



TO THE HEART

(*The Chosen* Retreat)

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful."

Overview

A retreat experience is an invaluable way to inspire teens and awaken in them a desire for a deeper life of faith. This *Chosen* “To the Heart” retreat will help your teens fully engage in their faith.

The retreat aims to reinforce the evangelization teens received in Lessons 1 to 6 and to prepare them to become lifelong disciples of Christ. Teens will be inspired and challenged to a stronger commitment to a life of holiness and discipleship after being introduced to the basic gospel message and the person of Christ and his cross (see 1 Corinthians 2:2). The following five points are addressed in this retreat:

1. Our very existence and the meaning of our lives are fulfilled only in God.
2. God loves us unconditionally and passionately.
3. Sin separates us from our created purpose: a relationship with God.
4. God wants our relationship with him to be a consistent commitment.
5. United to the Church and empowered by the sacraments, we are called to go forth and share the Good News.

The retreat materials are presented here in both a weekend format and a one-day format and may be tailored to fit your teens’ specific needs.

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Retreat Schedule – Weekend Option

DAY ONE – FRIDAY

8:00 PM **Teens Arrive**

8:30 PM **Welcome/Opening Music/Review of Retreat Rules**

Recommendation: Review consequences of abusing retreat rules. Many leaders enforce a consequence of contacting parents to pick up the teen—no matter the hour—if a rule is broken.

Icebreaker: “Balloon Stomp”

Each teen ties a blown-up balloon around his or her ankle. The object is to “stomp” on and pop other teens’ balloons without having your own balloon popped. The teen with the last balloon wins.

9:00 PM **Session I: Why Am I Here?**

- **Opening Prayer**

This prayer can be spontaneous or written out ahead of time. It should focus on asking God for the grace to be open to his message.

- **Teaching (20 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 11 for detailed theme and content.

- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on finding a deeper meaning in life through relationship with God. See notes on page 21 about giving personal testimony.

- **Small-Group Discussion (30 minutes)**

Small groups are easily formed by assigning a number to each teen’s name tag; those with the same number are in the same group. You can make the process fun by awarding a prize to the small group that gathers all its members first. “Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

10:00 PM **Night Prayer**

10:15 PM **Evening Snack/Free Time**

10:45 PM **Prepare for Bed**

Recommendation: Assign separate floors for males and females. This is a good time to review retreat rules and consequences.

11:15 PM **Lights Out**

Retreat Team Meeting to Prepare for Next Day

Recommendation: Have retreat team members take supervising shifts throughout the night.

DAY TWO – SATURDAY

7:00 AM **Wake-Up Call/Prepare for the Day**

8:00 AM **Breakfast**

9:00 AM **Morning Prayer: Music, One Decade of the Rosary, and the Morning Offering**

9:30 AM **Icebreaker: “Human Scavenger Hunt”**

See page 27 for instructions and necessary printout.

9:45 AM **Session II: The Depth of God’s Love**

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Skit: “You Did All This for Me” (20 minutes)**

See detailed skit cast, props list, and plot page 24.

- **Teaching (20 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 13 for detailed theme and content.

- **Personal Testimony (15 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of being deeply convicted of God’s love and learning to accept his love. See notes on page 21 about giving personal testimony.

- **Small-Group Discussion (35 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

11:15 AM **Free Time**

12:00 PM **Lunch**

During lunch, have a box and slips of paper available for teens to submit faith-related questions.

1:00 PM **Session III: Repentance/Reconciliation/Healing**

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of turning away from the burden of sin and coming home to God. See notes on page 21 about giving personal testimony.

- **Teaching (20 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 14 for detailed theme and content.

- **Meditation Activity: Nailing “Sins” to a Cross (30 minutes or more)**

Lead the large group in reverently writing down on slips of paper any sins, hurts, and resolutions they need to address in order to reconcile with others. (Instruct them not to put their names or the names of the people they need to reconcile with on these slips of paper). One by one, when each teen is ready, have him or her nail the slips of paper to a large wooden cross. Help create a prayerful atmosphere

with reflective music. See the “Retreat Recommended Needs Inventory” on page 8 for a list of items needed for this activity.

- **Small-Group Discussion (30 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

2:30 PM **Confession**

3:15 PM **Free Time**

Confession continued

Retreat Team Meeting to Prepare for Evening Session

5:15 PM **Q&A Session**

Have retreat team members answer questions from box.

6:00 PM **Dinner in Small Groups**

Complete Session III “Small-Group Discussion Questions”

7:00 PM **Session IV: Committing to Christ**

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Personal testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of responding to Jesus’ call to follow him wholeheartedly. See notes on page 21 about giving personal testimony.

- **Teaching (20 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 16 for detailed theme and content.

