

YOUTH GROUP GUIDE

TAKE THE FLAG

*FOLLOWING GOD'S SIGNALS
IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE*

ROB FUQUAY

Y O U T H G R O U P G U I D E

TAKE 
THE FLAG

*FOLLOWING GOD'S SIGNALS
IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE*

JOSH TINLEY

 UPPER
ROOM BOOKS®
NASHVILLE

TAKE THE FLAG: FOLLOWING GOD'S SIGNALS IN THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE

Copyright © 2016 by Upper Room Books

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews. For information, write Upper Room Books, 1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212.

Upper Room Books website: books.upperroom.org

Upper Room®, Upper Room Books®, and design logos are trademarks owned by The Upper Room®, Nashville, Tennessee. All rights reserved.

At the time of publication all website references in this book were valid. However, due to the fluid nature of the Internet some addresses may have changed or the content may not longer be relevant.

Scripture quotations marked CEB are from the Common English Bible. Used by permission.

Cover design: Marc Whitaker / MTWdesign

PDF #41



CONTENTS

Introduction	5
1 The Green Flag: Let the Race Begin	7
2 The Yellow Flag: Heeding the Cautions	13
3 The Blue Flag: Moving to the Outside Lane	19
4 The Red Flag: The Importance of the Delay	24
5 The Black Flag: When It's Time to Leave the Race	29
6 The White Flag: Getting in Position for the Final Stretch	34
7 The Checkered Flag: Experiencing Victory	39



INTRODUCTION

This Youth Group Guide is part of a seven-session worship and study series called *Take the Flag: Following God's Signals in the Race of Your Life* with pastor and author Rob Fuquay. This guide provides instructions for seven weekly sessions for youth based on this resource. This worship and study series takes participants through the content of the book and features interviews and spiritual application for each of the seven flags studied.

The DVD includes seven brief videos featuring auto racing professionals, including drivers, and Fuquay's explanations on how the flags communicate spiritual truths. If you want to use the DVD with your youth group, plan to view the video and choose some of the video discussion questions from the Adult Group Guide.

As you lead this study, you will be more a facilitator than a teacher. Prepare for leading each session by becoming familiar with the content of the book and by attending to your own spiritual disciplines during the week.

The sessions are designed for 45–60 minutes. The Youth Group Guide is flexible and can be used during Sunday school or at other times when small groups meet! Each session includes instructions for

- Opening
- Scripture, discussion, activity
- Spiritual discipline
- Optional video with discussion questions (questions provided in the Adult Group Guide)
- Closing

Be sure you are prepared each week by reading the book chapter from *Take the Flag* and previewing the DVD. Make sure to set up the DVD and equipment to show the video segments before youth arrive. Look for additional materials and any special preparations needed for each session.

We recommend ordering enough copies of **devozine** for each member of your youth group to read daily during the course of this study—and beyond. **devozine** is a devotional lifestyle magazine (**devozine** for short!) designed just for youth and published by The Upper Room® in Nashville, Tennessee. **devozine** is written by young people and by adults who work with them and love them.

You can access this guide both on the DVD and on the website at www.RobFuquay.com where you will find other helpful online tools and resources for this worship and study series.



1

THE GREEN FLAG LET THE RACE BEGIN

➤ Opening

You will need green paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The green racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small green flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth should hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth work on their flags, invite a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 12:1-2a, the key verses for this session.

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of green flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

List these predictions on a sheet of paper where the group can look at them later.

Matching Flags

A different racing flag inspires each session of this study.

Flags are an essential part of the sport of auto racing. They start the race; they manage the race; they keep crew and drivers safe; and they finish the race.

If several in your group are auto racing fans, see if they can name the flags used in a standard auto race and explain what each flag stands for.

If most of your youth are unfamiliar with the sport, challenge them to match each of the following flags to its meaning. The flags and their meanings are as follows:

- **Green:** start of the race; restarting the race
- **Yellow:** caution (Cars are not allowed to pass when the yellow flag is out.)
- **Blue:** Driver should move aside to allow faster cars to pass.
- **Red:** Race stopped.
- **Black:** Car must return to the pit because of a penalty.
- **White:** the final lap
- **Checkered:** Race is finished; winner declared.

After matching the flags to their meanings, discuss the following:

- Why do you think races use flags to give information to drivers during a race?
- Why are these flags so important?

Invite youth who are familiar with auto racing to talk about how flags affect the flow of a race. Then explain that this study will use these different flags as metaphors for the Christian life. But participants don't need to have any love or knowledge of racing to enjoy or benefit from this study. Each session will

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles.

The green flag signals the beginning of the race, and just about every race has a beginning. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

The apostle Paul, in this letter to the church in the Greek city of Corinth, compared the Christian faith journey to a race. Plenty of Christian thinkers since then have used the same metaphor. If our faith journeys are like a race, they should probably have a starting point—a green flag.

Ask the following:

When did your faith journey start?

It is OK if some youth aren't sure when or where their journeys started or if some of them feel that their journeys have not yet begun. Where possible, press the youth, asking them if their journey might actually have begun earlier. For instance, if they say their journey began when they were confirmed in the church or made a profession of faith, ask them what led them to be confirmed or profess their faith. Had they been coming to church with their parents or with a friend? Had someone invited them to go to a camp or on a mission trip? If possible, push back even further, challenging them to think back on any people or situations that first exposed them to Christ or introduced them to the church.

Then read Psalm 139:1-16 and Jeremiah 1:4-9. Ask the following:

What do these scriptures say about where our race begins?

Introduce the concept of prevenient grace. (Some of the youth may already be familiar with this concept, particularly if they've been through confirmation in a United Methodist or other Wesleyan church. Prevenient grace is the grace of God that is at work in our lives even before we have any idea of who God is. This grace pulls on us and nudges us toward a relationship with Christ. God's prevenient grace may take the form of parents or other family members who nurture us in the faith from birth; moments when we feel especially at peace, even amid tragedy; or Christian friends who reflect Christ in the way they live and relate to us. Ask the following:

How has God's prevenient grace been at work in your life? How did God reach out to you before you were even aware of God?

And They're Off

You will need a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and a marker.

Auto races typically begin with a pace lap. (In this way they differ from running and swimming races where competitors start from a fixed position.) **The cars are running and moving before the race begins. But when the green flag waves, things change.**

The same is true with our faith. God is always present in our lives and in the world around us. God may be reaching out to us through other people or drawing us closer in other ways. But when we acknowledge God and enter into a relationship with God, things change. We have a new perspective and new priorities; we give up certain habits and behaviors and take on others.

Create two columns on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Label one, "Before the green flag," and the other one, "The green flag is up." Have the youth identify differences in how a person might live before claiming his or her faith and how a person lives once he or she has made this profession of faith.

After you have a good list in both columns, discuss these questions:

- How has your life changed as a result of acknowledging and claiming your relationship with Christ? (It is OK if some youth feel as though they have not yet seen the "green flag" in their life.)
- How do you believe a person's life should change when he or she accepts God's grace and enters into a relationship with Christ?

How Far Can You Coast?

You will need various small toy cars.

Bring an assortment of small toy cars, such as Hot Wheels®. Find a space that has a tiled floor and quite a bit of room. Create a starting line with a piece of masking, duct, or electrical tape. Challenge youth, one at a time, to roll a car along the floor, release it before reaching the line, and see how far it will coast. Use pieces of tape to mark how far each car travels. Declare a winner.

Then ask the following:

- **What does it feel like to coast, whether on a bike, in a car, or with another vehicle?**
- **What are the dangers of coasting too far or too long?**

During the warm-up laps of a car race, before the green flag comes out, there's a lot of coasting. Cars are not allowed to pass one another so drivers mostly stay off the gas pedal. But when drivers see the green flag, everything changes.

