



80 Youth Group Lessons

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YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ACCEPTANCE

Bottom Line: There are things about ourselves and others that we struggle to accept.

God chose you because He loves you for who you are. Just as He made allowances for your faults, He expects you to make allowances for the faults of others.

Bible: Colossians 3:12-13

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES

- Paper
- Pens/crayons/markers
- Table/flat surface
- Blindfolds

Space Requirements

Room upfront for four-eight people to work side by side at tables

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide contestants into pairs.

One partner will be blindfolded.

The other will not be allowed to make any noises whatsoever.

During the allotted time (1-2 minute rounds recommended) the partners must work together despite their individual “flaws” to have the blindfolded person draw the items listed on a sheet of paper that only his/her partner can see.

The non-blindfolded partner helps the blindfolded partner by giving advice and direction, but cannot do the actual drawing him/herself.

The team that finishes drawing the most number of items wins.

In the event of a tie, the leader (or a panel of judges) can judge the quality artwork to determine the winner.

ITEMS TO DRAW

Cross, Smiley face, Heart, Stick figure, Tree, Bird, Cat, Football, Chair, Capital letter “G”, Cell phone, Flower

Game Tie-in

In this game, students with different “flaws” were forced to work together to overcome them.

Though they probably wanted to, they couldn’t change their partner’s flaws just as they couldn’t change their own.

Instead, they had to make “allowances” for them to move on and complete the challenge at hand.

TEACH

Doesn’t it just stink when there’s something you don’t like, but there’s nothing you can do about it?

Sometimes, there are things about ourselves that we wish we could change.

Maybe we don’t like our physical appearance.

We just don’t feel like we are attractive enough like we don’t live up to the unrealistic expectations of popular culture.

Sometimes there is something that we wished that we could be better at, but no matter how hard we try, we just don’t improve, at least not in a way that satisfies.

What about when your issue is with someone else?

Maybe there’s a person or group of people in your life with whom you just can’t get along.

It could be an attitude issue or perhaps this person treats you poorly.

In the scenarios I have described, the circumstances might be different, but they point to the same unfortunate truth: we can’t always make things (people) the way we want.

Sure, we can do our best to minimize the problem through fashion choices, avoiding the activity we struggle at or ignore the people who bother us, but they are still there. Life is often outside of our ability to control.

That’s just... well... Life. Cheerful topic, huh?

Don’t you wish I could just give you the secret answer that will solve all of life’s problems?

In truth, I can, but it may not be the solution you are hoping for.

The solution boils down to one word—acceptance.

Accepting Others

I'm going to start with the second scenario first.

Take a moment to close your eyes.

Who is the person or persons in your life that you are having a hard time accepting?

Why do you have a hard time accepting this person(s)?

It is entirely possible that you have every reason to dislike this person.

He/she might treat you poorly, might do things to you that Jesus would frown upon.

That, however, doesn't change God's solution.

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” - Colossians 3:12-13 (NLT)

Let's look at a few key points in this verse.

God chose you to be holy.

The Creator of the Universe looked down at the billions of people that have walked the earth since He formed it and said, “I choose you.”

That's pretty amazing.

He chose you for a purpose—to be holy.

Because of this He expects us to live a certain way—to be merciful, kind, humble, gentle, and patient.

Make allowances for each other's faults.

People aren't perfect.

If you are willing to be honest, neither are you.

Everyone has faults.

As much as we would love to be able to fix them, learning to accept others requires us to make allowances—make room—for other people’s faults.

Forgive like Jesus.

Finally, the key to learning how to accept others is to forgive like Jesus.

We could spend a lifetime describing the ways that Jesus has forgiven us.

Let’s hone in on just a couple.

First, Jesus forgave when we didn’t deserve it.

The just reward for our sinful lives (yes, we all sin) is death—an eternity separated from God.

Instead, He forgives everyone who follows Him.

Second, He forgives and *forgets*.

Boy, isn’t that the hardest part of forgiveness?

If we are to learn to accept others, we must forgive them even if they don’t deserve it.

We must also not continue to hold it against them for how they treated us.

Accepting Others

I decided to finish with this because, in my experience, accepting one’s self is the hardest thing to do.

We all have flaws, but even though we know this, it is hard to get past the flaws we see in ourselves.

Popular culture often doesn’t help with this.

For someone to truly live up to the “ideals” we see in the media, he/she would have to be obscenely rich, have access to the best plastic surgeons in the world, and be willing to sell his/her very soul to achieve “perfection.”

Here’s the saddest truth of all: there are plenty of people in the world right now with the means to do just that, and guess what, they are some of the unhappiest people alive.

The truth is that God doesn’t make mistakes.

He created you and loves you for who you are right now.

Next time you have a chance, look in a mirror and study the person looking back at you.

This person is so amazing in God's eyes that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son to brutal torture so that He could spend an eternity with you.

Let's look at a few things the Bible says about how He sees you.

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." - **Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)**

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." - **Psalms 139:14 (NIV)**

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." - **John 3:16 (NLT)**

Look at some of those key words: God's masterpiece, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Those words describe *you*. God loved *you* so much that He sent His only Son to die for *you*. You're not perfect.

You may not be the person you'd like to be, but never forget that God would do it all over again just for *you*.

You are His masterpiece.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

God has already accepted you.

Now, it's on you to start accepting yourself.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which is harder for you, accepting others or accepting yourself? Why?
- How can you start making allowances for other people's faults starting today?
- What does it mean to forgive like Jesus?
- What does it mean to be "fearfully and wonderfully made"?
- What are some ways that you feel God has shown you that He loves you just the way you are today?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON APPEARANCE

Bible: 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 23:25-26

Overview: Students spend more time on their outward appearance than they do on most other things in life.

The problem with this is that people are the ones who look at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart.

He's more concerned with your character than how you look on the outside.

OPENING GAME: FRUIT BOX MIX-UP

SUPPLIES

- One coffee cup that is clean on the outside, but dirty on the inside
- One coffee cup that is dirty on the outside, but clean on the inside
- A mask of a famous person or character
- Two lemons
- Two oranges
- Two bananas
- Two apples
- Two limes

Ten shoeboxes:

- Two that say lemon on the outside
- Two that say orange on the outside
- Two that say banana on the outside
- Two that say apple on the outside
- Two that say lime on the outside

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Before the game begins, put a piece of fruit in each box, and *make sure the fruit inside the box is different than what the box says.*

Scatter the boxes around the room. Break the group up into two teams.

Tell the teams that they have to find the labeled boxes around the room and gather one orange, one apple, one lemon, one lime, and one banana and bring it back to you.

The first team to do that will win.

Let the teams start looking.

If they bring you back the correct boxes without opening them, tell them that's incorrect.

Eventually, someone will open a box and realize that the boxes are labeled wrong.

The teams will then have to scramble to figure out which boxes contain which fruits.

The first team to bring you all five fruits wins.

TEACH

Wasn't that game tricky?

You didn't know it, but the outsides of the boxes were totally wrong.

It didn't matter that you brought me boxes that looked like they were the right ones from the outside, it was what was on the inside of the boxes that mattered.

How much time do you spend on your appearance?

Think about it—between your face, your hair, your clothes and shoes...that's a lot of time that you spend every single day.

How much time do you spend thinking about your appearance?

Thinking about if people will like the way you look, or if you should try to look like someone else.

Thinking about how you could fit in or stand out more with your appearance.

Sometimes, we probably spend more time thinking and worrying about our appearance than we actually do on our actual appearance.

Now, there's nothing wrong with spending time on your appearance.

It's okay to want to look nice, and it's a good thing to *care* about your outward appearance. It just shouldn't be your focus.

So, if outward appearance shouldn't be your main focus about yourself, what should be?

Your heart should be your main focus.

Why?

Because the heart is what God looks at.

He doesn't look at the outward appearance, like we do.

No, He looks straight at the heart.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

In this verse, Samuel was choosing the next king.

God could have told Him anything about choosing the next king—He could have just told him *who* the next king was supposed to be.

Instead, He tells Samuel to not look at appearance or height, because that's not what He looks at.

He looks at the heart.

This verse says that *people* look at the outward appearance.

So, when we put all of this effort and time and thought into our outward appearance, it's obviously for people.

I mean, you already knew that, right?

It's not like you thought that one day you were going to walk outside and bump into Jesus and say, “Oh, look how nice I look for you today!”

Like I said, there's nothing wrong with wanting to look nice.

When it starts to become a problem is when you focus so much on your outer appearance that you forget to focus on your heart.

It's no good to put all of your time and energy into making sure you look good on the outside if you're not going to have any time or energy left to make sure you look good on the inside.

Get out two coffee cups.

I need a volunteer to come up here.

Okay, so I thought we'd share a cup of coffee together.

Sound good?

Now, I only have two cups here.

Since you're my guest, I'll let you pick first.

Hold up the coffee cup that's dirty on the outside first, and then the coffee cup that's clean on the outside.

Which one would you want to drink out of?

If the student chooses the clean coffee cup, show them the inside.

Have them pass it around to the rest of the group.

Isn't that gross?

What if you came over to my house and we sat down for dinner, and I served you a drink in that cup?

It would be disgusting, right?

Why, though?

I worked hard to clean the outside of it, since I knew you were coming over.

The table looks nice.

Everything looks great from the outside—does it really matter what the inside looks like?

Of course, it does!

You would never drink out of that nasty cup!

But that's how we act in our lives, isn't it?

Read Matthew 23:25-26.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

The Pharisees were people who prided themselves on being very religious and "godly" in front of other people.

They publicly paraded around following all of the Biblical rules.

They made sure everyone around them knew that they were doing what was right, and they were very quick to condemn others who weren't doing what was right.

These people were all about appearance.
But Jesus is quick to call them out here.

He says that even though the outside is clean and looks right, the inside is filthy and full of greed and selfishness.

Ouch. That's tough to hear, isn't it?

Mostly because we're very guilty of acting like that sometimes.

We look the part, dress the part, and act the part.

We go to church, we raise our hands during worship, and we don't take part in things at school or with friends that we know are wrong.

Hey, we'll even be quick to tell everyone that they're wrong for doing those things.

But all of that means nothing if our heart isn't right.

Jesus doesn't care how you look to other people; He cares about how you look to Him.

And in order to look good to Him, we're going to have to make sure our hearts are in the right place.

So how do we do that?

We act like Jesus.

Do you think it's possible to try your best to be like Jesus and to still have a heart that's in the wrong place?

I really don't think so.

So, if you want to work on your heart, here's a great place to start: look at the heart of Jesus.

Jesus loved others.

He loved others so much so that He was willing to come to a world filled with sin and die for us, so that we could spend forever with Him.

If that's not love, then love doesn't exist.

All throughout Jesus' life, we can see how much He loved others.

He spent so much time not only telling others about God and His great love, but showing them as well.

If you want your heart to be like the heart of Jesus, you have to love others.

And guess what...it takes hard work to love others.

Sure, we don't usually talk about loving others as something that takes a lot of effort.

But if we're honest, we know that it does.

Loving others means putting them above yourself.

It means taking the time to talk to them, pray for them, and show them love, even when you're busy.

It means making sure the things you say and do are said and done in love.

It takes a lot of work.

Jesus knew the Word of God and lived according to it.

His entire time on earth, Jesus lived out the Bible.

When you look at the heart of Jesus, you see the Word of God.

He followed it, quoted it, told other people about it.

It was obviously very important to Him.

It should be just as important to you.

You should take the time to read the Bible, to learn the Bible, to pray about what the Bible says and what God is trying to say to you through His Word.

You cannot have a heart like Jesus without knowing what His heart was like—so read about it!

Jesus served others.

Jesus didn't have to serve anyone—He was the Son of God.

But all through His life, we see Jesus serving others.

Even when He was tired, He would take the time to help others.

On the last night before He was captured to be crucified, He got on His knees and washed His disciples' feet, showing them how important it was to be a servant.

Jesus had a servant's heart.

He wanted people to accept Him, but He did not parade around acting as if He were more important than everyone else.

Instead, He got on their level and served them, showing such a clear picture of how much God loved them.

Serving others is never going to be an easy choice, but it is the right choice.

Do you think that it was easy for Jesus to wash His disciples' feet when He knew what was about to happen to Him?

I don't think so.

But He still did it, because that was His heart.

If you want to reflect the heart of Jesus, you're going to have to have a servant's heart.

Above all, Jesus cared about God's will.

Jesus was all God, but He was also human.

The night before He was captured, He knew what was going to happen.

He knew how terrible it was going to be, and He asked God, if it was at all possible, to stop what was about to happen.

But then He said, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

Even in the face of great horror and pain, Jesus was more concerned with the will of God than anything else.

There are going to be times in your life where you think that you know best.

There are going to be times where nothing seems like it could be better than the plan that you have for your life.

And even in those times, you need to mimic Jesus and say, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

You cannot have a heart like Jesus without following God's will.

You cannot follow God's will if you're too busy thinking about how your plan is better than His.

It takes a lot of trust, but you have to care about God's will more than you care about your own.

So, no, having a heart like Jesus is not easy.

It's going to take some work.

Having a good outward appearance takes work, right?

Of course, it does.

You don't just roll out of bed in the morning and never think about how you look to other people.

It's time to start working as hard on the inside as you work on the outside.

TEACH – WRAP UP

Okay guys, I have an announcement to make.

Put on the mask.

I am now *[character's name]*.

I look like him/her, so obviously, that's who I am, right?

Do you believe me?

How silly is that?

To act like you guys would really think that's who I was, just because my face looked like them.

That's crazy!

But that's how we act sometimes.

I hope that tonight has shown you how the outside appearance does not matter nearly as much as the inside appearance, your heart, matters.

We've talked about four different ways we can try to copy the heart of Jesus.

I really want to challenge you guys to try your best to follow Him in those four areas this week.

If you do, your heart will start looking more and more like Jesus.
And that's going to look better than your outside appearance could ever look.

End in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you spend more time thinking about your outward appearance or your heart?
- Have you ever thought about which one God is more concerned with?
- When you look at Jesus, do you think He was more concerned with His outward appearance or with His heart?
- What are some things that you think you need to change about your "inside appearance?"
- How can you work on loving people like Jesus loved them?
- Do you spend time reading the Bible? Do you think that if you spent more time reading the Bible, your heart would be in better shape?
- Do you think that knowing what the Bible says is important?
- How can you serve others more?
- Do you trust that God's will is better than your own? Why or why not?
- Do you think that having a heart like Jesus is possible? How are you going to try to do that this week?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ATTITUDE

Bible: Ephesians 4:31-32

Use this lesson to teach students that they need to get rid of bad attitudes and instead have an attitude like Jesus.

SUPPLIES

- Two clear containers
- Cereal—enough to fill one of the clear containers all the way up
- Sand or dirt—enough to fill one of the clear containers all the way up
- Bowls
- Tape

OPENING GAME - Cereal Pour

Before the game, place a piece of tape about three-quarters of the way up on each clear container.

Split the group into two teams. Have each team line up in front of a clear container.

Give each student a bowl.

Set the cereal and sand or dirt up (either on the floor or on a table) behind the students.

The student at the end of the line must run to the table and fill their bowl with cereal.

They then must pour it from their bowl into the next student's bowl, who then pours in into the next student's bowl, etc.

This continues until it gets to the final student, who has to pour it into the clear container.

Once the final student pours it into the container, the student at the end of the line must run and fill their bowl with sand or dirt, and it must make its way the all the students' bowls, just like the cereal did.

Continue this, each time alternating cereal and sand/dirt.

The first team to fill their clear container to the taped off line wins!

After the game, discuss these questions:

Do you normally eat this kind of cereal?

Would you have eaten that cereal before the dirt got mixed in?

What about after we played the game—would you eat it now?

After the game, say:

Well, that cereal certainly doesn't look so good now, does it?

Now that's it's all mixed in with the dirt, I don't know that I'll ever look at it the same way again!

Have you ever had an experience where a bad attitude just really ruined your day?

I think we've all had those types of days.

It didn't matter what else had happened, once the bad attitude came, everything was ruined.

Just like the dirt in the game we played, when you add a bad attitude to the mix—even if it's a really good mix—it turns things sour.

Read Ephesians 4:31-32.

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Bitterness, rage, anger, slander...those things all sound like a bad attitude, don't they?

And if we're honest, those are all things we've experienced every now and then.

I know I have!

But those are the kinds of things that our attitude should not reflect.

And do you know why that is?

Because Jesus didn't have that kind of attitude!

At the end of that verse, it says we're supposed be kind and compassionate and forgiving.

Why? Because that's how Jesus was!

Hold up one of the clear containers.

Now, what if I were to pour you up a nice, big bowl of this cereal. Would you want to eat it?

Of course, you wouldn't! It would taste gross because it has been tainted by the dirt and sand.

It doesn't matter that this cereal is actually really good on its own, because it's been ruined by the dirt.

It's the same way with our attitude.

It doesn't matter if we're acting like Christ—being kind and compassionate, obeying our parents, and coming to church on Sundays—if we also have a bad attitude.

Bad attitudes ruin everything else.

Just like the dirt, they mix into every other part of your life and take away from how good things are.

So, what are you supposed to do?

Focus on Jesus.

Keep your eyes on him!

When you do, he begins to transform you to become more like him.

The Holy Spirit does his work in you, changing you to become more like Jesus in your attitude (and actions).

He rids you of anger, bitterness, and anything like that that causes your attitude to be bad instead of like Jesus.

When you focus on Jesus, he gives you a kind and compassionate attitude.

An attitude like Jesus is full of love and grace instead of hatred and bitterness.

Which attitude would you rather have?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If we're supposed to have an attitude like Jesus, what are some things we should be doing?
- Do you think the attitude you have now is one that Jesus would be proud of?
- How can you focus on Jesus in your everyday life?
- How can you work on having an attitude that is more kind and compassionate?

- Do you have any of those things that the verse talked about—bitterness, anger, those things—in your attitude right now? Do you want to get rid of them?

WRAP-UP

As Christians, we model our lives after Jesus.

This includes our attitudes as well as our actions.

When things don't go our way, it's always going to be easiest to just have a bad attitude.

That's why you've got to make the decision to have a Christ-like attitude and to get rid of your bad attitude, once and for all!

And the way to do that is to keep your eyes on Jesus. Focus on him.

When people look at you, they're going to see someone that makes Christ look appealing to them—like the cereal before the game—or they're going to see someone with a bad attitude mixed in, which makes Christ seem less appealing to them.

You are the only one who gets to choose what they see!

So, choose to have a Christ-like attitude. You won't regret it!

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON BOLDNESS

Bible: Acts 4:1-15

Bottom line: God uses ordinary people who are bold to do amazing things!

SUPPLIES

- Empty 2-liter soda bottles
- Balls that are soft and can be used for water fun
- Water
- Masking tape
- Timer

OPENING GAME: BOLD BOWLING MAZE

Fill the empty soda bottles halfway with water.

Divide the group into two equal numbered teams.

Choose a space about the size of half a basketball court OUTSIDE to play.

Explain: Each team will have a chance to set-up bottles in the shape of a maze.

Use the tape to make a single line the team has to follow throughout your maze.

You will have these balls which you can use to roll through the maze to try and get the other team wet.

BUT, your team has to stay outside of the maze while the other team goes through it.

If the team going through the maze tags one of you, you are out and have to sit on the side - which means it might be easy to lose teammates or balls in the maze.

The other team is going to begin at the starting line of your maze and try to run through the maze (marked with the tape) one at a time, without getting wet.

If they get wet, that person has to start back at the beginning.

Each team will have a chance to set-up a maze and also to run through the other team's maze.

Each team will be timed and the team that goes through the other team's maze the fastest - wins!

TEACH

Share a time in your life when it was easier not to be bold about your faith - maybe a time when fear got in your way.

Life can feel a lot like this maze game we just played.

You are going along, following a certain path, and then you get hit.

Now, I don't know about you, but sometimes it can be tough to be bold.

It's tough to be confident in who you know you should be and not to bow to fear.

Today's scripture is a story about two men who were anything but bold in the first part of their lives.

Peter was a disciple of Jesus and he actually denied even knowing Jesus three times!!

Peter was truly afraid for his life and needed to be because being friends with Jesus was dangerous.

But, let's check in on Peter and John following the death and resurrection of Jesus.

They have some serious words for the religious leaders... and it's important to remember these are the same religious leaders who killed Jesus.

They had every reason to be fearful.

Read Acts 4:1-15.

Now, let's put this situation into modern day.

Sure, we are really lucky that knowing Jesus doesn't put our lives in danger, but remember that around the world being a Christian can also mean you could be killed.

I'm going to ask you to get in groups of three or four people.

Come up with some examples of situations in which it is easy to let fear get the best of you and influence your decisions.

Give the groups 5 -10 minutes to come up with their own scenario.

If they need help, below are some suggestions:

Their friends are making fun of someone and although they feel they should stick up for them, they don't.

Your friends are making decisions they shouldn't, but you just go along with it.

Give the groups a chance to share their scenarios.

What are some reasons that it can be easier to be silent and not be bold in your faith?

Give the students a chance to answer.

One thing we see in the life of Peter is that even though he wasn't bold when he denied Jesus, not once, but THREE times, Jesus forgave him.

At that point, Peter stood before all the religious leaders and BOLDLY spoke for Jesus.

And what did the leaders think?

They were amazed because they knew Peter and John and knew they were 'just ordinary' men - and the same is true for us.

Is it easy?

No.

Could it cost you your reputation?

Well, I guess it depends on who's opinion of you matters: others or Jesus'.

Your own opinion - because even if you are simply silent in situations in which you could stand up - nobody else might know... but you will know.

Be bold. Speak up for what is right.

Don't be ashamed to share the difference Christ has made in your life.

And get ready for people to see Christ in you.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is it difficult to be bold in your faith sometimes?
- Share a situation in which you were silent when you should have spoken up.
- Share situations the group can pray for you to be bold about your faith in and commit to pray for one another.
- If you lived in a country where Christians are killed for their faith, what would you do?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON BULLYING

Bible: Matthew 5:43-44 (MSG)

Anyone here ever struggle with loving someone or something?

Have audience give you some examples.

Struggle with loving school?

Struggle with loving yourself?

Struggle with loving that boy or girl who is always pointing out your flaws...

Always on your case about something...

Always being mean?

Let's run with that last one!

How do you deal with someone who is always picking on you?

Always spreading rumors...

Always threatening you?

What do you do when someone is bullying you?

Wow! This is a tough one.

On one hand, you don't like the emotional and sometimes physical stuff that comes from being bullied...

But you don't want to speak up because you don't want the bullying to continue or get worse!

You don't want to get labeled a rat or a snitch!

Bullying makes it hard to love.

TEACH

What constitutes bullying?

It's the intentional tormenting...upsetting...in physical, verbal, or psychological ways.

It can range from hitting, shoving, name-calling, threats, and mocking to extorting money and possessions.

Some kids bully by shunning others and spreading rumors about them.

Others use social media or text messaging to taunt others or hurt their feelings.

Any of this sounds familiar to anyone?

Is any of this happening to you?

Are you doing any of this to someone else?

How do we love like Jesus did while we are being bullied?

How did Jesus respond when he was persecuted?

He showed love...and even said "Father forgive them they know not what they do" while he was hanging on the cross!

When people were intentionally trying to trick him into saying the wrong thing so they could get him thrown in jail or killed, how did Jesus respond?

He remained calm, allowed the spirit of God to guide his thoughts, and responded in love.

What did Jesus do when he was betrayed by one of his closest friends?

He allowed himself to be arrested and didn't fight back.

You may be saying, but yeah that is Jesus...he was perfect!

But who are we trying to be like more and more each day? Jesus!

We may never respond exactly like he did in every situation, but we can strive to!

We also need to remember that all the persecution Jesus went through was for a purpose.

When we are bullied, it's not the same as the persecution Jesus went through.

When we are bullied...it's not God's will!

It's someone being mean and malicious...it's not right!

And we need to make sure we are doing something about it.

Bullying is wrong and needs to be stopped!

So, what do we do?

1. We need to realize that first bullying is wrong!

Whether you are being bullied or you are doing the bullying.

Just because you don't do things or act a certain way doesn't mean that you need to be teased.

Just because you come from a certain family or neighborhood doesn't mean you deserve to be ridiculed.

Just because you took a stand on a certain issue isn't justification for people to hurl insults at you on Facebook or in text messages.

2. Bullying needs to be stopped!

You really need to talk to an adult about what is going on.

I know you will be scared to open up and even admit that you are being bullied.

I know you will be afraid of what happens when the person who is bullying you finds out you told someone.

But too many people just hid from the fact they are being bullied and over time it takes a toll on you emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically.

After you tell an adult that you are being bullied...and they take the necessary action against the person who is bullying you, where do you go from there?

More than likely you will have feelings about the person who was bullying you, so what's next?

Forgive and Love

Let's see what Jesus has to say about forgiving and loving in Matthew.

Read Matthew 5: 43-44 (MSG)

"You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves

Now will this happen overnight? Probably not.

There must be something inside you that wants to forgive the person who bullied you.

And every time you see that person and you get angry or feel shameful again, you ask God for the power to forgive them...again and again.

If you were the person who was doing the bullying, you need to ask for forgiveness from the person you were bullying.

You need to be sympathetic to that person's hurts and feelings towards you.

Bullying happens everywhere. School, work, online...

Doesn't mean it's right...or that it needs to be tolerated.

We just need to be the people of God who can come to a place where we no longer treat people differently because of their culture, interest, or beliefs...

And we also need to be people of God who can love our family, friends, and the people who may have bullied us.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is one of your pet peeves... what gets under your skin?
- What is your definition of bullying?
- How hard is it to love someone that is bullying you? Why?
- What are some things that could happen as a result of being bullied?
- Why is it important to forgive and love your enemies?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON CHANGE

Bible: Matthew 6:31-33

Bottom Line: Life is full of change. This is never truer than during the teen years. This season of constant new beginnings can lead to a lot of stress and worry.

God knows what we need. If He cares so much about something small like a flower or a bird, what do you think that says about how much He wants to take care of you?

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES

- Enough plastic spoons for everyone
- Peanuts

Space Requirements

Large enough space for teams to stand in a line

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Split your entire group into equal teams and have each team stand in a line.

Each person should have a plastic spoon.

The must put the tip of the spoon in their mouths (so that the actual spoon portion is out) and their hands behind their backs.

The first person in each line will start with a peanut on their spoon.

Once you tell them to go, they must, without using their hands or anything else, pass the peanut to the person behind them.

If the peanut falls, you must start all over again.

The first team to get the peanut to the end of the line, wins!

Game Tie-in

Having to start over can be stressful.

Though in this game, starting over came after a mistake, it often is just a part of life.

Starting over comes with the many changes in life that come our way.

TEACH

Life is filled with change. No one understands that more than a teenager. Think about it.

Look over the last 10 years or so of your life.

How many times have you had to start a "new beginning"?

Grades change every year which means new teachers, new classmates.

Many of you change school at least three times (elementary to middle to high school).

When you get to middle school and high school, you change your entire learning routine by having multiple teachers that teach different subjects.

There are the changes with friends.

The friends that were your closest in say 2nd grade are most likely not the same by the time you are a sophomore in high school.

Finally, your teen years end with your biggest change yet.

You leave the part of your life you've grown to understand in high school to the vastly different worlds of college or the career field.

This period of constant change can be equal parts scary and exciting.

There are so many unknowns involved in new beginnings.

Will I be able to handle the change?

How will people like me at my new school?

What will be expected of me?

For those who find change to be difficult (which is probably all of us at some point or another), the scariest part is that we can't stop the changes from coming.

We are left with having to adapt or get left behind.

How can we learn to navigate this constantly changing world?

What are some ways that we can start our "new beginnings" on a good fit.

Let's look at a few keys from the Bible.

Don't Worry

Ever heard the saying, "Don't worry, be happy"?

I'm not a fan.

It sounds like painfully simple advice that just isn't realistic.

When something is looming on the horizon—maybe it's a change you know is coming that you are dreading—isn't it hard to do anything *but* worry?

As hard as it is to fathom, one of the keys to starting a new beginning on the right foot is to surrender your worry to God.

In **Matthew 6:25**, Jesus paints an amazing picture of the freedom from worrying we can find in Him.

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?"

We are going to look at a few verses from this passage, but it's good to start here.

There are two interesting things to point out.

First, Jesus clearly understands the pangs of worry.

He starts with the essentials of life: food and drink.

Then, he hits on clothing—something that protects us from the "elements" as well as show our status to the world.

Whenever we start a new beginning, we want to know that we are going to be okay, that whatever changes may come, we will survive it.

Jesus knows that feeling.

Though this verse may not specifically mention high school or college, it does identify some of the most basic ingredients to a good life that people have been worrying about for centuries.

Second, Jesus goes on to ask a critical question: "Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?"

In other words, there's more to life than just these things we need for survival and protection/status.

Before we dive any further, I want to join with Jesus and say that, no matter what you may feel at the moment, there is more to life than school, social groups, and your teen years.

They can seem so big, so overwhelming sometimes, but there is certainly more to our lives and our Savior than the circumstances you are facing right now.

In the next verse, Jesus gives the example of birds.

They don't have warehouses full of food that they have been storing; yet, somehow, they survive.

God provides for them.

What Jesus is saying is that if God will take care of birds, how much more will He take care of you?

You are His masterpiece.

You are worthy dying for.

I think that says it all.

"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" - Matthew 6:27

Great point, Jesus!

Though I definitely struggle with this, the point Jesus is making is that when you get right down to it, what good does worry do?

Maybe you're stressed out about changing grades or schools.

What will worrying about it solve?

Will it make the transition go smoothly?

Will it make it come faster?

The obvious answer is no.

New beginnings are a part of life.

Worry doesn't have to be.

Jesus goes on to make another analogy using flowers.

If God cares so much about them to clothe them in such beauty, how much more will He take care of you?

Again, you are incredibly important as an individual to the Creator of the universe.

He knows you by name.

If He cares about flowers, what does that say about His true masterpiece?

Read Matthew 6:31-32.

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.”

Why worry? When you get right down to it, God knows all of your needs.

He knows the new beginnings looming on the horizon.

He knows exactly what you need to not only survive but to thrive in this situation.

Does that mean that everything will go perfectly smoothly all the time?

No, God doesn’t promise a problem-free life, but what He *does* promise is that He knows what you are going through and will be right there with you at all times.

Again, I cannot overstate this, you have the all-powerful God, Creator of the universe saying, “I’ve got your back.”

The Solution

So far, we have looked at some compelling words from Jesus.

He tells us that worrying is pointless.

God has you covered.

But how do you truly defeat worry?

Jesus has a rather simple (yet, incredibly complicated) answer.

Read Matthew 6:33.

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

The answer to happiness in life is right there in that verse.

Or maybe, it is better to say that the answer to *joy* in life is right there.

You see, happiness is an emotional state that is sometimes hard to control, but joy—something far greater and more lasting—is something we can live in every day.

The key, is found in seeking the Kingdom of God above all else.

What does this mean?

The first step is seeking God's way over everything else.

God's way isn't always the easiest, but it is always the best.

Pursuing the kind of life that Jesus talks about throughout Scripture is the key to joyful living.

So, I live the way that God wants, and I get what I want? Um, almost.

The second part of this verse is key.

If you seek to live like Christ, God "will give you everything you need."

What we *need* is not always the same as what we *want*.

I want a billion dollars. I don't need that much money, though.

When you worry about a new beginning, many of the things that are stressing you out are wants.

What do you need?

Pursue God and He will make that happen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the "new beginnings" that you have faced or will face soon in your life?
- What makes new beginnings scary?
- What does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God above all else?
- What are your true "needs" in life? What are some of your "wants"?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON CHARACTER

Bible: Romans 5:3-5

SUPPLIES

- Two large white t-shirts
- Washable paint
- Paintbrushes
- A tarp or towel to lay down on the ground
- Two blindfolds

OPENING GAME – PAINT IT

Before the game begins, lay down a tarp or a towel on the ground.

Select two students to wear the t-shirts.

Once they have put them on over their clothes, blindfold them and have them stand on the tarp or the towel.

Split the rest of the group into two teams and assign a team to each blindfolded student.

Give the teams the paint and paintbrushes.

Let the students take turns putting different colored paints on a brush and then stand with the brush almost touching the blindfolded student.

Call out a command that will make the blindfolded students move, such as *spin around three times!*

As the blindfolded students move, they will bump into the paintbrush, causing paint to get on the shirts.

When it's the next student's turn, call out another command, like *do five jumping jacks!*

Continue this until all the students have had a chance to hold the paintbrush.

Have a leader carefully remove the t-shirts from the students wearing them.

Lay them on the tarp.

Have the two students remove their blindfold and decide which shirt looks the coolest and should win!

After the game, discuss these questions:

Would the shirts have gotten any paint on them if the students who were blindfolded never moved?

Would they have moved if I hadn't called out things for them to do?

Did they know why I was telling them to move around?

After the game, say:

You guys actually came up with some pretty cool t-shirt designs!

It would have been too easy to let you guys just paint the shirts, so I decided to make it more interesting and have them be blindfolded.

While it would have been easier for them to just stand there wearing their t-shirts, the end product wouldn't have looked as cool!

Even though they didn't know why they were moving around and doing all the things I was saying, they were actually creating something really awesome!

They were blindfolded, so they didn't know what was going on.

But by walking through the motions I called out, they were transforming something very plain into something very colorful.

Read Romans 5:3-5.

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Don't get me wrong; I love this verse.

But wouldn't it be nice and so much easier if it just said, "God will give you character and hope" instead of that our sufferings produce perseverance, which produces character?

But that's not the way it works.

See, every single thing you go through produces some type of character.

We started the game with two white shirts.

And if you guys want have wanted to, you could have ignored my instructions.

If you had ignored me, you still would have had the shirts when the game was over.

They just wouldn't be as colorful!

With every situation in life that you walk through, it will build your character in some way.

You can choose to walk through times of suffering leaning on God, obeying and trusting Him, and that will produce good character, character that leads to hope.

Or you can try to get through hard times all on your own, ignoring God completely.

That will produce a character that's hard, isolated, and jaded. That kind of character is hopeless.

Which sounds like the type of character you would rather have?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have you ever been through a hard time that made your character better?
- Do you think it's possible to persevere through times of suffering without God?
- Would you rather have a character that came from God and produces hope, or a character that you developed on your own that is hopeless?

WRAP-UP

Just like this verse talks about, you are going to go through times of suffering in your life.

There's no way to avoid that.

But if you persevere through them, that's when good character is made.

So how do you persevere? You turn to God for strength and guidance.

You ask Him to help you persevere through the hard, suffering times so that you can develop good character.

If you turn to Him, God will help you.

But He doesn't make you turn to Him.

In fact, if you want to, you can ignore Him completely, trying to get through everything on your own.

But that will only make the times of suffering even harder.

Or, you can turn to Him, have Him walk you through the hard times, and develop amazing character in the process.

It's your choice.

I think the choice is pretty clear. Don't you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON CHOICES

Bible: Romans 12:1-2 (MSG)

Use this lesson to help students in your ministry make good choices.

Students are often blinded by what molds and shapes the decisions they make.

This lesson helps peel back the "why", "how" and "what" behind their choices.

This lesson really has the power to help your students in a big way.

Especially if you create some space at the end of the message, allowing students to reflect and go to God with the choices they make.

Doing that allows room for God to move in their hearts and minds.

TEACH

Say: Ever think about the everyday choices we make?

Like for real!

Why do we dress the way we do?

Why do we talk and act the way we do?

Why do we hang around the people we hang with?

Why are we sitting in this room right now?

Before today is over, I want you to ask yourself three questions...

- Who makes my choices?
- How am I making my choices?
- Why am I making them?

Who Makes Our Choices?

Who or what pressures us to do what we do?

Wear what we wear...

Talk how we talk...

If we are honest with ourselves, we would say that the culture around us has a huge say in what we do, what we wear, how we act, and how we talk.

And when I say culture, I'm talking about social media, movie stars, recording artist, athletes, where we live, the school we go to, and the friends we hang out with.

I'm talking about technology, books, and whatever social class people put us in.

Maybe your parents make all the choices for you.

Either because they are afraid that you are going to turn into a heathen, or because they want to "protect you"!

Maybe your friends make your decisions for you.

Because they are the closest family you have, and you're afraid you will lose them too!

Maybe money makes your choices. Because you don't have any, and you are tired of living broke!

Or you have a lot of "stuff" and that's what drives you.

That's a few examples of what could be making your choices.

Let's look at how we are making our choices.

How are we making our choices?

How can music influence the choices you make?

How does it influence how we act, talk, and what we wear? (Get responses)

Most of you have probably heard the phrase "YOLO", you only live once.

A lot of people adopted this "motto" and started to live life like there was no tomorrow because of a popular song.

Now what happens when you live like there is no tomorrow? Then all of a sudden, tomorrow comes.

You've been spending all your money.

Telling people what's on your mind, because you know they deserve it.

Maybe you started gravitating towards drugs and alcohol.

Skipping school and sleeping in.

What happens then?

What happens when someone disrespects you and you're like "YOLO"!

What happens when you are tempted to steal from the mall, knowing the police is in there, knowing they have people watching you, knowing they have cameras... but you're like "YOLO"!

What happens when your boyfriend or girlfriend is pressuring you to have sex, and you're like "YOLO". Then a month later someone is pregnant!

That's just one example of the culture around us can influence our choices.

The idea is to be aware of what is influencing you and how you make the choices you do.

What is the "why" behind our choices?

Again, if we are honest - music, money, friends, movies, sports shape the choices we make for two reasons:

Acceptance and fear!

Pretty much any choice we make hinges on those two things.

We dress like our friends because we FEAR that we will look different, and we want to be ACCEPTED by our friends. We want to fit in!

We chase money or "stuff" because we FEAR that we won't live a good life and have good things. We fear that we won't be ACCEPTED if we don't have a lot of money or "stuff".

We flirt and sleep around because we FEAR that we are not good enough for someone to love us, and we want to be ACCEPTED by our boyfriends and girlfriends.

We get drunk at parties and do drugs because we FEAR that people will label us "goody goodies", and goody goodies are not ACCEPTED by the circles we run in.

Listen to what Romans 12:1-2 has to say about choices.

Read Romans 12:1-2 (MSG).

So, here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.

You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you

Note to leader: *Talk a little about the meaning of this passage in your own words.*

Let me give you a choice to make.

Live free following Jesus!

Or..

Be enslaved to FEAR and ACCEPTANCE

Who's going to make that choice for you?

How are you going to make that choice?

Why will you make that choice?

I hope this message has challenged you to think about the choices you make.

I hope you're inspired to ask God to show you the source of your choices, how you make them, and why you make them.

Note to leader: *End the message with a time of reflection for students. Have the worship band (if you have one) come up and play a song.*

If you don't have a worship band, play a worship video or song. During the worship song, encourage students to reflect on the message, bringing their choices before God.

Allowing Him to speak to them about the choices they make.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Say your name, grade, and if you prefer Apple or Android.
- How easy is it to cruise through a day and not even think about the choices we make?
- Why is it so easy?
- How do things like music, media, celebrities, sports, etc. influence the choices we make?
- How/why do we allow our friends to influence the choices we make?
- What does “the renewing of your mind” in Romans 12:2 mean to you and how can your mind be renewed?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON CHRISTMAS - INAPPROPRIATE WREATHS

Bible: Matthew 23:27

Topic: Jesus is concerned with what's going on inside you, not how you look or how cool you are.

PREPARATION

Note: *If you're tight on time (or budget), an alternative to having a real wreath is to find pictures of some online, insert into PowerPoint or some other presentation software, and show to students.*

Get a standard wreath (made of green branches) and place it on a table.

Also, get one that is made of a different material—something interesting, but not too unusual.

For example, one made of ornaments or twigs. Place this “different” wreath out of sight but near the teaching area.

In addition, make one or two “inappropriate wreaths” out of material that really should not be used for a wreath.

For example, make them out of bacon or doll heads or toilet paper rolls.

You can accomplish this by gluing the “inappropriate” material to a cardboard ring.

Place these 2 “inappropriate wreaths” out of sight, but near the teaching area.

Also, make a sign that reads, “IT LOOKS LIKE A WREATH, BUT IT’S NOT RIGHT.”

Place this sign out of sight near the teaching area.

Mark a Bible at Matthew 23:27.

TEACH

Show the students the standard wreath and ask if anybody knows what it is called.

After getting the answer (wreath), ask: What is it that makes something a wreath?

Take responses and then show your “different” wreath.

Ask: Is this considered a wreath also? *(Sure)*

Say: According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, a wreath is either 'something intertwined or arranged in a circular shape.'

Or 'something having a circular or coiling form.'

According to those definitions, these are both 'wreaths.'

Explain: I would gladly hang either of these wreaths in front of my house, even though they are made of different materials.

However, some materials just shouldn't be used to make a wreath.

Look at this.

(Pull out one of the "inappropriate wreaths" and enjoy the students' response.)

OR... How about this?

(Pull out the second "inappropriate wreath.")

Ask: What's the problem with these wreaths? I mean, they're in the right shape, right?

They meet the definition of a wreath that we read earlier.

What's the problem here?

(Take response, and then show your sign - "IT LOOKS LIKE A WREATH, BUT IT'S NOT RIGHT.")

Say: On Christmas, we celebrate that God came to Earth 2,000 years ago as a baby named 'Jesus.'

As Jesus grew up, he explained that He came to save the lost.

And, He desires to CHANGE us on the inside.

See, Jesus is more concerned with what 'we are made of' than how we look.

Listen to what Jesus said to some of the religious leaders when he was around 30 years old.

Read Matthew 23:27.

"How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You are like tombs that are painted white. Outside, those tombs look fine, but inside, they are full of the bones of dead people and all kinds of unclean things."

Say: The same problem that Jesus saw with the religious leaders then, is the same problem that these wreaths have.

They are made of the wrong stuff.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day tried to walk around DOING the right thing, but Jesus says, 'No. It's not enough to look right. You've got to be made right from the very core of who you are.'

(Hold up sign.)

I really hope Jesus doesn't look at me and say, 'IT LOOKS LIKE A CHRISTIAN, BUT IT'S NOT RIGHT.'

(Challenge students to look at themselves a little more deeply this Christmas.)

It's not enough to DO the right things at Christmas time—come to Church, sing Christmas songs, etc.

What Jesus is really concerned with is what's happening inside us.

What really matters is what we are made of.

This Christmastime when you see a wreath, think about what the wreath is made of.

And remember that when Jesus looks at you, he's thinking about the same thing.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON COMMUNITY

Bible: Acts 2:42-43

Use this lesson to teach students that the community they choose for themselves is important!

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES

- Water balloons
- Access to water (a sink or a hose)
- Towels (optional, so student's can dry off after the game if needed)

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Before the game begins, fill up the water balloons.

Choose three (or more, depending on the size of your group) students to be the ones to throw the water balloons.

Line the rest of the group up and count down the line, "one, two, one, two, one, two."

Have the team split into groups of two with the person standing next to them.

Explain that if they were a number one, their goal is to not get hit by a water balloon.

If they were a number two, their goal is to protect their partner from getting hit by a water balloon.

On the count of three, have the chosen students start throwing water balloons.

The point is for the number two students to protect their partner by jumping in front of them, using their hands, or whatever else to ensure their partner doesn't get hit.

If a number one gets hit with a water balloon, their team is out.

The last remaining team where the number one teammate is still dry wins!

After the game, discuss these questions:

Do you think it was more fun for the number ones of the group or the number twos of the group?

Was it easier to avoid the water balloons when you had someone protecting you?

Did you work well together as a team?

TEACH

After the game, say: That was probably the riskiest version of dodgeball you've ever played, huh?

In the game, half of you were trying to avoid getting wet, and half of you were trying to protect your teammate from getting hit.

Without working as a team, you had no chance of winning!

You had to rely on each other as teammates.

We have teammates in life, too.

The friends that you choose, the community you surround yourself with, those are your teammates.

What if, in this game, I had told all the number one players that their teammates would be protecting them, but then I never told the teammates what they were supposed to do?

It would have been pointless, right? Everyone would have gotten wet!

It's important to choose teammates in life who are on the same page as we are.

Read Acts 2:42-43.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common."

This verse is talking about what Christians did during this time.

They devoted themselves to learning more about God and praying, and they did it together.

And because of their belief in Jesus, they had things in common.

It's so important to have a community of Christian friends who have a relationship with Jesus like you do.

If they don't, they can be the best friend in the world, but it won't make them a good teammate for you, because you won't ever be on the same page.

If you don't share the same life-beliefs with your community around you, it will be just like it would have been if I hadn't told anyone what to do in the game—it just would have been chaotic.

No one would be able to protect each other, even if they wanted to.

As a Christian, the most important thing in your life is your relationship with Jesus.

The community you surround yourself with should be one you can walk through life together with.

The ones you turn to when you need help, the ones who help you when you're going through something difficult.

And how can you expect that to happen if the most important things in your life don't line up?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree that the community of friends you surround yourself with should be people who share your belief in Jesus?
- Do you think it's hard for people who don't believe in Jesus to support you and be there for you when it comes to the big things in life?
- Do you have any friends like the ones in Acts 2, who you can pray with and learn more about God with?
- Do you think that you will grow more in your faith if you are surrounded by Christian friends?

CLOSE

Please don't leave here thinking that you are never supposed to even speak to people who aren't Christians.

If that was the case, how could you ever share Jesus' love with anyone?

What I'm telling you is that it's important that the people closest to you—your community—also have a relationship with Jesus.

When you surround yourself with a community of Jesus-following friends, you set yourself up to be the best you can be.

You give yourself a community to grow closer to God and to grow stronger in your faith

That's the best kind of community there is!

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON CONFIDENCE

Bible: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Bottom Line: True confidence comes from trusting in God.

LEADER PREP

Confidence is a subject that, yes, even us adults struggle with in life.

Just when you think that you've 'arrived' in being confident...something or someone can seem to knock the wind out of your sails with a small push.

But this week's lesson will hopefully remind you and students that our confidence is not to be found in ourselves, in other's opinions of us, the latest ideas, or anything other than the fact that God has us securely in his grasp.

The true key to living with confidence is to remember that we find our confidence in God alone.

All of the other voices, thoughts, or ideas around us can be very fickle.

Yet, God does not change and He loves us with a love and confidence that is greater than any other force we might encounter.

So, today, right now, survey your own spiritual landscape and ask yourself: Am I truly leaning on the confidence of God?

Or am I going about this life on my own strength?

Really reflect on these questions, and ask God to remind you to rely on Him alone.

SUPPLIES

- 2 large buckets filled with water
- A lot of sponges divided between the buckets
- A plant that you've failed to water for a few days or more (make sure that it is really crispy/or bring in a rose that has been cut off and dying
- Another plant that you have watered and is flourishing
- Small Succulent plants for each student

OPENING GAME: Garden Warfare

Divide the group into 2 teams of equal number.

The 'garden' should be the size of a basketball court with a large bucket filled with water and 5-10 sponges placed where the basketball baskets would be located.

Each team needs to choose 4 people to be their 'plants'.

Teams will each take opposite sides of the 'court', and both team's plants will be in the center in a straight line facing one another with about 4 feet in between the two groups (almost like linemen on a football set up).

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

The goal of this game is to water your plants without getting sprayed by the other team.

Also, 'Plants' must begin seated and can only rise up when they are 'watered'.

To water your plants, you must squeeze the sponge over their heads to water them.

But watch out, because if you get hit with someone else's sponge, you are out.

You can steal the other team's sponges so hold onto your sponges!

If the game goes quickly where teammates get out, restart the game with new 'plants' from each team.

TEACH

Show the youth the plant that is thriving.

This plant is alive and growing.

What kinds of things do I need to do, though, to keep it alive and green?

Give the youth a chance to share ideas.

Now, hold up the dead shriveled plant or rose stem.

Now, this plant is not only dead, but crispy.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that no plants were harmed in the making of this week's lesson, right?

Today's scripture tells us that we are a lot like these plants.

Some of us are growing and alive...while some of us are crispy.

And though we might think that we are fooling everyone around us, and hey, maybe we are even fooling ourselves - there is no fooling God.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8.

Basically, God is saying: Either you are growing and finding your confidence and strength from the Living God, or you are trying on your own, relying on people and not on God and you are wasting away.

See, we humans like to do things on our own, right?

Every little kid goes through a time in their life where they want to do everything on their own.

Share a funny story from your childhood about a time that you wanted to do things on your own and failed miserably and hopefully, comically.

It's like we want to take the training wheels off of the bike in our lives and do things in our own strength, right?

But life with God is not meant to be a solo journey.

We cannot live and grow and thrive without God being our strength.

Ask yourself this question: On a scale of 1 to 10 - how much do I rely on God and how much do I rely on others or myself?

Being a teenager can be super tough, can't it?

Everyone seems to have an idea of what you should do, how you should dress, what activities are important to you, what friends you have, etc.

And having confidence can be really hard.

But what if we rethought how we look at having confidence?

What if, rather than looking to humans (our friends, teachers, even our family) for confidence or approval...what if your first stop was with God?

What if, in everything you did, it was HIS opinion that was the one that mattered?

Wouldn't you think living like THAT would help your confidence?

Because let's face it, you have so many different voices and ideas pulling at you.

Ask for a volunteer from the group to come forward with you.

Imagine yourself as this plant.

Hold up a tiny succulent plant.

And you are in God's hands.

Place the plant in your hands.

He is holding you and wants to help you grow.

Yet, what would happen if I took this cute little plant, took it out of its pot, and instead, put this plant in the hands of _____ (*the volunteer name*)?

And _____ (volunteer name) thinks that the plant is just fine without water.

They think that actually, this little plant would love some soda or maybe some hot coffee.

Then _____ (volunteer name) says that the plant doesn't need her soil.

Take the soil away.

Nope, the plant just needs to be off all by itself with no light, no water, and no air.

Thank the volunteer and have them sit down.

What will happen to this little plant?

Allow the group to answer.

See, living without God and trying to do things on our own strength, basically, is exactly what we've done to this little plant.

It's experiencing what God described as the wasteland in our scripture - no water, no nourishment, hot, and no growth.

And we all know enough about plants to know that left like this, this little plant will die.

Yet, how often do we as people live like this little plant?

We say to God with how we live and the things or people that we choose that we don't need him.

We look to our friends; people we wish were our friends to see what we should be doing or thinking.

We do things that we know we shouldn't, and why?

To impress others?

To gain their confidence that we are worthy of being their friend?

Ask yourself this tough question: What gives you confidence?

Is it how you look?

How you dress?

The friends that you have?

And then ask yourself - what would it look like to find my confidence in God?

Because here is the amazing thing that you find when you truly find your confidence in God alone - you find yourself truly loving others while not needing their approval.

You make your decisions based on who you are in Christ.

You find your confidence in the fact that you are a child of God.

And THAT brings true growth in your life.

It might seem like a small change, this whole relying on God thing, but trust me, when you truly put your trust and confidence in God alone, the changes are huge.

Bring out the growing plant.

You become alive in a way that is beautiful and brings beauty to those around you.

You are confident in a way that cannot be explained any other way than in God.

Each of you can take a small plant with you to remind you to find your confidence in God.

To remember that when you grow in God and trust in Him, you will be more alive than you ever thought possible.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If you had to describe a plant to show where you are right at this moment with God, what would the plant look like? Alive, dead, withering, etc.
- What are some of the things or people that you are tempted to look to for your confidence?
- What would have to change in your life or the way you make decisions for you to really trust in God?
- What do you think it means to find your confidence in God? What would that look like for you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DECISIONS

Bible: Proverbs 3:5-6 *from the Message*

Bottom Line: Let God guide you in making tough decisions: you don't have to walk alone.

SUPPLIES

- Signs posted on the wall saying "Count me in", "No way" and "Meh".

OPENING GAME: MEH

In a Game Announcer voice, say: This is the game of tough choices and not so tough choices.

This is the game of 'Meh'.

'Meh' is a word that is "used when one simply does not care".

Today, I will read off some decisions and you will go to the sign that matches how you would feel about this decision.

Decisions:

- "Stand up in the cafeteria and sing the ABC song."
- "Drink milk that has been left out for a week."
- "The store is running a buy one, get one free on hair color: want to dye your hair bright pink?"
- "Test every flavor of baby food in the store."
- "Run through a field of thorn bushes."
- "Wear your dad's clothes for a week."

Come up on your own other examples of embarrassing decisions for this game.

TEACH

Share a story from your own life in which a small decision you made as a teenager had big consequences—try to think of a funny and light story if you have one.

We make tons of decisions every single day.

Hopefully, none of them are as silly as the ones that were in our game today, but your lives are full of decisions, aren't they?

What are some of the decisions that you've had to make the past year?

Give the youth time to answer.

Here's the crazy thing about this time in your lives: Do you know how many adults look back at decisions that they made when they were your age that they think – "Wow, that was stupid" or "I wish that I hadn't done that"?

Some of these make great stories, but there are some decisions that stick with us.

Share another example from your life (or someone you know) of decisions that you made that you didn't realize the full consequences of the decision until it was too late.

