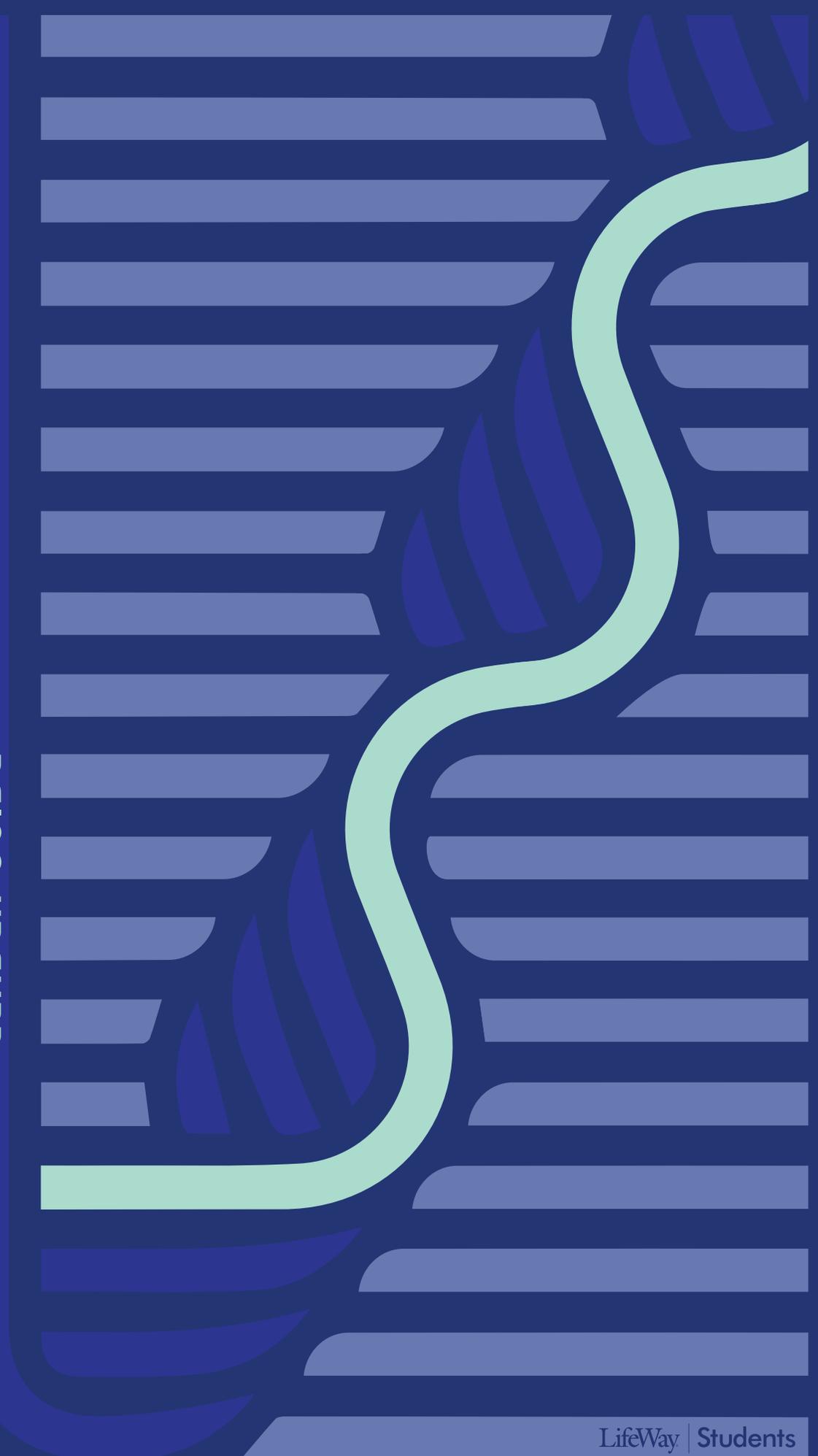


# Upstream

LEADER GUIDE



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## intro

The world culture is a strong river raging against God's way and toward a great fall. It would be easy for us to simply float along, but God calls His people to go against the flow, choosing Christ-centered living in a self-centered world.

This Bible Study Leader Guide is designed to be just that—a guide. It's something you can customize to fit your group and your own teaching style. The best way to prepare is to study the Scripture and use the lessons as your personal Bible study. As you interact with Scripture and the material in the Guide, take notes and answer the questions yourself. Learn from the lessons before you attempt to teach them. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you through this study and then use you to teach your students!

# leader tips

## KEY POINTS

### MEMORY VERSE

This is a verse that your students can memorize outside of group time to help remember and apply what was taught.

### KEY PASSAGE

This will be the text you cover during group time.

### THE POINT

The Point is the message that you want students to walk away from group time knowing.

### ENGAGE

At the beginning of each lesson is an activity that will help get you started and encourage interaction between students.

### THINK

This is the Bible Study portion of the session. You will find text helpful for you to know as you study and share, but there is also italicized text that you can speak directly to students. Read the Scripture as a group and encourage students to take notes and write down answers to the questions in their student books.

