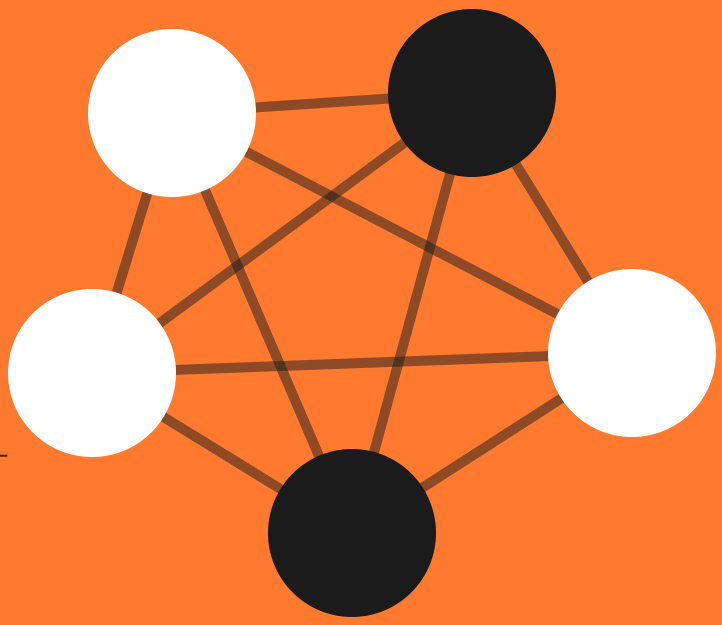
YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

FRIENDSHIP · COMMUNITY



WEEK 1 OF 4

Ride or Die

Theme: Loyal friendship · Main text: 1 Samuel 20:12–17, 41–42

SQUAD.

You weren't made to do this alone.

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

DAHAM
NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Ride or Die

Theme: Loyal friendship · Main text: 1 Samuel 20:12–17, 41–42 · Memory verse: Proverbs 17:17

THE BIG IDEA

A real friend sticks with you when it costs them something. Jonathan chose David over his own crown.

The question to carry all night

"Who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?"

By the end, students will…

- Tell the difference between an easy friend and a ride-or-die friend
- See how Jonathan stuck with David even when it *cost him the crown*
- Write their first Squad Card and pick one person to stick with this week

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 Couch Test" · 1 Samuel 20:12–17, 41–42 · Proverbs 17:17	10	12	12
Response Activity	The Jonathan Card + Squad Card #1 + My One Step	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

Supplies

- Squad Cards: the cut-out card on student page 2, plus a few blank index cards for extras
- Pens, a few markers, scissors for the Squad Card and pocket card
- Game extras: 2 bandanas or pool noodles (A), three signs: EASY · OUCH · NO WAY (B), paper (D)
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · phone timer

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read 1 Samuel 18:1–9 and all of 1 Samuel 20
- Practice "The Couch Test" hook out loud once
- Think of a friend who stuck with *you* when it cost them something
- Pray for each student by name, especially anyone who seems to be on their own lately

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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 quiet ones and a visitor. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Tonight's games are all about friends who stick around, and every game ends with a debrief that points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Shield Up Tag You're safe only while shoulder to shoulder with a friend, talking	High	Open space, 2 bandanas	Students need to move; you want everyone talking to everyone	10
B. Easy, Ouch, or No Way? What would you give up for a friend? Walk to your answer	Medium	3 signs on the walls	You want laughs and the strongest link to the message	10–12
C. This Side or Beyond? Guess your partner's numbers with Jonathan's arrow code	Medium	None	Lots of new students; zero prep time	8–10
D. Help Wanted: A Jonathan Trios write a funny, true job ad for a loyal friend	Low	Paper, pens	Small or quiet group; a mix of older and younger students	8–10
E. The Jonathan Card Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Squad Cards, pens	Every night: this is the heart of the week and starts the Squad Cards	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Shield Up Tag → B. Easy, Ouch, or No Way? → Message → E. The Jonathan Card

Small group (4–6)

D. Help Wanted: A Jonathan (whole group) → Message → E. The Jonathan Card in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

C. This Side or Beyond? → A. Shield Up Tag → Message → E. The Jonathan Card (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Easy, Ouch, or No Way? → Message → E. The Jonathan Card → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. Leaders form the pairs and groups, so nobody is ever left standing alone waiting to be picked. New students get paired with a regular. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Shield Up Tag

