest and hope-filled conversation with your teens about faith and mental health.

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?

WEEK 1: THE FOUR P'S OF MENTAL HEALTH

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Each week the "Youth Leader Soul Care" section will be a verse about mental health, and a short exercise you can do to keep that verse in the forefront of your mind for the day.

Verse: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Exercise:

You are created in God's image as a masterpiece! Take a moment and write down ten things about yourself that you are grateful for. Put them in your phone or on your desk. Then, make yourself look at them a couple of times this week. Weird, I know. But trust me—it'll be good for you!

KEY VERSES

Psalm 40:2

He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) How aware are your peers about mental health issues in people your age?
- 2) In your experience, what are some reasons/factors that contribute to declining mental health in your age group?
- 3) Why is it such a lonely experience to struggle with your mental health?
- 4) Of the "Four P's," which one would you say is most helpful for you when you are going through some mental health struggles? (Prayer, People, Professional Help, Personal Care)
- 5) Which of the "Four P's" is the hardest for you to pursue in difficult times?

- 6) Do you have people in your life you can talk to about your mental health? Do you do so? Does it help?
- 7) Does your faith in Jesus help you with your mental health, and if so, how?
- 8) When you struggle, what seems to help you most?

WEEK 2: THE THOUGHT TRAIN

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Verse: Philippians 4:7 (NLT)

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Exercise:

Pick three times today to reflect on where you have seen God's peace in your life. Maybe do it in the morning, around lunch, and before you fall asleep. Where did you see God's peace today? It could be as simple as a moment of respite as you walked outside with your dog, or a kind word from a friend, or a beautiful sunset, or a time of prayer. Just take a moment and reflect on it, and thank God.

KEY VERSES

2 Timothy 1:6–7

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. We know from this and other accounts that Timothy struggled with timidity, and that people were resisting him for being young. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) Does your mind feel like a safe place to you? Why or why not? What does that even mean?
- 2) If you feel comfortable sharing, what are the "thought trains" that you tend to get on— the ones you know don't lead you anywhere good? (For example: Maybe it's anxious thoughts, but what are they about? Maybe it's depressing thoughts. Maybe it's worst case scenario thinking.)
- 3) Is there anything you do that helps you get off those thought trains?

- 4) Christian tells us to “think about what we think about.” How can you personally apply that to your life? What do you think that means for you?
- 5) How do you think we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds? How can we renew our minds in this way?

WEEK 3: TRUTH AND LIES

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Verse: John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Exercise:

Right now, before you get up and go about whatever is next for you, take a few minutes in silence. Ask the Lord to bring to mind one area in your life where you feel the tension: where you feel the trouble all too well but you struggle to see what God is doing. In your time of silence just bring that issue that is in tension to the Lord, and ask him today (and over the next few days) to begin to speak to you about how he is working in that very situation to give you peace and to lead and guide you.

KEY VERSES

John 8:44

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you sometimes feel like you are in a spiritual battle in your mind? Does it ever feel like you are fighting off negative, condemning, or untrue thoughts about yourself or others?
- 2) Why does what you think about yourself and others matter so much?

- 3) Is there anything that you think about yourself (or struggle with thinking) that God would call a lie? Are there any repetitive negative or accusatory thoughts that you deal with? Can you talk about them?
- 4) Do you have any thoughts or beliefs about God that keep you from having a closer relationship with him? What are they?
- 5) Christian talks about identifying the lies and replacing them with the truth. Take one of the lies you believe (or are tempted to believe) and talk about a truth from Scripture that you could replace it with.

WEEK 4: THE THREE CUPS

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

KEY VERSES

Verse: Psalm 46:1

God says, "Be still and know that I am God."

Exercise:

This one is really simple. Get somewhere alone and comfortable. And listen to the song "Extravagant" by Bethel Music on the Starlight (Live) album. You may want to do this more than once today! And be still and know that he is God, and that he loves you.

Mark 14:32–36

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Matthew 26:42

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Romans 8:18; 24–25

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us....For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) How does it make you feel that Jesus struggled so much in the Garden of Gethsemane? What can you learn about him from this experience? Does that change how you view him at all?
- 2) Have you ever seen God work miraculously to deliver you or someone else from mental health struggles, or illness, or anything else? Can you share about that experience?
- 3) Do you ever pray for God to break through into situations with his miraculous power? Why or why not?
- 4) Do you agree with Christian that if God doesn't miraculously heal/deliver you, that he meets you with sustaining grace instead? Have you ever experienced that?
- 5) Does it bring you hope to know that in the end we will be whole, and loved, and free in God's presence at the end of time? That all sin, sickness, and pain will be defeated? Or does it feel too far off to really feel like much of an encouragement?
- 6) Why is it so hard to live in the tension of believing that God can answer prayers miraculously and knowing that he doesn't always do this for us?

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:

- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Small group questions each week.
- A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.

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About the Author

Christian Dunn

Christian and his wife Mandy live with their four amazing kids in Pennsylvania. He has worked in youth ministry for 20 years and has had the pleasure of serving as the leader of East Region Youth Task Force of the Vineyard for 10 of those years. He is currently serving as the National Youth Director for VUSA, and recently planted CityLight Vineyard Church in Newark, DE. He is the author of "Finding the One: How Dating Prepares You For Marriage" and "More Than Spectators: Empowering Teens for Ministry." He is excited about imparting to young people a passion for following Jesus, discovering their gifts, and pursuing their ministry callings.