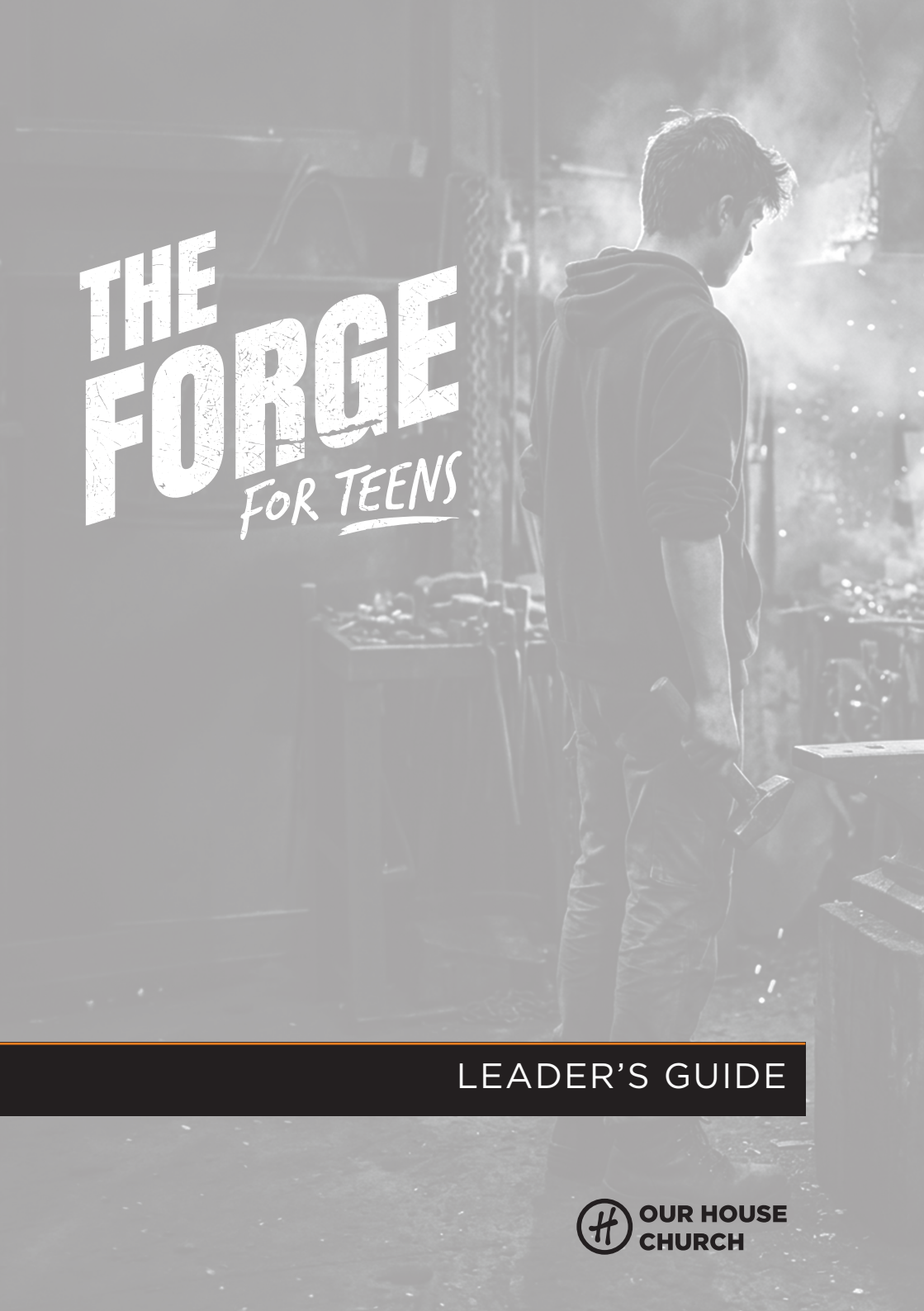


THE FORGE

FOR TEENS

LEADER'S GUIDE

OUR HOUSE CHURCH

THE FORGE FOR TEENS
LEADER'S GUIDE
DISCUSS • CHALLENGE • GROW

INTRODUCTION

The Forge isn't a lesson to teach. It's a conversation to lead.