- **Commitment Prayer Ceremony/Adoration (60 minutes)**

Before exposing the Eucharist, play several upbeat praise songs. The music should then become more solemn and prayerful to signal that the Eucharist is about to be exposed. When Adoration begins, ensure the reverence due in Christ’s real presence. Distribute a copy of the “Commitment Prayer” on page 28 to each teen and allow time to read it. One by one, when each teen is ready, have him or her move closer to the monstrance and silently pray the “Commitment Prayer.” After the teen’s silent personal prayer, he or she should move to one of the retreat team leaders, who will pray with the teen for the grace to remain faithful to his or her commitment, as well as for anything else the teen wishes to pray for. See the “Retreat Recommended Needs Inventory” on page 8 for a list of items needed for this activity.

- **Small-Group Discussion (30 minutes, time permitting)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 23.

9:00 PM **Free Time**

10:30 PM **Prepare for Bed**

Recommendation: Assign separate floors for males and females. This is a good time to review retreat rules and consequences.

11:00 PM **Lights Out**

Retreat Team Meeting to Prepare for Next Day

Recommendation: Have retreat team members take supervising shifts throughout the night.

DAY THREE – SUNDAY

7:00 AM **Wake-Up Call/Prepare for the Day/Pack for Departure**

8:00 AM **Breakfast**

9:00 AM **Morning Prayer: Music, One Decade of the Rosary, and the Morning Offering**

9:30 AM **Session V: Catholic and Proud**

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Skit: “Jesus Stay” (20 minutes)**

See detailed skit cast, props list, and plot on page 24.

- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of acting in a countercultural way, standing up for the Faith, and/or choosing God over peer pressure. See notes on page 21 about giving personal testimony.

- **Teaching (15 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 19 for detailed theme and content.

- **Large-Group Activity: Letters (15 minutes)**

Instruct the teens to write themselves a letter about where they would like to be in their personal lives of faith one year from now and what they will do to get there. These letters should be mailed to teens a year after the retreat. See the “Retreat Recommended Needs Inventory” on page 8 for a list of items needed for this activity.

- **Small-Group Discussion/Prepare for Mass (30 minutes, time permitting)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 23.

11:00 AM **Large-Group Sharing/Prayer**

12:00 PM **Mass**

1:00 PM **Lunch**

2:00 PM **Clean Retreat Venue/Pack Cars, Buses**

2:15 PM **Departure**

Retreat Schedule – One-Day Option

9:00 AM **Teens Arrive**

9:30 AM **Welcome/Opening Music/Review of Retreat Rules**

Recommendation: Review consequences of abusing retreat rules. Many leaders enforce a consequence of contacting parents to pick up the teen—no matter the hour—if a rule is broken.

Icebreaker: “Human Scavenger Hunt”

See page 27 for instructions and necessary printout.

10:00 AM **Session I: Why Am I Here?**

- **Opening Prayer**

This prayer can be spontaneous or written out ahead of time. It should focus on asking God for the grace to be open to his message.

- **Teaching (15 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 11 for detailed theme and content.

- **Personal Testimony* (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on finding a deeper meaning in life through relationship with God. See page 21 for notes about giving personal testimony.

- **Small-Group Discussion (20 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

10:45 AM **Break**

11:00 AM **Session II: The Depth of God’s Love**

See “Session Teachings” on page 13 for detailed theme and content.

- **Teaching (15 minutes)** *See page 13 for content.*

- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of being deeply convicted of God’s love and learning to accept his love. See page 21 for notes about giving personal testimony.

- **Small-Group Discussion (20 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

11:45 AM **Free time**

12:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00 PM **Session III: Repentance/Reconciliation/Healing**

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of “turning around” from the burden of sin and coming home to God. See page 21 for notes about giving personal testimony.

- **Teaching (15 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 14 for detailed theme and content.

- **Small-Group Discussion (20 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 22.

1:45 PM **Break**

2:00 PM **Confession**

3:00 PM **Session IV: Committing to Christ**

- **Personal Testimony (10 minutes)**

This testimony should focus on an experience of responding to Jesus’ call to follow him wholeheartedly. See page 21 for notes about giving personal testimony.

- **Teaching** (15 minutes)**

See “Session Teachings” on page 16 for detailed theme and content.

- **Small-Group Discussion (20 minutes)**

“Small-Group Discussion Questions” for this session are on page 23.

3:45 PM **Break**

4:00 PM **Adoration & Closing Prayer Ceremony (30 minutes)**

See instructions on page ____.

4:30 PM **Retreat Concludes**

** Leaders may consider substituting one of the “Skits” in place of one of the four personal testimonies listed in this “One-Day Retreat” option. See detailed cast, props, and plot information for two skits on page 24.*

*** Leaders may consider incorporating “Practical Tips” (Outline point #2 from Session V teaching) into this final teaching.*

Retreat Recommended Needs Inventory

The following list corresponds to the Chosen retreat. You may adapt the details as needed.

