

Youth Curriculum & Retreat Resources

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS CURRICULUM AND RETREAT PACKAGE

What you have at this point is all the ideas/instructions to host a weekend calling retreat or a multi-week teaching/discussion or a multi-week small group study. We have done that by creating the teaching content in two formats and adding everything else you need for a retreat (field games, upfront games, worship sets, etc.) in its own document.

Curriculum (Small Group Format): This piece is formatted for a small group study/discussion or similarly taught Sunday School class. Four to sixteen students with an adult leader should plan on spending 30-45 minutes with each session.

Curriculum (Sermon Starters/ Discussion format): This piece has two elements in each session. First, there is an outline of content to be covered by a speaker/teacher in front of a class or as part of a worship service. Second, there is an activity and set of questions to be used by a breakout group of four to sixteen students after hearing the teaching.

Worship Extras: In this document you will find a list of games that work in an “upfront” setting where a few students are selected to play the game in front of their peers. There is also a worship song list that you can use as a starting point for the music portion of your worship service. Though you can schedule your worship session in any way, these have been designed with the following order of worship:

5 Minutes Upfront Game
15 Minutes Worship Music
15 Minutes Lesson/Teaching (see Sermon Starters Document)
5 Minutes Reflection/Prayer Time
5 Minutes Closing music

Field Games: This is a teamwork-oriented program. Some of these are modifications of classic games with a mix of games that are fast paced with lots of movement and others are slow and require thoughtful strategy. You need to budget for 90 minutes split into three 30 minute sessions. It’s a good idea to give yourself 30 minutes before hand to split up your teams and give everyone instructions. Keep score by giving each team 50 points for winning a game.

Sound complicated? Don’t worry; we are going to walk you through this step by step.

Sample Retreat Schedule:

Though we know every retreat is unique, we wanted to give you a place to start on the schedule. This is a schedule we have used that works well:

Friday

7:30 Arrive and settle in
8:15 Worship service
9:30 Small group
10:00 Night activity
11:00 In room/lights out

Saturday

7:30 Wake up
8:00 Breakfast
9:00 Worship service
10:30 Small groups
12:00 Lunch
2:00 Group games
4:00 Free time
5:30 Dinner
6:30 Worship service
8:15 Small groups
9:15 Game orientation
9:30 Scavenger hunt
11:00 In rooms/lights out

Sunday

7:30 Wake up
8:00 Breakfast
9:00 Worship service
10:30 Small groups
11:30 Pack and clean rooms
12:00 Lunch
1:00 Group pictures
1:30 Leave

CURRICULUM (SMALL GROUP FORMAT)**Session 1 — God's Call: The Ministry of All Believers****Introductions**

Take a moment to go around the group and share your name, grade and at least two of these:

- The name of your favorite movie
- The biggest talent of your best friend
- Something you have done with someone else that you couldn't have done by yourself
- Your best subject in school

Group Crest

We are going to get creative! A long time ago families would have shields designed for them that had symbols on them that described their family attributes or history. We are going to do that as a group. Your first act will be to divide the work according to who is best at these different tasks.

1. The Supervisor: This person make sure you stay on task and move through the project and complete it on time. They are organized and good at paying attention.
2. The Sketch Artist: This person (or people) will draw the basic outline of the symbols. They are creative and good at drawing.
3. The Calligrapher: This person will be responsible for adding your team name to the crest. They have good handwriting.
4. The Colorist: This person (or people) will fill the drawing with color. They are good at spotting colors that go well together.
5. The Idea Person: This person will continue to give ideas and input along the way. They are good at coming up with ways to improve things.

From this point forward, you have ten minutes. The Supervisor can keep you on task. Once you have assigned the duties, you need to come up with answers to the following questions:

- Decide on one drawable attribute about each person's personality, interests or abilities.
- Decide on a team name that seems to describe you.

Then, its time for the sketch artist(s) to start on the outline. They will need to work fast so that the calligrapher and colorist can complete their jobs!

The Job of All Christians

A lot of Christians have a BIG misunderstanding when it comes to the idea of calling. A bunch of people think that God only calls people who are going to spend their lives as professional ministers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus lives his entire life, dies, is raised from the dead and is just about return to heaven when he does something powerful. He takes the eleven disciples up to the top of a mountain and gives them a big job.

Read Matthew 28:19-20

If we aren't careful we will read that and think that Jesus is hiring the first set of full-time pastors. That is not what is going on. In fact, we have examples of these early disciples not leaving their day jobs. Jesus is doing something much bigger.

Read 1 Peter 2:9

Re-read that passage as if it was written to you specifically. Substitute your name wherever you see "you." This is the big idea: God calls every Christian to ministry. That's right. Every Christian. You are a minister!

What emotions do you sense when you hear or read that?

Saying that someone is "called to ministry" has a bunch of implications. What comes to your mind when you hear that someone is "called to ministry?"

What part of your idea of being called to ministry makes sense when we say every Christian is called to ministry?

Let's take a look at another scripture in hopes of clarifying the calling of everyone.

Read Romans 12:3-8

This passage gives us a lot to discuss.

When have you seen someone "thinking too highly of themselves" backfire and mess things up?

What does "sober judgment" mean?

What makes it hard to look at yourself with "sober judgment?"

What kinds of things can you do (or what kind of people can you get to help) to make it easier to look at yourself with "sober judgment?"

The sober judgment in this passage has a very useful outcome. By the end of the passage the writer makes a list. It begins with a gift and then offers an action based on that gift. Look back on the passage and name one of those gift/action pairs.

This is one of the most incredible parts of being a Christian. It's almost like God gives us a crest of who God wants us to be. God gives us passions and gifts that on one hand will allow us to have many, interesting careers, AND God calls us to use those gifts in accordance with our faith.

What Kinds of gifts do you see in the others in your group?

That means that not only does God call and empower every person, God takes every career and transforms it into ministry.

My Discernment

Now, take a moment and (with sober judgment) come up with two of your gifts. When you have them, fill out this instruction based on Romans 12:

EXAMPLE:

Gift #1:

_____Jeremy_____ (your name), if you have the gift of _____Teaching_____ (your gift) then _____Teach_____ (Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Gift #1:

_____ (your name), if you have the gift of _____ (your gift) then _____ (Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Gift #2:

_____ (your name), if you have the gift of _____ (your gift) then _____ (Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Putting it this way it becomes quite clear that not every gift you may have is the same thing as a career. However some of them could be tied to a career. Take time this week to think about your gifts and how God may be speaking through them to call you into a particular career.



