I. INTRODUCTION TO YOUNG LIFE. WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT AT YOUNG LIFE?

1. Taste and See

A. Scripture: Psalm 34:8, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

B. Introduction: There are basically two kinds of people in the world. Those who use mayonnaise on a sandwich and those who use Miracle Whip. Which are you? Have you ever gone to a friend’s house and wondered which he would use? I’d pass if he offered me a sandwich with the wrong spread. Trying out something you never use was bound to be a bad experience.

C. Body: Obviously, I’m joking. Most of you don’t avoid new things — in fact, one of the things I appreciate most about high school folks is your willingness to try new things. I, along with the other Young Life leaders, invite you to a taste test — taste and see that the Lord is good. We invite you to use this year as a taste test as you come to Young Life and hear about God. When you try a new food you take a small bite to see if you like it or not. You don’t even have to swallow it if you don’t want to.

D. Conclusion: We believe that as you come to club and hear about God you’ll want more. Nobody is going to make you do or say or believe anything, but we believe what we talk about is so important that you’re going to want to hear it. For some of you, it’s like tasting something that you thought you didn’t like and realizing you do like it. We welcome you to come and have some fun with us every week, bring your likes and dislikes about God and the Christian faith and take a taste. You may be surprised.

2. Why Did You Come Here Tonight?

A. Scripture: John 10:10, “I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly.”

B. Introduction: Why did you come here? “To scope guys or girls,” “Saw all the cars and thought it was a party,” “Needed to get out of the house.”

C. Body: This is Young Life. We have two membership requirements that we are very strict in enforcing. The requirements are defined by our name — you must be young and you must be alive. If you are dead, don’t come here. If you are 80 or 90 years old, don’t come here. You must be young and alive. And because you are young and alive, we believe you’ll have an interest in the things we do here. We plan to have a lot of fun together and to celebrate the fact that we are alive and we plan to explore the gift that we have in being alive. We believe that being alive is not some sort of cosmic accident, but the work of a Creator who loves us. We plan to explore the Christian faith together, and to look hard at the life and claims of Jesus Christ. Christ said He came that we could have life abundantly. What does that mean? We are going to answer that question over the course of this semester.

D. Conclusion: We hope you will stick with us as we investigate the Christian faith. We believe the message we share here is vitally important. We want you to look with us at Christ and what it would mean to follow the one who promises abundant life.
3. Existence or Living?

A. Scripture: John 12:45, “Anyone who sees me, sees the one who sent me.”

B. Introduction: Is there a difference between existence and living? Have you ever seen dogs in a cage in a pet store? They are alive — their hearts are pumping and they’re breathing — but they aren’t living. Take a dog and let it run in a field and chase some squirrels and rabbits, or put it in a family where people love it and give it affection, and the dog is fully alive.

C. Body: How about us? Is there a difference for us between existing and being alive? I think so. I believe to be fully alive, we must be in touch with the Giver of Life. But that isn’t easy. God can seem so distant, so foreign, something others seem so sure of, but confusing to us. How can we see what God is like?

Here’s another dog story. My Golden Retriever is a hair machine. When we first got her, we were puzzled because she just shed in the kitchen. We have a funky blue carpet in the kitchen that is constantly covered with dog hair. The rest of the house has tan carpet. One day we finally realized there was dog hair everywhere in the house, but we couldn’t see it because it is the same color as the carpet. If we want to see how much the dog is shedding we have to look in the right place. So it is with God. If we want to see what God is like we have to look in the right place. Jesus said if we see Him, we see the one who sent Him. By looking at Christ, we can see God.

D. Conclusion: Where will we look for God? You can spend a lifetime searching all over, but there is one definite place to see God, in the person of Jesus Christ.

4. God’s Way to Communicate

A. Scripture: Colossians 1:15, “Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God.”

B. Introduction: Imagine you were God and you have a problem. You want to communicate with humanity, to tell them you love them, that you made them and you want to have a relationship with them. What would you do? I was thinking about that the other day and I thought, I’d probably use the media. Wouldn’t you? Isn’t that the best way to get a message across to everybody?