Staff:

- Retreat team comprised of adults committed to serving the teens throughout the retreat with support and prayer

- Musicians for praise and worship sessions
- Sound equipment staff to manage audio needs (i.e., set up, tear down, perform sound control)
- Priest for the celebration of Mass
- Priest or deacon for Eucharistic Adoration

Basic Retreat Needs:

- Retreat banner
- Journal for each teen
- Audio equipment (i.e., cables, amps)
- Statue of the Blessed Mother
- Crucifix
- Rosaries for all teens (There are many places to buy rosaries in bulk at a low cost; check religious supply stores as well as dozens of online suppliers.)
- Resource guide for praying a “Scriptural Rosary” (i.e., book, online article)

“Welcome” and “Icebreaker” Needs:

- Name tags with small-group designations
- One approximately twelve-inch piece of string for each teen
- One balloon for each teen

Session II Needs (for Three-Day Retreat Activity):

- Pencils/pens
- “Human Scavenger Hunt” handout for each member of your retreat group
- Projector and screen or large TV for showing a crucifixion scene from one of several movies about Christ’s Passion: (i.e., *Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Passion of the Christ*)

Session III Needs (for Three-Day Retreat Activity):

- Small slips of paper, enough for each teen to have several
- Large wooden cross
- Meditation music appropriate for spiritual reflection
- Hammer
- Small nails (one per teen)

Session IV Needs:

- Handouts with “Commitment Prayer” (*Located in “Reproducible Resources” on page 28*)
- Candles
- This session includes Eucharistic Adoration, which is subject to the requirements of

certain liturgical rubrics. Your pastor or deacon can tell you what logistics are required for Eucharistic Adoration at your retreat venue.

Session V Needs:

- Letter paper
- Envelopes
- Pens
- Copy of the song, *How Could You Say No* (Julie Miller), to play during the session skit

Suggested Supplies for “Free Time”:

- Sports items, such as volleyballs, basketballs, Frisbees, and footballs
- Board games
- Playing cards

Session Teachings

The following outlines correspond to each session's designated teaching topic. The outlines are intended to be general guidelines that should be adapted and personalized for your specific retreat group.

SESSION I: WHY AM I HERE?

Theme

Wherever we find ourselves, we are here for the purpose of being in relationship with our Creator. A relationship with God is the meaning and purpose of human life.

Teaching Outline

1. Why are you here (on this retreat)?

- Pose some questions to your teens: Who is here because a parent made you attend? Is anyone here because *you want to be* and not just because you have to be?
- Explain that they are ultimately here because God wants them to be.
- Many people ask about the meaning of life, but never get much deeper than, "My parents wanted a child, so here I am."

2. Unanswered question = emptiness

- When people do not know why they exist, their lives have no meaning or purpose.
- People yearn for answers, so they seek things and experiences that will satisfy their longing for purpose. Some common places people seek fulfillment include:
 - » Money and material wealth
 - » Sexual pleasure and power
 - » Success (through good grades or career recognition)
 - » Constant partying, mindless distractions, or thrill-seeking activities
 - » Image and popularity
- When people do not know why they are here, they find life meaningless and end up broken and empty. If a prehistoric caveman stumbled upon a modern toaster, he would probably pick it up, shake it, try to hunt an animal with it, and eventually break it. Why? He would not know how to fulfill the toaster's intended purpose because he would not know the reason for the toaster's existence in the first place.
- If *you* do not know why *you* are here, then you will not know your destination, and if you do not know your destination, you will not have direction. In order to have hope, you need direction.
- Young adulthood should be a time of hope and possibility, yet so many young adults feel confused and empty, sometimes even leading them to despair.
- Young adults who do not know what their lives are intended for end up feeling miserable

and broken. (Suicide is the sixth leading cause of death for five- to fourteen-year-olds and the third leading cause of death for fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds.)

3. The answer

- You are not here as a result of random chance. You are here for a purpose, and when you pursue that purpose, you will become what you are intended to be. And nothing can take away the fulfillment and hope that comes with that.
- Just as you would look to the toaster's owner's manual to find out how to operate it, if you want to know why you are here—your purpose—you must look to *your* Creator. God knows your purpose because he designed you himself.
- You are here to know, love, and serve God in this life and to be happy with him forever in the next. (Have students repeat this phrase aloud with you a few times.) In other words, you were made for a relationship with your Creator.
- Through the Creation story in the Bible, we learn that God created the world in order to share his life with us. We learn of humankind's rejection of God, of God reaching out to humanity through covenants and prophets, and, finally, of God sending his own Son to restore us to relationship with him. This is the story of *your* life. It is the story of *your* creation, *your* reason for existing, *your* salvation, and, ultimately, *your* promise of eternal life.
- Share with your teens a personal story of someone you know who was sick, poor, or otherwise suffering, yet who was full of joy and hope because he or she lived for God—lived with *purpose*.
- St. Paul was a man who lived joyfully because he lived with purpose. Paul was in prison during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero, a deranged and violent man who sometimes lit up his palace by using Christians as human torches.
- What did St. Paul write as he sat in prison awaiting what was sure to be a horrible death? Here is one letter he wrote from prison. (*Read Philippians 4:4-13 aloud.*)
- People who live their purpose shine—they stand out. Nothing can take away their joy because, like Paul, they have the peace that no earthly concern can suppress.
- If St. Paul had looked for his life's meaning in anything other than God—money, sex, partying, popularity, or success—his life would have lost all meaning when a prison sentence stripped away every earthly pursuit and left him seemingly alone and desolate.