10 min · High energy

Purpose: A fast tag game where the only safe spot is next to a friend. You're safe from the tagger while you stand shoulder to shoulder with someone and you both answer the Shield Question. Once you've both answered, the shield drops and you have to move on. Students burn energy, hear quick real answers from a lot of different people, and feel what it's like to have someone stand with you.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Mark the boundaries. Pick 1–2 taggers (3 for a big group) and give them a bandana or pool noodle. **Fast walking only**, no running.
2. Before each round, the leader calls out the **Shield Question** for that round (see the list below).
3. To be safe, stand shoulder to shoulder with someone and say **"Shield up!"** While you're shielded, you each answer the Shield Question. When you've both answered, the shield drops and you both have to walk away.
4. You can't shield with the same person twice in a row. Anyone can join a shield to make a trio, and **nobody ever gets turned away from a shield**.
5. If you're tagged, you take the bandana and become the new tagger. Rounds last 90 seconds. Switch the Shield Question every round. Play 5–6 rounds.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This is Shield Up Tag. Walking only. The taggers are trying to get you, and there's only one way to be safe: find somebody, stand shoulder to shoulder, and say 'Shield up!' Then you both answer the Shield Question. As soon as you've both answered, the shield drops and you have to go find somebody new. Same person twice in a row doesn't count."
>
> "One big rule: if somebody walks up to your shield, you let them in. Nobody gets turned away. Here's the first Shield Question: *What's the best snack of all time?* Taggers, ready? Go!"

SHIELD QUESTIONS (ONE PER ROUND)

- What's the best snack of all time?
- Who's a TV or movie duo that always has each other's back?
- What's a show or game you could talk about for an hour?
- Best thing to do on a Friday night with friends?
- What's something a friend taught you how to do?
- Group chat: do you read everything or mute it?
- What's a song you'd put on a squad road-trip playlist?
- Pizza, tacos, or burgers for a squad dinner?
- What's one thing that makes someone easy to be around?
- Who's someone who showed up for you this year? (No names needed: a coach, a grandparent, a friend.)

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One tagger and a smaller space. Shields are always trios, so the tagger has to wait for someone to break off. Or play seated as "Shield Circle": the leader calls a question, and everyone answers it to the person on their right, then on their left.

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- **Shield wall:** In the last round, any shield can grow as big as it wants. Can the whole group end up in one shield?
- **Limited space:** Everyone walks heel to toe. It's slower and funnier.

LEADER NOTE *Play the game too. If you see anyone drifting without a shield, walk over, stand next to them, and say "Shield up!" Nobody should be the person nobody stands next to.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Did you notice? You couldn't be safe on your own. Somebody had to stand next to you. Friendship is a lot like that. We're starting a series called Squad, and for four weeks we're asking one question: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

B. Easy, Ouch, or No Way?

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Three signs on three walls: EASY, OUCH, and NO WAY. The leader names something you could give up for a friend, and everyone walks to their honest answer. Then students chat with the people who picked the same wall. It's silly, it's honest, and it sets up the message perfectly: in tonight's story, a prince gave up the biggest thing anyone could give up for a friend.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Tape up three signs on three different walls: **EASY** (I'd give it up, no problem), **OUCH** (I'd do it, but it would hurt), and **NO WAY** (sorry, friend).
2. The leader reads a prompt: "For a friend, would you give up…" Everyone walks to their answer. No wrong answers.
3. At each wall, students turn to 1–2 people near them and answer the **talk question** (about 30 seconds).
4. The leader asks for one volunteer from each wall to explain their choice in one sentence. Volunteers only.
5. Play 8–10 prompts, getting a little more costly each time. Always end with the Jonathan round.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Three walls: Easy, Ouch, and No Way. I'm going to say something you could give up for a friend. If it's no big deal, go to Easy. If you'd do it but it would hurt, go to Ouch. If it's not happening, go to No Way. Be honest. No Way is a totally legal answer tonight."
>
> "When you get to your wall, find one or two people there and answer the talk question. Ready? For a friend, would you give up… your last chicken nugget?"

