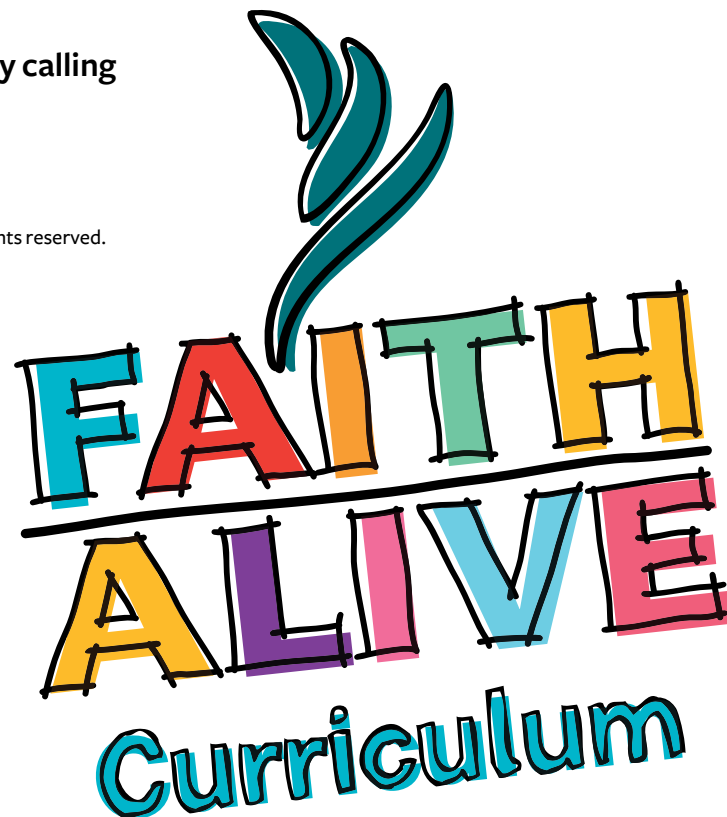


Sample

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EXPLORE

TOUGH CHOICES

What Else You'll Need:
Student Handouts ▾



Any questions or comments about this unit?
We'd love to hear from you:

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Walk With Me

Grades 6-8

Year 1, Unit 1: Tough Choices

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Contents

Getting Started	4
Session 1 Decisions, Decisions!	8
Session 2 The Love Bug	16
Session 3 Learning to Say No	24
Session 4 A Fresh Start	32
Reproducible Pages	39

Ways to Get Others Involved

Many adults in your church who are not able to teach would love to use their gifts in other ways in your sessions. For this unit, consider asking other members of your congregation to do some of the following:

- Be your supply person throughout the year. Although you certainly can do this on your own, it's time-consuming, and someone else may value this opportunity to contribute to your church's educational ministry. You'll need to go through the four sessions of each unit ahead of time and let the supply person know which steps, options, and overtime options you plan to use. (See session planners on pp. 8, 16, 24, and 32.)
- Answer student letters seeking advice (see session 1, Overtime).
- Help the group with a service project (see session 2, Overtime). A deacon from your church would be a natural in this role.
- Play the role of "David" and answer student questions (see session 4, step 3).
- Assist you with art or drama activities. Maybe there's an artist in your congregation who would love to come in and help with a poster-making activity or some other art form. A member of your church's drama team would probably be delighted to participate in a session in which the kids make up and present a skit or role plays.



Getting Started

Welcome to *Walk With Me*—a church school curriculum for preschool through grade 8. The sessions in this unit are designed with you and your students in mind. Sessions are

- biblical and Reformed
- kid-friendly
- easy-to-use

They will help you and your students to

- grow faith
- build community
- celebrate diversity
- have fun!

Biblical and Reformed describes the lens through which these sessions focus on both Scripture and life. This curriculum takes the Bible's teachings seriously and helps make the Reformed faith come alive. You'll find recurring themes in *Walk With Me* units that are rooted in the Bible and lived out in our everyday experiences as children of God.

Kid-friendly means these sessions are developed specifically for the age level you are teaching. It also means the sessions include activities that will appeal to the many different ways the kids in your group learn—through words, music, art, drama, and nature, and through personal reflection and interaction with others. (See p. 5 for a more detailed explanation of these different learning styles.)

Easy-to-use means we've thought about how important your time as a leader is and that we've tried to make these session plans easy to follow and easy to teach. The detailed description of the sessions on pages 6-7 will make it clear that leading *Walk With Me* sessions can be as easy as 1, 2, 3.

When we say *Walk With Me* **grows faith**, we mean these sessions aim to do a lot more than fill kids' heads with knowledge. They're designed to touch the hearts of both leaders and students and encourage them to live out their faith.

Our emphasis on **building community** means that we encourage you and your middle schoolers to become a small group together—to care for each other, to hold each other accountable for learning and growing, to encourage one another, and to have fun together. In your group everyone should feel accepted, loved, and safe.

Walk With Me sessions **celebrate the diversity** of God's family and encourage all learners to do the same. Because our writers and consultants come from a variety of races and cultures, your students are challenged to see truths and hear stories in ways that may be new to them—and through their learning to grow in a love and appreciation for all parts of God's family.

Have fun! We believe middle schoolers learn best when your sessions together are fun and active. *Walk With Me* sessions include lots of games, drama, music, and other fun activities that will keep the kids you teach eager to come back for more.

We hope these values of the *Walk With Me* curriculum will take root in your teaching and help you lead and develop a group of kids who walk with the Lord.

Walk With Me Resources on the Web

Check out our website, www.WalkWithMeOnline.org, for a variety of resources, including the following:

- philosophy and goals of the curriculum
- scope and sequence of the curriculum
- sample session plans
- a helpful list of age-level characteristics of the kids you teach
- tips for working with children who have learning disabilities, attention disorders, mental impairments, and physical disabilities
- samples of the many different types of student resources *Walk With Me* offers

Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn

How do children learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the children in your group. Some learn best through words. Others through music. Still others through nature or through movement.

Sessions in the *Walk With Me* curriculum try to respect the many ways children learn. *Walk With Me* sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to children with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how children in your group learn best. Children who are



Word Smart

learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.



Number Smart

learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logical puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.



Picture Smart

learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.



Body Smart

learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving—anything hands-on.



Music Smart

learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.



People Smart

learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role-playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.



Self Smart

learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.



Earth Smart

learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on these pages are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.

A Look at the Session Plan

Walk With Me curriculum supplies leaders with a step-by-step guide for each session. These two pages will help you know what to look for and how to use a typical *Walk With Me* session:

- 1 The Bible passages your lesson will focus on are clearly listed on the first page of each session. You'll want to allow time for reading the passages as you prepare to teach.
- 2 Each unit includes a Memory Challenge—a Scripture passage that everyone may learn over the four-session period. Although we believe memory work is an important tool for helping young believers keep God's words in their hearts, we recognize that not all teachers will have time to include memory work in their sessions. So suggestions for helping children learn these passages are usually optional.
- 3 Here you'll find the key teaching or theme of the session.
- 4 This planner outlines the session for you, noting both main steps and options. By checking the boxes before the steps you plan to use, you can create a session plan that fits the needs of your group.
- 5 This section is for you, the leader. It's meant to help you

- understand the background of the Scripture you're teaching (Think About It).
- look for new ways to grow spiritually (Pray About It).
- think about ways that this Scripture connects with the lives of the young persons you're teaching (Tell About It).

Other Walk With Me Leader Resources

Reproducible Pages
Sometimes you'll need patterns, activities, or worksheets to enhance your session. You'll find these at the back of each leader's guide.

1

Scripture

1 Kings 2:3-12; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 31:31; 12:15; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Memory Challenge

Colossians 1:23-24

Focus

When faced with a difficult decision, we can be guided by God's Word, by prayer, and by the advice of other Christians.

WORDSEARCH

Think About It
Decisions, decisions! We're constantly facing

Session Planner

Recognize that life is full of decisions we need to make.

- Yours Choice? 3-7 minutes
- Identify situations in our lives that call for tough decisions. 15-25 minutes
- Create a Scenario Recognize that God provides help when we need to make tough decisions (and even some not-so-tough ones). 20-25 minutes
- God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions 20-25 minutes
- Options: Magician Apply guidelines to a decision we're facing or might soon face. 20 minutes
- Trying It Out 20 minutes
- Options: Scripture Reinforced 20 minutes

OverTime

- Memory Challenge and Prayer 5 minutes
- The Rusty Robot 20 minutes
- Free Advice! 20-25 minutes

Pray About It
Oh, you've made a decision to teach this class. Maybe that was a big decision for you. Maybe not, but one thing is sure—you'll need a lot of wisdom to teach your students about making decisions. Look again at Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 3:9-12). Then kneel and ask for whatever wisdom and insight you'll need to teach this unit on making tough choices.

Think About It
Most of the decisions we make don't take much thought, but others are so difficult that they keep us awake at night. Tough choices are an unavoidable part of life.

When we face tough choices, how do we know we're making the right decision—especially when we can't always foresee the consequences? How do we know if our decisions will lead to a dead end, a frightful adventure, or blessed rest?

Whether we know the consequences or not, our main concern must be to obey God. We entrust our futures to God, who knows our deepest needs. If we do what's right, God will bless us—now or later. But how do we figure out what God wants us to do? How do we recognize the right choice? There are three practices that can guide us.

Be guided by the Bible. In

apostle Paul explain breath and is using, correcting and men." This doesn't a proof test that was seen to every people. Bibles, we enter into with God about our to reflect widely on for life. It makes us. Christ and his king rely on God's power

8

12 Scenarios Revisited

Time
20 minutes

Materials
Student Handbook 3: "Checklist for Making Tough Decisions"

Instead of using the notecard activity in step 4, you can encourage them to create—and bind—in step 3. Distribute "Tough Decisions."

For more mature kids who know the Bible fairly well, each group to discuss the scenario using the question handout. Ask the groups to decide what the person in the story has each group give its response to the entire story.

For younger kids who may not be as familiar with the Bible, helping the kids apply biblical standards to the story. Close by inviting your middle schoolers to think about how they might use, invite brief sharing, then lead in

14

14 + OVERTIME

The Rusty Robot

Time
20 minutes

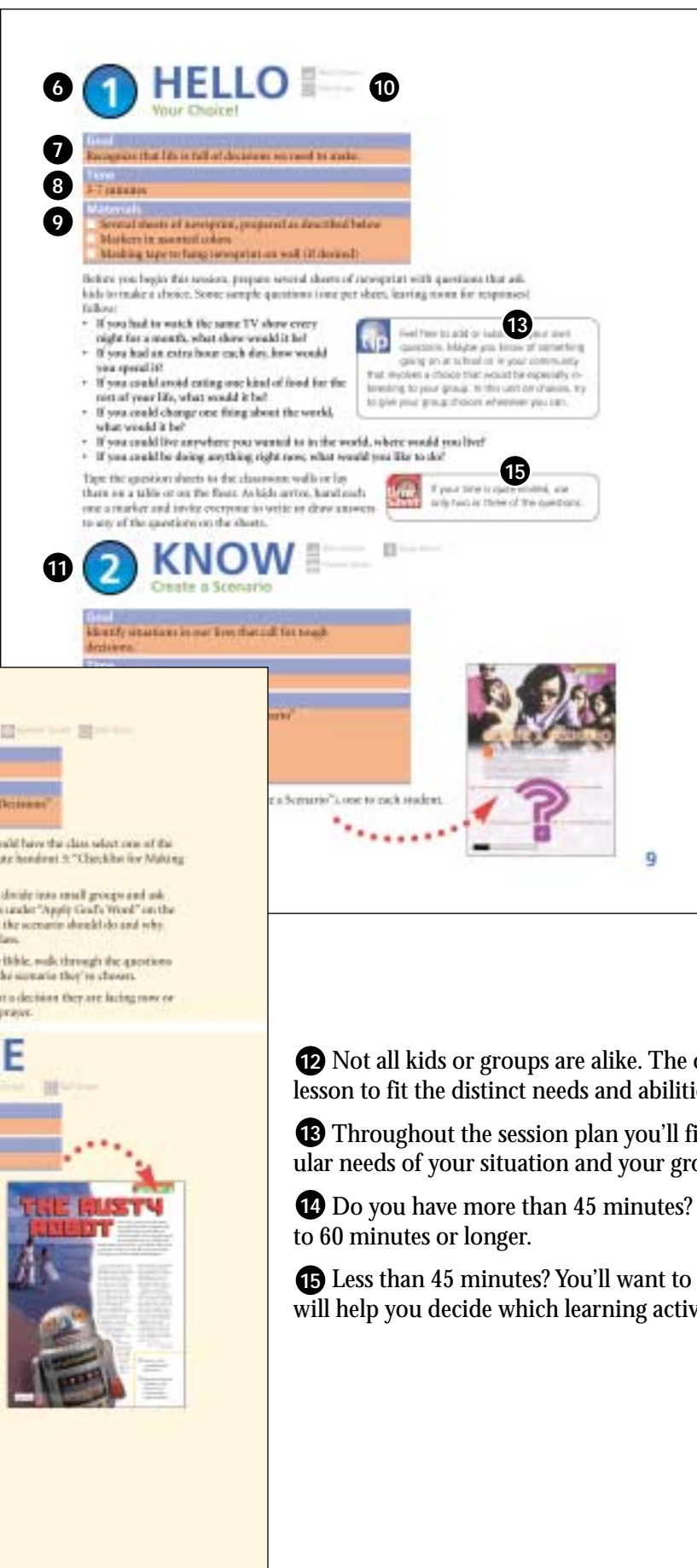
Materials
Student Handbook 4: "The Rusty Robot"

You can add this short parable to your session plan during step 2 or 4 to help your group understand the guiding rule that God's Word—and especially God's law—plays in decision making. Read the story to the group and discuss the two questions that follow the story:

- How are God's commandments good for us?
- What does this story remind us to do—and not to do—when we make tough decisions?

