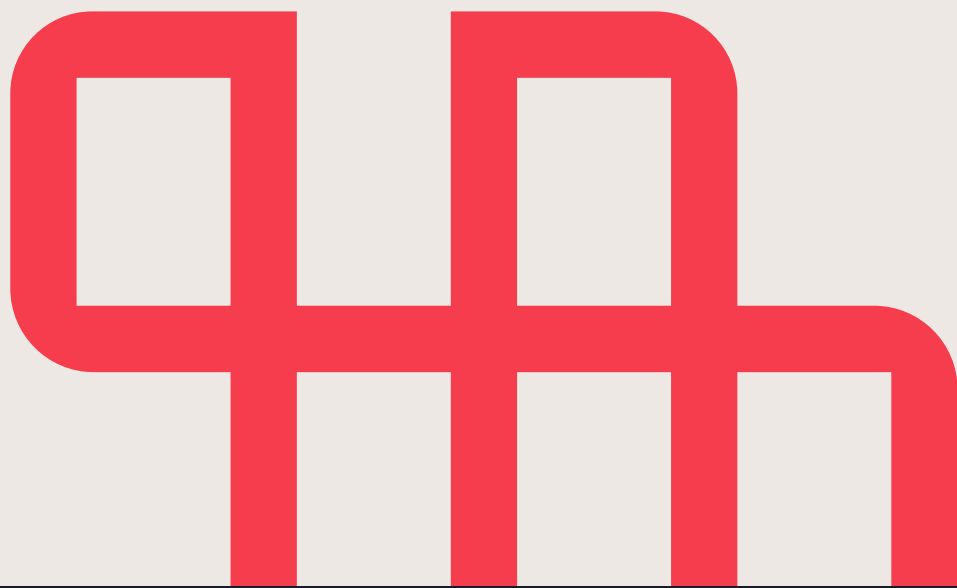




# A different kind of curriculum

LEADER GUIDE



# What is Holy Disruptions?

These lessons use Holy Disruptions, a method that educates teenagers and youth workers as they engage in theological reflection and spiritual practice. The Holy Disruptions process produces reflective action that youth workers can use in any experience of disorientation. Disorientating experiences are those everyday occurrences that happen in our lives and disrupt the regular flow of life. In moments of disorientation, we are most receptive to experiencing change and growth.

We often find that students are relegated to be passive consumers of faith and theology in ministry settings. At Ministry Leadership Center, we strongly believe that all youth are theologians and belong at the center of tough, life-changing dialogue around faith, relationships, and life. By placing teenagers and adult leaders in the driver's seat together, we equip them to think differently about the world as they experience it and to provoke a sense of awe and wonder.

Or, as we call it, a **WOW moment**.

Whether it is the blinding experience of Saul on the road to Damascus, encountering poverty in our city, or news of war abroad, when our experiences upend our expectations, we experience this life-changing disorientation. In this curriculum, we capture those wow moments, ripe with possibility, and help students and leaders theologially parse them out.

From there, we invite students to engage in a three-phase process. Students will dive deep into this moment of disorientation—asking how it connects to their lives, their community, and the story of God.

## Interruption

A disorienting dilemma allows the participant to have a revelatory "WOW" moment where experiences are shared.

## Reflection

A process that allows participants to reflect on the WOW by asking why it impacted them and what others would say about it.

## Holy Disruption

Through reflection and conversation, participants are invited to ask what God says about the dilemma and align with that.

## Your Role

We're going to ask you to read, think, and discuss a theological text with other people. But hear this:

- You don't have to know the Bible well
- You don't need to have all your theology figured out
- All you need to do is read, think, and discuss
- To wonder aloud and ask questions
- To point out things that don't make sense and the ones that spark something inside you

You don't have to be an expert on gun violence. This is hard, painful, and sacred work—and that's exactly why it matters. Your role isn't to make it easy or tidy. Don't shy away from tough questions, raw stories, or uncomfortable language. Instead, hold space, ask real questions, and let youth lead with their own experiences. Trust that the Holy Spirit is present—moving, guiding, and bringing insight—even when the path feels messy.

It's your job to meet youth where they are, as non-anxiously as possible. With emotionally charged topics like gun violence, young people may bring attitudes that feel explosive or emotions that spill out in unexpected ways. When that happens, your steady presence matters most. Stay calm, listen deeply, and welcome the pain being expressed as part of the holy work of healing.

Your openness and honesty show young people that it's okay to sit with hard truths, and that real understanding comes through engaging—not avoiding. Lead with courage, spark meaningful dialogue, and lean into the Spirit. Remember: you are not doing this work alone. We are praying with you and for you as you guide these conversations.

