Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

A Guide for Leadership Teams

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ISBN 0-8192-6062-2

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

There are many decisions people make in their lives each day. Some are fairly easy ones--such as what time to get up in the morning, what clothes to put on, and whether to have a hamburger or hot dog for lunch. Others are more difficult and may affect the rest of one's life. Examples of these are deciding to work or go to college, to try sports or join the drama club, and to go on the church's mission trip or to spend the summer at the beach. Still others can be life and death decisions that we hope no one ever has to face, but often we or someone we care about does—eventually.

The purpose of this study, called difficult decisions, is to explore the process individuals go through as they make a variety of difficult decisions. Who to talk the issues over with? How can reading the Bible help? Why should we pray about it? We do all of this so that we may know that the decisions we make "in all our doubts and uncertainties" will be such that "the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices."[1]

Introduction

Difficult Decisions is one of a series of modules developed for Older Youth who are in senior high school. The curriculum is based on the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant found in *The Book of Common Prayer.*

The vision for the curriculum also includes the development of leadership skills for Christian young people. Youth need to be leaders of their own lives by following Christ's example and making choices that are best for them.

The leadership of the group will come from a team that includes youth and adults. It is recommended that leadership teams of youth and adults meet in advance, perhaps on retreat, to choose and plan for the various areas of study.

This Guide

This guide contains nine sessions, seven of which provide maximum opportunity for choice. Two copies of the guide will be helpful in sharing responsibility for leadership. The first session, "Plotting Our Course," is designed for preparing to work with the sessions. It begins with a "Point of Contact"—a Personal Story by a teen faced with numerous decisions— and scripture that helps look at the decisions faced by early Christians. The planning session begins, as do all other sessions, with prayer and the scripture study to focus the experience on the presence of God in our hearts and God's will for our lives.

[1] For Guidance, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832

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The activities in **Session 1** are designed to develop the leadership skills of communication, trust, and relationship. Specific help such as Steps for Planning and the Planning Reference Guide is included to facilitate the planning effort for all members of the leadership team. Because pre-planning is not always possible, the first session can also serve as a tool for involving all participants in the choices to be made.

At this time the group will choose youth leaders and develop plans for study of the other eight sessions. In this process, adults will serve as facilitators for youth-directed planning.

Sessions 2 - 8 examine the issues of Spirituality through these individual topics:

Making Right Decisions
Taking Risks
Setting Priorities
Substance Abuse
Sexuality
Depression & Suicide
Adult Decisions

Each session begins with prayer, scripture, and a Personal Story. The Personal Stories, written from the perspective of a young person, focus on the heart of the topic for that session. The group may select from a variety of themes and activities developed from those themes the ways in which they want to interact with the materials.

A study of issues and Scripture often leads to more than just awareness of an issue. **Session 9** is designed to help youth bring together what they have learned and make decisions about the actions they will take in response. This may be done as individuals or as a group. The final activities include plans for liturgical celebrations, social action, and just plain fun.

Other Modules in the Episcopal Curriculum for Older Youth

Diversity	**Relationships**	**Spirituality**	**Violence**
Peace & Justice	**Success & Failure**	**Difficult Decisions**	**Treasuring Our Gifts**
Who Is God?	**What Am I Called to Be?**	**What Do Others Believe?**	**What Is Evil?**

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How to Use These Materials

1. DECISIONS ARE MADE BY LEADERSHIP TEAM

This curriculum is based on a model that requires a team of people to lead the sessions and the planning process. The assumption is that this team will consist of several teenagers who will take the key leadership roles and adults who will provide resources and support.

Each issue-based session develops three themes using a specific passage from the Bible as a focus for study. Suggestions for activities, discussion topics, and questions are provided for the three themes. Teams can decide to focus on one or two of the themes or take a broader look using all three.

The members of this team may change during the year as new issues are introduced or the needs of the group change. Leadership skills introduced throughout the module are for the whole group of youth and adults.

2. BUILDING A YOUTH-LED TEAM

The best way to function well as a team is to spend eight to ten hours together before the year begins. The team may decide to meet several times or go on retreat for this purpose. Here is a way to set up an effective team.

- Identify four to six teens who are leaders in school, church, and other settings. Choose two to four adults who are leaders but who also know how to follow.
- Spend time together getting to know each other and building community with one another. This can best be done in a retreat setting by sharing prayer time and meal times as well as planning times.
- Share faith stories in whatever way seems appropriate and comfortable.
- Review all of the materials in the chosen module and begin to make some plans about how best to use this resource. If time permits, it may also be a good time to make plans for future modules. Be aware that new leadership may emerge during the coming year.
- Decide on a plan and delegate responsibilities for planning, leading sessions, and communicating.
- Meet with the entire group, share your plans, and get their input.
- Finalize the plan and begin.
- Be prepared to revise your plan if circumstances change.

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3. CORE COMPONENTS

Each session includes the same basic information. Optional activities and sections change as needed in response to the issue and themes. These components are:

- **Session design**. Three elements are essential for every session. 1) A beginning prayer, chosen from *The Book of Common Prayer*, is offered as a way to center the group's time together. 2) The heart of the session is the three themes and activities that help the participants to gain deeper understandings of the issue. 3) The dismissal brings everyone together as the time ends and sends them out to do God's work in the world.

- **Objective.** A learning objective is found at the top of page one of every session. The objective guides the team in determining what is to occur as a result of the time spent with this material.

- **Scripture.** With a note to "Begin here," youth are asked to look at passages from the Bible that relate to the issue. Three different pieces of Scripture provide three different views of the issue. Most sessions include both Old and New Testament references.

- **Commentary.** Each passage from the Bible is briefly explained in a paragraph following the biblical quotation. Leaders who wish to know more may explore larger works such as *The Interpreter's Bible*, a Bible commentary, or a Bible dictionary.

- **Personal Stories.** Except for the initial planning session, all of the sessions include a Personal Story. Typically it is a story of an experience that youth encounter as a part of their daily lives. In telling these stories to each other the youth will be able to examine their own experiences and be more aware of the feelings of others.

- **Questions.** Suggestions for questions to be used as discussion starters are offered throughout the sessions. An icon easily identifies the questions.

- **Skill Building.** Because a specific goal of these materials is to help youth recognize their strengths and improve their leadership skills, certain skills are emphasized in each session. These will be developed through the optional activities.

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- **Optional Activities.** A goal of the *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* is to offer a wide range of options that allow flexibility within groups and meet the needs of different types of groups. Leadership teams are invited to use their own creativity in choosing other games or activities they enjoy. The following options will be available throughout various sessions:

1. **Creative activities** to stimulate the artistic talents of teens.

2. **Games** to build trust and skills as well as explore issues.

3. **Movies, TV Shows, and Print Media** that illustrate the theme presented in today's time.

4. **Literature**, books, and short stories, that develop the theme as well as those created by the individual members of a group.

5. **Music** from *The Hymnal 1982* and from contemporary and Christian resources relevant to the topic.

6. **Field trips** to places that provide an enhancement of the theme.

7. **Service projects** that arise from the themes to carry the mission of the church beyond the walls of the classroom or the church.

8. **Posters.** A set of six posters representative of the themes within each issue are provided separately. The posters are designed to stimulate thoughts, discussion, and reflection on the various concepts.

4. SAMPLE SESSION

After the leadership team has met and the planned study of the module, the group begins to meet. A model for a session might look something like this:

1. **Planning for a session.** The leadership team has selected Theme 2 as the way they wish to approach Session 2. One or two members of the group are assigned to be leaders. They prepare for the group to participate in several of the discussions and activities for Theme 2. Any necessary speakers or other outside arrangements are made in advance.

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2. **Begin with Prayer.** Starting together with prayer is a way to help the group focus their attention. A prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* is printed above Theme 1. Leaders may use this prayer, choose another, or compose one of their own. The prayer can be said by one person, or everyone can pray together. This may also be a time for sharing of any concerns of those present or for those absent.

3. **Scripture.** These materials are unique because they look at issues through specific passages in the Bible. The leaders read the designated Scripture and use the questions to talk about the relationship of the Scripture to the theme.

4. **Activities.** The group participates in one or more of the activities furnished in the guide. The choice will depend on the interests of the group and the time frame of the gathering.

5. **Preparing for Next Time.** A few minutes before the end of the time, announce any coming events and give leaders for the next session an opportunity to give a preview.

6. **Dismissal.** Just as the start of time together needs prayer for focus, so does the closing. The participants share any concerns to be held in prayer during the coming days and close with the "Dismissal," also printed above the beginning of Theme 1.

5. SOME GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

A key to the effectiveness of these materials is to help the group learn how to talk with one another about the issues that affect their lives and faith.

Sharing of individual stories. People are given the opportunity to share the things that are important in their own lives. This will become easier as the group members grow in trust for each other. Sometimes this may be difficult or impossible for an individual. This person needs to be allowed to pass if they wish.

Issues, themes, stories. There are many interesting topics and stories that serve as a "launching pad" for rich and deep discussion. Choose those that will engage those who participate.

Active learning. There are many opportunities for trips, visits, and other activities to bring great energy into your study. Your team can decide what works best for your group and plan times for these events

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to take place.

Speakers and guests. There are many people in your community with fascinating stories. The team can find the right people who will have an influence on your group.

Statement to the church. Teens have valuable things to say about and to their church. This can be incorporated into the program around any issue that the members of your group feel moved to respond to.

Here are some simple guidelines that can be used to facilitate sharing and community building. It is a good idea to discuss these guidelines with your team and add or delete suggestions from your group.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Make and commitment to all sessions (continuity).

2. Include everyone, even yourself, in the conversation.

3. Be real—be honest.

4. Send "I" messages—share feelings.

5. Talk about your own experiences.

6. Listen with great respect.

7. Listen, understand, but do not fix.

8. Be specific.

9. Respect confidentiality.

10. Allow the Spirit, within and beyond, to work in this group.

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6. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The setting where your session takes place is crucial to the success of your program. In short, the less it is like a classroom the more you will be able to facilitate learning, sharing, and growth. Pay attention to the environment you are providing, as this will have a great impact on the learning process. Consider three possibilities to create the desired environment.

- **The youth room.** One good alternative is a room at the church designated for young people and arranged with comfortable chairs, couches, etc. This provides a comfortable and inviting atmosphere.

- **Meeting in a home.** Holding meetings at someone's home near the church can be a great asset. This provides a casual, comfortable setting that usually enhances the process. This may cause some problems but it is well worth investigating. Also, people may be more open to making their homes available if it is done on a rotating basis. Don't rule out this possibility without carefully considering it.

- **Gathering in a restaurant.** A restaurant can provide a wonderful opportunity for a meal, fellowship, and learning. Often young people who wouldn't come to the church will feel comfortable in this setting. Of course, this will raise some financial considerations, but these are not impossible. You could also consider meeting at a restaurant on an occasional basis as a way of promoting outreach and for celebration.

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For Members of the Leadership Team

A General Philosophy of a Teaching Ministry

God made all people with great intelligence, skills, talents, feelings, opinions, and ideas regardless of their age. All people are growing in their faith journey. Two key words in working with others are value and respect. Never assume that you know more than they do or that your or their experience in life gives either one more value. Instead, enter into a learning adventure, side by side. You will discover as much as you impart. You will be impacted as much as you impact others. Keep an open mind and heart to all that is said, felt, and shared; and experience God doing greater things than you could pray or ask for.

Who are Older Youth?

Volumes have been written on the lives of teens and adolescent development. The purpose here is to give the leadership team some keys about what young people are like. Youth who are on the leadership team may agree or disagree. A lively conversation about these issues will enhance the ability of the team to work together.

Characteristics of Older Youth:

- **THEY LIKE TO HAVE FUN**

  Fun is not the opposite of learning and should not be something to avoid. On the contrary, people learn best when they are having a good time. When they are having a good time, there is often chaos. Don't be afraid of a little commotion if most of the group is on task. Encourage each other to have fun in class and see how much you can learn.

- **THEY HAVE SKILLS, TALENTS, AND ENERGY**

  Teens are not empty vessels waiting to be filled up. They are people blessed with skills, talents, and intelligence. Draw upon the rich resources of the members of your group and know that there is much to offer, to share, and to teach to others. The energy of the group can deeply enhance the learning experience.

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- **THEY ARE PEOPLE IN TRANSITION**

Youth are in a transition stage of life. The essential element is change as a person moves from dependence to independence. The closer a person gets to graduation from high school, the more this reality will set in. Youth need freedom to make choices with adult support. Never underestimate the abilities of each other or the need for adult cooperation and support.

- **THEY ARE SELF-RELIANT AND ACCOUNTABLE**

Most youth want to be self-reliant. By this point they have had enough experiences to form their own opinions and be able to make their own decisions. Of course, like everyone else, they will both succeed and fail. Encourage the group to take responsibility for the choices they select and hold them accountable to the agreements they make. Remember that everyone deserves input on decisions that affect his or her life.

- **THEY LIKE MAKING CHOICES**

Youth can and do make good decisions. Our gift to others is to help them to develop their abilities to make good decisions and to treat them as capable human beings.

• **THEY NEED TO BE HEARD**

One of the best tools you can provide for members of the group are opportunities to speak out and be heard, and to listen to others with respect. It is important to set the example not by what you say but by what you do. Your ability to listen to others and respond to their ideas and comments will be a model for developing good listening skills. Being heard for even a moment can be a powerful experience. This is true for people of any age.

• **THEY WANT TO BE VALUED AND SIGNIFICANT**

How you treat the people in your group is much more important than what is taught. If all members feel important and significant, they are more likely to learn something. It is also crucial to pay attention to how the members of the group treat each other. The atmosphere of the classroom can inspire or destroy the whole experience. Encouraging all members of the group to treat themselves and others with extraordinary respect is one of the most important lessons to teach.

