

6 New Youth Group Lessons

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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

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.

For more information about teenage depression, go [here](#).

SUPPLIES

Poster board for each youth

Magazines of many different types

Scissors

Glue sticks

Psalm 40 from the Message printed for each youth

Pens

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 understand.

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 UNITY

Bible: Galatians 3: 26-28

Bottom Line: Being one in Christ requires love and forgiveness.

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.

SUPPLIES

Puzzle (with enough pieces for each youth to take a piece with them)

Sharpies

OPENING GAME

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 would not 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 HAPPINESS

Bible: Matthew 5:1-12 (Common English Bible translation)

Bottom Line: Jesus helps us to redefine what happiness looks like through His kingdom.

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.

Enjoy the lesson!

Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

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

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?

Close in prayer.



YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON IDENTITY

LESSON OVERVIEW: 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!

A NOTE FROM NICK

The students in your ministry need to know what God thinks about them. As young people, they are in the process of discovering their identity.

Use this lesson to help students know what God really thinks about them.

When it comes to this topic, our knee jerk reaction is, “Awesome...this lesson will be perfect for my junior high students.”

We forget that students often grapple with their identity through high school and into early adulthood.

For me, that was definitely true. When I was a teenager I allowed my peers to shape my identity. And that didn't turn out so well (ha..ha...it never does). It wasn't until I turned 19 that I started to follow Jesus.

In those early years of being a Christian, I allowed God to shape and mold my identity. Instead of going to others to define who I was, I went to God.

That's the goal for all the teenagers in your ministry – to know and believe what God says about them. And allow that to define their identity.

Enjoy the lesson!

Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

SUPPLIES

Printed handouts (included below) with scripture references

Four white t-shirts

Vaseline

Two different colors of pompoms (little cotton balls). Substitute anything you'd like 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 an 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.

WRAP UP

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 and 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 QUESTIONS

Break up students into small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. 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?
2. How often do you worry about what other people think about you?
3. How does the fact that God calls you His masterpiece change the way you think about yourself?
4. What are your thoughts on the fact that God delights in you? How does that make you feel?
5. In your own words, what does it mean to be more than a conqueror?
6. How can you choose what opinions you let stick to you and which ones you let slide off?



YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DOUBT

Bible: Psalm 10 (preferably from the Message)

Bottom Line: Doubt is often the evidence of faith.

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!

Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

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 are not 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 GOD'S LOVE

Bible: Romans 8:38-39

Bottom Line: NOTHING can separate us from the love of God.

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?

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.

Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

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.”

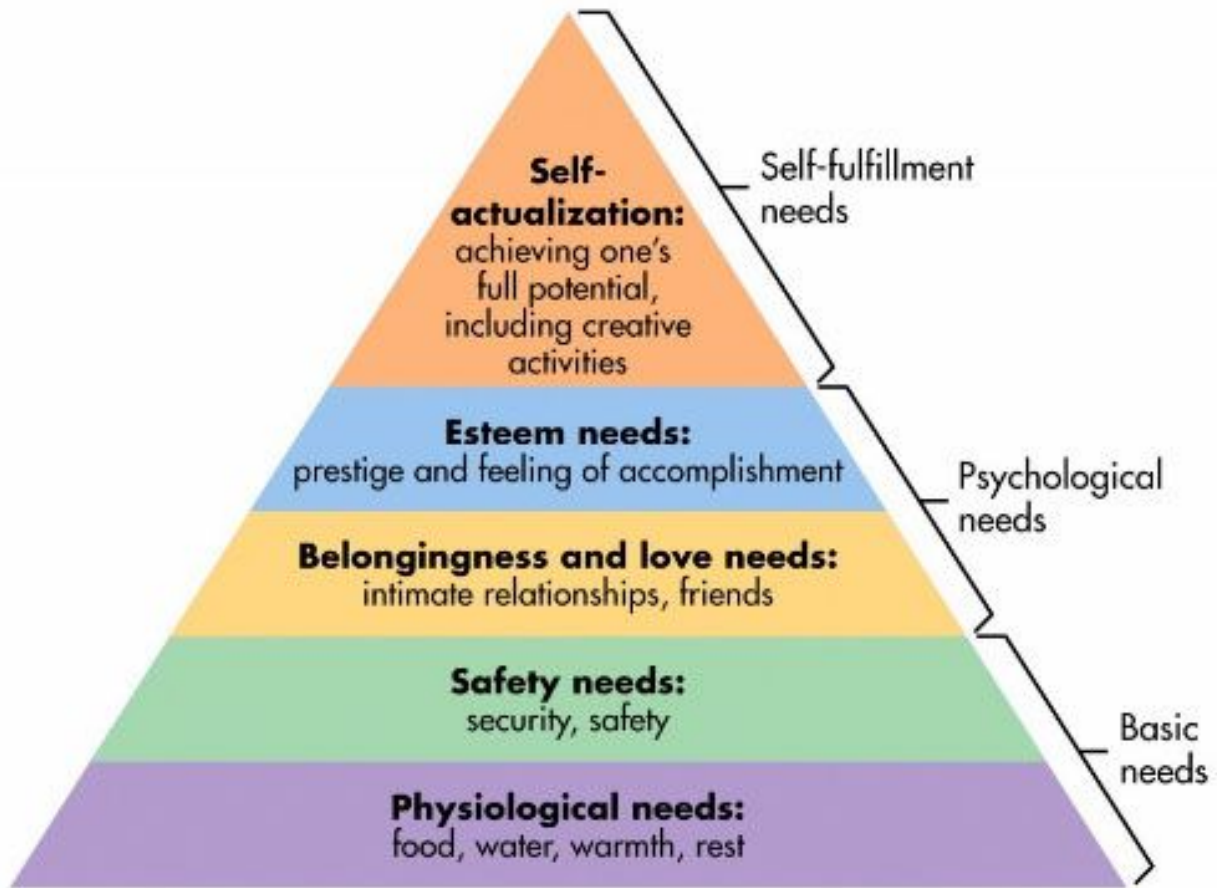
There is a great deal of study that has gone into the importance of love.

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 or 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?

Close in prayer.