

LIFE TEEN

Leading Teens Closer to Christ

www.LifeTeen.com



WHEN IT'S DARK

A LIFE NIGHT ADDRESSING CRISIS

GOAL

The goal of this Life Night is to discuss the emotions teens may experience when a crisis happens, and the existence of evil, as well as inspire them to have hope in Jesus when it's dark. The Life Night is designed to be general so it can be adapted to meet the needs of various crisis situations.

KEY CONCEPTS

- God does not create evil; He creates only what is good. Evil is the absence of good.
- Crisis affects every person differently. There is a wide spectrum of emotions that can be experienced, and it's important to honor and pay attention to those emotions.
- Through Jesus, divine life and grace are dispensed to all who believe in Him. With Jesus, we can overcome darkness.

KEY TERMS:

Crisis
Evil
Free Will

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 1-3
Romans 8:20-23
Ephesians 1:7
1 Corinthians 15:57

CATECHISM:

309-314
324
396-400
1708

ABOUT THIS LIFE NIGHT

The Life Night begins by welcoming the teens to a comfortable environment and saying an opening prayer under candlelight. The Proclaim discusses the crisis and how to process crisis situations in a healthy way, as well as the existence of evil and living victoriously with Jesus in the midst of darkness. The Break is a small group discussion and prayer about how the crisis is affecting the community and each person individually. During the Send, the youth minister, parish priest, or deacon leads the group in praying the *Order for the Blessing of a Victim of Crime or Oppression*.

ENVIRONMENT

Create a simple and welcoming environment with soft lighting, peaceful music, and comfortable seating. Have framed pictures of the people or communities affected by the crisis in the front of the main meeting space and/or a framed picture of Our Lady of Sorrows. Place candles around the pictures and light them. Consider hosting this Life Night in the sanctuary space of the church or chapel.

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

- “It is Well,” Bethel Music (*You Make Me Brave, Live at the Civic*, Bethel Music, 2014)
- “Instrument,” Matt Maher (*Saints and Sinners*, Sony, 2015)
- Rend Collective: “Weep With Me - Rend Collective *new song*” (youtube.com)
- Life Teen: “A Good God in a Suffering World” (Edge: *August 2015*)
- Ascension Presents: “Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen” (youtube.com)

LIFE NIGHT: **WHEN IT'S DARK**

GATHER

Welcome and Opening Prayer (15 min)

For those directly affected by the crisis, create a comfortable and inviting environment with dim lights. As teens enter, pass out an unlit candle and invite them to take a seat and make themselves comfortable. Once gathered, light one candle and have the teens light each others candles as the youth minister slowly and prayerfully reads Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Introduce the Life Night and discuss the crisis. Encourage the teens to be aware of how they are feeling, emotionally and physically. Let them know that this is a time for prayer and processing, and that the priest, youth minister, and Core Members are there for them. While the candles are still lit, have the music minister sing a verse of *It Is Well*, see *Media Suggestions*, or another suitable song.

For those not directly affected by the crisis, create a comfortable and inviting environment with dim lights and unlit candles at the front of the main meeting space. Instruct the teens to pick up a candle and then sit for the opening prayer. The youth minister then discusses the crisis and how it has impacted the community, and says an opening prayer. Use the following:

“Lord God, we come to you in the wake of a crisis. Our hearts are conflicted, and we need your healing presence to be with us now. We ask that you send your love, comfort, and peace into the lives of those directly affected. In this time of need, please help us understand. Help us be there for those in need and be present to our own emotional process during this difficult time. You, Lord, are kind and merciful. While we do not know why these things have happened, we know that you continue to love and guide us during times of triumph and crisis. Our Lady of Sorrows, Mother Mary, you have been given to us by your Son, to be the loving mother we need

when our hearts are broken. Pray for us and for those who are in great mourning. Amen.”

PROCLAIM

“When It’s Dark” Teaching (15 min)

The Proclaim Details can be found on pages 10 to 15.

BREAK

Small Group Discussion (15 min)

Divide the teens into small groups with one to two Core Members to lead each small group. Have the Core Member(s) begin with a prayer and then use the following questions to lead a small group discussion:

- What was your initial response or reaction to **“insert crisis”**?
- Did this crisis have a direct or indirect affect on you? How so?
- How are you doing now? How are you coping or what are you doing to cope?
- In your own words, why do you think God allows evil to exist? Is the reality of evil something that you struggle with? Why? Why not?
- What do you see when you look at Our Lady of Sorrows?
- What gives you hope in times of crisis?