• **THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A FAITH OF THEIR OWN**

Teenagers are seeking their own opinions, values, and faith. Identity comes from becoming your own person. Youth often reject much of their parents' faith. This is an important sign that new values and a

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stronger faith are being formed. Embrace the searching process and affirm the importance of the ability to question, doubt, and think. Your response to doubts will encourage or discourage others' journeys to spiritual knowledge. You can't teach faith but you can grow together in your knowledge and love of the Lord.

- **RELATIONAL MINISTRY**

  This curriculum is based on building relationships in three ways. Be constantly aware of the importance of these three dynamics of relationships.

  1. The first, and most important, is the relationship between each person and God. This should be an ongoing focus in whatever is taught, discussed, or explored.
  2. This second is the relationship between young people and adults. The adult's role is not that of teacher but rather one of "mature friend." One-to-one relationships take on special significance in this model.
  3. The third is the peer relationship. How the members of the group treat each other enables or destroys the building of a caring community.

- **OWNERSHIP**

If youth are going to be truly involved in a program of learning, they must have a sense of ownership. The wise teen will learn how to share the program and build a sense of ownership together with the adults. This process can be improved and simplified by the formation of a team in the beginning with youth taking responsibility for leadership roles.

Who Are The Adults?

Adults who work with youth are more than teachers. To foster effective teaching and learning among youth, the Church needs adult leaders who are grounded in their own faith and identity as Christians. Effective leaders are excited about growing and learning and enjoy working with youth in a team relationship. They have high energy, genuine enthusiasm, and a passionate interest in youth.

Youth can have input into which adults are selected for the leadership team. Seek out people who care about youth, have a strong faith, and are committed to the program. Adults who want to be kids or who don't keep commitments are not effective over time. The following points should be carefully considered as leadership teams are formed.

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Characteristics of Effective Adult Leaders:

- **THEY ARE ROOTED IN THEIR FAITH AND COMMITTED TO JESUS CHRIST**

Who adults are speaks loudly to teens. They don't have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean that they no longer have any doubts or are at the end of their own spiritual journey. Good leaders have a strong relationship with God and are comfortable with their faith.

- **THEY ARE WILLING TO BE A PART OF A TEAM**

For some adults working with teenagers as they grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for teens to understand the sense of responsibility that comes with this task. Wise teens know that they are only part of a teaching team and that adults are accountable to other people in the church who may or may not care about the activities of young people. Adults need to be able to let go of their need to be in charge and still have the ability to use their gifts as part of the team.

- **THEY ARE FUN AND ENJOY BEING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Adults should be able to relax and enjoy their time with youth. Effective adults know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Adults must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with group, however, is essential for the adults' full participation.

- **THEY ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT PEOPLE THAN FACTS**

The *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, Scripture, and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that Affect young people's lives. Effective adults are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in the work of the group. Adults should give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling.

- **THEY HAVE A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO THE GROUP**

Adults are committed and consistent. Steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Leaders should focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

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A Final Word

Remember that this is a process of growing in the knowledge and love of the Lord. There will be ups and downs, successes and failures, joys and frustrations. Often you will never know the impact you have made on another person's life. So much happens intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in individuals' lives that they themselves are not aware of the people who have had an impact on them. Trust in each other, trust in yourself and, most of all, trust in God.

For More Ideas

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Plotting Our Course

SESSION 1

Objective

Youth will be able to plan a course of study that involves individual and group participation in making difficult decisions.

Personal Story

There's a part of me that likes growing up and being able to do new things. I got my driver's license this year, and I can go places without my parents. I still have limits about where I can drive and how many people can be in the car, but that hasn't been too hard to work around. I also have a part-time job at a landscaping company. I like having my own money, and I enjoy working outside.

The downside to getting older is the decisions I have to make. When I was younger, my parents made the decisions about where we lived, what we ate, and how we spent our time. Now they've turned some of those decisions over to me.

At school, I have to decide which courses I am going to take and whether I want to try an honors section. I don't have a clue what I want to do for the rest of my life, but my guidance counselor keeps pressuring me to move in one direction. Should I take an extra math class or sign up for the drama class I have secretly wanted to try? Do I take a preparation course for the SAT, or enroll in a weight-lifting class?

I decided not to try out for sports, but I enjoy playing in the marching band. I could join the drama club, but I don't know anyone in it. There are lots of other clubs, but I don't know if my job and schoolwork will leave me enough time to be involved.

I try to go to church each week, but my attendance at youth group is spotty. I enjoy the activities at church, but there's never enough time. I've been asked to help coach new acolytes, but I'm not sure I want to get to church early each week.

In the next year, I need to decide whether I want to go to college or get a job. Do I want to stay here or go somewhere new? Should I work for a few years first so I have a better handle on what I want to do with my life?

I've also been dating the most wonderful girl. We have so much fun together. She knows she wants to go to college and has already been corresponding with several out-of-state schools. We've been going together almost a year, and are facing some difficult decisions about our relationship and our love for each other. When we're together, sometimes neither of us is thinking too clearly.

My parents have offered to discuss some of these decisions with me, but the final choices are up to me. Part of me knows that God can help, but I'm not sure how. It seems like a lot of growing up is making decisions. I just hope I make the right ones.

Scripture

I John 3:18-24

Skill Focus

Relationships
Responsibility

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Prayer

God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know the things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

From Ordination of a Priest
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 528

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

I John 3:18-24

Commentary: This passage from the *First Letter of John* offers help and support to Christians in making decisions. The author of this letter outlines the Christian ethic as practical help to a person in need. Even as people work toward this goal of Christian life, they are often not confident that what they are doing is right. The hopelessness of life that confronts all people can cause a great deal of confusion. What does a person do when prayers are unanswered or when guilt or fear clouds his or her faith? This passage says that God is greater than everything else. Therefore, decisions and work should be centered on God and not on individuals. Christians are assured that God can untangle good from evil. They can then be confident that prayers will be heard by God and answered.

☐ Questions

- The scripture passage talks about loving in truth and action. What does that mean today?
- God is described as "knowing everything." How would the lives of individuals be different if they believed that God knows everything?
- Hopelessness and confusion can often overwhelm people when they must make difficult decisions. What is the hope and clarity offered in this passage?
- The scripture says that prayers will be answered. In what ways are prayers answered?

Point of Contact

The themes and scripture passages in this module address some of the most difficult issues that people have to face. During this course of study, the focus is not on making the decisions themselves, but on thinking about the process that goes into making decisions. The process will include both study of the Bible and finding God's will.

Personal Story

The personal story focuses on decisions one teen is facing about school, career, church, and relationships. Reread the story and recap the decisions this person is facing.

- Are you facing similar decisions?
- Who can help you make these decisions?
- How can God be a part of the decision-making process?

Think about the decisions you are facing in the next week, in six months, and in the next year. Reflect on how you will go about making those decisions.

☐ Activities

Spectrum Game

Play a game to get to know each other and to explore the decision-making process. Sometimes it is difficult to know how you feel about an issue when others around you have strong opinions.

Tape a ten-foot strip of masking tape on the floor. At one end place a sign that says, I AGREE; in the middle, one that says, I DON'T KNOW; and at the other end, one that that says, I DISAGREE. Present several situations in which these responses would be applicable. For example: Everyone should go to college; everyone should get a job; everyone should serve in the armed forces; the drinking age should be lowered/raised; schools should have dress codes. Add other statements based on issues your group is facing.

As the statements are read, each participant should express an opinion by standing at some point on the tape. Ask them to share the reasons behind their responses.

Hint: If there is a high level of trust in the group, the reasons could be discussed. Don't put anyone on the spot.

Why Are You Here?

Everyone makes decisions every day. Each person had to decide to be a part of this gathering. On newsprint, list all the reasons participants say they came. On another sheet, list the expectations of the group for this course of study. Save these lists to review at the end of the module.

Fears and Hopes

Every important decision has fears and hopes connected to it. When traveling, there are fears of theft, accidents, and finding the way in a strange place. For each fear there are hopes—of buying a special souvenir, arriving safely, or discovering something unusual.

Give each person five index cards. Ask them to think of a decision they will be making in the near future. On one side of the cards, write down five fears about the decision. On the other side, write a hope that is the opposite of the fear. Talk about how looking at positives and negatives together changes the way we think about future actions.

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Prayer Exam

Read the prayer at the beginning of this session. It is a prayer used at the ordination of a priest. Invite each person to take one line of the prayer and rewrite it in their own words. Look up words in a dictionary to increase your understanding. What does this prayer say about God's role in our lives and about our mistakes?

☐ Steps for Planning

1. Save enough time in this session to make plans for the study of Difficult Decisions. Make copies of the Planning Reference Guide on the next page that lists themes and scriptures for Sessions 2 through 8 and distribute them to participants. Depending on the size of your group, divide the sessions among individuals or small groups, honoring preferences when possible. Tear out sessions from a Difficult Decisions guide to pass out to the appropriate people—an activity may pique interest as much as a scripture passage or theme. (It is helpful to have a second copy of the guide for this purpose.) Give the group five or ten minutes to look over the sessions assigned. Encourage participants to make notes on their copies of the Planning Reference Guide.

2. The goal of this planning session is to give the group latitude in deciding what they will study. There is no right or wrong way to do this. For example, the group may decide to spend three weeks on one session and skip another entirely. Look for topics, scriptures, and activities that are relevant to your life now.

3. Ask a volunteer to write down on newsprint the sessions and themes the group selected. Next to each entry, write the name of a participant who agrees to be the leader or coordinator for each week. This person will decide which activities to use and gather necessary materials. Coordinators do not need to actually lead the sessions, but they are responsible for finding someone to be the leader and making all the preparations.

4. Look at the resource posters and decide how each will be used. Make sure the posters are available to the appropriate coordinators. The posters can be used to set the tone or as the centerpiece of a discussion. The following posters are available for this module:
   Poster 1: Taking Risks
   Poster 2: Substance Abuse
   Poster 3: The AIDS Virus
   Poster 4: Depression and Suicide
   Poster 5: Marriage and Divorce
   Poster 6: Euthanasia

5. Distribute copies of the sessions to people who have agreed to be coordinators. Take a few minutes to stop the process to see if anyone feels that his or her ideas have been overlooked.
   - Do you agree with the decisions made so far?
   - Do the topics interest you?
   - If there are disagreements about the selection of the topics, can we find a way to come to agreement?

6. On another piece of newsprint, make a calendar of the sessions and themes the group will study. Include items from your church calendar that may affect scheduling. For example, you may want to participate in an intergenerational event that is held the same time as your meeting. Make sure every coordinator has a copy of the calendar, and post it in a central location.

7. Discuss accountability for coordinators and participants.
   - What are our expectations for attendance?
   - If coordinators get sick, who can they call?
   - Who can make changes in the schedule if necessary?
   - Should someone call coordinators to remind them about their upcoming responsibilities?

8. If the group wants to share responsibility for bringing in snacks, decide who will be responsible for assigning and reminding people about bringing in food. Make provisions for cleanup at the same time.

9. Ask the following questions to measure how well the planning session went:
   - Did everyone participate?
   - Did the group listen to each person?
   - Is everyone comfortable with the study plan?
   - Does everyone have a role for this unit of study?

10. Save time at the end of your study of Difficult Decisions to reflect on what you have learned and how you can put that knowledge into practice. Session 9 will help you do this with individual and group responses and celebrations through art and liturgy and in the community. Don't forget to find a way to celebrate the conclusion of the study of Difficult Decisions with some fun.

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PLANNING REFERENCE GUIDE

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Questions

- What surprises you in this session?
- What ideas do you like in this session?
- Which scriptures and themes would you want to focus on?

Topic	Scripture	Theme	Notes
Making Right Decisions	*Proverbs 21:2-3* *Philippians 1:9-11* *Psalm 119:33-36*	What Is Right? Determining What Is Best Understanding of God's Laws	
Taking Risks	*Deuteronomy 30:15-20* *Proverbs 1:8-10, 15* *John 3:8*	Choosing Life Tempted by Sin Trusting the Spirit	
Setting Priorities	*Leviticus 26:1-2* *Ecclesiastes 3:1, 10-15* *Matthew 6:19-21*	Putting God Before Idols A Time for Everything Where Is Your Treasure?	
Substance Abuse	*Proverbs 23:29-35* *II Corinthians 6:16-18* *II Peter 2:17-21*	How Substances Affect You Temple of the Living God Slave or Master	
Sexuality	*II Samuel 12:9-14* *I Corinthians 6:19-20* *I Thessalonians 4:1-8*	Facing the Consequences What Do You Do With Sexuality? Staying in Control	
Depression & Suicide	*Philippians 3:12-16* *II Corinthians 7:5-10* *Psalm 42:1-6a*	Letting Go of the Past Consoling Others Finding Help	
Adult Decisions	*Matthew 19:3-6* *Job 28:12-15, 23-28* *Philippians 1:20-24*	Living with Divorce Seeking Wisdom about Abortion Life or Death	

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Making Right Decisions

Objective

Youth will be able to understand how scripture and the example of other Christians can help them in making decisions about their own lives.

Personal Story

Last year I went with a group of young people and two adult leaders to Jamaica to lead a Bible school at our sister parish. Because I had gone there the year before, I was asked to be the youth leader of the group. The adults, who had never even visited the island, made it clear that I would be a co-leader with them. I was excited about the trip.

We had a wonderful time the year before. Our goal that year was to help parishioners paint and repair a mission church in the mountains. Although we worked hard the first day, we spent most of our time visiting tourist areas and swimming at local beaches.

One of the best parts about that trip was spending time with the young people from our sister church. They accompanied us on many of our excursions, and helped us appreciate local foods and customs. One night, without telling our sponsors or the parish priest who was our host, we went into a nearby resort town to a club for young people. We had a wonderful time, and I felt like our new friends had brought us to a safe, fun place.

My second trip to Jamaica was very different. We worked each day at the Bible school or attended church services. We only took one afternoon and one day off to visit the sights. We were there in August, and the heat was oppressive. We loved working with the children, but when they left each afternoon, we were tired. Every evening we had to get together and plan our role in the next day's activities.

