

# FINDING YOU

## SO WHO'S LOST?

Lost! The panicky feeling, the fear. Then the relief, the joy of being found. Everyone knows these feelings from firsthand experience (even the most macho junior high guy!). In telling parables, Jesus drew on common experiences, but his stories have the power to move us in uncommon ways. So whether we're finding Nemo, finding you, or finding God, the point is that God wants us to be found and no longer lost.



## APPETIZERS (Additional ideas on CD)

**Publicity Ideas:** *Don't neglect advertising (within your church and elsewhere). Use your imagination. Create a timeline for maximum effect. Spread the word with passion!*

- ☞ **Milk Cartons—Have You Seen Me?**—For a different kind of invitation, collect some used milk cartons (not jugs), wash them out, and then glue pictures of various youth group leaders on them. Drop one off at each student's house. Include the words: "Have you seen this person lately? Come join us at church this Sunday at 6 p.m. We will be using the movie *Finding Nemo* to help us take a close look at teen issues. Hope to see you there!"  
**Option:** You may also do this with postcards. They are easier to handle and can be mailed.
- ☞ **Where Are You?**—Make a brief video or do a skit with several different cell phones ringing one at a time. The actors all answer the phones, "Where are you?" and then do a promo for the theme. Show the video or do a "commercial" the week before at youth group. Or send a video copy to members and have them show their friends or pass the video along with an invitation to come. (Copies of the video on CD are inexpensive to make and mail.) You may also use the video as a "countdown" to let your group know that you are about to start.
- 🎵 **Fingerprint Art**—Design a flyer to send to group members and others. Ink your fingertips and press them on the paper. Then decorate each fingerprint as a face, person, or critter. (include some fish!). Have fun! Add the theme logo (from the CD) the dates, times, and location.
- 🎵 **Fish Key Chains**—Hand out fish key chains imprinted with your group's name. Give one to group members for themselves, plus at least one extra, with instructions to give the key chain to a friend as an invitation to come to this Combo. (Ordering information on CD)

# COMBOS MENU



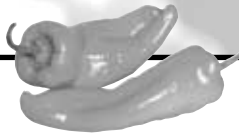
## Main Dishes

**Weekly Program Options:** *Choose one or all; do in any order. Check each description for the fixin's.*






- 1. The Desire for Independence**—Growth and rebellion seem to be a natural part of adolescence. Help your students begin to achieve a healthy independence while recognizing that we were created to be dependent on God and one another.
- 2. Real Friends**—Everyone needs true friends—the ones who remind you of what is most important in life. I love the fish named Dori, in *Finding Nemo*. The only thing she could remember was the most important thing—the location of the lost son. Use this program to help your group develop a deep sense of connection and responsibility toward one another.
- 3. The Searching Dad**—Prodigal Son/Waiting Father/Searching God story is a well-used example of teenage rebellion. Use this program to point out to your group that God came to earth as Jesus, searching for the lost. This may be a new perspective for many.
- 4. Finding You, Finding Me**—We all search for meaning and purpose. Use this time to help your group discover who they are by discovering who God is and how God views them.



## SPICE IT UP



**Theme Decorations:** *Look at your space. Use your imagination. Give away or auction off purchased decorations as prizes at the end of the week or the theme.*

-  Use water-play “noodles” to make *ichthys* fish decorations and a cross. ([Instructions on CD](#))
-  Create a fishing village, complete with a hut, dock, small boat with or without a sail, fish net, shells, beach balls. Make waves out of blue fabric or a mix of white and blue cellophane. Have on hand an anchor (can be made of cardboard and painted) and some nautical flags ([Ordering information on CD](#)). Go to a local bait store and buy a few Styrofoam® buckets. Borrow windsocks and fishing poles.
-  Order some bottles of mini bubbles ([Ordering information on CD](#)) to hand out to the youth. Buy one or two party bubble machines.
-  For a fun change, borrow a canoe and make a grand entrance! Carry in the hosts or youth who make announcements that night.
-  If you have a worship band, dress them in fishing or beach clothes.



