



SESSION THREE



God Guides the Wise

Key Verse

The wise men heard the king and then left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east. It went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy

Matthew 2:9–10

LEADER PLANNING

Materials Needed:

- Copies of this lesson plan (each small group facilitator needs the Study God's Story pages; each Rest Stop guide needs the pages pertaining to their Rest Stop)
- Student Handouts and pens (1 per student—use alternate Student Handout for elementary-aged students if appropriate)
- Read a Story Script (2 copies)
- Study God's Story: Bibles, flip chart, and marker (1 per group)
- Quiet instrumental version of “We Three Kings” and a device to play it on
- Signs identifying each Rest Stop

Road Trip Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Map
- Bulletin board and pushpins (or tape, if bulletin board is not available)
- Car cutouts (1 per student, use template provided)
- Scissors (if cars are not cut out ahead of time)
- Pens

Follow Your Light Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Lamp with no shade (floor lamp or table lamp)
- String of white Christmas lights
- Clips or clothespins or large paperclips
- Lightbulb cutouts (use template provided)
- Scissors (if lightbulbs are not cut out ahead of time)
- Pens
- Bibles

Who Wears the Crown Rest Stop

- Crown (Burger King crown, or a gold costume crown)
- Towel
- Blank sheets of paper (2 per student) and thick markers
- Pens
- 2 cameras, or students' smart phones

Fragrance of Worship Rest Stop

- Fragrance (Depending on the fire code for your building, you can use a scented candle, fragrance sticks, fragrance plug-in, wax warmer, or incense. It's not essential, but would be cool to find a frankincense fragrance. Frankincense incense cones are available at an affordable price online.)
- Poster board and thick marker, masking tape
- Pens

Ointment of Forgiveness Rest Stop

- Scented oil or lotion (there is actually such a thing as myrrh oil, but baby oil will do just fine)
- Highlighter pens (not yellow) or dry erase markers

Candle of Commitment Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Symbols from each Rest Stop: toy car, table lamp with no shade, crown, fragrance oil/ lotion (*Zero budget option: Signs for each Rest Stop*)
- Tea lights (1 per student) (battery-powered or wax candles) (*Zero budget option: Pieces of gravel or rocks, such as found on a road*)
- Lighter (if necessary)

Preparation:

- **Set the Stage:** Assign the reading about the Nativity play to a person other than yourself, if you prefer.
- **Read a Story:** Assign the reading parts to one female and one male student ahead of time.
- **Study God's Story:** Draw "What They Did with the Light" chart on flip chart.
- **Christmas Practice:** Set up Rest Stop stations.

Things to do before your meeting:

- If you are adjusting the activity of a particular Rest Stop (i.e., if you don't have a bulletin board, you might need to use tape instead of pushpins for the Road Trip Rest Stop), edit the instructions in the Student Handouts before duplicating them.
- Assign a leader or older student to each Rest Stop as the guide. Assign 2 leaders to the Who Wears the Crown Rest Stop.
- Collect items for each Rest Stop plus the recording of "We Three Kings" to play in the room during the exercise.
- Decide on the number of Rest Stops:
 - If your group is larger than 50 students, set up duplicate Rest Stops in two or more areas if possible.
 - You may need more than one Candle of Commitment Rest Stop to accommodate your whole group at the end of the exercise.
 - If your group is younger, set up fewer Rest Stops, such as the three focused on the wise men's gifts (Who Wears the Crown, Fragrance of Worship, and Ointment of Forgiveness Rest Stops). An alternate Student Handout is provided for groups that offer only three Rest Stops.

Items to prepare before your meeting:

- Make signs to identify each Rest Stop, making more than one where duplicate Rest Stops are needed.
- Road Trip Rest Stop: Photocopy and cut apart car template.
- Follow Your Light Rest Stop: Photocopy and cut apart lightbulb template.
- Fragrance of Worship Rest Stop: Write out Psalm 63:1–5 on a poster.

Set up the Rest Stops:

- Post a sign at each one identifying it.
- If you have tables and chairs available, you may use them for Rest Stops where students are writing something, but they are not necessary. Students can sit on the floor for these activities.
- Dim the lights, and clear away distractions in the room.
- Turn on the recording of “We Three Kings,” and set it to play on repeat.
- Station a leader or older student as a guide at each Rest Stop to answer questions.

Road Trip Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Cut out the cars, or cut apart the printed templates into 6 squares.
- If using a bulletin board:
 - Post the map on the bulletin board.
 - Place the bulletin board on an easel (or use a board already mounted on the wall).
 - Place a supply of pushpins next to the bulletin board.
- If using a wall:
 - Tape the map to the wall.
 - Place a roll of tape next to the map.
- Provide a supply of pens and car cutouts and scissors (if necessary).

Follow Your Light Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Cut out the lightbulbs, or cut apart the printed templates into 6 squares.
- Plug in the lamp.
- Hang the Christmas lights low enough to be reached. Plug them in.
- Place a supply of clips next to the string of lights.
- Provide a supply of Bibles, pens, lightbulb cut-outs, and scissors (if necessary).

Who Wears the Crown Rest Stop

- Set out crown and towel at the photo booth area.
- Set out blank paper and markers.
- Provide a supply of pens.

Fragrance of Worship Rest Stop

- Print Psalm 63:1–5 on a poster, large enough to be read far away.