4. The challenge

- If your life is not centered on a relationship with God, you are like a toaster in the hands of a curious caveman. Missing a relationship with God is missing the very point of your life and leaves you in one of two positions: You will either be a surfer or a drifter.
- Surfing your way through life means always looking for the high of the next “wave”—the next party, the next indulgence of pleasure, the next thrill.

- Drifting your way through life is like floating aimlessly in the ocean, letting the current carry you wherever it flows.
- *Challenge your teens:* Do you have a purpose and meaning? Does your life reflect this? Or are you just another surfer or drifter?
- You are made for far more than surfing or drifting through life—you are made for the adventure and glory of loving and being loved by the Creator of all things.

SESSION II: THE DEPTH OF GOD’S LOVE

Theme

We see the endless depth of God’s love for us now and forever when we consider the cross.

Teaching Outline

1. Creation and the Fall

- God created us so we could partake of the Holy Trinity’s infinite love and beauty, and he has adopted us as his eternally beloved children.
- Humankind rejected God’s love by freely choosing sin, which separated us from his grace. By sinning, we caused our own destruction.
- God did not abandon us as would have been justified after our disobedience. His love for us could not be defeated even by our willful rejection of him.

2. The cross and redemption

- Instead of shutting out humanity forever, God came even closer to us—he became man.
- In the person of Jesus, God lived our human life to offer us hope, life, and healing.
- Ultimately, Jesus took our place to confront our worst fear—death. He submitted to death in order to bridge the separation humanity had placed between itself and God—the way back to the love we were created for.
- The crucifix we see in church does not capture what Jesus actually endured for our sake. If it did, the true violence of the passion would overwhelm us.
- Share with your teens the dramatic details of Jesus’ passion—the brutal scourging, the humiliating crowning with thorns, the nailing of hands and feet. You may also consider including some physical props for your teens to handle during the teaching (i.e., a cross, a pair of large nails, a branch of thorns).

3. The love of God for you

- This is *your* God, the Creator of the universe.
- Jesus is your bridge to the Trinity and to the life of sharing in the divine love for which you were created.
- God’s love for you exceeds your understanding. If you were the only person on earth, Jesus would have gladly laid down his life for your sake alone.

- We should each ask ourselves how seriously we take Jesus' love. What difference does it make in our lives?
- At the foot of Jesus' cross, the apostle John stood steadfast, witnessing the scene with Mary, Jesus' Mother, but all the other disciples ran away into hiding.
- Ask your teens to close their eyes and place themselves in that scene with John and Mary. Say: "Imagine Jesus gazing at you from the cross, loving you, happy to suffer any agony in order to give you life. Will you allow his love to transform you, or will you run away in fear and hide?"

SESSION III: REPENTANCE/HEALING/RECONCILIATION

Theme

Sin divides and tears apart our relationships with others and with God.

Teaching Outline

1. The parable of the prodigal son

- Describe the parable of the prodigal son dramatically. Emphasize the despair of the son who, having squandered his father's inheritance on empty pleasures, returns home planning to beg his father to let him be a slave in his household.
- Imagine how the son feels when he sees his father running out to meet him. He was probably afraid of his father's wrath and rejection.
- Instead, his father is overjoyed, not disgusted, and embraces his son with love and welcomes him home joyfully.

2. Personal testimony

- Here, share a personal testimony relating your experience to the parable.

3. Letting go of sin/coming home to God

- Everyone is wounded by sin—young people, old people, people who do not believe in God at all, and even faith leaders such as priests, religious, and youth ministers. *Everyone.*
- Many people carry deep shame for their sins, sometimes subconsciously. Shame often makes us hold ourselves back from the mercy of God when he wants nothing more than to shower us with forgiveness and grace.
- Shame held the prodigal son back from his father. Does the same shame hold us back from our heavenly Father when we sin? Are we like the prodigal son, chained by shame to the trough of pig slop instead of celebrating at God's feast?
- Sometimes we cling to sin because we are afraid of how our lives would change without sin. What would I do on Saturday nights? Will I lose my friends? Will I become boring?
- Choosing to give up sin may be a bumpy transition. If you are accustomed to engaging in sinful activities every weekend, you will not have those familiar go-to plans. Some people might end their relationships with you, but this would only prove that your connection with them was not true friendship, but rather was based on something external.

