YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

STRESS · GRADES · FAILURE

WEEK 1 OF 4

Running on Empty

Theme: Stress and exhaustion · Main text: Isaiah 40:28–31



PRESSURE.

Steady when everything pushes.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

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NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Running on Empty

Theme: Stress and exhaustion · Main text: Isaiah 40:28–31 · Memory verse: Isaiah 40:31

THE BIG IDEA

You are not a machine. God never runs out, and he gives strength to people who are worn out.

The question to carry all night

"What holds me steady when the pressure is on?"

By the end, students will…

- Notice what drains them and what refills them
- Hear Isaiah's promise: God never runs out, and he gives strength to the tired
- Choose one refill and start **My Pressure Plan**

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements	—	—	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"The Gas Light" · Isaiah 40:28–31 · 1 Kings 19:5–7 · Matthew 11:28	10	12	12
Response Activity	The Fuel Gauge + My Pressure Plan · Tool 1	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

Snack Station (optional): set out water and a simple snack labeled "Refill Station." Tonight's message says God sometimes answers exhaustion with a nap and a snack, so let students refill whenever they want. Leaders grab one too.

Supplies

- My Pressure Plan cards: copy the card on student page 2 onto cardstock
- Three signs: Eagle, Runner, Walker (Game A)
- Index cards and pens (Game B); bottles, spoons, dry beans (Game C)
- Water and a snack for the Refill Station
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · phone timer

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read Isaiah 40:27–31 and 1 Kings 19:1–8
- Think of one honest "running on empty" moment of your own
- Read the Care Note at the end of this guide
- Pray for each student by name, especially anyone new

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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four tired ones and a visitor. (Mid-semester, that second one is pretty likely.) Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Keep the games light and fun. The heavier conversation belongs in the message and small groups. Every debrief points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Eagle, Runner, Walker Move to a zone, then talk with whoever's there	High	3 signs, open space	Students need to move; you want the strongest link to the memory verse	10
B. Whose Tank Is This? Anonymous "what fills me up" cards, then guess	Medium	Index cards, pens	You want students learning real things about each other	10–12
C. Fill the Tank Relay Spoon relay to fill a bottle, with a question at every fill-up	Medium	Bottles, spoons, beans	Lots of new students; teams make it easy to jump in	10–12
D. Tired Brain Tales Trios trade funny "I was so tired I…" stories	Low	None	Small or worn-out group; zero prep time	8–10
E. The Fuel Gauge Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Pressure Plan cards	Every night: the heart of the week; starts My Pressure Plan	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Eagle, Runner, Walker → C. Fill the Tank Relay → Message → E. The Fuel Gauge

Small group (4–6)

D. Tired Brain Tales (whole group) → Message → E. The Fuel Gauge in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

A. Eagle, Runner, Walker → B. Whose Tank Is This? → Message → E. The Fuel Gauge (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

A. Eagle, Runner, Walker → Message → E. The Fuel Gauge → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. Nobody's grades, schedule, or tiredness gets compared or mocked. Leaders steer away from jokes like "I'm so stressed I could die"; just redirect with a smile. If a game starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Eagle, Runner, Walker

10 min · High energy

Purpose: A fast "pick a side" game built right out of the memory verse. The room has three zones: Eagle, Runner, and Walker. The leader reads a question with three answers, and students move to their zone the way that animal or person would: flapping, jogging, or strolling. In the zone, they find someone and explain their pick. Students learn real things about each other, and by the end they know Isaiah 40:31 without trying.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Tape up three signs in different parts of the room: **Eagle** (soar), **Runner**, and **Walker**.
2. The leader reads a question and the three answers. Students move to their zone: Eagles flap, Runners jog in place on the way, Walkers stroll slowly.
3. In the zone, students pair up with someone (or make a trio) and each explain their answer in one or two sentences. About 45 seconds.
4. The leader asks for one volunteer from each zone to share a quick answer with everyone. Volunteers only.
5. Play 8–10 rounds. Finish with the Bridge round.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This game is called Eagle, Runner, Walker. See the three signs? I'm going to read a question with three answers. Eagle is always the first answer, Runner is the second, and Walker is the third. You move to your zone like what it says. Eagles, flap. Runners, jog. Walkers, take your sweet time. When you get there, find somebody and tell them why you picked it. There's no wrong zone. Ready? First one..."
>
> "Best way to spend a free Saturday. Eagle: out on an adventure. Runner: busy with sports or friends all day. Walker: home in sweatpants. Go!"