Emphasize that our choices need to be made within the bounds of God's Word and God's law—not just because "God says so" but because God knows that we hurt ourselves and others when we violate God's rules for living. So when we talk about making decisions, we always need to ask what God's Word has to say about the choices we're facing.

6



6 Each session is divided into four steps. The Hello step gives you suggestions for fun, interactive things to do as your students arrive, activities that will hook their attention and make them want to learn more.

7 Each step includes a goal that helps you focus your teaching on what the children should learn and do.

8 Each step or option includes an estimate of how much time it will take.

9 You'll find a list of materials needed for each step and each optional activity in the session.

10 These symbols will tell you which kinds of learners will benefit most from an activity (see descriptions on p. 5).

11 The Know, Grow, and Show steps will help you plan your session and measure whether you've succeeded in leading and teaching your students successfully.

- The *Know* step usually involves presenting the story or Scripture to the children.
- The *Grow* step usually includes activities that help learners recognize what the Bible story or passage means for their own faith and life.
- Learning involves more than listening and understanding. We want to encourage everyone to respond in tangible ways to what they've learned. The *Show* step includes activities that provide ways for children to act and serve.

12 Not all kids or groups are alike. The options in these sessions help you customize your lesson to fit the distinct needs and abilities of the young persons you teach.

13 Throughout the session plan you'll find tips that will make it easier to meet the particular needs of your situation and your group.

14 Do you have more than 45 minutes? Overtime ideas will help you expand your session to 60 minutes or longer.

15 Less than 45 minutes? You'll want to look for the clock symbols in most sessions that will help you decide which learning activities you can cut or shorten.

1

Decisions, Decisions!

Scripture

1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 2:1-5; 12:15; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Memory Challenge

Colossians 3:23-24

Focus

When faced with a difficult decision, we can be guided by God's Word, by prayer, and by the advice of other Christians.

WORDSearch

Think About It

Decisions, decisions!

We're constantly facing new ones. Most of the decisions we make don't take much thought. But others are so difficult that they keep us awake at night. Tough choices are an unavoidable part of life.

When we face tough choices, how do we know we're making the right decisions—especially when we can't always foresee the consequences? How do we know if our decisions will lead to a dead end, a frightful adventure, or blessed rest?

Whether we know the consequences or not, our main concern must be to obey God. We entrust our futures to God, who knows our deepest needs. If we do what's right, God will bless us—sooner or later. But how do we figure out what God wants us to do? How do we recognize the right choices? Here are three practices that can guide us.

We consult the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the apostle Paul explains, "All Scripture is God-

breathed and is useful for

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." This doesn't mean we can dig out a proof text that magically delivers us an answer to every problem. When we open our Bibles, we enter into a long conversation with God about our lives. The Bible calls us to reflect widely on the God-created norms for life. It makes us examine our motivations. It transforms us with a vision of Christ and his kingdom. It encourages us to rely on God's promises. Gaining

Session Planner

Hello *Recognize that life is full of decisions we need to make.*

☐ Your Choice! 5-7 minutes

Know *Identify situations in our lives that call for tough decisions.*

☐ Create a Scenario 10-15 minutes

Grow *Recognize that God provides help when we need to make tough decisions (and even some not-so-tough ones).*

☐ God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions 20-25 minutes

☐ Option: Slogans 10-15 minutes

Show *Apply guidelines to a decision we're facing or might soon face.*

☐ Trying It Out 10 minutes

☐ Option: Scenarios Revisited 20 minutes

Overtime

☐ The Rusty Robot 10 minutes

☐ Free Advice! 10-15 minutes

Pray About It

OK, you've made a decision to teach this class. Maybe that was a big decision for you. Maybe not. But one thing is sure—you'll need a lot of wisdom to teach your students about making decisions. Look again at Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 3:6-9). Then humble yourself before God in prayer and ask for whatever wisdom and insight you'll need to teach this unit on making tough choices.

Tell About It

Emphasize that none of these three disciplines are last-minute fixes. Without regular Bible reading your students won't have a clue about where to begin looking when a difficult choice breathes down their necks. And if they're not in the habit of talking with God and consulting with other wise people, it won't even dawn on them to do those things when the going gets tough. The time to start preparing for life's really big decisions is *now*.

biblical wisdom to make wise choices involves a lifelong discipline of reading, studying, and reflecting on Scripture.

We pray. We often fool ourselves by rationalizing and making pious excuses. We often avoid listening to what we don't want to hear. Only God can open our eyes and give us true spiritual discernment. Listen again to Paul: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6). In prayer we dialogue with God, inviting God to direct us and, if necessary, to change us. When King Solomon prayed for wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong, God was pleased with his request and gave him great wisdom (1 Kings 3:7-12).

We seek advice. Wise people have experience; they've "been there, done that." They speak in ways that build people up and help them find sensible solutions. In the Bible, wise people are also godly people; they walk faithfully in God's ways (Ps. 119:105). Wise people look for guidance from other wise people, and they heed godly advice (Prov. 12:15).

Life is complicated. But if we faithfully practice these basic disciplines, they'll help us on our journey. The road signs to God's blessed kingdom will more readily pop into view.



Goal

Recognize that life is full of decisions we need to make.

Time

5-7 minutes

Materials

- Several sheets of newsprint, prepared as described below
- Markers in assorted colors
- Masking tape to hang newsprint on wall (if desired)

Before you begin this session, prepare several sheets of newsprint with questions that ask kids to make a choice. Some sample questions (one per sheet, leaving room for responses) follow:

- If you had to watch the same TV show every night for a month, what show would it be?
- If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?
- If you could avoid eating one kind of food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?
- If you could live anywhere you wanted to in the world, where would you live?
- If you could be doing anything right now, what would you like to do?



Feel free to add or substitute your own questions. Maybe you know of something going on at school or in your community that involves a choice that would be especially interesting to your group. In this unit on choices, try to give your group choices whenever you can.

Tape the question sheets to the classroom walls or lay them on a table or on the floor. As kids arrive, hand each one a marker and invite everyone to write or draw answers to any of the questions on the sheets.

After three or four minutes, ask everyone to stop. Then have some fun together sampling the responses. Point out that you've been talking about choices—for example, about favorite TV shows, foods, things to do, and so on. As you make this point, you could say something like this: **You'll probably never have to make the silly choices these questions ask about, but you *will* be making many, many other**



If your time is quite limited, use only two or three of the questions.

choices throughout your life. So let's think about that a minute. What are some of the ordinary choices you've made so far today or in the past twenty-four hours?

Let the group rattle off a bunch of responses—what they ate for breakfast, what TV shows or videos they watched last night, what they decided to wear, and so on. Then wrap up this exercise by saying something like this:

During our next four meetings we're going to be talking about making choices. Some choices are made quickly and easily, but others make us scratch our heads and wonder what God wants us to do. For example, let's say your best friend shows you some cool stuff that he's shoplifted from a local store. You're bothered by this, so you mention it to your parents. "You have to tell your friend's parents," they say. But if you tell, you'll lose a friend. And if you don't tell, you'll be disobeying your parents. So what do you do? We'll be learning together about how to make good choices that honor God in situations like that—and many more.

Open with prayer, asking God to help everyone learn a lot about decisions and tough choices during the next four sessions—and enjoy being together.



KNOW

Create a Scenario

> Word Smart

Body Smart

People Smart

Goal

Identify situations in our lives that call for tough decisions.

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

- Student handout 1: "Create a Scenario"
- Bibles
- Pens or pencils
- Newsprint
- Markers

Distribute student handout 1 ("Create a Scenario"), one to each student.

Read aloud the directions on the handout.

Then form groups of two, three, or four, depending on the number of kids you're working with. It's best to have at least two or three small groups. Tell the groups they have about five minutes to fill in the details of their scenario.



Working in small groups is an important way to *build community*—one of the goals of the *Walk With Me* curriculum. When doing group work, you may want to choose the groups yourself to maintain a balance of talkers and non-talkers. If possible, let groups go to an area where they will not be distracted by the others—in the hall, in the corner of a stairwell, in an empty room nearby.

When the time's up, have each small group present their scenario to the others, either by describing it or acting it out.

Don't be concerned if some of the kids' scenarios are more ordinary and less tough than others. The intent here is to get kids talking about the decisions they see as difficult and challenging.



Summarize by commenting along these lines:

At some points in our lives we have to make tough choices. We might be confused and uncertain about what to do. So in this next activity we're going to look at some guidelines from the Bible that will help us make wise decisions.

3 GROW

God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions

> Word Smart
> Number Smart
People Smart
Picture Smart

Goal

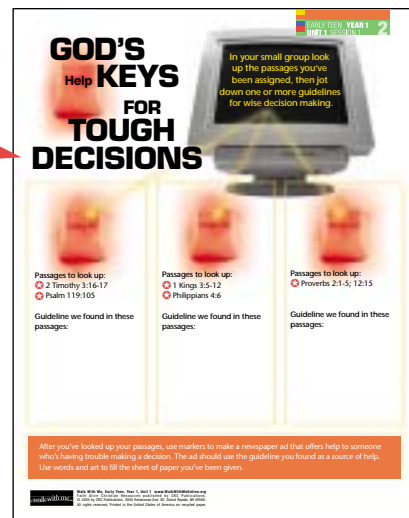
Recognize that God provides help when we need to make tough decisions (and even some not-so-tough ones).

Time

20-25 minutes

Materials

- Student handout 2: "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions"
- Bibles
- Pens or pencils
- Newsprint (or poster paper)
- Markers in assorted colors



With everyone remaining in their small groups, explain that each group will next look up a couple of Scripture passages to find a guideline for wise decision making. Then they'll make a newspaper ad that aims to "sell" their guideline to someone who's puzzled about making a decision.

First have the groups use handout 2, "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions," to discover biblical guidelines for wise decision making. Assign one set of passages to each group. (It doesn't matter if more than one group gets the same set of passages.)

When the small groups are finished reading and writing, give them newsprint (or poster paper) and markers in assorted colors, and ask them to make a newspaper ad. Be sure they understand the assignment, as described on the handout. If they're having trouble getting started, you could explain that ads often use a headline or an illustration to grab people's attention. For example, a headline might read, "In the dark about a decision?" and it could picture a person groping around in a dark, scary place. Then the ad could go on to say, "God's Word can shed light on your problem."

Let the groups quickly read or summarize their passages and present their ads. After each group's presentation, talk about the guideline they came up with.

Help Key #1

The guideline here is to find help in God's Word. Ask, **How can reading God's Word help us make wise decisions?** Clarify that using the Bible in decision making doesn't mean searching for a single verse that gives us the answer (though we may be helped in general ways, as with the wisdom in Proverbs or the advice of Jesus or Paul). Instead it means we need to read the Bible faithfully so that we know how God wants us to live. A good question to ask when we have to make a tough decision is whether any of our choices goes against God's commands or other teachings. A choice that would require us to hurt someone, for example, is not in line with what we know God teaches in the Bible.



