THE FINAL BATTLE

The Passion and Death of Jesus

GOAL

The goal of this session is for middle school youth to recognize the significance and gravity of Jesus' sacrifice and see in it how much God loves them.

Scripture

Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 53, Mark 14:53-64, Luke 22:52-53, John 10:10, John 15:13, Romans 5:6-8, Ephesians 5:2, Philippians 2:5-11, Galatians 2:20

Catechism

CCC 512-560, 585-623

Resources

Handouts
"Scriptural Stations of the Cross" handout

"The Final Battle" Parent Letter

Media
Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, "Why Stations of the Cross?" (youtube.com)

"Stations of the Cross" (lifeteen.com)

GATHER

Youth work in teams to rescue their teammates, bringing them safely across a dangerous path. Thematically, the game corresponds to Jesus as our Savior who shields us from danger and saves us from death.

PROCLAIM

The following are the main teaching points of the Proclaim:

- Jesus' Passion began with his arrest, suffering at the hands of the authorities, and his Crucifixion.
- Jesus took on the punishment for our sins, redeeming and saving us from an eternity separated from God.
- Jesus accepted all of the pain and suffering of death for our sake. Through his Passion and Death, God proves his great love for us and the lengths he would go to bring us back to him.

BREAK

Youth pray through the Scriptural Stations of the Cross as a way to follow in Jesus' footsteps during the Passion.

SEND

Youth reflect on the empty tomb as the final note of the Passion and take a moment in their small group to process the session together.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Reflect on the Stations of the Cross at home. Meditate on the one that stands out to you the most.

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PREP

Collect all materials needed for the Edge Night.

The Break for this session is intended to be done as a walk around your parish grounds. Map the path you plan to walk ahead of time, including the 14 stops, one for each station. If the weather does not permit you to go outside, compile a slideshow of images representing each station to project during the activity in the main meeting space. The activity follows the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. If your parish has icons of these stations inside the church or outdoors, consider praying this prayer there. Alternatively, consider using the "Way of the Cross" pamphlets your parish uses during Lent.

The next Edge Night in this series, "Saved the Day," includes a time of Eucharistic Adoration. Coordinate final details with your parish priest and music minister.

SETUP

Follow the Environment suggestions for the series.

Create a "chasm" down the center of your main meeting space. Use tape to outline the left and right boundaries of a "chasm" 15 feet wide. Mark the start and finish lines perpendicular to the chasm sides about 50 feet apart. If your space allows, consider making the sides of the chasm slightly zig-zag, rather than straight.

Test all audio-visual elements of the Edge Night.

Project the environment image and play the "ES - Unsuspecting Hero" Spotify playlist as the youth enter.

COMING SOON

The next Edge Night in this series, "Saved the Day," includes a time of Eucharistic Adoration. Coordinate final details with your parish priest and music minister.

SUPPLIES

Prepare the following supplies:

Gather
- ☐ Gaff or masking tape
- ☐ Dodgeballs
- ☐ Blindfolds

Proclaim
- ☐ Image of Jesus on the Cross

Break
- ☐ Portable speaker system
- ☐ "Scriptural Stations of the Cross" handout, one per person
- ☐ Processional Cross (optional)

Send
- ☐ Image of the empty tomb

NOTES

CORE ASSIGNMENTS AND NOTES

This youth minister worksheet provides writing space to detail core member assignments and notes specific to running this Edge Night. Write the names of core members assigned to the roles listed.

Highlights:

- Core members not assigned to a role during the Break should be dispersed among the crowd of youth, providing a prayerful example and quiet redirection to distracted youth when necessary.

Announcements: The following session, "Saved the Day," includes Eucharistic Adoration.

Setup: _____

_____

Opening Prayer: _____

Gather – The Harrowing of Sheol

- Leader: _____

Proclaim – The Final Battle: _____

Break – Stations of the Cross

- Leader: _____
- Scripture Reader: _____
- Reflection Reader: _____

Send – The Fifteenth Station

- Leader: _____

Weekly Challenge: _____

Parking Lot: _____

NOTES

THE FINAL BATTLE

The Passion and Death of Jesus

GATHER

Introduction

Welcome the youth and introduce those who are there for the first time. Invite the preselected core member to begin in prayer. Give a brief overview of the Edge Night topic, using the following as an example:

The most epic part of superhero stories is when they finally face their nemesis. The head-to-head battle that ensues is momentous: Will good triumph over evil? In these fights, we often see the hero pushed to their limits, down and out, with no strength left. It appears for a moment that the villain has won. This is how the disciples and followers of Jesus saw his Death — the hero he was supposed to be was overcome by death. However, Jesus' Death was not his defeat, and it ultimately laid the path for our salvation and freedom.

