



12 BACK TO SCHOOL GAMES

12 Back to School Games for Youth Ministry

Created by Ministry to Youth

www.ministrytoyouth.com



12 Back to School Games for Youth Ministry

Created by Ministry to Youth
www.MinistrytoYouth.com

GAME	TOPIC	BIBLE	PAGE #
Paper Plate Powerball	Focus on Jesus	Philippians 3:13-14	3
Silent Charades Remix	Gossip	Proverbs 20:19	7
Fashion Fad Frenzy	Trends	Romans 12:2	11
Angry Potatoes	Anger	Ephesians 4:26-27	14
Fear Relay	Fear	John 4:4	16
Twins	Identity	1 Samuel 16:7	18
Keep Your Fork	Experiencing God	Psalms 34:8	21
Lego Towers	Priorities	Matthew 22:37-39	25
Level Up	Humility	Philippians 2:3-4	28
Optional Obstacles	Trusting God in the Chaos	Jeremiah 29:11-13	35
Corny Race	Following Jesus	Mark 4:1-20	38
Challenge by Chance	God is in Control	Various Bible Verses	41

PAPER PLATE POWERBALL

Topic: Focus on Jesus

Bible: Philippians 3:13-14

The 1990's hit TV show (later re-launched in 2008), American Gladiators, had a game called "Powerball". In this high-energy game, contestants pushed, wrestled, and juked to get their ball in the can before the gladiator tackled them.

This is a much safer version of that game!

SUPPLIES

- Paint stir sticks (or over-sized popsicle sticks) – enough for each student
- Heavy-duty paper plates for each student
- Staplers, Tape or Glue (to attach plates to sticks)
- 4 Trash Cans
- 10 Red and 10 Blue Balloons

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Give every student a paint stir-stick, or an oversized popsicle stick, and a heavy-duty paper plate.

Instruct students to staple, tape, or glue the paper plate to the stick leaving enough of the stick out for a handle. This will be their "paddle."

For the game setup, place 4 trash cans around the room—one in the middle of each wall.

Inflate 5-10 red balloons and 5-10 blue balloons for the game.

Be sure to have some extra in case a balloon pops.

Divide students into two teams—Red Team and Blue Team.

When the game begins, each team will use their "paddles" to try and hit their team's balloon into one of the 4 trash cans.

Place an adult at each trash can to award 1 team point for each balloon that is hit into the can.

After the point is counted, the balloon can be tossed back into the game. It cannot be immediately hit into the same can.

Allow students to play in 5-minute rounds.

You may change the game up by making students lock arms with a teammate.

Another variation may be to have one team on offense and half of the other team be on defense during a round.

This will provide more opportunities for scoring, as the defense will be outnumbered.

Just be sure to give each team an equal number of rounds.

TEACH – FOCUS ON JESUS

After the game, say:

This game was all about getting to the goal, right?

Once you had a balloon near your paddle, you stayed focused until you got it into the can!

There were lots of others trying to hit the balloon—and sometimes they stole it—but you were determined to get to the goal!

We need to have this same passion and determination in our walk with Jesus!

Too often, we're tempted to just sit on what we know or what we learn about Him, instead of sharing it with others around us.

It's like we come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then we just sit back and wait to go to Heaven when we die.

But, God has called us to a much greater mission than that!

He has called us to use our time on this earth in a way that points others to Jesus and His gift of salvation.

Listen to the way Paul describes this mission that God has given to all of us.

Read Philippians 3:13-14.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The people Paul was talking to were living in Northern Greece—the place where the Olympics were started.

They would've totally understood the picture of a race that Paul was giving.

Paul was reminding them that the full reward of our salvation is when we get to Heaven.

So, until then, we want to continue loving, obeying, and serving God here on earth!

When we come to know Jesus, we receive forgiveness and power to grow in a relationship with Him.

The Bible says that we are a New Creation!

The old you—that was lost in sin and only living for yourself—is gone!

But here is the difficulty for most of us.

Even after we come to faith in Jesus, meaning we are forgiven and saved, we can't stop thinking about this part of our life over here.

Satan floods our mind with memories of our sins.

Suddenly, our eyes are fixed on all the reasons why we don't deserve salvation instead of the amazing grace that God has freely given!

At other times, we see this point in our life as being the final goal for everything.

We come to faith in Jesus and then it's like we just plop down on the couch and wait to die!

We have no idea what is supposed to be next or how we should continue to grow in our relationship with God.

But this is where Paul's words speak such a great truth for us.

God's Word says, *"But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

We will never fully realize the benefits of salvation until we die or Christ comes back.

The fullness of salvation will be revealed in Heaven as we stand before the throne.

But there are so many ways that we can experience glimpses of Heaven here on this earth.

When we're pressing onward and upward toward the life Christ has called us to live, then we can see His Gospel spread and His will being done here on the earth.

My challenge for you is this: Don't be content. Don't be happy just sitting on the sidelines and waiting to one day to enjoy the benefits of salvation.

Instead, press onward and upward—fixing your eyes on Christ, growing in the Word, asking the Spirit to produce fruit in your life, and sharing the Gospel with others.

Like a runner who lunges toward the finish line, keep moving toward the prize that God has set in front of us in Christ.

End in prayer.

SILENT CHARADES REMIX

Topic: Gossip

Bible: Proverbs 20:19

Use this back to school game to challenge your students' views on gossip.

