

Generations Ministries 2014 Camp Curriculum

Superhero



"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."
(Ephesians 6:10, NASB)

By Michelle Fleming

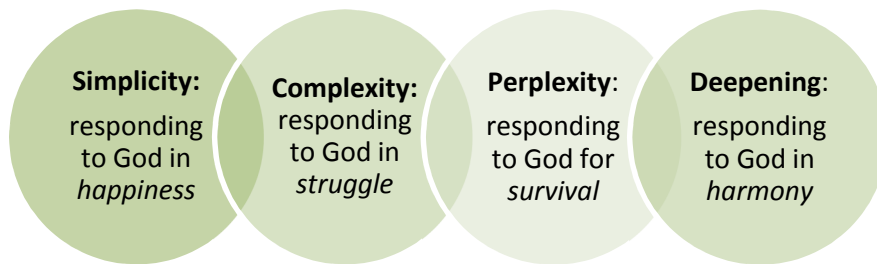
Batman. Superman. Wonder woman. Spiderman. Whether by supernatural strength, ability to fly or super-human intelligence, these and other superheroes fight crime and defend the innocent from evil. The superhero genre remains popular in movies and other media. For that reason, we've utilized this genre as the theme for GenMin's 2014 camp teaching curriculum.

Though superhero stories are not strictly biblical, they can meaningfully remind us of biblical stories, and of the gospel itself. The gospel tells us that we humans share a common plight—we're under assault from sin, self and Satan.

Though often we try to deliver ourselves from this plight, our self-effort falls short. We are not superheroes, and never can be. We simply are unable to save ourselves (or anyone else). And so we need a Savior—a true Superhero. Thankfully, God provided one for us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. This Superhero gave his life for us, willingly. He rose again for us, victorious. He came to save us despite having no need to do so. And he saved us from that which we cannot save ourselves.

Another way to look at this gospel story is to note that apart from Jesus, we humans walk in the darkness of sin. We are afloat in a gigantic universe that seemingly is devoid of any meaning. Feeling alone and insignificant, it is natural that we would look for someone—for a superhero to make sense of it all; to provide ultimate meaning. Jesus is that Superhero. He came into our world to bring true meaning to life. Indeed, he is true life and light.

This 2014 GenMin camp curriculum encourages campers to look to Jesus as their one Superhero. It encourages them to trust in him, no matter what challenges they face. Indeed, life brings many seasons of challenge as noted by Brian McLaren in his book, *Naked Spirituality* where he identifies four such seasons, each calling forth a particular response of faith:



Of course, sin, self and Satan conspire to keep us from responding to God in faith. Instead, we tend to respond with self-reliance—we thus put our trust in false superheroes. Doing so leads to disappointment and failure. However, when we look to Jesus, walking with him by faith, we find that we not only meet life’s challenges (and opportunities), we experience the miracle by which our character becomes increasingly conformed to his. Though we don’t become superheroes ourselves, we share in the love and life of the one, true Superhero, Jesus Christ.

This year’s camp curriculum is thus designed to help campers focus on Jesus and in doing so to grow in faith and in their experience of life transformation. The curriculum examines five attributes of Jesus’ own “superhero” character: his gratitude, courage, hope, integrity and vulnerability. Each of these qualities is illustrated with stories of a currently popular superhero

(like Superman), of a well-known biblical character (like Jonah), and of Jesus himself. Each lesson then introduces a spiritual discipline that will help campers open their hearts and minds to receive, in faith, what Jesus has to share with them. This combination of stories and spiritual practices is designed to capture the campers' imaginations. Doing so is a vital aspect of their spiritual formation. Note these quotes:

- The modern Christian, reading the Bible, is all too often blinded to great parts of it, and simply screens out the portion for which his mind no longer has an imaginative category with which to think. –The Trinitarian Renaissance
- Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create. –Albert Einstein

It is our prayer that the messages in this curriculum will spark our campers' imaginations, leading them to more deeply understand who Jesus is as the one, true Superhero. We pray that they will thus place their trust more fully in him, and in doing so experience greater levels of life transformation.

You will note that the curriculum this year is in outline form. This is to encourage each presenter to express his or her personal style—to add their own thoughts, illustrations, stories, dramatic presentations and the like. Each lesson includes a list of resources from which presenters may choose. Included is a video clip from a superhero movie that ties into the aspect of Christ's character being examined in that lesson. Presenters may incorporate this clip and any of the other resources as they see fit.

