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## **5 Back to School Lessons**

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## **YOUTH GROUP LESSON: New Creation**

**Object:** Paper

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:15-17, Galatians 3:27-28, Romans 12:3-5

**Bottom line:** It's good look at the beginning of each school each year as a fresh start. In this lesson, we'll look at being "new creations" and how God gives us a new start.

### **OPENING GAME – SNOWBALL FIGHT**

Materials: Blank sheets of paper (one per student), 2 small trash cans

Simply set out one sheet of paper on everyone's chair (If you don't use chairs, have a stack of paper on a table. Ask everyone to grab a sheet as they walk in.)

Divide the room into two teams (boys vs. girls, 7th vs. 8th grade, or random). Announce that each team will be competing in a snowball fight. When you say "Go," each team will wad up their paper and throw it at someone on the other side. When a designated time is up (a countdown video or music video works great for this), the side with the least paper wins the game.

Then, set up two trash cans on each side of the room. Announce that for this round, the goal is to get as many paper snow balls in the opponent's trash can as possible. Do the same thing with a timer or music video to determine how long it should go. You can count the paper balls or just visually declare one side a winner.

(To go along with the lesson, you could give out iTunes or App gift cards or email them a direct download for the *Paper* or *Penultimate* app.)

### **TEACH**

Let's start very simply with a blank sheet of paper. No matter how digital school gets, there will always be a place for paper. Most of us are familiar with the lined version that has three holes punched to fit in binders. And most of us were pretty excited the day we got to move from wide-ruled to narrow or college-ruled. And whether it's a loose page or the first page in a notebook, there is something exciting about a blank sheet of paper.

Think about it. It's full of possibilities and potential. You might think I'm crazy, but really think about this. That sheet of paper could be anything from just notes in your math class to an amazing comic strip. It could be the start of a script for the next blockbuster movie or a page full of doodles when you were bored. I love a blank page!

And if we think digitally, do you know what one of the most popular apps for the iPad is?

*(As you go through each app, you might put a picture of it on the screen.)*

### **Paper by 53**

*Paper!* (<http://www.fiftythree.com/paper>) It allows you to use a stylus and draw, sketch, paint and more on your iPad as if you had a real paper notebook.

### **Penultimate by Evernote**

Another highly popular app is called *Penultimate* (<http://evernote.com/penultimate/>). It's a simple app, but syncs everything to the cloud. And "magically," *Penultimate* scans and recognizes all your hand-written text or text in images so everything can be digitally searched.

### **Pixar**

How many of you are familiar with a little company called *Pixar*? They use a ton of paper to create storyboards and little pictures that represent individual scenes before they ever start animating. And they have a huge atrium at their headquarters in California where they are known for having epic paper airplane contests. Speaking of that, let's have one now!

[Invite a few students up on stage to race to create and fly paper airplanes. Award prizes for best airplane and longest flight. You can pick up a cheap toy airplane kit from a dollar store to use as a prize. And after service, have paper out where students can do more paper airplane contests and races.]

One of the reasons that paper airplanes are so fun is that you create a brand new plane every time! And that's what I love about new paper at the beginning of a school year: It's new! You may or may not enjoy how you have to use the paper in school, but it's new.

Let's look in the Bible to see what it has to say about being new and making fresh starts. Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 5:17.

***[Read or have a student read 2 Corinthians 5:17]***

When you become a Christian, you become new! If you have chosen to follow Jesus, you have become a new person. It's not that you physically change, but you are changed on the inside by God. In science terms, it's like the change a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. In school terms, it's like your chalk/dry-erase board has been wiped clean. It's like you are a new sheet of paper. God gives you a fresh start!

If you have not chosen to follow Jesus, let me explain this to you. Before accepting Jesus as Lord, God looks at each of us and judges us based on how well we've obeyed Him. The only problem with that is he has two grades: pass or fail. Either we have obeyed him 100% or we haven't. That's not the grading scale any of us wants!

When we accept Jesus as Lord, we are confessing to God that we are not able to live perfectly—that we sin or disobey God. We accept His gift of grace, which means we're forgiven! Jesus died on the cross, taking the punishment for our sins, so that we could be graded on a curve! (2 Corinthians 5:21) He allows us a new start as forgiven children of God! If you want to know more about this, any of the youth leaders would be happy to talk with you after service.

Let's look back at the two verses that come before what we've just read, **2 Corinthians 5:15-16**.