ROUNDS (EAGLE / RUNNER / WALKER)

QUESTION	EAGLE	RUNNER	WALKER
A free Saturday	Adventure somewhere	Busy all day	Home in sweatpants
How you do big assignments	Done way early	Night before	Slow and steady
Breakfast on a school day	Full breakfast	Grab it and go	What's breakfast?
In a group project, you're the...	Big-idea person	Get-it-done person	Finish-it-right person
Dream vacation	Mountains	Theme park	Beach
When you have the most energy	Morning	Afternoon	Late at night
Music while you study	Loud	Upbeat playlist	Total silence

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What recharges you most	Being with people	Moving your body	Quiet alone time
A long road trip	Window seat, watching	Talking the whole way	Asleep in ten minutes
Bridge round: Honestly, how's this week going?	Soaring	Running to keep up	Just walking, barely

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Skip the zones. Everyone flaps, jogs, or strolls in place, then the whole group goes around and explains their pick.
- **Silent zones:** For one round, students move to their zone without a sound, then guess why the others picked theirs.
- **Student questions:** After five rounds, let volunteers make up their own Eagle / Runner / Walker question.

LEADER NOTE *If one zone ends up with a single student, walk over and join them yourself. On the Bridge round, don't comment on who went where. Just say, "Thanks for being honest. All three zones are in tonight's verse."*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Here's a secret: those three zones come straight out of the Bible. Isaiah 40:31 says people who wait for God will soar like eagles, run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. Some weeks you soar. Some weeks you run. Some weeks you're just walking. God has strength for all three. Tonight we're starting a series called PRESSURE, and every week we'll ask: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

B. Whose Tank Is This?

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: A guessing game about what fills people up. Everyone secretly writes three short answers on a card: what drains them, what refills them, and one surprising thing that gives them energy. The leader reads the cards, and the group guesses whose "tank" it is. Students learn real, specific things about each other, and they start noticing what refills *them*, which is exactly where the message goes.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Give everyone an index card and a pen. The leader picks three **Tank Questions** from the list and reads them out.
2. Students write short answers, no names. Fold the cards and drop them in a pile. Leaders fill one out too.
3. The leader shuffles, reads one card aloud, and the group gets up to three guesses.
4. The owner can claim it ("That's my tank!") or stay a mystery by saying "Mystery tank." Both are fine.
5. If the owner claims it, the group asks one quick follow-up question. Then read the next card.

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LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Everybody's got a tank, like a gas tank. Some things drain it and some things fill it back up. Grab a card. Don't write your name. I'm going to give you three questions; just write a few words for each. Then I'll read the cards, and you guess whose tank it is. If it's yours, you can claim it or say 'Mystery tank' and stay secret. Here's the first question..."

TANK QUESTIONS (PICK THREE PER NIGHT)

- One thing that drains my tank fast
- One thing that fills my tank back up
- A weird thing that gives me energy
- My favorite snack when I'm worn out
- The best nap I ever took (where?)
- A song that gets me going
- A place where I feel calm
- Something I'd do with a free day
- A person who always cheers me up (first name or "my grandma")
- The time of day I'm most "on empty"

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Everyone writes four answers instead of three. Read every card and let each person claim theirs if they want.
- **Lots of visitors:** Play in two rounds. First round, only regulars' cards. Second round, everyone. New students get to learn faces before guessing.
- **Group tank:** After the guessing, read only the "fills my tank" answers out loud and let the group pick the three best refill ideas in the room.