Small Group Prayer (10 min)

As a small group, make a list of individual people, families, and communities who may have been affected by **“insert crisis.”** Encourage the teens to be specific and list groups of people, such as firefighters and police officers, who are part of the recovery effort. After this list is complete, take time, as a group, to say a prayer for all those on the list.

For those directly affected by the crisis, encourage the teens to insert themselves into the prayer. They can list how they’ve been affected, and ask God for specific things that can help with their healing.



WHEN IT'S DARK

KEY TERMS

Crisis: A time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger.

Evil: The absence of good.

Free Will: The ability to act at one's own discretion.

TEACHING

CRISIS

Take a moment to invite the teens to share their thoughts, feelings, and emotions about the current crisis. Giving them the opportunity to share will allow for an open discussion about the crisis, why evil exists in the world, and how to process it in a healthy way. Even if a teen doesn't share, hearing others echo his or her thoughts and emotions can be beneficial because it normalizes the experience, and can offer opportunities to hear ways that others are coping and finding meaning in the midst of tragedy.

Crisis is defined as a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger. Experiencing a crisis tends to leave a lasting impression on individuals, families, communities, and even a person's or community's faith in God.

Many of us remember exactly where we were when we first heard the news of **“insert the names of the most recent tragedies.”**

Hurricanes, forest fires, tornadoes, drinking and driving accidents, mass shootings, and suicides are tragedies we all, unfortunately, experience.

INDIRECT VS. DIRECT EFFECT

Crisis situations affect us in one of two ways; directly or indirectly. Crisis situations that have a direct effect happen to those who are present to the crisis, who experience the situation first hand. Crisis situations that have an indirect effect happen to those who may not have been present at the crisis or even live in the city in which the crisis took place, but still share in the pain that the situation caused.

Direct effect has the biggest impression on those who experience it because they experience the fear, terror, and panic. People who directly experience a crisis situation are exposed to realities they never thought they would ever have to experience. Often times, they seek professional counseling for years after the crisis.

Indirect effect also has an impact on us. We may not have been directly involved, but the reality of tragedy is still difficult to process. We watch on the news and stay updated with the Twitter feeds. We hear the stories of heartbreak and pain from those who were part of the situation. When crisis has an indirect effect on us, we can feel helpless as we watch the event unfold.

Regardless of whether we are directly or indirectly affected by the crisis, our brain has a response to it. While “trauma,” for a lot of people, refers to bodily injuries, a crisis often has a traumatic effect on the brain — it can literally change the way our brain functions. Our brains have little time to process the information about the crisis, and end up storing that information in a quick and ineffective way. This leads to some of the complicated feelings we may be experiencing, and can make it difficult to “go back to normal” after a crisis. It is not uncommon to have bad dreams, intrusive thoughts, and/or an increase in anxiety or depression following a crisis.

OUR RESPONSE

When initially responding to a crisis situation, we experience disbelief, confusion, anger, and sadness. We wonder why the crisis had to happen; for a short period of time, we may even deny that the event actually took place. Furthermore, we may feel somewhat responsible for the crisis, not that we caused the situation, but that we allowed ourselves, or another person, to experience it.

It is best to allow ourselves the freedom to experience these emotions as they come, and to know that it is acceptable and normal to be feeling this way.

A lot of these emotions are connected to a phenomenon known as grief. We can experience grief at many different times in our lives — if we move across the country and have to say goodbye to our friends, if we are in an accident and have to deal with a major physical injury, if a loved one passes away, or if we experience a crisis. There are specific stages that we go through when we're grieving. Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identifies them as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Denial is the stage when we feel disbelief about what just happened. It feels unreal, and we have a hard time believing this could have happened to us, our friends, family, or community. In denial, we sometimes have thoughts like, "This isn't happening; this is just a bad dream." Denial is a way our minds cope with what just happened.

Anger is an important part of the grieving process. It is an emotion that oftentimes masks our true feelings — sadness, fear, confusion. You may be angry at yourself, at the adults in your life, at God Himself. Oftentimes we try to brush our anger under the rug, but in order to overcome the anger, we have to be present to it.

Bargaining can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it is making a bargain or truce with God. "If

you just let them live, I'll never do **"insert bad thing"** again." After a loss or crisis, we may find ourselves thinking, "I'll be a better person if only you let me wake up and have this all have been a bad dream." We may have a lot of "what if" thoughts. This is a stage where we find fault in ourselves, and sometimes bargain with the pain — we'll do anything not to feel this hurt, but the truth is we can't avoid the pain.

