

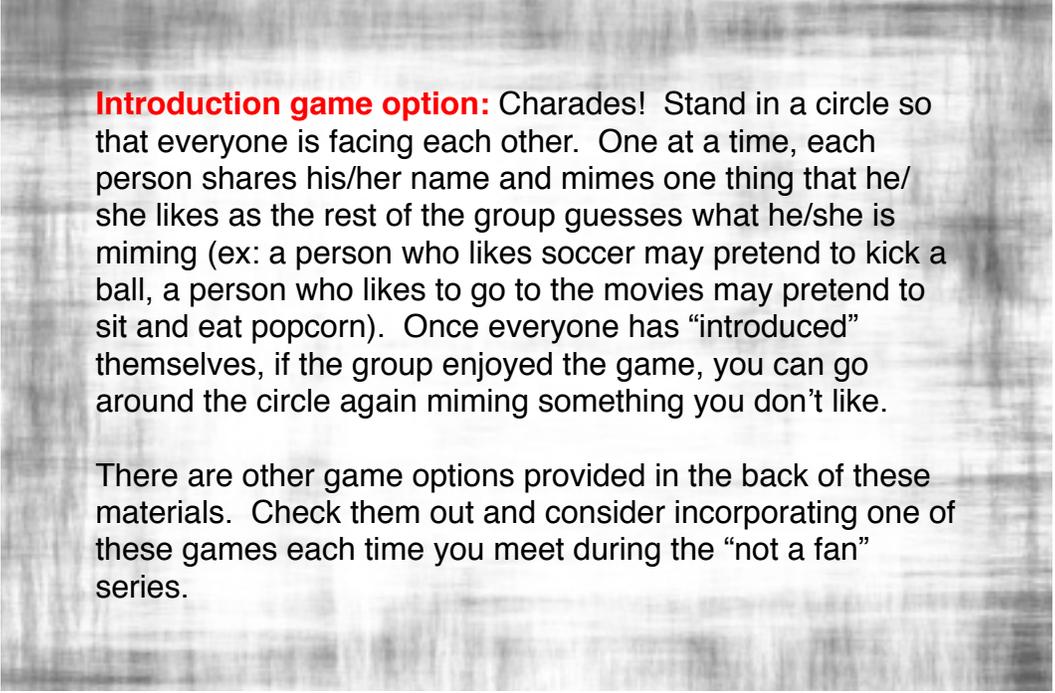
not a fan.

COMPLETELY. COMMITTED. FOLLOWER.

WEEK ONE

Fans love rules. Followers love Jesus.

Allow everyone to introduce themselves. Ask students to share their name, grade, and something about themselves. Introduce yourself as well. Share a little bit about your family, where you work, and why you decided to lead a small group.



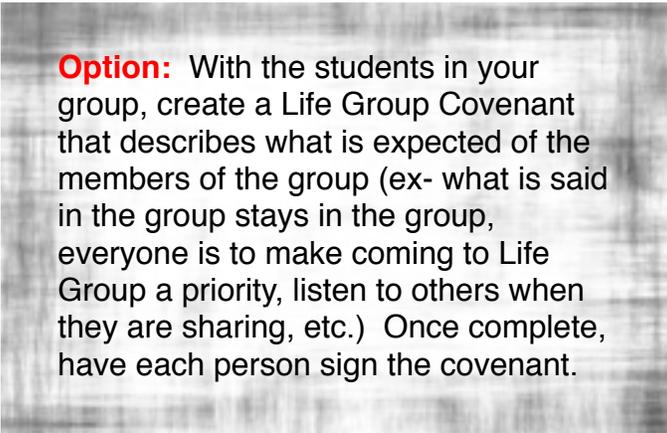
Introduction game option: Charades! Stand in a circle so that everyone is facing each other. One at a time, each person shares his/her name and mimes one thing that he/she likes as the rest of the group guesses what he/she is miming (ex: a person who likes soccer may pretend to kick a ball, a person who likes to go to the movies may pretend to sit and eat popcorn). Once everyone has “introduced” themselves, if the group enjoyed the game, you can go around the circle again miming something you don’t like.

There are other game options provided in the back of these materials. Check them out and consider incorporating one of these games each time you meet during the “not a fan” series.