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PROMPTS + TALK QUESTIONS

FOR A FRIEND, WOULD YOU GIVE UP…	TALK QUESTION (AT YOUR WALL)
Your last chicken nugget	"What's your go-to fast food order?"
Your favorite hoodie, for a whole week	"What's your comfort clothing item?"
The front seat, every ride, for a month	"What are the car rules in your family?"
Sleeping in on Saturday to help them move	"Morning person or night owl?"
Your phone charger when you're at 5%	"What's the lowest battery you'll let your phone get?"
Your spot in line for the best ride at a theme park	"Best ride you've ever been on?"
A 200-day streak in your favorite app or game	"What's the longest streak you've ever kept?"
Your spot in the starting lineup so they get to play	"What's a team, club, or activity you love?"
The credit for a group project you mostly did	"In group projects, are you the leader, the worker, or the snack person?"
Jonathan round: "You're next in line to be king. Your best friend is going to get the crown instead of you. Do you stay his friend?"	Lead into the debrief

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Skip the walls. On "three," everyone holds up one finger (Easy), two (Ouch), or three (No Way). Go around the circle for the talk question.
- **Student prompts:** After a few rounds, let students call out their own "Would you give up…" prompts.
- **Lightning round:** No talk questions, just fast walking. Ten prompts in two minutes.

LEADER NOTE *Keep it light and never tease anyone's choice. Make sure you walk to No Way at least once yourself. When leaders are honest, students relax.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Some of those were easy. Some were ouch. That last one? That's a real story. There was a prince named Jonathan who was supposed to be the next king, and his best friend was the one God picked instead. Tonight we'll see what he did. Keep this question in your head: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

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C. This Side or Beyond?

8–10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Zero prep, lots of talking. In tonight's story, Jonathan and David used a secret arrow code: if the arrows landed "on this side," David was safe; if they flew "beyond," he had to run. In this game, partners guess numbers about each other, and the only hints they get are "This side!" (too low) and "Beyond!" (too high). Every number comes with a real story, so students learn true things about each other fast.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader forms pairs (or trios). New students pair with a regular.
2. The leader reads a number question. Partner 1 thinks of their real answer and keeps it secret.
3. Partner 2 guesses. Partner 1 answers only **"This side!"** (guess higher) or **"Beyond!"** (guess lower) until Partner 2 hits it. Count the guesses.
4. Once the number is found, Partner 1 tells the story behind it using the **talk question** (about 30 seconds). Then switch roles for the next question.
5. Play 8–10 questions. Fewest total guesses at the end wins bragging rights. Always end with the Bridge question.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Tonight's story has a secret code. Jonathan would shoot arrows in a field. If the arrows landed on this side, his friend David was safe. If they flew beyond, it meant run. We're borrowing that code."
>
> "I'll ask a number question. Partner one, think of your real answer. Partner two, start guessing. Partner one can only say 'This side!' if the guess is too low, or 'Beyond!' if it's too high. When you get it, partner one tells the story. Ready? How many hours of sleep do you usually get on a school night?"

NUMBER QUESTIONS

NUMBER QUESTION	TALK QUESTION (AFTER THE NUMBER IS FOUND)
Hours of sleep on a school night	"What keeps you up late?"
Times you hit snooze on a normal morning	"What's the first thing you do when you wake up?"
Minutes it takes you to get ready for school	"What's the one step you never skip?"
U.S. states you've been to	"Best place you've ever visited?"
Pets you've had in your life (fish count)	"Best pet name you've ever heard?"
Cousins you have	"Who's the funniest person in your family?"
Hours of your longest car ride ever	"Where were you going?"
Pancakes you could eat in one sitting	"Best breakfast food, and why is it pancakes?"

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Hoodies you own	"Which one is your favorite, and where did it come from?"
Bridge: Years you've known your longest friend (a family member counts)	"What's one thing that person did that made you trust them?"

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One person answers and everyone else guesses together, taking turns. Go around until everyone has had a number.
- **Leader edition:** Let students guess numbers about the leaders first (years you've been a Christian, cups of coffee a day). It's a great icebreaker for new students.
- **Student questions:** In later rounds, pairs make up their own number questions.