The Harrowing of Sheol (20 min)

Divide the youth into three equal teams. Each team must protect three blindfolded members as they walk through a chasm while the other two teams try to hit the blindfolded members with dodgeballs. If a blindfolded player is hit by a dodgeball, they must return to the start line with at least one teammate.

The team members who are not blindfolded may freely deflect dodgeballs with their hands and arms. If they are hit in the torso or legs, they must stop where they are for three seconds before moving again, counting the seconds out loud. They may also throw the dodgeballs back at the throwing teams.

If a player on a throwing team is hit, they must sit down and stop throwing dodgeballs for five seconds, counting the seconds out loud. Players may retrieve dodgeballs, but they cannot throw them until they are standing on their side of the chasm again.

Place the two throwing teams on either side of the chasm. Line up the dodgeballs along the tape lines. Provide three blindfolds or bandanas to the first team passing through the chasm.

On "go," begin a timer. Stop the timer when the crossing team gets all of its members from the start to the finish. Play three rounds so that each team gets the chance to pass through the chasm. The team with the shortest time wins!

Suggestion

Play thrilling cinematic music during the game.

Step It Up

Place stacks of cardboard boxes or tables on their side to create the walls of the chasm. Use stage platforms to elevate the throwing teams.

Alternate Gather

For smaller groups, consider playing Save the Civilians. Divide into two groups. Select one person from a team to be the first "hero." The rest of that team, the "hostages," stand in a large circle in hula hoops, as spread out as your space allows. The hero stands in the center of the hostages within an eight-foot diameter circle with dodgeballs. The hero's job is to toss dodgeballs to the hostages without them being deflected by the opposing team of "villains" standing between the hero and the hostages. Villains may not throw dodgeballs and should be discouraged from "puppy guarding" the hostages. If a hostage catches a dodgeball, they may leave their hula hoop and join the hero, tossing dodgeballs to their other teammates. Time two-minute rounds, swapping the two teams and the starting hero between each round.

PROCLAIM

"The Final Battle" Teaching (10 min)

Victory?

Share with the youth a one-to-two minute clip of your favorite (appropriate) final battle scene from a movie. This clip should show the heroic actions of one of the main characters. Share with the youth why you like this clip. Write your thoughts here:

_____

_____

_____

- Most epic movies have a character who sacrifices something for the good of others.
- This storyline is so popular because it speaks to a deep reality that we are made for something great, and we are made by someone great.
- But for us as Christians, this type of heroic epic battle and courageous character is not something that is reserved only for movies or books; it is our reality.
- Our Savior, Jesus, laid down his life to save us. The events of Jesus' Passion detail just how much he went through to bring about our salvation.
- This culmination of what Jesus came to accomplish began with his arrest by the Jewish authorities. In the middle of the night, they came and arrested him in secret and put him on trial late into the night. **(Mark 14:53-64, Luke 22:52-53)**
- Even though there was no evidence to convict Jesus, they brought him to Pilate, the Roman authority in Jerusalem, who was the only one with the power to put Jesus to death.
- Pilate attempted to appease the crowd by having Jesus publicly beaten, but they insisted on his Crucifixion.
- If Jesus' followers believed he was truly the Messiah, this is not how they thought things would go. How could Jesus save them if he were tortured and died a criminal's death?
- Jesus' Passion does save us, just not in the way his followers thought it would.

