



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

THE NEW TESTAMENT

KARA POWELL
General Editor



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How to Use the *Uncommon* Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The handouts include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

Starter

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

Message

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_new_testament.zip and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_new_testament.zip.

UNIT I

The Kingdom of God Is Near

Recently at a Christian music festival I was struck by the superstar status showered on the musicians as fans swarmed to catch a glimpse of their favorite Christian band. A few minutes later, my focus turned to another band of Christians ministering at the festival without any audience at all. Largely invisible, these individuals roamed the grounds picking up trash, setting out food, counseling troubled kids or praying silently in a corner. And though no one appeared to notice them, I couldn't help but wonder from God's view where the real stage was—in the limelight or in the quiet acts of service. Or maybe in both.

Often when we teach Scripture, we make it a point to tell stories of Peter. But what about Andrew? If it weren't for Andrew's faithfulness and concern for his brother that led him to introduce Peter to Jesus, we would never have heard about Peter. Similarly, Levi was not one of the more celebrated disciples, yet his calling helped people see that even a sinner could become a follower of Jesus. His conversion also produced one of the four Gospels, for Levi was also known as Matthew.

And what about those whose names we'll never know? An unnamed centurion in Matthew 8 takes Jesus at His word and is held up as a prime example of faith. A widow in Mark 12 demonstrates what giving really means. And in Mark 2, four friends go to a great deal of trouble to carry a friend to Jesus for healing.

This unit uses these stories to offer hope to your junior-highers—some of whom feel nameless and lost in the crowd—and to introduce the four canonical Gospels. As your students work their way through this study, they will see the importance of each person's story—including their own. If you want the stories in this book to have full impact on your students, try some of the following:

- **Practice telling good stories.** Have you ever heard someone say that we have to “make the stories of the Bible come alive”? In a sense, that's

not really true . . . the stories of the Bible *are* alive! But sometimes the details we give, the way that we help students understand what each character was thinking and feeling, and the way we help students feel as if they were actually there—even if that might mean wearing a tunic or carrying a prop—will help the life of the stories shine clearly.

- **Tell your own story.** Students love hearing about *you*, especially what you went through when you were their age. Take a few minutes to dig deep in your memory to remember what you felt like when you walked onto your junior high campus, how you related to your parents and what you wanted from your friends. Be courageous and share your junior high pictures with them. When the giggling stops, your students will be more open to what you have to say because they'll know you can understand them.
- **Ask others to share their stories.** Who are the adults that students respect in your church or community? Invite them to come in and share how they felt in junior high, especially when it connects with the “big idea” of that week’s lesson. From senior pastors to parents to local TV celebrities, students love getting the inside scoop on their heroes.

The more students are connected to these stories, the more they will be inspired to live out their own stories with faith, courage, joy and excitement. In the end, we'll all realize that our true audience is really only an audience of One: Jesus Christ.

Laurie Polich
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SESSION I

MARY AND MARTHA: WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION

THE BIG IDEA

The everyday details of life can distract us from giving our undivided attention to God.

SESSION AIMS

In this session, you will guide students to (1) learn that Jesus places time with Him ahead of everything else; (2) understand the effects of spending time with Jesus; and (3) act by committing to spend time with Jesus this week.

THE BIGGEST VERSE

“Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 10:7-8,38-42; John 15:5; Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9

Note: Additional options and worksheets in 8¹/₂” x 11” format for this session are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_new_testament.zip.

STARTER

Option 1: Water Balloon Hot Potato. For this option, you need a five-minute timer and four or five balloons filled with water. (*Note:* It might be best if this activity were done outside! If that's not possible, lay down a large plastic tarp where the activity will take place.)

Greet students and ask for five volunteers to come up front and sit in a circle (in chairs or on the floor). Let them know that they are going to play a type of Hot Potato game with water balloons, so volunteers should be willing to get wet. Explain that you will ask the first contestant a question and he or she can only pass the water balloon when he or she answers the question. Once the question is answered, the water balloon is passed to the next contestant, who must give a new and different answer to the same question before he or she can pass the water balloon to the next person (no repeating answers). Whoever has the water balloon when the timer goes off is out and gets doused with the contents of the balloon!