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "That last question was the real one. Some of you have a friend you've known for years. Some of you are still looking for that friend, and that's okay too. Tonight we'll meet two friends who used that arrow code because one of them was in real danger, and the other refused to leave him. Here's our question: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

D. Help Wanted: A Jonathan

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, story-based game for small or quiet groups. Trios write a funny, honest job ad for the position of "Loyal Friend." Every line in the ad has to come from someone's real experience of a friend who stuck around (or one who didn't). Older students get to help younger ones, and everyone learns what loyalty looks like to the people in the room.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader forms trios. If you can, mix older and younger students in each trio.
2. Each trio writes a job ad titled **"Help Wanted: A Jonathan"** with three parts: **Must be able to...**, **Bonus points if...**, and **Please do NOT...**
3. The rule: every line has to start with a real story. Someone in the trio says "One time..." and the line comes out of that story. Use the starters below if they're stuck.
4. Keep it kind. No names of real students or teachers. Funny and true.
5. Each trio reads their ad to the group. The group votes on the single most "Jonathan" line from the whole night.

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LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "You're in groups of three. We're hiring. The job is Loyal Friend, and your group is writing the job ad. You need three parts: 'Must be able to,' 'Bonus points if,' and 'Please do not.' But every line has to come from something that really happened to one of you. Keep it kind, no names. I'll go first: 'Must be able to sit in the hospital waiting room for three hours and only complain a little.'"

STORY STARTERS

- A time someone showed up when I was sick
- A friend who stayed when the rest of the group left
- Someone who kept a secret the right way
- A friend who told me the truth when it was awkward
- Someone who sat with me when I was new
- A friend who stuck up for me
- Someone who remembered something important to me
- A friend who said sorry first
- A time a friend shared something they really wanted
- Someone who stayed friends after we stopped being on the same team or at the same school

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Write one ad together. Keep it, and read it again in Week 4 to see if you'd change anything.
- **Lightning round:** Skip the writing. The leader says "Must be able to…" and anyone finishes the sentence with a real story.
- **Flip it:** Write a second ad: "Help Wanted: Fair-Weather Friend." Then compare the two.

LEADER NOTE *If a story turns into "my friends all left me," don't rush past it. Say, "That really hurts. Thanks for being honest." Then gently ask, "What would a Jonathan have done?" Follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Look at those ads. Almost every line is about someone who stayed, someone who showed up, someone who paid a price to be there. That's loyalty. Tonight we're going to meet the guy we named this game after. Keep this question in your head: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

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Hook: "The Couch Test"

2 min

SAY

"Quick question. How many people would like a picture you post? Shout a number." (*Let students answer.*) "Okay. How many people would text you happy birthday?" (*Answers.*)

"Now here's the real one. It's 6 a.m. on a Saturday. It's raining. You need help carrying a giant couch up three flights of stairs. How many people would actually show up? Don't say names. Just think about it." (*Pause.*) "That number is usually a lot smaller, right?"

"That's the Couch Test. It's the difference between people who like you and people who will stick with you when it costs them something. For the next four weeks we're doing a series called Squad. And every week we're asking: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

Message: The Prince Who Gave Up the Crown

10 min

1. Easy friends and ride-or-die friends

SAY

"Being friends is easy when it's free. Sitting together at lunch, laughing in the group chat, playing the same game. That's good stuff. But every friendship eventually hits a moment where staying costs something. Your time. Your reputation. Your seat at the cool table. And that's when you find out who your ride-or-die friends are."

"Some of you have a friend like that. Some of you are still looking. Some of you just lost a friend group, and it hurts. Wherever you are tonight, this story is for you."

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about a friend who stuck with you when it cost them something (or a time you wish you had stuck with someone), tell it here. Thirty seconds is plenty. Change any names. Students trust leaders who go first.*

2. Read the story

SAY

"Here's the setup. Jonathan was a prince, the son of King Saul. He was next in line to be king. David was a shepherd kid who beat a giant named Goliath, and after that the whole country loved him. Jonathan and David became best friends. Jonathan even gave David his own robe, his sword, and his bow."

"But King Saul got jealous. People were singing about David more than about him. And Saul figured out that God had chosen David to be the next king, not Jonathan. So Saul decided to kill David. David runs to Jonathan and says, 'What did I do? Your dad is trying to kill me.' And Jonathan makes him a promise. The old language is a little heavy, so here's the short version first: 'I'll find out what my dad is planning, and I'll warn you, no matter what. And when you're king someday, take care of my family.' Listen."

