

# UNIT 1 HANDOUT

# SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF GOD'S MISSION

This unit helps students examine some of the foundational scriptures and themes found throughout the gospels. Students will be encouraged to build the foundations of their lives upon the God we read about in the Scriptures. As students secure their foundation in God, they will be taught the importance of staying connected to the True Vine (Christ). A life that divorces itself from Christ will fail to bear fruit. Next, students will learn that we are not alone as we seek to live out God's mission in the world. The same Holy Spirit who empowered and guided Jesus desires to empower and guide us to live out our faith today. And as we strive to be faithful to God, Jesus reminds us to live and serve for the glory of God as opposed to the praise of people. The unit also examines how Jesus taught the disciples to pray. Students will take a closer look at the Lord's Prayer and how it provides us with a great template for how to pray. Finally, students will observe Jesus praying in the garden and be challenged by his ability to pray, "Not my will but your will for my life." Students will be challenged and encouraged to surrender to God's will for their lives as well as embody the selflessness and servanthood of Christ.

## This unit will include:

- **Lesson 1: Securing a Strong Foundation**— This first lesson takes a look at the baptism of Jesus and focuses on the importance building our lives on the foundation of God. Teens hear mixed messages all the time about spirituality and alternative forms of faith. This lesson will help encourage and challenge the teens to find that faith and foundation in God. (Matthew 3:13-17)
- **Lesson 2: Staying Connected to the Vine**— This lesson continues where the first lesson left off. Once your teens have decided they want God to be the foundation of their lives, they must stay connected to the True Vine if they are going to remain strong and fruit bearing. (John 15:1-17)
- **Lesson 3: Empowered and Guided by the Holy Spirit**— This lesson looks at how the Holy Spirit guided and empowered Jesus as he spent 40 days in the wilderness. That same Holy Spirit desires to guide and empower your teens as they seek to live out God's mission in the world. (Luke 4:1-13)
- **Lesson 4: An Audience of One**— This lesson teaches teens the importance of having humility as we seek to live for God. Teens are taught that we should desire to give God the glory and not ourselves. (Matthew 6:16-18)
- **Lesson 5: Praying How Jesus Taught**— This lesson teaches teens how to pray in a more thorough way. The lesson takes a closer look at the Lord's Prayer and how it is a good guide and example for prayer life. (Luke 11:1-13)
- **Lesson 6: Jesus As Our Example**— This lesson challenges teens to look at Jesus's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and how he surrendered to the Father's will. Jesus demonstrates a selfless heart and attitude. (Matthew 26:36-46)

## GROUP EXPERIENCE

As you begin this lesson series, hang up a large poster or canvas on a classroom wall. If you can't hang it on a wall, you can roll or fold up your poster or canvas every lesson. At the top of the poster simply write in large letters, PRAYER. Let the students know that at any point during the next six weeks (or after) they are free to write down their prayers, praises, requests, thoughts, and questions for God. It is an opportunity for students to respond to what God is doing in their lives. As you plan your weekly group time, feel free to incorporate this prayer banner as much or as little as you would like.

## LEADER LINK

There may be weeks that you leave your group time a little discouraged because it didn't go as well as you would have liked or you didn't do as good a job explaining something as you hoped. In those times, remember the most important thing you can do is be a living example for your students. You can be the most knowledgeable Bible scholar in the word, but if students do not see Christ in your words and relationships, chances are they will reject anything you have to say. Be encouraged!

# SECURING A STRONG FOUNDATION

**LEADER GUIDE**  
UNIT 1 LESSON 1

## Scripture

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**LUKE 6:12-16; JOHN 15:12-15**

## Lesson Overview: Relational Dimension

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While there are times in our lives when it is good to get away, there is no doubt about it: God created his people to live in community with one another. Jesus makes it a point to get away and pray several times throughout the gospels; however, he is also intentional about surrounding himself with close friends. That's right; Jesus has friends.

This first lesson will take a broad look at the life and teachings of Jesus in regards to friendships and relationships. Students will be challenged to understand the importance of surrounding themselves with people who will encourage them to live out their faith while not excluding and isolating themselves from the rest of the world. The remainder of the lessons in this unit will look at specific traits we should seek to embody in our friendships and relationships.

## Biblical Commentary

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While the gospels do not go into great detail about the lives of some of the disciples, one thing we can conclude is that Jesus calls some pretty ordinary people to spend a vast majority of his time with. When speaking about friendships and relationships in John's gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that they are to love others just as Jesus has loved them. Jesus goes on to demonstrate the fullness of his love by laying down his life for them. Sacrificing one's life for another is the highest form of love that one can show.