When a new movie comes out, that’s what the entertainment industry does — they send the stars on the TV talk-show circuit. Can you imagine God doing that? “Tonight our guests are comedian Billy Crystal, psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers and the Creator of Heaven and Earth, God.” How inappropriate! Isn’t God above all that? But what would you do to communicate? Take out newspaper ads? Drop leaflets from the sky?

C. Body: All of those approaches seem silly for God. God faced the communication problem and solved it, in a way a lot less flashy than going on TV or dropping pamphlets from the sky, in a way that was much more sensitive and in touch with us. God decided to become one of us. In Christ God became a human being — a person we could see, touch and hear, and a person who felt and experienced life the same way we do, a person who could see, touch and hear us. Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. Christ is God in human form, fully human and fully God.

D. Conclusion: In Christ, God became one of us. One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is that Christ was simultaneously God and man. When we look at Christ, we look at
God. When we listen to Christ, we listen to God. Christ is God's communication to us in the form we understand best — a human being.

5. A Crazy Dream

The following talk was done by a man, but could be adapted for use by a woman with a little creativity.

A. Scripture: John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

B. Introduction: I had a terrible dream last night. I dreamt I was 10 years old again. When I was ten I was into GI Joes — macho dolls for boys. In my dream I went to my closet to get my GI Joes out, and suddenly I was under attack. My GI Joes had come to life and had declared war on me. They were shooting me with little plastic bullets that felt like bug bites, and were lobbing little grenades at me, and I noticed they were lining up a missile that was kind of big, so I jumped for cover behind my bed.

C. Body: What could I do? I tried to talk to them, but they didn't seem to understand my voice. I wanted to find out what their problems were, and I wanted to get up from behind my bed, and mostly I wanted to get this cleared up before my parents found out, because if my GI Joes shot my dad with the tank he had just bought me, my dad would really get mad at me.

So I decided, since it was my dream, I would become a GI Joe. I made myself into GI Jeff and I went and talked to them. They explained their complaints. They were mad because they lived in a box in the closet, and because they never got to change their clothes, and mostly because — when we did go out to play — it was with the boy next door and his GI Joes instead of his sister who had an extensive Barbie doll collection.

I tried to reason with them. I told them if they played with Barbie they'd have to deal with Ken first, and I told them that at least I didn't bite their heads off and drop firecrackers inside of them like some of my friends did to their GI Joes. Some of them were kind of backing off, but some others were suspicious and, before I knew it, GI Jeff was being lined up in front of a firing squad.

Suddenly a bell rang — it was my alarm clock — and I awoke in a cold sweat.

D. Conclusion: I know it's a silly story and it really isn't true, but I think it's a good analogy to understand what God faced trying to express Himself to us. It isn't a perfect comparison, but it does have its merits. I became a GI Joe to communicate with GI Joes. God became a man to communicate with humanity. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Christ is called God's Word here, and what is a word? A word is how we communicate. God's communication to us is in the form of a living word named Jesus Christ. In the weeks to come, we are going to discuss the message God has for us in Christ, a message we receive by listening to the words of Christ, by looking at the way He lived and how He encountered people, and most importantly by looking at the way He died and what His death and resurrection can mean to us.

II. THE PERSON OF CHRIST

1. Jesus Calms a Storm

One way to add variety to the message is to let kids illustrate the message through their own experiences. It can be done with almost any encounter Christ had. Instead of asking, “What personal story illustrates this Bible passage?” ask, “What questions can I ask kids that will allow them to get involved with this story?” Here's an example:
A. *Scripture*: Mark 4:35-41 — Jesus calms the sea.

B. *Introduction*: Break into groups of three or four kids and ask everyone to share something unusual or unbelievable that has happened to them. You may want to warm them up by telling your own story first (allow about ten minutes). Then bring the whole group back together and ask for three or four good stories. Have a leader or two ready if it seems to drag. Be ready to be amazed at what kids come up with (allow another 10 minutes for this).

C. *Body*: How many of those kinds of experiences do you think you could take? It is fun to have something wild happen occasionally, but if you are like me, you appreciate a little order and certainty in your life. I think Jesus’ disciples felt the same way. Yet, after they met Jesus, they witnessed one incredible incident after another. I am going to share an incident where Christ completely astonished the disciples. (Read and tell how Christ calmed the sea. Point out the disciples’ fears and the fact that many were fishermen and made their living on the water.)

