

IMAGO DEI



MOUNTAIN MADNESS

• • • 2026 • • •

Small Group Guide



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Theme Explanation

Theme:

Imago Dei

Main Scripture Verse:

“By the grace of God, I am what I am.” 1 Corinthians 15:10

Theme Development:

You are created in the image and likeness of God and by His grace alone will you fully understand who you are. God’s grace towards you is not in vain; He has called you by name to be His disciple, and to share His love with others.

Small Group Times & Supplies

Small group time is a beautiful time to enter into conversations more deeply with the youth. We have provided everything you need to run a good small group – but to make it fantastic, the only thing it needs is YOU! As you invest time into these young people, they will grow in trust and confidence to open up and have fruitful discussions that will bring the events of the weekend to it’s fullness. We also have a few pro tips on the next page.

Friday Night | 9:00PM

Small Group Time #1

“You Are Good”

Questions Provided

Saturday Morning | 11:05AM

Small Group Time #2

“You are Loved”

Questions Provided

Saturday Evening | 9:30PM

Small Group Time #3

“You Are Changed”

Questions Provided

Follow-Up Session | After Retreat

Small Group Follow-Up

“You Are Sent”

*For use on the drive home, or at a youth group session after the weekend!

Icebreaker Questions:

Use the Icebreaker “Would You Rather” game at the beginning of each small group as needed to get discussions started! Some are more serious in nature, but most are designed just to get to know one another – so have fun with them!



Tips to Lead a Small Group

1. Start your group with a prayer.
2. Don't feel bound to the questions provided. The goal of a small group is to help them process what they are going through and to help form community. The questions are only to help spur on conversation to this end. You don't need to get to them all.
3. Have everyone sit on the same eye level.
4. Don't dominate the group by talking the whole time. They just heard a long talk. Small group is not Talk #2.
5. Don't fear silence.
6. Don't fear your own discomfort. Try your best to be natural. Prioritize getting to know the young people in your group and how God is working in their lives.
7. Small groups are for personal sharing ("I...") not just theological reflection or preaching ("you...") ...though some theological reflection and preaching is fine. Try to keep it personal without laying down hard and fast rules about it.
8. Make sure they feel safe to be themselves. Make it clear that no negative humor is allowed. What is said in the group stays in the group – it isn't to become gossip.
9. While this isn't time for you to preach – you do need to steer the discussion in the following ways:
 - a. Try to keep it personal, and set the stage yourself through personal sharing (though not necessarily first).
 - b. Keep them generally on topic.
 - c. Keep one teen from dominating too much.
 - d. Encourage those who need it to share (without pushing).
 - e. Gently teach if a teen is in error about a Church teaching.
10. Recognize the difference between questioning and pouring out disbelief. The latter usually can't be solved through endless answers. It usually has a faith/trust issue at its core. Don't get caught up in providing endless answers if this is the case. Tell the person you can talk more with teen one on one after the group.
11. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't make it up. Tell them you'll find out and reconnect later!

Remember, your small group time is a great time to build intentional relationships with your teens. You don't have to know everything – Just do your best to love them as Jesus does!

You Are Good

Time:

25 minutes. (Friday night during Reconciliation).

Theme Connection::

CREATED - In His Image.

Leader Objective:

To help middle schoolers reflect on what they heard during the opening keynote and the opportunity for Reconciliation, and to begin the weekend rooted in the truth that they are created intentionally by God, made in His image and likeness, and called into a real relationship with Him. This first small group is not meant to resolve everything. The goal is to create a safe space, invite honesty, and gently open hearts to God's mercy and grace as the weekend begins.

Key Truth for Leaders

God creates each person intentionally and out of love, in His own image and likeness. Every teen in your group is indispensable to Him and possesses an unchanging dignity as a son or daughter of God. Sin wounds our relationship with God, but it does not erase who we are or God's desire for us. Through His grace—especially in the sacraments—God continually invites us into deeper communion with Himself and restores us to become more fully who we were created to be.

Opening Prayer: (1-2 minutes)

Invite the group to quiet themselves.

Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us here tonight. Thank you for creating each of us with love and purpose. As we talk together, help us to be honest, to listen well, and to know how deeply you love us. Open our hearts to your mercy and grace. Amen.

Discussion Questions: (12-15 minutes)

Choose questions based on your group's comfort level and time. You do not need to ask every question.

