

EVEN STRANGER THINGS

LIFE IN THE UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM

FOUR WEEK SERIES
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyardyouth

EVEN STRANGER THINGS

WELCOME!

to Vineyard Youth Curriculum

Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

About This Curriculum

In the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, we join a little group of nerdy teenage friends on their adventures as they are drawn into a world of parallel dimensions, fearsome monsters, and a mysterious girl named Eleven, who has supernatural powers. Their experiences remind us of ordinary heroes in the Bible and even of ourselves as we follow Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to turn the world upside down just as Jesus promised his disciples in John 14: "You will do even greater (and stranger) things than these!"

WEEK 1: ORDINARY HEROES

SUMMARY

What does it take to be a hero? Most of us spend a good bit of time watching actors play heroes, but what if God is calling us to do more than watch? What if He is calling us to BE heroes in our daily lives? Like the kids in the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, God is calling us out of our ordinary day-to-day existence to do the extraordinary, by the power of His Spirit, and with the courage that His presence brings to us.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

What are some ways that God has called you in your own life to be an ordinary person who does extraordinary things? How has He enabled you to rise to meet those challenges? Take a moment to reflect on your own “hero’s journey” and God’s providential care in your life.

INTRODUCTION

Ordinary Heroes

TIME

5 minutes

READ

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” – John 14:12

ASK

Can you think of a show or movie you enjoy about ordinary people doing extraordinary things?

TEACH

So many of the stories we enjoy involve ordinary people rising to meet extraordinary challenges, and in doing so accomplishing greater things than they ever thought possible. Stories like that do more than entertain—they inspire us and capture our imaginations. Ordinary heroes allow us to imagine ourselves walking in their shoes, in much the same way that Jesus’ disciples were just ordinary people following in the footsteps of Jesus.

POINT 1

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

In the same way, you have been chosen by God and called into his kingdom to do the things that Jesus did. Jesus told his disciples all that was required was that they believed that God could and would use them. It's time that we raise our expectations for what God wants to do in our lives so that we too can become ordinary heroes who do extraordinary things.

Called to Something More

10 minutes

"He asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered, 'but he is tending the sheep.' ...Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; he is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power." – 1 Samuel 16:11–13

When we say yes to the call of God on our lives, the same Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to do the incredible things He did comes and lives inside of us. We too have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. You might hear that and say to yourself, "I can't do that kind of stuff. I'm just a kid!"

In *Stranger Things* a bunch of ordinary kids are drawn into a cosmic struggle of light and darkness, good and evil. None of them is especially strong or smart or prepared for the battle they are entering, and yet out of the basement they are called to do battle with the forces of darkness.

In the Bible we discover that many people God calls are just kids themselves—kids like Esther, Samuel, David, even Mary the mother of Jesus himself. God chose them just as they were and promised that He would empower them to meet the challenges they would face.

Have you ever had to rise to a challenge you didn't think you were ready for? How did God help you to grow and meet that challenge?

POINT 2

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

Bursting the Bubble

10 minutes

“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’

‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’

Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’ Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.’” – John 1:47–50

The twelve disciples were just ordinary people (young people too) living ordinary lives when an extraordinary someone crashed into their existence. That person was Jesus. Soon these young people found that Jesus was turning their world upside down.

In a similar way, the friends in *Stranger Things* are a loveable band of nerds who spend most of their free time in the basement playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. They have a tight-knit friendship with one another, but all shrink from stepping outside of their social bubble into the big scary world beyond their little group. Into this socially awkward circle bursts a nameless girl who refers to herself only by number: “Eleven.” This girl is anything but ordinary, wielding powers that soon open their eyes to the existence of another reality, which they aptly call the “Upside Down.” Like the disciples whose eyes were opened by Jesus, suddenly they are challenged to step out of their safe bubble of imaginary adventures and take part in a real adventure of their own.

When did you first encounter Jesus? How has Jesus challenged you to step out of your safe bubble and into a larger world?

SUM UP

TIME

READ

TEACH

ACT

PRAY

Do Not Be Afraid

10 minutes

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." – John 14:26–27

Having our eyes opened to new realities can be a scary thing at times. Some of the experiences the kids in *Stranger Things* encounter are creepy and even downright terrifying. Saying yes to Eleven was probably the toughest decision some of them had ever made, just like saying yes to Jesus was the most significant decision the disciples ever made. But it was also the decision that set them on the path to finding a purpose and destiny far beyond anything they had ever dreamed.

One thing that Jesus promises as we step into this larger world is that He will always be with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The disciples knew that when Jesus was by their side, no other power in the world could stop them. We know that power is still with us, and that knowledge can give us the courage to get off the couch, turn off Netflix, and answer the call of God to no longer be satisfied with watching actors play heroes on a screen, but to BE those heroes ourselves.