God, you are my God.
I want to follow you.
My whole being
 thirsts for you,
like a man in a dry, empty land
 where there is no water.
I have seen you in the Temple.
 I have seen your strength and glory.
Your love is better than life.
 I will praise you.
I will praise you as long as I live.
 I will lift up my hands in prayer to your name.
I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods.
 My lips will sing. My mouth will praise you.

Psalm 63:1–5

- Mount the poster on a wall above eye-level, so students have to look up to read it.
- Set up the source of fragrance and plug it in or light it.
- Provide a supply of pens.

Ointment of Forgiveness Rest Stop

- Set out the highlighter pens or markers.
- Set out the oil or lotion.

Candle of Commitment Rest Stop (optional for younger students)

- Set out the symbols of the Rest Stops. Spread them far enough apart to allow space for tea lights or pieces of gravel to be placed around them.



SESSION THREE OUTLINE

Set the Stage: Nativity Play (3 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Preparation: Assign the reading to a person other than yourself, if you prefer

Read a Story: Road Trip (5 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Materials: Read a Story Script (2 copies)

Preparation: Assign reading parts to 1 male and 1 female student ahead of time

Tell Your Story: A Good Road Trip (5 minutes)

Setting: Pairs

Materials: Student Handouts (1 per student)

Study God's Story: Magi Follow the Light (10 minutes)

Setting: Small Group

Materials: Bibles, flip chart, and marker (1 per group)

Preparation: Draw "What They Did with the Light" chart on flip chart

Christmas Practice: We 3 Kings Rest Stops (25 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Materials: See detailed lists in lesson plan.

Preparation: Set up 3 to 6 Rest Stops (see detailed instructions in lesson plan)

Christmas Carol: "We Three Kings" (2 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Materials: Student Handouts

Christmas Challenge: Practice one of the Rest Stop practices daily

Christmas Focus: Read *Because of Bethlehem*, chapters 7–9



SET THE STAGE: NATIVITY PLAY (3 MINUTES)

Preparation:

- (Optional) Assign the reading about the nativity play to a person other than yourself.
- As students enter, distribute Session Three Student Handouts.

This week we are talking about another set of key characters in the Christmas story. Before I introduce them, let's do a quick review. Who remembers who we talked about last week? *[angels]* How about the week before? *[baby Jesus]*. Do you remember how we are supposed to respond to the baby Jesus? *[make room for him]*. What did the angels do that we should try to do? *[worship]*

We're going to introduce today's characters to you the same way Max Lucado does in his teaching video for this session:

Read aloud the opening to Session 3 of the Because of Bethlehem teaching video by Max Lucado:

We're only a couple of weeks away from Christmas, and I have an important question for you. One that requires immediate action if your answer is no. Have you got your tickets for the children's nativity play yet?

Whether you're a brother or sister or friend, I think we'd all agree there is nothing cuter or more heartwarming than seeing the little kids act out the Christmas drama.

You all know the cast of characters required to orchestrate this epic saga. You've got your Joseph, your Mary, and your baby Jesus—usually someone's baby doll swaddled up nice and tight. Then you've got your shepherds, the innkeeper, and maybe a couple of barn animals.

Key roles to be sure. We wouldn't have a Christmas Story without them. But let's face it, the role kids most desire to play is one of the three wise guys—the magi.

Is it the fancy clothes? The chance to wear a fake beard? Those great, expensive gifts they bear? Or is it where they come from, the East . . . very far away? I think it's the last one. Why? Because every child loves the idea of a road trip. They love the idea of visiting a place they've never seen before.¹

1 Adapted from Max Lucado, *Because of Bethlehem/He Chose the Nails: A DVD Study*, session 3, (2016; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), DVD

READ A STORY: ROAD TRIP (5 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Read a Story Script (2 copies)

Preparation:

- Assign the reading parts to one female and one male student ahead of time.
 - Reader 1 = Female
 - Reader 2 = Male

How many of you have ever taken a road trip at Christmas time?

Share a personal story from your life about a holiday road trip, if appropriate.

It's interesting to think that Christmas road trips have been a tradition since that first Christmas! Think of it. We had Mary and Joseph making the original road trip, then the wise men did an epic road trip too. Let's take a little glimpse inside the family minivan to see how this early tradition has evolved over the years.

READER 1: Holiday time is road trip time. Ever since the wise men packed their bags for Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus has caused people to hit the road.

READER 2: We might not have to ride in a slow caravan for months, but six hours in a minivan with three siblings might have made the wise men thankful for those camels.

READER 1: Yes, it's not always ho ho ho on the high, high highway. A long time in the close quarters of a car can bring out our worst.

READER 2: Think about traveling with your big sister. She can be perfectly civil to you until you're on a road trip with her. You could say, "I like that song," and at any other time your sister might say,

READER 1: "I like it too."

READER 2: But on a road trip, she'll say,

READER 1: "It stinks and so do your feet." Then there's that thing that happens no matter how many times your mother reminds everyone to go to the bathroom before you leave.

READER 2: Five minutes down the road your little brother says, "I gotta go!" You get to see the inside of every public restroom between home and Grandma's house when you're on a road trip with your siblings.

READER 1: But traveling with your parents is no picnic either. Why is it, for instance, that dads refuse to stop? Perhaps they had ancestors who were pioneers . . .

