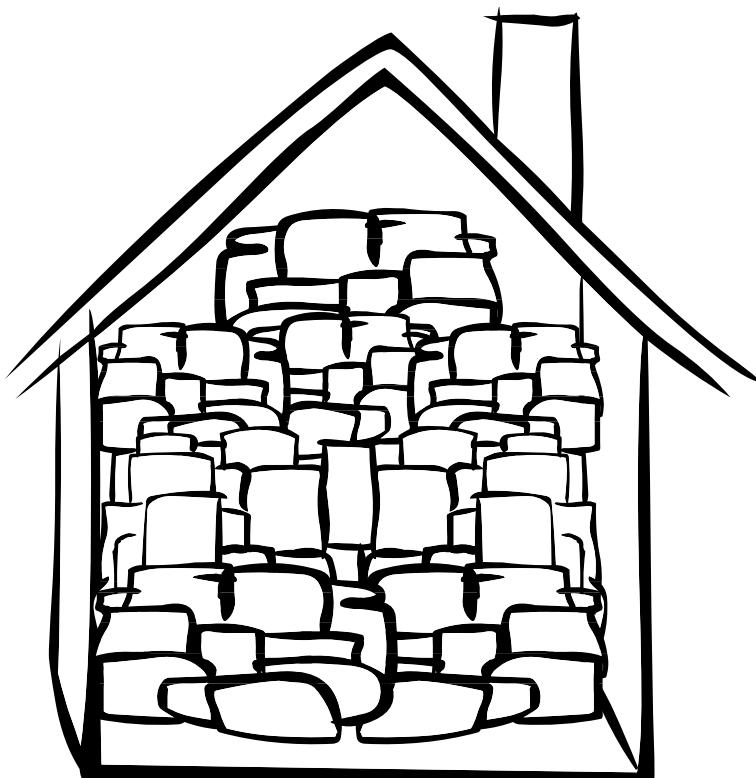


# LET THERE BE...STUFF?

A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD  
A Faith-Based Program for Christian Teens



created by



[www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org)

[www.greenfaith.org](http://www.greenfaith.org)

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# Introduction

## The Big Picture

The environmental crisis facing our planet is now an accepted reality worldwide. Our life-support systems are unraveling and the consequences are being felt in the form of extreme weather patterns, the melting of polar ice caps, and an increase in preventable diseases. In 2009, leaders at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the Earth Summit, declared that: "The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production...and developed countries should take the lead in achieving sustainable consumption." In short, God's Creation is in trouble because of our ravenous relationship with our stuff.

Until now, we have attempted to encourage more sustainable lifestyle practices by providing information and financial incentives. While these have helped, they have not created the lasting behavior changes needed to correct our course and restore health to the planet. We did see a temporary dip in the level of consumption during the recent recession, but as the economy has begun to recover our habits have bounced back. It is clear that, when the money is available, our demand for an ever-increasing supply of stuff persists and so does our perception that growing consumption equates with economic growth and prosperity. Just learning about the problems facing our environment is not sufficient to create real change. To change behavior, people need a structured program with support for taking action and they need opportunities to see the difference their actions make.

It's an all hands on deck situation! Everybody's best efforts are needed. But while all our efforts matter, young people, more than any other population, provide the promise for the biggest impact. They are likely to be more open to changing behavior patterns since their habits aren't as engrained. And they have the possibility of bringing more energy, creativity, and optimism to bear. Supporting young people in making changes early is one of the most effective and gratifying places to focus our efforts.

Since *The Story of Stuff* first premiered in 2007 it has been watched online over 10 million times. The Story of Stuff Project has received thousands of requests for educational programs, especially from the faith community, and has partnered with GreenFaith, an interfaith coalition for the environment to meet this need. Together we have developed this 6 week series for teenagers of faith designed to ignite their passion for Creation, help them understand the problems the planet is facing, raise awareness of the changes needed, and empower them to make them. We hope to support them in developing environmentally sustainable patterns of consumption that honor Creation and deepen their spiritual lives.

