

GIGS



God Investigation Groups



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GIGs: Starting Well

An Introduction

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Connie is a Christian today because she met Jesus in a GIG. When she arrived at college, she was not looking for God. But through friendships that InterVarsity students built with her during her first two years at college, Connie was ready to come and see about this spirituality that her friends were committed to. She came to a large group meeting and immediately noticed the passion and the fervor that her friends had for God. She then heard a preached message from Luke 15 and rapidly identified herself as the lost sheep the Good Shepherd was seeking to save. After the sermon I invited her to take the next step of getting to know the Good Shepherd by joining the GIG I had just begun with another friend of mine. Next week, Connie came to her first GIG and brought her friend Laura, who was also a non-Christian. In the four weeks that followed, Connie and Laura met Jesus face to face in His word. Connie's life began to transform. She began to experience the opening of her eyes to Jesus, the Father's love for her, the value of people. She began to see clearly how little she knew of God and how little she trusted him for her future. At the end of our third GIG, it was clear that Jesus was moving powerfully in Connie's life. It was time to challenge her. I took her aside and asked her to consider following Jesus. I challenged her to pray about this decision during her spring break and she agreed. She returned from her spring break and asked me this question, "John, every morning during spring break, I woke up with this inner-sense that I should follow Jesus. What do you think I should do?"

A month later, Connie made a final decision to follow Jesus. Her friend Laura followed close behind with Connie being an instrumental part of Laura's conversion. Both became excellent members of the InterVarsity chapter and have since graduated and integrated into the post-university world and local church as committed followers of Jesus. In Connie's story, we see the unique place that GIGs have in the conversion of our non-Christian friends!

I am excited for the joy that God has for you as you embark on the GIG adventure. Becoming a GIG leader that makes disciples will not just happen to you. It is an intentional choice to pursue evangelism and requires hard work. Developing skills such as praying effectively, building trust, speaking relevantly, teaching the Word well and helping our friends commit to Jesus does not naturally happen. We must choose to do good. We must choose to lead GIGs. May God bless you as you enter into this joy-filled process!

I. Introduction to GIGs

What is a GIG?

GIGs (God Investigation Groups) is a small group or one on one gathering where Christians can teach the Bible to their non-Christian friends in a non-pressured environment. The GIG provides a context for our friends to be honest with their questions, struggles, and doubts. It is the perfect place for them to see the Jesus of the Bible who brings transformation and spiritual life. The GIG simultaneously creates a wonderful opportunity for the Christian to take a more active role of leadership and spiritual care in the life of their friend. This small group meeting will become a spiritual experience that the non-Christian can easily commit to on a weekly basis.

The End Goal

I believe GIGs are one of the very best ways to fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations. The goal of any GIG is to introduce someone to Jesus and to partner with the Holy Spirit to help them become a disciple of Jesus who obeys all that He commands.

The Perfect On-Ramp

If our InterVarsity chapters and local churches are a freeway of discipleship that host cars that whiz by at 70 miles per hour, then GIGs are the on-ramp for the non-Christians who are on the surface streets cruising at twenty miles per hour. They might see the freeway, and might even want to drive fast, but without the on-ramp, there is no way for them to get on. GIGs provide the unchurched a way to arrive at their spiritual destination...the Kingdom of God!

Here are some practical reasons GIGs are the perfect on-ramp for our non-Christian friends:

1. ***A Place at the Table.*** GIGs are the placards that invite our friends to dine on spiritual food with us. GIGs are so attractive to the non-churched because they feel genuinely loved that someone is thinking about them. This is crucial in an age when Christians are perceived as being judgmental, narrow minded and inflexible.
2. ***GIGs are Relational.*** GIGs are a natural spiritual destination for our friendships with non-Christians. Through GIGs the process of the friendship becoming more spiritual is seamless. Because GIGs spring from friendships, many of the barriers that would keep our friends from a bible study or fellowship meeting will evaporate. Our friends might join our GIG just because they are our friends.
3. ***GIGs are Comfortable.*** It is easy for a non-Christian to come to a spiritual discussion group. It is much harder for them to come to a "Bible study". In a "Bible study", it could be easy for a non-Christian to feel intimidated. In a GIG, however, they tend to feel very comfortable, relaxed and therefore more open to God speaking to them through His Word.
4. ***GIGs Don't Require a Masters Degree or WWJD Bracelet.*** In the GIG, our non-Christian friend doesn't feel like a spiritual midget when Susie Christian sitting next to them in a regular Bible study quotes the prophet Nahum. Nor do our friends want to vomit when Joey Christian rambles about some distant truth that has no relevant meaning or power in his life. GIGs keep it real and meet non-Christians on their level.
5. ***GIGs Make the Bible Relevant.*** Today's postmodern non-Christian is incurably spiritual. They are eager for input and help in spiritual growth. They look for it in culture, from music to movies to the special guests on Oprah. GIGs will help people get connected to the true words of life in the Word of God. Our friends need help to know the Bible is relevant and that it works. GIGs are the perfect introductory showcase of God's Word.
6. ***GIGs Create Community.*** Our friends have grown up in "The Friends" era. Life may be difficult and disappointing, but at least they experience it together with their friends. GIGs capitalize on that and help people experience Jesus with their friends, often with non-Christians, like Connie, helping their friends come to faith.

