



**PREPARING TO BE
BOLD**

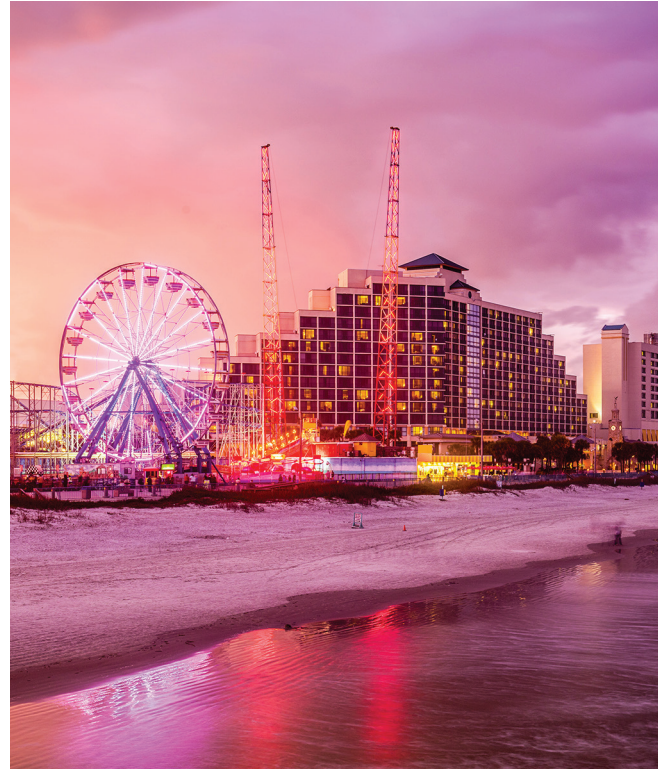
**THEME-BASED APPETIZERS TO
SNACK ON BEFORE YOUTH 2023**

A NOTE TO YOUTH LEADERS

We are excited to have you join YOUTH 2023 in Daytona Beach, Florida! You have access to this resource because you have registered for YOUTH 2023. While together on the beach, we will have an opportunity to consider what it means to be **BOLD: BEING OURSELVES & LIVING DIFFERENT!**

This resource includes four sessions created by the YOUTH 2023 Design Team and Young People's Ministries staff at Discipleship Ministries. The four sessions in this resource are meant for either individual or group use in preparation for our time together in Daytona Beach, Florida. Think of it as a way to "step on the sand and tap your toes in the water" before arriving at YOUTH 2023. Or think about it like appetizers to get you familiar with the theme of YOUTH 2023 and get you hungrier for the main course in Florida. You can read and do these exercises by yourself or perhaps together with others who will attend YOUTH 2023 alongside you!

The more reflection and conversation you or your group have around the theme of **BEING OURSELVES & LIVING DIFFERENT** before arriving at YOUTH 2023, the more opportunities you will have to grow in faith and experience the power of Christ in transforming ways. All of this will help us all return home to be **BOLD** in our faith and in making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!



In these four sessions, **we invite you to reflect on how someone may come to live boldly as a disciple of Jesus, pressing on and pursuing discipleship**, even when it is challenging or life is hard, through the four basic movements of a hero's journey. In the first session, we will focus on our introduction to the hero (in this case, the disciple) and learn that the hero wants or desires something. In session two, we will reflect on a disciple's search and his/her crossing a threshold into something new. In session three, we will engage with the disciple after he/she finds what he/she sought, but we'll discover that the finding comes at a cost. And in the final session, we will explore what it is like when the disciple returns home and is changed by the experience.

Throughout each session, we will draw from fictional and real-life heroes, depicted in movies, scripture, and/or the news to explore our YOUTH 2023 theme of **BOLD: BEING OURSELVES & LIVING DIFFERENT**. In the sessions that follow, we invite you to reflect on how a person may come to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Each of these sessions is written and designed so that youth could complete them as individuals or together as a whole youth group. We hope that this resource will be beneficial to you and/or your small group as you prepare for YOUTH 2023. We can't wait to join you for some fun in the sun this July!

Sincerely,
Mikayla, Ron, and Chris



SESSION ONE: Recognizing the Hero

For Youth Leaders: Welcome students into a space where they can be who they are and feel safe to engage in reflection and discussion. Be sure students know one another by name. Remember, snacks are always a welcome addition to any gathering.

For Individuals: Find a sacred space or a quiet spot where you can reflect, engage with the material, and grow as a disciple of Jesus.