If you have a career in mind, begin to ask God to show you how you could minister through that career.

Session 2: What does God's voice sound like?

Whisper Icebreaker

Begin this icebreaker by giving everyone in the group a piece of paper and asking them to write their first name on it. Then, select a person to be the "listener" and ask them to turn around so that their back faces the group. The goal is for the listener to be able to recognize the whispers of the others in the group.

Begin by going around the group having each member say their first name.

Then, ask the group members to either swap names with another person (by trading papers) or keep their own name. It's up to each member what they want to do.

After the name swapping is finished, take turns having each person walk up behind the listener and whisper the name on their piece of paper.

After each person, the whisperer will say real or fake depending on whether or not they think the listener is saying the whisperer's name or the name of someone else.

If you want to make it harder, have each person whisper a random fact about themselves, and have the listener try to guess to whom the attribute belongs.

Hearing God's voice...

Hearing God's call on your life in regards to your faith and career is based on a fundamental, confusing part of being a Christian: hearing God's voice. So, what does it sound like? How do we hear it?

We are going to look at a couple of stories to help us plunge into these big, important questions

We are going to start by looking at Moses before he was the big spiritual leader of the people of Israel. At this point he is just a criminal who is trying to make a new life for himself in a place where people don't know about his past. When we read this, it's important to remember that even though this is Moses, this is Moses before he has spent hours communing with God, before he received the Ten Commandments, and before he told Pharaoh to "Let God's people go." This is the "average guy" version of Moses:

Read Exodus 3:1-4

Moses is going about his day, doing his everyday work as a shepherd. He has been in this area before. He has seen these bushes. This is just another day. Then, he sees something. There is a bush burning. Again, nothing special, but he looks closer. After he

takes the time to stare at this pretty average sight, he notices something different. He notices that there is something supernatural going on. Then, he hears God speaking his name, and he responds. Every single piece of that is instructive to us when we think about listening to the voice of God.

First, Moses was present and open to the fact that something supernatural might happen. Put another way, he was open to the idea that God may speak to him at any point.

What would that look like in your life? What would it mean to be open to the fact that God could talk to you at any moment?

His staring at the bush helps us see how fully-engaged he was with what was happening right then. He didn't dismiss the bush, he considered it.

What are some of the things in your life/world that make it difficult for you to be fully-engaged with the present? What distracts you from living in the now?

After he considers the bush, he sees that God is at work in it. He gets the inclination that there is something more going on and opens himself up to whatever that might be. Some of the Christian mystics talk about things "sparkling" spiritually. Like a shiny object on the pavement catches your physical eye, sometimes something will catch your spiritual eye in the same way.

Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever sensed the presence of God in your everyday life? Share that story. What did you notice?

Once Moses had fully turned his attention to the bush, once he had begun to try and figure out what could be going on, he noticed God speaking his name. God was trying to get his attention. When he heard this, he responded letting God know he was listening.

What kinds of things could the Bible mean by "Moses heard?"

Have you ever heard God's voice in one of those ways? How did you know it was God's voice?

Moses' response shows us the importance of being open to God speaking to us at any time. It shows us how being fully engaged with what is going on around us plays a huge role in whether or not we will notice where God is trying to get our attention. But what should we expect? What will God's voice sound like?

Let's look at another Old Testament passage to help us find that answer. In this passage, Elijah has just had a major high-point in his life that was immediately followed by a major low-point. After hiding for a while, God tells Elijah to go to a mountain and wait for God.

Read 1 Kings 19:11-13

What surprised you about this passage?

Take a moment to think about this passage and try to boil the meaning down to a single sentence, like a “moral of the story.” Then share the meanings with everyone else.

Have you ever been confused about God’s voice like Elijah? Tell that story.

How do you think Elijah knew which of those things was God’s voice?

That last question is a tough one. We can get some help from Jesus in John 10.

Read John 10:1-5

Jesus is using the metaphor of a Shepherd and sheep to talk about a whole host of things. It says the sheep (us) follow the shepherd (Jesus) because they know his voice. To understand this, you need to understand two things. First, sheep are pretty dumb. They have tiny brains, and cannot learn or understand much. Second, sheep and shepherds spent all day every day with each other, and it is only by spending all this time together that sheep learn the shepherd’s voice. Since it is so hard for sheep to learn something, it is not easy for a stranger to trick them because it would take the same amount of time with the stranger to trick them.

Knowing all of that, what things does this teach us about hearing and understanding Jesus’ voice?

However, all of this depends on us being able to discern Jesus’ voice in the first place, and it is sometimes as difficult as recognizing one whisper among many. That can be hard, but that’s where we are going in the next session.

My Discernment

What kinds of things do you think you may have heard God say. Or, What are the things you would really like to know whether they are your ideas or God’s?

Take a moment now and pray about these. Say each of them and ask God to help you know whether the particular statement/idea has come from you, God, or both. Try doing this a couple more times before the next session.

Session 3: Discerning God's voice

Follow my voice

We are going to have some fun guiding people through an obstacle course. First thing first, decide who will be the obstacle course adventurer and send them out of the room equipped with a blindfold. Once they are gone, rearrange the room. One of the remaining people will be giving the correct directions to the opposite side of the room while everyone else will be trying to misdirect your blindfolded member.

After you choose who will be the person giving correct directions, ask the blindfolded member to re-enter and have the person giving correct directions say "I am going to be the one giving you correct directions. Are you ready?" Once they say yes, everyone can start giving directions. After they complete the obstacle course, choose another person, rearrange the room and repeat!

Four Great Tools to Help Discern God's Voice

The good news about learning how to hear and discern God's voice is that Christians have been learning to do this for thousands of years. One of the most brilliant methods for learning to discern God's voice was practiced by John Wesley. He used four tools to help him to tell whether or not what he was feeling/hearing/sensing was God's voice or not.

John Wesley began with Scripture. In fact, he often said that though he read widely, he was a man of one book: the Bible. The Bible is clear about how it is to be seen and used.

Read Hebrews 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:16

How do these verses tell us we should use the Bible?

