



6 Youth Group Lessons

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DISAPPOINTMENT

You've heard the proverbial phrase, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!"

It's intent is to encourage us to take the most discouraging moments in life, and find the good in them.

When we study the life of Jesus, we see a man who was betrayed by his friends, misunderstood by those around him, and seemed to have lost everything – Jesus understood disappointment.

Every day, students encounter situations at home and at school that leave them feeling broken and discouraged.

Use this lesson to teach students: Never lose heart... God is always with you!

– Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON DISAPPOINTMENT

Written by: Tiffany Hollums

Bible: John 16:33

Bottom Line: Never lose heart... God is always with you!

OPENING GAME: WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS

SUPPLIES

- Lots of lemons, cut in half
- 2 Pitchers
- 2 bags of sugar
- Styrofoam Cups
- Bag of ice
- 2 tables
- Paper Hearts – one for each student

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide your group into two teams and have each team line up across the room from two tables.

On each table, place a pitcher, a bowl of lemons, and a bag of sugar for each team.

Choose an adult to be the nominated “lemonade taster”.

Explain: You’ve heard the phrase ‘When life gives you lemons, make lemonade’?

Well, today we are going to do just that!

When I say GO, the first person from each team will run to the table, grab one lemon, and squeeze it into the pitcher as fast as they can, and then run back to their team.

Then, the next person in line will take their turn.

After everyone has taken a turn squeezing lemons, nominate someone to add sugar and ice to your group’s lemonade.

Each team will serve a prepared glass of lemonade to the “lemonade taster” who will judge which team made the best lemonade.

After the best lemonade is chosen, congratulate the winning team and serve the rest of the lemonade to the students.

TEACH

Think about one of the best days of your life: What happened? What made it so great?

Wait for responses.

Okay... now, think about one of the most disappointing days of your life... what happened?

Wait! You don’t have to share with the group because it’s probably not something that you want to relive again.

But, I’d like to share one of my most disappointing memories with you...

Share a story from your teen years in which you were truly disappointed and things didn’t work out how you thought that they would.

Let’s face it, there are just some days that aren’t that great.

Life can be really hard.

And here is something that sometimes Christians don't talk about much: God knows that life is hard.

God never promised us that this life would be easy, in fact, Jesus told his disciples and us these amazing words...

Read John 16:33.

And if anyone knows how hard this life can be, wouldn't it be Jesus?

But listen to the amazing hope and promise that He gives to us – He has overcome the world *and* He has come to give us peace.

And you hear a similar reminder in other parts of the Bible too.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"

You start to get the idea that what Jesus is giving us is a peace that is beyond anything that can ever happen in our lives.

Life hands us lemons and Jesus says to just keep your eyes on Him and watch what He does.

Does it mean that everything is "poof... perfect!"?

You just magically get the grade on the test that you wanted... or you make the team?

Not necessarily, but what He does promise us is that if we look above the things of this life, and look to Jesus that we see things differently.

When the world sees chaos, we see peace.

When we should lose hope, we find joy.

It really doesn't make sense, but it does.

And that is why Paul says in the verse that I just read – Don't lose heart.

What are some of the reasons that you can think of as Christians that we shouldn't lose heart?

Write down what the students share.

Not only do we have eternal hope and know that even when this world ends and our bodies die, we will be with Jesus... but even as our bodies get old and the world seems to be falling apart, God is making all things new.

The things that are eternal are beyond what this world sees.

Jesus came into a world filled with darkness and death and despair and turned things upside down.

And that is why we, as God's people, are the ones that have hope even in the darkest times because we *have* a hope.

We know that this world is not all that there is.

We know that even though we might be disappointed or beaten down, that God is with us.

It really is all about perspective.

Choosing to see things from God's point of view.

Choosing to see lemonade, instead of sour lemonade.

Choosing to see the love that God has for us that can't be stopped.

Not even death.

I want to give each of you a heart to put in your pocket, or to put somewhere that you can see it, to remind you to not lose heart.

In this life, we will have disappointments and hurts.

But, don't lose heart because you are not alone and God loves you so much.

And the peace and the hope that comes through Jesus is honestly the kind of thing that won't fade.

No matter what kind of disappointments you may face.