## Let There Be...Stuff? Program Overview

The *Let There Be...Stuff?* faith-based teen program is designed for a group of 6-15 youth between 13-18 years old to attend at their house of worship and is led by a facilitator. The program is organized in six sections:

1. **Caring for Creation** – Opening ourselves to the awe and wonder of Creation and our role as Earth stewards.
2. **The Story of Stuff** – Revealing the whole Story of Stuff, from cradle to grave, its impact on people and the planet and hearing the call to take action.
3. **An Unfortunate Creation Story** – Looking at the specific stories of some of our favorite Stuff: What's in it, how it was made, how it got to us, and the real cost of production to the planet and people.
4. **Don't Buy It** – Learning how we are being manipulated by the media to keep endlessly consuming and how we can start thinking for ourselves and have more fun.
5. **Waste Not** – Learning where our stuff goes when it leaves our hands, the true cost to people and the planet, and how we can reduce our waste.
6. **Going Forth** – Celebrating student's achievement in taking the course and supporting them in taking their next steps as Earth stewards beyond the course.

Each section provides opportunities for young people to:

- **Think** - gain new information about stuff and think about its impact on their lives
- **Reflect** on God's teachings related to the topic
- **Engage** the theme more deeply
- **Get Inspired** by actions other teens have taken
- **Enact** what they've learned with an Action Plan

### Taking Action

Students choose actions to be completed during the week between the sessions. Each action opportunity is weighted and assigned a value of 1-3 points depending on the amount of effort it involves. This will be done on the honor system, so you will trust students to tally their own points each week and report them to you at the beginning of each session. At the end of the fifth session, you will add up the totals for each student and give an award certificate to the highest scoring individual. At the end of the fifth session students will also vote for fellow student Earth stewardship awards.

### Buddies

At the end of each session students will be assigned a buddy for the week. They will commit to having a at least one check-in call with their buddy between sessions each week to provide support for their actions and make the program more fun. They will get a new buddy each week.

## Facilitator Information

Our heartfelt congratulations to you for taking on this program! You will be playing a vital role in supporting your students in becoming good Earth stewards. Research on behavior change shows that adult support increases the likelihood of the success of teen efforts to make changes. We celebrate you for taking on this role as a service to God and Creation, and for the betterment of these young lives.

The program is designed as a journey with each session building on the last. Because sessions don't stand on their own, it will work best if you have a group committed to taking the whole journey together. The bond and mutual support a consistent group offers will deeply enhance everybody's experience and make the program much more effective. We recommend you take the time to enroll a group and their parent(s)/guardian(s) before your first session, with the understanding that they are committing to a six-session journey together. We will provide some guidance for this in the Preparing for the Journey section.

Communication with parent(s)/guardian(s) is an important part of your work as a facilitator. We suggest you send them a letter at the beginning of the program (this is included in the preparation section) and invite them to a celebration at the end of the program.

This program is in its earliest stage of development. You are the very first participants to use it and your feedback will help shape the program and make it more fun, effective and usable for future groups. It takes a village to design a program and your feedback will help raise a few barns for us. Please let us know what does and doesn't work by going to the website [www.storyofstuff.org/teach.php](http://www.storyofstuff.org/teach.php) and filling out the feedback form. Don't worry, we'll remind you at the end of each session as well.

We wish you joy and success as a facilitator!

## Preparing for the Program

Start by getting inspired! Your inspiration and enthusiasm are contagious. They will attract eager and committed students and give you the fuel you need for the journey. If you haven't already, before you do anything else watch *The Story of Stuff*. It is the centerpiece of the program and will get your fire started. Once you've seen it consider how amazing it would be if every teen understood the true impact of their consumption habits and chose a more sustainable path. Imagine them feeling closer to God as they do. Imagine the joy and gratification of being a guide for them in this process!

To get a group of 6-15 passionate teens to commit to the program, we suggest you start making announcements a month before the program starts. Post it in at least two bulletins before starting sign-ups. You could also suggest that the Pastor/Preacher does a youth sermon/message around it the week before sign-up starts.