We still managed to find time to see our friends from the year before. From the first time we saw them we began making plans to visit the club again. The situation was different for me, however. Now I was one of the leaders. Sometimes I want to be in charge and to be treated like an adult—this was not one of those times.

After much discussion, I convinced the others that we had to tell our two adult sponsors about our plans. Another young person and I were elected to approach our sponsors. Our Jamaica friends had told us the trip would be off if the rector found out about it, and we asked the sponsors not to tell him. They were open to the idea, and said they trusted my judgment that it was an appropriate place to go. But they had reservations about not telling our host.

The next day, our sponsors told us that we could go to the nightclub. They also told us that the rector had given his blessing to the trip. He said that he trusted his young people, and was aware that they had taken our group there last year.

We were surprised that he knew about the trip, and our Jamaican friends were amazed that the rector had known about last year's escapade and still trusted them. I'm glad we decided to tell our sponsors; taking away the guilt helped me enjoy our night a lot more than I would have otherwise. Making right decisions doesn't mean you can't have fun.

SESSION 2

Scripture
Proverbs 21:2-3
Philippians 1:9-11
Psalm 119:33-36

Skill Focus
Choices
Influence

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Prayer
O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Guidance
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 What Is Right?

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,
but the Lord weighs the heart.
To do righteousness and justice
is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.
Proverbs 21:2-3

Commentary: In these two verses the writer expresses the truth that no matter what people do, they seek to justify it in their own view. God's view, however, may be entirely different. God calls all people to make decisions that are morally and ethically right. This will happen if they follow God's will for their lives and not their own, sometimes stubborn and selfish, ways.

☐ Questions

- Why do people get defensive when their decisions or opinions are questioned?
- What does verse 2 in Proverbs say about this?
- What does this tell us about the nature of human choices?
- What is more acceptable to God in verse 3?
- What does it mean for God to weigh our hearts?

☐ Activities

Definitions

Ask the group to give their definitions for the following words: moral, ethical, legal. When all have had an opportunity to express their thoughts, look up the definitions in a dictionary. Compare the definitions. Invite the group to think of issues or events in which all three concepts could be taken into account, such as stopping for a traffic light. Then ask for situations which may be moral but unethical, such as a lawyer turning in a client who had committed a crime. Or, ethical but illegal circumstances, such as not telling on a friend who is dealing drugs. Or, moral but illegal conditions, such as lunch counter sit-ins during the 1950s civil-rights actions. Continue the discussion as long as there is interest or time permits.

- Which concept is more important—morals, ethics, or the law?
- What does the scripture passage say about these ideas?
- How many of your situations had clear answers?

Dilemma

In studies on moral development, subjects are asked to come up with solutions to difficult situations. There are no right or wrong answers, but individuals must explain why they chose a particular course of action. Using the following situation, discuss different ways the situation might be resolved. Note that men and women often have very different viewpoints.

Mary's sister is very ill. The health maintenance organization the family uses does not cover the expensive medication that Mary's sister needs. The family has tried every means possible to get the money to pay for the medicine, even petitioning the HMO to reconsider their coverage. Mary's friend's father works for the HMO. Mary and her friend consider entering the HMO offices when they are closed and changing the computer files to say that the drug has been approved.

- Should Mary do it?
- What if her sister could die within a week without the medicine?
- What if it were her friend and not her sister who was sick?
- What if it were a student at school that Mary only knew casually?
- If your heart is in the right place, does anything go?

Explore other solutions to Mary's dilemma. Look in the phone book or call a local health agency to find out how people can apply for money to pay for expensive medications. Talk about ways the group could support an agency or non-profit organization that helps poor people with medical expenses.

Dead Poet's Society

Watch the movie *Dead Poet's Society*. Be sure everyone has paper and pencil to make notes about decisions that are made—who made the decisions, what influenced the characters, and what were the consequences? Assign different characters to different observers so that everyone is not concentrating on every character. When the movie is over, discuss the results.

- This was a "religious" school where students attended chapel on a regular basis. What role did God and prayer play in the decisions made?
- Did consequences influence decisions?
- What would you have done in similar circumstances?

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2 Determining What Is Best

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

Commentary: The scripture passage is a portion of a letter written by the apostle Paul to the members of the church in Philippi. In it Paul prays that God will give them three things: love, knowledge, and righteousness. It is a prayer for love in abundance that grows beyond anything individuals could hope for. Love, however, must be guided by knowledge so that it will not be blind or misdirected. Love also must be tested so that it will be pure and blameless. Love and knowledge are God's gifts that allow people to seek righteousness—that which is good in others, in themselves, and in relationship with God.

☐ Questions

- What would it be like to have love in abundance that is never questioned or doubted?
- Is there such a thing as too much love?
- Can people do things out of love that are not good for the other person?
- Paul is asking for love in abundance, but this love is guided by knowledge and tested. Describe this kind of love.

☐ Activities

Personal Story

Reread the personal story. Discuss the difference between being a leader and being a member of the group.

- What changed when the narrator became the group's leader?
- Where in the story is love used to help the person make right decisions?
- Are there similar stories the group knows about?

Compare the stories and the process by which the decisions were made. On a piece of newsprint, write down the way decisions were made. Include influences, both negative and positive, from other people, school, church, the media, and other sources.

- Does the way decisions are made change if the person has to think about others as well as him or herself?
- Can others help you make good decisions?
- How do you determine if someone is a good or bad

God's Prayer for Us

Paul's prayer for and with the Philippians is similar to Jesus' prayer for his disciples. Both prayers are examples of how God prays with and for us, hoping that we will make the right decisions for ourselves.

Invite the participants to individually write a letter to themselves from God that is God's prayer for their lives. Keep in mind that God does not make decisions for us, but helps us to make decisions for ourselves that will bring us into a closer relationship with God.

- What would God want us to look closely at or examine in a new way?
- Desires and hopes are often part of God's plan for us, perhaps even put there by God. What are your desires and hopes?
- Do you struggle against your dreams trying to meet the expectations of others?

Before they begin, encourage the participants to think about the dreams and hopes that they may not have shared with anyone else. Seal the letters in individual self-addressed envelopes. The group can decide to have the letters mailed to them upon graduation from high school or at some other appropriate time. Ask someone in the group to be responsible for following through on this decision.

Gather the letters at the front of the room or the center of the group. Use the prayer at the beginning of this session or another you have selected to think about where God's hopes for us will lead us.

Epistles

Paul wrote letters to the members of the churches he had established in Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, and others. Imagine you are the apostle Paul. Individually or as a group, write a series of letters to other Christian youth offering them advice about making decisions and prayers that will help them seek God's will for their lives.

- What advice will you give other young people?
- Will you use your own experiences as a basis for your advice?
- How do you respond when others give you advice? Is it important to approach people in a positive manner?

Compile the letters in your own epistle or in book form. Use the book as a Prayers of the People in the celebration at the end of the unit or with another group in the church.

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3 Understanding of God's Laws

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
Turn my heart to your decrees,
and not to selfish gain.

Psalm 119:33-36

Commentary: The image of God in this Psalm is one of divine teacher. Those who follow God's example by seeking to understand the law and to live it in their lives will receive God's blessing. But following the law for its own sake is not enough. God wants people to follow the path of God's law with pleasure, to even delight in it. Obedience to God's law is never easy. It is only possible through devotion, wisdom, and understanding.

☐ Questions

- In what ways does the writer of the Psalm refer to God?
- How is God the divine teacher?
- What are the laws we are asked to follow?
- What does the writer mean by "delighting in the law"?
- Why is it so difficult to obey laws or rules?
- How do laws give you freedom?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How do you respond to unreasonable rules?
- Do you confront those who make the rules or find a way to get around them?

☐ Activities

Delight in the Law

Distribute clay or other art materials to the group and ask them to "delight in" creating whatever they wish. Make note of any questions that are asked about what they should make or how they should use the materials. After a designated time period or when everyone is finished, ask them if they enjoyed the experience.

- Did the absence of directions cause anxiety?
- Were they able to experience the freedom of no rules?
- Tell them about the questions you heard. Did they try to impose their own rules?
- Did the materials themselves provide rules, such as clay being one color? Or did the paper limit their design?
- Does design itself have rules?

Talk about how the freedom of creating something compares with the freedom God gives us through his laws. Just as artists must know the limits of their media, we must learn to live in the freedom of God's laws.

Display the art created in your meeting space or share it with others.

Wolf and Sheep

Draw a large circle on a sheet of brown or green construction paper. Outside the circle draw a large gray wolf. **Hint:** If you are not artistic, draw a stick figure and label it! Give each of the participants a white sticker or piece of paper with a piece of tape. Invite them to put their "sheep" anywhere they wish on the paper.

Afterward, explain that the circle is a fence to keep the wolf out. The fence represents the rules that we live by. Begin a discussion by talking about the sheep and what keeps them safe from the wolf.

- What rules keep us safe?
- Do the sheep struggle against the fence?
- If they get outside, there is freedom. What does freedom mean to the sheep?
- Is this kind of freedom good?

Talk about situations in which rules actually lead to freedom. For example, traffic laws allow many people to get to their destinations safely. When automobiles were first invented there were no traffic laws or signals.

- What would it be like today if there were no traffic laws or signals?
- Would you feel safe driving if the driver in front of you could make a right or left turn at any moment?
- Why do we have seatbelt and child-safety-seat laws?

Close the session by reading what Jesus had to say about God's laws in *Matthew 22:34-40*. How do these commandments affect our decisions?

Ropes Course

Arrange for the group to participate in a ropes course in your area. Ropes courses offer physical challenges that build self esteem and help groups learn to work together. Local YMCAs or Outward Bound groups often operate or can provide information about local courses. After the group has experienced the ropes course, talk about the rules of the course.

- Did the rules give freedom or take it away?
- Could you have done as much without rules?
- Would the course be safe for everyone if there were no rules?
- How do these rules help us understand God's rules for human beings?

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Taking Risks

SESSION 3

Objective

Youth will be able to identify risk-taking behavior and discuss strategies for making decisions.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Proverbs 1:8-10, 15
John 3:8

Skill Focus

Trust
Ethics

Personal Story

ANDREW

I am cautious by nature. Before I do anything, I want to be fairly certain that I will be successful. I enjoy playing sports, and I've discovered that I am best at baseball. I'm just not aggressive enough for contact sports like soccer. One of the reasons I am good at baseball is my ability to stay focused and know where to throw the ball when I get it.

Last year, I played in a league with people who were better than I am. They could hit the ball further, run faster, and make the hard plays that I sometimes missed. My ability to keep focused was still an asset, but if I wanted to stay on this team, I was going to have to take some risks. I would have to go after some balls at the risk of missing them completely. An error like that might even cost us the game.

I wish I could say that we won the championship and that I was the hero. We didn't and I wasn't. By taking risks, I made a few spectacular catches and watched other balls soar over my head. I learned that caution could sometimes be as costly as taking a risk.

VICKI

As part of our confirmation class, we went on a ropes course that was supposed to test our ability to work together. I hardly knew anyone in the group and dreaded this outing. Being in this class was not my choice; my parents had made it clear that I had to do this.

My fears about the day came true on the drive out. Everyone seemed to belong to a group. The girls in my car weren't mean, but I felt left out of their conversation. When we arrived at the camp, we were divided into groups led by counselors who were young and fun to be with. The morning went well, and by lunch I found several people to talk to.

Afterward, we went with the counselors for a more challenging activity. We were led into the woods to a high wooden wall built between two trees. Wooden braces were nailed up the side of one tree, and a rope dangled from a higher limb over the wall. Each of us was to climb the tree and rappel down the wall with the rope, anchored by a safety line held by others in the group.

My heart stopped. Just looking up the tree made me dizzy. I have a terrible fear of heights; I knew I could never climb that tree. I didn't say a word, but hoped we would run out of time before it was my turn.

Meanwhile, one of our adult sponsors began saying all the things I was feeling. She also had a fear of heights, and didn't think she could get past the second brace on the tree. I finally shared my fears with her, and we made a pact to at least try.

Others in the group practically ran up the tree, rappelled down, and asked for a second turn. (*Continued on p. 24.*)

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Prayer
O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For the Good Use of Leisure
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 825

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Choosing Life

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Commentary: One of the most precious gifts from God is the freedom of human choice. Life is constantly offering choices, and to choose the right one is often difficult. In this scripture passage the followers of Moses are being asked to make a choice for life or death. Making such a choice can mean taking on an unwanted responsibility or losing a friendship. Sooner or later each person must face the same challenge.

☐ Questions

- What are the choices we are given as human beings?
- What does Moses mean when he says choose life or death, curses or blessings?
- What does it mean to be able to live life?
- Does living life mean taking chances and risks?

☐ Activities

Taking Your Own Risks

Display Resource Poster No. 1 of the two teens taking risks. Reread the personal stories of Andrew and Vicki. In both stories, the writers learned about taking risks that were good for them and good for their growth as people. If you don't try new things, you won't discover what we can and can't do.

On one side of a large sheet of paper or chalkboard, make a list as the group shares risks they have taken. To stimulate the discussion ask the group members to think about the first time they rode a bike or went rollerblading. When the group has run out of ideas, ask them to list things they wish they could take a risk to do, like skydiving or mountain climbing. Next to each item list healthy reasons for taking that risk. For example, "I would love to feel the freedom of floating with a parachute." Or, "I really want to get to the top of the mountain." Discuss what they would need to do to accomplish the task or take the risk. Next, think about ways these risks might be unhealthy or unsafe.

We grow in faith when we face challenges in physical, emotional, social, and spiritual ways. Ask the participants to choose between two different events that represent a challenge. Ask the question, "would you sooner do A or B?" Group members must make a choice. Examples are:

- Would you rather go bungee jumping or ask someone on a date?
- Would you rather preach in church on Sunday or ski down an expert mountain trail?
- Would you rather spend three days on a silent retreat or go to a formal dance?

Make up your own challenges based on real experiences the group faces. For each one, identify the challenge for each side and discuss why the choices were made.