What is one way that God is calling you to step out of your bubble and into the adventure this week?

For the courage to answer the call of God.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you naturally enjoy stepping out of the ordinary into adventures, or does it take an extra effort for you?
2. Have you ever thought about following Jesus as living a life of adventure? Do you think seeing yourself as a hero might change the way you live? How so?
3. How high are your expectations for what God wants to do in your life? What is one way He might be calling you to raise your expectations?

WEEK 2: UPSIDE DOWN

SUMMARY

When the disciples first answered Jesus' call and started following him, their lives were turned upside down. They had their eyes opened to a whole other dimension of spiritual reality they never knew existed. We too need to have our eyes opened and be accompanied by the Holy Spirit so that we can walk in victory over the powers of darkness. Wherever we go, we are invited to join forces with what God is doing in turning the world upside down and replacing darkness with light.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Have you ever encountered spiritual warfare or resistance in your life and ministry? What are some tactics you have learned for getting breakthrough in these times? Take a moment to reflect on how God has helped you get the victory, and how He might still be working to help you get the victory today.

INTRODUCTION

Upside Down

TIME

10 minutes

READ

"When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch...' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break... When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' ...Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him." – Luke 5:4, 6, 8, 10–11

ASK

Have you ever experienced something that turned your world upside down? How did you respond?

TEACH

When the disciples first decided to follow Jesus, little did they know that over the next few years they would see things they had never dreamed possible, and even learn to do those things themselves. Jesus opened their eyes to a realm of possibilities never before imagined.

As followers of Jesus, we too are invited to open our eyes to a world far larger than what can be seen with the naked eye. Just like those first disciples, God is ready to turn our worlds upside down if we will let Him. Like a roller coaster at an amusement park, having our worlds turned upside down might feel a bit unsettling, or even scary at first, but with God at the controls we can be confident He will protect us and be with us. That confidence can enable us to let go and experience the fun and excitement as we go for an incredible ride with Him!

POINT 1

TIME

READ

Opened Eyes

10 minutes

"When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?' the servant asked. 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." – 2 Kings 6:15–17

TEACH

Just like the characters in *Stranger Things* encountered the Upside Down, a parallel dimension usually invisible to their eyes, influencing people without their knowing it, Jesus' disciples came face to face with spiritual dimensions as well. Like the prophet in the story, we need God to open our eyes to the reality of spiritual warfare going on around us. When we understand that there are spiritual enemies influencing people, it can help us realize that people are not our enemy. In the same way, knowing God's power is supporting and surrounding us can help us not to be afraid.



POINT 2

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

Overcoming Resistance

10 minutes

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." – 1 John 4:4

In *Stranger Things* it isn't long before the kids in come into conflict with some of the monstrous inhabitants of the Upside Down. Led by Eleven, they must do battle with these forces of evil.

When Jesus began his ministry, he immediately started healing the sick and casting evil spirits out of those who were suffering. He gave this power and authority to his disciples, and they too overcame the forces of evil. People began to rise up against Jesus, but he relied on the Holy Spirit to guide him and give him words to speak.

We too have been given this same power as Jesus' followers. When we begin to walk in this power, we can expect to encounter resistance, sometimes from spiritual forces and other times from people. Yet when we face resistance, we, like Jesus, can rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us the power to overcome.

What does it mean to have authority? How has the Holy Spirit helped you to overcome resistance?

SUM UP

TIME
READ

TEACH

ACT

PRAY

SMALL GROUP
QUESTIONS**World-Turners**

10 minutes

"...They dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...'" – Acts 17:6–7

When we encounter the life-transforming reality of God's power at work in us, our lives are radically changed. This isn't a change we can keep to ourselves, but one that is destined to turn the entire world upside down, conquering the kingdom of darkness and filling the world with light. And it starts with us!

Wherever we go, we have been commissioned to share the stories of what God has done in our lives; when we do, we can expect to encounter resistance, maybe even persecution. But we can also expect to see amazing things happen in the lives of those who receive the message that we share. Don't be afraid to have your life turned upside down. Embrace the fun and excitement, inviting others to come along with you, and get ready for the ride of a lifetime!

What are some areas of your life where you have encountered resistance lately? This week, how can you rely on the Holy Spirit's power and authority to overcome?

Let's begin by giving those areas over to God in prayer right now.

1. Have you ever thought about the reality of angels and demons? Do you think there is any evidence that such beings exist?
2. How do you think being more aware of unseen spiritual dimensions might change the way you live and interact with people?
3. Do you find the thought of spiritual warfare freaky or weird? How can knowing that you have the power and authority of the Holy Spirit help you to overcome fear?