READER 2: "My great-great-great-grandfather crossed the prairies and never once stopped at a McDonald's. Why should we?"

READER 1: And what is it about a road trip that prompts your parents to sing all of their favorite songs from the nineties . . . at the tops of their voices . . . with the windows down?

READER 2: My advice to you is to deploy that great survival strategy that kids everywhere have done down through the ages to live through road trips with their families: pull your baseball cap down over your face and slump down. You want no one, absolutely no one, to see you in the car with these people, okay?²



2 Adapted from Max Lucado, *Because of Bethlehem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), page 60

TELL YOUR STORY: A GOOD ROAD TRIP (5 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Student Handouts

*Have students pair up with someone next to them. Read aloud the instructions for the **Tell Your Story: A Good Road Trip** exercise on the Student Handout. Have students choose their answer on their own to what makes a good road trip, then take turns sharing their answers to the two discussion questions with their partner.*

Tell Your Story: A Good Road Trip

Ever since the wise men first went in search of Jesus, it seems that Christmas and “road trip” have gone together. Whether it’s during the holidays or at any other time, what makes a good road trip for you? Review the list below and place a check mark next to the statement that best describes your response. Discuss the following questions with your partner.

It’s only a good road trip if . . .

- ☐ Everybody gets along, follows the rules, and doesn't bug me. *(I need space so I can stay patient.)*
- ☐ We get there quickly and don't take too long with boring stops. *(I push to finish things.)*
- ☐ We stop and get out of the car frequently so I don't have to sit still for hours. *(I have to stay active.)*
- ☐ We see the sights along the way and learn about interesting places. *(I like to learn new things.)*
- ☐ I can withdraw and listen to my music or watch a movie. *(I need my alone time.)*
- ☐ We play games and tell jokes and have great conversations. *(I enjoy being with people.)*
- ☐ We buy great snacks and souvenirs along the way. *(I like to have mementos of the journey.)*
- ☐ Other: _____

- Share the statement you checked. Why is this important for a good road trip? To explain your answer, share any stories from previous road trips that come to mind.
- What similarities might there be, if any, between what makes a road trip good for you and how you live your life? Or is there another statement on the list that comes closer to describing how you approach your life overall? Share the reasons for your answer.

STUDY GOD'S STORY: MAGI FOLLOW THE LIGHT (10 MINUTES)

Materials:

- Bibles
- Flip chart and marker (1 per group)

Preparation:

- Draw the blank “What They Did with the Light” chart on flip chart. Wait to fill in the answers with the students during your discussion.

At this time, if your group is larger than 10 students, break up into discussion groups of 4 to 6, with an adult facilitator or student leader.

We are going to read together the full story of the journey of the wise men from Matthew 2:1–12. As the story is read, pay particular attention to the differences in how Herod, the priests/teachers, and the wise men respond to signs that point to the Messiah. We are going to fill in this chart after we read the story.

Have your group take turns reading one verse per person until the entire passage has been read out loud. The scripture is provided on the Student Handout in case the students don't have Bibles, or if you prefer to have everyone reading from the same version.

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east. We came to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this new king of the Jews, he was troubled. And all the people in Jerusalem were worried too. Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ would be born. They answered, “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the Scriptures:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are important among the rulers of Judah;
A ruler will come from you.
He will be like a shepherd for my people, the Israelites.”

Then Herod called a secret meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. Then Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem. He said to them, "Go and look carefully to find the child. When you find him, come tell me. Then I can go worship him too."

The wise men heard the king and then left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east. It went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They went to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshiped the child. They opened the gifts they brought for him. They gave him treasure of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country by a different way.

Matthew 2:1-12

Now we are going to dig into this story and discover the different ways these three sets of people responded to the coming of the Messiah.

Review Matthew 2:1-12 with the students, and fill in the blanks on the chart by asking students each question, such as, "Did the wise men see the light?" Invite students to complete the chart on their Student Handout as well.

What They Did with the Light

	Wise Men	Herod	Priests
Did they see the light?	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
What did they do?	<i>Followed it</i>	<i>Plotted against it</i>	<i>Knew about it but didn't do anything</i>
Why were their responses so different?	<i>Wisdom, obedience</i>	<i>Pride, fear, wanted to stay king</i>	<i>Pride, self-righteousness</i>

- In our life journey we can at times experience any one of these responses to God's desire to come into our lives. When have you responded to God's light like Herod did? Have you ever treated God's light like the priests did? What does it look like in your life to respond like the wise men?

Think back to last week's session, "Worship Works Wonders." Our challenge was to worship God by talking more about him.

- Did you try to bring up God or Jesus in your conversation this week? Were you more aware of Jesus in your life this week? Share anything that changed in your heart because of the idea of shifting your worship from other important things to God.
- Did anyone find something meaningful in your reading of *Because of Bethlehem* you'd like to share with the group?