Here is a little secret: sometimes when your parents or the adults in your life freak out about decisions that you have made or worry about decisions that you might make, sometimes it is because they have lived that...they've 'got the t-shirt' of that decision and they love you and don't want you to make the same decision.

What is the answer?

How do you know what decisions to make or not make?

Ask someone to read Proverbs 3:5-6 from the Message:

"Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life!

Honor God with everything you own; give him the first and the best. Your barns will burst, your wine vats will brim over. But don't, dear friend, resent God's discipline; don't sulk under his loving correction. It's the child he loves that God corrects; a father's delight is behind all this."

God wants to help us make decisions.

And it starts when we walk with him in making the small decisions.

Do you tell the truth even if it hurts or do you tell a small lie?

Do you speak the truth or do you act like you didn't see it?

It is the small decisions that really do matter.

It's in that picture that you send on Snapchat or the post that you write.

It's in the ways that you treat others when you don't think anyone is looking or seeing.

But here is the truth: You see. You hear. You know.

And God does.

See, making your paths straight means walking with God when the roads are easy, because as the decisions get tougher, which they will, He is right there with you.

And when there are those times that you don't know what to do: He is there with you too.

Think about the decisions that you might be facing today: maybe you are wondering if you should hang out with certain people or choose one way or another.

Ask God to help you to know what you should do.

Share about how you listen for God's guidance in making decisions or an example of a time in which God helped you to make a decision.

I wish that I could give you "The 3 Steps to Hearing God's voice" but honestly, it is about listening and seeing if you sense God leading.

Here is the one thing that I can tell you: God won't lead you to make a decision that goes against who you know God to be.

He won't lead you to be dishonest or unkind.

God's path is straight.

Now don't hear me saying that God's path is easy, because sometimes God's way is really tough.

It can be lonely.

But what I do know is that when you walk with God: you are not alone.

God is with you.

And once you make one decisions with God, hearing the next time is usually clearer.

Take a moment to think about a decision that you are facing.

Ask God right now to guide you.

To help you to know what His path is and to guide you.

God doesn't expect you to have all the answers... the scripture today even says not to trust in your own understanding.

Ask God for his wisdom.

And then honestly ask yourself: What would it look like to listen for God's voice in all you do?

Keep your ears, eyes, and heart open.

God never meant for us to try to do life all on our own.

Walk with God.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the tough decisions that teenagers have to make?
- What are some of the consequences you have seen from others' decisions?
- Share about a time that you made a decision that had tough consequences.
- Give each person a chance to share a decision that they need the group to pray with them about.
- How does it make you feel to know that God never meant for us to walk alone or on our own strength?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DEPRESSION

Bottom Line: God is with us no matter how we feel and He cares. No judgement.

Bible: Psalm 40, The Message

SUPPLIES

- Poster board for each youth
- Magazines of many different types
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Psalm 40 from the Message printed for each youth
- Pens

LEADER PREP

Depression is a challenging topic to address in any youth ministry.

It is important to remember that many of your students are likely, at some point in their lives, to struggle with depression in some form or another.

However, there are still many misconceptions about depression.

In fact, odds are that many of you reading and preparing to teach this lesson struggle with depression, and there is one thing that you need to know: you are not alone.

Depression is not a sign of weakness or of lack of faith.

It is a very important reminder to each of us that we are human and for many amazing Christians throughout the centuries, depression has been a struggle.

Yet, we as leaders must be the first to 1). Know the signs of depression and 2). Know when we or others need professional health.

For some of you, this lesson is might be a holy nudge that you need to spend some time taking care of your soul, your body, and your heart.

Youth group time, of course, is not the time to nurse these wounds and is definitely not meant to be a 'therapy session' for the leader.

But spend time this week in prayer, doing some real soul searching and evaluating if you indeed sense that you are depressed.

Next, spend time praying for the students in your youth group, as it is very likely that there are youth in your group who are depressed.

Again, this time is not a time for therapy, but rather a time for them to learn some ways that they can share their heart with God.

One of the beautiful things, and yet maddening at times, about teenagers is that they often feel things very strongly.

It is important to remember that though their 'issues' or feelings might seem trivial to us as adults, they are feeling them and we must recognize that.

It is a holy thing for a teenager to share how they truly feel and nothing throws cold water on their bravery than being told that their emotions, or feelings, are not valid.

In fact, try to remember a time when you were a teenager and your feelings were dismissed...it's a hard thing.

It is also important to guard against what I call the 'drama trap' - in which you open the conversation about feelings and suddenly the tidal wave opens!

Oh, how many youth lock-ins have been derailed by the infamous cry fest!

As you can see, it is a juggle to discern how best to respond, but the best advice is to respond with grace.

It is important to sense where your group is at in regards to the stage of life that they are in.

For example, for some middle schoolers, depression might be a bit heavy for them, but they can identify with being sad or disappointed.

It is tough to paint any group with a single brush, though, as many students have endured pain that many adults cannot fathom.

Again, it requires discernment, grace, and wisdom as a leader to navigate these discussions.

It might also be an important time in which you open their eyes to the fact that they need further help, which is not something to be ashamed of, but is actually a sign of great strength to know when help is needed.

Anytime that depression is addressed, it is also important to remember to be very aware that if a youth in the group shares that they are having suicidal thoughts, this is very serious and it is important that you seek help.

Encourage students to share their feelings with their parents and a pastor.

Though youth ministers do a great deal of counseling, it is important to remember that most of us are not counselors and to know when we have reached our limits.

OPENING ACTIVITY: Feelings Board

Say: Each of you are going to create what I would call a 'Feelings Board'.

Today, we are going to tackle a deep topic and you will help us to start the conversation by making these feelings boards.

Here's what I want you to try to describe with pictures: Depression.

Leader note: The tone in which groups go about this activity might vary from age groups to how comfortable they feel. Some might go the humor route, which shouldn't be immediately discounted... you can learn a great deal from teenage humor. The thing to try to avoid is any mocking or belittling about depression.

Give the students 10-15 minutes to make their boards and then to present them IF THEY WANT.

Display the boards around the room to reference throughout the lesson.

After the activity, ask: Which of the images on the posters do you think help to describe what depression must feel like?

Why do you think that so many people are depressed?

Depression is a tough topic, but one that can't be ignored.

TEACH

In 2015, an estimated 3 million adolescents ages 12 to 17, in the United States, had at least one major depressive episode in the past year.

This number represented 12.5% of the U.S. population ages 12 to 17 (from NIMH).

But let me ask you this: How many of you have not felt 'down' or sad at all this past year?

I bet if we are honest... not one of us could say that we haven't ever had a down moment.

You know what that means?

WE ARE HUMAN!

Have any of you seen the movie *Inside Out*?

Basically, it is a movie that presents a creative way to explain emotions to kids.

There is Fear, Greed, Anger, Sadness, and Joy.

It is a huge surprise to everyone in the movie to realize that sometimes joy and sadness can go together, or that you can be 'Sad Mad'.

This movie really brings home the important reminder that our emotions are not bad.

We are human and God made us to feel strong emotions.

Just think about this past week for you: How many different emotions did you feel?

Share about a time in the past few weeks in which you felt strong emotions (a funny example might be a good reprieve at this point in the lesson!)

God created us to feel emotions.

The Bible might not use the exact word 'depression,' but it uses words like "downcast," "brokenhearted," "troubled," "miserable," "despairing," and "mourning," among others.

I think those will fit for depression, don't you?

The Bible also tells about amazing men and women of God who truly struggled.

Even Jesus expressed how deeply he hurt for others.

He felt betrayed.

He felt sad.

He felt disappointed.

He felt lonely.

And He is God.

I hope this helps you to see is that God is going to be the last person to judge you for feeling down because He knows and He created us to feel deeply.

King David, you know the kid-wonder who killed a giant with some rocks and was the most amazing King of all time for the Israelites?

David, the one who was called 'the man after God's heart'... do you think he struggled with feeling down?

Let's see.

Give each youth a copy of Psalm 40 as you read it outloud.

David wrote songs and prayers, which expressed a wide range of emotions.

Some are full of joy... some are filled with raw words.

What are some of the words that David prayed that stuck out to you?

It is interesting that in this Psalm, David seems to go back and forth from feeling very down... to then reminding himself that God is with him.

This is a really important thing to remember: It is ok to feel and to feel deeply.

And there might be days when you feel like nobody cares or hears or understands.

But if you leave this place knowing one thing, it needs to be this: God cares deeply about you and your feelings.

I want you to read Psalm 40 again and underline any of the lines that bring you comfort.

Give the youth a few minutes to read again.

These are the words that you need to remind yourself of when you find yourself in a place where you feel alone.

Because we all will be there at some point in our lives.

But know this: God is with you and He cares.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which emotion do you struggle with the most from the movie *Inside Out*: fear, greed, anger, joy or sadness?
- How does it make you feel to know that Jesus felt the same emotions that we do?
- Share a line from Psalm 40 that you want to remember that brings you comfort?
- Which line in Psalm 40 surprised you that David felt that way?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DISCIPLESHIP

Bible: Matthew 8: 18-22, Matthew 5:3-10 (MSG)

Ask: When you hear the word disciple...what do you think about? (Get responses)

People who followed Jesus?

12 people way back in Jesus' time?

Devoted followers?

Anyone here a disciple?

Whether you know it or not, we are all disciples...we all follow something.

Question is...what are we following?

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

A disciple is a follower, a student of a mentor, teacher, or other figure.

Why would you want to be a follower or a student?

Because we all need to learn!

When you think you know it all - you are one of two things: dead or a fool!

So, we are all being taught by someone...a mentor, teacher, friend. We are all following something.

WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP LOOK LIKE?

Well, if you are a disciple of baseball, then it looks like practicing, working out, focusing on techniques, and repetition.

You eat, sleep, drink, and live baseball.

You talk about baseball, watch baseball, read baseball articles...you think baseball!

If you are a disciple of music, then it looks like learning the theory of music, notes, rhythm, reading sheet music, and chords.

You are patiently practicing your instrument.

Sometimes so much your fingers bleed.

Your hands hurt; your voice can't utter another sound.

You live in music stores and always have earphones in your ears.

Music soothes your soul.

If you are a disciple of literature or poetry, then you're learning allegory, foreshadowing, etc...

You are reading all kinds of literature, like *Treasure Island*, *Les Miserables*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

You go to book clubs, attend public readings, and even begin to write on your own.

WHAT DOES A DISCIPLE OF JESUS LOOK LIKE?

Read Matthew 8: 18-22 (MSG)

When Jesus saw that a curious crowd was growing by the minute, he told his disciples to get him out of there to the other side of the lake. As they left, a religion scholar asked if he could go along. "I'll go with you, wherever," he said. Jesus was curt: "Are you ready to rough it? We're not staying in the best inns, you know."

Another follower said, "Master, excuse me for a couple of days, please. I have my father's funeral to take care of." Jesus refused. "First things first. Your business is life, not death. Follow me. Pursue life."

Jesus puts it another way...

Read Matthew 5: 3-10 (MSG)

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."

*"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought."
"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat. "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for. "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world."
"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."*

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom."

WHY IS DISCIPLESHIP IMPORTANT?

With baseball, it's about the thrill of the game.

With literature/poetry it is important to be able to express yourself through the art of writing.

With Jesus, it's important to show the world what the people of God looks like.

It's important to show the world that despite all the evil and wrong in the world...there is hope!

It's important to display the glory of God and invite everyone around you into that story.

Baseball is great... Literature is awesome...

But being a disciple of Jesus...it gives us life. It sustains your life.

There's a reason why baseball is America's "pastime".

It's a fun competitive game with a long history.

There's a reason poetry exist.

Those emotions, the pain, the triumph, all trying to grasp the thing that sustains life.

Being a follower of Jesus means that you are following him and his ways.

You are practicing loving God with all you heart, soul, and mind.

You are loving your neighbor as yourself, and you are inviting other people to join this story with you.

Close in Prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Say your name, school, and if you prefer Coke or Pepsi.
- In your opinion, what is the definition of disciple?
- What are you a disciple of...what do you follow?
- Why is it easier to be a "disciple" of sports or music than it is to be a disciple of Jesus?
- What does a disciple of Jesus look like? How can you adopt those traits?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DISTRACTIONS

Lesson Overview: How to Not Get Distracted from Focusing on God

Bible: Hebrews 12:1-2; Genesis 37-50

The goal of our lives is to focus on Jesus.

Instead of focusing on the distractions of life, it's important to focus on God.

Sometimes the distractions actually help us see God more clearly.

OPENING GAME: DISTRACTED DRIVING

SUPPLIES

- Two storage tubs, large enough for a student to sit inside
- Several blindfolds

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide your entire group into teams consisting of four people.

The goal of the game is to race from one end of the room to the other without getting distracted, and to do it faster than the other teams.

Teams race one at a time.

Each team chooses one person to “drive” the storage tub in the race.

The other members of that team are blindfolded and will push the tub from the start to the finish line as fast as they can.

Put several obstacles between the start and finish lines. (ex: chairs, tables, etc.)

The driver will direct their team members to move around the obstacles to reach the finish line.

The teams who are not racing will stand on the sidelines, doing whatever they can to distract the driver and slow down the racing team.

Distractors can say things, do stupid actions, make lots of noise, etc. - while remaining on the side of the racing lane.

Each team gets its own turn racing.

Time each team to see who crosses the finish line in the least amount of time.

The team with the shortest time wins.

Note: You might also like this free game, Paper Plate Powerball, that helps students focus on Jesus.

TEACH

Even with distractions, it's a lot easier to drive a tub than it is to drive a car!

Not all of you have had the experience of standing in line at the DMV, having your picture taken, and being handed that golden ticket to freedom, but you will have your turn someday.

There's a lot to learn before you can take your driving test – the rules of the road, how to drive in dangerous conditions, and the dreaded parallel parking.

But, there are some things that aren't outlined in the driver 's manual; things that are essential if you are going to drive safely and avoid accidents.

Can you guess what the biggest cause of car accidents is today?

(Allow students to respond.)

Distracted driving.

When a driver is distracted, he or she can cause an accident and endanger not only their own life, but also the lives of others on the road.

Have you ever heard of the word "rubbernecking?"

That's when people just have to look at something going on outside of the car, on the side of the road.

They slow down and sit up a little straighter so they can see more of the action.

Rubbernecking can lead to accidents or cause traffic to be backed up for hours just because one person had to slow down and see what was going on outside their car.

Unfortunately, there's a danger that is far more likely to cause you distraction on the road, something almost all of us carry around with us all the time – cell phones.

(Hold up your phone.)

There's a reason texting, and even talking on the phone in some places, while driving is illegal.

People who use their phone while driving are almost three times more likely to get into an accident than those who don't.

Just like there are distractions when driving, we have distractions in our spiritual lives too.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 (NCV):

"We are surrounded by a great cloud of people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back.

Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne."

Our goal as Christians is to "look only to Jesus"...to focus on our relationship with God.

But it's so easy to get distracted.

The Bible tells us to "remove from our lives anything that would get in the way".

In other words, don't get distracted from your personal relationship with Jesus.

Distractions come in many forms: sin, problems, successes, friends, family, school, girlfriends/boyfriends, etc.

Instead of focusing on the distractions, focus on Jesus.

Having a quiet time where you dedicate a chunk of your day to being with God is a great place to start.

It gives your relationship with God a solid foundation.

Note: Use this free lesson to help students develop a quiet time in their lives.

Coming to youth group (or church), singing praise and worship songs, and attending a small group are some other ways to focus on God.

But what about the rest of your life?

You spend about 7 hours a day at school.

You might play sports or do some other after school activity that takes up a few hours a week.

You're on your phone texting, watching youtube videos, snap chatting, and on Instagram.

You might watch some TV on Netflix too.

Or maybe you do other stuff in your spare time.

Most of your life is spent doing these things.

Why do you separate everyday activities from your relationship with God?

How can you focus on God while doing what you do all day long?

The key is to look for what God is doing in your life and those around you.

Be aware that God is always doing something in your life.

He's always up to something good.

Just ask God to show you what he's doing, then be on the lookout for what that might be.

Trust your gut.

Trust the Holy Spirit's soft voice within you.

Be willing to respond to whatever it is that he's showing you.

Here's a couple of examples...

Let's say you have a science teacher that you really hate.

She's mean to you and your classmates.

She gives you a lot of homework, and her tests are really difficult.

Instead of just complaining about how horrible she is, maybe you could pause and ask God what to do about the situation.

Maybe this situation is an opportunity for you to learn patience and humility.

Boom! There's God at work in your life.

Maybe you start crying during a scene in a movie on Netflix (use a personal example here if applicable).

You're moved deeply.

Maybe that's God speaking something to you in that moment.

That could be God at work in your life.

Let's say your best friend does something horribly mean to you.

So bad that it ends your friendship.

You pause and ask God for help and insight into the situation.

Maybe that friendship needed to end so that you could open up yourself to other friendships that are even better for you.

That's God at work in your life.

(Give an example in your own life).

Instead of putting "time with God" and "time doing life" in separate compartments, blend them together.

Notice what God is doing in your everyday life as you go to school, hang out with friends, play sports or other activities, spend time on social media, etc.

Okay, here's another idea to think about.

The distraction is sometimes the way.

What often looks like a distraction away from God can actually bring you closer to God.

Let's take a look at the life of Joseph.

His full story is written in Genesis 37-50.

Joseph was misunderstood by his family, rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery.

He became the slave of Potiphar, an officer to the king of Egypt (the Pharaoh).

Read Genesis 39:3-6.

"Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord made Joseph successful in everything he did. So Potiphar was very happy with Joseph and allowed him to be his

personal servant. He put Joseph in charge of the house, trusting him with everything he owned. When Joseph was put in charge of the house and everything Potiphar owned, the Lord blessed the people in Potiphar's house because of Joseph.

And the Lord blessed everything that belonged to Potiphar, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left Joseph in charge of everything he owned and was not concerned about anything except the food he ate."

Joseph remained loyal to God.

The situation forced him to focus on God, who proved himself faithful to Joseph.

God gave him favor with Potiphar, who put Joseph in charge of his entire household.

This was a big deal for a servant. It was an honor and privilege to be in that position.

Then, things took a dive for the worse.

He was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and put in jail, but Joseph continued to focus on God.

Here's what happened next.

Read Genesis 39: 21-23:

'But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness and caused the prison warden to like Joseph. The prison warden chose Joseph to take care of all the prisoners, and he was responsible for whatever was done in the prison. The warden paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and made him successful in everything he did."

God continued to show up in Joseph's life.

The very thing that could have distracted Joseph from God, being falsely accused and put in jail, was just another opportunity for God to show up.

Joseph interprets a dream for some people close to the king, and almost gets a "get out of jail free card" because of it.

Unfortunately, he remains in jail for another 2 years.

The Pharaoh has a bad dream, and Joseph is called in to interpret it.

The dream meant there will be 7 years of plenty food, followed by 7 years of famine.

Then, check out what the Pharaoh told him:

Read Genesis 41:39-40.

"So the king said to Joseph, "God has shown you all this. There is no one as wise and understanding as you are, so I will put you in charge of my palace. All the people will obey your orders, and only I will be greater than you."

Joseph literally went from jail to being the second in charge of Egypt.

He was later reunited with his family, and found it in his heart to forgive his brothers.

Wow. What an amazing story!

Joseph's story reminds us that what appear to be distractions away from God can actually bring us closer to God.

The distraction is the way.

The problem is the way.

Any one of these events could have turned Joseph away from God.

He could have become bitter and angry towards his brothers and the unfair circumstances.

However, he chose to let those circumstances bring him closer to God.

What problems or distractions are you facing that could bring you closer to God?

Take a moment to reflect on that question.

End in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some examples of distractions that get in the way of your relationship with God?
- Do you find it hard to focus on God in everyday life? Why or why not? Explain.
- What are some ways you stay focused on God?
- What is God doing in your life right now?
- What is God doing in the lives of your friends or family right now?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DOUBT

Bible: Psalm 10 (*preferably from the Message*)

Bottom Line: Doubt is often the evidence of faith.

LEADER PREP

Sometimes we get really nervous when students express their doubts or question their faith.

Yet, for many, the time they doubted and asked those tough questions, in retrospect, is actually a time when they were 'chewing on their faith'.

A common response from adults to those types of questions is - "just have faith" or "pray more" ...which can be a point of frustration when those are the exact questions that students are asking in the first place!

If instead, we can engage in discussion and take the time to talk with students through their questions, it can have a huge impact on their spiritual growth.

It is an honor when students come to us with their questions and doubts because it's an evidence of faith: a faith that is wanting to engage and think and wrestle.

So, the next time you have a concerned parent come to you with worries that their youth is having doubts, remind them that doubts are often just the beginning of a search for truth. If those doubts are engaged and patiently chewed on together, it can build faith.

And even more, that God WANTS to hear what we are thinking and struggling with, yes, even you as a leader.

He wants to walk with you through those doubts.

He is loving and patient.

He can be trusted.

He can take your questions and He wants to hear them.

And you can also be sure that the questions that you wrestle with God with, will be asked by someone else somewhere down the road, so ask away!

OPENING GAME – I DOUBT IT

SUPPLIES

- Bible trivia (from your brain or find some online!)
- Notecards
- Pens for each youth

Say: (in an overly dramatic voice)

Today, we are going to play a game that will test even the best Bible scholars among us.

You will scratch your heads in agony as you doubt if you truly do know the right answer. Only the bravest should step forward.

Ask for 6 brave volunteers who feel confident in their Biblical knowledge.

Have the volunteers go in the other room to spend time with their Bibles (make this a funny challenge), making sure that they cannot hear what is going on in the room.

Tell the group once the volunteers are in the other room: Today we are going to try to make our Biblical scholars doubt their answer to these questions.

I want to see your best arguments and confusion tactics, ok?

I will bring the contestants in one at a time and ask them one question each, and once they answer, try to make them second-guess their answer.

Then we will call the next scholar in and on and on.

Once the volunteer has answered the question (or attempted to answer) have them join the group.

It will be funny to see their reactions as they realize they have been tricked into doubting their answers.

After the game, ask the contestants:

What was the most difficult thing about answering the trivia questions with others trying to make you doubt your answer?

Did you doubt whether you had the right answer? Why or why not?

How is this game like trying to figure out what you believe?

Is it ok to doubt? Why or why not?

TEACH - YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DOUBT

Today, we are talking about doubt.

Doubt can be a tough topic, and today you might be surprised by what you will discover.

I want everyone to take some index cards and a pen.

As we talk about doubt, if you think of a question or a doubt that you have, please write it down on those cards.

Don't put your name on it because if it were me and my name were on it, I might not write out my honest doubts.

It's hard to admit that you have doubts.

I know because I have had doubts.

Share, if it isn't too fresh, some of the doubts that you had when you were younger in the faith.

For example, maybe you doubted about prayer or the problem of evil and why bad things happen.

Share honestly, but don't 'rip the bandaid' off too much with this short sharing.

Would it surprise you to hear that many of the greatest Christians throughout time have had serious doubts and questions about the faith?

Feel free to choose one of the prominent Christians mentioned in this article:
<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/7-prominent-christian-thinkers-who-wrestled-doubt>

King David in the Bible was said to be a man after God's heart, and even he had questions.

Read Psalm 10.

What were some of the questions that David asked of God?

What did you think after reading this Psalm, especially knowing that it was written by a man who truly loved God?

So, let me ask you: Do you have doubts?

Do you secretly worry that your questions or doubts are wrong?

Maybe some of you have already written questions down on your cards....and most of you have questions but are afraid to write them down.

Let me share a few things that doubt says about us:

#1 - Doubt sometimes shows that we have faith.

Expressing the fact that you have questions about God or faith or the Bible is a really scary and brave thing to admit.

And unfortunately, some adults and even pastors can feel uncomfortable with questions, but God does not have a problem with the questions.

In fact, God says that we should come to him with our requests and our needs

Many Christians have found that when they come to God honestly with their questions, that something amazing happens, which leads to...

#2 - Asking questions of God requires that we have faith that He is there and loves us.

Think of any relationship in your life: when you get to the point that you can ask honest questions, that is when you know that your relationship is close.

You aren't putting on a show or acting like everything is fine, but being honest and vulnerable.

That takes faith.

#3 - Doubt can lead us closer to God and help us grow in our faith.

Many Christians who are very strong in their walk with God will point to the times that they had a crisis of faith or asked serious questions.

Why do you think it works that way?

How can doubt bring you closer to God?

Imagine that you go to God with those doubts and questions that make you worry that you aren't strong enough and that you actually have him answer?

God wants us to ask him questions.

God wants us to come to him with those questions.

And through that searching, amazing growth can happen in your life.

#4 - Doubt can lead to answers that strengthen you and prepare you for real life, which can be tough.

One of the main questions that people ask about is "why do bad things happen?"

Maybe share your own struggle with this question.

And though there are no easy answers, when you go to God with these questions, you learn things about him.

That he is loving and fair always.

That he knows our hearts and motives, and we don't have to ever worry that He doesn't understand us or 'get' us.

5 - Doubt can lead you closer to God if you just simply go to Him.

Does it mean that He will immediately answer you?

No, probably not.

And God has shown a habit of answering His children in strange ways, such as whispering to them, speaking in burning bushes, and even in the life of a tiny baby born in a manger.

But this is something you can be sure of: God wants to talk to you. He wants to hear what you are thinking, and if you listen or watch... you might just be surprised in how God talks with you about your questions.

Maybe someone will come up to you with just the thing you were asking or you hear a song with words that really speak to you.

It might take years or seconds, but keep on going to God and waiting on those answers.

And know that God loves you.

You are safe asking him...questioning him.

I want you to take a minute and just write down the questions and doubt that you might have.

Don't put your name, but know that I will be here afterwards to talk if you want to come up and say "hey, that was my question...can we talk more about this? "

And I will take these questions and try to answer these questions in lessons the next few weeks.

I was going to read them out loud in a minute, but only to show you all something really important, so write on the card “Don’t read out loud” if you don’t want me to read it.

Give the students a few minutes (some will finish quickly, some will take longer) and pass them in to you.

Read the questions/doubts slowly and making sure to not let this become a time to laugh at others or try to guess who wrote what as this might be very vulnerable for some.

As you read, you will likely find very similar questions, which is a great insight into the group of where to go with future lessons.

After you have read the questions, ask:

Were you surprised by any of the questions?

Raise your hand if you have asked any of these questions at some time in your life?

(Hopefully, most of the students will raise their hands).

I hope you see through this simple exercise that you are not alone in your doubt or your questions.

Share some of the questions that you yourself have asked.

If there are questions that you feel a need to immediately answer address those with the group at this point as you feel is age and situationally appropriate.

What questions or doubts did you hear a couple of times as I read?

I hope this lesson gives you some peace in realizing that no one has all the answers.

No one has it all together in this faith thing, and that is actually a good thing because it is in asking questions sometimes that we learn.

It is the questions that can drive us to really depend on God and one another in ways we wouldn’t if we had all the answers.

God loves us just as much, if not more, after hearing these questions and doubt than he ever has.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What questions did you hear that were asked the most by the group?
- How does it make you feel to know that everyone has questions or doubts at some point?
- What is the one question that you would ask God if he were sitting next to you right now?
- What are some of the ways that God might answer your questions or doubts?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON EASTER

Title: Empty is a Good Thing!

Bible: Luke 24:1-8; Mark 8:31; Romans 6:6-11

LEADER PREP

When you think about Easter, what do you think about? (repeat their answers)
Easter bunny... Candy... Family get togethers... Pastel colors?

All of those things are good and cute, but when you think about the true meaning of Easter, those seem so empty.

And when it comes to the true meaning of Easter, empty is a good thing!

Normally the concept of something being empty isn't really a good thing, is it?

Empty...it brings about unneeded stress.

Empty gift cards...

Empty coffee cup...

Empty wallet!!

So, empty equals no good, right?

You see everybody and their momma gets together for Easter to celebrate a holiday that is to them...empty.

But I'm here to tell you today that...

TEACH

Point #1: Empty is a good thing.

When we look at Easter in the proper light, and we understand what really happened, and what was going on, and why we celebrate Easter... empty is a good thing.

When Jesus was murdered, and nailed to a cross, they buried him in a tomb, basically a cave, and rolled a huge heavy stone in front of the tomb.

Then three days later something unbelievable happened. The tomb was empty.

Luke 24:1-8 it says this...

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground.

Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered that he had said this.

Point #2: Empty is proof.

Now let's back up a minute. Let's look earlier during Jesus' ministry when he said had to go through this to his disciples.

Mark 8: 31 (NLT)

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.

Proof Jesus is who he says he is.

Ever heard someone make a bunch of claims, but couldn't back it up?

Jesus didn't do that.

We just read in Mark that Jesus said he would die and rise again after three days....and he backed it up.

Now I can follow somebody who makes a claim as huge as this, and then backs it up!!

Point #3: Empty is powerful.

Jesus has power over death

Because Jesus died and rose again, because he Jesus is who he says he is, Jesus has power of sin's greatest weapon... death.

You know for something to have life, something else has to die.

Did anyone eat some fruit today?

It had to be disconnected from its tree, its life source; it had to die to give you life.

Jesus is the one who says I can give you life, I can make it so that you will never really die... that even after life on earth is done with, you will live with me forever... because that is how much I love you!!

The empty tomb shows us that Jesus has power over death, he looked death straight in the eyes, he took death's best sting... and overcame it!!

How amazing is that!!

Point #4: Empty is permanent.

You know plenty of people visit Jerusalem every year.

Plenty of people walked down some of the same roads that Jesus may have walked down.

One of the places people love to visit is the place where historians believe Jesus was buried... and guess what?

Till this day, the tomb is still empty!!!

Read Romans 6:9 (NLT).

We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.

Jesus wasn't in the tomb 3 days after he died... he isn't in the tomb today... and he never will be!!

Jesus is God and is alive forever!

His body wasn't stolen, it wasn't in the wrong tomb, it wasn't some magic trick....

So, when we look at the true meaning of Easter and everything Jesus did for us on the cross...empty is a good thing!!

Empty means Jesus is who he says he is,

Empty means Jesus has power over death,

And empty is permanent...

Jesus is permanently alive and death will never overcome him again.

When we decide to follow him instead of following our own selfish desires, we too can begin to really live!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your favorite Easter candy?
- Why is the concept of something being empty usually considered a bad thing?
- When it comes to Easter, how is empty a good thing?
- What thing in your life seems “empty” right now?

EASTER YOUTH GROUP LESSON

Bible: Matthew 28: 1–10

Bottom Line: With God’s help, the power of sin in your life can be broken!

SUPPLIES

Opening Game

- One three-foot swimming noodle per student. Cut noodles in half, giving each player a three-foot noodle.

Optional – an equal amount colored bracelets to separate teams (2 colors). An equal amount of colored bracelets to separate the teams. Two colors, one color for each team.

Alternative is to put boys on one team and girls on another (try and get an equal amount of players on each team).

Teach

- One donut. Substitute something else if your students don’t absolutely love donuts.
- Skateboard - borrow one from a student.

OPENING GAME: EPIC NOODLE BATTLE

Split up the group into two teams of even number of players.

Give each student a three-foot swimming noodle and a bracelet to wear on their wrist.

The bracelet identifies the teams.

The goal of the game is to hit players on the opposing team (below the waist) with the noodle.

If a player is hit, she is “dead” and sits down on the ground.

Dead players cannot move from the spot they were hit, unless they are resurrected.

A player from the same team can hit “dead” players with the noodle and “resurrect” them to life.

Resurrected players are back in the game and continue playing.

The goal is to hit all players on the opposing team, declaring them all “dead”.

Once successful, declare that team as the winner.

If you need to end the game before all players on one team are “dead”, call time when appropriate.

Whichever team has the least amount of “dead” players wins.

Variation: If you have access to a large building, with a lot of empty rooms, then open up the building as your playing area.

Students will enjoy the large playing area and hiding in the many room (it makes the game more exciting).

After the game, say: Congrats to the winning team! In today’s message, we will be focusing on Jesus’ “death” and “resurrection.”

Sound familiar?

Ha, that’s right.

We just played a game involving “dead” & “resurrected” players.

Let’s talk about this a few minutes.

Discuss the following questions:

If you were Jesus’ best friend, what would be going on in your mind when he died on the cross? What emotions would you be feeling?

If you were Jesus’ best friend, what would be going on in your mind when he rose from the dead? What emotions would you be feeling?

Why do you think Jesus’ resurrection is so important to us today?

TEACH - EASTER

SUPPLIES

One donut. Substitute something else if your students don’t absolutely love donuts.
Skateboard - borrow one from a student.

(Note: This experience could trigger the emotions of some students who have experienced a death of a family member or friend. In the event that occurs, please be sensitive to the student’s emotions and feelings. If necessary, pull the student aside to talk through the issue and pray together. Look at it as a ministry opportunity.)

Close your eyes and imagine the events I am about to describe happen to you.

I want for you to imagine in your mind one of your close friends.

Choose a friend and get a clear picture of him or her in your head.

As I read through the following events, picture they are happening to you.

You're at home watching your favorite show on TV while sitting on the sofa.

Your mom enters the room and asks you to turn off the TV.

You can tell she has something important to tell you by the tone of her voice.

She tells you that your friend has died in a car accident.

Your friend's death troubles you deeply—you are sad, mad and confused.

You are at the funeral a few days later when all of a sudden someone notices the casket is empty.

The family starts to complain to the funeral home only to soon realize an amazing miracle has taken place.

Your friend is alive.

In fact, she enters the room appearing to be quite normal.

Question: What would you be thinking & feeling at that moment?

When Jesus died on the cross, his closest friends and family were devastated.

They loved and cared for him deeply.

When they discovered he was alive, they were thrilled!

Their thoughts and feelings were probably similar to what you would experience in the same situation.

Read Matthew 28:1–10 (NCV).

The day after the Sabbath day was the first day of the week. At dawn on the first day, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary went to look at the tomb. At that time there was a strong earthquake.

An angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, and rolled the stone away from the entrance. Then he sat on the stone.

He was shining as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The soldiers guarding the tomb shook with fear because of the angel, and they became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid.

I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified.

He is not here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would.

Come and see the place where his body was. And go quickly and tell his followers, 'Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there.'

Then the angel said, "Now I have told you."

The women left the tomb quickly. They were afraid, but they were also very happy. They ran to tell Jesus' followers what had happened. Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings."

The women came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my followers to go on to Galilee, and they will see me there."

Say: You may have heard this story before, but have you ever thought about why it is so important that Jesus came back from the dead?

Today we are going to explore that question, and you might be surprised at the answer.

(Hold up the donut)

**Note: feel free to use something else that your group would really like if donuts aren't appealing enough.*

Who likes donuts? Who is a really big fan and would like to eat this one?

(Pick a student to come upfront.)

Hi there, what's your name? Great, before you eat this.

I am going to put it right under your nose, but you can't have it yet.

(Put it under the student's nose.)

Now, smell this yummy donut.

Smells good, doesn't it? I want you to hold it now, but you still can't eat it.

(Hand the donut to the student.)

What's going through your mind right now?

(Get response.)

I bet your mouth is watering and you can't wait to eat it.

Well, you can't have it yet. But you will soon, so hang on.

I've got a few more things I want to share with everyone.

So, while I do that. You just hold up the donut. But don't eat it yet.

I have a love-hate relationship with hot, warm donuts.

I love them because they're soooo good (especially when they are warm and gooey), but I hate them because they aren't very healthy.

I try to eat a healthy diet, and donuts aren't on the list of good things to eat. But once I smell and see yummy donuts, I simply can't resist.

A certain kind of power comes over me.

I will try with all my strength to not eat one, but I just got to have it.

So warm, tasty and soooooo goooooood!

(Talking to the volunteer with the donut)

Has it been difficult not eating the donut?

Why or why not? *(Get a response)*

You've done a great job, go ahead and eat it.

Let's give him a round of applause. You can go sit down now.

It's hard to resist what I call, the "power of the donut".

Donuts are a great illustration of the power of sin.

For many of us, we can't resist the tempting power of the donut. Like the donut, sin has power over us.

In fact, its power is much stronger.

Before we surrender our lives to Jesus, we can't break the power of sin. In some area of our lives, sin will control and overpower us.

And that sin blocks us from having a forever friendship with Jesus.

SIN was powerful enough to kill Jesus.

Although Jesus was whipped, wore a crown of thorns, nailed to a cross and stabbed on the side – none of those things killed him.

What killed Jesus was the weight of all the sins of the world.

The Bible tells us that SIN crushed and killed Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus came back to life.

Why is that so important?

Because he broke the power of sin!

Sin killed him, but God's power raised him from the dead!

With God's help, the power of sin in your life can be broken!

Jesus broke the power of sin in his life when he came back from the dead.

When we surrender our lives to Jesus and follow Him, we are given the same power to overcome sin in our lives.

What does that look like in everyday life?

God gives you the power to say no when all your friends are going out partying and drinking, and they want you to join them.

God gives you the power to say no when you're all alone online, and are tempted to go to that website you know you shouldn't.

God gives you the power to say no when you and your boyfriend/girlfriend are all alone late at night....and you really want to have sex.

Who can give some more examples? (Get responses)

(Hold up the skateboard)

Who likes to skateboard and is pretty good at it?

I need someone to show us a skateboard trick. Who wants to do that? (Pick a volunteer)

Okay, thanks for coming up here. Go for it.

(Allow the volunteer a few minutes to show everyone a trick.)

Great job!

I have a few questions for you.

How long have you been skateboarding?

When you first started, did you fall down a lot?

When learning a new trick, do you still sometimes fall down?

Thanks for sharing! You can have a seat now. (Volunteer goes back to his chair.)

When you first learn something new, such as skateboarding, you're going to fail a lot.

But over time, you get better.

Like how you saw (name of volunteer) do those cool skateboard tricks.

At first, he probably messed up a lot.

Even when you get really good at something, you're going to mess up some.

You will never be perfect at anything. But you do get better over time with practice.

It is the same with sin.

The first step is to surrender your life to Jesus.

You then have access to God's power to overcome sin.

But you're still going to sin, mess up and fail.

The goal is to start relying on God's power to resist sin now. Over time, with God's help, you're going to get better.

One day you will be like a pro-skater, where, for the most part, you do what is right and live life God's way.

You will still mess up every once in awhile, like any pro-skater does, but for the most part you are overcoming sin in your life.

Note: Consider allowing students an opportunity to get prayer for whatever issues they're struggling with. Do that in small groups, ask students to come to the front for prayer, or whatever method you feel comfortable with. This is a great opportunity for a time of prayer.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ENCOURAGEMENT

Bible: 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Philippians 1:3-11

Bottom Line: We are called to encourage one another. Our words can either build up or tear each other down.

SUPPLIES

- Colored paper with the name of each student in your group written across the top. (Even make a paper for students who are not present and these will be sent to them to encourage them.)
- Pens for each student
- Encouraging Christian music to play for the group.
- Envelopes and postage to mail letters to absent students.

LEADER PREP

Our prayer is that this lesson will grow into a ministry of encouragement for your students.

Take time before the lesson to write down the names of the students in your church, even and especially those who might not be active.

Write one name per page which will be passed around to the students in the group to write words of encouragement to the person named on the sheet.

Prior to the lesson, write words of encouragement to each student on the sheet to give you a chance to think and pray about the words that you share with each student.

Pray for each student as you write on their sheet.

Write a letter of encouragement to your group to read out loud.

Look to the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians as you pray for your group and pray that God would lead you in words to write to encourage them.

Make the letter personal and affirming, pointing out the strengths that you see in the group.

OPENING GAME— Cheerleader Huddle

Say: How many of you have been to a game with cheerleaders?

What are some of the cheers or phrases that they say to encourage the team?

Write their ideas down, and add any others such as “You Rock!”, “Way to go”, etc.

Ok, we are going to use these cheers in this game: Cheerleader Huddle.

Let’s get in a circle, and I need one person to volunteer to be the first cheerleader.

Your challenge is to go to each person in the circle and yell out, cheer out, or whatever you need to do - using one of these phrases to make someone in the circle smile.

Circle - your challenge is to NOT SMILE.

Cheerleader - get creative, but you cannot touch the person you are cheering to.

Be funny, be serious, do a cartwheel, just be creative to make them smile.

If someone smiles, then they become the cheerleader.

Then, go to the person beside them to the left and go around the circle trying to make someone smile.

If you go around the circle and no one smiles, choose another ‘cheer’ and maybe add a tumble!

If you find that a student struggles to make anyone smile, nonchalantly join the circle and relieve them by smiling or maybe talk to some of your other leaders beforehand to help those who struggle out...for some introverted students, this activity could be very stressful.

After the game, ask:

Which cheer was the toughest to not smile through?

What methods seemed to work the best to make someone smile?

Which cheer did you like the best?

Which phrase would be a phrase that could really encourage you and why?

TEACH

You might have guessed that today we are going to be talking about cheering one another on, or encouraging one another.

Raise your hand if you can remember (almost word for word) a time that someone said something harsh to you that hurt you.

Leader could share at this time a personal story in which the words of another stuck with them in a negative way.

How many of you know the children's rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones..."

Allow the group to finish the phrase.

But, think about those words that have been spoken to you that still sting.

They hurt and they can stay with you for days, weeks, or even years.

It is a sad reality that there are many people who still carry the scars of words said to them as little children as adults.

Words that the person who said them probably doesn't even remember saying.

Our words to one another really do matter more than we can realize, and that is why today's lesson is so important for our group.

I want you to think about a time when you were really encouraged.

Maybe someone said something to you that has stuck with you, and encourages you.

Invite them to share these instances and be prepared to share a personal story in which you were encouraged.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

We seldom realize that our words really do make a difference, both for good and for bad.

And God knows this.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus who spent his adult life encouraging Christians.

He wrote letters to the churches saying things like this:

Read Philippians 1:3-11.

How do you think Paul's words made the Christians in Philippi feel?

I want to read you a letter that I think will encourage you.

Read the letter that you wrote to the group in your prep time.

God made us for community and far too often we forget to encourage and lift one another up.

We forget to tell each other that we truly thank God for each other.

There is something really powerful that happens when we say or write words with the purpose of encouraging each other.

Don't just assume that others know how you feel, but let them know the talents and gifts that you see in them.

As our scripture said, "do this as the day draws near", which is a way of saying that we never know how much time we may have to bless one another.

Take the opportunity today to encourage one another.

I have sheets of paper that have each of your names written across the top.

We are going to take time today to encourage one another.

Have the group sit in a circle and if possible sit around tables.

Write a word of encouragement to the person named on the sheet and then pass that sheet to the person on your right and just keep passing.

Remember to be encouraging.

This isn't the time to write things that you might think are funny but could hurt someone.

Try doing this: As you get a paper, pray for the person at the top of the paper.

Ask God to help you to write something that He loves about them.

Write about how you see God shine through them or something that makes them special.

Really try to avoid writing things like "You are cool" or "I like your hair", but rather really pray about how you can say something that will encourage this person.

You could draw a picture, if you are more creative and prefer art over words.

And if you find that you want to write more, know that this might be just the beginning of you really taking a step to encourage others.

Write thoughts to each person today, but then feel free to go home and continue encouraging one another in creative ways.

Hopefully, this encouragement will last well beyond today.

Start circulating the papers and play some encouraging music for the students as they write.

Once everyone has completed their writing, pass the papers out to each student and let them know they they can read them whenever they prefer.

Mail the papers to those students who are not present and take this as an opportunity to let them know they are important and thought of.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to read the words of encouragement on your paper?
- Which words stick out to you most?
- Why do you think encouraging others is so rare?
- Who is someone in your life that you can encourage in this way this week?
- Challenge one another to choose 3 people that they can encourage through writing a letter, a text, an email, etc. over the next week.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ESTHER

Bible: Esther 4:12-13

Bottom Line: God wants to use us right where we are - for this time.

SUPPLIES

- Boxes of small paper bathroom cups (get at least a box per youth you expect)
- King and queen costumes (wigs, etc.)
- A surgical gown or some type of clothing which could be easily torn

OPENING GAME: THE TIME IS RIGHT

Divide the group into 2 equal teams.

Choose a large area, either inside or outside, to play this game—preferably the size of a basketball court.

Place half of boxes of small cups in the center of the play area.

Have each team go to opposite sides of the room and face the center.

Say: This game is all about time and how quickly what you work to build can be torn down... or even crushed.

When I say 'go,' the first team will run, open the boxes of cups and place the cups standing up around this room.

You can only take as many cups from the center as you can hold in your hands.

When I call 'time,' you will freeze where you are, and the other team will run as fast as they can to smash the cups that you put out.

When I call 'time' again, they will freeze and the first team will continue to place cups standing up and maybe even try to think of ways to protect their cups from being smashed.

But remember, everyone on your team must freeze when I call 'time' on your turn - so you can't push people away from your cups.

Just do what you can on your team's turn. Ready? Team 1, GO!

After all of the cups are smashed, switch which team will be putting out the cups and try the game again.

TEACH

What was the toughest part of this game?

What was it like to see all of your hard work destroyed in a moment?

Time is a complicated thing.

One day you think that you have a ton of time and are bored out of your mind; the next day time seems to go by in a flash.

Share a funny story in which time for you seemed to either stand still or stretch on...

Today our scripture is from a book of the Bible called 'Esther.'

One of the interesting things about this book is that when you read it, you can almost see the story play out.

I need a few volunteers to come and help act out this scripture because I don't want to read the whole book of Esther to you, but it would really make for some great storytelling.

Choose a volunteer who will ham this up:

Say: There is a beautiful Jewish girl named Esther (place the wig/gown on Esther).

She is living in a strange country along with her Uncle Mordy (give this person the 'tearable clothing' to put on).

News spreads that the King of this strange land is looking for a queen.

He holds a beauty pageant (call forward another student to play the part of the King and put on the Crown) to choose a queen.

Even though all the beautiful women from his country are there... he only has eyes for Esther.

But Esther has a secret: She is a Jew and the King doesn't know it.

Now, Esther is with the King, her Uncle Mordy hangs around the castle and overhears that Haman (choose a volunteer to be Haman and have them make a maniacal face) has made it his goal to kill all the Jews.

He creeps around, influences the King, and convinces him to kill all the Jews.

Haman is so happy he does an evil dance of joy (make sure Haman does this), but Uncle Mordy is creeping around too and over hears the evil plan and rips his clothes... (make sure Uncle Mordy rips up his tearable clothes) and tells Esther about the plan.

Say: Here, Uncle Mordy, can you read this?

Give Uncle Mordy a copy of Esther 4:12-13 from the Message to read.

Let's give all of our actors a hand and you all can sit down.

Now, how do you think this story ends? (*Give the group a chance to give their endings.*)

Well, the story gets even better.

Esther knows that the King has this rule: No one comes to meet with the King without being invited, unless they want to die.

He is a super friendly guy and she knows that she has to go and plead for her people, and also for herself, but this will mean putting herself at the King's mercy.

Esther goes to the King and he basically tells her she can have whatever she wants.

She comes up with this amazing plan to reveal Haman's evil plot to the king.

Long story short, each of you should read the rest of what happens because it gets really bad for ol' Haman and in the end the King saves Esther and her people.

Think about how this story could have ended if Esther had not listened to Uncle Mordy's words to her?

Esther was living the good life.

She was the Queen, living in safety, and the King adored her.

He had no clue who she really was, and honestly, Esther knew that when she went to the King, he had every right to kill her according to the Law.

Think about how she felt putting on her royal robes and walking to what could be her death?

Maybe you aren't facing a king who will kill you if you enter uninvited, but each of us at some point in our lives face these moments where we have to choose: Who am I?

Am I going to do the right thing... or the easy thing?

Am I going to do what is best for me even if it hurts those I love? What about if nobody would ever know any different?

The story of Esther shows us that even though God is never mentioned in this book, there are so many 'coincidences' in this book that it is clear, without saying it, that God is at work behind the scenes helping Esther.

Think about your life right now. Your friends.

Your family. Situations in your life right now.

Some of you have some pretty tough situations you are in and maybe no one but you know it.

God knows. He is saying that maybe you are here at this moment, at this time, with these people, to let God work behind the scenes for you.

What it requires is for you to be brave, honest, and to take those steps that only you could take.

Maybe you have a friend that you are aware is going down a bad path. It would be simple to just be silent, right?

Maybe God has put you right in their path to speak the truth to them and to go to them like Esther went to the King; she took a chance saying something that might make them angry.

Or maybe you are on a team or in a group in which it is easiest to just blend in with the crowd, but you see things happening that shouldn't be happening.

You see people being hurt who don't deserve it.

Be like Esther and do the right thing.

You are right where you need to be... right for this time.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What would you have done in Esther's position?
- Which character in this Bible story could you be playing right now? Esther? The king? Uncle Morty? Haman?
- What are some of the situations that you have been in when speaking up is very hard? Are you currently facing situations like this?
- What do you think it means to be in a certain place and a specific time for a reason?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON EVANGELISM

Bible: Matthew 13:44

Topic: Telling others about Jesus

OPENING GAME – HIDDEN TREASURE

SUPPLIES

- A “treasure” (something like enough candy for the winning group)
- Clues written down to the location of the treasure: both true and false

Before the game starts, hide the treasure somewhere in the building, or outside, if that works with your location.

Split the students into two groups.

Choose one student from each group and pull them aside.

Tell them where the treasure is, but tell them that they cannot give their teammates any hints at all.

Send the surely confused students back to their groups and tell everyone to start looking for the treasure—without giving them any rules or hints to where it may be.

After teams have been looking for a while, start passing out clues.

For every true clue you give the students, also give them a false clue.

After the students run around confused for a few minutes, eventually give them enough true clues to allow one of the groups to find the treasure.

Ask:

Wasn't that a confusing treasure hunt?

Did the false clues make it a lot harder to find what you were looking for?

Wouldn't it have been easier if I had given you directions at the beginning of the game?

TEACH

Say: Now, I'm going to confuse you all just a little bit more. What if I told you that (names of students you pulled aside at the beginning) knew where the treasure was the entire time?

Pause and allow students to react.

That's right, they knew exactly where the treasure was.

They even knew that some of the clues I gave you were wrong!

If they had spoken up, your entire team would be enjoying candy right now!

What kind of friend keeps their mouth shut when they know something that could help their friends?

Say: Sadly, a lot of you may be that kind of friend this year.

You see, as you go back to school, you're going to rub elbows with a lot of people who don't know Jesus on a daily basis.

You may even become close friends with some of them.

Ask: What kind of friend would you be if you didn't tell them about Jesus?

Say: If you know Jesus, you already have found the greatest treasure in the entire world.

Ask: What reasons do you have to not tell your friends about Jesus?

Do you agree that knowing Jesus is like having a treasure?

If you think of knowing Jesus as a treasure, does that motivate you more to share him with others?

Say: It's easy to just go throughout the school year focused on yourself.

It would be really easy for you to just worry about your assignments and making sure you got in with the right group.

It would be easier to *not* worry about telling people about Jesus this school year.

But if you did that, you would be withholding the secret to the greatest treasure there is.

Read Matthew 13:44.

"The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

Say: Isn't that verse so cool?

It shows us how excited we should be over the fact that we know about Jesus and Heaven.

The man in this story was so excited that he rushed to give away everything he had so he could get the treasure.

Now, if he was that excited, don't you think he told all of his friends once he got the treasure?

WRAP UP

Maybe you've never thought of having a relationship with Jesus as having a treasure.

I hope that after reading that verse, you will.

Think of how many people in your school don't know Jesus and are just blindly wandering around looking for something.

Just like in the game, they don't have clear direction on where they should be looking.

They're receiving false advice on where they should be going.

They're waiting on someone to tell them something that makes sense.

You could be that someone.

Someone needs to tell the students at your school about the greatest treasure they could ever have.

Is it going to be you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FAITH

Bottom Line: Use this lesson with your youth group, student ministry, youth ministry or youth sunday school class to teach "trusting the voice".

SUPPLIES

- Items for obstacle course (could include chairs, cones, books, coats, shoes... basically anything that you would want the contestants to "avoid")
- Blindfolds

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

You will need room to set-up a sort of obstacle course.

This space can be as small or large as you would like it to be depending on the size of the teams competing.

GAME DESCRIPTION (for a small youth group)

Select six students and pair them up.

One will be the "voice" while the other will be the "contestant".

Have the "voices" stand at the end of the obstacle course while the "contestants" are blindfolded and placed at the beginning.

When the game starts the "voices" must guide their specific "contestant" to the finish line at the other end of the obstacle course.

The first "contestant" to cross the finish line wins.

GAME DESCRIPTION (for a large youth group)

Divide the group into teams (two or three works best).

Have each team select two players: one will be the "voice" the other will be the game's "contestant".

Have the "voice" stand at the end of the obstacle course.

Make sure that the "contestant" knows who is the "voice" and can recognize the sound of his/her voice.

Have the members from the other team surround the obstacle course.

Blindfold the “contestant” and place him/her at the beginning of the obstacle course.

When the game starts, the “voice” must guide the “contestant” through the obstacle course while the opposing team tries to distract the “contestant” with incorrect directions.

If the groups are very large the game leader has the option to limit the opposing team to using whispers as opposed to shouting.