God's Word

Deuteronomy is an interpretation of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. The book was intended to help all of the people understand the promises and conditions of the covenant. The setting for *Deuteronomy* is the plains of Moab. The Israelites are finally ready to enter the promised land, and Moses is giving his farewell address.

Reread the scripture passage. Move the setting to the present at a high-school graduation. Pretend that you are the commencement speaker, and you want to bring the same message in this passage to the young people in the audience. It will be important to use language and examples that will help them in choosing God. Discuss the passage and the themes to be included in the address. Individually or as a group rewrite the scripture as a speech.

Field Trip

Plan a trip as a group to go whitewater rafting, downhill skiing, on a silent retreat, or some other activity that the groups decides would be healthy risk-taking for them. Discuss ahead of time the expectations for learning that may take place. After returning, share how the risk-taking experience helped the members of the group to grow physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually.

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2 Tempted by Sin

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;
for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck.
My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent. . . .
my child, do not walk in their way,
keep your foot from their paths. . . .

Proverbs 1:8-10, 15

Commentary: In this Proverb we are reminded that the guidance and loving discipline of parents is the first teaching in learning to get along with others. Parents give a great deal of advice, some of which children would rather not hear. God also wants to give advice and loving guidance. God wants people to follow this guidance and reject those who would lead them toward sin. It is only by the grace of God that they are able to do so.

☐ Questions

- What kinds of things do our parents tell us that we really should listen to?
- Why is it natural for teens to reject what parents say?
- What is sin?
- How are we tempted or lured by sin?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- If you feel comfortable doing so, describe risks you have taken that have been harmful.
- What makes a risk healthy or unhealthy?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 1.

- Describe scenarios for each picture in the poster. In your story, did the people take a risk because they wanted to try something new, or were they giving in to peer pressure?
- Is peer pressure always bad?

Continued from p. 22.
When my turn came, I approached the tree with my heart pounding. My sponsor was saying words of encouragement, but my legs shook in fear. Then a surprising thing happened. Everyone in my group came over to the tree to help me. They told me not to look down and where to place my feet. When I got to the top, they were all looking at me and shouting encouragement. After I got to the bottom, I could barely walk, but the group seemed as joyous about my success as I was.

Confirmation class isn't as bad as I thought it would be. I discovered that it sometimes helps to have the support of others when taking risks.

☐ Activities

Temptation

When Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, he was tempted by the devil three times. In the biblical accounts Jesus knew clearly that it was the devil who was tempting him. Jesus also had the strength to refuse the temptations. Read the scripture account of Jesus' temptation in *Matthew 4:1-11*; *Mark 1:12-13*; or *Luke 4:1-13.*

- What were the temptations?
- What did each represent?

Ask each participant to anonymously write down three things on separate index cards that tempted them, such as eating several candy bars or a carton of ice cream all at once, or trying a beer when "everybody else is." Put the cards in a bag and mix them up. Pull the cards out one at a time and brainstorm ways to avoid the temptation.

- How are our temptations similar or different to the ones Jesus faced?
- How do we know when to listen to our friends?
- Where can we go for help?

Gather the cards back in the bag at the end of the discussion. In *Matthew 4:10*, Jesus said to Satan, "Away with you!" Find a way to symbolically get rid of the temptations in the bag. For example, put the bag at the back of the room while you say or read together the prayer at the beginning of this session. Or, burn the bag and its contents in a safe container while you pray together.

Good Risks/Bad Risks

As Christians, we are sometimes asked to take risks. Read stories in the New Testament about taking risks—being a Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:29-37*), preaching the gospel (*Mark 6:17-29*), or ministering to the sick (*Luke 5:12-16*). In our society, as in Jesus' time, doing these things can put the persons undertaking the ministry at risk.

Create a role play for each of these stories as if they were taking place today. Afterward, discuss the situations.

- Is it easier for a man to be a "good Samaritan" to a person stranded on the street at night than it is for a woman? Why?
- Many people in South America and Africa face death for preaching the gospel in their countries. Can that happen here?
- What are the risks to caring for the sick? In Jesus' time people risked getting leprosy as they cared for these outcasts. Who are the sick, the outcasts who need care today?
- When are these risks good and when are they bad?
- How can you minimize bad risks and still do God's work in the world?

Briefly make a list of people who put themselves at risk to serve God and others. Add specific names if someone in the group knows a person who is taking these risks. Pray for the people on the list.

Watch a Movie

Watch the movie *Sister Act II*. In this movie a number of the characters take risks to be able to sing in a competition. Identify the risks taken by different characters and discuss what might have happened in real life if the story had not had a happy ending.

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3 Trusting the Spirit

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

". . . The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:8

Commentary: This verse is set in the middle of the story of Nicodemus' visit to Jesus in the middle of the night. Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish establishment, is curious enough about Jesus' ministry to seek him out and question him. Jesus replies to Nicodemus' questions by talking about the Spirit. For the author of the *Gospel of John*, the spirit or breath is life itself. True life comes from the Spirit of God. When Jesus says, "The wind blows where it wants . . . ," he uses a word that means spirit, breath, and wind. None of these can be seen of their own accord. It is only the results of the wind, the breath, and spirit that we can see. As we trust without question our breath which keeps us alive, so we must also trust in the Spirit of God which is our life.

☐ Questions

- What is meant by the Spirit in this verse?
- How does a person know if the Spirit is a part of their lives?
- How do we recognize the work of the Holy Sprit?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Did the Spirit work in the lives of the narrators?
- Can others sometimes help us recognize the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 1.

- In one picture, the young person is stepping into air. If we could see the whole scene, what else would be in the picture? Have you ever been asked to try something when you couldn't see the whole picture? What happened?

☐ Activities

Wind, Wind, Blow on Me

Bring in a fan and turn it on. Ask the members of the group to first walk in front of the fan several feet away, and then to come just one foot away. Put different items, such as cotton balls, feathers, scarves, and paper, in front of the fan.

- What did they experience when they walked in front of the fan at a distance?
- What changed when they moved closer to the fan?
- What are the effects of the moving air on the different items?

If possible go outside and see the effects of the wind by flying kites, holding balloons on strings, or watching other objects blown by the wind. Or, with permission, from the roof or a second-story window, drop different items to see the effect of the air on their fall.

- How do we know the wind is blowing?
- How do we measure its strength?
- How does the wind symbolize the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Invite the members of the group to write a reflection or poem, or to draw a picture that represents the Holy Spirit for them. Display the results.

Four Winds

Divide the top of a large table into four equal sections. Place an equal number of cotton balls in each section. Divide the group into four teams of one or more persons each. The teams must use only their breath to move all of their cotton balls out of their section and into the other sections at the same time. The game ends when all are out of breath. Now put all the cotton balls on one corner of the table. Together, blow the balls to the opposite corner.

- Was it difficult to blow against the other teams?
- Did any group win? Why?
- Is working against the Holy Spirit a similar experience?
- What happened when everyone worked together?

Bring in several packet of seeds and some gardening tools. Even though the lightweight cotton balls were frustrating to work with, at least they could be seen. Often we have to trust that the Spirit is working even when we see no evidence of that work. To gain an understanding of this concept from nature, plant seeds in a garden area around the church. The group will have to trust that the garden will grow.

Random Acts of Kindness

Enlarge a map of your local community and display it on the wall of your meeting room. Agree that each member of the group will commit an anonymous random act of kindness each week in the community. For example, raking a neighbor's yard when they aren't home, helping a stranger carry grocery bags to the car at the supermarket, using your spending money to buy food for the soup kitchen, or picking up litter in a playground. The doer of the act can discretely put a colored push pin in the map where the deed occurred. At the end of the nine sessions examine what has happened.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Setting Priorities

SESSION 4

Objective

Youth will be able to define the demands on their lives and develop strategies for setting priorities.

Personal Story

My best friend Elizabeth is a popular student who has many friends, loads of activities, and a new boyfriend. We are both very involved at church serving as lay eucharistic ministers, acolytes, and youth leadership team members. She is applying to college, has a part in the spring play, and is one of three children in a home where family is considered the most important thing.

Any adult will tell you how wonderful she is. Her friends will tell you something else. Elizabeth volunteers for everything, yet she rarely can be relied upon to finish anything. Usually, she depends on her friends to bail her out. We love her, but this part of her makes us angry.

Elizabeth's mother often must force her to choose between various activities that she is reluctant to turn down. Last Sunday her mother called to say that although Elizabeth was in charge of the youth program that evening, she would be unable to attend because she was too tired from play practice and her new dating schedule. She had also spent no time at home that week. I should have told her mother to add her friends to the list of people she had not spent time with.

As soon as we finished talking, I had the unpleasant task of telling Mark, our youth minister, that Elizabeth had disappointed us once again. He then had to relay this information to our fellow planners. We somehow managed to pull off the program that night, but many felt let down by Elizabeth, wondering why she didn't call herself and why the church, or better yet God, wasn't the most important thing on her schedule.

Others in the group could identify with the difficulty of keeping up with the competing demands of school and relationships, believing that God is in places other than church. I saw her a dozen times at school the following week, and she never once mentioned not coming on Sunday, acting as if nothing was wrong. In fact she talked about how busy she was, so busy that she didn't even ask how I was.

She returned to youth group the following week full of apologies but justified her actions with the excuse that she felt overwhelmed. When no one said anything, she just laughed and started talking about the latest gossip at school. I guess I am angry that we let her get away with being a part of a group without taking any of the responsibility for it. I also worry that she can't tell the difference between what is important and what isn't. I just can't count on her

Scripture

Leviticus 26:1-2
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 10-15
Matthew 6:19-21

Skill Focus

Independence
Communication

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Prayer
Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Proper 20
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 234

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Putting God Before Idols

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 26:1-2

Commentary: Moses concludes his long lecture on what God requires of the people by defining the limits of the holiness code that was designed to make the children of Israel stand out among their neighbors. They were to worship God and God alone without using anything that could be considered an idol. They were also to keep holy both the Sabbath day and the sanctuary where the holy tablets given to Moses at Sinai resided. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish God from the good things that God creates. Making a choice about what is most important among all of God's creation can often be a problem. Avoiding idolatry, setting apart sacred time, and establishing a way to find God helps Christians discern those choices and recognize the Lord when he is in their midst.

☐ Questions

- Do you take time out to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?
- When was the last time you had a day just to "be" instead of "do"? Is it hard to find the time or is it hard for you to be still?
- How would you define idolatry? Where are the idols in your life?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What was most important in Elizabeth's life? Did she know?
- Do you know someone like Elizabeth? What is that like?

☐ Activities

Idols in Your Life

At the front of the room, hang a picture of a popular actor or actress and a name-brand tennis shoe. Talk about the things in modern life that have become idols, using the pictures as references.

- What comes to mind when you see these pictures?
- How do they or the people who create them lure us into thinking that our lives will be better if we own them or are like them?

Ask each participant to think about the three most important things in their lives and write them on a piece of paper. For example, music, sports, drama club, or a car. Discuss the way these things affect your lives.

- How does the way we spend our time and money create idols?
- Which of your activities gives you a sense of peace?
- Which fills you with a sense of dread?
- When did an activity or possession become something that owned you?

Ask each person to fold the paper with the list of important things. Gather them on a table and say together the prayer for this session.

Idols or Icons

Provide markers and paints, old magazines, newspapers, and modeling clay for participants to create a symbol that best depicts what they love most. When everyone has finished their creations, gather in a circle and ask volunteers to tell about their creation.

Hint: Don't force anyone to share who isn't comfortable doing so.

When everyone has had an opportunity to share, ask the participants to determine if their symbol is an idol, something that replaces God, or an icon, something that draws them closer to God.

- If you have created an idol, can you change it into an icon?
- How do "good" things become idols?
- How can your symbol help draw you closer to God?

Close by reading the scripture passage from *Leviticus*.

A Walk in the Park

Instead of meeting in your regular space, keep the Sabbath by taking a walk in a park, a garden, or around the church grounds. Don't try to structure the time for the group. Ask participants to find one thing that will help them remember the day—an image, a leaf, a stone, or whatever helps them to recall the Sabbath as both the practice and the feeling of just enjoying all that God made including ourselves. If they wish to do so, talk about the items the participants selected to remember the day.

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2 A Time for Everything

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. . . . I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Ecclesiastes 3:1,10-15

Commentary: The author of *Ecclesiastes* believes in God but struggles with the difficulties life presents, particularly when it comes to choices. Both hope and despair are observed in a world where the wicked prosper and the good perish. One thing is clear in the midst of this confusion: the final trust must be placed in God. Often the greatest struggles with God are in those times when life doesn't go according to plan. God is at the heart of all that matters: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." By trusting in God, people can find real happiness, losing nothing that matters.

☐ Questions

- Do you believe God has plans or purposes for your life?
- Are those plans or purposes always easy to identify in the midst of so many good choices?
- Do you find it difficult to wait on God to lead you?
- What is "a time for every matter"?

The Road Not Taken
Stanza 4

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

☐ Activities

Elizabeth's Choices

Read the Personal Story to the group. List the priorities in Elizabeth's life.

- What do we know about her by the way she spends her time?
- Is there "a time for every matter" in her life?

Ask the participants to list the top priorities in their own lives. Include time spent for study, television, friends, and activities.

- Where do God and church rank on the list?
- What activities are more important than church? Why?
- Are worshipping God and coming to church the same thing?
- Is there enough time in every day?
- Can God help us to order our priorities?

Return to the story and find ways Elizabeth could reorder her priorities. Ask the group to look at their own lists of priorities and do the same thing. Do they need to drop some activities?

Close the session by reading Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken."

Timely Considerations

Photocopy blank sheets from a calendar or appointment book for each person in the group. Ask participants to write down their schedule for the coming week. Include projects or test dates, chores they are responsible for, and other activities. Be sure the calendars allow them room to put down everything they do in a day.

Together, talk about the types of activities the participants listed on their calendars. List on one side of a chalkboard or piece of newsprint all the things they have to do, such as school, doctor's appointments, practice, church, eating, sleeping, or brushing teeth. On the other side, list all the things you want to do, such as spending time with friends, dating, going to a movie, or working on a hobby.