In refining and then presenting these messages, we pray that each presenter will be assured that our faithful God is with them and will work through them to bless the campers and staff members who hear their presentation. What a privilege it is to help our campers and staffers engage with our triune God as he works to transform their lives. What a joy it is to help them develop a Christ-centered imagination by which they may see God more clearly and thus trust him more fully!

Chapel 1: Gratitude

When our attitude is based on our circumstances, we struggle to maintain a grateful heart. But when our attitude is based on trust in God, we find that, no matter our circumstances, we are satisfied in God and that brings forth deep gratitude.

One of the outstanding characteristics of Jesus, the Superhero, is his heart of gratitude—a heart that he shares with us.



"Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.. –Karl Barth

Resources:

- [Superman movie clip](#). Throughout his life, Superman felt burdened by his gifts because they made him different. However, as he discovered his true identity as the son of Jor-el, he experienced freedom—his gifts ceased being burdens and became blessings. When we discover and then rejoice in our true identity as children of God, we can face our circumstances with a heart of gratitude toward God.

“If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough.”

-13th-century German theologian Meister Eckhart

I. Introduction

- Understanding God’s unending love for us is the foundation of a grateful heart.
- We wrongfully gauge God’s love for us based upon:
 - Circumstances: health, job, relationships
 - Actions: obedience, generosity, earning God’s love
 - Gifts: strengths, get attention, strongest, smartest, most successful

1 Thessalonians 5:18: “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” We are not told be thankful FOR all circumstances, but IN all circumstances. God’s heart hurts when we hurt. Though it was not his desire for us to live in a broken world, he redeems the pain we go through for our good.
- Gratitude turns what we have into enough.
- When we believe lies that tell us that God has not given us enough, we plant seeds of bitterness that rob of us of joy.

II. Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:12-32)

a. Main Characters

i. The Younger Son

1. Common assumptions:
 - a) Lost
 - b) Addict
 - c) Sneezy
2. The heart of the matter
 - a) Independent
 - b) Seeking own kingdom
3. The reality is that the kingdom we build for ourselves can never compare for what God has in store for us.
4. The younger brother believed the lie that he knew better.

ii. The older brother

1. Common assumptions
 - a) Responsible
 - b) Righteous
 - c) Bitter
2. The heart of the matter
 - a) Effort based—trying to earn the father’s love
 - b) Entitled
3. The reality is that we do not have to earn the Father’s love. He loves us, because we are his children.
4. The older brother believed the lie of “if...then...”

Though all that the father had belonged already to the older brother, he didn’t enjoy any of it because he was busy comparing himself and his behavior.

b. Family resemblance

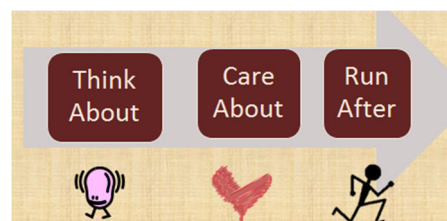
- i. Both brothers were not satisfied by what the father gave them...they had misplaced hope that made them ungrateful.
- ii. Proverbs 13:11: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”

c. Summary: It is by positioning our hearts towards our heavenly Father that we are satisfied by him.

III. Cultivating Gratitude

a. We cannot force ourselves to be grateful. Gratitude begins in the mind.

- i. What we think about, we care about.
- ii. What we care about, we run after.



- b. We must battle between kingdom-oriented thoughts versus me-oriented thoughts.
 - i. The younger brother's desire to build himself planted a seed of restlessness.
 - ii. The older brother's thoughts of entitlement planted a bitter seed of envy in his heart, which caused him to miss out on the joy of the party his father was throwing, and limited his perspective of what his Father had for him. The Father had divided the wealth—what the older brother had been trying to earn working in the fields was already his.
- c. Romans 12:2: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
 - i. The mind is a battlefield. Practical ways to maintain a grateful heart:
 - 1. Store up God's promises in your heart
When we spend time in God's word, we are reminded of our need and his provision.
 - 2. Replace negative thoughts
Ask God to reveal lies you believe, and to replace them with his truth.
 - 3. See your life from an eternal perspective
Some people see every occurrence in their life as crucial to their happiness. This limited perspective crushes hope. Putting disappointments in an eternal perspective builds hope because it reminds us to be grateful for what God has already done for us, and remember his promise to redeem our life and work all things for our good.