CHRISTMAS PRACTICE: WE 3 KINGS REST STOPS (25 MINUTES)

Preparation:

Things to do before your meeting:

- If you are adjusting the activity of a particular Rest Stop (i.e., if you don't have a bulletin board, you might need to use tape instead of pushpins for the Road Trip Rest Stop), edit the instructions in the Student Handouts before duplicating them.
- Assign a leader or older student to each Rest Stop as the guide. Assign 2 leaders to the Who Wears the Crown Rest Stop.
- Collect items for each Rest Stop plus the recording of "We Three Kings" to play in the room during the exercise.
- Decide number of Rest Stops:
 - If your group is larger than 50 students, set up duplicate Rest Stops in two or more areas if possible.
 - You may need more than one Candle of Commitment Rest Stop to accommodate your whole group at the end of the exercise.
 - If your group is younger, set up fewer Rest Stops, such as the three focused on the wise men's gifts (Who Wears the Crown, Fragrance of Worship, and Ointment of Forgiveness Rest Stops).

Items to prepare before your meeting:

- Make signs to identify each Rest Stop, making more than one where duplicate Rest Stops are needed.
- Road Trip Rest Stop: Photocopy and cut apart car template.

- Follow Your Light Rest Stop: Photocopy and cut apart lightbulb template.
- Fragrance of Worship Rest Stop: Write out Psalm 63:1–5 on a poster.

Set up the Rest Stops:

- Post a sign at each Rest Stop to identify it. Refer to each Rest Stop for detailed setup instructions.
- If you have tables and chairs available, you may use them for Rest Stops where students are writing something, but they are not necessary. Students can sit on the floor for these activities.
- Dim the lights, and clear away distractions in the room.
- Turn on the recording of “We Three Kings,” and set it to play on repeat.
- Station a leader or older student as a guide at each Rest Stop to answer questions.

Gather the group together and explain how to proceed through the Rest Stops.

For our Christmas practice we are going on a road trip with the wise men. We will be traveling around the room to 6 different Rest Stops that provide a space for prayer based on the themes of the 6 verses of the Christmas carol “We Three Kings.” You’re going to learn about some things in that carol you may have never understood before! At each Rest Stop look at your Student Handout to find your instructions to follow. We will have guides at each Rest Stop to help if you have questions, but they will only answer questions. They are not there to lead you through the exercise—you are doing each Rest Stop on your own, as a private time of guided prayer. Your instructions will tell you to whisper some things, but at no time should we hear any sounds louder than a whisper. Spend as much time as you want at a Rest Stop. You don’t need to visit all the Rest Stops, and you can visit the first 5 in any order, but go to the Candle of Commitment Rest Stop last. *If you have only set up 3 Rest Stops, say,* You don’t need to visit all the Rest Stops, and you can visit them in any order.

Be prepared to announce when students should be moving to the last Rest Stop.



ROAD TRIP REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Map
- Bulletin board and pushpins (or tape, if bulletin board is not available)
- Car cutouts (1 per student, use template provided)
- Scissors (if cars are not cut out ahead of time)
- Pens

Preparation:

- Cut out the cars, or cut apart the printed templates into 6 squares.
- If using a bulletin board:
 - Post the map on the bulletin board.
 - Place the bulletin board on an easel (or use a board already mounted on the wall).
 - Place a supply of pushpins next to the bulletin board.
- If using a wall:
 - Tape the map to the wall.
 - Place a roll of tape next to the map.
- Provide a supply of pens and car cutouts and scissors (if necessary).

Whisper this verse of “We Three Kings” quietly.

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts **we traverse afar** [*we travel far*]
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

PAUSE AND IMAGINE

Pause for a moment to think about the road trip the wise men took. Imagine what it would have been like to camp out and ride camels for many months. Imagine the kinds of obstacles they ran into. Imagine the discomforts they went through. They kept going, pushing through the difficulties, so they could be with Jesus.

MY RESPONSE

Earlier in our lesson during the **Tell Your Story** exercise you thought about your life as a road trip. What obstacles are you facing on your life's journey? Where are you heading? Are **you** driving the car, or have you asked **Jesus** to be the driver of your car?

The 23rd Psalm is a well-loved psalm that describes how the Good Shepherd takes care of his sheep. Today, our Road Trip Edition of the 23rd Psalm describes a journey that has its share of obstacles and has a great destination, but more importantly, has a good and kind driver who is taking care of the passengers all along the way. Fill in the blanks of this Road Trip Edition of Psalm 23 with your personal answers to the questions.

Psalm 23: Road Trip Edition

The Lord is my driver. I have everything I need.

He gives me rest when _____

[When do you need rest or new strength?]

He gives me new strength.

For the good of his name, he drives me on roads that are right.

Even if I travel through the very dark valley of _____

[What is something you fear or worry about?]

I will not be afraid because you are with me.

Your GPS and your seatbelts comfort me.

You prepare a roadside picnic for me when _____

[What is a situation you're struggling with?]

You keep my gas tank full.

You give me more _____ than I can hold.

[What is a gift God is giving you that you're thankful for?]

Surely your goodness and love will be with me for the whole journey.