And when the times get tough, you know that there is one you can go to who understands disappointment like no one else: someone who was betrayed by his friends, misunderstood by those around him, and seemed to have lost everything.

Jesus knows disappointment and that is why his words to us should ring so clear...

Read John 16:33.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

So, take heart.

Give each student a paper heart.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is someone that you have seen struggle with disappointment and how did they handle it?
2. What disappointments are you struggling with? Take some time to pray for one another.
3. Which disappointment that Jesus faced can you identify with the most?
4. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus had disappointments?
5. What is the heart that you received tonight going to remind you of?

[End]

THE PRODIGAL SON

Wasteful.

That is the best definition we have for the “prodigal” son.

Prodigal is not a commonly used word today, but the story is all too familiar... an individual decides to live life however they want, without regard to the consequences, but when they stand face-to-face with results of their actions, they don't know what to do.

The story of the Prodigal Son reminds us that it is never too late to turn back to our Father who will, without exception, welcome us back with open arms.

Use this lesson to teach teens that no matter how far we may run away, God will always love us.

– Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON THE PRODIGAL SON

Written by: Tiffany Hollums

Bible: Luke 15:11-32

Bottom Line: No matter how far we may run away, God will always love us.

SUPPLIES

- Chocolate pudding or Spaghetti-Os (a very messy food)
- Bowls
- Paper towels

OPENING GAME: EAT LIKE A PIG

Set up a long table in the front of your space.

Ask for 4-5 ‘brave’ volunteers to come to the front and stand behind the table.

Say: Today, we are going to hear a story in which the main character becomes so desperate for food that he had to eat what pigs eat.

So, today our challenge is to eat like pigs... which just means it will be messy!

We will set a bowl of messy food in front of you and you will have to eat it without a fork or spoon... and without using your hands.

We're going to see who can clear their bowl the fastest – Ready? Go!

Once the first group has participated, see if there are others who would like to take the challenge and even change up the foods if you like.

Be sure to take photos!

TEACH

That's probably not the way that most of you eat... but it was hilarious to watch!

Today, we are going to divide into groups and tell the story of this guy that I mentioned earlier that ate with pigs.

This is the story of the “prodigal son” found in Luke 15:11-32.

Often, the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day, would complain that Jesus would associate with sinners – notorious criminals and tax collectors.

Jesus was telling this story of the prodigal son to those people.

Divide the students into groups of 6-8 people and give each group a Bible.

Say: Each group is going to read the story found in Luke 15:11-32.

Read the Scripture and come up with a creative way to share the story.

Make sure and involve every person in your group because once you are done, we will have a chance for each group to share their retelling of story.

Also, try to tell us what you think Jesus was trying to get across through this story.

Give the groups 10-15 minutes depending on how involved and creative they get.

Then, give each group a chance to share their retelling.

Jesus chose to share deep things about God, the Kingdom, and faith through stories called “parables.”

These stories were real and easy to relate to.

Let's see...

Are any of you the youngest child in your family?

How would you describe the younger son in this story?

What do you think about him asking his father for his inheritance?

Raise your hand if you are the oldest child in your family.

How would you have felt if you were the oldest son in this story?

See, there are heavy emotions and drama in this story because let's face it... families can get really messy, right?

If you have a funny story, with some good drama, share a story about your siblings.

In this parable, the younger son basically goes to his father, and says: "Hey, old man... you know how when you die I will get your money and stuff... yeah, I want it now".

In a super selfish way, it is like he is acting like his dad has already died.

And then, the son leaves and goes crazy, wild doing all kinds of things that he shouldn't do and blows all of the money.

He ends up wishing that he could eat what the pigs are eating and decides to go back and beg his dad to just let him have even a scrap of mercy.

And here is where we get to the real amazing part of the story.

If you were his father, what would you have done if your son came back after all of those things had happened?

But no, this father (who is supposed to represent God, by the way...) has been waiting and looking for his son to return.

And not just that, when he sees him, he runs to him, hugs him, and showers him with blessings.

This father is radical and does exactly the opposite of what you think he would do: He welcomes his son home with open arms.

And even so much that it really makes the older son super mad and jealous.

Maybe some of you can relate to the oldest son: He had stayed with the father and had done what he thought he was supposed to do.

But, here is where you can see a bit more into the hearts of the characters...