IV. The Main Character in all of our lives: The Father

- a. The Father's heart:
 - i. Joyful
 - ii. Grateful
 - iii. "Prodigal"
 - 1. We think of a "prodigal" as someone who is wasteful. However, the word actually means "extravagant" or "lavish." The son is lavish (prodigal) in lifestyle in a negative sense. However, the Father is the true prodigal—he is lavish in his love for his sons.
 - 2. No effort is required to earn the Father's love—he freely bestows his grace
 - 3. When we spend time with the Father, we become a mirror that reflects his light and love onto those around us.
 - 4. I Corinthians 13:13: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." When we are grateful, God's

love overflows from our hearts in word and deed. Our lives become about his kingdom, which like his love NEVER fails and never ends.

5. Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

V. **Spiritual Practice: *Gratitude Journal***

- a. Every day this week you will be given a spiritual formation exercise that aligns with the theme for the day. These exercises train us to make space for God in our busy lives in order that we may “hear” his heartbeat for us and simultaneously align our heartbeat with His.
- b. “But we who would be born again, indeed, must awake indeed, must awake soul unnumbered times a day.” –George McDonald
- c. It is easy to see the things we are longing for and overlook how God is providing us with our daily bread.
- d. This week we encourage you to keep a gratitude journal. We are confident that as you do, God will meet you individually as you begin to see more clearly his goodness in your life during both good times and hard times.
 - i. Keep a record of the abundances God has given you. As you start today you can reflect on past incidences and record them in your journal. Continue to update it throughout the week.
 - ii. Next to each abundance, write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life.
 - iii. Notice what you have been given that you did not deserve. What do you want to say to God about these things?

Chapel 2: Courage

Yesterday we discussed gratitude, which is essential to positioning our hearts to be satisfied by God alone. Today we are going to talk about another attribute of our Superhero, Jesus Christ: *courage*. When courage is fueled by love it compels us to engage the world around us and in doing so to be a blessing to many. Courage breaks down barriers, catapulting us to share in Jesus' own loving and living in this world.



Resources:

- [Captain America movie clip](#). The courage that lasts under pressure is courage fueled by love and not fear. True courage is fueled by the great love of the Father, and who we are in Christ.
- [Batman movie clip](#).
- Share a story of your own about courage:
 - An honest conversation with a friend
 - Standing up for the marginal
 - Sacrificing time, energy, and resources for the kingdom
 - A short bio of someone leveraging it all for the kingdom (i.e. Corrie Ten Boom)

I. Introduction

- a. Courage is often thought of as the ability to stand up in the face of fear.
 - a. Our greatest fears are often of the unknown
 - b. We also fear being known...and then rejected
- b. Our courage is directly impacted by the definition of courage that we accept.
 - i. Courage based on our own strength
 1. Fear can motivate us to action, which is often mistaken for courage.
 - b) Fear sparks an innate fight or flight reaction. Running away and creating conflict are both forms of action, but both methods rarely bring lasting solutions.
 - c) Fear can be a motivator, but it is not sustainable.
 2. Our personal abilities, like our will power, are feeble and finite. Our courage crumbles and cracks under the pressure of daily life.
 3. Courage based on fear and our own strength can quickly become complacency, and we settle for less than what life could be. The

fear of the unknown becomes greater than our fear of failure and we settle for the routine of life. Completing assignments and attending social engagements becomes our fixation, with little purpose and a perpetual sense of urgency to move on to the next item or goal on our to-do-list. Fear can cause us to run toward our short term solutions and satisfactions rather than toward what God has for us.

- ii. Courage based on who God says I am
 - 1. When our courage is fueled by God's love for us, our source of strength is never-ending because God's love never runs out.
 - 2. Our fears are eased because we trust Him. We can live in this freedom, because we know Him and have taken the time to listen to who he knows us to be. We know he is working for our good.

II. Where does our courage lie?

Read John 13:1-13 (in the NLT translation).

- a. Courage is created by experiencing love. At the end of his time on earth, Jesus' priority was making his love known to his disciples. He took the time to personally serve each of his disciples.
 - 1. It was his love for them (and us) that helped him prepare for his sacrifice on the cross.
 - 2. When the world defines courage, it envisions people getting bigger. Jesus' act of courage looked like service and made the people around him look greater. Peter fought being served by Jesus, because he felt unworthy. We often fight against receiving love from God. We try to fix ourselves first and then present ourselves to God. Jesus reminds Peter and us that He takes us as we are. It is by opening up to receive Jesus' love that we are healed.
- b. Accepting love gives us the courage to accept who we are. When we meet Jesus, with eyes wide open, we see who God truly is, including the depths of his love as well as the massiveness of his power. When we meet God for who he is, we see who we really are.
 - 1. Knowing Jesus exposed Peter to his own brokenness, but in washing his feet, Jesus reveals that through his love we can be healed.
 - 2. We all fight our own brokenness. We struggle, strive and try to will or force our way to healing.
 - a) However, if we take time daily to look for how God is "washing our feet", loving us and bringing us healing today, we will see that our next right step is right in front us.

