



## 2021 THEME SERIES OVERVIEW

"...in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" John 16:33

The goal of the 2021 Student Life Theme Series is to begin a conversation about mental health. Depression, Anxiety, Grief, Trauma, are all things that plague teens and students at alarmingly high rates. Our hope is to use a story about a family working through the depths of their grief to explore what it means to "Take Heart." In life we will face deep pain and trials, but through Jesus we have an enduring hope.

### EPISODE BREAKDOWN

#### EPISODE 1: PAST PROMISES, FUTURE CONFIDENCES

**Question:** What happens when we second guess God's promises for the future?

In episode one we find Maddy and Jake, siblings who have suffered tremendous loss struggling to see God in the midst of their tribulations. Even though Jake struggles to explain what his parents meant by "Take Heart", he knows it has something to do with sticking around and not running from your grief, which Maddy ignores.

Aunt Leena tries to influence Maddy when driving her back from another runaway attempt. She points out that Maddy's parents taught her about Jesus, but uses scripture in a way that Maddy doesn't receive well. Maddy flat out rejects Aunt Leena's attempts, not trusting Aunt Leena's motives. Our characters still don't know what Take Heart means, and like the audience, will grow in their understanding of it throughout the week.

#### EPISODE 2: STRONGHOLD IN WEAKNESS

**Question:** Can our weaknesses serve any purpose other than to torment us?

Maddy suffers from panic attacks and has nightmares, Jake doesn't have his asthma medication, and they are all locked in a room surrounded by fog. Our heroes are not at a loss for weaknesses. They're confused and isolated from the rest of the world, as are Maddy and Jake from each other. In their weakness each character has a moment of finding a stronghold. Jake teaches Maddy a grounding technique that helps calm her. Carson risks his life for his friends and goes into the fog. Maddy pulls Jake and Carson down the hall, barely making it to an air pocket. While they each find an earthly stronghold, ultimately we know that any stronghold apart from God will fail us. Sometimes, God uses weakness and difficult moments to push us toward Him, our ultimate stronghold in the midst of weakness. God can use the things in our lives that feel like curses to bring us closer to Him and to each other.

#### EPISODE 3: LOVE AND SUFFERING

**Question:** What is the difference between sacrificing for a selfish love and a selfless love?

This episode could also be called "The Everyone Get's What They Want" episode. Both Jake and Maddy decide they'd rather live in a dream rather than deal with their brokenness. Jake makes a deliberate choice, but Maddy's choice is unintentional. Both characters get what they want. What brings them back together is the Love that God has demonstrated to us. A sacrificial love that lives in tension and demonstrates itself to others. Both Jake and Maddy realize that their ideal version of the world is wrong and instead they have to accept their own brokenness and suffer. They must accept the depth of their own suffering and do so out of their love for one another. A love that is demonstrated.

#### EPISODE 4: GREAT OPPONENT / GREATER GOD

**Question:** If God is always with us are our opponents always with us?

Jake needs his medicine and Maddy must get it. The only way to retrieve the medicine is to go to the source of the fog—a metaphor for going to the source of her trauma. In the fog she hears all the things she has said to herself over the



years, until she finds her parents. She finally apologizes to them and asks for help. Her mom responds with “take heart” the phrase said throughout the whole series and the whole week of camp. The instruction never changed, but Maddy and Jake’s perspectives have. The hope that Maddy and Jake find for their future as a family is a placeholder for the hope we all can have in Christ.

Aunt Leena demonstrates her love for Maddy, and is willing to suffer and sit patiently with her niece. Our issues can seem huge, but the way back to God is always there and never changing. Some people take a long time to get there, some people never do, but God is great no matter our pace. The path is always there.

## TAKE HEART SYMBOLS

### THE FOG

The fog is a metaphor for the various issues that our characters or the audience might be dealing with: depression, anxiety, grief, trauma, fear. The fog isn’t a villain, it isn’t trying to kill people, but it does consume everything. If you know someone who suffers from any of the above issues, you know how all encompassing it can become. Most important is what the fog does, it makes people fall asleep and dream.

In episode three Maddy lives out a large chunk of time in one of the dreams, having no idea she’s been deceived. If the fog represents mental and traumatic issues, the dreams represent the altered reality that someone can believe when dealing with one of these conditions. The dreams become a coping mechanism that allows you to NOT deal with your fears. The only way out is to realize that this version of the world isn’t true, and that it is a scary and painful process.

In this same episode Jake decides he’d rather live in a lie than deal with the present pain of his sister’s abandonment. It isn’t until he realizes Maddy’s sacrifice that he truly deals with the pain of his parent’s loss.

As Maddy walks in the fog she begins to hear people calling to her. As the character Carson explains in the story, “The fog just wants you to sleep. It uses what you’re already dealing with. Whatever crap you got going on up here is gonna come out. One way or another”. So as Maddy walks through the fog, all of her trauma is mirrored to her. Her self-loathing, her fears, her thoughts, her anxiety, her grief. All of this manifests in the supreme form of her parents.

Mom and Dad appear several times in the story, but what’s important is that we never see them in a flashback, before they passed away. We only see them through Jake and Maddy’s perspective, so we see them how they see them. Jake thinks of his parents as strong and faith-filled, reliving idyllic times. Maddy thinks of them as ghosts haunting her, as she’s crushed by her guilt of being a problem child. Only in episode four when Maddy confronts them in the fog does she make peace with the memory of her parents by seeking forgiveness and remembering what her parents taught her.

All of this metaphor is a way for the characters, and by extension the audience, to be able to recognize and deal with their own present issues, or to have sympathy for those presently dealing with them. Spurring them on to see what it actually takes to explore the message from Maddy and Jake’s parents to “take heart”.

### THE EGG

The egg that the fog comes from is meant to represent new beginnings, something new and foreign coming into the world. It looks man-made, constructed with crude metals, but is also an egg, occurring only in nature. It’s meant to straddle the line between man made and natural occurrences that trauma could come from. This could also be seen as a metaphor for sin entering into the world

### THE BLUE SPECKS

Both Maddy and Jake cough up a blue liquid at different points in the story. This is meant to show the presence of something within them that isn’t going away. Some things in life we have to carry with us the best way we can, but like Maddy the best thing you can do is reveal those problems to someone and find support.