Compare the lists, paying careful attention to pressure that comes with the expectations of how things should be done with the way they often are done. Also consider how priorities change when there is an emergency or when someone is ill.

When everyone has had a chance to contribute to the discussion, hand out another blank calendar sheet. Say together "A Prayer of Self Dedication" found p. 832 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Give the group time to plan a new schedule according to what God would have them do.

Video

Together watch a film about fulfilling dreams and meeting parental expectations, such as *Shine* or *Searching for Bobby Fischer*. Discuss the expectations and disappointments the characters encountered as they pursued their exceptional talents in a life filled with mixed blessings.

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3 Where Is Your Treasure?

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6:19-21

Commentary: Jesus addressed the crowds about many important things from a mountaintop in the Galilee region. As part of his sermon, he tells the people he recently fed with perishable food that they should refrain from working so hard for things that have no lasting value. People tend to work hard for what they can see and taste and touch. Jesus knew the temptation of clinging to something tangible. Even the children of Israel created idols after they had been delivered by God's hand from Egypt. Tangible things capture hearts, leaving the illusion of safety and happiness. Christ wants to capture hearts and help people cling to what is most important—a relationship with God that will never fade away.

☐ Questions

- What treasures do you cling to? A sport? A relationship? Certain clothes?
- Have you ever had something you valued taken away without your consent? What did it feel like?
- Did the sense of its value change later on? Was it more or less important to you and why?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What did Elizabeth treasure?
- What did she lose?

☐ Activities

Shopping Spree

Make a list of tangible and intangible treasures on newsprint. Include in the list things that most people desire and spend money on such as cars, music, stereos, snack food, or clothes. Also include intangible treasures like peace in the world, companionship, health, or a trusted friend. In another part of the list, add wishes and dreams, such as a date with a favorite actor or lunch with a figure from history. Make the list as simple or as outrageous as the group wants.

Go back through the list and attach a monetary value to each item based on group consensus. Hand out a form of currency such as ten pennies, with each representing $100 or $1,000, or $5,000 in monopoly money, making sure that everyone is given the same amount. Auction off the objects on the list. Follow with a discussion about what we value and why.

- Are friends more important than a onetime date with a star?
- Is your health worth more than a car?
- Does the way you spend your time and money reflect your values?

Fire Drill

Give everyone in the group index cards and a pen. Inform them that their house is burning down and they have only five minutes to get in and remove what they consider most valuable. Ask participants to write down one item per index card that they would take out. After a few minutes blow a whistle, ring a bell, or blast some music. Ask participants to talk about what they were able to save and why they saved it. Tape the cards to a piece of butcher paper to compare the types of items listed. Talk about why these things were important to save. Then discuss how they felt when favorite items were lost, damaged, or stolen.

- Have you ever lost a tangible object that was really important to you, like a bike that rusted, a favorite sweater that moths attacked, or a purse or wallet that was stolen? What was that like?
- Did you replace the object? If so, did you value it more or less?
- Have you ever given anything away freely that was really valuable to you? What was that like?

On another index card, list the intangible things that are important to you. Talk about how those things can also be lost, damaged, or stolen. End the session by praying silently or aloud for objects or people that have been taken away.

Pin the Treasure

A popular expression suggests that putting the cart before the horse can illustrate our values. For example, we may rush out to buy the latest CD of a favorite music group even though our CD player is broken. Draw a picture on newsprint of a horse with a dollar sign above it and a cart with a heart above it. **Hint:** If you are not an artist, draw and label stick figures.

Ask the group if their hearts follow their money or if their money follows their hearts. Pass out post-it notes or small slips of paper with tape. On one color paper, list the things, activities, or people that are important to them. On another color or paper, list the things they spend money on.

Ask each person to place the slips on either the cart or the horse.

- What really determines the direction we take our treasures?
- What does our use of money say about the status of our heart?

Close by rereading the passage of scripture from *Matthew* and saying together the prayer at the beginning of this session.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Substance Abuse

SESSION 5

Objective

Youth will be able to review current information about substance abuse and identify ways God helps them deal with temptation.

Personal Story

My best friend Leslie was popular, and because I was her best friend, I was popular by proxy. This was the way things were until the year my father was elected mayor. Then suddenly our family was in the headlines.

Every fall Angela had an overnight party to which she invited the most popular girls. I never made the cut until my father's election, despite my connections with the popular crowd through Leslie. Everyone who was anyone was going to be there. It was also the year I entered high school.

I agonized about what to say, wear, and talk about for weeks in advance. The big day finally arrived, and I was determined to make the most of this chance to finally be popular. We all arrived and were hanging out watching MTV, giggling, and eating popcorn. It was perfect until Angela's brother and his friends arrived with marijuana.

Since their parents were out until midnight, the coast was clear. The party was moved to the patio under the stars where we could bask in God's creation and avoid leaving an odor in the house, or so Sonja said. Everyone made their way to the patio. Everyone, that is, except me.

I stood in the doorway unable to follow, not because of lofty principles, but just out of pure fear. I was afraid of so many things. I knew I would get into terrible trouble if we were caught, especially considering how fast word travels. My parents would be horrified and the press would have a field day with the new mayor and his delinquent daughter. Smoking might also cause cancer, and I find it disgusting anyway.

I was afraid of being so out of control and making a fool of myself in front of this group of people. No one pressured me really, but it felt awful to be on the inside looking out—especially since I had always been on the outside looking in, hoping to be one of them.

I never was invited to another party by anyone in this group again. Popularity was now out of the question. I can't say God helped me to say no, but I wonder how God used my fear to help me make a better choice than I would have made on my own.

Scripture

Proverbs 23:29-35
II Corinthians 6:16-18
II Peter 2:17-21

Skill Focus

Conflict
Trust

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Prayer
Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Fifth Sunday in Lent
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 219

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 How Substances Affect You

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has strife? Who has complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger later over wine,
those who keep trying mixed wines.
Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.
At the last it bites like a serpent,
and stings like an adder.
Your eyes will see strange things,
and your mind utter perverse things.
You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.
"They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt;
they beat me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake?
I will seek another drink."

Proverbs 23:29-35

Commentary: The writer of *Proverbs* clearly has some personal experience with the vivid effects of being captured by a substance—being drunk and having hallucinations and crazy thoughts. The passage suggests that loving a mood-altering substance can be a real problem especially when it is used as a means of escaping the difficulties life presents. Most of the time after consuming too much of anything, people wake up the next morning and realize it has consumed them with the terrible physical or emotional after effects. Even more tragic is the nightmare of being or becoming addicted to a controlling substance.

☐ Questions

- What is the motivation for drinking or using a mood-altering substance?
- What makes for fun or a good time?
- What does God think of using pleasurable substances in moderation? Is that possible?
- How can what we choose to use or abuse affect our neighbor?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.
- What do you think happened to the people in the story? Write your own ending.

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.
- Have you seen your peers use drugs?
- If so, what did you do?

☐ Activities

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

Bring in current newspapers and magazines. Ask participants to look for advertisements for food, alcohol, cigarettes, beer, and other substances. After they have found some good examples, discuss the way society treats substances that can be abused or addictive.

- What style of life is held up for admiration in these ads?
- What do people think they are going to get if they purchase or use these products?
- Are there consequences for their abuse? If so, for whom?

Gather the advertisements, and put them in a place everyone can see them. Look at the prayer at the beginning of this session. Talk about "true joys" individuals in the group have experienced without using substances. Close by reading the prayer together.

You Can't Eat Just One

Bring in a bowl of corn chips or chocolate-covered candies. Give each person one chip or one piece of candy and place the rest in a bowl in the middle. See how many people reach for more and how long it takes to eat everything in the bowl. Talk about the experience.

- Why did you reach for more?
- Was it habit or desire?
- Was it because you couldn't help yourselves?
- When does a habit become an addiction?

Discuss things that are difficult to say no to that may be positive, such as one more lap in the pool, one more hour of homework, or one more good deed. How can this behavior work for us and against us?

Ask each person to think about one thing they will stop and one thing they will try to build on during the next week. Share with the group, if you are comfortable doing so.

Video or Literature

In a scene in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis, Edmund becomes a slave of the White Witch, or Ice Queen, because of his love for Turkish Delight. This turns out to be a candy which he finds so addictive and enticing that he will forsake all that is important to him to have it. Watch or read the clip and ask the group to think about what Edmund has lost in his pursuit of the one thing he thinks he cannot live without. Discuss the scene and the innocent beginnings of many addictions.

- How did Edmund's actions affect those who loved him?
- How did his addiction lead to betrayal?
- Do you have something that you are addicted to?
- Do addictions always involve harmful substances?

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2 Temple of the Living God

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,
"I will live in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be your father,
and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

II Corinthians 6:16-18

Commentary: In a world filled with unbelievers, the apostle Paul calls the Corinthians to holiness. They must wrestle with the truth that their bodies are not simply their own, but the place where God resides. Holiness is not just on the outside, something that happens in church or in a special place, but also on the inside, where room is made by remaining empty of things that separate people from God. During the Eucharist, Christians are joined to the body of Christ who "dwells in us and we in him." When people abuse substances, there is no room for God to dwell. They are filled up with things that leave them thirsting for the living water of Christ. God gives us all we need.

☐ Questions

- What does it mean to be holy? Is it the same thing as purity?
- What are the consequences of believing that your body is a temple of the Spirit?
- Would you live your life differently if your choices were guided by the knowledge that God lives within you?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Did God play a role in the author's decision to stay inside the house?
- Has God helped you even though you weren't aware of God at the time? What was that like?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.

- Does knowing that God is a part of you affect your decisions about using drugs or alcohol?

☐ Activities

Wholeness and Holiness

A trend in medicine today is to treat the whole body instead of focusing on certain parts. Medical professionals are more careful about gauging the effects of treatments on other parts of the body and mind. Sometimes in church, we focus on spiritual issues without looking for the ways these issues impact the rest of us. Talk about things that help you feel whole.

- When do you feel physically well, emotionally good, or spiritually whole?
- Did those feelings come after a long run, a hot shower, or a great youth group activity or retreat?

Ask the participants to write down on pieces of colored construction paper when they felt good, in balance, and whole. Using these pieces of paper construct a building using tape or glue, being as creative as possible. When the building is complete, talk about the purpose that buildings serve.

- Do they offer people shelter? House important programs? Give them a place to learn?
- How do we take care of buildings?
- Which buildings are most important to us and why?
- What does Paul mean when he suggests that we are to be temples, buildings made by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Find time during the week to do something that makes you feel good and whole. Plan a group outing or service project that helps you have these feelings.

Affirmation Bodies

Give each person a piece of newsprint large enough to trace their body. In pairs, trace each other's bodies on the newsprint. Put them up on the wall and ask each person to fill their bodies with pictures, words, and descriptions about what they want to be. Talk about the drawings if the group feels comfortable doing so. Are there any surprises?

After looking at each outline, ask each person in the group to write kind phrases on the paper surrounding the figures about the person depicted. Choose peaceful background music to accompany the exercise.

Give each person time to read the phrases others have written.

- Are the observations of others similar to the way you see yourself?
- Can others sometimes see you more clearly than you can see yourself?
- How can keeping our bodies as a temple of God make a difference?

Outreach

Explore areas of outreach that deal with substance abuse, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Alateen, Over-Eaters Anonymous, or Gamblers Anonymous. Find out which organizations are available in your community by looking in a phone book or the classified section of a local newspaper. Many of these groups meet in churches, and most welcome people who are serious about exploring the organization. Select a program the group is interested in, and attend a meeting either individually or in small groups.

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3 Slave or Master

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[False teachers] are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the deepest darkness has been reserved. For they speak bombastic nonsense, and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who have just escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them.

II Peter 2:17-21

Commentary: This passage is possibly written by the apostle Peter before his martyrdom in Rome. It exposes false prophets and teachers who claim that there are no consequences for following instincts, passions, or desires. These false teachers wanted to free Christians from moral choices that were embarrassing in a pagan society. It is easy to believe that a person can do what everyone else is doing without consequence to self or others. Christians, however, are called to a larger view of life that is beyond the next pleasure. They must take into consideration not just their own needs, but the needs of others in this life and the life to come. People can become false prophets by their choices and actions. They become slaves to what masters them and then teach it to others. God has made it clear that this way of life is like "waterless mists driven by a storm," a storm from which a deep darkness will ensue.

☐ Questions

- Do you prefer to blend in or stand out in a crowd? Why?
- Have you ever done something you did not want to do just so that you would not draw attention to yourself?
- Have you drawn attention to yourself by standing up for something that was right?
- Have you ever regretted getting someone into trouble through your choices?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Could the author's choice not to join in help someone else?
- How does fear sometimes help us?

☐ Activities

Poster Drama

Divide into two groups, and assign each group one of the pictures in Resource Poster No. 2.

Hint: The poster shows a young person smoking an illegal substance and another person using a needle. If the poster is not available, find other pictures of teens using illegal substances or describe such a scene.

Ask the groups to create a short drama about what led the person to that moment in time. In the second scene, follow that person home and dramatize the consequences of his or her choices. Let each group act out the skit and then talk about the stories.

- What were the similarities and differences in the dramas?
- What leads people to make poor choices?
- Are the people using drugs slaves or masters?

Select one or both of the dramas to stage for a younger group of teens in the church. Be ready to follow the dramatization with a discussion period.

Looks Can Be Deceiving

Fill two bowls with substances that look the same, such as cornstarch and confectioners (powdered) sugar or regular sugar and salt. Give each participant a spoon. Without telling them what is in either bowl, ask them to choose one by taking a small portion in his or her spoon. Ask the group to wait until everyone has selected before tasting or smelling the substance. On the count of three ask the group to taste what is in their spoons. After people have had a chance to react, talk about how choices were made.

- Who did you listen to and why?
- How do we make choices about things that look enticing but still feel a little risky?
- What can we do after we have made a poor choice?
- Have you made a decision before asking questions? What happened?

