

4 WEEK YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM

Leader's Guide

CURRICULUM PREVIEW

LIVE IT UP!

30 DAY CHALLENGE

Greg Stier



A WORD TO YOUTH LEADERS

Jesus has called us to advance the gospel!

When we keep the advancement of the gospel central to our ministry efforts, we have the awesome privilege of seeing the Holy Spirit do amazing things—both in the lives of our students, and also through them to their friends, classmates, teammates and ultimately, to the ends of the earth!

As we seek to help them know Him and make Him known, what better place to turn than to the Gospels?

The life of Christ is a continuous kaleidoscope of conversations, challenges and coaching that draws us in and shows us what it looks like to LIVE IT UP! Jesus modeled what it looks like to live a life that is upwardly focused on the Father, inwardly fueled by the Spirit and outwardly intent on inviting others to embrace the gospel and join this amazing party He is throwing.

As your group launches into this *LIVE IT UP! 30 Day Challenge*, may your students build healthy habits that take them deeper with Jesus each day, and propel them wider into the world with His message of grace and hope.

Exploring the adventure of the abundant, joy-filled life Jesus invites us into is what LIVING IT UP is all about!

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HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

This Leader's Guide and companion 30 days of student devotions drill down into key chronological snapshots from the life of Christ. The lessons and devo readings work in tandem to help your students step up to the challenge and embrace a grace-drenched, joy-filled, all-in, God-breathed, LIVE IT UP lifestyle that seeks to know Him and make Him known! This is what it really means to LIVE IT UP!

The four youth group lessons in this curriculum focus in on four key conversations found in the Gospels. In each of these conversations, we find Jesus communicating His message of grace and challenging others to accept His invitation to the only party that matters—the one being thrown by Jesus Himself!

The lesson topics and challenges from Jesus break out like this:

- 1. The Invitation of a Lifetime:** A Conversation with Nicodemus
Jesus' Challenge: You must be born again. Connection with God comes through relationship, not religion.
- 2. Free Grace:** A Conversation with the Woman Caught in Adultery
Jesus' Challenge: Embrace grace, then go and sin no more. Grace is always free, otherwise it's not grace, but your response to this free gift should be a depth of gratitude that bursts forth and changes your life forever.
- 3. Stop Trying, Start Trusting:** A Conversation with the Rich Young Ruler
Jesus' Challenge: If you try to go down the road of striving to earn God's favor, it's impossible. Stop trying, start trusting.
- 4. Truth Is Like the Sun...It Ain't Goin' Away:** A Conversation with Pilate
Jesus' Challenge: He came to testify to the truth. He is "*the way, the truth and the life,*" and has called us to testify to the truth of His message and share it with others.

Within each lesson, you'll find step-by-step directions that walk you through the following:

- **Key Idea** - This summarizes the lesson's theme
- **Key Scripture** - These are the central verses your group will be unpacking
- **Supplies** - A handy list of what you'll need to pull this off with excellence
- **Loosen Up** - A creative ice breaker activity that has a purpose and ties into your lesson content
- **Check It Out** - This is the meat of your Bible study lesson, complete with discussion questions and teaching content
- **Join the Party!** - Use this natural segue to provide a clear presentation of the gospel message and invite students to trust in Jesus
- **Take the Challenge** - This personal application section nudges students deeper in their walk with Jesus, or wider into the world with His message of grace and truth.

If your discussion times go well, there may be more content in these lessons than your group has time for, so feel free to pick and choose what to cover and what to cut. If your group is hesitant to participate in the discussion time, ask your questions and wait patiently for your students to engage. Waiting creates tension, and tension is a tool for change. You know your students best, so customize your use of the materials to your own situation. The detailed lessons are simply a plan that you can modify as needed. (User Note: The words in bold provide a sample script to help you, while the non-bolded words provide logistical directions for you.)

Each lesson includes a segue to a clear gospel presentation. Don't assume that all your students have previously understood or embraced the grace-infused message of the gospel. Follow up with those who make a decision to trust in Christ. Get them grounded and growing in their new faith. For help with this, check out Dare 2 Share's *Now Grow!* discipling curriculum, or go to www.somethingamazing.net/moving-forward for a free, engaging, new believer video series.