Try not to let the small groups rush through the Bible passages. Be sure to mention that someone in each group should read the passages aloud and that each person should write down a key idea or guideline from the passages.



You may want to let the small groups choose between inventing a TV ad or a newspaper ad. A TV ad may appeal to groups that prefer acting things out to writing and drawing.



Help Key #2

The guideline here is to find help in prayer. Ask, **How can praying help us make wise decisions?** Affirm that God wants us to ask for help when we face tough decisions. Remind everyone about how pleased God was when Solomon—who didn't know how he could handle the job of being a real king—asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:6-10). God hears our prayers for help. God's answers are sometimes surprising, sometimes disappointing, sometimes a long time in coming. But, as the saying goes, "God answers knee-mail." Prayer, talking with God, is our greatest help in tough times—and in all other times as well.

Help Key #3

The guideline here is to find help by seeking the advice of others. Ask, **Who are some people we could go to for help?** Talk about how helpful parents, grandparents, teachers, and pastors can be. Wise people listen to the advice of others whom they trust, especially those who are wise in God's ways (Prov. 12:15).

Summarize by saying something like this: **When we read God's Word and try to live the way God wants us to, when we pray about our decisions, and when we talk to other Christians, we are using a biblical decision-making process. And guess what? It really helps!**

Option to
step 3

tion option option o

Slogans

> Word Smart

People Smart

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 2: "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions"
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils



If you have a short class session, you may want to use this option to step 3.

Once each of the small groups has found their guideline using handout 2, have them invent a slogan for it (for example, "When in doubt—pray!") and share it with the class (instead of creating a complete ad, as in the main step). Then use the questions from the "Help Key" items in step 3 to talk about each guideline.



SHOW

Trying It Out

v Number Smart

People Smart

J Self Smart

Goal

Apply guidelines to a decision we're facing or might soon face.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 3: "Checklist for Making Tough Decisions"
- ☐ Notecards—one for each person
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Memory Challenge (reproducible page 45), optional

Give each person a notecard. Explain that you'd like each person to think about a decision he or she is facing or might soon face. On the notecard each person should complete one of two sentence starters (after copying these on one side of the card and choosing one to complete on the other side):

- **This week I will need to decide if I should . . .**
- **I'm not facing any tough decisions right now, but one thing I might have to make a tough decision about is . . .**

Explain to your students that if they choose to complete the first sentence, the decision they describe doesn't have to be something super-big that will affect them the rest of their lives. Maybe they have to decide how to deal with a situation at home or at school or to settle an issue with a friend. Maybe they need to decide how to fix a situation or relationship they've messed up. It should be a decision to which they can apply the guidelines of finding help in God's Word, in prayer, and in advice from others.

If the kids can't think of a decision they need to make in the coming week, they should choose to complete the second statement.

Allow a couple of minutes for everyone to finish. Then distribute handout 3, "Checklist for Making Tough Decisions," introducing it with a few statements like these:

This page can help you through the decision-making process. You can use it this week if you're facing a decision right now. Or you can save it and use it to help you make a tough decision some other time.

If there's enough time, you may want to walk through the handout quickly with the group.

Close your session with prayer, noting that it's one of the guidelines God gives us for decision making. If you like, use one of the following approaches, or try an idea of your own.

- Invite each person to find a partner (one group of three is OK), and together they can share what they wrote on their notecards, if they wish. Partners can then pray silently or aloud for each other, asking God to lead them in making a decision or simply to be with them as they face tough decisions in their lives. Encourage the partners to continue to pray for each other throughout the coming week.
- Ask for volunteers from the entire class to share what they wrote on their cards. Then lead the group in prayer, asking for God's help in the situations that were mentioned and in all other decision making that the group members may face.
- Have group members hold up their notecards in their palms (turned upward as in an offering to God). Then invite everyone to repeat this prayer after you (one statement at a time):

Dear God, these are the decisions that we face this week or later in the future.
We commit these decisions to you, Lord.
Give us wisdom to know what choices to make.
Bless all our decisions, Lord.
May they be pleasing to you and good for others and for us.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Have your middle schoolers take the handouts home with them. If you're going to be assigning memory work, give each person a copy of the Memory Challenge (Col. 3:23-24) as well (see reproducible page 45 at the back of this leader's guide). Also hand out "The Rusty Robot" (student handout 4) and encourage everyone to read it at home. Sometime this week send a copy of the family letter (reproducible page 39) to the parents or guardians of each member of your group.



You may want to explain that some things that call for tough decision making are

- use of leisure time (movies, TV, video games, music, sports, giving time to help others, and so on)
- school issues (behavior in classroom, cheating, extracurricular activities, competition, tests, papers, homework, and more)
- home issues (rules, chores, parents, siblings, and so on)
- friendship issues (loyalty, gossip, competition, and so on)

Looking back at the scenarios from step 2 may also help students think of a tough decision they need to make.

Checklist for Making Tough Decisions

- Decision I Need to Make**
What decisions do I need to make?
- Apply God's Word**
Can I rule out any choice that seems to go against God's Word? For example, do any of the choices involve breaking one of God's commandments by lying to someone or hurting someone?
- Pray About It**
When will I pray about this decision?
- What will I ask God for?**
- Which choices seem to be most in line with what God's Word teaches? Remember especially God's commands to love the Lord above all and to love others as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).**
- What are my choices in this decision?**
- Ask Other Christians**
What people could help me make this decision?
- Are there any Bible passages I could read that might help me make this decision? (The book of Proverbs is full of good advice. You might also check a concordance, which will list passages for words like kindness, love, sharing, anger, and so on. Or you could get advice about helpful passages from your parents, a pastor, or a trusted Christian friend.)**
- Whom shall I ask to help me? When?**
- Decision Time**
Now that I've applied God's Word, prayed about it more than just once or twice, and asked for advice, what will I decide to do about this situation?

Self Smart

- Student handout 3: “Checklist for Making Tough Decisions”
- Pens or pencils

Close by inviting your middle schoolers to think about a decision they are facing now or may be facing soon. Invite brief sharing, then lead in prayer.



Student handout 4: “The Rusty Robot”

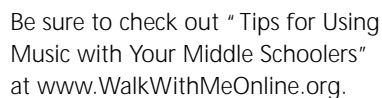
Emphasize that our choices need to be made within the bounds of God’s Word and God’s law—not just because “God says so” but because God knows that we hurt ourselves and others when we violate God’s rules for living. So when we talk about making decisions, we always need to ask what God’s Word has to say about the choices we’re facing.



10-15 minutes

- ☐ Letter-writing paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Envelopes
- ☐ One or more “advice writers” from your congregation or broader faith community

If your advice writers are willing, you could also invite kids to hand in other requests for advice throughout the four weeks of this unit on tough choices.



2

The Love Bug

Scripture

Matthew 22:36-40; John 15:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3, 10-11, 16-18, 23-24

Memory Challenge

Colossians 3:23-24

Focus

Love, guided by God's Word, is our guide in decision making.

WORDSearch

Think About It

Love, as the Bible defines it, is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling between our ears or some romantic notion we celebrate on Valentine's Day. Love is

action. We know that God is love because God gave us his only Son (1 John 4:8-10). We know Jesus loves us because he "laid down his life for us" (3:16; 4:10). Embrace Jesus and you will meet God's love person to person. God's love is a steady force that sticks with us through thick and thin, through Word and Spirit.

As God's imagebearers, we are called to reflect God's love. The one who is born of God is a person who loves (4:7). The apostle John makes clear that loving is not an option for us. Nor may we restrict it to family or friends. God's love is not selective. It's a way of life. We need to radiate it all the time. In John 15 Jesus teaches us to see ourselves as branches that remain in him as in a vine. Like branches, we draw our strength and nourishment from the vine, from Christ. "Remain in my love," Jesus commands. "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:9, 12).

Real love requires sacrifice. We need to give up our own well-being for the sake of others (15:13; 1 John 3:16). That's hard, especially when we need to show love to people we don't even like (Luke 6:32-36). Genuinely loving others is risky. Showing God's love to "losers" may make us lose our status with the "cool" crowd. When we spend time caring for people in need, we may not have time to "hang out" with friends. Nor will sacrifice make us popular. Yet, in God's eyes, when we reflect Christ's sacrificing love, we're *real* heroes.

Love fulfills God's commands (Matt. 22:37-40). For instance, loving includes

Session Planner

Hello Explore various meanings of the word love.

- ☐ Words of Love 5-10 minutes
- ☐ Option: Name That Title! 5 minutes

Know Identify love, guided by God's Word, as the key principle in making decisions.

- ☐ Bible Study Challenge 20 minutes
- ☐ Option: Love Poster 15-20 minutes

Grow Understand that love is more than just feelings or intentions; it's the way God wants us to treat others.

- ☐ Love in Action 15 minutes

Show Apply the love command to a specific situation in our lives.

- ☐ Committing to Show Love 5 minutes

Overtime

- ☐ Appreciation of God's Creation 15-20 minutes
- ☐ A Group of Love 10 minutes

Pray About It

How can you show Christ's love to your students? How will you go beyond the lesson outline and what's on these pages? To find out, you may need to reexperience God's love to you. Reflect again on the passages from 1 John. Meditate on them. Then spend some time in conversation with the One who's gone the extra mile for you.

Tell About It

Can your students love someone they don't even like? Of course! Remind them that love involves commitment and action, not just a feeling. Start with the commitment and action, and the feelings will follow. God has shown us how. The apostle Paul tells us that God loved us "while we were still sinners" (Rom. 5:8). While we were still repulsive to God because of our sins, God acted in love to save us and sanctify us. As we are transformed, we become more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Being loved, we become increasingly lovable.

not killing our neighbor (Ex. 20:13; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 John 3:10-11). But love widens and deepens this command to prevent us from doing or saying anything that would make others look dumb. And love drives this command to its positive intent: to show kindness to all. Love embraces the law and then surpasses it by a country mile (Matt. 5:41).

God's love challenges us to go far beyond the letter of the law. God went the extra mile for us—over Calvary and through the grave. So we too may joyfully take up our cross, treating others better than they deserve. That's exactly how Jesus treats us.



Goal
Explore various meanings of the word <i>love</i> .
Time
5-10 minutes
Materials
<input type="checkbox"/> "Words of Love" (reproducible page 41), photocopied and cut apart <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors <input type="checkbox"/> Box or basket <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Markers or chalk <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions written on newsprint or board (see below)

Words of Love	
Admiration	Adoration
Acceptance	Reverence
Celebration	Respect
Affection	Kindness
Cherish	Appreciation
Value	Devotion
Charity	Courtesy
Honor	Attention
Consideration	Concern

While preparing to teach this session, photocopy and cut apart the "Words of Love" sheet (p. 41) in the reproducible pages at the back of this leader's guide. Place the words in a box or basket. As kids arrive, greet them and ask them to pick a word from the box or basket.

Ask your students not to show anyone else the word they've chosen. Explain that their job is to think of a way to present their word without actually using it. They may choose to draw, write a sentence, or act out the meaning of the word. (Show them the markers or chalk and paper or board they may use.) If some of the kids would rather work in pairs, you may want to have each pair present two words to the group.



Don't drag this out. If the audience is stumped by any of the presentations, have the presenters reveal their words quickly and move on.



Like most of us, kids appreciate a friendly greeting. If you can manage an occasional inquiry or comment about something you know is happening in their lives, that's even better. ("Hey, Shawn, saw you in the store last week. Did you buy that baseball glove you were looking at?" "Lisa, did you get that book report done you were talking about last week?") There's no need to be buddies, but everyone likes a little recognition.

After a couple of minutes, invite the kids to show their drawings, read their sentences, or act out the meanings of their words. Encourage the others to guess each word being presented. (If they need a hint, tell them only that it's a word associated with *love*.)

Acknowledge everyone's efforts. Then lead into your session theme by saying something like this: **Today we're going to be looking at Christian love for others and how it affects the choices we make.** Have everyone return their words to the box or basket for use later in the session.

Name That Title!

