



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

It's Just A Lot / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

## SERIES SUMMARY

A 3-week series about stress, worry, and faith.

**SERIES BOTTOM LINE:** Looking for God when we are overwhelmed with stress and worry.

**WEEK 1:** You can trust God with a lot.

**WEEK 2:** God can use others to help when you are worried.

**WEEK 3:** Choose joy over worry.

## SCRIPTURE

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25a NLT).*

*Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (Acts 16:26 NLT)*

*But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"*

*The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:28-30 NLT)*

## TEACHING SLIDES

All scripture, bottom lines, and prompts that are bolded in this script are also provided as teaching slides for Premium Tier Subscribers.

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## OPTIONAL MEDIA

### OPTIONAL MEDIA available in the Annual Subscription to the XP3 MS Media Package:

- It's Just A Lot Countdown Video (10 minutes)
- It's Just A Lot Week 3 Teaching Video
- It's Just A Lot Week 3 Integrated Teaching Video
- It's Just A Lot Sensory Box Tutorial Video
- It's Just A Lot Week 3 What I Wonder About the Future Interactive Smash Cut Video
- It's Just A Lot Week 3 Day 6 Video Devotional

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## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

- We've been talking about how we can look for God when we're overwhelmed with stress and worry.
- Today we're talking about something that's exciting and sometimes stressful: the future.
- *[Ask students to share with a neighbor what comes to mind when they think of the future.]*
- *[Tell a personal story about what you pictured the future to be like when you were in middle school.]*

### TENSION

- Thinking about the future can be fun and exciting, but it can also feel like a lot.
- **Interactive: To The Future:** Ask students to write down what they want to know about the future, create a paper airplane with their paper, and fly it on stage. Then read off a few things students wrote to demonstrate that we all want to know a little more about the future.
- Some of us might have things that make it difficult to be excited about the future. We may hope things will be different than they are right now. *[Give relevant examples.]*
- Some of us might stress about the future because we don't want things to change. *[Give relevant examples.]*
- The future is going to be filled with things that are good and things that are stressful.
- How can we face a future we have no control over? How do we stay stress-free right now when we have no idea what the future holds?

### TRUTH

- Paul and Silas dedicated their lives to share the Good News about Jesus, and their journey is recorded in the New Testament in a book called Acts.
- During their ministry, Paul and Silas met a girl who was making money for people by telling fortunes. This was not from God, so Paul and Silas prayed in Jesus' name to set her free. The people who were depending on the girl to make money were so mad that they had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison.
- Paul and Silas were put into the innermost prison cell with their feet chained. They were watched by a guard so they couldn't escape.
- In this super stressful situation, this is what they did: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25a NLT).*
- In the middle of facing a stressful moment and an uncertain future, they chose joy. They chose prayer and praise.

- You can choose joy over worry.
- Instead of choosing stress, fear, and hopelessness, Paul and Silas faithfully followed Jesus and chose joy.
- The story doesn't end there! *Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (Acts 16:26 NLT)*
- The guard who was keeping watch was worried about his future because he believed the prisoners had escaped. He was about to kill himself when this happened: *But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:28-30 NLT)*
- The guard was so amazed by the way Paul and Silas responded to their uncertain futures that the guard put his faith in Jesus, right then and there.
- Every day, when you choose joy over worry, you never know whose future you might change.

## APPLICATION

- We can navigate the stress we feel in unknown circumstances by remembering to choose joy over worry.
- First, identify what you're worried about. Be honest with yourself, with an adult you trust, and with God.
- Then, remember what God can do. Just like Paul and Silas, we can choose to look back and remember what God has already done as we look forward to the future.
- Finally, be grateful. The more you're able to be grateful for, the more joy that will come as a result.
- Choosing joy doesn't mean that we pretend to be fine when we're not. In those times, we may need to ask a trusted adult for help.
- Paul and Silas used a practical way to choose joy in their stressful circumstance; they chose worship and prayer.
- We're going to create our own practical way to choose joy!
- **Interactive: Stress Relief Stations:** Prepare students to go to stations to make their own stress relief objects.
- This week, use your stress object to help you remember the truth that you can put your trust in God and choose joy over worry when you're feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

## LANDING

- You can choose joy over worry.
- You're not the only one worrying about the unknown or stressing about the future. Talk with your small group about what you're thinking and feeling; they can help you figure out what joy looks like for you right now.
- What's one way you can choose joy this week?