Before leading each lesson, take a moment to center yourself in prayer or reflection, asking for wisdom, sensitivity, and empathy. These conversations may stir strong emotions, so prepare to respond with care. This kind of preparation creates a safe, calm space where youth can reflect honestly, engage deeply, and begin to imagine small steps toward change.

Whenever possible, invite another trusted adult to join you for support—for the youth and for yourself. This topic is one steeped in trauma for you and the participants. Your role is to anticipate and make space for conversation in the midst of trauma. **Keep a list of local mental health resources close at hand, so youth know where to turn if they need additional care.**

# Audience

This curriculum is designed for urban youth who may have had little to no experience talking about faith in a church setting—let alone engaging in conversations about gun violence. That’s okay. Some young people may actually have more experience with this topic than you do, and that’s okay, too. You are not the expert in the room. They bring knowledge, perspective, and lived experience that are essential to the conversation. Because the goal is to engage youth authentically in this process, be mindful that phone usage may interfere with meaningful participation and connection. Setting clear expectations around device use can help foster deeper engagement and presence. Your role is to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and hold space for their voices and experiences.

You will use music, media, stories, and other elements of culture to spark dialogue—even if some of it feels new or uncomfortable within a church or faith-based setting. For example, the final lesson references Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright.” While the lyrics may not align with what is traditionally considered appropriate in a faith-based setting, many young people have embraced this song as a modern protest anthem, much like “We Shall Overcome” during the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this curriculum is not only to talk about gun violence. It is to help young people process emotions, build community, find solidarity within their culture, and explore ways they can contribute to safety and healing in their neighborhoods.

If you are using this curriculum with youth outside of the culture for which it was originally written, that’s okay, too. The key is to approach the material with respect, curiosity, and humility. Acknowledge that the curriculum was written from a particular cultural perspective, and invite reflection on what that means in your context. Use it as a starting point for conversations about violence, grief, and hope within their own communities. Encourage young people to share their own cultural expressions of joy, resilience, and healing, and remain open to learning from their experiences. The goal remains the same: to create a safe space for processing emotions, building connection, and imagining ways to make their neighborhoods safer and more compassionate.

<sup>1</sup>TeachRock. (n.d.). “*Alright*” and the history of Black protest songs. TeachRock. Retrieved November 19, 2025, from <https://teachrock.org/lesson/alright-and-the-history-of-black-protest-songs/>

# Theological Lens

Every lesson begins with an explanation of the theological lens that is used to navigate the subject at hand. It's a brief explanation for you as the leader to help you understand what approach is being used.

## Preparing

Every lesson has a preparation section. This is a space for tips on how to lead the lesson. It includes quick insights for what you should think about and how to set the stage for students. Just a note: each session is described as a week, but this series does not have to be done in a week-to-week setting. However, this content is quite heavy. We do not suggest using it in a retreat format.

## What are disorienting dilemmas?

In a dilemma, students will confront something that challenges the way they view a particular topic. In doing so, it will open them up to reflecting and analyzing their own perspectives, ultimately from a faith point of view. The leader in this is to provide just enough support and just enough challenge to the students amid a disorienting dilemma. Too little or too much of either can push the students back into a hardened dependence on past modes of interpretation, and the movement toward transformation is hindered. In our Holy Disruption Theological Reflection Model, this movement is the interruption.

# Sharing our wow

## THE WOW MOMENT ( 10 MIN )

Once you have finished the activity (disorienting dilemma), you want to help students name one moment that stuck with them. This could be a moment in their experience or a feeling they had during the experience: something that sticks out. We call this their WOW moment; Wow that was hard, Wow that surprised me, Wow I didn't think I could do that, etc. To do this, gather back together. If you have a large group, be sure to break off into small groups and use the questions to reflect together. Some of the WOW moments might even be contradictory to each other, let that tension remain and nurture space that encourages divergent thought.

After youth have shared their WOW, you'll then invite them to articulate/think about their WOW moment in some way, and for others to ask them questions or participate in a process that helps them deepen their understanding of why that moment was significant. The goal of this discussion is to help youth begin to see where their preconceived ideas fall short of explaining their experience away.

In our Holy Disruption Theological Reflection Method, sharing our WOW, reflecting internally and culturally (below) is the reflection movement.

# What would culture say?

## WHAT ( 10 MIN )

There are a lot of voices in our world that contribute to how we see it. Our views are not constructed in a vacuum but in a complicated web of family, friends, institutions, and culture. This section will help students reflect on those influences, helping them to see not just how they contributed to their already held assumptions, but continue to expose ways those may fall short in helping them navigate the topic at hand.