LEADER NOTE *Skim each card before you read it aloud. If a card says something heavy (like "nothing fills my tank anymore"), skip it with a smile, keep the game moving, and quietly check in with students afterward (see the Care Note). Never try to figure out whose it was in front of the group.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Did you notice how different our tanks are? Somebody gets filled up by a loud party, somebody by a nap. But everybody has a tank, and every tank runs low. Tonight we're going to hear about a God whose tank never runs low. And we'll ask: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

C. Fill the Tank Relay

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: A team relay where every runner carries a spoonful of dry beans from the "gas station" to their team's bottle, the tank. The catch: at every fill-up, the runner has to answer a Fuel Question before they go. Teams cheer, talk, and laugh, and the last round shows what happens when a tank has a leak. It connects to the message: you can't run on empty, and refilling takes regular stops.

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HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams of 3–5. Mix it up: "Find people you haven't talked to yet." Each team gets a spoon and an empty clear bottle (the tank) with a fill line drawn on it. Put a big bowl of dry beans (the gas station) at the far end of the room.
2. Before each trip, the runner draws a **Fuel Question** card and answers it out loud to their team. Short answers are fine.
3. Then the runner walks fast to the gas station, scoops one spoonful, carries it back, and pours it in the tank. Next runner goes.
4. First team to reach the fill line wins round one.
5. **Leaky tank round:** Swap in a paper cup with a few holes poked in the bottom. Teams try again. Watch the beans fall out, then debrief.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This bottle is your team's gas tank. Right now it's empty. Your job is to fill it to the line, one spoonful at a time, from the gas station over there. No running, fast walking only. But before you go, you draw a Fuel Question and answer it to your team. No answer, no gas. Ready? Runners, draw your first question!"
>
> (*Leaky round*) "Round two. Same game, new tank." (*Hand out the cups with holes.*) "Good luck."

FUEL QUESTIONS

- What's the longest you've ever slept?
- What's your go-to snack after school?
- What's a busy day for you this week?
- Coffee, tea, soda, or water?
- What's something you do to relax?
- Best place you've ever fallen asleep?
- What's one thing you look forward to this week?
- Who's someone who always gives you energy?
- Early bird or night owl?
- What's a hobby that doesn't feel like work?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One team against the clock. Everyone takes turns, and the whole group answers each Fuel Question together.
- **Outdoor version:** Use cups of water and a bucket instead of beans and spoons.
- **Refill helpers:** In the leaky round, let one teammate hold a hand under the cup. It works better with help.

LEADER NOTE *Keep a broom and a dustpan nearby for beans. Use only fast walking to avoid slips. Keep Fuel Questions light; the heavier conversation comes later in small groups.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "How did the leaky tank feel? You kept pouring, and it kept running out. A lot of us live like that leaky cup. We pour out energy all week, and we never really refill. Tonight we'll hear where real refills come from. Keep this question in your head: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

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D. Tired Brain Tales

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, funny storytelling game for small or tired groups. The leader reads a "tired brain" moment, and students who've done it share the story. Everybody has done something ridiculous while exhausted, so nobody looks weird. Then each person shares what actually helps them recover. It quietly makes the point of the night: you are not a machine.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Sit in trios (or one circle for small groups).
2. The leader reads a **Tired Brain Moment**. Anyone who has done it raises a hand, and one volunteer tells the quick story.
3. The trio decides: funniest version wins a point for the whole room. (Nobody is ever "out.")
4. After 6–8 moments, play the **Refill round**: each person shares one thing that actually helps them recover when they're wiped out.
5. Finish with the debrief.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "When your brain is tired, it does strange things. I'll read one. If you've ever done it, raise your hand, and somebody tell the story. I'll go first: once I was so tired I put my phone in the fridge and spent ten minutes looking for it. It was very cold when I found it."
>
> *(Use your own true story if you have one.)*

TIRED BRAIN MOMENTS

- Fell asleep somewhere strange (car, class, bleachers)
- Put something in a totally wrong place
- Laughed at nothing at all late at night
- Read the same sentence five times
- Answered a question nobody asked
- Wore something inside out or mismatched
- Sent a text that made zero sense
- Woke up and had no idea what day it was
- Called a teacher "Mom" or "Dad"
- Walked into the wrong room or class

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One circle. Everyone gets a turn to tell one tired brain story, then everyone shares a refill.
- **Draw it:** Instead of telling the story, students sketch it in 30 seconds and the group guesses what happened.