Verse 15 says we live for Christ. That means my life is no longer about me and what I can do to impress others. It's about Jesus and what he's already done for me! It means I live my life making decisions that will make Jesus happy.

Verse 16 describes how this overflows into our relationships with others. Paul says we stop evaluating people from a human point of view. We can be so quick to judge a person by how they appear, who their friends are, which school they go to, or even which team they are a fan of. Yet in this new life, we look at others through God's eyes. It's like someone who can't see well puts on glasses for the first time, and suddenly everything is clearer!

When Paul talks about being "in Christ," he's using a phrase that appears over twenty-five times in his writing! It's probably important! So let's look at it a little closer.

Look up **Galatians 3:27-28** (read or have a student read). Being “in Christ” refers to the connection we get with Jesus when we are baptized. Verse 28 also hints at the connection we have with others.

Look up **Romans 12:3-5** (read or have a student read). This is simple science. We all know our bodies are made up of lots of different parts. But they all work together for us to have a healthy, functioning body. It’s the same way with the church. When you become a Christian, you become part of this group—this community—where we have a variety of different kinds of people with different skills, abilities, passions, experiences, personalities, etc. But when all of us work together, the church—also known as the “body of Christ”—is healthy and functioning the way God intended it to be.

## **Paper**

So, let’s tie all this together. When you become a Christian, you live for Jesus and see others through God’s eyes. This leads to changes in your life. And we are constantly changing to become more like Jesus. So this year could be the start of some great, transforming changes in your life! Think about it.

This might be an exciting opportunity for you! Whether you have become a Christian or not, the start of a new school year allows you the opportunity to change things. Maybe last year didn't go well for you. Maybe this is your first year in a middle school. Maybe your family has moved and you are at a totally new school and new community. Maybe you are going to school with the same friends you've gone with your whole life in a building you've already been in for a year or more. But it's a new year.

What if you didn't let old reputations and habits hold you back? What if you grabbed on to this idea of being new this school year and really run with it?

Maybe you failed a class or just didn't do as well as you wanted to do. Determine to learn some new study skills to have a better academic year this year. Be humble enough to seek help. It could be from a teacher or guidance counselor. It could be from a parent or older sibling. It could be from a classmate who is very good in school. When we ask others for help, we are reminding ourselves how we need each other and showing those who help us how much they are valued through their unique talents and gifts!

Maybe everything in your life is about your success, your popularity, or your friends/likes on social media. What if you flipped that around and thought about how much attention you draw to Jesus? It could be as simple as inviting your friends to church, just like you

would invite them to go to a game or movie with you. Or it could be as bold as starting a Bible study in your school or joining up with one that already takes place and inviting others.

Maybe you really hurt some friends last year. This year, find creative ways to help others. Look at others through God's eyes instead of your own. If they become new friends or it heals old friendships, cool. If not, you'll be a better person for helping others regardless of the results. And every time you look at someone through God's eyes instead of your own, you make a significant change in your thoughts and actions that help you live more like Jesus.

We're going to break into small groups. The biggest change that can take place is for you to follow Jesus and become a new person in Christ. However, beyond that, there are so many ways a new school year can mean a fresh start for you. Let's take some time in small group to talk about what makes us excited about a new start or what we need to change from last year. Let's pray for each other and all the challenges and opportunities that come with a new school year.

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

**Supplies:** Blank sheet of paper (one for each student), pens, pencils, crayons, markers

Re-read 2 Corinthians 5:15-17 (or have a student read).

Then, guide a discussion with the following prompts:

If you have become a Christian, what is different about your life now?

Give some specific examples of how someone lives for themselves. Then give examples that show the change when they live for Jesus.

Describe a way you have judged someone based on a first impression, especially if you ended up being very wrong. How do our thoughts about others change when we look at them with God's eyes?

What is the most creative thing you have ever done with a blank sheet of paper?

What are you looking forward to leaving behind from last year?

What are you excited about with a new school year?

Do you have any goals for this school year? Academics? Athletics? Extra-curricular? Friendships?

What can we be praying about for you? (Pray as a group or form pairs and have students pray for each other.)

Hand each student a blank sheet of paper. Tell them what they do with it is up to them. They can make it a paper airplane and challenge someone. They could wad it up and start a snowball fight. They could grab a pen and write a poem or a crayon and draw a masterpiece. Or, they can write "2 Corinthians 5:17" on it and put it somewhere in their room to remind themselves that in Jesus, they have a fresh start!