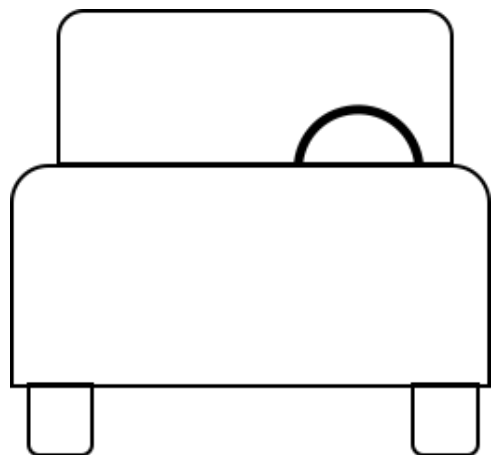
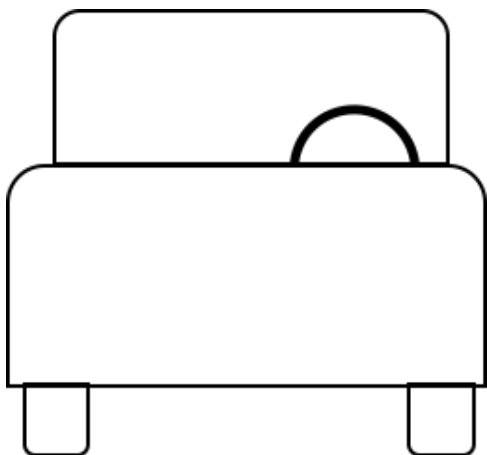
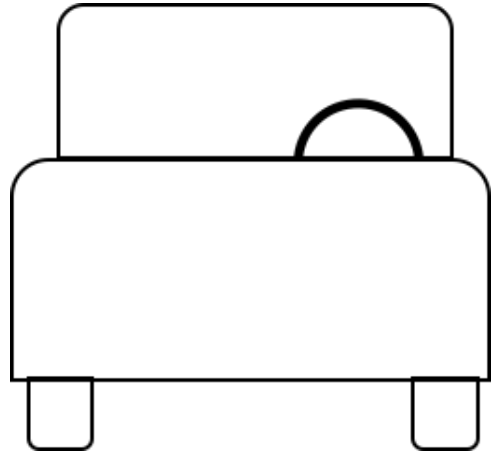
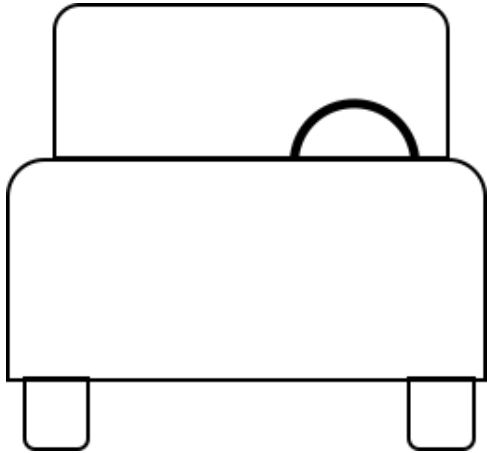
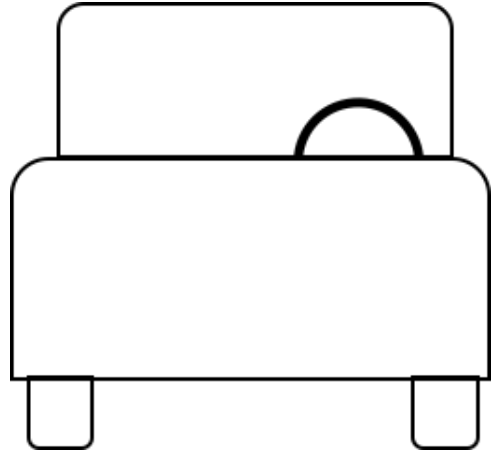
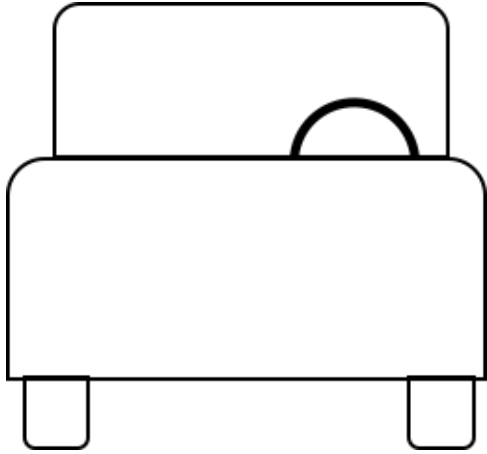
And at the end of the road, I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

Adapted from Psalm 23

Now whisper the finished psalm as your prayer of thankfulness and hope for your road trip, and your commitment to make Jesus your driver.

MY PRAYER

Using a car cut-out, write your name on the passenger side of the car and Jesus' name on the driver's side. Stick your car on the map with a pushpin. Before you move to the next station, stop and think about whether Jesus really is the driver in your life. If you are the driver, perhaps now is the time to move over and let him take the wheel. Then thank Jesus for being your driver. Thank him for what's waiting for you at the end of the road, and for how he is taking care of everything you are coming across on your journey.



FOLLOW YOUR LIGHT REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Lamp with no shade (floor lamp or table lamp)
- String of white Christmas lights
- Clips or clothespins or large paperclips
- Lightbulb cutouts (use template provided)
- Scissors (if lightbulbs are not cut out ahead of time)
- Pens
- Bibles

Preparation:

- Cut out the lightbulbs, or cut apart the printed templates into 6 squares.
- Plug in the lamp. The exposed bulb symbolizes the bright star of Bethlehem.
- Hang the Christmas lights low enough to be reached, but out of the way so someone won't walk into them. They may be pinned on a wall or strung across a corner. Plug them in.
- Place a supply of clips next to the string of lights to use for attaching the paper cutouts to the cord.
- Provide a supply of Bibles, pens, lightbulb cut-outs, and scissors (if necessary).
 - Guide should be prepared to instruct students to turn the lightbulb upside down before writing their word on it so their word is right side up when the lightbulb is clipped to the cord.