As they play an interactive, silent version of the age-old game of telephone, students will take part in what gossip really is—blindly repeating words without having any idea if they're true or not.

SUPPLIES

- Pen & paper
- Various props—since you will be creating the prompts, whatever props you have will work.

Before the game starts, write down several prompt sentences for students to act out.

Line the students up.

Give the first student in line a prompt to act out for the next person in line to guess by using motions and the provided props—but no words.

While the first student acts out the prompt, everyone except the next person in line has to close their eyes.

Once the student guessing has an idea of what the answer is, they then turn to the next person in line (who then opens their eyes) and acts out what they think the prompt is.

Continue down the line this way, but make sure no one talks or opens their eyes when it's not their turn!

Once the game reaches the end of the line, have the whole group open their eyes.

Have the first person act out the starting sentence, and then have the last person in line act out the sentence they guessed.

Tell the students what the sentence actually started out as, and go down the line to see what their guesses were.

After the game, ask:

How big of a difference was there in what (first student) was trying to get you to guess and what (last student) was trying to get you to guess?

Was the game more difficult because you couldn't speak up and say what you wanted to say?

Does this remind you of any real-life situations?

TEACH – GOSSIP

I have to say; it was pretty funny watching you guys try to communicate with no words.

It was even funnier to hear how drastically the original message changed as it went down the line.

Even though this game was hilarious, it was also reminiscent of a real-life problem that's not so funny.

Does anyone know what I'm talking about?

Wait for students to answer.

I'm talking about gossip, something that seems to exist in every single school.

Even if I don't personally know you, your friends, or your school, I can guarantee you'll be faced with gossip at some point this year.

It's just a sad fact.

I know you guys had your eyes closed during the game, so why don't I tell you what I saw?

I saw some written words start out pretty good, and then get twisted really fast.

The words got twisted so fast because once the game got going, no one was getting the story from the original source.

It changed from person to person, getting more and more mangled as the game went on.

This is exactly what happens with gossip.

What may start out as a true story or concern quickly changes as it is passed from person to person.

Ask:

Have you ever had gossip circulate around school about you?

Have you ever participated in gossiping about someone else?

Say: Gossiping is an extremely easy trap to fall into.

I mean, think about it. You overhear something interesting in class, so you want to repeat it.

If you want to be a part of someone's conversation, it's easy to just drop a few lines about what you overheard. It seems harmless, really.

But in reality, it's anything but harmless.

You see, there was another similarity to gossip and our game, and that's the fact that none of you were allowed to speak up.

Think how quickly the game would have ended if you were able to use words and ask questions instead of blindly gesturing and using props that were given to you.

This is exactly how gossip works.

All you're doing is passing along words that were given to you.

You're doing this blindly, because really, you don't know if they're true.

And the person you're talking about? They don't get the chance to speak up for themselves.

Read Proverbs 20:19.

"A gossip betrays confidence; so avoid anyone who talks to much."

Say: Ouch. Are you really betraying confidence when you repeat a little harmless gossip?

Absolutely.

This year in your school, you're sadly going to be surrounded by gossip.

And while you may not be able to stop gossip from starting, you can definitely stop it from continuing with you.

Ask:

How does it make you feel to realize that the Bible advises avoiding people who gossip?

Does this verse change the way you think about gossip?

Why do you think it's so tempting to participate in gossiping?

WRAP-UP

When you're tempted to join in with others gossiping this year, I want you to remember two things.

One, I want you to remember just how silly you all looked and felt as you were acting out your guesses that without knowing if they were true or false, and remember that gossip is very similar to that.

Two, I want you to remember this verse.

You don't want to be the type of friend who betrays confidence.

And even more than that, you don't want to be a person who the Bible recommends avoiding.

Just like in the game tonight, gossip would end so much quicker if someone spoke up.

So, don't be afraid to speak up and stick up for those who are being gossiped about.

Because those actions are the actions of a person you can be proud of.

FASHION FAD FRENZY

Topic: Trends; Not conforming to what is popular

Bible: Romans 12:2

Use this back to school game to point out how crazy trends really are and how trying to follow them is not a good idea.

Students will put together the best “first day of school” outfit based on what they’re given, then they’ll be rated by judges representing different eras.

They will learn that during the school year, trends not only apply to clothes, but also life-style. Instead of following them, they should focus on living a life they can be proud of.

SUPPLIES

- Clothes and accessories from all different eras (70s, 80s, today, etc.)
- Pictures (either hard copy or a slideshow) of outfits that would have been popular on the first day of school in those eras

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Split the students into groups of four.

Randomly divide the clothes and accessories between each group.

Tell the students that they have three minutes to put together the best first-day-of-school outfit out of what they’ve been given.

Once the time is up, explain that their outfits are going to be rated by three different judges: one from the 80s, one from the 90s, and one from today (or whichever eras you would like).

Have the judges walk by each outfit and rate it based on what was popular in the year they’re representing.

For example, the judge representing the 70s may say, “those shorts are way too tight to be popular” or “those jeans aren’t cool because they’re not wide enough at the bottom.”

End the game by showing everyone pictures of what would have been popular first-day-of-school outfits in previous years.

After the game, ask:

What do you think are the most absurd trends of the past?

Do you think what's considered to be cool now will be cool in ten years? Why or why not?

TEACH - TRENDS

Say: You guys came up with some pretty creative outfits! It's so weird to think about how often what's "cool" changes.

If I wore something today that I wore as a back-to-school outfit when I was in school, you guys would definitely laugh at me!