REFLECTION

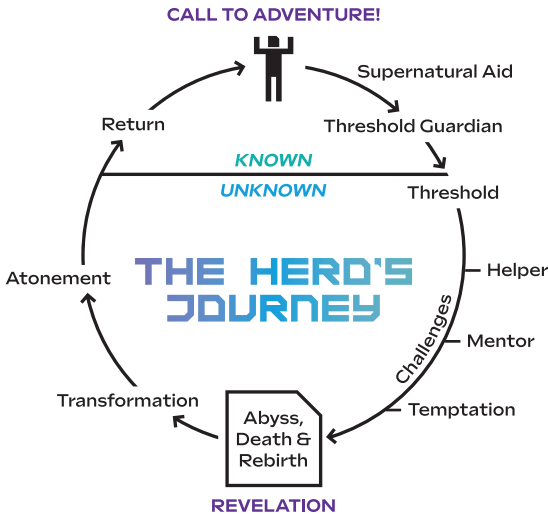
For Youth Leaders: Ask students a few questions to get them thinking and reflecting on their lives and being open to sharing with others in the group setting. These questions can help students get to know one another better too!

For Individuals: Engage with these questions as a practice of examen as you reflect on your week. Examen is a spiritual practice that can help us to reflect on our lives. Take your time and be honest.

1. What was the high of your week?
2. What was the low of your week?
3. Where did you see God in your life or in the world this week?

CHEW ON THIS

In mythology writing, there is a common template of stories that involves a hero. This template is often referred to as a “hero’s journey.” Typically, the story involves a hero who goes on an adventure, is victorious in a decisive crisis, and comes home changed or transformed. Basic outlines of the hero’s journey can be found in great Greek epics like *The Odyssey*, J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, or the latest Marvel movie. No one is born a hero. Heroes are made and formed through crucibles of learning, failing, growing, changing, and succeeding. This is the same formational story for disciples of Jesus Christ!



Another Helping

The practice of examen, a prayer, is a spiritual exercise that helps us pay attention and reflect on our day or week. Examen helps us to see God’s presence in our lives and the world around us. To learn more about the practice of examen, check out this resource from The Upper Room:

www.upperroom.org/resources/the-examen

Notes

Like heroes, no one is born a disciple. Disciples of Jesus Christ are called, formed through experiencing God’s grace and discipleship opportunities (think Sunday school or small groups), developed through worship, prayer, acts of service, and witnessing to the good news of God’s love. It is a journey of emotion and intellect. The journey of discipleship can be difficult and can involve some failures and a few setbacks. Yet, disciples press on and pursue more faithful discipleship. The apostle Paul writes in the Letter to the Philippians, “It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose” (Philippians 3:12, CEB).

Check out this video for more information on The Hero’s Journey:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1Zxt28ff-E>

EXPLORING WHY: Who We Are and Why We Gather

A disciple’s life is a journey. It’s a journey you are on right now, and you are not on it alone. It is a journey rooted and grounded in who we are, beloved children of God, but it is also a journey of becoming more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple’s life is about transformation. Our planned gathering, YOUTH 2023, is grounded in both our identity (who we have been) and our aspiration (who we want to be). We are beloved children of God, called to be Christ’s disciples in the world. The author of Hebrews writes, “Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25, CEB). We gather, then, to grow in our faith, in our relationship with Christ, and with others. We gather to become **BOLD: BEING OURSELVES, LIVING DIFFERENT.**

In the New Testament Book of Acts, the writer describes the day of Pentecost as a day when all the people were gathered in one place. Then, suddenly, from heaven, there was a sound of a really strong wind that filled the entire house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like individual flames of fire blazing on each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke in languages that were not their own.

After some conversation and questions, Peter said to the crowd, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away — as many as the Lord our God invites.’ Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized...The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone...Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.” (Selected verses from Acts 2, CEB.)

Pentecost was a gathering of the disciples. They trusted that they were beloved children of God and they sought to live as faithful disciples. Because they were gathered, because they were on a journey of discipleship, because they encountered God’s grace, they were transformed. Not only were the

A MARVEL(OUS) Connection

Who we are is grounded both in where we come from and who we yearn to be.

In 2022’s *Ms. Marvel*, sixteen-year-old soon-to-be-hero Kamala Khan is depicted as grounded in many communal aspects of her identity: She is a Muslim Pakistani-American high school student in New Jersey, and she is a fan of the Avengers (especially Captain Marvel). Even so, she struggles to fit in. Her parents and community don’t always understand or embrace her individual interests as an artist and cosplayer. Kamala imaginatively yearns to be something more, to be a hero like Carol Danvers; and eventually, receiving a mysterious package from her grandmother, she embarks on a hero’s journey that will eventually bring her home as a beloved hero in her community.

Ms. Marvel is streaming now on Disney+, and Kamala will return in *The Marvels* in theaters in 2023.

Notes

disciples transformed, but their community and, ultimately, the whole world was transformed because they gathered together seeking more faithful discipleship and to live their faith in BOLD ways.

Even today, Christians around the world gather. They gather for worship, for small groups, for meals, and to engage in meaningful acts of service and tangible expressions of love. Perhaps you gathered with your faith community this week, or you might even be gathered with your youth group right now! We gather to find companions on our own heroic journeys. We gather because we trust that there is power in being together and that God shows up when one or two or more are together. We realize God’s presence in our lives, we have a better chance to be transformed, to become somebody slightly different, perhaps even slightly better, or bolder, than we were yesterday. The difference that God makes in our own lives can be multiplied and amplified throughout our community and the whole world, all because we are transformed by God’s grace. When we are changed and transformed, we can be BOLD (BEING OURSELVES & LIVING DIFFERENT).

