Don't tell the group what you're thinking about.

After a few minutes, **ASK:**

» What impact do our failures and our sins have on how we see God?

» How is the way we've covered the sheet (or paper) with crumpled newspapers like the way our bad choices or failures harm our relationship with God?

**SAY:** Bad choices come between us and God- they mess up our relationship with him and make closeness with him difficult. In Old Testament times,

God provided a set of rules to live by. But the Jewish people became so caught up in those rules that they forgot God and served the rules instead. T hankfully, God gave us a new beginning-a new way to relate to God. God sent his Son., Jesus.

Have someone read aloud John 3: 16. Then have the group carefully bring togetr1er the four corners of the sr1eet or paper so it still holds the crumpled newspapers. Then have everyone work together to roll it up so all the newspapers remain inside but the sheet or paper looks like a delivery package. Have kids pass the "delivery package" around the circle.

**SAY:** As you hold this bundle that looks a little like a package, filled with all your mistakes and bad choices, think about how God must've felt, knowing that he was sending his Son Jesus as a special

**of the junk that you pretend doesn't exist! So take a long look at what's on this bedsheet right now.**

After a minute or so, bring out the backpack. Have kids each grab a few of the crumpled-up newspapers and stuff them into the backpack until ali the newspapers are contained in it. Then zip the backpack shut. lf you have a large group, you may need multiple backpacks.

**SAY: For rnany of us, our past hurts, hang-ups, and habits hold us back and get in our way. Many of us are stuck in bitterness over what sorneone has done to us. We continue to hold on to the hurt and we refuse to forgive the ones who've hurt us.**

**1 want you to know that I hurt for you. l'rn truly sorry for you, sorry that you had to go through that hurt. But holding on to that hurt and not being**

**willing to forgive sorneone who hurt you in the past allows that person to continue to hurt you today, in the present.**

Have each kid put the backpack on. lf you have a

\arge group, ask for a few kids to volunteer to put on the backpacks.

**SAY: Jesus prornised he'd take ali our hurts, hang­ ups, and habits and put thern on his back. He'd carry thern, freeing us to be in relationship with God. But we have to give hirn our stuff-he can't carry what we hold on to. Sorne of you are bound by guilt. You keep beating yourself up over sorne past failure or sorne poor decisions. You're trapped, stuck in**

**your guilt.**

You think that no one anywhere is as bad as you are, that no one could love the *real* you, and that no one could ever forgive you for the terrible things that you have done.

You're wrong. God can. That's why Jesus went to the cross, for our sins. He knows everything you've ever done and everything you've ever experienced. And you're not alone. Sorne people right here have faced similar failures and hurts in their lives and have accepted Christ's forgiveness. We're all here to encourage and support each other. The Apostle Paul had a lot to regret about his past. Before his conversion in Acts 9, Paul even participated in Stephen's murder. Yet in Philippians 3:13 (CEV) he tells us, "My friends, 1 don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead." 1 don't mean that we *ignore* the past-it's right here in this backpack. We all need to

*learn* from our past, offer forgiveness, make amends, and then release it. Only then can we be free from our guilt, grudges, and grief! God isn't interested in how we started, but how we finish the race.

lf you'd like, close your eyes as I read this poem, called "God Sent Us a Savior":

lf our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.

lf our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.

lf our greatest need had been money,

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**SAY: AII the ways people typically search for meaning will leave them empty, still thirsting *tor* truth. lt's a lot like these snacks. They taste good,**

**but they leave you thirsty.**

Glose by reading the Serenity Prayer together (available on p. 3 of their Student Journal). Keep in mind, sorne teenagers may not want to read aloud with the rest of the group. That's OK; encourage them to focus on the words being shared.

**God, grant me the serenity**

**to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the ditterence.**

**Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time;**

**Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; Taking, as Jesus did,**

**this sintul world as it is; Not as I would have it;**

**Trusting that you will make all things right lt I surrender to your will; So that 1**

**may be reasonably happy in this lite and supremely happy with you forever in the next. AMEN.**

- Reinhold Niebuhr

**0on't forget to remind your students to spend time with their journals this week, reflecting on what God is teaching them during this journey.**

Warmly thank everyone for coming to the group, and invite them to stick around for sorne connection time.

**::. CONNECT TIME**

Serve refreshments of sorne kind so kids and leaders can hang out and connect. Consider having sorne healthy options for those may use food as a way of coping. A ping-pong table, foosball table, or even a few board games will give teenagers an excuse to connect.

**LEA0ER NOTE: As you go through this program, you may find that sorne of the students are going through sorne pretty heavy things. Situations may arise**

**in which you feel out of your comfort zone. lf this happens, do a coupte of things. F irst, let them know that you are there for them. Next, report the situation to your pastor. 0on't try to f igure it out on your own. Go for help.**

**For more information on this important topic, please reference the document *lmportant Note\_Please Read!* on the CD-ROM.**