(Close in prayer.)

## **YOUTH GROUP LESSON: Friendship Drama**

**Objects:** Tabloids/Celebrity Gossip Magazines, Fast Food Meal

**Scripture:** 2 Tim. 2:22-24

**Bottom Line:** The drama we show to others comes directly from the drama we fill our own lives with; garbage in, garbage out.

### **TEACH – FRIENDSHIP DRAMA**

#### **Supplies**

- Tabloids/Celebrity Gossip Magazines
- Fast Food Meal

*Today we are talking about drama that gets stirred up with friends! We will talk about the craziness that surrounds you with all the things that are served up every day in your schools, around your house, and even here at church.*

*For you ladies, your drama comes out in a slightly different way than with the guys. Girls, you tend to be DRAMA QUEENS. You get wrapped up in the emotional, relational, and social side of things. You have to be the QUEEN of your group, and the way you might get there is through gossip, cliques, or other emotional/social means.*

*Guys, however, are a little different. Guys are not as much into being gossipy or letting their emotions show. They tend to be “BLOW UP KINGS.” The drama in your life and your circle of friends come out in physical ways. You don’t quietly pull your friends off to one side or try to hurt other guys emotionally. You do it physically by blowing up and getting into physical or verbal fights.*

**Transitional Statement:** *You see, even though the drama in your school, home, and life come out in different ways depending on whether you’re a guy or girl...or even who you are. All of it comes from the same places of sin, culture, and being human. Let’s look at our key verse.*

**Read:** 2 Timothy 2:22-24, read it aloud for the group.

**Say:** *Check that verse out! We are supposed to be living differently and “flee” the old ways of being a young person in our world. A part of that is staying away from “foolish talk, stupid arguments and causing quarrels.”*



**Group Question:** (raise your hand survey response)

- How many of you hear a lot of foolish talk happening with people your age?
- How about arguments over stupid stuff?
- Do you see people getting in fights verbally or physically because of dumb drama?

*Alright, it would seem this is a problem for almost everyone?" Let's look at the last part of the verse. It tells us the opposite way to act. [Have volunteer read verse 24b]*

**Group Question:** (volunteer answer)

- Instead of "Drama" we are to be what 3 things?

**Transitional Statement:** *So, it's not just in our own personal life that we see and experience drama. We are fed a constant diet of it everywhere.*

**Do This: (VISUALS)** Hold up a couple different Teen Magazine, and Tabloids.

*Wherever we go, we see this. Whether it is the grocery store checkout or on TV, we are being fed a very unhealthy, over-the-top portion of Drama—Gossip, Backstabbing, Lying—with reality shows and even teen TV shows. We constantly are being filled with drama. And just like someone who eats nothing but fast food, eventually it will affect you. Eventually, the drama MUST come OUT!*

**Do This: (VISUAL #2)** Hold up your fast food meal. As you talk, take each item out and hold it up. Maybe even be a bit dramatic at the end when you say the "drama MUST come OUT!" 😊

**Transitional Statement:** *"What you put IN your heart will come OUT of your mouth and into your life."*

*This is the main point. What comes into our hearts is what comes out of our mouths. Let's read our key verse.*

**Read:** Matthew 12:34-35 you read it aloud for the group.

*So if you fill your lives with nothing but a fast food diet of drama at school, at home, with your friends, and even at church; then you top it with a big portion of magazines and TV shows, what is going to come out?*

*D-R-A-M-A!! Let's break it down.*

### [D.R.A.M.A. - Division]

**Read:** I Corinthians 1:10, have a volunteer read it for the group.

**Group Question:** (raise your hand survey response)

- How many of you have lost a friend or have had a friendship ruined by drama?

*Drama DIVIDES; it doesn't unite. We think if we share a bit of gossip, or we act in a certain way, it will draw us close to others. We will be more united as a group of friends if we talk smack about someone else. It never works, and we are left with...*

[Resentment]

### [D.R.A.M.A. - Resentment]

**Read:** James 4:1-2, have a volunteer read it for the group.

**Group Questions:** (Volunteers Answer)

- What does it mean to "resent" someone?
- What does it mean to "hold a grudge"?