> Word Smart

People Smart

Time

5 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Sweet prize for winners

When everyone has arrived for the start of your session, divide the kids into groups of 2-5 persons each. Tell each group they have two minutes to list as many titles of movies, songs (including praise songs and hymns, of course), or books that contain the word *love*. The group with the most titles gets a prize of candy hearts or some other sweet treat (which, of course, they will lovingly share with the rest of the class).

Have fun! Hopefully some of the titles will convey something other than romantic love, and you'll have an opportunity to (briefly) point out some of the many meanings of the word *love* in our society.



KNOW

Bible Study Challenge

> Word Smart

Body Smart

f1 Music Smart

People Smart

Goal

Identify love, guided by God's Word, as the key principle in making decisions.

Time

20 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 5: "Bible Study Challenge"
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ A couple of praise and worship songbooks (if available)

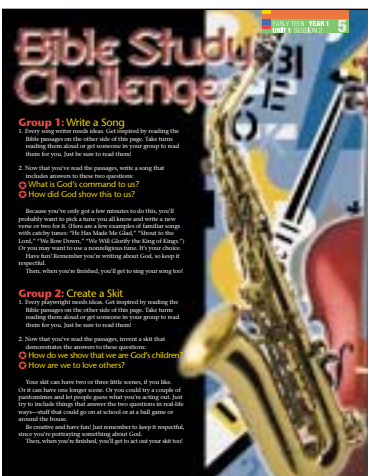
Take a minute to ask kids to recall from the previous session the three parts of the decision-making process (apply God's Word, pray, ask for advice). You may want to ask if anyone used one or more parts of this process while facing a decision in the past week.

Acknowledge that even with this process, making decisions can be difficult.

Explain that in this session you'll be learning how Christian love for others can help all of us make better decisions.

Distribute student handout 5, "Bible Study Challenge," and quickly read through the instructions on side 1. Assign your students to be in one of the two groups described there (or let the kids choose their preference): song writers or skit creators. Each group should have no fewer than three persons and no more than six or seven.

Be sure that the groups read through the Scripture passages on the back of the handout before they write their song or plan their skit. Give Group 1 a couple of praise and worship songbooks, if possible, for reference.



If your class is larger than fourteen or if your students work better in smaller groups, divide into three or more groups (it's OK if more than one group does the same task).

Tell the groups they have about ten minutes to write their song or plan their skit. When the time's up, have the groups present their work to the class. Lead the class in a round of applause for the creative work done by each group.

Conclude by having the kids summarize in a sentence or two what they've learned about love. (A simple statement like "We love others because God loves us" is a good example.) Comment that **love, guided by God's Word, is the guiding principle when it comes to making decisions.**



It may save a little time to read the Scripture passages together before the groups begin their work.

Love Poster

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Side 2 of handout 5: "Bible Study Challenge"
- ☐ Posterboard or newsprint
- ☐ Markers, crayons
- ☐ Bits of construction paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue sticks

If your kids prefer art to writing or drama, have them create their own love posters. First, read the passages from side 2 of the handout with the entire group. Then discuss the passages with questions like these:

- What do these Bible passages tell us about how God wants us to live?
- Why should we want to live that way?
- What might that kind of love look like in our lives right now? (This question doesn't have to be answered right away—use it as a lead-in to the poster making.)

Divide into groups of two or three and ask each group to create a poster that answers the third question above or that expresses another key idea of the passages you've just read.

You'll want to allow about ten to fifteen minutes for kids to work, and then another five for presentations.

Option to step 2



The poster can be as simple or as elaborate as your time and materials allow. The basic model requires just newsprint and markers. Use posterboard and add some other art supplies (such as colored construction paper, bits of cloth, and so on) for a fancier version.



GROW
Love in Action



Number Smart
People Smart



Word Smart

Goal

Understand that love is more than just feelings or intentions; it's the way God wants us to treat others.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

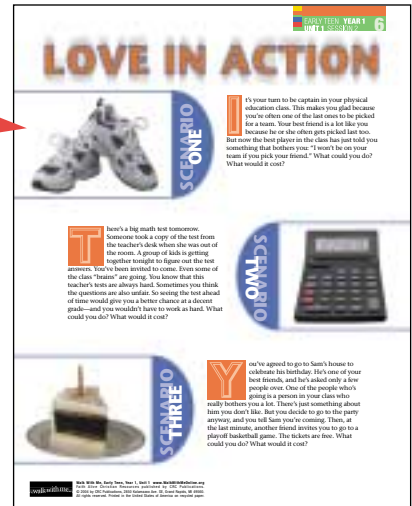
- ☐ Words from "Hello" (step 1) in box or basket
- ☐ Student handout 6: "Love in Action"
- ☐ Heart shape—large, cut out
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ Pens or pencils

Make a large heart shape out of paper or posterboard and tape it to the wall prior to your session. In this step everyone can choose a word from the box or basket you used in step 1. Introduce this step by saying something like this: **Now that we've talked about love, let's look again at the words we discussed earlier. These words describe ways to show love to God and to our neighbors. This time choose a word that really says "love" to you.** (If you didn't do the "Words of Love" activity during step 1, you'll want to introduce those words now—photocopied, cut apart, and placed in a box or basket; see p. 41 in the reproducible pages at the back of this leader's guide.)

Once everyone has chosen a word, ask the students to take turns sharing (briefly) what their word means to them. When each person has finished sharing, that person can tape the word to the heart shape on the wall.

Distribute handout 6, "Love in Action," and divide the kids into three groups. Assign one scenario to each of the three groups (or let the groups choose among themselves), and have each group read the description of their scenario and then complete the chart on side 2 of the handout.

In the last column of the chart they should try to use some of the "love" words from the heart on the wall. You may also want to explain that in the column "What does God say?" the kids need to think especially about God's command to love our neighbors.



You may want to remind your group that God's command to love others must not be mistaken for a kind of easy-going tolerance that overlooks God's other commands. For example, acting out of concern for a friend doesn't mean we can simply overlook that friend's dishonesty (or some other sin). This point may seem obvious, but neglecting it can run the risk of implying the "love tolerates all" approach that's so popular today.

When the groups have filled out their charts, have one person from each group present their scenario. Discuss the options and the requirements of "love in action." Encourage discussion about why it is often difficult to show the love that God expects. Is it realistic? Remind everyone that showing God's love always takes place within the guidelines of God's Word. Also mention that showing love may come with a price. While this is difficult for everyone, it's possible because God loved us first.



You can save about five minutes in step 3 by skipping the "large heart" activity and proceeding directly to handout 6 with the scenarios. You may, of course, still want to encourage kids to recall the words from the "Hello" step as they fill out the last column on the chart.

4

SHOW

J Self Smart

Committing to Show Love

Goal

Apply the love command to a specific situation in our lives.

Time

5 minutes

Materials

- Student handout 6: “Love in Action”
- Student handout 7 (to take home): “The Story of Saint Francis”

In this step we’ll continue to use handout 6 as a sheet to write on. Ask your students to think of someone who’s difficult to love. Maybe it’s a kid at school or in the neighborhood whose mission in life is to torment them. Maybe it’s an adult they think is mean or unfair. Maybe it’s someone who taunts them because of their appearance. Encourage them to put that person’s initials somewhere on handout 6.

Now ask the kids to think of one way they could show that person love in the coming week—the active, Christian kind of love that you’ve been talking about here. It could be just a small gesture, a kind word, an offer of help—even a genuine smile. It should also include praying for that person each day.

Invite the kids to jot down on the handout some of the active things they could do, and then to choose one of those things and commit to doing it.

Close with a circle prayer in which the kids may silently ask God for help in keeping the commitments they have made (or simply in finding a way to show God’s love in the coming week). Invite everyone to say “Amen” aloud at the end of this prayer time. If you like, you could finish by saying the prayer of Saint Francis (student handout 7: “The Story of Saint Francis”) in unison or as a choral reading (with two groups reading alternate lines).

If you haven’t already done so, distribute handout 7. If you don’t have time to read the story of St. Francis during your session, encourage everyone to read the story at home.



It's possible that a student may respond with the initials of someone who is abusing him or her. Offer to meet after class with anyone who has really strong feelings about a hurtful situation and wants to talk with you about it. You could also mention that it may be helpful to talk with a pastor, teacher, or other adult who can be trusted. Disclosure of abuse in this context is not too likely, but open lines of communication might lead to some helpful professional intervention, if needed.

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3

Learning to Say No

Scripture

Genesis 3:1-13; Psalm 139:23-24; Romans 7:21-25; 1 Corinthians 10:13

Memory Challenge

Colossians 3:23-24

Focus

In making choices, we need to be honest with God and ourselves. No excuses!

WORDSearch

Think About It

To make tough choices, we can't just deal with the options *out there*. We also need to pay attention to what's happening in our own heart—what's *in here*. That's because we so easily lie to ourselves. We *think* we're giving good reasons when actually we're just talking ourselves into dumb excuses.

Pray About It

Pray through the verses of Psalm 139 (skipping verses 19-22). As you experience God's compassionate nearness, listen carefully to what God is telling you.

The apostle Paul knows that feeling. In Romans 7 he complains that he keeps doing wrong. He's learning just how powerless he is to resist bad choices. We're new creatures in Christ. But the power of our old selves still works in us and can overwhelm us in a flash. Paul reminds us to always be alert to how strong temptation can be. We need to take steps to resist it *before* it overwhelms us.

First, we should be brutally honest with ourselves. We need to stop believing our own lies. When Adam and Eve answer God's question of why they've eaten the forbidden fruit, they only offer excuses. Adam tells God that Eve made him do it. Even worse, he blames God in the bargain: "The woman *you* put here with me—*she* gave me some fruit from the tree . . ." (Gen. 3:12). He tries to make it sound as if God dropped a criminal into his life. But God doesn't buy that for a minute. Adam has willingly broken God's clear command. Until he admits this to God and to himself, Adam won't be able to deal with his sin. He'll lose out on the salvation God so patiently and lovingly holds out to him. We can't accept God's grace either if we can't admit the truth about ourselves.

The second step we should take to resist temptation is to ask God's help in discerning right from wrong. We can't just rely on our own flawed insights. Self-delusion and rationalization are too strong and too sneaky. That's why the psalmist turns to God, saying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me . . ." (Ps. 139:23-24). You'll want to remind your students that they may be due for a heart-to-heart chat with God about their motives for doing all sorts of things.

Session Planner

Hello *Recognize that we make both honest and dishonest excuses.*

- ☐ Excuses, Excuses! 5-7 minutes
- ☐ Option: Excuse Game 10 minutes

Know *Describe the excuses Adam and Eve gave to God, and give examples of the kinds of excuses we make after giving in to temptation.*

- ☐ Don't Blame Me! 15-20 minutes

Grow *Sense the struggle we have resisting common temptations.*

- ☐ In the Hotseat 15 minutes
- ☐ Option: Cartoon Strip 15 minutes

Show *Identify ways to resist temptations, especially in situations in which it's difficult to say no.*

- ☐ Getting Help 10 minutes

Overtime

- ☐ Talk Show 15-20 minutes
- ☐ Decisions: Why Are They So Hard to Make? 10-15 minutes

Tell About It

Kids, like all of us, are experts at making excuses. While leading this lesson, you'll find lots of opportunity to use humor to illustrate our need for God-given honesty. Humor can be the best medicine to help us swallow that bitter pill.

option option option opt

1 HELLO

Excuses, Excuses!

Number Smart
Word Smart

Recognize that we make both honest and dishonest excuses.

5-7 minutes

- ☐ Newsprint or board
- ☐ Markers or chalk

List everyone's responses on newsprint or a board as you enjoy the creativity of the group.



You may want to remind your group that brainstorming means all answers are accepted, no matter how wild or wacky.

■ Body Smart ■ People Smart

10 minutes

None needed

Option to
step 1

25



KNOW

Don't Blame Me!



Word Smart



Number Smart



Self Smart

Goal

Describe the excuses Adam and Eve gave to God, and give examples of the kinds of excuses we make after giving in to temptation.

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Newsprint or board (optional)
- ☐ Markers or chalk (optional)



Not everyone likes to read aloud. Weaker readers may be embarrassed by their lack of skill. That's why it's wise to ask for volunteers to read (or to appoint kids who don't mind reading aloud). Try, though, to keep others occupied with something worthwhile as well. For example, in today's reader's theater, you could ask nonreaders to watch for the excuses that occur in this chapter. In this way you can help to avoid giving nonreaders the impression that they're on the sidelines.