D. *Conclusion*: The last line of this story asks a question that we should ask, “Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey Him?” What are the possible answers? I can think of only two — either He was incredibly lucky and He said hush to the waves at exactly the right moment (which sometimes happens to me when I’m sitting at a red light and I say green and it changes), or He is the one who created the wind and the waves.

2. Three Funerals

A. *Scripture*: Luke 7:11-17 — The raising of the widow’s son.

B. *Introduction*: Who is your hero? When I was a kid my hero was Hercules, because he was so strong, and if there ever was a problem, he’d just beat everybody up. Now I’m older and I realize that’s not enough. I have a new hero named Jesus. I saw my hero the other day. I was walking by a funeral home in the neighborhood, and there was a great crowd of people crying about a kid who had been killed. Jesus came walking up to the people, right here in the neighborhood, and saw the grief of the mother whose son was killed. She was a widow, and this was her only son.

Jesus stopped the funeral and went up to the casket and opened the lid. People were freaking out. He told the dead kid inside to get up and he did. You should have seen it. The kid sat upright, and the six guys carrying the casket dropped it and ran away — but the mother was overjoyed because her dead son was alive.

C. *Body*: I want to tell you about two other funerals I’ve been a part of. The first was a gang funeral — a guy I was with in the Spanish Cobras. He was a real honored gang member who had saved my life on a couple of occasions. To see him dead was crushing because he was so tough. The gang marched into the funeral home and put on a show of strength in his honor. As I walked out my eyes met the eyes of his mother — and there was accusation and condemnation in those eyes. I felt helpless as I looked at her. She was accusing us of getting her son killed, and I had no response.

The second funeral happened recently. It was for a young man named Norberto, who had been involved in Young Life, who had learned to water ski at Castaway and had made a commitment to Christ there. Norberto was in the wrong place at the wrong time — he was standing on a corner that was Cobra territory and some rival gang members drove by and shot him three times.
I went to the funeral home and it was like a carnival. Nobody was mourning — it was like they were trying not to deal with what had happened to Norberto. I saw his mother and she was sad, and I found out she was a Christian. I had the opportunity to say a few words about Norberto, and when I got up to speak I saw about 30 members of the Cobras in the back. I told them he had a lot of potential and how angry I was that he was killed — he had made a commitment to Christ and he could have been someone great in our neighborhood.

The family didn’t know he had accepted Christ at Castaway. I talked to the gang and told them I knew what they were thinking. They weren’t mourning, they were plotting revenge, because they think the other gang is their enemy.

I told them the real enemy is Satan, the one who messes with our minds so we wind up killing each other. I know I was starting to get to them because their leader gave a signal and the whole gang got up and left. The family and friends of Norberto remained. The atmosphere in the funeral home changed dramatically as they realized salvation had come to Norberto. His mother came up and embraced me.

D. Conclusion: It dawned on me that I had done what my hero Jesus had done. I had given a son back to his mother. Jesus is the difference between the mother who stared with condemnation at me and the mother who embraced me. Jesus restores hopeless situations. The family knows they will see Norberto again.

3. The Touch of Christ

A. Scripture: Mark 1:40-45 — Christ heals a leper.

B. Introduction: When I was in seventh grade we had to square dance with girls in gym class and somehow I got paired off with a girl that all of us feared getting paired with. She was a girl with a number of problems — she had some disabilities and when I was in seventh grade, I wasn’t ready to handle being around a person like that. I felt sorry for her, but I was too cool to be nice to her, so I just went through the motions of square dancing and then ridiculed her like crazy in front of my friends. My biggest fear was that they would say I liked her, so I went on the offensive and just tore into her.

C. Body: As an adult I look back on that with a lot of guilt. I compare my reaction to the way Jesus treated the outcasts of His time, and I am embarrassed. When Christ lived, there was a real problem with a disease called leprosy. Most of you have heard about it, but I bet none of you have ever seen a leper.