Here's the thing: What the world views as cool is always going to be changing. No matter how hard you try, it's going to be pretty difficult to keep up.

If you do try to follow everything the world says is cool, it's going to take a lot of your time and focus—not to mention money!

And just think—all of that time and money poured into something that in ten years a group of students will probably be sitting around laughing at!

Read Romans 12:2.

"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."

Say: If you ask me, it's kind of a relief to know that I don't need to conform to the pattern of this world. I mean, look how often the pattern of the world changes—it's impossible to keep up!

In all seriousness, this verse isn't only talking about trends like which kinds of clothes are popular.

It's also talking about other patterns of the world: Lifestyle, how you act, how you talk and what you do on the weekends.

Much like how what the world views as popular clothes is always changing, the lifestyle and actions that the world deems as cool changes too, and not always in a good way.

For example, the world says it's popular to be successful no matter how you have to treat other people to get there, or it's normal to talk badly about someone at your school as long as it raises your popularity.

Is that the kind of person you want to be?

As you go back to school, there are going to be a lot of trends you'll be pressured into following.

Trying to keep up with which kinds of clothes are popular is only the beginning of it.

What are some lifestyle trends that you know are popular at your school?

Do those fit in with the kind of life that Jesus wants you to have?

Why shouldn't you conform to the pattern of the world during the school year?

WRAP-UP

It's fun to look at those pictures and laugh about how people dressed.

In ten years, I promise that you'll look at how you dressed now and laugh at yourself.

Like bell-bottom jeans, some trends are harmless and provide a lot of laughter down the road.

Some of the things that the world says are cool are nowhere near as harmless.

The type of lifestyle that the world deems cool and popular now won't result in laughter later; it will result in regret.

When you feel tempted to conform to the patterns of the world this school year, I hope you think of this silly game and remember how often those patterns change.

I also hope that you'll remember this verse and know that God doesn't want us to conform, but instead he wants us to be transformed.

ANGRY POTATOES

Topic: Anger

Bible: Ephesians 4:26-27

SUPPLIES

- Potatoes
- Sling shots
- Raw spaghetti
- Marshmallows
- Black sharpies

Note: If you have a large youth group, then you might want to have two groups of students do this activity upfront on the stage.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Break up students into groups of 3-4.

Give each group a few minutes to build a tower using marshmallows and raw spaghetti.

If you want, have students compete to see who can build the highest tower.

Give each group 2-3 potatoes.

Instruct students to write down on the potatoes with sharpies what makes them mad. It could be specific situations, actions or people.

Assign each group the task of knocking down another team's tower.

The goal is to be the first team to knock down a tower.

But be sure to have the activity continue until all the towers are knocked down.

The towers are knocked down by placing the potatoes in a sling shot and shooting them from 15-20 feet away.

Optional: If a sling shot is not available, then have players simply throw the potatoes at the towers.

Award the winning team a prize.

TEACH – ANGER

After the game, say:

This game is a picture of what can happen when we're angry.

On our potatoes we wrote down things that made us mad.

Those very things (the potatoes) were used to destroy something.

Just like anger has the power to destroy, tear down and hurt others.

Read Ephesians 4: 26-27:

“And don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil”.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What did you write down on your potatoes? Why does it make you angry?

What does “don't let the sun go down while you are still angry” mean to you?

How can anger be a “foothold” for the devil...and what does “foothold” mean?

How can we deal with our anger in a healthy, rather than destructive way?

FEAR RELAY

Topic: Fear

Bible: John 4:4 (MSG)

Challenge students to get out of their comfort zones and face some fears they may have.

SUPPLIES

- 5 tote-like plastic containers
- 5 small items per tote for students to find (*Example: coins or marbles*)
- 5 covers for the totes
- Paper towels
- Cooked spaghetti noodles
- Pudding or Jell-O
- Pipe cleaners
- Loosely packed dirt
- Packing peanuts
- Stop watch

GAME PREP

Have someone cook the spaghetti and pudding/Jell-O ahead of time.

Place the small items at the bottom of each tote and prepare each plastic tote with enough of the ingredients to fully hid the small items.

Have an adult leader or a strong student leader in each group to keep the group involved.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Break the larger group up into groups of 5.

Have the groups select 5 different people to find the small items in the 5 different totes.

Time the groups according to how fast they can find the 5 different items in the 5 different totes.

The fastest group wins a prize that can be shared during discussion time.

TEACH - FEAR

Read 1 John 4:4 (MSG):

My dear children, you come from God and belong to God. You have already won a big victory over those false teachers, for the Spirit in you is far stronger than anything in the world.

Goal: For students to realize that God is with them...while taking a test, at home, or sticking your hand in a plastic tote full of weird stuff.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Go around say your name, grade, and one thing you fear.

What were your thoughts as you stuck your hand in that tote, or watched someone stick their hand in the tote?

How does what we fear limit us?

How can we apply 1 John 4:4 to the things we fear?

TWINS

Topic: Identity

Bible: 1 Samuel 16:7

SUPPLIES

- Identical candy in a variety of colors but with different flavors (Skittles, jelly beans, Jelly-Belly Beanboozled Beans, or red candy that can be cherry, fruit punch, cinnamon, etc.) *Due to so many food allergies among students, fruit flavored candy is recommended over chocolate.*
- 10 containers to hold candy
- Masking Tape
- Marker
- Index cards or dry-erase boards
- Pens or dry-erase markers

GAME PREP

To have the most control of the game, separate candy into containers where you know what flavor is in each.

