



**jim burns**

general editor

**CD-ROM INCLUDED**

# uncommon object lessons & discussion starters

leader's  
resource



Published by Gospel Light

Ventura, California, U.S.A.

*www.gospellight.com*

Printed in the U.S.A.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®.

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Other versions used are

*NASB*—Scripture taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

*NLT*—Scripture quotations marked *NLT* are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

*TEV*—Scripture quotations are from *Today's English Version*. Copyright © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976. Used by permission.

© 1997, 2002, 2010 Jim Burns

All rights reserved.

Previously published in the Fresh Ideas series as *Case Studies, Talk Sheets and Discussion Starters* (compiled by Mark Simone) published in 1997 and *Hot Topics* (Jim Burns and Mike DeVries, general editors) in 2002.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Case studies, talk sheets, and discussion starters.

Uncommon object lessons & discussion starters / Jim Burns, general editor.

p. cm.

First work originally published: Case studies, talk sheets, and discussion starters. [S.l. : s.n.], 1997. (Fresh ideas series).

2nd work originally published: Hot topics. [S.l. : s.n.], 2002.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8307-5098-6 (trade paper : alk. paper)

1. Christian education of young people. 2. Object-teaching. I. Burns, Jim, 1953- II. Title.

III. Title: Uncommon object lessons and discussion starters. IV. Title: Hot topics.

BV1485.C25 2010

259'.23—dc22

2009054206

All definitions are from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Rights for publishing this book outside the U.S.A. or in non-English languages are administered by Gospel Light Worldwide, an international not-for-profit ministry. For additional information, please visit [www.glww.org](http://www.glww.org), email [info@glww.org](mailto:info@glww.org), or write to Gospel Light Worldwide, 1957 Eastman Avenue, Ventura, CA 93003, U.S.A.

# contents

introduction .....	9
object lessons .....	11
<b>Christian influence</b>	
1. Any Light Makes a Difference: <i>As Christians, we are to serve as light in a dark world</i> .....	12
2. Shattering Sin: <i>We must always present the hard truths of the gospel</i> .....	14
3. When Candles Burn Out: <i>The Body of Christ can keep the darkness of the world at bay</i> .....	16
<b>encouragement</b>	
4. Bruised on the Inside: <i>God calls us to carry one another's burdens</i> .....	18
5. A Candle in the Dark: <i>Each of us can affect the lives others and encourage them</i> .....	20
6. The Words We Speak: <i>Our words should build up others instead of tearing them down</i> .....	22
<b>God's Word</b>	
7. Follow the Manual: <i>The Bible is God's instruction manual for living life the way He intended</i> .....	24
8. The Power of Soap: <i>We have to read God's Word and apply what it says to our lives</i> .....	26
9. Worthless! <i>A Bible that is only partially read and obeyed is like a map with holes in it</i> .....	27
<b>the Holy Spirit</b>	
10. Walk by the Spirit: <i>When we walk in God's ways, we will tend to become less tangled in sin</i> .....	29
11. The Wedding Ring: <i>The Holy Spirit is our seal of belonging, partnership and commitment</i> .....	30
<b>judging others</b>	
12. The Apple Cart: <i>God has made each of us unique and with different purposes in mind</i> .....	31
13. Faulty First Impressions: <i>What we see initially does not always tell the whole story</i> .....	32
<b>life in Christ</b>	
14. Commitment Is Costly: <i>Commitment to Christ comes with a cost—our lives</i> .....	34
15. Fellowship and a Bunch of Charcoal Briquettes: <i>Fellowship is essential in our lives as Christians</i> ..	35
16. First Things First! <i>When we put God first, everything else in life falls into its proper place</i> .....	37
17. Important Functions: <i>Each person has a valuable function in the Body of Christ</i> .....	39
18. The Old Made New: <i>God is able to make us into new creations</i> .....	40
19. Walking the Tightrope: <i>Real faith requires not only belief but also actions based on that belief</i> ...	42
20. Will It Stand? <i>We need to build our lives on a solid foundation</i> .....	45
21. The Windows of Our Soul: <i>We must seek God's will and not try to live through our own efforts</i> ..	47
<b>salvation &amp; redemption</b>	
22. A Messy Situation: <i>All have sinned and are in need of a Savior</i> .....	49
23. Never Lost: <i>We can know where we are, spiritually, through the study of God's Word</i> .....	51
24. Only One Key Turns the Lock: <i>There is only one way to God—through faith in Jesus Christ</i> .....	52
<b>self-evaluation</b>	
25. Melting Away: <i>When we resist following Jesus and follow our own ways, we waste our lives</i> .....	54
26. The Road Signs of Life: <i>It's important to stop and take a look at our relationship with God</i> .....	56
27. The Value Remains: <i>God created each of us, loves us and values us simply for who we are</i> .....	58
28. Who We Really Are: <i>Our words and actions reflect the spiritual condition of our heart</i> .....	60
<b>sexuality &amp; purity</b>	
29. Filling Our Minds: <i>What we put into our hearts and minds has a way coming out</i> .....	62
30. Fish in a Blender: <i>God created sex for the marriage relationship alone</i> .....	64