In this scenario, there can be multiple “voices” and “contestants” competing on the same course if space allows.

The goal of the game is for the “contestant(s)” to be guided through the obstacle course by their “voice” despite the surrounding distractions.

Read Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. (New Living Translation)

Read Hebrews 11:1

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. (NLV)

As we saw in the game we just played, sometimes it can be really hard to follow a voice in the middle of all the distractions.

How can we find our way when we can't see where we are going and can hardly understand what our Guide is saying?

Even when we can hear Him, how do we know it is safe for us to follow?

The two verses that we just read are foundational for Christians when it comes to understanding how faith works.

In Psalm 119:105 we see that our Guide, the “Voice” that we need to follow is God's Word.

In Hebrews 11:1, we see that faith is what gives us strength to follow that “Voice” even when we can't see where it is leading us.

Make no mistake about it, faith takes hard work.

It takes trust, focus, and the ability to ignore the distractions around us.

Overall, faith requires us to understand that the true “Voice” knows the absolute best way through the giant obstacle course that is life.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was the hardest part about being the blindfolded person in the game?
- What are some of the distractions in life that make it hard to hear God's Voice?
- Why is sometimes so hard for us to use God's Word as our guide in life?
- What are some ways that we can shut out the “distractions” around us?
- How can we make our faith stronger?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FAMILY

Bible: Joshua 24:15

Bottom Line: Family can be amazing and messy, but a family that loves God together can be an awesome thing for the world to see.

LEADER PREP

God created us for relationship and there is no relationship quite like that of a family that is seeking God together.

Today's lesson might be the first picture that some students get of a family that could really change the world for God together.

Family can be a very dicey topic with youth because nobody's family is perfect.

Sadly, some of our teens' families are very far from perfect.

Family can also be wonderful and some of the students in your group might be a part of an amazing and godly family.

It's important to remember that sitting in your group could be students who have suffered at the hands of their family or ARE currently suffering, so pray even now that your words might bring them the healing and clarity that they need.

And for many of you, leaders, you might know in a very personal way the messiness of family.

Prayerfully ask God to give you the words to share to be honest, yet to not use the time with the youth as your own personal therapy.

Spend some time before this lesson thinking about the specific families of the students in the youth group and pray for those who you know might be struggling.

OPENING GAME – Family Charades

Divide the group into 2 teams.

You could have older siblings on one team versus the younger siblings or some other random grouping.

Teams will send a member of their team to act out one of the following family 'relationships' using words or actions to get their team to guess the word first.

Leader will tell the 2 opponents the word they are to act out and then say 'Go'.

Family Words:

- Cousin
- Brother
- Grandpa
- Godmother
- 3rd cousin
- Step mom
- Mother
- Uncle
- Grandmother
- Step sister

After the game, ask:

Which family relationships would you add to the list that weren't mentioned in the game?

What family relationships do you think are the toughest for people in general?

Which family member would you like to be like in your life? Why?

TEACH

Find some funny family photos to project (if you don't have any go to <http://awkwardfamilyphotos.com/> and find some hilarious options.

It would also be funny to find some funny photos of your family to show.

Say: We are going to show some pictures of families

Raise your hand when you see one that might as well be your family.

Have a good time with this activity.

Families can be super funny, awkward, messy... (add words that you think of when we talk about family.)

Give the students a chance to share their words, which will give you insight into where they might be in regards to thinking about family.

What emotions come to your mind when we talk about families?

Would it surprise you to hear that there are more dysfunctional families in the Bible than there are good ones?

There are some really messed up families in the Bible - brothers who sell their brother and then pretend that he is dead (Joseph), a brother who tricks his blind dad to think that he is his other brother (Jacob), a son who chooses his Dad's enemy over his dad (Jonathan), and then there are some really troubling stories in the Bible that we won't go into here, but just trust me...it gets really dark. You should read it!

But here is something to think about - why do you think that God created families?

What do you think God had in mind with moms and dads and children and grandparents?

There is one passage in the Old Testament that really does give an amazing idea of what God might have intended with families to look like:

Read Joshua 24:15.

Some of you sitting here might be the only Christian in your family, but this passage of scripture could be a reminder to you that YOUR family, when you are a parent, could be a picture to others of God's love.

If you have a story from your life of someone in your family who might have come to faith, or a relationship that has been reconciled, share it!

Ask yourself, if my family were asked to make a choice right now, would we serve God even if everyone around us was not choosing God?

What if your family didn't choose God, would you be able to say to them like Joshua did - "I am choosing God"?

Because for some of you, your family might not ever take the stand that Joshua made, but you won't always be the 'youth' or child in your family, right?

Someday, you will be the adult and maybe today you need to hear that YOU can be the one even right now to make that stand for your family, both now and in the future.

God can do amazing things in even the worst families.

Maybe some of us here have seen families changed by the love of God...and it is these stories that remind us to pray for our family, ESPECIALLY if your family is a hot mess!

Because God is in the business of redeeming lost lives.

Just like the Bible is full of stories of dysfunctional families and messed up people in them, the Bible also is full of stories in which truly messed up people are transformed into beautiful testaments of God's power.

Stories of lives changed and people who were hateful, selfish, and mean became true people of God.

Stories of forgiveness; Stories of joy and redemption.

And God can do that in your family.

It might not happen tomorrow or the next day or even in a year, but begin praying even today for God to do amazing things in the lives of your family members.

Some of you might have amazing parents, and if you do, thank God and thank them because it can be really easy to take them for granted.

Ask anyone who has had parents who are less than great and they will tell you not to ever take them for granted.

Sure, they might nag you or not let you stay out until 2 am, but if they love God, love you and are trying... you are one of the lucky few.

Maybe things that are really tough and hard are going on in your family, and if that's the case, please find an adult that you trust to share these things with because it is never ok for family to hurt you on purpose.

Maybe your family is ok, but there is some tension, which is tough.

Maybe your parents are divorced or family members are sick. These things can be really tough.

But know this: God sees your family issues and He is listening.

I want you to think of one relationship in your family that is not what it should be, and honestly, sometimes this is not your fault at all.

But picture them in your mind, and right now, let's pray for those relationships.

Pray with me:

God, I lift up (say the name of your family member to yourself right now).

Our relationship is (choose a word that would describe your relationship with them and say it now).

God, you are in the business of doing amazing things in people's lives, and I ask that you cover us in your love.

Help us to choose you, God. Amen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Give the youth a chance to share the family member they prayed for if they feel comfortable.
- Share about a family relationship that makes you happy. Why?
- Share about family relationship that is a challenge to you. Why?
- What dreams do you have for your family when you grow older and maybe have your own family?
- What do you wish your parents knew or would do?
- How could your family serve God and share his love as a family?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FATHER'S DAY

Bible: 1 John 3:1-3

Bottom Line: God is the perfect Father and shows us what love truly looks like.

SUPPLIES

- Cans of shaving cream
- Cocoa puffs cereal
- Hairdresser capes or trash bags with holes cut in them for the 'bearded contestants'
- Sunglasses or goggles for bearded contestants
- Towels
- Giant Father's Day Card and large markers
- Youtube video of David Crowder's "How He loves us" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCunuL58odQ>

OPENING GAME: BEARDED DECORATING PARTY

Game Options

For a large group: Choose 4 'contestants' to come forward and then choose 4 partners to help them and use this as an up-front crowd game.

For a smaller group: Divide the youth into pairs and one person will be the 'bearded one' and the other will try to throw the cocoa puffs in their 'beard'.

Be sure to give the bearded contestants a cape (or trash bag with a hole) to protect their clothing and the sunglasses or goggles to protect eyes from the shaving cream.

Have the 'bearded contestant' stand a few feet across from their partner with a bowl of cocoa puff cereal.

Next, have an adult make a beard using the shaving cream on each 'bearded' contestant.

On the word 'go', the partner will toss as many of the puffs as they can in a minute into the beard of their partner.

The bearded contestant with the most puffs wins!

TEACH

Share a funny story of your own dad.

Say: When I say “Father’s Day” what are the words that come to mind?

Write down what the youth say on the large Father’s Day card. These words will also be a helpful ‘gauge’ of how they are thinking regarding Father’s Day.

After you’ve written down their words, add this word: God.

Father’s Day can be a day in which we honor our dads or other important men in our lives, but it can also be a really tough day for those who have lost their fathers or wish they had a father to celebrate.

It can be easy to forget the most important Dad in our lives - God, our heavenly Father.

Read 1 John 3:1-3.

These words might sound simple, but imagine that you are hearing this for the first time.

You are a child of God.

God is your heavenly father.

And he loves you more than you could ever be able to measure.

There are no words big enough to explain how much your Father in heaven loves you.

The lengths that he would go to for you have no limits.

God loves you and you are a child of God.

How does that make you feel?

Give the youth a chance to share their thoughts.

You can see how much God loves you by looking at the cross: God showed his love for you by dying for you.

There is no price he wouldn’t pay for you.

He is the Daddy of all Daddies and you are the love of his life.

Isn’t that amazing?

Share about a time in which you realized the depth of God's love for you or ask if one of the teens would like to share.

Here is another amazing thing: God, the creator of the universe.

God who spoke the world into existence and created animals and plants and ecosystems... that God loves you.

God delights in you.

And God wants you to know him... God wants to share his thoughts and dreams with you.

See, God is not a distant father.

He doesn't just want you for a weekend.

He is in this thing with you.

God is never too busy for you.

You are his priority and his every thought is for you.

When you feel alone, unheard or forgotten, God is holding out his arms to you because you are his child.

And that simple fact changes everything.

As this song plays, there is a large Father's Day card and you can come and write a note to your Heavenly father because if anyone deserves a card on Father's Day it is your Heavenly Father.

Play David Crowder's "Oh how he loves us"

– <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCunuL58odQ>

Have adults ready to be able to pray with those who might find this sharing emotional.

Close with a prayer in which you present the Father's Day card to God.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- You are a child of God – how does that make you feel?
- How is God like an earthly father and how is God different from an earthly father?
- How do you think it could help people to realize just how much God loves them?
- What do you think God loves about you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FEAR

Bible: Isaiah 41:9-10

Bottom Line: We do not have to fear when we know that we have God by our side.

OPENING GAME - Bean Boozeled Challenge

SUPPLIES

- Bean Boozeled Jelly Bean Challenge (<http://www.jellybelly.com/beanboozled-challenge>)
- Spit cups
- Box filled with 'scary/gross' items such as sardines, crickets, play spiders or bugs, rubber snake, a baby doll (which to some is very scary!), clown toy, villain figure, etc.
- Scary 'fear' music
- Index cards for each student
- Pens
- Big bag

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Ask for 2 volunteers to 'face off' to the Bean Boozeled Challenge.

Spin the wheel to choose the type of jelly bean and then they eat the bean at the same time.

The trick with this game is that a 'good tasting' bean and a bad tasting bean look the same and you can only tell the difference once you bite into the bean.

Take pictures of the youths' faces as they eat the beans to have a hilarious photo collage.

Ask for the next 2 volunteers and continue until all of the beans have been tasted.

Spin the wheel provided in the game to choose the color of jelly bean to be tasted, hand the youth the beans, and on the count of 3, they eat the bean.

Provide 'spit cups' for contestants to spit out the 'bad beans'.

Next Game: The Box of Fear

Inside of this box, I have items which should strike terror in your heart.

Everyone will sit in a large circle and when the music stops, if you are holding the box, you have to reach in and grab an item.

You will have to hold onto that item for the rest of the night unless you are able to scare someone and make them jump...then they have to keep the item.

Play music (the scarier the better) and start passing the Box of Fear.

Remind the youth that they have to hold onto the object and they can only get rid of it if they scare another youth and make them jump.

TEACH

Large Group Questions:

What was something that you were really afraid of as a small child?

What helped you to not be afraid as a little child?

Hold up a large bag.

Imagine right now that you are a contestant in the popular show, *Fear Factor*.

What would be in this bag if I were to be holding something that you would truly be afraid of?

Share what would be in bag for you.

Share why this item would cause you fear.

Fear is something that all of us struggle with at some point.

Maybe you can remember lying in bed as a small child and being so afraid that the shadows on the walls were monsters, or being afraid of the dark.

Leader, share a story of a time that you were very afraid.

How many times have you been afraid of something only to find that it really wasn't that bad?

But no amount of telling yourself that it was 'ok' before that point seemed to help, did it?

Fear is a very real and powerful emotion.

And it can cause us to do some pretty crazy things, too.

So, let me ask you: What are you afraid of today?

Maybe it is your future.

Maybe it is what others think about you?

Many people fear death or someone you love dying.

Maybe it is that someone will find out something that you are ashamed of.

Maybe you are afraid of love; of disappointing someone.

Are you afraid that God will judge you?

The list could go on and on...

Everyone is going to get a notecard.

I want you to write down what your greatest fear is on that card and pass it to me.

Do not write your name on the card because I will be reading these outloud.

Give the youth a few minutes to write down their fears and pass them in.

Read the fears on the cards to the group.

How many of you were surprised to hear that others have the same fear as you do?

How did it make you feel to know that you are not the only one who gets afraid or fears certain things?

Were there any fears that we should add to this stack?

Give students a few minutes to share more fears. (Some to add might be: being alone, what others think of you, not having enough food.)

Now this list of what we fear would also change depending on where we are in life or what type of community we live in.

There are some places in the world today where people worry about violence or what they will eat.

They worry that war will break out or that their lives are in danger.

For them, fear is real and it is life or death.

Can you imagine living every day with that level of fear?

Just think about how your body feels when you are really afraid.

Sweaty palms.

Your stomach gets all queasy.

Every single inch of your body is on alert.

And each of us respond to fear in different ways.

Some of us freeze.

Others run.

And some of us fight, but regardless, we all know what it is like to be afraid.

Fear can truly be paralyzing and it can be very difficult to think clearly when you are truly afraid.

It is no surprise, then, that the Bible talks a lot about fear and being afraid.

Read Isaiah 41:9-10.

This scripture is one that we all should probably memorize because it is so important.

Is there really anything that we should be afraid of when we have God with us?

But it is almost like God knows that we will struggle with fear, isn't it?

He reminds us that he is with us.

And he tells us to not fear.

Why?

Because God is with us.

Say that with me: God is with us.

And not only that, He will strengthen us.

As if his presence with us isn't enough, he also gives us strength.

God knows that we will be afraid.

Over and over in scripture are these reminders: Do not be afraid.

Do not fear.

So, think about the situations that cause you to be afraid.

Now, picture yourself facing those situations WITH GOD.

Because that is the reality.

You do not face those things alone.

Hold up the index cards with their fears.

These things: Do not fear. God is with you.

Even those people who live in real fear every single day, God's promise is true for them also.

God is greater than all of our fears.

And he can and WILL give us the strength to face those fears.

I am going to read each of these fears again, and after each one, I want you to say these words: "Do not fear. God is with you."

Read each card and prompt the students to respond "Do not fear. God is with you" after each one.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What fear can we pray with you about?
- What times are the hardest for you to remember not to be afraid?
- When you think about your future, what causes you fear?
- How does it make you feel knowing that God is with you? Does it help you to face your fears?
- Have each student write "Fear Not, I am with you" on a note card. Challenge them to put this in a place where they can see it and read it each day.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FORGIVENESS

Bible: Matthew 18:21–35; Colossians 3:13

Bottom Line: Forgive others the way God has forgiven us.

OPENING GAME: HEAD SQUARE, 9-SQUARE

SUPPLIES

- One playground ball and some masking tape for each group playing the game.

We recommend setting up one playing area for every 20 players.

So, if you have 100 students, then setup 4-5 playing areas.

GAME PREP

Here's how to setup one playing area.

Using masking tape, make one large square that contains nine small, equal squares.

The nine squares should each be 4-5 feet high and wide.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

This game is a modified version of four square.

Here are the official rules of four square - <http://www.squarefour.org/rules>.

For this game, players use nine squares instead of four and use their head to hit the ball rather than hands.

For a detailed explanation of nine-square, go here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9-Square>.

Ask the following questions after playing the game: Was it easy or hard to use your head instead of hands when playing the game? Explain.

Say: It didn't feel natural to play with your head, did it?

You might even say it was awkward, wasn't it?

Today we're going to talk about forgiveness.

And the truth is that it doesn't come natural to us.

We have to work at it.

But the more we do it, the more natural it will become.

Optional: If players get real frustrated using their heads to hit the balls, then after a few minutes allow them to use their hands.

But make them work for it.

TEACH

Prepare: *During the teaching time, you're going to share personal examples describing two ways people often react to someone hurting or upsetting you.*

Be prepared to share a time when you ignored being hurt and a time when you were hurt and you got revenge.

Be prepared to also share the consequences of ignoring it and getting even.

Say: Today we're going to talk about forgiveness.

Is it easy or hard to show forgiveness to your classmates at school (or anyone for that matter)?

Think of the students in your class.

Imagine you are in the classroom and take a look around at everyone that would be there with you.

Do you see anyone who has ever done something to hurt or upset you?

When you think about what they did to you, how did you respond?

When others do something wrong to you, you have 3 choices for how to respond.

First, you could ignore what they said or did.

This might seem like a good decision, but you never get the chance to deal with your emotions.

When you hold on something, it eats away at you.

[Share a time when you ignored something and it ate away at you. Talk about how unforgiveness affected you.]

(Optional – Show a picture of a skin infection.)

An infection can get really bad when you ignore it and do nothing about it.

It can get really nasty.

When we ignore a wrong done to us, like an infection, it can eat away at our souls.

The second option is to get revenge.

You could do to them the exact same thing that they did to you.

Or better, you could do something even worse than what they did!

I think we all know that this is not the wisest choice.

For many of us, revenge is what comes naturally.

It's like a knee jerk reaction.

Your brother hits you for no reason, and you whack him on the head.

A classmate at school plays a prank on you, and you get even doing something even worse to him.

Share an example of when you got even with someone.

Talk about the negative consequences that occurred.

The third option, forgiveness, is much better than the first two.

You could choose to forgive the person for what they said or did.

Forgiveness allows you to give the whole situation to God and let Him help to fix the broken friendship.

Even if you can't be friends with the other person, God can work in you to heal your pain.

Forgiveness is always the best option.

It's not just the best of the three choices; it is also a command from Jesus.

Matthew 18:21-22 tells us about a conversation that took place between Jesus and the disciples.

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus responded to Peter by saying, "I tell you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."

The disciples must not have understood Jesus' response, so He explained it by telling them a story called a parable.

In the story, there was a King who wanted to collect the debts of all his servants.

Each of the servants had to go before the King and pay him what they owed.

If they could not pay, the custom was to be thrown in prison until the debt could be paid.

One of the servants owed a great deal of money to the King.

The Bible says that the debt was equal to 10,000 bags of gold!

I'm going to use these buckets to represent the debt of the servant.

There are 10 buckets.

Each bucket represents 1,000 bags of gold that the servant owed to the King.

Place 10 large buckets or flowerpots on stage to represent the debt.

Be sure to use large pots to emphasize the magnitude of the servant's debt.

When the King learned that the servant couldn't pay the debt, He ordered that all of the man's possessions be sold.

On top of that, the man, his wife, and his children were ordered to be sold as slaves!

The servant fell to his knees and begged the King to have mercy on him.

Matthew 18:27 says, *"The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."*

Can you believe that?

This massive debt was just erased, and the man was free to go!

After he left, the servant went and found another man who owed him money.

The Bible tells us that this man owed him around 100 silver coins.

I'm going to use this bucket to represent that debt.

This is nothing compared to that huge debt over there.

Place 1 small bucket or flower pot on stage to represent the second debt.

Make an effort to compare the two debts and the drastic difference in amounts.

The man fell to his knees and begged for mercy because he couldn't pay his debt.

Sound familiar?

Listen to what happened in the end of this story.

Read Matthew 18:30–34.

This man was forgiven so much (*point to large buckets*), and yet he couldn't forgive someone else for this little amount (*point to small buckets*).

The point Jesus was making was that we have all been forgiven for so much by God.

He chose to love us and offer us forgiveness for sin.

If we have been forgiven for so much, how can we not forgive a friend or classmate who has done something wrong to us?

Forgiveness is always the best option.

It's not easy to forgive others, but it is what Jesus commands us to do.

Even if the other person is not really sorry, we still have to forgive and give it over to God.

Colossians 3:13 says, *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

Remember, we should forgive others the way God has forgiven us.

SMALL GROUPS

Note: This small group activity is optional and would probably work best with junior high/middle school students rather than high school students.

SUPPLIES

Flash paper (1 per student) & Sharpie's. You can purchase flash paper here on Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/B00XKOJCWU/ref=dp_olp_new?ie=UTF8&condition=new.

However, if for any reason it is no longer active, then simply do a Google or Amazon search for “flash paper”.

Take those sheets and cut them into fourths leaving four smaller rectangles.

You can also do a search on Google for – flash paper magic.

You can find multiple other sources for the flash paper.

Each student will receive a piece of flash paper and a marker (Sharpie's work best).

Ask the students to write something that someone has done to them.

Something that they haven't yet forgiven.

Remember the paper is small and thin, so remind them they don't need to write every sin, just something that represents it.

Ask them to take some time and pray over the paper, praying for God to forgive those sins.

Then they should bring you the piece of paper.

Don't let the students do the lighting!

You should be stationed in an area with no flammable things close by sitting or standing behind a lit candle.

Take the student's paper and pray over it.

Then light just the edge of the paper and throw it into the air.

The paper will burn in a flash leaving behind no ashes or other residue.

Make sure you practice burning it before the students arrive.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What connection does this activity have with forgiveness?
- Are some things easier to forgive than others? If so, what actions are easier to forgive? What actions are harder to forgive?
- Have students take out their Bibles. One student reads Matthew 18:30–34 while everyone follows along in their Bible. Discuss the following questions:
- What do you think is the point of the story?
- Does it make it easier for you to forgive others knowing that Jesus has forgiven you on so many things? Why or why not?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ON FREEDOM (MEMORIAL DAY)

Bible: Luke 4:14-21

Bottom Line: Through Christ, we are free from sin and condemnation.

SUPPLIES

- 5 large poster boards with one of the following phrases written in large writing in the middle of each poster board: “to proclaim good news to the poor”, “proclaim freedom for the prisoners”, “recovery of sight for the blind”, “set the oppressed free”, “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”
- Large varied supply of newspapers and magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Markers and colored pencils

OPENING GAME: Jailbreak

Divide your group into two different teams.

Have each team choose a captain.

Set boundaries for the game that are very widespread, but clear.

Choose a central and easy to access space to be ‘jail’ which all the members of one team could easily fit in and get out of.

Choose a team to hide first. The other team will wait in jail while this team hides.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

When you are caught by the seeking team, you must walk to jail once you are tagged.

In order to be set free from jail, a member of their team who is NOT in jail must touch the jail and yell "jailbreak".

The game ends when everyone on the hiding team is caught and in jail.

Once everyone from the hiding team is found and in jail, switch sides that are hiding and seeking.

(Note: Game source from wikihow.com)

GAME DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ask the people who were the last to be caught (or who were never caught) what their secrets were for staying free.
- Now that you've played the game, what would you do next time to not get caught?
- How would you feel if you were really in jail?
- What did it feel like to be in jail and not able to get out?

TEACH

We are close to celebrating Memorial Day, which is a U.S. Holiday in which we honor those who have died while serving in the armed forces to protect our freedom.

Let's talk about Freedom, and not like 'Freedom from jail', but another kind of freedom.

It's really interesting that when Jesus began his ministry, he talked about freedom, which is surprising to some.

Read Luke 4:14-21

Divide the students into 5 groups.

Instruct students to demonstrate, in a cool visual way, what Jesus might have meant when he said what "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed him" to do in Luke 4:18-19 (which Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61:1-2).

Group 1: "to proclaim good news to the poor"

Group 2: "proclaim freedom for the prisoners"

Group 3: "recovery of sight for the blind"

Group 4: "set the oppressed free"

Group 5: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

Directions: In your small group, you will create a collage of the phrase that you have at the top of your poster board using pictures from magazines or drawing.

Cover your entire poster board.

Everyone will need to participate in sharing the amazing things Jesus fulfills.

Give the groups 10-15 minutes to complete their poster and then give each group a chance to share and display their posters while you are teaching.

Say: The people hearing Jesus say these amazing words from the scroll of Isaiah should have been amazed, but whether they were or not, we should be amazed.

Jesus said that the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Jesus not only read these words, but his actions backed up what he was saying.

Can any of you think of stories of Jesus healing that did fulfill these promises?

Examples: Jesus healing the blind, feeding others, healing those possessed by spirits. etc.

That's right, and Jesus also comes to bring these things to us.

You might not be in jail like in the game that we played, but Jesus always seemed to be saying one thing on the surface with a deeper meaning, and that's exactly what he was doing here.

Read Romans 8:1-2.

Let's focus on the freedom that comes through Christ.

Imagine that there is a person who is in prison for many, many years.

Now imagine the moment when the judge comes and says that they can go free. If that was you, what would you do?

Well, now imagine that you decide to just go ahead and stay in jail.

Does that make sense?

The doors are open, the locks are unlocked, and you are no longer chained, and yet, you stay.

That's the sad reality that many who are Christians still live in when they continue to live as if they are not free.

Can you think of any ways in which Christians could live as prisoners?

Jesus said that he came to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free—all which speak to different ways that Jesus can set us free.

Think of all the people in the world who are poor.

Remember that we are actually very wealthy because if you have clean drinking water or food to eat: you are rich.

But imagine what it must feel like to be poor.

What would it be like to not have food to eat?

What are some of the other challenges that being truly 'poor' comes with?

Allow students to share.

Being poor can be a very real sort of captivity, and many who live in these conditions feel like they are in prison.

Jesus is saying that he and his followers have a mission to help those who are poor to find freedom from poverty.

How could Christians help those who are in poverty?

How could you help the poor?

Or how could being blind be a form of imprisonment?

Allow the group to share their thoughts.

And there are other places where Jesus says that though we might have physical sight, many are spiritually blind.

What would it mean to be spiritually blind?

How many times have you felt like you just don't 'get' something in the Bible or wonder what Christ would want you to do?

This might be what Jesus was talking about, but he also said that there are times when those who others think are the strongest in their 'religion' are blind to the ways that God is moving or calling them.

It's a very powerful thought to think that though you might be able to see with your eyes, you might not be seeing with your spiritual eyes?

Next, Jesus also uses the idea of being captive or a prisoner.

Imagine being held somewhere and not being able to go free.

What emotions would you feel?

Listen to student's answers.

Here is the good news that Jesus comes to bring: You are free.

From whatever kind of chains or bondage or sin or blindness or poverty that you might be experiencing: You are free.

Jesus has set us free from all of the ways that you are not free right now.

So, ask yourself these questions:

Have I truly been set free from sin in my life or am I continuing to do things that I know God doesn't approve of?

That is slavery.

Slavery to sin.

Do you let worry, fear or anything else stop you from being free in Christ and his power? That is NOT FREEDOM, and as a Christian, it is like you are living in a prison cell that has been unlocked.

But listen again to the words from Romans 8: Jesus does not condemn you.

He wants you to be free.

Free in every sense.

Free to proclaim his good news and freedom to those in the world who are still captive.

He is calling each of us to fight with him to free people from the chains of poverty and despair.

He is calling us to join him in setting people free to truly live.

But it has to begin with you being free

If you are not free in Christ, let's ask that he would open your eyes and you would have the courage to accept the freedom that is yours.

Close in this prayer:

Jesus. Thank you for setting me free:

Free from sin. Free from despair. Free from worry.

Free from being held a prisoner of fear, or worry, or whatever it might be that is holding me hostage.

Help me to realize that I am free.

Amen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Read Isaiah 61 (entire chapter) with the small group.
- What other things were mentioned in this chapter that are being promised?
- Where do you see some of these being fulfilled today through the church?
- Which of these do you feel passionate about?
- Are there people or countries that are oppressed or struggling with poverty that we should pray for?
- If you feel comfortable, share an area of your life that during this lesson you've become aware that you are not free.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON FRIENDSHIP

Have you ever had a friend let you down?

Humans are certainly not perfect, if it hasn't happened already, inevitably someone who is close to you will do something that hurts you.

(Use a personal example of when a friend let you down or use the example below.)

Several years ago, I had a friend that I was very close to.

We traveled around the country in a worship band.

While he was in the process of moving, I let him live in my house.

Though I did not charge him rent, I asked that he help with some of the utilities.

His stay dragged on and he ended up failing to live up to our agreement, and it ended up costing me a lot of money that he never repaid.

I was hurt, angry, and disappointed. I allowed it to drive a wedge between us.

Years later, I really regret how I reacted.

We just recently began to reconnect, and it now seems silly that I allowed money to separate myself from a good friend.

Have you ever allowed the actions of a friend to drive you apart? (Have students raise their hand.)

What are some common things we do when a friend hurts us? (Get responses)

What's are some better ways to respond?

Let's read these verses and find out...

Read Proverbs 17:9 (NLT)

Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.

Read Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

These verses give us some key pointers on how to make friendships last.

As I said earlier, friends will make mistakes. They have faults (just as you do).

How you react will determine the future strength of your friendship.

In Proverbs 17:9 we see that forgiveness is essential, but notice what it says will drive a wedge between you... dwelling on the fault.

Often, when someone hurts me I have a hard time thinking about anything else.

It sticks in my brain whether I want it to or not. This, more than anything, has the potential to destroy a friendship.

True forgiveness means moving past the hurt while giving your friend a clean slate.

Colossians 3:13 reminds us that we, too, have been forgiven.

Think about it. Have you ever hurt a friend? Have you ever done something that you regret?

Jesus forgave you. In turn, we are required to do the same.

Everyone has faults.

Everyone makes mistakes.

The key to a healthy friendship is true forgiveness... the kind that Jesus has shown to you.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think it is easier or harder to forgive a friend who hurts you badly as opposed to when someone who is not your friend does it? Why/why not?
- What do you think it means to “make allowances” for your friends' faults?
- How do we learn to let go of hurt?
- How could I have better handled the situation of my friend owing me money?
- What do you think “true forgiveness” really looks like?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON - FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Bible: John 15:5, Galatians 5:20:22–23, Proverbs 16:32, Matthew 5:43–48

Bottom Line: Stay connected to Jesus and good stuff comes out of your life.

So often when we talk about the Fruits of the Spirit the core of our message is... be more loving, kind, forgiving, etc.

The problem is that we're not designed to live that way in our own power.

It's only when we stay connected to Jesus that those characteristics flow out of our lives.

Instead, the message needs to be... Stay connected to Jesus and good stuff comes out of your life.

When we nurture our relationship with God, we become more loving, kind, forgiving etc.

It's what naturally happens as a result of what God is doing in and through us.

OPENING GAME: KEEP IT UP

SUPPLIES

- Masking tape
- 2–3 beach balls (more if your group is large)

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Split the group into two even teams and mark a line down the middle of the playing area with masking tape.

Each group takes one side of the playing area.

Players spread out wherever they want on their side.

The game will consist of beach balls being thrown (or hit) and caught between the two sides.

Players attempt to keep the balls moving and not allow the balls to hit the ground on their side of the playing area.

If a ball hits the ground, the opposing team is awarded points.

The team that has the most points at the end of the game wins.

Variations:

If your group is large, consider adding more beach balls.

If your group is really big, consider dividing it into four parts instead of two.

After the game, say:

In life, we often react to others in the same way we are treated.

If your brother hits you, you hit him back. If your parents yell at you, you yell back.

Sort of like what happened in the game we just played.

If one team hit the ball hard, the other team reacted by hitting it hard too.

If one team got real competitive, the other team did too.

Today, we're going to explore how we can react differently to others.

We're going to discover how we can break the cycle.

If someone is mean to us, we're going to learn the secret to how we can react in love rather than hate. Let's get started!

TEACH

SUPPLIES

- Jar of small pickles
- A few trash bags
- Bag of large marshmallows
- Good, ripe fruit
- Rotten fruit

Say: To get started today, I need two volunteers.

Choose two volunteers to come up front. Have them stand about 10 feet apart.

Give one volunteer an open jar of pickles.

Put a trash bag over the other preteen (so their clothes don't get pickle juice on them). Place trash bag or plastic sheeting over the floor where the volunteer is standing.

Give the volunteer an open bag of large marshmallows.

The volunteer then attempts to throw a pickle into the mouth of the other volunteer.

Next, the other volunteer attempts to throw a marshmallow into the mouth of the other volunteer.

They must stay 10 feet apart while throwing the items.

Continue, throwing a pickle and marshmallow.

Keep track of how many marshmallows and pickles land in the mouth of a volunteer.

After the activity, congratulate each volunteer for their effort and ask the audience to give them a round of applause.

Say: Believe it or not, if someone throws a smelly pickle at our faces, we can learn to throw a soft delicious marshmallow back at them!

What do I mean by that? I mean that it is possible for us to react in love rather than anger.

We can forgive rather than seek revenge.

But, we can't do it by ourselves.

Let's look up a verse in the Bible that helps explain this.

Read Galatians 5:22–23 (NCV):

But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong.

What do you think these verses means? (Get responses)

A lot of times people misunderstand these verses.

They think God is saying to be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

God is saying more than that.

He is saying that those characteristics are formed in our lives when we stay connected to Jesus.

Let's take a look at another verse that will help us understand this concept.

Read John 15:5 (NCV): *I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing.*

Jesus is saying that a branch needs to stay connected to the vine in order for fruit to grow.

Good fruit will naturally come out of a branch that is connected to the vine.

[Show good, ripe fruit]

The branch doesn't need to try and create the fruit in its own power.

Its job is to stay connected to the vine.

When it does, good fruit will be produced.

Like this fruit I'm holding in my hand.

Jesus is saying that we are like the branch.

Our goal is to stay connected to Jesus.

If we stay close to him in our everyday lives, then good fruit will come out of us.

The good fruit is the characteristics we read about in Galatians 5:22–23 – love, patience, kindness, goodness, etc.

Like a branch can't make the fruit, we can't simply choose to be loving, patience, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and have self-control.

It's the Holy Spirit's job to create those characteristics in our lives.

Our job is to stay connected to Jesus.

When we do, good characteristics flow out of us.

We find ourselves naturally reacting to the bully at school with love and compassion.

We are more likely to forgive our friends.

We are more patient.

Sure, it's a choice we make.

But ultimately, it's God working through us to make us more like Him.

[Show bad fruit]

So, what happens when we don't take the time and effort to stay connected to Jesus?

Well, bad stuff comes out of our lives.

Much like if you were to break off a branch from the vine, the fruit goes bad.

Our lives begin to look like rotten fruit, like in this fruit I'm holding. Yuck.

The Bible actually talks about what this bad fruit looks like.

Read Galatians 5:20 (NCV):

...worshiping gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people...

So, when we're feeling jealous, angry, and selfish or causing drama around us, those things are the bad stuff coming out of our lives because we are not connected to Jesus.

We're unconnected to Him.

We're not spending time with God in prayer, worship or allowing God to speak to us from the Bible.

Today's bottom line – Stay connected to Jesus and good stuff comes out of your life.

When we choose to surrender our lives to Jesus, the pollution of sin in our lives is cleaned up.

We now have an opportunity for good stuff to come out of our lives.

We have an opportunity to live the way God wants us to live.

We won't be perfect.

We'll mess up often.

That's just a part of being human.

In order to have good stuff come out of our lives, we have to stay connected to Jesus.

When we do, the Holy Spirit will make us more loving, kind, patient, etc.

We'll be able to return a sour pickle with a soft marshmallow.

We'll be able to react differently than we were treated.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON GIVING

Bible: Luke 6:38

Use this game to help students understand the importance of a giving heart.

SUPPLIES

- Different sized jars, cups, and bowls
- Pennies
- Colored Tape

OPENING GAME

Set up the jars, cups, and bowls on the floor.

You can put some close to each other and some spread out more.

Mark several lines with the tape in front of the jars.

Make the first line right in front of them, the next line a few feet back, the next line further back, etc.

Do this until the final line is all the way across the room from the jars.

Give each student five pennies.

Explain that the goal is to get the pennies into the jars (and cups or whatever else you have put out).

For each penny they land in a jar, they get two more pennies.

If they don't make it in the jar, they get nothing.

Have the students line up behind the first line and let everyone toss a penny.

Give the students who make it into a jar two more pennies.

The ones who don't are down one penny.

Once everyone has gone, have them move to the next line and repeat this.

Again, give the winners two more pennies.

Continue going through all the taped off lines.

Once a student runs out of pennies, they are out.

Once you get to the last line, have remaining students compete until there is just one student left.

The last student to still have any pennies wins.

After the game, discuss the following questions:

Was that game harder than you thought it was going to be?

Do you think you would have had a better chance of winning if you had stayed at the first line the whole time?

Did it make it harder to win since the only way to get more pennies was to give up the ones you already had?

After the game, say:

That was a pretty interesting game, right?

To win, you had to get more pennies than anyone else.

But in order to get more, you had to give up the ones you already had.

That made it difficult, right?

That's kind of how it is in life, isn't it?

God gives us things—money, talents, time—and we have the choice of what to do with those things.

We can have an attitude that says it's all about us, and we can choose to hold tightly to everything we have, making sure we never give anything away.

Or, we can choose to have a giving heart.

Which one do you think will work out better for us in the end?

Read Luke 6:38.

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Does that remind you of anything?

What do you do when a bag is full, but you're trying to fit more into it?

You press it down, right?

You shove the stuff in, shake it around, and try to make room for more.

That's what this verse is saying.

The measure in which it will be give back to you will be so much that it's been pressed down, shaken together, and it's *still* running over.

I don't know about you, but that's something I want to get in on!

But first, we have to give.

And that just doesn't make sense, does it?

That we have to give in order to get?

In the game we played, you could have held onto all of your pennies and never tried to make them into a cup or a jar.

But if you had done that, you never would have gotten any new pennies, either.

This verse is not just talking about money; it's talking about everything.

It can be hard to get rid of that "everything is all about me!" kind of attitude, but that's what God wants us to do.

See, God has already blessed you.

Think about it!

Sure, some of you probably have money, but that's not all He's blessed you with.

He's given you time, talents, friendship, compassion, and so many other things that you have to give.

You can choose to hold onto those things and keep them for yourself.

You can choose to not have a giving heart.

Or, you can choose to have a giving heart, and in turn, things will be given back to you.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Does it make sense to you that giving leads to getting more than you had in the first place?
- Would you describe your attitude right now as one that has a giving heart, or one that is all about yourself?
- What are some things that you have that you can give?
- Has there ever been a time before where you've been blessed because you chose to give?

WRAP-UP

Listen, I'm not saying that if you put five dollars in the offering today, that ten dollars will show up in your locker tomorrow.

Of course, it might!

But that's not what this is about.

It's about your heart.

Let's say there's someone at your school who doesn't have any friends and who's kind of an outsider.

God has given you friendship, and you get to choose who to give it to.

Imagine that you befriend this person, giving of your friendship and time.

In turn, God blesses you with the best friend you've ever had, because you were willing to give.

That's the heart of God.

He wants to give back to you, pressed down, shaken together, and still overflowing.

But He can only do that if you have a giving heart.

Having a giving heart blesses others *and* it blesses you.

I'd say that's a win-win situation, wouldn't you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON GOD'S BLESSING

Opening Game: Unwrap it!

SUPPLIES

- Baking soda (for invisible ink)
- Water
- Paintbrush
- Bowl
- Paper
- A lamp or accessible light bulb
- 20 (or more, based on the size of your group) varying sized gift packages wrapped up (there doesn't need to be anything inside of them).

Make the invisible ink before the service by mixing equal parts baking soda and water.

You may want to practice this once without an audience just to make sure you used enough baking soda for the ink to show up when the paper is warmed.

Split the group into two teams.

On one side of the room, put the pile of presents.

Have the teams line up on the other side of the room.

When you say, "Go", the first person from each team must run over and select a gift from the pile.

They have to completely unwrap the gift *without using their hands*.

Once they've freed the package, they then have to get it back to their team—once again, without using their hands.

Once they get the package back, they can tag the next person.

If they drop the package at any point on the way back, the next person in line has to pick up where they left off.

The first team to successfully unwrap and retrieve ten packages wins.

TEACH

You guys are pretty good at opening gifts without your hands!

Who knows when you'll need that skill in life, but hey, it's good to know!

Tonight, we're going to be talking about gifts.

More specifically, we're going to be talking about blessings.

It's a pretty common prayer to ask for God's blessing on something.

We bless our food, pray that God will bless our friends, and sometimes we even ask Him to bless us.

And we should! He is a wonderful God who *wants* to bless His children—that's us!

You do not have to *earn* God's blessing.

What I mean by that is that there's not some cosmic scoreboard in heaven keeping track of all your rights and wrongs, waiting for the good to outweigh the bad before God blesses you.

There are, however, some verses in the Bible that talk about God's blessing and what type of people He blesses.

Those are the type of people we should strive to be.

Read Psalm 1:1-3: *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.*

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers."

Here we see that the type of person that is blessed.

This type of person doesn't hang out with those who live in sin, act in wickedness, or mock God or others.

Instead, they find joy in God's word, which they study.

And what do these things get this person?

Blessed. They are prosperous and fruitful, no matter what the circumstances around them are.

That's an example of how, though we don't have to earn God's blessing, certain types of lifestyles result in being blessed.

Now, it's important that we get something straight right away.

Sometimes, when we talk about God blessing us, people only think of blessings in terms of things like money, houses, cars, and clothes.

Let me be clear: God's blessings do not equal material things.

Yes, of course God can bless us financially and provide things like clothes and food for us. And he does that often.

If you have a house to live in, you should be thankful for that blessing!

But God does not only bless us with material things.

He blesses us with things that are worth far more than that. Let's take a look.

Read Psalm 5:12:

"Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield."

This verse doesn't say, "Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you give them lots of money for fun things."

Or, "Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you make sure they get good grades in all their classes."

No, the blessing here is God's favor—something far greater than money or popularity or good grades.

Read Psalm 29:11: *"The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace."*

Once again, we have a verse about God blessing His people with things that have nothing to do with material things, but instead, strength and peace.

I'm going to tell you something that may seem difficult to understand, but it's the truth.

You would be far better off living on the streets, poor and alone, and being blessed with God's strength, favor, and peace than you would be to be living the most extravagant, rich lifestyle you can imagine and be living without those things.

Read Matthew 7:9-11:

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

God's blessings go far beyond money, and they usually go far beyond the things that we want or think we need.

The amazing thing, though, is that we can be confident that God knows exactly what is best for us and exactly what we need.

If it were money, that's what He'd give us.

But more often, it's something like peace, favor, or strength.

And those are incredible gifts.

We can rest assured that God loves us way more than any earthly father could ever love his children.

That means He delights in blessing us with gifts!

He knows the plan He has for us, so He knows what we need to make that possible.

He truly wants the best for us.

I think that we would all agree that we are extremely blessed.

We all have places to live, we're educated, and we have an awesome group of people to come learn about Jesus with every week.

Chances are, you haven't had to go days without eating this week.

You're all wearing clothes, and you all look nice.

We're obviously very, very blessed.

But sometimes, life can get a little bit hard.

When that happens, it's easy to forget about all those amazing blessings in our lives.

We can start to feel sad, lonely, and beat down.

When things get tough, it's easy to feel like we aren't blessed at all.

Get out the invisible ink and paper.

Now, I'm just going to paint something here for you guys.

Paint with the invisible ink for a few seconds.

Well, it looks like there isn't anything there. That's weird.

Oh well, I'll keep painting anyway.

Wave the picture in the air to dry while you read this next verse.

Read Matthew 5:3-11

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So, let's get this straight: poor, sad, meek, hungry, insulted, persecuted people are referred to here as *blessed*?

Yes, they absolutely are.

And look at those blessings: The kingdom of heaven is theirs!

How amazing is that?

Next time you feel like things aren't going so great, and you don't feel God's blessings in your life; remember this verse.

Because the people referenced in this verse aren't having that great of a time either.

But their unseen blessings are worth far more than you could ever imagine.

Hold your painting up over a lamp.

It will take a few seconds to warm up, but soon the paper will heat up and your picture will begin to show up.

Isn't that cool?

That's just how the blessings in our life are sometimes.

Even when we don't think we see them, we know they are there, because we know God loves us.

He knows exactly what we need, and He knows exactly when we need to see it.

We just have to trust that God knows what's best for us, and that if we live a life that's pleasing to Him, He is going to make sure we get what we need, when we need it.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you consider yourself to have a life that's full of God's blessings?
- What are some ways God has blessed you?
- Do you ever feel like you have to earn God's blessings?
- Do you think that your life reflects the type of life talked about in Psalm 1?
- Do you think that God's blessings like peace and strength are more important than the material things that we think we need?
- When you go through hard times, do you sometimes forget how blessed you are?
- How does it make you feel to know that God loves you like a father and wants to give you good gifts?
- Do you think that God's plan is better than our plan? That His blessings are better than any we could imagine for ourselves?
- If there were one blessing you could ask God for, what would it be?
- Have there been times before in your life where God really blessed you, but you couldn't see that until later?

WRAP-UP

Sometimes it's easy to forget how truly blessed we are.

We can get caught up in the mundane, everyday things we have to do, and we can take God's blessings for granted.

So really quick, before we end, we're going to go down the line and just shout out one thing God has blessed us with.

Start at one end of the front row and work your way back.

If you have a bigger group, you may just ask for a few volunteers.

If you have a small group, you can ask them to say more than one thing.

Those are a lot of blessings! Wow, we have a great God!

I would encourage you to do that every now and then on your own.

Just take a few minutes and list out all the amazing blessings God has given to you.

It can be so encouraging!

It's important to remember a few key things about God's blessings.

First, we need to remember that they come along with certain lifestyles, like those that follow the Bible.

Second, it's important to remember that His blessings may not be things that we think we want, like money or material things, but they will always be better.

Lastly, it's important to remember that even though sometimes we can't always see God's blessings right away, they are there, and they just come into sight later.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON GOD'S LOVE

Bible: Romans 8:38-39

Bottom Line: NOTHING can separate us from the love of God.

LEADER PREP

Love is a word that we use freely.

I love coffee... I love French fries... I love this TV show.

But if we take a moment to stop and consider the word 'love', all other loves really do fall short when we consider the great love of God for us.

Sadly, the students in your ministry can easily become immune to the 'love of God' talks.

It is pretty basic, right?

God loves us. No matter what.

Yet, many of the students in our ministry live as if they are earning His love.

Some of them even live in fear that they might not be worthy of His love.

Spend time before this lesson really praying for the youth in your group who will experience this lesson.

Pray for those who feel unloved in their lives and in their homes.

Pray for those who feel that they are unworthy of God's love.

Pray for those who feel that they have to earn his love.

And then spend the last part praying for yourself: Ask God to show you those ways in which you limit his love for you.

SUPPLIES

- Printed lyrics to love songs
- Printed copies of Romans 8:38-39 (one for each student)
- Heart cut outs
- Tape
- Black Sharpies

OPENING GAME - LOVE, DON'T LAUGH

Have students stand in a circle and then sit down.

Choose one person to be 'it' and give them the lyrics to a love song.

They will go around the circle and choose someone to speak the words of the song to and they cannot smile or laugh.

It" continues until someone 'breaks' and then they are 'it'.

Have a few current love songs lyrics ready to give to the students to use.

A great one to use would be "Mirror" by Justin Timberlake or "Story of my Life" by One Direction.

Other great songs: "All you need is love" by the Beatles or any 'sappy' 80s love song (just be sure to read the lyrics before hand to avoid a very embarrassing situation!)

TEACH – GOD'S LOVE

It's a word that is used a lot these days.

I love that food... I love that new song... I love that team...I love that purse... (add any current examples that might be relevant).

But, sometimes the way that we talk about love, we are really talking about emotions very different from 'love'.

I'm not sure if any of you have experienced a 'first love', but it can be brutal.

Share a story of your first love and try to make it a light hearted one! If you don't have one there are plenty of great stories on line.

Especially, if you look for most embarrassing first dates!

Love - What words come to your mind when I say the word "Love."

There is a great deal of study that has gone into the importance of love.

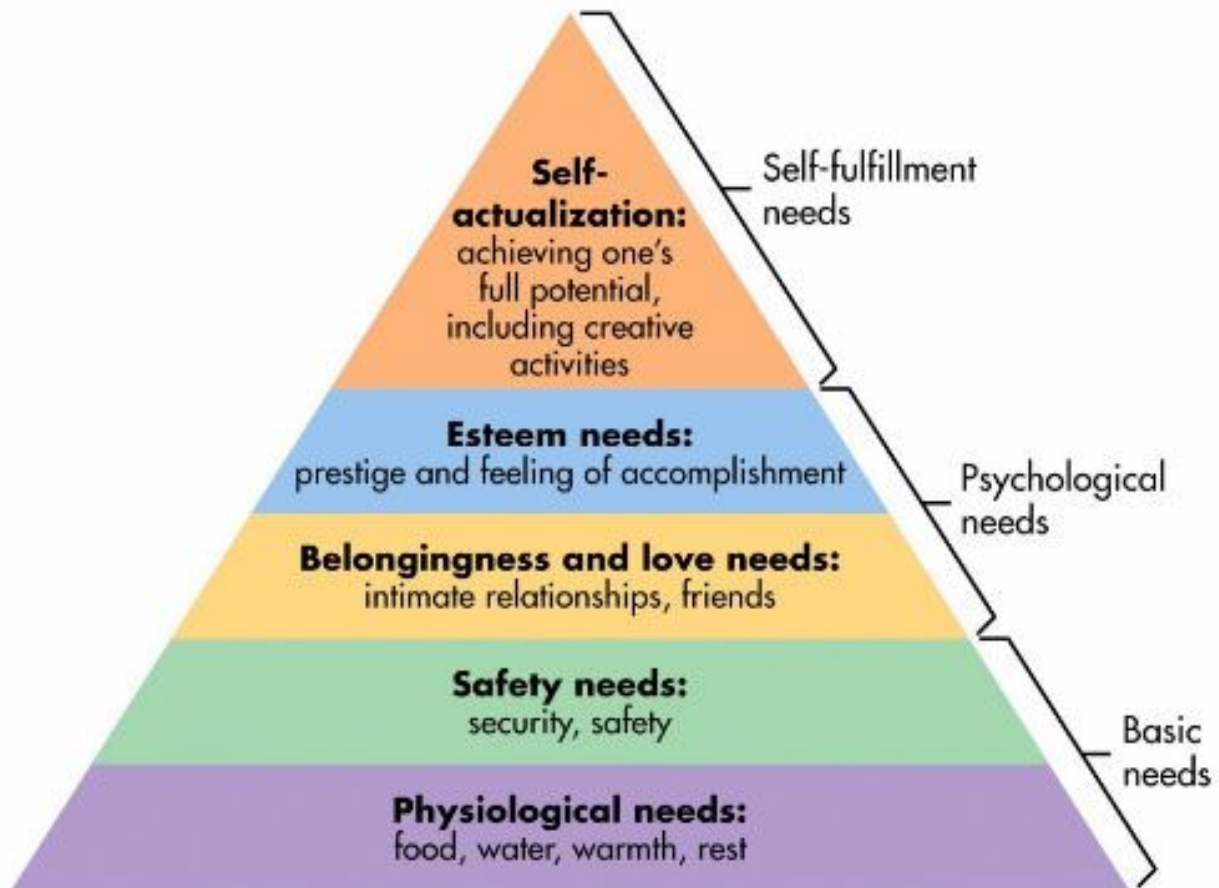
Let me ask it this way: What do you think are the things that are key to helping us to live?

What are our basic needs?

Write down their answer on the board as they share such things as shelter, food, clean water, etc.

There was this guy named Maslow who created [this great tool](#) showing us the importance of love.

Draw a simplified version of this diagram:



As you can see from this diagram, we all have a basic need for things like food, water, warmth, rest, etc.

Those are all basic needs we share.

As you move up the diagram, there are other needs we need once our basic ones are met.

The next set of needs is security & safety, then a sense of "belonging and love".

We ALL need love.

Notice it's a real need...right after food, water, shelter, safety and security (which are all very basic).

Just think of all the books, songs, poems, and movie written about love.

Have students list some that come to mind.

Think about all the fights and wars that have been fought in the name of love.

Love is a powerful powerful thing.

Why do you think that love is so powerful and important?

Here's the thing about love, though.

As humans, we didn't create it and we certainly haven't perfected it, right?

What are some of the things that get in the way of love?

Have youth name some of the issues humans face regarding love.

But, there is one who has mastered love.

Give each youth a printed copy of Romans 8:38-39 and say:

We are going to read this amazing scripture together.

Each person will read one sentence of phrase and then another person can read the next and so on.

You don't HAVE to read, but it will be very cool for us to read all of this together.

I will begin our reading.

Read Romans 8:38-39 as a group.

Take some time silently now to read this scripture again.

Underline the words that stick out to you.

And as you read this, let the words really soak in: Nothing can separate you from God's love.

Nothing will ever make Him stop loving you.

Give the youth 5 minutes to read the scripture silently.

Which of these words stuck out to you?