Going Deeper

Read and discuss the following quote. "Jesus' violent Death was not the result of change in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan." Share with the youth the connection between Jesus and the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament, and how his blood is now the blood of the New Covenant. God had a plan from the very beginning to bring us back to him. **(CCC 599)**

Saving Grace

- From the beginning of time, after the fall of Adam and Eve, God promised to save us from our sin. **(Genesis 3:15)**
- The entire Old Testament outlines how God formed a people to be his own, but they kept on sinning and breaking their covenants with God. Finally, God sent his own Son to fulfill his promises to his people to set them free from sin. **(CCC 602)**
- We could not redeem ourselves, as history had shown time and again. But only by the power and grace of God could our salvation be accomplished. By his Passion and Death, Jesus took on all the consequences of sin and all the consequences of the broken covenants and overcame them all.
- Jesus' Death "restores [us] to communion with God by reconciling [us] to God through the 'blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" **(CCC 613)**
- God shows us that his plan was a plan of love – a love that would go to any end, even death, to save us.
- This ultimate sacrifice would be more understandable if, like in our hero's story, we were innocent bystanders captured by the evil villain. However, in the case of sin, we turn our backs on God, rejecting his goodness and willingly submit ourselves to lesser things. Even then, God does not reject us.

Project and read **Romans 5:6-8**.

- God did not wait for us to "get it right" to save us. He suffered greatly so that we might be saved even while we were still separated from him. Through Jesus' sacrifice, he brought us back to him.
- We do not have to do anything to earn God's love or to earn this gift of salvation; it is freely given to all of us.

He Saved You

- Jesus suffered and died for all of humanity, but that also means that he did this all specifically for you. Jesus freely gave his life for you because he loves you. Jesus freely gave his life for you so you could experience new life now and for eternity. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." **(John 15:13)**
- Jesus knows your struggles, sufferings, and sins, and he loves you and died for you to set you free. He wants you to know him, to love him, and to follow him, for in him is the fullness of life. **(John 10:10)**
- Jesus "knew and loved us all when he offered his life." **(CCC 616, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2)**
- He knew you, and he loved you, when he died on the cross. In his death, he shows you the lengths he is willing to go to for you.

End the Proclaim by projecting an image of Jesus on the Cross.

BREAK

Stations of the Cross (35 min)

Bring the youth outside to the first stop on your preplanned path. Introduce the Stations of the Cross, using the following as an example:

The Stations of the Cross is a prayer that commemorates the Passion of Jesus and the painful path he walked to the Cross. Praying the Stations of the Cross helps us remember the weight of Jesus' sacrifice, allowing us to reflect on the actions leading up to his Death and challenging us to see the Passion as an act of love.

Pass out a copy of the "Scriptural Stations of the Cross" to each youth. Invite them to read along and respond at the appropriate times.

Suggestion

Consider putting on a "Living Stations" by assigning one or two stations to each small group. With their small group members, they create a tableau image of the station for others to look at while the meditation is read aloud.

Step It Up

Place a bowl of two-inch stones at each stop along your path. After each station is prayed, have the youth pick up one rock to place in a bag that they carry, signifying the weight Jesus carried on the road to Calvary.

SEND

The Fifteenth Station (10 min)

Gather back in the main meeting space, and invite the youth to sit down. Invite them to take a quiet moment to reflect on what they just experienced in the Stations of the Cross.

After a few moments, walk them through the next reflection, using the following as an example:

The week that began with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem ended with his being laid in the tomb. However, that is not the end of the story. Jesus did not remain in the grave.

Project an image of the empty tomb.

We will expand more on this in the next session, but we can still look ahead and remember that Jesus is victorious over death. Just as it was not the last word for him, it is not the last word for us either. The final word of this great battle is one of love that conquers the grave — Jesus' infinite love for you.

Invite the youth to gather in their small groups to process the session. Consider using the following questions to prompt discussion:

- What stood out to you the most from the Stations of the Cross?
- What feelings did you experience as we prayed through them?
- What do you want to remember the most from this experience?

Step It Up

While the youth are outside the main meeting space for the Break, set up an "empty tomb" with large fake rocks, greenery, and loose white fabric to represent the burial garments.

Weekly Challenge

Invite the preselected core members to present the Weekly Challenge and Closing Prayer.

Reflect on the Stations of the Cross at home. Meditate on the one that stands out to you the most.

Dismiss the core members preassigned to parking lot safety.

Make announcements related to your program.

NOTES

NOTES

SCRIPTURAL STATIONS OF THE CROSS

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: God of power and mercy, in love, you sent your Son that we might be cleansed of sin and live with you forever. Bless us as we gather to reflect on his suffering and death that we may learn from his example the way we should go. We ask this through the same Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

FIRST STATION: JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Matthew 26:36-41

Reflection

Jesus is afraid of what will happen. Even in his sorrow, he desires the will of his Father. Lord, grant us your strength and wisdom that we may seek to follow your will in all things.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

SECOND STATION: JESUS, BETRAYED BY JUDAS, IS ARRESTED

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away safely." And when he came, he went up to him at once, and said, "Master!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him.