It might be handy to label containers with masking tape.

Make sure you have at least two containers for each color of candy with a different flavor in each container.

For example, if you have red hard candy: put cherry in one container; fruit punch in a different container; and cinnamon in another container.

Label each with masking tape and the marker as you go so you know what is in each.

For a wackier version of this game, use Jelly Belly's Beanboozled beans.

You won't know what flavor each color is, but you'll have a more dramatic experience!

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Choose students to play this game.

If you have a large number of students, each can represent a team.

Make sure labels are removed or not visible on containers.

Set out one container in front of each player – all with the same color, but different flavors.

Give each student a pen and index cards or a marker and dry-erase board.

Without letting them touch, smell or taste, have them write down their guess as to the flavor of the candy.

After 60 seconds, have them show everyone their guess.

Then, have them taste one piece of candy.

Announce who is correct.

There should be some surprise when students have different answers but are still correct because their identical “twin” candy was made of different ingredients and therefore different flavor.

For a wackier version, use Jelly Belly’s Beanboozled Beans.

Have students come up and take the same color bean.

Then taste to see who gets the good and “normal” flavor and who gets the gross flavor.

You can have a large number of players playing at the same time.

Or, you can play different rounds by setting out candy of a different color each round.

You can also have multiple students at each color, helping each other identify the flavor.

When the game is done, have everyone take a seat and prepare for the lesson.

TEACH - IDENTITY

Say: This game seemed like a simple taste-test and when you just looked at the candy, it looked like they were all the same flavors.

However, all it took was one second in your mouth and you could tell the actual flavor.

This seems silly, but let me ask you a question: Have you ever grabbed a piece of candy thinking it was sweet and fruity because it was red, only to have your tongue on fire because it was hot cinnamon?

Or have you eaten a piece of candy thinking it was apple flavored only to find out it was lime?

More often than we realize, we are fooled into thinking that we can figure out something based on how it looks.

In reality, that is only part of figuring something out.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7 (New Living Translation).

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

There’s a much bigger story here.

The short version is that Samuel is picking out the man who is going to be King.

His instructions come from God.

He sees a group of seven young men and goes through them, one-by-one, thinking that each is the one God will choose to be king based on his appearance.

In the end, Jesse, the father of these young men, summons his youngest son, David, who wasn’t even there for the selection process.

When Samuel sees him, God makes it clear that this is the man who will be king.

David was dismissed because of his size, age and experience.

He was out watching sheep and goats while his brothers were participating in this selection process for King!

Yet, God sees more than just the outward appearance.

He knew the character of David; the qualities that would make him a great king.

When we look in a mirror, we see the outward appearance that everyone else sees.

And when we look at others, we see their outward appearance as well, but each person is unique – even twins, triplets, etc. are each unique individuals.

Whether you got tasty candy or gross, let this game and verse remind you that there is more to who you are than just what people see on the outside.

And remember that same truth when you look at others.

Just because they look a certain way, doesn’t mean you really know who they are on the inside.

KEEP YOUR FORK

Topic: Experiencing God

Bible: Psalm 34:8

SUPPLIES

- 4 Blindfolds
- 4 dry erase markers
- 4 erasers
- 4 dry erase boards

Samples of 5 or more desserts (set out single servings ahead of time, at 4 per type of dessert)

Optional: Copy of the children's book *Green Eggs and Ham*

Optional: Bulk amount of mini Rice Krispie Treats to be able to give one per student at the end of the lesson

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

**As should be stated with any activity involving food, be sure to warn students with allergies that this will not be a game they should volunteer to play.*

Pick out five or more desserts that students would easily be able to identify.

And pick out one that may be difficult for them.

Then make or have those desserts made and divided into single-serving portions.

For our example, we are using: chocolate cake, Rice Krispie treats, cookies-n-cream ice cream, apple pie, chocolate chip cookies and either Norwegian School Bread or Chinese Coconut Rice Pudding.

This is a great opportunity to involve some parents in a unique way.

Pick a few parents who are known for their baking or desserts and ask each of them provide one of the above desserts.

Give your more talented and/or adventurous ones the last option.

To help you out, we'll provide recipes here for [school bread](#) and [coconut rice pudding](#).

Have one blindfold per player.

This would work well to divide your group into four teams and have one representative at the table per team.

Place the desserts in a hidden area or inside an opaque container before the game so they are easily accessible but not visible to the students.

Have one leader blindfold each player.

Then, one at a time, place the dessert in front of them and help them taste it.

Give them 30 seconds to taste again and decide what the dessert is.

Then, have them whisper to their respective leader what they believe it is.

The leader will write their answer on the board.

When time is up, take off the blindfold and reveal their answers.

Repeat this process with a new student for each type of dessert you have.

Hopefully, most of the students will guess each of the desserts correctly until you get to the last one.

TEACH – EXPERIENCING GOD

Say: Anyone else hungry after watching all of these students eat?

Me too! Those desserts looked – and I’m guessing tasted – delicious!

Ask: How many of you believe you could have guessed almost all of these desserts correctly?

How many of you would have had trouble with the last dessert? (How many of you still don’t know what that is?)

Say: Most of those desserts are familiar to us because we have had them before. And these aren’t things we have tried just once. More than likely these are desserts that you have had multiple times.

(And knowing you as students, you probably eat more than just the recommended serving size each time you get to have it!)