Part of growing up is trying new things. Discuss the difference between exploring new experiences that are positive and those that are negative. Is it always easy to tell the difference? As a group make a checklist of four or five questions to ask before trying something new. Make sure everyone has a copy of the questions to keep.

Music

Ask participants to bring in music about addiction, particularly those songs that make it look appealing, such as Eric Clapton's song "Cocaine." Ask each person to talk about what they think about the music.

- Do you like the music? Why?
- What does it teach you?
- How does it disturb you?
- Can you just ignore the lyrics and enjoy the music? Does this really work?

Most schools now offer classes about drugs. Ask the group to design a session they would present to students in fifth or sixth grades about drugs. Perhaps use some of the music the group listened to. What would be included? How would it be presented? If appropriate, present it to a group of younger youth at your church.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Sexuality

SESSION 6

Objective

Youth will be able to discuss sexuality in terms of respect for themselves and others.

Personal Story

I had been selected to be a counselor at a church camp. I had been a camper there every summer since I was a kid. It just so happened that my boyfriend of two years, Alan, was going to be there too. We lived in different cities and saw each other only once a month. We called and wrote letters in between. We both had big plans for a wonderful summer of romantic days off and secret midnight meetings.

Everything was going according to plan until Jennifer—with the long red nails and blue eyes—became interested in what was off-limits, or so I thought. I've never gone after someone else's boyfriend! I wondered why she thought the idea was okay.

A week after her interest became apparent, she appeared in my tent during my afternoon off. She came in, sat down on my bed, and announced with a big sigh, "Alan and I fell asleep in each other's arms by the lake last night." She added several other details implying that they had sex. Alan and I had agreed to wait until marriage to have sex.

I tried not to cry. I wanted to kill her or him, whoever I ran into first. It never occurred to me to ask Alan if this was true. Maybe I never really trusted him. I was terribly hurt, and for days found it difficult to talk to either one. Alan did make several attempts to talk to me.

Several days later we found a way to work through what had happened. We broke up! What Jennifer had said was true. The way she said it, though, was mean. But maybe she did me a favor. I still can't decide.

I wonder if I should have done things differently. If it would have made a difference in the ways things turned out. Like, maybe being my own best friend and fighting for the relationship. Instead, I gave into an act of betrayal.

Alan's excuses still make no sense though his apology did. I believe he never meant to hurt me. It was an impulsive decision. He just couldn't say no. It's a good thing she didn't get pregnant.

I really believed God wanted Alan and me together. I thought Alan believed that, too. Jennifer must have been irresistible. It makes me wonder if everyone has that much trouble saying no when they are in a long-term relationship. Is commitment overrated? Maybe people cannot control their impulses and need God's help.

Scripture

II Samuel 12:9-14
I Corinthians 6:19-20
I Thessalonians 4:1-8

Skill Focus

Respect
Relationships

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Prayer
O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Sixth Sunday of Easter
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 225

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Facing the Consequences

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Nathan said to David,] "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die."

II Samuel 12:9-14

Commentary: Nathan was sent by God to bring a difficult message to King David. David wanted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and was willing to go to any lengths to get her. He had seen her on a rooftop while she was bathing and had to have her. They committed adultery secretly and in the process conceived a child. To make matters worse, David sent Uriah to the front lines of battle where he knew Uriah would be killed. Earlier in *II Samuel 12*, Nathan brought the news of God's judgment to David in the form of a parable. When David understands, he repents. Nathan pronounces God's judgment: the death of the child David and Bathsheba had conceived in adultery. Though David repented and God continued to love him, there sometimes are irrevocable consequences.

☐ Questions

- What are some deeds which have consequences that cannot be undone?
- Can a person stop an action and go a different direction?
- Does God make bad things happen when we sin or are bad things a consequence of sin?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Rank the characters from best to worst: Jennifer, Alan, and the author. Give reasons for each ranking.
- Who showed the most respect for others?

☐ Activities

Bath, Bed, and Beyond

Create a series of stepping stones out of paper depicting the path between Bathsheba's bath, David bed, and beyond. For more detail return to *II Samuel* and read chapters eleven and twelve in their entirety. Write each part of the story on the papers in the form of newspaper headlines similar to those you might see in a tabloid. For instance, the first stepping stone in the path toward disaster might be: King spies woman in bath. Ask the group to help you write the headlines as you relate the story. Place the stones on the floor of your meeting room where everyone can see them. Discuss how one bad decision can lead to another.

- At what point could David, Bathsheba, or Uriah have made a different decision?
- Could Bathsheba have turned down David's advances?
- What would have happened if David had realized his mistake sooner?

Move the stepping stones around or add new ones to reflect possibilities suggested by the group. For example, if David had not had sexual relations with Bathsheba, what might have happened?

Consequences

As each person arrives, hand them a piece of paper with the following ten statements: I fear pregnancy. I expect to feel guilty and lose self-respect. I fear that my parents will find out. I worry about sexually transmitted diseases. I know God does not want me to do it. I have concluded that sex is overrated and may not be worth the risks. I worry that my partner will tell others. I want to be a virgin when I get married. I worry that my partner really does not love me and will break up with me when this is over. I love my partner and believe that having sex will have negative consequences for both of us.

Working individually, rank each item from one (most important) to ten (least important) to indicate which statements have the most influence in their decisions about premarital sex. If a consequence is not listed, invite people to add their own. When everyone has finished, put the answers in a brown paper bag. Tally up the responses and discuss what the most significant consequences are for the group.

If your group is comfortable doing so, ask them to define virginity and premarital sex. Also explore the advantages and disadvantages of sex before and after marriage.

Outreach

Spend some time in a school-based child-care center for children of teens who are still in high school. Be sure to check with the center's director before you visit. The director may request that small groups visit over a period of time. Before you visit, plan several activities and games that young children might enjoy. If possible, spend some time talking to teen mothers when they pick up their children. Find out what it is like to go to high school and be a mother. Afterward, talk about what you have learned with the group.

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2 What Do You Do With Sexuality?

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

I Corinthians 6:19-20

Commentary: Your body is a reflection of what you think about yourself, about God, and about others. The forgiveness of our sins was bought through the painful death of Christ. This is the highest price that one person can pay for another. To use the body irresponsibly, casually, or without regard for the consequences is to misuse God's gift of sexuality.

People tend to treat things that have a personal cost with more reverence. A car bought with hard-earned money is different than one delivered on a person's sixteenth birthday. Buying a gift with your own money is different than one parents bought. God gave his son to live and die for humankind. Paul believes that misuse of the body is a direct reflection on our acceptance of that gift.

☐ Questions

- How is sexuality a gift from God?
- What do you do with a gift that you love and respect?
- How is your self-esteem reflected in how you treat your body?
- What is the difference between sex and sexuality?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Did the actions of Jennifer and Alan affect others?
- If they had time to think about it, would they have acted the same way?
- Did God play a role in the decision?
- What are some strategies to help a person keep his or her decision to wait to have sex until marriage?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 3.

- Before you read the title, what did you think the photos in the poster were?
- Can a sexual relationship be both beautiful and destructive? How?
- What else in life has both beauty and danger?

☐ Activities

Video and TV

Many popular movies and television shows offer opportunities for discussing sexuality. There are several scenes in the movie *Circle of Friends* where the characters talk about having sex. One of the characters eventually becomes pregnant. Discuss the choices they made, why they made them, and the consequences they faced.

On a chalkboard or newsprint, draw a line. At one end write "holding hands" and the other end "sexual intercourse." List the progression from a first date to marriage. Talk about the intimacies that occur in between these two extremes and the emotional consequences of different kinds of behavior.

- What makes a relationship intimate?
- Should a couple discuss intimacy or deal with it spontaneously?
- Do decisions a couple makes affect other people? How?
- What does belief in God have to do with these decisions?

Music

Bring in music which reflects sexual norms and emotional expectations for relationships. Play different songs that identify the norms and expectations from the perspective of the artists. Talk about the music you listen to and how it affects your behavior.

- If you were entertaining aliens from another planet, what might they conclude about human beings from the way sex is depicted?
- How does what we see and hear around us affect who we think we are supposed to be?
- Do our relationships take into account Paul's description of bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit?

In the next week as you listen to the radio or play your favorite CDs, listen more closely to the messages being sent. Think about the effect these lyrics have on your actions.

What Would You Do?

On slips of paper, write down a variety of roles, including parent, wife, husband, girlfriend, and boyfriend. Make sure there are enough assignments for each member of the group even if you have to repeat them. Put them in a box or paper bag. Ask participants to select one slip of paper. Do not tell anyone what your slip says.

List five scenarios on newsprint, and ask each person to describe the words they would say and the actions they would take according to the role they selected. Make up scenarios or choose from the following: You discovered your child was involved in a pregnancy and has not told you. You found erotic publications in your friend's dresser. A person of the opposite sex who you worked with on a school project invites you to a private lunch. You accidentally walk in on your friends making love.

Talk about the scenarios and how responses can change according to the role a person is playing.

- Were you more sympathetic toward parents after playing their role?
- Do decisions about relationships continue after marriage?
- Can people enjoy God's gift of sexuality without abusing it?

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3 Staying in Control

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

I Thessalonians 4:1-8

Commentary: Thessalonia was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul chose the church there to express his concerns about sexual purity to the Gentile converts. The world they lived in was permeated by sexual irresponsibility. In this passage Paul calls Christians to control their bodies in "holiness and honor" and to treat one another with dignity and respect. They were not to behave like their neighbors, whose lust led to actions that created problems in the community. (Lust in scripture means acting on one's passions by plotting and carrying out a plan. A sexual feeling would not necessarily have been lust.)

Christians answer to a higher authority. God did not call us to impurity but to holiness. We can stay in control because we have the gift and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

☐ Questions

- Look up the words fornication and sanctification in a dictionary. What do they mean? What words would you use if you were editing this for Paul?
- What are lust and passion? Are they wrong?
- Why does it feel good to do something forbidden?
- Is lustful passion different if it is in the context of a Godly relationship?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Did Jennifer and Alan control their bodies in holiness and honor?
- Did their passion affect other people?

☐ Activities

Strategies for Staying in Control

As the participants arrive, give them an index card and a pen. Ask them to write down one situation involving sex where things get out of control that they have thought or heard about. Collect the questions. Select one situation at a time, and discuss ways to get back in control or how to avoid the situation altogether.

Hint: People of all ages are often uncomfortable talking about sex. Set the tone with your demeanor and be prepared to set aside a situation you feel is inappropriate.

Afterward, talk about the situations in light of the scripture passage.

- Is sex bad? Does Paul say that?
- Are you uncomfortable talking about sex?
- Could you ask God to help you make decisions about your sexuality?

Put all the questions into a bag or box. Remind the group that God respects all our questions and uncertainties. Say together the prayer from the beginning of the session.

What You See . . .

Look at magazines, catalogs, and newspapers for pictures and stories of couples in relationships. Talk about the feelings or images that the pictures invoke.

- What can you tell about the relationship from the pictures and the stories presented?
- What would the people who put the advertisements together like you to believe?
- Can you tell if a relationship is good from the outside looking in or do you need to be inside looking out?

Ask the group to design their own advertisements for a healthy relationship. Draw a couple or use some of the pictures found earlier. Decide what kind of activity the couple should be involved in and how to portray it. Include ads that offer abstinence as an alternative. Display the advertisement in your meeting space.

Finding Out More

Visit a local family-planning clinic to find out what services are offered and how clients are treated. Talk to the director of the clinic about its policies, especially those relating to teens.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Depression & Suicide

SESSION 7

Objective

Youth will be able to identify feelings of depression in themselves and others and discuss ways to seek help.

Note: *Some of the youth in the group may be experiencing depression or be close to someone who is. Don't try to handle situations that are beyond your abilities. Be ready to ask for outside help from a counselor or clergy.*

Personal Story

It's hard to define the feelings of depression, mainly because they seem so embedded in your soul that it's almost unimaginable that anyone else could feel the same way. I can remember the first time I was told I needed to seek help, but I'll never know when I first started feeling depressed. My schoolwork suffered. It seemed like I was working harder than ever, yet I got F's when I had always gotten A's.

But bad grades weren't the only thing that worried the people close to me. I was making myself an outcast. Most of the time I would sit in my room and cry until I fell asleep. I didn't want to work, and I definitely did not want to see my friends. I had always been very social, but at that point I found people loud and annoying.

Looking back on this now, I'm surprised that I didn't realize these problems came from inside of me. I had thought they came from my environment—my classes were too hard, my friends tiresome—and I felt that nothing could be done because that's the way life is. The worst part was that I thought only death could take away this pain.

It was my mom who first confronted me. I had been crying again, and when she asked me why, I finally admitted to her that I didn't know. I think this is when my healing started. It was hard to face the reality that I was depressed.

Until then, I didn't know there was such a thing as a chemical imbalance that causes depression. Once I read about it and talked to my parents, I was able to say that I was depressed and wanted help. I'm sure that the weekly counseling sessions and daily medications were important, but the two things that kept me alive were family support and prayer.

I discovered a new type of prayer. I would kneel for hours every day and tell God what I was feeling and ask him for relief. When I told him what I felt, answers came into my mind. I looked for small things that gave me joy, and every time I felt happy, I recognized it and thanked God. By gradually adding small pieces of light into my life, I improved.

Now one year, one month and eleven days since I confronted my problems, I have gone from crying every night, begging that my life would end, to feeling secure and confident. Depression is a disease that can be cured. I learned that when I felt completely alone, I could always talk to God.

Scripture

Philippians 3:12-16
II Corinthians 7:5-10
Psalm 42:1-6a

Skill Focus

Forgiveness
Communication

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Prayer
This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. *Amen*.

In the Morning
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 461

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Letting Go of the Past

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Philippians 3:12-16

Commentary: Paul had a special affection for the Christians living in Philippi, and wrote this letter to warn them of moral and other dangers they were facing. Many Philippians believed in a righteousness based on law, and claimed that total salvation could be found in the present. Paul insists that salvation was realized in the past through Christ's death and resurrection, is made available in the present as Christ is risen, and awaits us in the future as Christ will come again.

