SAY: Don't we all worry about things we don't have control over and don't have the power to change? As we walk this journey toward freedom at The Landing, remember 1 John 4:18: "Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear."

Let's say this bedsheet (or paper) represents God. Draw a picture or a symbol on it that represents who God is to you.

Give kid s a few minutes to draw their pictures on the bedsheet or p aper. Ask teenagers to each exp lain their drawing.

SAY: Let's take a little time to share what God means to each of us-in other words, how do you see God, and what role does God play in your life?

Then pass around newspapers and ask kids to each take a sect ion. Have them look for examples of failure in their section. After a few minutes, ask them to tell about the stories they found.

SAY: Now that we've read about others' failures, let's spend a few minutes thinking about our own failures. Consider your own lite-in what ways have you tailed yourself, failed others, and tailed God?

Maybe you want to close your eyes as you do this. Each time you think of something, wad up a page of the newspaper and toss it onto the bedsheet (or paper). Do this silently.

## delivery for us-and that Jesus would someday bear the burden of al! our hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

As kids continue to pass around the bundle, read aloud Hebrews 1 2:1 (NCV):

We are surround ed by a great cloud of people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back.

## SAY: There are two things I would like to point out in this verse. First, God has a particular journey and a unique plan for each of us. lt's a plan for good, not a life full of dependencies, addictions, or obsessions. God doesn't want us to be trapped by our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. The second thing is that we need to be willing to get rid of all the stuff that keeps us from a close relationship with God-our past failures that keep us stuck. The passage we just read says, "We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back."

Now have the group members carefully unwrap the "delivery package" again and hold it stretched out between them.

## SAY: The first step in moving toward freedom is always to take an honest, unflinching look at the stuff we've done to hurt God and others. You can't get rid 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 all the newspapers are contained in it. Then zip the backpack shut. lf you have a large group, you may need multiple backpacks.

## SAY: Far many 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 someone has done to us. We continue to hold on to the hurt and we refuse to forgive the ones who've hurt us. I want you to know that I hurt for you. I'm 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 someone 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 large group, ask for a few kids to volunteer to put on the backpacks.

## SAY: Jesus promised he'd take all our hurts, hang­ ups, and habits and put them on his back. He'd carry them, freeing us to be in relationship with God. But we have to give him our stuff-he can't carry what we hold on to. Sorne of you are bound by guilt. You keep beating yourself up over some past failure or some 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, I don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead." I 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,

# God would have sent us an economist.

# lf our greatest need had been pleasure; God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, So God sent us a Savior.

# SMALL GROUPS

prior to beginning your small group, read through the following Small Group Guidelines with your teenagers.

1. Focus on your ow n thoughts and feelings when sharing with the group.
2. Please avoid ALL cross talk.
3. We are here to support one another.
4. Value and protect anonymity and confidential
5. Avoid offensive language; it has no place Christ-centered group.

Remember, as a leader you are to model these guidelines for your group as lead the discussions

Break your larger group into small groups of three or more. with a conversation leader in each one. Have your conversation leaders tell about a past failure (make sure they choose appropriate examples) and its impact on their life. Have them talk about the ways they've seen God use "what Satan intended for evil" for good in their life. Then have groups each discuss these questions (available on the CD-ROM).

Remember, as the leader, you may want to model some of these answers for your group by sharing from your own experience.

ASK:

## » What's something you 've liked about this week's gathering, and why?

» What's something you wish you understood better, and why?

» What's a failure or mistake that is still impacting your life today?

» Have you seen God using that failure or mistake to bring something good into your life? Why or why not?

» lf you were free of the things that keep you stuck, what's something you'd start doing, and what's something you'd stop doing?

» What 's something you'd like our group to pray for you about?

Glose your small group time in prayer.

CLOSING

You 'II need a box of saltine crackers. Gather teenagers together in a circle and serve them each a cracker. Ask them to eat their cracker as you read aloud Romans 1:18-25.

## SAY: All the ways people typically search for meaning will leave them empty, still thirsting for truth. lt's a lot like these snacks. They taste good, but they leave you thirsty.

Close by reading the Serenity Prayer together (available on p. 3 of their Student Journal). Keep in mind, some 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 difference.

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

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

this sinful world as it is; Not as I would have it;

Trusting that you will make all things right

If I surrender to your will; So that l

may be reasonably happy in this life

and supremely happy with you forever in the next. AMEN.

Reinhold Niebuhr

## Don'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 some connection time.

CONNECT TIME

Serve refreshments of some kind so kids and leaders can hang out and connect. Consider having some healthy options for those who 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.

## LEADER NOTE: As you go through this program, you may find that some of the students are going through some pretty heavy things. Situations may arise

in which you feel out of your comfort zone. lf this happens, do a couple of things. First, let them know that you are there for them. Next, report the situation to your pastor. Don't try to figure it out on your own. Go for help.

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