So you don’t know these desserts because you have watched a cooking show or some dessert videos on YouTube.

You aren't able to recognize these because you have played a game or used a dessert app on your phone.

And you don't know them because they are something your parents or friends told you about.

You know them because you have tasted them before.

You have experienced the joy of getting to smell, taste and digest these wonderful sweet treats!

And the last item stumped you because this was not a dessert you had tasted before.

You didn't know about it.

You had not experienced its flavor and texture before.

This is the point God makes in the Book of Psalms about Himself. Check this out.

Read Psalm 34:8

"Taste and see that the LORD is good."

Say: At first, this seems like a weird verse. How do we "taste" God?

But that's not what this Psalm is saying.

The writer is similar to "Sam-I-Am" in Dr. Seuss's book *Green Eggs and Ham*. (read an excerpt if you have it)

His point throughout the book was simply to convince the other main character, (who is never named), to just try or taste the green eggs and ham.

Sam-I-Am is convinced that if he will simply try them, he will most likely like them.

In the end – *spoiler alert* – the unnamed character tries them and actually likes them!

It was through his experience of eating this strange breakfast food that he discovered how good they were.

The writer of this Psalm is challenging us to experience God, to live the way He wants us to live, to pray, to read the Bible, to learn more about God by doing life with Him.

And his challenge is that by doing so, we will find out through our experience just how good (major understatement) that God is!

That's our challenge for you today. What can you do this week to "taste" God – like maybe reading the book of John and watching what you learn about God as you read about Jesus.

Or look at how Jesus and others pray and spend time praying yourself.

Our challenge to you is that if you will take the time to experience God, you will find out just how good He really is!

Let's pray.

BONUS: End by handing out a simple dessert, like prepackaged Rice Krispie Treats that you can buy in bulk from a store like Sam's Club or Costco.

LEGO TOWERS

Topic: Priorities

Bible: Matthew 22:37-39

Use this back to school game & lesson to remind students how important it is to protect their priorities during the school year.

Students will have to balance both a tower of Legos and a water balloon while simultaneously trying to knock down everyone else's.

After the game, they will learn that the two biggest priorities they should have are to love God and love others.

SUPPLIES

- Water balloons
- Legos
- Paper plates

Give each student a water balloon, a small tower of Legos, and two paper plates.

Have them put the water balloon on one plate and the tower of Legos on the other, balancing the two plates on their hands as if they were a scale.

The goal of this game is to keep your two plates balanced while trying to knock the other students out of the game.

When a tower breaks or a water balloon pops, that student is out of the game.

They can use whatever methods they can think of to knock the other students' plates out of their hands, but since their own hands will be busy balancing their items, they'll have to get creative.

The last student standing with both a water balloon and a Lego tower wins.

After the game, ask:

How hard was it to balance not just one fragile thing, but two?

Wasn't it so much harder to do because you didn't just have to balance them, but you had to worry about other people trying to knock them down?

TEACH – PRIORITIES

Say: We're going to talk about balance.

Something that, based on this game, you guys could learn a thing or two about.

Lucky for you, I'm not talking about the type of balance that involves water balloons and Legos.

I'm talking about balancing your priorities.

Just like you had to balance and protect your items in the game, you also have to balance and protect your priorities.

As a junior higher, you have a lot of priorities to balance.

There's homework, sports practice, exams, family, friends, after school activities, etc.

When you have so many priorities, they can get really confusing really fast.

It can be hard to balance all of them, and if you're not careful in protecting them, you'll end up just like you did in the game: dropping the important stuff.

Ask:

What are your biggest priorities?

Do you have a hard time keeping your priorities straight during the school year?

Do you think God cares about what your priorities are?

The amazing thing about the Bible is that it's the Word of God...so when we read something in it, we know it's something that God wants us to know and take seriously.

When it comes to our priorities, the Bible is very clear on what the biggest ones should be.

Read: Matthew 22:37-39

"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.'"

Say: There you have it—your two biggest priorities.

Isn't it kind of a relief to know they're already laid out for you?
Sure, you'll have tons more than that.

And not everyone will agree that these are the most important things in life.

But you know they are, because it's written in the Bible.

Loving God and loving your neighbor should be the two most important things to you.

And at school, you're going to have quite a few neighbors, so you'll have plenty of chances to practice.

Ask:

What do you think it means to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

What are some ways you can show that you love your neighbor as yourself this school year?

Would you say that these are the two top priorities in your life right now?

Do you think it's possible to make these two things your top priorities?

How can you balance and protect these priorities with everything else you have to do during the school year?

WRAP UP

There will always be a lot of things fighting for your attention.

Just because something isn't a top priority doesn't make it a bad thing, it just means there are other things that are more important.

You're probably always going to be busy.

If you don't set your mind on these two things now, they're going to be crowded out by all of your other priorities.

When life gets overwhelming, just sit back and remember what's really important.

Once you get those two things straight, everything else will fall into place much easier.

End lesson.

LEVEL UP

Topic: Greatness and Humility

Bible: Philippians 2:3-4; John 3:30; Mark 9:33-35

SUPPLIES

- Colored construction paper (red, yellow and blue) – One set per person. You can cut sheets in half or quarters to get more for your money.
- Gaff or painter's tape to mark 10 lines or "levels" in your space

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

If you have lots of small colored paper, and are willing to let students play based on an honor code, this can be an individual game.