Were you surprised by any parts of the verse?

Give the group a chance to share.

Up front are hearts and Sharpies and tape.

Choose one of the words that stuck out to you or even just write a thought to God about the love that He has for you.

Then, come and get a heart and write your thoughts on the heart and tape it to the wall around us.

Play soft music as the youth come to write on their hearts and be available for prayer.

When everyone has had a chance to write on their heart and tape it around the room say:

You are surrounded by love in this room.

Maybe you have never really experienced the love of God.

Maybe you still worry that you aren't worthy of His love.

But, please listen to these words: God loves you and NOTHING can separate you from His love.

Spend some time just trying to wrap your brain and heart around that because it is huge.

God thinks that you are pretty amazing! He loves you.

As you leave, walk around the room and read the hearts and take the scripture we read with you.

Whether or not you feel the love of God.... His love is real and it is yours.

He loves you so much.

And nothing, not even your doubt, can separate you from his love.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which part of the scripture stuck out to you the most and why?
- If you want to share, what did you write on your heart?
- Why do you think it is hard for some to believe that God loves them?
- Has there ever been a time when you worried that God might not love you? If so, why?
- How does it make you feel to know that nothing can separate you from God's love?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON GRACE

Bible: Romans 6:23 (NLT)

Bottom Line: What is so amazing about grace? Although we deserved to be separated from God forever because of our sin, God sent us Jesus as a free gift so we could be forever friends with God.

OPENING GAME

Supplies Needed: *None*

Space Requirements: Your normal meeting room will be fine.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

This is a lyric/song battle.

Depending on the size of your group, either split everyone into two teams or grab about 10 volunteers and split into teams of 5.

You will explain that everyone will be given a word, and when it's your team's turn, you must sing the lyrics of a song that contain that word.

This will be a battle back and forth.

One team will be chosen to go first.

They only have 10 seconds before they have to start singing.

As soon as their song is accepted, it is the other team's turn and they have 10 seconds to start singing a song.

The team that fails to start singing within 10 seconds first, loses.

Pick random words for each round. Be sure the last word you choose is grace.

TEACH

The last word in our game was grace, which is our topic for today.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

Is there any first line of a song more famous than this one?

It has been sung by more people than most other songs ever written.

But what does it mean?

Grace is at the very core of the Gospel.

It is a word that you will hear all the time if you attend church even just a few times a year.

Still, it is often misunderstood or even ignored.

Let's look at this universe-altering five-letter word and see how it can and will change your life.

What is grace?

First, let's take a look at its definition according to dictionary.com: mercy; clemency; pardon: favor or goodwill.

On one hand, grace is similar to mercy.

Punishment is deserved, but because of grace, mercy or forgiveness is given instead. On the other hand, it could be somewhat synonymous with kindness and love.

If a person is on a teacher's good side, it could be said that he/she is in the teacher's "good graces."

So, we have looked at this definition, but if I'm being honest, this word doesn't look all that universe-altering.

What is so amazing about grace?

What we deserve.

From the moment you drew your first breath as a baby, you were born with a problem.

You entered a world covered with a thick, sticky substance that makes everything filthy.

It coats every person who is alive now, just as it has everyone from the beginning of time.

This substance is called sin.

This sin separates us from God.

God wants to be in a close relationship with us, but this sin separates us all from him.

"For the wages of sin is death." - **Romans 6:23 (NLT)**

Well, there you have it, folks.

Those are perhaps the most depressing seven words in the Bible.

This "death" is what we deserve for being born with our sin problem.

It basically means we deserve to be separated from God forever.

But God wants to be close to us.

He wants us to enjoy a relationship with Him.

He wants to guide our lives and speak to us.

He wants to be our best friend.

So, where does grace come into play?

Thank God (literally) that those seven words were only the first half of the verse!

"...but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." - **Romans 6:23**

Grace is the comma instead of the period.

What do I mean?

Our sad human story could have ended with a period after those first seven words.

"The wages of sin is death." Period. We have earned it.

God, however, says, "Wait a second, the sentence isn't over."

He added a comma.

The story doesn't end.

Instead of receiving what we deserve, we are given the choice of a free gift.

We know what happens if we don't take the gift, and we already know what's in the gift: life forever with Jesus!

Grace is the gift that says, "I know you don't deserve this, but I'm yours."

Grace and Forgiveness

Finally, I'd like to look at one more aspect of grace.

Sometimes we make the mistake of substituting it with the word *forgiveness*.

Forgiveness is also an amazing word. It is powerful, but it pales in comparison to grace.

Forgiveness is step one. Grace is the completion.

Imagine that you committed a horrible crime.

You killed someone who had a family that loved him/her dearly.

As you stand before the judge, you already know that you're guilty.

Everyone knows it.

The victim's parents show amazing strength by telling the judge that they forgive you.

How awesome is that!

But does it change what's going to happen next?

Not really. The judge will still sentence you for your crime.

Forgiveness is step one.

Jesus didn't stop there.

He gives us *grace*.

Grace says, "I forgive you, *and* I am taking your punishment for you."

Back to that hypothetical scenario, forgiveness was demonstrated by the parents of the victim.

They no longer hold the crime against you, but someone has to pay for the crime.

Grace would be like the judge then saying, "What you did deserves the death penalty, but because of how much I love you, I am going to take the electric chair in your place."

Forgiveness is awesome.

Grace is amazing.

They work hand-in-hand when it comes to the way God feels about you.

What's so amazing about grace? Everything!

You don't deserve it. You can't earn it.

All you can do is accept it.

It's God's free gift to you.

Optional - give students an opportunity to accept personally accept God's grace, surrendering their lives to Jesus.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is so amazing about grace for you personally?
- What's confusing to you about the Bible saying we deserve "death" because of our "sin"?
- Do you think even "good people" deserve death because of their "sin"?
- Is it a hard concept for you to grasp that a relationship with Jesus is a free gift and can't be earned)? Why or why not?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON HAPPINESS

Bible: Matthew 5:1-12 (Common English Bible translation)

Bottom Line: Jesus helps us to redefine what happiness looks like through His kingdom.

SUPPLIES

- Encourage teens to bring cell phones to take photos
- Either project photos or print off copies for the next week to view
- Sharpies
- Crowns - Cut out of paper for each student

Leader Prep

Happiness. When was a time that the students in your ministry were truly happy?

Do your students know what real & lasting happiness is, and do they know how to get it?

Jesus offers us a view of what it means to be happy (and the path to get there).

This view is radically different from what your students might expect.

Jesus says that happiness comes in ways that we least expect it: through suffering, grief, loss, persecution, and poverty.

When we study "The Beatitudes", we get the feeling that Jesus is saying something revolutionary here, yet, at the same time it feels like a brain twister or a riddle that is right out of our grasp.

I think that Jesus meant for his words to be this way, though.

He wanted us to scratch our heads and say "What"?

Because if you really think about what Jesus is saying in these few sentences, you begin to realize that he is turning everything we've ever believed about happiness upside down.

Happiness isn't something that comes to us, rather, it seems to be who we are in the midst of whatever happens to us, even the hard stuff. That is deep.

So, ask yourself as you prepare for this lesson: Are you truly happy and finding that happiness in the kingdom of God as Jesus describes it?

And maybe, just maybe, it comes when you let Jesus help you reframe the circumstances in your life that seem to be the hardest.

In the midst of THOSE times and experiences, you truly to find happiness.

And so will the students in your ministry.

OPENING ACTIVITY: HAPPINESS SELFIES

Divide the youth up into groups of 4 or 5, making sure that each group has at least one person with a cell phone camera.

Give the groups a way to share the photos with you to be projected or printed.

EXPLAIN THE ACTIVITY

Today, you are going to take "Happiness selfies".

What is a happiness selfie you might ask?

Well, each group of you will get some words that Jesus said about happiness and your challenge is to take a group selfies which helps to illustrate the words Jesus said.

These words may seem like a riddle, and they kind of are, but try to figure out a creative way to maybe explain what Jesus was saying.

Read Matthew 5:1-12 to the group and either ask them to choose one of the sentences or assign them!

You will need a group for verse 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Give the groups 15 minutes to take their selfies and to send them to you via text or other method.

TEACH

Today, you all are going to teach us a thing or two about some pretty amazing words from Jesus.

If you are able to project the selfies that the groups have taken - that is awesome!

If not, have the group share verbally what their selfie was of the different sections.

Many people call these verses the "Beatitudes", but today we are going to call them the Happiness Selfies because as you read them and really think on them, it seems like Jesus is trying to help us to look at happiness in different ways.

These Happiness Selfies, to the world, should and probably do look crazy.

So, let's look at each of these words from Jesus.

Either show the selfie that the group took and have them explain, or if you don't have a way to project the selfies, have each group explain their selfie.

Read Matthew 5:3 - *"Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs."*

Can you imagine being hopeless?

Hope is knowing that the future will be ok....so imagine how it would sound to someone who is hopeless that Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is theirs?

Those are amazing words, right?

Maybe someone in this room is sitting here, and you wouldn't ever want to really admit it, but you feel hopeless.

Then, these words are for you.

Jesus is saying that you have His Kingdom to look forward to.

It is YOURS.

How does that make you feel?

Read Matthew 5:4 - *"Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad."*

Grieving.

Grief means that death has been there and nothing hurts quite like the pain of someone you love dying, right?

Maybe some of you in this room are grieving.

And Jesus says amazing words to someone who is grieving... you will be glad.

The tears will not only stop but you will smile.

Read Matthew 5:5 - *"Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth."*

Humility is a hard thing to find in our world today.

It doesn't mean that you let others walk all over you... but it does mean that you don't run for the front of the line or think of yourself as better than everyone else.

Have you ever met someone who was truly humble?

What were they like?

And Jesus says, it's that kind of person who will inherit the earth.

Read Matthew 5:6 - *"Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full."*

What is the longest amount of time that any of you have gone without food or water?

Being thirsty and hungry...many of us haven't really experienced these at their worst, but can you imagine what it would feel like to not eat for days or to not have clean water?

So, what does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

And what does Jesus say will happen to someone who does?

They will be filled... filled with righteousness.

Wow, now that is quite the dinner, huh?

Read Matthew 5:7 - *"Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy."*

Has there ever been a time in your life when you really needed someone to show you mercy...to reach out to you in your greatest need?

How did that feel?

Now, imagine that you are the one giving mercy... Jesus says that when you give mercy, he will give you mercy.

How do you think it would feel for Jesus to reach out to you in your greatest moments of need?

Read Matthew 5:8 - *"Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God."*

Purity. What words come to your mind when we talk about purity?

Imagine having a heart that was pure.....clean....innocent.

And then, what is the promise that Jesus gives here?

They will see God.

Wow, makes you really want to get to cleaning, right?

Read Matthew 5:9 - *"Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children."*

Peace.

What do you think a peaceful world would look like?

How difficult is it to make peace when those around you want to fight and argue or prove others wrong?

Sometimes when we try to make peace, others will tell us that we "don't belong" or that we are living in a dream world, but God says that we will be called his "children".

When we bring peace.... we look like Him.

How could you make peace in the world around you? At your school? In your home?

Read Matthew 5:10 - *"Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs."*

Bullying is a big word these days.

Bullies harass people and do it over and over to try to break you down.

Have any of you been harassed or bullied?

What did it feel like?

Jesus says that when you are harassed that you are righteous and that you get what?

The kingdom of heaven.

Kind of tough to harass someone when they have a kingdom right?

And last, but not least:

Read Matthew 5:11-12 - *"Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you."*

Can you name a time when people talked about you and said things about you that were hurtful and untrue?

How did that feel?

Yeah, well Jesus says that if people say bad things about you and lie about you BECAUSE OF HIM...you should be glad because you are getting rewarded.

Now, let me ask you: How do you think Jesus' words here would sound to the world?

Do they make sense in the society that we live in?

Do they really make any sense?

No.

That's what's so amazing about what Jesus is saying: He is turning everything upside down and saying "Happiness doesn't look like what the world says it looks like.

Do this whole living my way thing... and you will be very surprised!"

Which of these words really stick out to you?

Maybe there is one that just doesn't make any sense to you.....chew on that one and take it with you today.

Because Jesus didn't make mistakes in saying these words.

He isn't clueless or naïve...no, he just sees things in amazing ways - Kingdom ways.

Around the room are cut out crowns

I want you to write the words of the Beatitudes that stick out to you on that crown.

Because Jesus is offering us a new way to live in his Kingdom.

And he wants to change things up.

He wants you to find happiness that this world can never give to you.

Happiness that isn't based on what others think of you, or what you earn, or even whether you are healthy, wealthy or have a ton of friends.

It is a happiness that is found only in Him.

Give students a few minutes to write out their Beatitude on the crown and take them with them.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Beatitude did you write on the crown and why?
- Which of Jesus' words seem to not make sense to you?
- What do you think it would look like if everyone lived by these words from Jesus?
- Which of the Happiness Selfies did you connect with the most?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON HONESTY

Bible: Luke 16:1-15

The Big Idea: The power of the truth.

LEADER PREP

Honesty is one of those areas that students that we serve can see Christ very clearly or vice versa.

Teenagers really do watch us, and that's one of the reasons that honesty is so important.

Ask yourself *honestly* - what was the last lie that you told? (And if you are trying right now to reason with yourself that 'it was just a white lie or an omission' - yes, count that one).

I don't know about you, but this is one area in which God is constantly sharpening me.

When I go to God and really ask him to search my heart, my words, and to let me know how I might have failed - these are the times that I have been not only truly humbled, but I also find that I hear God more clearly.

He helps me to grow in ways that simply were not possible before.

Each of us can probably think of a story of a teenager that we've known who was dishonest and it caused them a lifetime of hurt.

This lesson today just might be something that a student will remember in a key time in which they can make a decision to be honest and save them and others from hurt.

OPENING GAME - You Lie

SUPPLIES

- Boxes with crazy and creative things to put in boxes for the game (see below)
- Room divider or sheet
- This game originated on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.
- Click here to see a very funny example:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8vNn0WFUnY>

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Choose 2 contestants, one to be the guesser and the other to either tell them the truth or a lie.

Set up a divider between 2 contestants facing one another.

You could even have 2 other youth volunteers hold up a sheet leaving the top open for the 2 contestants to be able to see one another's faces.

Try to come up with the most random and strange items to put in shoeboxes.

Have the first contestant choose a box.

They will explain or lie and give a made-up explanation to the other contestant of the contents of their box.

Their opponent will guess whether they are telling the truth or lying.

This game could go on as long as you wish and you could even show them the clip of Jimmy Fallon and Emma Stone at the end.

After the game, ask:

- How could you tell when the contestants were lying?
- Who surprised you the most with their 'performance' in this game?
- How is this game like real life?
- Why do you think that people lie?

TEACH

Share a story from your life, funny or serious, in which you told a lie and the consequences that followed.

This game and my story show a funny side of lying and being dishonest, but let's be honest: It really is a big deal.

Think about a time recently that you have lied.

I am not going to ask you to share and don't worry, your parents aren't hiding in the back to catch you.

Just think about a lie that you've told: Why did you lie?

What were you afraid would happen if you didn't lie?

Now, whether others figured out that you lied—you knew, right?

See, that's the lie that you can tell yourself about lying: That no one will know.

But, that's not true, is it? Because *you* know.

Maybe it doesn't matter to you, but I would argue that it does.

I need 2 volunteers to help act out a parable that Jesus told:

Read Luke 16:1-8a.

Choose a person to be the rich man and another to be the manager.

Read the Scripture and have students act it out as you are reading.

When you get to the part where they bring in other debtors, just have the manager grab people from the crowd!

Have the volunteers sit down.

Jesus told parables to share deep kingdom ideas in simple ways.....so what do you think that Jesus was trying to say with this parable?

I am going to have you get into groups of 5-6 and I want you to come up with 2 theories of what you think Jesus was trying to teach: and yes, one will be a truth and the other will be a lie.

We might all be completely confused by the time this lesson is over, but have fun with it.

Give the group about 5 minutes to think of their theories and then, if time allows, give them a chance to present their theories to the large group.

Try to guess which is the truth, and which is the lie, or if there are more than 6 groups, have groups pair up to try to guess on each others' theories.

Jesus actually does go on to give us more clues into what he was trying to get at with his parable:

Read Luke 18:8a-15.

So, which of our theories do you think was the closest to what Jesus was trying to say?

Ok, here is *my* theory on what Jesus was trying to teach - creatively:

Honesty doesn't make sense to the world.

The world deals in money and profit, getting ahead and protecting yourself, and covering your back.

And when we desire those things more than we desire for God to be first, we let those things master us.

We begin to say, do, and think things are ok that we never would have before, and sometimes we even come up with rationalizations that sound good to us.

They probably sound good to the world and others might even tell you that what you are doing is just fine.

By the world's standards it might be fine, but those aren't the standards that matter to God.

Can you think of an example in our culture in which lying is actually 'ok'?

Give the groups a few minutes to think of examples to share.

And here is a really important question: if nobody knows, is it really lying?

Is it still ok if no one knows or no one else is hurt?

Because Jesus is saying that even the small things matter.

If you are not honest with a small thing like an answer on a test or telling your parents what time you REALLY got home, can you be trusted to be honest when the stakes are much higher?

What do you think Jesus would say in those instances?

Does it matter?

I believe that the answer is 'yes'.

Because if we played that game for days and days on end, training ourselves to lie and how to not give away that we are lying... lying does get easier.

There are probably some of you in this room who can really convince someone that you are innocent. Right?

Jesus is basically saying that as his children, we are to live differently.

He even pointed to the Pharisees, the leaders, and basically told them that they are fooling everyone but not God...because God knows the heart.

Today, I hope that you take some time to look into your own heart.

Don't worry about the person who is here that you know has lied this week, because that is not the point, here.

The point is to be honest with yourself about how you have been dishonest.

Not to beat yourself up, but to start today being honest.

God knows the truth and he is actually looking for people He can trust to be honest with themselves.

The more we lie, the more we dull the ability to hear His voice and be led by His example.

Take some time tonight to be quiet and honest with God and then, this week, when you are tempted to lie, remember that when you are honest in small things... God can trust you with big ones.

It says more about you and your character than you can ever know.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how honest are you right now?
- Can you think of another example of how our culture seems to make it easy to tell lies?
- Is it ever ok to lie? If the answer is yes, how do you know when it is ok or not?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said that “if you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones” (Luke 16:10)?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON HOPE

Bible verses: Psalm 25:5, Psalm 42:5, Psalm 62:5

Bottom Line: Jesus is our only hope of surviving and thriving in this world.

OPENING GAME: LIGHTSABER DUEL

SUPPLIES

- 1 - 2x4 wooden plank
- Two pool noodles of different color
- Two Blindfolds.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Ask for two volunteers.

Blindfold players and give them a pool noodle.

They have 60 seconds to “use the force” to swing their noodle and hit the other player.

Volunteers keep track of how many hits are landed for each player.

At the end of 60 seconds, the player with the most hits is the winner.

If one player is knocked off of the plank, they automatically lose.

Note: Be sure to lay the wooden plank on the ground rather than propping it up in the air. You don't want anyone getting hurt.

Transition - Use the game as a transition into talking about the Star Wars movie (which will lead into the topic of hope).

TEACH - JESUS IS OUR HOPE

A few months ago, the first of the third Star Wars trilogy was released: Star Wars - The Force Awakens.

Who saw it and liked it?

Well, it's the first of three more to come.

Now, let's go back a little...

The very first Star Wars movie that ever came out was “Episode IV: A New Hope.”

This story takes place after the fall of Anakin Skywalker, the rise of Darth Vader and the conquering Empire.

It follows a young boy and a young girl who are separated by galaxies but connected by bloodline and destiny.

One of the most famous lines of the movie is spoken by Princess Leia as she is trying to get a message out for help.

She says, "Help Me Obi Wan Kinobi, you're my only hope."

Leia is under the impression that he is her "Only Hope."

Before we unpack that idea, we need to focus on what happened in between Episode III and Episode IV.

Death and Destruction

Everything that has happened in between episode III and episode IV can be summed up in those two words.

The empire's reach knows no limitations.

The universe is in turmoil and disarray.

The galaxy is hopeless.

Kind of like all of us.

Just turn on the news and you'll see how our world is a mess.

Terrorism, murder, lying, cheating, etc.

It's not only the world around us, but it's you and I too.

We're not terrorists or murderers, but in our own way we're all messed up.

None of us are perfect, we all have our weaknesses.

We all struggle with sin. It looks different for us all.

You might struggle with lust, pride, anger, or greed.

Those are just a few of the countless ways sin shows its ugly head in our lives.

Sin is the underlying problem all of humanity faces.

It's what brings chaos to the world around us.

When we watch the news, it's easy to feel hopeless.

When we look at the crazy things that happen in our own schools, it can seem pretty hopeless too.

There is one problem with this idea. The Bible tells us differently.

Our hope is in Jesus!

Read Psalm 25:5 - *"Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."*

Read Psalm 42:5 - *"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."*

Read Psalm 62:5 - *"Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him."*

God brings us real hope. Hope we can count on.

In fact, Jesus came to earth to bring us hope.

God saw that the world was a mess. It was chaos.

We were separated from God because of our sins.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be right with God.

The more people who turn their eyes and hearts to Jesus, the better the world will be.

Your hope for a better life is in Jesus.

When you turn to Jesus, he makes you right with God.

He transforms you to become more like Him.

He shows up in the midst of your problems and difficulties.

He brings peace in the middle of chaos.

He gives you the power to overcome your weaknesses.

He gives you purpose in life. A reason for existing here on earth.

He enables you to make a difference in the lives of other people.

Luke and Leia eventually discovered they had a purpose - to bring hope to a hopeless situation.

With God's power, you can too.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What situations in the world do you think are hopeless? Explain.
- Have you ever been in a situation that seemed like it was hopeless? Explain.
- What's difficult about placing your hope in Jesus?
- Talk about a time when God showed up and did something amazing in your life?
- Ask students for prayer requests, especially those who currently face a difficult or hopeless situation.

Have students pray for each other.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON HUMILITY

Bottom Line: As human beings, it's natural to focus on yourself – what you want and the problems you face. Jesus teaches us a different way to live. He teaches us to be humble, which means we focus on serving others rather than being consumed with ourselves.

Bible: Matthew 20:25 (NLT)

OPENING GAME

This is a timed trivia game.

You will need four volunteers that will become two teams of two.

In each team, you will have the clue giver and the person who tries to answer.

The clue giver will be given a set of “phrases” that they must get their teammate to guess. They may not say any word in this phrase while giving the clues.

If they use a word in the phrase, that phrase must be skipped and may not be counted in their final total.

Each team will have 30 seconds to correctly guess as many of their phrases as they can.

Either person on the team may pass at any time, and if time allows at the end, they may come back to that question.

If both teams complete all of their phrases, the team to do it in the shortest amount of time, wins.

Phrases to use for Opening Game (feel free to add or create your own):

PHRASES USING THE WORD HUMBLE

In my humble opinion, Humble Pie, Humble Abode, Humble Beginnings

HUMBLE PEOPLE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Mother Teresa, Dalai Lama, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi

WORDS THAT RHYME WITH HUMBLE

Fumble, Jumble, Tumble, Rumble

PLACES TO VISIT IN HUMBLE, TEXAS

George W. Bush Airport, Botanical Gardens (can accept gardens), Luke Church, Golf Courses

RECENTLY VOTED MOST HUMBLE CELEBRITIES

Johnny Depp, Angelina Jolie, Dwayne Johnson (The Rock), Russell Brand

MOVIE TITLES WITH HUMBLE (OR HUMILITY) IN IT

Humble, Humble the Poet, Humble Heroes, The Humble Bee

Game Tie-in

Though some of the categories were intentionally corny, maybe the others (especially the first two) had you examine how the word “humble” has been associated with popular phrases and famous people.

What does it mean to be served “humble” pie?

What was it about Abraham Lincoln that gave him the reputation of a very humble man?

Remember some of the questions as we continue to dive into the topic of humility.

TEACH

As a human being it's natural to mostly think about the things you want and need.

It's easy to get consumed with the problems you face in life and the things you don't like about life at the moment.

You need a new iPhone, you want to be the star player on the basketball team, you need to get an A in Math this year, you really don't like your brother, your coach yells too much, the list goes on.

When you focus mostly on yourself – what you want/need, the problems you face – you become self-absorbed.

This doesn't happen consciously, it's simply a natural result of focusing on ourselves.

Jesus teaches us a different way to live.

He calls it “humility.”

The world around us has a much different perspective on this topic.

Professional athletes, actors, singers, and politicians thrive on big egos.

We flaunt our status with tech devices and clothing and social media basically exists to show off to the world (controversial, maybe, but true).

Because of this, humility is often greatly misunderstood.

At best, a humble person is seen as someone who is quiet, hiding in the background while avoiding attention.

At worst, humility can be seen as a weakness.

Even one of my most trusted resources gets it wrong!

Humble: adjective... dictionary.com - not proud or arrogant; modest:

So far, so good. Humility is the act of not acting proud or arrogant.... having a feeling of insignificance, inferiority, subservience, etc.:

Wait, what?

...low in rank, importance, status, quality, etc.; lowly

Do you see how the English language has warped the word “humble” to the point that it can be associated with inferiority or low status?

Does this mean that humility is only for the weak? No!

So, what is *true* humility, and is it really all that important?

The Humble Servant

Before coming to earth, Jesus resided in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

He was and always will be King over all of the universe.

He created everything.

He is the most awesome (in the truest definition of the word) Ruler.

So, one would expect Him to come to earth and correct everything we did to mess things up by acting like the all-powerful King that He is right?

Wrong.

When Jesus came to earth, He chose to be born in a barn (or cave).

He was born the child of a simple family living in an oppressed country.

He was born a Jew, a lowly race of people living under the thumb of the mighty Roman Empire.

He never became an earthly king.

In fact, He lived out His adult ministry as an itinerate (i.e. homeless) preacher and teacher.

In short, He was humble in every sense of the word.

He didn't stop there.

The moment that He started that would later be called Christianity was founded on this very principle.

Humility was at the very core of what it meant to be His follower back then, and it still is today.

Look at what He said to His followers about humility and "status".

"and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." – **Matthew 20:25 (NLT)**

Whoever wants to be first (the most important, the most popular, the greatest, etc.) must become a slave.

Is there any people group lower, more unimportant than slaves?

In our modern world, slavery is considered evil, but throughout the vast majority of human history it was a common practice.

Slaves were hardly viewed as human.

They were property, not unlike oxen or work horses.

What is Jesus saying?

Is He saying that humility requires this worthlessness of us? No.

To stop there would allow the message to get lost in translation.

Let's look at the second half.

Even the Son of Man (Jesus) came to serve, not to be served.

Was Jesus worthless? Was He just a slave? No!

Jesus never stopped being the Ruler of all the universe. He never stopped being King.

So, what is He saying? Jesus did not come to be treated like an idol, a revered hero that sits around letting people serve Him.

He came as a servant, someone so humble that He put other people's needs before His own.

He came to give His life so that others could live.

That is true humility.

He knew that He was the King.

He knew that He was and is our Lord.

Still, He came to *serve*.

Jesus is who we are supposed to emulate.

After all, the word *Christian* means "Little Christ" or "Jesus wannabe".

He washed His disciples' feet.

He gave up comfort for hardship so that we could have eternal life.

He tended to the needs of others long after He had reached the point of exhaustion.

He was both King and Servant.

To be like Christ, we must do the same.

We will never be King, but we are God's hands and feet on earth.

Humility is not thinking of yourself most of the time.

It means we think of what other people around us need and want.

The ultimate goal is to put other people's needs and wants above our own, but that may seem like a big jump at the moment.

For now, stop wasting so much time and energy on what you want and need.

Stop dwelling so much on the problems you face or what you don't like about your life right now.

Open your eyes to those around you.

Your parents, siblings, friends, and community.

What problems do they face?

What small or big things can you do to help them with their problems?

How can you serve them?

What can you do to bring them a little happiness and joy today?

Jesus told us to wash each other's feet just like He washed ours.

Jesus did it for us. Now, He asks us to pay it forward.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Before today's message, what is the first thing that came to mind when you thought of the word humility?
- Take a moment to think about a person in your life that strikes you as very humble. What makes them seem humble to you?
- A common phrase in Jesus' ministry was "the first will be last, and the last will be first." What do you think He meant?
- Who can you serve this week? What can you do to serve them?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON IDENTITY

There is an ancient Indian story that tells of six blind men who attempted to describe an elephant based on what part of the elephant they were examining with their hands.

Because of their blindness, they drew some pretty comical conclusions.

One felt the leg and decided the elephant was a pillar.

Another touched the tusk and determined it was a solid pipe.

Still another grabbed the tail and proclaimed it to be nothing more than rope.

The story goes on and in the end a man blessed with sight enters and sees the whole picture, that it was, in fact, an elephant.

This story is often used by world religions to describe what they incorrectly believe to be the different paths to God, but I want to use it to illustrate how incomplete our view and understanding is of ourselves.

Often, we make the mistake of finding our *identity* without realizing that in our blindness we have seen only a tiny part of the big picture.

For example, a guy may play a sport really well so he finds his identity in the fact that he is an athlete.

A girl might be really pretty and therefore she's finds her identity in her external appearance.

The problem is, this is such an incomplete picture.

Jesus sees so much more when He looks at us.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 NLT.

"...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."

What is wrong with finding your identity in the things that you can do, the way you look, the friends you hang out with, or so on?

For starters, everything I just mentioned in that sentence can be taken away from you.

Your *actual identity*, the part of you that truly and accurately describes who you are at the core of your being, cannot change.

Someday you may no longer be the athlete you once were.

What you see as “good looks” may change.

Your true identity, is an amazing gift from God.

Let's look at a few of the things that are mentioned in those verses.

Chosen People

God, in all His amazing power and wisdom, has looked at you and said, “This is a person that I love.

I want to know this person better. I chose you.”

Royal Priest

You are “royalty”, which means that you are an adopted child of the Creator of the Universe.

He loves you, not as a friend or a follower, but as a son or a daughter.

You are a priest.

That carries so many meanings.

You have the ability to help lead others to that same incredible love that God has for you.

God's People

You are a part of the Chosen People, those whom God has set aside as special to Him.

You have the ability to change the world with His love and grace.

These are just a few of the things that the Bible says are your true identity.

The best part is that no one can take that away from you.

Nothing you do, no matter what life throws at you, *your identity in Jesus Christ cannot be shaken or destroyed.* Jesus sees the full picture of who you are.

Allow Him to remove your blindness so that you can step into His wonderful light.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In your own words, what is “identity”?
- What are some of the “false” identities that people around you cling to? (for example: John's identity is that he is the “smart kid”)
- Why is it important to know what your identity is?
- What is dangerous about finding your identity in something that can change or be taken away?
- 1 Peter 2:9-10 touches on a few of the ways the Bible describes our identity.
- Can you think of any more?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON INTEGRITY

Bible: Psalm 139:23-24

Bottom Line: Living with integrity is possible when you walk with God.

SUPPLIES

- Balloon for each student
- A long piece of yarn that will make a large ball when wound.
- Integrity quotes written on individual cards for volunteers to read.

OPENING GAME

Give each student a balloon which they blow up and tie.

The challenge of this game is for everyone to keep their balloon in the air by hitting it.

Last person standing wins, but you have to sit down if any of these things happens:

Your balloon touches the ground: sit down.

Anyone else's balloon touches you: sit down.

You look ANYONE in the eyes: both sit down.

If you say anything: sit down.

Say: Ok, sound simple?

We will see: GO.

Leader: Watch carefully for students who might be 'stretching' the rules such as looking at someone and not sitting down, accidentally getting touched by another balloon, or talking.

Hopefully, these rules will prove more challenging for students, and they might begin to try to tell others who break the rules to sit down, which is one of the things that means they have to sit down.

Once the first round is over, which means that only one person is standing, ask the group if they have any questions about this game.

Ask them which rule was the toughest to remember.

Say: Ok, let's try this again, and remember the rules.

Play the game again.

Gather the group together and be sure to take all of the balloons!

TEACH - INTEGRITY

What was the toughest part about this game?

Here is a strange question, but an important one: How tempting was it to cheat at this game?

What are some of the ways that you could have cheated at this game?

Come, on, someone HAD to have cheated at this game, right?

How simple was it to 'act' like someone's balloon didn't really touch your arm, or maybe you did look at someone, but you both kinda had this secret 'look' and acted like neither of you looked at the other.

Leader: Share a personal story about a time in your life in which it was very easy or tempting to cheat.

Say: Integrity.

How would you define integrity?

Give youth a few minutes to share their thoughts on integrity and if possible write them down for the group to see.

Ask for volunteers to read the following famous people's takes on integrity and hand them one of the quotes below:

Integrity Quotes:

"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters." — Albert Einstein

"Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching." — C. S. Lewis

"Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not." — Oprah Winfrey

"The time is always right to do what is right." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Today I shall behave as if this is the day I will be remembered." — Dr. Seuss

(Leader get a long piece of string and as you talk in this next section, wind it into a ball.)

Think about integrity like this piece of string.

As we read, in these quotes, integrity seems to begin small.

“Integrity is who you are when no one is looking”, one person said.

But think back to a time when you told a ‘small lie’.

Then you had to cover with another lie.

And another.

It became more and more difficult to remember who you told what.

And with each lie, things became more and more complicated.

Think of how many times you see on TV that some famous person, everyone thought was an example and honest, actually messed up big time.

Do you really think that one day this person just woke up and thought “I’m going to lie, steal, or do something to disappoint everyone?”

No, it begins in those small decisions - telling one small lie or changing that one detail.

Thinking to yourself “No one saw me, so it’s not that big of a deal’.

One day you will wake up and what started out so small, has become a big giant ball of lies.

Some of you may have heard about King David in the Bible.

He was an awesome king and was called a ‘man after God’s own heart’.

Yet, this amazing king made one small choice, which led to one lie, which led to another and another.

Up to the point that David, the King, had stolen another man’s wife, committed adultery, had her husband killed in battle, and still seemed to not admit that he had done anything wrong until he was confronted.

David messed up big time.

Look at this huge snowball. (hold up the ball of yarn)

It took David coming face to face with the huge mess that he made to realize that he had betrayed God.

He had sacrificed his integrity.

It's easy to look at others and wonder how they could put themselves in that type of situation, but let's be honest: All of us have fallen and been less than honest - if we are honest!

Maybe you talked about a friend behind their back, or told your parents that you finished homework that wasn't finished.

Or watched that video you know you shouldn't have or said something you regret.

You reason with yourself that it was a small thing.

Or that nobody knew about it.

But there is something that we all tend to forget: Someone DOES know.

God.

What if I were to tell you that I have a video of your darkest secret?

A video that would show every single lie that you've ever told?

Some of you might be thinking: it's not possible, but just imagine for a moment that it could be possible.

What would you worry would show up on this video?

What would you never want anyone to know or to see?

Because this imaginary test will help you to answer this tough question: Do you live with integrity?

Ask anyone who has made bad choices and they will tell you that it started small.

They never realized that it was THAT moment, behind that closed door, or on that one text message that they compromised who they were.

In those moments, you realize that who you are and who God wants you to be are very far apart.

The good news is that God can help you, but first, you must let him help you to be honest with him and honest with yourself.

Read Psalm 139:23-24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

David wrote this amazing prayer to God.

Yes, the same David who stole a man's wife and had him killed.

David, the man who it would be so easy to look at and whisper to your friend "Wow, he really messed up, didn't he?"

The man who realized his sin and came to God pleading for forgiveness.

The man God restored.

Isn't that amazing?

I am going to read this prayer once more and I want you to spend some time quietly letting God search your heart.

Ask God to point out those things in you that are 'knotted' up.

The ways that your integrity is less than God wants.

Remember, for each of us, this should be a daily thing.

I challenge you to pray this prayer each night before you go to bed, and see how God helps you to live the life of integrity that He is calling each of us to live.

Re-read Psalm 139:23-24.

Living a life of integrity is possible, but only with God showing us our true selves every step of the way.

God is patient and loves us and WANTS us to live lives of integrity.

God will forgive you for the ways that you have failed to be who he created you to be.

Let's pray.

Pray: Lord, walk with us.

We need your guidance every single step of the way.

Help us to see those times when we have a decision to make about who we are and who we are not.

Help us to follow you and not our own desires.

And show us the way that we need to walk, talk and think to stay in step with you.

Amen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the greatest tests of integrity that youth face today?
- Which integrity quote did you identify with the most?
- If time allows, read each of the integrity quotes again and discuss them.
- Do you think integrity is valued today in society? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge that youth face in keeping their integrity today?
- Share a time when it was very tempting to lie or be less than God would want you to be.
- What types of situations test your integrity the most?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON JESUS

Bible: Mark 1:35-39

Bottom Line: We need to follow the example of Jesus - he was crazy busy and in demand, and made time to get away and pray.

OPENING GAME - CROWD TAG

Take the group into a large area and define the boundaries (preferably no larger than a basketball court size).

This game is called Crowd Tag.

It is like tag, except I will call out a number and you need to get in a group of that size, link arms and try to tag other crowds.

When you tag another crowd, they have to join your crowd until there is only one crowd.

But here is the catch - when I call out another number, the game starts over and you have to get in a group with the number of people I called out.

Also, if you don't find your way into a crowd and you get tagged by yourself... you are out.

Play game as many times as you'd like.

TEACH

Reflect on Crowd Tag.

Ask: How did it feel to be in the crowd versus being alone?

Which did you prefer: being in the crowd or being alone?

Ok, I'm going to poll the group: Raise your hand if you would rather have been alone than in the crowd?

These are the introverts, the ones who would much rather stay home with Netflix and a comfy blanket than go out with a crowd.

Now, raise your hand if you love the crowd.

These are the extroverts, the people who love a crowd.

People are different and while some of us love to be in a big crowd of people, others of us like to be alone.

Imagine that you were a celebrity.

And every single time you went ANYWHERE the crowds followed you.

How would that make you feel?

Sure, some of you extroverts might love the thought that the crowd would follow you wherever you went, but then the introverts in the group are freaking out right now even thinking about people following you, right?

Share with the group your preference: are you extroverted or introverted and maybe a funny or meaningful story about what this might look like for you.

But imagine that the crowd was ALWAYS there.

When you woke up.

When you wanted to eat lunch.

When you needed to just take a nap.

The crowd was always there, wanting your attention.

And soon you realize that the days when you could just relax or choose what you want to do are gone...because the crowd is there and they want and need something from you.

Raise your hand if you feel like you might faint from the stress of even thinking of this?

Because what I just described is what Jesus lived with during his time in ministry.

Have you ever thought about what it must have been like to be Jesus??

Think of what it would have been like for people to know that here was this man who could heal diseases.

If you were blind, you wanted to get to Jesus.

If you were sick, you wanted to get to Jesus.

All of these people desperately needing to get to Jesus.

Remember the song you might have sung when you were little about this short guy named Zaccheus?

He climbed up in a tree to be able to see Jesus because the crowds were so thick.

Jesus was one man everyone needed him and was desperate to just even touch him.

It stresses me out even thinking about it!

If you had been Jesus, what would you have done?

Think about it this way, who of you here have felt stressed out?

Maybe you are sitting here thinking about all of the homework that you have to do.

You have practice and school and maybe work.

You have to keep your grades up while you go to basketball, football, baseball, track, dance, and on and on.

And just imagine what it would be like when you are an adult.

With a job.

And kids.

Stress is real, right?

And pretty much everyone you know feels super busy.

But think about the stress and busyness that Jesus must have felt?

I mean, really think about what it must have felt like to be Jesus.

To know that you have been sent TO SAVE THE WORLD!??!

Crazy, right?

And this is where we learn an amazing secret from Jesus.

A secret that we all should learn, but sometimes miss.

Ask for volunteer to read Mark 1:35-39.

What was the secret that Jesus can share with us here?

When things got crazy and people were needing him here and there.

To fix this, heal this person, etc.

What did Jesus do?

He went off by himself to pray.

He got up early, even.

Imagine how tired he must have been.

In verse 32-34, it says, *“That evening after sunset the people brought Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The WHOLE TOWN gathered at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons....”*

The WHOLE town gathered at his door.

Can you imagine how late Jesus must have been up, and casting out demons is some pretty serious work, right?

And what does Jesus do?

He wakes up early.

He goes off by himself.

And he prays.

If Jesus needed to do this, what about you?

What is the cure for stress and being so busy you can hardly remember what to do next?

Go off by yourself...and pray.

When are you going to do that this week?

Maybe some of you right now, just need to leave this room and find a quiet place to pray.

Spend some time right now... spread out in this room.

Let the distractions leave you.

Don't think about all that you have to do or the crowd around you and pray.

That is a great secret from Jesus - Go and pray.

Give the group some silent time to pray or play some quiet music to give them a chance to pray.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Talk as a group about the things that are in their lives that are stressing them out?
- Is it a busy schedule, demands, expectations, or something else?
- How do you think it would have felt to be Jesus with all the demands he had?
- When is a time and a place that you could get away to spend time praying?
- What is keeping you from spending time with God?
- Commit to pray for one another this week that they take the time to spend time alone with God.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON JOB

Bible: Job 38-39

Bottom Line: Life can and probably will be hard, but God is with us and wants to speak to us in the storms.

LEADER PREP

The Book of Job is a really tough book to read and even tougher to understand.

The testing of Job can raise real questions about God from youth and even adults.

It is important that you, as a leader, think about how you explain the problem of suffering, if and when the youth ask, because the question will come up.

Why is there suffering?

Why is there evil?

Does God cause it?

Why doesn't God stop it?

This lesson doesn't dig into these questions per se, but speaks more about how God speaks to Job in the midst of his pain.

But the question really might come up as to why God allowed Satan to test Job.

That is a tough one to answer, isn't it?

I will say this: There is pain and suffering in this life.

We simply cannot deny that, and at some point, each and every one of us will be touched by this fact.

Why is there pain and suffering?

I would point to the Garden of Eden and the fact that God gave humans a choice: A choice to love him, to obey him, and to live a life that is more blessed than any of us can imagine.

And the humans chose to live life their way and there has been pain, suffering, and misery ever since.

We live in a fallen world that simply is not the paradise that God designed it to be.

But...and this is a big but: God is redeeming creation and redeeming us through Christ.

The pain and the suffering will not win because God loves us.

He will save us and redeem us.

Just like he did for Job.

Be sure to read the book of Job for yourself, but especially the last few chapters in which God really gives Job and all of us an amazing reminder of just how amazing God really is.

This is highlighted by the beautiful fact that God came to Job in the storm to remind him that God is there.

God is not done redeeming us and saving us from the misery.

THAT is the answer to the problem of evil and suffering.

SUPPLIES

This week's opening game will be messy and will require clean up.

Let the youth know the week before that they need to dress to get dirty and wet.

- Cooked oatmeal
- Coins
- Gummy worms
- Kiddie swimming pool
- Water balloons or hose to wash off with.
- Whistle
- Handouts with Job 38 and 39 for each youth (Use The Message version)
- Brown paper on the floors spread throughout the room
- Sharpies

OPENING GAME – I AM JOB

GAME PREP

Set up the kiddie swimming pool filled with cooked oatmeal, gummy worms and coins that youth will have to dig through to find the coins.

Be sure to have a lot of coins in the pool, but also make sure to blow the whistle after only 10 to 15 seconds to allow everyone a turn.

Divide the group into 3 to 4 teams and have them stand on opposite sides of the pool.

Have the teams line up and when you say 'go', the first person from each team will run to the pool filled with 'treasures' and collect as many coins as they can until you blow the whistle.

They will then run and tag the next person and they will take a turn until each person in the lines has gone.

For a fun twist, have adult chaperones have buckets of oatmeal to throw on the teams!

The messier the better.

Use a garden hose or water balloons after the game to clean up.

The team with the most coins and gummy worms wins.

TEACH

Today's game was meant to illustrate just how messy life can get.

Let's face it, how many times have you watched the news and wondered why things happen?

The question of suffering and why people hurt and why some people don't is a question that people have asked since the beginning of time.

How many of you have asked why there is suffering, but worried that asking this makes you seem like you have little faith?

Well, the book of the Bible called "Job" is God's way of saying that these are normal questions to ask.

The book of Job is about a man who seems to have a really great life and family.

And then everything, and I mean EVERYTHING seems to fall apart.

Can I have a volunteer who would like to be Job for us today?

Be sure to choose someone who is going to have a good time with acting out Job's life.

Can I have 5 volunteers to come, read, and tell us about Job.

And "Job", I want you to act out what we read about you, ok?

Reader 1: Job 1:1-3

Say to Job: Job, you got it pretty good huh?

Here's where this story gets good. Get ready, Job, ok?

Reader 2: Job 1:14-15

Reader 3: Job 1:16

Reader 4: Job 1:17

Reader 5: Job 1:18-19

Job, how are you feeling now?

To the Large Group: How would you be feeling about right now?

Well, this is what Job did: **Read Job 1:20-22.**

Be sure that Job doesn't completely act out this verse.

But wait, Job, because this story isn't over.

Let me keep reading: **Job 2:7-10.**

Give Job a hand and Job, you can go ahead and have a seat and thank God that you aren't Job, right?

To the Large Group: Ok, imagine that you were friends with this poor guy at this point?

What would you say to him?

Well, that's how this story plays out.

Job's friends come to sit with him to help, but to make a long story short (read the Book of Job) they tell him that he must have really made God mad for all this to happen.

And through it all, through all 42 chapters of this book, Job never loses his faith in God.

He asks God questions, though, and in one of the most amazing passages in the Bible, it says that God answered Job in the storm.

You gotta love this: God spoke to Job through the storm.

And God gives this amazing reminder to Job: God Is God.

I want you to read the words that God says to Job silently right now and think about the words that really strike you.

Imagine that you are Job and God is saying this to you: What would you think?

Pass out Handouts with Job 38-39 to each youth.

I want you to spread out throughout the room and take the time to really read the reply that God gives to Job.

Pick out a phrase that sticks with you.

Now, go to the brown paper that is on the floor and write those words with the pens.

Please do this in silence and keep on reading and re-reading God's words until I call you back together.

Give the group 10 minutes to do the reflection, but allow for longer if you see that they are still reflecting and writing.

Grab the brown papers and read what the youth have written to the group.

Job didn't just stay in this sad state.

The book of Job ends as God restores Job and gives him above and beyond what he ever had to begin with, and you get the idea that Job knew God in a very real and profound way.

Read Job 42:10-17.

There are a lot of things that you can learn from this amazing book of the Bible.

But what we learn about God in this Book is that he is sovereign and that our suffering does not go unnoticed.

And that God will bring redemption out of the tough things that happen in our lives if we allow him to.

The pain and the suffering will not last forever.

And here is something really important to remember: God did not create us or this world to be this way and someday make things how He wanted them to be before we messed it up.

He will deliver us through Christ from the suffering.

God loves us so much that he simply will not leave us in that storm alone.

Close in prayer.

God, You are mighty.

You are more powerful than any of us can imagine.

Yet you are with us. You speak in the storm to us.

Not with easy answers. But with reminders

That life is fragile; we are weak, but you are not.

You are God.

You alone save us.

Redeem us in the pain.

We are thankful. Amen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What things that happened to Job would have been the toughest for you to endure?
- What would you have done if you were Job?
- How could the book of Job help someone who is suffering in life?
- Which of the things that God said stuck out to you the most?
- Has there been a time in your life when God spoke to you in a hard time?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON JOSHUA

Bible: Joshua 1:9

Bottom Line: Be Strong and courageous because God is with you.

Leader Prep

I really wanted to do something from the book of Joshua that wasn't this passage, but let's be honest - How much better can you get than Joshua 1:9?

Just imagine being Joshua.

You are following Moses...enough said.

You have an entire nation waiting on you to get them safely home and enter a new land.

What more fitting words and assurance could God have given Joshua than to be strong and courageous?

And what more fitting words God wants to speak to you and to the students he has placed in your path.

Be strong and courageous because God is with you.

It's possible that someone reading this lesson is feeling anything but strong and courageous at this point, and to you, I say don't lose faith.

Remember that God wouldn't have repeated these words over and over to Joshua if God didn't think that he would need to be reminded.

And that is why God reminds us that He is with us.

He will do the 'being strong and courageous' thing for us even when we don't feel it.

God is with us.

SUPPLIES

- Funny trophy for the Thumb Wrestling tournament such as a strange ring for their thumb or a statue!
- Poster board for the Thumb Wrestling tournament
- Paper, markers, scissors
- Poster board
- Double stick tape

OPENING GAME — OLD-SCHOOL THUMB WRESTLING TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS

Create a funny Championship bracket poster for the Old-School Thumb Wrestling Tournament.

Have a 'Loser' and a 'Winner' side.

Challenge the youth to grab a piece of paper, some washable markers and make a thumb print on a piece of paper.

Then, they can decorate it and create a character to represent themselves on the amazing Championship bracket poster.

Give them time to make and cut out their thumb character and then using removable double stick tape have them tape their character on the 'winner' side.

If possible, have one made already for you that is funny and strange, yet clearly your thumbprint to get them excited!

Explain that the winner will receive a prize worthy of such a test of strength.

Instruct the students that as they battle one another, to move their thumbs either to the winner or the loser side.

After each battle have students come and move their thumb to the correct side and then find someone in that same 'bracket' to challenge.

The rules: Players must put one arm behind their back.

The thumbs attack after saying "1, 2, 3, 4 - I declare a thumb war."

You can also ask the group to create one other rule for the thumb war to really make it funny, such as they must do the chicken dance as they thumb wrestle or stand on one foot.

This tournament might go on forever so set a time limit and if there is no one winner, then have fun determining a winner!

TEACH

Winners and Losers.

Share a time in which you truly felt like a loser and make it a funny one.

No crying in thumb wars!

It really stinks to feel like a loser, right?

Yet, if we are all honest, it just isn't possible to be best, the brightest, the strongest, the top dog every single moment.

We all face these moments in which we just might be in over our heads.

What is the most impossible situation that you have been in?

You remember the phrase they would always say at the beginning of the Hunger Games?

"May the odds be ever in your favor!"

Well, sometimes, let's just face it - the odds really don't seem to be in your favor, right?

Share a time in your life when the odds truly did not seem to be in your favor.

How many times do you feel like this?

There are always those people who seem to have it all together and are fearless, but I bet if you were to ask them and they were totally honest with you, they have moments of fear, doubt, and weakness.

Because I will let you in on a little secret - that's what it means to be human.

We all reach points in our lives, some of us much sooner than others, when we see the mountain in front of us; or the assignment we procrastinated on; or the sickness of a loved one; or on and on until we reach the end of our strength and courage.

Maybe you can think of a situation in your life or someone else's life right now where it's truly scary to see what they are facing.

The decisions are just too much.

The risks just too high.

The expectations too crushing.

Well, today we are taking a look at someone who had every right to feel this way.

He was following arguably the greatest leader of all time.

Someone who parted water and made river turn to blood and entire countries fall to knees and God used him in mighty ways.

Moses.

The leader of all leaders, right?

Even though what we often forget is that Moses begged God not to choose him. Repeatedly!

Then, Moses dies and God's people are still not home yet after the world's longest road trip of 40 years!!!!

And Moses is dead.

Now, imagine being the leader who follows.

How would you feel?

All of these eyes...on you.

That is Joshua.

And that is when God says these words to Joshua that are so amazing that we are going to really chew on them today.

Ask a student to read Joshua 1:9.

Ask another student to read Joshua 1:9.

Ask ANOTHER student to read Joshua 1:9.

Then ask the group if we need to read it again.

What did God say to Joshua?

Be strong and courageous.

Don't be afraid: check.

Don't be discouraged: check.

Why?

Because God will be with him wherever he goes.

Wow.

Think about the situations in your life.

The challenges.

The worries.

And then put them up against these words that God gave to Joshua.

See, God isn't telling Joshua to just suck it up and be strong and courageous.

No, God is giving Joshua some pretty amazing punch behind his command: God himself will go with him.

THAT is why Joshua and you can be strong and courageous is because NO MATTER what you face...who is there with you?

See, some many people think that when you are a Christian that your road will be easy because God will make the path full of rainbows and flowers, right?

Wrong!

God knows that life is hard and that people die and get sick and you face challenges that scare you to the core of who you are.

And it is for THOSE reasons that God doesn't make you walk alone.

He goes with you.

God KNOWS it will be tough... And He goes with you.

That is an amazing gift, right?

So, be strong and courageous.

And when you face the next battle or failure or worry or whatever.....take heart and know that you are not alone.

You are never alone.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What situation in your life do you need to remember that God is with you?
- What is the hardest for you - being strong or courageous?
- Who is someone you know who needs to be reminded that they are not alone and that God is with them? Commit to remind them that they are not alone this week.
- Write the words "Be strong and courageous...I go with you. From God" on your mirror in your bathroom when you get home where you can see it and remember.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON JOY

Bible: Romans 15:13

SUPPLIES

- Glow sticks
- Tape
- Balls (soft, ones that wouldn't hurt if they hit a student)

OPENING GAME

Before the game, tape the glow sticks to all of the balls except for one.