- The struggle is infinitely worth it. The peace and fulfillment that came from God are the real thing, while the fleeting satisfaction of sin is an illusion. You deserve the real thing, even if it comes with sacrifice.
- Sometimes we do not want to give up habitual sins because we think it will be too difficult. This outlook is not from God. Wallowing in our sin is being dishonest with ourselves about our true identity and dignity as children of God. Shame that makes us lose any hope of changing does not come from God—it comes from the devil. Satan tempts us with sin and the lie that we are defined by the sins we have committed.
- You are God’s beloved child. God is not waiting until you mess up so he can condemn you. Quite the opposite—when you mess up, God is ready to run out to welcome you back. Even if you struggle with a sin that seems addictive, God is longing to help you become free.
- St. Maximilian Kolbe said to not lose heart, even if you commit a mortal sin many times. Do not allow discouragement to lead to the sin of pride—that is, thinking your sin could possibly be greater than God’s grace and mercy.
- Pride can also lead us to compare our sins to the “worse” sins of others and to conclude falsely that our sins are harmless or not really hurting anyone.
- Again, this is a lie. *All* sin leads to destruction. Seemingly “harmless” sins chip away at our dignity now and set us up for deeper falls in the future.
- Is it harmless to develop an addiction to porn? Is it harmless to risk contracting HIV or another STD? Is it harmless to damage your relationship with your parents because of lies? As sins play out, the price is your true self, and ultimately your life.

4. Called to freedom/called home

- God wants you to abandon sin not because he wants to limit you, but because he wants to free you from sin’s bondage and destruction. You are created good and beautiful, and sin represses who you really are.
- Seriously consider what holds you back from running to your Father when you sin. Choose to reject the lie that you are nothing more than the sins you commit. Instead, whenever you sin, whether it is a “bigger” or “smaller” sin, run back to God immediately. Say to him, “Father, I have sinned against you, and I have sinned against my family, but I want to try again.” You are eternally precious to God, and he will never refuse to embrace you again.
- The most profound way to return to God is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- In John 20:21-23, Jesus gives us the amazing gift of Confession when he authorizes the apostles to forgive sin in his name. When the priest, working *in persona Christi*, absolves us of our sins, we know without any doubt that we are reunited to God. What a gift to hear the words of mercy spoken aloud and to have absolute confidence that our sins are forgiven.

- Remember that the devil wants you to keep your sins secret. The last thing he wants is for any light to be brought into a sinful situation.
- Confession also enables us to release the burden of carrying around the weight of sin and to leave behind our darkest moments forever. Too many people hold onto the shame of sin for years, sometimes waiting until they are eighty years old to confess sins they committed when they were seventeen. This is a tragedy. Freedom is available to you right now. Get rid of your sins in Confession and never look back.
- If you turn to God with your sin, you will find God running to embrace you—every time, no matter how many times you have fallen.
- Lead the retreat group in a spontaneous prayer asking for the grace to reject sin's shame and for the courage to seek mercy and freedom in Confession.

SESSION IV: COMMITTING TO CHRIST

Theme

Jesus calls you—yes, *you*—to follow him with your whole heart. How will you respond?

Teaching Outline

1. Luke 5:1-11

- Retell the account of Luke 5:1-11 in a casual, story form.
- Ask your teens to place themselves in the scene: It is AD 20, and you are a Jewish fisherman, exhausted and frustrated from a hard night and day of fishing and catching virtually nothing. You have admitted defeat for the day, gone in to shore, and are washing your nets on the docks when an old friend arrives to help. He mentions that Jesus will be passing through town soon.
- You have heard of this Jesus, including that he has raised someone from the dead. You are curious to check him out and see if the rumors are true. When a crowd begins to gather in the streets near your docks, you realize Jesus has arrived.
- At first you do not notice anything special about him. Your curiosity about Jesus is mixed with just a little disdain for the people who clamor around him. Do they *really* believe this average guy can work miracles?
- The crowd parts a little more, and suddenly you realize Jesus is heading right toward your docks—toward *your* boat. He smiles and says, “Get in. Take me out on the water so I can preach from your boat.”
- Something stirs inside you. You can sense that Jesus is truly holy, not a lunatic or a person with some good tricks. And his eyes seem to see right through you, to all your darkest nooks and crannies, making you feel exposed and uncomfortable and ... unworthy of Jesus' holiness.
- You do as he says, taking him out on the water to preach, and after the crowd clears, your discomfort reaches a peak. Surely he can see that you are sinful, probably too sinful to be

this close to him. You just want to bring him to shore and hustle him along so you can shake off the whole experience.

