



Christian Leadership:

Pastor David

1. What makes the relationship between Pastor David and Jason unique? Have you ever had a pastor or Christian leader that you really connected with?
2. When Jason approaches the home of Pastor David, he hears yelling inside. Does this change the way you view the Pastor? Was this scene realistic?
3. Pastor David said he forgot what the purpose of the church was. How often do you and your congregation talk about your purpose?
4. What do you think the purpose of the church is?
5. What is the significance of Pastor David sitting down with the church on Sunday morning to apologize?
6. Do you think Pastor David had a significant transformation in the film? What was it?
7. Spend some time discussing the challenges that our Christian leaders face. Finish by praying specifically for your Pastor and other leaders that are guiding you. Remember to pray for your leaders throughout the week.

Study Verse

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. -Romans 3:23

If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. -1 John 1:6-7

We all have our secrets. Pastor David confessed that he wasn't treating his family the way he should. It is important for Christian leaders to be authentic. People need to see that real people can be Christians too. It is not easy and we will inevitably make mistakes, however it is nice to know you don't have to pretend to be perfect. We are all imperfect and there is a certain freedom in that. Jason says that the church is made up of people with problems. We need to embrace that and use that as a source of strength instead of allowing it to inhibit us.

Some May Never Find Their Purpose:

Jason's Dad

1. We never actually met Jason's dad, but what did you learn about him in the film?
2. How did he end up causing his own death?
3. Why wouldn't he veer from his own plan even when it seemed that God Himself was trying to guide him?
4. He was so stubborn that he actually missed out on what his purpose was. What did he end up sacrificing in order to maintain his path?
5. How could his dad have lived his life differently in a way that brought honor to God?
6. Jason's dad modeled some bad habits and poor decision-making. How did we see Jason making the same mistakes in the film?
7. What are the things that you are holding on to? What dreams do you need to let go of or alter?

Study Verse

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

-Jeremiah 29:11

Often when we hold so tightly to a dream, we totally miss God's plan for our lives. If we will only let go, God will show us what His purpose is in our lives, and usually it is something far better than anything we could have planned for ourselves. We need to search our hearts to make sure that we are not making decisions out of a need for safety and security. We need to let God work in our lives and that might not always be the easy thing to do. Jason talks about joining God in what he is doing



The River Within

• Discussion Guide •

Becoming Stagnant: *Layla's Story*



1. Layla talks about her fear of settling "like most people do." What is she referring to?
2. Do you ever have similar fears in your own life?
3. What are the dangers of allowing those fears to control you?
4. How did Layla's fear of becoming stagnant impact her relationships with Michael and with Jason?
5. How did it make you feel when Michael decided to forgive her and move forward with their engagement? What does this teach us about God's love for us?
6. Share with the group a time when your relationship with God became stagnant. What did you do to revive your love for him?
7. Have you ever become stagnant in your relationships with other people?

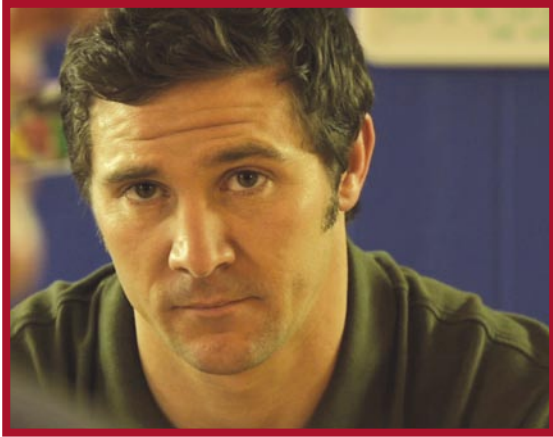
Study Verse

For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

-1 Timothy 1:7

God promises that if we follow Him, He will take care of us. Our lives will always be full if we commit ourselves to following Him. He loves us unconditionally and desires that we return that love. Just as we can become stagnant in our relationships with people, we can become stagnant in our love for God. Implement spontaneity in your walk with God to keep things interesting and fun. Take a prayer walk around your neighborhood or download a new Christian album. Ask your friends and family how they connect with God and see what things you can try.