What do you think the writer of Hebrews means when they say that the Bible is "living and active?"

That's it, and it's the key. For Wesley, God's word was the thing that held everything else together. We should go to the Bible first and last. As we continue talking about the other tools for discerning God's voice, we have to remember that they are only valid as they echo, explain or help us apply what we find in the Bible.

The next tool Wesley used was what people call tradition. By that we mean all of the people who have gone before us in the faith and what they learned about God. What we are doing right now (learning from Wesley) is using the tool of tradition. However, it doesn't have to be people who are not currently living. Let's look at a person in the Bible who used tradition to discern God's voice.

Before you read, it's important for you to know that this story is from the beginning of Samuel's life when he was a boy serving in the temple with a wise priest named Eli.

Read 1Samuel 3:2-10

How did Samuel use tradition to discern God's voice?

When have you done something similar to help you understand what God was saying?

The next tool, reason, is exactly what it sounds like it is. God gave you a brain and wants you to use it! The Bible is full of beautiful arguments, brilliant philosophy and the writing of some of the most beautiful minds to have ever lived. When we are considering whether or not God is speaking, we don't need to check our brains at the door.

Take a look at this incredible story of Paul's brilliant use of reason in discerning how God was speaking to the pagan philosophers in Athens:

Read Acts 17:19-23

If Paul had used something like "God told me so" as his argument, how do you think the Greek philosophers would have reacted?

Do you think Christians are more or less comfortable with using reason to discern God's voice today than in Paul's time?

Finally, we come to experience. The idea is here is that when we consider what the Bible says in light of how others explain it, making sure to use our ability to reason, we should ask, "Does this fit with my experience of God? Does this match what I know about God?"

Depending on how long you have been walking with Jesus, your experience tool might come up with a blank on a lot of subjects. That's ok, but as your experiences with God grow, you can draw on them more and more. This is part of what Jesus was talking about in the passage we read last session in John 10. You know his voice better and better the more you listen to it. You can figure out whether or not something is the voice of God the more you experience it.

We are going to see if we can use these tools to follow God's voice through a real obstacle course. We are going to imagine that a friend has asked us to help them decide whether or not what they think God has said to them is really God or not. For each of these statements, allow one person to play the part of the person who believes they heard the statement. If any details are needed, they can make them up. The group should then use Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to answer whether or not God was the one who said the statement.



Statement 1: God wants me to beat up my brother for hacking into my instagram.

Statement 2: God wants me to break up with my girl/boyfriend.

Statement 3: God wants me to be a youth pastor as a career.

My Discernment

Take a look back at what you were thinking about over the past couple sessions. Choose one of them and use Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience to make them clearer:

Scripture: What does the Bible say about it:

Tradition: What do other people say about it that agrees with the Bible:

Reason: What makes logical sense in light of Scripture and tradition:

Experience: How does my past help me understand all of this:

Session 4: Responding to God's Call

And Then...

You are going to create a story as a group. First, you need to select the most random person in the group. This is the person who says random things when it comes to discussions that may or may not always relate to the question. Their job is to come up with a very weird beginning to the story. After they say two or three sentences, the person to their right will pick up where they left off by saying, "and then..." Go around until the first person gets to finish the story.

Doing Nothing is Not an Option

We are ending back where we started because where we started will help us know what needs to happen next.

Read 1 Peter 2:9 again

Simply put, you have been called. You have been called into ministry, and whether or not someone ends up referring to you as "Reverend" some day, God has called you to minister wherever you are. In fact, those who are called to become "Reverends" are really called to a type of the ministry God asks every Christian to be involved in (more on that in a second).

Before we talk about "what you want to be when you grow up," we need to explore one more Scripture.

Read Matthew 4:18-22

There is something very surprising about this passage. Jesus walks up to grown men working at their job and says, "Follow me," and they straight leave everything right then. They don't sell off their boats, they don't take a couple weeks to pack up their stuff. They drop everything and follow Jesus.

That is huge because students often think of their "call" to be something that will happen in the future after they finish schooling or do an apprenticeship or something. But, this scripture is very clear. When God calls you, the call is for now not later.

So, it's time for you to drop out of school and move to Africa, right? Not really. Right now part of your calling is likely related to school. Before we talk about what it is, let's ask the opposite, what is it not? What in your life are things you cannot drop now?

That is helpful. Now let's talk about right now. What is your "and then..." at this point in your life? What is the next step for you to minister right where you are? How can you minister at school?

How can you minister at home?

How can you minister at church?

The reality is that God may be calling you into ministry as a career or as part of your career. A lot of people assume that means becoming the senior pastor of a church, but there are many forms of ministry in addition to being a senior pastor that God may be calling you to. Let's look at some of those.

There is a lot more information at www.explorecalling.org.

An Ordained Elder

What the job usually looks like: Most Ordained elders are the senior pastor of a church or an associate pastor. They preach, teach, offer serve communion, celebrate baptisms, perform marriages and burials, visit people in the hospital, and do pastoral counseling.

What is required: In general, ordained elders have completed an advanced theological degree (masters or above) usually a Master of Divinity. In addition, they have submitted to an intentional discernment process with Church committees that help them clarify their call, and been through a residency period.

An Ordained Deacon

What the job usually looks like: Deacons are ordained to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, and to equip and lead the laity (not ordained Christians) in ministries of compassion, justice, and service in the world. They can do this in a church, but also may choose to work in another setting like hospitals, social-service agencies, mission agencies, schools, etc.

What is required: In general, ordained deacons have completed the educations required for their particular field (like a degree in counseling, etc) as well as specific graduate courses in theology. In addition, they have submitted to an intentional discernment process with Church committees that help them clarify their call.

Licensed Local Pastors

What the Job Usually Looks Like: Local pastors are not ordained but are licensed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor. They will usually serve a local church (often in a part-time status) as the primary pastor.

What is required: In general, local pastors have gone to licensing school (a several-day training in the basics of being a pastor) and completed the course of study (a five-year process that involves attending some day-long or weekend-long courses and implementing what you learn in the local church setting).

Lay Minister

What the Job Usually Looks Like: These individuals are not ordained, but serve in a leadership role (often on staff) in a particular area of ministry. Many youth pastor, children's ministers, and music ministers are engaged in this form of ministry.