## **sin & confession**

- 31. Dealing with Past Sins: *Jesus' death and resurrection have the power to cleanse us* . . . . . 66
- 32. Flushed Away: *God's forgiveness flushes away our sin* . . . . . 68
- 33. Nailing Sin to the Cross: *We need to recognize our sin and seek God's forgiveness* . . . . . 70
- 34. The Poisoned Piñata: *We cannot hide our sin from God* . . . . . 71
- 35. Sucked in by Pride: *Christians are never invulnerable to Satan's attacks* . . . . . 73
- 36. Tough to Break: *God has the power to overcome our bad habits and set us free* . . . . . 75

## **spiritual growth**

- 37. A Box of Potential: *God can see the potential in each and every one of us* . . . . . 77
- 38. Faith and Works: *Without faith and works, our Christian life won't go anywhere* . . . . . 79
- 39. The Importance of Roots: *A well-developed root system is vital for spiritually healthy growth* . . . . . 80
- 40. Ready to Explode: *Situations that make us angry require us to rely on the strength of the Lord* . . 82
- 41. A Shaky Foundation: *People often build their lives on foundations other than the Word of God* . . 84
- 42. Staying Strong: *When we submit our lives to God, He will give us the strength we need* . . . . . 85
- 43. Taste and See: *You can't judge the reality of Christianity until you try it* . . . . . 87
- 44. That Was My Year: *We should look back on our lives to determine how to move ahead* . . . . . 89
- 45. What a Plant Needs to Grow: *We need to take care of our relationship with Christ* . . . . . 91

## **discussion starters**

### **Christian living**

- 1. Airsick: *When facing difficult situations, we must remember the tools God has provided to us* . . . 95
- 2. A Failure to Plan: *We need to make a plan for our spiritual growth—and stick to it* . . . . . 96
- 3. The Election: *God always has a plan for our lives, even we can't see it* . . . . . 97
- 4. Is There Really Any Difference? *Christians need to live differently from those in the world* . . . . . 99
- 5. The Love Letter: *We will miss out if we don't open the Bible, God's love letter to us* . . . . . 101
- 6. The Mission Trip: *Christians will encounter resistance when sharing the gospel* . . . . . 104
- 7. The New Christian: *We can't be afraid to correct others in love* . . . . . 106
- 8. Not My Reality: *Christ is the only true way to God* . . . . . 108