Split the group into two teams, and have each team split into four groups, with the two groups of each team standing facing each other, a couple steps apart.

Show the students the ball that does not have the glow stick taped to it.

Ask them if they think throwing it and catching it between the two groups of each team seems possible.

Get a leader to turn the lights off.

Ask the group if they think it's possible now that the room is dark.

If they do, ask them if they think it will be harder without the light.

Then, bring out the balls that are glowing from the glow sticks.

Ask if they think it is possible now, with the glow sticks.

Give the balls to one group from each team.

Have them toss the balls to the group across from them.

Anyone who doesn't catch a ball is out & all the balls that weren't caught are out of play.

Have that group throw the balls back.

Again, the students who do not catch any are out.

Continue with this pattern until all of the students on one team are out.

The last team standing wins!

After the game, discuss these questions:

Before I explained that there were glow sticks, did you think that catching the balls in the dark was going to be impossible?

Have you ever experienced circumstances where it seemed really hard to have joy?

Do you think that it's possible to have joy when you're not feeling happy?

TEACH

So, when I first asked you if you thought throwing balls back and forth was possible, it seemed pretty obvious, right?

It's something we all learned pretty early on.

But when the element of light was taken away, it suddenly seemed very difficult.

Something that had just seemed very possible moved into something that seemed impossible, just because of the circumstances.

It's like that with joy sometimes, isn't it?

When things are going good, joy seems easy.

You don't even have to think about it, it just comes!

But when you take away the good circumstances, joy turns into something that seems very hard, and at times even impossible.

But just like the glow sticks introduced a way to make something that seemed impossible, possible, I'm going to introduce you to something that makes joy possible at all times, even when the circumstances are bad.

Read Romans 15:13.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Say: That's a pretty cool image, isn't it? An image of God *filling* you with joy.

See, that verse doesn't say, "May you have joy all the time."

It doesn't say, "May God help you keep your joy."

No, it says, May God *FILL* you with joy.

There are going to be circumstances in your life where you just don't have any joy, no matter how hard you try.

Just like in the game we played, there are going to be situations where life seems so dark, you can't imagine joy being possible.

And that's when you have to turn to God.

This verse calls Him the God of hope, because that's exactly what He is.

He is our hope.

And it's because of that hope that we're able to have joy, no matter what the circumstances are.

I don't know about you, but overflowing with hope sounds like something I want to do!

And doesn't joy seem like something that would just happen if you were overflowing with hope?

Just like those glow sticks provided a way to toss the balls back and forth in a dark room, the hope that God gives us provides a way for us to be filled with joy when our circumstances seem dark.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's an example of a way God is your hope?
- Is joy something that is hard for you to have sometimes?
- Have you ever asked God to give you joy?
- Can you remember a time where it didn't make sense that you were joyful, but you were able to have joy because of God?
- Do you think it's truly possible to have joy, no matter what?

WRAP UP

While it would be nice to never have to go through any hard times in life, we know that we will. They're going to happen, it's just a fact of life.

But as Christians, we also know another fact—that we can have joy no matter how hard things get.

When you lose your joy, remember where your hope comes from.

Remember that it comes from God. Ask Him to fill you up with joy, and He will!

He is your hope. No matter how dark life gets, He will be there to light it up with joy.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON JUDGING OTHERS

Bible: John 8: 3-11; Ephesians 2: 8-9; Mark 2: 15-17; Matthew 7: 1-5 (NLT)

Say: Let me start off with telling you a story.

You see there was this lady.

She was caught doing something, well, pretty bad.

She was caught in the act of adultery, cheating on her husband.

And all the people where she lived found out about it, and wanted to punish her.

Severe punishment!

They wanted to kill her!

Then there was this dude...who told them if they never did anything wrong in life, they could be the one to kill her.

And everyone kind of just backed down.

Because he made a good point.

You see that dude is Jesus, and those people were all the religious people!

But it's not about what Jesus told the religious people.

It's what he told the lady.

Go and sin no more!

Why do we find that so hard to do?

John chapter 8, verses 3-11 depicts what I want to talk about today:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without

sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

I want to talk about something that I know we all struggle with...

Judging others!

We are going to look at why we judge and condemn ourselves.

Then we are going to look at how we judge other people.

So, speaking about judging ourselves...why are we so hard on ourselves when we mess up?

Jesus wasn't hard on the lady!

POINT #1 - We condemn ourselves.

Jesus told the lady to go now and leave your life of sin.

How many people here have ever done anything wrong before?

How many of us still beat ourselves over the head about doing those wrongs? Why is that?

Is it because we don't think we deserve to be forgiven?

Is it because we don't trust that God has forgiven us? Or, is it because we don't trust that God has the capability to forgive us?

You beat yourself up because you got mad and cursed some dude out.

Or you were on the computer the other day and looked at something you shouldn't have.

We are constantly mad at ourselves for messing up!

Why can't we ask for God to forgive us and be done with it?

In John, Jesus tells the lady to GO! An act!

He told her to MOVE!! And sin no more.

POINT #2 - We don't have to earn it

We condemn ourselves because we think that we have to earn God's forgiveness and love!

We think we have to be good enough.

We have to go through the motions of being a Christian...

Read a chapter in the Bible a day.

Pray for an hour a day.

Go to church.

Read all the books...

We then give up on God because we try so hard to earn his love.

When we fail, we start to beat ourselves up all over again.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Let's break this verse down.

"It is by grace".

Who can give me a definition of grace? (Get responses)

It is the infinite, never failing, love and mercy, and favor, that God shows to us.

Has anyone here ever been given a break before?

Have your parents let you off easy on a punishment? Well then, that was grace.

"Through faith"

How many people here sat in your chairs and didn't have to think if they were strong enough to hold you?

That's faith - placing your trust in something.

"The gift of God"

What gifts does God give you?

His love

His mercy

His grace

His son

His provision

His comfort

His invitation to you to be a part of what he is doing in the world

The list goes on...

"Not by works"

You don't have to earn God's great gift, as if you are competing in the Olympics or something.

We don't have to be "good" enough for God to love us, or accept us!

POINT #3 - We think we are beyond hope.

We condemn ourselves because we think we are beyond hope.

We mess up and think there is no way God can STILL love us.

Mark chapter 2 verses 15-17 gives us hope,

"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?'"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

There is hope!

Jesus came for those who had no hope, sinners, me and you.

He desperately loves us, wants to do life with us, give us hope!!!

POINT #4 - We judge others.

It is so easy to judge someone else isn't it?

We see someone messing up...and we are quick to give our opinion of how it should be done.

We see someone smoking a cigarette and we immediately think that they are going to hell.

We see someone with tattoos and immediately put them into a social class.

Why are we so quick to pass judgment on people?

Let's see what Jesus has to say about the topic of judging others.

Read Matthew 7: 1-5.

"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?"

How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

What is all this talk of a piece of wood in our eye?

Maybe your friend got drunk at this party last week, and you just saw them actually singing in worship.

You think to yourself, "They got drunk last week, and they have the nerve to sing to God!"

But then, you struggle with your own "sins", don't you?

In fact, you might drink too much sometimes, but you do it in private.

And if it's not that...then it's something else.

You have your own "sin" issues to deal with, so why would judge someone else?

POINT #5 - When we judge others, we are comparing ourselves to them.

What are we really doing when we judge others?

We are comparing ourselves to them.

- Our stuff
- Our reputation
- Our looks
- Our identity

We are trying to convince ourselves that we are better than them, and we actually think we deserve more!

And anytime we want to be better than everyone else...

Anytime we think that we deserve better than anyone else, what are we doing?

You and I are saying that...

I am the man...

I am the woman...

The truth is there really is only one "I AM" and that is God.

He's the only one who can judge, because He is the only one who is perfect, he is the only one who can purely judge without any evil intentions or hidden agendas.

God doesn't love one person more than another.

He doesn't love me more than he loves you.

So, just like Jesus told the religious people (you without sin throw the first stone)...

Don't judge people because they don't have what you have.

Don't make the same grades you do.

Don't like the same things you like.

But show them the love of God by not condemning them, or making fun of them, but just hanging out with them and getting to know them.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your name, school, and dream car?
- Why are we so hard on ourselves when we mess up?
- Do you live like you have to earn God's love (have to do certain things to gain favor with God)? Why or why not?
- Why is it so easy to judge other people?
- Have you been judged by someone? How did it make you feel to be judged by that person?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON KINDNESS

Bible: Colossians 3:12; Job 6:14

Lesson Overview: We often think about kindness in terms of a single “act of kindness” instead of a lifestyle. However, the Bible tells us that we are to clothe ourselves in kindness, which goes far beyond just doing kind things for others every now and then.

OPENING GAME: All Wrapped Up

SUPPLIES

- Roll of gauze, tulle, or some other type of fabric that can be wrapped around like a mummy (toilet paper works well too)

Divide the group into two teams and place them on opposite sides of the room.

Have a volunteer from each team go and join the opposing team. When you say go, the teams must start wrapping the fabric around the player from the other team, making them into a sort of mummy.

They have one minute to get creative and wrap the player up the best they can so that it will be difficult to unwrap.

When time is up, the players who are wrapped up must hobble, jump, or otherwise make their way across the room where their team will try to unwrap them as fast as they can.

The first team to completely unwrap their player wins.

TEACH

Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit.

That means if you are living the way you are supposed to be living, according to God’s Word, then kindness will be a fruit that grows out of your life.

When you think about kindness, what comes to mind?

Probably an action, right?

Doing something nice for someone else?

What if we stopped thinking of kindness as an action and started thinking of kindness as an entire lifestyle?

Colossians 3:12 - *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”*

In the game we just played, you wrapped the fabric all around the player from the opposite team.

Now, let me ask you—was it easy to get all of that off?

No! Eventually you were able to, but you weren’t able to get rid of all the fabric instantly, because you were clothed in it.

This verse says that we are supposed to clothe ourselves with kindness.

Now, when you get dressed for the day, do you just wear your clothes long enough for someone to see them before taking them off?

Of course not! That would defeat the entire purpose of wearing clothes!

In the same way, kindness should not be a single action completed and then forgotten.

Instead, it should be something we put on, wrapped all around us, and wear all day long.

Do you think that it’s really possible to clothe yourself in kindness and wear it all day long?

Do you think it’s really possible for kindness to be something that filters into everything you do all day?

It is!

And I’m going to tell you three ways you can keep kindness wrapped around you all day: with your words, with your actions, and with your attitude.

Kindness with your words

It’s incredibly easy to be unkind with your words.

Saying the first thing that comes to mind, or not taking time to think about your attitude before you speak can result in a lot of hurt feelings and a lot of regretted words.

However, it can also be incredibly easy to be kind with your words.

How? By taking a little extra time to think about your words before you speak them out loud.

This may sound like a lot of work, but it’s really not.

Actually, it's pretty easy.

You just need to ask yourself one question: *Are these words kind?*

If the answer is yes, that's awesome.

Clothe yourself in kindness with your words!

If the answer is no, then just don't say them.

Think of a different way to say what you want to say, this time using kindness.

Kindness with your actions

Our actions should be kind.

This may seem like a "duh" point, but ask yourself—do you take the time to think about whether or not your actions are done in kindness?

In the busyness of everyday life, kindness can quickly become something that is shoved aside in favor of convenience.

Why? Because it's just not convenient to be kind! It's way easier to just be selfish.

So, this week, as you're going about your normal routine, take the time to purposefully make sure your actions are kind.

Don't only think about how your actions affect you, or what people think of your actions.

Think about how you can exhibit kindness with your actions. And then do it!

Kindness with your attitude

This can be a tricky one.

How many of you struggle with having a kind attitude all the time?

Think about it—when someone is getting on your nerves, is your attitude toward them kind?

What about when someone is unkind to you?

Or what about when things don't work out the way you wanted them to—does your attitude show kindness?

There is only one person who has complete control over your attitude, and that one person is you.

So, take control of it!

When a situation happens that makes you feel irritated, or selfish, or any other unkind emotion, take a deep breath and choose to react with kindness.

If this is something you struggle with, ask God to help you!

When you feel yourself struggling to have a kind attitude, pray and ask Him to help you have more kindness in your heart and less of whatever else is going on.

God loves you and wants to help you—so ask!

Job 6:14 says, “Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.”

In this verse, fear doesn’t mean to cower in the corner, terrified.

It means to revere, or to respect.

Here it says that withholding kindness from a friend is forsaking the fear of God.

In other words, if you’re not being kind to those around you, you aren’t respecting God.

That doesn’t sound too good, does it?

But that’s how important kindness is to God.

It’s so important that His Word says that withholding kindness from a friend is withholding fear and respect from Him.

That’s a big deal!

It’s so important to show kindness to everyone, even the people who you don’t feel like being kind to.

No matter what people look like on the outside, and no matter what their life looks like from the outside, you never know what they are going through on the inside.

It can never hurt to be kind to someone, but it can hurt to be unkind.

Have you ever heard the saying that “You may be the only part of Jesus that someone ever sees?”

It means that there are some people in your life who may never go to church or open a Bible, so you are the only exposure to Jesus that they have.

In the same way, there may be some people in your life who think of Jesus as mean and scary, because they've never truly been introduced to Him.

So, you may be the only example of His kindness that they ever see.

That's a big responsibility!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to you to clothe yourself in kindness? What are some ways you can do that?
- Have you ever regretted not showing kindness to someone?
- Do you think that kindness is more of an action or a lifestyle?
- When you talk without thinking about what you're going to say, is the result usually kind or unkind?
- Do you take the time to think about whether or not your actions are kind? If not, is that something you want to start doing?
- Do you think that others would describe your attitude as kind? Why or why not?
- What are some ways that God has shown you kindness?
- Do you think it's possible to live an entire lifestyle full of kindness?
- Have you ever withheld kindness from a friend? How does it make you feel to know that the Bible says that's like forsaking the fear of God?
- What are some ways you can practice kindness this week?

WRAP UP

SUPPLIES

- Four clear glasses
- One pitcher of water

Every single day, you are going to be faced with a choice: be kind, or be unkind.

Your words, your actions, and your attitude...these are all things that you'll have to choose kindness in.

Kindness will not always be the easiest choice.

In fact, sometimes kindness will be the hardest choice. But it's *right* choice.

Play this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1KCzrTg9ic>

While that video was playing, were you thinking of any specific person or situation? Here's the deal—most likely, you're going to have a few regrets in life.

You'll make mistakes, miss opportunities, and do other things that will make your stomach hurt when you look back on them.

I'm telling you right now...don't let a lack of kindness cause those regrets.

You have no idea how much your kindness could mean to someone.

It could mean just a little, or it could mean everything.

But as a follower of Jesus, as an *example* of Jesus, it's your responsibility to be kind.

Before we close, I want to tell you one more thing about kindness.

The more you're kind, the easier it is to be kind.

The more kindness you show to others, the easier it is for them to be kind. Kindness is contagious!

Line up the cups.

Pour water into them in the following way:

Fill the first cup up almost all the way.

Fill the second cup up about a quarter of the way full.

Fill the third cup up halfway full.

Pour the fourth cup up about a quarter of the way full.

I want to show you guys an example of how kindness works.

We're going to use water as an example of kindness.

Hold up the first cup.

Let's pretend this cup is you, and that you've chosen to clothe yourself in kindness.

So when you have an interaction with someone else (*hold up second cup*), you choose to act in kindness, even though they don't seem very kind.

Pour about half of the water from the first cup into the second cup, bringing the second cup to be about three-fourths full.

So you act in kindness towards them.
And then, they leave.

You don't know what kind of impact your kindness had, but you know that you did what you should have by acting in kindness.

So then this person you were kind to, let's say they bump into someone else.

While their first reaction wouldn't normally be to be kind, they were impacted by the kindness you showed them, so they decide to act in kindness.

Pour about half of the water from the second glass into the third glass, bringing the glass almost all the way full.

Now this person (*hold up the third glass*) is just brimming with kindness because of their interaction with the person that you were kind to.

So what happens when they see someone (*hold up the fourth glass*) who seems to be completely empty of kindness, they don't even think twice—they just act in kindness!

Pour until the fourth glass is almost full.

See how all the cups have water in them now?

It's the same with kindness...it just spreads and spreads, and the more you give of it (*pour fourth glass back into the first glass until the water overflows*), the more you're filled with it!

If you want to overflow with kindness, start acting in kindness towards others.

It won't be long until you're so full of kindness that you just can't contain it!

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON LABELS

Bible: 1 Samuel 16:7

Bottom Line: We are so much more than the labels that we or others give to us.

LEADER PREP

We all label others whether we want to admit it or not.

To prepare your heart for this lesson, though, you need to really ask God: What are the labels that I give to others that I need to be aware of in my own life?

As leaders, it can be very tempting to try to quickly figure out who are the students that are leaders?

Who are the troublemakers?

We do it with parents of students: Are they the high maintenance parent or the trustworthy parent?

Yet, before we can ask the youth to examine the way that they label others, we must honestly ask ourselves: Am I part of the problem?

Today's scripture is a not so gentle reminder that God often chooses the ones that we tend to overlook.

Samuel was a leader and even *he* would have passed over David.

Samuel thought that he found the next king based on who was the strongest, oldest, etc.

We do the same thing in ministry, don't we?

When the seniors graduate, we begin to wonder who will be the next set of leaders.

Let this lesson be a reminder to see others as God sees them - at their heart.

Because it would be a true tragedy to skip over the 'Davids' in our midst because we are looking and labeling on our own.

No one person can be summed up with a simple category, yet we attempt to define others and ourselves in these simplistic and one dimensional labels every single day.

As leaders, we must first be aware of the tendency to label others and quickly try to 'sum them up' and also be a gentle and loving voice to the students we serve because God sees their heart.

He sees so much more than the things that the world is choosing to define them by.

And God also sees those things in them that they are simply blind to because of the ways that they have chosen to let others label them.

Our prayer is that through this lesson, students will see that God does see the richness of each and every person and that He has such amazing things planned for every person if they simply allow Him to be the one who defines who they are in Him.

And God wants to give us new labels that He gives from seeing who we really are.

OPENING GAME – Label Mania

SUPPLIES

- Label Sticker sheets (1 sheet per student)
- Pens/markers (1 per student)
- Large roll of paper or post it pad on a stand
- Cardstock with 'God's labels' - words written on each piece and extra cardstock to write more.

**Note the list of the labels that is in the teaching part of the lesson and write these labels one per cardstock paper, but feel free to add prayerfully other labels that would fit your group.*

Say: For today's game, I need your help.

Each of you will have a sheet of stickers and a pen.

I will give you about 5 minutes to fill this page with the labels that we give to ourselves and to others.

What am I talking about?

Well, when I was a teenager, I labeled myself as _____ (fill in the blank).

And I labeled others with these words: _____(fill in the blank).

Your labels can be serious or funny even, but write one 'label' per label and you will use these for the game.

Give the students 5 minutes to make their labels.

Be sure to walk around and help those who might struggle and give them funny labels to add!

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Say: Now that you've written down your labels on your labels (J), everyone get ready because we are going to play a game called "Label Mania" and it will be just as crazy as it sounds.

When I say "Go", you will run with your label sheet and try to stick a label on another person.

Of course, it goes without saying, but maybe it still needs to be said, that these labels should not be placed on someone else in any place that a bathing suit would cover, ok?

Also, avoid violently placing your label as we do have a lesson afterwards.

Once all of your labels are gone, you can still play by taking off the labels that are on you and placing them on someone else.

I will call "time" when I think that we are close to total mania!

Say "Go" and let the mayhem begin.

End the game when you can tell the mania is truly setting in.

Tell the youth to keep their labels on them and have a seat.

TEACH – Youth Group Lesson on Labels

Now that we have experienced true labeling mania, let's look at some of these labels.

I am going to have each of you come up, read all of the labels that are stuck on you, and place them on the large pad of paper.

Ask for a volunteer each time and have them come and place all of their labels on the pad for all to see.

Some of these labels are funny, but some of these are really harsh, right?

Are there other labels that you would add that you know people use to label others?

Add these label to the post it paper.

Labels are real.

And the hurt that some of these labels inflict is real too.

Raise your hand if you've been labeled in a way that hurt you.

Now ask yourself, have you labeled others in ways that hurt them?

Why do you think labeling others is so common?

Give students a chance to think and share about this, as it will give some good insights into the cultures that they are living in at school.

Here's the sad thing - labeling others is nothing new.

Share about the labels that used to be around when you were a teenager.

For some youth ministers of a 'certain age', using a clip from The Breakfast Club or Clueless movies might be great to use here.

The Bible is full of stories in which others quickly labeled someone and God showed that he had other ideas.

Take the story of King David, for example.

King David was THE king that the Jewish people would point to hundreds of years after his life as THE king; yet, he wasn't anyone's first choice.

Hey, he was WAY down on the list as he had older brothers who were perfect candidates.

So when God told the prophet, Samuel, to go and anoint the king from the sons of Jesse, Samuel went down the list of 7 seven brothers and God said these words to Samuel when he thought he'd found the king in one son who really impressed him:

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

One by one, Jesse's sons came until there were none left and Samuel still hadn't found the king.

He asked if there were any other sons and Jesse says "Well, the baby is out in the fields' as if David wasn't even on the radar with Jesse as a possibility.

But God had chosen David when no one, not even David's dad had ever considered him.

Maybe you are a "David" - the one everyone underestimates.

This scripture is a reminder to you that God sees your heart.

And God just doesn't see us as the world sees us, does he?

It's as if God is saying "throw these labels out the window" because he sees our heart.

Share a personal story about someone you've seen in ministry who was underestimated or a 'misfit' who God saw something awesome in them.

And here is the important thing to remember about how God sees us: He labels us by our heart.

And by 'the heart' it really does seem like this is just a way of saying that God sees who we truly are at our depth.

And not the person that we fear others will see.

No, God sees the amazing potential in us.

When we might look in the mirror and see words like "the shy one" or "the popular one"... God sees things such as "the one who loves others greatly" or "leader".

Around the room are more of the labels with new words on them that I pray might be new for you.

Labels that could only come from God who loves you.

Labels like:

- Beloved
- Child of God
- Mighty Leader
- Listening ear
- Friend to the friendless
- Beautiful
- Precious
- Righteous
- Blameless
- Chosen

Say: Can you think of other labels that God might give to us?

Write these labels down as well and place these labels around the area where you are speaking.

Please add labels that you prayerfully feel are applicable to your group.

I want you to take some quiet time and I will lead us in a prayer in which we ask God how he sees us.

For some of you, these words might be slow coming.

But know this, God sees amazing things in each and every one of you.

And for some of you, it might take a Samuel, someone who loves God and listens to God, to remind you that you are NOT forgotten.

To remind you that God does have great plans for you that will absolutely amaze you. I pray that each of you might get a small glimpse today of what God sees when he looks at your heart.

Pray a prayer such as:

God, you see our hearts.

You also see those labels that we have allowed ourselves to hear and think are true from others.

But it is YOUR opinion that matters most.

So, erase those labels we might have on us that don't come from you.

And help us to let you write new labels on us.

Amen.

Say: As you leave, please come forward to choose a new label or write your own to take with you.

And remember, God sees the heart.

He sees you and He loves you.

Close in prayer.

Leader: *Be available to help youth find or write labels that God would give them, as some youth will have a tough time with this.*

This would be a great time to pray with them and share with them the beautiful and amazing things that you see in them.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the labels that people give to others at your school and in society today?
- What are the labels that others give you or even that you give to yourself?
- What label did you choose or write that you feel comes from God about you today?
- Where can you put this label to help be a reminder to you about how God sees you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON LEADERSHIP

Bible: Daniel 1

Bottom Line: God's idea of leadership is very different from the world's idea of leadership.

OPENING GAME – Lego Battle

SUPPLIES

- 3 Lego Sets (try to find sets that could be complicated but doable in about 15 minutes)

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide the group into 3 teams.

Give each team a Lego set.

Your challenge is to put this Lego set together in the shortest amount of time.

Everyone must participate and no pieces can be left out of the Lego creation.

Give the teams time to complete the structure and then have a fun Lego judging time.

Adult leader Tips:

Observe how teams work together as they build.

Resist the urge to step in to help the groups and remind any adult leaders to also resist intervening.

Give the groups time to struggle (if needed) and watch for leaders and also quiet leaders.

Keep watch for youth who show leadership skills and note how they get the others on their team to participate.

Watch to see which youth stay to the end to help and clean.

Display the completed sets and have a completion 'ceremony'.

After the game, ask...

How did we work together as a team?

What different roles did people on the team seem to take?

Who was a vocal leader?

Who followed directions?

What was the most challenging part of this task?

What would you do differently next time?

TEACH

The world is looking for leaders.

What are the qualities that you think great leaders possess?

Name some great leaders.

What made or makes them great leaders?

Write down their answers for the group to see.

Share observations that you made as you watched the teams try to put together their lego sets.

Try not to single anyone out, but be sure to note if obvious leaders emerged and help the group to reflect on how this happened?

Were there any leaders that seemed to emerge in this activity?

How did they lead you?

Activities like this are very interesting because you notice that people seem to take on different roles.

There are those who are very vocal and loud.

But there are also quiet leaders.

The ones who might not say much, but will be the last one there finishing the job.

Did you notice, because I did, the ones who stayed to help clean up after the rest of the group left?

Leadership.

Leadership is a skill that the world really does value.

Yet, the way that the world defines a leader can be very different from the way that God defines a leader.

The world says that to be a leader, you have to be first and the best.

And that sometimes to 'get to the top' you have to do things that might go against your conscience.

What are some other ways that you see that the world defines leadership?

Today, the world is looking for leaders.

But more importantly, God is looking for leaders.

Leaders who don't lead like the world might expect.

We are going to read about some young leaders in the Bible.

They faced major challenges and made some major decisions.

And they had to go against the flow in some amazing ways.

Read Daniel 1.

Daniel and his friends were the best of the best from Israelite families and now they were in a foreign land.

They had been chosen to join this 3 year 'training' and to eventually be in the king's service.

Yet, Daniel seemed to be very clear about who and whose he was.

He belonged to God.

What were some of the decisions that Daniel and his friends made?

Why do you think that it was important for them to take these stands?

Daniel was young, and yet he knew that he was different.

In a good way.

In a "God way".

And Daniel wanted it to be obvious that it was God that set him and the others apart.

They didn't eat what everyone else ate.

The Bible says that he didn't want to be 'defiled' by what the king was eating.

Daniel had the courage to stand up and challenge the leaders.

Daniel belonged to God and he wanted that to be obvious.

And God gave Daniel understanding and knowledge.

Think about people at your school.

Who are the leaders?

And I'm not talking about the people who THINK that they are leaders, but the people that others listen to.

Are they positive leaders?

Why are they leaders?

Why do others listen to them?

These are really important questions that sometimes we don't take the time to ask, right?

Now, imagine that Daniel were to come to your school and live out a similar challenge?

What would people think about him?

Would you have the strength to join him?

Maybe it wouldn't be that Daniel only ate vegetables or refused the food from the 'king's table', but think in modern terms, what might Daniel refuse to do?

Would he hang out with your friends?

Tell the same jokes?

Listen to your music?

Go to the same places on the weekend?

Or would he refuse to do those things because they were going to weaken him?

See, what Daniel and his friends knew was that they couldn't be like everyone else.

They were different.

They led.

Today as we watch the news and everything seems to be about choosing a leader, these are important questions to consider.

What makes a great leader?

What makes people follow that leader?

And how can you become the kind of leader God wants?

Imagine that you decide to make the commitments like Daniel made.

You have choices that you must make about what you eat, wear, and do.

Do those things make a difference?

To Daniel they did because they said something about who he was.

It was about identity for Daniel and the choices he made were very purposeful.

He wanted everyone in Babylon to know that He belonged to God.

And God blessed Daniel and his friends.

God is looking for "Daniels" today.

Young leaders who are not afraid to be different, but in a good way.

Leaders who don't just go along with the crowd.

Leaders who won't compromise who they are to 'fit in'.

Ask yourself this: In what ways are you tempted to just fit in?

Why not take a stand and decided to stand out?

Make a conscious decision about what you put in your body, what you do with your time, what you watch, or how you speak.

Imagine if Daniel had Twitter or Instagram: What would his feed look like?

Now ask yourself this question: when others look at you, do they see a leader or someone trying to fit in?

It is a very tough question, but one that I want you to consider very honestly.

Who are you living to please?

God or everyone else?

What changes do you need to make starting today to be the kind of leader God wants you to be?

Because Daniel didn't wait until he was 'older', but knew that God was calling him even as a young man to be different.

And God is calling you to the same.

Pray and ask God what things you need to 'not defile' yourself with and how you could live as Daniel lived.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who would you consider to be some of the greatest leaders and why?
- In what ways are youth today challenged to 'fit in'?
- What are some things that you thought of today that you could give up in order to be like Daniel?
- How could you be a leader at your school? In your youth group? With your friends?
- What is holding you back from really being a leader?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON LENT

This lesson is designed to help make the centuries-old tradition of Lent more meaningful for today's youth.

It helps students to understand that Lent is not just about self-denial for its own sake, but that it can be a time of meaningful sacrifice, service, and self-reflection.

This lesson is designed for a small group but can easily be adapted to larger groups.

For larger groups, divide students into teams and have them send a representative up for each of the games.

The games are used to break up the lesson to keep students engaged, and are meant to reinforce the theme of the lesson (Lent is about giving something up to achieve a greater good).

The way this works is that students (or teams) start out with a prize (candy works well) and, with each new game, have the option of giving up their prize for the opportunity to win extra candy or prizes if they win the next game.

(It looks and sounds a lot like gambling, but “spin” it so that it is about giving up something small to achieve a greater good).

SUPPLIES

- Computer or tablet (one that can be connected to a projector or big screen TV if you have a large group)
- Scratch paper or personal whiteboards and pens/markers for quiz
- Cotton balls & Q-tips
- Petroleum jelly
- Paper bowls
- Straws
- Highlighter markers
- Candy - M&M's or Skittles

OPENING GAME: Deal or No Deal

Use an online version of the once-popular game show [like this one](#).

The rules of the game will vary depending on which site you use, but should be pretty self-explanatory.

Have students (individually, or a representative from each team) take turns playing the game.

As each student/team finishes their turn, give them a piece of candy.

At this point, they can choose to eat the candy now or save it to use in the next game.

ACTIVITY: Lent Quiz

Before you begin with the quiz, offer the students the opportunity to give up their piece of candy they received after the previous game.

If they give up their candy and win the quiz game, then they get their piece back plus two more.

If they keep their original candy, they get one piece for winning. (Give up something small to achieve a greater good)

Give students a piece of paper or whiteboard and a writing utensil.

Ask them the following questions and have them write down their answers.

Go over the answers at the end.

The winner gets a piece of candy (or two, if they gave up their candy before the game).

How long does Lent last? (40 days)

When does it begin? (Ash Wednesday)

What is "Fat Tuesday"? (A day to indulge before fasting)

What does Lent commemorate? (Christ's 40 days in the desert)

What is the purpose of Lent? (spiritual renewal)

What day of the week does not count in the 40 days of Lent? (Sundays)

When does Lent end? (Easter Sunday)

MINI-GAME: Sticky, Fluffy Noses

Before the game, offer students the chance to give up one piece of candy for the chance to get two pieces if they win the game.

Set up two tables about 25 feet apart.

On each table place a paper bowl for each student playing the game.

In the bowls on one table place five to ten cotton balls, and on the rim put a glob of petroleum jelly.

The object of the game is for students to get all the cotton balls from the bowl on the table into the bowl on the other table.

They do this by dabbing jelly on their noses and sticking their noses in the bowl of cotton balls and getting a cotton ball to stick to their noses.

They then walk over to the other table and get the ball to drop into their bowl on the other table.

They may not use their hands in any of this.

If they drop a cotton ball before putting into their bowl, they must pick it up (they can use their hands for this) and put it back in the starting bowl.

The winner is the first to get all their cotton balls from one bowl to the other.

LESSON 1: What is Lent? Why do we celebrate it by giving things up?

Lent is a time of self-reflection and self-denial in preparation for the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection during Holy Week.

Before Jesus began his earthly ministry, he spent 40 days in the wilderness (Luke 4: 1-13; read this with the youth if you like).

We don't know much about that time, other than the fact that he fasted and prayed and was tempted by the devil.

So, in the same way, we ought to spend time fasting and praying in preparation for our ministry of bringing the good news of the risen Christ to the world.

Our celebration of Holy Week often coincides on the calendar with the Jewish celebration of Passover.

In preparation for Passover, our Jewish friends must do a thorough cleaning of their houses and kitchens and get rid of all their old food.

The Passover meal must be prepared with all new and fresh ingredients.

In the same way, we ought to use this time of Lent to do some "spring cleaning" ourselves.

Traditionally, Christians will fast from something (usually certain foods or drink or certain activities) during the 40 days of Lent (with the exception of Sundays, which is a weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection).

This is to remind us of the great sacrifice that Christ made for us.

Jesus gave up so much to restore our relationship to God (Philippians 2), is it too much to ask of us to give something up for 40 days?

MINI-GAME: Q-tip Shooting Gallery

Before the game, ask participants if they want to give up one piece of candy for the chance at winning two pieces in this game.

Stand five to seven highlighter markers up on a table, placing them in a line about two inches apart from each other.

Place them near the edge of one of the long sides of the table.

Give each player a straw and ten Q-tips.

Taking turns, players will stand or squat on the side of the table opposite the markers.

They use the straw like a peashooter to try to knock over the markers with the Q-tips.

The player who knocks over the most markers is the winner.

In the event of a tie, place one marker in the middle (lengthwise) of the table and have the two players who tied go to either end of the table.

In this "sudden death" showdown, the players will shoot their Q-tips simultaneously at the marker.

The one to knock it over is the winner.

LESSON 2: Ideas of Lent: Fasting, Feasting, & Service

Below are some ideas for your students on ways they can celebrate Lent and make it a meaningful experience for themselves.

If they choose to give something up, it should not be for its own sake, but rather for the sake of gaining something greater (like the candy prizes with the games).

There are some great ideas here:

20 ODD LENT IDEAS FOR STUDENTS

20 MORE ODD LENT IDEAS FOR STUDENTS

Celebrating Lent is not just about giving things up; it can also be about adding good things to our lives, as well as about serving others.

Encourage your students to make a thoughtful choice that will provide them a meaningful Lenten experience.

Ideas of things they can fast from:

Social Media.

Giving it up altogether may be difficult since many students use social media for school or athletic purposes, but perhaps limiting their use is a good start.

Texting.

Like social media, texting does have its practical purposes and is necessary in many situations, but encourage students to call their friends and family members rather than texting them.

A phone call is much more personal and meaningful.

Junk food.

If students are in the habit of buying a soda or candy bar or coffee drink on a regular basis, encourage them to give that up for Lent.

Also encourage them to use the money they would have spent on junk food to help others.

Perhaps they can treat a friend to a soda or coffee drink, or they can donate the money to Heifer International or some other charity.

Sarcasm.

This can be a tough one for students, but attempting to give this up can encourage students to think about what they say and to look for ways to lift others up.

Sleeping in.

Emphasize again, that students should not do this for its own sake, but should use that extra time on Saturday mornings to do something meaningful and productive.

Ideas of things they can feast on:

Reading the Bible.

Encourage students to set aside time each day for reading their Bibles, if they don't do so already. The Gospels are a good place to start during the Lenten season.

Memorizing Bible Verses.

Students can memorize a verse a day, or a verse a week.

Give them suggestions of some of your favorite verses to start with.

Prayer.

Students should set aside a time each day for prayer, whether in the morning when they first get up or at night before bed.

Or perhaps during passing period between classes.

Time with family.

It can be difficult for families to connect with all the busyness in everyone's schedules.

Parents will appreciate the initiative if their students want to set aside time for family.

Ideas for service:

Do your siblings' chores once a week.

Not as a trade of chores, but simply to do something nice for a sibling.

Treat someone to a soda/coffee.

When out with friends, students can offer to pay for their friends' treats.

Write a thank you note to one of your teachers.

Teachers get a lot of calls and emails from parents and students complaining about things.

A thank you note will be very appreciated.

Help a neighbor with yard work.

Offer to rake leaves or cut the grass or shovel the sidewalk.

Bake cookies for an elderly member of the church.

A small gesture like this will be very meaningful for both the giver and receiver.

MINI-GAME: Sucking up candy

Before the game, ask participants if they want to give up one piece of candy for the chance at winning two pieces in this game.

Or, since this is the final game, you can offer a larger candy bar for the winner.

Using a similar set-up as the first game, put about ten M&M's or Skittles in a bowl on one table and an empty bowl on the other table.

Give each player a straw.

They must use the straw to “grab” the candy by sucking through the straw and carry the candy to the empty bowl on the other table.

If they drop any candy, they must take it back to the beginning.

The first player to get all their candy from one bowl to the other is the winner.

SMALL GROUPS:

How will you celebrate Lent?

Break into small groups and have students brainstorm ideas of what they might want to give up for Lent.

Remind them that whatever they choose should be meaningful to them and beneficial to others.

Give each student a note card and writing utensil.

If they decide to make a commitment during Lent (feasting, fasting, or service) have them write that commitment on the card along with their name and phone number or email address.

Have the small group leaders collect the cards, then call, text, or email the students during the week to see how their commitment is going.

This will provide students with some encouragement and accountability in their decisions.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON MATERIALISM

Bible: Matthew 6:19-34

Bottom Line: Does your stuff own you or do you own your stuff? God wants to be your treasure.

Let's face it, we live "in a material world", as Madonna would say. I know... I'm showing my age... ha! But, it is true.

We live in a society where material things are so readily available to us.

We can simply order whatever we need, whenever we need it, and have it delivered to our homes. 2-day free shipping.

It is effortless to accumulate these days.

Many are yearning for simple lives.

There's a reason that tiny homes and "simplicity" are buzz words – we are stuffed with stuff.

Many of the students in your ministry might be struggling with materialism.

The cycle goes like this.

They want something and eventually get it.

Then they want something else and get it.

They constantly want more and are never satisfied with what they have. It's a vicious cycle.

The struggle is real and is one that we face as a society.

SUPPLIES

- 5-7 thrift store "treasures" (stranger the better) wrapped in gift boxes

Note: Make a video of you shopping for the items at a thrift store, also showing the sheer volume of items that are available for purchase.

OPENING GAME: TREASURE HUNT

Hide “treasures” in your youth group space – wrapped boxes of very quirky and ‘untreasure-like’ treasures.

Examples would be weird things that you find at a thrift store or even in the church basement!

Tell the youth how many treasures are hidden and instruct them not to open the treasure when they find it, but bring it with them once the hunt is over.

On GO, give them 10 minutes to hunt for treasure.

Have a ‘treasure opening’ time in which the youth open the treasures and then following up by showing the thrift store video (if you have one to show).

TEACH

Imagine that next week, we are going to have a challenge in which each of you will be dropped off, from a fancy helicopter of course, onto a deserted island and you can only take one thing with you: What would that item be?

Give the youth a chance to answer.

How many of you wanted to answer “my cell phone”, but then you thought about needing to take the charger... and then wondered if you would get cell signal on this deserted island?

Let’s hear how you would answer would answer these questions:

How many pairs of shoes do you own?

Yes, even the ones that you don’t think fit or are cool.

How many pairs do you OWN?

How many shirts do you own?

What about how many possessions do you own?

The GRAND TOTAL of things that belong to you.

More and more the ‘cool’ thing is to get a tiny home.

Why? Because more and more of us are sick of all of our stuff.

The TV show ‘Hoarders’ has caused many of us to have nightmares—have you seen the show?

There are people, on this TV reality show, who are literally buried under their stuff, and there is a reason that so many people are writing about simplicity or simple living.

They are realizing what Jesus already knew: Stuff won’t fill us.

Jesus shared some pretty amazing thoughts on stuff and as we read his words, really listen.

Read Matthew 6:19-34: *Have different people read each verse to help break up the long scripture, but the scripture in entirety is powerful.*

What phrases really jump out at you?

What stuck out to you in these amazing words from Jesus?

Let’s look at just a few of these words.

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.”

We all have things that we truly love and treasure.

Let’s be honest, for a lot of you, it is probably your phone.

But what other things do you really treasure?

Or put this way: What are the possessions that you have that you wouldn’t want to live without?

What things do you spend time thinking about and trying to figure out how to buy?

And only you and God can truly know whether this thing is simply a ‘thing’ to you or a ‘treasure’.

But ask yourself this: If I were to lose this thing... what amount of my time would be spent either being so mad I lost it, thinking of how to get another one, or wishing I had it?

Listen to this phrase from Jesus: *“And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?”* (NLT translation)

How much do you worry about what you wear? What others are wearing?

And Jesus points to beautiful flowers to remind us that there are so many things that we worry about: what to eat, what to wear, what to do to earn more money to buy the things we want to eat and wear, when God loves us and will always care for us.

Does this mean that God is going to go and buy us a brand-new wardrobe from our favorite store or give us what we NEED?

See, many of us have to honestly look at what are our WANTS and desires and what are our NEEDS.

Jesus is saying that the difference is a heart issue.

It is a matter of what we treasure, value, or crave.

See, what we think will make us happy (the newest phone, car or just insert whatever that thing is for you) – will it truly make you happy?

Will it satisfy you FOR LIFE??

Because think about when you were a little kid: What was something that you wanted so bad from Santa Claus for Christmas that it just about drove you crazy waiting for Christmas morning to come?

Share a personal story about your Christmas gift obsession (if you have one) or give examples.

Give the youth a chance to share their stories.

Now, let me ask you: where is that item now?

See, I bet that item is maybe, best-case scenario, up on a shelf, but honestly, it probably stopped working or is at a thrift shop somewhere.

Because we had a WANT not a need.

We could easily talk about all of the people all over the world who live without things or who are starving.

They have no food or shelter.

And that conversation needs to happen, but, sometimes ‘that country’ is so far away that we forget to realize that we need to be really honest about what we have going on right in our own little world.

Let's stop looking at other people and look at ourselves and ask Jesus honestly: Do I have a problem with materialism?

Do I own my things or do they own me?

Or ask yourself this – on a scale of 1 to 10 how messy is your room?

Do you have stuff just laying everywhere?

Because if you do, like most of us do, what does that say about your relationship with stuff.

And maybe it is a good time to take a look at those piles and ask yourself: "Do I really need all of this?"

Why do we have the things that we have?

And where is my heart?

What do I treasure?

Here is a question I want us to really chew on: How could our stuff be used to bless others?

Let's think together in our small groups about ways that we could actually bless others with our stuff.

Because the last words from Jesus in this scripture are the real treasure: Seek God first and He will give you all that you need.

God wants to bless us and take care of us.

We honestly don't need to worry about most of what we spend our time worrying about because 'God has us'.

Imagine how your life could be if you let God truly take care of you?

If you looked for him, like you looked for that treasure today, and found him??

Seek God.

He wants to be found.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you think you struggle with materialism?
- What are your favorite possessions and why?
- Which things that you own would be the hardest for you to just give away and why?
- What are ideas of how we could use our stuff to bless others in our community? Share these ideas with others and even dream together as a youth group on how to bring these dreams to reality.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON MISSIONS

Bible: Acts 1:1-11

Bottom Line: Missions is more than a trip in the summer, but our calling as Christians - Right where we are.

SUPPLIES

- A map of Ancient Palestine including Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond. A good site is http://www.bible-history.com/maps/southern_palestine_judea.html
- Poster boards for small groups
- Markers for each small group

Leaders: This lesson is a great group preparation for summer mission trips or projects, and will hopefully inform that ministry.

Missions is more than a trip.

It is a way of living to witness about Christ.

This can happen far away, but it should truly be happening right where we are, every day.

Be in prayer in your own life as you prepare for this lesson about the ways that Christ might be challenging you to live on mission for him.

Be open to how Christ might be challenging you, your family, and the ministry.

OPENING ACTIVITY

The opening activity this week is a challenge is to bless the church where you meet.

This could be a project that has needed to be done or a creative way to show them the love of Christ.

Below are some ideas that you can choose beforehand or even give your group the opportunity to choose.

If your group is larger, prepare different projects for smaller groups beforehand.

'Missions' ideas: (choose options that are 'close to home' such as in your church, but not moving out to the community necessarily, as that will be the next challenge)

Clean the outside of the church doing yardwork, landscaping, etc.

Paint a room of the church needing sprucing (be sure to get this approved with necessary church leadership and let the students know to wear painting clothes prior)

Clean windshields of church member's cars who might be present for other meetings and leave a note that they are loved.

Send notes to elderly or those in the hospital.

Make posters sharing how God loves them to put around the church.

Hold up signs outside the church if it sits on a busy street that say that God loves them for those driving by.

Be creative.

After the Opening Activity ask:

How did it feel doing the 'mission' to bless people that you know?

How would you feel if they didn't notice?

TEACH

When I say 'missions' what other thoughts or words come to mind?

Give the group time to really brainstorm and write down their ideas.

Today, as a group, we were on a mission.

We did (talk about the project) and did it to bless those closest to us.

Jesus gave his disciples and us a very specific mission.

Read Acts 1:1-11.

If time allows, divide the group into smaller groups.

Give each group a poster board and markers.

Here is your mission: I want you to create a 'meme' for the mission that Jesus gave to his disciples in the scripture that I just read.

His words in verse 8 are really important.

Invite the youth to use their cell phones to look up Acts 1:8 - which they will use for this activity.

Be creative, but really try to get 'at the heart' of what Jesus is saying is the mission that he was leaving with his disciples, but also with US.

Give the groups 10-15 minutes to create their 'meme' poster.

Have each group share their poster 'meme' and post them around the room.

Jesus had some very specific things to say to the disciples right before he left.

Jesus knew that these were the last words that he would say before he ascended into heaven, so you know that these words were chosen carefully.

They were important.

Jesus knew that life would be very hard for his disciples, or the apostles as they were called following his resurrection.

He had been killed and those who killed him would not stop with him, especially if his followers continued his teaching and ministry.

Times were very dangerous to follow Jesus.

So for Jesus to say that they were to be his witnesses - that was serious.

What do you think it means or looks like to be a witness for Jesus?

Give the group time to share their thoughts.

The Book of Acts is a very cool book to read because we see just what it meant to be a witness of Jesus.

Basically, his followers just did what Jesus did.

They ate with people, they healed in his name, they shared his teachings, and they lived as Jesus lived.

They were witnesses to all that he had done, and their LIVES spoke his witness.

Let me ask you this: Does your life LIVE as a witness to Jesus?

Do your friends and family know that you love Jesus?

That you follow Jesus?

Because, even today, following Jesus can be challenging.

What will people think of you?

Will it change the way that you live your life?

It should.

But, I want to challenge you about what living as a witness of Jesus could look like.

It doesn't mean that you are standing on a street corner with a sign or that you carry about a big huge Bible at school.

It is about *being* a witness.

About *living* as Jesus lived.

Loving those around you, but especially those who are outcasts.

Forgotten.

Ridiculed.

It means that you eat with those that nobody else will eat with, and yes, those that will cause others to talk about you.

That's exactly what happened to Jesus.

It means that you care deeply about those who are hurting.

What if being a witness for Jesus meant that you loved others, cared for their needs, listened to their heartaches, and prayed for them?

Notice that Jesus said some very specific places, though: We are to be his witnesses in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth".

Does that mean that we need to get on an airplane to go to Jerusalem in order to be his disciples?

I think that Jesus was saying something very deep here, but something that really does apply to us today.

Show a map of Ancient Palestine.

Point out Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was the city where the apostles mostly lived. It was 'home base'.

Judea was the country...think of it like the state where you live.

We live in (name your city) which is in the state of (where you live).

What was Jesus doing?

He was saying: this is where you are (point at Jerusalem on the map).

Widen the circle.

Go to 'Judea' (point to Judea area on the map).

Don't just stay in Jerusalem or (name your city).

Go out.

Share that witness beyond where you are right now.

And then he said to go to 'Samaria'.

Point out Samaria on the map.

What do you notice about Samaria?

Yes, it's farther away.

But what you might also not know is that Samaria was a place that Jews would definitely NOT want to go.

Is there an area you can think of that isn't too close, but definitely not a place where you would feel comfortable going?

That's Samaria.

It's not home, it's not next to home, but it is close enough that not going there is definitely saying something.

Jesus said that once you've gone to Jerusalem and Judea, you must then go to that place where you think "Oh no, he wouldn't want me to go THERE".

Yes, he does.

I want you to think about where is our 'Samaria'.

We need to pray about where Jesus is calling us to go after we love our church, like we did today.

And then love our city, which we will be doing the next few weeks.

Then we need to really spend time thinking and praying about where is 'Samaria'.

And Jesus didn't stop there, did he?

Where else did he say that we need to go?

To the ends of the earth.

What do you think that Jesus is saying here?

He is saying this: Be my witnesses EVERYWHERE.

Jesus knew that it was a challenge to his disciples and to us.

It can be very scary.

But the main point is this: You cannot stay where you are to be his witness.

A deep part of being a witness of Jesus is NOT STAYING WHERE YOU ARE.

This amazing life you've found in Christ is NOT JUST FOR YOU.

But for the whole world.

Now, THAT'S missions.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think that Jesus meant by telling us to be his 'witnesses'?
- How can you be a witness to Jesus?

For the next questions, please write down your answers and share them with your leader as they can be used to pray about where God is leading the group in mission.

- Think about where would be your 'Jerusalem': A place nearby that you feel safe. How could you be a witness of Christ there this week?
- Think about where would be your 'Judea': Maybe the town that you live in. It's close but not your 'home'. How could you be a witness of Christ there this month?
- Think about where would be your 'Samaria': Somewhere that feels 'far away' and even dangerous or foreign. How could you be a witness of Christ there in next few months?
- How is Jesus challenging you to be on mission for him?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON MONEY

Bible: Matthew 6:19-21, 24

Bottom Line: God wants to be our treasure and only God can truly guide us on how to use HIS money.

Let's face it: Money is a tough topic.

Just think about how many stressful nights you have spent worrying about money?

Whether teens realize it or not, money impacts their lives in so many ways – sometimes in very negative ways, but today they might be challenged to beat the statistics.

Spend some time in personal reflection thinking about how you are doing with money.

Are you practicing what you preach?

Are you offering your own money to God?

Pray about possibly sharing how God has worked in your life or the lives of others regarding money and know that as a church, we need to have more of these kinds of conversations.

Rather than beating yourself up about what is or isn't in your bank account, ask God, as you will ask the students to ask God, to help you to use wisdom in how you handle His money from this day forward.

SUPPLIES

- A coin for each youth
- Paper and markers
- Money prize (dollar candy bars, 'pay days', etc.)

OPENING GAME: HEADS OR TAILS

Give each student a coin.

Say: Today is an epic battle – a battle of Heads or Tails.

When I say 'go,' find a partner.

Next, each of you will choose 'heads' or 'tails' (and you can't both call the same one).

Then, count to 3, toss your coin and if the coin lands on the side that you called, you get to keep the coin.

Choose 2 volunteers to come up front and demonstrate.

Say: Now, here is a practice round.

What did you call? Heads or Tails? *Let the student choose.*

Now on 3, we will flip our coin: 1-2-3

Each person takes the coin that landed on what they called.

Now, find someone to challenge and then move on to another person once that toss is done.

Keep going until I say to 'stop.'

TEACH

Divide the group into groups of 4 to 5 and give them this challenge:

Say: I've been given a Presidential order to ask you to create a new currency.

Each team will have 3 minutes to design this currency however you would like, prepare a 'pitch,' and then share your currency with our group.

Each group will get paper and markers – feel free to get creative and use other items.

After you give your pitch, our entire group will vote on the currency we would like to send as our model to the President.

Give each group 3 minutes to 'pitch' their currency.

Then, have the entire group vote on the currency they would like to adopt.

Give the winning group play money or chocolate 'dollar' bills.

Say: Think about this question: If you won a million dollars, what would you do with it?

Now, think about what some of the phrases are that you have heard about money?

Maybe even phrases from songs?

Give teens time to share and this will also give you a good 'temperature' of how the group thinks about money.

What are some things that your parents have taught you about money?

Can anyone guess what married couples fight about the most?

And can anyone guess what we are talking about today? Money!

It is that one topic that we want to think about, but we don't want to think about, right?

Yet, think about what our world would be like without money?

It isn't that money (hold up a dollar bill) is magical.

Yet, think of all the relationships that have been ruined over money.

Families fight over money when their loved ones die.

Couples get divorced and then fight over who gets what amount of money.

Countries have gone to war over money.

And there is no other topic, which Jesus talked about more than money.

In reality, money sort of makes the world go around and not in a good way most of the time, right?

Read Matthew 6:19-21, 24.

What do you think it looks like to 'love money?'

Really think about this because all around us, there are people who are truly in love with money.

Give them time to share examples of what this could look like and even pull in current examples of people who love money.

Jesus' words are really deep: Where your treasure is, there will your heart be.

So, let me ask you: Where is your treasure?

Maybe think of it this way: If you could have ANYTHING in this world... what would it be?

And now ask yourself this question and try to answer it honestly: What would you be willing to pay for this thing?

Would you give a month's pay?