What is required: The requirements vary widely and are determined by the leadership of each individual church that hire lay people as ministers. The United Methodist Church offers certifications in many areas (like youth, children, camps, etc) in recognition that an individual has been called, made a commitment to serve, and has fulfilled the required standards for academic training, experience, and continuing study to serve with excellence in an area of specialized ministry.

Commissioned Missionary

What the job usually looks like: Missionaries witness and serve in dramatically different locales and cultures and engage in a range of professions and activities. These commissioned persons are usually (not always) called to serve outside their country of origin, as pastors, teachers, doctors, nurses (or in other healing ministries), social workers, church planters, evangelists, and in a variety of other ways through various forms of denominational or ecumenical ministries.

What is required: Because of the many varieties of particular roles missionaries fill, the requirements vary widely depending on the particular type of mission work. However, those commissioned submit to a discernment and training process as a part of their commissioning work in addition to the particular requirements in their fields. There are several ways particularly designed for young adults to engage in this role. That information is available at <http://www.umcmision.org/Get-Involved/Generation-Transformation>

After looking at all those ways people serve in ministry as a career, are there any of those that you think you may be called to? Which ones?

What about the others? Who in your group do you see fitting in those areas?

The first step in all of these roles is talking to a pastor and beginning to pray together about the future, but as we discovered before. God's call is about now.

My Discernment

What is your next step in responding to God's call? If you are feeling a calling into ordained ministry, one good next step would be to talk to a pastor.

When will you take it and who will you allow to remind you about it?

Take a moment to write a couple sentences that describe what you learned during this study... write it in a story form:

Now, write the next part:

And then...

SERMON STARTER / DISCUSSION FORMAT**Session 1 — God's Call: The Ministry of All Believers****The Job of All Christians**

A lot of Christians have a BIG misunderstanding when it comes to the idea of calling. A bunch of people think that God only calls people who are going to spend their lives as professional ministers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus lives his entire life, dies, is raised from the dead and is just about return to heaven when he does something powerful. He takes the eleven disciples up to the top of a mountain and gives them a big job.

Matthew 28:19-20 - The Great Commission

If we aren't careful we will read the great commission and think that Jesus is hiring the first set of full-time pastors. That is not what is going on. In fact, we have examples of these early disciples not leaving their day jobs. Jesus is doing something much bigger.

1 Peter 2:9 - The priesthood of all believers

This is the big idea: God calls every Christian to ministry. That's right. Every Christian. Regardless of age, race, mental ability, or coolness. We are all ministers. That is a big call. It can be overwhelming to think about. Don't worry. It doesn't mean we all are instantly super-Christians, or that we are the ones responsible for making sure the whole world is living a perfect life all the time.

Let's take a look at another scripture in hopes of clarifying the calling of everyone.

Romans 12:3-8 Humble service

Most people have come face to face with a Christian who thought too highly of themselves, and it is never pretty. They often leave a wake of hurt people and broken relationships. The goal is not to put ourselves on a pedestal, but connect with God and with the people of God to work on God's great mission.

The sober judgment in this passage has a very useful outcome. By the end of the passage the writer makes a list. It begins with a gift and then offers an action based on that gift.

This is one of the most incredible parts of being a Christian. It's almost like God gives us a picture of who God wants us to be. God gives us passions and gifts that on one hand will allow us to have many, interesting careers, AND God calls us to use those gifts in accordance with our faith.



That means that not only does God call and empower every person, God takes every career and transforms it into ministry.

Breakout Discussion Groups

Introductions

Take a moment to go around the group and share your name, grade and at least two of these:

The name of your favorite movie

The biggest talent of your best friend

Something you have done with someone else that you couldn't have done by yourself

Your best subject in school

The Questions

1. Saying that someone is “called to ministry” has a bunch of implications. What comes to your mind when you hear that someone is “called to ministry?”
2. What part of your idea of being called to ministry makes sense when we say every Christian is called to ministry?
3. What makes it hard to look at yourself with “sober judgment?”
4. What kinds of things can you do (or what kind of people can you get to help) to make it easier to look at yourself with “sober judgment?”
5. What Kinds of gifts do you see in the others in your group?

My Discernment

Now, take a moment and (with sober judgment) come up with two of your gifts. When you have them, fill out this instruction based on Romans 12:

EXAMPLE:

Gift #1:

_____Jeremy_____ (your name), if you have the gift of _____Teaching_____ (your gift) then _____Teach_____ (Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Gift #1:

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_____ (your gift) then _____
(Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Gift #2:

_____ (your name), if you have the gift of
_____ (your gift) then _____
(Action version of your gift) according with your faith.

Putting it this way it becomes quite clear that not every gift you may have is the same thing as a career. However some of them could be tied to a career. Take time this week to think about your gifts and how God may be speaking through them to call you into a particular career.

If you have a career in mind, begin to ask God to show you how you could minister through that career.

Session 2: What does God's voice sound like?

Hearing God's voice...

Hearing God's call on your life in regards to your faith and career is based on a fundamental, confusing part of being a Christian: hearing God's voice. So, what does it sound like? How do we hear it?

We are going to look at a couple of stories to help us plunge into these big, important questions.

Let's start by looking at Moses before he was the big spiritual leader of the people of Israel. At this point he is just a criminal who is trying to make a new life for him in a place where people don't know about his past. When we read this, its important to remember that even though this is Moses, this is Moses before he has spent hours communing with God, before he received the Ten Commandments, and before he told Pharaoh to "Let God's people go." This is the "average guy" version of Moses:

Exodus 3:1-4 - The Burning bush

Moses is going about his day, doing his everyday work as a shepherd. He has been in this area before. He has seen these bushes. This is just another day. Then, he sees something. There is a bush burning. Again, nothing special, but he looks closer. After he takes the time to stare at this pretty average sight, he notices something different. He notices that there is something supernatural going on. Then, he hears God speaking his name, and he responds. Every single piece of that is instructive to us when we think about listening to the voice of God.

First, Moses was present and open to the fact that something supernatural might happen. Put another way, he was open to the idea that God may speak to him at any point.

His staring at the bush helps us see how fully-engaged he was with what was happening right then. He didn't dismiss the bush, he considered it.