It was a terrible disease. It affected your skin with a number of boils and rashes, and numbed your nervous system so you didn’t feel things and could easily burn yourself, and in many cases fingers and toes would rot away from your body. Leprosy could be contracted by physical contact, so lepers were ostracized and sent to live in leper colonies. And the law required lepers to yell out “unclean” when they approached people. I imagine, in many ways, it would be like having AIDS today. I want to share an encounter Christ had with a leper. (Read and tell of Christ’s compassion, lack of fear and healing power.)

D. Conclusion: One of the things I believe about Christ is that if He came into my gym class in seventh grade, He wouldn’t approach me first. He would approach my square dancing partner. The New Testament has incident after incident where Christ moves with mercy and healing toward those who were the have-nots in society. That is
very good news to me. As He says in another place, the well don't need a doctor, the sick do. If we are honest with ourselves, we know we are all have-nots.

III. NEED/SIN

1. What Is It We Need?

A. Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30 — The rich young ruler.

B. Introduction: Have you ever been around a crying baby that just won't stop? It is extremely frustrating. Why is it crying? You try everything to pacify it — you burp it, you change it, you hold it, you put it down, you rock it, you feed it, you give it a pacifier — and it keeps crying. What is the matter? Sometimes when one of my kids did that, I would get philosophical and think it was just crying because it sensed the world was a painful place and it would be a lot easier to climb back up inside of Mommy and be safe. I know that's a pretty deep thought for a three-month-old baby. I used to ask my baby, “What? What? Just tell me? I'll fix it, please stop screaming, just say a few syllables.”

C. Body: Is there a parallel with us? Are we screaming out for something we want but can’t name? There has to be more, but we don’t know what it is. Have you ever opened the refrigerator and just stood there staring without any idea what you want? You know you want something, but you don’t have any idea what it is. Here’s an encounter Christ had with a young man who knew he wanted something more in life, but was unwilling to accept the challenge Christ gave him. (Read and tell the story of the rich young ruler.)

D. Conclusion: The man knew he needed something, and even realized Jesus had the answer for him, but he could not abandon what gave him comfort and security in life to find it. I think that is like you and me. We know there has to be more, and we even know where to find more, but we stop because of the comfort and familiarity of the familiar.
of what we already have. Jesus re-imagined the way life could be for this man, and He can do the same for us, but we have to recognize the need and allow Jesus to act in our lives.

2. Should We Treat Symptoms or the Disease?

A. Scripture: Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

B. Introduction: When he was in college, a friend of mine became sick with a persistent cough, fatigue, swelling in some joints, and visited a doctor who prescribed medication to treat the symptoms. The doctor didn’t know what was causing the symptoms, but he gave my friend some cough medicine and some antibiotics so he’d feel better. He did feel better for a few weeks, but then the medicine ran out, the symptoms returned, and my friend was even worse than before he went to see the doctor. He decided to try another doctor. This one wasn’t content to treat the symptoms. This doctor wanted to know what the disease was and ran a number of tests, including X-rays, which revealed my friend had a form of cancer.

C. Body: The great news for my friend was that the cancer went into remission, and he is living a healthy life more than 20 years after he was diagnosed. But his story serves as an example for us. If we treat the symptoms and ignore the disease, the disease will kill us.

Our disease is sin, our inclination to be self-centered instead of God-centered. The symptoms of our disease are sins, the individual and corporate acts we commit against ourselves, each other and God. Romans 3:23 tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That’s not startling news to us; we are all painfully aware of the numerous ways we fall short of the ideal. The problem is, we spend our energy trying to treat our symptoms instead of treating the disease. “If I could only control my temper.” “If I could only quit getting drunk.” We may even succeed in treating some of the symptoms through self-help courses and through the power of our own wills. But we will never succeed in treating the disease without help.

D. Conclusion: What will it be for us? A lifetime of treating symptoms? Or the radical step of actually treating the disease? We may cover things up treating the symptoms of sin, but sin is a relentless killer that eventually punishes each of its victims with eternal separation from God.

3. Stuck!

A. Scripture: Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

B. Introduction: One day I was in a part of town I was unfamiliar with, trying to figure out how to get into the parking lot of a grocery store. I went into a driveway that went uphill to the sidewalk and suddenly slammed on my brakes as I realized there was about a three foot drop-off after the sidewalk. It was too late. My car crashed down onto the edge of the drop-off. The tires were in the air and the car was resting on its frame. I literally had to step up to get out of the car.