Jesus tells the disciples that he no longer calls them servants even though he has the right to refer to them as such. Christian friendship is more than just casual acquaintance; it is a partnership of mutual esteem and affection for one another. The disciples are not simply slaves whom Jesus calls to live out God's mission. A slave is never given a reason for the work that is assigned. A friend is a confidant who shares in the knowledge and mission of his superior's purpose and voluntarily decides to live life in accordance with that mission.

These two passages (**Luke 6:12-16 & John 15:12-15**) are two small glimpses of a larger picture that we see throughout the gospels. Jesus chooses to live in community, not only with the disciples but with other people we read about in Scripture. Jesus's life and teachings point to a greater truth that we as believers are created to encourage one another, support each other, pray for one another, rebuke one another, teach each other, and so forth. The book of Acts also gives witness to this truth. After the ascension of our Lord, the disciples continue to meet together for the greater purposes of living out God's mission in the world.

### REFLECT ON THESE THEMES:

- *Community*: Are you faithfully connected to the body of Christ? Do you allow yourself to pour into other people's lives and be poured into by others?
- *Friendships*: Are the closest friendships you have in your life ones that mutually encourage one another toward Christlikeness?

### THINK ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS:

- Do your students surround themselves with people who encourage them in the faith?
- Do your students see the importance of being connected to the body of Christ?

## Resources

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- White board or poster board
- Cloth tarp
- Sharpies and/or markers
- Magazines (creative option)
- Glue (creative option)
- Scissors (creative option)
- Envelopes (creative option)
- Paper (creative option)
- Stamps (creative option)
- Student journals (creative option)

## Messages to Parents and Teens

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For Teens: The following are a couple of text messages, Tweets, or Facebook statuses you could send out to your students to promote the meeting and/or prepare them for it.

- Check out John 15:12-15 before you come to group this week. How would you describe someone who is a good friend? Let's talk about it at group this week!
- Who is your best friend and why? Did Jesus have a best friend or best friends? Hmm... Looking forward to seeing everyone at group this week!

For parents: Here are some text messages to get parents and teens talking before your next meeting and a follow-up email to equip parents to continue encouraging their teens to engage in living out God's mission.

- This week we are looking at John 15:12-15 and talking about friendships and relationships. Ask your student who their best friend is and why they are their best friend.
- This week we are talking about the theme of friendships and relationships. Ask your students what they believe to be the most important trait or quality in a friendship.

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This is a follow-up email/message you may wish to send to parents regarding the content that you studied during group time.

*Dear Parents,*

*This week we looked at a couple different passages (Luke 6:12-16 and John 15:12-15). We talked about friendships, relationships, and the importance of being part of a strong community that encourages us in the faith. While Jesus made it a point to get away by himself to pray from time to time, he spent most of his time with other people. We challenged the students to look at their own friendships and relationships and to ask themselves if they are God honoring or if our friends are dragging us down.*

*Here are some follow-up questions you can discuss with your students:*

- *What are one or two things you remember from group this week?*
- *Why is it so important to surround ourselves with people who will build us up and encourage us?*
- *What challenges would we face if we tried to be Christian and never got connected to other believers?*

## Explore

Begin your time by allowing students to share highlights of their week. Also take some time to allow students to share some praises or prayer requests. Open your time in prayer.

OPTION: A Little Help From a Friend

PURPOSE: To open up your lesson by introducing the topic of friendship and community.

**ASK & DISCUSS: What challenges would you face in a baseball game if you were the only person on your team?**

**How could eight other people help you out in the game?**

**How long would it take you to put together a 10,000-piece puzzle by yourself?**

**How long would it take you if you had 10 other people communicating with you and helping you put it together?**

**How challenging would it be to put on a full play by yourself?**

**How could 40 other people help you put on an even better play?**

**How about in our lives as Christians? What challenges would you face if you never spoke or interacted with another person for the rest of your life?**

**SAY:** For this week's lesson we are going to look at the life of Jesus and the friendships and relationships he had with people. We are also going to talk about the importance of having friendships and relationships that encourage one another as Christians.

## Encounter

OPTION: Questions Surrounding the Text

PURPOSE: To understand and explore the text

Read through Luke 6:12-16 and John 15:12-15. You may want to read the passages twice using different translations to help the students hear and become familiar with the passages. After doing this, take some time to ask and discuss these questions.

**ASK & DISCUSS: What do you think is the difference between a servant and a friend?**

**Why do you think Jesus called these people to be his disciples in Luke 6:12-16? Why didn't Jesus just go through life alone?**

**Think about the people you surround yourself with in your life. Do your friends help you be a follower of Christ or get in the way of being a follower of Christ?**

**How can friendships and relationships help us as we try to live out our faith?**

**What are the benefits of being around a bunch of other Christians at a church?**

**As Christians, do you think we should ever hang out with people who are not Christians? Why or why not?**

**SAY:** While Jesus loved all people, he made sure his primary friendships were people who encouraged and supported him. Think about how much more difficult it would have been for Jesus if all he did was hang out with people who tried to drag him down. This doesn't mean Jesus never hung out with non-believers, but his primary friendships were with people who did their best to build him up. Can you say that about the people you spend most of your time with? Do your friends challenge you to be a better Christian?