LEADER NOTE *Keep it light. If a story turns into "I never sleep because I'm always stressed," thank them and say, "That's a real one. We're actually going to talk about that tonight." Follow up later if it seems heavy (see the Care Note).*

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DEBRIEF

SAY

"Those stories are hilarious, but they also prove something: our bodies and brains have limits. You can't run forever without sleep, food, and rest. You're not a phone you can just plug in overnight and expect 100% every morning. So tonight we're asking: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

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Hook: "The Gas Light"

2 min

SAY

"Has anybody ever been in a car when the little gas light came on? That little orange pump on the dashboard? It's basically the car saying, 'Hey. I'm about to stop.' Some people see that light and pull over right away. Other people see it and think, 'Eh, I've got at least thirty more miles.'" (*Pause. Grin.*) "I'm one of those people. And yes, I have ended up on the side of the road."

"Here's the thing. A lot of us live with our gas light on. Homework, practice, tests, family stuff, a job, friends, the group chat. You go and go and go, and one day you just… stop. You're running on empty."

"Raise your hand if you've felt tired this week. Not sleepy. Tired." (*Raise your own hand.*) "Yeah. Tonight we're starting a four-week series called PRESSURE. We're going to talk about stress, grades, and failure. And every week we'll ask one question: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

LEADER NOTE *If you have a true gas-light story (or a time you pushed too hard and crashed), swap it in. Keep it short and funny. The point is that you go first and that being tired isn't shameful.*

Message: You're Not a Machine

10 min

1. Even the strongest people run out

SAY

"About 2,700 years ago, God's people were worn out. Their whole nation had been through war and loss, and they felt like God had forgotten them. So God sent the prophet Isaiah with a message. And right in the middle of it, Isaiah says something that sounds like it was written about a high school hallway in October:"

> 30 *Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall;*
>
> ISAIAH 40:30 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Even the youths. Even the young, strong, fast ones. Being tired isn't a sign that you're weak or doing life wrong. It's a sign that you're human. You are not a machine. You weren't built to run at 100% all the time, and neither was anybody else in this room."

LEADER NOTE *Tell a short, honest story here about a season when you were running on empty: a stretch of school, work, or family stress when you pushed too hard. Thirty seconds is plenty. Say what it felt like, not every detail. Students trust leaders who go first.*

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2. God never runs out

SAY

"Now look at what Isaiah says about God, two verses earlier:"

> [28] *Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary. His understanding is unsearchable.* [29] *He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might.*
>
> ISAIAH 40:28–29 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"God doesn't faint. He isn't weary. He never has a gas light. He's never had a bad night of sleep or a week with three tests. And look at the last line of verse 28: 'His understanding is unsearchable.' That means God gets you, even on days you can't explain why you're so tired."

"And here's the best part, verse 29. God doesn't look at tired people and say, 'Try harder.' He *gives* power to the weak. He increases strength for people who have none left. The tired ones are exactly who he's looking for."

3. Strength comes from waiting, not pushing

SAY

"Then comes our memory verse:"

> [31] *but those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint.*
>
> ISAIAH 40:31 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Notice who gets new strength. Not the people who push harder. The people who *wait for Yahweh*. Waiting here means leaning on God, trusting him, coming back to him to refill. An eagle doesn't flap its wings nonstop. It finds the wind and lets the wind carry it."

"And look at the three speeds: soar, run, walk. Some days you'll soar. Some days you'll run. And some days, the win is just walking and not fainting. That counts too. God is in all three."