*Drama divides friends and causes hurt feelings that last a very long time. It also continues the cycle of drama. "I resent what you did or said, so I am going to get back at you by causing more drama." It is a never-ending cycle unless we say NO, and it stops with us. The problem is, when we hold resentment toward others, we swallow it down like a big greasy hamburger, but after a while it comes back out like a big stinky burp in our... [Attitude]*

[\*Optional: Burp for effect ☺]

### [D.R.A.M.A. - Attitude]

**Read:** Philippians 2:3-5 have a volunteer read it for the group.

**Say Something Like:** *Does your attitude STINK like a big nasty burp?*

**Group Questions:** (raise your hand survey)

- How many people have ever had someone burp in their face?
- How many people wanted to throw up on that person, because it was so bad?

*It is a progression. It moves from division to resentment to bad attitudes and it comes out in a response of... [Meanness]*

**[D.R.A.M.A. - Meanness]**

**Read:** Proverbs 17:4. Have a volunteer read it for the group.

*Drama really grows out of our human, sinful meanness. If left unchecked it takes over everything. Maybe you or someone you know is known for being a “mean girl” or “mean guy” because they are truly the Drama Queen or Blow Up King with everyone! But what is that really all about? It’s about trying to be #1 and the need for... [Attention]*

**[D.R.A.M.A. - Attention]**

**Read:** Proverbs 13;10

*Absolute PRIDE and the need for attention is the end result; the core of drama. It’s the idea that I have to have everyone see me, hear me, feel me or want to be me.*

**Group Question:** (Volunteer Answer)

- What was the first sin?
- What was the one before Adam and Eve?

Answer: PRIDE, Lucifer’s pride and need to “Be God”

*Drama—all of it—comes from one place and one individual: SATAN and his pride. That does not fit with who we should be as Christians or as humans. God needs to be number one. He is the one that all our attention belongs to. The second sin was pride, too. Satan tempted Eve with that same lie, “You can be like God.”*

*It is time for us to make the choice we need to make every week for the next couple weeks. Are you ready? Here it is...*

**Choose Not To Be Involved in Drama! 2 Timothy 2:22-24**

**End**

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Fun/Bonding:

- What is your favorite fast food restaurant?
- What is your favorite menu item?

### Lesson Discussion/Reflection:

- Do you think people are too wrapped up in other people's drama?
- Do you think YOU are ever wrapped up in drama?
- What do you think the biggest cause of drama is around you? (NO NAMES!)
  
- **Guy Question:** Do you see yourself as a "Blow Up King" getting into physical drama? How about others your age?
- **Girl Question:** Do you see yourself as a "Drama Queen" getting into emotional drama? How about others your age?

### Prayer Challenge:

- Is there any drama going on in your life or in your relationships that we can pray about?

## YOUTH GROUP LESSON: The Power of Words

**Scripture:** James 3:7–11, 1:19–20; Luke 16:10; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 3:17

**Bottom Line:** Use your words to build up others, not tear them down.

### OPENING GAME: HUMAN PYRAMID

Play the game in small groups.

**How to play:** Groups work together to build a ten-person pyramid (adjust if you have a smaller group). Teams run from the back of the room to the front to build human pyramids. The fastest group wins. Play a few rounds.

**After the game, ask the following questions:** How would you feel if I pushed your group down while you were forming a pyramid? What would you think about that? (Get responses)

**The point:** Today we are going to talk about the importance of building each other up. The human pyramid game we just played is something that can help us to remember why it is better to build each other up rather than to tear each other down.

### TEACH

Today, we're going to talk about one of the most powerful and most dangerous objects on the planet. It's not a nuclear bomb. It's not a type of machine gun. I'm talking about the tongue.

The tongue has two purposes for humans. The first purpose is for eating. The tongue helps to break up the foods we eat, and it helps us to enjoy the tastes of those foods. The second purpose of the tongue is to articulate (or pronounce) the words we want to say. This is where the tongue gets dangerous!

Words have the power to encourage and build up others, or words can be hurtful and lead to destruction. You need to remember to **use your words to build others up, not tear them down.**

People hurl insults at each other all the time at school. One student hurls insults at another student in order to put them down or bust them out. A group of girls make up a vicious rumor about one of their "friends" and start spreading it all over the school. A boy in your science class really wants to be a part of the "cool" group, so he makes up

stories and tells lies to make himself more popular. Words can be very dangerous. When your words are used incorrectly, they can hurt others and yourself.