C. Body: I eventually got the car off the drop-off by getting about six guys to come out of the store to help me lift the car up. Later, as I was reflecting on it, I realized that this illustrates our situation in life.

I was in the driver’s seat of my car in full control. I had the ignition on, the steering wheel in my hands, but I was going nowhere. Everything I had control over didn’t matter. I could turn the wheel, but it didn’t matter. I could step on the gas, but it didn’t matter.
The only way out for me was to get outside help. I couldn’t get the car off the drop-off by myself.

That’s our situation before God. We are in full control, and yet only spinning our wheels. We are in the driver’s seat, and yet going nowhere. The reason for that is sin, the state of alienation from God we are in. Sin produces alienation from God, bondage to ourselves and conflict with others. It is something we need outside help with because, on our own, we cannot solve the problem.

As the book of Romans says, “The wages of sin is death.” That’s the payment. Death. And not just physical death, because we all experience that, but spiritual death, eternal separation from God. We think of eternity as something in the distant future. The truth is, our clocks are ticking and eternal life has already begun for us. We can experience Hell just as easily today as we can after we die.

Think about it. Some of you already know what it is like. The same is true for Heaven. Heaven begins for Christians when they make a faith commitment to Christ.

D. Conclusion: We aren’t talking about some sort of eternity insurance package. We’re talking about something that impacts your life right here and right now. Sin pays its wage — death. Now let me read the conclusion of that verse, “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST/APPROPRIATION

1. Barabbas

   A. Scripture: Mark 15:6-15 — Barabbas.

   B. Introduction: Do a role play as Barabbas. Explain the events going on in Jerusalem and how you fit into them. Tell of your fear of crucifixion, and the unbelievable situation when the innocent man Jesus was crucified in your place. After His death you felt an incredible combination of relief and guilt. But then you heard the most amazing thing of all — that Jesus, who you saw die on a cross, is now alive. Somehow He died for you, and yet lives.

   C. Body: Invite kids to participate, either with questions they would ask Barabbas, or by asking them how they would feel if they were Barabbas and Christ was crucified in their place. How would they respond to hearing that the one they saw die is now alive?

   D. Conclusion: Step out of character and speak of the substitutionary nature of the atonement — that we are Barabbas and Christ indeed was crucified in our place.

   (This type of role play/talk can be done with any incident from Christ’s life. Simply tell the story from the point of view of one of the participants. It provides an effective change of pace from the normal club talk and allows kids to participate.)

2. A Visual Explanation of the Work of Christ

   A. Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, “God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so if anyone is in Christ, that one is a new creation.”

   B. Introduction: What happened when Christ was crucified? How does His death allow our relationship with God to change?

   C. Body: (Use a water pitcher, a cup and a saucer.) Pouring water from the pitcher to the cup and from the cup back to the pitcher illustrates how our relationship with God is designed to be. Sin causes two things to happen: first, we turn from God (turn cup
upside down); and second, a wall is built between us and God (place saucer over cup).

With Christ's death, the wall that separates us from God is torn down (remove saucer). We still are not in a position to be in a proper relationship with God (pour a little water over the upside-down cup). The wall of sin represented by the saucer was something only God could remove, and the historical event of Christ's crucifixion guarantees us the wall has been torn down.

Yet we still don't experience a right relationship with God. That is because God does not force Himself upon us. It is up to us to turn to Him. He has moved toward us, but we also must move toward Him. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. This is how God moved toward us in Christ and if we respond to Him, we can become a new creation.

D. Conclusion: Explain how kids can pray asking God to move into their lives.

3. How Do We Respond?


B. Introduction: There are only two possible responses to Christ — either yes or no. “I'll wait until later” actually is a no. “Maybe” is a no. “Sometimes” is a no.

C. Body: On the day Jesus was crucified, two others were crucified alongside of Him. Read and tell about the two thieves and their responses to Jesus. One mocks Christ, the other asks for mercy.

D. Conclusion: Which response is our response? Will we mock Christ — maybe not openly, like the thief on the cross, but in our lifestyle, our actions, our choices — or will we ask for mercy and accept Christ’s promise of paradise?