4. Sometimes refilling looks like a nap and a snack

SAY

"One more story. There was a prophet named Elijah who was totally burned out. He'd been through so much that he ran into the desert, sat under a tree, and wanted to quit everything. And what did God do? Listen:"

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[5] *He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat!" [6] He looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. [7] Yahweh's angel came again the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."*

1 KINGS 19:5–7 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "God's first answer to Elijah wasn't a lecture. It was a nap, a snack, another nap, and another snack. 'The journey is too great for you.' God knew Elijah had limits, and he wasn't disappointed in him. He took care of him. Sleep, food, and rest are not you being lazy. They're gifts from God."
>
> "Jesus says the same thing. He looked at a crowd of tired people and said:"

[28] *"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.*

MATTHEW 11:28 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "You don't have to fix your tiredness before you come to Jesus. You come to him *tired*. That's the whole invitation. You are not a machine. God never runs out, and he gives strength to people who are worn out. So hold onto this question all week: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?**"

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E. Response Activity: The Fuel Gauge

12 min

Purpose: Help students look honestly, privately, and without shame at which parts of their life are running low, then choose one simple refill. Tonight they also start **My Pressure Plan**: a small card that gets one new tool each week. By Week 4 they'll have a whole plan, written by them, to keep in a backpack, a phone case, or a locker.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Hold up a Pressure Plan card. Explain: one tool each week, four tools total, and it's theirs to keep. Nobody grades it.
2. **The Fuel Gauge:** On student page 1, students privately circle how full each tank is, from E (empty) to F (full). Nobody shares their answers.
3. Students star the **one tank** that's lowest or matters most right now, and write one thing that drains it.
4. **Refill pairs:** In pairs, each partner shares one refill idea (only what they want to share). Then each prays one sentence for the other: "God, give ___ strength this week."
5. **My Pressure Plan · Tool 1:** Students fill in "When I'm running on empty, I will ___" on their card.
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" on student page 2.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (PRESSURE PLAN)**
>
> "This is your Pressure Plan. It's not a rulebook from me. Every week of this series, you'll add one tool to it, something that helps you stay steady when life pushes. By Week 4 you'll have a plan you made yourself. Stick it in your backpack, your phone case, or your locker."
>
> **SAY (FUEL GAUGE)**
>
> "On your first page, find The Fuel Gauge. For each area of your life, circle how full that tank is right now. E is empty, F is full. Be honest. This is just between you and God. Nobody is going to see it, and nobody's in trouble. I'll tell you mine: my sleep tank is about a quarter right now."
>
> **SAY (REFILL PAIRS)**
>
> "Put a star next to the one tank that's lowest. Now find a partner. You don't have to say which tank. Just share one thing that might refill you this week. Then pray one sentence for each other: 'God, give Sam strength this week.' That's it. One sentence."
>
> **SAY (TOOL 1 + ONE STEP)**
>
> "Now grab your Pressure Plan card. Tool 1: 'When I'm running on empty, I will ___.' Make it small and real. Like: 'Go to bed by 10:30, even with homework left.' Or 'Text my mom and tell her I'm wiped out.' Then on page 2, write your one step for this week."

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Refill ideas (read aloud if stuck)

- Go to bed 30 minutes earlier
- Eat a real breakfast
- Drink water before soda or energy drinks
- Take a 15-minute walk outside
- Tell an adult I'm worn out
- Take one night off from screens
- Ask for help on one assignment
- Pray before I start homework

"Wait for Yahweh" step ideas

- Read Isaiah 40:31 every morning before school
- Pray one sentence when my gas light comes on: "God, I need your strength."
- Take five quiet minutes with God before bed
- Text my prayer partner one line on Monday
- Thank God for one thing that refilled me each night

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person names one refill idea (or passes) and prays one sentence for the person on their left.
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip the pairs. Students fill in the gauge and their card, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "God, you never run out. Give strength to every tired person in this room."
- **No cardstock?** Students cut the card from student page 2 or take a photo of it.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or look at student pages, and never ask students to share their gauge. Keep extra Pressure Plan cards for students who start in Week 2 or 3; they can begin with that week's tool. If a student marks almost every tank empty, or seems truly stuck or upset, check in quietly afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Look at that one tool you wrote. It's small. That's the point. You don't fix your whole life tonight. You just decide what you'll do the next time your gas light comes on. And you're not doing it alone, because God never runs out. **What holds me steady when the pressure is on?** This week, let him refill you."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