Maybe sell all of the possessions that you have to pay for it?

What about one of your siblings for it?

Would you give your family for this one thing?

What are the lengths and the prices that you would pay to have this thing?

And it might not be an item, but maybe you would do almost anything for a relationship.

That *one thing* that you desire more than anything? *That* is your treasure.

Ask yourself, do you desire that, whatever it is, more than God?

These are tough questions, but you will save yourself many years of chasing after desires and false 'treasures' if you honestly answer this question and then tell God that you want God to be your treasure.

Because only then can you truly be happy and content.

You will begin to see that anything that you have is truly a gift from God.

Your things and money don't own you.

You own them and you offer them and yourselves to God.

I am going to let you take the coin that you played the game with today, but I want to challenge you to not look at money the same way after today.

Money will always be around, whatever it might look like, but don't let it consume you.

Desire God more than any money, possession, relationship or treasure and then, and only then will you find that God will bless you with a happiness that money could never buy.

Hold your coin in your hand and let's pray that starting today, from this day forward, that

God will guide each of us in what we do with HIS money.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS QUESTIONS

- Why do you think that Jesus talked about money more than any other topic?
- What are some of the ways that you have seen money negatively affect people?
- When you look at this coin, what do you want to remember?
- How could you 'give your money' to God? Practical ways.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON MOSES

Awe.

That's what I thought the first time I watched the movie, The Prince of Egypt.

I had never seen in such vivid Technicolor what this passage in Exodus described.

As corny as it might sound, it deeply moved me to see the awesome power of God, yes, even in a cartoon.

Let's face it, many of us adults have simply lost our sense of wonder.

That wonder that sneaks up on you as you see God working in mighty ways.

That awe that comes when you know in your head that God can do anything, but then the grip it takes on your soul to really see with your own eyes His power and might.

Or maybe you are still waiting for these moments.

Well, your students are probably in one of these camps also - either they believe it could happen or they just don't.

And that is okay because God is in the business of surprising us.

That's what we can pray for as we prepare for this lesson - that God would wow us again with his power and his might.

And that waters would again be parted in the lives of our students as we come to this story with fresh eyes.

OPENING GAME: DODGE BALLOON

Divide the group into two teams.

The size of your play area will be determined by how many students are on each team.

Choose one team to go first and have that team divide their crew in half.

Next, form two parallel lines facing one another.

Take 6 steps back from one another - if using regular balloons.

If using water balloons they need to be farther apart because the other team will be running in between their lines trying to avoid being hit by a balloon.

Explain to this team that they must stay within the boundary of the other crew's parallel lines and try to avoid being hit with a balloon.

If they are hit—they are out.

The team will run and try to avoid the balloons until there is no one left on their team OR they are able to catch the balloons which would then cause the person who threw the balloon to be out (in dodgeball fashion).

This will be even more difficult if using water balloons, but much more fun to watch!

Switch the teams once everyone is out.

Each team will get a chance to be the 'Blue Crew' - which simply means they will be running through the center and having blue balloons (can be water balloons) thrown at them from each side by the other team.

If you use balloons just blown up, then have the boundaries be a few feet.

TEACH

After you have played a few rounds of the game...

Ask: Was there anything about the game that we just played that caught you off guard?

When was the last time that you were truly surprised?

When was the last time that you were left speechless?

Share with the group a time in which you were left speechless by seeing the power of God.

If you don't have an example, take some time before the lesson to talk with other Christians (would be a great Facebook question) about times when they've been truly wowed by the power of God in action.

Say: Some of you might have seen this movie - it's an old one, but a good one.

Play the clip of the parting of the sea from the Prince of Egypt.

OK, imagine that you had been there when God parted the sea for the Israelites: In a word, what would you have thought?

Write these words on the board or on large post its around the room.

Say the words slowly.

Ok, now when was the last time that you said these words from seeing God do something amazing?

*Ask a student to read **Exodus 14:31**.*

I know that some of you are thinking that maybe this is just a story from the Bible and things like this don't happen anymore.

But, what if it isn't that things are not happening, but that we aren't seeing them or recognizing them as being from God.

Here is something I want you to think about not only today but for a while: God hasn't stopped doing amazing and powerful things.

Sometimes the things that He is doing can seem strange to our human minds.

Sometimes even small, yet when you stop to consider just WHO is doing these things it really is quite huge.

Maybe you have been praying for someone and then BOOM they text you out of the clear blue, or your think of something at just the perfect time.

It might even be things that you would have never considered were God - like maybe you actually left your house late but didn't realize that if you'd left just a few minutes earlier things might have been really different.

Small, yet miraculous.

Maybe some of you sitting here today ARE miracles.

I could sit here all day and give you examples of ways that God is still at work and yet there would be so many other things that even I wouldn't even consider are things from God, but they are.

God is still at work; we just have to be on the lookout, and unfortunately sometimes those things are not as obvious as a big wall of water forming on either side of us.

But that doesn't mean they are any less a show of His power, right?

He still changes people.

God takes lives that others think are wasted and makes them whole again.

Share a personal story or a story of someone you know who has been changed by God.

Today God is still (*read the words the group shared earlier that you wrote down*) and this week I want you to carry around a reminder with you everywhere you go to be looking for God.

Hold up the blue glass 'water' stone.

Each of you are going to get a 'water stone.'

You can use a pen to write one of these words on your stone to remind you that you are supposed to watch for these (*say some of the words again*) moments because God is still up to amazing things because that is who He is.

Play the Prince of Egypt clip again and invite the students to come forward to get a water stone and write their word on the stone.

Challenge the group to share their 'water stones' on Instagram or Snapchat to remind one another to be watching this week for God!

Close with prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share a moment in which you have been in awe or 'wowed' by God.
- What were your thoughts after watching the movie clip?
- Why do you think that some people say that God doesn't do miracles anymore?
- Which word did you write on your rock and why?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON MOTHER'S DAY

Bible: Proverbs 31

Bottom Line: Mother's Day is an opportunity to thank God for the women in our lives who have helped to shape our faith.

OPENING GAME - Mommy Relay Race

SUPPLIES

- Adult Depends
- Baby food
- Spoon
- Bib
- Band-aids
- Kleenex
- Blankets
- Pillows
- Brown bags for each challenge (4 bags per station)
- Poster boards
- Markers

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide the group into teams of 5 members each.

Set up a station for each team with the following items in each challenge bag:

Diaper: Depends

Boo-boo: Band-aids

Feeding: Baby food, bib, and spoon

Nite Nite: Blanket

This is a relay to see which team will win the "Super Mom race".

When I call 'go', send a 'Mom' and a 'baby' to go up and complete a challenge.

When that challenge is done, both of you run back to your team and then another 'Mom' and 'Baby' will go up to do the next challenge.

The team that finishes each of the challenges first, wins.

Let me explain what each of these strange challenges will be:

First, the diaper challenge.

Each 'mom' will help their 'baby' to put on a diaper over their clothes.

Then the baby will crawl back with their mom to their team.

Next will be the boo-boo station:

A 'mom' will put band aids on each of her 'baby's' elbows and then give a get well 'kiss' on each boo-boo.

Then run back to your group.

The next challenge will be for the 'mom' to feed their baby by putting on a bib and then using a spoon to feed them the yummy baby food.

And finally, a 'mom' will put their 'baby' to bed by covering them with a blanket, tucking them in, singing a nite nite song, and both run back to their team.

The first team to complete all of these challenges first, wins.

TEACH

Large Group Question:

What do you think are some of the most important qualities that a Mom should have?

What do you think the hardest things would be about being a mom?

Being a mom, as we saw from the game can be a hard job.

I am sure that many of us here have probably made our moms feel like they were in some twisted relay race, right?

Share a funny or ridiculous story here (if you have one) of a way in which you challenged your mom.

What in the world would we do without our moms?

But while this day is usually full of smiles and cards and love, Mother's Day can be a complicated day for some people.

I want us to take a few seconds to think and to pray for those who might be hurting on Mother's Day.

Maybe you know someone who has a tough relationship with their mom - say a prayer for them right now

Or maybe you know someone who has lost their mom: Think of them and pray for them.

Think of the many children who are in foster homes and are away from their mothers today.

Pray for them.

Or the mother who selflessly gave her child for adoption to give her child a life she couldn't provide.

Pray for her.

Just think about how difficult this day would be for women who long to be mothers but for whatever reason can't have children.

Pray for them.

So, while we want to honor our Moms and tell them how awesome we think they are, let's take this discussion a little different way.

Let's talk about women who have made a difference in our lives.

Can you think of a woman in your life who has influenced you in a positive way?

Maybe you immediately think of a teacher or a friend.

(Give the group a chance to share a few examples).

The scripture today paints a picture of what a godly woman looks like, and while some of the examples might seem strange, we will talk about what this might look like for a woman to live like this today.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31.

Divide the group into groups of 5 students each and give each group a posterboard and markers.

Each group is going to take a section of this proverb that you want to highlight and create a 'wanted ad' like the kind that you might put in the newspaper.

Think about what the qualities described in your passage might look like creatively today.

Give each group a chance to share their 'wanted ad' and then display them around the room.

Have you ever met someone who lived out these "Proverbs 31" characteristics?

Maybe she would use her gifts like cooking or sewing or drawing and would bless others with them.

And there are so many other ways that we can bless others, but things like caring for others' basic needs is something special that we often overlook, isn't it?

Can you think of any other 'talents' that seem simple and easy to ignore that can really make a big difference if shared with someone?

Give the students a chance to share these simple 'talents' and be prepared to share a few which have blessed you.

It is sadly easy to overlook many of the things that the "Proverbs 31" woman does that bless others isn't it?

But part of what makes her so special is that she isn't doing these things to get praise. It almost seems like her actions flow out of who she is.

Who is she?

You get the idea when you read this that this woman first of all, loves God.

She loves her family and she loves to care for them.

Have you ever known someone who truly loved to care for others?

The Proverbs 31 woman reminds herself that "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting".

Those few words are really something that everyone in our society today should stop and think about.

Imagine how life might change for you today if you were to remind yourself that beauty and popularity and all of the things that the world seems to think are everything... are fleeting or short lived.

What if, instead of worrying about how you look or how others see you, you were to live like this woman in the scripture today and focus on your character?

Let's think about what character traits are important to this woman.

Share the words of the character traits that you think she would value and I will write them on the board for us to talk about.

Write down their words and add other character traits as needed.

Now, look at this list and ask yourself: How do I measure up today?

Do I care for others?

Do I try to make this world a beautiful place?

Do I use my time to bless others?

Do I love God and help others to feel his love through me?

Because it is THIS kind of person who God truly will honor.

It is this kind of person that their family will one day say how they were blessed by this person.

Wouldn't you love for your family and friends to remember you THIS way?

Because they really will not remember the cool outfit you wore or the car that you drove or even the way that you looked for more than a few minutes.

Let's face it, everyone is too concerned with what everyone else is thinking about them, right?

But what they will remember years from now is what you probably remember about the special woman that you mentioned who affected your life: That they cared.

The love that they showed you.

Well, it's time for you to start becoming that type of person for someone who will one day mention your name as one who affected their lives for good.

Don't leave here feeling guilty that you don't measure up.

Instead, choose one or two of these qualities that you want to become a part of who you are and start today.

Then, choose one or two women in your life thank for the ways that they bless you and love you.

Go home tonight and write them a letter or give them a call.

Just that small act of blessing someone else will start you on the same path of being a blessing.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which part of this proverb was a challenge for you to understand?
- What do you think a woman like the one described in Proverbs 31 might look like today?
- Share about an influential woman in your life. How did she affect you?
- Which of these qualities from the proverb do you want to show in your life?
- Reflect on the saying: "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting". What do you think this means?
- Have the students write a letter to their mother thanking her for the many ways that she blesses their lives.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON NEHEMIAH

Bible: Nehemiah 1:1-4

Bottom Line: We are called to care for and help others when they suffer.

SUPPLIES

- Jenga games (you can also make inexpensive 'Jenga' games by getting small pieces of wood to use)
- Balloons
- Current newspapers (Or print current stories from the Internet about suffering in the world the students might not be aware of happening.)
- Double stick tape or masking tape

OPENING GAMES - JENGA WALLS

Play this game in a large room and divide the room into 4 equal spaces.

Divide the group into 4 teams of equal size.

Give each team a designated space in the room.

Place building supplies (Jenga blocks or blocks of wood) in the middle of the room and explain that each team will race to see who can build the tallest wall.

Give them hints that it would be 'wise' to build their wall close to the back of their space because other teams will try to break their wall down.

But, here's the other challenge: Each team will also be given balloons that they will try to throw at the other team's wall to break it down.

Team members must stay within their space and cannot cross over into another team's space to throw the balloons.

Set a time limit and at the end of the time, the team with the tallest wall still standing - wins!

TEACH

You just experienced a very tiny bit of what the Israelites experienced in the book of Nehemiah.

To make a long story short, the Israelites used to have this amazing protective wall around Jerusalem and it was broken.

Nehemiah heard about his people and the wall and felt God call him to go and rebuild the wall.

*Ask a youth to read **Nehemiah 1:1-4**.*

Nehemiah wasn't even living in Jerusalem, but was serving in the palace for the King of Persia.

When he heard about the terrible condition in Jerusalem, with a wall that was in ruins, he cried.

It is very easy to sit in comfort while others suffer.

Think about places in our world today that are suffering.

Maybe they don't have enough food...or there is war....or suffering.

There are newspapers spread all around this room.

I want you to choose a newspaper and find a story from the world in which people are suffering.

Then, tape those stories to the walls around us.

Give the youth 5-10 minutes to find stories.

Direct the students to walk around and and pray while they read the stories on the walls around them.

Have students return to their seats.

Ask: Which of these stories really struck you?

How did these stories make you feel?

Why do you think that we don't know that this kind of suffering is going on around us? Nehemiah could have stayed in the palace and just kept bringing the cup to the King.

He had it good.

But instead, when he heard about his fellow Israelites, he cried.

He left the palace and he went to rebuild the wall which kept Jerusalem and the people living there safe.

And it wasn't easy.

Later on, in Nehemiah, while they were busy rebuilding this massive wall, the enemies around them begin attacking.

They basically had to hold a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other.

They had to take shifts - a building shift and then a guarding shift to keep one another safe.

Times are different now, and yet, as you can see around the room, people still need us to help them.

To stand around them and protect them.

To help them build up what has been ruined.

What are some ways that we could help _____? *(choose one of the photos/stories posted around the room)*

(Repeat this process with a few other stories)

And maybe you are thinking, what can I do?

We can start where Nehemiah started - he prayed.

And then he acted.

And he didn't give up.

The world is honestly full of 'walls that are falling down' and sometimes it can be overwhelming to see all of the need around us, right?

But, what you cannot do is to do nothing.

This generation is one that loves to find a cause and fight for it.

You hear stories everywhere of teenagers who see a need and find a way to meet that need.

Maybe they see that kids need clothes and plan a clothing drive.

Or maybe there is a need that is tugging at your heart that you are the one who could build that wall to help.

Today we are going to take some more time in our small groups and then gather back together to share some ways you are feeling God calling you to build.

Each group will create a poster or some form of art to share with the group where they see a need.

Pray for the groups as they go to share and pray.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the stories or the needs that tug at your heart?
- Where do you look in your school or town or country or the world and want to weep?
- Where do you think God could use us to bring healing and rebuilding of what is broken?
- What are your fears in going to do this work?
- Spend time praying as a group to know where God is calling them to serve.

LARGE GROUP - CLOSE

Give the groups a chance to share about the needs they see.

Then, have them post their poster around the room.

We can't build all of this today, but today is a big start.

Walk around the room and take pictures of the posters and spend the next week praying and looking at these photos.

Post them on your social media and let's see where God is leading us.

God lead us to where you need us.

NEW YEAR'S YOUTH GROUP LESSON

Bible: Deuteronomy 6:1–12; 8:11; Gen. 12:7–8; 13:3–4; Psalm 105:1–5

Bottom Line: Reflect on what God has done last year in your life.

TEACH

I hope you're excited about the new year!

Today we're going to start off the new year by reflecting on what God has done in your life over the last year.

Let's read a story about the Israelites in the Old Testament and what God told them about how to live.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–12

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

What was the main commandment that God told the Israelites to follow in this passage?

Near the end of this decree, the Israelites are told to make sure they don't forget the Lord.

Why do you think that the Israelites would forget the Lord?

They just were taken out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea and it collapsed onto their enemies.

Why would the Israelites ever forget God?

When things are good, we tend to do what is natural to us.

The danger for them isn't a problem of forgetfulness, it's more about disobeying the law that God gave to them.

It's like when I was young and my mom told me to stop playing Mario Brothers and clean my room.

I continued to play and didn't clean my room.

Was my problem that I forgot to clean my room or that I disobeyed my parents.

In fact, later on—just two chapters later—we read this verse:

Read Deuteronomy 8:11:

"Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today."

This verse tells us that the way that we forget is by disobeying God's commandments.

So today we want to remember and reflect on what God has done.

Have you been thinking about this last year?

What is it that you truly are thankful for?

In order to remember specific events that happened, the people of God built these things called altars.

Abraham, Isaac, Noah, Moses, and Jacob all built altars after a significant event happened in their lives.

Read Genesis 12:7–8:

"Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him."

"From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord."

Abraham built an altar after God told him that this was the land that was Abraham's. Later on Abraham goes back to that altar and calls on God.

Read Genesis 13:3-4:

"And he journeyed on from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord."

Abraham not only built something to signify an important event in his life, but also traveled back to connect with God at that place again.

Today for discussion, we are going to take a moment to reflect on what's happened in our lives in the past year and thank God for all the blessings that he's given us.

In my life, this year: (be sure to make these personal for you)

I had a son named Cannon/

We lost our dog Rico and he came back!

Best Camp Ever with Switch in Awanita.

We launched C-Groups in Switch. It's changed our ministry so much for the good.

As you break up into small groups for discussion, be thinking of what God has done in your life over the last year.

Have students break up into small groups.

If your group is already small, then use this time to allow students to discuss the following questions.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Name the top 3 best things that happened in your life in the past year?
- Do you think God had something to do with your "best things"? Why or why not?

- What was your biggest problem or difficulty over the past year?
- Why do you think God allowed that problem or difficulty in your life?
- What's one thing you look forward to in the upcoming year?

WRAP UP

Today you had the opportunity to remember the things that God has done in your life in the past year.

You've got some cards with you that you've completed and we want you to look them over right now.

Now after you've looked them over listen to the words from Psalm 105:1–5 and reflect on what God has done in your life.

Psalm 105:1–5

*"Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!
Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered."*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON OBEDIENCE

Bible: 2 John 1:6

Bottom line: Obedience is all about walking in love.

SUPPLIES

- White board or large paper to write on for group discussion
- Red marker
- Canned dog food
- Paper plates
- Paper towels

Many students in your youth ministry look at God's commands as just following a list of rules. Things to do and not to do.

But God's way of doing life is much bigger and broader than that.

God gives us his rules because they're actually the best way for us to live. Why?

Because he loves us. We follow his ways out of love for him.

We obey God because we love him.

He gives us the right way to live because he loves us.

Obedience is all about love.

OPENING GAME: PUPPY COMMANDS

Divide your youth group into as many teams of four as you can create.

Give each team a few cans of dog food and paper plates.

Have lots of napkins ready to clean their hands and maybe some bags for those with weak stomachs.

Explain: Today, we are going to play a game that will give each of you the AMAZING opportunity to sculpt something made from dog food.

Choose one person from your team to come and get a clue from me.

Then, that person will run back to the team and sculpt the clue using the dog food on the paper plate.

They can't use any words or actions – only sculpt the clue.

Each word will have to do with something that is important for dogs to learn: *obedience*.

CLUES: Heel, Stop, Sit, Stay, Food

TEACH

Share a story about trying to train a pet to be obedient – the funnier the better!

You can also go to <http://www.dogshaming.com/> to find all kinds of hilarious pictures of dogs who really need more training.

Say: Have you ever tried to train a puppy?

Obedience is sometimes a process.

A very long, hard, and frustrating process depending on the dog, right?

You can tell a dog not to chew up your shoes, but if you've had a new puppy, you know that if you leave those new Jordans out where they can get them... you're going to be buying new shoes!

Or think about a toddler.

What word do parents have to constantly say to a toddler?

No!

No, you cannot eat crayons.

No, please don't write on the walls with crayons.

No, do not run in the street.

And even though it is pretty cool to watch toddlers learn, it can also be a very slow process of helping them know what is right and wrong; safe and unsafe.

Okay, I have a tough question: What does obedience look like as a Christian?

Write down their answers on the board.

So, let's hear the answer to that question in the Bible.

Ask a student to read 2 John 1:6.

Grab a red marker and draw a huge heart over all the answers and say:

We are called to obey God's commands and the command is to LOVE.

On a scale of 1-10 how surprised are you by this answer?

See, God knows a secret here: When you love God, you follow His commands.

Just think about it by looking at the 10 Commandments that God gave to Moses and the Israelites.

Let's list the 10 Commandments.

Write down the commands on another board, or piece of paper, as the youth name them.

Here's the quick list:

Exodus 20: The Ten Commandments

Do not have any other god before God.

Do not make yourself an idol.

Do not take the Lord's name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Honor your mother and father.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not testify or fear false witness against your neighbor.

Do not covet.

Now, look at the first 5 commandments.

The theme of these commandments is: Love God.

Right? If you love God, then you won't take God's name in vain or make idols to worship instead of God.

You would keep the Sabbath holy...why? Because of your love for God.

Now, look at the last five: How could you sum those up by thinking of 'love'?

Love others, or as Jesus put it: Love your neighbor.

If you truly love others, you won't lie to them, steal from them, want what they have whether it's their stuff or their spouse!

It sounds simple, yet, it's easy to miss that all God really wants from us is to love God and love others.

THAT is obedience!

When love decides what you do or don't do, doesn't it make sense that you would naturally do things that please God?

The verse says to 'walk in love', which makes you think about learning to walk.

Do any of you remember when you were learning how to walk?

Probably not, but have you ever watched a baby trying to learn to crawl, then stand up, and then walk?

It's a slow process, but once they figure it out, that baby is running!

And it is almost impossible to remember what it was like when you couldn't walk or run, right?

It seems natural once you learn how.

That's how it is with obedience.

It's step by step.

Decision by decision.

You first have to crawl and then take steps before you can really learn to walk in love.

Maybe it begins with understanding how to love God.

Or maybe it means that you leave today really committing to honor your parents.

Maybe it means that you decide to try to take those first baby steps towards always telling the truth.

You quit wondering about the 'white lies' and commit to saying the truth, even if it is hard.

See, God doesn't give us commands to be just like a list of do's and don'ts.

These guidelines will help us live and walk in love.

They will help you to be content and not always look to others to see what they have.

And when you walk in love, you take each step knowing that you love because you are deeply loved.

And that when you make mistakes, which we all will make, even in learning to be obedient, Jesus is patient with us.

He loves us.

The more that you walk with God and love God and love others, the more natural that obedience becomes until one day you realize that you are walking and it seems natural.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How are you doing on loving God?
- How are you doing on loving others?
- Which command do you struggle with the most in your every day life?
- How are you challenged to 'walk in love' this week?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON OUTREACH

Bible: Romans 10:12-15

Bottom Line: We are the feet of Jesus!

SUPPLIES

- 4 Blindfolds
- Construction paper foot cut outs
- Double-sided tape
- Construction paper for each youth
- Scissors
- Baby flip flops-one for each youth
- Sharpie pens

OPENING GAME: STINKY FEET

Instruct youth to take off their shoes and pile them in a heap on one side of the room.

Divide the group into 4 equal teams that will line up on the opposite side of the room from the shoe heap.

Say: We're going to play a game called "Stinky Feet".

On one side of the room we have all of your shoes piled together.

On the other side, you have been grouped into 4 teams.

The goal of this game is to be the first team to recover all of your team member's shoes.

Choose the order in which your team members will race.

Now, the first person in the line needs to put this blindfold on.

The first person in line from each team will run (or feel their way) to the heap of shoes.

Teams – you might need to shout out directions for them!

Then, with the blindfold on, they will grab one shoe and run back to their team.

If the shoe belongs to a member of their team – that's awesome!

Have that person put their shoe back on.

But, if it's not a shoe from their group, the person who brought the shoe to the team must put the blindfold back on and return the shoe to the pile.

Grab another shoe and repeat the process until they get a shoe that belongs to a member on their team.

Then, the next person in line repeats the same process.

The first team to get all of their shoes on – WINS!

TEACH

I am glad that everyone has their stinky shoes back on their stinky feet!

Now, I want to ask you a completely unrelated question: How did you first hear about Jesus?

Seriously, I would like for you to tell me how you first heard about Jesus.

As the youth share, write a short phrase summing up the way they heard about Jesus on the paper footprint.

Take 4-5 examples and ask the youth to tape their footprint somewhere around the room.

Share how you personally heard about Jesus or how you grew in your relationship with Christ.

This would also be a great opportunity to have adults or youth share about how they heard about Christ.

Stories are always much more powerful than just simply talking about hearing about Jesus.

Say: For some of us, we grew up hearing about Jesus.

Maybe you grew up in church and honestly cannot remember the first time you heard about Jesus, which is honestly beautiful.

But for some of us, our families didn't go to church and maybe you've just begun to learn about who Jesus is.

And that also, is beautiful.

Ask a student to read Romans 10:12-15.

Think about it this way: It has been over 2,000 years since Jesus was teaching, performing miracles, was killed, and rose from the dead and we are sitting here... 2,000 years later still talking about it.

How?

Because someone shared the story and then another person shared about Jesus... And on and on.

As you say this, you could tape up more and more footprints.

The only way that we are sitting here learning about Jesus, and even able to know that we can have a relationship with him, is because others shared about Jesus.

Now, when I say 'share about Jesus' I'm not talking about walking up to strangers with a Bible and shouting, "Do you know Jesus?".

Sharing the love of Jesus is meant to be simple.

It is meant to flow naturally from who you are.

It could be making sure you remember the name of the janitor at school and smile.

It could be sticking up for someone who you know is being bullied.

It could be telling your friends when they share their problems that you are praying for them.

And nothing is as powerful as you simply sharing how knowing Jesus has impacted your life.

Now, what are some ways that you could share the love of Christ with others?

Think of simple ways.

Give each person a piece of construction paper and a pen and explain: Take just a second to trace around your foot and cut out the footprint.

Write a simple way that you could share the love of Jesus in a very simple way.

You can even share a real example from your life: either of someone who shared the love of Jesus with you, or you shared with others.

Then, tape up your footprint around the room.

Once you are done taping your footprint, walk around the room quietly and read the ways that you could share the love of Jesus.

Once everyone has taped up their footprints ask: How can others know and experience the love of Jesus without us telling them and living out what it means to be loved by Christ?

Look around the room and see the many ways that we could be the feet of Jesus.

One step at a time, we can either bring Jesus to people or push them away with just how we live out our faith.

It is the simple steps that we take that can make the difference.

As you grow and share the most important things to you, hopefully, your faith naturally shines through and comes out.

As you walk through your life, you naturally want to share about the person who has changed your life.

You won't want to keep that to yourself!

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Say: Around the room (*or at the front of the room depending on your setup*) there are these (*hold up the flip flop*) small little flip flops: the shoe of the summer and now all year.

There are also sharpie pens.

Choose a flip flop, grab a sharpie pen and write these words: We are the feet of Christ.

Then, throughout this week and hopefully beyond, let's start a movement.

Take photos of you sharing the love of Christ with your little flip flop—take a pic and then post on Instagram or Snapchat with this hashtag: #feetofchrist

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which footprints really stuck to you as you walked around the room and read how others shared the love of Jesus?
- Invite the students to share how they have heard about Jesus. Don't pressure anyone to share if they do not want to, but give each person a chance to share.
- When you look at the tiny flip flop, what does it remind you to do?
- What are some simple ways that you plan to share the love of Jesus?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PEACE

Bible: Matthew 5:9

Bottom Line: We are meant to experience God's peace & share it with the world around us.

SUPPLIES

- T-shirts for each student (or ask the youth to bring t-shirts, but also bring extra for visitors!)
- Masking tape
- Water balloons with different colored water (Battle Balloons Color Burst available on Amazon.com)
- Copy of the "Make Me An Instrument of Your Peace" prayer for each student
- Chalk for each student

St. Francis Prayer ("Make me an instrument of your peace") is attributed to St. Francis (12th century saint) (Cut and paste to hand out to students.

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life."

OPENING GAME - WAR AND PEACE

Note: Be sure to let the students know the week before this lesson that they will need to bring a change of clothes and a white shirt! This entire lesson is designed to be held outside.

Explain to students that they are going to experience 'Peace' and 'War' - beginning with 'Peace.'

The challenge is to create a peace sign on their t-shirt using masking tape.

Once they have their peace signs on their t-shirts, now begins the 'War' part.

Divide the group into two teams.

Have the water balloons divided by colors on different sides.

When you say 'war', they begin throwing the water balloons at one another until all of the balloons are gone.

At the end, they should have a really cool 'tie dyed t-shirt'.

They will need to let the t-shirts dry and then take off the masking tape to reveal a cool peace sign t-shirt.

TEACH

Peace.

Write the word 'peace' the ground outside with chalk with space around it.

What words come to your mind when I say this word 'Peace'?

Without spending a lot of time thinking about what you write, I want each of you to write a word around 'Peace' that came to your mind.

For the next few minutes, continue writing words that come to mind about peace or about the other words that people have written.

Give the youth 5-10 minutes for this exercise; helping out the youth who struggle by showing them words they could add their word alongside.

Choose some of the words that the youth wrote to point out how they illustrate peace.

Say: We look around the world and so many places and people and situations seem anything but peaceful, right?

Let's name a few places, people or situations that you pray will find peace.

Write those names, people or situations around the other's words that we wrote for peace as a way of praying for these things.

Give the youth 5-10 minutes to write these words.

Let's pray for areas of the world that do not know peace.

Write the names now.

Who are people you know who need peace in their lives?

Where in your life do you need peace?

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 5:9.

Each of us are children of God, which means that we are each called to be peacemakers.

But what does it mean to be a 'peacemaker'?

Find one of the words written by the youth and ask how we could be peacemakers in that situation.

Here is a very powerful prayer that some people believe was written by a saint in the 16th century named St. Francis of Assisi.

Maybe you've seen statues built with a saint who has animals around him...that is St. Francis of Assisi and this prayer is really powerful.

It says so much about how we can be peacemakers.

Give each youth a copy of the prayer and ask them to read a line of the prayer (only if they want to read...don't ever force a youth to read if they do not wish to read).

Invite them to really think about the words as you read the prayer and to choose one line that really 'jumps' out at them as you read.

Read the poem as a group with youth reading one line each.

Ask the group: What lines jumped out to you?

As each youth reads their line, ask them why it meant something to them, and how it might look to 'sow love' where there is hatred or how they could share light.

Ask: Where do you see hatred at school? In the country? In the world?

What would it look like to 'sow love'?

Think about the line: where there is injury, pardon.

Think of a person in your life who has hurt you.

What would it look like show them pardon...forgiveness?

Say: Peace is not easy, and maybe that is why the world desperately needs peace.

Maybe you need peace.

And first, remember that this peace isn't something that we can just 'make' happen.

*Ask a youth to read **John 14:27**.*

We are given an amazing gift when we let Jesus show us his peace - because he has given us his peace.

It is easy to forget that, right?

We watch the news or we go to school, or for some of you, you go home and peace feels like a dream.

Peace begins when we give Jesus those things that we are worried about.

Take time each day to do what we did with the chalk and share with him the places in your own life that you need his peace.

Pray for the people you know who need peace.

Pray for the world and let his peace fill you.

Because nobody 'does' peace better than Jesus, right?

And then, go and be a peacemaker.

Where in your life right now could you be a peacemaker?

Maybe it's at home.... at school... with friends... or in your town.

Write down what came to your mind with your chalk on the ground.

Think about the shirts that we made with our water balloon war.

Wear that shirt to remind you that you can be a peacemaker.

Because you are all children of God!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Spend some time talking about the words that they wrote for places or people or situations that need God's peace.
- Is there anything that they could do to bring peace to these places or people?
- Share if they feel comfortable about where they needed peace in their own life and spend time praying for each person.
- What are ways that you could encourage one another to be peacemakers?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PENTECOST

Bible: Acts 2:1-13

Bottom Line: We experience Pentecost every day when the Spirit lives in us as Christians.

SUPPLIES

- Red stickers or tape (you will need a lot of these)
- Red, orange and yellow construction paper
- Sharpie markers
- Double stick tape
- Scissors for each youth

A Note to Leaders:

This lesson can be a very powerful experience for your students as we talk about the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost.

The prayer with this lesson is that the students will experience that same Holy Spirit today, so please spend time in prayer and personal reflection before this lesson.

Think about how you first experienced the Holy Spirit.

And for some of you, maybe you are still waiting to really experience the Holy Spirit.

Don't be ashamed, but know that this lesson is for you.

There are many who serve in the church and work with youth who have answered a call, but have yet to truly experience the transforming work of the Spirit.

Our prayer is that you will experience the Holy Spirit of Christ today even as you prepare.

And to the seasoned youth minister: It can be easy to lose that fire.

Today is for you.

May you remember that fire and may it inspire you today.

Share how Christ and the Holy Spirit have moved in your life and the lives of others.

Refer to this great article at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/what-is-pentecost-why-does-it-matter/> about what Pentecost is, the meaning of the word, and history.

Determine whether your group would be interested in the history of the word “Pentecost” which simply means “fifty” and also the tie into the Old Testament Festival of Weeks.

Some groups will enjoy the history, but for youth groups with younger students or more seekers, this would possibly bog them down from really delving into the activity of the Holy Spirit which is really the main point of the lesson.

OPENING GAME – Fire

Choose one person to be the “Fire Starter” and give them a large supply of red stickers.

Also, set up a ‘Fire Station’ where more of the red fire stickers are located when the Fire Starter or the students who get stickers placed on them.

The Fire Starter will begin in the center with the rest of the students in a circle around the Fire Starter.

When you say “Go”, everyone can run and spread out in the designated area, while the Fire Starter runs and tries to stick a red ‘Fire’ sticker on people.

Once a person has had a Fire sticker put on them, they can run to the Fire Station to get Fire stickers to help the Fire Starter.

The game is over when everyone has been tagged with a Fire Sticker.

If your group is a smaller group, this will go quickly unless the students are very creative about where they hide, so you can play the game more times choosing a different Fire Starter.

TEACH

Say: We all know that playing with fire can be a very dangerous thing.

Can you remember the first time that you realized just how quickly fire could spread?

Give the students time to share.

Also, feel free to share a wise or unwise experience that you had with fire as a teenager, but be sure to remind them not to follow in your footsteps.

Yes, fire can be very scary, but it is also the one thing that can save you when you are trying to survive.

You know - like watching Survivor when they are left with no food and fending for themselves: fire is critical.

Today, we are going to be talking about fire, but a different kind of fire.

Can anyone here tell me what “Pentecost” is about?

The word Pentecost literally means “fifty”. In the Bible, we read about a time when the Jews were gathered in Jerusalem fifty days after the Passover for the Festival of Weeks.

This is where you can use the information from the article above if your group would find this interesting or direct them to the site to read later.

Long story short, there were Jews from all over gathered and something amazing happened...

Remember that at this time, Jesus had died, risen, hung out for 40 days and then went to Heaven.

Yes, it was 50 days after the Passover.

And something amazing was about to happen.

So imagine that you are in this scripture.

You are in the room.

Close your eyes.

Think about where you might be from... maybe you don't speak the language but you are here to celebrate.

As I read this scripture, I want you to use all of your senses.

What do you see?

Hear?

Smell?

Feel?

Read Acts 2:1-13.

Open your eyes.

What did you see?

Hear?

Feel?

What just happened??

Give students time to talk about what they experienced and felt.

Pentecost by many is called the “Birthday of the Church” because the Holy Spirit came on the apostles and all of those gathered from many different places.

Why would it be a big deal that these different places were gathered?

Let the students give their ‘theories’.

Up until this point, the good news of Jesus had been kept really close.

But at this time, all of these people were gathered from all over in Jerusalem.

Just imagine when you left this place after the Holy Spirit literally coming over you like fire.

You go back home.

Nothing is the same because you are not the same.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote in his journal these words “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that

He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

The Holy Spirit is the very spirit of Jesus, and Jesus promised that his Spirit would come and is available to all of us.

And when this Spirit comes, amazing things happen.

People are changed.

Just think about Peter.

Remember the one who denied Jesus three times and then the rooster crowed?

The one who walked out to Jesus on the water, but then got scared and began to sink.

Now, can I have a volunteer who would like to act out the part of the disciple, Peter?

Read Acts 2:14-31.

Choose a volunteer who you know has a relationship with Christ and will read the scripture in a meaningful way for the group.

Close with a prayer such as:

Jesus, we are gathered here today, in a simple room.

Fill us with your spirit.

Empower us to be changed.

To be on fire for you.

Amen.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How was Peter changed from before Jesus' death to now at Pentecost in his amazing speech?
- Share about what you experienced while reading the Pentecost scripture.
- How do you think your life would have changed if you had been there?
- Share about a time when you sensed that the Holy Spirit was at work.

Challenge the group to choose a color of construction paper, cut out a flame, and using a sharpie to write out a prayer for the Holy Spirit to come.

It could be a simple prayer such as "Come Holy Spirit"

Then have each student get a piece of double stick tape and tape up their flame around the room as a visible reminder that the Holy Spirit is at work.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PERSEVERANCE

Bible: Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:7; Romans 5:3-5

Bottom Line: Perseverance is hard, but it is important. It is possible to persevere through hard times because rather than destroying us it can build character, because Jesus persevered for us, and because we know who Jesus is and who we are through Him. If you keep persevering, you cannot fail.

Opening Game: Marshmallow Toss

SUPPLIES

- Marshmallows
- Plastic cups (enough for every student)
- Bowls (enough for each team of two)

Split the students into groups of two.

Give each team two plastic cups, a bowl, and some marshmallows.

Have the teams start arms-length apart, each holding a plastic cup.

They must toss a marshmallow from one plastic cup to the other.

Once they successfully get the marshmallow transferred between cups, they must put it in their team's bowl.

After that, one team member must take a step back before they toss the next marshmallow.

Once they successfully toss the marshmallow from one cup to the next, they put it in the bowl.

For every marshmallow that hits the ground, they must remove one from their bowl.

This continues until the team is ten steps apart and has ten marshmallows in their bowl.

If all the marshmallows have been removed by the time they get ten steps apart, the must continue tossing from this length until they get ten marshmallows in their bowl.

Once they have ten marshmallows, they must eat them all.

The first team to get ten marshmallows in their bowl and eat them all wins!

TEACH

Do you know what's pretty fun? Eating marshmallows.

Do you know what's not pretty fun?

Not being able to eat marshmallows until you perfect tossing them between cups.

Perseverance really isn't a fun topic to talk about, because it's hard. It's hard to persevere through hard times. It's hard to press on when things are tough.

There's really nothing fun about it, but it's incredibly important.

In the dictionary, perseverance is defined as "*steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.*"

Steadfastness. Staying steady. Holding steadfast to something and sticking out the situations that are difficult, where success seems really far away.

So tonight, while we talk about perseverance, I want you to be thinking about the answer to this question: What are you holding steadfast to?

Read 2 Timothy 4:7 - "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Have you ever heard that verse before? It's the essence of perseverance.

Fighting the good fight, finishing the race of life, and keeping the faith the whole time.

Don't you want to be able to say that?

When you get to the end of your life, don't you want to be able to confidently say that you persevered through the hard circumstance, that you kept fighting your way through the tough times?

Or do you want to look back on your life and just see time after time where you chose quitting over perseverance?

Perseverance is really, really hard.

But it is possible!

Let's look at why it's possible to persevere through hard times.

It's possible to persevere through hard times because we know that Jesus persevered for us.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 - *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.*

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Here, the race comes up again.

And here, we see that in order to run the race marked out for us, we have to have perseverance.

But that's not all we see in this verse.

We see that not only do we need to have perseverance, but that we need to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Why? Because He persevered.

Look at that—*for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.*

Jesus endured so much for us.

He had to go through far worse than any of us will ever have to go through.

He persevered for us.

Jesus is the example we are supposed to follow.

He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith, and we see here just how much He endured.

So we know that it's possible to persevere through hard, tough, sometimes even terrible situations, because He persevered for us.

So we can certainly persevere for Him.

It's possible to persevere through hard times because it builds character.

Romans 5:3-5 - Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

When perseverance is necessary, it's usually because there's some sort of suffering involved.

We're suffering through a tough situation, suffering through a confusing time, suffering through a time where accomplishing anything seems very far off.

So suffering causes the need for perseverance

So what does perseverance cause?

Character, which causes hope.

So having perseverance leads to hope.

And not just any hope—hope that doesn't put us to shame, because it's the hope of God's love, which He's poured into our hearts.

So no, perseverance isn't really fun to think about.

And it's certainly not fun to have to do.

But the result of perseverance is a really beautiful, incredible form of hope.

And it is well worth it.

It's possible to persevere through hard times because we know who Jesus is and who we are through Him.

Romans 5:6-8 - *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Jesus Christ died for you.

Before you were godly, before you were righteous, and while you were still a powerless sinner, Jesus Christ died for you. Why? Because He loves you with a crazy, overwhelming kind of love.

If you were worth dying for, you must be pretty amazing.

Knowing who Jesus is—the King and Savior of us all—and knowing what He did for us should give us confidence to persevere.

We know we can persevere through anything, because Jesus knows we can.

He gave His life for us because He thought we were worth it.

Knowing that, there's no other choice but to persevere and keep running the race He has marked out for us!

I want to show you a video that I think really highlights perseverance and why it's so important.

Play this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpQLkxqIKA>

If there's anything we can learn from that video, it's that if you keep persevering, you cannot fail.

Did he win? No, he didn't. In fact, he came in last place.

But did he fail? Absolutely not.

Because He ran the race and fought the fight, even when his race got incredibly difficult.

He finished the race.

Just like that man's father came to help Him, our heavenly Father helps us.

His father couldn't do it for him, and he couldn't take his pain away or make it any easier, but he could walk right beside him and encourage him.

When we persevere in life, even when it's incredibly hard we know that God is walking right beside us, cheering us on, and helping us persevere.

It's not worth it to give up.

It may feel like it, and there may be times where you don't know how you can possibly keep going.

Quitting may sound like a really incredible idea at some points in a tough situation.

When that happens, you just have to remember: if you do not quit, if you keep persevering, then you cannot fail.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have there been times in your life where you had to choose if you were going to persevere or quit? What did you choose?
- Does knowing that Jesus persevered for you make you want to persevere for Him?
- At the end of your life, do you want to be able to say you fought the good fight, finished your race, and kept your faith? If so, do you think you'll need perseverance to be able to do that?

- When you think of how much Jesus had to endure and persevere through, does that make the situations you have to persevere through seem less difficult?

Perseverance can sometimes be viewed in a negative way because it implies hard situations.

Now that you know it leads to hope, does it seem like more of a positive thing to you?

Does knowing that Jesus died for you make you feel more confident?

Have you ever had an experience where you feel like the fact that you persevered through a situation built character?

Do you agree that you should keep your eyes on Jesus while you are running the race of life?

Do you think Jesus is a good example of how we should persevere and run our race? Why?

Do you think that persevering and keeping our faith is something that makes Jesus happy? Does that make you want to do it more?

WRAP UP

Do you remember the question I asked you at the beginning of tonight?

I asked what it was that you were holding steadfast to.

So, what is it? When you're in a time that is hard, what do you hold on to?

Is it selfishness? Wanting to get out of the situation by making it as easy as possible for yourself?

Is it a friend? Clinging to friendship to help you get through a situation?

Is it Jesus? Fixing your eyes on Him and holding steadfast to Him while you persevere through tough circumstances? Because that's what it should be.

All that you've learned tonight doesn't make perseverance any more fun.

It isn't going to make the next tough situation you go through any less tough.

It isn't going to make a hard time into sunshine and butterflies.

But now you know that it's possible to persevere, and you have some reasons to persevere.

You know that Jesus persevered for you, and He's there to encourage you as you persevere for Him.

You can persevere, or you can be a quitter.

Those are really the only choices you have when it comes to hard times and tough circumstances.

Sure, it's going to be tempting to quit sometimes.

But when that happens, just remember all we've talked about tonight.

Remember who is on your side and what's at stake.

And remember: if you don't quit, you can't fail. If you keep going, if you persevere, then you win no matter what.

And that is so much better than quitting.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PRAYER

Say: A couple of weeks ago while I was on a business trip, I was talking on my cell phone with my wife (yes, they do more than send text messages!).

I had just received some great news and was excited to share it with her.

Suddenly, I realized that she hadn't said anything for several seconds.

I looked at my screen and it said that we still had a connection.

I said her name several times and waited for a response but did not get one.

I was frustrated because I was pretty sure that she was still on the line, but for some reason my conversation was only working one-way.

After hanging up and trying again, we were able to resume the conversation, but later I got to thinking about my experience and realized that prayer can sometimes feel the same way.

I know that God can hear me when I pray, but when His voice feels silent in my life, I sometimes wonder if the connection only works one-way.

Read 1 Kings 19:11-13

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave..."

Say: In this story, Elijah was searching for God.

First, he looked for Him in a windstorm, then a powerful fire, but God was not in either of those things.

This was a very significant experience for Elijah because God had established a pattern of appearing in these ways over hundreds of years when communicating with His people.

God appeared in a burning bush to Moses in Exodus 3 and in billows of smoke on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19 with winds that shook the ground.

Despite these patterns, Elijah does not feel God's presence until he hears the faintest of whispers.

Do you ever find yourself expecting God's voice to come in windstorms and explosive fireworks?

I know that when I am desperately seeking God in prayer, I most often want to hear or see His response in very obvious, visible ways.

If I am sick, I pray for healing and want to feel better immediately.

If I need help with a problem, I want a clear solution.

If I am in emotional pain, I want God make the pain go away.

Sometimes, though, I feel the same way I did during my dropped call with my wife.

I talk to God in prayer and feel and see no change.

It is in those moments that I need to remember that God's voice sometimes comes in a gentle whisper. He doesn't always work in dramatic ways.

Sometimes it is in the little things that God moves the most.

I might not feel healthy right away, but He may nudge me toward the help that I need.

A solution may not present itself to fix my problems, but He can use those problems to make me stronger.

The pain may not always go away immediately, but He sometimes uses that pain to remind of all that He has blessed me with.

These are just a few tangible ways that God speaks through a whisper.

How are you looking for God to respond to your prayers?

Maybe the connection hasn't been lost.

Perhaps you are just not listening carefully enough.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How has God spoken or moved in your life in a way that seems like a powerful wind or fire?
- How has God spoken or moved in your life in a way that seems like a gentle whisper?
- What things in your life can make it difficult for you to hear God's whisper?
- Why do you think that God uses a whisper sometimes instead of a dramatic experience?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PRIDE

Bible: Luke 18:9-14

Bottom Line: Pride puts ourselves in the center of everything instead of God.

SUPPLIES

- Large amounts of cooked spaghetti in a big bucket
- Sheets of paper
- Markers

Before you begin:

Leader - Pride is a tough topic, especially when you are serving in a church with imperfect people who sometimes think they are perfect.

We all, at some point or another, find ourselves on one side or the other of that ugly equation of pride.

Spend some time before you teach this lesson reading the parable.

Write your own humble prayer to God like the tax collector did, and confess to God those ways in which you have been prideful.

And know that God sees you and knows you and loves you.

Pride and all.

OPENING GAME: Pride, Prejudice and Zombies

DISCLAIMER: *While this game is meant to be played in fun, please use discretion as to whether or not a game about "zombies" is a good fit for your youth group.*

You might have heard of the new movie based on the book, Pride, Prejudice and Zombies.

Yeah, we aren't going to watch the movie, but this game is a fun second.

Set the game boundaries (the size of a baseball field or smaller) and explain that no-one can go out of bounds.

Pick two youth to be "zombies".

The rest of the group are the "townspeople".

The townspeople will be given a few minutes to spread out while the zombies get their 'brains' from the center of the field. ('Brains' are cooked spaghetti.)

Zombies can only walk on one leg while dragging their other leg, and they will chase the townspeople with the brains.

If a townspeople gets touched by the 'Brains', they become a zombie also.

The game is over when there is only one townspeople.

This game can be played as long as needed and you can choose zombies for the game and just gather up the brains to reuse! (The grosser the better)

TEACH - YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PRIDE

Today, we are going to take a look at "pride", which is a word that can have different meanings to different people.

What are some instances in which pride is considered a 'good thing'?

What does pride look like when it has crossed the line into being a 'bad thing'?

Listen to this quote from CS Lewis: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone."

Pride turns rotten when it involves comparing yourself to others and finding that you think that you are better than others.

Can you think of a time when you looked down on someone else or you were happy when they failed?

Share a personal example from your life when pride showed itself in you in a negative way.

Today, you are going to help us bring our scripture to life.

I need two volunteers (*Leader, be sure to choose very animated youth for this task*).

I will read the parable from Jesus and one of you will be the Pharisee, a religious leader in Jesus' day, and the other will be a tax collector.

As I read the parable, each of you just act out the parts of the parable that apply to you and make us think!

Read Luke 18:9-14 from the Message to add some character!

Thank you, Pharisee and Tax Collector!

It can be very tempting to compare yourself to others.

Let's be honest: Who in here hasn't looked at someone else and thought "I'm glad I'm not THAT person".

And it can be super easy to fall into that type of thinking when you are trying to live as a Christian because you don't have to look too far to find all kinds of people who are messing things up, right?

The tax collector in Jesus's time was considered the worst of the worst.

Can you think of a profession today that if you ask someone what they do for a living that they don't want to answer because of the eye rolls that they will get?

Ask the group to share some of these jobs.

And the Pharisee was supposed to be the one who was close to God, right?

Yet, what do we see in this parable?

The Pharisee is looking DOWN on the tax collector.

The Pharisee is judging the tax collector for whatever reasons and then patting himself on the back.

And then what does the Pharisee do?

He is praying and it's like he is reminding God of all the awesome things that he does....for God, of course?

Or is he doing it for God?

Do you think it is possible to 'do all the right things' and not 'get it right' with God?

That is pride.

See, God knows our hearts.

He KNOWS what 'makes us tick'.

He knows if you are saying one thing and doing another.

He knows if you are just going through the motions.

He knows WHAT YOU THINK.

He isn't fooled by what you do.

Think on that....

This parable of Jesus probably upset the religious leaders.

It was really a 'mic drop' from Jesus, though, because he meant for them to be upset.

He was making a very important point.

God isn't playing and we can't play God.

And pride is that ugly part of us that wants to 'look good' and then look down on others.

Just look at the tax collector: What did he do right?

The tax collector saw that he was flawed and humbled himself before God.

See, we sometimes forget that NONE of us are perfect.

Maybe you are watching some of your friends or acquaintances at school or even in this group doing things that you know wouldn't make God happy.

But ask yourself this: Are you secretly judging them rather than praying for them?

Are you measuring yourself to their failures?

Because we truly can lose sight of God when we measure ourselves by what we think we see in others.

Why? Because we miss the own mess in our own lives.

God isn't playing and we can't play God.

As you leave to go to your small groups, there are pieces of paper and pens scattered around this room and I want you to take a few minutes to write out a 'Tax collector' prayer to God.

What does that mean?

The tax collector KNEW that he needed God.

The tax collector humbled himself before God and didn't pray to be seen....he just poured out his heart to God.

Write out a very simple prayer to God from your heart.

Take that prayer with you to your group and with you throughout this week.

Let it remind you in those times when you might want to compare yourself with others that it doesn't matter what they think.

The only opinion that truly matters is the only person who really knows you: God.

Give the students time to write out their prayers and be available to pray with them as needed.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Give the group a chance to share their prayers written on the papers, but only if they feel led.

Share a time recently when you felt prideful or better than someone.

Share a time when you felt judged as 'less than' by someone and how it made you feel.

Why do you think that pride is such a challenge for Christians?

How can we help one another not to compare ourselves to others?

End with prayer.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON PRIORITIES

Topic: Priorities - So Much to Do, So Little Time

Bible: Psalm 90:12; Ephesians 5:15-17; James 4:14

We live in a generation that demands instant gratification, yet spend hours and hours on things that don't really matter.

This can leave us with little to no time to focus on what's important and the stuff that actually need to get done.

Learning time management isn't only helpful with this, it's Biblical!

As we approach back to school time, use this lesson to help students with "priorities".

Opening Game: How Much Is Too Much?

Divide students into teams.

For a small crowd, have the whole team vote to choose an answer.

For a larger crowd, have them select one person to represent their team by giving the answers.

Ask the following trivia questions about how the average person spends their time. The answers are in bold.

1. How much time per month does the average American spend social networking?

- 2 hours
- 1.7 hours**
- 9.3 hours
- 6.9 hours

2. How much time per month does the average American spend watching television offline (meaning on an actual television, not on Hulu or Netflix)?