- 7. God Will Meet Our Friends.** God will meet them and speak to them right where they are at. You will be amazed at how the Holy Spirit will cause the words of Jesus to come off the page and alive into their daily experience. God will use the GIG to build trust with your friend and prove to them that following Him is a very solid investment in their life.

Our GIG will offer a safe environment for our friends to discuss areas of their lives that they really need help with. We have so much more to offer them anything our culture promotes. GIGs will scratch a deep itch many of our friends have. Yet, only a very select few will ever cross the huge barriers to join a formal bible-study small group. We must go to them! Our friends are eager and willing to be lead into true spirituality. Will we lead them?

II. Trust and Leading People to the On-Ramp

Identify Where Your Friends Are At

It is important to identify your friends' openness to GIGs. Once you can identify their openness, you will know what steps need be taken in order to get them into GIGs. As mentioned before, GIGs are the on-ramp onto the freeway of life in our InterVarsity chapters and church bodies. Some friends are incredibly eager to drive right onto the on-ramp and try it out. These folks quickly jump right in and feel at home right away in our GIGs. These might be the friends who just need to be asked to join a GIG or could be someone you just happen to meet who is curious about spiritual things. For an in-depth theory of post-modern conversion, please see Doug Schaupp's article, "Five Thresholds of Post-Modern Conversion."

Others, however, might have had bad driving experiences in their past. They might be afraid of the freeway and the on-ramp. Their previous negative experiences with Christians, misinterpretations of the church, fear of cults, and terrible advice might cause them to be cautious at best. For these folks, it is crucial to help them ease into the GIG. They may initially feel apathetic and closed to spiritual growth, but God will use you and your love for them to show them what they lack.

Trust – Helping Our Friends onto the GIG On-Ramp

Our friends do not need to be our *best* friends to come to our GIG. Rather, a realistic level of trust appropriate for an invitation is that you are a normal person and you like one another. Many of us have far more trust with our friends than we realize and we don't cash in on it to help them grow. Ironically, while thinking people need to be our best friend to come to our GIG, it is harder to invite our best friends to the GIG because it might feel "weirder". Let's build trust far and wide and see God bring in people who we thought would never be interested.

These are some of the best ways I have seen to build trust with non-Christians:

- **Do what they do.** Our friends don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. It is crucial that we get to know them! Dave Palmer, the man who lead me to Jesus, built trust with me by talking endlessly about college basketball with me. Because I could relate to him through sports, it helped me be open to his invitation to join his GIG. What hobbies are your friends into? What music do they listen? Do you talk to them about what interests them?
- **Be Full of Passion and Integrity.** I listened to Dave and accepted his GIG invite because he lived as if God were real. He lived Jesus' words to the point of cleaning our entire dorm floor after a shaving cream fight at 4:00 in the morning. With each scrub on his hands and knees,

Dave's God became more real. This passion and integrity speaks more clearly in the trust building stage than anything you can speak.

- **Serve them.** We can build trust as we care for them and meet their needs practically so that they are made curious by our practical love. Helping them study, supplying them with food, treating them to evenings of entertainment and caring for them when they are sick are just a few of the basic acts of service I have seen God bless. When your friends ask you why you are so nice or why you are so different, that is a good sign real trust is happening.
- **Have Fun.** Many of our non-Christian friends have perceptions that Christians are religious and stuffy. One time during lunch, my friend Stein boasted that if we gave him \$100 we could shave his head anyway we wanted. From those around the table we collected \$90 and needed \$10. The last person in the dorm that weekend was Dave. I knew he was religious and assumed he wouldn't be interested. Reluctantly I asked Dave if he wanted in on shaving Stein's head. He quickly got \$10 and said he would be in if he could do some of the shaving. (We ended up giving him a bozo the clown shave!). By joining the head shaving project, Dave shattered stereotypes and became more real to me. Have fun with your friends!
- **Speak Relevant Language.** Jesus spoke in parables that the common man could take to heart. Our language must be re-invented if we are going to communicate with our post-modern non-Christian friends. Why tell them we are going to bible study when they have no idea what that means and it sounds boring to them? Instead, why not tell them we are going to gain direction for our lives and food for our souls. Why not speak of the Bible as Jesus' Biography? Speaking relevant language is hard work. Are you willing to be intentional and re-invent your vocabulary for the sake of your friends?
- **Be Vulnerable.** We all have real problems and real joys in our lives, so let's grow in learning how to bring our non-Christian friends into the middle of our emotional lives. One of the most effective ways of building trust this year for me has been sharing about my recent wedding and my new life with Becky. As Christians, people think they know us. In sharing vulnerably about our lives, we become real to people. What would happen if all of us shared about our joys, our fears, our bad days, our good days, and our struggles with our parents? Our friends need to know that we are real people and not Christian robots.