After Moses considers the bush, he sees that God is at work in it. He gets the inclination that there is something more going on and opens himself up to whatever that might be. Some of the Christian mystics talk about things "sparkling" spiritually. Like a shiny object on the pavement catches your physical eye, sometimes something will catch your spiritual eye in the same way.

Once Moses had fully turned his attention to the bush, once he had begun to try and figure out what could be going on, he noticed God speaking his name. God was trying to get his attention. When he heard this, he responded letting God know he was listening.

Moses' response shows us the importance of being open to God speaking to us at any time. It shows us how being fully engaged with what is going on around us plays a huge role in whether or not we will notice where God is trying to get our attention. But what should we expect? What will God's voice sound like?

Let's look at another Old Testament passage to help us find that answer. In this passage, Elijah has just had a major high-point in his life that was immediately followed by a major low-point. After hiding for a while, God tells Elijah to go to a mountain and wait for God.

1 Kings 19:11-13 - Elijah hears God's Whisper

This is wild because most of us think of God as a big, strong, supernatural being and we would expect his presence to be signaled by an equally big, over-the-top manifestation, but it isn't here. It is a tiny, soft whisper.

But here's the bigger question: how did Elijah know which of those things was God's voice? We can get some help from Jesus in John 10.

John 10:1-5 - Sheep know the Shepherd's voice

Jesus is using the metaphor of a Shepherd and sheep to talk about a whole host of things. It says the sheep (us) follow the shepherd (Jesus) because they know his voice. To understand this, you need to understand two things. First, sheep are pretty dumb. They have tiny brains, and cannot learn or understand much. Second, sheep and shepherds spent all day every day with each other, and it is only by spending all this time together that sheep learn the shepherd's voice. Since it is so hard for sheep to learn something, it is not easy for a stranger to trick them because it would take the same amount of time with the stranger to trick them.

Are you getting it? The more time you spend with Jesus, the better you know his voice. Elijah knew the sound of God's voice because he had spent a lot of time with God. He knew exactly what it would sound like when it came.

However, all of this depends on us being able to discern Jesus' voice in the first place, and it is sometimes as difficult as recognizing one whisper among many. That can be hard, but that's where we are going in the next session.

Breakout Discussion Groups

Whisper Icebreaker

Begin this icebreaker by giving everyone in the group a piece of paper and asking them to write their first name on it. Then, select a person to be the "listener" and ask them to

turn around so that their back faces the group. The goal is for the listener to be able to recognize the whispers of the others in the group.

Begin by going around the group having each member say their first name.

Then, ask the group members to either swap names with another person (by trading papers) or keep their own name. It's up to each member what they want to do.

After the name swapping is finished, take turns having each person walk up behind the listener and whisper the name on their piece of paper.

After each person, the whisperer will say real or fake depending on whether or not they think the whisperer is saying the whisperer's name or the name of someone else.

If you want to make it harder, have each person whisper a random facts about themselves, and have the listener try to guess to whom the attribute belongs.

The Questions

1. What would it mean to be open to the fact that God could talk to you at any moment like Moses?
2. What are some of the things in your life/world that make it difficult for you to be fully-engaged with the present like Moses was? What distracts you from living in the now?
3. Have you ever sensed the presence of God in your everyday life? Share that story. What did you notice?
4. What kinds of things could the Bible mean by "Moses heard?" Have you ever heard God's voice in one of those ways? How did you know it was God's voice?

My Discernment

What kinds of things do you think you may have heard God say. Or, what are the things you would really like to know whether they are your ideas or God's?

Take a moment now and pray about these. Say each of them and ask God to help you know whether the particular statement/idea has come from you, God, or both. Try doing this a couple more times before the next session

Session 3: Discerning God's voice

Four Great Tools to Help Discern God's Voice

The good news about learning how to hear and discern God's voice is that Christians have been learning to do this for thousands of years. One of the most brilliant methods for learning to discern God's voice was practiced by John Wesley. He used four tools to help him to tell whether or not what he was feeling/hearing/sensing was God's voice or not.

John Wesley, the man who led a revival movement that eventually developed into the Methodist Church, began with Scripture. In fact, he often said that though he read widely, he was a man of one book: the Bible. The Bible is clear about how it is to be seen and used.

Hebrews 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:16 - The Role of Scripture

God's word is alive and able to be used in our every day life. For Wesley, God's word was the thing that held everything else together. We should go to the Bible first and last. As we continue talking about the other tools for discerning God's voice, we have to remember that they are only valid as they echo, explain or help us apply what we find in the Bible.

The next tool Wesley used was what people call tradition. By that we mean all of the people who have gone before us in the faith and what they discovered about God. What we are doing right now (learning from Wesley) is using the tool of tradition. However, it doesn't have to be people who are not currently living. Let's look at a person in the Bible who used tradition to discern God's voice.

This story is from the beginning of Samuel's life when he was a boy serving in the temple with a wise priest named Eli.

1Samuel 3:2-10 - God calls Samuel

Samuel just hadn't been around the voice and presence of God enough to know what God's voice sounded like. He made mistakes at the beginning, but after he talked to a person who knew how God worked, he was able to recognize God's voice better. That is tradition. That is how it helps us discern what God is saying to us!

The next tool, reason, is exactly what it sounds like it is. God gave you a brain and wants you to use it! The Bible is full of beautiful arguments, brilliant philosophy and the writing of some of the most beautiful minds to have ever lived. When we are considering whether or not God is speaking, we don't need to check our brains at the door.

Take a look at this incredible story of Paul's brilliant use of reason in discerning how God was speaking to the pagan philosophers in Athens:

Acts 17:19-23 - Paul Drops the Mic at the Areopagus

Paul walks into a room full of some of the greatest minds of his generation and uses an amazing argument to speak God's words to people who needed to hear them presented logically. That is what reason does. It helps us sift through everything, organize ideas, and bring into focus all the relationships between pieces of ideas.

Finally, we come to experience. The idea is here is that when we consider what the Bible says in light of how others explain it, making sure to use our ability to reason, we should ask, "Does this fit with my experience of God? Does this match what I know about God?"

Depending on how long you have been walking with Jesus, your experience tool might come up with a blank on a lot of subjects. That's ok, but as your experiences with God grow, you can draw on them more and more. This is part of what Jesus was talking about in the passage we read last session in John 10. You know his voice better and better the more you listen to it. You can figure out whether or not something is the voice of God the more you experience it.