Listen, we’re all figuring out who we are and who we want to be. We want to know ourselves so that we can be ourselves in community. There’s power and wonder that we can grow and change into people more closely formed into the image of God. A shared identity that all of us can marvel at, in the Christian faith, we’re all members of God’s household (Ephesians 2:9) — we’re all adopted into the family through Christ. And we’re all trying to figure out who we want to be tomorrow and how the communities that we are a part of shape us. Perhaps a heroic challenge is to also think about how we might shape the communities that we choose to be a part of because of who we understand ourselves to be.

A BOLD faith can change us, our church, our community, and yes, even the whole world.

QUESTIONS

1. Who are your favorite heroes? What is their origin story and how did their heroic journey change them?
2. Can you think of heroes who are traditionally alone versus teams of heroes? What is it about community that can make heroes better about being who they are or who they want to be?
3. How would you define discipleship? What does a disciple look like to you?
4. Can you name stories, either from the Bible or from history, where Christians have gathered and been transformed because of their gathering?
5. What is different about the community because the disciples were gathered together on Pentecost?
6. Name some ways that you have gathered in community and have been transformed by it.

Notes

SESSION TWO: Crossing a Threshold

For Youth Leaders: Welcome students into a space where they can be who they are and feel safe to engage in reflection and discussion. Be sure students know one another by name. Remember, snacks are always a welcome addition to any gathering.

For Individuals: Find a sacred space or a quiet spot where you can reflect, engage with the material, and grow as a disciple of Jesus.

REFLECTION

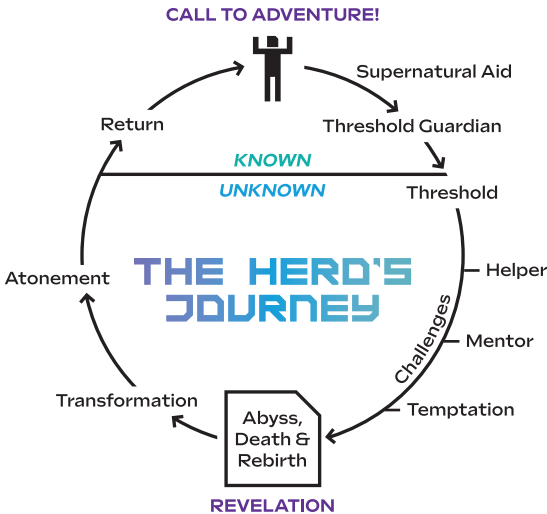
For Youth Leaders: Ask students a few questions to get them thinking and reflecting on their lives and being open to sharing with others in the group setting. These questions can help students get to know one another better too!

For Individuals: Engage with these questions as a practice of cultivating joy in your life as you reflect on your week. Take your time, be honest, and allow yourself grace as you reflect.

1. What was the high of your week?
2. What was the low of your week?
3. Where did you see God in your life or in the world this week?

CHEW ON THIS

In this session, we will focus on the second phase of the hero’s journey. During this part of the journey, a hero is tasked with reflecting on the search and is challenged to cross over a threshold into something new. A disciple’s journey is similar, in that a life of faith is also a life that will include challenges, even though we may not know what those challenges are when we cross the threshold. What we make of those challenges and what those challenges make of us become defining moments in our lives. The prophet Isaiah says, “Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it?” (Isaiah 43:19, CEB)



Notes

Seeking to be a disciple means looking for and noticing the ways that God is at work in the world. It also requires an openness to God's presence and transforming love that is at work in an individual's own life. In the superhero's journey, crossing over a threshold is what propels the plot forward. In the disciple's journey, crossing over a threshold is about having the courage and boldness to trust God and to become part of God's ongoing work in the world. Disciples are challenged to live as those who are BOLD: BEING OURSELVES & LIVING DIFFERENT. We are reminded that "since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness" (2 Corinthians 3:12, NRSVUE).

EXPLORING THE GOAL: Crossing the Threshold to Seek Out Our Goal

To cross over a threshold and begin something new is an uncertain, not to mention SCARY, prospect! Can you think of some scary or uncertain thresholds that you have crossed over in your life? Did you ever have to move or get settled in a new home? Perhaps it was the first day of middle school or high school? Maybe it was beginning a new friendship or relationship? Possibly it was choosing a college or making plans for after graduation.