The Invite

The most challenging part of helping our friends onto the on-ramp is communicating the invitation to them. We often feel 100% of the challenge to invite them and get all worked up about what they might think. Am I pressuring them? Am I jeopardizing the friendship? The truth, however, is that they probably aren't thinking about those issues at all. If they are, they will tell you. I suggest we assume that they will be open to our invitation and deliver it with confidence. The smoother we are, the more normal it will be for them. Here are some tips to help you construct a compelling and confident invite:

- Tell them you will personally teach them the Bible in a way they will understand it
- Tell them your GIG is a study group for people who do not go to church
- Tell them your GIG is for people who want to learn and are willing to grow

- Tell them why you think Jesus will be good for them (this assumes you get to know them!)
- Tell them that it is only an hour (make sure you keep it to an hour and honor their time)
- Be very clear about your invite and nail down the time and place
- Base your GIG series on a relevant issue, movie, or hot topic

III. GIG Preparation

Creating A Learning Environment

Choose a regular time for the GIG and be consistent. It will be important to have a good meeting place for your GIG. Depending on who the people are and what context you know them from, the meeting place could range from your house to a restaurant to your place of work. Also, try and think ahead about what kind of potential distractions you could eliminate. If inside a room, try and turn down the phone ringer, turn off the television, etc. This will help them focus and be prepared to learn. Here are some principles to create a non-Christian friendly atmosphere:

- Provide snacks and drinks and have them available at the outset
- Buy the lunch or drinks if you meet at a campus eatery or restaurant
- Play cool music in the background (preferably something your friend chooses)
- Have a DVD player for using movie clips
- Make sure the room is friendly to a non-Christian with posters, signs, etc.

IV. Teaching the GIG

“Take pains with these things (public reading of Scripture, exhortation and teaching); be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” - 1 Timothy 4.15-16

Preparing to Teach

You are now ready to lead the actual GIG. As you prepare to teach, here are some tips to help you become an excellent teacher:

- Pray that God increase your authority and to deepen your sense of his call to teach the Word
- Pick passages which show them who Jesus is and why He is so special (see attached studies)
- Work hard to understand the passage beforehand and come prepared
- Ask your one or two friends in the GIG to ask how to make the study better
- Have a long term perspective and know that becoming a great teacher takes time

The Rules

As the leader of the GIG it will greatly help you to establish a learning environment. The worst peril of a GIG is when there are some who don't want to learn and ruin it for those who are genuinely seeking after God. The GIG is so organic in nature that it really helps to create some structure. This will deepen your authority in the eyes of your friends. Here are the 5 rules I present at the outset of the GIGs I lead:

1. Have fun
2. Listen to each other and respect each other
3. Be curious and ask questions

4. Choose to be open to growth and change
5. Stay in this passage to answer our questions

Teaching the Text

As you teach the passage, have a balance in your leadership style. Encourage initiative and try to help your friends see things on their own. Fan the flames of their discussion. When people see something in the Word for themselves, it can be a life-changing experience.

At the same time, however, it is important to remember that they are coming to the GIG to be taught. We don't want our friends leaving our GIG feeling as though it was a waste of their time. Don't be afraid to teach during the GIG. You are the leader, not just the facilitator. Your friends are looking for leadership. Don't be afraid to walk into that and help them see the Word's treasures.

Application - Making it Real

The most important part of the GIG is when it moves to application. As you study the Word together, your friends will see Jesus in new ways. They will probably be pleasantly surprised at how He doesn't fit into their stereotypes. But if it ended there, there is no experience that brings the Jesus of the Gospels into your room. GIGs should be much more than an exercise in amassing spiritual knowledge. Great GIGs are marked with God's power and his Word alive inside of you.

During application, it will be crucial to be able to share how the Word is true in your life. Our friends will know that Jesus is real as we share our experience. It will not be theory. It will not be principles. It will be you and your God. This is super appealing to our friends. As you prepare to teach, ask yourself questions about how Jesus has been real to you from the passage. How has He touched you and brought healing? How has He taught you? How has He met your questions and doubts?

I recently lead a GIG from John 4 where Jesus teaches that if we don't see signs we cannot believe in him. As I prepared I knew that I needed to come with a story that would persuade them that this teaching is true and that God wants to do wonders in their life that they might believe in Him. After discussing the text, I shared with them a story of how God got involved in my life in supernatural way. The theory became real and the discussion went to a whole different level as they grappled with my experience. If you don't have stories from your own life, find stories from friends, Christian biographies, or anywhere else where they can see Jesus' goodness in action.