Make a poster and put it up wherever young people are likely to see it. Here are some things you can say:

- "Have you ever heard of the internet sensation, *The Story of Stuff*? Do you ever wonder what you can do to make the biggest difference on the future of the planet? Do you want to feel closer to God while you're at it? If the answer is "YES!" and you're between 13 and 18 years old, then you have a great adventure ahead. Come be part of the Let There Be Stuff..? program. Commit to six sessions and change the world. Contact \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Enrolling Parent(s)/Guardian(s)**

We also suggest holding a screening of *The Story of Stuff* film at your congregation and inviting parents of teens. You'll find a lot of useful information in the "Host a Screening" Packet ([www.storyofstuff.com/downloads.php#pdfs](http://www.storyofstuff.com/downloads.php#pdfs)). After the screening, ask the parents what the film made them think and feel, particularly as it relates to their children. Share with them your plans and enthusiasm for the course as a way to frame the message of the film within the context of their faith and provide constructive things that can be done about it. You can describe the session themes and even pick out some of your favorite exercises and describe it to them. Pull out all the stops to get a buzz going.

### **Parent(s)/Guardian(s)**

If you don't already know the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the students who have enrolled in *The Story of Stuff* course, begin your contact with them with a letter of introduction. Send this letter to them the week before the course starts. In it you will let them know that you are inviting students to look at some hard realities about our world and make changes. Those changes are based on their love of God's Creation and their desire to serve God by caring for Creation. Let them know how important they, as parent(s)/guardian(s), are in their children's journey.

### **Sample Letter to Parent(s)/Guardian(s)**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Your teenager is about to undertake a very special program. *Let There Be...Stuff?* helps them understand the impact of their consumption habits on the environment and turn their love of God and Creation into effective action. It is a six week program. Each week they will commit to doing actions at home between sessions.

An important feature of this program is that it allows your child to understand the impact and implications of their choices. We invite you to support your child by using it as an opportunity to examine your own choices as well. This is not only an environmental program; it's also an empowerment and leadership program. We want your child to know that they can make a real difference not only in their own lives but in others' as well.

Your child will be assigned a buddy each week to support them in taking action between sessions. Even though they will get support from their buddy, there may be times that your child gets stuck and needs your help. Try to offer support in a way that empowers their learning. Your child will also be learning and reflecting on the moral dimension of their actions and the environmental challenges the planet is facing. We encourage you to ask them what they are learning about the Bible, their faith, and the Earth.

Each of the program's sessions asks your child to share with you what he or she is attempting to accomplish in the Action Plan for the week. This sharing allows you to anticipate the kinds of activity you will see them undertaking on their journey to become good Earth stewards. It also makes it possible for you to play a consistent role in supporting and learning with your child. If your child forgets to share what they're doing, we suggest you make a point to ask them.

I've attached the course schedule with the dates, times, and themes for each session. The last session will be a celebration. I would be honored and delighted to have you participate and I know it would mean a lot to your child. I'll remind you the week before and find out if you are planning to attend.

This is an exciting program and I am eager to begin. Thank you for this opportunity to work with your children. Please feel free to call me with any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Address  
Phone number

## Let There Be Stuff...? Course Schedule

Session	Date	Time	Location
Session 1: Caring for Creation			
Session 2: The Story of Stuff			
Session 3: An Unfortunate Creation Story			
Session 4: Don't Buy It!			
Session 5: Waste Not!			
Session 6: Going Forth!			

### Preparing for the Sessions

The first thing to know is that there are no hard and fast rules about how to go through this material. Every group is unique and you will find your own style and system. Just trust that you are the right person for the job and that you'll be guided to give the students what they need.

Begin each session a few days before by reading through the whole session plan to make sure you're comfortable and familiar with it. Make notes or highlight any sections you need to call special attention to. We have designed each session to be an hour long, but there can be a lot of variation in the length of the activity or exercise depending on the group. Try to keep it to the suggested length, but if the learning is rich and students are engaged, you can improvise and shorten another section later in the session to accommodate the time.

There are also occasionally a few options provided for a particular section of a session. In addition to reading and highlighting the session, we suggest you choose the exercises you'll do, collect your materials, prepare your exercises, reflect on the biblical text, and make sure you're comfortable with the content and the flow before you start. We encourage you to make any modifications you're inspired to make to the session schedule, if you think it will enhance the learning. We also appreciate you sending those changes and adjustments along to us as feedback. This is your group and your experience, so your inspiration and creativity are critical to its success.

## Gathering Materials

To save money and make the congregation aware of the course, ask members to contribute:

- Nature magazines like National Geographic for Session 1.
- Pop culture magazines full of advertisements relevant to children for Session 4.
- Three-ring Binders or Folders – make sure these are either being reused or are Earth friendly.
- Any other needed materials that you or the church don't already have in stock.