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## NOTE TO THE COMMUNICATOR

Your students are experiencing all kinds of stress in their lives, from relationships and family, to school and extra-curricular activities, to even their faith. They're feeling the weight of stress in real ways, and talking about that stress during large group can trigger a lot of feelings and emotions for them. As you prep for this series, you'll probably notice how heavily the teaching scripts rely on personal stories and interactive activities. This is strategic! Using a more interactive approach to talking about stress helps reduce the heaviness of this talk, but more importantly, it also helps give students tools to cope and manage their stress in healthy ways. By actively engaging in your talk's interactive components, students will be able to learn and apply skills that they can take with them throughout their lives.

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## THINK ABOUT THIS

Stress caused by an unknown future is something we all experience. The fact that we can't control what's ahead in our lives can leave us feeling overwhelmed and anxious. For middle schoolers, the stress over uncertainty is real, but they may not be able to pinpoint exactly what they're feeling or why they're feeling it. That's simply because their brains just aren't there yet! For starters, they're specifically wired to focus on the here and now in this phase rather than the future. With that, their self-awareness is still developing, so even if they are stressed about the future, they may not be able to identify it just yet. Since naming the causes of their stress can be a bit abstract, don't be afraid to share an example or two from your own life to help make this life skill a little more tangible. Then, talk through how choosing joy helped (or could have helped) you through the stressful time in your life. Remind them that choosing joy doesn't mean dismissing or downplaying their stress. Instead, it's a chance to acknowledge their stress while also choosing to trust God, remember God's faithfulness, and find ways to be grateful, not in place of their stress but in the middle of it!

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## INTERACTIVE 1: TO THE FUTURE

### OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, students will write down what they want to know about the future, create a paper airplane with their paper, and fly it on stage. You'll then read off a few things students wrote to demonstrate that we all want to know a little more about the future.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- All of your middle schoolers
- A piece of paper for each student
- A pen for each student

### PREP

- Decide how you'll get the paper and pens to your students before your talk. Consider handing them out as students walk in the door, putting them under students' seats, or having volunteers pass the materials out.
  - Can you walk my dog for me?
  - Can you make me dinner?
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## INTERACTIVE 2: STRESS RELIEF STATIONS

### OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll prepare students to go to stations to make their own stress relief objects.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Small tables for stations (You'll need enough for all of your students to visit simultaneously.)
- A bold, permanent marker for each station
- A number of stress relief objects at each station (You'll need enough for each student to choose one.) We've provided object ideas to get you started!
- 1 volunteer per station

### PREP

- Create enough stations around your environment that all of your students can visit them at the same time without being overcrowded.
- Assign a volunteer for each station to assist students in selecting their stress objects and writing the following on each: "I can choose joy over worry."
- Place a large selection of stress relief objects at each station.

### STRESS RELIEF OBJECT IDEAS

- Stress balls
- Fidget spinners
- Poppers
- Liquid bubbler timers
- Fidget cubes
- Sensory strips
- Sensory stretch strings
- Squishy sensory tubes

Tip: Check out Amazon for stress reliever bundles that include a variety of objects for students to choose from.



# TEACHING SCRIPT

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## BOTTOM LINE

CHOOSE JOY OVER WORRY

## INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

You picked an awesome week to be here because we're in our last week of a series called *It's Just A Lot*. We've been talking about how we can look for God when we're overwhelmed with stress and worry. Sounds good, right?

Today, we're going to talk about something that's both exciting and sometimes stressful: **the future!** What are some things that come to mind when you think of the future? Turn and share your answer with somebody around you! *[Give students time to share.]*

### TELL A PERSONAL STORY

*Tell a story from your own life that illustrates the following thoughts or ideas . . .*

- Talk about what you pictured the future to be like when you were in middle school.
- Keep it light and fun here! Things like flying cars, or the ability to teleport, or the job you thought you'd have one day.
- Bonus points if you have pictures that can illustrate the examples you give!