### LIVE IT OUT

The Live It Out section allows students to take a step back and look at their own life in light of the material that was just covered.

### PRAY

Always pray as a group at the end of each session. Lead students in completing the pray exercise described in their book.

### DEVOS

The Devos found in the back of the student books can be completed during the course of the event or they can be saved for students to do on their own as a follow-up to the event.

## GENERAL TIPS

1. Learn names. Find a way that works for you and do it. This doesn't sound like much, but when you know their names, students feel you are interested in them.
2. Do your best to hang out and talk with students during meals and free time. Granted, sometimes they will be preoccupied with others, but find times to talk with them.
3. Be yourself. Allow the Bible study materials to take on your personality and teach it the way that is best suited to you.
4. Love students, but also lead them. You will have times when you will want them to think you are the coolest, but make sure you lead them. Being a small group leader is not a popularity contest.
5. Do not compare yourself or your group to others. Anytime we compare, we will always come out the loser. Focus on your students and your call to the job.
6. Don't focus on negatives, but believe you have a great group—because you do.
7. Don't give up when you have a tough group or when they don't meet your expectations. They can and will be a great group if you lead them the way they need to be led. Study your group and meet them where they are.
8. Pray, pray, and pray some more for your students. Pray over the seats before the first session. Pray over chairs in your Bible study room daily. Pray with students. Pray!
9. Don't just hang out with the "fun kids," "popular kids," or "pretty kids" in your group. Try to build relationships with all of them. Some may not be responsive, but you may just be surprised if you try.
10. When you need help, ask for it. Your student pastor or staff are there to help you with anything.
11. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak and teach through you. Pray for this each day.
12. See Bible study as a time of worship and lead out that way.
13. Keep personal time with the Lord a priority throughout the event.
14. If you have many active students, allow them to be active through lively activities. Try to plan activities that will encompass all students—active, artistic, thinking, and so on.
15. Be forgiving.
16. Look for students who need encouragement and encourage them.
17. Build them up as a group.
18. Challenge students to minister to one another.

## SMALL GROUP MANAGEMENT TIPS

1. Set expectations from the beginning (and hold students to that) to make the rest of the event easier. Be consistent from day to day.
2. Tell students on opening night that Bible study is God's time. Ask them to respect that and be prepared to listen to what He is saying.
3. Allow rowdy/active students to be active. Forcing an active student to sit alone in silence will most likely cause a larger distraction.
4. Be prepared! Do not procrastinate setting up for Bible study. If you are prepared, you will have confidence and in turn, Bible study will run smoother.
5. Set the tone the first night and watch your own attitude and enthusiasm. Students will feed off of you.
6. Do not allow down time. In other words, know where you are going and move from one thing to the next with easy, smooth, and quick transitions.
7. Know your material backward and forward so you are able to keep a flow throughout Bible study regardless of time, tangents, and so on.
8. Do not yell over your students. Silence is your friend.
9. Address disruptive behavior immediately. Pull students aside, make expectations clear.
10. If your group is sleepy, lead them to stand and stretch or take a move break.
11. Walk around during Bible study. Do not sit during group discussion time. Keep moving around from group to group.
12. Give all students a note card to hold throughout Bible study if they are too nervous to ask questions out loud or if it is not pertinent at the time.
13. Establish a healthy learning environment from the beginning. Students must feel safe. They must feel comfortable to participate and ask questions. Students must feel like what you are teaching is relevant.
14. Keep calm at all times. Do not panic. Keep your frustrations to yourself. Never let them see you sweat.

## COUNSELING TIPS

1. There is a plan of salvation at the end of every leader and student guide you can use when you talk to students about salvation.
2. While counseling a student is a private moment, it is important to not be alone with a student. Always keep yourself in a place where you can be seen.
3. If more than one student approaches you for counseling, ask to meet with each student one at a time to prevent pressure for other students making decisions.
4. Ask open-ended questions such as "Why do you want to talk me?" "What is God doing in your heart?" "Why do you want to make this decision?"
5. Avoid questions that only prompt a *yes* or *no* response such as "Do you want to be saved?" and "Do you want to go to heaven?"
6. When using Scripture in your conversation, use your Bible and encourage the student to read the verse.
7. If the student begins sharing something with you and says, "Please don't tell anyone," you cannot promise them that. They may share with you an experience or situation that you need to report to church staff or a parent as soon as possible.
8. It is easy for a student to be overly emotional during a big event. Help them realize that a salvation or baptism decision cannot be just based on how they feel, but needs to be because they WANT to turn toward God.
9. Follow up. Make sure whatever decision a student makes is not just kept to the two of you. Encourage the student to share with someone on staff or with a parent. Follow up with the student after the event to encourage them in their walk with Christ. If they made a salvation decision, follow up with them about what it means to be baptized and discipled.
10. Celebrate! Whatever decision the student makes in their walk with Christ should be celebrated. We want them to know that while following Jesus may not be easy at times, it is the BEST decision they could ever make!