### **handling conflict**

- 9. A Change in Behavior: *We should reach out to others when we see they are hurting* . . . . . 110
- 10. The Date: *Telling one lie usually leads to telling others in order to cover it up* . . . . . 111
- 11. Delinquents or Outcasts? *We need to look at both sides of an issue before passing judgment* . . 112
- 12. Joint Custody: *Handling conflict requires communicating our needs to others* . . . . . 114
- 13. Losing Control: *If not dealt with properly, conflicts can quickly escalate and get out of control* . . 116
- 14. No Connection: *Sometimes what is really bothering us is buried beneath the surface* . . . . . 117
- 15. Pizza Night: *We shouldn't always assume that we are the cause of every conflict* . . . . . 119
- 16. Prom Night Sleepover: *Parents set rules for their children not out of spite but out of love* . . . . . 121
- 17. Sound-System Wars: *Retaliation is never a good way to handle conflict* . . . . . 122

### **hardships & suffering**

- 18. The Collision: *Sometimes suffering causes us to question God's love for us* . . . . . 125
- 19. Suicide Note: *We must take it seriously when someone threatens suicide* . . . . . 127
- 20. That Sinking Feeling: *We begin to sink when we take our eyes off Jesus* . . . . . 128
- 21. Trauma from Terrorism: *People respond differently when they experience traumatic situations* . . 130
- 22. A Very Bad Day: *Even on the worst of days God is still in control* . . . . . 132

### **helping others**

- 23. A Bad Influence: *Setting a bad example can cause others to turn away from Christ* . . . . . 133
- 24. The Good Samaritan: *We shouldn't just walk by when we see someone in need* . . . . . 135
- 25. The Invisible Homeless: *It's often easier to pretend poverty doesn't exist than to deal with it* . . . 137
- 26. Scam Artist? *Sometimes it's hard to determine the best course in helping those in need* . . . . . 139

**integrity**

- 27. The Betrayal: *Lying to others to spare their feelings will only end up hurting them worse* . . . . .140
- 28. A Celebration Denied: *It's vital to maintain our integrity even when things don't go our way* . . . . .141
- 29. Dismembered Dolls: *Integrity involves respecting the gifts that have been given to us* . . . . .143
- 30. Missing Mugs: *It is important to admit our mistakes to maintain our integrity* . . . . .145
- 31. Playing by Different Standards: *We should always put God's standards first in our lives* . . . . .147
- 32. Stealing Sheep: *A lack of integrity will only serve to divide the Body of Christ* . . . . .149

**peer pressure & sexuality**

- 33. Date Rape: *We should seek to avoid situations that make us feel uncomfortable* . . . . .151
- 34. A Driving Dilemma: *We need to obey the rules even when we don't agree with them* . . . . .153
- 35. Inappropriate Behavior? *It's often hard to determine when someone has crossed the line* . . . . .154
- 36. Only One Time: *Even one sin can lead to lead to consequences* . . . . .156
- 37. Passing Notes: *Christians should avoid graphic or vulgar language* . . . . .158
- 38. The Rumor: *Speaking out often requires a great deal of boldness* . . . . .159
- 39. Unequally Yoked: *Christians should never compromise when entering into a relationship* . . . . .160
- 40. What Can It Hurt? *We should always listen to our conscience rather than our emotions* . . . . .161

**racism & prejudice**

- 41. Being the Minority: *A simple gesture can often break down racial barriers* . . . . .163
- 42. Campus Confrontation: *Christians are called to act when they see injustice* . . . . .165
- 43. Mistaken Identity or Racism? *Making generalizations about people leads to racism* . . . . .167
- 44. Subtle Barriers: *It's often hard to see the subtle barriers that divide cultures and races* . . . . .169
- 45. What's in a Name? *The media often creates racial stereotypes that are not accurate* . . . . .171

**responsibility**

- 46. Borrowing the Car: *Trust takes a long to develop but can be destroyed in an instant* . . . . .173
- 47. Don't Blame Me! *We have only ourselves to blame when we fail to heed warnings* . . . . .175
- 48. Movie Mistakes: *One person's irresponsible behavior will adversely affect another* . . . . .176
- 49. More Movie Mistakes: *Those in leadership are held to a higher standard of responsibility* . . . . .178
- 50. A Prank Not Taken in Fun: *Self-control is vital if you are in a position of leadership* . . . . .179
- 51. That's Why We Hired You! *There's a line between seeking help and shirking responsibility* . . . . .180