One of the beautiful challenges of this life is discovering just how many chances there are to experience something new. The journey of discipleship and a life lived in relationship with God through Christ is no different. God always seems to be up to something new — whether that is something new inside us or something new in the world where we find ourselves. As disciples, we must cross over thresholds from unbelief to faith, then to spiritual maturity, leadership, and a deeper relationship with Jesus. This, like introducing yourself to a new potential friend, the first day of school, or choosing a college, can feel like an uncertain, uncomfortable, and even scary step. Our decision to follow Jesus and become a disciple might feel countercultural or even unpopular. Yet, when we grow in a relationship with Jesus, we are given the boldness to take this step, crossing over thresholds of fear, uncertainty, and discomfort to live a life of faithful discipleship. Living the life of a disciple will open possibilities of many ways to be a great friend, community member, and force for positive change. To move forward in the hero's journey and in the discipleship journey, we must step out of our comfort zones and cross over thresholds to both seek out and reach our goal.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus was traveling through Samaria.

He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food. The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (John 4:4-9, CEB)

In biblical times, Jews and Samaritans did not get along. That actually is an understatement; they really, really disliked one another and did not mix. The Jewish religious leaders of the time taught that Samaritans were unclean, and because of that, Jews sought to exclude Samaritans from their society. In fact,

A MARVEL(OUS) Connection

Pick a heroic movie and look for the moment that the hero must step into something new, and in doing so, has the chance to develop as a hero.

Consider Sam always taking one more step farther away from home than he's ever been (LOTR) or Miles Morales stepping into the identity of Spider-Man and infinite challenges in the Spider-verse and even Indiana Jones as a young person at the beginning of *The Last Crusade*. Some of the most straightforward and powerful threshold moments from heroic stories in the last ten years come from the movie, *Black Panther*. Both T'Challa and Killmonger have scenes where they cross a threshold into the land of their ancestors, caused by the purple, heart-shaped plant that also gives power to the person serving as the Black Panther. These scenes show how different people might react to a challenge and emerge changed by the experience. Both Killmonger and T'Challa have a better sense of their identity because they crossed a threshold into a new way of being with their ancestors, with the community that raised them. Their responses to those experiences, and who they choose to become because of them, drive the conflict they find themselves in during that film.

Notes

a Jewish person would go out of the way to avoid contact with a Samaritan person or even come into contact with earth that was considered Samaritan soil! (This makes the story of the *Good Samaritan* extra powerful when you understand this context!) Likewise, during this time, a Jewish man would likely not have interacted one-on-one with a woman, let alone a Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman at the well had more than her ethnicity against her. She was an outcast of society. She had to go to the well at noon, in the middle of the day and in the peak of the heat and sun because she was not welcome to go with the other women the first thing in the morning. She was an outcast, possibly because of her many marriages and the relationships she engaged in with other men that would have been far outside the cultural norms of her time.

Jesus upended and crossed over a societal threshold when he not only spoke with the Samaritan woman, but he requested a drink from her water vessel. He crossed over a religious threshold when he offered the Samaritan woman “living water.”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles into eternal life” (John 4:13-14, CEB).

The outcast Samaritan woman crossed over a threshold into a relationship with Jesus when she answered him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!” (John 4:15, CEB) She further and boldly crossed over the threshold into a life of discipleship when “the woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who has told me everything I’ve done! Could this man be the Christ?’ They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus.” (John 4:27-30, CEB)

This outcast, marginalized, Samaritan woman was bold enough to cross over thresholds to live in relationship with Jesus and become a disciple. Her decision and willingness to face her fear and uncertainty, not only changed her life but it changed the life of many Samaritans and the city in which she lived because she went and told her story and invited others to meet the person who had invited her into a new and lasting connection with God. “Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s word when she testified...” (John 4:39, CEB)

Like the Samaritan woman, we are invited by Jesus to cross over thresholds and live in relationship with him and commit ourselves to a life of faithful discipleship. We must face our fear and uncertainty, trusting that God gives us boldness and courage to be ourselves and live differently. We, too, can live a life of discipleship, invite others into relationship with Jesus, and change the world with God’s help.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some more, and perhaps better than we included, examples of heroes going into something new and finding a challenge?

Another Helping

In some Christian traditions, this Samaritan ‘woman at the well,’ is given a name. Eastern Orthodox traditions call her “Photine” which translates to “luminous” — a great name for someone who shines brightly after this interaction with Jesus. Roman Catholicism names her “Photina” and she has a feast day associated with her in March!

Notes

2. Think of a time in your life when you crossed over a threshold into something new. How did you feel at the moment? What did you learn about yourself?
3. Can you think of someone—and the story in Christian history—who crossed over a threshold and did something **BOLD**? How about at your home church? Do you know anyone’s **BOLD** stories from there?
4. The Samaritan woman heard Jesus’ words and interacted with him, and the interaction encouraged her to cross over the thresholds that divided people. What can you do to put yourself in a place to hear and converse with Jesus? Can you think of some things that seem to separate or stop you from connecting more with your faith? What would help you cross over the threshold into a life of more faithful discipleship?
5. Whom might you ask to support you on your journey? Are there people in your life who challenge you to find new, meaningful experiences?
6. Who are people that seem like “Samaritans” to others in your school? How do you react to those who think very differently than you? How might you be open to new ways of doing things like the Samaritan woman was to Jesus? How does it take courage and boldness to listen to and share space with those who think differently than you do?
7. How do you think attending YOUTH 2023 might be a new experience for you? How do you think it might be a challenge?
8. The Samaritan woman affects her entire community because she crosses over a threshold and into a relationship with Jesus and discipleship. Whom could you affect if you were able to share about Jesus and what your life looks like because of your faith?
9. What steps can you take this week to be yourself and live differently because of your relationship with Jesus?