The boys already have opinions, experiences and questions about identity, friendship, pressure, choices and becoming a man. Your role isn't to have all the answers or to talk for most of the session.

Your role is to **create the space for a good conversation**.

Ask good questions. Listen carefully. Draw quieter boys into the conversation. Challenge poor thinking without embarrassing someone. Don't be afraid of silence.

The Christian foundation is important, but the aim isn't to turn every discussion into a sermon. Allow the boys to wrestle with the questions. The Bible and the example of Jesus provide a different perspective and give you something solid to bring into the conversation.

A FEW SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

Talk less. Listen more.
If you're doing most of the talking, you're probably doing too much.

Don't be afraid of silence.
Give them time to think. The first answer isn't always the best one.

There are no stupid questions.
If a boy asks something difficult, don't panic. You don't have to know the answer immediately.

Don't force personal disclosure.
The boys should be able to pass on a question if they don't want to answer.

Challenge ideas, not people.
It's fine to say, "I'm not sure that's right. What makes you think that?" Avoid making a boy feel stupid for his opinion.

Keep bringing it back to real life.
"What would that look like at school?"
"What would you actually do?"
"Why is that difficult?"

Session 1 | FORGED, NOT FINISHED

THE BIG IDEA

Nobody is the finished article. Growing into a good man is a process of being shaped through experiences, choices, mistakes and the people around us.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, the boys should understand that:

- They don't need to have everything worked out yet.
- Becoming a man involves growth and change.
- Mistakes don't have to define them.
- The choices they make now are helping shape who they become.
- The Christian picture is that God is actively interested in shaping our lives.

The booklet uses the picture of the potter working with clay and Jeremiah 18:1–6 to introduce this idea.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Start with things they have learned to do rather than asking immediately about character.

> **What are you good at now that you weren't good at two or three years ago?**

This gives them an easy way into the idea of growth.

Then move towards:

> **Do people change as they grow up?**

> **What makes someone become a better person?**

> **Can someone change if they've made some really bad choices?**

WATCH FOR

Some boys may say, **That's just who I am.**

That's a great opportunity to ask:

> **Do you think that's always true?**

Avoid turning this into a discussion about whether someone is "good" or "bad".

The emphasis should be **potential rather than guilt.**

KEY THOUGHT

You're not finished. You're being shaped.

Session 2 | IDENTITY

THE BIG IDEA

Being different is part of what makes us who we are, but the people, places and things we allow into our lives can shape who we become.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help the boys:

- Recognise that differences are positive.
- Understand some of the things that shape identity.
- Think about the influence of family, friends, places and media.
- Recognise the pressure to fit in.
- Begin to make deliberate choices about their influences.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Don't rush past the opening discussion about being different.

Ask:

"Why do people sometimes hide the things that make them different?"

Then:

"What's the difference between fitting in and belonging?"

This can lead naturally into people, places and things.

GOOD FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Who has influenced you without you really noticing?

Can someone influence you without being a good influence?

Can something you enjoy still have a negative effect on you?

WATCH FOR

Boys naming celebrities, YouTubers or influencers isn't necessarily a problem. Don't immediately tell them they're bad influences.

Instead ask:

What exactly are you taking from that person?

That moves the conversation from who they follow to what influence they are receiving.

KEY THOUGHT

You don't have to fit in with everyone. Choose wisely what you allow to shape you.

Session 3 | INFLUENCE

THE BIG IDEA

Every boy already has influence, whether he realises it or not.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help them understand:

- Influence isn't just something famous people have.
- Their behaviour affects friends and younger people.
- Peer pressure works both ways.
- They can make it easier or harder for others to make good choices.
- Leadership can begin with ordinary choices.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Use real situations rather than definitions.

For example:

> **You're with five friends and someone starts taking the mick out of another boy. Everyone's laughing. One person stops laughing. What happens next?**

Ask:
Who has the influence in that situation?

Then:
Could the quiet person actually have more influence than the loudest person?