HOW TO USE THE STUDENT DEVOTIONAL HANDOUTS

The reproducible *Live It Up! 30 Day Challenge* daily student devotional readings drill down into additional key events from the life of Christ in between your weekly youth group *Live It Up!* lessons. These 30 snapshots from Jesus' life provide a concise, chronological exploration of 30 central events and teachings from the Gospels that every teenager should be familiar with. But they are designed to do far more than fill your students' heads with knowledge about Jesus—though of course that IS a good thing! Each weekly set of daily devos is designed to move what they're learning about Jesus from their head, to their heart and out into their lives. Each devo provides a real life challenge that unleashes students to *"be doers of the Word, and not hearers only."*

Through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them, I'm praying they will go deeper with Jesus AND impact their world for Him. May they embrace an all-in, LIVE IT UP life that risks everything for Him.

WEEK 1

THE INVITATION OF A LIFETIME!

A Conversation with Nicodemus



Key Idea

Jesus' Challenge: You must be born again. Connection with God comes through relationship, not religion.

Key Scripture

John 3:1-17

Supplies

- A teen version of the game Taboo, or your own made up version of a Taboo-style word guessing game
- Bibles — physical or digital, one for each student
- Slides or a printed copy of the medical symbol  and United Nations World Health Organization logo 
- Printed copies of Week 1 of the reproducible *Live It Up! 30 Day Challenge* student devotional handouts — one for each student

EXPLAIN

This week, we're launching into a new four-week series called *Live It Up!*

Jesus told His followers that He came to give us a joy-filled, abundant life—which means He's invited us to the best party ever! So we'll be exploring what it looks like to "Live It Up." In order to do this, we'll be looking at a few key snapshots from the life of Christ, and exploring together what it looks like to do life with Jesus.

But first, let's start with a game you're probably familiar with—Taboo.

 **Loosen Up**

Taboo

Divide your students into teams and play a few rounds of a Taboo-style word game as a large group.

Transition

After the game, settle your students and open in prayer.

EXPLAIN

Okay, just like we experienced in our Taboo game, sometimes explaining things, even when we're using words can be pretty challenging, can't it? Sometimes the best we can do is to try to describe certain things by saying, "Well, it's hard to explain, but it's sorta like this..."

Did you realize that Jesus used this same approach? Seriously, He had a particularly insightful and effective way of explaining spiritual stuff and God stuff. When He wanted to start up a conversation about spiritual stuff with someone, He would often zero in on some truth about God and compare it to common, ordinary things and say (loosely paraphrased), "Well, it's sorta like this..."

ASK

- **What are some examples you can think of where Jesus used common, everyday things to describe spiritual truths?** [Encourage answers such as farming, fishing, sheep, light, salt, bread, etc.]

 **Check It Out**

EXPLAIN

Jesus provided word pictures in His conversations so that those around Him could grab onto what He was trying to teach them. In some of His parable conversations, you can almost imagine His followers thinking to themselves, "Okay, so now I'm starting to get what You're talking about..."

So today, we're going to be drilling down into a conversation Jesus had with a man called Nicodemus. We'll see Jesus using this kind of word picture approach as He was trying to answer Nicodemus' very blunt and honest questions about the spiritual side of life.

So let's take a closer look at this particular conversation.

Ask for a volunteer to read John 3:1-2:

Bible Box

*¹ There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee.
² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."*

ASK

- **Okay, let's stop right there. What are a few things we learn in these two verses about the setup to this conversation?** [Nicodemus was a Pharisee, he came to Jesus after dark, he said that he believed Jesus was sent from God and was a teacher of spiritual truth.]
- **Can anyone explain what a Pharisee was back in Jesus day?** [The Pharisees were a Jewish sect who were generally self-righteous, hypocritical and focused on enforcing their religious rules on others.]
- **Can you think of any possible reasons why Nicodemus came to Jesus after dark?** [Possible reasons: 1) He was afraid to be associated with Jesus; 2) He was a spy for the Jewish religious leaders who thought Jesus was a trouble-maker; 3) He was busy during the day, but was truly searching for spiritual truth, because he felt the emptiness of the Pharisees religious "rules and regulations" approach to spiritual life.]

EXPLAIN

While we don't really know Nicodemus' true motivations for coming to talk to Jesus under the cloak of darkness, I think it'll be pretty clear as we read on, that whatever our friend Nic's motivations were, Jesus quickly drew him into a deep, soul-searching conversation about how to connect with God. But before we read further, I have another question for you.