Hand out Bibles and invite the kids to participate in a reader's theater of Genesis 3:1-13. You'll need volunteers to read the following parts:

- Narrator(s) to read all the lines not in quotation marks (use two or three narrators, if you wish, dividing up the verses between them)
- serpent
- Eve
- Adam
- God

Perform the reader's theater; then discuss with questions like these:

- **Why do you suppose Adam and Eve fell for the serpent's lies?**
- **How can we tell that Adam and Eve knew they had done wrong?**
- **What excuse did Adam give for his wrongdoing?** If kids say, "He blamed Eve," ask them who else Adam blamed (*God—when saying, "The woman you put here with me"*).
- **What excuse does Eve give for her wrongdoing?**
- **Why weren't Adam and Eve honest with God when it came to admitting their guilt?**
- **Can you think of an example of how we might blame others for our wrongdoing?** If necessary, suggest a possibility or two to get kids thinking. For example, we might excuse cheating on a test by saying the teacher made it too hard. Or we might excuse getting into a fight by saying the other kid started it. Or we might excuse disobeying our parents because we think their rules are too strict.

Expand the discussion to include other types of excuses (besides blaming others) for doing something wrong—or for *not* doing something we should have done. You may want to suggest categories (perhaps on newsprint or a board) and let kids fill in examples for each category, along these lines:

- We blame the way we are: "I just can't help lying. That's the way I am." In effect, we're blaming God for making us sinful people (which God didn't do).
- We claim lack of knowledge: "You didn't tell me I had to be home by ten!"
- We blame difficult or unusual circumstances: "If I wasn't so tired from running track after school, I would have done my homework."

- We blame peer pressure: “Everyone else was lighting up. I had to or they would think I was weird.”
- We blame the influence of evil in the world: “The devil made me do it.” (Sounds a lot like Eve blaming the serpent!)
- We blame inanimate things: “If the dumb alarm had gone off, I wouldn’t have been late.”



If the category approach doesn’t work after a few tries, you might ask the kids to give examples of excuses and then work with them to place the examples in categories.



GROW

In the Hotseat

J Self Smart
Body Smart

People Smart

Goal

Sense the struggle we have resisting common temptations.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Newsprint or board
- ☐ Markers or chalk
- ☐ Red “hotseat” cushion (optional)
- ☐ Two pieces of clothesline, each 8-12 feet long (optional)

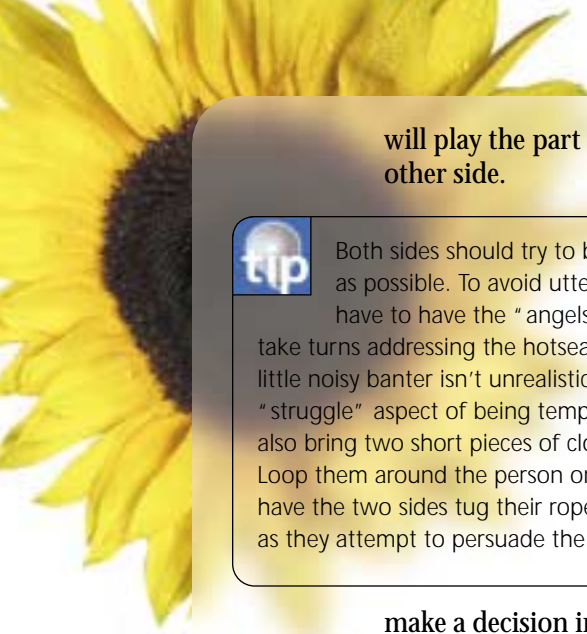
Introduce this step by saying something along these lines: **It’s easy to come up with excuses for doing what we know is wrong—or for *not* doing what we know is right. Let’s look together at some common temptations we face and how they pull us in two directions.**

Ask the kids to help you make a list of possible temptations. Record their ideas on your board or newsprint. To help everyone get started, you could mention a couple of these examples:

- gossiping, spreading rumors
- smoking
- drinking
- doing or selling drugs
- cheating
- shoplifting
- lying to parents
- using bad language
- being mean or picking on someone at school
- being mean to brothers or sisters
- badmouthing parents or teachers
- visiting porn sites on the Web
- watching TV instead of doing homework
- telling dirty jokes
- goofing off while doing chores at home
- nagging parents to buy expensive clothing or tech gear
- carelessly spending money
- being jealous of kids who seem to have everything going for them
- getting by with as little effort as possible at school

When you’ve got a decent list, ask the kids to pick three or four items that seem like the greatest temptations to them or that they’d like to explore further.

Arrange your chairs in a semicircle. Designate the middle chair as the “hotseat.” (If you like, you could place a red cushion on it.) One person will sit in the hotseat. The others



will play the part of “angels” seated to one side of the hotseat and “devils” seated to the other side.



Both sides should try to be as persuasive as possible. To avoid utter chaos, you may have to have the “angels” and “devils” take turns addressing the hotseat person. But a little noisy banter isn’t unrealistic! To enhance the “struggle” aspect of being tempted, you could also bring two short pieces of clothesline to class. Loop them around the person on the hotseat and have the two sides tug their rope (not too hard!) as they attempt to persuade the tempted person.

Select one of the three or four temptations the group picked out. Have the “devils” suggest all sorts of excuses the person in the hotseat might offer for giving in to the temptation. They can also apply peer pressure with taunts, jeers, and threats to convince the tempted person to give in. In the meantime, the “angels” can suggest reasons why the tempted person should not give in to the temptation. The hotseat person need not reply or decide until the end of his or her turn.

After a couple of minutes, ask the hotseat person to make a decision in response to the arguments the “angels” and “devils” have made. Encourage realism, acknowledging that some people would likely give in to the temptation.

Then repeat, using another temptation and switching the roles of “angels” and “devils.” After doing several temptations this way, debrief with questions like these:

- What did it feel like to be in the hotseat?
- Is this the way it sometimes feels to be tempted? Explain.
- Was it difficult to reach a decision?
- Will you be more prepared now when situations like these arise?



If your time is quite limited, you may want to only give one or two kids a chance to sit in the hotseat.

You may want to conclude this step by reading a description of how the apostle Paul felt about being tempted:

It happens so regularly that it’s predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. . . .

I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.

—Romans 7:21-25, *The Message*

Option to
step 3

ption option option option option

Cartoon Strip

J Self Smart People Smart N Picture Smart

Time
15 minutes
Materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing paper
<input type="checkbox"/> Pens or pencils

If your group enjoys drawing more than role playing, have kids make the same list of temptations as described at the beginning of step 3. Then, instead of the hotseat exercise, have them work in pairs or trios to make a cartoon strip showing a kid facing one of the temptations they’ve listed. Cartoons could show someone being subjected to peer pressure to do something wrong, excuses the person makes, reasons not to give in to the temptation, and the final decision. Humor is welcome! (The drawings need not be fancy—stick figures will do fine.)

Have the groups show their cartoons to the class. Discuss the decision made in each cartoon and the reasons or excuses for making it.

If your church has a newsletter, you may want to look into publishing one or more of the kids' cartoon strips. That way others can also see and enjoy some of the fruits of your church's youth ministry!

4 SHOW

Getting Help

Self Smart
Word Smart

Goal

Identify ways to resist temptations, especially in situations in which it's difficult to say no.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- Notecards—one for each person
- Pens or pencils
- Student handout 8 (to take home): "Decisions: Why Are They So Hard to Make?"

As you hand out notecards to each person in the group (including yourself), say something like this: **We've looked at some common temptations and how they pull us in two directions. Now let's take a minute to list on these notecards some things that really help us say no when we're being tempted. We can also list things that help us avoid a tempting situation. Please be real here—don't just write something down because it sounds good. These should be things that really help you.**

Allow a minute or two for writing, then invite each person to contribute an idea for resisting temptation. It's OK if some people give the same answers. Be sure to share an idea or two of your own as well.

Next ask your students to think about a temptation that would be really difficult to resist, a situation in which they'd be likely to make excuses for doing the wrong thing. On the flip side of their notecards, they should jot down a word, phrase, or simple illustration that reminds them of this situation. Tell them they will not be asked to share this information.

Then read 1 Corinthians 10:13 to the group:

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

—from *The Message*

Encourage the kids to write this Scripture reference (1 Cor. 10:13) somewhere on their notecards so that they can read it at home during the week.

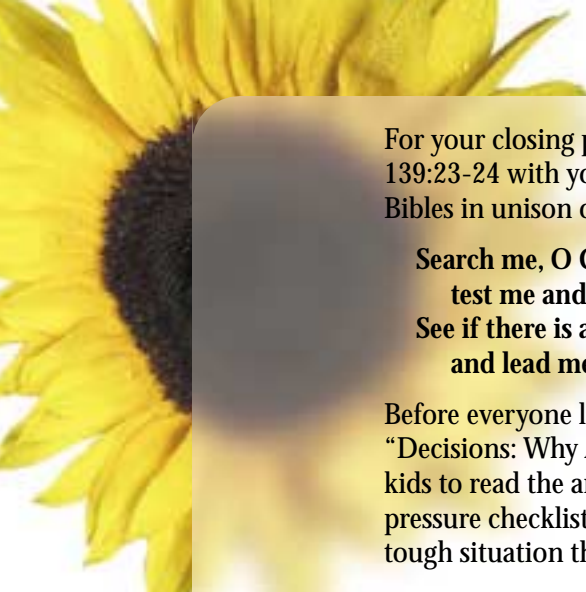


You may want to mention some of the following ideas for resisting temptation, if no one else does:

- Ask God for help.
- Build up your faith life by reading God's Word, praying regularly, going to church.
- Make yourself accountable to a parent or older brother or sister.
- Hang out with friends you can trust.
- Avoid situations and places where you know you'll face temptation.
- Think about the consequences of giving in—consequences for yourself and also for others.
- Picture Jesus there with you in the temptation, giving you power to resist.
- Picture yourself saying no and feeling good about it, in God's strength.



If your students are learning Colossians 3:23-24, have them say it together a time or two, and encourage everyone to "work at [resisting temptation] with all your heart" during the coming week.



For your closing prayer
 139:23-24 with your
 Bibles in unison

**Search me, O God,
 and
 test me and
 see if there is a
 wickedness in me
 and lead me**

Before everyone leaves
 “Decisions: Why
 encourage the
 kids to read the
 pressure checklist
 tough situation the

Before everyone leaves, distribute student handout 8: “Decisions: Why Are they So Hard to Make?” Invite kids to read the article at home and to use the peer-pressure checklist on the back to help them handle a tough situation they may have to face.



OVERTIME

Talk Show  Body Smart  Word Smart

 Word Smart

People Smart

15-20 minutes

- ❑ Notecards—one for each person

- host (give this person a fun name)
- expert panel of advisors (you can specify roles within this group, such as teacher, parent, psychologist, pastor, and so on)
- callers

Follow the talk show with the second half of the notecard activity described in step 4 (use slips of paper if you don't have notecards handy).

Decisions: Why Are They So Hard to Make?

> Word Smart

People Smart

10-15 minutes

- Student handout 8: “Decisions: Why Are They So Hard to Make?”

- Some decisions involve what we “believe and value,” says the author. What do you think that means?

- If you had to make these two decisions, what would you decide to do? Would these be hard or easy decisions for you? Why?
- What “reward” did the author get for making these tough decisions? What do you think these decisions cost him?
- What, if anything, did you find helpful about this article?

4

A Fresh Start

Scripture

2 Samuel 11:26-27; Psalm 51:1-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 1:8-9

Memory Challenge

Colossians 3:23-24

Focus

God is always ready to make a new start with you.

WORDSearch

Think About It

The story behind Psalm

51 tells of David, a “man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), who is suddenly ambushed by the power of sin. This warrior king has gained international prominence and power, so he stays behind as his troops march off to war.

Unable to sleep, David sees his neighbor’s wife, desires her, and commits adultery. When his sin threatens to become public, he tries to cover his tracks by ordering her husband’s murder. The “man after [God’s] own heart” gives in to his own lust and readiness to abuse his God-given power (2 Sam. 11).

Pray About It

Take time to talk with God about your sins. Be as specific as you can. Experience God’s forgiving grace. Close your prayer with the familiar words “for Jesus’ sake, Amen,” reflecting on what these words mean.