The Bible warns us about how dangerous our words can be. James 3:7–11 says,

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

The tongue is very powerful. It is pound for pound one of the most powerful muscles in the human body! Let me demonstrate. I need 3 volunteers to help me out.

*(Call 3 students to the stage)*

This is going to be a competition between the three of you. I want you to try to say a tongue twister four times as fast as you can. You will be racing against the other two. The trick is that you must hold your tongue between your thumb and index finger, and you must always keep a hold on your tongue. If you let go, you're disqualified.

*Have students stick out their tongue and "pinch" with their thumb and index finger. Have them race to say, "Freddie Frog fried Fritos for forty-five firefighters," four times as fast as they can. If any of them are able to keep a hold on their tongue (not likely), you can declare them the winner. Volunteers can return to their seats after the competition*

You all tried very hard to "hold" your tongue, but you just couldn't do it. It was too powerful! James wasn't talking about physically trying to hold our tongues, but he was warning us about how we use our words. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me?" That is just not true. Words have the power to hurt people very badly. Insults, lies, and other comments can ruin the relationships you have with others at school.

Using words to build others up requires discipline. God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us work towards this goal. The Bible gives us a blueprint for how to manage our words.

**Read: James 1:19–20**

This verse says that we are to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” I once heard someone say that God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as we speak. The point is that we need think about the words we use instead of responding out of anger or jealousy. As you are taking time to think before speaking, here are three questions that you can ask yourself about what you’re about to say:

**1) Are my words true?**

Lies never build anyone up. God desires for us to only speak the truth. He wants us to share the truth so that others will be able to trust in us as Christians. Luke 16:10 says, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.” Our words need to be true so that they can build others up and strengthen our relationships.

**2) Are my words encouraging?**

Insults, critical comments, and gossip can really hurt people’s feelings. Instead of tearing them down, find ways to lift them up with your words. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Even when there is not much to be positive about, find something uplifting to say that will encourage the person to keep growing.

**3) Are my words helping others see Jesus Christ?**

Colossians 3:17 says, “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.” God desires for you to **use your words to build up others not tear them down**. The main reason for this is so that they will see Jesus in your speech and want to know more about Him.

Our words have the potential to be very dangerous. They can harm others if we are not careful and thoughtful about what we say. But, our words also have the power to build up others if we will make sure that what we say is true, if what we say is encouraging, and if what we say points our classmates closer to Jesus Christ.

**End in prayer.**

## YOUTH GROUP LESSON: The Pressure of School

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:28:31

**Bottom Line:** We need God, and God is all we need!

### OPENING ACTIVITY: EGG RACE

#### Supplies

- One dozen eggs for each small group
- Paper towels
- Rain ponchos (or some other type of protection for students)
- Optional – plastic sheeting laid out on the floor

Do the following activity in small groups or as one large group.

**Optional:** Lay out plastic sheeting on the floor to protect it from the eggs OR play outside on the grass.

Instruct small groups to line up in a single file line at a designated start line. Place a chair or cone at the opposite side of the room about 15 to 20 feet away. Give each small group a carton of eggs. On your signal, have the first team member place the egg under their chin, hold it under their chin, and then run to the opposite cone and back. Students must have each team member complete the race with the egg tucked under their chin. If the egg cracks under their chin or falls to the floor and cracks, that team member must restart with a new egg. The first team to have all team members complete the race is declared the winner.

**Alternative:** For a cleaner version of this game, consider using hard-boiled eggs or plastic eggs filled with water. If you choose to use normal eggs, be sure to have plenty of paper towels on hand for cleanup.

**The Point:** Like an egg is easily cracked under pressure, we often feel like we're going to "crack" under the pressure we experience at school.



## TEACH – THE PRESSURES OF SCHOOL LIFE

### Supplies

- Poster board or whiteboard
- Index cards and pen

Thank you, Professor Egghead. That is one weird guy! But I think I understand how his experiment applies to today's lesson. We'll get to that in a moment.

You all are starting back to school, and that means it's time to get back to work. Do any of you ever feel tired or worn out by all the things that you have to do at school?

Find a partner and ask each other this question: What are some of the things that wear you out the most about school? I'll give you a few minutes to answer that. Ready, set, go!

Let's hear some of the things that you and your partner came up with. (Write the things students share on a white board or poster board. Leave it displayed throughout the lesson.)

