

Back Home Group Devotional Guide

Montreat Middle School Conference 2021

This guide is designed for back home leaders to facilitate each evening's devotional time together. The material provided is simply a suggestion on how to lead the process. Our hope is that experiences in keynote, worship, small groups, and community building events will provide even more content for each evening's gathering. You will be able to read your group's energy level and adapt or expand upon the devotional time each evening.

The theme for the 2021 Montreat Middle School Conference is "Just as I Am." Each day will explore God's claim on our lives, the gift of community and the grace of Jesus Christ who loves and accepts us just as we are. The Back Home devotional is a great way to tie together all the parts of the day. It's also a safe space to help youth process all that they have seen, heard and felt throughout each day.

TUESDAY

Your first back home meeting is a chance to set the tone for the rest of the week. Gather your entire Back Home group together and, if possible, sit in a circle where all can see each other and make eye contact. Explain that this Back Home Group will meet at the end of each day to provide the opportunity to check-in with each other, share highlights and concerns, discuss any community logistics and announcements, and end each day together in prayer. Be sure to remind the group of the expectation of your time together, particularly encouraging active listening, confidentiality, empathy and trust.

- **Announcements** - Use this time to share any community announcement information that you need to with your group. This may include announcements about the schedule or other important updates from Conference Staff.
- **Group Check In** - Invite everyone in the group to answer the following:
 - What is one word that describes how you are feeling right now?
 - What is one expectation or hope you have for the rest of the week?
 - Share the best part of the trip to get to the Middle School Conference.
 - Share one thing that made you wonder today.

- **Theme Focus - Just As I Am**

Invite the group to think about the theme for the Conference, use the following as a prompt:

- What do you think of when you hear the words, "Just As I Am"?

- **Closing Prayer**

Use this prayer, or your own, or invite someone in your group to lead the closing prayer.

God of Love: we give thanks for safe travel as we have arrived at the Middle School Conference. Bless our group and bless our time together as we discover your love for us and the grace of Jesus Christ. May our hearts and minds be open to experience your love in new ways this week. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

- **Announcements**

- **Group Check In** - Invite everyone in the group to respond to the following:

- Describe today using one word only.
- Name one thing you experienced today that reminded you that you are a Child of God?

- **Theme Focus - Just As We Welcome**

Today's theme focused on welcoming, and the reminder that we are created in the image of God.

- What is one thing you learned in keynote, small group, worship or recreation related to God's welcome?

- **Scripture: Luke 19:1-10** (Jesus and Zacchaeus)

Re-visit the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus with your group.

Invite someone to read the story or sum it up from what they remember.

- What made Jesus' welcome of Zacchaeus so radical?
- Did you hear or experience this story in a different way today than you knew it before?
- How do you think we can welcome others in the way that Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus?
- Where did you experience welcome today?

- **Closing Prayer**

Invite someone in your group to close in prayer, or use the following:

Welcoming God: thank you for claiming us and loving us in ways beyond our imaginations. Thank you for welcoming us as your children. Help us to see others as you see each of us. We give you thanks for all the ways we experienced welcome today. Grant us rest at the end of this day so that we may fully experience your love and grace tomorrow. Amen.

THURSDAY

- **Announcements**

- **Group Check In**

Invite everyone in the group to respond to the following:

- Where did you experience grace today?
- Share one thing that made you smile and one thing that made you frown today.

- **Theme Focus - Just As We Are**

Today's theme focused on the concepts of doubt and grace - and the reminder that we are loved and accepted just as we are.

- What is one thing you learned in keynote, small group, worship or recreation related to doubt, grace and forgiveness?

- **Scripture: John 4:1-26** (Samaritan Woman at the Well)

Re-visit the story of Jesus' encounter with the Woman at the Well.

Invite someone to read it aloud or have someone in the group retell the story from memory.

- Have you ever imagined what it would be like to encounter Jesus?
- What do you think is the difference between living water and water from the well?
- If the “living water” offered by Jesus was a drink from Starbucks, what would it taste like?

- **Closing Prayer**

Invite someone in your group to close in prayer, or use the following:

God of grace and mercy, we offer to you this evening the prayers of our hearts.

We rejoice in the grace and forgiveness you offer in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us peace and rest as this day comes to an end. Amen.

FRIDAY

- **Announcements**

- **Group Check In**

Invite everyone in the group to respond to the following:

- What is the most surprising thing you have experienced at the conference so far?
- Share a favorite meal you've eaten so far at the conference.

- **Theme Focus - Just As We Are (In Community)**

Today's theme focused on the concepts of community and the reminder that God invites us into community together - to each use the particular gifts we have been given.

- What is one thing you learned about community today?

- **Scripture: Psalm 133**

Invite someone (or a couple people) in your group to read Psalm 133 out loud.

- What does this Psalm tell you about being in community together?
- What part of being a part of a community is the most difficult for you? What part bring you the most joy?

- **Closing Prayer**

Invite someone in your group to close in prayer, or use the following:

God of all creation, you created us good and made us to be a people who live in unity together. Help us to love one another the way you have called us to love.

Thank you for loving us beyond our wildest imagination. Grant us rest this night and peace as we prepare to travel home tomorrow. Amen.