



# How To Run a *Your Story* Group Session

*Your Story* is a powerful survey  
**and** a great opportunity for discipleship conversations

One of the powerful things about the *Your Story* project is that it offers group leaders a great opportunity to follow up the survey with supportive discipleship conversations.

When a young person completes the survey it not only helps us to understand more about the teenage experience of faith, but it also helps the young person to learn more about their own spiritual journey. The survey can shine a light on who has been a part of that journey and how it has been shaped over the years.

**One of the great ways to use this survey is to gather a group of young people together to complete the survey and then have a follow-up conversation.**

These group sessions can be a real win-win. The feedback we have received is that these follow-up conversations are appreciated by the young people, while the leaders and/or teachers appreciate the opportunity to understand more of the spirituality of those whom they lead and/or teach.

Already we have heard some wonderful stories of various groups achieving these outcomes in creative ways:

- **Impromptu Groups:** One minister put out a message that anyone who remained after the Sunday night service to complete the survey would be treated to a pizza dinner. The minister later reported that the group became engrossed in the survey, so he fed them pizza while they completed it and then sat down afterwards to have a conversation with them over dessert.
- **Small Groups / Life Groups:** Youth leaders have been using the survey to run a small group sessions for teens and young adults. After group members complete the survey, the leader then facilitates a conversation that either debriefs the experience in general or focuses on one of the discipleship themes present in the survey (see resources below).
- **Teachers in Schools:** Teachers of Christian Studies or Religious Education have included the survey in their classroom teaching. After gaining parental consent, teachers have utilised two consecutive classes; the first to complete the survey and the second to have a follow-up conversation, again using the resources given below.

## Suggested Session Outline

Pre-gathering	Check parent/guardian consent + Internet Access
5 mins	Welcome and Introduction
10 mins	[Optional] Short Theme-Based Activity
40-60 mins	Complete online Survey
	[Break]
30-60 mins	Follow-up Discussion

# Preparing to run a *Your Story* Group Session

To prepare for a group session, follow the following steps:

- **Get familiar with the Your Story project:**
  - Eligible participants include anyone who is at least 16 years of age and is not yet 21 years of age who is willing to complete a survey focused on faith and spirituality. They do not need to identify as a Christian.
  - Background Information and Survey Links can be found at: <https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/>
  - Information for group leaders can be found at <https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/leaders-information/>
  - A summary of the survey and the kinds of questions asked can be found at: <https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/survey-summary/>
  - Use this information to tell group members about the project and what it means to participate.
  
- **Understand Parental/Guardian Consent:**
  - If a group member is under the age of 18, they will need to arrange parental consent to participate. All the information you need to know about consent can be found here: <https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/consent/>
  - Parent/guardian consent can be given in one of two ways:
    - If the parent/guardian is present when the young person commences the survey, they can enter their details directly into the online survey in the appropriate sections.
    - If the parent/guardian is not present, they can give their consent in advance by completing this form: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6866544/Your-Story-Consent> Group leaders should provide the parent/guardian with their name and contact email address to include in the consent form.
  
- **Preparing for the Group Session:**

A variety of resources are provided further below that you can combine in different ways to create an engaging group session.

When planning your session, keep in mind:

- A short engaging activity to commence the group session can help bring focus to the group and prime people's memories and thoughts for the survey. Some group starter suggestions are given below.
- Reserve around 60 minutes for respondents to complete the survey.
  - The length of time taken by people to complete the survey can vary quite a bit.
  - Anticipate and allow time for any technical difficulties people might have with gaining an internet connection or stepping through completing the consent process etc.
  - Plan to have a break time and perhaps a snack/meal of some kind following the survey. This will also create a buffer if there are some people needing more time.
- Consider what kind of conversation and application you would like to take place following the survey. There are many options available to you, and there are a variety of resources given below. Potential topics for discussion include:
  - Who has helped your journey of faith (and who has hindered it)?
  - How can knowing the history of your faith and its turning points help you to choose your preferred future?
  - Faith needs to grow up as we grow older. How has your experience of God changed over the years (and in what ways might it still need to grow up)?
  - Doubt, challenges, and disorientation are building blocks of faith. What has been your experience of these, and how have they influenced your journey of faith?
  - How does realising how others have been there for you help you to be there for others?