ASK

- **What kinds of things first pop into your head when you hear the words "born again"?** [i.e., physically gross, politically-loaded, etc.]

EXPLAIN

For some of us, at least, just the terminology "born again" might be loaded with a lot of baggage. But I want to suggest that for the next 30 minutes or so, you try your best to set that baggage aside, and listen to the deeper things that are being communicated here between Jesus and Nicodemus. Because this striking, insightful conversation goes to the very core of one of key questions humans have been asking since the dawn of time: What does it really take to be connected to God?

ASK

- **So now we're ready to read on. Can I please have a volunteer read verses 3-8?**

Bible Box

³ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

ASK

- **Okay, let's stop here and unpack this passage a bit before we read further. When Jesus says, "You must be born again," what do you think He is talking about? Tell me in your own words, what you think Jesus' point is here.**
- **What spiritual truth is Jesus using the word picture of the wind to describe? Can you think of anywhere else in Scripture where the Spirit and wind are coupled together?** [Pentecost: *On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting (Acts 2:1-2).*]
- **What are some ways you can think of in which the wind and the Spirit of God are similar?** [Both are invisible. You can't see them, but you can see the effect they have—like when the wind moves tree branches and the Spirit transforms lives and produces spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). Both can move gently and quietly, or become roaring, powerful forces.]
- **All this "born again" talk is challenging stuff. Even Nicodemus thought it was difficult to understand, so let's read further in the story. Can I please have a volunteer read John 3:9-17?**

Bible Box

⁹ “How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”

EXPLAIN

Near the end of this passage we just read lies perhaps the most familiar and famous verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16: **“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”** Which means it’s really important that we do our very best to understand what Jesus is telling us both before and after this key verse that pretty much summarizes the meaning and message of Jesus’ entire life! So let’s dig in.

First off, it’s clear that Nicodemus is still confused, because he point-blank asks Jesus the question, **“How are these things possible?”** Remember earlier, when Nic asks **“How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”** He’s still not really getting what Jesus is trying to explain to him.

And how does Jesus respond? Basically, He says—my paraphrase here, **“Nicodemus, even though you’re very religious, you’ve missed God—you’ve missed the point about how to get connected to God. Listen to me, I’ve come down from heaven with a mission and a message that changes everything! Remember back long ago, during the time of Moses, it’s sort of like that...”**

I want to press pause here for a couple minutes so we can explore the back story here about Jesus’ reference to Moses lifting up a bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness. Way back, hundreds of years before the time of Jesus, just after the Jewish people had been brought out of slavery in Egypt, they went on a sin-soaked rampage of idolatry and were turning away from God. Because of their sinful ways, God sent an infestation of poisonous snakes that killed lots of people [Numbers 21:8-9]. So God instructed Moses to make a

symbolic bronze snake wrapped around a pole, and to hold it up for the people to look to when they needed help and healing. If they would look to the pole Moses was holding up, they would be saved from death due as a result of the bite of these poisonous snakes.

Now I get that this all sounds a little weird, but let me explain something for you. There are many times in the Old Testament where God provided specific, concrete instructions and experiences that spoke to the people living then, but that were also allusions to the coming Messiah, Jesus. And this is one of those instances. This story about Moses lifting up the pole for people to look to in order to be healed and saved is really a story about Jesus! And when Jesus talks about the Son of Man being lifted up, He's alluding here to the crucifixion, where He will be lifted up on a pole—the cross—and anyone who looks to Him in faith will be saved from the death that comes from the poison of sin.

Note: For the next question, you will need to print out copies or create Power Point slides of the following two symbols of a single snake wrapped around a pole.



ASK

- **Have any of you ever seen either of these symbols before?** [medical symbol, United Nations World Health Organization (W-H-O) logo]

EXPLAIN

Some people claim this pole and snake symbol has its roots in Greek mythology. But after exploring what we've just been talking about in terms of Moses lifting up the snake on the pole to bring healing to the Israelites, it seems highly likely that this common medical symbol actually has biblical roots, doesn't it? Who knew that we have a Jesus story openly displayed on ambulances and medical buildings all over the world?! And even on the United Nations World Health Organization's logo!

ASK

- **But now, let's get back to our original conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. What reason does Jesus give for why He must be lifted up (on the cross)?** [*"so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life"* (John 3:15-17)].