I end the sharing by challenging them to go to Jesus with their needs and allow Him to do the same for them that He did for me. Without a well-prepared story of God's reality to share with them, they would merely leave with a bible study. Make it real for your folks!.

Paradigm Shifts and Active Applications

Your non-Christian friends need shifts in their paradigms of how they see God. These paradigms will shift as they experience God. It will go a long way to them helping know God by preparing ahead of time "active applications". I have seen feeding and clothe drives for the homeless help people understand God and his love. Today's non-Christians are looking to make a difference. What kind of service projects can you plan for your GIG? What kind of practical application can you offer them so they will experience God in a fresh way? This will take forward planning and is entirely worth it.

Jesus is Full of Grace AND Truth

As you lead your GIG and pick passages for your people, make sure that they see all of Jesus. As you teach the “What Do You Seek” series, make sure you lead your people so that they see the Jesus who is full of grace and truth. Show them the Jesus who embraced and healed the lepers, AND the Jesus who spoke so powerfully against sin and called for unparalleled commitment.

A couple of years ago, I lead a GIG that focused primarily on the goodness of God. After six studies, my friends thought Jesus was great, but had no desire to follow Him. His grace was like a flavor of the month to them and made them feel good. They needed to know Jesus also brings truth. Therefore, for the next GIG I taught them Jesus’ parable on the ten maidens, five who were wise and ready and five who Jesus called fools for not being ready. As we observed the passage, Jimmy started feeling uncomfortable. He stopped the study during observations and blared out, “What happened to Jesus?” I asked him what he meant. Then Jimmy asked, “Where is all the grace?” Seeing God was really challenging Jimmy, I asked him what Matthew 25 taught him about Jesus. He then said very soberly, “I am learning that I can’t #\$\$% around with Jesus!”

In being over-cautious and trying to protect people, we keep from them Jesus the leader and His grace and truth which tells them to follow Him. People want to be lead and challenged. They are tired of feeling comfortable. Allow God’s counsel to motivate and instruct through your GIG!

Index Cards

I always end the GIG by passing out index cards. I tell my friends to write a question that they have about God and also write one issue that they are currently grappling with in their lives so that I can be praying for them. The cards serve two main functions in the GIGs. It is a great opportunity to know what legitimate questions people are thinking about so that you can pick passages and answer questions in the GIG that address those issues. I usually start the next GIG answering one of their questions. The cards also create a great opportunity for us to help our friends with their deepest problems. As they tell us their pain, we can bring the gospel to them! I make sure I follow up and help people through the tough issues they are grappling with that week.

Commitment to the GIG

For someone who is new to the GIG, I always invite them to the first GIG and then ask them how it went for them during snacks. The normal response is very positive. At this moment, the iron is very hot and it needs to be struck. I then gently challenge them to prioritize their spiritual lives. I might say something like, “You know, when I first started going to GIGs, I got so much out of it because I went every week. I received a steady diet of spiritual food that made me really strong. Would you consider prioritizing your spiritual growth and committing to coming for four weeks?” Calling for commitment might feel pushy, but in fact, I think it would be more odd if we didn’t call them to commitment on some level. In asking for four weeks, we are communicating that their spiritual life is important and that what we are offering is worth coming to. (It also really helps if you are doing a series, then it becomes really natural to call them to come for the whole series. Tell them that you will work hard and prepare all four teaching times.)

V. Follow Up and Following Jesus

The Flow of GIG Community

The GIG community, once up and running, will begin to take on a life of its own. People will become tight with one another. Scott was a non-Christian friend of mine who came to three previous GIGs. On his fourth one, we studied Luke 15 and experienced the Father who welcomed home his dead son. We really filled out what life at Dad's house was like and contrasted it to the distant land. Scott then shared about how when he came to college he joined a fraternity. He wanted to belong and feel a part of something special. He gave the frat his money, all of his time and every single weekend. He said they promised brotherhood but all he received was competition and jealousy. My jaw dropped when he said that all the guys in the GIG were better friends than any friends he had in his frat. It was so encouraging that he was having such a great experience. But it was also sad in that he only experienced four hours with the guys.

Here are some tips to enhance the flow of your GIG community:

- Do outside things with your friends to help build deeper friendships
- Be creative with email and internet communication to create more community
- Help them learn to share about their problems together and pray for each other
- Help them experience healing and God's presence together at retreats, etc.
- Be sure and be a good leader when they mistreat each other – teach them reconciliation!

Merging into the Freeway

The greatest weakness in the GIG model is helping people become full disciples in a worshipping community. For every two or three converts who become faithful disciples, there is a convert who has no community and doesn't actually become a disciple. Here are some steps we could take early to prevent floating non-disciples who think they are Christians.