- 12.5 hours
- 59.4 hours**
- 17.3 hours
- 23.9 hours

3. The peak time for watching television online is:

- On a lunch break
- Right before bed**
- During the workday
- Right after work

4. According to a report by NBC News, if you added up the minutes spent on social media in July of 2012 in the United States, how many years would they add up to?

230,060 years

9,612 years

143,462 years

64,586 years

5. How much time does the average American spend on Netflix per month?

14.2 hours

10 hours

7.6 hours

13.7 hours

Information found on: <http://www.cnbc.com/id/100275798> and <http://www.mashable.com/2012/11/28/social-media-time/>

TEACH

There's no arguing that we live in a day where everyone desires instant gratification.

If we have to wait too long in a drive thru, we get mad.

We get impatient while waiting on our food to come out of the microwave, because when you're craving popcorn, three minutes seems like an excessively long time.

Any amount of waiting time at a doctor's office or a restaurant seems unbearable.

At the same time, one could say that this generation wastes more time than ever before.

That doesn't make sense, does it?

In fact, it seems like an oxymoron.

If having to wait more than 90 seconds for a cheeseburger and milkshake is something that upsets us, surely, we must hate wasting time.

Yet, as we learned a few minutes ago, the average American spends 94.2 hours per month on social networks, phone, email, and watching television.

Think about that--that's almost four days a month wasted on things that probably have no significant importance.

So we act like we hate wasting time, yet we gladly give away four (maybe even more!) of our 30 days a month.

With that in mind, I think it's safe to say that we could all benefit from learning to manage our time better.

High school is the best time to learn good time management, and the beginning of a new school year is the perfect time to learn something new.

If you want to actually graduate with grades above D's this year, you're going to *have* to learn time management.

If you learn good time management now, it will be easier to manage your time when you go off to college.

If you can do that, it will be easier to manage your time when you graduate college and get thrown back into the real world.

And if you think time management is essential in high school, just wait until adult life hits you.

As with any issue, the first thing we should do is see if the Bible has anything to say about it.

Read Psalm 90:12.

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

What does it mean to number your days? Let's think about it.

While we may not know the exact number of days we have to live, we do know that we don't have forever to live on this earth.

So keeping that in mind—that we have a small number of days that make up our life—how do you feel about the way you spend your days?

Are you a planner, who takes care of the important things before moving on to do the fun things?

Are you a procrastinator, who pushes everything of importance to the last possible minute?

Or do you even think about how you spend your time, just letting whatever happens happen? And most importantly: Where does God fit into any of that?

Read Ephesians 5:15-17.

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

Have you ever had a test that you just didn’t study for?

You knew it was happening, you knew when it was, you knew what you needed to study for it...and you just didn’t?

Maybe you didn’t because life got in the way of studying, or maybe because your priorities weren’t exactly how they should be.

Either way, when this happens, there’s a common prayer that happens: “God, give me wisdom for this test!”

Did you ever think that maybe God already gave you wisdom for the test?

You know, that test that you knew about.

The one where you knew what to study, but just didn’t, even though you had the time and resources.

Wisdom would have been using the time God gave to you and the brain God gave to you and studying!

This verse says to be careful to live as wise.

How does that relate to time management? More than you might think.

Look at it this way: how you spend your hours adds up to how you spend your days. How you spend your days adds up to how you spend your life.

So if you’re spending your days wasting time and avoiding what you need to do, that is essentially how you are spending your life.

And that, my friend, is not wise.

This verse also urges us to “make the most of every opportunity...do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

Do you know the best way to understand what the Lord’s will is?

By spending time with Him! By praying and reading the Bible.

The more you are spending time with Him, the easier it will be to make the most of every opportunity.

Read James 4:14

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

Ouch. That one stings a bit. Your whole life—the one you’re so concerned about, the one filled with good and bad and happy and sad—it’s but a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

In other words, your life is just a little blimp in the grand scheme of time.

So why not make the absolute most of it?

There’s this idea that to enjoy life, you need to be a free spirit who is spontaneous and goes with the flow, never planning anything.

Sure, many people choose to live that way.

But the bottom line is this: if you want to make the most out of your life, you can only do that by learning to manage your time.

Whether or not you decide to take charge of your time, it’s going to pass you by anyway.

Monday-Friday you are going to go to class, get homework, have exams, write papers.

The four years of high school are going to happen regardless of if you manage your time.

But if you want to make the most of them, and you want to live them the way the Bible says you should, managing your time in a wise way is a must. So how do you do that?

Here are three simple ways to get the most out of your time.

1. Make God your number one Priority.

No matter how busy you get, no matter how much you have to do, no matter what, spending time with God needs to be your number one priority.

If that means you have to get up earlier, then wake up earlier.

If that means you have to sacrifice something extra, then so be it.

This is one choice you will not regret making.

2. Prioritize the things in your life.

Regardless of how you may feel, high school is a priority right now.

That means that for the school year, classes, tests, papers, and projects come before late night movies and weekends spent doing nothing with your friends.

One of the best ways to remember your priorities is to get a planner or a calendar and write down when things are due, when you need to study, etc.

3. Hold yourself accountable.

After you know what your schedule should be, pray over it.

Ask God to help you achieve all you need to achieve in the time that you need to achieve it.

Ask Him to help you manage your time better.

Then, find someone who will hold you accountable to this.

Maybe that's a leader here, or maybe it's another person who's also trying to manage their time better.

Either way, getting a weekly text asking how you're doing with your time can be a great motivator!

Another way to hold yourself accountable is to write these verses down—the ones that talk about how we should spend our days—and put them somewhere you can see them.

After all, spending hours on twitter isn't really enjoyable when you're looking at a verse that reminds you of how short your life is.

Closing

You will learn a lot of new things this school year, and I hope that time management is one of those things.

It isn't just a good skill to have; it's also a step in the direction of living how God has called us to live.

You only live once and you only live for a short time.

There are going to be things you have to do, there are going to be things you want to do, and there are going to be things that God calls you to do.

It can seem like a lot and can pile up fast. If you're prepared by having the right mindset—the mindset that knows God has blessed you with this life and you want to make the most of it that you can—this year will be so much better for you.

High School is only four years of your life.

If you want to make the most of those four years, learning to manage your time is one of the best places to start.

And God is the best one to help you with that.

Ask Him to help you this year—He loves you more than anything and wants to see you succeed with the life He has blessed you with.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think it is so easy to waste time?
- When you're wasting time, do you think you're taking time for granted?
- What effect does wasting time have on your relationship with God?
- In the past, is time management something you've taken seriously?
- Have you ever thought about time management as something that God would want for you?
- What are some steps you could take this week to help you manage your time?
- Do you think time is a gift from God? If you do, does that change the way you think about spending your time?
- Would you say that the way you are managing your time now is bringing honor to God?
- What is the biggest challenge you face in your personal life when it comes to managing your time?
- One of the verses compares our life to, "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." How does that make you feel when you think about the way you currently choose to spend time?
- How do you think this school year could be different from previous years if you manage your time?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON QUIET TIME

Bible: James 4: 8-10

Bottom Line: Spending time with God can be the best part of your day - so be creative!

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES/SET-UP

- Paper plate for each student
- Pen for each student

Set up a table in the room with Post-it notes (broken into small stacks) and pens.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

I want you to pick out the most stressful day over the past few weeks that you've had.

Can you think of one?

Yup, I can too.

Now, here is what I want you to do: (Give each person a paper plate and a pencil/pen).

On this paper plate, draw a clock face, and no, not a digital one.

Then, once you've drawn the clock, I want you to fill in what you did for each minute of that most stressful day that you thought of just a minute ago.

(Give students 5-10 minutes to complete the activity)

Now, get in groups of 2-3 people and choose one of your clocks to act out in less than 25 seconds - being sure to act out every single activity that was listed.

I will give you 5 minutes to work on your stressful day reenactment.

(Gather the groups together and tell the group to be sure to try to guess as many activities in each groups' day as possible.)

This should lead to everyone being stressed out!

TEACH

Raise your hand if you are now officially stressed out.

Let's face it: The stress that you face each day is real, isn't it?

(Tell a personal story from when you were a teenager - how the stress, pace and technology (or lack thereof) made life very different.)

But, things today are different.

The pace is different.

How many times this week have you felt stressed, overloaded, or overwhelmed?

Your schedules are crazy.

The stress is real.

How in the world could you add one more thing to your schedule?

And yet, how many of you listed time alone with God as one of the activities on your calendar?

Here's the thing: God doesn't want you to feel guilty if he wasn't on your schedule.

He wants to offer you rest and peace.

And believe it or not, spending time with God, or as some people call it, a 'quiet time' is probably the only thing in this life that can help with the stress and pressure that we all feel.

Read James 4:8-10.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

First, God cares about what is going on in your life.

God cares about those things that you felt were too small or even dumb to list on your clock.

He is with you in every single thing that you do.

God is there in the midst of the stress.

What were some of the emotions that this scripture lists?

Weeping, grieving, joy, and laughter: God WANTS to be there with you in it.

And his request is simple: Draw near to Him, and he will draw near to you.

It really is as simple as that: Take a step to God, and he will take a step to you.

You may think: “I don’t know how to spend time with God”.

Hopefully today, you will see that it isn’t fancy or difficult.

Spending time with God is not meant to be another stress in your life.

He wants to help you live with joy and freedom.

Today, we are going to do a very simple ‘drawing near to God’ activity.

(Point out the Post-it notes and pens on the table.)

We are going to do a ‘Stress Dump’ and here is how this works:

You will take a stack of Post-it notes and a pen.

Find a quiet place and sit in this room - free of distractions.

Write out all of the things that you brought with you today that are stressing you out.

I will guide you with some ‘stressors’ that you can also reflect on in your quiet time.

As you write these stresses down, just talk to God about how these things are weighing on you.

He really does want to hear.

Please write one thing per Post-it and feel free to get up and get more if needed.

Leader: Give students about 5 minutes in silence or play some quiet music.

(Suggestion: “Rest Easy” by Audio Adrenaline).

Then, begin with prompts of things to write down such as:

Worries, Friendships, Family, School struggles, My Future, People hurting, Decisions to make, Worries about my faith

(Give students about 10-15 minutes to write their worries and offer more Post-its.)

Now, look at your stack of Post-its.

Even in this simple act, you drew near to God.

You poured your heart and worries out to him.

And here is the amazing thing: God doesn't want you to bear all of this without him.

And he certainly doesn't want you to leave this room with a stack full of worries and stress.

Now, go and put your Post-its around the room, wherever you want.

As you place your Post-it, let this be a physical act of drawing near to God and giving him your worries.

Does it mean that these things will magically go away?

No.

But, what it does mean is that God is with you and you are drawing near to him.

Sometimes the sheer act of voicing how we are feeling to God can make all of the difference.

So, get your stack and take some more prayerful time of giving these worries to God.

Put the Post-it there and leave, knowing that God is with you in all of these things, but also look around the room and know that you are not alone in your stress.

(Give students a few minutes to post their Post-its, and then, direct them to walk around the room and pray for one another.)

Ask God to be with the person who wrote each worry.

Resist the urge to try to guess who wrote what, because you will miss the joy of praying for one another.

(Give students 5 minutes before they go to their small groups to read the Post-its on the walls prayerfully.)

We just spent time with God.

Quiet time with God as a group.

For some of you, this might be mind-blowing: **YOU JUST SPENT TIME WITH GOD!!**

Let that sink in for a minute - The God of the universe wants to hear from you.

He can handle every single worry and stressor on this wall.

And, He can give you His strength to face them and even grow closer to Him in the process.

There are amazing things that happen when you spend time with God.

And there is no 'one' or 'right' way for you to spend time with God.

It will and should look different for every single one of us.

There are so many other ways that you can spend time with God doing things that you enjoy.

(Share a personal way that you spend time with God that is creative or one that you have heard from others such as listening to music, journaling, singing, or even taking photos. Close the teaching in a time of prayer, thanking God for drawing near to us, and praying for the prayers on the wall.)

Before you leave, walk around the room once more and choose 4 or 5 of the Post-its from the wall and commit to pray for these worries this week.

Put this Post-it somewhere in your room or your locker: somewhere it can remind you to pray.

Sometimes, having a quiet time is as simple as reminding ourselves to pray.

This will give you a visual reminder to pray not only for your worries, but for others.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Were you surprised at how many worries and stresses there were in this group and how did that make you feel?
- Reflect on this statement: Spending time with God is not meant to be a burden.
- How could you take the time this week to spend time with God?
- What are the things that get in the way of spending time with God and how can we encourage each other with these?
- How might spending time with God affect your life in a positive way?
- Create a list together of ways that you could creatively spend time with God.
- How can we help one another to keep this time with God?
- Commit to pray for one another and remind one another to spend time with God.

Give each student a stack of Post-it notes to take home and try this activity in their room.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Bible: Luke 10:38-42

Bottom Line: Use this youth group lesson to help students make time to develop their relationship with God.

This lesson is a great tool to help teach youth about discipleship.

OPENING GAME: What's Your Schedule?

Divide students into groups of 3-5.

Give each small group a large sheet of butcher paper.

Ask leaders to write the days of the week (Sunday-Saturday) along the top of the butcher paper.

Instruct the small groups to talk about their weekly "schedule."

Have students write their daily chores and activities on the schedule under the particular day.

Encourage them to think of things like school, sports, homework, chores, family time, getting ready, etc.

The point of the activity is to get a visual representation of the extremely busy schedules we all have.

After the activities have been listed on the butcher paper, allow groups to share some of the activities with the entire youth group.

After the activity, say:

We all have some really busy schedules.

From the time we wake up to the time we go to bed, we have to go-go-go to get it all done.

Do you ever feel like you're going to forget to do something you're supposed to do or be somewhere that you're supposed to be? Do you ever get tired?

All of these things are good things.

We have to do chores around the house, go to school, eat, and shower (hopefully).... right?

And it's a great thing to be able to play sports, play an instrument, spend time with friends, and all those things, right?

These are all good things, but sometimes we get so busy with good things that we miss out on some great things.

Let's read the story of 2 sisters, Mary and Martha.

Read Luke 10:38-40.

While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town.

A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house. Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him teach.

But Martha was busy with all the work to be done.

She went in and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me."

Say: Jesus was very close to Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus.

Jesus loved them enough to decide to come to their home and spend time with them.

Can you imagine if Jesus was coming over to your house?

Do you think your parents would make you clean up if Jesus were coming over?

Probably so, and this is exactly what Martha was doing.

She wanted everything to be just right for such a special guest.

Martha was very busy playing hostess.

She had to cook.

She had to clean.

She had to make sure everyone had a place to sit down and relax.

She had to make sure that there was water and towels to wash everyone's feet.

The list went on and on.

There was just so much to do!

Meanwhile, her sister Mary is not doing anything to help her!

She's just sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to Him talk and teach.

You can imagine how this made Martha feel. She was MAD! In fact, she's so mad that she goes to Jesus and tattles on Mary.

She says, "Make her help me!" Now, listen to how Jesus responds to Martha.

Read Luke 10:41-42.

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will never be taken away from her."

Say: Jesus understood why Martha was so upset.

He understood why she was working so hard to make everything right.

But Jesus wanted Martha to see that there was something more important.

She was doing good things, but she had missed out on the most important thing.

The most important thing is spending time with Jesus.

Just like Martha, we can get so busy with other things that we miss out on the most important thing, spending time with Jesus.

In our busy lives, we need to focus on spending some time with Jesus.

You still need to do those other things, especially the things you're asked to do by parents or teachers.

However, we need to be sure that we make time in our schedule to meet with God.

He loves us and wants to speak to us, so we need to take the time to listen.

Jesus told Martha that Mary had "chosen what was better."

Mary has chosen to spend time with Jesus so that she could learn and grow closer to Him.

Jesus wants us to choose time with Him over anything else.

This is the most important thing.

We can get busy doing lots of important things, but we need to make sure that we remember the main thing.

The main thing is spending time with Him and growing in our relationship with Him. Spending time with God is a choice.

Just like we put all our other activities on the calendar, we need to set a time to meet with God.

Whether it is in the morning or evening, in the car or in our room, with our parents or by ourselves, find time to spend with God and grow in your relationship with Him.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was the work Martha was doing a “bad thing”? How did Jesus respond to her work and her complaining?
- What was the “one thing” that Mary did? How did Jesus respond to Mary?
- How does spending time with someone (God) show your love for them?
- Which personality are you more like: the to-do list Martha or the laid-back Mary?
- If Jesus spent a day at your house, what would be some things He might say are distracting you from spending time with God?
- What are some ways or activities you can do to spend time with God?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - Make Time for God

Take another look at the schedule created in the opening activity.

Give students time to think about the places in their schedule that they would make time for God.

Encourage them to think hard about a consistent time that they could spend with Him.

It may mean they wake up 10 minutes earlier or spend less time on fun things, but encourage them to make time for God.

At the end of the discussion, give each student an index card and have them write down their chosen time.

Ask them to place the card in a visible place to remind them of their commitment to spending time with God this week.

If students have a smartphone (who doesn't these days), lead them to set a calendar reminder on their phones.

This is a great way to help them remember the main thing!

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON RESPECT

Bible: 1 Samuel 24:8-10

Have you ever had a hard time respecting someone in authority over you?

(Share an example from your own life or use the example below.)

I can remember a teacher that I had in high school that I felt had not "earned" my respect.

He was short-tempered, rude, and often showed dislike toward me and my friends.

One day, he lost his temper and yelled at me in front of my classmates even though I did nothing wrong.

I was so angry that I just snapped.

I treated him exactly how I felt he should be treated by yelling back and saying some very hurtful things.

Later, I found myself sitting in the principal's office.

She agreed that the teacher was out of line, but it did not excuse my actions.

I walked away confused. How could I respect someone who was always acting wrongly? Do I even need to?

David and King Saul

Before we read a passage from 1 Samuel, let me give you some backstory.

God never intended for Israel to have a king, but after they begged for one, He relented.

King Saul was chosen by God to lead His people.

Things did not end up going so well.

Eventually God appointed Saul's replacement—a shepherd boy named David.

It would be many years before David became king.

In that time, Saul went from David's caregiver to trying to murder him.

David was forced to live a rough life on the run from his king.

One day, Saul enters a cave not knowing that David is hiding in the dark.

David finally has a chance to kill Saul and take his place as King of Israel. His friends urge him to go through with it.

David does not. Let's read why he spares Saul's life:

Read 1 Samuel 24:8-10 (NLT):

David came out and shouted after him, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him. Then he shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn't true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, 'I will never harm the king—he is the Lord's anointed one.

To this point, Saul had definitely not "earned" David's respect.

He had lied to him and tried to murder him.

Basically, Saul's chief ambition in life seemed to be making David miserable even though David had never done anything wrong to him.

But look how David responds to Saul.

First, he bows before him, showing him the respect a king deserved.

Second, he explains that he will never harm the king because "he is the Lord's anointed one."

As difficult as it must have been for David, he realized that by showing Saul the respect a king deserves, he was actually showing God respect.

Saul was God's chosen king.

David realized that it was God's choice when and how to remove him.

When I think back to how I treated that teacher I realize what my principal was trying to teach me.

There are times in life when those in authority over me will make mistakes.

Does that mean I do not have to respect them?

No. God is in control.

He has the power to place people in authority and also to remove them.

By showing restraint and respect, I am honoring God and trusting in His power.

It is no wonder that David was so incredibly close to God.

He understood that respect is not earned but is required.

Following Jesus requires a tremendous amount of humility.

More than anything it requires faith that God will always support and defend us in His timing.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do feel that there is a point that we no longer need to show respect to an authority figure? Why/why not?
- Why is it so hard to show respect to an authority figure that has not "earned" it?
- Is it possible to show respect while standing up for myself? How so?
- Learning from David's example, how should I have responded to the teacher in my story?
- After I realized I had reacted wrongly toward my teacher, what should my next steps have been?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON SALT & LIGHT

Bible: Matthew 5:13

Bottom Line: We are the salt of Christ to the world.

SUPPLIES

- Salty foods such as chips (of different and strange varieties), sardines, dill pickles, popcorn, salted caramel candy, salted peanuts, and just plain salt. Each item needs to be divided into 4 parts for the taste test.
- Paper and pen-set of 4
- Blindfolds (4)
- A 'salty' prize for the winners of the game, preferably something funny such as a gold salt shaker!
- Matthew 5:13 from the Message printed out and put in a large salt shaker
- Salt packets for each youth. (Or cheap salt shakers for each youth with a slip of paper inside for them to write their 'salty' challenge.)

OPENING GAME: SALTY

GAME SET-UP

Set up a long table or 4 different smaller tables with 4 chairs.

At each place, you will need a pad of paper, pen, and a blindfold.

Divide the group into 4 equal teams.

Allergy alert: Be sure to ask before you begin if there are any food allergies and the seriousness of the allergies. If someone has a serious peanut allergy, don't use peanuts in this challenge.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

For each round have all the salty items hidden

Once the contestants have eaten the item, put any of it remaining back in the box with the other items.

The contestants cannot take off their blindfolds until everyone has tried it.

Say: Today, we are going to test just how 'salty' you are.

At this table, we will be testing your 'saltiness' by having you taste different salty things, while blindfolded, and then you will write down on the pad of paper at each chair what you think the food was without saying anything.

Each person on the team will go at least once for this challenge, but you won't know what item you will get, so choose your order wisely!!!

Call forward one person from each team and have them put on the blindfold.

Tell the other people who are watching not to give away what you hold up!!

Choose one item to give to each person for Round 1 after they put on their blindfolds and show it to those watching.

Say: Ok, I am putting Round 1 in front of you and on the count of '3' you will eat it and then keep your blindfolds on until I tell you take them off.

After everyone has eaten the item, put the items away.

Tell the contestants to take off their blindfolds and to write on the pad of paper what they think the item was that they just ate.

Bring out the item and see which contestant guessed correctly and their teams get a point.

Continue for each 'salty' item and at the end of the game give a 'salty' prize to the team that wins!

TEACH

Say: Can someone tell me what the word 'salty' means?

Give them a chance to give you all the different current meanings and they will probably give you the correct usage... this will be a funny time for you to show just how 'old' you are!!

Does anyone know where this phrase originated?

Give a disclaimer that this definition is probably written by 'old people' but see if they agree:

"Salty" is a slang term meaning "upset" or "bitter" typically used as an insult in player-vs.-player (PvP) games to suggest that the opponent feels mad or frustrated due to pwnage.

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the U.S. slang sense of salty meaning angry or irritated was first attested in 1938.

On April 24th, 2007, an entry on the term was submitted to Urban Dictionary.

The author describes it as having originated in Philadelphia, where it was defined as “looking stupid... because of something you did”.

It is thought to have entered into widespread usage on the internet through fighting game and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) communities.

But I would argue that Jesus actually came up with this phrase:

*Ask for a reader and hand them the large salt shaker with **Matthew 5:13** from the Message inside:*

“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.”

Jesus is basically telling us to be ‘salty’ but he is redefining this to mean what?

(Give them a chance to share their understanding of what Jesus is meaning).

I’m going to divide you all back into your ‘salty’ teams and I here is your next challenge: create a virtual meme of what ‘saltiness according to Jesus’ could look like today.

Think of tough situations that each of you face every day and then think of what it would look like to add a different ‘flavor’ to that situation... a flavor that adds Jesus in a creative way.

I will give you 10 minutes to work on your meme!

After the teams seem to be done with their scenarios (or slight mayhem is breaking out) call everyone back together and call each group to share their ‘virtual meme’ of ‘saltiness according to Jesus’.

Share a personal story in which you faced a similar tough situation and how you did or didn’t add ‘saltiness’ from Christ to that situation.

Jesus had this amazing way of saying tough things in simple ways.

What are some of the things that salt is used for?

Give the group a chance to share, but add any of the following Salt Facts from <http://www.mortonsalt.com/article/salt-history/>

The first written reference to salt is found in the Book of Job, recorded about 2,250 BC.

There are 31 other references to salt in the Bible, the most familiar probably being the story of Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt when she disobeyed the angels and looked back at the wicked city of Sodom.

From ancient times to the present, the importance of salt to humans and animals has been recognized.

Thousands of years ago, animals created paths to salt licks, and men followed seeking game and salt.

Their trails became roads and beside the roads; settlements grew.

These settlements became cities and nations.

The widespread superstition that spilling salt brings bad luck is believed to have originated with the overturned salt cellar in front of Judas Iscariot at the Last Supper, an incident immortalized in Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting.

And from <http://www.maldonsalt.co.uk/About-Salt-Salt-interesting-facts.html>

Interesting Facts about Salt

Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt – which is where the word 'salary' comes from. Difficult to spend it in restaurants today though.

Every cell in the body contains salt – an adult contains about 250 grams, equivalent to a box of Maldon Salt.

In old Japanese theaters, salt was sprinkled on to the stage before each performance to prevent evil spirits from casting a spell on the actors.

Sprinkling salt around your home may have the same effect today.

Salt is used to remove traces of water from aviation fuel after it is purified.

Salt was used to preserve Egyptian mummies (and in the pies eaten by Egyptian daddies).

Salt removes red wine stains (though probably not from your best cream carpet).

Sodium is key in the operation of all signals within, as well as to and from, the brain. And from <http://www.maldonsalt.co.uk/About-Salt-The-many-uses-of-Salt.html>

The Many Uses of Salt

Most people probably think of salt as simply a white granular food seasoning.

In fact, only 6% of all salt manufactured goes into food.

Apparently, we use salt in more than 14,000 different ways from the making of products as varied as plastic, paper, glass, polyester, rubber and fertilizers to household bleach, soaps, detergents and dyes.

Everyone uses salt, directly or indirectly.

Jesus is saying in what seems to be a very simple way, yet has just as many ways to live it out as the 14,000 different ways that salt is used.

He is basically saying: you must be salty.

And only you can know what that looks like for you: maybe you need to step up how you stand up for what you know to be right.

Maybe it means that the words you speak need to be filled with things that you know Jesus would want you to say.

And it doesn't have to be 'preachy' but just think about what it would sound like to speak words of love, kindness, mercy, grace, and forgiveness into the hurt and rudeness of this world.

Jesus is saying: Be salty. But by HIS definition of the word.

Before you leave, each of you are going to get a salt packet (*or salt shaker*) and here is your challenge: Write how you will be 'salty' for Christ and this world and put it somewhere where you can see it to remind yourself to be salty.

The Jesus kind of salty.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are your favorite salty foods?
- Which facts or uses of salt surprised you?
- What other situations can you think of in which it would be challenging to be Jesus salty?
- How are you feeling challenged to be salty in your everyday life?

Close in prayer.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON BEING LIGHT

Bible: Matthew 5:14-16

Bottom Line: We are the Light of Christ in a dark world.

SUPPLIES

- 5 Glow-in-the-dark necklaces per youth
- Current newspapers (enough copies for the group to be able to read quietly)
- Flashlights for each youth which they will take with them at the end of the lesson
- Tape

OPENING GAME: GLOW TAG

Give each teen 5 glow-in-the-dark necklaces to wear for the game.

This game is a fancy game of hide and seek...the youth will hide with their glow necklaces **AROUND THEIR NECKS** in plain sight – be sure to say this because some youth will be sneaky and try to hide the necklaces.

When they are spotted by 'it,' they have to go to 'it' and give them one of their necklaces.

Once a person loses all of their necklaces, they are 'it'.

The person who used to be 'it' takes 5 necklaces and leaves the rest with the new 'it'.

This game can continue as long as the group wants.

TEACH

Say: Were any of you afraid of the dark when you were a little kid?

Have you ever stopped to ask – why are kids afraid of the dark?

Give the youth a chance to answer and if you were afraid of the dark, share your thoughts also.

The world can be a scary place to a little kid.

The fear of the unknown is scary...but sometimes the fear of what is known can be just as scary.

There are children around the world who have real reasons to be afraid – reasons that are much more real and scary than a make-believe creature under their bed.

There are probably people in this room who know exactly what I am talking about too.

Sometimes the world can seem like a dark place.

And the hurt and the pain and the darkness are real.

I'm going to give each of you a flashlight and then we are going to turn off the lights.

Not yet, though!

Around the room are newspapers and these pages are examples of just how dark and full of hurt our world is right now.

Take your flashlights and I'm going to give you 10-15 minutes to take your time and read the papers.

Find stories in these papers that stick with you.

Take your time and really read the stories and stay silent to give everyone a chance to read, think, and choose the stories that stick to you.

Then, tear out that page and tape it to the wall around us.

Once you've done this, keep on reading the papers and taping up articles.

As you read, you will have to use your flashlight to see because in a minute we will turn out the lights.

Give the groups 10-15 minutes to walk around and read from different newspapers.

As some youth get done more quickly, prompt them to go and find other stories or help others to tape their stories up around the room.

As more and more get done, prompt them to walk around the room using their flashlights to read the stories on the wall around the room, silently.

Read Matthew 5:14-16 from the Message.

"You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Jesus told his disciples to shine and his words are true for us: Shine so others see the light and see God.

Look around this room.

It might look like we are surrounded in darkness, but think about the challenge that Jesus is giving to us.

He agrees that the world is dark with pain and hurt and loneliness and _____ (let the youth fill in the words), but then here is the amazing thing that Jesus is Sharing with us: we are the light of the world.

We shine the light of Jesus or we SHOULD be shining the light and the love of Jesus in the middle of this pain.

Can we 'fix' each and every one of these situations? No.

But what we can do is to shine the light and the love of Jesus through our actions.

Start where we are and shine.

Think about this – Where is there darkness around you?

Maybe at school or in your neighborhood or at home even.

What would it look like to shine in those situations?

Give the youth a few moments to answer on ways they could shine the light of Christ.

It doesn't have to be complicated or preachy to shine the light of Jesus.

Share an example of someone who you have seen shine the light of Christ in simple ways that they live.

Shine the light that Christ puts inside of you.

When we really let the light of Christ shine into our own lives, it leaks out without us really trying sometimes.

Shining becomes a part of who you are and you shine.

As we get ready to go to small groups, I want you to take a few moments to walk around this room once again using your flashlight to reread the stories and pray as you read.

Even this simple act is a way to shine the light of Christ.

Choose one of the stories to take with you to commit to pray.

Pray that the light of Christ would shine in these places.

Take your flashlight with you and put it somewhere to remind you to shine the light of Christ in your own life.

As Jesus said, “you are the light of the world.”

Don’t keep that light hidden.

Shine.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Give each youth a chance to share the story that they chose to take with them and why.

Brainstorm about ways that others or even you could shine the light of Christ in these situations.

- Where are the situations in your life where shining the light of Jesus seems difficult? Why?
- What are some practical ways that you could shine the light of Christ in your life?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON SELF-IMAGE

Bible: Psalm 139:13-15

Bottom Line: We truly see ourselves when we see ourselves through God's eyes.

LEADER PREP

Self image is such a critical subject for youth.

As adults, it can be easy to forget what it was like to be a teenager: Your body is like an unknown alien, everyone seems to be at a completely different developmental stage, and let's not even talk about how awkward it is when you have to shower for gym! Yikes!

Before you teach this lesson, try to take a possibly painful walk down your teenage memory lane to remember what it was like for you.

If you were one of the few teenagers who looks with longing to your early teen years, then try to think about what it was like for that awkward kid in your class because believe me, it was painful.

Some adults still carry around the hurt and rejection they felt from this time, and if you are one of these adults, take some time to really talk with God before this lesson.

Remind yourself that you are NOT a teenager anymore and to forgive if you need to forgive.

Remember that you can be a source of comfort and encouragement to youth who might feel as awful as you felt.

And spend time thinking and reflecting on this very important question: how does God see me?

Here's what I know: God loves you dearly and he loves each and every youth in your group dearly.

My prayer is that they leave this lesson with a deep and reassuring sense that God sees them for who they really are and loves them dearly.

Self-image built on what God thinks is radically different from what their peers or the world will say, but in the final analysis, it is the only image that is genuinely honest.

Hold onto that!

SUPPLIES

- Stickers with the names of current popular artists, athletes, leaders, star etc
- 2 Large mirrors
- Dry erase markers
- List of scriptures
- Individual mirrors
- Dry erase marker for each student

OPENING GAME - WHO AM I?

As the students walk in, place a sticker on their back without them seeing it, with the name of someone who the youth will know from pop culture: Could be the name of a movie star, athlete, person in the news, character in a movie, or artist.

Try to pick names of people who will be entertaining to try to identify.

Tell the students that they need to help one another figure out who they are by giving them clues about the name that is on their back.

The clues cannot mention names but should be clues that would make it very simple to identify the person.

Have extra names ready as some of the youth will figure their name out quickly.

You could even offer a prize of a strange item for the person who guesses the most names.

TEACH

Reflect on the game they just played by asking these questions or similar ones:

What were some of the clues that you were given to identify the famous person on your sticker?

Were there any names which stumped you?

Imagine this game: What if I put your name on one of these stickers and then we gave clues to help someone guess your name?

What kind of things do you think people would say?

Share a quality or something about yourself (even from when you were their age) of clues that would have been used to identify you that would possibly be less than positive.

Pull out a large mirror and have dry erase markers ready to write down the words the youth give to you.

How many of you think that others might be surprised to hear how you see yourself?

Let's face it, we are often our toughest critics and sometimes the things that we say to ourselves when no one else can hear are the words that stay with us.

But have you ever stopped to really question those things that you think?

Share a time in your life, or even in the life of someone who is famous, in which you realized that the way that you saw yourself was unfair, unkind, or inaccurate.

Think about the people at your school.

How do you think that they see themselves?

Write down the words or phrases on the large mirror with the dry erase marker as the youth share their thoughts.

Or you can invite the youth to come up and write the words one at a time silently for added effect.

Now, ask yourself honestly, how many of these words do you identify with?

When have you felt _____ (insert words from the mirror)?

Read Psalm 139:13-15.

What if we instead, viewed ourselves as God sees us?

Do you think that God sees you as _____ (choose one of the words and then erase that word)?

No, God sees you as wonderfully made.

Erase the words on the mirror and write "Wonderfully made".

What other words do you think God would choose to write for you?

Add the following words as needed from scriptures:

You are: Beloved, Bought with a price, Adopted, A child of God, Loved, Known, A saint

See, God tells us in scripture that He thinks we are worth dying for...that is how much we matter to him.

It's possible that some of us have chosen to believe lies about who we are, and those words have been written on our souls and have rewritten our self image...but with lies.

But why would we give words spoken against us, or even by us, more value than words from God?

Maybe you don't believe that you are precious or worth more than anything...but God does.

Why not just for a moment consider this: What if you let God and what He thinks about you be the voice that you listen to?

How would this change the way that you think about yourself? And others?

Just look at these words.....*read them again.....or invite youth to read them outloud.*

Whether you believe it or not...He thinks these things about you.

Is there one of these words that jumps out at you?

Maybe you think "Yeah, that word definitely doesn't apply to me".

That's your word, then.

And each of you is going to come and get one of these tiny mirrors and a pen and choose a word to write on this mirror.

Carry this mirror with you this week.

Place it in a place where you can see it.

And look at the word that you write.

Try to let it sink in that God thinks this about you, regardless of what you think or what others think: God thinks you are wonderful.

He loves you.

I pray that you can see this word reflected in you because it is the truth from God for you.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which word in the first set of words on the mirror surprised you? How does it make you feel to know that someone feels that way about themselves?
- Which of the words we first wrote on the mirror (that we sometimes think about ourselves) would describe how you have been feeling about yourself?
- Which of the words that we wrote on the mirror (that God would think) is sticking with you?
- Why do you think that word has stuck with you?
- How do you think life could be different for you if you chose to believe these words from God about you?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Bible: Colossians 3: 16-17 (NIV)

Bottom Line: Use this lesson to encourage students to "look up" from their devices, in order to pay attention to real life relationships & what God is doing in their lives.

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES

- Notecards - 1 per person
- 1 pen per person
- Group of 20 or smaller: Whiteboard or area to write for the group to see.
- Group of 20 or larger: each group of 5-10 students will need poster board and a marker.

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Space to sit as a group in a circle.

GAME DESCRIPTION

Give each youth a card and a pen with this challenge: write a 'Tweet' describing yourself in less than 40 words (yes, we know that you can use 140 characters on Twitter, but let's make this a challenge).

Do not write your name or any other identifying places such as school, last name, etc.

Keep your tweet hidden and pass it to the leader.

Leader, mix up the cards and then allow each student to draw one of the tweets.

Go around the circle and have the student read their tweet one at a time and then attempt to guess which student wrote the tweet.

If they cannot guess or guess incorrectly, others in the group can try to guess one at a time, starting at the student's left and moving left until the correct 'Tweeter' has been guessed.

Whoever guesses the tweeter gets to keep the card, and the student with the most cards at the end of the game wins.

GAME TIE-IN

Social media has become a way of life for us.

We attempt to 'sum up' who we are in tweets.

Do you think it is possible for others to fully 'know' you through only your social media?

TEACH - SOCIAL MEDIA

Group Discussion

What are the biggest challenges that you face personally with using social media?

In what ways does social media help you connect with others?

We are going to watch a video about technology and some of the challenges that we probably all face.

Listen for phrases or points that 'hit home for you' or that make you think.

Even listen for statements that you don't agree with and want to discuss further.

Write them down on the notecard and we will talk about them after you watch this video.

Caution: The word "bastard" is used once in the video.

Play video: <https://youtu.be/Z7dLU6fk9QY><https://youtu.be/Z7dLU6fk9QY>

Spend 10-15 minutes allowing the students to share the phrases or statements in the video which stuck out to them.

Group of 20 or smaller: As a large group, write down the items students share for all to see.

Group of 20 students or more: break them into small groups of 5-10 students each and give each group a poster board and marker to write down their phrases.

After the groups are done, ask them to display their posters in front for all to see.

The video hopefully challenged you to think about the impact that technology and social media has on your life.

We really do live in a world that is radically different from the one that even your grandparents grew up in because we can 'stay connected' with friends and family and even people we don't know at all times it seems.

But what the video points out, many of us are 'talking' with others or looking at their tweets or photos, and yet feel very alone.

Ask yourself honestly if you've felt alone even when being connected with so many people.

Think about a time when you were sitting in the room with your family or with friends and spent that time looking at stuff on your phone.

I want you to take a moment right now and think about this: imagine you were looking at a photo collage of the best moments of your life up to this point.

What would the photos be in this collage?

(If time allows, ask for students to share some of these photos with the group).

Now ask yourself this question: which moments could be in this collage, but you missed because you are on your phone?

What if, though, social media isn't all a 'bad thing'.

How many of your parents or teachers complain about how much time you spend looking at your phone?

Well, adults get that complaint also.

But what if there could be a happy medium?

What if social media could be something that draws you closer to God and to others if used in an intentional way?

Ask a student to read Colossians 3:16-17.

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

What if we were to creatively look at social media through this scripture and it's challenge to do EVERYTHING in the name of Jesus?

Here are a few ideas of ways that we could live out this challenge using social media:

What if we pulled up our Twitter feed and prayed for each person who posted something?

Or what if you took a moment to look at the photos posted on Instagram and ask God to help you see his creation in a new way or to see that person as God sees them?

What if someone shared that they are hurting, or it's obvious that they are hurting and instead of 'liking' it, you call them up or better yet, go find them in person?

Maybe just let them know that you are praying for them.

How do you think even these small steps could radically change the way that each of us interact with our phones and social media?

See, your phone or social media or technology isn't bad.

It's when it crosses the line of being THE sole connection with living, breathing people in your life that there becomes a problem.

And usually that problem is that you become more and more isolated until one day you realize that you feel alone.

But what if God is offering a reminder that ANYTHING and EVERYTHING if done for his glory can be redeemed.

Yes, even social media.

What if we took this passage seriously and challenged ourselves to do EVERYTHING in the name of Jesus and to give thanks.

What if each time you look at your phone's texts or social media, you give thanks for every single person who comes across your screen and even let them know that you thank God for them?

Your friends and acquaintances share more with you than anyone realizes, don't they?

Why not stop and pray right at the moment for the person who posted the picture from the party this weekend or shared that they are hurting?

Take the information that they share with everyone and give it and THEM to God.

We have a unique picture into the lives of our friends and family, and many of us just look and go to the next photo or tweet.

Many of them are hurting, feel alone, hopeless, or are making choices that we all know are going to hurt them.

What if, each of us committed this week to look at our social media in the name of Jesus?

What if, we each committed to pray for every single person who posts something or sends us a text?

And give thanks to God that they are in our lives.

If time allows: Invite the students to take out their phones (or share if they do not have a phone) and to prayerfully look at their social media.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges that youth today face with social media?
- What are your biggest challenges with technology or social media?
- In what ways were you challenged today to change the way that you approach your phone or social media?
- How do you think 'doing social media in the name of Jesus' will change the way that you look at your feed this week?
- Think through your feed from this week: who do you need to commit to pray for?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Title: "What's Your Shamrock?"

Bible: Romans 10: 13-15 (NLT), Romans 12: 6-8 (MSG), Matthew 5: 13-16 (MSG)

Introduction

Hold up or show a picture of a shamrock.

Ask students if they know what it is, and what holiday is associated with a shamrock.

Once they answer St. Patrick's Day...ask them if they know why.

Give brief history of shamrock being associated with St. Patrick's Day:

St. Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland by using the shamrock to explain the Trinity...you know God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

So, you may be asking a few questions right now. What does St. Patrick and a shamrock have to do with me? Why is this person talking about it in church?

Point #1: Why did St. Patrick share Christianity with Ireland?

St. Patrick was born in Ireland, but moved away at a young age.

He was told about Jesus and what he did on the cross, and he loved his home country so much, he felt compelled to go back home and tell other people about Jesus.

Can you think about someone you love dearly?

Do you know if they have a relationship with Jesus? Do you know if they need to be saved from stuff like...

Depression?

Addictions...like drugs, alcohol, and lust?

Parents just split up and they feel like every thing is falling apart?

You know there is someone willing to save us from this stuff right?

It isn't Dr. Phil or Oprah Winfrey, it's God.

Read Romans 10: 13-15 (NLT).

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?

That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

So you are probably thinking "Oh great!

Now they are going to tell me that I need to walk around school and work and home holding my Bible, yelling bible verses at people, beating them in the head with my bible"!

Nope, that's not what I'm going to tell you!

Point 2: Let your life and interests tell people about Jesus

What did St. Patrick use again?

A shamrock...very easy and very simple, right?

Think for a minute.

What are you passionate about?

What wrongs would you like to see made right in the world?

World hunger ended?

Children educated?

Elderly taken cared of, not taken advantage of?

People following Jesus?

Making sure everyone knows they are worthy and lovely and encouraged?

Read Romans 12: 6-8 (MSG).

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with

the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

You might be saying..."it's that simple"? Yes!

You don't have to be a pastor to do these things (nothing against pastors we need them)!!

Take your talents, your interest and passions, take what you are good at, and use them as a way to show other people the love of Jesus!

Another question running through your mind might be "Why me"? "Aint nobody got time for that"!!

Point 3: The World needs YOU!

Wait what? Someone needs me...you must be joking?!

Read Matthew 5: 13-16 (MSG)

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

The world needs you!

Your talents, what you are passionate about,

Your convictions about the wrongs in this world,

The world needs you to use all of this, and show it the love of Jesus!!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your favorite holiday and why?
- When was the last time you needed someone to save you? From a bad grade, from feeling alone, from a bully?
- What talents, passions, or gifts do you have that could be used to tell people about Jesus...St. Patrick used the shamrock, what could you use?
- How could you take your answer to question 3 and make a difference in your home, neighborhood, or school?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON STRESS

Bible: Matthew 6:31-34

SUPPLIES

- 2 Large white t-shirts
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- 2 ropes
- Tape
- Ten stackable items, varying in size. Example: books, plates, etc. Anything flat that can be stacked on top of something else.
- A timer

Before the game, tape the two ropes together, forming one long rope.

Tape them tight enough that they will stay together, but not so tight that they can't be pulled apart when tugged on.

OPENING GAME: STACKABLE

Divide the group into four teams.

Lay out the stackable items in any random order, as long as the biggest item is not first and the smallest item is not last.

Tell the students that the objective of the game is to be able to stack all ten items in the order that they are in and carry them to the other side of the room. If they drop the stack, they have to start over.

Let the first team go and time them.

Once they've completed the task, rearrange the items again in any order, as long as it is not largest to smallest.

Let the second team go and time how long it takes them. Repeat for the third team.

When you are laying out the items for the fourth team, lay them out from biggest to smallest, in the order they will stack the easiest.

Their time will be the shortest.

TEACH

In the game we just played, you guys tried carrying a stack of items four different ways.

The last team was able to complete the challenge in the shortest amount of time.

Now, how many of you think that their success was because of the order the items were in?

The challenge worked best when the bigger things were first on the stack and the smaller things were on top, right?

Well, it's like that in life, too.

It's least stressful when the most important things are first.

If the less important things are first, things can get messy and unbalanced, just like they did in that game.

Not having your priorities in the right order can be really, really stressful.

If you're confused about what your priorities should be, then you're in luck!

The Bible has a lot to say about it.

Let's take a look.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them.

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. – Matthew 6:31-34

As humans, our most basic needs are food and water. It's how we survive!

So if we're without them, it would definitely be cause for worry and stress, right?

This verse tells us not to worry, but it doesn't just say not to worry about superficial stuff or things out of our control.

It says not to worry about the most basic of things!

And if we shouldn't get stressed over the most basic of things in life, we certainly shouldn't get stressed over other things, right?

This verse also lays out what our priorities should be when it tells us to seek God first, before anything else.

The words "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own" can seem close to impossible.

I mean, not worry about tomorrow?

If we could figure out the secret to not worrying about tomorrow, we'd never be stressed!

How are we supposed to do that?

It's simple, really. If we really do seek God and His kingdom first, above all else, then we won't have to worry about tomorrow. Why?

Because when you seek God and His will first, you're acknowledging that He is in control, so there's no need to worry about tomorrow or the day after that or the week after that.

This is a great example of how having your priorities in order can greatly decrease the stress in your life - seeking God above anything else leads to not worrying.

Can you imagine how much less stressful life would be if you didn't worry? It would be amazing!

Let's look at another way the Bible talks about what your priorities should be.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will. – Romans 12:2

This world that we live in isn't all good.

And the pattern of this world - the "normal" way of doing things - is a sinful one.

One that we don't need to conform to.

See, it's not normal to make it a priority to not conform to the world around you.

But being a Christian isn't about being normal; it's about following Christ!

Conforming to the world around you and caving into a lifestyle of sin may be tempting, and may even seem fun at times but trust me, it's not worth it.

Nothing leads to stress faster than knowing you're living a sinful life and being worried about the wrong things you're doing.

Instead, you should make it a priority to not conform to the lifestyle of this world.

See, you may think that's not really necessary.

Sure, you'll avoid doing the "really bad" stuff, but you don't need to actually spend time and energy focusing on not conforming to the world around you, right?

Let me show you what that's like. I need a volunteer to help me out.

Give the volunteer the white shirt to put on over their clothes, and you put one over your clothes, too.

Get out the paint and paintbrush.

Okay, we're going to pretend that this paint represents things in a sinful lifestyle that I'm living.

Begin to paint on your own shirt.

Now, you're a Christian, but you don't think it's really important to focus on not conforming to this type of lifestyle.

After all, you love Jesus, and you actually know this stuff is wrong, so as long as you don't do any of it, you'll be fine, right?

While you're talking, start to stand closer to the student. Swing your arms around, bump into them, etc.

But here's the thing—the more you're around me, the more you're around my lifestyle and actions, the good and the bad.

Make sure you've touched the student's shirt enough that some of the paint has gotten on them.

Regardless of what you're actually participating in, it's all around you, and it's going to influence you. Because what's on your shirt right now? Paint!

I don't understand! How did it get there? You didn't put it there! You didn't even hold a paintbrush!

But you also didn't make a decision to be sure to keep paint off your shirt.

Had you made the decision that you weren't going to get any paint on you, you could have done that!

We still could have hung out and talked, but you could have stood a little further away from me.

You could have been more aware, and when I got too close to you with the paint, took a step back.

It's the same way with conforming to the patterns of this world.

You cannot escape sin - it's all around you.

But you can make the decision not to conform to it.

You can always be thinking about the way you should live, making sure to not let certain things become a part of your life.

If anyone else walked in right now and we asked them who they thought had been painting, they would think we had both been painting.

They wouldn't be able to tell that you hadn't touched any paint or even held a paintbrush.

You aren't meant to conform to the patterns of this world.

You are meant to be set apart.

When you think of having your priorities straight and how that can cause stress, this may not be something you think about.

You probably think of good priorities as being something more along the lines of making sure your homework is done before you hang out with your friends.

But let me explain this to you.

I need two volunteers.

Hand each volunteer one end of the rope that's been taped together in the middle.

Have them stand close enough to each other that there is a lot of slack in the rope.

There's no doubt about it; being a Christian is difficult.

We're supposed to be in this world but not of it.

We're not supposed to conform to the patterns of this world, yet we still have to live here.

That's why having clear priorities is so important.

Because when you don't - when you think that you can just coast along and everything will be fine - this is what happens.

Ask the students to both take a step back, lessening the slack of the rope, but not pulling it tight yet.

On one hand, (*point to one end of the rope*) you know what's right and wrong.

You know what you should and shouldn't do.

And hey, maybe you even make sure you don't do the things you know are wrong.

But on the other hand (*point to the other end of the rope*) you haven't exactly made it a priority to not conform to the world around you.

Have students step back until there is no slack in the rope at all.

Without clear priorities, you're pulled each way.

If you don't decide to make sure certain things don't influence you, then they're going to influence you.

Being pulled in two different directions?

That's extremely stressful.

Have the students pull on their ends of the rope until the rope snaps in the middle.

How can you expect to not be stressed when you're being pulled two different directions?

Eventually, you snap.

Can you see how having the right priorities is essential to fighting stress?

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." - **Matthew 22:37-39***

Lastly, let's talk about the most important priority of all.

While there are a lot of things in life that will probably always be a little unclear, this is not one of them.

In this verse, Jesus laid out exactly what our main priority should be.

He even helped by adding what the second one should be!

Your number one priority in life should be to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

And once you get that in place, your number two priority should be to love others.

Your heart, soul, and mind...that's all of you! It's everything you have!

Your very top priority should be to love God with everything you have.

Let me just tell you this...if you can truly make this your top priority, the rest of your priorities will fall into place, and your life will have much less stress.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When you think about the stress in your life, how much of it do you think comes from not having the right priorities in the right order?

Is worry something that causes a lot of stress in your life?

Do you think that seeking God first, above everything else, would decrease stress?

What do you think it means to not conform to the patterns of this world?

When you think about your priorities, is not conforming to the world one of them? Do you think it should be?

Do you agree that if you don't make clear decisions about the lifestyle you have that you will be pulled in different directions and that it will cause a lot of stress?

Do you think it's helpful that Jesus laid out exactly what your number one priority should be?

Is loving God with everything you have your number one priority right now?

If not, is that something that you want to change

How do you think that loving God above all would make you less stressed?

CLOSE

Today, we covered a topic that you maybe hadn't thought of before.

I mean, sure, you know that not having your priorities straight can lead to stress.

But maybe you were thinking of responsibilities like homework and chores as priorities, not the things we discussed in this lesson.

I hope that now you see how important it is to consider these things.

Like I said, if you make loving God with everything you have your top priority, I guarantee the amount of stress you have in your life will go down. Why?

Well, for starters, it helps you make a lot of decisions without even thinking about it.

Because if you love God with everything you have, you're going to want to follow His word the best that you can.

So those verses that we talked about - about not worrying, about seeking God first, and about not conforming to the patterns of this world - well, those are no-brainers!

Because you want to do everything you can for the one you love more than anything else, right?

If you have a lot of stress in your life, look at your priorities and ask yourself these questions.

Am I loving God with everything that I have?

Am I loving those around me?

Am I purposefully not conforming to the world around me?

Am I worrying about what may happen instead of trusting in God to take care of me?

A lot of the unnecessary stress in your life could be taken away by dealing with those four questions.

Jesus loves you guys so much, and He doesn't want you to live a life full of stress.

He loves you so much that He actually told you exactly what your priorities should be in the Bible.

Why not try listening to them?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON TEMPTATION

Bible: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Bottom Line: Temptation happens, but with God, you can remain faithful.

SUPPLIES

- 'AWESOME' PRIZES such as a dollar bill, gift card for \$5, candy: enough for each youth to choose a prize. Also, include some funny and weird prizes!
- The 'Awesome prize' box
- Bell or buzzer
- Trivia questions (app such as Trivia Crack works)
- Index cards for each youth
- Pens

OPENING GAME: Temptation Game Show

There was a game show on TV in 2007 called "Temptation" and this game is our version.

Create a fun 'game show' set with a table at the front of the room with 2 buzzers or bells at each end.

Leader stands in the middle as the 'announcer'.

Divide the students into two teams.

Now using your best 'announcer' voice explain:

Today we are going to play a game called "Temptation", and for each round, send one member from your team to the table to answer a question.

The first person to ring the bell (or buzzer) gets to answer the question.