1. What stood out to you from Tanner's talk tonight?
2. As we begin this weekend, how would you describe your relationship with God right now?
3. We heard that we are created in God's image and likeness. What do you think that means?
4. How does knowing you were created intentionally by God affect how you see yourself?
5. What does it mean to you that God cared so much for you that He gave His life for you?
6. Is there anything that makes it hard for you to believe that God loves you or wants a relationship with you?

Leader Tip: Middle schoolers may struggle to articulate their thoughts. Affirm their responses and avoid correcting language unless it's clearly necessary. Your presence and attentiveness matter more than perfect answers.



Scripture Reflection: (5-7 minutes)

Invite one teen (or the leader) to read the passage slowly.

Scripture: *1 John 3:1-3*

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.”

Reflection Prompts:

- What words or phrases stand out to you from this reading?
- What does it mean to be called a child of God right now?
- How does this Scripture connect to what we heard tonight about being created in God’s image?

Allow a brief moment of silence after the reading.

Invitation to Reconciliation: (2-3 minutes)

Gently remind the teens:

- God’s mercy is not something we earn; it is a gift freely given.
- Reconciliation restores our relationship with God and strengthens us to become more like Him.

God does not want part of your heart—He wants all of you, because He loves you completely. When we bring our sins and weaknesses to Him, He does not turn us away. He restores us and draws us closer to Himself.

Encourage them to go to confession and receive God’s mercy and love.

Closing Prayer (1-2 minutes)

God, thank you for creating us good and loving us as your sons and daughters. Help us trust you more deeply this weekend. Give us the courage to receive your mercy and the grace you want to give us. We place the rest of this weekend in your hands. Amen.

Transition:

Small group time continues alongside Reconciliation. Groups are dismissed back to lodges.

You Are Loved

Time:

25 minutes (Saturday morning, following Mass).

Theme Connection:

LOVED - In His Image.

Leader Objective:

To help middle schoolers internalize the truth that they are deeply and personally loved by God, and that this love invites a real response. God's love is not distant or abstract—it is revealed fully in Jesus Christ and offered to us through prayer, the sacraments, and daily relationship with Him.

Key Truth for Leaders:

God's love is faithful, personal, and freely given. He loves first and never withdraws His love from His children. Nothing we do can earn or diminish this love.

At the same time, God's love is not passive. He desires communion with us and calls us to respond. By His grace, He draws us into deeper relationship and forms our hearts to love as He loves.

Opening Prayer: (1-2 minutes)

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us before we ever loved you. Thank you for calling us your sons and daughters. Help us understand your love more deeply and respond with open hearts. Amen.

Discussion Questions: (10-12 minutes)

1. What stood out to you from Tanner's talk this morning?
2. When you hear the phrase "God loves you," what thoughts or feelings come to mind?
3. How do you think God shows His love for you personally?
4. Are there things that ever make it hard for you to believe that God really loves you?
5. How is God's love different from the kind of love we often see in the world (on social media, TV, or among friends)?



Scripture Reflection: (6–8 minutes)

Invite one teen (or the leader) to read the passage slowly.

Scripture: *Romans 5:6–11*

“For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his Blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life. Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Reflection Prompts:

- When does God choose to love us, according to this passage?
- What does this reading reveal about the cost of God’s love?
- What words or phrases stand out to you?
- How does this connect to what we experienced together at Mass?

Allow a brief moment of silence after the reading.

Responding to God’s Love: (4–5 minutes)

God’s love is a gift, and every gift invites a response. We respond to God’s love by knowing, loving, and serving Him.

Invite discussion:

- What is one simple way you could spend time with God this week?
- Is there a moment in your day where prayer could fit naturally?

Encourage realistic, concrete resolutions and ideas.

Closing Prayer: (2–3 minutes)

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us completely and giving your life for us. Help us trust your love more deeply and respond with our own love. Teach us how to pray, how to listen, and how to remain close to you. Amen.

Transition:

Groups are dismissed to lunch according to the schedule.

You Are Changed

Time:

25 minutes (Saturday afternoon).

Theme Connection:

CHANGED - In His Image.

Leader Objective:

To help middle schoolers understand that encountering Jesus truly changes us. God's grace is not only about forgiveness, but transformation. When we cooperate with His grace, He gradually shapes our hearts, our choices, and our lives so that we may become more like Him.

