

Youth Retreat Session Guide: The Counter-Cultural Witness

Target Audience: Middle & High School Youth Groups, Confirmation Retreats

Duration: 40 Minutes

Theme: Living as an authentic, fearless disciple in a skeptical world.

Part 1: Icebreaker & Introduction (5 Minutes)

Facilitator Goal: Grab their attention by highlighting the tension between fitting in and standing out.

- **The "Unpopular Opinion" Icebreaker (3 mins):**
- Ask the youth to raise their hands or move to one side of the room if they agree with a series of lighthearted "unpopular opinions" (e.g., "Pineapple belongs on pizza," "TikTok is better than Instagram," "Winter is better than summer").
- **The Pivot (2 mins):**
- "It's easy to stand alone when we're debating pizza toppings. But what happens when standing alone means risking your reputation, your friendships, or even your life? With her Feast Day just days away on July 22nd, we are looking at St. Mary Magdalene. She was chosen as the 'Apostle to the Apostles' because when everyone else ran away in fear, she stayed. Let's watch her story."

Part 2: Video Screening & Options (15 Minutes)

Facilitator Tip: If your retreat includes bilingual families or ESL students, this is a great time to utilize the Traditional Chinese or English subtitles so every teen can fully engage with the narrative.

Play: The complete animation (00:00 – 13:13).

Part 3: Peer-to-Peer "Virtue Mapping" Activity (15 Minutes)

Facilitator Goal: Move the youth from passive listening to active application. Teenagers open up more in smaller peer groups.

- **The Setup:** Divide the room into small groups of 4-5 teens. Give each group a large piece of poster paper and markers.
- **The Activity:** Assign each group one of the following "Virtue Scenarios" based on Mary Magdalene's life. Have them draw a line down the middle of their paper. On the left side, they write how Mary Magdalene lived out that virtue. On the right side, they brainstorm how a teenager in 2026 can live out that *same* virtue in their school or friend group.

Group 1: Faithfulness & Obedience (The Cross & The Mission)

- *Mary's Side:* She stayed at the cross when the other disciples fled in terror. She obeyed the command to preach the Gospel globally.
- *Teen Side (Prompt):* What does it look like to stay faithful to your beliefs when your friend group is making fun of your faith or making bad choices?

Group 2: Zeal (The Empty Tomb)

- *Mary's Side:* She ran to tell the Apostles that Jesus was alive; she couldn't contain her excitement (08:13 – 09:15).
- *Teen Side (Prompt):* Why is it so hard to be enthusiastic about our faith? How can we show genuine joy and zeal for Jesus without being "fake"?

Group 3: Courage & Perseverance (The Roman Emperor)

- *Mary's Side:* She traveled to hostile Rome, faced Emperor Tiberius, and didn't back down when she was mocked (11:35 – 13:11).
- *Teen Side (Prompt):* Who are the "Emperors" or hostile crowds in your high school or online? How do you find the courage to speak up for someone being bullied or for the truth?

Group Share (Last 5 mins): Have one person from each group quickly share their best modern-day application with the whole room.

Part 4: Commissioning Challenge & Closing (5 Minutes)

Facilitator Goal: End with a strong, actionable challenge and a moment of prayerful surrender.

- **The Challenge:**
"Mary Magdalene didn't have a theology degree; she had a personal encounter with Jesus that changed everything. She stepped into the unknown with total **Faith**. This week, I want you to identify your 'Rome'—the place where you are most afraid to live out your faith. Bring that fear to Jesus, just like she did."
- **Closing Prayer:**
"Jesus, we thank You for the fierce courage and faithfulness of St. Mary Magdalene. In a world that constantly pressures us to blend in, give us the strength to stand out. Ignite a zeal in our hearts to be Your messengers in our schools, on our sports teams, and in our homes. Guide us to be true Apostles to those around us. Amen."