What do you hope to get out of our time together?

Our Life Group is to be a safe place where we can learn and grow together, encourage each other, and hold one another accountable. In order for this to happen, what is discussed and shared in the group must stay in the group.

Have all the members of the group agree to respect one another and not gossip about what is shared during Life Group.



Option: With the students in your group, create a Life Group Covenant that describes what is expected of the members of the group (ex- what is said in the group stays in the group, everyone is to make coming to Life Group a priority, listen to others when they are sharing, etc.) Once complete, have each person sign the covenant.

Pray for what you want the group to become.

Encourage students to bring their Bibles to Life Group meetings. If a student in your group does not have a Bible, let Shannon know and the church will provide one.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 23:23-28. In this passage, Jesus refers to the Pharisees. Does anyone know what a Pharisee was? A religious and political leader who strictly followed the written and traditional law.

In this passage Jesus is not talking to the Pharisees, but to His disciples and other listeners. As we read, consider why Jesus tells His followers these things.

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage for the group. Because the group is still getting comfortable with each other, if no one volunteers you can read the passage aloud.

Jesus refers to the Pharisees as hypocrites time and time again. Can someone explain what a hypocrite is?

In the Old Testament, God instructs His followers to tithe, to give 10% of everything to Him. We read in v. 23 that the Pharisees went as far to tithe of their spices. Why was this upsetting to Jesus?

Jesus goes on to compare the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs and cups that are clean on the outside, but dirty on the inside. The Pharisees had put a higher importance on what was visible to the people as opposed to what God saw in the heart. They were viewed as religious, but lacked a relationship with God. Often Christians today are not much different. We are more concerned with what people see on the outside than what God sees on the inside. The things that matter the most to God, like holy thoughts, purity, and faithfulness, are often done in private. If we're not careful, we'll wind up just like the Pharisees- religious fans that love rules and miss out on having a relationship with Jesus.

Why do people settle for religion? Why is it easier to follow rules rather than follow Jesus?

Now turn in your Bibles to John 14:15, 21. Would someone read this passage for us?

Wait a minute? We just read in Matthew about how following Jesus is not about rules and doing the right things but about a relationship with Jesus. These verses say obedience is important. How can one passage claim one extreme and another passage claim the opposite extreme?

Love is what matters, and we show our love with our actions.

Hand out the Follower's Journal. Encourage the students to bring their journals to Life Groups.

This is a 6 week daily devotional for you to not only help you follow Jesus, but to come to know and love the One you are following. It won't take you much time to complete each day and the questions and exercise will stretch your faith. Each day for the next two weeks until we meet again, make this journal a priority.

As a Christ-follower, our relationship with Christ is to come before any other relationship and we demonstrate our love for Him through our obedience. For a few moments reflect on what you can do over the next two weeks to chase after Him. In your journals on page 8 there is a section to write notes and you can write your answer here. This is just between you and God.

After providing the students with time to write in their journals (and you are encouraged to do so at this time as well), ask the students for prayer requests and close your time together with prayer.

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WEEK TWO

Fans glorify themselves. Followers die to themselves.

Game Options: Did you check-out the game options provided in the back of these materials? Prepare to play one (or come up with your own) before beginning the lesson this week.

Reading Option: To involve more students, break-up large scripture passages into smaller sections and divide the passage among several students.

Ask the students about their journals. Did they use them consistently? Did they like the morning, noon, and night format? Did anything stand out to them that they would like to share with the group? How can they be more consistent over the next two weeks?

Let's turn in our Bibles to Luke 9:18-25. Would someone be willing to read?

Notice the progression of this passage:

In vv.18-21 Jesus is recognized as the Christ and Messiah, the One that was prophesied about in the Old Testament, the One who would provide salvation.

In v. 22 Jesus reveals that because He is the Christ, He will suffer, die, and then rise again. Why must He die?

In vv. 23-25 He tells His followers that they must die as well; not a physical death, but to themselves. But if they do, they too will be raised, their lives will be saved. Jesus adds, "If anyone tries to save his life, he will lose it." Why is this so? How does trying to save one's life lead to losing one's life?