## TENSION

6 MINUTES

Thinking about the future is fun and exciting, but it can feel like a lot sometimes, too. There are things we may worry about. Maybe not things like zombies and alien invasions from outer space, but more like "What classes will I take next year?" and "Will I ever grow taller than my mom?!" Let's be real, some of you are wondering if the future will need Guardians of the Galaxy, and if so, how can you sign up to be one?

Here's the thing about the future: It's **unknown!** No one has a way of knowing the future.

## INTERACTIVE: To The Future

*This is where students will write down what they want to know about the future, create a paper airplane with their paper, and fly it on stage. You'll then read off a few things students wrote to demonstrate that we all want to know a little more about the future.*

If you could step into a time machine and peek into the future, what would you wonder about? Use your paper and pen to write down what you'd want to know about the future. *[Give time for students to do this.]*

Okay, now use that paper to make an awesome paper airplane! *[Give time for students to do this.]*

Everyone have their planes? On the count of three, launch your airplane right at me on stage! 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . .!

*[Pick up a few paper airplanes and read off what students wrote. Comment on each.]*

I think it's safe to say that we all want to know more about the future! And that's because, while the future can be exciting, it can also cause us some stress.

For some of us, there might be big things that make it difficult to be excited about the future. They're things you hope will be different than they are right now.

- Maybe your home life isn't that great, and you worry that it will never get better.
- Maybe you don't have a lot of friends, and you're afraid that you'll never find people who accept and understand you.
- Maybe you learn differently than other people, and you wonder if that will ever get easier.

Whatever it is, you're nervous about the future because you're worried it won't bring the change you want to see.

For others of you, it's the exact opposite. Maybe your stress about the future has to do with the fact that you don't want things to change.

- You love the way your life looks right now.
- You're happy with your family, your friends, your school, your team.
- When you think about the future, you're stressed that things won't always be the way they are now.

Here's the thing: Every day we get to enjoy this thing called life and wake up just a tiny bit older. Anyone else also count down the days until their birthday? *[Insert number of days until your birthday here]* days until mine in case you're wondering!

The future is coming, and it's going to be filled with things that are really good. The future will also have some really difficult things coming our way, too. I don't know about you, but to me, that can be stressful sometimes.

So, how are we supposed to face a future that we have no control over? How do we stay stress-free right now when we have no idea what the future is going to look like?

# TRUTH

4 MINUTES

There's an incredible experience recorded in the Bible that I think can help us out here. A couple of guys were in a situation where they had zero control over what was going to happen next. I think we can learn a lot by watching the way they handled the stress that an uncertain future brought on.

The two guys I'm talking about are **Paul and Silas**. They had dedicated their lives to traveling from city to city sharing the Good News about Jesus. Their journey is recorded in the New Testament in a book called Acts.

During their ministry, Paul and Silas met a girl who was making money for people by telling fortunes. This wasn't from God, so Paul and Silas prayed in Jesus' name to set her free. The people who were depending on the girl to make money were so mad, they had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison.

Now, this wasn't any old prison. The jailer put Paul and Silas in the innermost cell with their feet chained. A guard stood watch over them at night so that they couldn't try to escape. That definitely feels like a lot!

In that super stressful situation, what did Paul and Silas do? Let's find out!

## ***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying (Acts 16:25a NLT).***

Even if you're not sure about all this God stuff, I think all of us would be sending up some desperate prayers in that situation!

*"God, would You just get me out of this mess?!"*

Sound familiar? While I'm sure we've all prayed a few prayers like that in stressful situations, I think Paul and Silas were praying some different kind of prayers. Theirs sounded more like prayers of hope.

How do I know? Well, let's finish reading the verse.

## ***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25 NLT).***

These guys were full-on singing while they were in prison! They were chained up, beaten up, and their future looked anything but up. There was so much unknown! How long would they be there? Would they ever be released? Were they going to get beaten again tomorrow? In the middle of facing a super stressful moment and an uncertain future, they chose joy. They chose prayer and praise.