# What does God say?

GOD? ( 20 MIN )

Every lesson includes a theology talk plus two quotes: one from a theologian and one drawn directly from culture. In this series, **What does God say?** section encompasses **Real Stories for Reflection** and **Perspectives from Culture**. This is an invitation to go on a journey—a journey of exploring a difficult topic through stories rooted in culture and learning together with the friends gathered right now. That might sound a little unusual, but reading and learning weren't meant to happen alone. From Paul's letters in the New Testament to the Greek poetry of Homer, communal learning has always been how understanding grows.

This series doesn't assume that all youth know scripture. While Christian themes appear, the lessons are grounded in real stories of people who have experienced and worked to end gun violence. Each talk points to God's presence and faithfulness, showing youth that even in the midst of hard and painful topics, God is with us—guiding, sustaining, and calling us toward hope and action. The theology quotes help connect the conversation to youth's own experiences and the world around them, showing that theology isn't just abstract ideas found in old books. Theology is alive—found in communities, in stories, in culture, and in the work people do for justice and peace. By engaging scripture and cultural narratives together, the series creates space for honest reflection, understanding, and meaningful conversation.

In our Holy Disruption Theological Reflection Method, asking what does God say, reading the quotes from culture and theologians, the God Section Worksheet, and the Alignment activity is the Holy Disruption movement.



## INSTRUCTIONS

For this journey, we recommend that someone read the texts aloud while the rest of the group follows along on their **God Section Worksheet** to take notes. It's easier to remember and understand something you're both hearing and seeing. During the reading, have everyone respond to questions in writing on the worksheet. Then, during the discussion, encourage them to refer back to that sheet.

# God Section Worksheet

As you read the theological section, use the boxes below to take notes. As you listen or after completing the statements as a way to process the talk and quotes.

## CONFUSED

These concepts, ideas, or points the author has made don't make sense to me...

ASK: Who can shed some light on this?

## MY EXPERIENCE

This helps me see my own experience of people, the world, God or myself in this new way...

ASK: Who else has had this experience?

## MY BELIEFS

I'd never before thought about this idea that the author presents:

Do you believe the author is correct? Why or why not?

ASK: Who else doesn't believe it? Who does?

## GRASP IT

Another way to explain one of the author's main points is this...

ASK: Do others think that's the main point?

# Where is God?

## GOD? ( 5 MIN ) - CONTINUED

This section will be used after you have explored scripture and some different theological responses to the topic. The questions in this section will help students articulate their new theological understandings of how they might navigate the topics discussed. Remember, you are not looking for uniform and agreed-upon answers. You are inviting everyone into a conversation about how they believe God acts or what they believe their faith has to say about everything you have discussed so far.

# Alignment activity

## ALIGNING WITH GOD ( 10 MIN )

Now that we have experienced disorientation, reflected on it through multiple lenses, and listened for what God is saying through Scripture, theologians, and our own lived theology, we ask: How do I carry what I've learned into my life? This movement is about more than reflection—it is about participation. It invites us to join in God's action already unfolding around us, shaping our lives and our communities to look a little more like the Kingdom of God.

# Prayer

## CLOSING ACTIVITY ( 5 MIN )

Every lesson ends with a closing activity, often a prayer. Feel free to pass the prayer around and let students lead this. Depending on the length of the prayer, they can read one line each or pick a couple of students to read the prayer aloud. Do what works best for your group.

# Citation Link List

## WEEK 1-ORDINARY PEOPLE

Give me the Gun Video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diK\\_aCikDNA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diK_aCikDNA)

The Story of Antonio:

<https://apnews.com/article/baltimore-youth-gun-violence-poverty-entrepreneurship-1cb941be0cd302df626f7ba38bb96df6>

## WEEK 2-TOUGH-MINDED AND TENDERHEARTED

Restorative justice YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YMxk3v7mVY>

Oakland gun deaths article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/dec/30/gun-violence-oakland-youth-deaths>

Firearms are leading cause of death statistic:

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>

## WEEK 3-STRUGGLE AND LAMENT

Hymn for the Hurting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkX7OiqZRJQ>

Hymn for the Hurting Poem:

<https://kindredmedia.org/2022/06/a-hymn-for-the-hurting-by-amanda-gorman/>

Charleston Church Shooting Article:

<https://apnews.com/article/mother-emanuel-charleston-church-tree-of-life-5dd10f7052281699a1b40b44201c555b>

## WEEK 4-JOY AND HOPE AS RESISTANCE

Everytown:

<https://www.everytown.org/states/>

Cause IQ:

<https://www.causeiq.com/>

Hope Video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_pKcv0Fml-A&list=RD\\_pKcv0Fml-A&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pKcv0Fml-A&list=RD_pKcv0Fml-A&start_radio=1)

Hope Lyrics:

<https://genius.com/Twista-hope-lyrics>

Black Pastors Demand Justice article:

<https://www.aol.com/news/churches-black-pastors-demand-justice-035900012.html>