Whisper the chorus of "We Three Kings" quietly.

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy Perfect Light

PAUSE AND THINK

Earlier we discussed different responses people in the Christmas story had to the star. What's your response to the light you have been given? Have you been ignoring it? Have you ever tried to sabotage it—destroy it in some way? Or are you willing to follow it, no matter where it leads?

MY RESPONSE

Using a Bible, choose one of these verses about light and look it up.

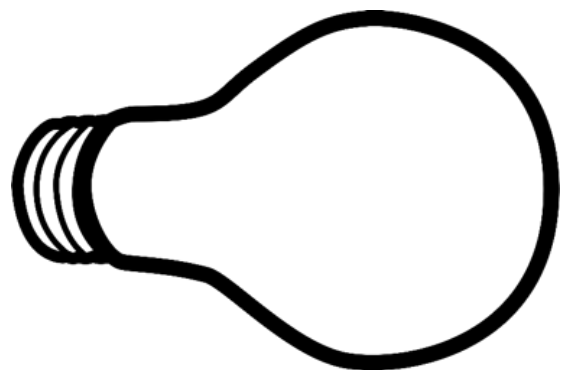
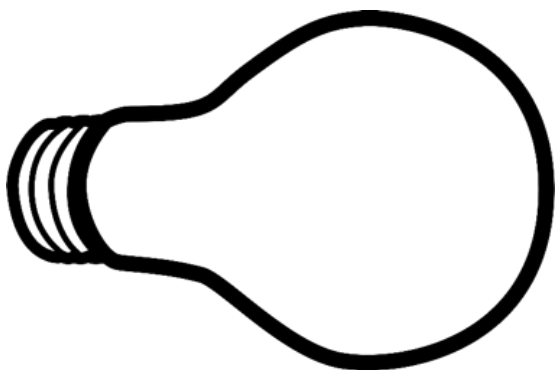
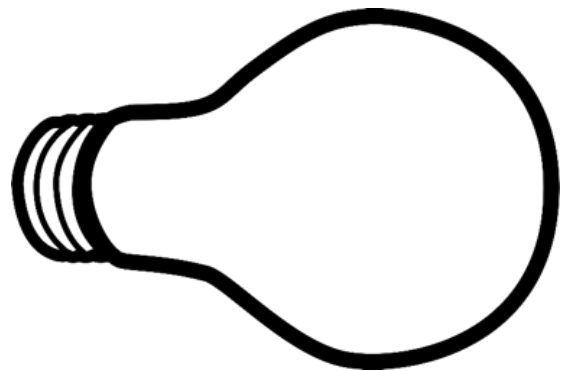
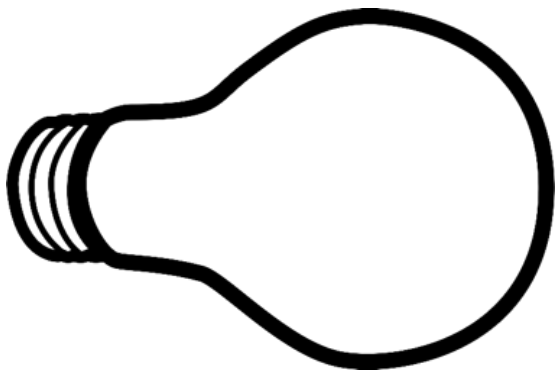
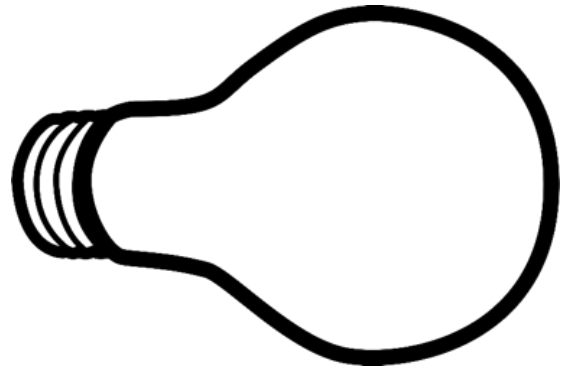
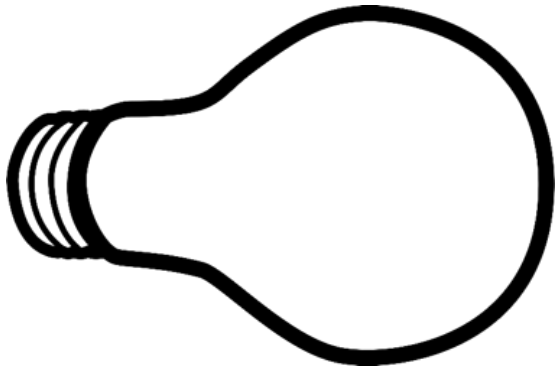
Your Light

- John 8:12
- Psalm 119:105
- 1 John 1:5
- Matthew 5:14–16
- Luke 11:33–34

Circle the verse you chose so you can go back later and find it in your own Bible. Think about your verse, then write one word on the paper provided that says what type of light you have been given, or where your light is contained (such as Jesus, Bible, God, myself, eyes). Treat the light from your verse as YOUR light—the light God is giving you today.