WARM UP

1. On a scale from "fully charged" to "gas light on," where are you tonight?
   Follow-up: What made it that way this week?
2. What's the best day off you've ever had?
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

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GO DEEPER

3. Isaiah says, "Even the youths faint and get weary." Why do you think a lot of people feel like they're not allowed to be tired?
   Where does that pressure come from?
4. God "doesn't faint" and "isn't weary." How does it change things to know God never runs out, even when you do?
5. What do you think it looks like, in real life, to "wait for Yahweh" instead of just pushing harder?
   What would it look like on a school night?
6. God's answer to Elijah was sleep and food. Why do you think we sometimes feel guilty for resting?

TAKE IT HOME

7. What's one thing you'll do this week when your gas light comes on?
8. Who's one adult you could tell if the pressure ever feels like too much?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again. Never compare students' schedules or how busy they are. If a student says something that sounds like more than normal stress, listen, thank them, and follow up privately (see the Care Note).*

Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme: when we're running on empty, one of the ways God refills us is through people who carry our needs to him with us.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with "**I lift up ___ to God.**" Everyone responds together: "**Lord, hear our prayer.**"
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

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LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "We just talked about being tired and about a God who never runs out. You don't have to carry everything by yourself, so let's carry some of it together. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something that's weighing on you, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- A good night of sleep or a day off
- Something I finished or did well this week
- My team, club, or band had a good week
- Someone I love got good news

Concern starters

- A test, a project, or a crazy-busy week
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." That includes no screenshots, posts, or texts about what someone shared. If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

Everlasting God,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone here for the very first time tonight.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Ava's good game, for Noah's weekend with his cousins..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the things we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Liam's grandpa. Give Emma peace about her test on Thursday..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Hold them too.

God, you never faint and you never get tired. But we do. Some of us walked in tonight running on empty. We've been pushing through school, practice, work, and home, and our tanks are low. Thank you that you don't look at tired people and tell them to try harder. You give power

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to the weak. You give strength to people who have none left. Teach us to wait for you. Help us rest without feeling guilty, sleep without worrying, and come to you when we're worn out. Let us soar when we can, run when we have to, and walk without fainting when that's all we've got.

For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And for anyone who is carrying more than they can handle, give them the courage to tell someone, and surround them with people who will help.

In Jesus' name, amen.

SEND-OFF

"Grab one more snack from the Refill Station on your way out. Take your student pages home: a five-day devotional and a tracker for your one step. Keep your Pressure Plan card somewhere you'll see it. Tool 1 is done, and next week you'll add Tool 2. Next time we're talking about grades, performance, and what you're really worth. It's called **'More Than a Grade.'** And every week we'll keep asking: **what holds me steady when the pressure is on?** Go get some sleep. See you then."

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 by asking students to look at their One Step tracker and Pressure Plan Tool 1. "Did your gas light come on this week? Did you try your tool? What helped? What got in the way?" Celebrate any progress, even one day, and laugh about the slips (leaders too). Never ask students to report hours of sleep or grades. Have extra Pressure Plan cards ready for new students.

Care Note for Leaders

Talking about stress can open up more than ordinary tiredness. Normal stress comes and goes. Watch for signs that something heavier is going on: constant worry, panic, or stomachaches before school (anxiety); sadness, hopelessness, or losing interest in everything for weeks (depression); exhaustion that never lifts, or "I can't do anything right" (burnout); hidden cuts, long sleeves in hot weather, or talk of hurting themselves (self-harm); skipping meals, extreme dieting, or exercising to "earn" food (disordered eating); and any talk of wanting to die or not being here.