KEY QUESTION

> **If the people around you became more like you, would that be a good thing?**

Give them time with this one.

WATCH FOR

Some boys will naturally say, "I don't care what other people think."

Don't challenge this too quickly. Ask:

Really? Do you think anyone genuinely doesn't care what other people think?

That can open up a much more honest conversation about belonging and approval.

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

Jesus describes his followers as salt and light. The point isn't that the boys need to become famous or impressive. It's that **the way they live can make a difference**.

KEY THOUGHT

You already have influence. The question is what you're going to do with it.

Session 4 | STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL

THE BIG IDEA

Real strength isn't about having no emotions. It's about learning how to handle them well.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Recognise that anger is a normal emotion.
- Understand the consequences of uncontrolled reactions.
- See self-control as strength rather than weakness.
- Learn to pause before reacting.
- Understand Jesus as an example of strength with restraint.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Don't ask, **"Who gets angry?"** They'll probably all say no!

Instead ask:

What sorts of things really wind people up?

Talk about situations rather than individuals. Then ask:

Why is it so difficult to walk away when you're angry?

Is walking away weak?

What's the difference between controlling your anger and bottling it up?

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Make sure the boys understand:
Self-control isn't the same as pretending you aren't angry.

You can feel angry and still choose how you respond.

THE PAUSE

Practise it together:

Stop • Breathe • Think • Choose

Ask:

What response would strength choose here?

The adult Forge identifies this as the key practical tool for the session.

KEY THOUGHT

Real strength is having the power to choose your response.

Session 5 | THE BATTLE IN YOUR HEAD

THE BIG IDEA

What we repeatedly put into our minds can affect how we see ourselves and the world.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Recognise the effect of comparison.
- Think critically about social media.
- Understand that thoughts aren't automatically facts.
- Create space for honest discussion about online influences.
- Know that asking for help isn't weakness.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

This session needs a little more sensitivity than some of the others.

Start broadly:

> **Where do teenagers get their ideas about what it means to be successful, attractive or popular?**

Then explore social media.

Ask:

> **"How much of what you see online is actually real life?"**

PORNOGRAPHY

Don't turn the session into a lecture about pornography. The bigger issue is **what we allow into our minds and what it teaches us**.

If the subject comes up, remain calm and matter-of-fact. Don't ask boys to disclose whether they've watched pornography.

Instead discuss:

- What does pornography teach about relationships?
- Is it realistic?
- Why can habits become difficult to break?
- Why might secrecy make a problem worse?
- Who could someone talk to if they were struggling?

WATCH FOR

A boy making jokes may be testing whether it's safe to discuss the subject.

Don't embarrass him. A calm response such as:

> **We can joke about lots of things, but this is worth taking seriously.**

...usually works better than a telling-off.

KEY THOUGHT

You can't always control what thought enters your head, but you can choose what you do with it.

Session 6 | CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES

THE BIG IDEA

Growing up means having more freedom and learning to take responsibility for your choices.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Think beyond immediate consequences.
- Understand that choices affect other people.
- Recognise peer pressure.
- Take responsibility rather than automatically blaming others.
- Develop a habit of thinking before acting.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Use situations they recognise.

Your mates say, 'Come on, nobody's going to know.'
What goes through your head?

Ask:

Why do people make decisions they already know aren't very wise?

Then introduce:

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

What could happen?

Who could it affect?

How will I feel about this tomorrow?

Is this the sort of person I want to become?

WATCH FOR

Don't make this about rules.

The deeper issue is responsibility.

If a boy says:

But everyone else was doing it.

Ask:

Maybe they were. But what was your choice?

KEY THOUGHT

You can't always control what happens, but you can take responsibility for your choices.

Session 7 | WHAT DO I STAND FOR?

THE BIG IDEA

Character is revealed by what we do when doing the right thing is difficult.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Identify qualities they value.
- Understand the difference between words and actions.
- Explore integrity.
- Think about doing the right thing when nobody is watching.
- Understand that character is built over time.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Ask:

What makes someone a genuinely good man?

Write their answers down.