Some question ideas include the following:

- What is an excuse teenagers give for not doing their homework?
- What things do people do to waste time?
- What things do you do with your friends?
- What is a dreaded chore around the house?

Set the timer for one minute (or for more unpredictable fun, set the timer at random *short* amounts of time) and begin the game. After you've eliminated all but one of the volunteers, stop the game and invite the volunteers to return to their seats. (*Option:* If time allows, ask for five new volunteers, but don't drag the game out too long or nonparticipating students will lose interest.)

Ask the group to identify things that can distract teens from spending time with God. Answers might include TV, video games, sports, music rehearsals, dance classes, movies, friends, homework, magazines, books, chores, sleep, and so forth.

Discuss why these things often come before God. (Answers might include because they're fun to do, they're distracting, they have deadlines, they're easier to do, and so on.) Then suggest that sometimes it's simply because spending time with God doesn't even come to mind.

Ask the group members if they ever feel that life just gets too busy to spend time with God because they simply have too much going on, or they're stressed out because of school, or they have too many extra activities, or their parents

seem impossible to please. Explain that we've all felt that way at some point in our lives. Today, you're going to look at how two lesser-known followers of Christ learned about the value of time and the best way to spend it.

Option 2: Timetable. For this option, you need a video recorder and screen to present the video, a few volunteers for voice-overs, copies of "Timetable" (found on the next page) and pens or pencils. (*Optional:* Get extra "actors" for the school scene.) Ahead of time, create a brief video as if the camera is you and the audience is looking through your eyes. The scenario should be something like this:

You (the camera) wake up to a buzzing alarm clock. You yawn and rub your eyes (the camera lens) while you mumble to yourself that you need to do your devotions. Just as you open your Bible to read, your mom calls out for you to feed the dog and eat your breakfast. Put the Bible down and stop filming.

Open a new scene by picking up your Bible again. Just as you begin to read this time, your dad yells at you for leaving the video game stuff out all over the living room and tells you to come clean it up. After doing that, you only have enough time to jump into the shower and run off to school. (You can show this part by filming your hands turning on the shower.) The next scene shows your Bible lying on your bed where you left it and the audience hears you telling your mom that you're leaving for school.

If you decide to tape some at-school scenes, take some volunteers to visit a local junior high campus (or "fake" it at a similar location, such as a park) and film them acting as students during a snack break, talking about how hard the history or math test was. The final shots should be after school: watching TV, doing homework, calling friends, practicing sports, playing video games, eating



Youth Leader Tip

Junior-highers get bored easily, especially with homemade videos, so make sure your clips are short and fast-paced. Add upbeat music in the background to keep your students engaged and awake!

dinner—anything that will take you to bedtime, when you notice your Bible still lying where you left it on your bed that morning and you suddenly realize that you didn't spend any time with God today. As you are drifting off to sleep, you promise yourself, "Tomorrow I won't get distracted and I'll spend time with God" and the video ends.

Greet students and let them know that they're going to watch a short video. After the video, distribute "Timetable" and pens or pencils. Ask students to make a list of the things that distract them from spending time with God. Next to each item, ask them to list the number of hours they spend per week on that activity; then circle the top five activities that use the most time.

Ask a few students to each share an item, and after each item is shared, ask the rest of the class to vote whether that is typically a good or bad use of time. Vote on a few items, and then ask the following:

- Are most of the things that we listed on the worksheets bad? (*No.*)
- When can something that is neutral—or even good—become bad? (*When it takes priority over relationships with other people and our time with God.*)

Continue by asking the group if they ever feel like their lives just get too busy to spend time with God—that they simply have too much going on in their lives. Do they ever feel stressed out because of school and all their extra activities? (You'll probably hear a resounding "yes!") Conclude by stating that today, you're going to look at how two lesser-known followers of Christ learned about the value of time and how to best use it.