WEEK 3: EMPOWERED

SUMMARY

After Jesus returned to God, the promised Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. Instantly they went from people hiding in fear to bold proclaimers and displayers of God's kingdom. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we receive supernatural boldness and other gifts from God. These gifts enable us to minister to others in extraordinary ways. God urges us not to keep these gifts to ourselves, but to give them away generously, as He has given them generously to us.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

What demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's power and presence have you experienced in your own life? Can you remember times when a prophetic word or supernatural answer to prayer had a significant impact in changing the direction of your life? Take a moment to reflect on the role the Holy Spirit has played and continues to play in your personal walk with God.

INTRODUCTION

Empowered

TIME

5 minutes

READ

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." – Acts 1:4–5

ASK

Do you have a favorite superhero? If you were a superhero, what would your powers and abilities be?

TEACH

After Jesus' resurrection, he told the disciples that he would soon be returning to the Father, but that he would not leave them to face the world alone. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and that once they had been filled with the Holy Spirit, they would be empowered to go out and reach the world with the message of the kingdom of God.

POINT 1

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

So they waited. Then one day their lives were turned upside down again when the power of the Holy Spirit came on them at Pentecost. Suddenly they were transformed from a fearful, huddled group of friends who were too afraid to leave their hiding place in the upper room to a group boldly proclaiming the message of the kingdom in the streets, performing miracles, and standing strong even in the face of opposition and persecution. All this took place by the power of the Holy Spirit within them!

Filled with the Spirit

10 minutes

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit & began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” – Acts 2:1–4

The heroes in *Stranger Things* don't seem very heroic at first: too awkward to step outside of their immediate circle of friends, hiding in the basement, like the disciples in their upper room. When dark powers come against them, they take one look and run for cover!

But suddenly another friend joins their band, a friend with powers that can vanquish even the most hideous monsters. With that kind of friend beside them, our heroes not only stand against the darkness, but they fight and win.

We too have that kind of friend. His name is the Holy Spirit, and He wants to empower us in the same way that first bunch of disciples were empowered. How does this happen? Simple by asking! The first step is by giving our lives to Jesus and making Him Lord. Then we can ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit the way the disciples were at Pentecost and experience the full power of God in our lives!

Have you ever prayed to receive the Holy Spirit? What was it like? How have you experienced change in your life since?

POINT 2

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

To Each One is Given

10 minutes

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues."

– 1 Corinthians 12:7–10

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see him do many remarkable things, such as casting out demons, healing the sick, even raising the dead!

In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives a description of many different "superpowers" that God can work through us. These powers aren't something that we have to earn or purchase with good works, instead he calls them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, free to all of us to use to advance God's kingdom.

Paul says, "to each one a manifestation of the Spirit is given." That means you! Like Christmas gifts around the tree, these gifts are waiting to be opened and tried out. Paul also tells us to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts." Which gifts have you opened? Which ones are you still excited to try for the first time?

Have you ever experienced any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12? What was it like? Which gifts would you most like to experience?

SUM UP

TIME

READ

TEACH

ACT

PRAY

SMALL GROUP
QUESTIONS**Freely Give**

10 minutes

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.” – Matthew 10:8

The gifts that God gives aren't meant for us to simply enjoy and keep to ourselves. God gives to us so that we can share what we have been given with those around us. You've probably heard the phrase, "With great power comes great responsibility." If we are to become the kind of superheroes God wants us to be, we must make the decision to use the power we have been given to do the work that God intends us to do.

Sharing our gifts can be awkward or scary at first. Each takes lots of practice to get good at, and sometimes we may even experience failure or embarrassment. But the only way to succeed is to try as many times as it takes and remember that it isn't us doing it on our own. This is the Holy Spirit in us, and with that kind of firepower on our side, nothing on earth can hold us back.

If you've never received the Holy Spirit before, would you like to today? If you already have, God promises free refills!

To be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Note to youth leaders: Afterwards, try to speak privately with anyone doing so for the first time.

1. Does the idea of God giving people supernatural powers seem weird to you? Do you know Christians who hold different beliefs about whether the supernatural powers of the Holy Spirit can still be experienced today?
2. What do you think the purpose and importance is of experiencing God's supernatural power? Why do you think He chooses to do supernatural things?
3. Have you ever wanted God to do something supernatural and it didn't happen? What might be some of the reasons why the Holy Spirit doesn't always do what we want him to do? to overcome fear?

WEEK 4: SIGNS & WONDERS

SUMMARY

Why does God do what He does? Throughout the Bible and even in our lives today we see amazing displays of God's power at work. These signs and wonders point us back to the source of everything that God does in our lives—His extravagant love for us. Sometimes we can get distracted by the excitement of what God does and forget about why He does it in the first place. Whenever we experience the signs and wonders of God, it is up to us to always remember to look back to Him and point others to God's love.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Have you ever gotten caught up in the nuts and bolts of doing ministry and lost sight of the ultimate purpose for all that you do? Can you think of a time God brought His love and care for people back into focus for you in a powerful way? Take a moment to reflect on the ways God has shown His love to you.