# Resources, Tips and Checklists for Running a *Your Story* Group Session

## Inviting Group Members

- Inform group members of the date, time, and purpose of the gathering.
- Inform group members of the need to bring an internet-enabled device with an external keyboard (phones don't work very well with the survey platform).
- Inform those who are under 18 years of age that they need to gain parent/guardian consent in advance using this link: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6866544/Your-Story-Consent>

## Before Group Members Arrive

- Check internet access and Wi-Fi connection for group members

## As Group Members Arrive

- Check each group member has an appropriate device (something with an external keyboard is best)
- Check parental/guardian consent for all group members under 18.
- Confirm the age of participants is older than 16 and younger than 21 years of age

## Welcome and Introduction

- Your introduction should help orient those gathered to how the session will run and to the nature of the survey. Make sure that all participants understand that:
  - The survey will be online and require using their device;
  - The length of time people take to complete the survey varies greatly. It is not a race. Thoughtful and thorough responses are best.
  - If they can't finish the survey in the allotted time, they can pause and save their progress to complete it later (though we have found that it is best to complete it in one sitting if possible)
- Use information from the website to introduce the survey. An example introduction could include the following:

*The Your Story Survey helps to identify the experiences, choices and relationships that have shaped your story of faith. It is part of ground-breaking Australian research that is surveying 100s of young people across the nation. It is not important whether you believe or don't believe in God, religion or spirituality. If you are willing to take the survey, the research team would love to hear your story – the deep story about who you are, what you believe and how you have come to hold these beliefs.*

*The Your Story project team are Christian researchers seeking to understand what has shaped the spiritual experiences of young people today. Your Story is part of a national research project sponsored by Converge Oceania and supported by a number of local organisations that serve young people all over Australia. The findings of the study will assist community-based and church-based youth organisations to improve their understanding and support of young people and their faith journeys.*

*The survey is pretty involved and can take some effort to complete. It is divided into two major sections: Section 1 invites you to reflect upon the story of their faith so far, and Section 2 invites you to think about who and what has been a part of that story.*

*Your Story is as much about where you have come from as where you are now. So, quite often the survey will ask you to compare three different stages of your life – 1) **Now**, 2) when you were an **Early Teenager**, and 3) when you were a **Child**.*

1. **Childhood** means any memories you have from when you were really little up until the end of primary school.
2. **Early Teenager** refers to the time from the start of High School until the end of year 9 or 10 (say around 16 years old); and
3. **Now** is referring to your present experience;  
(If you are in year 10 now, try to distinguish between the last year and your earlier teenage years. If you are older than year 10, concentrate on the last few years.)

*You take the survey by navigating to [www.yourstory.ridley.edu.au](http://www.yourstory.ridley.edu.au) and clicking on the link that says 'SURVEY'. From there, the online survey will step you through the process.*

*The first thing you will encounter is giving your consent, and if you are under 18 years of age, making sure your parent/guardian has also given their consent. Again, the survey platform will step you through the process. For those under 18, you should have already gained your parent/guardian's consent and there will be a point where I'll need to sign off something before you can continue. If you have any trouble, just let me know and I'll help you through.*

## **Opening Group Activities (Optional)**

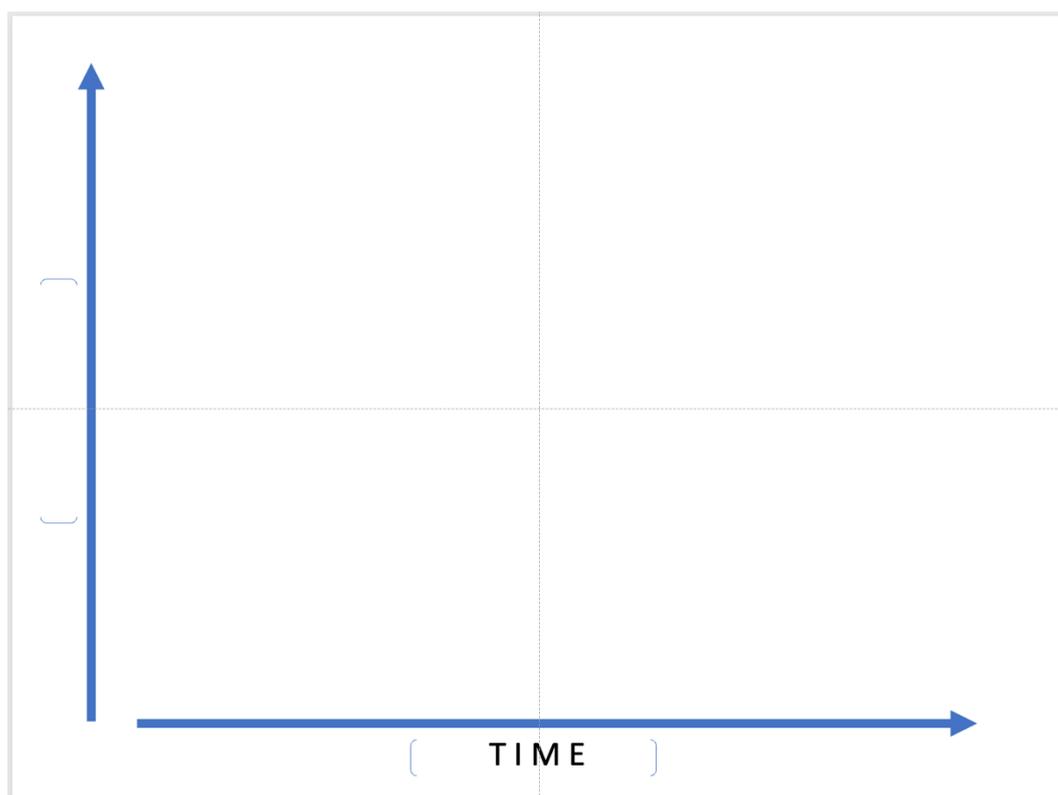
The following activities are optional elements that you can include in the group session as a way of warming up the group and/or focusing group members on the task at hand. You can select from amongst the following resources or come up with your own to reflect the nature of your group. The following resources assume that group members already know one another and have a level of trust.