Then ask:

Which of those qualities are actually difficult to live out?

This is where the conversation gets interesting.

If someone says **honesty**, ask:

What if telling the truth gets you into trouble?

If they say **loyalty**:

What if your friend is clearly in the wrong?

KEY QUESTION

Would you still do the right thing if you knew nobody would ever find out?

Don't answer it for them.

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

Micah 6:8 gives a wonderfully simple framework:
do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

KEY THOUGHT

Your character is being built by the choices you make, especially when nobody is watching.

Session 8 | PURPOSE

THE BIG IDEA

You don't need your whole life planned out, but it is worth thinking about what you want your life to be about.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Think beyond career choices.
- Identify their strengths.
- Consider what they care about.
- Question simplistic ideas of success.
- Explore purpose as something bigger than getting things for yourself.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Start with the obvious:

What do you want to do when you grow up?

Then deliberately move beyond it:

That's what you want to DO. What sort of person do you want to BE?

Then:

What do you want your life to be ABOUT?

That distinction is important.

WATCH FOR

Don't put pressure on boys to identify a grand purpose.

At 14, **"I don't know"** is a perfectly reasonable answer.

The aim is to get them **thinking**, not to make them produce a five-year plan.

GOOD QUESTION

If you had plenty of money and didn't have to work, what would you spend your time doing?

Then explore what their answer reveals about what they value.

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

Ephesians 2:10 gives the Christian perspective that our lives have purpose and that we can use what God has given us for good.

KEY THOUGHT

A good life isn't just about what you can get. It's also about what you can give.

Session 9 | FINISH WELL

THE BIG IDEA

The man you become is being shaped by the choices you're making now.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Help boys:

- Reflect on the whole course.
- Identify qualities they want to develop.
- Think about their future selves.
- Recognise that character develops through small choices.
- Leave with a sense of possibility rather than pressure.

GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

The **future self** exercise is particularly valuable here.

Ask them to **imagine themselves at 25**.

Then:

What would you want that version of you to thank you for?

Allow some silence.

Then:

Is there anything he might wish you'd done differently?

DON'T TURN THIS INTO A LECTURE

This is the boys' opportunity to own what they've discovered.

Ask:

What's one thing from the course you'll actually remember?

Has anything changed the way you think?

What's one thing you want to work on?

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

1 Timothy 4:12 is a great closing passage because Paul tells a young man that he doesn't have to wait until he's older to be an example.

FINAL CHALLENGE

Ask each boy to choose **one quality** he wants to develop.Not ten. One.

KEY THOUGHT

The man you become starts with the boy you are today.

TIPS FOR WHEN THE GROUPS GETS MESSY

A GUIDE FOR LEADERS

Working with 13–16-year-old boys can be brilliant. It can also be chaotic.

Don't expect every session to be quiet, deep and perfectly behaved. Some of the best conversations will happen after someone has made a ridiculous comment and everyone has stopped laughing.

Your job isn't to eliminate the energy. It's to **channel it**.

THE BOY WHO WON'T STOP TALKING

Don't immediately shut him down.

He may be enthusiastic, confident or simply uncomfortable with silence.

Try:

> **"That's interesting. Hold that thought because I want to hear what someone else thinks."**

Then deliberately ask a quieter boy:

> **"What do you think?"**

You haven't told the first boy off. You've simply made room for someone else.

Avoid:

"You're always talking."

That's personal and will usually make things worse.

THE BOY WHO SAYS EVERYTHING IS "STUPID"

Don't get into a battle.

Try:

> **"What is it about the question you think is stupid?"**

Or:

> **"Okay, you don't agree. Tell us why."**

Sometimes a dismissive comment is actually the beginning of a worthwhile discussion.

THE BOY WHO MAKES EVERYTHING SEXUAL

This is particularly likely when discussing relationships, pornography or identity.

Stay calm. Don't show embarrassment.

You can say:

> **"I'm guessing you said that to get a reaction. But actually, this is something worth talking about seriously."**

Then bring the conversation back.

If the comments become persistent, address the behaviour rather than shaming the boy.