Notes

CLOSING PRAYER

God of presence and courage, thank you for the example of the Samaritan woman who crosses over the threshold into new life in relationship with Jesus and faithful discipleship. Help me, O God, to have the courage and the boldness to cross over the threshold into relationship with Jesus and more faithful discipleship. And help me to share my story and my experience of you with others, so that they might also be changed and transformed. God, I desire to be myself and live differently. Amen.

Verses marked CEB are from [Common English Bible](#) (CEB) Copyright © 2011 by [Common English Bible](#).

Verses marked NRSVUE are from New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

SESSION THREE: Exploring the Cost

For Youth Leaders: Welcome students into a space where they can be who they are and feel safe to engage in reflection and discussion. Be sure students know one another by name. Remember snacks are always a welcome addition to any gathering.

For Individuals: Find a sacred space, or a quiet spot, where you can reflect, engage with the material, and grow as a disciple of Jesus.

REFLECTION

For Youth Leaders: Ask students a few questions to get them thinking and reflecting on their lives and being open to sharing with others in the group setting. These questions can help students get to know one another better too!

For Individuals: Engage with these questions as a form of prayer. Give thanks to God for the times or places in your week that were good; ask God for peace or forgiveness for the times or places that were not good. Invite God into a conversation about where and how God was at work in your life and the world this week. Take your time and be honest.

1. What was the high of your week?
2. What was the low of your week?
3. Where did you see God in your life or in the world this week?

CHEW ON THIS

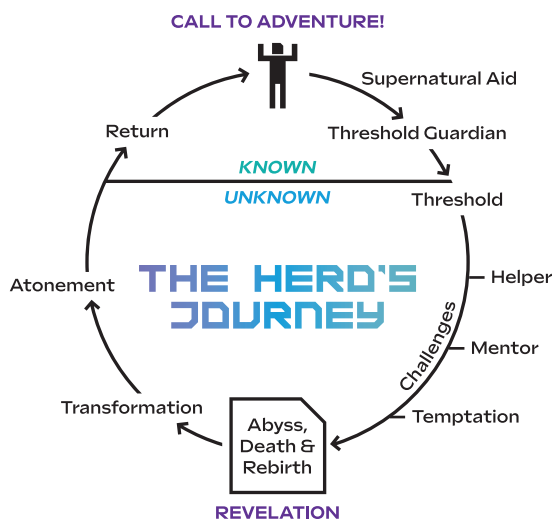
In this session, “Exploring the Cost,” we will focus on the third phase of the disciple’s journey. It is at this point in the journey that the disciple realizes that discipleship has a cost. Following Jesus requires something of and from the disciple.

Another Helping

Fasting is a means of grace. Most often, we think of fasting as abstaining from food or certain kinds of food. For example, some Christians fast from meat products on Fridays during the season of Lent. Fasting, however, is a powerful means of grace that can extend beyond just abstaining from food. There are many forms that fasting can take, but in all ways, it is a form of prayer. Follow this link to learn more about how to use fasting as prayer and resources for how to design your own fast.

<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/spiritual-practice-fasting-and-freedom>

Notes



It is much easier to talk about the rewards of following Jesus or all the good stuff associated with discipleship than it is to talk about the cost of discipleship and, ultimately, the responsibility that disciples carry. Throughout the gospels, we are introduced to disciples who recognized the cost of discipleship and were willing to offer their all to follow Jesus. For these characters, whatever they had, whoever they were, and whoever they hoped to become, they offered it to Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus called his first disciples along the Sea of Galilee. He said to them, "Come, follow me, and I'll show you how to fish for people. Right away, they left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:19-20 CEB). Simon Peter and Andrew heard the call of Jesus to be disciples, and they chose to follow him. Following Jesus, though, cost them their nets and their careers as fishermen. Being a disciple, being ourselves and living different, costs us something. Saying "yes" to some things inevitably means saying "no" to other things.

EXPLORING THE COST: What Does Being a Disciple Cost?

Let's explore together the cost one woman paid to be a disciple in the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me (Mark 14:3-6 CEB).

Connecting with Jesus in a personal way was a risk for this woman. She entered a party she may not have been invited to. Seemingly without asking, she offered her very expensive perfume. Then she experienced shame and ridicule from other, more established disciples at the dinner table. Engaging as a disciple cost her financially (the perfume she offered was expensive), and it cost her socially (the ridicule she endured from others at the table).