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[12] *Jonathan said to David, "By Yahweh, the God of Israel, when I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good toward David, won't I then send to you and disclose it to you?* [13] *Yahweh do so to Jonathan and more also, should it please my father to do you evil, if I don't disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in peace. May Yahweh be with you as he has been with my father.* [14] *You shall not only show me the loving kindness of Yahweh while I still live, that I not die;* [15] *but you shall also not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when Yahweh has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the surface of the earth."* [16] *So Jonathan made a covenant with David's house, saying, "Yahweh will require it at the hand of David's enemies."* [17] *Jonathan caused David to swear again, for the love that he had to him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*

1 SAMUEL 20:12–17 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Did you catch it? Jonathan is talking like David will be the one on the throne. He already knows his friend is going to get the crown that was supposed to be his. And he makes a promise anyway."

3. It cost him the crown

> **SAY**
> "So Jonathan goes to dinner with his dad. David's seat is empty. Saul asks where he is, Jonathan covers for him, and Saul explodes. Here's what Saul says to his own son:"

[31] *"For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you will not be established, nor will your kingdom. Therefore now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die!"*

1 SAMUEL 20:31 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Translation: 'Jonathan, as long as David is alive, you will never be king. Pick: your friend or your crown.' And Jonathan says, 'Why should he die? What has he done?' Saul throws a spear at him. That's how Jonathan knows. So the next morning he goes out to the field, shoots the arrows beyond the boy, which is the secret signal for 'run,' and then this happens:"

[41] *As soon as the boy was gone, David arose out of the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times. They kissed one another and wept with one another, and David wept the most.* [42] *Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have both sworn in Yahweh's name, saying, 'Yahweh is between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.'" He arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the city.*

1 SAMUEL 20:41–42 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

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LEADER NOTE *If anyone giggles at "kissed," just say: "In their culture a kiss on the cheek was how guys said hello and goodbye, like a hug or a handshake for us. These two are saying goodbye, and they don't know if they'll ever see each other again."*

> "Jonathan chose David over his own crown. He lost his dad's approval. He almost lost his life. He gave up the throne. And he still said, 'Go in peace. I'm with you, forever.' That's ride or die."

4. A friend loves at all times

> **SAY**
> "Here's our memory verse. It was written by David's son, Solomon. I like to think he grew up hearing stories about Jonathan."

A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity.
PROVERBS 17:17 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "'Adversity' means hard times. A real friend isn't just there for the fun times. They were made for the hard ones. And here's the best part: Jesus is that kind of friend. He said this:"

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
JOHN 15:13 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Jonathan gave up a crown for his friend. Jesus gave up his life for his friends, and that includes you. If tonight you feel like nobody would show up for the couch, hear this: Jesus already did. You are not alone."
>
> "And because he stuck with us, we get to be that friend for somebody else. So here's the question again, and I want you to really think about it: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?**"

E. Response Activity: The Jonathan Card

12 min

Purpose: Help students notice the people who have stuck with them, and pick one person they can stick with this week. Tonight they also start **Squad Cards**: every week of the series, each student writes one short encouragement card to a real person and decides when to give it. In Week 4, the series ends with a Squad Commission where the group prays over each other.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Hold up the Squad Card from student page 2. Explain Squad Cards: one card each week, written to a real person, given away by hand (or slipped into a locker, a backpack, or a lunchbox).
2. **Who Stuck With Me:** On student page 1, students privately list people who have stuck with them, what they did, and what it cost them. Family, coaches, teachers, neighbors, and friends all count.

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3. **Whose squad am I in?** Students write down one person who could use someone to stick with them right now: someone new, someone left out, someone going through a hard time.
4. **Squad Card #1:** Students cut out the Squad Card on page 2 (or use an index card) and write their first card to one of those two people: a thank-you to someone who stuck with them, or an "I'm with you" to someone who needs it. They fill in the "My Squad Card" box on page 2 and decide *when* they'll give it.
5. **Squad Prayers:** In leader-formed trios, each person says (only if they want to) who the card is for, or just "a friend." The others pray one sentence: "God, help ___ be a Jonathan this week."
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" on their student page and cut out the pocket card.

LEADER SCRIPT

SAY (SQUAD CARDS)

"This is a Squad Card. Every week of this series, you're going to write one of these to a real person and actually give it to them. Short is fine. Three sentences is plenty. By the end of the series, you'll have given away four of them. That's four people who know somebody is in their corner."