Mark 14:43-46

Reflection

One of Jesus' closest friends hands him over to the authorities. Judas, who has seen and believed that Jesus is the Messiah, turns away from him. Lord, grant us the courage to live lives that faithfully reflect the Good News you bring.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

THIRD STATION: JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE SANHEDRIN

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

They said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." And they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Luke 22:67-71

Reflection

For the authorities, the one who claims to be the Son of God is an enemy, a heretic, and a danger. Punishment must be exacted — the law demands it. Lord, grant us your sense of true justice that we may always work to bring about the Kingdom that you promised.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

FOURTH STATION: JESUS IS DENIED BY PETER

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Matthew 26:73-75

Reflection

Fear again scares away one of Jesus' closest friends. Peter is not unrepentant; he shows sorrow for his cowardice. Lord, grant us the gift of honesty that we may not fear to speak the truth even when difficult.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

FIFTH STATION: JESUS IS JUDGED BY PILATE

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered. So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Mark 15:1-5, 15

Reflection

Pilate takes the easy way out, trusting the false evidence of the crowd instead of his own beliefs. Lord, grant us good discernment that we may see as you see, not as the world sees.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

SIXTH STATION: JESUS IS SCOURGED AND CROWNED WITH THORNS

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.

John 19:1-3

Reflection

Jesus is crowned as king as a mocking jeer. The head meant for a crown of glory is met with a crown of thorns. Lord, grant us patience in times of suffering that we may offer our lives as a sacrifice of praise.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

SEVENTH STATION: JESUS BEARS THE CROSS

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him." They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own Cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.

John 19:6, 15-17

Reflection

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was praised as a king. Now he leaves as a condemned prisoner, carrying his heavy death sentence on his shoulders. Lord, grant us strength that we may faithfully bear our crosses each day.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

EIGHTH STATION: JESUS IS HELPED BY SIMON OF CYRENE TO CARRY THE CROSS

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his Cross.

Mark 15:20-21

Reflection

What a profound gift of love — to aid Jesus in carrying his Cross, the Cross he bears for us. Lord, grant us willing spirits that we may be your instruments on Earth.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

NINTH STATION: JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

“For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Luke 23:27-28, 31

Reflection

We join the women in mourning. This is a terrible sight to witness, but Jesus turns their mourning to a different cause. Lord, grant us gentle spirits that we may comfort those who mourn.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

TENTH STATION: JESUS IS CRUCIFIED

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Luke 23:33-34

Reflection

From the Cross, Jesus offers words of forgiveness to his executors. Jesus died for them and their sins too. Lord, grant us merciful hearts that we may bring your forgiveness to all.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

ELEVENTH STATION: JESUS PROMISES HIS KINGDOM TO THE GOOD THIEF

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:39-43

Reflection

Though we are deserving of punishment, we trust in your great mercy, Jesus. Forgive us our sins. Lord, grant us perseverance, that we may never stop seeking you.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

TWELFTH STATION: JESUS SPEAKS TO HIS MOTHER AND THE DISCIPLE

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

Standing by the Cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John 19:25-27

Reflection

Mother Mary, lead us closer to Jesus, always. Lord, grant us perseverance that we may be willing to stand by those in need.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

THIRTEENTH STATION: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

Luke 23:44-46

(pause and kneel for a short time)

Reflection

Jesus, in my sin I despair, but in you is my hope. Lord, grant us trust in you that when our time on Earth is ended, our spirits may come to you without delay.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

FOURTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS PLACED IN THE TOMB

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: (genuflect) Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. (stand)

Scripture

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed.

Matthew 27:57-60

Reflection

Jesus, your death has ransomed us. We patiently wait by the tomb for your glory to be revealed. Lord, grant us your compassion that we may always provide for those in need.

All: Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Jesus, our Lord and Savior, may our meditations upon your great love for us continue to draw us closer to you and make us more compassionate and caring toward others. May we learn from your sacrificial example and never hesitate to help our brothers and sisters in need. Thank you, Jesus.

All: Amen.

Adapted from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (usccb.org).