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ZONDERVAN

The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers, Volume 2

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Crabtree, Jack, 1949-

 The complete New Testament resource for youth workers / Jack Crabtree.

 p. cm.

 ISBN 978-0-310-27335-6 (pbk)

 1. Bible. N.T.—Study and teaching. 2. Church work with teenagers. I. Title.

BS2408.C73 2009

225.071'2—dc22

2009033729

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Produced with the Assistance of The Livingstone Corporation

Cover design: Toolbox Studios

Interior design: David Conn

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Contributors	7
Mark.....	9
Luke	58
Acts.....	135
1 Corinthians.....	220
2 Corinthians.....	267
1 Thessalonians	305
2 Thessalonians	320
Hebrews	329
James.....	371
1 Peter.....	385
2 Peter.....	400
Revelation	408



Mark 1:35-39

TOPIC: Shhhhh!

OBJECTIVE: Teens will know how to cultivate time alone with God and will begin keeping a prayer journal.

BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW: Throughout the gospel we see that Jesus purposefully spent time alone in prayer with his Father. Before and after most of the major happenings in Jesus' ministry we find him in solitude.

GAME/ICEBREAKER: Superhero charades

Before your meeting come up with a list of superheroes' names. (The bigger the group, the more names you'll need.) Divide into two teams. One team at a time, ask individual teens to act out the name of a superhero without using any words. The other members of their team should try to guess (as quickly as possible) the identities of the superheroes. Give each team a maximum of three minutes to act out the name so that their team can figure out who it is. Alternate teams and award 1,000 points each time a team guesses correctly within the time limit. Be sure to end with Superman.

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS:

- Why do people sometimes think of Jesus as a superhero?
- What do Jesus and Superman have in common? (Answers: They can do amazing feats; they tend to stick up for the oppressed and abused; they are often misunderstood, etc.)

- Where did Superman go when he needed to speak with his father, think, and recover? (Answer: The Fortress of Solitude.)

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:35-39

Read the passage aloud.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- What example did Jesus give us to follow in the midst of a busy, hectic life? What are we to take the time to do?
- Why was it important for Jesus to spend time alone talking to God the Father before he got involved in his public ministry?
- Why is it that when we are busy, spending time with God through prayer or by reading the Bible is usually the first thing we skip?

TALKING POINTS:

Share the following:

Jesus set the example

Jesus regularly spent time praying in solitude, conversing with his Father. We're not Jesus, but if we want to be close to God, we also need to practice the discipline of solitude. We may think of solitude as a punishment—as in "solitary confinement." Many of us fear being alone—we need a constant stream of noise and crowds to fill up our day. But at the end of the day, after all the text messages, music, and phone calls have stopped, many of us go to bed feeling alone and unhappy. How can we still feel so alone when people and noise surround us all the time?

The discipline of solitude is God's way to overcome your loneliness

For a follower of Jesus, solitude does *not* mean being alone. It means being intentional about spending time with God. You may wonder why you would want to seek solitude when you are feeling lonely or empty—it seems as though the logical response would be the opposite. It seems to make sense to call someone, seek out friends, listen to music, watch TV, or log on to the computer. But instead of taking away any inner emptiness, those things simply distract us for a while. The only way to really get rid of our inner emptiness is to spend time alone with God cultivating a relationship with him.

REAL-LIFE CONNECTION: 40-day prayer journal

Give teens the following instructions:

- Make the commitment to start spending time alone with God. Ask God to fill you up and reveal himself to you.
- When you start don't just sit and do nothing. Keep a prayer journal on your computer, or in a book you can carry with you.
- Follow a Bible reading plan that allows you to systematically and consistently read through the whole Bible:
- Read until you come across a verse that is interesting to you or speaks to an issue in your life.

- Use the S.O.A.P method of journaling.

Scripture: Focus on and write down a specific Scripture.

Observation: Record your observations about what is going on in the text and any questions you have about the text. If you have a study Bible, you might write down some of the comments that help you better understand what is going on.

Application: Write how this Bible text applies to your life. Does it address any fears or questions? Does it give you direction for a specific area of your life or relationships?

Prayer: Finally, pray and write down your prayer, asking God to give you what you need for the day. You could ask for a sense of his presence in your life or direction on a specific issue you are facing.

- A few times each week try spending 30-40 minutes alone with God writing in your prayer journal.

Keep a prayer journal for the next 40 days, and journal at least three to four times a week. If you do this for a few years, or even for a few weeks, you can go back in your journal and see how God has worked in your life. You will have a written copy of what God did, how he worked, or how he answered prayer. Seeing God at work reminds us that we are not alone and that God is always with us trying to speak to us.

MEDIA: Fortress of solitude

Obtain the original *Superman* movie (1978) and show chapters 12-13 (39:04-47:56) where Superman visits the Fortress of Solitude (a crystal ice palace) to find out his purpose.

Go to www.imdb.com (Internet Movie Database) and search for *Superman*. Select the video trailer for the 1978 movie. Then look in the related videos section for the *Superman Combo Trailer*. It is the best video combining all the *Superman* characters.

