

Back Home Group Evening Devotional Guide

Welcome to the Middle School Conference! You've arrived, you've checked in, you've begun to learn your way around the campus, and you've experienced a small part of what the conference has to offer. You and your group are probably feeling a combination of excited and nervous. Some of you may be tired, others bursting with energy. And if you ran into any travel or other difficulty today, you may be feeling some frustration on top of it all.

At the end of each evening of the conference, a devotional time before lights-out can help you and your group process the day, wind down, and prepare for a restful night. Try to take TIME for each of the following ways of connecting with each other and God:

- ***A time to share*** – A check-in time to review the day
- ***A time to rest*** – A reading from Scripture (we rest in God's Word)
- ***A time to wonder*** – A question or two to prompt additional reflections on the theme
- ***A time to pray*** – Closing prayer

As you begin, here are a few tips to make the most of your time together:

- *Pay attention to your group's energy level in relation to time for back home. It is good to give space for conversation and reflection, but everyone needs good rest to start the next day fresh! The time to share will help facilitate this for you.*
- *Choose a location that is free from as many distractions as possible.*
- *Sit in a circle (or similar shape) so that everyone can see and hear each other.*
- *Encourage the group to share as they are comfortable and to make space for each person to have opportunities to share. One way to facilitate this is through a process of "mutual invitation," which looks like this:*
 - *The leader introduces the prompt or question and invites one person to answer.*
 - *That person can say "pass," or offer a response. When they are finished, the person invites another person to participate.*
 - *The same option, "pass" or "respond" is given to each invitee, who then invites the next person (who has not yet been invited).*
 - *When all have been invited, those who elected to "pass" may be re-invited, with "pass" still as an option. If time allows, you may invite repeat responders.*
- *Model respectful language, both for those in the group and comments about others (including conference leadership and other conferees). Avoid making this a time to "rate" the conference simply based on "like/dislike." Instead, focus the conversation on new insights or things that challenged you – get at the "why" rather than just the evaluation if possible.*
- *Remind your adults that this is primarily a time for the youth to process. If necessary, find some time for the adults to have additional conversation for their own reflections.*

Wednesday

A Time to Share

This conference will be full of opportunities to worship, play, learn, and rest. As you begin the week together, invite the group to share things they are excited about and things they are nervous or anxious about, or need to “let go” of in order to make the most out of the week.

A Time to Rest (in God’s Word)

Read the following Scripture passage slowly, with a breath between each verse to allow the words to soak in.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Common English Bible Translation

There’s a season for everything
and a time for every matter under the heavens:
a time for giving birth and a time for dying,
a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,
a time for killing and a time for healing,
a time for tearing down and a time for building up,
a time for crying and a time for laughing,
a time for mourning and a time for dancing,
a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,
a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,
a time for searching and a time for losing,
a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,
a time for tearing and a time for repairing,
a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,
a time for loving and a time for hating,
a time for war and a time for peace.

A Time to Wonder

Invite the group to reflect on the following questions . . .

- I wonder . . . what made you come this week?
- I wonder . . . what does it mean to you to spend time at this conference?
- I wonder . . . how can you make the most of this time?

A Time to Pray

Close in prayer together using this, or a prayer of your own:

God of all time, you have given us the rhythms of seasons and days and years. Help us, in these days together, to pay attention to how we spend our time, so that we can truly be connected to this experience here and now, honoring your presence in our midst. Amen.

Thursday

A Time to Share

Check in with your group. Invite them to share one word or phrase that describes their day.

A Time to Rest (in God's Word)

Read the following Scripture passage slowly, with pauses every few sentences to allow the words to soak in.

Jeremiah 1:4-8 (The Message)

This is what GOD said:

“Before I shaped you in the womb,

I knew all about you.

Before you saw the light of day,

I had holy plans for you:

A prophet to the nations—

that’s what I had in mind for you.”

But I said, “Hold it, MasterGOD! Look at me.

I don’t know anything. I’m only a boy!”

GOD told me, “Don’t say, ‘I’m only a boy.’

I’ll tell you where to go and you’ll go there.

I’ll tell you what to say and you’ll say it.

Don’t be afraid of a soul.

I’ll be right there, looking after you.”

GOD’S Decree.

A Time to Wonder

Invite the group to reflect on the following questions . . .

- I wonder . . . how does it feel to know that you are a child of God?
- I wonder . . . if you have ever hesitated like Jeremiah did?
- I wonder . . . what holy plans does God have for us . . . this week? beyond?

A Time to Pray

God of promise, thank you for your claim on us as your children. You have made us each unique, with distinct personalities, natural and acquired abilities, and passions in life. Help us to celebrate the ways in which we are marvelously made in your image this week, and as we live into our own identity as children of God, help us to see others as children of God, too. In the name of the one who claimed us and loves us, no matter what, Amen.

Friday

A Time to Share

Review highlights of the day, creating a word-picture of what you have experienced. Ask:

- What is one image that stuck with you today? (something you saw)
- What is something you heard from stage that made you think?

A Time to Rest (in God's Word)

Read the following Scripture passage slowly, with pauses every few sentences to allow the words to soak in.

Matthew 18:18-20 (The Message)

“Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I’ll be there.”

A Time to Wonder

Invite the group to reflect on the following questions . . .

- I wonder . . . what comes to mind when you think of the word “community”?
- I wonder . . . how can we be the best covenant community together?
- I wonder . . . where have you experienced the presence of God this week?

A Time to Pray

God, in the Trinity you reflect three persons knit together in seamless community. We thank you for the gift of togetherness and the strength and encouragement we find with each other. Help us to live into your best vision for us as your people; forgive us when we make mistakes, heal us where our relationships are broken, reconcile us when we have come unraveled. Bind us together in your love as we seek to be the body of Christ. Amen.

Saturday

A Time to Share

Check in with your group. Invite them to share one word or phrase that describes their experience of this conference.

A Time to Rest (in God's Word)

Read the following passage from Scripture slowly to allow space for reflection:

Esther 4:12-14 The Message

When Hathach told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai sent her this message: "Don't think that just because you live in the king's house you're the one Jew who will get out of this alive. If you persist in staying silent at a time like this, help and deliverance will arrive for the Jews from someplace else; but you and your family will be wiped out. Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this."

A Time to Wonder

Invite the group to reflect on the following questions . . .

- I wonder . . . who are the Mordecais in your life that help guide you?
- I wonder . . . what or who God might be calling you to speak up about?
- I wonder . . . what from this week you would share back home, and how you might do that?

A Time to Pray

Gather your group in a circle. Have each person cross their right arm over their left, and link hands with those standing next to them. Tell the group to keep hands connected after the prayer:

God of the journey, we thank you for our time together this week. For the fun we have had, the things we have learned, the brave space to share and wonder what you are up to in our lives here and now. Help us continue to hear your voice, and give us the courage to be your faithful disciples. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Following the Amen, stay linked with hands, and invite the group to imagine this week preparing them to not always face in, but to go out into the world. With hands still connected, have each person slowly turn around (lifting the right arm up and turn under their own arm).

