



PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH BOOK CLUB

Faith, explored through fiction, fantasy and fun.

The Giver

BY LOIS LOWRY

90-minute lesson with additional optional activities

Supplies

- a copy of the book *The Giver*
- a DVD player and a copy of *The Giver* DVD (optional)
- memory game (print and cut and have on a table)
- a Bible (or Bibles for each participant)
- two or more gray crayons
- two large pieces of white paper (tape to hang up if desired)
- scrap paper for each participant
- pencils/pens for each participant

Focus of the Session: In this meeting, the participants should discuss the book *The Giver*, looking at the major themes of memory, individuality, and love, and how the themes connect to our lives and our faith.

Objectives: As a result of participating in this session, participants will be able to

1. acknowledge the role of “peaks” and “valleys” through memory and emotion;
2. recall the society depicted in the book;
3. name the role of memory in the book, in our Christian story, and in our society;
4. discuss the book and make connections to our lives.

Welcoming Activities (20 minutes)

Peaks and Valleys: Have participants introduce themselves to one another by saying their name and their “peak” and “valley” for the week. A peak is the best thing that happened this week, and a valley is the worst thing that happened this week.

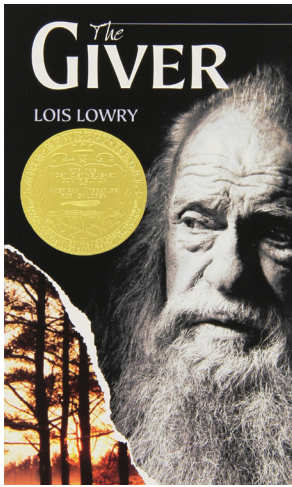
Debrief introductions:

- Have you ever had a week with all peaks or one with all valleys?
- How do peaks and valleys influence each other?
- The elders in the book eliminate peaks and valleys with medication. What do you like about this? What don't you like about this?

Memory Game

Setup: Print memory page (appendix 1) and cut cards apart before the meeting. Prepare the game by placing the cards face down on a table.

Split the group into teams of two to five participants (ensuring you have at least two teams and no more than five teams). Each team will take turns flipping over two cards, trying to match a memory with a lesson. For example, the memory “I burned my hand on the stove” would be matched with the lesson



“stoves are hot and not to be touched when on.” If they find a match, the team gets a second turn. If they don’t find a match, then it’s the next team’s turn. Repeat until all cards are uncovered.

Debrief the game:

- How do memories influence our life?
- In the book, how would memories benefit the society?
- How would memories break down the society?
- What is important about memories and history in a society?

Book Review (10 minutes)

Split the participants into two groups. Have them, using only a gray crayon, doodle and/or write words or phrases on large pieces of white paper about how they remember the society from the book. If they need help remembering the community, give key words as clues (*elders, assigned jobs, rules, released, caretakers, nurturer, pills, etc.*). Share drawings and society descriptions.

Book Discussion on Theme of Memory (20 minutes)

Read the quote about receiving memories on page 78: “There’s much more. There’s all that goes beyond—all that is Elsewhere—and all that goes back, and back, and back. I received all of those, when I was selected. And here in this room, all alone, I re-experience them again and again. It is how wisdom comes. And how we shape our future. . . . I am so *weighted* with them.”¹ Choose a few of the following questions to help discuss the theme of memory:

- Think back to a memory that may have been a valley for you. How would your life be changed without this memory? How can this memory weigh you down? Can memories of negative times weigh us down so much that they don’t allow us to experience good?
- Think back to a memory that was a peak for you, a memory that evokes love and joy. How would your life be changed without this memory? Can one good experience leave us with such a good memory that we find it difficult to experience anything less?
- Why do the elders believe that access to memories is dangerous?
- How can memories of good and bad allow us to shape our future?
- Thinking about distant memories, why is it important to share stories? In the book, the community only has their generation of memories. Is there a benefit or drawback from having fewer memories? How is story sharing important to your family or friend group? Do you have that one family story everyone talks about? What does that story say about your family?
- As the Giver releases the painful memory of an elephant being killed and its tusk taken, he shares the sound made by a grieving elephant. “Jonas had never

1. Lois Lowry, *The Giver* (New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1994), 144.

heard such a sound. It was a sound of rage and grief and it seemed never to end.”² Why is this an important memory to be shared with Jonas? Why is this an important memory for people today? How would life be different for us if we had no knowledge of the evils people commit? Do you think this is why books are banned in the community? Explain.