MESSAGE

Option 1: Judge Rudy. For this option, you need several Bibles, eight copies of "Judge Rudy and the Case of Martha v. Mary" (found on the next page), two tables (one each for the plaintiff and the defendant), a podium or table for the judge, whatever props you can easily obtain (such as a gavel, a wig and a big black dress or robe for Judge Rudy), and a large character name card for each of the following cast members to hang around his or her neck: "Judge Rudy," "Jury" (three of these), "Bailiff," "Mary," "Martha" and "Jesus." (*Note: this skit can also be prepared in advance with adult staff and/or students or performed spontaneously by giving each participant a script to read from as the skit is performed. Either way, you should act the part of Judge Rudy.*)

Judge Rudy and the Case of Martha v. Mary

The Cast: Judge Rudy; Bailiff; Martha; Mary; three jurors

The Props: Black robe or dress; white wig; gavel; podium or table (for judge); seven chairs; two tables (plaintiff and defendant); seven character nametags made from posterboard with a string attached to hang around the characters' necks; a large Bible

The courtroom scene is set with two tables, one for the plaintiff and one for the defendant, and a podium (or another table) for the judge. Jurors are sitting in a row at the side. Each character is wearing a large name card around his or her neck. Everyone except the judge (who is offstage) is sitting down. Judge Rudy is wearing a wig and a big black robe or dress and carrying a gavel.

Bailiff: (*Stands up.*) All rise for the Honorable Judge Rudy.

Judge: (*Enters and takes the bench.*) Be seated. Let's see. What have we got on the docket today?

Bailiff: Martha v. Mary, your Honor.

Judge: What's the complaint?

Bailiff: Martha is suing for damages due to her sister's laziness and lack of help at a dinner party they hosted.

Judge: Martha, you may take the stand.

Bailiff: (*Holding large Bible.*) Raise your right hand and place your left hand on the Bible. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Martha: (*Raising her hand*) I do.

Judge: You may begin.

Martha: Well, Your Honor, the other night my sister and I decided to have a friend over for dinner. When He arrived, there were still plenty of things that needed to be finished. The salad wasn't made, I had a roast in the oven that needed to be basted every five minutes, the table wasn't set, and drinks needed to be served. But instead of helping me take care of all these things, she (*pointing at Mary*) went and sat with our guest and completely ignored my pleas for help. I finally couldn't take it anymore and practically had a nervous breakdown. I am still suffering with headaches every time I think about it (*whining as she takes hold of her aching head*).

Judge: Thank you, Martha, you may be seated. (*Martha returns to the plaintiff's table.*) Those are serious charges. Mary, please take the stand. (*Waits for Mary to take the witness stand.*)

Bailiff: (*Holding large Bible.*) Raise your right hand and place your left hand on the Bible. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mary: I do.

Judge: How do you plead?

Mary: Well, Your Honor, I suppose I'm (*pause*) . . . guilty.

Jury: (*Looking shocked, gasping and talking amongst themselves*) Oh my . . . what did she say? . . . can you believe it?

Judge: You are pleading guilty to these charges?

Mary: Well, yes . . . but I do have an explanation.

Judge: This had better be a good one!

Mary: Your Honor, our guest wasn't just any old guest; it was Jesus. The way I look at it is: How can you spend too much time with the Son of God? Isn't He really more important than whether we had salad or if the roast has been basted every five minutes? He is my Savior and my Lord, and He is my priority. Everything else is second to Him. My sister must understand that Jesus deserves our attention even if we think we are too busy.

Judge: Jesus was your dinner guest, huh? That guy sure gets a lot of free meals. (*Clears throat.*) Anyway, under the circumstances, I see why you did not worry about the details that concerned your sister. Case dismissed! (*Hits gavel.*)

Mary: Thank you, Your Honor.

Ahead of time, set up the courtroom: Place the judge's podium in front of the audience behind the plaintiff's and defendant's tables, the jury chairs off to one side and a chair for the witness next to the judge on the same side as the jury, facing the audience. Ask for seven volunteers to act out a skit. Distribute "Judge Rudy and the Case of Martha v. Mary" to each volunteer and assign characters by giving volunteers each a character name card. Instruct the enthusiastic actors to take their positions in the "courtroom" (Jesus is to sit with the audience) and begin the skit.