What does it mean to try and gain the whole world? *Possible answers- to seek success in the business world no matter the cost, to do whatever it takes to make more money, to hurt people to feel better about yourself, to lie to get your way, to do things for your own glory*

What does it mean to die to one's self? *Possible answers- to put what God wants for me ahead of what I want for myself, to put other's needs before my own*

Dying to yourself involves discernment (determining what is right and wrong, what is beneficial to you as a Christ-follower and what is not Godly), self-control, and sacrifice.

Do you think it is easier to physically die for Christ or to live daily for Christ?

Has following Jesus cost you anything? *Possible answers the students might share- friends, popularity, judgment and criticism, rejection, refraining from playing certain video games or watching certain movies or listening to certain music, a boyfriend or girlfriend, not attending parties where alcohol is present)*

Today, the symbol of the cross has been romanticized, and even turned into an attractive logo for Christianity. But that was not the feeling toward the cross in ancient times. Crucifixion was considered the worst form of death. The Romans perfected its use as a deterrent for crime and rebellion. Roman Citizens could not be crucified; this punishment was only for the worst of crimes committed by the lower classes. People accepted the practice of crucifixion and even supported it, because it was inflicted upon thieves and runaway slaves. Crucifixion helped keep the peace and curb crime. But crucifixion was still perceived to be disgusting. The cross was described by writers of that time with phrases like

- the infamous stake**
- the criminal wood**
- a shameful execution**
- the most wretched of deaths**

Knowing all this, what does the phrase, "Take up your cross and follow me," now mean to you?

In your follower's journal, take a few moments and consider how you need to "die to yourself." What is one specific thing that you can do before we get together again to put Christ before yourself? This is just between you and God.

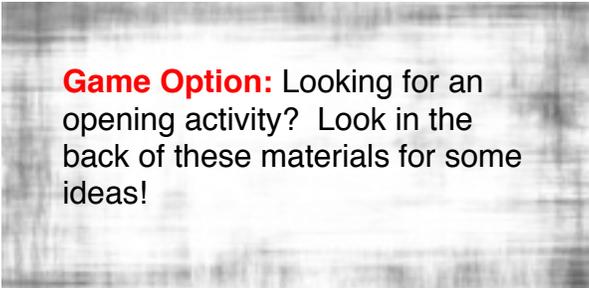
After the students have had time to write, ask if the students have any prayer requests (remember to record what the students mention). If a student is comfortable with praying, allow him/her to close in prayer.

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WEEK THREE

Fans settle. Followers sacrifice.

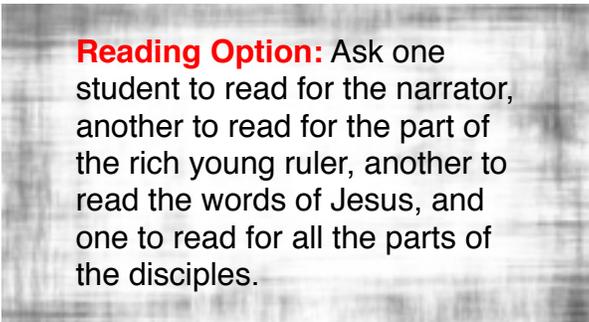


Game Option: Looking for an opening activity? Look in the back of these materials for some ideas!

Ask the students if anything exciting happened over the past two weeks since you last got together as a group. Ask if they have been using their journals and how it is helping them grow.

Ask for follow-up on their prayer requests from the past two weeks and if there are any new prayer requests. Open your time together with prayer.

Let's turn to Matthew 19:16-30 in our Bibles. Who would like to read this passage?



Reading Option: Ask one student to read for the narrator, another to read for the part of the rich young ruler, another to read the words of Jesus, and one to read for all the parts of the disciples.

We read in this passage that Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, and the disciples are surprised at this statement because in that culture people considered the reality to be just the opposite. The rich were believed to be rich because they were blessed by God. Plus the rich had time to study the Scriptures so as to better know God's will. The rich also had the resources to give large amounts to poor and the people assumed this won them favor with God. In the case of this rich man, he knew the commandments and

kept them all. After talking with Jesus, he still has his money, his status, and all the freedom that comes with those privileges. So why did the man go away sad?