- But Jesus stops you: “Go out to the deep water,” he says, “and lower your nets again.” You are confused. *What? The day’s fishing is over. There are no fish to be caught, anyway. Don’t you know just a bit more about fishing than this guy? Isn’t he just a carpenter?*
- But you cannot resist. You put out to the deep water, lower your nets, and almost immediately see them straining as fish begin to fill them. Astonished, you and your crew can barely haul up the catch before your nets tear under the weight. The fish keep coming, so many that you have the crazy idea that your boat might even be in danger of sinking. You have never had a catch this enormous in all your years as a fisherman. You scramble to signal another boat to hurry over, so they can take some of the load.
- When the commotion subsides a bit, you remember that Jesus is still in your boat. He is watching you closely. And then it hits you: This catch is a miracle. This Jesus truly is a holy man, and you are overwhelmed with your own unworthiness. You fall to your knees, ashamed.
- But he surprises you once more: “Do not be afraid,” he says kindly. And then he asks you to join him—to catch men, men for God.
- You know your life will never be the same. You know you are not worthy, but that will not hold you back. You know you will leave everything to follow him.

2. Jesus calls the weak

- Saints are not the flat, often romanticized images we see on holy cards. They are real people like us. They have strengths and weaknesses. They act impulsively and make terrible mistakes.
- For example, St. Peter denied Jesus three times and abandoned him at the hour of his death. After Jesus’ resurrection, St. Thomas did not initially believe that the others had seen the risen Lord. And even upon seeing Jesus, he still did not believe until he physically put his fingers into the holes in Jesus’ hands and side. These are certainly not the perfect images of saintliness with which we are often presented.
- Jesus came for the average people, for the sinful people—for people like us. Jesus called Peter, the impulsive fisherman who at first was not interested in Jesus, to be the first pope, a martyr, and one of greatest saints in our Church.
- Today, the same holds true. God calls us regardless of our self-perceived worthiness or unworthiness. Christ’s Church is not a museum of saints, but a hospital for sinners.

3. Jesus is calling you

- Maybe when you hear someone’s personal testimony or listen to these retreat session teachings, you dismiss them because you think holiness is not for you. It is too difficult; you sin too much; you are too “far gone”; and besides, you *enjoy* your sins.
- But if holiness was possible for St. Peter, it is possible for you. If holiness was possible

for St. Paul, who dedicated himself to persecuting and even killing Christians before his conversion, it is possible for you.

- Sometimes we look at a person like Blessed Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) and think that the average person is not capable of her joy, peace, and endless service. Yet, the saints show us that holiness is possible and that no one is exempt from the calling, because the very same grace they had is available to us today.
- Prayer, union with Jesus in the Eucharist, freedom from the bonds of sin through Confession—these are what gave Blessed Teresa her “impossible” joy. And we are invited to the same joy, peace, and freedom.
- Imagine Jesus saying the same words to you that he spoke to St. Peter: “I want to get into your boat. I don’t care how small or beat up it is. Come and follow me.”

4. Jesus wants *all* of you

- You may be thinking, *Am I not doing enough already? I go to Mass every Sunday. I have attended religion classes for most of my life. I pray grace before my meals.*
- But consider: Just because I sit in a garage, does not make me a car. Just because I go to church, does not necessarily mean I am living in *real* relationship with God.
- Jesus does not just want a part of you. He wants you to do more than just go through the motions.
- Blessed John Paul II said, “Only in the encounter with him, the Word made flesh, do we find the fullness of self and happiness. Religion itself, without the experience of wondrous discovery of the Son of God and communion with him, who became our brother, becomes a mere set of principles that are increasingly difficult to understand, and rules that are increasingly hard to accept.”
- Consider gangsters with tattoos of Jesus and rosaries hanging in their cars or mafia bosses who attend weekly Mass while living a life of crime. They go through the motions of faith, but it is a faith of mere motions and is as dead as a statue. Jesus Christ is a living person. Without a relationship with him, our faith can become a set of abstract rules that are easier and easier to disregard.
- Or, you may be thinking, this message is for the real sinners. I do not have any really serious sins, so this does not apply to me.
- If you are not caught any big sins, that is great. But it is not enough. God wants you to stay away from all sin because it hurts your relationship with him and other people. He does not want merely your obedience to rules—he wants your heart. It would not be enough for a husband to tell his wife, “I don’t cheat on you. I stay in line. What more do you want?” His wife wants his whole heart, just as God wants your whole heart. Love demands nothing less.

5. Give it up

- Jesus wants you just as you are, with all your fears and brokenness, and he loves you so much that he will heal you from these things if you will let him.
- Jesus offers us something much too great for an apathetic response. When a woman is offered a ring and a marriage proposal, her response is “yes” or “no,” not “whatever.” Jesus asks for our “yes” or “no” to his love. Nothing in between will do.
- Here, introduce the “Commitment Prayer Ceremony” on page 5 and transition into the activity.

SESSION V: CATHOLIC AND PROUD

Theme

Living in a consistent, daily relationship with Jesus and sharing the Good News with others requires commitment.