- Be quick to help them know from the outset that Jesus is all about team and community
- Once trust is built, help them get around the larger community of faith
- Once they convert, help them make a public declaration of their faith to the community
- Once they convert help them see themselves as leaders in the community
- Once they convert, challenge them to the commit to the community events to get more of God
- Be quick to ask them about how their transition is going
- Help them start going to church right away so that it becomes a habit before they graduate
- Pray that their merge from the on-ramp to the freeway will be smooth

Becoming a Christian

The end goal of the GIG is to lead our friends into becoming full disciples of Jesus. For the unchurched person in your GIG, they need help in understanding the larger framework for the gospel message. I have found the bridge diagram to be an invaluable tool in helping post-moderns become believers. It paints for them the larger picture, explains Jesus' work on the cross and also challenges them to self-identify where they are at spiritually. As you lead your friend in this diagram exercise, you will be able to understand where they are at on the conversion continuum and lead them with great confidence and spiritual power. Please see the training article, "Food on the Line" by John Teter, a training resource for how to lead your friend in the bridge diagram.

VI. Closing Exhortation

John 4.1-42 captures the heart of GIGs. The woman goes to drink and cure her thirst. She is given Jesus' living water and the woman at the well becomes a well. She goes back and gives witness about Jesus' power and identity. The GIG starts as the entire Samaritan village goes out to Jesus and gets to know Him personally. In those two days He warms them with His light, quenches them with His hidden water and feeds them with His hidden food. The woman is the GIG leader who first connects them Jesus. He takes over from there and wins them to the point of their witness:

"It is no longer because of the woman's words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world!" – John 4.42

God has sent you to his friends so that they might know and follow Jesus. Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus is in front of you, behind you, on your right, on your left and He makes his home inside of you. The Father is proud of you and the new steps of faith you are taking. As you listen to the Holy Spirit, build trust with your friends and teach the word, be confident that Jesus will back up His witness. May you enjoy the ripe fields He has set before you!

Teaching Notes: What Do You Seek?

The GIG Series

Teaching Tips

March 2002

Almost 2000 years ago, two fishermen had heard great reports about Jesus and began walking towards him. Jesus sensed their presence and turned to greet them. Jesus' first recorded words in John's gospel are, "What do you seek?" The Living God, come to earth, is here to satisfy the longing soul of humans. What do we seek? We seek to know and understand the love of God. We seek the transforming power and healing that God offers. We seek to grasp the destiny he has for us. We seek to live lives that make a difference. Jesus, knowing what the world yearns for, arrives on the scene and invites us all to begin to travel with him.

This seven study God Investigation Group (GIG) series is designed for our friends to begin to understand what their soul seeks. Here are the following studies:

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| 1. <i>Jesus Transforms Water in Wine</i> | <i>John 2.1-11</i> |
| 2. <i>Jesus Catches Fish and Men</i> | <i>Luke 5.1-11</i> |
| 3. <i>Jesus Offers His Followers Servant Love</i> | <i>John 13.1-17</i> |
| 4. <i>Jesus Battles the Devil in the Desert</i> | <i>Matthew 4.1-11</i> |
| 5. <i>Jesus Calls the Spiritually Sick to Follow</i> | <i>Luke 5.27-32</i> |
| 6. <i>Jesus Teaches On His Second Coming</i> | <i>Matthew 25.1-13</i> |
| 7. <i>Jesus Teaches On Coming Home to God</i> | <i>Luke 25.11-24</i> |

Video Clips

I would recommend that you use DVD movie clips and secular music during the course of your study. They are great for the introductions and ice-breakers. The multi-media clips help create a comfortable environment for the people in your GIG, while establishing your being student of the larger culture (and not being too stuffy).

For example, I use the climactic scene from Mr. Holland's Opus, where Richard Dreyfuss walks into the auditorium of people he had loved and changed. This scene captures the heart of Jesus' promise that Peter will now be fishing for people (Luke 5.1-11). As you personally prepare for your GIGs, ask what movies or songs the text connects to, and ask yourself what music and movies your friends like. A little extra effort to help them connect will go a long way for your friends.

Teaching Preparations

I recommend a solid hour of preparation for your GIG. Make sure that you are familiar with the Bible passage, understand the cultural background and know what questions might come up in your GIG. Coming in prepared will help you feel more confident and comfortable.

I have offered text questions, personal story questions and faith challenges in the following studies. Please use what is most helpful for you. I have tried to follow a linear thought process, but don't feel tied to all the questions.

The personal stories from the GIG leader are the most important aspect of your GIG. If the person leaves with a great understanding of the Bible teaching, but no testimony of how this is true, it will be merely a mental exercise. Please prepare thoroughly with your stories of how the GIG study has been true in your own life. The greater the passion and conviction of your testimony, the greater impact the GIG will have on your friends.

Order of the Studies

I have put together the study order to try and enhance the grace AND truth of Jesus' gospel. If they work for you, that is great. My advice would be for you to look at the studies and see if it fits your friends and where they are at in their spiritual journey. Feel free to mix and match the order. I encourage you to come up with your own GIGs based on your favorite passages and their questions.