Yes, the older son seemed to follow the rules, but in his own way, he was rebelling because he didn't trust his father.

And also, he was just kind of whiny!

Maybe he thought that he was the favorite son now that his younger brother was gone.

Whatever it was that the older son thought, one thing he didn't about think was how relieved he was to see that his younger brother was home and safe, which kind of shows what was in his heart.

But, like the father tells the older son – this son was dead and is now alive.

See, Jesus told this story to each one of us.

In our own individual way, we have gone to God and insulted him... we have taken the love and gifts that He has given us and just thrown them away.

And all the while, you know what God wants for us?

For us to be home and to know that we are loved by him.

As hard as it must have been for the father to let his son go, it's almost like he knew that he needed to go and try it his way.

But you know what, the father probably knew that it would end badly for his son.

So, he was waiting for him to return home and no telling how long the father had just been there waiting and watching for his son on the road.

And I think that Jesus wants those of us who think that we have gone so far away that God would never want to take us back to really stop and hear these words.

Feel the arms of God around us when we return home ashamed and broken.

No matter what you have done.

No matter how far you have tried to run away.

No matter how bad you have failed.

God loves you and will always be standing there waiting to see you return home.

And when he sees you, it's like he runs to hug you and welcome you home.

That is the kind of love that God has for you.

You are his child and nothing will ever change that.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which son in the story do you relate to the most and why?
- How do you think the father felt in the story?
- How did you expect the father to react when the prodigal son returned?
- How does it make you feel to know that God loves you no matter what you do?
- Think of someone you know who may be running from God (*don't say any names, but think of them to yourself*). Take a moment to pray that they would turn back to God.

[End]

TRUE LOVE

Our world gives us so many confusing ideas about 'love'.

But, there is only one true love and that's the love we find in God.

Use this youth group lesson to teach teens that God shows us what true love should look like by the way He loves us.

This is an awesome lesson to use around Valentine's Day.

Hope you enjoy it!

– Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON TRUE LOVE

Written by Tiffany Hollums

Bible: Revelation 2:4-5

Bottom Line: God shows us what true love should look like by the way that He loves us.

SUPPLIES

- Bags of conversation hearts candy
- 6 bowls
- Long table
- Hearts for each student (could be a foam heart or even heart rocks... whatever you find will work!)

OPENING GAME: HEART TO HEART

For this game, you will need several bags of conversation hearts candy.

Divide the group into three equal teams.

Set-up a long table with three bowls across from where the teams are lined up.

Each team will have a bowl of conversations hearts (start with 10 per student, or more, if you want this game to go on for a while!)

Have each team line up in a single file behind their bowl of hearts.

Say: Today, we will test your commitment to love.

Each team has a bowl of heart candy.

When I say GO, the first person in the front of each teams' line will grab a heart from the bowl.

Place it on your forehead and put your hands behind your back.

You will run to the bowl on the table and without using your hands drop the candy from your forehead into the bowl.

Then, you will run back to your team and tag the hand of the next person in line.

The team that gets the most hearts in their bowl will win.

If you drop your heart... well, it's broken... just kidding.

Just run back to your bowl, get another heart and try again.

Now, if you have to go back 5 times, just run back and tag the next person.

GO!

TEACH

How many of you would say that you have been in love?

If your group is younger, they might not be able to relate.

Share a funny story about your first love, which will help clear the uncomfortable air you just caused with the "love" question.

Some of you may not have experienced a 'first love'.

Maybe you've seen TV shows, movies, or heard songs that talk about first love – can you think of any examples?

Wait for students to respond and share a couple of examples.

Let's talk about this: When someone first falls in love, what kinds of things do they do? Act like? Think about?

Write down their answers to use later in the lesson.

Hopefully it will include things like: they are all you can think about, you want to talk to them all the time, what to spend time together, etc.

Our culture gives us all kinds of crazy examples of love.

You say you 'love' this food or you 'love' your phone... but when it really comes down to the word, love, what does it mean?

God shows us what true love really looks like through Jesus.

God sent his only son (*John 3:16*) to die for us... now, THAT IS LOVE, right?

God basically shows us what love should look like by the way that He loves us.

And what does He want in return?

Our love.

God loves us so much and He desires for us to love him back.