Another woman in Luke's Gospel risks all for Jesus, while Jesus was on his way to the home of Jairus (a well-known religious leader in Capernaum) to heal his daughter who was dying. Along the way, people were pressing in around him.

A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent her entire livelihood on doctors, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the hem of his clothes, and at once her bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

Notes

When everyone denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds are surrounding you and pressing in on you!” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.”

When the woman saw that she couldn't escape notice, she came trembling and fell before Jesus. In front of everyone, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. “Daughter, your faith has healed you,” Jesus said, “Go in peace” (Luke 8:43-48 CEB).

This woman had already paid dearly by living with a painful ailment. She also would have suffered socioeconomically, as her condition would not have allowed her to be part of the main community of her day, and she probably would have lived as an outcast. Religious laws at the time would have limited her ability to be present in worship or other community activities. Her suffering and her belief led her to risk touching Jesus' garment for a chance at transformation.

The hem of the type of garment that Jesus would have worn included tassels, used in prayer time. These tassels would have symbolized the prayer life and connection that Jesus had with God. In a sense, this woman was reaching out and thinking, “If I could just be a part of the prayer life that Jesus and God share, perhaps I could be healed.” This is the idea that Jesus recognizes as he tells her that her faith made her well. Her symbolic ability to connect with a meaningful prayer life with God helped heal her as much as Jesus' healing powers may have.

The cost of being a disciple for the woman who touched Jesus' garment was to risk joining a community as an outcast and then having the spotlight turned on her. She was used to being unnoticed and being excluded from much of society and community life. Remember, because of her bleeding disorder, she would have been considered “unclean” and kept at a distance from the rest of society because of the religious laws of the time. When Jesus asked who touched him, and the crowd clears away, the woman was noticed and became the center of attention. It cost her the physical effort of sneaking close enough to touch Jesus' prayerful connection with God, and in doing so, she invited the attention of others who were following Jesus. In fact, we are still giving her attention, as her story appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke! Her cost of discipleship is nearly impossible to ignore.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells parables, or stories, to explain to those traveling with him what it may cost to be a disciple. Just before the famous parables in Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son), in Luke 14, Jesus says to a large crowd, “*Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters-yes, even one's own life-cannot be my disciple. Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*” (Luke 14:26-27 CEB). Jesus gives several other clearly worded warnings about the difficulties of choosing to follow in his footsteps. Jesus, of course, does not mean that to be a disciple, we need to literally hate our families or carry around a cross. Instead, Jesus is using these phrases to explain that the cost of discipleship, the cost of patterning one's life after the life of Christ, should not be taken lightly. That life requires disciples to be prepared to give of themselves and to face difficult challenges. It requires

A MARVEL(OUS) Connection

Spider-Man's universe is...complicated. The Spider-verse is a tangled web of powers, storylines, and personalities. No matter the context, Peter Parker, Gwen Stacey, Miles Morales, or any of the other Spider-People in the Spider-verse all must wrestle with questions of their identity, where they belong, and the purpose of their life as they each wrestle with loss and the idea that “with great power, comes great responsibility.” Every iteration of Spider-Man has the hero giving up something to fully become who he/she was meant to be. Then, even when they have accepted the burden of their powers, the losses and difficulties don't disappear. Recognizing that he is called to a life of service and using his power for good has a way of making Spider-Man's life both messy and meaningful. Likewise, committing yourself to a life of discipleship will not suddenly make your life sunshine and rainbows and frequent, complimentary upgrades. Instead, a life of discipleship will open your eyes to the injustices and inequalities of the world and will call on you and others to help bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice. Challenges lead to revelations and transformations!

Notes

endurance and the ability to stay with our faith and the actions a healthy faith life calls us to, especially when times get difficult. It's a BOLD move to take on a life that has real costs and live differently because of our grounding in faith. It is even bolder to offer ourselves to Christ and to follow wherever Jesus leads.

Notes

QUESTIONS

1. Think back to your original idea or explanation of what a disciple was from a few sessions ago. Has your idea or explanation changed at all after today's session? Why or why not?
2. Can you name someone who was a disciple and what following Jesus seemed to cost that person?
3. What does "the cost of discipleship" mean to you? Can you think of other stories where the hero must realize or bear the costs of the journey?
4. Had you heard the stories of the perfume and the bleeding woman before? What other lessons have you heard taught that relate to those scriptures?
5. How are you living as a disciple of Jesus right now? Does it seem to be costing you anything or asking you to live differently because of your discipleship journey?
6. Who do you look up to as a disciple? Why? Have you told them?
7. How do you think being bold and living differently can be challenging? Explain.
8. Why do you think Jesus says what he does to the crowd in Luke 14:26-27? That's not really a great way to get a ton of followers, right? Why do you think we need to be reminded of the cost of being a disciple?
9. What do you think is required of you to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship?
10. How might recognizing the cost of discipleship be a part of a revelation and transformation on a hero's journey?