Using the Cards

At the end of each study, I pass out index cards to help people process the GIG. At its core, the GIG is relational evangelism. God has graciously given us relationships with our non-Christian friends. As we meet with them outside the GIGs, I recommend fun everyday life and times to help them get closer to Jesus. As you meet with them, don't be afraid to bring up the issues that they have written down on the card. They write the issue down because they need help. Bless them by answering their questions. Minister to their pain. Help them know that the gospel is true for them. With the cards comes the invitation of spiritual authority into their lives.

Leading the GIG

As you lead your GIG, I have seen that the dominant trend with new GIG leaders is to err on the side of being too conservative in leadership. Our non-Christian friends are in the GIG to be lead by us. Ask yourself how much authority they are giving you. Are you leading them as strongly as they want to be lead? As we teach people about Jesus, they will experience his life. As we call people to follow Jesus, they will follow. May you have great joy as you lead your friends to the One they seek!

The Wedding at Cana

John 2.1-11

I. Introduction

- When was the last time you were unprepared for something very important?
- How did you respond to the situation?

II. The Bible

- *Read John 2.1-11 out loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- Please describe the best wedding you have been to? What was it like?
- Why do you think Jesus and his crew were invited to the wedding?
- Can you picture Jesus sitting at the table? Dancing with the bride? Telling stories?
- History: Jesus' reply to his mother is kind – the Greek word for *woman* is very tender
- History: The jars for purification were used to wash feet that were dirty from travel
- How would you feel if you were a servant told to fill the jars with water?
- How would you feel to give a cup of that same water to the best man at the wedding?
- Why do people serve the best wine first (someone who drinks can answer that)?
- What words would you use to describe the wine of Jesus?
- How much wine did Jesus create at the wedding?
- What percentage of people understood what happened at Cana that day?
- What is glorious about what Jesus did at the wedding?
- What did his followers believe about Jesus after that sign?
- What do we learn about Jesus from his changing water into wine?

III. Personal Story – Drinking the Good Wine

- *Leader* – Share a true and vulnerable story about a time when you had run out wine and Jesus brought you his good wine? What was the situation? What was the nature, amount and quality of Jesus' wine?

IV. Faith Challenge

- Where in your life do you feel like you have run out of wine?
- Do you know that Jesus cares and will intervene to help you?
- Do you want Jesus' good wine to burst into your life?

Challenge – Please go to Jesus with a specific area where you have run out of wine this week. Pray once a day with your GIG leader to have your life filled with Jesus' good wine.

V. Closing Remarks

- **Index Cards** – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- **Index Cards** – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?
- **Growth Step** – Ask them what they thought of it – what friends should they bring?

Main Point: Jesus breaks into our lives with signs of his goodness by providing for us abundantly in areas where we run out of resources.

Faith Challenge: Identify the area where you are out of wine and pray for Jesus to meet your need!

Jesus and The Big Catch

Luke 5.1-11

I. Introduction

- Have you ever tried to meet someone famous in a crowd?
- How did it go? Did you meet them? Did they stop to meet you?

II. The Bible

- *Read Luke 5.1-11 and share observations and questions from the study*
- When was the last time you have been in a wild, pushy crowd?
- What do you think of the crowd pushing to hear Jesus teach God's word?
- How do you think Simon felt to have Jesus speak to him and get into his boat?
- How would you react to being told to put out the nets again after finishing your work?
- What would it have been like if you were on the boat pulling in the catch of fish?
- Why does Peter fall at Jesus' knees and proclaim his unworthiness?
- What does Peter learn about Jesus from the miraculous catch of fish?
- How would Peter feel as he heard that Jesus has a plan and destiny for his life?
- How would you paraphrase Jesus' destiny for Peter in your own words?
- What does Peter leave behind to follow Jesus?
- Is it worth it?

III. Personal Story – Caught!

- **Leader** – Share a personal example of how Jesus revealed himself and turned your world upside down
- **Leader** – Share a story of what you have gained in following Jesus and how worth it is!

Main Point: Jesus initiates with us, winning our trust, to reveal to us the amazing destiny he has ahead of us.

Faith Challenge: Will we obey his commands and experience the miracles he has for us? Or will we not throw in our nets and miss out on his miracles?

IV. Challenge

- What do you learn about Jesus?
- What area of your life do you feel like you have been toiling all night long?
- Do you know that God has a plan and a unique destiny for your life?
- Would you be willing to throw in your net for a catch? What area of your life?

Challenge – Where have you been toiling all night long and caught nothing? Throw in your nets by praying for God to reveal himself to you this week!

V. Closing Remarks

- **Index Cards** – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- **Index Cards** – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?
- **Growth Step** – Ask them what they thought of it – what friends should they bring?

Dirty Hands – The Servant Love of Jesus

John 13.1-11

I. Introduction

Describe a time you have been in a difficult situation, and a leader or friend “got their hands dirty” to help you? What was the leader like? What did you learn about them?

