



# help sheet

ELCA Youth Ministries



## *Finding God in Today's Secular Music*



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Often, those ministering with youth offer Christian music as an alternative to secular music. While Christian music certainly has an important place in youth ministry, there is also room for music played on today's radio stations. That music has already found its way into the lives of our young people. Let's first admit that. Then, let's go about the task of helping them discern and reflect on the music that dominates their lives.

Many secular songs are spiritual, so if you turn on the radio today and really listen to song lyrics you may hear people singing about God. You may hear anger, suspicion or confusion in the songs, but you may also hear a positive or authentically searching message. Either way, they are song themes that often mirror the feelings and thoughts of youth. Listening to these songs and helping kids process the lyrics may help them define what they believe about God and life. This is an important step in developing discernment.

### *Ways to Use Popular, Alternative, or Country Music in Youth Ministry*

- Use songs as a starting point for discussions about key issues
- Choose a song for devotions at a youth group or planning meeting. If the song is a modern-day psalm, compliment it by reading one of the Psalms.
- Build a Bible study around a song or several songs with the same theme.
- Have a dance.
- Have music playing while young people gather for events or class.
- Host a study series on modern music for young people and parents. Throw in some music from their parents' generation.
- Play background music during creative art projects or small group discussions.
- Use a song as an introduction to prayer. Let prayer be a response to the pain and broken-ness expressed in the lyrics.
- Rewrite lyrics to modern songs. Use them in worship.

### *Using Songs With Spiritual Themes*

Once you've picked a song or two to play for discussion purposes, copy key words from the lyrics onto a transparency (copy-right laws prohibit printing the entire song). Ask young people to read those key words as you play the song: challenge them to look for significance or meaning in those words. Spend some time discussing the song's themes and ideas. Look for ways scripture intersects with the message of the song.

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### **Questions to Facilitate Discussions**

- How do you feel about the song?
  - What does this song say about God, the church, God's people or the world in which we live?
  - Is the song positive, negative, or neutral?
  - How does the message of the gospel compliment or contradict this song's message?
  - How do you connect, or not connect, with the song?
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### **Song Suggestions**

- "Who Will Save Your Soul?"- Jewel- *Pieces of You* (1994 Atlantic)
  - "Unanswered Prayers"- Garth Brooks- *No Fences* (1995 A&M)
  - "What if Jesus Comes Back Like That?"- Collin Raye- *I Think of You* (1995 Sony)
  - "Heresy"- Nine Inch Nails- *The Downward Spiral* (1994 Interscope)
  - "Operation Spirit"- Live- *Mental Jewelry* (1991 Radioactive)
  - "One of Us"- Joan Osborne- *Relish* (1995 Polygram)
  - "God"-Tori Amos- *Under The Pink* (1994 Atlantic)
  - "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For"- U2- *Joshua Tree* (1987 Island)
  - "Dear God"- Sara Mclachlan- *Rarities, B-Sides and other stuff* (1996 Nettwerk Productions Inc.)
  - "Personal Jesus"- Depeche Mode (1990 Sire)
  - "Sympathy for the Devil"- Originally recorded by the Rolling Stones, can be found on the Rolling Stones *Rock and Roll Circus* (1996 ABCKO records and others). Also on the *Interview With A Vampire Soundtrack* (1994 Geffen Records) recorded by Guns'n'Roses
  - "Counting Blue Cars"- Dishwalla- *Pet Your Friends* (1995 A&M Records)
  - "Shame on You"- Indigo Girls- *Shaming of the Sun* (1997 Epic)
  - "God is Love"- Lenny Kravitz- *Circus* (1995 Maverick)
  - "Everything Falls Apart"- Dog's Eye View- *Happy Nowhere* (1995 Sony)
  - "Forgiven"- Alanis Morissette- *Jagged Little Pill* (1995 Maverick)
  - "Terrible Lie"- Nine Inch Nails- *Pretty Hate Machine* (1991 Interscope)
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### **Sample Session: Dear God**

These songs address God as if God is the recipient of a letter. Try listening to at least two of these songs and discussing what the songwriter seems to be saying to God.

- "Hey Jesus"- Indigo Girls- *Strange Fire* (1996 Epic)
  - "Dear God"- Sara Mclachlan- *Rarities, B-Sides and other stuff* (1996 Nettwerk productions, Inc.)
  - "Wake Up Dead Man"- U2- *Pop* (1997 Polygram) CAUTION: There is one word you may wish to edit in this song.
  - "God"- Tori Amos- *Under The Pink* (1994 Atlantic)
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## **Questions to Guide Discussion**

- Is the song positive or negative?
  - What is the songwriter trying to say?
  - For whom is the song intended? God?
  - What would you say in response to the songwriter?
  - How does scripture respond to the perspective offered by this song?
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Give young people a chance to write their own lyrics, or at least their own letter.

Encourage them to put down on paper faith questions with which they struggle. Ask: How would your message to God be different if you knew it would get air play?

Secular music can be used in many ways in youth ministry. This "Help Sheet" should give you some suggestions, but you'll create your own avenues if you're alert for new songs that deal with religious themes. Our kids are listening to music. The least we can do is honor their music world. In so doing, we help them filter the ideas and images that come to them through music. You'll be surprised how often that music is about God. And in helping them wrestle with faith issues, you'll help them discern healthy music from music that harms.

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