MY PRAYER

Clip your word to the string of lights, then think about your verse again. Pray to God, asking him to help you respond well to the light you have been given, whether you need to follow it, obey it, read it, see it, or let it be seen.





WHO WEARS THE CROWN REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Crown (Burger King crown, or a gold costume crown)
- Towel
- Blank sheets of paper (2 per student) and thick markers
- Pens
- 2 cameras, or students' smart phones

Preparation:

- Set out crown and towel at the photo booth area.
- Set out blank paper and markers.
- Provide a supply of pens.
- Station the guides in an area designated as the photo booth. Each guide needs a camera to take photos of students who do not have their own smart phones for this purpose.
 - Guides should be prepared to e-mail or text photos (or mail!) to each student, either at that moment or later if students' contact information is collected.
 - Guides should be prepared to help students slow down and experience each step of this station (reading, choosing what to write on the paper, taking off—or giving back—the crown, praying).

Whisper this verse of "We Three Kings" quietly.

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign

PAUSE AND CONSIDER

In the Bible Paul tells us how Jesus gave up his heavenly status and became our servant. Read the passage below slowly and thoughtfully, underlining the ways Jesus served others and the ways we can serve too.

When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.

In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.

Christ himself was like God in everything.

He was equal with God.

But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be held on to.

He gave up his place with God and made himself nothing.

He was born as a man

and became like a servant.

Philippians 2:3–7

MY RESPONSE—PHOTO BOOTH

Are you are wearing the crown that belongs to God? In other words, are you trying to be king of your own life? Name one area where you are wearing the crown. Look back at Philippians 2:3–7 for ideas, or use some of the following ideas to get you thinking:

- I try to be in charge.
- I expect people to make me happy.
- I don't listen.
- I'm selfish.
- I'm too busy.
- I'm holding on to a bad friendship.
- I worry.
- I disobey.

Now that you have thought of the area where you are wearing the crown, write it in large letters on a sheet of blank paper. Go to the photo booth area, put on the crown, and hold up your sign. Have your guide take your picture.

IDEA: *As you take off the crown, do it thoughtfully, thinking about it as God's crown that you are taking off and giving back to him, putting him back in charge of your life.*

Now think about how you can look more like a servant. Come up with one way you can put others before yourself this week. Look back at Philippians 2:3–7 for ideas, or use some of the following ideas to get you started:

- I will offer help to my parents.
- I will listen to a friend.

- I will make friends with a new person.
- I will spend time with my sister/brother.
- I will give a gift to someone who doesn't expect it.
- I will serve someone who may not thank me.

Now that you have thought of a way to put others before yourself, write what you plan to do in large letters on another blank sheet of paper. Go to the photo booth area, pick up the servant's towel, and hold up your sign. Have your guide take your picture.

MY PRAYER

Save these photos on your phone or have your guides send them to you to remind you of your commitment. Before you move to the next station, take some time to pause and pray and ask God to help you give the crown back to God and pick up the servant's towel this week.



FRAGRANCE OF WORSHIP REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Fragrance (Depending on the fire code for your building, you can use a scented candle, fragrance sticks, fragrance plug-in, wax warmer, or incense. It's not essential, but would be cool to find a frankincense fragrance. Frankincense incense cones are available at an affordable price online.)
- Poster board and thick marker, masking tape
- Pens

Preparation:

- Print Psalm 63:1–5 on a poster, large enough to be read far away.

God, you are my God.
I want to follow you.
My whole being
thirsts for you,
like a man in a dry, empty land
where there is no water.
I have seen you in the Temple.
I have seen your strength and glory.
Your love is better than life.
I will praise you.
I will praise you as long as I live.
I will lift up my hands in prayer to your name.
I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods.
My lips will sing. My mouth will praise you.

Psalm 63:1–5

- Mount the poster on a wall above eye-level, so students have to look up to read it.
- Set up the source of fragrance and plug it in or light it.
- Provide a supply of pens.

Whisper this verse of “We Three Kings” quietly, noting the explanation of the meaning of the second line.

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh *[our prayers (symbolized by
incense) are owned by or
deserved by a God (Deity)
who is close (nigh)]*

Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high

PAUSE AND IMAGINE

In Bible times, frankincense was often burned, and the fragrant smoke symbolized the sweet aroma of our prayers and worship. Imagine how pleasing our prayers and our worship are to God. Imagine what kind of fragrance they actually have. Think about how God feels about us when he hears our worship.

MY RESPONSE

In our lesson last week, we studied the gift of worship the angels gave to God. Return to the practice of worship right now by lifting your eyes to Psalm 63:1–5 posted on the wall, lift your hands up to God, and whisper the words of praise in the psalm to God as your sweet fragrance of worship.

MY PRAYER

After you have whispered the words of the psalm printed on the poster, look at it again below. Circle your favorite phrase and repeat it a few times while closing your eyes and imagining how fragrant your words are to God.

God, you are my God.
I want to follow you.
My whole being
thirsts for you,
like a man in a dry, empty land
where there is no water.
I have seen you in the Temple.
I have seen your strength and glory.
Your love is better than life.
I will praise you.