II. The Bible

- *Read John 13.1-17 loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- Background: Jesus is the one who has revealed God’s glory through signs
- Background: Jesus is at the last night before his death, with his closest friends
- Background: Jesus has been honored as the King of Israel by all the multitude
- Background: Footwashing is the lowest of tasks reserved only for menial servants
- Jesus’ love is to the end. Who else do you know who loves with that commitment?
- What words would you use to describe international world leaders?
- Have you ever seen one of them wash a toilet or perform menial labor?
- How would you feel if you were a disciple and saw Jesus begin to wash feet?
- What would you say if he washed your feet? What do you make of Peter’s words?
- What does Jesus expect from his followers after his model of love and service?
- Why does Jesus wash the feet of his disciples on the last night?
- What does Jesus want them to understand about God?
- How is Jesus different from leaders you have experienced?

III. Personal Story – Jesus’ Servant Love

- **Leader** – Challenge the people about how they see Jesus. Do they see him as a leader who is not afraid to use all of his resources to get dirty in your life and care for you? Exhort them to believe it!
- **Leader** – Share a personal and vulnerable story about a time when Jesus personally cared for you with servant love. What was the situation? What was the “dirt on your feet?” and how did Jesus’ service communicate his love for you?

IV. Faith Challenge

- In what area of your life do you need Jesus to wash your feet and make you clean?

Challenge – Please go to Jesus with a specific area where you need Jesus’ servant love. Pray once a day that you will experience Jesus’ servant love for you!

V. Closing Remarks

- **Index Cards** – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- **Index Cards** – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?

Main Point: Jesus’ love is strong to the very end. He gets dirty and cares for our greatest needs with his servant love and unending resources.

Faith Challenge: Identify the area where you need Jesus’ servant love and pray for Jesus to meet your need this week.

The Spiritual Wrestling Match

Matthew 4.1-11

I. Introduction

This is a passage about temptation, power and battle. There are a number of different openings to choose from:

- WWF: Who is your favorite wrestler? How do they do battle?
- Film: Lord of the Rings and discuss the temptation for power
- Struggles: How have you handled personal struggles for power?

II. The Bible

- *Read Matthew 4.1-11 out loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- What do you think the devil looks like? Please describe him...
- When was the last time you were tempted? What was the situation?
- Can you imagine not eating for forty days?
- What is Jesus' state as he is visited by the devil?
- What is the first temptation? How does Jesus fight the devil?
- Describe the view from a spot where you could see the "whole world"
- What is the second temptation? How does Jesus fight the devil?
- Have you ever known someone with great power? How did they handle it?
- What would it be like to be the ruler of all the countries of the world?
- What is the third temptation? How does Jesus fight the devil?
- What was Jesus' method for fighting temptation and how did he defeat the devil?

Main Point: We are in spiritual battle all the time, yet we don't know how to fight the devil. Jesus memorizes scripture and believes his life will be better if he obeys God and rejects the devil.

Faith Challenge: Identify one temptation (jealousy, anxiety, anger, lust, etc) and fight it using a specific promise from the Bible.

III. Personal Story – Spiritual Battle and Spiritual Weapons

- *Leader* – Share a personal and vulnerable example of a real temptation in your own life. What was the temptation and how did you use scripture to defeat the devil?
- *Leader* – Share a story about how you became familiar with the Bible and how you are growing in knowledge of it.

IV. Faith Challenge

- Do you know the Bible is Jesus' method for defeating the devil?
- What area of your life do you feel like the devil is tempting you?
- Do you know the Bible so that you can fight against Satan?
- Would you be willing to commit to the GIG and learn a "weapon" a week?

Challenge – Find a bible verse to use as a weapon for each person in the GIG

Challenge – Return next week and report on the battle. Were you victorious?

V. Closing Remarks

- *Index Cards* – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- *Index Cards* – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?

Follow Me!

Luke 5.27-32

I. Introduction

- Who are the leaders that the world is following today?
- What is their leadership like and why do people follow them?

II. The Bible

- *Read Luke 5.27-32 out loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- Give background on tax-collectors and their hated state (see Bible dictionary, etc)
- Who are the tax-collectors of our community today?
- What do you think Levi thought about at work that day?
- When was the last time someone commanded you, "Follow me?"
- What words would you use to describe Jesus and his interaction with Levi?
- What do you think of Jesus beginning his movement with tax-collectors and sinners?
- What does Levi leave behind and why does Levi follow Jesus?
- Why does Levi throw a party for Jesus and invite the other tax-collectors?
- What do the religious people think of Jesus calling Levi and hanging with him?
- Why do people go to the doctor? Why do people go to Jesus?
- Have you ever considered Jesus desires to be your soul doctor?
- Give background on the dramatic transformation in Levi's life (see Matthew, etc)

III. Personal Story – Following the Good Doctor

- *Leader* – Share a personal and vulnerable example of how you used to be a tax-collector (whether from Christian or non-Christian background) and how life following Jesus is today.
- *Leader* – Share the story about how Jesus told you, "Follow me!"