When the skit is finished and the spontaneous standing ovation subsides, distribute the Bibles and explain that courtroom observers typically don't find out the actual truth of what happened because the plaintiff and defendant each has his or her version of the story, and only certain information is allowable in the courtroom. Fortunately, we *do* have the facts about this particular situation today.

Explain that four different followers of Jesus wrote accounts of His life, ministry, death and resurrection. We call these accounts "the Gospels," and they are the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We often study one story at a time from these books, as we will do today, but it's important to remember that the stories we highlight from Jesus' life are small parts of His bigger story: the story of God's project to save the world.

Choose two volunteers to read every other verse from Luke 10:38-42, and then discuss the following:

- How are we similar to Martha? (*We often make less important things a priority over spending time with God.*)
- Was Martha doing a bad thing by focusing on preparing the meal and wanting Mary's help? Why or why not? (*She wasn't necessarily doing a bad thing, but her priorities were misplaced. We often think that other things need to get done before we can spend time with God.*)
- Why do you think Martha didn't understand Mary's choice? (*She lost perspective and became overwhelmed with details, losing track of what was truly important—spending time with Jesus. She might have felt a need to have everything perfect for Jesus and the other guests.*)
- What makes Mary's choice better? (*Because she chose to spend time with Jesus. All the other things that distract us or take our time will mean*

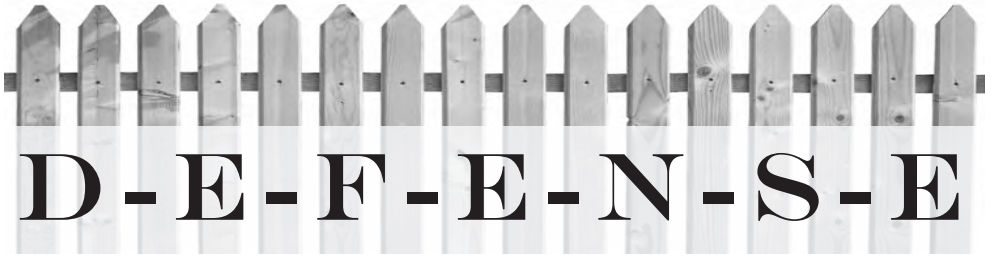
nothing in heaven. Getting to know Jesus better, on the other hand, will mean everything.)¹

- So does that mean Martha should not have worried about feeding her family and her guests? (*Jesus views domestic hospitality positively [see Luke 10:7-8] and Paul encouraged it [see Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9], so a better solution might have been to spend time with Him first and then prepare a simple meal without fussing about unimportant details or trying to impress someone.*)
- Why does it seem so hard to fit Jesus into our daily lives? (*We lose track of what's most important. If we step back and look at our lives in perspective, we will see and understand why Jesus must come first and that everything else is secondary.*)
- Jesus said only one thing is needed: Him. Do you think that's true? Why or why not? (*He is everything we need. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*)

Transition to the next option by inviting students to ask themselves, *Am I making excuses like Martha did, explaining away my lack of attention to Jesus, or am I giving Jesus the attention and priority He deserves in my life?*

Option 2: D-E-F-E-N-S-E. For this option, you will need several Bibles, copies of "D-E-F-E-N-S-E" (found on the next page), and pens or pencils. Divide students into groups of three or four and distribute "D-E-F-E-N-S-E" and pens or pencils to each group. Explain that four different followers of Jesus wrote accounts of His life, ministry, death and resurrection. We call these accounts "the Gospels," and they are the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We often study one story at a time from these books, as we will do today, but it's important to remember that the stories we highlight from Jesus' life are small parts of His bigger story: the story of God's project to save the world.

Ask each group to read Luke 10:38-42 and develop a defense for Martha by outlining excuses Martha might have had for her actions. When a group finishes Martha's defense, it can move on to complete part two of the handout, with students discussing and writing down reasons why they often don't make Jesus a priority in their own lives.