INTRODUCTION

Signs & Wonders

TIME

5 minutes

READ

"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

– Hebrews 2:3–4

ASK

Can you name a time you saw someone do something really crazy & awe-inspiring?

TEACH

It's always exciting when we get to experience something out of the ordinary, something unforgettable and eye-opening!

When God moves in power, we get to catch a glimpse of something beyond the limits of this world, leaving us with stories to tell and to remember. But these glimpses also leave us with a question. Why? Why does God do the things He does, and what does it mean for us?

The Bible calls these outpourings of God's power "signs and wonders," & the answer to our questions can be found in those words themselves. Let's break it down.

POINT 1

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

Signs

10 minutes

"The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing." – Acts 8:6

What's the purpose of a sign? Is a piece of metal or wood with writing on it something worth getting excited about? I probably wouldn't round up all my friends so we could go hang out next to a signpost all day.

But that's not what signs are for! Signs are markers that point to something else, something bigger and better by far than the sign itself. The same is true for the signs of God. When we see a miracle, hear a word from God, or receive an answer to prayer, these are signs that are pointing back to the source—to God!

It's possible to get distracted by the excitement of the signs themselves & lose focus on the reason for the sign in the first place. Let's do our best to always remember to give thanks and glory to God for what we see Him do; when we share our stories or pray with someone, always point that person back to God's love for them.

Did you ever see or hear something exciting and forget what the point was in the first place? What are some ways we can point to God when He does awesome things?

POINT 2

TIME

READ

TEACH

DISCUSS

Wonders

10 minutes

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven... But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralyzed man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, 'We have seen remarkable things today.'" – Luke 5:20, 24–26

At the center of the show *Stranger Things* is a relationship between Eleven, a teenage girl with special powers, and Hopper, the gruff but loving chief of police who takes her under his wing. If we're honest, it's not all the scary creatures, Russian spies, or explosive battles that win our hearts and make us root for our heroes: It's love that really matters, the love of a father for his child, and the extremes that he will go to in order to keep her safe.

This is what wonders are all about—to make us “wonder” why God would heal someone, forgive them, speak to them, or reach out to them in the first place. And once again it all comes back to love, the love of a Father for His kids, one who would give His life to stand between us and the powers of sin and evil. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Did you ever wonder why God does what He does? How has God shown His love to you?

SUM UP
TIME

READ

TEACH

ACT

PRAY

SMALL GROUP
QUESTIONS

Pointing to Jesus

10 minutes

“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger... And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” – Luke 2:12, 17–18

When Jesus came to earth, his entire life was a sign and a wonder pointing people back to the love of God for us. In his final moments on the cross, he became the physical embodiment of God’s unlimited, unstoppable willingness to sacrifice Himself for us. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

Jesus is calling us, as his disciples, to lay down our lives each day so that others might look at us and see signs and wonders of God’s love for them. The next time you experience an answer to prayer, a display of God’s power, healing, forgiveness, or mercy, make sure to take a moment to look back to Him and point others to Him as well. Even just in simple daily expressions of love and service to others we can live as signs and wonders for God.

Recall something God has done in your life recently and think about how it shows His love for you.

Give thanks to God for those things, and pray for the courage to share those stories with others who need to hear about God’s love.

1. Have you ever stopped to think about what the statement “God loves me” really means? Does the idea that the Creator of the universe created you and loves you personally seem strange or difficult to understand?
2. Can you remember a time when the truth of God’s love for you became real in a new way? How did that experience affect you?
3. Do you ever find it difficult or challenging to point people back to God, whether in conversation or in your actions? What has helped you to grow in helping others to see and understand God’s love for them?

WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson includes:

- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Small group questions each week.
- A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.

Why This Topic?

In the Netflix show "Stranger Things," we join a little group of nerdy teenage friends on their adventures as they are drawn into a world of parallel dimensions, fearsome monsters, and a mysterious girl named Eleven, who has supernatural powers. Their experiences remind us of ordinary heroes in the Bible and even of ourselves as we follow Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to turn the world upside down just as Jesus promised his disciples in John 14: "You will do even greater (and stranger) things than these!"

About the Author

Tim Holmes

Tim has served in youth ministry for 15 years and currently pastors youth and young adults at the Vineyard Church in Hopewell, NY. He serves on the Vineyard East Region Taskforce for Youth, and is a regular speaker at regional retreats and youth events. A bi-vocational pastor and worship leader, Tim also teaches guitar, drums and other instruments privately and in local schools. Tim seeks to kindle in students an unquenchable desire for God while equipping them with the tools needed to build a foundation of faith that will last a lifetime.