> **"You can have a laugh, but you also need to know when we're having a serious conversation."**

THE BOY WHO DOMINATES

The confident boy can unintentionally become the group's spokesperson.

Don't rely on him to answer everything.

Try:

> **"Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet."**

Or occasionally use a round:

> **"Let's go around the group. You can pass if you don't want to answer."**

This gives quieter boys permission to speak without having to fight for space.

THE BOY WHO WON'T SPEAK

Don't put him on the spot repeatedly.

Some boys need to listen for a while before they feel comfortable.

Instead:

- Give everyone time to think.
- Use pairs before whole-group discussion.
- Ask questions that don't require personal disclosure.
- Accept "I don't know" without making a fuss.

If you know the boy well, you might occasionally ask:

"What do you think, Sam?"

Then leave it there.

If he says "I don't know", move on.

THE BOY WHO WANTS TO ARGUE

This can actually be useful.

Don't confuse disagreement with disruption.

A boy challenging an idea may be **exactly what the course is designed to encourage**.

Try:

> **"Good question. Let's explore that."**

Then ask:

> **"What makes you think that?"**

The aim isn't to win.

It's to help them learn how to **think, question and listen**.

THE BOY WHO CROSSES THE LINE

There is a difference between messing around and making the group unsafe.

If a boy is bullying, humiliating another boy, repeatedly making offensive comments or deliberately preventing others from participating, deal with it.

Do it calmly and privately where possible.

A useful approach is:

NAME IT

> **"You're making it difficult for other people to take part."**

SET THE EXPECTATION

> **"You can disagree and you can have a laugh, but you can't keep stopping other people speaking."**

GIVE A CHOICE

> **"You can stay and take part properly, or we'll need to deal with this separately."**

Don't threaten consequences you aren't prepared or authorised to carry out.

DON'T HUMILIATE A BOY IN FRONT OF THE GROUP

This is probably the most important principle in the whole leaders' guide.

A boy who feels embarrassed in front of his mates will often respond by becoming more disruptive.

Correct behaviour without attacking character.

Instead of:

> **"You're being a pain."**

Say:

> **"That comment isn't helping the conversation."**

Instead of:

> **"Why are you always doing this?"**

Say:

> **"I need you to give everyone else a chance to speak."**

Keep the boy's dignity intact.

WHEN SOMETHING SERIOUS COMES UP

The boys may disclose things that are more serious than you expected.

A boy might talk about bullying, family problems, pornography, self-harm, abuse, anxiety or something happening at home.

Don't promise confidentiality.

If something concerns you, follow the safeguarding procedures of the school or organisation you're working within.

A useful response is:

> **"Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you told someone."**

Don't interrogate him in front of the group.

Don't try to solve everything yourself.

Safeguarding comes before the session plan.

A FEW FINAL POINTS FOR LEADERS

- You don't need to be the coolest person in the room.
- You don't need to have the perfect answer.
- And you don't need to control every conversation.
- The boys will probably remember very little of what you actually said.
- They may remember that **someone listened to them**.
- That they could ask a difficult question without being laughed at.
- That an adult took them seriously.
- That someone believed they could become good men.
  That's a significant part of what The Forge is trying to achieve.

Create the space. Ask good questions. Listen well. Let the conversation do some of the work.

NOTES

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ABOUT THE FORGE

The Forge for Teens was developed by **Our House Church, Yateley**, to help young men explore what it means to grow into men of character, confidence and responsibility.

The course uses honest conversation, practical challenges and a Christian perspective to help boys think about who they are, the choices they make, the people who influence them and the kind of man they want to become.

The Forge for Teens is an adaptation of **The Forge**, our original adult men's discipleship and mentoring course, which is designed to help Christian men grow in character, faith and leadership. This version has been developed specifically for 13–16-year-olds, retaining its Christian foundation while making the conversations accessible and relevant to young men from a range of backgrounds.

FREE TO SHARE

We believe resources like this are most useful when they are shared.

The Forge for Teens is free to download, copy and use by churches, schools, youth groups and anyone who wants to invest in young men. It may also be adapted for your own setting, provided the original acknowledgement remains.

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