SAY (WHO STUCK WITH ME)

"On your first page, find Who Stuck With Me. Write down people who have stuck with you. A grandparent who came to every game. A friend who sat with you when you were new. A coach who didn't give up on you. What did they do, and what did it cost them? This is just between you and God. If your list is short tonight, that's okay. Some seasons are lonely. You're not the only one, and you won't always feel this way."

SAY (WHOSE SQUAD AM I IN?)

"Now flip it. Think about somebody who could use a Jonathan right now. Maybe somebody new at school. Somebody who sits alone. Somebody whose friend group just fell apart. Write their name, or just their initials."

SAY (SQUAD CARD + ONE STEP)

"Pick one of those people and write your first Squad Card. You can say thank you to someone who stuck with you, or you can tell someone, 'I see you, and I'm with you.' Then on page two, write down when you'll give it. Tomorrow at lunch? Before practice? Last thing: write one small step. Keep it tiny. Like: 'Every morning this week, I'll read Proverbs 17:17 on my pocket card and look for one person to sit with.'"

Squad Card starters (read aloud if stuck)

- "Thanks for sticking with me when..."
- "I noticed you... and it meant a lot."
- "I'm glad you're at our school/team/group."
- "You don't have to go through this by yourself."
- "Want to sit together on Thursday?"

"Be a Jonathan" step ideas

- Read my pocket card before school
- Give my Squad Card by Friday
- Sit with someone who's usually alone, once
- Text one friend who's having a hard week
- Stick up for someone instead of laughing along

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VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person prays one sentence for the person on their left, all the way around.
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip the trios. Students write their card quietly, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "God, help each of us be a Jonathan for the person on our card."
- **Bonus card:** Students who finish early can write a second card to someone in your church who has stuck with your youth group.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or read student pages or Squad Cards. Have extra cards ready for anyone who wants to start over. Watch for a student who sits with a blank page; quietly offer, "Want to write one to someone in your family, or to one of our leaders?" If someone seems really alone or upset, check in afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "That card in your hand is small, but it's a big deal. It might be the only note someone gets this year that says, 'I'm in your corner.' Jonathan didn't just feel loyal. He did something. **Who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?** Tonight you answered that with a card. This week, you get to hand it over."

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. Who's your favorite friendship from a movie, show, or book?
   Follow-up: What makes them such good friends?
2. What's the nicest thing a friend has ever done for you that cost them almost nothing, like a snack or a ride?
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

GO DEEPER

3. Jonathan was supposed to be king. Why do you think he stayed loyal to David anyway?
   What would you have been tempted to do?
4. What's the difference between an easy friend and a ride-or-die friend?
   Can an easy friend become a ride-or-die friend? How?
5. Proverbs 17:17 says a friend loves "at all times." When is it hardest to stick with a friend?
6. Jesus said the greatest love is laying down your life for your friends. What does it mean to you that Jesus calls you his friend?

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TAKE IT HOME

7. What's one small thing you could give up this week to stick with someone? (Time, a seat, a comment you don't say?)
8. When will you give your Squad Card? What could get in the way?

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. Don't ask students to name their friends out loud; some may not have anyone to name right now.*

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: praying for someone is one of the most loyal things a friend can do. It's how we stick with each other even when we can't fix the problem.

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.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Tonight we talked about friends who stick with you. One of the best ways to stick with somebody is to pray for them. So let's do that for each other right now. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something heavy you're carrying, 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 friend who showed up for me this week
- A good day at school or practice
- Someone I love got good news
- Making a new friend

Concern starters

- A friend who's going through something
- Drama in a friend group
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- "I have an unspoken request."

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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." 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.

Faithful God, friend who never leaves,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone who walked in tonight for the very first time. Thank you that nobody here is an extra.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Ava's new friend, for Marcus's great game..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

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

Thank you for Jonathan, who chose his friend over his crown. Thank you even more for Jesus, who laid down his life for his friends and calls us his friends. Some of us have a squad, and we thank you for them. Some of us feel alone right now, and we ask you to send us a Jonathan. Remind us that you are with us at all times, in the good days and in the hard ones.

Make us loyal friends. Give us courage to stick with people when it costs us something. Help us give our Squad Cards this week, and open our eyes to the person who needs someone in their corner.

In Jesus' name, amen.