## DRINKS

“ ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you . . . thirsty and gave you something to drink? . . . ’ ‘Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these’ ” (Matthew 25:37, 40a).

Service project ideas

# THE DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE

## Have it YOUR way!

Choose from, adapt, or rearrange these elements to create the best soul feast for your youth group.

## THE Fixin's

More fun stuff to make the theme extra special! Your choice.

## Munchies

- Oyster Cracker Trash
- Fish and Chips

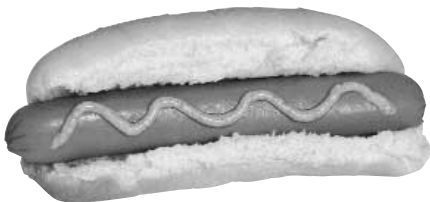
## Add Parents

Make this a “Bring Your Parents Program.”

## Popular Songs

Use these before and/or after the program to engage the youth. These are some options. Try to include the latest appropriate popular songs.

- Surfin' USA, by The Beach Boys (*Sounds of Summer—The Very Best of The Beach Boys*)
- Ocean, by Ten Shekel Shirt (*Much*)
- Who I Am (Rosemary's Granddaughter), by Jessica Andrews (*Who I Am*)
- House of Pain, by Faster Pussycat (*Wake Me When It's Over*)
- Born to Be Wild, by Steppenwolf (*All Time Greatest Hits*)
- Welcome to the Jungle, by Guns 'N' Roses (*Appetite for Destruction*)
- This Is Your Life, by Switchfoot (*The Beautiful Letdown*)



**SOUL FOOD:** Sin is being deceived by the lie that life outside of God's will and protection is better than life at “home.”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15:11-32 (The rebellious son)



## GAMES (Additional game on CD)

### Go Fish!

Give a group of 4 to 6 youth a deck of cards (or *Cardversations™*) to play Go Fish. Each person is dealt 5 cards. Pile the rest of the cards face down in the center. Players take turns asking another player whether that player has a particular denomination card, saying something like, “Do you have any threes?” (The asking player must have at least one card in hand already of that denomination.) If the answer is yes, he or she must give all of those cards to the one who asked. If the answer is no, he or she says, “Go Fish!” The asking player then draws from the pile. The object of the game is to get rid of all one's cards by laying down sets of four. Play Go Fish with the *Cardversation™* decks and get youth talking. Topics range from the Bible and Christian tradition to tough issues such as drugs and alcohol, racism, and sexuality.

### Tug O' War

This is a traditional game. Order a large, thick rope from a sports equipment catalogue or a home improvement or hardware store. Have two people or teams play at a time. Play until you have a champion. Adult leaders or parents may play against students. Have fun!



## SHARE AND CARE GROUPS

**Checking in:** Highs and lows of the week, prayer requests, and prayer

**Warm up:** Have the students make a list of “Everybody's Doing It.” (Try not to be shocked by anything, or you will discourage honest sharing.) Or talk about these questions: When have you rebelled against your parents? What was their reaction? What was your explanation? What makes you rebel? (Additional questions on CD)

## FOCUS POINT

**Video Options:** *Finding Nemo* (Start 4:44—Nemo wants to prove himself and goes to the boat; stop: 14:43—Nemo gets caught; dad screams, “Nemo! Nemo!”)

**Skit Option With Parents:** Reversal of Roles—Have the students perform short skits on the “stupid” or “unfair” things parents do. Have some parents do a skit about the “stupid” things youth do. Alternate student and parent skits. The skits are supposed to be funny and clean. Be ready to discuss afterward. Or have a panel of parents answer teens’ why-do-parents-\_\_\_ questions. Have a panel of youth answer parents’ why-do-kids-\_\_\_ questions.