- b) We will see that since he *knows* me and *loves* me, my actions do not need to be motivated by fear, but I can courageously live with joy and freedom.
- c. Courageous acts are not what make us worthy of love, but the result of the overflow of God's love in our lives.
 - i. Recognizing our identity as God's beloved children gives us the courage to breakout of a self-centered life and experience the abundant life God has for us, and that motivates us to serve others.
 - ii. Read John 17:13-19 (in The Message Bible)
 - 1. After washing Peter's feet Jesus charges him to carry out his mission of love. During his prayer before his journey to the cross. Jesus prays for us that we will have the courage to rise above the temptations of this world and carry out his mission of love and healing.
 - 2. God does not put his people in small places.
 - a) When you love God. You notice things in this life that break God's heart, and that evil will break your heart too.
 - b) Living a courageous life means ignoring the pervasive message that tell us to satisfy ourselves, and because of our assurance of God's love for us engaging in the world around us to serve others.
 - c) Courageous acts in your life may look like:
 - i. Spending your time differently
 - cutting out pet idols, like consumerism or popularity, and putting God first
 - Pursuing a passion
 - Advocating for a cause close to your heart
 - ii. Having hard conversations (speaking the truth in love)
 - d) Simple acts of faith lead to bigger moments, and remembering God's previous faithfulness prepares us for trusting that he will show up in big ways when we are called to make sacrifices.

III. How does Jesus' courage become part of my character?

- a. Draw near to Jesus, who gives us his courage.
- b. Our life shrinks and expands based on our courage. Trusting God's bigger story opens the door to weave our small stories into his work of drawing all people to himself.
 - i. Leverage small moments
 - ii. Overcome opposition

- iii. Trust in God: When we open up to be known by our loving God. We can heed Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: "Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love."

IV. Spiritual Practice: *The prayer of Invocation*

- a. *Invocation* is a fancy way of saying "becoming aware of God's presence." So often in our lives we are caught up in the routine of what we have to accomplish, that we do not take time to know our real selves. We also do not take the time to know who God really is. We simply talk at Him in moments of desperation, or small allotments of time we dedicate to telling him our will, instead of seeking Him and His will. The truth is God is always with us, we just often tune him out with the distractions and busyness of our lives. A simple prayer that reminds us that God is all around us is: "Here I am. Here you are. Here we are together" [repeat together].
- b. Throughout the day, practice murmuring this prayer. Developing an awareness of God, awakens us and begins to transform us.
- c. You may also encourage campers and staff to expand the prayer in their gratitude journals:
 - Here I am Lord
(Where are you? Physically? Emotionally? Personally?)
 - And here you are, Lord
(Describe your experience of or feelings about God at this moment. How would you describe God today?)
 - Here we are together
(How would you describe your togetherness with God?)
- d. The process moves from "*Here* you are God" to "*who* are you God?". Then we are not confined to our perceptions of God, but give God the room to tell us about himself.
- e. This prayer helps us align our hearts to God in the present moment, inviting a constant, vital connection and communion.

Chapel 3: Hope

Yesterday we discussed courage and the difference we can make when we allow love to spur us toward courageous acts. Today we are going to talk about another important aspect of Christ's character: *hope*. Hope is the confidence that our current broken circumstances are not eternal. Hope is a game changer that spurs us on to trust God's goodness, and do the good works He has prepared for us. We are going to learn that in dark seasons we cannot manufacture hope, but we can share in Jesus' own hope.



Resources:

- [Spiderman movie clip](#). Peter (aka Spiderman) had lost all hope. His Aunt and the faith of a child lend him to his calling and the hope that came from it.
- Do you ever feel bad for people you do not know?
 1. Seeing a car accident on the side of the road, someone sitting alone in the cafeteria at school, etc.
 2. Often our first reaction is to want to fix the circumstances for the people around us. Today we are going to talk about how often the best gift we can share with others is our hope.

I. Introduction

- a. Hebrews 6:11-12: "We wish that each of you would always be eager to show how strong and lasting your hope really is. Then you would never be lazy. You would be following the example of those who had faith and were patient until God kept his promise to them."
 - i. In life there are seasons where we are waiting to see God's promises fulfilled.
 - ii. Hope anchors us when we are being assailed by waves of grief and doubt. It holds onto the expectation that God is working for our good.