Session Planner

Hello *Think about what sin is like.*

- ☐ Sin Is Like . . . 10 minutes
- ☐ Option: Imagination Exercise 10 minutes

Know *Explain why King David needed a fresh start with God.*

- ☐ The Rich Man’s Choice 10 minutes

Grow *Experience Psalm 51 as God’s forgiveness for our sins and God’s encouragement to make a fresh start.*

- ☐ David’s Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours 20 minutes
- ☐ Option: Ask David 20 minutes

Show *Confess our sins and praise God for forgiving us.*

- ☐ Prayer and Praise 5-10 minutes

Overtime

- ☐ Grace Cards 20-25 minutes
- ☐ Help! I Need to Make a Decision 10-15 minutes

By God’s grace, through the prophet Nathan’s pointed message (12:1-14), David finds the way back. He needs to right the wrong. But how can he? He can’t undo his wrongdoing. The warrior-king must now answer to Israel’s real King. What can he say?

David honestly confesses his sin to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4). Hurt God’s child (in this case Bathsheba’s husband), and you fall into the hands of the heavenly Father. Confession recognizes that sin is

not just about the people we have hurt. Ultimately sin is about our relationship with their, and our, Creator. Notice how David frankly admits to being a repeat offender. “Surely I was sinful . . . from the time my mother conceived me” (51:5). We need to lay it all out on the table before God. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

David asks God for forgiveness: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps. 51:2). Notice the basis for this request. It’s not David’s own good behavior. He knows better. His plea for mercy rests solely on God’s “unfailing love” and “great compassion” (51:1). Sure, he’ll try to do better. But that’s the *result* of God’s forgiveness, not its cause. It’s only God’s unmerited love that has removed our guilt and heaped it on the

Tell About It

Your students may feel that their sins are far different from David’s. Point out that the net result, though, is the same. A simple illustration may help: a miserable ink stain, whether it’s humongous or smaller than a dime, will ruin our favorite sweater. Ruined is ruined.

thorn-crowned head of God's own Son. That's why we pray for forgiveness only *in Jesus' name*.

David prays for a new heart that's willing and able to serve God faithfully. This is what God gives us in Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus to die so that our sins would be forgiven, and God raised him to life so that we could live in him. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ we receive clean hearts and steadfast, willing spirits. In Christ, the Holy Spirit comes with power to live in our hearts, enabling us to follow Christ in this world.

In Christ there is always a new day, a resurrection day. We can leave our old sins at the foot of the cross. Then we can move on, following him.



Goal

Think about what sin is like.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

■ "Sin Is Like ..." cards (reproducible page 43), photocopied and cut apart

As students arrive, give each person a "Sin Is Like ..." card that you've photocopied and cut apart from the reproducible page at the back of this leader's guide. The cards call for kids to pantomime various images of sin—most of them taken from Scripture.

When everyone has received a card, let the kids present their pantomimes about sin. It doesn't matter what order the mimes are presented in, and it's not necessary to use all the cards. Please do, however, use the cards that suggest sin is like dirt and a stain, since these images tie in well with Psalm 51, which you'll be studying later. Make sure the kids catch the idea that even though we're on a heavy-duty topic (sin), everyone can have fun doing this.



If some kids are shy about miming by themselves (or if you have more than a dozen students), they could work in pairs or even trios.

During the presentations, the audience should try to guess the things that sin is being compared to. As in charades, they can guess out loud, and the presenter may encourage them with gestures but not with words. If it looks as if the audience isn't going to guess the comparison (after 30 to 60 seconds), you could have the presenter tell what he or she is showing about sin. For your reference during mime time, here's what's on the cards:

- Pantomime how sin is like carrying a huge burden on your back.
- Pantomime how sin is like a stain that can't be scrubbed out.
- Pantomime how sin is like stumbling and falling.
- Pantomime how sin is like wandering around in the dark.
- Pantomime how sin is like weeds choking out a good crop.
- Pantomime how sin is like being bound by a chain.
- Pantomime how sin is like an arrow missing a target.
- Pantomime how sin is like a sharp knife.
- Pantomime how sin is like wearing filthy clothes.
- Pantomime how sin is like being covered with dirt.
- Pantomime how sin is like a poison that spreads through your system.
- Pantomime how sin is like a roaring lion on the prowl.

Conclude by saying something like this: Today we're going to be talking about what happens when we make sinful choices, which, unfortunately, is something we all do. And how does God handle our sin? We'll be talking about that too.

People Smart

10 minutes

- Objects that say something about sin (with some imagination applied!): small plastic bags of dirt, duct tape, knife, dirt stain on clothing, short piece of chain, rope with knot in the middle, weeds, bottle with poison symbol on it, brick or large stone, blindfold, other things you can think of

- the plastic bag of dirt could suggest that sin messes up our lives and makes us dirty so that we need to be washed clean.
- the duct tape could suggest that we live in a world that sin has broken and that needs fixing and mending.
- the chain could suggest that sin binds us and makes slaves of us by attaching us to bad habits. (The duct tape could suggest this as well.)
- the rope with a knot in the middle could suggest that sin ties us up in knots or that sin fouls up our usefulness to God. (Ever try using a knotted rope on a pulley? How about a knotted shoelace?)

KNOW

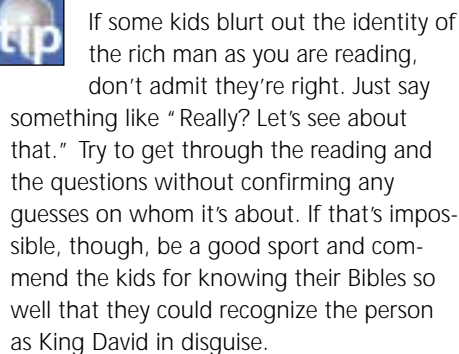
The Rich Man's Choice

Number Smart

Explain why King David needed a fresh start with God.

10 minutes

- ☐ Student handout 9: “The Rich Man’s Choice”
- ☐ Bibles



Distribute handout 9: “The Rich Man’s Choice.” Read it to the class without saying who it’s about (*King David*).

After the reading, discuss the questions at the bottom of the handout:

- What are your feelings toward the rich man?
- How do you think God felt about the rich man?



- Do you think the rich man should be punished for what he did?
- What would you advise the rich man to do?

Hand out Bibles and have everyone turn to 2 Samuel 11. Explain, if necessary, that the story of the rich man basically describes King David. For the sake of students who may not be familiar with the Bible, quickly summarize some of the story details that parallel David's life: *his wealth, his killing of Goliath, other military victories, his rise to power, his great love and service for God, his adultery with Bathsheba, his murder of Uriah.*

Ask for a volunteer to read 2 Samuel 11:26-27. Note that God was “displeased” with David. In fact, God would indeed punish David for his adultery and murder. Ask, **So what did David need to do now? More than anything else, he needed to confess his sin to God—and that’s exactly what he did.**



If your time is very limited, you can skip the contemporary story, “The Rich Man’s Choice” and go directly to the story in Scripture.



GROW

> Word Smart
People Smart

J Self Smart

David’s Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours

Goal

Experience Psalm 51 as God’s forgiveness for our sins and God’s encouragement to make a fresh start.

Time

20 minutes

Materials

- Student handout 10: “David’s Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours”
- Pens or pencils

Divide your middle schoolers into groups of three or four kids each. Distribute handout 10: “David’s Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours.” Say something like this: **Psalm 51 is David’s prayer for forgiveness. He wrote it shortly after he realized how greatly he had sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba and by having Uriah killed. We’re going to be experiencing this psalm in a special way in our small groups.**

Have each group quickly choose . . .

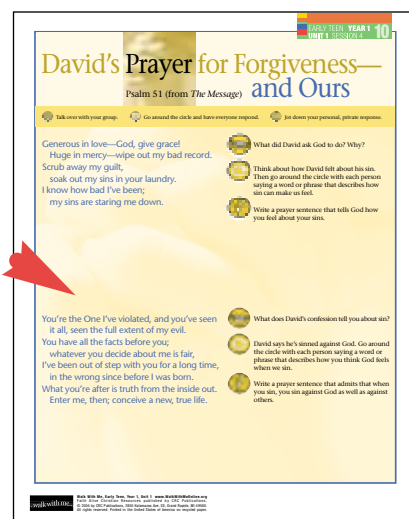
- a Scripture reader, who reads all the parts of Psalm 51 aloud to the group.
- a question reader, who reads all the questions or instructions aloud for the group.
- a starter, who is the first to respond to each question.
- a time-keeper, who reminds the group to keep moving and to finish on time.

Kids can combine roles or omit the role of time-keeper for groups that are smaller than four persons.

Read aloud the words that go with the three symbols at the top of the handout. Tell the kids to be sure to write wherever they see the pencil symbol. Each person will be composing a private prayer of confession, modeled after David’s. Make sure everyone has a pen or pencil, and give the groups about fifteen minutes to work through the psalm.

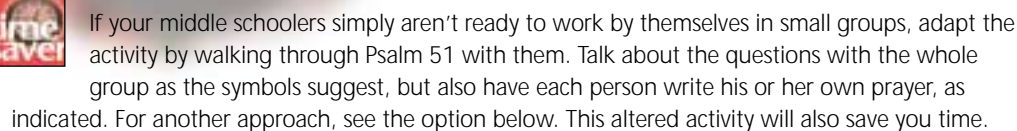


Before the groups begin their work, you may want to tell them that you think they’re mature enough to learn on their own, without your guidance. Letting the kids know you trust them in this way helps to build community, one of the goals of this curriculum.



After fifteen minutes (or less, if every-
one is ready), debrief or go over the questions again.

time saver If your middle schoolers simply are not ready for this activity by walking through Psalm 139, use the group as the symbols suggest, but do not read the poem indicated. For another approach, see the



option option option option option

 Word Smart

People Smart

20 minutes

Materials

☐ Student

- ☐ Student handout 10: “David’s Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours”
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils

- **How did David feel about his sin?** Have kids point to specific words or phrases from the psalm.
- **What did David ask God to do?** The general answer, of course, is *to forgive him for his sin* (with Bathsheba, and for killing her husband). But have the group look back through the psalm to find different ways in which David asked for forgiveness.
- **What did David say he would feel like when God forgave him?** Note the references to being as clean as snow, to dancing bones, to “a clean bill of health,” to making “a fresh start,” and to having “fresh wind” in his sails.
- **What did David promise to do?**

Hand out paper and pens or pencils, saying something like this: **Imagine that David himself is right here with us today. What would you like to say to him? What would you want to ask him? Take a few minutes to jot down questions or comments on your papers.**

Allow five minutes or so for writing. Then ask for volunteers to read their questions or comments aloud. If you wish, you could assume the role of David and respond to the questions as you think David might have. Or you may wish to invite your pastor or another church member to respond as “David.”

If you choose this option for step 3, then at the beginning of step 4 you'll want to ask the students to write their own prayers of confession. The questions printed on handout 10 will give them some suggestions to shape the content of their prayers.



SHOW

Prayer and Praise

V

Number Smart

J

Self Smart

f1

Music Smart

Confess our sins and praise God for forgiving us.

5-10 minutes

Student handout 10: "David's Prayer for Forgiveness—and Ours," completed as described in step 3

For your closing time, invite the entire class to take a minute to read (silently) their prayers of confession to God, using the statements they wrote during the previous activity (wherever they saw a pencil symbol). Encourage them to offer their prayers of confession with a specific sin in mind.

Say **Amen** aloud after a minute or so. Then read 1 John 1:9 while the kids listen:

If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Assure your young people that the same God who forgave David's sins of adultery and murder has forgiven all their sins as well. Because of Jesus, they have been washed clean of all their sins, given a clean bill of health. All their "broken bones" may dance for joy! At this point you could say something like this: **Remember how David said he would "let loose with . . . praise" for God's forgiving him? Let's praise God together for giving us a fresh start!**

Depending on how much time you have left, you may wish do one or more of the following:

- Ask for volunteers to pray aloud the last part of their written prayers (praising God for forgiving their sins).
- Brainstorm some ways to praise God with your lives in the coming week—trying again to reach that "difficult-to-love" person (session 2); showing special kindness to someone who needs it; saying "thank you, God" when good things happen; reading a psalm of praise each day; and so on. Then commit to doing one specific thing to praise God in the week ahead.
- Have a time of celebration! You could include some refreshments and balloons, if you wish. You may want to sing some praise songs too, if your group is comfortable singing. "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" and "Through It All" fit well with the theme of this unit. Otherwise you might bring (and encourage kids to bring) some Christian pop or rock CDs. Among those appropriate for this unit are
 - "Everytime I Fall" by Jaci Velasquez (on *Crystal Clear*)
 - "King of the Jungle" by Steven Curtis Chapman (on *Declaration*)
 - "What If I Stumble?" by dc Talk (on *Jesus Freak* and *Intermission*)
- See the Overtime options for other ideas.