Key Truth for Leaders:

God's grace is real and effective. Through baptism and the ongoing life of prayer and the sacraments, God works within us to heal, strengthen, and transform our hearts. Conversion is not a single moment, but a lifelong response to God's grace.

God never forces change. He invites our cooperation, and as we freely say yes to Him—often in small, ordinary ways—He faithfully continues the work He has begun in us.

Opening Prayer: (1-2 minutes)

Heavenly Father, thank you for meeting us where we are. Help us to see how you are working in our lives and give us the courage to trust you as you transform us. Amen.

Discussion Questions: (10-12 minutes)

1. What stood out to you from the talk this afternoon?
2. When you hear the word "change," what comes to mind?
3. Why do you think God wants to change us or help us grow?
4. What makes change difficult?
5. How is letting God change us different from trying on our own?



Scripture Reflection: (6–8 minutes)

Invite one teen (or the leader) to read the passage slowly.

Scripture: *Ezekiel 36:26–28*

“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, removing from your flesh the heart of stone and giving you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your ancestors; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

Reflection Prompts:

- What does God promise to do in this passage?
- What kind of change is He describing?
- What does it mean to receive a new heart?
- How is this different from trying to change ourselves on our own?

Allow a brief moment of silence after the reading.

Responding to God’s Work: (4–5 minutes)

God does not ask us to change by ourselves. He gives us His grace and walks with us every step of the way.

Invite discussion:

- Where might God be inviting you to grow right now?
- What is one small way you could say yes to Him this weekend?

Encourage realistic but meaningful responses, such as examining conscience honestly, returning to prayer after falling away, choosing integrity when it is difficult, seeking the sacraments more intentionally, or surrendering a specific habit, attitude, or area of life to God.

Closing Prayer: (2–3 minutes)

God, thank you for being faithful even when we are not. Help us trust your grace and cooperate with the work you are doing within us. Amen.

Transition:

Groups are dismissed according to the schedule.

You Are Sent

Time:

Optional Session (for bus ride home or parish follow-up).

Theme Connection:

SENT - In His Image.

Leader Objective:

To help middle schoolers reflect on how their encounter with Christ continues beyond Mountain Madness. Being sent does not require having all the answers—it means returning to daily life with a desire to live differently because of what God has begun.

This optional session is designed to help teens connect the fruits of the weekend to their everyday lives at home, school, and in their parish community.

Key Truth for Leaders:

God's grace is real and effective. Through baptism and the ongoing life of prayer and the sacraments, God works within us to heal, strengthen, and transform our hearts. Conversion is not a single moment, but a lifelong response to God's grace.

God never forces change. He invites our cooperation, and as we freely say yes to Him—often in small, ordinary ways—He faithfully continues the work He has begun in us.

Opening Prayer: (1-2 minutes)

Invite the group to quiet themselves.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all that you have done in our hearts this weekend. As we reflect together, help us see how you are calling us to live differently when we return home. Give us the courage to follow you and to share your love with others. Amen.

Discussion Questions: (10-12 minutes)

Choose questions based on your group's comfort level and time. You do not need to ask every question.

1. What has stood out to you most from this weekend?
2. How has your understanding of God or yourself changed?
3. When you hear the word "mission," what do you think it means?
4. Where do you think God is sending you right now (school, family, friendships, activities)?
5. What might it look like to live differently because of what you experienced this weekend?

Leader Tip: Help teens see mission as realistic and personal. Avoid language that makes mission feel overwhelming or distant.



Scripture Reflection: (6-8 minutes)

Invite one teen (or the leader) to read the passage slowly.

Scripture: *Matthew 28:18-20*

“Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’”

Reflection Prompts:

- What does Jesus ask His disciples to do in this passage?
- What promise does He make to them?
- How does knowing that Jesus is always with us change how we live our faith?
- How does this connect to what we’ve experienced together this weekend?

Allow a brief moment of silence after the reading.

Living the Mission: (4-5 minutes)

Help teens see that mission begins now, not later.

Invite discussion:

- What is one concrete way you can live your faith when you go home?
- Who is one person you can pray for or be more intentional with this week?

Encourage simple, realistic commitments.

Closing Prayer: (2-3 minutes)

Lord Jesus, thank you for walking with us this weekend. As we return home, help us carry your love into our families, schools, and friendships. Give us the strength to live as your disciples and the courage to follow you wherever you send us. We trust you and place our lives in your hands. Amen.