### NOTES

### THE POINT

**Christ-centered living chooses trust in God, not in circumstances.**

### ENGAGE

Ask three student volunteers to come up front and be blindfolded. Place unfamiliar food objects (e.g., rhubarb, uncooked green bean, beef jerky, sardines, sliced turkey, potato salad) in front of them, and have students feel, smell, or eat the foods in order to determine what they are. The student with the most correct guesses wins a prize.

*Our senses can deceive us, and if we're not spiritually healthy, sin can cause us to be led away from God's truth.*

### INTRO QUESTION

**When have you felt like you couldn't believe your eyes?**

### THINK

*Graduation is a big event in the life of a student. It's a day you've been working toward since you were five years old. Your parents say, "It will be here before you know it!" Your teachers offer encouragement, "You will make it!" But somehow or another, no matter where you are along your academic journey, it can seem like you're stuck in an endless loop of Algebra and Chemistry, French and Language Arts—and graduation will never come!*

**Describe a time when you felt stuck and struggled to move forward.**

### READ NUMBERS 13:26-30.

Explain how God's people had been stuck in Egypt for 400 years, yet God came through and they experienced a miraculous delivery. When Israel's leaders who had gone ahead to search the promised land came back with news, 10 of the 12 scouts were troubled. Sure, they had large grapes to prove the land was fertile and rich, but they also had stories of huge people with huge strength. The task was too big for them—at least, that's what they thought. But Caleb didn't agree, and his message was different. "We must go up and take possession of the land because we can certainly conquer it!"

*Jesus' followers will face challenges. We may experience fear and uncertainty. But unwavering faith means we trust in God's promises and live accordingly.*

**Who or what are we tempted to trust instead of God?****Why do we often focus on the difficulties as opposed to God's promises and blessings?**

Allow students to discuss the idea of “trendy” in today’s American culture. For example:

- Pinterest hosts an endless array of trendy goods you can fashion using only pallet wood.
- Following what’s trending on social media keeps us in the know.
- Fashion trends mean one day, everyone is wearing Jordans and joggers; the next day, maybe not.

**What do you notice about yourself that shows you’re influenced by trends?**

*We are highly influenced by those around us—it’s the way we’re made. However, when what’s trending points us away from God, it’s a major problem.*

**READ NUMBERS 14:6-10.**

Discuss this passage with students. After receiving the scouts’ report, the people of Israel were so afraid they complained, “It would have been better to die in Egypt or in the wilderness!” They were influenced in all the wrong ways, but Joshua and Caleb weren’t sucked into the current of complaining about God. They trusted God’s promises and were resolved to go against the flow.

*This is what it means to be a Christian. The world is set against God’s purposes. Our friends may push us to do things we know are wrong. However, those who are a part of God’s church, the “called out ones,” are happy to live differently, knowing that God is with us, and He is pleased by our desire to honor Him.*

**What are some fears that might keep us from trusting God’s promises?****How does the world tempt Christians to question God?**

Ask students to tell you the date and year of their mother’s birthday. Then ask about their grandmother’s birthday.

*Though these are people we sincerely love, and we’ve likely known their birthdays at some point, chances are many of us can’t remember. In Numbers 14, the Israelites experienced the same forgetfulness. They saw firsthand the power of God as they walked on dry ground through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Yet somehow they forgot about God’s faithfulness and doubted He would deliver on His promise to give them the land.*

**READ NUMBERS 14:21-24.**

Share how instead of living by faith, the Israelites were controlled by fear, and this resulted in consequences:

- God pronounced judgment upon an entire generation.
- They would die in the wilderness.

Discuss that Joshua and Caleb were exceptions because they had followed God faithfully. Therefore, God would allow them to experience the blessings of living in the land God had promised.

*God always keeps His promises—He’s shared them with us in His Word, and it’s up to us to know them. And it’s a good idea (because we are forgetful people) to remind ourselves of God’s goodness over and over so we don’t forget, and ultimately receive what He’s promised.*

**How does God reward those who are faithful to Him?**

**How have you seen that God always keeps His promises?**

## LIVE IT OUT

### CHRIST

God has promised us many good things (as well as a few tough ones). Remembering God’s promises helps us to understand His character and purposes, and allows us to relate more intimately with Him.

**Write a few thoughts about how each of these verses impacts your relationship with Jesus.**

- **John 14:1-2:** He is preparing a place of eternal joy for us.
- **John 15:9-11:** He will fill us with joy in His presence.
- **Romans 8:28:** He makes all things work together for our ultimate good.
- **Hebrews 13:5:** He will never leave us or forsake us.
- **John 16:33:** You will have suffering in this world.

### COMMUNITY

One of the most powerful ways we’re reminded of God’s promises is through the fellowship and encouragement of other believers.

**What promises have been particularly meaningful to you in your relationship with God? Share these with others!**

### CULTURE

God has called His people to be in the world, but to live in a way that’s very different from non-believers. Many of His promises are a great encouragement and comfort, because—admit it—living differently isn’t always easy.

**What is God calling you to do this week that will stand out from the cultural norm?**

**How will remembering this promise help you live by faith?**