II. The Book of Ruth

- a. Main characters in the book of Ruth
 - i. Naomi
 1. She lost her husband but still has hope through two sons (Ruth 1:3)
 - a) Women were dependent on male family members to provide for them

- b) Ruth 1:4-6: Later, Naomi's sons married Moabite women. One was named Orpah and the other Ruth. About ten years later, Mahlon and Chilion died. Now Naomi had no husband or sons.
 - i. Naomi is now destitute, and without hope.
 - ii. When Naomi buries her family she buries a part of herself.
 - 1) Ruth 1:20 "Don't call me Naomi any longer! Call me Mara, because God has made my life bitter.
 - 2) Naomi means pleasant. Her life no longer feels pleasant. The loss of hope has caused her feel bitter
- ii. Ruth
 - 1. Has experienced a loss similar to the loss Naomi experienced, but she is younger and a part of the community where Naomi and Ruth live.
 - a) Ruth still has the hope of re-marrying, or being supported by family members in the community where they live.
 - 2. However, Ruth does not hold onto her hope for better days and abandon Naomi.
 - 3. When Naomi gives Ruth permission to leave she replies (Ruth 1:6): "Please don't tell me to leave you and return home! I will go where you go, I will live where you live; your people will be my people, your God will be my God."
 - 4. Ruth goes with Naomi and shares her hope with Naomi.
- b. There have been or will be times in our lives where we relate to Ruth and Naomi's situation. We all go through dark seasons where we are plagued with grief and doubt.
 - i. During these seasons we cannot manufacture our own hope.
 - ii. We must draw near to people who love Jesus and love us, and borrow hope until we are strengthened by love.
 - iii. During these seasons it is easy to feel like God has abandoned us, but despite our feelings he is always right there with us. Being surrounded by people who remind us of his faithfulness can anchor our hearts to the truth that he is always working for our good.
- c. We will also go through seasons where we are provided for beyond our wildest imaginations. It is during these seasons that we must be lenders of hope.
 - i. True friends celebrate well with us and mourn well with us.
 - ii. Lending hope does not mean taking on the burden of fixing others problems, but means taking notice of others and offering what we can.
- d. Boaz: a lender of hope
 - i. Read Ruth 2:1-14,
 - 1. Boaz lends hope by:
 - a) Offering physical and emotional protection (vv8-10)
 - b) Providing community (vv9,14)
 - ii. Ruth's character covered her reputation and reinforced her hope. (vv11-12)

III. Lessons on borrowing and lending hope

- a. Play through the pain
 - i. Naomi had lost hope, but she chose her next right step. She knew her people were commanded to care for the widows.
 1. God's law required the Israelites to share land and care for widows. His law is a reflection of his heart and turned his people into mirrors of his love for the whole world.
 2. When we lose hope it's easy to want to withdraw and wallow. Instead, draw near to people who can lend us hope, then prayerfully consider your next step.
- b. Do not miss an opportunity to do good. Many times we are so busy finding ways to make ourselves great, we miss the opportunities God gives us to do good. Both Boaz and Ruth took the opportunity to leverage the little they had for good. In God's kingdom, greatness is goodness consistently sown.
- c. No matter where you find yourself today there will be seasons where you will be a borrower of hope and seasons where you will lend hope. Regardless of your current season, take hold of the hope he has set before us and let it steady your soul.
 - i. We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us. ¹⁹ This hope is like a firm and steady anchor for our souls. In fact, hope reaches behind the curtain and into the most holy place. Jesus has gone there ahead of us, and he is our high priest forever (Hebrews 6: 18-20).

IV. Spiritual Practice: *The Prayer of Blessing*

- a. In his book *Love in a Fearful Land*, theologian, Henri Nouwen states, "Prayer is the way to the heart of God and the heart of the world – precisely because they have been joined through the suffering of Jesus Christ....Praying is letting one's own heart become the place where the tears of God's children merge and become tears of hope."
- b. Before praying, sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths. Posture and awareness are important components of prayer because our physical posture and inward posture are interconnected. Take time to become aware of God's presence.
- c. Today you are going to pray a blessing over a partner. The presenter should model this prayer as follows with another individual:
 - i. Before beginning, ask the individual if you may touch their shoulder
 - ii. Silently ask the Holy Spirit to come—WAIT
 1. Do not rush. Quietly wait to receive a word or image that God wants to share with the person.
 - iii. Bless the person with the blessing you receive.
 1. Less is more.
 2. Be Specific
- d. Now switch roles

Chapel 4: Integrity

Yesterday we discussed hope and the seasons in life where we borrow and lend hope to one another. Today we will examine another attribute of Christ's character: *integrity*. We all have social power that can be used to change our world. Integrity is leveraging our power to build Jesus' kingdom and not our own. We are not just waiting for Jesus' kingdom to come—we are called to be active participants in restoring His kingdom to earth even now.