If they guess wrong, the other team can answer the question.

When you guess the question correctly, here is where this game gets tricky: the winner each battle can choose between a point for their team or the 'awesome prize' which they will draw from the 'Awesome prize box'.

Explain that in this 'Awesome prize box' are AWESOME PRIZES!!! (include maybe a dollar bill, gift card, candy, etc.).

TEACH

Which prize was the most tempting for you to choose in this game?

What did you risk if you were to choose a prize over the points for your team?

This was just a game, but let's be honest, in real life the stakes can be much higher can't they?

It is very tempting to think that your choices don't matter, isn't it?

I wish that I could tell you that choices in your life will never get more difficult than the choices between earning your team a point or choosing an 'AWESOME PRIZE' from our game today, but you would all know that's a lie, right?

Life is filled with choices, and the choices that you make can change your life and the lives of those around you.

Just think about someone you've seen on the news who seemed to have it all in life and then some type of scandal comes out.....

An amazing person who seemed to have it all makes a choice that affects the rest of their life.

Can you think of a famous person who made a choice that seemed to surprise everyone and yet affected their life in a really negative way?

If there is a story in the news of a famous person who has been tempted, share with the group or ask for examples of famous people who have been tempted.

We might look at these examples and think "Why did they do that?", but honestly we have ALL done things that we regret, and sometimes it is really easy to look at someone else's mistakes and think "Oh, that all never happen to me" or "I would never do that".

But ask yourself, do you really think that these people said "Hey, I really want to do something illegal, or hurt my family, or lie and get caught"?

No!

They probably started out thinking exactly what you are thinking...

Ask yourself if you've ever thought any of these common thoughts that often lead us right into temptation:

That would never happen to me.

Just one lie won't matter that much.

No one else will know.

Everyone else is doing it.

You get the point, right?

See, every single one of us are very, very close to the line of temptation.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:12-13.

Did you hear the first part of this scripture about temptation?

It's basically saying: "Hey, you over there who thinks that you are safe from temptation. Yeah, You!

Watch out, because you are closer than you think."

Ok, so let's be honest, here: Being a teenager can be super challenging, and the temptations that you each face or will face can be intense.

We are going to get in groups and I want you your group to make a very short skit of common temptations that teenagers face.

You can choose a situation, or if you need help, I have some suggestions.

I will give you 10 minutes to come up with your skit that you will then share with the rest of the group.

Suggestions for skits as needed:

- *Friends encouraging you lie to your parents about where you will be tonight.*
- *Cheating on a test or paper.*
- *Joining in on teasing someone at school.*
- *Stealing something 'small' at a store.*
- *Lying to an adult or teacher.*

Give each group a chance to share their skit.

Nobody said that being a teenager would be easy, and you probably don't want to hear this, but, the struggles get even more difficult as you get older.

Can you think of other temptations that you've seen others face?

Write these examples on the board.

The struggle is real, isn't it?

Add other temptations if not mentioned such as: partying, trying to fit in, bullying others, physical romantic relationships, sex, drugs, etc. as you think appropriate for your group.

Here's what we have to remember:

God wants to help you fight temptation.

He will provide a way out.

God wants to help you fight temptation.

Now, some people read the scripture that God will never let them be tempted beyond what they can bear and think it is a 'Free Pass'.

That doesn't mean that they can walk right up 'to the line' and God won't let them pass.

That's not what this scripture is saying, is it?

God gives us reminders of how we should live.

WE know that we shouldn't lie or steal or kill, right?

God gives us those reminders of how to live to help us to fight temptation before it strikes because he knows **TEMPTATION WILL STRIKE US ALL**.

But here is the tricky part: God knows when we are trying to push those lines or those rules.

You can't fool God.

Share a time in which you were tempted to do something you know that you shouldn't and how you could look back and see the ways that God offered you an 'out' that you didn't take.

God will offer you a way out, but often it starts at the very beginning.

Those small decisions or the tiny lies.

But it is **THOSE** moments where God wants to help you.

THOSE are the 'get out of it' moments that He is giving to you before that snowball starts down the hill.

We've all known people who do one small thing that then leads to another small thing, and another until the problem gets to be really big.

Nobody sets out to get into trouble or to be addicted to alcohol, drugs, or pornography.

No....it begins when you click on that one picture on the internet or take that one drink.

Any addict will tell you that it started with just one.

But God wants to offer you a way out before that snowball starts, and it really does require you to be honest with yourself and honest with God.

It will require you to make some tough choices, and it might mean that you spend some time NOT following the crowd.

But ask yourself this: think about that person you know that has major problems in their life....where did those problems start?

Trace it back to that one decision.

Because you WILL be faced with those same decisions and God is offering you a way out before disaster hits.

He WILL offer you a way out, but He doesn't promise that the way out will be easy or popular.

NO, usually that way out means that you are the lone person making that decision or not going to that party or not hanging with those friends.

You might be standing alone...but remember this: when you make those choices you are not alone because God stands with you.

And maybe you are sitting here tonight knowing that you've already started making those decisions.... you've giving into temptation.

Maybe tonight's lesson is God offering you the way out.

Confess to him that you are being tempted or that you've made those decisions, and stop right now.

If you need help, ask Him for help.

If you feel weak, cry out to Him.

Because God wants to give you the strength, and it is no accident that you are here tonight.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share about a time when you were tempted when you were a child?
- What are other ways that teenagers are tempted?
- How are you being tempted?
- How does it make you feel to know that God is with you in the temptations that you face?
- Pray for one another and the temptations that each of you face.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON THANKFULNESS

Bible: Colossians 2:6-7; Ephesians 5:20; 1 Chronicles 16:34

Description: God has blessed us with so much, but sometimes, we take that for granted and forget to be thankful. We should take the time to be thankful for all the things in our life, so that we can live our lives in Him, overflowing with thankfulness.

SUPPLIES

- Water balloons
- Two buckets
- A tarp or towels (If you're going to play the game inside)
- A roll of paper (for the students to write on)
- Pens or markers

OPENING GAME: Make it Overflow

This game can be played outside in order to minimize the mess. If you choose to play it inside, lay down a tarp or some towels before beginning.

Split the group into two teams and have them line up.

On the opposite side of the room, put a bucket for each team.

On the side of the room where the teams are lined up, put all the water balloons.

Explain that the object of this game is to be the first team to get their bucket to overflow with water.

One at a time, students from each team must get a water balloon to their bucket *without using their hands*.

They then have to pop it and get the water in the bucket, still without the use of their hands.

The first team to get their bucket to overflow wins!

TEACH

How often do you complain? No, really.

Think about it.

How often do you complain about something, big or small?

Sadly, you probably can't even think of a real answer, because we tend to complain so much that we don't even know we're doing it.

How often do you say the things you're thankful for?

Probably not nearly as much as you complain, right?

Because for some reason, it just seems easier to complain than to be thankful.

Do you feel happier when you're complaining or when you're being thankful?

Personally, I'm much happier when I'm living a thankful life. It's just easier to be happy when you're thankful!

How can you *not* be thankful when you think of all that God has done for you?

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." – **Colossians 2:6-7**

Do you want something to be thankful for?

How about the fact that you've received Jesus?

That's worth being thankful for, right?

This verse is telling us how we should live.

It says we should live our lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in faith, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Isn't that a cool thing to think of?

Overflowing with thankfulness.

Being so full of thankfulness that you just can't keep it to yourself, and it just bubbles out of you.

Just like in the game we played, where you filled up the bucket again and again, until eventually it overflowed!

I would say that most of the time, you're overflowing with something.

Even if you don't realize it and even if it's not on purpose.

Sometimes, during the school year, you guys come in here and you're overflowing with stress.

Stress about homework, assignments, projects, and studying.

It's all you can think about, and you can't help but overflow with it.

Sometimes, you're overflowing with happiness.

You've had a great day hanging out with your friends, you guys have plans for tomorrow, and you're having so much fun that you're just overflowing with happiness.

I've also seen people overflow with jealousy, wanting what someone else has so badly that they just can't help the emotion from flooding out of them.

I've seen people overflow with compassion, so moved by someone else's situation that the desire to help just overflowed.

Whatever you're feeling the most, or thinking about the most, that's what you're going to be overflowing with.

So how do you overflow with thankfulness?

Well, you first have to try.

You have to make a decision to start being thankful more than you are now.

Make an effort to be thankful on purpose.

Don't just wait for something to come along that makes you feel thankful, but instead, actively look at all of the things in your life that you're thankful for.

Another way to overflow with thankfulness is to be thankful for the big things and for the little things.

Don't just be thankful for the big things that happen, like getting an A in your toughest class, or getting exactly what you wanted for your birthday.

Be thankful for the small things too, like when your mom makes you breakfast, or when the bus is on time.

You don't only complain in the big things, do you?

Of course you don't.

We complain about pretty much everything, big or small.

If you're wearing shoes that are uncomfortable, what do you do?

Well, you probably complain about them.

About how they are pinching your feet, about how your feet hurt, and about how you're so uncomfortable.

When was the last time that you were thankful because your shoes were comfortable?

Do you see where I'm going with this?

If it's big enough to complain about, then it's certainly big enough to be thankful about.

So be thankful!

For comfortable shoes, for good friends, for the piece of pizza you got that had the perfect ratio of cheese and sauce...be thankful for it all!

Another thing that is sure to make you overflow with thankfulness is to make being thankful a part of your prayer life.

Sure, most of us would say that we're very thankful to God and all He's done for us.

We would probably all say that we're extremely thankful for the things God has blessed us with. But when you pray, is it usually to say thank you, or is it to ask for something?

"...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." – **Ephesians 5:20**

When was the last time you just said thank you to God?

This verse says we should be *always* giving thanks to God for *everything*.

It's easy to read a verse like that and kind of skip over its actual meaning.

Because seriously—give thanks for everything? Is that even possible?

I need a couple of volunteers to come up here.

Okay, I want you guys to start at the beginning of your day today, and tell me some things that happened that you should be giving thanks to God for.

Let each student say just a couple of things, or as many as they want—it's up to you and how long you have.

Okay, great.

Those are some awesome things, and you're right, you should definitely give thanks to God for those.

But, I think you missed a few things.

First of all, you woke up today.

That's something to be thankful for all on its own.

You woke up, you were breathing, and you were physically able to get out of bed.

Don't you think God deserves some thankfulness for that?

Also, the sun was rising when you got up.

A beautiful sunrise brought the good news that, surprise; you're not going to freeze to death today!

Then, you got to go to a bathroom with a working shower, toilet, and sink.

You got to brush your teeth with running water without being afraid about whether or not the water was going to give you any diseases.

Most of the world can't say the same, so that's something worth being thankful for!

And let's not forget that when you woke up, you woke up into a promise of eternal life, not death.

You woke up forgiven, because Jesus has died for your sins.

All of these things you have to be thankful for in your day, and your day hasn't even really started yet!

But, did you thank God for all of those things this morning?

Probably not.

We become so used to them that we start to take them for granted, and we forget to be thankful for them.

If you want to overflow with thankfulness, start telling God thank you every single time you encounter something that He's blessed you with.

You won't stop saying thank you all day!

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." - **1 Chronicles 16:34**

When things get tough in our lives, it can become a little hard to be thankful.

We tend to focus on the bad stuff instead of the good stuff, complaining instead of saying thank you.

And sometimes, things are just going to be hard.

Things in life are going to get pretty bad every now and then, but that doesn't mean the thankfulness should stop.

Even if you're going through a hard time where it's hard to think of things to be thankful for, you have this.

The Lord is good, and His love for you endures forever.

No matter what else goes wrong in your day, or week, or month, The Lord is good.

No matter how many times you mess up, make mistakes, and fail, His love for you endures forever.

And that's worth thanking Him for.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think there are things in your life that you forget to say thank you for? Like what?
- Is saying thank you to Jesus something you need to do more often?
- What do you think you overflow with most often? Is it thankfulness or something else?
- Do you think that taking the time to think about all God has blessed you with will cause you to overflow with thankfulness?
- Do you spend more time complaining than you do being thankful? Is that something you want to change?
- Do you think it's possible to give God thanks for everything?
- What are some small things you're going to work on being thankful for this week?
- Do you agree that you're happier when you're thankful than you are when you're complaining?
- How do you feel when you do something really nice for someone and they don't say thank you? Do you think Jesus ever feels that way?
- We have eternal life through Jesus. Is that something you think about every day? If not, do you think it's something that you should think about every day?

Wrap-Up

At the beginning of the night, overflowing with thankfulness for everything in our life seemed like it may be difficult to do.

But after remembering all that God has done for us and all that we have to be thankful for, it doesn't seem hard at all.

It's so important to be thankful, and we have so much to be thankful for.

But if you're used to complaining all the time and not really used to being thankful, it's going to take a little bit of effort.

I thought we could get started on that tonight, all together.

Roll out paper and pass out pens or markers.

On this, I want everyone to write a couple of things they're thankful for.

Whether they're big things or small things, it doesn't matter.

Just write some things on here that are worth being thankful for.

Allow some time for students to do this.

I'm going to hang this banner (*in my office, in this room, etc...wherever you can*).

And then next week, we're all going to write something else we're thankful for, until it's completely full of thankfulness.

So if you find yourself having a hard time being thankful this week, I understand.

It's a new thing and can be difficult.

But if nothing else, I want you to come back with three more things to write on this banner.

So at least three times this week, stop and be thankful for something.

We all have so much to be thankful for because of Jesus.

And I know that if we make an effort, and really start thinking about all He has done for us, it won't be long at all until we're overflowing with thankfulness.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON - THANKSGIVING

Bible Passage: Luke 17:11-19

Bottom Line: Because of all that God has done for us, we should respond with an attitude of gratitude.

OPENING GAME – TEXT IT BATTLE

SUPPLIES

- One mobile phone per small group.

The game leader will also need a mobile phone with texting capabilities.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Break up into small groups.

Each group sits in a circle.

On GO, one student at a time types one they're grateful for in text (don't yet send it) and then passes the phone to the next player.

No duplicates within the group.

Once every player in each group is done, send the message to the game leader.

The group that gets their text through to the game leader first wins the round.

The winning team gets 100 points.

Play a few rounds.

Each round, individual players have to text something different.

No repeats.

The team with the most points at the end wins.

The point: What a great way to create an attitude of gratitude. Now that we're focused on the things we're thankful for, let's get started!

TEACH

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and we'll soon be gathering together with family and friends to celebrate the holiday.

When you think of Thanksgiving, what comes to mind?

(Take responses that might include football, turkey, grandparents, family, etc.)

Thanksgiving is about all of those things, but the main purpose of Thanksgiving is to pause from our busy lives to give thanks back to God for who He is and what He has done for us.

Gratitude means expressing thanks for someone or something.

So, what do you think it means to live with an "attitude of gratitude"?

(Allow students to respond)

Living with an attitude of gratitude means that you live in a way that shows thankfulness for everything – both in the good and bad circumstances in life we face.

Open your Bibles to **Luke 17**.

If we all take the time to think about it, we have lots of things for which we should be thankful.

The problem is that we take these things for granted.

Instead of living with an attitude of gratitude, we go on with our day and forget to give thanks for these blessings.

This is what happens in the Bible story we're reading today.

Jesus was traveling on his way to Jerusalem when he came across a group of lepers.

Now, leprosy is tough stuff. It is a skin disease that causes the person to have sores all over their body.

The disease would spread and worsen until eventually the person would be crippled by the pain and irritation.

It was a nasty disease.

Those who had leprosy were outcasts.

They were pushed out of their homes, their cities, and they were forced to live with other lepers away from normal life.

Needless to say, being a leper meant a miserable life.

When Jesus came passing by, these lepers knew that He would possibly heal them. Let's read how the story unfolds.

Read Luke 17:11-14.

What did the lepers want Jesus to do? (Have mercy)

What do you think they meant by "mercy?"

These ten lepers wanted Jesus to heal them from this disease.

Can you imagine the sight of them running into town with no more leprosy and being reunited with their friends and family that they haven't seen in years?

Jesus had just spoken the words and they were healed, but let's take a look at how they responded to what Jesus had done.

Read Luke 17:15-19.

Only one out of ten came back to thank Jesus.

How do you think Jesus felt when He saw that only one had returned?

Jesus had healed them of a horrible disease, he made a way for them to return to their homes and live a normal life, and yet only one of the ten took the time to say "thank you."

By asking where the other nine were, Jesus shows that he is shocked and disappointed by their reaction.

Our bottom line for today is: Because of all that God has done for us, we should respond with an attitude of gratitude.

The one that returned is a great example of living with an "attitude of gratitude."

When he realized what Jesus had done for him, he stopped everything that he was doing and he returned to give thanks to Jesus.

He fell at Jesus' feet and, "with a loud voice," began to express his thankfulness through praise.

He was thankful because God had changed his life.

God has done so much for us.

He loves us, provides for us, protects us, and guides us.

And most importantly, He sent His son to die on the cross for us.

We know that God has done these things, but we often forget to express our thanks.

We need to remember that God deserves our gratitude.

Because of all that God has done for us, we should respond with an attitude of gratitude.

Let's say that together: Because of all that God has done for us, we should respond with an attitude of gratitude.

This means that we need to live in a way that shows thankfulness to God for all that he has done.

We should take time in our day to thank Him when he protects us, guides us, or simply reminds us of His love.

We can show our thankfulness when we pause before lunch to thank God for providing food, or when we pause after a test to thank God for giving us wisdom.

When you realize what God is doing, take a moment to say 'thank you' to Him.

End Lesson.

[Break up into small groups for discussion]

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think the other 9 lepers were thankful for Jesus' healing? If so, why do you think they did not return to thank Him?
- How hard do you think it was for the one man to leave the others and be different (return to Jesus)?
- How do you think the others reacted to his actions?
- Who do you identify with most in this story: the one man who returned or the nine who did not? Explain.
- What excuses do people usually use for not being more thankful or saying 'thank you' more often?
- What is one thing that God has recently done in your life that you could thank Him for today?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON TRUST

Bible: Proverbs 3:5-6

Bottom Line: Following God is more about trust than understanding.

OPENING GAME: 3 BLIND MICE

SUPPLIES

- 3 blindfolds
- Chairs
- Masking or gaff tape

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Set up 3 "paths" that each "mouse" will be walking down.

You can use masking or gaff tape on the ground or even set up chairs as barriers.

The length of the path depends on how long you want this race to go.

The complexity of the path will depend on the difficulty you want.

For example, need a quick game or have a small space?

Make a short path that is straight or relatively straight.

Need a game that takes some time or is more challenging?

Then create a longer path with some curves or even sharp turns.

Divide your group of students into three teams.

Pick one person from each team who will be the mice.

Give them each a blindfold.

Say: On "Go!", each of you will put on your blindfold and try to be the first one to make your way through your path to the end.

However, nothing in life is that simple.

So we have a few surprises.

First, before you can start down the path, you have to spin around in circles five times.

Second, you must choose one of the following, but once you choose, you can not change your choice.

Here are your choices: 1) do the race on your own; 2) have a fellow student be your guide; or 3) have a leader be your guide.

Third, and finally, because you are mice, you have to stay on the path.

If you cross the line or touch a chair, it's like setting off a mouse trap.

You get two close calls.

The third time it happens, you are caught and out of the game.

Have "mice" pick their choice, get on the starting line, put on the blindfold, and then spin them around.

If any "mouse" crosses a line/hits a chair, allow them two warnings.

The third time they are out.

If they have chosen a guide, the person can talk to them but can not touch them.

Ready? Set? Go!

It's okay if no one wins.

That will add to the teachability.

And if you get done sooner than expected, simply run another time with three different people.

INTRODUCTION

We've started a new calendar year.

That's an exciting thing for adults.

They have parties.

Many make resolutions or goals.

Some even keep them!

If you have a good story about a new year's resolution you kept or epically failed, share it here.

But, for you as students, this is more like what you experience in the fall when school starts.

You're in a new calendar year, but right now, you're still in the middle of your school year.

COMMON GROUND

However, both adults and students need help when it comes to following Jesus.

Today, we're going to find some advice on that adventure from a little book in the Old Testament called "Proverbs."

BIBLE TEACHING

This is a strange little book.

You don't read it like a normal book.

It's not a story.

It's a collection of wise sayings, similar to what you might find in a fortune cookie at a Chinese Restaurant, but these were inspired by God.

And, if you're hoping to read your Bible more this year, this is a great book to try for a one-month challenge.

It has 31 chapters.

So, you can read one chapter a day and be done in a month!

The verses we'll be reading today come from near the beginning in chapter 3.

Let's read these verses and see what they have to do with following Jesus and that strange game we just played.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. (New Living Translation)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

You don't have to be a genius to understand these verses.

But, it does take some work to obey them.

It starts off by saying to trust God "with all your heart."

That means you really trust God.

This idea expands in "do not depend on your own understanding."

Well, this is something you can probably relate to.

How many of you have felt confused about something, at some point, since school started?

It could have been a lesson from a teacher.

It might have been a book you read.

It could have simply been trying to understand a story your friend was sharing.

Sometimes, I get confused trying to figure out what students are saying when they tell me about their day!

There are a bunch of slang terms that you use without thinking that I have to have translated.

In the third part, it says to "seek His will."

This means that we learn all we can about what God wants us to do and try to do that.

It's much easier to describe than to do.

But that's why we're here studying the Bible and helping each other live it out.

Finally, this ends with God showing us which path to take.

APPLICATION

We need to start by understanding that for all of us, following Jesus is more about trust than understanding.

In the "3 Blind Mice" race, each "mouse" was able to see the path before the race started.

But once they put the blindfold on, were spun around, and started walking, it was a little more confusing.

That's similar to how you might feel when you come to church and learn about how to live like Jesus from the Bible.

Then you go into your everyday life with family, neighbors and school, trying to figure out how to put all this into practice there.

This is why we are instructed not to depend on our own understanding.

Sometimes, it's just not going to make sense.

We have to accept that.

We don't have to like it.

But we have to understand that we can't always understand everything, especially when it comes to following Jesus.

The "seek His will" part is also easy to understand but takes discipline to do.

We need to read and study our Bibles.

We need to be connected to church and a small group of people who can help us by challenging us and holding us accountable.

And now the part we're waiting for: "He will show you which path to take."

So, why doesn't God answer my prayers specifically?

Why are there so many things that I'm confused about that God doesn't seem to be giving me clear answers?

Well, remember: Following Jesus is more about trust than understanding.

The "path" is a symbol for how we live our lives.

Our way of living is supposed to look like Jesus.

The way he thought, spoke and acted is our example.

That's the path to take.

Those principles apply in our families, communities, schools, athletic practices and competitions, lunchrooms, hallways, bus rides and more.

But when you think about it, a lot of the stuff we learn by reading about Jesus is confusing.

He cared about people that no one else cared about.

Sometimes when people asked him questions, he answered with questions or a story.

He said to love our enemies.

He said to pray for people who persecute us.

He said we're supposed to be like salt and light.

And he said if we want to be first we have to be last.

But once again: Following Jesus is more about trust than understanding.

We have to trust that God's instructions in the Bible and the way Jesus lived out his obedience to God is the best way, even if it doesn't always seem like that to us at the time.

We have to trust that God will help us when obeying and following is hard.

And we have to trust that God cares about us more than we can possibly imagine.

INSPIRATION/CHALLENGE

What would our homes, neighborhoods, schools, church and community look like if those of us in this room started taking these two little verses in Proverbs seriously?

Imagine students who say "yes" to following Jesus, even when they don't necessarily know where that will lead.

Imagine students reading their Bibles like it provided the most important information for their lives! (which it does if you want to know more about the Jesus we're following)

Imagine adults, coaches, parents and teachers who receive respect from students.

Imagine students who are usually lonely or bullied who now find people caring for them and loving them.

And let's move from just imagining it to making it happen.

How do you do that?

The same way you win the "3 Blind Mice" race: One step at a time.

Let's move into our small groups and help you figure out what your first step is this week.

SMALL GROUPS

The goal here is to help students understand . . . and put that into action this year and this week.

JUST FOR FUN (5 minutes)

These students need a little fun to help them relax and transition into this small group time.

Don't skip over this.

It is an intentional part of building relationships and setting up your group to have a great discussion time!

Probably all of us have woken up in the middle of the night and tripped on something or walked into something.

Anyone have an unusually funny story of a time you tried walking through the house when you weren't really awake or just couldn't see because of the dark?

Or has anyone spent the night at a friend's house or at a hotel and woke up, not realizing where you were and have a hard time finding the bathroom or something similar?

(When you have spent about 5 minutes on this section, transition into the discussion questions.)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The goal is to guide the students as they talk, to have a discussion.

Get them to do most of the talking.

Make sure you watch the clock and save 5 minutes at the end for the closing, even if that means you skip some questions and don't discuss them all.

Is it easy or hard for you to trust God?

What does it look like for you to trust God in your everyday life? How do you do that?

What are some things that you just don't understand about God or following Jesus?

How is trying to follow Jesus without any help as frustrating as going through the "3

Blind Mice" race without any help?

How can other students your age help you follow Jesus? How can you help them?

How can older believers, like high schoolers, college students and adults help you in a different way with following Jesus than your peers? What about older adults like grandparents?

We could easily get overwhelmed with all the instructions that Jesus has for us, especially those that are confusing.

So let's get real basic.

Which one of these will you work on this week as your step in following the path God is showing you?

- Reading the Bible
- Studying the Bible
- Acting on something you learned from the Bible recently
- Allowing us to hold you accountable

CLOSING CHALLENGE

Following Jesus is more about trust than understanding.

If you trust God, then take that first step this week in going down the path where God is leading you.

When that time is up, close your group in prayer - or even better, ask one of the students to close in prayer.

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON UNITY

Bible: Galatians 3: 26-28

Bottom Line: Being one in Christ requires love and forgiveness.

SUPPLIES

- Puzzle (with enough pieces for each youth to take a piece with them)
- Sharpies

Unity.

There is something really beautiful about finding unity in a group, especially in a youth ministry.

Yet, probably all of us have seen the exact opposite of unity happen in our youth ministries at one time or another.

It is painful and it is debilitating.

This week's lesson will help your group dive into what it means to be united in Christ...to be "one".

Spend time praying for the specific people in your group.

That hurts and differences could be put aside.

That Christ would truly make all of you one in His love.

OPENING GAME—Pieced

Prior to the lesson, hide pieces of a puzzle around the building.

Make sure to hide these pieces in very difficult places that would require the youth to work together to find.

Today's game is a challenge.

There are pieces of a puzzle hidden throughout _____. (Share the area where the pieces are hidden.)

You could try to find pieces all on your own, but I will save you the trouble by saying that you will need to find these pieces *as a team*.

There are ___ pieces and the game is only over when all of those pieces are found.

When all of the pieces are found, reflect with the group on these questions:

Which pieces did you need someone else to help you find them?

Do you prefer to do things by yourself or with others help? Why?

What are the challenges in doing things together?

TEACH

Today, we are going to start this time by taking a photo of our group...including everyone.

But, here is the challenge: We will take this photo as a selfie with my camera.

So, we have to figure out how to get everyone in the picture!

And I cannot help you...I am only here to take the photo!

But I have to see every single one of you in the picture!

Observe how the youth work together to take the photo and include everyone, and make sure to not say anything or help with ideas.

Ask the group to reflect on taking the photo:

How did they manage to get everyone in the photo?

What were the challenges?

It might have been simpler to take this photo without everyone in the frame, but it wouldn't be "us".

Can you think of a time when you were left out of a group?

How did it feel to be left out?

Now, has there been a time when you left someone else out of a group?

Why did you make the decision to leave someone out?

What do you think is a key to finding unity in a group?

Is it simpler to choose a few to be in the group?

Sure.

But in the end, the whole suffers, right?

Read Galatians 3:26-28.

We might not be able to identify with being Gentile or Jew (and Gentile basically meant anyone who wasn't a Jew).

But, we can get a better sense of what this scripture is talking about by saying "slave or free".

What would be the main differences in being a slave and being free?

Imagine what it would be like to not be free.

You are told what to do... What to eat...

And your decisions are not your own.

It was a way to divide people: Jew or Gentile. Slave or free.

What are some ways that we divide people today?

Give the youth a chance to share ideas and be ready to give other ideas of differences that they use to divide themselves.

Write their examples on the board.

If they need prompts, include difference such as politics, wealth, age, etc.

Even in this group, we have differences.

We won't go into what they are, but we all know that they are present, right?

Even watching the news with the election, we seem to spend a lot of time looking at our differences, don't you think?

So, ask yourself this question: Do differences bring us closer together or farther apart?

As Christians, we are supposed to be "One".

What do you think it could look like if we really did live as if we were ONE....

What would have to change for us?

In the world.....in our country....in this group?

Give the group time to share their thoughts and ideas on each of these distinctions.

Being one in Christ requires a couple of things from us, though.

Love - we genuinely need to learn to love one another. Warts and all!

Does it mean that we always agree?

No, but what it does mean is that we give each other the benefit of the doubt.

We take the time to try to understand one another.

Forgiveness

Being one in Christ means that we forgive each other.

Doing life together means that unfortunately, we will hurt each other.

In order to move forward, we must forgive one another because we will probably need others to forgive us one day as well!

And we ALL need the forgiveness of God.

Can you think of any other things that being 'one' requires of us?

Write the ideas on the board as youth share.

Now take a minute to look at these words, and honestly ask yourself which of these things you need to work on to truly find unity in Christ.

Each person should get a piece of the puzzle that we used for the game and write that word on the piece to keep with you to remind you of what you need to work on to find

Unity.

And each and every one of us bring something different to the whole.... the puzzle just isn't complete without every single piece.

There will be days that you might feel like you aren't important, and on those days, look at this puzzle piece to remember that the puzzle just isn't complete without you.

We are one in Christ.

And the things that divide us, simply do not matter as much as the fact that Christ makes us one.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which differences do you think are the most difficult for Christians to overcome?
- Which differences do you struggle with?
- What word did you write on your puzzle piece and why?
- What do you think it would look like if we were truly one in Christ? What needs to happen for that to occur?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON VALENTINE'S DAY

Title: "What is Love?"

Bible Verse: John 3:16 (MSG)

Introduction: (Nice touch would be to play the song "What is Love" by Haddaway while the speaker is approaching to talk to the audience)

Who here loves Valentine's Day?

Why? (take a few answers from the audience)

So, the gifts, the candy, the fact that someone you love is expressing their love for you!

Great answers.

For one day love is expressed...

It's the focus...

It's on display!

Anyone know the history of Valentine's Day? (take a few answers from the audience).

Back in 496...that's the year 496...not an area code...St. Valentine was martyred for marrying persecuted Christians.

There is also another story that says he prayed for the daughter of his jailor and she was healed.

Another story says right before he was executed, he wrote a letter to the girl that was healed and signed it "My Valentine".

So why does this matter?

Because we can see parallels from what St. Valentine did, to what God did for us.

So to answer the question...what is love? It's sacrifice!

How is the meaning of love sacrifice? Well let's break it down.

St. Valentine SACRIFICED his freedom to marry persecuted Christians.

St. Valentine SACRIFICED his integrity and reputation by having the faith to pray for the daughter of his jailor.

St. Valentine SACRIFICED his life and was obedient to God.

Speaking of God...what does all this talk of St. Valentine have to do with God?

Read John 3:16 (MSG)

You may be saying really...the most played out bible verse in history...and you want me to sit here and read this again?

Yes!

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again."

POINT #1: God sacrificed His Son.

It says it right there in the beginning of the verse...God loved the world so much, he gave his one and only son...

Do you know any fathers that would give up their one and only son so someone else can live?

Can you even imagine how difficult that is?

Tell me one thing that you can not live without (this doesn't have to be deep and spiritual, it can be material).

Maybe your iPhone...

Your tablet or laptop...

Maybe your blanky...hahaha!!

Not take that thing...image it, picture it...

Now think about giving it away to someone you don't even know.

You know what that is called...love, sacrifice!

POINT #2: God sacrificed control.

What do I mean by that?

God is God. He created the universe and everything in it.

Mountains...

Mars...

Cute little puppies...

Coffee...

If He really wanted to, he could have accomplished everything he did in and through Jesus from heaven.

He could have snapped his fingers and made us believe in him...but that isn't love...that's control!

Just like St. Valentine didn't have to go to these persecuted Christians and marry them...

Just like St. Valentine didn't have to pray for the daughter of his jailor...

God didn't have to come to earth,

Wait 30 years to finally begin his ministry; go through 3 years of persecution and people hating on him; then die a painful, embarrassing death...to beat sin's biggest weapon (death).

He could have done that some other way, He could have controlled all of us like robots, but he sent his one and only son, something very near and dear to him, and sacrificed it!

POINT #3: God sacrificed time.

From the creation of the universe to the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve messing up to all of the events of the Old Testament to Jesus to the church as we know it...

God has sacrificed a lot of time!!

Like I said, God could have fixed this thing in like 2 minutes if he wanted to, but he didn't.

At the end of the day, how do you know that someone really loves you?

Because they buy you flowers and chocolate one time out of the year?

Because they spend a bunch of money on one present on one day in February?

Because they gave you a tear jerking greeting card that has a bunch of words that you never actually hear from this person throughout the rest of the year?

No! When it seems like your life is falling apart, they are right there holding you hand...crying with you...spending time with you!

Why do you think Jesus waited 30 years to start his ministry?

Because he took the time to be with the people he wanted to minister to!

He didn't heal people just on February 14th...

He didn't teach just one day out the year...

He sacrificed.

Life.

Control.

Time.

What is love? That is love!!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your favorite Valentine's candy?
- What is that one thing that you feel you can not live without? How hard would it be to sacrifice that one thing?
- How does giving up control go hand and hand with love? In other words, how does giving up control of something show that you love it?
- How does spending time with someone or something reflect your love? This could be relatives, boyfriend/girlfriend, hobbies, sports, etc...

YOUTH GROUP LESSON - WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE

Description: What the rest of the world thinks about you does not matter in comparison to what God thinks about you. Based on what the Bible says, He thinks some incredible things about you!

SUPPLIES

- Printed handouts (included below) with scripture references
- Four white t-shirts
- Vaseline
- Two different colors of pompoms (little cotton balls). Feel free to substitute anything else here.

OPENING GAME: MAKE IT STICK

Split the group into two teams and choose two volunteers from each team to be “it.”

Have each team cover the entire outside of the two t-shirts with Vaseline.

Important—do this before they put the t-shirts on in order to avoid any awkward moments.

Once the shirts are covered in Vaseline, have the two volunteers from each team put them on.

Put one team on each side of the room and give them each a color of pompoms.

Each volunteer must run across the room twice—once while the other team is throwing their colored pompoms and trying to get them to stick to their shirt, and once while the other team does the same.

Volunteers cannot block their t-shirts with their arms or hands.

(Note: If the volunteers are running too fast and no pompoms are sticking, then change it up. Have the volunteers stand still 10-12 feet away from the other team while they're throwing the pompoms.)

The objective is to avoid the opposing team's pompoms and to try to get as many of their own team's pompoms to stick to their shirt as possible.

Once all four volunteers run through, count up what's on their shirts.

For every pompom that is their team's color, they get a point. For every pompom that is the opposing team's color, they lose a point. The team with the most points wins!

TEACH

In this world, you are going to constantly be bombarded with what different people think about you.

Whether it be your family or friends, strangers, or companies who are only telling you what they think about you because they want to sell you something, it seems that everyone has an opinion.

You're going to constantly to hear negative things about yourself—that you're too big, too small, too shy, too outgoing.

Standing in the line at grocery stores and reading the headlines on magazines will reveal things that you had no idea were wrong with you, but surely must be wrong with you since so many magazines are talking about something that you don't have.

It's impossible to live life without hearing what other people think about you.

But just like in that game, you need to be careful about what you let stick to you and what you don't.

Pretty much everyone you come into contact with is going to have an opinion of you, but the most important opinion is God's.

And based on what I've read in the Bible, He thinks pretty highly of you.

So, what exactly does God think about you?

God thinks that you are worth fighting for.

"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." – Exodus 14:14

Here's the deal—God doesn't need you, He wants you.

He didn't *need* to send His only Son to die for you so that your sins would be forgiven.

But He loved you so much that He wanted to be with you forever, so He made the ultimate sacrifice to fight sin and make a way for your salvation.

Obviously, you are worth fighting for!

God thinks that you are His masterpiece.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." – Ephesians 2:10

Another word for handiwork is masterpiece.

You are God's masterpiece!

Can we just take a second to think about how amazing it is that the Bible says we are God's handiwork (masterpiece)?

When a famous artist creates a new painting, fans from all over the world will fly in to see it.

People will *ooh* and *ahh* over it before paying incredible amounts of money just to be able to hang it in their home and look at it every day.

And the artist who made you is so much better than any of those artists.

Next time you don't like the way you look, or the next time someone tells you what they think of your looks and it's something less than amazing, just remember:

You are God's masterpiece.

God thinks that you are more than a conqueror.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." –
Romans 8:37

I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I am nothing like a conqueror.

I feel like a coward, not a soldier.

There are times when I feel so useless that I can't imagine anyone ever thinking of me as a winner.

But here we have the Word of God saying not only are we winners, but *more* than conquerors.

How? Through Him who loved us.

Next time you're feeling down about yourself, remember that not only are you loved by the creator of the universe; you're also more than a conqueror through Him.

You are loved and accepted as-is by God.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." –
Jeremiah 31:3

I think we can all agree that there are times where we don't feel very loved, or times where we don't feel like we deserve to be loved.

No matter who else in your life you have—whether you have a wonderful family who loves you and tons of loyal, loving friends, or whether you have parents who could not care less about you and no friends to speak of—none of that matters when it comes to how loved you are.

Because God just goes ahead and blows everyone out of the water when it comes to love.

He doesn't just love you; He loves you with an *everlasting* love.

When He thinks of you, it's with that love.

You are worth loving with a kind of love that lasts forever.

He loves you just the way you are.

When you mess up, he loves you.

When you're doing life your way, he loves you.

He loves the way you are right now, in this moment, as-is.

God thinks you are delightful.

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. – **Zephaniah 3:17**

Can you even wrap your mind around this?

The Mighty Warrior who saves *takes great delight in you.*

It would be nice to hear from anyone that you are worth delighting in, but from God?

That's just plain incredible.

We often allow what others think of us to shape how we think of ourselves.

But that needs to stop.

From now on, you need to think about yourself the way that God thinks about you.

When you have the creator of the universe saying these things about you, does it really matter what anyone else thinks about you?

No, it doesn't. Once you've heard these things, it just seems silly to worry about what anyone else says.

TEACH

Think about how you feel when you know that someone thinks or says something mean about you.

Now, think about how you felt just now hearing those things that God thinks and says about you.

Don't you wish you could share that feeling with everyone?

We have a responsibility to stand up for each other and to shine the light of Jesus on each other.

That means that when you talk and think about others, you should do so with how they feel in mind.

Do you want them to feel the way you know how it feels when someone says something mean about you, or do you want them to feel the way you how it feels to know what God thinks about you?

We're going to do an activity that may seem a little awkward at first, but it's a good reminder of how we should act with each other—we should act supportive, reminding each other of what God thinks of us.

Pass out the handouts to everyone (copy and paste "handout" below).

Starting with a student on the end of a row, have them turn to the student next to them and read the first thing on the paper, "You are _____ in God's eyes."

Have everyone do this out loud to the student next to them.

When you get to the end of the paper, just start over, going around until everyone has had a chance to remind someone of what God thinks of them.

HANDOUT

(Copy & paste on a sheet of paper)

You are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's eyes. (Psalm 139:14)

You are the salt and light of the world in God's eyes. (Matthew 5:13-14)

You are complete in God's eyes. (Colossians 2:10)

You are loved in God's eyes. (Jeremiah 31:3)

You are worth delighting in. (Zephaniah 3:17)

You are forgiven and redeemed in God's eyes. (Ephesians 1:7)

You are anointed and have a purpose in God's eyes. (Isaiah 61:1)

You are beautiful in God's eyes. (Psalm 45:11)

You are more than a conqueror in God's eyes. (Romans 8:37)

You are chosen, holy, and dearly loved in God's eyes. (Colossians 3:12)

You are God's handiwork. (Ephesians 2:10)

You are worth fighting for in God's eyes. (Exodus 14:14)

You are set free in God's eyes. (Galatians 5:1)

You are a new creation in God's eyes. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Isn't it amazing to hear what God thinks of you out loud?

—

Remember that when you talking about other people.

When you have the opportunity to say what you think to other people, use these words whenever possible.

Take this handout home with you.

Hang it on your wall.

Put it somewhere you can see it every day.

Look up these verses this week and really soak in just what God thinks about you.

No one else's opinions matter when you've got God thinking such incredible things about you!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Break up students into small groups to discuss the following questions:
- Have you have felt something was worth fighting for? If so, what? Why? What does that say about how God thinks we are worth fighting for?
- How often do you worry about what other people think about you?
- How does the fact that God calls you His masterpiece change the way you think about yourself?
- What are your thoughts on the fact that God delights in you? How does that make you feel?
- In your own words, what does it mean to be more than a conqueror?
- How can you choose what opinions you let stick to you and which ones you let slide off?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON WISDOM

Bible: Proverbs 1:7

The Point: Wisdom is living life God's way. It's not just knowing the right thing to do, but doing actually doing the right thing.

Three steps to being wise: 1) Rely on God. 2) Think before you act. 3) Use failure as your teacher.

OPENING GAME

SUPPLIES

- Newspaper
- Masking tape
- Chairs
- Soda cans

Space Requirements

Large enough space for teams to be able to work building a bridge between two chairs.

Game Description

Split your entire group into equal teams of five or so.

Each team will get equal amounts of newspaper, one roll of masking tape, and two chairs.

The goal is to see which team can create the strongest bridge from chair to chair, with the chairs being 2 feet apart, using only the newspaper and masking tape.

Give them a good amount of time to do this, maybe 10 minutes.

Once the time is up, they will all need to step away.

The strength of their bridge will be measured by how many soda cans it can hold.

The team whose bridge holds the most cans before breaking, wins.

Game Tie-in

If your bridge wasn't built right, it didn't hold too many soda cans.

Today we're going to be talking about how we need to build our lives on the strong foundation of "wisdom", so that we don't make big messes in our lives.

TEACH

In the Bible, there is a book called Proverbs.

It is filled with information about wisdom.

Let's look at a verse that is the underlying theme for everything that is found in Proverbs.

*"Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." - **Proverbs 1:7***

Respect for God

The "fear of the Lord" is a frequently used phrase in the Bible.

The word "fear" used in this phrase has a different meaning than what we use the word for today.

When we say we fear something, we usually mean it scares us. In this context, it means utmost respect, honor, or reverence.

In other words, true respect and reverence of the deepest kind for God is the beginning of wisdom.

Wisdom starts here.

You respect, revere, and have faith in God that He knows what He is doing, that His plan is the right plan.

Two Parts to Wisdom

Now, let's tackle the word "wisdom".

When we think of wisdom, we might think of an old smart dude with a beard, wearing glasses and a robe...or something like that. Ha!

The word wisdom to us means "smart".

You know a lot of stuff.

Kind a like you studied really hard in history all year and got an A.

So, you're pretty wise when it come to history.

The Biblical definition of wisdom is much different.

There are two parts.

#1 - You know the right thing to do (how to live God's way).

#2 - AND you do it! In the case of living a "wise" God honoring live life, it means you know how to live God's way AND you actually do it.

Wisdom is Protection

There is an amount of "protection" when you are "wise" and put God's way of life into action.

Check out this verse: *Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you. Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do!* - **Proverbs 4:6-7a (NLT)**

Wisdom—living life according to God's plan—protects you.

If you think about it, it makes sense.

God's plan is the best plan for your life.

The ability to live that out can protect you from the alternatives that are not what is best for you.

Now, of course, just because you make wise choices you're not protected from bad things happening to you.

Sometimes, others make choices that affect you, and you have to live with those consequences.

But when you live a "wise" life, you're protected from the negative consequences of your bad choices.

Here are three steps to living a "wise" life:

#1 Rely on God.

This one seems like a no brainer, right?

But how often do we make choices because it's what we want to do, and then end up paying the price for a bad decision?

I've been there about a thousand times.

It's always best to rely on God for the best thing to do in a situation.

Even if what you want to do is different, trust that God's way is better.

(Share a story where you relied on God for making a decision. Talk about the struggle of what you wanted to do verses what the right thing to do. Then, talk about what happened as a result of relying and trusting on God.)

The starting point to being "wise" is relying on God, trusting that his way is always the best way.

#2 Think before you act.

Not too long ago, I was furious at a guy behind me driving just a few feet behind my rear bumper.

He was really irritating me, so I stopped the car, got out and started yelling at him.

As I did, I was humbled when realizing it was a 75 year old man! Ha :)

Next time it could be a 250 pound weight lifter who eats me for lunch!

After a few minutes of cooling down,

I realized how stupid that was.

How often do you NOT think before you act?

You just react to a situation without thinking.

You yell at your mom because you think she's nagging you.

You drink a few beers and then drive home.

You're stressed about passing the test so you cheat.

Just this one time.

The list goes on.

You would make a lot more "wise" decisions if you just paused before acting and took a second to think about the possible outcomes of that decision.

Doing this one thing would save you a lot grief. Seriously.

3. Use failure as your teacher.

The truth is, you're going to make a lot of stupid decisions that have negative consequences.

You're human.

We all mess up.

Welcome to the club.

When you do mess up, use it as a learning experience.

Don't just go through the pain of your bad decision.

Learn from it.

In fact, think back to your last dumb decision you made.

Take a second to think of it. (Pause for a minute)

Now, think about the consequence of that decision. (Pause for a minute)

The big question is... What did you learn from it?

When you learn from your mistakes, over time you become wise.

Some of the wisest people I know made some of the most stupid decisions in their past.

But they didn't keep making them over and over. They learned from each one. Do the same.

End in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is it hard to trust God's way rather than your way?
- Share a time when you went your way rather than God's way. What happened?
- Do you think it's a good idea to think before you act? Why or why not?
- Share a time when you really messed up and did something stupid. What happened? What did you learn from the experience?

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON WORRY

Bible: Matthew 6:25-27

SUPPLIES

- Enough blindfolds for half of the group.
- A screen that can play a Youtube video.
- Water Balloons

Opening Game: Traffic Jam

Have everyone pair up in groups of two.

One person will act as the car; one person will act as the driver.

The person acting as the car puts on the blindfold.

Have the pairs scatter throughout the room.

When you say go, the player acting as a car has to follow your instructions.

Yell things like:

- Red light!
- U-Turn!
- Reverse!
- Turn Left!

When you yell something, the player acting as the car has to immediately follow your instructions.

The player acting as the driver must help the “car” avoid hitting other cars by using only their words.

For example, if you say “turn left” and the player acting as the car turns left, but there’s another car there, the driver would yell, “stop!”

When a car hits another car, both of those cars and drivers are out of the game.

The final team who has not crashed or been crashed into wins!

TEACH

Say: That was quite the fiasco!

Now, I have a question for all the people who were cars.

Where you worried at all that your driver was going to steer you the wrong way and you were going to crash?

If so, why didn't you take the blindfold off and stop playing?

Well, because then you would have missed out on the fun of the game.

It's the same way in life—the things we worry about are either going to happen or not happen, and sitting around worrying about them only makes us miss out on life.

If we were to all go around the room and list out all the things we worry about, we would be here all week.

But do you know what else?

We would probably also laugh at each other.

Because there are some things that, once you say them out loud, you realize just how silly it is to be worrying over them.

If you look in the Bible, though, you'll see that worrying isn't only just silly.

It's actually the opposite of what God wants us to do.

Read Matthew 6:25-27:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

Say: When you read the end of the verse, doesn't it make worrying seem so stupid?

Because it's right, worrying doesn't add any amount of time to our life.

In fact, it does the opposite—it takes away from the life we already have.

Now, I need a volunteer. I need someone who is willing to get wet.

Okay, you're going to stand here and worry. Why?

Because I'm going to throw these water balloons at you, that's why.

But the good news is, I'm going to give you a few seconds to worry.

Maybe if you worry hard enough, the water balloons won't hit you. Let's try it.

Throw a few water balloons.

Okay, so that's a silly example.

But isn't that how we act sometimes?

We know that worrying won't change anything.

So why do we still worry?

This is one of those verses where it's almost like Jesus is talking right to you through it.

Like He's saying, "Hey, you worry a lot. Why do you do that? What's the worst that can happen? So what if you don't have any food or clothes. Don't you think I'll take care of you?"

And really, when we worry, we act like we don't think He's going to take care of us.

We worry over things that, in the grand scheme of life, are pretty small.

We worry about grades and friendships, curfews and colleges, opinions and jobs.

And yes, all of these things are important, and they're things we should work hard and care about.

However, if we spend our time worrying, it's basically like we're saying, "Hey Jesus, I know You said You'd be there for me no matter what, but I'm not sure that I believe you.

I know You're supposed to be enough for me, but I'm not sure that you are."

That's just crazy talk!

Put on the video of the flowers blooming while you read this verse. You can mute the music. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IENTji39i4k>

Read Matthew 6:28-34:

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

To me, this is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible.

It’s like there’s a picture being painted of just how much God really cares *about* us, and just how much He is always going to take care *of* us.

Let’s look at how.

“If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you?”

Let’s be honest—how many of you have worried about clothes?

Isn’t it funny that this verse, which is so many years old, references a problem we still deal with today?

Of course, we worry about clothes.

We worry about money to buy clothes, and then we worry about which clothes we should buy.

We worry about which clothes we should wear to which places.

We worry about what other people are going to think about our clothes.

We worry, worry, and worry.

And it’s ridiculous.

Have you stopped and looked at any flowers lately?

I mean, look at those in that video!

Sure, flowers are gorgeous.

But when you think of how all that color and beauty and shape and smell just grew right out of the dirt—that's amazing.

And this verse is right, flowers are more beautiful than even the richest king's clothing.

The God who created those flowers—those stunning, incredible flowers that outshine royalty—loves us so much more than He loves those flowers.

So why would we even waste a second of our lives worrying about clothes?

“Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”

These are such reassuring words.

They just reiterate that God *already knows what we need*.

Our heavenly Father is well aware of exactly what we need.

It's like a little love letter from Heaven, reminding us that everyone needs these things, but we don't have to worry about them, because He already knows we need them.

That's just amazing.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Well, if that isn't the clearest instruction, I don't know what is.

We're very clearly told not to worry, but to place our focus somewhere else.

And that somewhere else is seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness.

After that, everything will fall into place exactly how it should.

Isn't that a relief?

Now, this doesn't mean that you have permission to just slack off of everything and throw caution to the wind, claiming that God will take care of everything as long as you read your Bible and pray.

That's not what this verse means.

There's a difference between working hard and worrying.

God calls us to work hard and not be lazy.

But instead of worrying about those things, He calls us to seek eternal things, not temporary things.

Seek what really matters, and everything else will follow.

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Now isn't that just the truth.

Tomorrow is going to happen whether you worry about it or not, so just let tomorrow worry about itself.

There's too much to think about and to do today to have the time or energy to worry about tomorrow.

It's an incredible gift to be able to lay your head on your pillow at night and be able to tell the God who created everything you see that you trust Him.

You may have no idea what tomorrow will bring, but you know that He'll be there and that, because He cares for you, He will take care of you.

Now, how do you avoid worrying?

Read Philippians 4:6

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Next time you start to worry about something, I want to remember this verse.

This verse gives you a clear formula for how to deal with worry. Are you ready?

No matter what the situation is, do not be anxious.

With a thankful heart, pray and tell God what you need.

That's it! Seem too easy?

Well, when you have a God who's got your best interests in mind, who you can talk to at any time, it really is.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some things you spend a lot of time worrying about?
- Do you agree with the statement that worrying is acting like you don't believe God's promises?
- How does it feel to know that God cares about you and is going to take care of you?
- Does the flower analogy put into perspective how silly it is to worry about clothes?
- What are some ways you can seek the kingdom of Heaven first?
- Why do you think we worry so much, even though we know God will take care of us?
- Why do you think God tells us not to worry?
- Does talking to God about the things your anxious about help you worry less?
- Would it hurt your feelings if you told your best friend you were going to bring them lunch, but they spent the whole morning telling everyone they were worried that they weren't going to have anything to eat that day? Do you think that's how God feels when we worry about things He's already said He'd take care of?
- What can you do this week that will help remind you to not worry?

WRAP-UP

The temptation to worry is never going to go away.

There are always going to be things in your life that you *could* worry about.

You just have to choose to not worry about them.

But here's the thing—after reading those verses and seeing how much God loves and cares for you, how could you *not* choose to give up worry?

The next time you start to worry, do like that verse in Philippians says, and talk to God about it. If you still struggle with worry, sit down and open your Bible.

Google "God's Promises" and look those verses up.

Read those promises, and decide if you believe them or not.

If you don't, then yes, you've definitely got a lot to worry about.

More than you could ever deal with on your own. But if you do trust in those promises, what an amazing gift you have.

It's a gift of knowing that someone is looking out for you and providing for you.

It's a gift of knowing that someone is taking care of you and you don't have to worry.