The problem wasn't that he had money; the problem was money had him. What are things that "have" teens now? *Possible answers- video games, boyfriend/ girlfriend, need for popularity, money, TV shows, social networks, surfing the internet, want of material possessions*

Ask students to share about times they gave something up for the sake of Christ and the benefits of these sacrifices. Possible answers- didn't go on a spring break trip and went on a mission trip instead, a time they fasted from TV or video games, gave away something they loved to someone who was in need, gave their canteen money at camp to the mission of the week.

When you give up something you consider significant to Jesus, do you regret it later? Or do you feel honored, relieved, free, more alive?

Let's turn in our Bible to Philippians 3:7-9. Would someone please read these verses?

In your own words, what are these verses saying?

Now turn to Matthew 6:24. Who would like to read this verse?

The rich young ruler had a choice to make between a relationship with Jesus and a love for his money. What decision do you have to make? In the notes section of your journal, write down something that has a hold on you that you need to give-up for the sake of Christ.

Close your time together with prayer for the students in your group.

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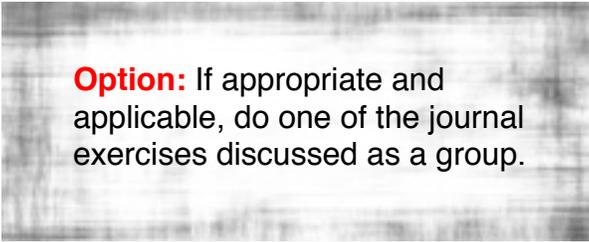
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WEEK FOUR

Fans create outcasts. Followers create followers.

Ask the students what was the highlight and lowlight of their week and open your time together with prayer.

Did you find a particular exercise in the journal helpful? *Be prepared to share an exercise from the journal that you liked.*



Option: If appropriate and applicable, do one of the journal exercises discussed as a group.

Bookmark or dog-ear the pages you found the most helpful in your growth so you can find these exercises quickly in the future.

The first four books of the New Testament are referred to as “the Gospels” and give an account of the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus. Each author provides a list of the names of the disciples. Mark, Luke, and John describe Matthew simply by name. In Matthew’s list, he describes himself as a tax collector. Why would he designate himself as “the tax collector” when he doesn’t note the other disciple’s occupations?

In the Old Testament, tax collectors were known to be greedy and abused their position by taking more money from the people than they were entitled to. Tax collectors were not popular and were considered to be traitors by the religious leaders because they were a vital part of the oppressive system of Roman taxation. Thus, simply by mentioning that he was a tax collector, he paints a picture for the people of that day of his status and reputation.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 9:9-13. Would someone please read this passage?

What stands out to you about the account of Jesus inviting Matthew to follow him?

As people pass by Matthew's tax booth, they try to ignore him, sneak by, and avoid eye contact at all costs. But not Jesus; Jesus was different. He meets Matthew where he is and invites him to follow.

Why do you think sinners were attracted to Jesus? *Possible answers- He was kind and compassionate to them, He spoke truth in love, He provided hope, He loved them, He didn't condemn them, He offered forgiveness and salvation*

What does this mean for us as Christ-followers?

From the text, what do you notice about Matthew's response to Jesus' invitation?

Matthew invites the same people we would to a party- his friends. And who are his friends? Other tax collectors and sinners

What can we learn from Matthew's example?

What is the Pharisees' reaction to Matthew's party for Jesus?

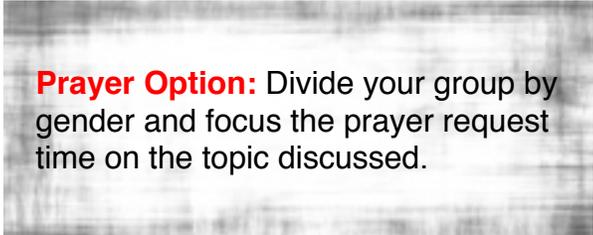
The Pharisees were fans. Instead of going out and spreading the love of Christ, they made their own clique and condemned people from a distance.

And what is Jesus' response to the Pharisees?

In your journal, I'd like you to do two things. First, reflect on how non-Christians were attracted to Christ and write a prayer asking God to make you more like Jesus and thus more attractive to those who don't know Him. Second, write down the name of one of your non-Christian friends and ask God to give you opportunities to talk to them about Jesus.