Or, you can divide your students into two teams and play that way.

In your space, use the tape to mark 10 lines on the floor.

Designate each as "Level 1", "Level 2", etc. all the way to "Level 10".

Each round, explain what that color represents.

They are described next to each answer in the questions below.

All students or both teams start on "Level 1".

That is the lowest level they can reach.

If they get a question correct, they "level up" by moving to the next higher level.

If they get a question wrong, they "level down" and move to the next lower level.

The goal is to see who can reach the highest level in the game.

If you are playing this game as an "all-play" with individual cards, then they each move up or down based on how they answer.

If you are playing this game with two teams, you can have a captain represent the team; you can have players take turns representing the team; or you can have the whole team move together.

So, let's play!

Question #1

Which consoles were released in 2013? (Hint: There were two.)

- PS4 (red)
- Wii U (yellow)
- Xbox One (blue)

Answer: PS4 (red) & Xbox One (blue)

Question #2

Which console was released in 2012?

- PS4 (red)
- Wii U (yellow)
- Xbox One (blue)

Answer: Wii U (yellow)

Question #3

Which console features a “Gamepad” controller with a touch screen?

- PS4 (red)
- Wii U (yellow)
- Xbox One (blue)

Answer: Wii U (yellow)

Question #4

Which console was originally released in black, then in 2016 an updated version was released in white?

- PS4 (red)
- Wii U (yellow)
- Xbox One (blue)

Answer: Xbox One (blue)

Question #5

Which console featured a DualShock 4 controller with an integrated “touch pad”?

- PS4 (red)
- Wii U (yellow)
- Xbox One (blue)

Answer: PS4 (red)

Question #6

Which consoles were released in 2006?

- PS3 (red)
- Wii (yellow)
- Xbox 360 (blue)

Answer: PS3 (red) & Wii (yellow)

Question #7

Which console was released in 2005?

- PS3 (red)
- Wii (yellow)
- Xbox 360 (blue)

Answer: Xbox 360 (blue)

Question #8

In 2009, IGN named the *Top 25 Video Game Consoles* of all time, which one was 6th?

- PS3 (red)
- Wii (yellow)
- Xbox 360 (blue)

Answer: Xbox 360 (blue)

Question #9

In 2009, IGN named the *Top 25 Video Game Consoles* of all time, which one was 10th?

- PS3 (red)
- Wii (yellow)
- Xbox 360 (blue)

Answer: Wii (yellow)

Question #10

In 2009, IGN named the *Top 25 Video Game Consoles* of all time, which one was 1st?

- Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) (red)
- Sony PlayStation 2 (yellow)
- Atari 2600 (blue)

Answer: Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) (red)

TIE-BREAKER or BONUS

Which was the first console to use the Blu-ray Disc as its primary storage medium?

Students have to write down answer and reveal with no options given.

Answer: Sony PlayStation 3

When the game is done, have everyone take a seat and prepare for the lesson.

TEACH – GREATNESS AND HUMILITY

Say: In most video games, whether you play them on your portable device like an iPhone or iPad or you play them on a console in your home like a PlayStation or Xbox, everyone wants to get to the highest level.

You don't see anyone bragging about not getting past level one.

That's embarrassing!

Ask: Over winter break, did any of you spend a serious amount of time on one particular video game trying to "level up" as high as you could?

As we start the new year, do any of you have a goal of conquering a game you own?

Say: It's funny how sometimes video games reflect real life. People don't start a new job at a company hoping to stay at an "entry level" position.

If you look ahead to high school, no one wants to stay a freshman for all four years!

Even as a student, you might love your teachers, school, or classmates right now, but you are planning to be promoted to the next grade level when this school year ends.

However, sometimes, something humorous can actually remind us of a sad truth.

It's not natural for us to live the way Jesus wants us to live.

Our desire and motivation for advancing in games doesn't translate to the best strategy for living a life that looks like Jesus.

So, let's take a few minutes and look at what I call "Jesus' Backwards Game Strategy."

Read Philippians 2:3-4 (New Living Translation).

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."

Say: This is pretty much the opposite of how you play games and how we just described how we live our lives.

We very much try to impress others.

Think about it this way: When you talk to your friends after break or the weekend, is your goal to find out what they did?

Or is it to tell them what you did?

When you text your friends, do you usually start by asking how they are doing?

Or do you start by telling them something about you?

Or when you log into social media accounts, is your first priority to see what's going on in your friends' lives so you know them better and can be praying for them?

Or do you see first how many followers or likes you have before looking at their accounts?

Or do you try to be sneaky and go around liking other people's posts hoping they will like yours and drive your numbers up?

Our goal today is not to make you feel bad.

What I've just described happens often with us adults too, similar to how it does with you students.

However, all of us should be trying to live more like Jesus.

How do we do that?

Let's take a tip from Jesus' cousin, a preacher by the name of John.

He had his own followers.

They saw what Jesus was doing and came running to him one day and said, "everybody is going to him instead of coming to us." (John 3:26)

John's response included this awesome little phrase:

Read John 3:30 (New Living Translation).

"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

Say: John realized that what was really important was more people knowing God through Jesus, not his own number of followers.

And he humbly celebrated that!

Think about this.

His number of followers was going down.

He was not "leveling up."

He was actually "leveling down," and John was happy about it.

So, if Jesus is where our focus is supposed to be, let me end with this short description of what happened with him and his own disciples:

Read Mark 9:33-35 (New Living Translation).