CLOSING PRAYER

God, thank you for the examples of so many disciples who show us what it means to follow you. We want to be bold and live different, but we face struggles and challenges along the way. Remind us that no matter what we face or go through, you are always there. Guide us on our journey and help us stay in love with you. Amen.

SESSION FOUR: Exploring the Change

For Youth Leaders: Welcome students into a space where they can be who they are and feel safe to engage in reflection and discussion. Be sure students know one another by name. Remember, snacks are always a welcome addition to any gathering.

For Individuals: Find a sacred space, or a quiet spot, where you can reflect, engage with the material, and grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Another Helping

Did you know that listening can be a spiritual practice? The practice of listening helps us to better understand others, their stories, and the world around us. We can honor other people, grow in our faith, and learn to tell our own life story with confidence when we practice listening well. Check out this link from The Upper Room to learn more about the spiritual practice of listening:

<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/listening>

Notes

REFLECTION

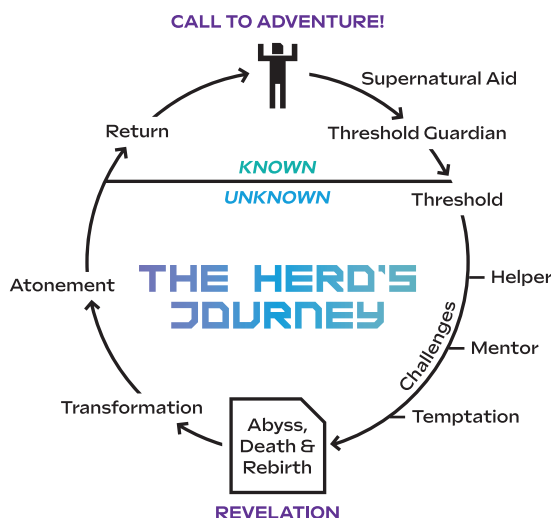
For Youth Leaders: Ask students a few questions to get them thinking and reflecting on their lives and being open to sharing with others in the group setting. These questions can help students get to know one another better too! Make sure your students listen well to one another's responses.

For Individuals: Write your responses to these questions. Challenge yourself to ask someone else these questions and listen well to the responses.

1. What was the high of your week?
2. What was the low of your week?
3. Where did you see God in your life or in the world this week?

CHEW ON THIS

In this fourth session, we focus on the final part of a disciple's journey, where the disciple returns home, changed because of what he/she has experienced. In the hero's journey, the final stage occurs when the hero returns with the "elixir" (elixir is used in storytelling as anything that brings healing, whether physical or symbolic, to the community). The hero returns home, transformed by the experiences, to share what he/she obtained during their journey to help others or bring healing to the community. In the disciple's journey, the final stage occurs when the disciple embraces the transformation, shares



what he/she received in order to help others and the community, and begins to transform the world. In a twist to the journey template, that very act of transformation calls the disciple to again adventure, always seeking out new ways to understand and be with God.

When we think about attending worship, or youth group, or even YOUTH 2023, we often focus on what we will experience while we are there. Perhaps you were thinking about what songs or hymns you would sing in worship before you arrived or what game you might play during youth group. Maybe you are thinking about soaking up the sun on the beach while at YOUTH 2023. You've likely thought at least a little bit about what you might experience. Going and experiencing are only a part of the whole journey. The disciple's journey always includes a return home and a call to act differently because of the experiences and lessons of the journey itself. The experiences that we have continually shape and form us. Discipleship is a lifetime pursuit, which is why Hebrews 12:1 uses the word "endurance" as a key component of running the race of faith before us. Upon our return home, we should feel compelled to share our journey, especially our revelations and transformations, with others.

**EXPLORING THE CHANGE:
How Are We Changed When We Return?**

We can find what the return of a disciple's journey looks like in the Gospel of John. Jesus was in the city of Jerusalem, and a crowd of people who were sick, blind, weak, unable to walk, and paralyzed were sitting and lying along the street. One man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years! Jesus saw him, and knowing he had been there a long time, asked him if he wanted to get well. The man answered that he did but that he did not have anyone to help him. Jesus said to him,

"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately, the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked... Later Jesus found him in the temple and said, "See! You have been made well. Don't sin anymore in case something worse happens to you." **The man went and proclaimed to the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the man who had made him well** (John 5:8-9, 14-15 CEB).

When the sick man experienced Jesus, he was healed; he was changed. When this man encountered the Jewish leaders upon his return to the Temple, he owned his story of being transformed and changed by Jesus.

Think about a time in your own life where you experienced something that left you different or changed. Did you want to tell other people about it? Your teen years are overflowing with transformation, new responsibilities, new knowledge, new boundaries you get to push with parents and guardians, new bodies, new ways of understanding the world around you and the ability to find your own independence. For some students, high school can be a time of transition and change. Often when seniors are preparing to graduate, they will share their wisdom or their stories of transformation with younger students, especially those who are going to be freshmen. They share their stories to explain how they changed and to help the next group of students find their place and have their own transformation experiences.