### **Kinda Like Speed Dating ...**

- Divide the group into pairs. Everyone will swap to new pairs during this activity as many times as the facilitator has discussion questions. If there are enough group members, each pair can stand facing each other with the whole group making a circle (one person is part of the inner circle facing toward their partner who is part of the outer circle). When it is time to switch pairs, one of the circles can simply shuffle in a direction to form the next pair.
- Direct the group to get into their first pair and explain that when you give the signal, they will have 1 minute to discuss the first question. They should try to divide the time evenly between them. At the end of the minute, they need to stop the discussion, move to their next partner and be ready to discuss a different question.
- Repeat this process of discussion and swapping partners until you run out of questions or the group is losing interest. At the end of this process, the facilitator can get the group together and ask them if there was anything interesting they discovered about the person, about the questions asked, or about the general topic.
- Early questions can be simple get-to-know-you style discussions:
  - Would You Rather questions (Own a dog or cat, Be invisible or be able to fly, Be popular or smart ...) and explain why!
  - Personal Favourite questions (Holiday destination, Best meal ever, Best car ever ...) and explain why!
- Or you can jump to deeper questions that are more related to the survey:
  - If you could ask God one question, what would it be?
  - When it comes to faith and spirituality, what would you tell your younger self?
  - If you could change one thing about the church, what would it be?
  - Do you believe the same things as your parents?
  - Who has had the greatest influence on your faith so far?

### Mapping the Journey So far...

- Provide group members with a blank piece of A4 or A3 paper and a pen. Ask group members to
  - Draw an arrow along the bottom of the page from left to right and label it “time”. Write the year of your birth on the far left and the current year on the right.
  - Draw another arrow on the left-hand side of the page from bottom to top and but don’t label it yet  
(Alternatively, you can print these out as a handout in advance – see Diagram 1)
- Explain to the group: “We are going to attempt to map out our faith journey on this page. Now, we are using the word “faith” very generally here to mean the deep personal ideas, principles, and/or convictions that you hold, particularly in relation to God and the supernatural world. We call it a faith ***journey*** because, so often, things that we discover and hold to be deeply true change over time. How would you map out your journey?:
  - First of all, decide what you will name the arrow pointing up: commitment, strength, challenge, happiness, discontent.
  - Does your faith journey start at the very bottom corner of the page or part way up?
  - What is the destination of your faith journey, and where would you like it to go in the future
- Invite group members to map out their faith journey and reserve some time for discussion and sharing.