☐ Questions

- ♦ It has been said that yesterday and tomorrow are twin thieves that rob us of today. Do you have regrets over the past or fears of the future?
- ♦ How can you best forget what lies behind?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 4.

- ♦ Have you ever felt like the person in the poster?
- ♦ What do you do when you feel this way?
- ♦ What would you say to God?

☐ Activities

Light in the Darkness

After a brief introduction of the topic, put the room in total darkness—you may need to relocate to a room where this is possible. Allow a few minutes for everyone's eyes to adjust. Ask participants to silently make a list of everything they can see. After another minute, strike a match and light a candle. Ask everyone to silently add to the list of what they can see. Invite participants to come forward and get a candle, which they should light from the original candle. After everyone has lit a candle, turn the lights back on and discuss the experience.

- What, if anything, could you see in the darkness?
- What could you see with one candle lit?
- What could you see as more and more candles were lit?
- Why do you think Jesus described himself as "the light of the world"?

People who have experienced depression often lose their peripheral vision. Take turns looking through an empty paper-towel roll. Note the things you can see before looking through the roll and then afterward.

- What can you see in your peripheral vision that you cannot see while looking through the roll?
- What parts of your life might you lose sight of if you experienced depression?

Pass It On

Stand in a circle, with each person holding an object of their own choosing, such as a chair, a book, a coin, a cup, whatever is handy. At a signal, everyone should pass their object to the person on their left, taking the object from the person on their right, and passing that on, in turn. Whenever an object is dropped, the game pauses. Whoever dropped the object must leave the circle, but the object remains in the circle. Resume passing the objects. The game gets progressively more difficult as more people leave the circle and fewer people must pass the same number of objects. Repeat the game several times.

Afterward, discuss what it was like to have an increased burden or respond to increased pressures.

- In what ways is this game similar to real-life experience?
- Did you laugh or get frustrated?
- How can humor help us deal with pressures?
- What happens when you try to do too much?

Think about your activities and responsibilities for the next week. Find at least one thing you could drop to ease the pressure in your life.

Video

Watch the movie *Brother McCullen* about a family facing changes when one of its members announces his wedding. One of the issues they face is depression. After viewing the movie talk about how the family deals with depression.

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2 Consoling Others

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within. But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

II Corinthians 7:5-10

Commentary: Paul himself had brought Christianity to Corinth, one of the world's most cosmopolitan and important cities of the day. Although the church got off to a great start, relations between the Corinthian church and Paul deteriorated shortly after Paul left the city for his other missionary travels. They ignored his advice. Just when he was at his lowest point, Titus caught up with him and gave him encouraging news—the Corinthians were finally willing to listen and eager to welcome Paul back.

☐ Questions

- According to Paul, what is the difference between "godly grief" and "worldly grief"?
- Can you give examples of each grief from what you have observed in the world around you? Can you give examples from your own life?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Who was the consoler in the story?
- Have you been in the role of consoler with a friend or family member? What was that like?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 4.

- Sometimes we don't recognize depression in ourselves or others. What are signs you look for?
- How do you differentiate between feeling sad (a healthy feeling) and feeling depressed?

☐ Activities

Ministering to One Another

Paul was snubbed by the Corinthians because he had pointed out and challenged their self-destructive behavior. Talk about people who have played Paul's role in your life.

- Has there ever been a "Paul" in your life who challenged your behavior?
- How did you react?
- Have you ever challenged another person's destructive behavior? What happened?

Just when Paul was feeling very down about the situation in Corinth, Titus came to him and consoled him. This lifted Paul's spirits tremendously.

- Has there ever been a "Titus" in your life who came to you in a time of difficulty and consoled you?
- How did you react?
- Have you been a consoler as Titus was? What happened?

Talk about ways participants can challenge and console each other. Ask God to help you have the courage to confront those who need to be challenged and to recognize those who need to be consoled.

Looking for Light

Rabbi Hillel said, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." In the Personal Story the author talked about "gradually adding small pieces of light into my life." Repeat the exercise of darkening the room (see previous page: Light in the Darkness), but this time, as participants light their candles, ask them to name something that they are thankful for.

Discuss how the person in the Personal Story got to the point of finding light in life again. Talk about how to distinguish between being depressed and being low—a normal part of life. People who are depressed often cannot see any light in their lives. During the exercise was it easy or hard to name something to be thankful for? End by saying together the prayer at the beginning of this session.

It is often other people who help us to get beyond sadness.

- Who helped the person in the story?
- Can you name someone who has helped you?

Say a prayer for that person while holding your candle. How are people like small glimmers of light in our lives?

Reaching Out

Invite a counselor, social worker, or psychologist to talk to the group about depression and suicide. Share the information you learn with other groups in your church. Or, contact an organization that operates a community suicide hotline to find out how the group could be involved as peer counselors. Attend a training session to learn how to identify and respond to signs of depression.

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3 Finding Help

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.
Why are you cast down, O my soul?
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Psalm 42:1-6a

Commentary: Feeling cut off from God and oppressed by his enemies, the psalmist cries out to God for help. As a deer thirsts for water, the soul longs for the reassurance of God's presence. The writer remembers happier times, leading a procession on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of God. With great honesty, pain, and anguish, the author questions why he is so cast down and disquieted now. Then ending on a hopeful note, the psalmist praises God who is "my help."

☐ Questions

- Is this scripture passage comforting? Why or why not?
- Is there anything about this passage that you can relate to the life of someone you know? To your own life?

Signs of Depression

- Feelings of loneliness and hopelessness;
- Becoming uncommunicative;
- Having explosive emotional outbursts, moodiness, bursts of crying;
- Loss of appetite or excessive eating;
- Losing interest in activities once considered enjoyable;
- Loss of energy, extreme fatigue;
- Sleeplessness;
- A preoccupation with the notion that "nobody understands";
- Fascination with death;
- A tendency to become more active and aggressive than usual;
- A serious drop in grades;
- Giving away valuable possessions;
- Feeling useless;
- Feeling unloved and unlovable;
- Drug or alcohol abuse

☐ Activities

Warning Signs of Depression

It is normal to occasionally experience sadness. However, if you or someone you know frequently experiences many of the warning signs of depression, that is an indication of clinical depression, which should be treated by professionals. If possible, give each participant a copy of the list on this page.

Discuss the signs of depression and how to distinguish sadness or an occasional feeling of being blue from depression. Brainstorm strategies for dealing with sadness, such as calling a friend to talk or exercising. At the end of the session, pray for people you know who are sad or depressed. Also ask God to help you use some of the strategies for dealing with sadness in your own life.

Personal Story

Read the Personal Story and discuss the different parts, from the writer's denial of the problem, to acceptance, to finding help, and to healing.

- How did this young person find help?
- Did she look for help or did someone intervene?
- What choices did this young person make on her own?
- What choices were made on her behalf?
- What does the writer say about suicide?
- Which of the signs of depression were present in the story?

Both the psalmist and the young person in the story found hope in God's presence. Talk about ways to find hope through friends, music, parks, prayer, and other things. Even if you are only feeling sad, the things that give you hope can lift your spirits. Write down one thing that gives you hope or adds light to your life. Put it on a mirror or other place you look at every day.

Resource Book

Research and put together an annotated resource book of information on local agencies, organizations, and hotlines that are dedicated to the issue of depression and suicide. In doing the research, be sure to actually call each of the numbers that you are going to recommend to get first-hand knowledge of whether the number actually works, how responsive and friendly the people are, and what sort of help they offer. Make the book available to young people and adults in your church. Give each of the agencies or organizations listed a copy of the book.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Adult Decisions

Objective

Youth will be able to state that these decisions are difficult and painful for all people and need prayer.

Note: *While many teens will not face these decisions themselves, many will know peers and adults who are dealing with these issues.*

Personal Story

My grandmother was a woman who loved and trusted God. As the wife of a priest, she was immersed in the church. She would do anything and everything necessary to better other people's relationships with God. She raised three amazing kids, the youngest a priest like his father. She was remarkable.

Among Grammy's many gifts was a talent for writing. She never sought publication, but she wrote volumes. She wrote about her children and her husband. She created worlds with adventure and romance. There were liars and heroes. She wrote because it was what she did, a God-given talent that made her whole.

I don't remember my grandmother being physically well. A few years after my grandfather died, she was diagnosed with cancer of the bone marrow. The doctors said she only had a few months left to live. At that point she decided what she had to do. Although she was in great pain, she would push through. She fought the cancer as hard as she could.

After three months, she was admitted to Hospice, an organization devoted to the very sick and dying. There she started writing a book about the experience of dying. It was her way of coping with the pain and dealing with her death. She wrote it from the view of a Christian mother leaving her children, joining her Savior in heaven.

Three months later she was discharged from Hospice. She was still under their care, but miraculously her disease was not progressing. Grammy no longer fit the bill for Hospice care. She kept writing to me, my father, my mother, and her other children. She worked for the next three years as hard as the medications and pain would allow.

She then got progressively worse. She was put on life support. I understood one thing to be true: Her time on Earth was over. She had done everything in the world that she had wanted to do. She was through with this life. I knew Grammy wanted nothing more than to be with her maker. It pained me to see her with tubes running up her nose, machines breathing and eating for her.

One of her sons wanted to keep her alive as long as possible. For eighteen long days she lay in that hospital. It hurt me to know that she was not where she wanted to be. For the first few days I would visit her, but the more I went, the angrier I got. I began to hate the way they kept her alive.

I remember my father telling me when they took Grammy off life support. Instead of feeling sad like the rest of my family, I felt relief. I could feel her smiling to me from heaven. God took care of her when humans could not. God was good to my Grammy.

SESSION 8

Scripture

Matthew 19:3-6
Job 28:12-15, 23-28
Philippians 1:20-24

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Influences

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Prayer
Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Guidance
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Living With Divorce

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Matthew 19:3-6

Commentary: Jesus' teaching about divorce is really a teaching about marriage. When questioned by the Pharisees about the circumstances under which he would allow divorce, Jesus responds by reminding them that when a man and a woman marry, they are no longer two persons, but one. Also, God intends for that "one" to remain a unit, and not separate. God intends marriage to be lifelong; oftentimes, however, this intention is not realized—a marriage dies, and divorce results.

☐ Questions

- Who is the happiest married couple you know? What seems to make that marriage happy?
- When did you first learn about divorce?

Another Way to View Divorce

A marriage can be compared to a child. It is a creation of two people, a creation of love and intended for joy. Sometimes, a child or a marriage gets sick. When this happens, it is important to restore it to health, especially if the child or marriage is very sick. Sometimes, however, in spite of heroic efforts, a child or marriage dies. When this happens, there is great pain and sorrow. People feel guilty, betrayed, and angry. During such time, they must remember that God redeems that which is broken, enabling people to go on in new and different ways.

☐ Activities

Experiencing Divorce

Ask participants to think of five different sets of parents including their own and four from their extended family or friends. Hold up your hand with all five fingers extended. Then ask the group to indicate the number of parents who are still in their first marriage. How many are still holding up five fingers?

Tape Resource Poster No. 5 of the wedding picture under shattered glass. Draw a spider web around the picture. Ask the group to think of words or phrases about the effects of divorce to write in each space of the web. Talk about the words in the web.

- Has a divorce affected you? How?
- What are the consequences of a divorce on children and teens?
- What happens when a divorced parent dates or re-marries?
- How can people keep their marriage vows?

Note: Be sensitive to youth whose parents may be recently divorced or who are dealing with the aftermath of a bitter separation. Ask your adult mentor or clergy to be a part of this discussion.

Ask each person to write on index cards the names of two people in a successful marriage and the names of people in a broken marriage. Gather the cards in a bag and pray anonymously for the people whose names are listed. Use the prayer at the beginning of this session.

Broken Beauty

An artist in North Carolina makes jewelry from broken pieces of precious china. Think of items that mean a great deal to you.

- Are any of them broken?
- Have you kept them anyway? Why?
- Why do people hold on to marriages that seem broken?
- What are some ways to fix broken relationships?
- Have you tried to repair a broken relationship? What happened?
- What role does Jesus' teaching play?

If possible, bring in broken pieces of pottery or other items that no longer work, such as clocks, radios, and flashlights. Individually or as a group design a sculpture from the broken parts. Display the sculpture in the room. Talk about making something of beauty from something broken.

Video

Select a video, such as *Mrs. Doubtfire* or *Kramer vs. Kramer*, for a discussion of marriage and divorce. Talk about the affect of divorce on the adults and children in the movie.

- Who else was affected by divorce?
- How does a divorce of parents of a friend affect you?
- Is divorce ever good?
- Where do God and prayer fit in?

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☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

"But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Mortals do not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, 'It is not in me.'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'
It cannot be gotten for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed out as its price. . . .
God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he gave to the wind its weight,
and apportioned out the waters by measure;
when he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt;
then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.
And he said to humankind,
'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'"

Job 28:12-15; 23-28

Commentary: The *Book of Job* is the original "Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?"After suffering unbelievable calamity—the loss of all his property, children, and health—Job searches the mysterious will of God. He can only begin to make sense of his plight by stepping back and looking at God's wisdom from afar, "for he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens" (*Job 28:24*). God's will is mysterious, yet God seeks to have humans understand and live by God's wisdom.

☐ Questions

- How does Job see God?
- How do you see God when bad things happen to good people?
- Do you get angry? Do you think God understands your anger?

Abortion Statement

In 1988 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a statement on childbirth and abortion. It is available in *The Journal of the General Convention, 1988*, p. 683-684. It is also printed in its entirety in *The Crisis in Moral Teaching in the Episcopal Church*, p. 72-73.

The Book of Common Prayer states that "The birth of a child is a joyous and solemn occasion in the life of a family. It is also an occasion for rejoicing in the Christian community" (p. 440).

☐ Activities

In Her Shoes

Relate the following scenario to the group: You are 16 and a friend tells you she is pregnant. She asks you what her options are.