Encourage everyone to read Psalm 51 during the coming week as a part of their devotions.



As part of your celebration time, have each person find a partner. Encourage partners to recite the unit Memory Challenge (Col. 3:23-24) to each other—not just as a verse to rattle off but as an encouragement to make wise decisions, to resist the temptation to make bad choices, and to receive God's forgiveness when they fail. Invite them to start the verse with their partner's name:

" _____ (name), whatever you do, work at it with all your heart . . . "

Dear Family,

Today our church school group started a new *Walk With Me* unit on tough choices. Your child is beginning to encounter situations in life that don't have easy answers, that may not have a clear "right" or "wrong" solution. Together we'll be looking at some tough questions and situations and talking about how we make decisions as Christians.

Through our discussion of Bible passages and stories, we'll look at biblical guidelines that can help us make choices—even when the answers are far from obvious. We'll also be talking about the role of love in the decisions we make, about the importance of prayer and Bible reading in our decision making, and about Christian adults and friends who can help us when we're struggling for answers.

Please pray for our group as we look for ways of understanding and addressing life's tough choices.

Sincerely,

Dear Family,

Today our church school group started a new *Walk With Me* unit on tough choices. Your child is beginning to encounter situations in life that don't have easy answers, that may not have a clear "right" or "wrong" solution. Together we'll be looking at some tough questions and situations and talking about how we make decisions as Christians.

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Please pray for our group as we look for ways of understanding and addressing life's tough choices.

Sincerely,

Page 40 is blank

Words of Love

Admiration	Adoration
Acceptance	Reverence
Celebration	Respect
Affection	Kindness
Cherish	Appreciation
Value	Devotion
Charity	Courtesy
Honor	Attention
Consideration	Concern

Page 42 is blank

Sin is Like . . .

Pantomime how sin is like carrying a huge burden on your back.	Pantomime how sin is like an arrow missing a target.
Pantomime how sin is like a stain that can't be scrubbed out.	Pantomime how sin is like a sharp knife.
Pantomime how sin is like stumbling and falling.	Pantomime how sin is like wearing filthy clothes.
Pantomime how sin is like wandering around in the dark.	Pantomime how sin is like being covered with dirt.
Pantomime how sin is like weeds choking out a good crop.	Pantomime how sin is like a poison that spreads through your system.
Pantomime how sin is like being bound by a chain.	Pantomime how sin is like a roaring lion on the prowl.

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Memory Challenge

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

—Colossians 3:23-24 (TNIV)

Memory Challenge

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.

—Colossians 3:23-24 (NRSV)

Page 46 is blank

Leader's Evaluation

We invite you to take a few minutes to tell us how *Walk With Me* is working for you. Please complete this form and return it to

WWM Evaluation
Early Teen
Year 1, Unit 1
Faith Alive Christian Resources
2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560



Save time by e-mailing your comments to us at editors@WalkWithMeOnline.org.

Be sure to tell us that you are teaching Early Teens, year 1, unit 1.

Things I found especially helpful/effective in these materials . . .

Things I changed or supplemented in this unit . . .

Joys/challenges I encountered while teaching this unit . . .

Name:

Church/Denomination:

Grade level I teach:

Early Teen

Year 1: Explore

Unit 1: Explore Tough Choices

Unit 2: Explore Your Bible

Unit 3: Explore Relationships

Unit 4: Explore Prayer

Unit 5: Explore Your Place in Culture

Unit 6: Explore Sharing Your Faith

Unit 7: Explore God's Gift of Sex

Unit 8: Explore Diversity

Unit 9: Explore Stewardship

Year 2: Believe

Unit 1: My Only Comfort

Unit 2: The Father: God for Me

Unit 3: Jesus: God with Me

Unit 4: The Spirit: God in Me

Unit 5: Our New Life in Christ

Unit 6: Signed and Sealed

Unit 7: Living My Thanks

Unit 8: Living Love for My Neighbor

Unit 9: Connecting with God

Year 3: Discover

Unit 1: Discover Church History

Unit 2: Discover Your Church

Unit 3: Discover Your Gifts

Unit 4: Discover Worship

Unit 5: Discover Creation and Science

Unit 6: Discover God's Covenant

Unit 7: Discover God's Kingdom

Unit 8: Discover Justice

Unit 9: Discover End Times





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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CREATE A SCENARIO

Life is full of decisions. Some are easy, like the ones we make every day when we watch TV or decide what to wear. Other decisions can be hard—like whether to tell on a friend who's getting into drugs or visiting porn sites on the Web after school.

With others in your group, invent a tough decision that someone your age has to make. It could be a scenario that uses peer pressure to do something wrong. Or it could be a friendship issue, or something to do with someone in your family. It could be a situation at school, or at home, or in your neighborhood. It could also be a personal matter. Whatever it is, it should be something that puzzles the person needing to make the decision—that person is not sure what to do.

Answer the questions below as you make up the details of your scenario.

★ 1. **Who** has a decision to make?

★ 2. **What** is the decision?

★ 3. **Why** must the decision be made?

★ 4. **How** will this person know what to do?

GOD'S KEYS FOR TOUGH DECISIONS

Help

In your small group look up the passages you've been assigned, then jot down one or more guidelines for wise decision making.

Help #1

Passages to look up:

- ★ 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- ★ Psalm 119:105

Guideline we found in these passages:

Help #2

Passages to look up:

- ★ 1 Kings 3:5-12
- ★ Philippians 4:6

Guideline we found in these passages:

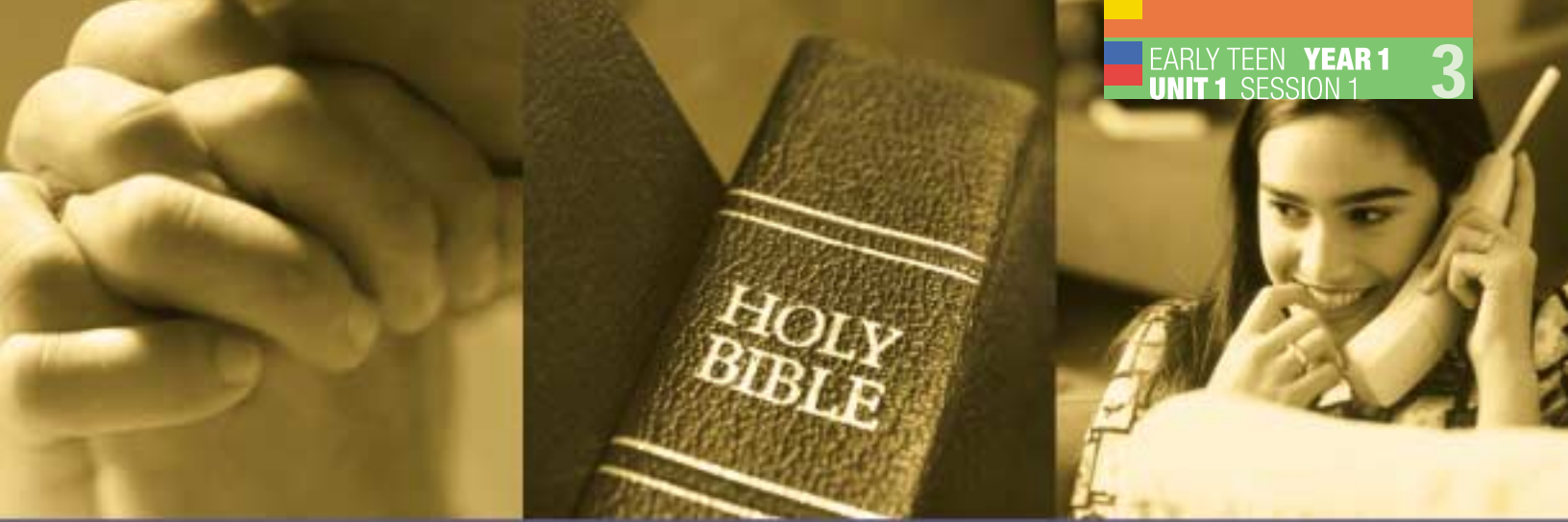
Help #3

Passages to look up:

- ★ Proverbs 2:1-5; 12:15

Guideline we found in these passages:

After you've looked up your passages, use markers to make a newspaper ad that offers help to someone who's having trouble making a decision. The ad should use the guideline you found as a source of help. Use words and art to fill the sheet of paper you've been given.



Checklist for Making Tough Decisions

★ **Decision I Need to Make**
What decision do I need to make?

★ **Apply God's Word**
Can I rule out any choices that seem to go against God's Word? For example, do any of the choices involve breaking one of God's commandments by lying to someone or hurting someone?

★ **Pray About It**
When will I pray about this decision?

What will I ask God for?

What are my choices in this decision?

Which choices seem to be most in line with what God's Word teaches? Remember especially God's commands to love the Lord above all and to love others as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).

★ **Ask Other Christians**
What people could help me make this decision?

What persons will be affected by what I decide?

Are there any Bible passages I could read that might help me make this decision? (The book of Proverbs is full of good advice. You might also check a concordance, which will list passages for words like *kindness*, *love*, *trouble*, *anger*, and so on. Or you could get advice about helpful passages from your parents, a pastor, or a trusted Christian friend.)

Whom shall I ask to help me? When?

★ **Decision Time**
Now that I've applied God's Word, prayed about it (more than just once or twice), and asked for advice, what will I decide to do about this situation?

THE RUSTY ROBOT

Let's say you are a scientist and you have just built a marvelously complex robot. It can talk, see, and even think. It's as nearly human as a machine can be. Along with many other instructions, you tell the robot not to get wet. Since you are the one who made the robot, you know water will destroy it.

One day, as the robot is talking a stroll, it sees some kids playing and swimming on the beach. It watches. The kids are having great fun. Of course, the robot remembers your instructions not to get wet. But the longer it watches, the more enjoyable the water looks. The robot wonders how something that appears so pleasant can hurt, and it starts to think that you are just out to spoil its fun. Once that thought has crossed its computer, the robot moves toward the playing children who are calling it to join them.

The robot dives into the water, and it has a great time. But an hour later it begins to notice

that its joints are creaking, that moving is getting more difficult, and that its thinking is not so clear. The beautiful robot is becoming rusty, and its computer is waterlogged.

Like the scientist's instructions to the robot, God's law (in God's Word to us) is meant to show us how best to live. God gave us the law to protect us from doing and suffering evil, and, more positively, to guide us in loving our neighbor. All God's commands are summed up in this one rule: *Love*. Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).

—adapted from *Decisions* by
Rev. Jack Roeda

- ★ How are God's commandments good for us?
- ★ What does this story remind us to do—and not to do—when we make tough decisions?

Bible Study Challenge

Group 1: Write a Song

1. Every song writer needs ideas. Get inspired by reading the Bible passages on the other side of this page. Take turns reading them aloud or get someone in your group to read them for you. Just be sure to read them!

2. Now that you've read the passages, write a song that includes answers to these two questions:

★ **What is God's command to us?**

★ **How did God show this to us?**

Because you've only got a few minutes to do this, you'll probably want to pick a tune you all know and write a new verse or two for it. (Here are a few examples of familiar songs with catchy tunes: "He Has Made Me Glad," "Shout to the Lord," "We Bow Down," "We Will Glorify the King of Kings.") Or you may want to use a nonreligious tune. It's your choice.

Have fun! Remember you're writing about God, so keep it respectful.

Then, when you're finished, you'll get to sing your song too!

Group 2: Create a Skit

1. Every playwright needs ideas. Get inspired by reading the Bible passages on the other side of this page. Take turns reading them aloud or get someone in your group to read them for you. Just be sure to read them!

2. Now that you've read the passages, invent a skit that demonstrates the answers to these questions:

★ **How do we show that we are God's children?**

★ **How are we to love others?**

Your skit can have two or three little scenes, if you like. Or it can have one longer scene. Or you could try a couple of pantomimes and let people guess what you're acting out. Just try to include things that answer the two questions in real-life ways—stuff that could go on at school or at a ball game or around the house.