Reasons Martha didn't spend time with Jesus (see Luke 10:38-42)	Reasons we don't spend time with Jesus

Allow six to eight minutes of discussion, and then invite the groups to share their insights and discuss the following questions:

- How are we similar to Martha? (*We often make less important things a priority over spending time with God.*)
- Was Martha doing a bad thing in focusing on preparing the meal and wanting Mary's help? Why or why not? (*No, it is easy to understand that she would feel that way. We often think that other things need to get done before we can spend time with God.*)
- Why do you think Martha didn't understand Mary's choice? (*She lost perspective and became overwhelmed with details, losing track of what was truly important—spending time with Jesus.*)
- What makes Mary's choice better? (*She chose to spend time with Jesus. All the other things that distract us or take our time will mean nothing in heaven. Getting to know Jesus, on the other hand, will mean everything.*)
- So does that mean Martha should not have worried about feeding her family and her guests? (*Jesus views domestic hospitality positively [see Luke 10:7-8] and Paul encouraged it [see Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9], so a better solution would have been to spend time with Him first and then prepare a simple meal without fussing about unimportant details or trying to impress someone.*)
- Why does it seem so hard to fit Jesus into our own lives? (*We lose track of what's most important. If we step back and look at our lives in perspective, we will see and understand why Jesus must come first and that everything else is secondary.*)
- Do you think what Jesus said was true: only one thing is needed? Why or why not? (*He is everything we need. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*)

Transition to the next option by inviting students to ask themselves, *Am I making excuses like Martha did, explaining away my lack of attention to Jesus, or am I giving Jesus the attention and priority He deserves in my life?*

DIG

Option 1: A Question of Priorities. For this option, you need a willingness to wrestle with students to find the truth. Discuss the following questions:

- If Jesus knows everything about me already, why should I talk with Him? *(Have you ever gone to an amusement park and ridden on all the roller coasters and then enjoyed recalling with your friends the fun you had long after that day was over? Jesus is there for you, waiting to listen as you recall your day—both the high and low points.)*
- How do I explain how Jesus affects me to someone who doesn't believe in God? *(Let people see that Jesus affects you. If you claim to be a Christian, but there isn't any difference between you and your non-Christian friends, then they probably aren't going to see Jesus affecting you. If, however, you are spending time with God and praying that He will give you strength to do what is right, people are going to see a difference. It is equally important that you are real about your struggles, by admitting that it's hard for you not to cheat, gossip or tease. When you do mess up—and we all do—apologize and explain that it is your true desire to not act that way. We are to seek God's strength and the Holy Spirit's power to do what is right and to hold on to His grace when we blow it.)*
- If spending time with God is so good for me, why doesn't He make it easier? *(God has given us free will to choose what we do. If He made it easy for us, we wouldn't be choosing to spend time with Him. Just as we appreciate it when people we care about make a special effort to spend time with us, God wants us to consciously choose to spend time with Him.)*
- Does that mean I should spend all my time with God and never do anything else? *(God is always with you, wherever you are. Since you can talk to Him at any time, you can spend time with Him in science class, while*



Youth Leader Tip

It is important for students to share their ideas. It is equally important to watch your reactions to off-the-wall answers. A simple nod or "okay" can allow you to pass by these moments and stay focused.

you're riding your bike or while you're snacking after school. After all, He wants us to spend time with other people and develop the gifts and talents He has given us, but He also wants us to acknowledge that He is with us all the time and that we can talk with Him whenever we want.)

Option 2: Skating for Jesus. For this option, you need several Bibles, a whiteboard and a dry-erase marker. Begin by reading the following story:

Jason woke up really early one morning—as a matter of fact, he had had a hard time sleeping the night before. Maybe it was the fact that he was at camp in a not-so-comfy bunk or maybe it was that he couldn't stop thinking about what the speaker had asked the campers: "Does your life really count? Or is it meaningless and empty?"

Jason had to think about that one. As he looked at his life, he saw a lot of cool stuff. He was captain of the football team and was dating the most popular eighth-grade girl, even though he was only in seventh grade. He was a part of his church youth group and went on all the trips. He did pretty well in school and most of the teachers liked him.