## **FOCUS THOUGHTS** (Two versions on CD)

We all desire independence! How many times have you said, “When will I get to do what I want? I’m sick of all the rules! I can’t wait to graduate!” How many times have you wanted to run away to a distant country? We are all about instant gratification. We never seem to be satisfied. Our cravings, our lust for freedom, for status, for sexual intimacies, for escape often lead us to places of hurt, to places of embarrassment, and even to places of death.

In the movie *Finding Nemo*, Nemo got in trouble because he was trying to prove to his dad that he could do something. (If he had not been caught, what would he have gained?) But he did get caught. His rebellion landed him in a “foreign place”—a dentist office prison. His desire for independence cost him his freedom and almost cost him his and his dad’s lives.

Here’s a familiar story; it’s sometimes called the prodigal or rebellious son. (Read **Luke 15:11-32**.) Jesus is telling the story to a group of religious leaders called the Pharisees, who were challenging him about his hanging out with “tax collectors and sinners.”

Sinners loved to be around Jesus. In Jesus, sinners saw something they had never seen in their religious leaders. With Jesus, there was no condemnation. There was no judgment. There was radical acceptance. There was amazing love. There was deep forgiveness. And every one of the sinners was looking for the way home, the way that had been shut tight by the religious leaders.

In the story, the younger son takes half of his father’s money and wastes it. By asking for his part of the inheritance, he basically declared his father dead. Can you imagine walking into your parent’s house tonight and saying, “Give me my inheritance! I want to get out of here! I can’t take it anymore!”

Jewish laws and customs aimed to preserve family property for the benefit of the extended family. To waste an inheritance on one’s self was a grave sin. Our religious ancestors would never have the bumper sticker saying, “We’re spending our grandkids’ inheritance!” on the rear of their donkey.

*Sin* is being deceived by the lie that life outside of God’s will and protection is better than life at “home.” It is so easy to be drawn to “the party,” the flashing lights, the pounding bass. No one can deny that there is pleasure in sin. Trust me, I know! Been there; done that. Got several t-shirts. One mistake—we can often excuse one mistake; but most of the time we find ourselves hooked, burned, and in a “foreign country.”

The son separated himself from his family by going to a foreign land to live out his fantasy. Word of his parties and prostitutes reached his hometown. But then the money ran out, and so did his “friends.” The party was over. The lights were turned off. The music stopped. The “good life” was over. He got so desperate that he went to work for a pig farmer. According to Jewish law, pigs were unclean animals, to be avoided at all costs; but life got so bad that he even wanted to eat what the pigs were eating. He found himself in a place he did not want to be. He was a hired hand. He had no friends. His self-esteem was at rock bottom. Everything was gone, and he was with the pigs.

Finding You

## **Worship and Praise Music**

The first five songs are on the album *Faith*, available at [www.bigstuf.org](http://www.bigstuf.org).

- Ocean, by Heath Bennett
- Cry for Mercy, by Jeffrey B. Scott
- Lovely Noise, by Chrystina Llore
- Time After Time, by Candi Pearson
- My Glorious, by Jeffrey B. Scott
- We Fall Down, by Passion (*I Could Sing of Your Love Forever*)
- Shout to The North, by Delirious (*Cutting Edge*)

## **Other Movie Options**

Choose one of these, or ask students to recommend a more recent release. Be sure to preview your selection to avoid any content that would be objectionable in your setting. Remember that you must have a video license.

([Video licensing information on CD](#))

- *The Little Mermaid*
- *Lilo and Stitch*
- *Home Alone*
- *Now and Then*

## **Instead of a Message**

**Fish Bowl Conversation:** Tell all of your students, volunteers, and parents to bring a chair and form a circle. Put four of the chairs in the middle of the circle (facing one another). Pick a student leader to moderate the experience. Bring up a topic such as curfew, appropriate age for dating, how far is too far, house rules. Have four people (two students and two adults) come to the middle to discuss the issue. A person in the middle cannot speak for more than 30 seconds at a time. No one in the outer circle may speak. As each person uses up his or her talk time, a person in the outer circle can take his or her place and speak for 30 seconds. Remind participants to keep it respectful. A person must wait for several people to have a turn to speak before returning to the middle.