I will praise you as long as I live.

I will lift up my hands in prayer to your name.

I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods.

My lips will sing. My mouth will praise you.

Psalm 63:1–5

Before moving to the next station, think about why you circled the phrase you did. What is happening in your life right now that made that line meaningful to you? Thank God for what he means to you.



OINTMENT OF FORGIVENESS REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Scented oil or lotion (there is actually such a thing as myrrh oil, but baby oil will do just fine)
- Highlighter pens (not yellow) or dry erase markers

Preparation:

- Set out the highlighter pens or markers.
- Set out the oil or lotion.
 - The guide should be prepared to dispense a small amount of oil or lotion to each student.

Whisper this verse of “We Three Kings” quietly.

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb

PAUSE AND WONDER

Did you ever realize “We Three Kings” had such a gloomy verse? Think about why such a sad thought has a place in a Christmas carol. Have you figured it out? Why do you think the wise men brought a gift of myrrh to the baby, which was an ointment used to prepare bodies for burial? That’s an unusual gift for a baby, but not for this baby. Why?

MY RESPONSE

This baby was going to die in our place. Jesus’ death paid for the forgiveness we need for our sins. Ask God to show you a sin in your life that needs his forgiveness. Using the washable pen, write that sin on your arm. Then, as a symbol of how Christ’s death wipes out your sin, rub oil or lotion over your arm, similar to the way the myrrh would have been rubbed on Christ’s body when it was being prepared for burial. As you rub and see the sin slowly fade away, read the following psalm:

God, be merciful to me
because you are loving.
Because you are always ready to be merciful,

wipe out all my wrongs.
Wash away all my guilt
and make me clean again.

Psalm 51:1–2

MY PRAYER

After your “sin” has been rubbed away, repeat Psalm 51:1–2 as your prayer, this time thanking God for his mercy and naming your specific sin:

Thank you, God, that you are merciful to me
because you are loving.
Because you are always ready to be merciful,
wipe out my _____ .

[Name the wrongs you are trusting God to wipe out]

Thank you for washing away all my guilt
and making me clean again.



CANDLE OF COMMITMENT REST STOP

Materials Needed:

- Symbols from each Rest Stop: toy car, table lamp with no shade, crown, fragrance oil/ lotion
 - Zero budget option: Signs for each Rest Stop
- Tea lights (1 per student) (battery-powered or wax candles)
 - Zero budget option: Pieces of gravel or rocks, such as found on a road
- Lighter (if necessary)

Preparation:

- Set out the symbols of the Rest Stops. Spread them far enough apart to allow space for tea lights or pieces of gravel to be placed around them.
 - Guide should be prepared to light the tea lights for the students if wax candles are used.

Whisper this verse of “We Three Kings” quietly.

Glorious now behold Him arise
 King and God and Sacrifice
 Alleluia, Alleluia
 Earth to heav’n replies

Pause and Reflect

Think about the symbols from each of our Rest Stops, and notice their connection with the words in the last verse of “We Three Kings.” Choosing from the 5 symbols from our Rest Stops, which symbol do each of these words or phrases refer to?

ANSWER KEY

Glorious now behold him arise	STAR
King	GOLD
God.	FRANKINCENSE
Sacrifice.	MYRRH

MYRRH	ROAD TRIP	GOLD	STAR	FRANKINCENSE
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MY RESPONSE

Which of the Rest Stops did you need the most today?

- Did you need to let Jesus be the driver at the Road Trip Rest Stop?
- Did you need to follow, obey, read, or see the light at the Follow Your Light Rest Stop?
- Did you need to take off God's crown and pick up the towel at the Who's Wearing the Crown Rest Stop?
- Did you need to give God a gift of worship at the Fragrance of Worship Rest Stop?
- Did you need forgiveness at the Ointment of Forgiveness Rest Stop?

Light your candle and put it next to the symbol of the Rest Stop you responded to most today.

MY PRAYER

Kneel and focus on the candles. Pray about your response to the Rest Stop you chose. Review what you did at that Rest Stop, and make a commitment to God in the area he spoke to you about.



CHRISTMAS CAROL: "WE THREE KINGS" (2 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Student Handouts

Call the students together to wrap up. Share the Christmas Challenge and Christmas Focus for this week.

CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE: Refer back to your Student Handout and review the Rest Stop that meant the most to you. Once a day, work on the practice of that Rest Stop. Next week come prepared to share with our group a way your Rest Stop practice worked for you. Did it shine God's light on your path a little clearer? Did you follow his light a little better? Did you get closer to Jesus?

CHRISTMAS FOCUS: Continue your reading of *Because of Bethlehem*. This week's readings will help us see God's light and be better followers and learners. Please read chapters 7–9.

Close your time together by singing the Christmas carol we have been focusing on today. Ask the students as they sing to reflect on the new meanings they have discovered in the song. You may wish to have the students gather in a circle and join hands as they sing the closing song.

"WE THREE KINGS"

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

—Chorus—

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy Perfect Light

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign
Chorus

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high
Chorus

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb
Chorus

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav'n replies
Chorus

SPECIAL NOTE TO LEADER: *There are a few extra items to collect for the Christmas Practice activity in Lesson Four.*