"After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, 'What were you discussing out on the road?' But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, 'Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.'"

Say: When it comes to video games, play hard and level up as high as you can.

That's the point of the games!

But, when it comes to life, let's learn from Jesus and his cousin John.

Let's make sure that we are living humbly, and helping others to get to know Jesus.

It's ultimately not about how many followers we have, but how many followers He has.

Let's pray.

End lesson

OPTIONAL OBSTACLES

Bible: Jeremiah 29:11-13

Topic: God's plans are better than our own.

Game Overview: Students will be given the option to take one of two paths—one that is easy and one that is filled with obstacles.

Through the game, they will learn that even when we go through things in life that we don't understand, God is always up to something good.

SUPPLIES

- Two baby swimming pools or buckets
- Applesauce (enough to fill the pool or bucket)
- Shaving cream
- Cheetos Puffs (enough to fill the pool or bucket)
- Several small toys, such as action figures
- A really awesome prize (like pizza or ice cream for the whole group)
- A smaller prize (like lollipops)

Before the game, divide the room using tape or chairs.

Leave one half of the room empty.

On the other half of the room, create the following stations:

- A baby swimming pool or bucket full of applesauce with small toys hidden in it
- A baby swimming pool or bucket full of Cheetos with small toys hidden in it

Line the students up at the end of the room.

Tell them the object of this game is to get to the other side of the room.

They can either choose to walk directly across the room on the empty side, or they can choose to participate in the obstacle course.

For those who choose to walk on the side with no obstacles, award them with their small prize when they get to the other side.

Have the rest of the students line up to begin the obstacle course.

They must start by spinning around 20 times, then running to the pool of applesauce, where they will dig around with their hands until they find a toy.

Once they find a toy, spray a “beard” of shaving cream on them.

They must go “bobbing” for a toy in the bucket of Cheetos.

Once they have that, they can cross the finish line.

When all the students have completed the game, give the students who participated in the obstacles with a big prize—like pizza or ice cream sandwiches for everyone.

Ask:

What was the weirdest part of that game?

Do you think it’s fair that only the people who participated in the obstacles got big prizes?

Does anyone understand why you had to do those things in order to get the big prize?

TEACH – GOD’S PLANS

Say: Well, now that we’ve caused a big mess, let’s talk about the point of going through all those obstacles.

Are you ready? *You don’t get to know.*

No, I’m serious. You don’t get to know.

But really—why do you need to know? You don’t.

All you need to know is that because you completed the obstacles, you got a great prize.

The “why” of the obstacles aren’t as important as where you ended up and what you ended up with.

And really, isn’t that how life is?

You go through things you don’t understand, but those things aren’t as important as where you end up.

Ask:

Have you ever gone through any “obstacles” in life that you didn’t understand?

Do you think you would be in the place you’re at today if it hadn’t been for those things?

Do you think there's a purpose behind the difficult situations we face in life and at school?

Say: This year at school, you're going to face obstacles.

It's just a fact.

Whether it's struggling in a class, not having lunch with any of your friends, or dealing with bullies, your school year will probably be filled with things that you wish were different and that you don't understand.

I can't promise you that you'll ever learn the reason for those obstacles you will face.

What I can promise you, though, is that God has a plan for you, and no matter how difficult those things may seem, his plan is never a plan to harm you.

Read Jeremiah 29:11-13.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Say: No matter the obstacle, challenge or difficulty...God has a good plan for your life.

He wants what's best for you.

Sometimes that means going through adversity and not understanding why you had to go through it.

At one point in the future, you might look back and see what God was doing at the time.

On the other hand, it might all be a mystery to you.

You might never fully understand why you had to go through that difficulty.

But know this...

No matter what, God has a good plan for your life.

His way is better than your way. He wants what's best for you.

End in prayer.

A CORNY RACE

Topic: Being a Growing Follower of Jesus

Bible: Mark 4:1-20

SUPPLIES

- 4 Blindfolds
- 4 ears of cooked corn-on-the-cob (preferably buttered)
- Paper towels

Prize: Popcorn, two giant bags from a local theater if possible (sometimes you can get “end of day/shift” popcorn cheap, especially if you let them know it is for a church group)

Optional: Oven mitts, aprons, seed packs (one per student)

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Pick out eight students to play in four teams of two.

Only one will actually be eating the corn.

Position students next to a table.

If they are tall tables so they can stand, that is easiest.

But this can also be accomplished with a regular table by having one person sit in a chair and the other kneel behind them.

The partner in front has to put their hands down by their side or you can have fun by putting oven mitts on their hands.

If you really want to be nice, you can put aprons on these partners.

The person in back gets blindfolded.

Then, help them get in position where they reach around their partner so the person in back’s arms and hands look like they kind of belong to the person in front.

When you have all the partners ready, set an ear of corn on a plate in front of each team.

When you say “Go!”, the teammate in back will use their hands to feed the teammate in front the ear of corn.

The first person to completely eat all of the kernels off their ear or to eat the most in 3 minutes is our winning team!

“Go!”

Award the winning team the popcorn prize!

Say: At this point you are either really hungry for some corn-on-the-cob . . . or you are completely disgusted after watching these students try to eat as someone else was feeding them the corn!

Ask: How many of you love corn-on-the-cob?

Now, has anyone actually grown corn in a garden?

Or grown any plant in a garden?

If so, allow them to explain what the process is like . . . briefly. If no one volunteers, then go on with the next part.