## Create-a-Video Idea

Have some members of your group write a modern-day parable about the Prodigal Son, Waiting Parent, or Searching God. Have them perform it for the whole group. Videotape it.

## On Screen

Key points from Focus Thoughts ([PowerPoint®](#) and [Text on CD](#))

## Service Project

Ask your local officials to allow you to paint over graffiti somewhere in your community.

## Leader Scripture Exploration

- Exodus 7-11 (Ignoring God has consequences.)
- Exodus 32 (Disobeying God)
- Jonah 1:1-3 (Running from God)

## Out and About

Have a beach party. Hand out leis, play volleyball, and have a luau.

## Witness Statement

Invite a student or parent to tell about his or her experience of rebellion and turn around. ([How-to on CD](#))  
([Sample Witness Statement on CD](#))

## Love Letters

Give everyone a sheet of paper, an envelope, and a pen. Have students write love letters to their parents, expressing their deep feelings. (Some may need to ask for forgiveness.) Play music while they write. Have them place their their addressed envelope on the altar. Tell them you will mail the letters. Some students may not know the address of a separated parent. Some may have lost a parent due to death. Ask these students to write a letter to that parent anyway. (The students will keep these.)

He wanted to be all grown up. He wanted to be independent. But outside of his father's will, he was frustrated, angry, embarrassed, and filled with shame. Life had become dark. He was lost. There seemed to be no hope.

How about you? Does this story connect with you? Have you run off to a far country? Do you think that you have run too far? Have you messed it all up?

Remember who is telling this story . . . Jesus, the Son of God. And just as in the movie *Finding Nemo*, there is a searching Father. There is a place called home. And you are welcome there. You are welcome here. God sent Jesus to die for you, to find you! There is a Creator who is running to you. God wants to be with you. You can be home in God's arms forever. Come to your senses. Turn around and walk down the road, back to a loving God. Turn around. There is a God who has given Jesus, God's only Son, as a sacrifice for your sins. Turn around. Meet God right now. Ask God to wash you clean. Tell God, "Put your arms around me. Restore me to life. I want to be your son. I want to be your daughter. Thank you for looking for me. Thank you for finding me. Thank you for saving me."

Some of you may already have plans to go to the foreign country. Don't go there! Avoid the pain. Avoid the guilt. You don't need it. Yes, the party is attractive; but it does not last.

Some of you have made a commitment to God and yet wandered off to a foreign place, a lonely place. Turn around. Run back home. God is a God of mercy. Your mistakes can be washed clean. You know it! You've experienced life in the family! Come back home! Be found! Let's pray.



## FOCUS GROUP ([Additional questions on CD](#))

- Luke 15:32 says that the son was "dead" and "lost." How does this compare with our understanding of rebellion? How do people rebel?
- The father allowed his son to leave. Do you think that this was a good approach to parenting? (Have your parents allowed you to search for yourself even when they knew that you might get hurt? How did you feel?)
- When you rebelled and got burned, how hard was it to go back and ask for forgiveness?
- Do you ever worry about not obeying God? What does it mean to rebel against God?
- Have you ever been like the older son—loyal and faithful, but envious, angry, and jealous?
- The father asked no questions. He threw a party and had total forgiveness. Could you do this as a parent? Could your parents do this?
- This story teaches many lessons, such as changes in direction are always possible. What other lessons can you find in the story? (You may want to reread it.)

## CLOSING

How many miles must I run to get away from You?  
How many steps does it take for me to walk far away from You?  
I don't know what You expect me to do,  
but this one thing I know is true:

Life is about You finding me—me finding You.  
All about You finding me—no matter where I go.  
All about You finding me—me finding You.