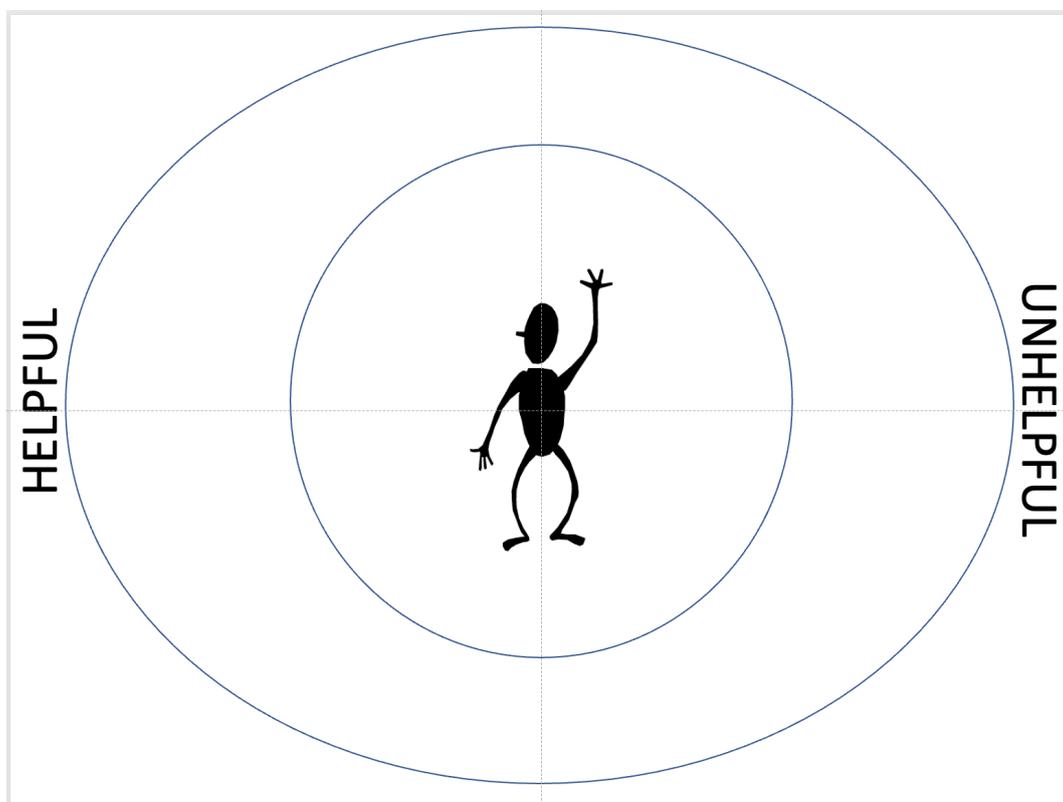
**Diagram 1) Mapping the Journey So Far**

Note: The point of this exercise is to get people thinking about how their faith has changed over time. This will be helpful when they commence the survey as there are a number of questions that invite them to consider the differences in their faith from childhood through to today.

Alternative Option: Some group members may prefer a more organic way to map out their faith journey. Such people may prefer to dispense with the arrows and instead draw an actual map that charts some important milestones in their faith. Just be aware that the arrows force group members to be quick and simplistic (allowing this exercise to be short), while actually making a map can be elaborate and take much more time.

### Who's Been With Me?

- Provide group members with a blank piece of A4 or A3 paper and a pen. Ask group members to
  - take 30 seconds to draw a representation of themselves right in the middle of the page – but not too big. It can be a simple stick figure or an emoji.
  - Draw two concentric circles around this central image, one that is smaller and one that is much larger (See below. Again, you could prepare this in advance and provide as a handout. See Diagram 2)
  - On the far left of the page, write the label 'Helpful' and on the far right 'Unhelpful'
- Explain to the Group: We are going to use this page to map out the role different people play in your life and faith. We are using the word "Faith" quite generally to mean the deep personal ideas, principles, and/or convictions that you hold, particularly in relation to God and the supernatural world. You have 2 minutes to write down the names of as many people as you can think of. But where you write their name on the page is what is important.
- Locate where to write people's names based on whether they are 1) a close relationship that impacts you greatly and 2) whether they have been helpful or unhelpful for your journey of faith.
  - Close relationships that have been helpful in your faith are located near the centre AND to the left.
  - Distant relationships that have been unhelpful are located on the far right.
  - Neutral relationships can be located near the midline.
- Examples of relationships include: Parents, Siblings, Peers, Mentors, Spiritual Leaders, Authors, Artists, Podcasters etc.
- After group members have written in at least 10 names, invite the group to then add an arrow to indicate what direction the relationships is moving in (more or less helpful / more or less close). They can also add another arrow to indicate what direction they would LIKE the relationship to move in.
- Reserve time for discussion and sharing.



**Diagram 2) Who's Been With Me?**

## Completing the Survey

- Allow at least 60 minutes for group members to complete the survey
- Direct group members to the survey link: <https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/>



- Provide any assistance required to complete the consent step, including checking parent/guardian consent.