IV. Faith Challenge

- Describe how you personally handle change?
- What are the areas of your life where you need transformation?
- Have you ever considered heeding Jesus' call to follow him?
- What is appealing to you about following Jesus?

Challenge – Please go Jesus with a specific spiritual ailment this week. Pray once a day with the GIG leader. What were the results of going to Jesus?

Challenge – Consider this week how your life would be different if you followed?

V. Closing Remarks

- *Index Cards* – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- *Index Cards* – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?

Main Point: Jesus loves people who have problems, like Levi the tax-collector. He calls people to faith so that he can be their doctor and bring wholeness and healing to their lives.

Faith Challenge: Identify one area of spiritual illness and go to the Doctor. Pray everyday and ask for his aid. What were the results?

Be On The Alert

Matthew 25.1-13

I. Introduction – Small Group Icebreaker

- Have you ever known someone who ignored a warning? What happened?

II. The Bible

- *Read Matthew 25.1-13 out loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- *Background: In Jewish culture, weddings were official at the engagement. The groom would then return home and build an add-on to his father's house. He would return later in the year to claim his bride and begin the wedding celebration.*
- *Background: The bridesmaids were expected to be ready when the groom returned*
- *Background: To not be prepared for the dramatic return would be unforgivable*
- What do all ten of the bridesmaids have in common?
- What make five of them foolish?
- What makes five of them wise?
- How did the fools feel when the bridegroom arrived and their lamps didn't work?
- Why didn't the wise let the fools borrow their oil?
- Have you ever been late, unprepared for something really important?
- What was the experience for the wise once in the party?
- Why does Jesus not let them in the party? Is he being fair?
- Do you know Jesus will return and end history upon his arrival?
- Are you ready for him to come back right now?

Main Point: Jesus expects everyone to be ready for him when he returns. The wise are those who are ready by having relationship with him. Heaven awaits the wise.

Faith Challenge: What blocks you from following Jesus today?

III. Personal Story – Joyful and Prepared

- *Leader* – Share a personal and vulnerable example of when you realized that you needed your own oil in a relationship with Jesus.
- *Leader* – Share a story about how you about the experience of being prepared and ready for when Jesus returns.

IV. Faith Challenge

- Do you know that Jesus is coming back and expects everyone to be ready for him?
- Do you have a relationship with him today? Would he know you?
- What blocks you from being a wise maiden and being ready for his return?

Challenge – Commit to Jesus today and be prepared for his return

V. Closing Remarks

- *Index Cards* – What is an area of struggle in your life that I can be praying for?
- *Index Cards* – What is one question about God that you have been grappling with?
- *Growth Step* – Ask them what they thought of it – what friends should they bring?

Is Today the Day?

Luke 15.11-24

I. Introduction

Show the picture of Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son
What themes do you observe in this masterful painting?
What is happening inside your soul as you look at this portrait?

II. The Bible

- *Read Luke 15.11-24 out loud and share observations and questions from the passage*
- *Background: In Jewish culture, the Father was never shamed. For what the younger son does, he should be driven from the family and put to death.*
- *Background: The father's gifts all have cultural meaning (see bottom of the page)*
- How would you describe a son who wishes his father dead for the family fortune?
- Why does his father agree to his insane demand?
- What was this young man's life like in the distant country?
- What happened to his friends when the famine hit and his money ran out?
- What brings him to his senses?
- What does he think the reaction will be if he comes home?
- Describe what the son looks and smells like as he comes home to dad?
- Why does the father see him a long way off? What does that tell you about dad?
- When was the last time you saw an older person run? Embrace and kiss in public?
- Why does the Father give the child gifts? What would you have given him?
- Robe – The Father's robe; Ring – Credit signature; Sandals – Slaves went barefoot
- The fattened calf was killed once in a lifetime for the most honored of guests
- Why does the Father give this kind of homecoming to his son?
- How would you feel if you were the son and were given this reception?
- What words would you use to describe the Father? Do you see God in the same way?

Main Point: God the Father loves sinners and welcomes us back no matter what we have done in the past. He waits at the driveway, looking to see if we will return home today.

Faith Challenge: Will you return home or stay in the distant country?

III. Personal Story – Celebrating Life with God

- *Leader* – Share a personal and vulnerable example of when you were felt like the son in the distant country and God received you with a party.

IV. Faith Challenge

- God is the waiting father at the end of the driveway hoping his children return!
- The distant country lures us and ultimately leaves us unsatisfied
- Do you want to stop running in the distant country and come home?
- Where are you at in your seeking journey: The distant country? Coming to your senses? Worrying about Dad's reaction? On the road?

Challenge – What blocks you from coming home today? Will you return to God?