You've already discussed how it is impossible to pinpoint one moment when one's relationship with God begins. We experience God's love and grace even before we are aware of it. But we still have green flag moments—times when we stop coasting and hit the gas.

Discuss the following:

- What green-flag moments in your life have motivated you to stop coasting and step on the gas pedal?
- How has your life changed as a result of these moments?

Confess? Saved? What Do They Mean?

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Romans 10:9-10. Then ask the following:

- What does Paul, the author of this scripture, say about faith?
- What does the scripture say about salvation?
- What does it mean to confess that “Jesus is Lord”?
- What does it mean to be saved?

As needed, consult dictionaries for definitions of *confess*. Discuss which definitions apply to confessing Jesus as Lord and which do not. Ask the following:

- How is confessing Jesus Christ as Savior similar to and different from confessing to a crime?
- What happens or changes when you confess to doing something wrong? What happens or changes when you confess to loving Christ?

Paul, in Romans, tells us that if we confess Christ and “have faith that God raised him from the dead” (CEB), then we will be saved. *Saved* is a word that Christians throw around a lot, but we don't always give thought to what it means.

Discuss the following:

- What do we, as Christians, believe that we are saved from? (*There are many possible answers, but make sure that sin and death are both mentioned.*)
- While faith in Christ does save us from sin, death, and other things, it doesn't only save us *from*. Faith in Christ also saves us *for*. In other words, God saves us not just to rescue us but also to use us to do God's work in the world.

Discuss the following:

- What has God saved you for? What are you able to do because of your faith in Christ?
- How does thinking about what God has saved you for (instead of just what God has saved you from) affect your faith and how you live?

Allow the youth a couple minutes for reflection and challenge them to identify one thing that they believe all Christians have been saved for and one thing that they, as individuals, believe they have been saved for. For instance, one could say that all Christians have been saved to tell people the good news about Jesus or to meet the needs of people who are sick, homeless, or hungry. One could say that he or she personally has been saved to glorify God through the gift of music or to show God's love by working with younger children.

After they've had some time to think, invite each person to say aloud his or her idea of what all Christians are saved for and, if he or she feels comfortable doing so, what he or she feels personally saved for. Make a list on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper of the ideas that apply to all Christians. Then raise this question:

How could remembering that you have been saved for these things affect how you live?

➤ **Spiritual discipline: daily devotional time**

You will need scriptures listed below ready to pass out or send to each participant.

Before the green flag comes out, drivers stay in their assigned spot and move along at a predetermined speed. They cannot pass other drivers, and they cannot allow others to pass. But when the green flag comes out, they can take control of their car; they can accelerate and draft and pass. Our spiritual lives are similar. God is always at work in our lives, actively seeking us out. When we accept God's grace, we take ownership of our faith and may actively respond to God. We take ownership of our faith, in part, by developing spiritual habits. One such spiritual habit is setting aside a daily devotional time.

Daily devotional time often consists of reading and reflecting on a passage of scripture and spending time in silent prayer. It may also involve a devotional reading—a reflection on faith and scripture written by another Christian. If possible, ensure that this time is quiet and free of other distractions.

Encourage youth to set aside time each day in the coming week for devotion. Pass out these scriptures *or* send to each youth to an online Bible site like BibleGateway.com. Suggest that they consider the following scriptures and prompts:

Day 1 Romans 10:9-10. How have you confessed that "Jesus is Lord"? How has your life changed as a result of this confession? What, if anything, has kept you from confessing your faith aloud?

Day 2 Psalm 138:13-18. How was God at work in your life even before you were aware of God? Looking back now, where do you see God's presence?

Day 3 2 Timothy 1:3-7. Who has nurtured your faith? Give thanks for these people.

Day 4 1 Samuel 3. How have you heard God's voice? How have you responded?

Day 5 Ephesians 2:8-10. How have you been saved? What have you been saved for?

Day 6 Hebrews 12:1-2. How is your faith like a race? Who are the witnesses surrounding you? How do they encourage you to keep going?

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 12:1-2a, the key verse for this session. Then consider the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- **Looking back at the beginning of this session, how correct were your predictions?**
- **What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?**

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones made at the beginning of the session) one thought that they'll take away from your time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Thank you, God, for all the ways you are at work in our lives, even before we are aware of your presence. Give us the awareness and the courage to accept and respond to your love and grace that we may go out into the world as your people and do the work that you have set out for us. Amen.



2

THE YELLOW FLAG HEEDING THE CAUTIONS

➤ Opening

You will need yellow paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The yellow racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, ask each participant to create a small yellow flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth will hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth are working on their flags, ask a volunteer read aloud Hebrews 4:16, the key verse for this session. Then ask the following:

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of yellow flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper where you can look at them later.

Red Light, Green Light, Yellow Light

If space permits, play a variation of the children's game Red Light, Green Light. One person will play the role of the stoplight. The rest will stand in a straight line facing the stoplight.

When the person playing the stoplight says, "Green light," all of the participants will move forward in a line, at the same pace. At some point the stoplight will say, "Yellow light." When the light is yellow, participants may continue to move forward, prepare to stop, or proceed with caution, but they must have stopped

before the stoplight says, “Red light.” Any participant who is still moving when the stoplight begins to say, “Red light,” is out. The goal is to move as far as possible before the light turns red without getting caught in the red light. The stoplight may determine the length of the yellow lights (and the green and red lights) and will cycle through the lights—green, yellow, red, green, yellow, red—until only one player remains.

Following the game, discuss how the participants decided how long to keep going and when to stop.

Ask youth who drive to respond to the following question:

When you see a yellow light, how do you decide whether to keep moving or to stop? What factors come into play?

Ask everyone:

- Why are yellow lights so important? What might happen if there were only red and green lights?
- Have you encountered any yellow lights in your life—signs that told you that you might need to stop, change something and proceed with caution? How have you responded to these signs? What changes have you made?

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles.

Traditionally we think of Jesus’ ministry beginning with his baptism. That was his “green flag.” But right after his race started, the yellow flag came out. Read the following scriptures:

- Matthew 3:13–4:11
- Mark 1:9-13
- Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-13

Discuss the following:

- What happens to Jesus immediately after his baptism?
- What three temptations does Jesus experience in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13?
- How is Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness a yellow flag? What warnings did Jesus pick up? How, do you think he responded to them?

Explain that Christians affirm that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. Part of his being fully human came in facing yellow flags and experiencing the same pressures and fears that all humans deal with. Jesus’ humanity not only allowed him to empathize with us but also allowed him to set an example for us to follow. Ask the following:

What can we learn from Jesus’ example in these scriptures?

Beware Dumpster Fires

Invite the youth, on their phones or other devices, to search for Centralia, Pennsylvania. Ask the youth to look for information on the history of the town and the event that caused it to be abandoned.

Make sure that the youth, in their research, identify the key parts of the story:

Centralia used to be a small, but substantial, coal-mining town in the Appalachian Mountains. In 1962 the town decided to clean up a landfill it had built in an abandoned strip mine by setting the garbage on fire. Residents thought they'd successfully put out the fire, but the flames were not completely extinguished and ignited coal in the mining tunnels beneath the town. Residents didn't become fully aware of the problem for many years. When sinkholes appeared and the fumes from the underground fire started making people ill. The federal government had to step in and relocate the entire population. Today, Centralia is a ghost town, but the fire under the city still burns and may keep burning for centuries.