Resources:

- [Thor movie clip](#). This superhero gains his power after leveraging the little he has left to protect the people of earth.
- [Bat kid movie clip](#). A kid who has beaten leukemia has one wish. That wish is to become batman for a day. Thanks to the city of San Francisco, the boy's wish came true

I. Introduction

- a. Musician Bob Marley once stated, “The greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively.”
 - i. Bob summarized the humility, honesty, and compassion required to encompass true integrity.
 - ii. Often integrity is considered as doing the right thing when no one is watching. However, this definition rings flat because it does not account for our human desire to serve self.
 - iii. Like true courage, true integrity must be motivated by love.

II. Jonah chapters 3-4

- a. Ask the audience what they know about the story of Jonah.
 - i. Many people are familiar of the story of Jonah and the whale. How he ran away from God and was swallowed by a whale for three days.
 - ii. However, many people are unfamiliar with what happened when Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh.
 1. Jonah originally ran away from God's call because of fear and self-righteousness. The people of Nineveh were known for evil acts. Jonah feared for his life because he could not predict the people's

reaction, and he also knew God's grace well enough to know that God might be merciful.

2. We are all given the gift of grace. However, if we receive it and do not share it, hoarded grace becomes self-righteousness. The beauty of the gospel is that the more we receive and extend God's grace the more His grace abounds within us.
 3. After experiencing God's grace afresh, and being released from the belly of the whale Jonah makes the journey to tell the people of Nineveh the truth about God.
- b. Jonah chapter 3 tells us that Jonah went to Nineveh and warned the people that their evil deeds were provoking God's anger.
- i. Jonah 3:5: "The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers."
- c. What do you think was Jonah's reaction to the people's repentance?
- i. Jonah 4:1- 2: "Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at GOD, "GOD! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!"
 - ii. Jonah obeyed God, but he did not love the people God sent him to serve. If our good deeds are not motivated by love they do not reflect God's character but our self-righteousness.
 - iii. Integrity and self-righteousness are often confused as synonymous.
 1. Self-righteousness cares only about our own purity.
 2. True integrity reflects God's standard of purity. We cannot be righteous on our own.
 3. We demonstrate integrity when we lean into God and leverage his power inside of us to benefit the world around us.
- d. Throughout the rest of Jonah chapter 4, Jonah wrestles with his anger toward God.
- i. Jonah goes into the desert outside of Nineveh to see if God is going to destroy Nineveh or show compassion.
 - ii. Despite Jonah's anger toward God, God provided for Jonah and his heart softened. Jonah 4:6: "God arranged for a broad-leafed tree to spring up. It grew over Jonah to cool him off and get him out of his angry sulk. Jonah was pleased and enjoyed the shade. Life was looking up."
 - iii. God takes the opportunity to teach Jonah about his reasons for showing grace to the people of Nineveh. He causes a worm to eat up the tree and shade. Jonah's pleasure quickly melts into anger.

1. God said, “What’s this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can’t I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don’t yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?” (Jonah 4:10-11).

III. Jonah’s struggle is our struggle

- a. When Jonah preached God’s truth to the Ninevites, he had just been released from the belly of the whale and received God’s grace.
- b. Just as Jonah quickly got wrapped up in his own good works and forgot his desperate need for God’s grace we fall into the same trap.
- c. In our performance based culture it is so easy to connect with God through our actions, and tell God and the world around us, “look at how well I’m doing”
- d. However, the deepest connection we can have with God occurs when we connect with him through his never-ending grace. Our actions and words tell God and the world around us, “look at how much I have been forgiven.”
 - i. Connecting with God through grace requires admitting our brokenness and uttering the words sorry and help. These words can be hard to admit, but they have transformational power in our lives.
 - ii. When we pretend we can be pure and righteous on our own, our prayers and actions and do not reflect our true reality.
 - iii. Even Jesus cried out for help from his father. In Luke 22:42 Jesus prays, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done”
 1. This simple cry for help was profoundly deep. It honestly expressed his desires while simultaneously petitioning God for the help he needed to expand to the challenge of facing the cross.
 2. Often we are like Jonah have and immature prayers that ask God to give us an easier world with fewer obstacles and annoying people to deal with. As we draw closer to God our prayers can mature to be like Jesus’ petition and ask God to help us become stronger, kinder, less annoying people.
 3. Our immature prayers ask God to “Make my will be done in reality as it is in my selfish fantasy”. Thankfully Jesus’ prayer for the Father’s will to be done was fulfilled. Although he still had to endure the pain of the cross we receive the benefits of his surrender and the strength he received from the Father today.