- **What to say:** "Thank you for telling me." "That sounds really heavy." "You're not alone, and we're going to get you help." Ask directly and calmly if you're worried: "Are you thinking about hurting yourself or ending your life?" Asking does not put the idea in their head.
- **What not to say:** "Just pray more." "Everyone's stressed." "You'll be fine." Don't diagnose, don't lecture, and **never promise to keep a safety concern secret.**
- **Act the same day:** follow your church's safety policy, tell your lead pastor, and involve parents or guardians (unless the concern is about home; then follow your policy).
- **Connect them to trained help:** a school counselor, a doctor, or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time. **If someone is in immediate danger, call 911** and stay with them.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Your job is to notice, listen well, take it seriously, and make sure they're connected to the right people.

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THE FULL SERIES

PRESSURE · 4 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the four weeks help students face pressure honestly: exhaustion, grades and worth, failure, and building on a foundation that holds. The question every week: *What holds me steady when the pressure is on?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Running on Empty** Stress and exhaustion	Isaiah 40:28–31
2	**More Than a Grade** Grades, performance, and worth	Matthew 6:25–34
3	**Sinking** Failure and fear	Matthew 14:22–33
4	**Built on Rock** A steady foundation	Matthew 7:24–27

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- A new tool for My Pressure Plan every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks are written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

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Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

You are not a machine. God never runs out, and he gives strength to people who are worn out.

ISAIAH SAID · ISAIAH 40:28–30

"The everlasting God… doesn't _____. He isn't _____."

"He gives _____ to the weak."

"Even the _____ faint and get weary."

THE FUEL GAUGE

Private, just you and God. Circle how full each tank is right now, from E (empty) to F (full). Then **star** the one tank that's lowest or matters most this week.

MY TANK	HOW FULL?
Sleep	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
Food, water, and moving my body	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
School and homework	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
Sports, activities, or a job	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
Friends	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
Family and home	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
My soul (time with God)	E ¼ ½ ¾ F
Other: _____	E ¼ ½ ¾ F

One thing that drains my starred tank: _____

WINGS LIKE EAGLES · ISAIAH 40:31

"Those who _____ for Yahweh will renew their _____."

This week I'm mostly (circle one): **soaring** · **running** · **walking**. One way God could refill me:

If the pressure feels like too much, tell a trusted adult. You can also call or text 988 any time.

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MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Every _____ (morning / after school / homework time / bedtime)

I will let God refill me by _____

Example: "Every night at 10:30, I will close my books, read Isaiah 40:31, and go to sleep."

My Pressure Plan · Tool 1

When I'm running on empty, I will

_____

Copy it onto your card below.

Gas Light Check (only you see this)

My gas light usually comes on when:

_____

One adult I could tell: _____

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

MY PRESSURE PLAN CARD

✂ Cut it out and keep it in your backpack or phone case. Missed a week? Fill in any tool now.

PRESSURE

My Pressure Plan

"Those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint."

ISAIAH 40:31

1. **When I'm running on empty, I will** _____
2. My worth statement: I am more than _____
3. When I fail, I'll remember _____
4. My rock verse: _____

Two people I can text when it's too much: _____ _____

If the pressure feels like too much, tell a trusted adult. You can also call or text 988 any time.

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5 Days of Refill

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. Bonus: do it before you start your homework.

DAY 1 Isaiah 40:30 · Even the youths

Being tired doesn't mean you're weak. It means you're human. Where do you feel most worn out right now? Tell God about it.

DAY 2 Isaiah 40:28 · He never runs out

God doesn't faint and isn't weary. What's one thing you can hand to him today that you've been carrying alone?

DAY 3 1 Kings 19:7 · A nap and a snack

God told a burned-out Elijah to sleep and eat. What does your body need from you this week? Is rest hard for you? Why?

DAY 4 Matthew 11:28 · Come tired

Jesus says "come to me," not "fix yourself first." What would it look like to come to him exactly as tired as you are?

DAY 5 Psalm 4:8 · Lie down in peace

"In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep." What worry could you give to God tonight before you fall asleep?

A prayer you can pray this week

God, you never run out, but I do. When my gas light comes on, help me come to you instead of just pushing harder. Give me strength when I'm weak, rest when I'm tired, and the courage to ask for help. Amen.

If the pressure feels like too much, tell a trusted adult. You can also call or text 988 any time.

Next week · Week 2: **More Than a Grade**

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