The situation in Centralia is a metaphor for our lives. We all have garbage in our lives that, if not properly taken care of, can ignite and get out of control. This garbage may include grudges that we hold, bad habits that we haven't dealt with, or negative influences that we allow to affect our decisions.

Raise the following questions:

- What kinds of “garbage” do people hold on to in their lives? (While the literal garbage we hold on to can do real damage, encourage the youth to focus on figurative garbage, such as grudges, addictions, obsessions, fears, and so on.)
- What sorts of things can happen if this garbage is not taken care of?
- What garbage have you allowed to pile up in your life?
- How can you deal with the garbage in your life before it becomes a problem?

Form two groups and assign each group one of the scenarios below. (If you have many participants, form more groups and assign the same situation to multiple groups. Or create additional scenarios.) Give the groups a couple minutes to read over the situations and decide who will play what roles. Then have each group perform a role play of its situation. After each role play, discuss the following:

- What was the “garbage” in this situation?
- How might this garbage cause major damage if it is not taken care of?
- In racing, the yellow flag tells drivers that normal racing must stop until a hazard is taken care of. What would a yellow flag look like in this situation? How could the people involved stop and deal with the problem before moving on?

Situations

- A person holds a grudge against a close, one-time friend over a misunderstanding (possibly over a rumor that was going around) and can't bring herself or himself to show forgiveness. Have one person play the role of the person holding the grudge; have others play the roles of people affected by the grudge (such as mutual friends of both parties).
- A person gets hooked on a particular online video game to the point that he or she spends less time with friends and family, drops out of extracurricular activities, and allows his or her grades to slip. Have one person play the person with the addiction; have others play the roles of concerned friends

and family. (You could replace video games with another activity. The point is not to condemn video games but to show the dangers of being so consumed with one activity that other commitments suffer.)

Absolutely Not! Unless . . .

Ask the youth to brainstorm actions that are wrong no matter what. After you have a good-sized list, choose one of the items and ask pointed questions, suggesting to the youth that it may be OK in certain situations.

For instance, youth may say that it is *never* OK to steal. You could ask them questions such as: “What if your family is in crisis and doesn’t have money for food? Is it OK to take money or food from people who have plenty and are unwilling to share? Would it be OK for someone who lacks warm clothing during an unusually cold winter to take a coat from a lost-and-found bin?” Continue pressing and see if the youth come up with situations where breaking this rule would be acceptable.

Then have the youth pair off. Choose several items from your list and ask the pairs to select one of these items to discuss. (Do not open this activity to all of the items on your list. Youth do not need to try to come up with situations where murder or sexual assault would seem acceptable. Stick with examples such as lying, cheating, disrespecting parents, and so forth.) One person in each pair should try to convince the other that it is OK to break the chosen rule in a certain situation. The other person should make the case that it’s not OK to break the rule under any circumstance and counter the first person’s arguments.

After the pairs have had a few minutes to discuss, ask each pair to share its most convincing arguments for breaking the rule they chose and for obeying the rule even when they are tempted to do otherwise.

Then ask the following:

- **Do you still agree that these items you named earlier are wrong no matter what? If not, what changed your mind?**
- **Which of these actions are still wrong, even if we can sometimes rationalize them?**

Ask the youth to think back on the temptations Jesus faced (which you read and discussed earlier). Discuss this question:

- **How could Jesus have rationalized turning the stones to bread, throwing himself from the top of the temple, or bowing down before the devil?**
- **Could he have made a strong case for taking any of these actions?**

Explain that while there were some good reasons for Jesus to succumb to each temptation, giving in to any of them would have meant not putting his full trust in God. Ask the following:

- **How did Jesus respond to each temptation he faced? (*He cited scripture.*)**
- **When you face temptation, how can you take a “yellow flag” and first seek guidance from God?**

Brainstorm, as a group, yellow-flag activities that can offer guidance, courage, and patience when temptation looms. These could include prayer, reading scripture, seeking the advice of Christian friends and mentors, and so on.

Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 4:16. After hearing this passage read aloud, ask the following:

What does this verse have to say about yellow flags and how we can turn to God in situations of crisis and temptation?

➤ Spiritual discipline: meditation

The yellow flag is a frustrating sight for many drivers. The drivers' objective is to complete their laps as quickly as possible and before as many other drivers as possible. A yellow flag tells them that they may not accelerate and may not pass other racers.

Slowing down can be equally frustrating for us. Sometimes we get so busy that we feel as though we can't waste a single moment. We have to study or practice or work or do chores; we don't have time for anything that doesn't seem productive. A spiritual practice such as meditation, which requires long periods of stillness and silence, just doesn't fit into our schedule.

But the days and weeks when we're busy, stressed, and overbooked are when meditation can have the biggest impact. When we slow down and intentionally spend time with God, we receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit and valuable perspective on where God is leading us and what is truly important.

Encourage youth, in the coming week, to set aside time each day for meditation. They should begin this time each day by reading a passage from scripture—either a parable of Jesus or a story from Jesus' life. They should visualize the story as they read it. Then encourage them to spend ten minutes in silence (if possible), allowing God to speak to them through the scripture. If ten minutes seems too long, encourage them to begin with fewer minutes and then add minutes later in the week. (It may help to set a timer so that they don't have to break focus to look at a clock.) As much as possible, they should allow God to guide their thoughts. If they find their mind wandering—as soon as they realize it they can think back on the scripture and then sit quietly again.

Encourage them to use the following scripture passages from Luke's Gospel:

Day 1 Luke 4:1-13 (Jesus' temptation in the wilderness)

Day 2 Luke 5:17-26 (Jesus heals a paralyzed man)

Day 3 Luke 9:10-17 (feeding of the five thousand)

Day 4 Luke 10:25-37 (parable of the good Samaritan)

Day 5 Luke 12:13-21 (warning against greed)

Day 6 Luke 15:11-32 (parable of the prodigal son)

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 4:16, the key verse for this session. Then discuss the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- How correct were your predictions?
- What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from the time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Divine Manager, alert us to the hazards in our lives, and give us the patience to pause and seek your wisdom and guidance when temptations arise. Work with us so that we can take care of the garbage in our lives before it gets out of hand. Most of all, thank you for the example of Christ, who was tempted in the desert but did not give in. We pray these things in his name. Amen.



3

THE BLUE FLAG

MOVING TO THE OUTSIDE LANE

➤ Opening

You will need blue paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The blue racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small blue flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth should hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth are working on their flags, have a volunteer read aloud Philippians 2:3, the key verse for this session.

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of blue flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper where you can look at them later.

Getting Lapped

You need dictionaries.

Ask the youth if any of them have experienced the feeling of being lapped. Explain to those unfamiliar with the concept that when one racer passes another racer who is a full lap behind, he or she has “lapped” his or her competitor. Those who have competed in sports such as swimming or distance running likely have known the feeling.

Ask these youth:

- How does it feel to be lapped?
- When you notice that another racer is getting ready to lap you, how do you respond? Do you get out of the way and let the other person pass, or do you speed up and try to keep that person from getting around you?

In auto racing, the blue flag comes out when someone is about to be lapped. The flag tells a driver (or drivers) to move out of the way and allow faster cars to pass. Drivers are not required to heed the blue flag; if they ignore it, they can be penalized. The blue flag is also known as the “courtesy flag.”

Discuss the following:

- If you were in an auto race and saw the blue flag, how would you respond?
- Would you willingly move over, or would you speed up to avoid being lapped?

Hélio Castroneves, three-time winner of the Indianapolis 500, says that while seeing the blue flag isn’t a pleasant experience, drivers should obey it because, “it’s the right thing to do.” Castroneves says that responding to the blue flag requires humility and that “being humble takes you far.”