- e. More good news we can glean from Jonah's story is that God loves us through the process of refining our character to reflect his goodness. Even though Jonah was still struggling with self-righteous anger, God still used his obedience to rescue and change the hearts of the people of Nineveh.
- i. St. Bernard stated that there are three stages of love:
 1. We love God for our sake.
 - a) What God can do for us.
 2. We love God for God's own sake.
 - a) For his own character, glory, and beauty.
 3. We love ourselves for God's sake.
 - a) We join God in seeing ourselves in a gracious and compassionate light.
 - b) This can only happen when we let go of self-righteousness and petition God with words asking for help in our state of weakness. For as his word tell us, it is when we are weak that we are make strong through Him.
 - ii. When we take the time to seek God's will rather than our own, love overflows from our lives into the lives of those around us. We can be people of integrity who leverage our time, resources, finances, and social power for God's kingdom rather than our own.

IV. **Spiritual Practice: *The Prayer of Relinquishment***

- a. Practice the prayer of relinquishment, "Not my will but yours be done."
 - i. Ask God to move your will so that you want to choose that which spreads his glory and love.
 - ii. If you can't pray this yet, ask for the desire to do so.
- b. To continue the exercise, campers and staff may be given the following prayer to use in their gratitude journals:
 - *Behold! Now I see...* (What previously resisted truth or insight do you now see in a new way?)
 - *Behold! Now I feel...* (Describe how you feel and how it differs with what you previously felt.)
 - *Spirit of God, now I know....* (What new confidence has arisen within you?)

Chapel 5: Vulnerability

Yesterday we talked about integrity and how love is the difference between self-righteous living and a character formed by integrity. For our last talk we are going to discuss a fifth character of Christ's character: *vulnerability*. We are not called to stand alone—vulnerability is what allows us to connect with each other.



Resources:

- [Avengers movie clip](#). When we are vulnerable in the midst of community, our weaknesses can be healed and be turned into strengths. We are better together.
- [Teddy Roosevelt quote](#)
- [Velveteen Rabbit quote](#)

I. Introduction

- Our world is a world full of masks. We all of have a public image that we work to craft, we share partial information about ourselves seeking to shape other people's opinions of who we are. The most blatant example is the way many of us use social media. So often we spend time documenting our experiences through pictures and posts, that we do not take time to enjoy the actual moment we bragging about to all our cyber friends.
- Often vulnerability is considered weakness, because it involves truth and it takes courage to be authentic. Both open us up to the fear of rejection, and neither are comfortable, but they are definitely not weakness.
- Vulnerability is being all in, connecting our whole self to another, and leads to a whole hearted life. Vulnerability creates connections, and it is our connections that give us purpose.
- If vulnerability is so beneficial, then why do we struggle so much to be vulnerable? To answer this question, we must go back to the beginning and see the world God intended for us to live in.

II. Genesis chapter 3

- Read Genesis 2:25-3:13, 21. Though this story is often called "The Fall," *The Jesus Storybook Bible* helpfully calls it "The Terrible Lie." This title highlights the reality that lies make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to be open to (vulnerable with) others (including God). When we lie, we hide rather than relate.

- i. In this passage in Genesis, sin enters the world. We often think the act of eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is what separated us from God's perfect world for us. However, what God was saying "no" to was the lie: "The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"'"
- ii. Originally, Adam and Eve, though naked, felt no shame. In believing the lie, they experienced shame. Shame is what prevents us from being vulnerable.
- b. Researcher Brene Brown describes a cycle of Sin & Shame (see diagram at right).
- c. We see this cycle at work in Adam and Eve's reaction to sin:



- i. **Cover:** Adam and Eve were never ashamed before, but now they sew fig leaves to cover themselves. There are common fig leaves that are found in all groups of teenagers:
 1. Goody-good:
 - a) The golden child, who is always responsible, always hard working. Lives in a constant state of anxiety and fear of failure
 2. Apathy:
 - a) Flippant and easy going. Lives by the saying, "have no expectations, and you will never be disappointed". Burdened by a lack of purpose and hope.
 3. Wild child:
 - a) Always ready for a good time and a new adventure. Easy to envy, but almost always has a story of being shamed in the past, and would rather control shameful behavior than have other people put them in shameful situations.
 4. Theologian:
 - a) Has advise and a Bible verse easily ready for anyone else's problems, but rarely applies knowledge to their own lives.
- ii. **Hide:** Adam and Eve heard God present among them but hid in shame.
 1. We often hide in the busyness of our own lives. We hide from God, from others, and from ourselves. Rather than take the time to admit our shame and brokenness, and take off the fig leaves we are wearing as masks.
- iii. **Blame:** When questioned by God, Adam and Eve blame the serpent and one another. Adam even blames God for giving him Eve.
 1. Blame is a habit we have all learned from Adam. We deflect blame from ourselves and try to make ourselves appear perfect on the outside even when we know we are breaking on the inside.

III. The world after the terrible lie

- a. Following the entrance of sin into the world, it is no longer safe to know ourselves or to be known by others.
- b. But the good news (the gospel) is that God did not end our story with him there. *The Jesus Storybook Bible* explains:

“No matter what, in spite of everything, God would love his children—with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love. And though they would forget him, and run from him, deep in their hearts, God’s children would miss him always, and long for him—lost children yearning for their home.

“Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: “It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I’m going to do battle against the snake. I’ll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I’m coming back for you!”

“And he would. One day, God himself would come.”

- c. From that moment, God began working to draw us back to himself—to change the terrible lie. Even though Adam and Eve said no to God and disobeyed Him, God still said yes to them and to us as well.
 - i. God began to reverse the cycle of sin & shame. To be known by God is to be exposed—not to shame, but to His love. Note God’s response to our Shame (see diagram):

1. **Seeking in love**

- a) God’s response to Adam and Eve was to ask them a question, “Where are you?”

2. **Taking our blame**

- a) Adam makes excuses as to why he was hiding, and covering himself. God does not argue but merely provides a better covering.

3. **Covering us up**

- a) In the garden God provides clothing (he took away their fig leaves—their self-effort—and gave them animal skins—representing Jesus’ sacrifice, which is God’s grace: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is exhausting to try to cover ourselves, but we find rest in the covering that Jesus provides. By his grace, we stand before God blameless and shameless.



IV. How can we be vulnerable?

- a. We still live in a tension of already-and-not-yet that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:12-13: “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”
- b. We fully experience a life free of blame and shame only as we position ourselves to be clearly seen by the one who is always seeking to draw us closer to himself, and thus to our true selves.
 - i. We must remove the fig leaves of our own self-effort to allow God to cover every area of our lives with his grace.
 - ii. God is always with us—always mindful of us. We must train ourselves to be mindful of his presence and thus to be open to his grace.
- c. The process of removing fig leaves also requires living in close proximity to one another.
 - i. It is not safe to be vulnerable with everyone we come in contact with, but as we discern those who are wearing Jesus’ full covering it is crucial for us to have a community where we can be vulnerable and thus fully known.
 - ii. When we are vulnerable with one another we find others who share our passions and interests. The Holy Spirit forms us into one body that breathes together the love, justice, and mercy of God into the world around us.
 - iii. There will be times when we are tempted to put back on our fig leaves and say no to what God has put in front of us. We need people in our lives with whom we can be vulnerable, who will remind us that God is always saying yes to us, and protect us from re-entering the Sin & Shame Spiral.
 1. Vulnerability and accountability are essential to fighting against the lies of this world and allowing God to forge his character in us through His loving truth.
 2. James 5:16-18: “Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn’t rain, and it didn’t—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.”



- a) There are many seasons to this life. As we discussed in our talk about sharing in Jesus' hope, the prayers of people who love you and love Jesus are a powerful stabilizing force in your life.

V. Spiritual Practice: *Unplugging*

- a. To be truly vulnerable before God or before another person, we must be fully present and uninterrupted. Today's spiritual practice will help us do that—it's called *unplugging*. Take the time unplug from technology and fully connect with someone else.
- b. Choose one of these two activities:
 - i. Write a handwritten letter to a friend. What is gained and what is lost in electronic communication? What are the tradeoffs?
 - ii. Plan a face to face hangout with a friend for the week following camp. Do not let any electronic interrupt your time together.