Teaching Outline

1. 24/7

- We are called to a real relationship with God, not just for one hour every Sunday.
- Consider the effects of devoting only one hour each week to your best friend—the relationship would collapse. Compare this to the way we often treat God.
- Sometimes we have different “selves” depending on where we are. We party on Saturday and then go to Mass on Sunday, even though we recognize easily that this kind of inconsistency in any other relationship would be destructive.
- Jesus wants us on Saturday night; he wants us in the classroom; he wants us on the football field; he wants us when we are out with our friends. Our lifestyle should make it clear that God comes first.
- Building an authentic relationship with God, just as with any relationship, requires time spent together, specifically through prayer and the sacraments.

2. Practical Tips

- Seriously committing to Christ, like serious athletic training, takes consistent effort and a plan. Here are some strategies for building your relationship with God:
 - » Seek solid nourishment in God’s Word and in the Eucharist. Make Sunday Mass a priority; do not skip Mass because you are tired or busy.
 - » Pray daily and pray often.
 - » Choose the right friends, ones who will support you in the life of faith instead of dragging you into the empty promises of sin.
 - » Practice making the right choices even in the small things. Choosing God in the smallest things prepares you to choose him when it seems overwhelmingly difficult.
 - » Go to Confession often, as soon as possible after you fall, and at a minimum once

a year. Think of Confession as cleaning your soul—we clean our bodies daily, so shouldn't we give at least as much concern to the cleaning of our souls?

- » Practice charity by small acts of service. Sharing the gospel starts with our actions.
- » Go on an annual retreat to refuel your spiritual life and renew your commitment to God.

3. Close

- The Holy Spirit empowers you with the strength to conquer any temptation or trial you may face. Read Acts 2 to see the dramatic change in the apostles after Pentecost.
- If you truly want a life of adventure, a life with deep meaning and fulfillment, be a rebel. Be a committed Catholic. Be a saint!

A Guide To Giving Personal Testimony

“[What] we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” – 1 John 1:3

1. Before you begin to plan your testimony, spend several minutes in prayer.
2. As you plan, remember that the goal of personal testimony is to share how Jesus has worked in your life. Choose only stories and details that will serve this goal.
3. A simple testimony outline:
 - a. Describe yourself before the change.
 - b. Describe what changed you.
 - c. Describe your life now, after the change.
4. Open with a brief overview of the theme or major point, and then give your testimony. Close by referring again to your testimony’s theme or major point.
5. Streamline your story by omitting irrelevant details and facts. Focus on the heart of what was happening in your life. What was your life like before, and why? What did it feel like to change? What was your specific turning point? What is your life like now?
6. Be authentic, but avoid sharing about anything you are struggling with currently.
7. A testimony is not meant to be a catechetical lecture, so focus on personal stories rather than on ideas or theories.
8. You may wish to incorporate Scripture references that highlight God working in your life.
9. Use “I” statements, but avoid “you” statements. A testimony is not the forum for criticizing or reprimanding others.

Small-Group Discussion Questions

SESSION I: WHY AM I HERE?

1. Introductions: Have each group member state his or her name, where he or she is from, and his or her favorite thing to do. Have each group member answer the following question: If you had to be someone else (anyone in history), who would it be?
2. State that anything shared in the group is confidential and should not be shared outside the group.
3. Why are you here on this retreat? (Be honest.) What do you hope to gain by being here?
4. Have you ever wondered about the purpose of your existence? What answers have you come up with?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very important), how important is Jesus to you?
6. What do you want to have happen in your relationship with God? What do you need to do to make this happen?

SESSION II: THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE

1. What do you think about the skit you just saw? What do you think about the session teaching you just heard?
2. Who, if anyone, would you be willing to die for right now? Why?
3. Think about the person you are closest to. What qualities do you like most in this person? How do these qualities compare with those of Jesus?
4. Do you take God's love for granted?
5. How hard is it for you to relate to, imagine, or accept God's unconditional love? Why?
6. In our daily lives, how should we respond to God's love?

SESSION III: REPENTANCE/HEALING/RECONCILIATION

1. What struck you most in the last session?
2. What are two sins people your age often struggle with? What sins do you personally struggle with?
3. How do these sins keep you from growing in your relationship with Jesus? How can you move past them?
4. What happens when you hold onto anger, pain, or guilt for a long time? How does that negatively affect you?
5. Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask for forgiveness? What is stopping you?
6. God is always ready to forgive and heal us if we ask. Do you find this hard to accept or relate to? Why?

7. What holds you back from experiencing God's mercy in Confession more often?

SESSION IV: COMMITTING TO CHRIST

1. What from the last session struck you most?
2. Have you ever sat in Church or looked at a holy person and thought, *That's not for me?* Why?
3. How do you feel about God calling you to a deep relationship with him and to a life of holiness? Do you find this scary? Hard to accept? Exciting? Why?
4. What sacrifices are you afraid of making in order to answer God's call?
5. What good would come from a life committed to Jesus that would be lacking in a life that is not committed to him?