Breakout Groups

Follow my voice

We are going to have some fun guiding people through an obstacle course. First thing first, decide who will be the obstacle course adventurer and send them out of the room equipped with a blindfold. One they are gone, rearrange the room. One of the remaining people will be giving the correct directions to the opposite side of the room while everyone else will be trying to misdirect your blindfolded member.

After you choose who will be the person giving correct directions, ask the blindfolded member to re-enter and have the person giving correct directions say "I am going to be the one giving you correct directions. Are you ready?" Once they say yes, everyone can start giving directions. After they complete the obstacle course, choose another person, rearrange the room and repeat!

Using the Tools

We are going to see if we can use these tools to follow God's voice through a real obstacle course. We are going to imagine that a friend has asked us to help them decide whether or not what they think God has said to them is really God or not. For each of these statements, allow one person to play the part of the person who believes they heard the statement. If any details are needed, they can make them up. The group should then use Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to answer whether or not God was the one who said the statement.

Statement 1: God wants me to beat up my brother for hacking into my instagram.

Statement 2: God wants me to break up with my girl/boyfriend.

Statement 3: God wants me to be a youth pastor as a career.

My Discernment

Take a look back at what you were thinking about over the past couple sessions. Choose one of them and use Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience to make them clearer:

Scripture: What does the Bible say about it:

Tradition: What do other people say about it that agrees with the Bible:

Reason: What makes logical sense in light of Scripture and tradition:

Experience: How does my past help me understand all of this:

Session 4: Responding to God's Call

Doing Nothing is Not an Option

We are ending back where we started because where we started will help us know what needs to happen next.

1 Peter 2:9 Ministry of all believers

Simply put, you have been called. You have been called into ministry, and whether or not someone ends up referring to you as “Reverend” some day, God has called you to minister wherever you are. In fact, those who are called to become “Reverends” are really called to a type of the ministry God asks every Christian to be involved in (more on that in a second).

Before we talk about “what you want to be when you grow up,” we need to explore one more Scripture.

Matthew 4:18-22 - Jesus calls the disciples

There is something very surprising about this passage. Jesus walks up to grown men working at their job and says, “Follow me,” and they straight leave everything right then. They don’t sell off their boats, they don’t take a couple weeks to pack up their stuff. They drop everything and follow Jesus.

That is huge because students often think of their “call” to be something that will happen in the future after they finish schooling or do an apprenticeship or something. But, this scripture is very clear. When God calls you, the call is for now not later.

So, it’s time for you to drop out of school and move to Africa, right? Not really. Right now part of your calling is likely related to school. Before we talk about what it is, let’s ask the opposite, what is it not? It’s not leaving school. It’s not moving out of your house. It’s not leaving all your friends.

It’s about now. You can minister right where you are: in your school, in your family, and in your church!

The reality is that God may be calling you into ministry as a career or as part of your career. A lot of people assume that means becoming the senior pastor of a church, but there are many forms of ministry in addition to being a senior pastor that God may be calling you to. Let’s look at some of those.

There is a lot more information at www.explorecalling.org.

An Ordained Elder

What the job usually looks like: Most Ordained elders are the senior pastor of a church or an associate pastor. They preach, teach, offer serve communion, celebrate baptisms, perform marriages and burials, visit people in the hospital, and do pastoral counseling.

What is required: In general, ordained elders have completed an advanced theological degree (masters or above) usually a Master of Divinity. In addition, they have submitted to an intentional discernment process with Church committees that help them clarify their call, and been through a residency period.

An Ordained Deacon

What the job usually looks like: Deacons are ordained to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, and to equip and lead the laity (not ordained Christians) in ministries of compassion, justice, and service in the world. They can do this in a church, but also may choose to work in another setting like hospitals, social-service agencies, mission agencies, schools, etc.

What is required: In general, ordained deacons have completed the educations required for their particular field (like a degree in counseling, etc) as well as specific graduate courses in theology. In addition, they have submitted to an intentional discernment process with Church committees that help them clarify their call.

Licensed Local Pastors

What the Job Usually Looks Like: Local pastors are not ordained but are licensed to preach and conduct divine worship and perform the duties of a pastor. They will usually serve a local church (often in a part-time status) as the primary pastor.

What is required: In general, local pastors have gone to licensing school (a several-day training in the basics of being a pastor) and completed the course of study (a five-year process that involves attending some day-long or weekend-long courses and implementing what you learn in the local church setting).

Lay Minister

What the Job Usually Looks Like: These individuals are not ordained, but serve in a leadership role (often on staff) in a particular area of ministry. Many youth pastor, children's ministers, and music ministers are engaged in this form of ministry.

What is required: The requirements vary widely and are determined by the leadership of each individual church that hire lay people as ministers. The United Methodist Church



offers certifications in many areas (like youth, children, camps, etc) in recognition that an individual has been called, made a commitment to serve, and has fulfilled the required standards for academic training, experience, and continuing study to serve with excellence in an area of specialized ministry.

Commissioned Missionary

What the job usually looks like: Missionaries witness and serve in dramatically different locales and cultures and engage in a range of professions and activities. These commissioned persons are usually (not always) called to serve outside their country of origin, as pastors, teachers, doctors, nurses (or in other healing ministries), social workers, church planters, evangelists, and in a variety of other ways through various forms of denominational or ecumenical ministries.

What is required: Because of the many varieties of particular roles missionaries fill, the requirements vary widely depending on the particular type of mission work. However, those commissioned submit to a discernment and training process as a part of their commissioning work in addition to the particular requirements in their fields. There are several ways particularly designed for young adults to engage in this role. That information is available at www.umcmision.org/Get-Involved/Generation-Transformation .

The first step in all of these roles is talking to a pastor and beginning to pray together about the future, but as we discovered before. God's call is about now. What can you do to move towards these things today? How will you respond to God's call before you leave?

Breakout Groups

And Then...

You are going to create a story as a group. First, you need to select the most random person in the group. This is the person who says random things when it comes to discussions that may or may not always relate to the question. Their job is to come up with a very weird beginning to the story. After they say two or three sentences, the person to their right will pick up where they left off by saying, "and then..." Go around until the first person gets to finish the story.