The two things he enjoyed the most, though, were skateboarding and playing the drums. If there was ever any free time after those two activities, it usually went to TV or video games. He thought life was good; at least he was having fun. *What did that guy mean, "Does my life count?" I've always thought it counted, but what if I'm wrong?*

Jason spent the whole day pondering the question and began to wonder whether all the things in his life really satisfied him. Finally, he decided to go talk to the speaker. As they talked, the speaker asked Jason if he had a relationship with Jesus. Jason answered, "Oh yes, I've basically grown up in the church."

The speaker said, "That's not what I mean. Do you know Jesus yourself? Do you spend any time with Him? Do you literally have a relationship with Him like you do with a friend?"

Jason hesitated and then replied, "Well, I'm not sure. I thought I did, but it's more that I go to church and stuff."

"You see, Jason," said the speaker, "all of those things you do are fine. But if you don't have a relationship with Jesus and put Him *first* in your life, all those other things are simply time fillers until you die. If you make Jesus your first priority, not only will you find a purpose, but He will have an impact on everything that you do."

“What do you mean?” asked Jason.

“Well, you said you like skateboarding, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Imagine if you spent every morning with Jesus for 10 or 15 minutes, learning about Him and praying; He would begin to affect you. Next thing you know you aren’t just skateboarding for fun, but you have a purpose.”

“Really? What is it?” Jason asked.

“That’s what you have to find out. It might be that God wants you to reach out to the other skaters who don’t know Jesus. Or it might be that He wants to use you as an example for other students. Maybe it’s just that He wants you to skate for Him instead of yourself. Whatever it is, it has an eternal purpose, not just filling time.”

Now discuss the following questions with the group:

- If you are a skater who makes Jesus your first priority, how might that impact your skateboarding or the people you skate with?
- If you have a big homework assignment and you make Jesus your first priority, how might that affect your homework and your grades?
- If you’re an athlete and Jesus is number one in your life, how will your relationship with Him affect the way you prepare, play and interact with other players?

Divide students into groups of three or four and instruct them to pick one activity per group to discuss how making Jesus number one might impact that activity. Allow three or four minutes, and then ask the groups to share their responses, highlighting their answers on the whiteboard.

APPLY

Option 1: Ripple Effect. You will need a copy of “Prayer Journal” (found on the next page) for each student, pens or pencils, a sample entry from a real prayer journal, a bowl filled with water and a pebble or marble. Instruct students to gather around and watch as you drop the pebble into the middle of the bowl filled with water. Point out the ripple that moves from the middle to the outside of the bowl, and then explain that you are going to create the same effect using a volunteer as a pebble and the rest of the group as the water.

Position students in a circle and ask for a volunteer to stand in the middle. The volunteer leans toward one side of the circle, and the students on that side use their arms to start a ripple like the wave at a sports game with the ripple continuing around the circle. Have students do this a couple of times, and then ask the “pebble” what it is like to see the effect of his or her “splash.” Explain that prayer is like the pebble that creates a ripple effect: Things happen as a result of prayer. In our daily prayer lives, it’s important to look for the ripple.

Read the journal entry and share how the prayer was answered. Explain that we often pray for something but never actually pay attention to the answer. When we keep a prayer journal, however, we can go back and look at what we prayed for and see how it was answered. We need to look for the ripple and see how God is answering our prayers. Distribute “Prayer Journal” and pens or pencils and challenge students to keep a prayer journal by spending a few minutes each day praying for the needs of friends, family, missionaries or non-Christians. Allow students five minutes to write their first journal entries as a group. (*Note: You might want to keep extra copies of “Prayer Journal” on hand at future meetings and invite students to take one as needed.*)

Option 2: Let Your Light Shine. For this option, you need a candle and a match. If your meeting room cannot be made fairly dark, make arrangements ahead of time to use a room that can be darkened.

Assemble students in the room, and then turn out the lights. Light the candle and set it in a safe place. Tell students to raise their hands when they are able to see your face as their eyes adjust to the light. After a few moments, everyone should have his or her hand raised.

Explain to the group that it doesn’t take much light to see you in the dark room—just a small bit of light can make all the difference. Likewise, the world is a dark place where people can’t see the true light. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says that His followers are the light of the world and that we are supposed to let our lights shine in a way that allows others to see God. This means we need to be committed to a personal time of Bible study, prayer and listening to God. We specifically need to be praying for the lost and those who can’t see God yet.