- On page 123, the Giver shares his favorite memory with Jonas. It is a memory of Christmas. This memory teaches Jonas about words he never knew existed: *warmth, happiness, family, grandparents, and love*. Can memories teach us new things? How can memories teach us to look at situations with different perspectives?
- Pages 133–34 tell of the children playing a game of good guys vs. bad guys. This game triggers memories of war for Jonas. Jonas tells his friends that it is a cruel game. How is his new understanding and empathy from the memories turning him into an outcast with others in the community? How is it changing how he interacts with others?

Connecting the Theme of Memory to the Bible (15 minutes)

Look at how a story and memory is recalled throughout our Christian story:

- Explain that Passover was the 10th plague in Egypt against Pharaoh and his people. This event allowed Moses to lead the Israelites to freedom from slavery. Read our story from Exodus 12:11–14, which follows the instructions of how to prepare the lamb and bread for the Passover meal.
 - What does this story say about memory?
- Passover is still an important tradition and story recalled in Judaism today. The disciples also shared in this story with Jesus during the Last Supper, which was a celebration of the Passover meal. Read our story from Matthew 26:17–19, 26–30.
 - What words were spoken and actions completed as part of the Last Supper celebration?
 - What connection does this story have with the Passover story?
 - How is this story changed and made into a new story?
- After Jesus died and ascended into heaven, the disciples and followers of Jesus are left to be the church, after they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is about their first acts to build the church. Read Acts 2:42–47.
 - How did the community continue the story?
 - How do we continue being part of this Christian memory and story?
 - What would our faith look like without these memories?
 - How is memory vital to our faith?

2. Ibid., 100.

Book Discussion on Theme of Sameness (15 minutes)

Read the quote about sameness on page 94: “There was a time, actually—you’ll see this in the memories later—when flesh was many different colors. That was before we went to Sameness. Today flesh is all the same. . . . We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with differences. . . . We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others.”³ Choose a few of the following questions to help discuss the concept of individuality and sameness:

- The elders in the community have decided that sameness benefits everyone. What are the pros and cons of sameness—in people, weather, landscape, food, etc.? Describe what life would be like without variety.
- Recall the different ceremonies that take place at each age (a bicycle at age nine, a haircut at age 10, assignments at age 12). How do we mark different milestones in our society? What happens at age 11? 13? 16? How do these celebrations mark our maturity as individuals and a community?
- In the book, who decides on job assignments? How would life be different in the community if people could choose their own assignment? How does their experience of being assigned a job compare with the way we choose our professions? Would you prefer for someone to decide your job for you? Why or why not?
- Why did Jonas stop taking his pill each morning? How did this change his depth of feeling and his understanding of what others were, or perceived to be, feeling?
- After discovering how people are released, Jonas decides to save Gabe’s life by running away with him. When their supplies dwindled, they begin to experience hunger and fear as well as awe at new animals. How do these feelings differ from life in the community, with its sameness and predictability?
- The community in the book discourages individualism and promotes sameness. On page 121, the Giver shares the memory of a birthday party. This memory allows Jonas to understand the joy of being an individual. Take a few moments to contemplate the importance of being the individuals God created us to be. After each question, there will be a time for reflection. Doodle your response to the question, or think about your answer:
 - What excites you or brings joy in your life?
 - How do you make time to experience this excitement or joy?
 - How do these things that bring you joy and excitement shape who you are?
- “*They have never known pain*, he thought. The realization made him feel desperately lonely.”⁴ Sharing in one another’s pains and joys can connect us.

3. Ibid., 94.

4. Ibid., 110.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes this as **place sharing**, meaning “**to suffer with**” and “**stand in**” for others. How can place sharing not only help us to stay connected but allow us to empathize with others and therefore show compassion?