Notes

Essentially, this is the hero's journey. The disciple's journey is similar. When disciples encounter Jesus and are transformed, they return to what was their "ordinary life" and tell others what they have experienced. John Wesley, who is credited with much of the Methodist movement, had his own "disciple's journey." In 1738, John Wesley was at a low point in his life. He had returned from the colony of Georgia in what would become the United States to his home country of England after a disappointing missionary effort. On May 24, 1738, Wesley attended, reluctantly, a group meeting being held on Aldersgate Street in London. While he was there, he heard a reading from Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley was changed by this experience and wrote in his journal that his "heart was strangely warmed" and "I felt that God loved me." Wesley was absolutely changed by recognizing God's love for him. He wrote about that experience in his journals and was so transformed that he began to share that story with others and build a methodical approach to faith that might just provide other people chances to have their hearts strangely warmed as well!

After Jesus' crucifixion, his disciples grieved and mourned his death (a totally natural and appropriate response, by the way). Mary and other female disciples returned to Jesus' tomb early in the morning on the third day after he was buried to anoint Jesus' body with oil and spices. When she arrived at the tomb, she realized that Jesus was not there. She cried because she thought someone had taken his body. She mistook Jesus for the gardener, and it wasn't until Jesus called her by name, "Mary," that she recognized him. He was the same and different, familiar and unfamiliar, transformed in the Resurrection. After this encounter with Jesus, "Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." (John 20: 16,18 CEB) Death couldn't stop Jesus' ability to lead others in their discipleship journey. Mary was changed and excited because of her encounter with Jesus. Her response was to go and tell the other disciples what she had experienced, returning to the spiritual "home" that she shared with the other disciples to tell them that the adventure wasn't over yet!

This summer, as you prepare to travel to YOUTH 2023, don't forget to plan for your return. Be ready to tell others about what you experienced and how you are changed and will be yourself and live differently because you encountered Jesus!

QUESTIONS

1. Think about a time when you experienced something that changed your life. What did it feel like? How did you process the change? Did you tell others about it?
2. What do you think of the idea of a million different versions of understanding who you are because of the way you interact with others? What do you hope are the consistent characteristics, the truest parts of yourself, that would be shared in common when others think about who you are or attempt to describe you? Are any of those characteristics grounded in your faith or attributes of what you would consider a Christian to be?

A MARVEL(OUS) Connection

Wakanda Forever focuses on the interactions between the people of Wakanda and the people of Talocan, as well as the rest of the world as they protect and redefine what their home looks like. The backdrop of British, American, and Spanish colonialism in the story adds anxiety to the conflict between the two fictional nations. Eventually, their leaders determine that by becoming allies, their people will be transformed and strengthened. The heroic journey of those leaders lead to transformation for entire "homes."

In the *Ant-Man* series, the concept of home and home life continually evolves for every character. Jumps between the Quantum Realm and reality mix up time and space. The concept of the multiverse, planted by Dr. Strange, includes the possibility of multiple versions of one character, as both Ant-Man and Kang have millions of variants included in *Quantumania*. This concept may seem strange, but wrap your head around this idea: there really are thousands and millions of different versions of you out there...they just exist in other people's minds. There is the version of you who you know yourself to be, the version that your best friend knows, the version your pastor or youth leader knows, etc. There are versions of you out there in the minds of people that you've interacted with only once, when ordering food at a restaurant or passing someone on the street or even that person you were rude to because you were in the middle of a very bad day. In *Quantumania*, each variant of Ant-Man and Kang has characteristics that are unique in their appearance or behavior, shaped by the context where their heroic journeys take place. Your heroic journey as a disciple is taking place here on Earth. As your personal story unfolds, you create versions of yourself in other people's minds through your interactions.

So ask yourself this, "What is the impression that I want to leave through my interactions with others that might give them an idea of who I really am? Does the way I treat others help them understand that I am a Christian trying to demonstrate God's love and Jesus' way of living in my actions?"

3. Why do you think so many people in scripture responded to their experience with Jesus by going and telling others?

4. Do you think it is important for people to share how they were changed by Jesus? Why or why not?

5. What makes sharing about your experience of Jesus easy? What makes it difficult for you?

6. How have you found the hero's journey and the disciple's journey to be similar? How are they different?

7. What do you think the saying, "You can't go home again" has to do with the hero's or the disciple's journey? Are there parts of your home church or community that you think you might see differently after attending YOUTH 2023?

8. Take a few minutes to reflect on our theme for YOUTH 2023 — **BOLD: Being Ourselves. Living Different.** How does the theme relate to the last part of a disciple's journey?

9. What are you going to do to prepare yourself to arrive at YOUTH 2023? What are you going to do to prepare yourself to return home after YOUTH 2023?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of transformation and change, we are grateful for your presence in our lives. Help us to be open now and in the future to experiencing and encountering you and your love for us. Give us the confidence and the boldness to be ourselves, live different, and share our story of change with the world. Amen.

Notes