**salvation & faith**

- 52. Always a Christian? *Those who belong to Christ are known by their actions* . . . . .182
- 53. Faith Crisis: *Doubts are a natural part of the Christian life* . . . . .184
- 54. Is Christ the Only Way? *There are many religions but only one way to God through Christ* . . . . .186
- 55. The Visitor: *We must leave ungodly practices behind when we choose to follow Jesus* . . . . .188

**you be the judge**

- 1. The Dying Prisoner: *A convicted alcoholic is dying from liver disease* . . . . .190
- 2. The Repentant Inmate: *A man in prison for rape receives the gospel and repents* . . . . .192
- 3. The Teen Murderer: *A promising young football star is convicted of his girlfriend's murder* . . . . .195
- 4. The Unruly Guests: *A guest takes offense at another guest's actions and calls the police* . . . . .197
- 5. The Disillusioned Volunteers: *Youth run into problems when they try to serve their community* . . .199

**indexes**

- Scripture Index . . . . .204
- Subject Index . . . . .215

**thanks** . . . . .222

**contributors** . . . . .223

# introduction

I hope you will love this book as much as I do! As a youth worker and the general editor of this project, I know how beneficial it is to get students talking and discussing the important issues of their lives. I think you will agree that this book has a little something for everybody when it comes to getting your students to open up and talk.

Edgar Dale, one of the great educators of the last century, informs us that when students are spoken or written to their retention level is only 5 to 10 percent, but when they are active participants in experiential learning, the retention can be expanded to as much as 85 percent. That's why this book is so important. Students learn best when *they talk*, not when *we talk at them*.

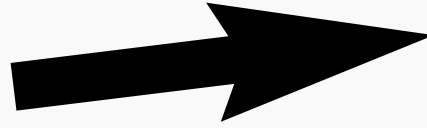
Over the years, I've often noticed that the best meetings with the most energy are always the ones with interaction and discussion. Participation seems to be the ingredient for a successful youth meeting. When someone talks at the students, the success of the meeting is dependent on the speaker being dynamic or on the subject hitting the mark. When there is group interaction and discussion, however, the meeting works almost every time.

The good news is that you do not need to be a gifted speaker to affect the learning and spiritual growth of your students. Instead, you can become a good facilitator of communication and interaction among your students. This resource book will show you how. In putting together the material for this book, Mark Simone and I asked youth workers from the front lines to send us their best stuff for getting students to think and talk about the important real-life issues of living out their Christianity. Within these pages you will find object lessons taken directly out of real situations and other types of discussion starters that have already been used successfully with students. You'll be introduced to a wonderful style of teaching and learning that encourages thought-provoking discussions.

Our goal as Christian youth workers and teachers of adolescents is to plant God's Word in students' lives and to help them actively live out their faith. Oftentimes, using the kinds of experiences in this book will do a better and more effective job than any sermon or youth talk. A discussion in which the students discover the truth for themselves with your guidance can be a powerful tool for active learning.

God bless you as you help youth navigate through the not-so-easy world of adolescence. Thanks for being a difference-maker and for being committed to youth.

Jim Burns  
San Juan Capistrano, California



# OBJECT LESSONS

**object lesson** \ ab-jikt le-sen \ **1a:** a concrete illustration of a moral or principle **1b:** a lesson taught by using a material object **2:** something that serves as a practical example of a principle or abstract idea.