Closing Activity (10 minutes)

Revisit the conversation between Jonas and the Giver about the memory of the family at Christmas:

“The family in the memory seemed a little more—’ He faltered, not able to find the word he wanted.

“A little more complete,” The Giver suggested.

Jonas nodded. “I like the feeling of love,” he confessed.⁵

- On page 127, Jonas asks his parents if they love him. They caution him to not use vague and meaningless words like *love*. Can love be broken down into enjoyment and pride, like Jonas’s parents suggest?
- In the community, is there an absence of love? Can there be an absence of love in our relationships? Describe relationships that have love as well as relationships that don’t have love. How do they differ? Does love complete us?
- On a piece of paper, write the word *LOVE* in the middle and circle it. Draw lines or branches from the circle, and write the names of people with whom you are in relationships where love is present. Circle their names. Draw lines or branches extending from those circles, and write down the qualities that are present in those relationships—laughter, common interests, family, trust, honesty, respect, shared experiences, or pride, for example. Allow time for each participant to share a few qualities that are present in their loving relationships. Give thanks to God for allowing love to reside in our community and in our lives.

Closing Prayer

God of the past, present, and all times,

Help us continue to strive to live as people of hope. Help us to feel your presence in our peaks and in our valleys. You are a God that walks with us, eats with us, and is present in our lives, and we thank you. Amen.

Additional Activities

- Watch the movie *The Giver* either before or after the session. Discuss and compare the book and movie.
- The community in the book is marked by grayness and colorlessness in their sameness. Think of a service project that gives color back to your community, and do it together. One idea would be to do a book drive or literacy service project.

5. Ibid., 126.

Appendix 1

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| <p>Memory: I burned my hand on the stove.</p> | <p>Lesson: Stoves are hot and not to be touched when on.</p> | <p>Memory: I tripped on the side walk.</p> | <p>Lesson: Look for cracks on the sidewalk.</p> | <p>Memory: Cheese makes me really sick.</p> | <p>Lesson: I am lactose intolerant.</p> |
| <p>Memory: I get cake on my birthday.</p> | <p>Lesson: Save room after dinner for cake on my birthday.</p> | <p>Memory: I studied a lot for a test and didn't do fun things one night.</p> | <p>Lesson: I made a great grade on my test by studying.</p> | <p>Memory: My sibling took me to the movies.</p> | <p>Lesson: My sibling and I can have fun together.</p> |
| <p>Memory: I lied to a parent and got in big trouble.</p> | <p>Lesson: Don't lie to your parents.</p> | <p>Memory: I teased a girl about her shirt and she cried.</p> | <p>Lesson: Teasing makes other people sad.</p> | <p>Memory: I was frustrated and slammed my laptop shut, breaking it.</p> | <p>Lesson: Frustration expressed on items can break them.</p> |
| <p>Memory: We sang my favorite song, "Silent Night," at Christmas Eve worship.</p> | <p>Lesson: I enjoy going to worship Christmas Eve to sing.</p> | <p>Memory: Sledding on big, open hills was fun and exciting.</p> | <p>Lesson: I like the thrill of sledding.</p> | <p>Memory: I won a soccer tournament with my team.</p> | <p>Lesson: I like playing sports on a team and trying to win.</p> |
| <p>Memory: This boy made fun of my shoes.</p> | <p>Lesson: Stay away from the boy that makes fun of me.</p> | <p>Memory: A dog bit me.</p> | <p>Lesson: Be cautious when approaching dogs.</p> | <p>Memory: I egged a car with friends and felt so nervous.</p> | <p>Lesson: Breaking rules makes me nervous.</p> |
| <p>Memory: My friends and I always get popcorn at the movies.</p> | <p>Lesson: Movies are better with popcorn.</p> | <p>Memory: I pulled out of my driveway without looking and almost got hit.</p> | <p>Lesson: Look both ways when pulling out of my driveway.</p> | <p>Memory: I held hands with someone I liked at the mall.</p> | <p>Lesson: It feels nice to hold hands with significant others.</p> |