Have them drop off magazines and binders at least a week before the course begins.

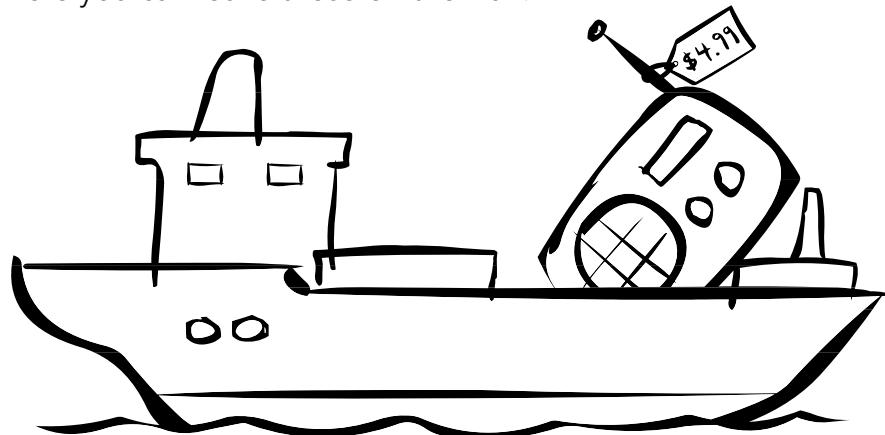
The first page of each session provides an overview with summaries, goals, key concepts, and all the materials and preparation you'll need for that session. There will be hand outs you'll need to print ahead of time. Be sure to leave yourself enough time to gather and print out all the materials.

## Finding a Good Room

We know that it can be tricky to find a good space to use at the church. So, do the best you can. If possible, use a space with windows so that students can see a little bit of nature during the course. Also, if you can, use a space with room where a group of your size can move freely. Most of the exercises are set up for students to do sitting in a circle but some require that they get up, move chairs out of the way, or even go outside. We have provided alternatives in case that's not an option.

## Keeping Posters on the Wall

Throughout the course, students will be creating murals. If possible, find a space where you can leave the murals on the wall so you don't have to put them up and take them down every week. Having them displayed will also allow others to see them and get inspired by the students' journey. In addition, there will be a posters that should remain up for the whole series. These include: the Promise Poster, which you'll be referring to at the beginning of each session and the Right Stuff Actions Board, which collect the pictures and artifacts from the actions students take between sessions. It will be much easier if you use a room where you can leave these on the wall!



## **Religious and Facilitation Preparation**

Each week, we have provided a preparation section for you to reflect on the religious text for the session and to consider and prepare for any facilitation challenges you might face. Exploring the true cost of consuming can be difficult material for youth to face and their resistance is natural. They may also feel the conflict between the message of the program and their family's values and lifestyle. We have attempted to help you feel as prepared as possible to meet their resistance and help them hold the inevitable tensions in a way that increases their learning.

## **Action Plans**

At the end of each session students will commit to taking some actions and will take home an Action Plan. Between Session 4 and 5, there is also a group mission. It is important for students to share what they've done between sessions to receive encouragement, inspire each other, and share the learning. The period for sharing homework at the beginning of each session also provides the opportunity for you to reinforce the value of everything they do between sessions. They will be invited to document their actions each week to share and post in class. To display these photos tape them onto a large piece of butcher paper on the wall titled "Right Stuff Actions." We recommend you post one for each session starting with Session 2 and title each one with the prior Session – the one that inspired the actions. As we mentioned, you'll leave this mural up each week as well and will become a focal point for the Session 6 celebration with parents.

## **General Supplies**

Here are some things you'll probably want to have at every session, but which aren't listed in the session material lists:

- name tags (for the first session at least)
- clock and/or timer
- tape
- a chime to get people's attention so you don't have to yell.
- note paper
- pens – ballpoint pens and large colored pens
- butcher or newsprint flip chart paper
- computer and projector (if possible) for screening Story of Stuff segments

You will always want to have your course materials, the student roster, and the tally sheet.