Ask the youth how they would define the word *humble*. Record their definitions on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Then have volunteers look up the definition of *humble* in several different online dictionaries or have a few dictionaries with you. Discuss how the dictionary definitions are similar to and different from the definitions you came up with. As a group, come to an agreed-upon definition of *humble*. Then raise the following questions:

- What are the benefits of humility—being humble? Why is it a significant part of living a Christian life?
- What is most challenging about being humble? When is it most difficult to be humble?

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

Read aloud Philippians 2:5-11.

These verses from Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi may be part of an early Christian hymn.

Discuss the following:

- What do these verses tell us about who Jesus Christ is?
- What does this scripture have to do with humility?

Christians believe that Jesus is God. We also believe that he became fully human.

Discuss the following:

- What did Jesus have to sacrifice to become human?
- How did this sacrifice involve humility?

We see this incredible humility not only in Jesus' birth and death but also in the way he lived.

Ask this question:

How so?

Ask the youth to form groups of three or four. Assign each group one of the following scriptures. (The same scriptures may be assigned to more than one group. If you have fewer than four groups, assign more than one scripture to a group.)

- Matthew 3:13-15
- Matthew 19:13-15
- Matthew 20:29-34
- John 13:1-20

Have each group read its assigned scripture and discuss the following questions:

- How does Jesus show humility in this scripture?
- How might people have expected Jesus to act in this situation? How might he have surprised them?

The Pecking Order

Ask the youth to think of ways that they are ranked and compared against others. This might include class rankings at school, standings in sports, applications for jobs or schools with limited openings, and so forth.

Discuss the following:

- How does it feel to be ranked among and compared to your peers—and even with your teammates and friends?
- When does being compared to other people motivate you? When does it frustrate you?
- How does being compared to and ranked among others affect your humility?

Read aloud Mark 10:35-45.

- What does Jesus have to say to James and John about ranking among and comparing ourselves to one another?
- Jesus teaches his disciples, “Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant” (v. 43, CEB). What does it mean for someone to become a servant? How can you live as a servant?
- How do Jesus' teachings affect our attitudes toward being compared to and ranked among our peers?

Thank You for Letting Me By

You need paper, pens or pencils.

Jesus sets for us an example of heeding blue flags and allowing others to pass. But most of us owe a lot to those who have followed Jesus' example by allowing us to pass.

Ask each person to make a list of people in their lives who have allowed them to pass. The list could include parents and other family members, teachers, coaches, friends, or church members. Emphasize that they are to select people who have made sacrifices on their behalf, not just people who have influenced or nurtured them.

Give the youth a few minutes to compile their lists. Then allow volunteers to name some of the people they included. (It's OK if youth don't want to divulge the names on their list.)

Set out construction paper or card stock, markers, and other art supplies. Ask the youth to select one person from their list to whom they are especially grateful and to write a letter or create a card thanking this person. In their letters, the youth should acknowledge that they're aware of the sacrifices the person has made for them.

Encourage the youth to send or deliver their cards or letters. You might have blank note cards and stamps available for those who want to pursue this activity at home, or you could take time to do it during the session.

➤ **Spiritual discipline: service**

The blue flag gives drivers an opportunity to humble themselves by allowing faster drivers to pass. We each encounter plenty of blue-flag moments when we have chances to set aside our interests and work for the good of someone else. In many cases, these moments find us. But we can also, as a spiritual discipline, seek them out.

Challenge the youth to identify one way they can humbly serve others in the coming week. Discuss the following criteria and others they may have for this activity:

- It should be specific. (Giving food to someone who is hungry is too vague. They need to think about how they will identify the hungry person(s), and how—or through whom—they will deliver the food.)
- It should be something they can accomplish in the coming week.
- It should be measurable. They need to know with certainty if and when they complete the task.

Invite youth to use electronic devices to research service opportunities in the community. As much as possible, also make them aware of opportunities through the church. Chances are, your congregation has outreach ministries in need of volunteers. If youth are having trouble coming up with ideas, make suggestions, such as:

- Offering to help a teacher or other school staff member clean his or her room or set up for the next day

- Picking up trash and recyclable items at a local park. Or as senior citizens drive up to the recycling center, offering to recycle their items
- Tutoring younger students in the community (Perhaps your church or another congregation in the area has a ministry that assists elementary school students with homework.)
- Sorting food at a food bank
- Helping coach younger children in a team sport
- Giving blood (This option will only be available to youth who are 17 or 18.)

During your next meeting, check on the youth and see if they were able to meet their commitment to serve. Invite those who met the commitment to talk about what they learned and how the experience required them humility. Encourage those who were not able to meet their service commitment the following week.

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 2:3, the key verse for this session. Discuss the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Raise these questions:

- How correct were your predictions?
- What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones they made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from your time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Humble Savior, though you are the Lord and Creator of all, you humbled yourself and took on human form. You sacrificed yourself so that we could experience victory. Empower us and encourage us to follow your example by humbling ourselves on behalf of others. In the week ahead remind us to set aside our wants and worries so that we can invest in the needs and lives of those around us. Amen.



4

THE RED FLAG

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DELAY

➤ Opening

You will need red paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The red racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small red flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth should hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth are working on their flags, have a volunteer read aloud Psalm 62:1, the key verse for this session).

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of red flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper where you can look at them later.

Worst Commute Ever

Ask the youth to close their eyes and imagine that they are late for an important event. Maybe they're on their way to take a big test such as the ACT or SAT and must be present before the starting time. Maybe they're on their way to practice and their coach has said that anyone who is late will have to sit out part of the next game. Maybe they're helping to lead worship and have to get to church before the service starts. Depending on their experiences, they can imagine themselves driving or can imagine themselves as passengers.

Give them a minute to think of a situation. Have the youth close their eyes and be silent. Then say,

You have barely enough time to reach your destination without being late, if everything goes your way. You've been stuck in traffic, but things are starting to open up. The traffic clears and you pick up speed. You see a green light ahead, but as soon as you get up to the speed limit, the light turns yellow, then red. You stop at the red light and wait. (Pause for the wait.) The light turns green and you get going again. But as soon as you get up to speed, another light turns red and you have to stop. (Pause again.) This light turns green. You pick up speed and see another light ahead. You get through it right before it turns yellow. You look at the clock on the dashboard. There's still enough time to make it if everything goes smoothly. You're feeling good about your chances of reaching your destination on time. But then there's another light. It turns yellow. You speed up hoping you can make it, but you can't. It turns red, and you hit the brakes and wait. (Pause yet again.) Your hopes of making it on time are growing slim, but there's still a chance. You have two minutes to get to your destination, and you can see it off in the distance. Traffic is light and you're moving at a pretty good speed. You should have just enough time to park and run into the building. Then, one block before you get there, you hit another red light. And it's a long red light. You wait and wait, keeping one eye on the clock. You're down to one minute, and the light is still red.

Invite the youth to open their eyes. Then ask these questions:

- What were you feeling as you kept hitting those red lights?
- Have you been in situations similar to this one? How did you express your frustration as you continued hitting setbacks or other delays?
- Which of the situations you imagined were completely out of your control?

Red Flags

Almost everyone has had frustrating experiences with red lights on the road. Red lights stop traffic temporarily. In auto racing, red flags stop a race indefinitely. Some races are able to resume after a red flag comes out; others must stop entirely. The red flag usually indicates conditions that will not allow the race to continue, such as rain, darkness, major accidents (perhaps involving severe injuries), fires, or fuel spills. With red flags all activity stops.

Discuss the following:

When have you faced a red flag in your life?