On a chalkboard or piece of newsprint, write down every option the group identifies in one column. Make two additional columns labeled "Negative Consequences" and "Positive Consequences." For each option, lists as many positive and negative consequences as possible. On a separate piece of paper, for each option, think of a place or person the young woman could go for help and direction.

Note: This issue can be very explosive, and some youth in the group may have strong opinions. Remind them that this is not a debate, but an exploration.

What Does the Church Say?

If possible, make copies of statement about abortion that was accepted by delegates at the Episcopal General Convention in 1988. This is as close to an official position on abortion that they will find in the Episcopal Church. Episcopal Church policy in general acts as a guideline, not an ultimatum. Each member is responsible for wrestling with the issue for themselves. Look at each part of the statement and discuss it. If you are unable to find a copy of the statement, look up the "Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child" on p. 440 of *The Book of Common Prayer* and printed in the box on this page.

- Does the statement or prayer book words reflect your views?
- Do they go too far or not far enough?

The Anglican tradition that has been passed on through the Episcopal Church values the "via media" or middle way. Compromise and diversity of opinion is part of that middle way.

- Can someone be both for choice and against abortion at the same time?
- Is there a "via media" for this issue?
- Could you develop a statement that would embrace the middle way?

Write a prayer for teens who are pregnant or who have fathered a child and their families. Carefully consider your discussion as you write the prayer. Write the prayer on newsprint and say it together.

What Others Say

Gather, read, and summarize literature from opposing sides of the abortion issue. Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments on all sides. Find out teen pregnancy rates in your community or area from the local health department. Examine ways to prevent pregnancy while keeping God's will for your life. Share this information with others in your church.

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3 Life or Death

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

Philippians 1:20-24

Commentary: Paul probably wrote this letter while in prison and undergoing struggles, sorrows, hunger, and deprivation. However, he remains surprisingly joyful. In this passage, he rejoices in anticipation of being with Christ in heaven. Fully convinced of the good news of salvation, Paul realizes that his life is not his own but belongs entirely to Christ. He knows that to depart this life and be with Christ is positive. But he is torn, because he also knows that his work on Earth is not finished and that he would be missed.

☐ Questions

- Have you known someone like Paul? Describe this person.
- Is dying ever a "gain"? How?
- Is living sometimes more difficult than dying?

☐ Activities

Personal Story

Read and discuss the Personal Story. Decisions about ending a life are difficult, and often people with differing, but strongly held, views are involved.

- Why did the writer become upset?
- Is there anything that he could have done differently?
- What would you have done in a similar situation?
- Did euthanasia seem like a good decision in this situation? Why?
- What made the second hospitalization different from the first?

Ask the participants to come up with as many different situations as possible that would lead to a discussion of euthanasia. Refer to Resource Poster No. 6 of a teen in a hospital setting, and ask the group to include scenarios of people their own age, such as a person in a coma from a drug overdose or a teen involved in a car accident. Put the scenarios in a bag and pick out one at a time. Discuss the issues involved in life and death for each person and their families.

When I Die

Talk about the group's perception of death.

Note: Some youth have spent a great deal of time thinking about death while others have only thought about it in passing. If comments sound suicidal get immediate outside help from an adult mentor or clergy person.

- How old do you think you will be when you die?
- What do you think you will die of?

Finish the following statements:

I fear death most when_____.
When I think about death, I wish I could know_____.
The worst kind of death is_____.
The best kind of death would be_____.
Being a Christian reduces my fear of death because___.

As you discuss the statements, go back to the scripture passage to see how Paul might have completed each one.

While death is a certainty for all of us, living to the fullest each day is our primary concern. When a person dies, often epitaphs are written about him or her in an obituary or on a tombstone. It is a summary of a person's life in just a phrase or sentence. It is often not only a statement about what a person did, but who he or she was. Write an epitaph that summarizes who and what you are, and how you would like to be remembered. Share the epitaphs if the group is comfortable doing so.

Life or Death

Draw a scale from one to ten on a chalkboard or newsprint. At one end, write "Prolonging Life," and at the other, "Postponing Death." Invite the group to give example of each. For example, eating well and exercising is an example of prolonging life; keeping someone on a respirator who has no brain activity might be an example of postponing death. What are examples in between?

Keep in mind the personal histories of people who may be facing death. The grandmother in the story had lived a rich and full life and wanted to be with God. Others may need additional time to put things right in their lives—with family, friends, and with God.

Ask each person to identify one way they can prolong life. For example, meditating for five or ten minutes each day to relieve stress. Or, eating fast food only once a week. Pair up and tell your partner what you have identified. Together, find a way to stick to your resolution.

Hospice Care

Visit a hospice or invite a hospice worker to come to your group to describe hospice care and its philosophy toward dying. You may be able to identify someone at your church who works or volunteers in a hospice program.

After learning about hospice work in your community, identify a way the group or individuals could help. For example, you could provide a meal or offer to do yard work for someone receiving hospice care at home.

Definition of Euthanasia

The putting of a person to death painlessly, especially a person suffering from an incurable and painful disease.

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Moving Ahead

SESSION 9

Objective

Youth will be able to identify the role of forgiveness and reconciliation in making and living with difficult decisions.

Personal Story

My brother Mark was 17 when I saw him pushed into the back seat of a police car. My boss was driving me home from work when we passed the scene only two blocks from my house. Mark's old Mustang convertible was parked crookedly by the side of the road with two police cars nearby with lights flashing and doors thrown open. Next to one of the cars were two officers with clipboards, and a third was forcing a young man into the back seat of the other car. While I only saw the scene momentarily, it burned into my memory.

I knew Mark had had plans to go to a party with his girlfriend that night. My mind raced as I quickly said good night to my boss and ran inside where my mother sat on the couch reading a book. I told her what I had seen. After several phone calls, she and my father ran out the door. I was left with instructions to say put and answer the telephone.

Mark had been drinking hard liquor that night. He'd had a disagreement with his girlfriend. He was driving home at speeds approaching 100 mph, swaying from one lane to another. The police stopped him, gave him a breathalyzer test, and arrested him.

My parents were furious. They were enraged that he had broken the law, that he had driven his car when he was drunk, and that none of his friends tried to stop him. He had endangered his life and those of others. He had hurt his prospects at the colleges he had been applying to. I even heard them saying what a bad example he was for me.

They sold his car the next day and grounded Mark indefinitely. The worst parts were the constant arguments, the shouting of obscenities, slanderous words, and hateful remarks, the slamming of doors, and my mother's crying that penetrated our house. I wondered about our family. Everyone was angry and alone and hated being at home. The behavior of all the family members was worse than Mark's original crime.

Healing took months—years passed before the actions and words during that time were forgiven. As a family we had to understand and forgive, forget, and reconcile. We all had to live with Mark's bad decisions. While our first reactions were too hardhearted, we finally came together as a family, becoming stronger in the end.

Scripture

I John 3:18-24

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Forgiveness

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Prayer
Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who are reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

From Easter Vigil
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 290-291

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Remembering Scripture

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

I John 3:18-24

Connect with the Personal Story

Read the Personal Story for this session. Think about an experience when you had to forgive or be forgiven for a bad decision. In a journal or on a sheet of paper, write a personal story about that experience or about the feelings you encountered. How did the experience help your understanding of God?

☐ Questions

- Did any difficult decisions arise in the group during the study of this topic? How did you deal with them?
- Do you have a better understanding of the difference between loving in truth and action and loving in word or speech?
- Do you feel abandoned when facing consequences of poor decisions?
- In the Personal Story, how could the family have changed their responses to Mark's arrest?
- Where was God in the experience described in the Personal Story?

RESPONDING ACTIVITIES

Identify ways that participants individually and as a group can apply the information and skills they have learned during the course of study in making difficult decisions. Outreach ideas for sharing your experiences from Sessions 2 through 8 are included in a chart at the end of this session. During the follow-up discussions, decide if the group wants to pursue one of these ideas or one of its own.

☐ Individually

Individually or as a group think of ways a person can respond to challenges and ideas raised during your study of Difficult Decisions. Share your ideas, and write them on a piece of newsprint. Ask each person to find at least one idea to follow up on. Possible responses:

- Be aware of the influence you may have on others facing difficult decisions. If you had been at the party described in the Personal Story, would you have stopped Mark from driving? Make a covenant with the group to help others avoid costly mistakes with God's help.
- Identify one difficult decision you are now facing or will be facing in the near future. Write it down at the top of a piece of paper. Underneath, list the steps you will take in making this decision, including the names of people you can go to for help.
- Identify one positive risk you have always wanted to take. For example, rappelling down a cliff or asking someone you admire for a date. Write it down on an index card, and put it someplace you will see it each day. Explore the steps for accomplishing this risk, set a time table, and do it!
- If you are suffering the consequences of a poor decision, find a way to reconcile to those you have disappointed or rebuild the trust of those you failed. Read the service of reconciliation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 447-452. Don't skip the words of comfort on p. 449.

☐ Group

- Every participant in the group is facing or will soon face difficult decisions. Often, an outside opinion or advice can help a person make the best decision. Make a covenant among participants to be available for each other, even if you can only be a listener. List people in the church or community who could help young people facing issues studied in Sessions 2 through 8. Be open to advice.
- Share your learning experiences with a younger group. Take a junior-high or middle-school group on a ropes course described in Theme 3 of Session 2.

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- Set priorities in your group for future study. Look back over your study of Difficult Decisions and identify the good parts and negative parts, especially in terms of group dynamics. Talk about how you could do things differently to be more inclusive and enjoy your time together.
- Read together the prayer on p. 528 of *The Book of Common Prayer* from the ordination service for a priest. Look at each phrase, and discuss the meaning of the words and expression. For example, what does it mean that God has unchangeable power and eternal light? Or, why is the church referred to as a wonderful and sacred mystery? What is wonderful about your church? What is sacred or mysterious?

☐ Celebrate!

Celebrate the completion of the group's study of Difficult Decisions. Come up with your own celebration or use one of the following ideas.

Art

- Display the sculpture made during Session 8, Theme 1, that was made from broken pieces. Make a poster describing the art work and show how beauty can come from something broken.

Liturgy

- Create a liturgy to celebrate positive risk taking. Find examples of people from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible who stepped out in faith and took risks. Identify the common denominators of these people of faith. The liturgy can be as simple as reading the passages, telling the stories, and singing hymns or other songs related to the stories. Use *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* or *The Hymnal 1982 Supplement.*
- Observe a true Sabbath by doing nothing with friends for the rest of the day after attending church together.
- Adapt the graduation speech written for Session 3, Theme 1, as a homily for a youth or other worship service.

Community

- Share the random acts of kindness map made during Session 3, Theme 3, with others in your church. Prepare a new map, and invite others in the congregation to join you in randomly helping others.
- Invite an adult group or parents to join you in taking a walk in the park. Give them the same instructions used in Session 4, Theme 1.
- Share information with others in your church that the group learned about organizations that deal with substance abuse (Session 5, Theme 2).

Fun

- Take a group of children to fly kites to test the wind as you did in Session 3, Theme 3.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Individual Response: Make a covenant with God to include God in making difficult decisions. Find a way to use the things you have learned at church in decisions you make outside the church—at school, home, and in the community. Think through the steps you will take in making decisions and how you can help others facing tough choices.

- Read the Bible.
- Do you need outside help in reaching your goals?
- Can you identify a person in the church or community who you can turn to when you or someone close to you is facing a difficult decision?

Group Response: Look at the list of possible responses the group has put together, including the suggestions in this session. Decide which of the suggestions the group would like to do. You may decide to break into small groups to respond in several different ways or select one, more comprehensive project. On a piece of newsprint, write down the activities or project the group has selected. List all the actions that must be taken to complete the activities or project. Estimate the time each will take, and designate a person to be responsible for each action. Ask for a volunteer to oversee the activities who can make sure each component has been completed.

- How did you determine which action to take?
- Do the activities include each person in the group?
- Are there people in the church or community who can help you complete the tasks?

Celebrate: Ask for volunteers to select and plan an appropriate liturgical response to your study of Difficult Decisions. Set a time for the group to gather for the liturgy and discuss whether you want to include others. Ask someone to find a way to display the art, if you decide to do so, and make additional posters if necessary. Find a person in the group who can copy the map of the community or get a new one for the church-wide random acts of kindness. Contact teachers of a children's group to set a time to fly kites. Issue an invitation to adults at a coffee hour or other gathering to join you in taking a walk in the park.

- Does your celebration include all the participants in the group?
- Does your celebration embrace people outside the group?

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MOVING AHEAD

Difficult Decisions

Outreach Activities for Sessions 2-8

Session	Theme	Suggested Outreach Activity
Making Right Decisions	1 2 3	• Find a way to support an agency that helps poor people with medical expenses. • Write Prayers of the People about advice to share with another group in the church. • Display the "delightful" creations the group made in your church.
Taking Risks	2 3 3	• Pray for those who take risks to serve God and others. • Using seeds, plant a garden at your church. • Commit random acts of kindness in your community.
Setting Priorities	2	• Help each other assess personal activities and responsibilities, and then set priorities based on reasonable expectations.
Substance Abuse	2 2 3 3	• Plan a group service project that helps you feel good and whole. • Find out about organizations in the community that deal with substance abuse; share the information with others in your church. • Stage a drama for a younger group of teens about substance abuse. • Present a session about drug use to another group using contemporary music.
Sexuality	1 3	• Help out at a school-based child-care center for children of teen mothers in high school. • Share your advertisement about healthy relationships with others.
Depression & Suicide	2 2 3	• Invite another group to hear the speaker on depression. • Volunteer to serve as a peer counselor for a community hotline. • Create an annotated resource book of local agencies that deal with suicide and depression; make it available to people in your church.
Adult Decisions	1 2 3	• Pray for God to strengthen the relationships of married couples. • Share information with others in your church about teen pregnancies in your community. • Pray for families involved in teen pregnancies. • Help someone who is receiving hospice care at home.

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