Depression is another stage of grief. Sadness, longing, emptiness — these are typical responses to a crisis. It may feel like we need to snap out of it, but we don't. What you have been through is actually depressing — it is hard, sad, unfathomable. It's OK to feel this sadness.

While a period of depression is a normal, and sometimes even a healing response to a loss, this stage can turn into a serious problem known as complicated grief. If your depressive symptoms do not become more manageable, begin to prohibit you from accomplishing daily tasks, and/or include thoughts of self harm or suicide, it could mean that you are experiencing complicated grief, which will not get better with time and requires the help of a professional.

The final stage of grief is acceptance. Acceptance does not mean that one day things will just be OK — it is never OK that terrible things happen in this world. This stage is about accepting the reality of what has happened, and learning to live with it.

During grief, we don't simply move from stage one to stage five. We journey back and forth through the stages. We may feel like once we have passed the denial or anger stage we shouldn't go back to it, but we will continue to journey through the stages until we are fully healed.

For some people affected by a crisis, the process of grief can be more complicated, and their emotions can become overwhelming. If you are finding that your grief is impacting your day to day functioning — unable to complete school

work, disinterest in things you used to love, withdrawing from relationships — it's time to find a professional to talk to.

WHY DOES EVIL EXIST?

The question that is almost always asked in any crisis situation is, "Why?" "Why does God allow this to happen?" or "Why would God do this?" These are valid questions.

God does not desire or will evil. God is good and only creates what is good. Therefore, God is not the creator of evil. Evil is the absence of good. When evil things happen, it is because they lack goodness and lack God. For example, murder is evil because it is the lack of care for the life of another. Stealing is evil because it is the lack of proper respect for what belongs to another.

Summa Theologica Article III, Genesis 1, CCC 309-314, 324

When God created humanity, He gave us the ability to exercise free will, the ability to make decisions for ourselves. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve used their free will to do the one thing God asked them not to do - eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

CCC 390, Genesis 3

Thus, evil entered the world, which is now considered fallen. In this fallen world, there are two kinds of evil; human evil and natural evil. Human or moral evil stems from free will. We do something bad and suffer the consequences. Natural evil occurs from consequences of nature — earthquakes, tornados, floods, hurricanes, and the like.

Matthew 12:35, CCC 396-400

The created world, oceans, skies, plants, and animals do not have free will, but operate according to their design: animals behave according to instinct and natural selection, the seas ebb and flow in keeping with the laws of thermodynamics, and the sun and stars obey the laws of physics. When mankind fell, creation also fell; goodness left and evil entered. The Genesis account explicitly says, "Cursed is the

ground because of you." Saint Paul in the book of Romans confirms, "We know that all of creation is groaning in labor pains..." Creation now operates according to its principles, which sometimes lacks goodness.

Genesis 3:17, Romans 8:22

FALLEN AND REDEEMED

Not only do we live in a fallen world, but we also live in a redeemed world. Jesus came, took on our sin, and died so that we might be redeemed. Through Jesus, divine life and grace are dispensed to all who believe in Him. With this divine life, we can overcome the darkness.

Romans 8:20-23, Ephesians 1:7, CCC 1708

Look at the examples of light and love that are shining through this crisis.

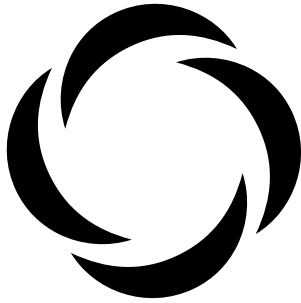
Share stories and photos of people helping their neighbors.

Jesus' mother, and our mother, Mary, also knows sorrow. She experienced great suffering in her earthly life. Soon after the birth of her Son, she and Joseph fled to a foreign land because the king was murdering all newborn children. On the way home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, she lost her Son, only to find Him back at the Temple in Jerusalem. She watched her Son carry His cross, bleeding and broken. She watched Him fall three times. She watched Him give up His life on the cross and be buried in the tomb. Mary knows great sorrow and aches as we ache. We can turn to her for comfort and consolation. We can turn to her for help living a redeemed life in a fallen world.

Matthew 2:13, Luke 2:43-45, John 19:25, John 19:40-42

No matter how dark it gets, the love of God in our hearts will always outshine the darkness of evil. We can turn to Jesus, Mary, and the Church for support and consolation. Light can and will overcome when it's dark.

1 Corinthians 15:57



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