I think there's an important lesson in that for us: You can **choose joy over worry**.

Paul and Silas had little control over their current circumstances and even less control over their futures. Instead of choosing stress, fear, and hopelessness, they faithfully followed Jesus and chose joy. They chose to turn to God, who they trusted with their present and their future.

If this were the end of the story, it would be good enough. But right in the middle of Paul and Silas' worship set, something crazy happened. Let's take a look:

## ***Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (Acts 16:26 NLT)***

Great news for the prisoners, bad news for the guard who was now worried about his own future. If all the prisoners escaped, he would certainly be put to death. He was so worried about what might happen to him that he drew his sword and was about to kill himself.



Let's read what happened next.

***But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"***

***The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:28-30 NLT)***

Wait, what? The guard who was watching over Paul and Silas in prison suddenly felt completely different! He was so amazed by the way Paul and Silas responded to their uncertain futures that the guard put his faith in Jesus, right then and there.

And that's the other lesson that we learn from Paul and Silas: Every day, when you **choose joy over worry**, you never know who else's future you might change!

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## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

I know this doesn't take the questions about your future away immediately. But I do think it can help us navigate the stress we feel in any unknown circumstance. It can help us remember that every day we can **choose joy over worry**.

How can you choose joy when you are feeling stressed and worried?

Well, here's where I would start.

First, **identify what you're worried about**. When I say "choose joy," I don't mean put a pretend smile on and fake that you're fine when you're not. That doesn't help any of us! It's important to identify what it is that you're worried about. Be honest about what's stressing you out. Identify it to yourself, to someone you trust, and to God!

Then, we have to **remember what God can do**. Paul and Silas experienced God's faithfulness, goodness, and love many times up to this point. So, when their backs were literally against the wall, they weren't left wondering if God would provide, or if God cared, or how God might be faithful to them. Instead, they could remember the ways they'd seen God show up in the past and have hope that God would do the same in the future. That's what I want you to do, too! When you're worried about what's ahead or stressed about the unknown, look back. Remember how God has been faithful to you in the past to help you choose joy, both today and in the future.

Finally, **be grateful**. One of the best things you can do when you're worried? Practice gratitude! Look for things to be thankful for even in the middle of your stress and worry. Big or small, the more things you can think of to be thankful for now, the more joy you'll see show up as a result.

Remember, choosing joy isn't a quick fix. I'm not asking you to pretend you're okay when you're not. I get that, sometimes, choosing joy doesn't feel possible. When that happens, it's important to know you may need help. Talking to an adult you trust can be a great first step, especially when stress and worry might be something more like depression and anxiety that don't just go away.

Now, think back to Paul and Silas. Remember what they did when they were in a really difficult situation? They chose to worship and pray. That is a practical way they chose joy. To help us with our own stress, we're going to create our own practical way to choose joy today!

### **INTERACTIVE: Stress Relief Station**

*This is where you'll prepare students to go to stations to make their own stress relief objects.*

Before we end today, we're going to do something that's not only fun, but also super helpful when we find ourselves feeling stressed about the future.

In just a minute, everyone's going to find a station around this room. At your station, you'll pick one item that can help you relieve stress, like the stress ball I carry in my backpack! [*Hold up a stress ball.*] It might be a stress ball, a fidget spinner, a popper, or something else!

Once you find the perfect stress reliever, you'll write this phrase on it with permanent marker, "**I can choose joy over worry.**" Then you'll spend a minute thinking about one way you can choose joy over worry.

This week, use your stress object to help you remember the truth that you can put your trust in God and choose joy over worry when you're feeling overwhelmed with stress or are thinking about an uncertain future.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

Before we move onto our stations, remember, you can **choose joy over worry.**

A great way to start is to keep this conversation going with your small group. Trust me, you're not the only one worrying about the unknown or stressing about the future. Talking about what feels like a lot with people who love and care about you is a good start to figuring out what joy looks like for you right now.

So, as you head to your station, think about how you might answer this question: **What's one way you can choose joy this week?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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