The Questions

1. What in your life are things you cannot drop now?
2. What is your "and then..." at this point in your life? What is the next step for you to minister right where you are? How can you minister at school?

3. How can you minister at home?
4. How can you minister at church?
5. After looking at all those ways people serve in ministry as a career, are there any of those that you think you may be called to? Which ones?
6. What about the others? Who in your group do you see fitting in those areas?

My Discernment

What is your next step in responding to God's call? If you are feeling a calling into ordained ministry, one good next step would be to talk to a pastor.

When will you take it and who will you allow to remind you about it?

Take a moment to write a couple sentences that describe what you learned during this study... write it in a story form:

Now, write the next part:

And then...

WORSHIP EXTRAS

In this document you will find a list of games that work in an “upfront” setting where a few students are selected to play the game in front of their peers. There is also a worship song list that you can use as a starting point for the music portion of your worship service. Though you can schedule your worship session in any way, these have been designed with the following order of worship:

5 Minutes Upfront Game
15 Minutes Worship Music
15 Minutes Lesson/Teaching (see Sermon Starters Document)
5 Minutes Reflection/Prayer Time
5 Minutes Closing music

Upfront Games

First Session - Donut Hole

Ask for 3 volunteers and have them pick a partner. Once the 6 volunteers have come on stage explain that one person is going to eat a donut and their partner must feed it to them. Have the 3 volunteers that are going to eat the donuts lay down on the tarp and have their partners stand at their head. Inform the eaters that they cannot use their hands at all. The partner volunteers will then be given a donut tied to a string and instruct them to hold the non-doughnut end in their teeth and dangle the donut over the partner’s head on the ground. The person laying on the ground must try to eat it without lifting their head. Whichever pair finishes first wins. For extra entertainment, add messy toppings on the donuts like chocolate syrup, sprinkles, or marshmallow cream.

Supplies:

Donuts, garbage bags or tarp for the floor, string, and optional toppings

Prep:

Tie strings to each of the 3 donuts. Cover the floor with the tarp or garbage bags

Second Session - Know it All

Ask for two teams of best friends. Have them sit in chairs on stage back to back with at least 1 foot in between the chairs. Give each volunteer a chalkboard and piece of chalk. Then ask them each of the questions and tell them to write their answer on their chalk board. On your count, have them hold up their answer simultaneously. If the answers don't match, they each get a pie to the face! After all 5 questions have been asked, the team that has been pied the least amount of times wins.

Supplies:

4 chairs, garbage bags for under the chairs, 4 chalkboards with chalk, 4 pie tins, 5 cans of whipped cream

Prep:

Tear garbage bags apart and spread underneath the chairs to protect the floor. Make a swirl of whipped cream in each of the 4 pie tins and begin. Optional: make a garbage bag drape for each student.

Questions:

- **It's a rainy day, you are stuck indoors, what movie would you watch together?**

Avengers, Harry Potter, Divergent, Hunger Games

- **Which Amusement Park would you and your bestie want to go to?**

Disney World, Universal Studios, Six Flags, Typhoon Lagoon Waterpark

- **You and your friend get to go on a week long vacation together, where would you go?**

Cruise to Alaska, European Tour, Atlantis in the Bahamas, Hiking in the Grand Canyon

- **You are going out to eat, where would you go together?**

Pizza Hut, Olive Garden, Applebees, Red Lobster

Third Session - Honey Face

You will need 6 volunteers for this game, 3 of which are not allergic to honey and don't mind getting sticky. Have 3 students sit in the chairs and have an adult spread honey all over their face, avoiding eyes, nose and mouth. Then tell their partners they need to try and get as many fruit loops to stick on their partners face. Tell them that whoever can get the most to stay on wins. Once they are done, pull out the water guns and inform them that now they have to try and take the fruit loops off using only the water gun. If you are concerned about the allergic reaction you can use petroleum jelly or shaving cream.

Supplies:

Honey, Fruit Loops, 3 water guns, 3 bowls, garbage bags or tarp for floor, towels, 3 chairs

Prep: Fill water guns with water. Put the garbage bags on the floor under the 3 chairs, separate fruit loops into 3 large bowls

Fourth Session – Bull's-eye

You will need 4 volunteers to battle it out in this tournament. Split them up into pairs and have the first pair prepare for battle. Each student will be given a finger rocket (you can order them at www.buckets-o-fun.com) and will stand on a line 15 yards away from the table on stage. Prepare two small tables with a tower of 10 red solo cups stacked on each of them. Set a timer and tell the pair of students they have 90 seconds to try and knock as many cups off the table as possible. Set the cups up again and have the second pair of volunteers compete, then have each winner compete for the final round.

Supplies:

20 red solo cups, 2 tables, 2 finger rockets, and a timer

Prep: Have an adult leader or 2 volunteers be in charge of setting up the cups and returning the rockets to the shooters.

Worship Song Ideas

First Session

- *Deep Cries Out*, Bethel Music & William Matthews, Be Lifted High
- *Praise Him (All This for A King)*, David Crowder Band
- *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*, Hillsong United
- *Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)*, Chris Tomlin

Second Session

- *Your Love Never Fails*, Jesus Culture
- *How He Loves*, David Crowder Band
- *Before the Throne of God Above*, Shane and Shane
- *Cornerstone*, Hillsong United

Third Session

- *This Is Amazing Grace*, Phil Wickham
- *Stronger*, Hillsong United
- *You Are My King (Amazing Love)*, Phillips, Craig & Dean
- *Jesus Paid it All*, Kristian Stanfill

Fourth Session

- *Deep Cries Out*, Bethel Music & William Matthews, Be Lifted High
- *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)*, Hillsong United
- *In Christ Alone*, Kristian Stanfill
- *Sinking Deep (Acoustic)*, Hillsong Young & Free

Other Music Selections

- *This is Living (Acoustic)*, Hillsong Young & Free
- *From the Inside Out*, Hillsong United
- *God of Wonders*, Kutless
- *Nothing but the Blood*, Matt Redman
- *You Never Let Go*, Matt Redman
- *It Is Well With My Soul*, Phil Wickham

FIELD GAMES

This is a teamwork-oriented program. Some of these are modifications of classic games with a mix of games that are fast paced with lots of movement and others are slow and require thoughtful strategy. You need to budget for 90 minutes split into three 30-minute sessions. It's a good idea to give yourself 30 minutes before hand to split up your teams and give everyone instructions. Keep score by giving each team 50 points for winning a game.