## Additional Consent

Because you are under 18 years of age, we need to confirm the consent of a Parent or Guardian for you to participate in this project.

There are two ways to do this:

1. **If your parent or guardian is present with you now:** select the first option below ("My Parent or Guardian is present ...") and ask them to fill in their details on the following page.
2. **If your parent or guardian has already given their consent:** select the second option below ("A witness will confirm ...") and ask your witness to complete the details on the following page.

**Note:** For this option, your parent or guardian must have completed [this consent form](#) and provided you with a confirmation email. A witness who is over 18 years of age can sign this confirmation and fill in their details on the following page.

If your parent or guardian is not present and has not already completed a consent form, you can send them the following link, ask them to complete the form, and then send you the confirmation email to be witnessed:

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6866544/Your-Story-Consent>

### 6. Please tell us how additional consent is being provided: \*

- My parent or guardian is present and will complete the next part of the consent form
- A witness will confirm that my parent or guardian has given consent

Click Next (or the forward arrow) when you are ready.

Back Next

7%

## **Post-Survey Conversation Ideas**

### **Option 1) General Reflections**

For some groups (particularly older groups), it may be simplest to have an open conversation inviting reflections and insights that occurred to them as they completed the survey. You can kick off this discussion by simply inviting group members to share anything that stood out to them as they made their way through the survey. Alternatively, you can remind group members what different aspects that made up the survey (see below). Remember, a summary of the survey can be found at:

<https://yourstory.ridley.edu.au/survey-summary/>

#### Section 1) The Faith of the Young Person

Part 1. Spiritual Experiences and Practices of Faith

Part 2. The Story of Your Faith

Part 3. Your Spiritual Worldview

#### Section 2) The Faith Context of the Young Person

Part 1. Key Relationships in your Faith Journey (Mother, Father, Friends, Mentors etc)

Part 2. Key Groups in your Faith Journey (Church, Youth Group, Youth Agency, School, Camp etc)

Some guiding questions might be:

- Did you have any 'ahah!' moments of insight as you made your way through the survey?
- What stood out in your reflections/responses?
- What parts of the survey helped you have a new or clearer insight into your story and your beliefs?
- Is there anything you want to affirm about how we (ie the group) do things here? Are there things we could do differently that would help you live out your convictions?
- Did the survey raise any questions for you that you want to explore further?

### **Option 2) Who has helped your journey of faith (and who has hindered it)?**

**Main Point:** Faith is never a solo journey. Surrounding yourself with faithful companions and mentors who will be with you in good times and hard times is an important way to develop your spiritual life.

1. Pose the question to the group: Who has been the most influential person, group or thing that has shaped your faith so far (positively or negatively)?
2. Assist the group in formulating a list of characteristics of those who positively influence faith and those who negatively influence it.
3. Explain: Our faith grows like a plant in a fertile ecology. One of the best ways to grow our faith is to make deliberate choices about what and who is a part of our 'faith ecology'.
  - What or who is an asset in your faith ecology? How could you make this stronger?
  - What or who is a liability in your faith ecology? What would you like to do about this?
  - Is there something missing from your faith ecology? What could be a smart action you could take to make it stronger?
4. Invite group members to take a moment and send a text message to someone who has been a positive influence on their faith journey. Encourage them to be specific in the communication to name what it is that they have done to be this positive influence.

### **Option 3) Knowing the history of your faith and its turning points helps you to choose your preferred future.**

**Main point:** you can expect your faith to change over time. Being aware of how your faith is changing is important; learning how to direct your faith is key.

Invite the group to discuss the following questions

1. Have you thought much about the way your faith has changed over time? What was something that stood out to you as you made your way through the survey?
2. Can you identify some key milestones in your faith journey?
3. Is there anything that you regret or would like to change in your faith story?
4. Have you thought much about the future direction or trajectory of your faith? Where is it heading and where would you like it to be heading?

### **Option 4) Faith needs to grow up as we grow older.**

**Main point:** You can expect your faith to change over time. Faith matures when we let go of old ways of going about faith that have become too simplistic in favour of something more complex and robust. Being aware of what to let go of and what to hold on to is key.