OPTION: Who's in Your Circle?

PURPOSE: To challenge students to think about their closest friends and if they are being built up and encouraged to follow Christ or being brought down.

(Before using this option, read through the main gospel passages and discuss some or all of the questions listed in the option above. This will help students become familiar with the theme and direction of the lesson.)

Using a white board or poster board, draw a dot in the center and then draw four or five circles that get gradually larger around the dot (so it looks like a bull's-eye).

**SAY:** The dot in the middle of the board represents you, and the circles surrounding the dot represent your relationships and friendships. The people in the closest circle are the friends and people you spend the most time with and who have the greatest influence on you. The furthest circle represents the people in your life who are more like acquaintances whom you spend little time with and who don't have as much of an influence on you.

**SAY:** The passages we read tell us that there were 12 disciples Jesus had, but other parts of the Bible suggest that out of the 12, there were a couple he was especially close with (John, Peter, James). Jesus taught and encouraged them, but these people

were also good friends in return to Jesus. These two or three disciples Jesus was especially close to would be in Jesus's closest ring. The people in Jesus's outer ring were the people Jesus spent time with who were far from God. These were the people who took extra energy for Jesus to be around because they either tried to bring Jesus down, or they required a lot of attention. When Jesus needed to recharge his battery, he went to pray and spend time with his closest friends, who loved him.

**ASK: (EITHER RHETORICALLY OR DISCUSS ALOUD) What would your friend chart look like?**

**Are the people in your closest circle people who bring you up and encourage you, or do they bring you down and tempt you to make poor choices?**

**As people trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ, are there any changes you may need to make in your circles?**

## Engage

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OPTION: Friendship Graffiti

PURPOSE: To allow students the opportunity to creatively respond to the lesson and to think about what the discussion and conversation mean for their lives.

Using a large roll of paper or a large cloth tarp, write the words *God-Honoring Friendships* at the top prior to class. Provide plenty of Sharpies and markers for the students.

**SAY:** We have spent some time talking about friendships, relationships, and the importance of being connected to people who are going to encourage us as Christians. Now we have the opportunity to make our own graffiti. I want all of you to be as creative as you want decorating this poster with words, phrases, pictures, symbols, and designs that describe what it looks like to be a good friend. We are going to hang this graffiti up in the room once you are finished (optional).

Give the students 13-15 minutes to work on the graffiti.

## Closing

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Reaffirm the following truths to your students:

- Jesus surrounded himself with people who loved and encouraged him.
- God created us to live in community with one another.
- We as Christians need to surround ourselves with people who are going to encourage us and challenge us to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Close your group time in prayer.

# Creative Options

## Engage: Journal It- A Good Friend Is...

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**PURPOSE:** To have students look for words they would use to describe good friends.

Bring in some magazines you don't mind parting with along with some scissors. Challenge the students to go through the magazine and cut out words they would use to describe a good friend. Have them glue the words onto a page of their journal. Give the students 8-10 minutes to do this. Allow students to share some of the words they found afterward.

**SAY:** Today we are going to begin our group time by looking at what Jesus taught us about friendships and relationships in our lives.

## Encounter: The Power of Community

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**PURPOSE:** To help students understand the importance of being part of the church and surrounding themselves with people who will build them up.

(This option would best fit after groups have already read the gospel passage and discussed the questions surrounding the text.)

**ASK & DISCUSS: How can being a part of a church community...**

**Help us learn more about the Bible and Jesus's teachings?**

**Encourage us?**

**Help us make good choices?**

**Help us when we are making poor choices?**

**Help us get through difficult times?**

**Help us love and serve others?**

**Challenge us to grow in our faith?**

## Engage: Thank a Friend

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**PURPOSE:** To challenge students to think about someone who has been a Christlike influence in their life and to thank them for doing so.

As you close your lesson, give the students some lined paper, an envelope, and a stamp. Ask them to think about someone in their life who has been a great friend to them and a positive influence. Challenge them to write a letter expressing gratitude for that friendship. Give the students about 6-8 minutes to do this.

# SECURING A STRONG FOUNDATION

## READ MATTHEW 3:13-17.

What does it mean for God to be the foundation of our lives?

What does it mean for us to be faithful to God with the choices we make at school? While hanging out with our friends? While we are on the internet or watching television?

The Bible shows us how Jesus was faithful to God's mission. What are one or two ways God may want to use you to do his work?

**Notes:**