To generate discussion, give an example of a red flag from your life. Red flags are events or circumstances that cause you to change your plans completely. Examples might include changing jobs or colleges to be closer to an ailing family member, changing a job or career abruptly after an unexpected layoff or company closing, or having to put life on hold after a natural disaster. Talk about what had to stop or change as a result of this red flag; what positive outcomes, if any, came from this red flag and how this red flag affected your faith.

Then allow, but don't pressure, the youth to offer examples of their own. Ask the following:

- When have red flags caused you to question or become frustrated with God?
- How were you able to start moving again after this red flag?
- What did you learn from this experience?

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles

Ask the youth what they know about the story of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. Fill in the gaps in their knowledge as needed. Make sure they understand the main points of the story:

God's people—the descendants of Jacob, known as Israelites—moved to Egypt from the land of Canaan during a famine. After several generations, the Egyptians felt threatened and forced the Israelites into slavery. They worked as slaves for hundreds of years before God appointed Moses to lead them to freedom. After a series of flags rocked Egypt, the Egyptian pharaoh agreed to grant the people their freedom.

Scripture says that God's people spent four hundred years in slavery before they were allowed to return to their ancestral homeland. On their way back home, they hit a red light.

Ask volunteers to read aloud Numbers 14:11-25. Explain that prior to these verses, the Israelites—based on a report from spies they had sent into the land—expressed doubts and fears about entering the land God had promised them. Discuss the following:

- How did God react to the Israelites' fear and disrespect?
- How did Moses respond to God?
- How did God punish the Israelites?

Because of the Israelites' lack of faith, God put up a red flag and forced the people to spend forty years in the desert wilderness before being allowed to enter the Promised Land. While this was certainly a severe punishment, the Israelites didn't spend this time sitting around and sulking. During this time in the desert, they received God's law; they established rituals and festivals for worship; they watched as God defended them from nations that sought to harm them; and they matured in their faith.

Ask the youth to think back on the red-flag experiences they named as a part of the previous activity. Discuss the following:

- How has God been at work in your red-flag experiences? What opportunities arose as a result of these red flags?
- How did these red flags affect your faith and relationships with God and others?

A Red Flag a Day

You will need Bibles.

Most of our red-flag experiences arise from situations that are out of our control. But sometimes we may want to put up a red flag.

Discuss the following:

- When in your life have you decided that you needed to stop, whether to take a break from something or to rest and refresh?
- How often do you set aside time for rest and recovery?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 62:1.

Rest and recovery—taking breaks from our busy routines—are important Christian spiritual practices. Setting aside time for rest is important on a daily, weekly, and long-term basis. Ask the following:

- What is the value of setting aside time each day for rest?
- How can you connect with God during these daily rest times?

Read aloud Mark 1:32-39. Discuss the following:

- From what we can see in these verses, how does Jesus handle the busyness of his life?
- How do his followers respond to his decision to go away and pray?
- What can we learn from Jesus' example in these verses? (If Jesus felt it was important to set aside time for rest and prayer, how much more important is it that we do so?)

Challenge the youth to identify times in their day that they could set aside for rest and time with God. Have them pair off and talk to each other about the times they identified. If possible, partners should keep tabs on each other during the week to check in and encourage commitment to a time of rest each day.

➤ Spiritual discipline: sabbath

You will need Bibles.

Ask a youth to read aloud Exodus 20:8-11.

Keeping the sabbath day holy is one of the Ten Commandments, but it's something that often gets lost in our fast-paced, busy culture. It's a red flag; and we don't like to stop. (Or we feel that we cannot.)

Ask a youth to read aloud Mark 2:27.

The sabbath was a gift created by God for us. God gave us sabbath so that we could be restored and refreshed, so that we could pause from our work and obligations and spend

time on our relationships with God and others. Too often we treat the sabbath like a burden because it keeps us from getting things done.

Challenge youth to be intentional in the coming week about setting aside a day for sabbath rest. Traditionally Christians observe the sabbath on Sunday, but if Saturday or another day works better, youth can choose to set aside this day for sabbath time. During their sabbath rest, youth refrain from homework and from practicing a sport or instrument. (They can still do these things for leisure. You might want to discuss what leisure is.) They also should choose a day when they don't have to go in to work for a job.

On the day following their sabbath, encourage them to write down some reflections about their experience. Was it difficult to set aside a sabbath day? Were they able to honor the sabbath fully? What did they gain from this experience? How might they be intentional about setting aside a sabbath day every week?

Be sure to discuss the youths' reflections during your next meeting.

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 62:1, the key verse for this session. Discuss:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- **How correct were your predictions?**
- **What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?**

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones they made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from your time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Lord, we live in a world that is always on the go. But sometimes we have to stop. Guide us during these times so that we do not give in to fear or frustration but learn from them and seek new opportunities to do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



5

THE BLACK FLAG

WHEN IT'S TIME TO LEAVE THE RACE

➤ Opening

You will need black paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The black racing flag serves as the inspiration for this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small black flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth should hold on to these for the entire session for use in the closing activity.

While the youth work on their flags, ask a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:38. Then ask the following:

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of black flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper so you can look at them later.

I'm Out

You will need whiteboard or large sheet of paper and a marker.

Ask the youth to spend a few minutes reflecting on any situations in their lives where they saw a black flag and had to step away. Perhaps they were spending time with a group of friends who were having a bad influence on them and had to cut ties. Maybe they had become consumed with a particular activity that was taking up much of their time and having a negative effect on their school work, church involvement, and relationships. Maybe they were training with a coach or instructor who didn't seem to have their best

interests at heart. Following this time of reflection, allow volunteers to give examples of black flags they've encountered.

Affirm their experiences. Then ask them to name examples of circumstances that might act as a black flag in someone's life—an indication that it's time to leave behind a job or activity or habit and move in a new direction. Ask that they not focus on specific people or events but that they keep the examples general. Examples might include getting arrested for driving while intoxicated, learning that one's employer is acting unethically, or failing a class on account of staying out late too often. Write their examples as they are spoken on the board or paper.

Once you have a good-sized list, ask the following:

- Even though black flags are usually negative, how can they have a positive effect on our lives?
- How might God work through black flags?

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles, a whiteboard, and marker.

Form groups of four or five, and assign each group one of the two scriptures below. (The same scriptures may be assigned to more than one group.) Ask each group to read its assigned verses and answer the following questions (which you may want to write on a whiteboard):

- What is the black flag in this scripture? What has to stop?
- What happens as a result of this black flag?
- How does God work through this black-flag moment?

NOTE: These are lengthy scriptures. Youth will need to read them carefully and pay close attention to detail. Read through these scriptures ahead of time, and be prepared to answer any questions or clarify anything that doesn't make sense to the youth.

- Numbers 22:22-35
- 2 Kings 22:3–23:7

Give the groups plenty of time to read and discuss. Then ask each group to summarize the story contained in its scripture and go through their answers to the three questions.

Then ask these questions:

- How do these Bible passages compare to your personal black-flag experiences?
- What do these scriptures teach us about God and how God works?

Metanoia

You will need blindfolds.

If space permits, scatter obstacles throughout the room (such as chairs, tables, and boxes). Pair off the youth. Blindfold one person in each pair and line up the blindfolded youth at one end of the room. Challenge the blindfolded youth to get from one end of the room to the other without running into an obstacle. The non-blindfolded person in each pair should guide his or her partner but may not do so by speaking. Instead, each pair should come up with two signals, one that means to turn left and one that means to turn right. (Signals might be a clap, a whistle, a snap, or a stomp.) Nonblindfolded youth should stay close to their partners so that their signals can be heard clearly and not confused with other pairs' signals.