Say: When people plant a garden, they don’t just plant one seed.

They plant a few seeds hoping that at least one of them will grow into the plant of whichever vegetable they are trying to produce.

In Jesus’ day, many people had not just gardens, but farms, or they worked on one or knew someone who did.

So, when he told stories, he would use agricultural images because he was explaining truth about the Kingdom of God with examples from everyday life.

In fact, in one of his stories, he talks about this principle of planting seeds and comparing the different results.

Check this out.

Read Mark 4:3-8 (The Message).

“Listen. What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled among the weeds and nothing came of it. Some fell on good earth and came up with a flourish, producing a harvest exceeding his wildest dreams.”

Say: Ohhhh...that makes sense...send no student unless they live on a farm.

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus explained this story to us?

Well... he did!

At least, the disciples asked him what he meant and he explained it to them.

Thankfully, the explanation was written down so we can check that out too.

Read Mark 4:3-8 (The Message).

"The farmer plants the Word. Some people are like the seed that falls on the hardened soil of the road. No sooner do they hear the Word than Satan snatches away what has been planted in them.

And some are like the seed that lands in the gravel. When they first hear the Word, they respond with great enthusiasm. But there is such shallow soil of character that when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it.

The seed cast in the weeds represents the ones who hear the kingdom news, but are overwhelmed with worries about all the things they have to do and all the things they want to get. The stress strangles what they heard, and nothing comes of it.

But the seed planted in the good earth represents those who hear the Word, embrace it, and produce a harvest beyond their wildest dreams."

Whether it is a lesson from a youth pastor, sermon from a preacher, or conversation with a friend, people respond differently to hearing about Jesus.

We want to strive to be like those seeds that fell into good soil and grew into healthy plants that produces a great harvest. Jesus says we do that by not just listening to the Bible, but by embracing it, by taking what we hear and putting it into action, allowing it to affect every part of our lives.

What about you?

Which soil type describes you?

Think about that this week and talk with one of us if we can help you be more like the good soil.

Close in prayer.

BONUS: End by handing out packets of small seeds for students to plant.

Challenge by Chance

Topic: God is in Control

Various Bible Verses

SUPPLIES

- One large poster board
- One large paper fastener
- Arrow cut out of poster board
- Sharpie
- Ruler
- One 24 pack of toilet paper.
- One ball per team.
- One sleeve of paper cups per team
- One package of 25 balloons

GAME PREP

Cut the poster board into a large circle and using the sharpie, draw lines to divide the circle up into six pie slices.

Write the titles of the six challenges below, one per slice, onto the circle.

Poke a hole in the center and then, using the paper fastener to attach the arrow to the middle of the circle, create a spinner.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide students into their small groups or into teams.

Each team will take turns spinning the spinner.

Whatever it lands on is the challenge that they will compete in against the other teams.

Each challenge gives the winning team 50 points.

Keep track of points and play 10-12 rounds depending on the size of your group, until one team is clearly the winner.

CHALLENGES

ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

Have students, as a team, decide whether they will reveal rock, paper, or scissors.

Have each team find another team to face off against.

After the count, have them reveal their team choice.

Losing teams will sit down while teams left standing will go to the second round.

Keep going until there is only one team standing.

Freeze!

Each team quickly chooses a sport to act out as a charade.

When the leader says “freeze”, teams hold their pose.

If any team member moves after the leader calls “freeze” than that entire team must sit down.

Winning team is the last one standing.

RELAY RACE

Have teams line up at one end of your room.

Mark a starting line with a rope or a chair.

When you say go, teams compete relay style by running to the opposite side of the room and back with a ball between their knees.

If a team member drops the ball, they return to the start line to try again.

Winning team is the first team to finish.

IN A ROLL

Have students choose one team member to wrap the rest of their team members in toilet paper.

The first team to wrap their team, using the most toilet paper, without breaking the roll – wins!

Be sure to eliminate any team that breaks their toilet paper.

Save leftovers on the roll in case the challenge gets picked again.

STUCK ON STACKING

Teams have one minute to stack the highest stack of cups possible without it falling over.

If a team's stack collapses, they are out of the challenge.

The winning team will have the highest stack after a minute or be the last team standing.

KEEP IT UP

Give each team a balloon.

Each team circles up with their team members and bounces the balloon in the air to keep it up.

If a team holds the balloon, or if it drops to the ground, their team is out.

Once the game is finished ask:

How many of you got the challenge you hoped for when your team got to spin?

If you could have picked, what challenge would you have chosen?

This game had a degree of uncertainty.

You could not predict how it would end because you didn't know what challenges your team would face.

Ask: What kind of challenges do we face that are uncertain in our world today?

Allow for responses and give some ideas if needed.

For example: who will become president/prime minister, the impact of global warming, what grades we will get at the end of the school year.

We live in a world that is constantly changing and because of that, we live with a degree of uncertainty every day.

This can feel unsettling for us and cause us to be anxious about the future.

Read and discuss the following verses with your students so they can see that God is in control:

2 Chronicles 20:6 (NLT)

He prayed, “O Lord, God of our ancestors, You alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against You!

Colossians 1:15-17 (NLT)

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through Him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through Him and for Him. He existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together.

Romans 11:33 (NLT)

Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His ways!

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

Remember, God is in complete control over everything that happens.

We do not need to be concerned about what the future might bring because we can trust Him.

God has the ultimate power and He leaves nothing to chance.

End lesson.