Object lessons are great. In my first youth ministry job after I graduated from seminary, I often gave the children's sermon at our church. I would usually use a fun object lesson to bring home a point the children could understand. I was always amazed that after the service many adults would come up to me and comment on the object lesson. I still remember the time one of the older members in our congregation enthusiastically told me, "It finally makes sense. When you brought out the little duckie and explained the Trinity, it finally made sense!" That day, I was reminded that even adults learn best with object lessons—even if you use a little duckie to get the point across. 😊





1

# any light makes a difference

## key verses

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

## materials needed

small flashlight  
large battery-powered lantern  
small penlight or candle for each person  
a few lighters (if you use the candles)  
a box large enough to cover the lantern

## preparation

Gather all of the items together and turn out the lights in the room.

## object lesson

As the group sits in the darkness, explain that in Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus taught that Christians are like lights set on a hill and that the light would be no good if it were hidden. Use the different lights to illustrate the following points about light and Christians as lights in a dark world:

- *One small flashlight:* Even a small light in darkness will make a difference. There is no Christian who is less important or has less to do. All light, no matter the size, will shatter the darkness.
- *The large lantern and the box:* This large lantern will drastically change the darkness. But if you put a box or blanket over it, it cannot be seen. If we hide our light, it will have no effect on the dark world.

- *The penlights (or candles)*: Hand these out to the group but instruct them not to turn them on yet. If you are using penlights, click one on and then walk around the room touching the other penlights. Each time you touch a student's penlight, have him or her click it on. If you use candles, walk around with a lighter and light the candles one at a time. Explain how one light lighting another light brightens the world.

Ask your group how Christians can hide Christ's light. Have students give an example of a Christian they know who shines and gives light to everyone around. Challenge them to think of ways they can be a light in the darkness on their school campus during the next week.

**additional scriptures**

John 1:3-5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 13:47; Romans 13:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8-14; 1 John 2:9-11



# what happens when you start good conversations?

You already know that teens learn best when they talk with each other . . . not when you talk at them. But how can you guide the conversation in the right direction so that the youth in your group discover the truth for themselves? *Uncommon Object Lessons & Discussion Starters*, created by veteran youth minister Jim Burns, brings together 90 field-tested tools for sparking dialog that will fire your students' passion for God and His Word. Those conversations will help them actively live out their faith—and turn every group meeting into a dynamic, relevant confab they can't wait to attend.

Each object lesson and discussion starter includes key verses and additional Scripture references to help you tie it in with your session or theme, and the handy topical index makes it easy to pick a suitable object lesson or discussion starter for your focus. Whether you're aiming for silly, thought-provoking or moving, you can hit just the right note in your next youth meeting, Sunday School class, retreat, staff meeting, parent night, camp, lock-in or outreach program. Give your students something to talk about and see what happens.

- More than 100 object lessons/discussion starters that will get the conversation going
- Includes CD-ROM with easy-to-print files of every lesson
- Object lessons and discussion starters arranged by topic (with accompanying Scripture references) to make it easy to select the perfect illustration for your message
- Includes subject index and Scripture index for easy reference
- Edited by Jim Burns, one of today's leading authorities on youth ministry



Hit the ground running with a complete package of proven and effective materials for Junior High and High School ministries!



**JIM BURNS**, Ph.D., is president of HomeWord and host of HomeWord's radio broadcasts, heard on more than 800 releases a day around the country. Jim speaks to thousands of people around the world every year. He is a three-time Gold Medallion Award winning author and has written books for parents, students, children, youth ministry and church leaders. Jim has more than 1.5 million resources in print in over 20 languages. His most recent resources include *The Purity Code*, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, *Accept Nothing Less*, *God Made Your Body*, *How God Makes Babies*, *Confident Parenting*, *Creating an Intimate Marriage*, *Closer: Devotions to Draw Couples Together*, *The 10 Building Blocks for a Solid Family* and *The Youth Builder*. Jim and his wife, Cathy, and their daughters Christy, Rebecca and Heidi live in Southern California.

 **Gospel Light**  
*God's Word for Your World™*

ISBN-13: 978-0-8307-5098-6  
ISBN-10: 0-8307-5098-3



9 780830 750986 Printed in the U.S.A.  
RELIGION/Christian Ministry/Youth