SEND-OFF

"Take your student pages home: a five-day devotional and a tracker for your one step. Cut out your pocket card and keep it in your phone case or wallet. And give that Squad Card! Remember when you said you'd give it. Next week we're meeting a guy who walked over to the one person everybody else was afraid of. It's called **'Be a Barnabas.'** And every week we'll keep asking: **who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?** See you then."

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Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 by asking, "Who gave their Squad Card? You don't have to say who it went to. How did it go?" Celebrate every card given, and every one still on its way. Then check the One Step tracker: "How many days did you look for someone to stick with?" Have extra index cards and Week 1 student pages ready for new students.

Care Note for Leaders

Friendship is tender. Some students have no close friends right now. Some are being left out or bullied, in person or online. Some just lost a friend group. Some are in friendships that pressure them into unsafe choices. Watch for a student who always sits alone, says "I don't have anyone," goes quiet during friendship talk, or mentions threats or cruel messages.

- **Stay calm and thank them** for telling you. Never make them prove it or tell them to "just make new friends."
- **Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Follow your church's safety policy** and tell your lead pastor the same day. Talk with parents or guardians.
- **Connect them to trained help:** a school counselor or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

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

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THE FULL SERIES

SQUAD · 4 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the four weeks help students build real friendships: loyal friends, friends who include, friends who make us better, and the church as a squad nobody has to earn their way into. The question every week: *Who's in my squad, and whose squad am I in?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Ride or Die** Loyal friendship	1 Samuel 20:12–17, 41–42
2	**Be a Barnabas** Being the friend who includes	Acts 9:26–28
3	**Better Together** Friends who make you better	Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
4	**Squad Goals** The church as your squad	Acts 2:42–47

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 Squad Card to give away 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

A real friend sticks with me when it costs them something. Jonathan chose David over his own crown.

THE STORY · 1 SAMUEL 20:17, 42

Jonathan caused David to swear again, for the love that he had to him;

for he loved him as he loved his own _____.

Jonathan said to David, "Go in _____..."

What it **cost** Jonathan:

Why he **did it** anyway:

WHO STUCK WITH ME

Private, just you and God. List people who have stuck with you: family, a coach, a teacher, a neighbor, a friend. All of them count. If your list is short right now, that's okay.

WHO (FIRST NAME OR INITIALS)	WHAT THEY DID	WHAT IT COST THEM

Whose squad am I in? One person who could use a Jonathan right now: _____

AT ALL TIMES · PROVERBS 17:17

"A friend loves at _____ _____; and a brother is born for _____."

One hard time when I could stick with someone this week:

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MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Every _____ (morning / lunch / after school / bedtime)

I will be a Jonathan by _____

Example: "Every morning before school, I will read my pocket card and look for someone who needs a friend."

My Squad Card · Week 1

Who it's for: _____

What I wrote: _____

When I'll give it: _____ Given? ☐

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…

SQUAD CARD #1 + MY POCKET CARD

✂ Cut along the dashed lines. Give the Squad Card away. Keep the pocket card in your pocket, phone case, or backpack.

SQUAD CARD #1 · GIVE IT AWAY

You're in my squad.

To: _____

From: _____

POCKET CARD · RIDE OR DIE

"A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity."

PROVERBS 17:17

This week I'll stick with: _____

M☐ T☐ W☐ T☐ F☐ S☐ S☐

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5 Days of Ride or Die

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 1 Samuel 18:3–4 · The robe and the sword

Jonathan gave David his own robe, sword, and bow. What's something you could share with a friend this week?

DAY 2 1 Samuel 20:4 · Whatever you need

Jonathan said, "Whatever your soul desires, I will even do it for you." Who could use a friend like that from you right now?

DAY 3 1 Samuel 20:32 · Speaking up

Jonathan asked his own dad, "What has he done?" When is it hard for you to stick up for someone?

DAY 4 1 Samuel 23:16 · Into the woods

When David was hiding, Jonathan went out to find him and "strengthened his hand in God." Who could you encourage this week?

DAY 5 John 15:13 · The greatest love

Jesus laid down his life for his friends, and he calls you his friend. What do you want to say to him about that?

A prayer you can pray this week

Jesus, thank you for sticking with me, even when it cost you everything. Thank you for the people who have stuck with me too. Help me be a loyal friend, and show me who needs someone in their corner this week. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **Be a Barnabas**

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