When everyone is ready, give them the signal to go. See which pairs can successfully get across the room. Watch the youth closely to ensure safety.

Following this activity, say, "You may not realize it, but this game has a lot to do with repentance."

Ask the following:

- **What do you think when you hear the word *repent*?** (For some this may bring to mind street preachers and doomsayers urging anyone who will listen to repent, for the end is near. Others may recognize it as a word they hear a lot in church but never give much thought to.)
- What words can you think of that have a similar meaning to *repent*?

Often we think of repenting as confessing or apologizing, but it's more than that. Explain that the Greek word translated as "repent" is *metanoia*. (You may want to write this word on a whiteboard.) *Metanoia* means not just to confess but also to go in a new direction.

To get a better idea of what *metanoia* means, have a youth read aloud Acts 2:38-39. (Some translations of this scripture use the English word *repent*; others do not.) Ask the following:

- **What does this scripture say about what it means to repent?**
- **What does this scripture have to do with changing direction?**
- **What, according to this scripture, is the result of our repentance?**

Starting Over

You will need Bibles.

While a black flag means that a driver must leave the race for consultation, it does not signal the end of the race or their racing career. They are to stop and get feedback from the official on what needs to change. Often a driver who sees a black flag one week is back on the track the following week in hopes of a stronger finish. (If drivers do not heed the black flag, they will see the black flag with an X—and that means they are disqualified!)

When we encounter black flags, we should not view them as end points but as turning points. A black flag offers an occasion to repent: to turn in a new direction and to start moving again, taking with us what we have learned from our mistakes and setbacks.

Ask the youth to think about things they've done that got them into trouble or that they regret. Ask the following:

What was most difficult about moving on or starting over after these incidents?

While Jesus was on trial and facing execution, his disciple Peter ran into a black flag of sorts.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 13:36-38. Ask another to read aloud John 18:15-18, 25-27.

What black flag does Peter run into?

Not long after Peter's denial, Jesus died on the cross. But Peter's story wasn't over.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud John 21:15-19. Ask the following:

- Why does Jesus ask Peter, "Do you love me?" three times?
- What does Jesus mean by his response of "Feed my lambs"?
- How does Jesus offer Peter an opportunity to repent and start over?
- What can we learn from Jesus through these verses about repentance?

➤ **Spiritual discipline: confession**

You will need Bibles, paper for each participant, pens or pencils.

We've talked a great deal in this session about repentance. While repentance is ultimately about turning in a new direction, it starts with confession.

Confession is one of the most uncomfortable Christian spiritual practices, but it is one that God wants us to practice. Invite a volunteer to read aloud James 5:16.

Ask the following question:

To whom does James say we should confess our sins?

Explain that while it is important to confess our sins to God, confession is also a practice we employ as a group of believers. Make sure each person has a pencil or pen and paper, and invite the youth to spread out. Ask the youth to make three lists:

1. A list of mistakes they have made recently.
2. A list of sins from earlier in their life that still weigh on them.
3. A list of people to whom they may be able to confess their sins. (This list may include both people who have been hurt by their sins and people whom they trust for support and accountability.)

Give the youth several minutes to make their lists. Then ask them to go through the sins they've written and put a plus (+) next to any one they've already confessed to another person, a minus (-) next to any one they have not confessed, and a question mark (?) next to any one they feel unsure about.

Challenge youth in the coming week to confess these sins to people on their third list (or to other people as opportunities arise). In addition to confessing sins to others, youth also can make a point each day of praying for persons who have confessed sins and mistakes to them.

At your next meeting, follow up with the youth on this spiritual practice by raising the following questions:

- What was most difficult about confessing sins to other people?
- Were you able to confess any sins that have been weighing on you for a long time? How did it feel to talk to another person about this sin?

Encourage the youth to make a habit of confession. Discuss why confession is a helpful spiritual discipline.

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the key verse for this session. Then discuss the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- How correct were your predictions?
- What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones they made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from your time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Gracious Lord, we confess that we have failed to love you fully, that we have failed to follow your teachings, and that we have failed to love our neighbors. Give us the wisdom to learn and grow from our sins so that we can turn away from past mistakes and move in the direction you have set out for us. Thank you for people who forgive us, encourage us, and hold us accountable. Work through us to respond to others who are facing black flags in their lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



6

THE WHITE FLAG

GETTING IN POSITION FOR THE FINAL STRETCH

➤ Opening

You will need white paper or fabric, dowel rods or pencils, paper, tape, and a marker.

The white racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small white flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. The youth should hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth are working on their flags, have a volunteer read aloud Mark 8:35, the key verse for this session. Then ask this question:

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of white flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper or whiteboard where you can look at them later.

Win without Winning

The chief objective in most sports is winning, but many teams and athletes have found plenty of reasons to celebrate even when they haven't been able to come away with a victory. In auto racing, drivers earn points based on where they finish. Even drivers who don't have a chance to cross the finish line first still have an incentive to try to push their way into the top

five or top ten because it can boost their position in the points standings. Drivers can conceivably compile enough points to win a championship without ever actually winning a race.

Often runners and swimmers are just as concerned about their times as they are about where they finish. Finishing toward the back of the pack isn't so bad if you shave several seconds off your best time. Players in team sports may celebrate their ability to compete well against a superior, highly ranked team, even if they don't pull out the win. In some cases, qualifying for a prestigious tournament or meet is a big deal even if the team or athlete loses early or places in the bottom half.

Ask the youth to think of situations where they have won without winning. These can be related to sports or other forms of competition, but they don't have to be. Maybe losing an argument gave them a new perspective or strengthened a relationship with a friend or family member; maybe getting a poor grade on a test compelled them to study harder and focus more on a particular class.

Discuss their examples for a few minutes, then ask this question:

What are the dangers of a win-at-all-costs attitude?

In auto racing, the white flag indicates that the race leader is on his or her last lap. For many of the drivers, the white flag is a signal to start jockeying for position. If a driver can get around a couple cars and move from sixth place to fourth place, it can help his or her points total considerably. If a driver isn't careful, he or she can lose valuable points on the final lap. The white flag tells drivers to get into a winning mind-set, even if they cannot win the race at hand.

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles.

Ask volunteers to read aloud each of the following scriptures:

- Matthew 10:38-39
- Mark 8:34-38
- John 12:24-25

Discuss the following:

- How do these verses relate to the topic of “winning without winning”?
- What does Jesus mean when he encourages us to “lose” our lives and to take up our crosses?

These verses deal with making sacrifices and humbling ourselves.

Form groups of three or four. Challenge each group to come up with a new saying with a message similar to those in the scriptures. (For example: “Those who are willing to come off the bench are the real MVPs.”) Give the groups a few minutes to work then invite each group to read aloud its saying. List the sayings on a whiteboard or paper.

Ask the following:

What can we learn from these sayings about how we should live and interact with others?

Jesus vs. the Romans

You will need paper, pens and pencils, and other art supplies.

Jesus didn't fight back when he was arrested or after he was tried.

Ask the following:

- Based on what you know about Jesus, do you think he could have taken on the Roman soldiers and leaders and saved himself from crucifixion?
- What do you think his disciples were expecting? Do you think they were surprised when Jesus surrendered to his captors instead of fighting back?

Explain that some Jewish people believed the Messiah would free the Jews from Roman rule. It is possible that some of Jesus' followers (and some who knew about Jesus) thought that he would expel the Romans from the Jewish world.