Going back to school includes a lot of pressures for you guys. First, there's the schedule. You have to wake up early and spend the whole day at school. When you finally get home, you've got tons of homework that might take you hours to finish!

You have a lot of pressure to get good grades and complete all your work. If you have a bad day and do poorly on a quiz, it can really weigh you down and wear you out. There's also the pressure that you face from relationships with teachers and friends. All of those people put expectations on you that can drag you down. It probably won't take long and some of you will just feel tired and worn out from going back to school. What a bummer, right?

The Bible talks about these times when we feel so tired and weary. When we get worn out from these pressures, the Bible says we need to hope in the Lord. Open your Bibles to Isaiah 40. Let's read verses 28-31 together.

### ***Read Isaiah 40:28:31***

It feels good to know that God has created everything, controls everything, and he cares for everything. He's always working, but he never gets tired or worn out. In fact, He has enough strength to give it away to us! These verses tell us that if we hope in the Lord, He will renew our strength. What do you think it means to "hope in the Lord?"

Those are all great answers. "Hope in the Lord" means we realize that we can't make it on our own. It means that **we need God and God is all we need.**

Just like the verses say, everyone gets tired and grows weary. When all the pressures of school and homework weigh you down, you're going to feel worn out. You may even feel like giving up and quitting. In those moments, we can get strength from knowing that we have a relationship with a God who created everything and never gets tired!

In Professor Egghead's experiment, the first egg just sank to the bottom of the jar. That's kind of like how we feel when we get tired. We just give up and we sink under all the pressure!

However, the second egg didn't sink. When it was put in the water, it was able to float. When we trust in God to renew our strength, He can renew our strength and help us to stay afloat—even in the midst of the toughest pressures.

The Bible says that those who hope in the Lord will "soar on wings like eagles."

Have you ever seen an eagle fly?

The flight of an eagle is amazing. It's practically effortless! The eagle takes a few large flaps of its wings, and then it just glides gracefully through the air. When you think about other birds, how do they fly? They often flap their wing rapidly. And they must keep it up to stay in the air. But the large wing span on the eagle allows it to rest even while it's soaring through the sky!

When we depend on God to help us in our weakness, it's His strength that He gives us. We soar effortlessly like eagles because God's power is lifting us up!

On our own, we're a lot like a humming bird. We are flapping our wings and wearing ourselves out. We need something to lean on, something to help us renew our strength. That something is God!

As you go through this school year, sooner or later you will get tired and worn out. When you have those feelings, let it be your sign to *hope in the Lord*. When you have mountains of homework, work hard to get it done and ask God to give you the strength you need. When you are yawning in that boring math class, take that as a sign that you need to ask God to renew your strength!

We're going to wrap up by taking a moment to write a prayer. I want each of you to write a prayer to ask God to renew your strength. Tell him that you're putting your hope in Him and ask him to give you the strength you need. Each of you has a card to write your prayer. Take a few minutes to write that prayer, and then we'll go to small groups to talk more about how God can renew our strength when we are tired and weary.

*Give students a few minutes to write a prayer to God. You might want to create an example prayer and put it on screen for the students to follow. When students are finished, lead them in prayer and divide into small groups.*

**Discuss the following questions as a small group:**

- What are some of the pressures that you face related to schoolwork and grades?
- How do you typically handle those pressures? Does your method work?
- What are some ways that you can express hope in the Lord?
- Why does Isaiah say that God does “not grow tired or weary? Why is that important to us in our weariness?
- How do you think God renews our strength? Describe the way you believe that happens.

## **YOUTH GROUP LESSON: Stress**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:31-34

### **Supplies**

- 2 Large white t-shirts
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- 2 ropes
- Tape
- Beforehand, 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
- Ten stackable items, varying in size. Example: books, plates, etc. Anything flat that can be stacked on top of something else
- A timer

### **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 the 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 QUESTIONS

1. 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?
2. Is worry something that causes a lot of stress in your life?
3. Do you think that seeking God first, above everything else, would decrease stress?
4. What do you think it means to not conform to the patterns of this world?
5. When you think about your priorities, is not conforming to the world one of them? Do you think it should be?
6. 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?
7. Do you think it's helpful that Jesus laid out exactly what your number one priority should be?
8. Is loving God with everything you have your number one priority right now? If not, is that something that you want to change?
9. How do you think that loving God above all would make you less stressed?

## TEACH 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?