Finding our Purpose: Jason's Transformation

1. When Pastor David tries to recruit Jason to work with the youth group, why is he initially hesitant?
2. Do you think Jason truly thought he might end up with Layla? Why did he engage in behavior to lead her to believe that he was interested?
3. What are the things that boost your confidence but are probably not glorifying to God.
4. Why is it important for Jason to let Layla know he is not going to end up with her? What does he mean by "I put away childish things?"
5. Paul tells Jason that he should do something that makes him "come alive" like he does when he's fighting for the youth. Write down 5 things that make you "come alive." What do you lose track of time doing?

Study Verse

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. -1 Peter 4:10

God created each one of our lives for a purpose. He planted a unique combination of skills, personality, and demeanor within in you for you to use to His glory and to further His Kingdom. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to figure out what that purpose is; even if it seems evident to those around you (just as Jason's purpose became evident to Paul before Jason realized what it was). But if we take our talents, and use them to serve those around us, we will be joining God in His work, and in so doing, we will discover our true reason for being.

A Detour in the Plans: The Story of Paul

1. Why was it so difficult for Paul to give up his plans to go to the acting conservatory?
2. Paul says, "me and the church don't mix." At what point in the story did this change, and why?
3. How does Paul become a pivotal figure in Jason's life? What can we learn from Paul's ability to confront Jason?
4. Paul made a series of bad choices. Do you think that these prevented him from his true purpose?
5. Do you think that teaching drama to children is a way of Paul settling and giving up his dreams and purpose?
6. Has there ever been a time when you did not want to take responsibility for something because it seemed like you would have to sacrifice what you really wanted? How did it turn out?
7. Jason tells Paul that he could use God in his life. Do you find it difficult to tell non-believers how they can benefit from God in their lives? Brainstorm as a group ways to make that conversation comfortable.

Study Verse

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 8:38-39

God's plan for our lives remains the same. We will inevitably make poor decisions and make our lives more difficult than God wants. However there is nothing we can do to escape God's love and the ability he has to use us.



More than Meets the Eye: The Story of Marcus



1. What was your first impression of Marcus? When did it change?
2. The kids in the youth group thought he was stuck up. Why would they make this assumption?
3. Have you ever made the assumption that someone was mean, weird, or stuck up and then come to find there was more to the story?
4. Why do we make these assumptions about people and how can we prevent it in the future?
5. Why did Marcus look up to Jason? What kind of difference did he make in his life?
6. Marcus said that he hadn't been hugged in 9 years. Do you think something like that could be possible in your own church? What should you do to prevent that from ever becoming a reality?
7. Have you and your church body discussed the issue of depression and cutting?
8. Marcus loses the church scholarship and is shunned by his own father for his behavior. Does this happen in churches? Who are the most marginalized? Do you agree with Jason when he says that they need the church the most?

Study Verse

If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? -Matthew 18:12

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all will know that you are my disciples. -John 13:34-35

It is so important that we try to get to know each and every person in our congregation. Even if someone seems a little odd or stuck up, we need to try to find out what their story is. It is impossible to hate someone once you know their story. Try to find out what makes each person unique and valuable. Pay attention to people who sit alone, and don't assume that it's because they like to be alone. One purpose of the church is to support one another. God is our shepherd and when even one of the sheep is lost, he leaves the whole flock to care for the one lost sheep. Depression and self-injury are very prevalent among today's youth. We must be educated and aware about these types of issues that young people are faced with. In America, 18 million people struggle with depression (The National Institute of Mental Health). Untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide, and suicide is the third leading cause of death in the United States (NIMH).

The following resources will guide you if you are open to addressing this issue in your congregation:

www.twloha.com www.selfinjury.com www.teenchallengeusa.com

***If you face an emergency or you are worried that someone you know may be at risk for suicide please call 911, or call and talk to someone at 1-800-SUICIDE.