Form groups of four or five people. Challenge each group to come up with a plot and description for a movie called *Jesus vs. the Romans*. In this movie, Jesus fights back and defeats the Roman oppressors. Groups can do one of the following:

- A story board: several sketches of scenes showing the plot of the movie
- An outline: a synopsis of the movie in outline form
- A poster: a visual advertisement for the movie
- A descriptive paragraph

Give the groups plenty of time to work, then invite each group to present its work to the others. After going through your movie ideas, discuss the following:

- How does the Jesus in your movie pitches compare to the Jesus you know from scripture? Are these movie portrayals of Jesus consistent with who you know Jesus to be? Why, or why not?
- What would have changed if Jesus hadn't been killed—if he had fought and defeated the Roman authorities?
- What victory came through his surrender?

Affirm the responses. Note that through his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated an opponent much greater than the mighty Roman Empire. He defeated sin and death. Because of this greater victory, we too may overcome sin and death and live eternally with God.

Jesus' Last Lap

You will need Bibles.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he saw tree branches waving rather than a white flag. Looking back now, we know that those branches signaled Jesus' final lap. Days later he surrendered to Roman authorities, was tried, and was executed.

Ask the following:

What comes to mind when you hear the word *surrender*?

Explain that when Jesus was on his final lap—his final week in Jerusalem—he surrendered. By surrendering instead of fighting back, he achieved a greater victory. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 22:39-53. Ask the following:

- When Jesus surrendered, did he give up?
- To whom did Jesus surrender?
- How did Jesus show love and grace to his accusers?

Explain that while Jesus surrendered to the guards and religious leaders, he also surrendered to God's will. To get a better idea of what it looks like to surrender to God's will, look at Luke 23:32-43, another scripture from Jesus' final lap. Then discuss the following:

- How does Jesus surrender to God's will in these verses?
- How does Jesus show love and grace even when he is on the cross?
- How does Jesus defy people's expectations?
- What can we learn from Jesus' example?

➤ Spiritual discipline: surrender

You will need pens or pencils and paper. (A paper shredder is optional.)

For Jesus, the white flag waved as he entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week when he would face his trial and execution. During this tumultuous week, Jesus had to surrender to his heavenly Father's will. He felt anxiety about his inevitable death, but he was able to give his worry over to God and face his arrest and crucifixion with boldness.

This week, encourage youth to follow Christ's example by practicing the spiritual discipline of surrender. At the end of each day, youth should list things from that day that they need to let go of. These things could include a grudge they're holding, a test or assignment they're stressed out about, or a regret that they can't let go of. After they've made the list, they are to pray over it, surrendering each item on the list to God. Then they destroy it by tearing it into small pieces or shredding it and putting it in the recycling bin.

Youth should understand that the goal is not to forget these things or to pretend they don't exist. Rather, they are letting go of these things and giving them over to God.

Have the youth begin this spiritual practice during your time together. Distribute paper and have them make a list. Give them time to pray over their lists or have a group prayer you can say together. Then have them destroy the lists. (You might provide a paper shredder.) Discuss with them how it feels to name these items and surrender them to God.

After doing this for a week, youth should spend some time in reflection:

- How has this experience of surrendering their burdens and worries to God changed their attitude and outlook?
- Has it helped them better cope with stress?
- Has it made them more intentional about prayer?

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 8:35, the key verse for this session. Then discuss the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- How correct were your predictions?
- What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones they made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from the time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Humble Savior, on your final lap you surrendered to God's will. Even during your arrest and execution, you showed love and grace to your accusers and tormenters. We surrender to you, Lord. Give us the courage to do your will, especially when we're tempted to take matters into our own hands. Amen.



7

THE CHECKERED FLAG

EXPERIENCING VICTORY

➤ Opening

You will need Bibles, cloth or paper (and possibly markers), tape, and dowel rods or pencils.

The checkered racing flag inspires this session. To begin your time together, have each participant create a small checkered flag (about the size of an index card) using paper or fabric and a dowel rod or pencil. You can have them start with white paper or fabric then color black squares with a marker. Or you could have them weave together strips of black and white paper or cloth. The youth should hold on to these for the entirety of the session and will use them in the closing activity.

While the youth are working on their flags, have a volunteer read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:54b, 57, the key verses for this session.

Based on this scripture and any knowledge you have of checkered flags, what do you think we'll be learning and discussing in this session?

Make a list of these predictions on a sheet of paper where you can look at them later.

Like a Champion

Ask the youth to think of the most excited they've ever been to have won something. Invite volunteers to talk about these experiences, answering the following:

- What did you win?
- What challenges did you have to overcome to get this victory?

- How would you describe how you felt after this victory?
- What is most satisfying about winning something?
- Are there any downsides to winning? If so, what are they?

In racing, the checkered flag indicates that there is a race winner and the race is over. It is a moment of celebration for the driver and his or her team and fans. Sometimes racers compete for placement in a series of races with cumulative points.

Ask the youth to name some recent major sports championships. Ask the following:

In addition to the athletes, who takes enjoyment from a championship?

Make a list of their answers on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. These may include coaches, owners, executives, team staff, residents of the city or state, students and alumni (in the case of college championships), and so on.

Explain that in this session, you'll be looking at the ultimate checkered flag. It was victory not only for the One who was victorious and those who first witnessed it but also for us still today.

Until It's Over

You will need a video of an impressive comeback from the world of sports, along with the equipment needed to view the video.

One of many memorable quotes attributed to New York Yankees hall-of-fame catcher Yogi Berra is, "It ain't over till it's over." The spirit behind this saying is especially true in Berra's sport, where no lead is ever completely safe. In baseball there is no clock, and play continues until the losing team records its last out. But even sports that have a clock have seen plenty of memorable comebacks, in which a team overcame a seemingly insurmountable deficit.

Show a video of an impressive comeback from the world of sports that will resonate with your youth. You might search for

- The Boston Red Sox's comeback against the Yankees in the 2004 American League Championship Series
- Reggie Miller of the Indiana Pacers scoring eight points in nine seconds to beat the New York Knicks in a 1995 NBA playoff game.
- The underdog Boise State Broncos going on a late run full of trick plays to come back and defeat the Oklahoma Sooners in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl.
- Tennis great Steffi Graf coming back from a 4-1 deficit in the final set to beat Jana Novotna in the 1993 Wimbledon final.
- The Cleveland Cavaliers overcoming a 3-1 deficit to beat the Golden State Warriors for the 2016 NBA championship.

(If possible, choose an example that is especially relevant to the city or state where you live.)

Ask the following:

- What had to happen for this comeback to be possible?
- What attitude did the athletes involved have that made this comeback a reality?

Then ask the youth to think of a time when they made a comeback. This might involve sports, but it could also involve any situation where, due to a setback, a goal seemed out of reach. (Perhaps, due to absences or other factors, their grade slipped to a D or F and they had to ace a test or get through a pile of make-up work to get their grade up to where they wanted it.) Form groups of two or three people each and have them discuss these comebacks with one another. Ask them to focus on the following questions:

- Did you ever consider giving up on your goal instead of working to make your comeback? If so, what kept you from giving up?
- How did you find the strength to keep going, even when the goal seemed out of reach?
- Who encouraged you and supported you during this time?

Explain that comebacks remind us of what is possible and teach us that hope is not lost, even if it's hard to find.

➤ Scripture, discussion, activity

You will need Bibles.

As we saw in the previous session, Jesus' last lap was a bit rough.

Ask volunteers to read aloud Matthew 27:32-61, with each person reading a few verses at a time. Then raise the following questions:

- What emotions do you think Jesus' closest friends and followers experienced as these events unfolded?
- If you had been in their position, do you think you would have been ready to give up and admit defeat? If not, where do you think you would have found hope?