Sound complicated? Don't worry; we are going to walk you through this step by step.

You will need a two game leaders that will run the games in each of the 30 minute sessions.

Field Game Supplies

(May need to be multiplied if you have more than 50 students):

- Four Cones (Fanuary, Flamingo Jousting)
- Tape and/or field paint depending on your location (9 Square, Poop Deck, Dizzy Bat)
- 2 plastic baseball bats (Dizzy Bat)

Creating Teams

The first step is dividing and naming the teams. Take a final list of your participants and divide them evenly into groups of 8-12 students and 1-2 adults. If you have the time and want to make it more exciting, you can assign a creative name to each team, choose colors, make team flags, let them paint their faces, and let them create a team chant! If you have a larger number of students, feel free to multiply this process and make it fit your needs.

Step 1: Assign a name to each team and write them here.

Team A: _____

Team B: _____

Team C: _____

Team D: _____

Step 2: Use the form attached and plug in your students names. Try to split teams evenly in terms of athletic abilities.

Step 3: Fill out the team schedule with the names of your teams.

Team Games Schedule

SESSION 1 - 30 MINUTES

ROUND ONE

January
Team **A** vs Team **B**

9 Square Tourney
Team **C** vs Team **D**

ROUND TWO

9 Square Tourney
Team **A** vs Team **B**

January
Team **C** vs Team **D**

SESSION 2 - 30 MINUTES

ROUND ONE

Poop Deck
Team **A** vs Team **C**

Dizzy Bat
Team **B** vs Team **D**

ROUND TWO

Dizzy Bat
Team **A** vs Team **C**

Poop Deck
Team **B** vs Team **D**

SESSION 3: 30 MINUTES

ROUND ONE

Ships and Sailors
Team **A** vs Team **D**

Flamingo Jousting
Team **B** vs Team **C**

ROUND TWO

Flamingo Jousting
Team **A** vs Team **D**

Ships and Sailors
Team **B** vs Team **C**

Game Descriptions

FANUARY

Setup: Create a rectangular field with cones or other method and select one “tagger” for each team, and have the rest of each team line up on opposing sides of the field.

Rules:

- If you are tagged or you run out of bounds, you are out.
- If you are selected as a zombie, you cannot move your feet once you have been placed.

Play: When the Game Leader yells out a color any players wearing that color must run to the opposite side of the field without getting tagged or running out of bounds. If a player is tagged they are out. After a round or two, the Team Leader can select Zombies from those who are out to place in the field as obstacles to help the tagger. The last runner standing wins.

9 SQUARE TOURNEY

Setup: Mark off a 9 square court with tape (1 square in the middle of 8 surrounding squares)

Rules:

1. The King serves the ball to the corners
2. Underhand hits only
3. If the ball lands on an inside line, it is in
4. If the ball lands on an outside line, it is out

Play: Have the two teams line up alternating with their opponents. Flip a coin to see which team is at the head of the line and then have them enter the court in that order. Play begins with the King serving the ball underhanded to a corner square. A player is out when they are not able to return a ball, get hit by a ball, or hit the ball out of bounds. Once a player is out, they must go to the back of the line. The team that has the most players still in the court at the end wins the round.

POOP DECK

Setup: Make two vertical lines on the ground/floor to make 3 horizontal aisles. Mark the middle aisle Main Deck, the right aisle Poop Deck, and the Left aisle 1/4 deck.

Rules:

1. You must have both feet over the line
2. Cannot push an opponent

Play: Have both teams stand in a line down the middle of the Main Deck. The game leader needs to stand at the front of the court horizontally, elevated by a chair or bench. The game leader yells out the commands and the players must do as they are directed. For example, if the leader yells “Poop Deck” then players must cross over the line as quickly as possible. Whichever player is last to cross the line are out. Give them a few test commands so they understand the game. To get more players out at a time you can trip them up by pointing to one deck and saying another.

DIZZY BAT

Setup: Mark off two aisles about 30 yards in length. At the end of each aisle leave a plastic baseball bat

Rules:

1. You must tag the next player
2. You must spin 10 times

Play: The two teams take their place at the beginning of each aisle in a line on the opposite side as the bat. When the Game Leader says go, one member from each team must race over to the bat in their aisle, bend over placing their head on the bat, and spin in a circle 10 times with their head maintaining contact with the bat and the bat maintaining contact with the ground. After they have spun themselves 10 times they must run back to the beginning of the aisle and tag the next player on their team. It is a relay and whichever team finishes first wins.

SHIPS AND SAILORS

Setup: None

Rules:

1. You cannot move onto the next command if you are “at ease”
2. You are out if you are the last one completing a command
3. You are out if it is group command and you do not have a group

Play: This is a game about listening and coordination. After teaching the commands (below) to the participants, the leader of the game shouts commands that must be followed carefully. If players do not follow the command correctly or are the last player to complete the command, they are out. The team with the last player wins 1 point, and the team with the most points at the end of the time wins.

Commands:

Captain's Comin' - Players must stand at attention until the leader says "at ease." If the leader says another command without saying "at ease" all players that moved to the next command are out.

Three Men Rowin' - Players must form a group of three, sit down together, and begin rowing an imaginary canoe. Any players that don't find a group of three are out.

Five Men Eating - Players must form a group of five, sit down, and begin eating an imaginary meal. Any players that don't find a group of five are out.

Star Fish - Players must lay down on their stomachs with all limbs stretched out like a star.

Cockroach - Players must lay on their backs, wiggling their arms and legs.

FLAMINGO JOUSTING

Setup: A medium sized square boundary marked with lines or cones

Rules:

1. If you let go of your foot you are out
2. If you step out of bounds you are out
3. You cannot push pull or shove anyone except with a flat hand

Play: In this game, the teams begin facing one another and stand on one leg by holding their foot, and stretch their free hand out in front of them. Count to three, then the teams can attempt to push other players off balance by pushing their opponent's outstretched hand. They are not allowed to use other parts of their body to push, bump, or pull other players. The team with the last man standing wins 1 point, and the team with the most points at the end of the time wins.