1. Invite group members to discuss:
  - What did you notice about your childhood faith in comparison to your faith today?
  - Are there things that you wished were still childlike in your faith?
  - Are there things that you prefer about the adult faith you are developing?
2. Explain to the group: There is all the difference in the world between growing older and growing up. Growing older only requires that you wake up each morning and, moment by moment, you will get older. But growing up implies maturity, complexity, taking responsibility for yourself and 'adulting'. What do you think is the difference between your faith growing older and your faith growing up?
3. Invite each group member to reflect:
  - Are there some childish/dependent aspects of your faith that you need to let go of?
  - In what ways could you take greater responsibility for your faith?
  - Identify one thing you could do that would help your faith grow up, not just older?

### **Option 5) Doubt, challenges and disorientation are building blocks of faith**

**Main Point:** Faith doesn't grow without being challenged and disrupted in some way. Understanding how doubt functions in the life of faith can help you navigate challenging times with purpose.

**Note:** This option is a little more involved and may take additional preparation by the group leader to explain the following concepts and be able to illustrate them from their own life experience.

Faith doesn't grow without being challenged and disrupted in some way. Sometimes we go looking for challenges by seeking to get out of our 'comfort zone' and take our faith to the next level. More commonly, these challenges come to us uninvited. These unbidden moments come in the form of doubt, questioning, disorientation, and sometimes deep personal loss or crisis. When you look back at your faith journey, you may notice that significant changes in your faith were preceded by some kind of disruption and challenge. Looking back and examining these periods can help you to understand your faith better and consider how you can respond constructively to the next challenge that comes your way.

Invite the group to examine a time when their faith was challenged by looking for the following things:

1. When faith is challenged, usually something new has come into your world. It may be a new idea that you hadn't thought of before, a new relationship, a new hardship and so on. What was the new thing?
2. That new thing may directly challenge or call into question something you've held in your faith for a long time. What was the thing that was challenged?
3. When your faith is disrupted, you go looking for resources to help resolve the struggle. You might talk to mentors, research on the internet, ask for prayer from friends. What resources did you go looking for, and which ones were the most helpful?
4. Finally, when you resolve a disruption to your faith, you can do so in one of four ways:
  - a. Reaffirm: Reject that new thing that came along (identified in step one) and reinforce your existing faith.
  - b. Reconsider: Tweak your existing faith (identified in step 2) but tweaking it a bit to make it more complex.
  - c. Revise: Cautiously integrate the new thing that came along (identified in step 1) in such a way that it changes your existing faith (identified in step 2) to be significantly different.
  - d. Rejecting: Leave behind the part of your faith that was challenged (identified in step 2) in favour of the new thing (identified in step 1).  
(Rejecting doesn't necessarily mean you walk away from your faith entirely. It can simply mean that you leave behind an aspect of your faith).

Invite group members to discuss their thoughts in pairs or with the whole group. As people share, help the group to identify

- What were the things they did that were most helpful/unhelpful through this period?
- What were the things that others did that were helpful/unhelpful?
- Are there any lessons learned that they may want to apply next time their faith is challenged?

### **Option 6) Realising how others have been there for you can help you to be there for others**

**Main Point:** Knowing how others have positively influenced our faith can help us to be a positive influence for others.

**Note:** this option is perhaps more relevant for older groups, especially groups who have a leadership role. It is similar to Option 2 but instead offers a leadership-oriented application

1. Pose the question to the group: Who has been the most influential person, group or thing that has shaped your faith so far (positively or negatively)?
2. Assist the group in formulating a list of characteristics of those who positively influence faith and those who negatively influence it.
3. Invite individual group members to consider:
  - a. Who do you influence?
  - b. How does your faith shape and impact the faith of others (positively or negatively)?
  - c. Identify one of the positive characteristics from the list made in point 2 that you would like to develop.
  - d. How would you like to be more deliberate in the way your faith impacts others?
4. Conclude the session by inviting group members to identify an individual with whom they would like to be a helpful presence in their faith journey. See if they can name one tangible action they could do in the next week.

## **Concluding the Group Session**

There are many ways to conclude the group session, and it may not be clear how best to conclude until you observe what direction the conversation has gone. Some groups will find that the process is cathartic and clarifying and they can conclude on a note of reassurance. In other cases, it may be appropriate to end with a note of challenge. If time permits and it is appropriate for the group, it may also be beneficial to break into pairs or triplets for prayer.

Please ensure the group knows of your willingness to follow-up with anyone who would like additional pastoral support. Sometimes the process of reflecting upon the past can stir up unwanted memories and it is important for the group to know that they are supported in this way.

On behalf of us, the research team at *Your Story*, please pass on our sincere thanks to the group. It is always humbling being able to attend to the faith stories of so many young people and we greatly appreciate every single person who has taken the time to sit down and complete the survey.