Now ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:1-10.

- What do you think the women who went to Jesus' tomb were thinking and feeling? What questions might they have had?
- At what point in this story do you think the women were certain that Jesus had been victorious?
- What changed—both for Jesus' followers and for the entire world—as a result of what happened in these verses?

Sharing in the Victory

You will need Bibles.

Ask this question:

When have you felt like you were part of a victory that you weren't actually part of?

Youth may have been big fans of a team that won a championship. Maybe a music artist they had long been a fan of won a big award. Perhaps a friend whom they had supported earned a major honor. Maybe their school achieved recognition at the state or national level.

Ask the following:

What victory do we as Christians share in?

Read aloud each of the following scriptures.

- Romans 8:1-2
- Romans 8:35-39
- 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

For each one, discuss the questions below.

- **What do these verses say about how Christ's victory affects us?**
- **What do these verses say about how we should live as people who have victory through Christ?**

Mention that all these scriptures were written by the apostle Paul. During his life, Paul encountered persecution, imprisonment, and even a shipwreck. Through it all, he never lost sight of the victory he had through Christ. He remained fully focused on the work that God had called him to do.

Behind the Scenes

You will need Bibles and supplies to show or perform a "magic" trick.

Show the youth a magic trick that involves a diversion or misdirection. You can find a video of such a trick online or can learn a simple trick that you could perform. If you perform a trick, consider a card trick using sleight of hand. Or do something like the glass-through-the-table trick:

For this trick, you place a glass on a table upside down, then cover it completely with a sheet of paper or cloth. While the glass is covered, lift it off the table and draw the youths' attention to something on the table where the glass had been sitting. You might say that there is a magic spot on the table and say that you'll be able to push the glass through the table at this spot. You could even mark the spot with a dry erase marker or a coin.

While the youth are focused on the table, hold the glass close to your body so the bottom of the glass is at or below table level, then drop the glass into your lap. As the glass falls into your lap, continue holding the paper or cloth as though the glass were still underneath it. Return the paper or cloth to the spot on the table where the glass had been, still giving the appearance that the glass is underneath it. Slowly press on the top of the paper or cloth to suggest that you are pushing the glass through the table. As the cloth or paper starts to flatten,

place your free hand beneath the table. When the paper or cloth is completely flat, bring the glass back above the table to reveal that it has been pushed completely through.

Explain that skilled illusionists keep their audience's attention on one thing or place while they are at work somewhere or on something else. The key to a great illusion is what happens behind the scenes.

Faith and sharing in the victory of Christ also involves what happens behind the scenes.

Ask the youth what they know about the story of Joseph—not Jesus' father but the Joseph in the Old Testament, the one favored by his father with a beautiful coat. Correct and fill in the gaps in their knowledge as needed.

Make sure that the youth know that Joseph had ten older brothers who were jealous of him because Joseph was his father's favorite son and because Joseph spoke of dreams in which his brothers bowed down to him. Joseph's brothers beat Joseph and nearly left him for dead before selling him into slavery. They convinced their father that Joseph had been killed. Joseph ended up in Egypt. After spending time as a slave and in prison for a crime he didn't commit, Joseph earned a place of prominence in the king's court because of his ability to interpret dreams. In this position, Joseph led Egypt through seven years of famine. Joseph managed the famine so well that people from outside Egypt, including his brothers, traveled to Egypt for food. Joseph's brothers came before him but did not recognize him. After some trickery on Joseph's part, he revealed his identity to his siblings.

Ask volunteers to read aloud Genesis 45:1-15. Discuss the following:

- How did Joseph respond to the brothers who'd betrayed him?
- What did Joseph have to say about how God had been at work in his life?
- What resulted from Joseph's reunion with his brothers? How was Joseph's family able to share in Joseph's victory?
- Can you think of circumstances in your life or in the lives of people you know where God was at work behind the scenes?
- How does the knowledge that God is always at work behind the scenes affect how we live?
- How does the knowledge that Christ has already achieved victory over sin and death give us hope, even when we aren't sure what God is doing?

It is important for youth to understand that God does not create diversions or make bad things happen in order to work magic. Rather, regardless of the circumstances, God is always at work. Also explain that we don't always see the work God is doing behind the scenes. We may not be aware of God's "magic" until much later.

Pass It On

You will need Bibles and music or an object for Hot Potato.

Play a few rounds of the children's game Hot Potato. (In Hot Potato, players sit in a circle and pass an object from one person to the next while music plays. Whoever holds the object when the music stops is out.)

Pose this question:

What is the objective of this game? (*To keep the “potato” moving.*)

Explain that the victory we have through Christ is similar in some ways to the potato in this game. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:16-20. Discuss this question:

What does Jesus instruct his followers to do in these verses?

Jesus tells us to “teach” and to “make disciples.” He wants us to spread the word so that others will experience victory through Christ.

Make two columns on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Label one column “individually.” Label the other “as a church.” Brainstorm ways that you as individuals can let people know about Christ’s victory through your words, actions, and example. Once you have a pretty good list, brainstorm ways that participants can spread the news of Christ’s victory through words, actions, and example.

Go through the items on the list and ask the following:

- Which of these things (in the first column) are you doing already? Which could you be doing?
- Which of these things (in the second column) are we, as a church, doing already? Which could we be doing?

Often, after a team wins a championship, longtime fans of the team try to distinguish themselves from fair-weather fans or bandwagon fans—people who follow the team only when it’s winning or who started following the team only as it closed in on victory. Followers of Christ should not take this attitude. We want as many people as possible to join in the celebration.

(If time permits, read Matthew 20:1-16 and talk about what it adds to this discussion.)

Spiritual discipline: holiness

You will need Bibles.

Read aloud Leviticus 20:26.

This verse says that we are supposed to be holy because God is holy. Ask the following:

What do you think it means to be holy?

As the verse suggests, being holy means being set apart. It means to live differently and to have different priorities because of who we are and to whom we belong. We share in the victory that Christ has won by following Jesus’ example and living the life he calls us to live.

Challenge the youth to set a “holiness goal” for the coming week. This goal should involve intentionally living differently because of their faith. This goal can take one of two forms:

- They could give something up: Youth may decide to eliminate gossip or cursing or other hurtful speech. They could opt to stop spending money on unnecessary things, such as junk food or upgrades on phone apps. They could take steps to waste less water, energy, or other resources.

- They could take something on: Youth might choose to commit to a daily spiritual practice like prayer or scripture reading. They may commit to assisting an older adult or child in their community.

Give the youth a few minutes to think of a “holiness goal.” Then have the youth pair off. Invite them to explain their goals to their partners. While you will not gather again as a part of this study, ask that partners hold one another accountable to their commitments and encourage the youth to be holy in all that they do. Discuss how goals in other areas of their lives have become second nature or habits. What seems to be a discipline can become a powerful spiritual practice in their lives.

Optional Activity: View the DVD for this session and choose appropriate questions from the Adult Group Guide.

➤ Closing

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:54b, 57, the key verses for this session. Then discuss the following:

How does this verse apply to what we discussed today?

Look back on the predictions the youth made at the beginning of the session. Ask the following:

- How correct were your predictions?
- What is one thing that we learned or talked about that you didn't expect?

Then have the youth write on their flags (the ones they made at the beginning of the session) one thing that they'll take away from your time together. Invite each person to say what he or she wrote on the flag.

Close in prayer:

Victorious Lord, thank you for winning and for inviting us to share in your victory. Through you, we have overcome sin and death and have the promise of eternal life. Use us to spread the word of your victory and to invite more people to join the celebration. Amen.