Ask the group to pick out one person today whom they know personally and who is not a Christian. Tell them to pray over that person for the next month. This is not a *light* challenge! Give students 30 seconds to pray on their own for that person, then close the time in prayer, asking that God would help us be like Mary and spend time with Him and that He would use us as lights to those around us.

REFLECT

The following short devotions are for the students to reflect on and answer during the week. You can make a copy of these pages and distribute to your class or download and print from www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_new_testament.zip.

1—UP, UP AND AWAY!

Jam over to James 5:16-18 and get in on the super power.

Imagine you're designing a superhero named "Prayer Warrior." You can choose two of the following for his superhero uniform (check two):

- Kneepads, so he can pray for hours on end
- Scotch tape, so he can tape open his eyes when he gets sleepy
- Nose plugs, so the smell of food won't distract him
- Gloves, so he won't get his prayer journal dirty
- Soft-soled shoes, so he can prayer-walk at night without waking anyone
- Mind-reading glasses, so he can look inside people to find out what they really need prayer for

Well, surprise! Each of us has the chance to be Prayer Warrior. In James 5:16-18, we learn that we can pray for each other for healing and that the prayer of a righteous person (junior-highers included!) can accomplish much. You don't need a superhero uniform; you just need a relationship with God.

Spend a few extra minutes praying for your friends today—especially friends who don't know Christ yet. Be their superhero warrior of prayer!

2—IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN

Before you check your watch, find Hosea 10:12.

Dawn's small-group leader, Carol, had a really cool watch. It was gold and silver and had this really cool black band. Dawn had been admiring it for months when she noticed something strange on it: Carol had put a little green dot sticker on the band. At first, Dawn thought she had put it there on accident, but when she saw Carol the next week at Bible study, she was still wearing it.

Dawn liked the watch so much that she decided to ask Carol, “Why’d you have to ruin the watch by putting the green dot sticker on it?”

The youth leader replied, “Every time I look at the watch and see the sticker, it reminds me to pray and ask God for help in whatever I’m doing.”

Suddenly, Dawn began to like that green dot sticker.

Maybe Carol read Hosea 10:12 and found out that no matter what time it is, we can always stop for a moment and pray.

Make a mark on your hand or put a rubber band on your wrist or do something to remind you to stop and spend a few seconds talking with God every time you see it.

3—NOW IS GOOD

If you’re wondering when a good time to pray is, check out 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

When do you think is the best time to pray?

- During your church’s service
- While trying to ignore a really boring TV commercial
- Walking to school
- While your mom or dad lectures you about your history grade

The truth is that *anytime* is the best time to pray. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 that we are to “pray continually.” Maybe you’re wondering if that means we should pray in our sleep. Well, that’s pretty tricky, so a better idea is to pray as often as we can and look for reminders of God around us.

What is one way you can be reminded of God today? Pray and ask God to help you think about Him today more than you usually do.

4—MAKING INTRODUCTIONS

Skip and hop your way to Acts 2:42-44.

Keith couldn’t believe his luck. Just as he is walking into a movie theater with his friends, he literally bumps into Josh, the lead singer of Keith’s favorite local band. The group is really popular and plays at all the best Christian parties and local concerts.

Keith introduces himself, and since Josh can tell that Keith is his number-one fan (Keith's forgetting his own name was a clue!), he spends a few minutes talking with him. As Keith turns to go, Josh asks if he wants to grab some ice cream after their movies are over.

Keith ditches his friends after the movie and races to meet Josh. As they enjoy their banana splits, Josh asks Keith why his friends hadn't come with him; they looked like pretty cool people and Josh would have liked to meet them. Keith mumbles something about wanting to spend time with Josh alone and quickly changes the subject.

Being a real friend means that when we meet someone cool, we invite our friends to come along to spend time with the new person. That's what the Early Church members did in Acts 2:42-44; they were constantly introducing others to Jesus through prayer.

Is there someone you can spend time with while you spend time with Jesus today? Maybe you have a friend you can pray with at lunch, thanking God for your food and the day He has given you. Pray and ask God to show you how to pray with someone else today.