SESSION V: CATHOLIC AND PROUD

1. When have you had a powerful experience of prayer?
2. What things might get in the way of your daily commitment to God?
3. What are three ways you can stay connected to Christ through the Church? Be specific.
4. When have you had an experience of sharing your faith with others?
5. What will you do with the Holy Spirit's help to help spread the gospel to your friends, family, and even your enemies? Be specific.

Skit Outlines

The following skits may be implemented as indicated in the “Session Teachings” or adapted for your group’s particular needs and circumstances. Plan to practice the skits several times prior to performing them on the retreat.

SESSION II: THE DEPTH OF GOD’S LOVE

Skit: “You Did All This For Me”

Time: 20 minutes

Theme: How seriously do we take the love of God?

Cast: Teen (male); Priest; Person Confessing; Friend 1; Friend 2

Props/Music: Two chairs (for staged confessional); projector and screen or large TV; *Jesus of Nazareth* video

Plot:

- Teen is in line for Confession with Friend 1 and Friend 2, while another person is in the confessional having his (or her) confession heard.
- Teen complains that his parents dragged him to Confession.
- His two Friends help him to think of ridiculous lies to tell Priest (i.e., “I am in the Mafia and killed twenty people.”)
- Teen then goes to Confession and confesses these made-up sins.
- Priest tells Teen to go in front of the cross and say, “Jesus you did all this for me and I don’t care” five times for his penance.
- Each time Teen says these words, he takes what he is saying more seriously.
- After the third time, Teen freezes as the crucifixion scene from *Jesus of Nazareth* begins to play on a large screen.
- Teen finishes his penance very seriously and then goes back to Confession and confesses his real sins to Priest.

(The teen in this story is a real person, and this is a true story. He went on to become a priest.)

SESSION V: CATHOLIC AND PROUD

Skit: “Jesus Stay”

Time: 20 minutes

Theme: A challenge to bring Christ with you everywhere

Cast: Jesus, Teen, Friend 1, Friend 2, Friend 3

Music: *How Could You Say No?* (Julie Miller) or *World Apart* (Jars of Clay)

Plot:

- Teen is sitting around watching TV.
- Jesus comes into the room.
- Teen asks Jesus who he is; Jesus responds and asks what Teen is doing.
- Jesus sits down next to Teen, shows him or her the Bible, and begins teaching.
- A knock on the door reveals Friend 1, Friend 2, and Friend 3. They invite Teen to a wild party.
- Teen accepts the invitation, gets up, and is about to leave with them, when Jesus gets up and follows.
- I need a minute to fix my hair, Teen tells Friends.
- Teen tells Jesus he would not like the party, and promises they can hang out later; Jesus nods.
- Once more, Teen is about to leave with Friends when Jesus follows.
- Teen tells Friends (who are growing impatient) that he or she forgot something and will be right back.
- Getting impatient with Jesus because of the delay, Teen tells Jesus more forcefully to stay there.
- Teen then tries to leave again, but Jesus follows yet again.
- Teen, now angry at Jesus for interfering with the party plans, pushes Jesus back and yells, “Jesus, *stay here.*”
- As Teen begins to back away Jesus slowly walks toward Teen. Teen then pushes Jesus’ again, this time pushing specifically on each arm.
- Jesus is knocked back (without falling down) and ends with his arms and legs in the crucified position.
- Teen then leaves with Friends. The song, *How Could You Say No?* (Julie Miller) or *World Apart* (Jars of Clay) plays as Jesus remains crucified.
- As the song ends, Teen slowly returns, remorseful, and falls to his or her knees at the feet of Jesus.



Reproducible Resources

Copy the following pages as needed in order to provide a copy to each member of your retreat group.



Human Scavenger Hunt

Task

Initial Here

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Get seven different autographs on the back of this paper. | _____ |
| 2. Get someone to sing "Happy Birthday" as fast as he or she can. | _____ |
| 3. Arm-wrestle someone. | _____ |
| 4. Find a person who lives twenty minutes or farther from church. | _____ |
| 5. Find a person who has a birthday in the same month you do. | _____ |
| 6. Do as many push-ups as you can and have someone count them off for you. | _____ |
| 7. Find a person who has different color eyes than you. | _____ |



Prayer of Commitment to Christ

*Lord Jesus Christ, you said, "I came that they
might have life and have it more abundantly."*

I want to belong to you from now on.

I want to know what it means to live life abundantly.

Teach me what it means to be a Christian.

Teach me how to follow you.

*I ask you to forgive me and to free me
from the sins that keep me from living
the life that you have for me.*

I commit myself to you. Jesus, I trust in you.

Amen.