If one or more of your students remarks that they don't have any non-Christian friends, discuss with the group how Christians their age can meet non-Christians in a safe, non-threatening manner.

Close your time together with prayer.



Prayer Option: Divide your group by gender and focus the prayer request time on the topic discussed.

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GAMES

A good principle with any game: stop the game before it drags on too long. It's better to stop a game and have the students want more than to keep playing a game after it expired long ago.

Easy as ABC, 123: As people enter the room, give everyone a pre-typed sheet of paper with A, B, C, 1, 2, 3 followed by blanks respectively.

Example:

A _____
B _____
C _____

Everyone must fill in the blanks with information about others in the group that correlates with the letter or number.

Examples:

Alana plays **b**asketball.

Jamal broke his finger in **2nd** grade.

Limit how many times one person can sign another's sheet and how many times they can use a particular fact. Have students share with the whole group interesting discoveries about each other.

Two Truths and a Lie: Each person writes down two things about themselves that are true and one thing that is a lie. Example: I play saxophone in the marching band. I went to Nicaragua for spring break. I don't like raw fish. One at a time, group members share their truths and lies. The others in the group write down which facts they believe to be lies. If a player guesses correctly, they earn a point. If no one guesses correctly, the individual earns five points.

Guess Who?: Group members write down something about them on paper provided (ex: I ride horses for 4H.) The paper slips are handed in and read aloud one at a time. The slips are then read a second time, and players write who they think wrote each slip. After everyone has guessed on slips, the truth is revealed. Each player gets a point for every correct guess. If no one guesses a person's slip correctly, that person gets five points.

Ninja: Participants stand in circle. One person is chosen to be the “sensei.” The sensei states “Bow to your sensei” and all participants bow. The sensei then instructs the group to “Strike your ninja pose” and everyone freezes in a pose of their choosing. Starting with the sensei and moving clockwise, participants take turns “attacking,” attempting to hit the hands of either one of the participants next to them. Participants must move quickly and in one motion and then freeze. The person being attack attempts to move in one motion to avoid being hit and then freezes. If the person attacking hits another participant’s hand, that hand is “out” and placed behind the participants back. Once both hands of a participant are out, that person steps out of the circle. The last person left wins.

A What?: Instruct everyone to find a small item, such as a hat, bracelet, shoelace, lip gloss, pen, spoon, etc. Once everyone has an item, have the group sit in a circle. Each person looks to the person on their left and says, “This is a(n) ___(item)_____.” They then turn to the person on their right and say, “A what?”, then turn back to the person on the left and say, “A(n)(item)”, turn again to the person on their right and say, “A what”, again to the person on their left “A(n)(item)” and then say, “Oh, a(n)(the new item handed to them from person on their right)...”

Example: Lets say your item is a pencil, and the person to your right has a hat. This is what you would say: “This is a pencil...a what? A pencil...a what? A pencil...oh, a hat!” The group should attempt to be in sync with each response. Continually pass the items until everyone is laughing and it becomes complete chaos.

Variation- If someone messes up they are removed and the circle gets smaller. If no one is messing up, speed up the game.

H.O.R.S.E: **Highly recommended for middle school boys.** Students are divided into pairs and each team given a handful of small marshmallows. Teams take turns setting up “shots” where one student throws the marshmallow and his/her partner tries to catch it in their mouth without using their hands. When a team makes their “shot,” the other teams must replicate the same shot. Those who fail to catch their marshmallow receive a letter (H for the first time they miss, O for the second time, etc.). Once a team completes the word HORSE, they are out. The team with the fewest letters wins!

NOTE: You may be tempted to use the big marshmallows but we don’t recommend it. It makes it much more difficult to catch and is a choking hazard.

Catwalk: **Highly recommended for middle school girls.** You will need several rolls of toilet paper, tape, and fashion magazines. Divide your group into teams with 2 to 3 people on each team. Have teams look through magazines for a picture of an outfit (you may want to provide a time limit for doing this). Then give each team their roll of TP and tape and instruct them to recreate the outfit they chose. Have models walk the runway! If you did not participate, pick the winning team that looks the most like their outfit.

Variations: 1) Forget the magazines and simply break-up into teams to create your own TP outfits. 2) Pick a winner based on which model had the best catwalk.