Show one or two of these videos during the Icebreaker section when you are discussing what Jesus and Superman have in common and where Superman went to get focused about who he was and his purpose for life.

Or go to www.lifejournal.cc where you can order the *First Steps Life Journal*. This journal comes with a Bible reading plan that guides teens in journaling using the S.O.A.P Method.

Mark 2:23-27

TOPIC: Rules, rules, rules

OBJECTIVE: Teens will know that their Christian faith is based on following Jesus Christ—not following a long list of rules.

BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW: The Jewish leaders watched Jesus and his disciples closely. The Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus breaking the Jewish law so they could discredit him as a teacher from God. When they saw Jesus' disciples gathering and eating grain on the Sabbath, they thought they had an opportunity to lower the boom on him. Jesus refuted their accusation by focusing on the *purpose* of the law, not the strict adherence to the law.

GAME/ICEBREAKER: Turn-off survey

Items needed:

- Index cards
- Pencils

Pass out index cards and pencils. Have teens write on their cards "Churches turn off people by . . ." Then give everyone time to write one to three short answers. Then they should rank their answers with stars to indicate how strong the turn-off is (one star is the least and three stars is the most). Collect and read the cards. Take note of what makes people dislike the church. Be attentive to reasons related to legalism and rules.

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS:

- What answers to this survey surprise you?
- What reasons do your friends give for why they don't like the church?
- Today we'll talk about the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath laws. What do people today say about the rules and commands associated with churches?
- How important is it to keep the commandments?

SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:23-27

Read the passage aloud.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- What made the Pharisees so angry with Jesus and the disciples?
- What was Jesus' response to the Pharisees' accusations?
- What experiences have you had with religious groups who have strict laws and rules?
- What does Jesus do when a religious law conflicts with meeting the needs of a person?

- In what ways do we not give enough attention to God's laws?
- What's the connection between Jesus' expectations and God's laws?

TALKING POINTS:

Share the following points with your teens:

Don't let rules become your faith

Jesus was born into a Jewish culture that focused on following the Law in order to please God. The Law was given by God to show us how bad we are and how much we need God's grace and forgiveness, but the Pharisees thought they could keep the Law and win God's approval. They wrote another 613 laws around the Law of Moses that would make it impossible to break the commandments—or so they thought. The Pharisees lived the letter of the law and felt proud about being so holy, and Jesus called them out on it. They did what was right on the outside, but they were sinful in their hearts and minds. They missed the whole point that humility and sacrificial love mark a true child of God.

Problem with rules-centered living

The problem with rules-centered living is the continual need for more rules to cover every situation and exception. Life becomes a list of what you can't do—instead of freedom to do what God gives you *opportunity* to do. Rules can never anticipate every situation. Instead of responding to the unique needs of people, rule-keepers are constrained by lists of dos and don'ts, and rules religion promotes a spirit of criticism. Being judgmental of others comes easily—we judge people's faith and relationship with God by what we see them do—their adherence to the *law*. We assume that outward issues and appearance mark a holy life. And some religious leaders spend their time watching everyone—looking for a reason to correct or condemn. That approach may be highly *religious*, but it's not what God wants from his children.

Walk in the spirit of the law

Jesus loves God's Law. He did not come to destroy it or weaken it. Instead, he came to earth to get our focus off the rule-keeping so we could turn our hearts toward knowing and loving God. The Law's purpose is to show us how far our thoughts and actions are from God's desires. God wants us to know we can come to him only by his grace and mercy. He loves us even though we are profoundly sinful and full of personal pride, and he makes a way to forgive us and make us holy through unexpected—and undeserved—grace. We are to pay attention to God's Law because it leads us to life, and we are to follow the Spirit of the Law as Jesus did when he told his disciples to pick grain to eat on the Sabbath. We recognize the grace and mercy God has given us, and we give it to others without condemnation. Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Sabbath is made for people, not people for the Sabbath. God's Law was not given to enslave us, but to set us free. Loving God's Law means reading the Bible to see what he wants us to do and then doing it.

REAL-LIFE CONNECTION: Three questions

Instruct your teens:

Ask yourself three important questions every day this week.

- What makes me right with God—is it my good behavior or God's amazing grace?
- Do I make decisions based on what I have to do or what I want to do to be like Jesus?
- Is there any pride in myself or condemnation of others based on good behavior or do I offer forgiveness for others as God forgives me?

MEDIA: Legalism or love?

From *The Boys Are Back*, show the scene, "Hog Heaven" (1:08). In this clip Joe is adopting a new laid-back style of parenting. He explains the new foundational rules of the house to his boys. This video is available from www.wingclips.com. Or on the DVD: Chapter 8, 43:42-44:09. (Note: On the DVD bad language precedes and follows this scene.)

Use this video to introduce the Scripture reading by explaining—

At times we need to reassess the rules we follow to find out what is really true and important. Look what happens in this family.

Then follow up the clip and any comments about it by saying—

Jesus made his disciples think about why they followed the rules they were taught.