## **Additional Materials**

We strongly recommend students keep a binder or folder for the course. If possible, we recommend you provide these for the students. It's great if you can get a donation of reused binders from members of the congregation. Otherwise, you can buy Earth friendly binders or three-hole punch folders. There are lots of options available with a quick search online. Bring binders to the first session as part of the launch of the course.

## Media needs

In the first session there will be an optional slide show and in each subsequent session there will be a video clip. You can download the slide show as a power point deck onto a computer. You will need either a computer screen that is big enough for the group to watch together or a computer projector for the slide show. If you don't have the equipment to show it, don't worry, there is another option for that section. *The Story of Stuff* video is central to the program, so you'll want to be sure you can show it easily. You can download the video onto your computer or order a DVD at [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org). You will also need a large television, computer or projection screen for the video.

## Bible Passages

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Finally, one of the best ways you can prepare for the journey is through prayer. In addition to lesson preparation, take some time to pray or meditate on how *The Story of Stuff* speaks to you and your relationship with Creation. Ask God to give you the courage to guide the group with honesty, respect, clarity, humility, and humor.

# Facilitation Tips

## Setting the Tone

- **Welcome teenagers as they are** - In case you don't remember, being a teenager is mostly a time of learning who you are by how your peers see and respond to you. So don't be surprised if most of their attention is on each other. Just know that teens learn best with and through each other with a supportive adult guide. Fighting it is futile. Work with their stage of development by holding them accountable to their own goals, standards and promises for the course and letting them have non-disruptive fun.
- **Creating safety** - To be willing to take risks; students need to know that it's safe to make mistakes, and fail. The promises are a good start.
- **Make it playful** - Just because the content is serious, doesn't mean the course has to be somber. People learn best when they're playing. Feel free to bring humor and delight to the sessions and students will relax and take more risks.
- **Model the principles** - Walking the talk elicits respect and inspires participation. We learn a lot more from what they see than what we hear.
- **Be transparent** - Revealing your own mistakes without embarrassment creates an open environment in which it's safe for everyone to make mistakes.
- **Make everything that happens right** - Whether students come in late, something breaks, or a participant becomes resistant, your response can either create more stress or turn an awkward moment into an opportunity to connect and/or learn. Don't resist anything. Just stay focused on the purpose of the course and on loving your students.

## Conducting Exercises

- **Make sure they understand** - After giving instructions for an exercise, ask if there are any questions and make sure they understand what they're going to do.
- **Break into groups first** - If the activity requires breaking into groups, teams, or pairing up, break into the groups first, then give the instructions for the activity.
- **Break it down** - We can only remember a few instructions at a time. If there are several steps to an exercise, give students an overview of what you're going to do and then give the instructions again when they need them. Don't expect them to remember more than one instruction at a time.

- **Timing** - Use a timer and let students know when they have a minute left and then just a few moments before they need to wrap it up. If things are really cooking and you have a little extra time in the program, you can bend time a little as needed.

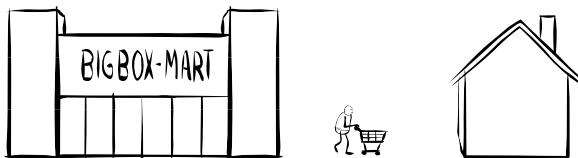
## Debriefs and Group Conversations

- Know where you want to go with a conversation and at the same time, be flexible and go where the group needs to go at a given moment.
- Stir the Pot. Throw out a question and see what comes back. Don't be afraid if there's no response. Sometimes it takes awhile for thoughts to form. Just reframe the question and ask it again. It's OK to play the "Devil's Advocate," challenge assumptions, and sometimes act as the 'clueless facilitator' to check for understanding or explore other perspectives.
- Build on comments by asking questions that will take the conversation deeper. If the conversation isn't clear to you, you're probably not alone. Ask a question to gain clarity (e.g 'Could you say more about that?').
- Be Patient with what may seem like an unrelated story or comment and listen for its relevance to the course.
- Let Participants teach each other. They are their own best teachers. That means you can let a conversation or a comment go for awhile without any comments. If someone has made a point, you can reinforce and affirm it.

## And So It Begins...

God Bless you and your group's journey. May you all enjoy yourselves, may it bring courage, hope, strength, and peace to your hearts and may it bring health to our world!

# Let There Be...Stuff? Course Roster



## Let There Be...Stuff? Tally Sheet