Be creative and have fun! Just remember to keep it respectful, since you're portraying something about God.

Then, when you're finished, you'll get to act out your skit too!



Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

—Matthew 22:36-40

Again, this is God's command: to believe in his personally named Son, Jesus Christ. He told us to love each other, in line with the original command. As we keep his commands, we live deeply and surely in him, and he lives in us. And this is how we experience his deep and abiding presence in us: by the Spirit he gave us.

—1 John 3:23-24 (*The Message*)

This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.

My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love.

—1 John 3:16-18 (*The Message*)

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to.

But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own.

—1 John 3:1-3 (*The Message*)

Here's how you tell the difference between God's children and the Devil's children: The one who won't practice righteous ways isn't from God, nor is the one who won't love brother or sister. A simple test.

—1 John 3:10-11 (*The Message*)

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."

—John 15:12-14

LOVE IN ACTION



SCENARIO ONE

It's your turn to be captain in your physical education class. This makes you glad because you're often one of the last ones to be picked for a team. Your best friend is a lot like you because he or she often gets picked last too. But now the best player in the class has just told you something that bothers you: "I won't be on your team if you pick your friend." What could you do? What would it cost?



There's a big math test tomorrow. Someone took a copy of the test from the teacher's desk when she was out of the room. A group of kids is getting together tonight to figure out the test answers. You've been invited to come. Even some of the class "brains" are going. You know that this teacher's tests are always hard. Sometimes you think the questions are also unfair. So seeing the test ahead of time would give you a better chance at a decent grade—and you wouldn't have to work as hard. What could you do? What would it cost?

SCENARIO TWO



SCENARIO THREE



You've agreed to go to Sam's house to celebrate his birthday. He's one of your best friends, and he's asked only a few people over. One of the people who's going is a person in your class who really bothers you a lot. There's just something about him you don't like. But you decide to go to the party anyway, and you tell Sam you're coming. Then, at the last minute, another friend invites you to go to a playoff basketball game. The tickets are free. What could you do? What would it cost?

1

What are the options?

What are the costs?

What does God say?

How could you show love?

2

3

The Story of Saint Francis



Francis was born in the beautiful old city of Assisi, Italy, in A.D. 1182. His father was a wealthy cloth merchant. Though many children in Assisi had to beg or work, Francis was taught how to read and write. His father hoped that someday Francis would take over his business of selling fine cloth.



When Francis was older, he and his friends walked around town looking for parties and places to eat and drink. They would often stay out late at night and wake up neighbors with their loud singing.



At the age of nineteen Francis became a soldier. But he was captured and taken hostage for a year. When he returned home, he became ill and spent several months in bed. As he began to get better, he wandered around through fields and woods. He began praying to the God he saw reflected in creation.



One day he prayed in an old chapel. In response to his prayer, he heard a voice speaking from the cross. The voice told him to repair the chapel! So Francis hurried to his father's store and took some cloth and a horse from his father and sold them. Then he gave the money to the priest to repair the chapel.

Francis's father was furious!
He dragged his son to the bishop.



Francis gave all the money back—in fact, he gave his father the very clothes off his back, right then and there!



Having no other place to go, Francis went to live with beggars and lepers, helping them as much as he could. He fixed the chapel with his own hands. He began to tell everyone about God's love. Though once rich, he now lived in poverty and simplicity, relying completely on God to provide. But he was happier than he had ever been.

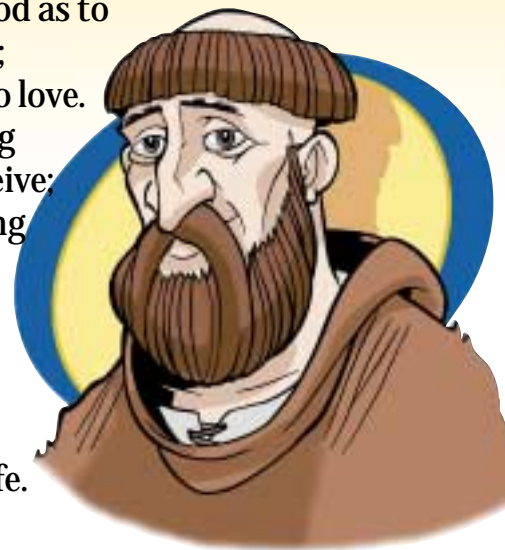


Soon other men began following Francis. They became an order of monks (the Friars Minor) and traveled throughout Italy. Francis and his order became famous for their simple way of life, for helping the poor, for loving every part of God's creation. In the year 1212, Clare Sciffi, a girl from a noble family of Assisi, joined Francis. With his encouragement, she founded a sisterhood known as the Poor Clares. Francis himself traveled to Spain and Egypt as a missionary. He died in 1226 at the age of 44.

The Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me show love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
to be understood as to
understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving
that we receive;
it is in pardoning
that we are
pardoned;
it is in dying
that we are
born again
to eternal life.





Decisions:

Why Are They So Hard to Make?

by Chris Lutes

I don't want to say no. After all, my friends are going. Every single one of them. No way do I want to feel left out. No way. Sometimes they think I'm weird anyway. They tease me about being a "goody-two-shoes." They tell me, "Not all R-rated movies are bad." Maybe they're right.

But . . .

I'm feeling pulled. My parents would definitely say no. They're strict about stuff like movies. But are they always right? Can't they trust me to make the right decision?

And what about me? How do I feel about R movies?

I'm not sure. I've seen a few on video, and, to be honest, I've felt a little dirty afterward. Like I needed to have my brain dry-cleaned. So I made a promise to myself, *No more R movies*. But now all my friends are going. . . .

Some decisions are just plain easy. Like, will I push the button for Pepsi or Sprite? Mushrooms on my pizza or green peppers? Those are no-brainers.

Some decisions, though, are tougher. Like, will I take another year of Spanish?

Then there are decisions that go a bit deeper. That say something about who I am. And about what I believe and value. . . .

Take the major paper I have to finish for English class. There's a box in our attic with all my big sister's term

papers. One of those papers is an English assignment with a humongous A+ at the top. I could take it, change it a bit. My teacher would never know. After all, I need a good grade on this paper. Without it, I could flunk the class, not to mention disappoint my parents and my teacher.

I can't escape something that's true about me. I have these things called values. I know keeping them will make me a better person. I know keeping them will make me feel better about who I am. . . .

After much thought, sweat, and prayer, I've made a couple of decisions: The R-rated movie is out. And I'm going to leave my sister's paper in that box in the attic.

Suddenly I feel kind of, well, free. No, my decisions don't set me free to do what I want. And right now they don't make me feel very happy. But they do set me free from all the bad stuff that can come from wrong decisions.

I know I will eventually feel good about the decisions I've made. After all, there will be no guilt. No regrets. That's the kind of freedom I can live with.

On top of that, I claim to be God's friend. I say my relationship with him is more important than any other relationship I could ever have. Yeah, God does have some rules. But these rules are made to protect me from hurt and harm.

Someone once told me that the more time I spend with people I love and trust, the more I become like them. Their values become my values. These good friends . . . influence the way I make my decisions. Their goodness just kind of rubs off on me.

That's also true of my friendship with God. When it comes to making good decisions, I know I'll still make some mistakes. I also know I'm ultimately headed in the right direction, because I'm friends with the One who's pointing the way.

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Romans 12:2, New Living Bible).

—from *Campus Life* magazine (May/June 1997),
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Peer Pressure



Peer pressure can be tough to handle. Sometimes our friends will try to pressure us into doing something we know is wrong. But they can also help us do the right things.

Being prepared for certain situations can help us get through them. Thinking through these questions may help you understand a situation before it happens. It may help you to say no.

- ★ The situation I think I will have to face at some point is . . .
- ★ Who might try to pressure me to do something wrong?
- ★ What choices do I have?
- ★ What would God want me to do?
- ★ What reasons do I have for not participating?
- ★ What excuses might I hear to help convince me to get involved?
- ★ How could I reply to those excuses?
- ★ Which people can help me stay out of this situation?
- ★ What positive steps can I take now to help me stay away from this situation?



THE RICH MAN'S CHOICE



He was young and good-looking and enormously successful. There was nothing he wanted that he couldn't buy. Well, there was one thing, but we'll talk more about that later. He lived in a style that Bill Gates would envy. He simply had the very best of everything. Period.

His mansion had dozens of rooms and a staff to match. His garage was loaded with the latest sports cars. If he wanted to, he could enjoy steak for breakfast, lunch, and supper. He regularly entertained rich and famous people.

He had risen to fame from a large, poor family who had farmed for a living. As a teen he had enlisted in the military, and it wasn't long before he was a general. Along the way he won the medal of honor for personal bravery under heavy fire. He had charged the enemy all by himself, killed their most powerful soldier, and sent them running for cover. He had fought and won countless battles, a fearless leader that each of his men would die for.

His heroic efforts did not go unrewarded by his government. Eventually, after his enemies failed in many attempts to end his skyrocketing career, he landed the top job in the country. And that gave him enormous power over the lives of all the people—rich and poor, soldiers and civilians.

Strangely, all this success didn't go to his head. In spite of his great wealth and power, he remained a humble, God-fearing man. "Love God like that man does," people everywhere would tell their kids. He always gave God all the credit for his successes. And God seemed to smile on him in return. Some of the rich man's

prayers and songs were so beautiful they were published and read in churches throughout the country.

One day, though, he got into big trouble. He became attracted to the lovely woman who lived next door. Her husband, an enlisted man in the army, was seldom home. Figuring he had the right, the rich man decided to take the woman for his own. He invited her over to the mansion one night while his family was away. She accepted. They fell in love. He wanted to marry her.

But there was a problem. The lady was going to have the rich man's baby, and she had a faithful husband who had to be gotten rid of somehow. All the rich man's money would never be enough to buy another man's wife. So the rich man used his connections with the military to arrange for an "accident" to happen. The husband was killed in the line of duty. His wife mourned for a while and then moved into the rich man's mansion. They got married, as planned.

Though he had an innocent man murdered, no one—it seemed—had found out. But then one Sunday in church the rich man heard a powerful sermon that seemed to be directed right at him. He suddenly realized that what he had done was terribly wrong. He knew he had to make things right with God, or he would never be happy again.



TALK ABOUT IT

- ★ What are your feelings toward the rich man?
- ★ How do you think God felt about the rich man?
- ★ Do you think the rich man should be punished for what he did?
- ★ What would you advise the rich man to do?

David's Prayer for Forgiveness— and Ours

Psalm 51 (from *The Message*)



Talk over with your group.



Go around the circle and have everyone respond.



Jot down your personal, private response.

Generous in love—God, give grace!
Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.
Scrub away my guilt,
soak out my sins in your laundry.
I know how bad I've been;
my sins are staring me down.



What did David ask God to do? Why?



Think about how David felt about his sin. Then go around the circle with each person saying a word or phrase that describes how sin can make us feel.



Write a prayer sentence that tells God how you feel about your sins.

You're the One I've violated, and you've seen
it all, seen the full extent of my evil.
You have all the facts before you;
whatever you decide about me is fair,
I've been out of step with you for a long time,
in the wrong since before I was born.
What you're after is truth from the inside out.
Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.



What does David's confession tell you about sin?



David says he's sinned against God. Go around the circle with each person saying a word or phrase that describes how you think God feels when we sin.



Write a prayer sentence that admits that when you sin, you sin against God as well as against others.

Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.
Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,
set these once-broken bones to dancing.
Don't look too close for blemishes,
give me a clean bill of health.
God, make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Don't throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me.
Bring me back from gray exile,
put a fresh wind in my sails!



David says his sin is like dirt on his body, like having broken bones (ouch!), like having skin blemishes and bad health. When God forgives him, what will happen to the dirt, the broken bones, the blemished skin and bad health?



Go around the circle with each person saying a word or phrase telling what sin is like.



Write a prayer sentence or two asking God to forgive you and make you clean and new inside. Then write another prayer sentence telling God what it feels like to be forgiven.

Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
so the lost can find their way home.
Commute my death sentence, God,
my salvation God,
and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways.
Unbutton my lips, dear God;
I'll let loose with your praise.



What does David promise to do if God forgives him?



Go around the circle with each person saying a word or phrase that praises God for forgiving our sins. ("God, you are . . .")



Write a prayer sentence of praise to God for forgiving you.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

—2 Corinthians 5:17

...walk with me...