We can make our relationship with God about all kinds of things, but if we miss the fact that God wants us to love Him back, we miss the point.

Think of it this way... The Bible is really just a huge love story in which God, the creator of everything, just wants His people to love Him.

And over and over they chose not to.

Yet, what does God do?

Gives them another chance.

Finds another way to show them that He loves them.

It is like God is yelling through a mega phone: Hey, I love you.

And we have on noise canceling headphones.

Have you ever really fully accepted the fact that God loves you?

He loves you so much that there is nothing that He wouldn't do for you.

You.

Not just the person in youth who you think is the perfect Christian.

Not just your pastor.

But you.

And all that we have to do is return that love.

Remember those notes that you used to write as kids: Do you love me? Check “yes”, “No” or “Maybe”?

Think of God sending one of those to you every single day.

And most of the time how do you answer?

Maybe you’ve never thought of it this way, but how do you answer that simple question?

With your actions and with your time.

Because whether you knew it or not... God is waiting on that answer.

The Book of Revelation is the last book in the New Testament.

One really interesting part of this book are the letters that are written to the churches.

John is told to write these letters to early churches.

Some of them get really good letters... but others get some pretty harsh letters.

One of the letters is to the church in Ephesus (*the book of Ephesians which was written to this church*) and they get what seems a pretty good report card.

They work hard and don’t give up. (*Revelation 2:2*)

They don’t put up with people who are wicked or who twist the Word of God. (*Revelation 2:2b*)

They have even had hard things happen and haven’t given up. (*Revelation 2:3*)

Sounds pretty good, right?

How many of us would hope that God would say this to us?

But let’s see what else the letter says:

Read Revelation 2:4-5.

What is the criticism that God has for this church?

They have forgotten their first love.

Look at the things we wrote on the board earlier about 'first love'.

What would it look like to be in love with God for the first time?

Maybe you have experienced it: What did you do? Feel? Act like?

Write these things down on the board.

Share about your experience when you first fell in love with God.

Also, this would be an amazing opportunity for the students to ask you questions following your sharing.

For some, they have no idea what it means to be in love with God.

I want to give all of you a chance to really fall in love with God.

For some of you, you just need a reminder like this church needed a reminder... remember what you first did when you fell in love with Jesus.

Remember how you would read your Bible, or share your faith, or pray because you needed to and not because you felt that you HAD to?

Remember how excited you were.

We live in a society where love seems to be cheap.

People seem to fall in and out of love, but here is the tough truth about any relationship: loving relationships also take work.

You might not 'feel' that butterfly in your stomach or get excited to the point that you want to shout from a rooftop every single time you pray or read your Bible, but if you keep doing those things you will connect with God.

Even when you don't feel it.

Then, there are some of you who haven't ever heard or considered that God, the creator of the Universe, would want to have a relationship with you.

He longs to talk to you, listen to you, cry with you, get to know you.

How?

Pray and just share your thoughts with Him like you would a good friend.

Maybe even just write some texts to God. *(I'm not sure where you would send them, but make a note on your phone.)*

Be honest.

Share your heart.

Because God is there to meet you and He loves you more than you can ever imagine.

He wants you to fall in love with Him because He has always and will always love you.

Whether you realize it or not, everyone is somewhere in a relationship with God.

Maybe you need to meet God.

Maybe you need to go back and reconnect with God.

Where are you?

(Hand out the hearts that you have prepared for each student.)

Come and take one of these hearts as we close in prayer.

Sometimes it is just a matter of giving yourself some time to listen and ask God to help you hear him.

Take that time as we pray.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is a relationship with God similar to a relationship with a person? How is it different, or is it?
- Why do you think 'true love' is such a difficult thing to find today?
- How does it make you feel to know that God loves you?
- How would you describe God's love?
- How would you describe your relationship with God?
- What is your heart going to remind you of this week?
- What are some things that will help you to keep growing in your relationship with God?

[End]

POPULARITY

Who doesn't want to be the 'cool kid'?

They're the ones that have the most friends, wear the name-brand clothes, and have the opinion that everyone wants to follow.

But, is that really what makes someone cool or popular?

Use this lesson to teach students that God's opinion of us is the only one that really matters.

-Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON POPULARITY

Written by Tiffany Hollums

Bible: Galatians 1:10

Bottom Line: God's opinion of us is the only one that really matters.

SUPPLIES

- Playlist of songs for the dance-off
- Funny dance off trophy
- Large mirror
- Dry-erase markers
- Small mirror for each student

OPENING GAME: THE POPULARITY GAME

This game is a simple 'dance-off,' but you can take it to the next level by encouraging the students to dress-up and think of the goofiest dance that they could do before the lesson.

Students can even join together to come up with funny dance moves and routines.

If you have time, give them a little time to work up their routines.

Announce that there will be a dance-off and that the winners will be determined at the end by the crowd applause.

Choose a student who might not want to dance, but could be the Applause Meter to judge who wins.

You can also [download](#) a free applause meter from the App Store.

Give a funny prize. (*Example – a pair of spray-painted shoes which could become a yearly dance off tradition for your group.*)

TEACH

Share a story from your teenage years along with a photo: Go for the one in which you embarrassed yourself or where you realized that popularity might be less than you expected.

If you don't have a story, ask some of the adults in the church to share... but, come on, we all have those stories.

Popularity.

It's that thing that so many people chase, but have you ever stopped to really think about what makes someone popular?

Who decides who is popular?

Ask the students to share their thoughts on what it means or looks like to be popular.

So, using this description we just gave of popularity, where do you find yourself on the 1 to 10 'popularity scale', with 1 being a slug and 10 being the Superstar of the World?

But, please don't say your number out loud!

Now, what are some of the things you've seen people be willing to do to be popular?

Write down these things on a card and hand it in.

I will read these and we can talk about them.

Give each youth a card and pen.

Why? Because if they are really honest, these could be some 'dicey' answers and best to filter.

Read the cards and ask the students to agree or disagree on whether teens seem to do these things to be popular.

Here is something to ask yourself from now on: Who am I? And what am I willing to do or not to do for others to like me?

Read Galatians 1: 10. (NKJV)

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Everyone will have an opinion about you.

But, the truth is, most people care more about what others think of them and really aren't as worried about you as you might think.

That's why it is really important that you decide beforehand who you are.

What do I mean by this?

Ask yourself if you are willing to compromise your character, who you really are, to become more popular.

Is popularity really worth making bad decisions, and more importantly, is that who you are?

Share a story from your life in which you faced this dilemma of who you are in Christ versus what others in the world want you to be.

See, the first thing that you have to think about is who you are in Christ.

So, tell me... who are you in Christ?

What words would Jesus use to describe who you are?

Write down what they say on a mirror with a dry erase marker.

Here are a few suggestions:

Beloved

Valuable enough to die for

Righteous

Bought with a price

You are loved by God and just think about the lengths that God has gone to show you His love.

Some of you see these words on the mirror and might think "That can't be true about me", but ... these are true for you in Christ.

Jesus doesn't expect you to be perfect, and in fact, he knows that you will probably fail, but that is why he offers us grace.

His strength and grace give us the ability to try again... and keep trying.

And His opinion of you is the only one that really matters because it is the only one that is truly correct.

I wish that I could tell you that living in God's grace will make you popular with the rest of the world, but you and I both know that this isn't always true.

Now don't get me wrong, when you really live for Jesus, you will find that others are drawn to the 'thing' that they see different in you: that's Jesus.

But just look at the life of Jesus: Was he popular?

Yes, for a week!

One week everyone was praising him and waving palm branches, which is basically the equivalent of a parade in his honor, but the next week, the same people are screaming "Crucify him".

His popularity was very quick and seemed to turn on a dime... which is a true picture of popularity.

Here one day and gone the next.

So, that's why it is so important for you to spend some time really searching your soul and asking yourself, "Who am I?" and "what am I willing to do to be popular?"

As you find yourself living day by day, ask yourself: "Do I really want to do this or do I want others to like me? "

And then ask yourself this question: "Am I living in a way that is God's best for me?"

Those are the real answers that matter because the opinion that God has of you won't change based on what you wear, who you hang out with, what you have... his opinion of you is based on his love for you.

His love that will never change.

As you leave, I am going to give you a mirror.

I want you to write a word on that mirror that can remind you of who you are in Christ.

Maybe you need to write that you are loved or beautiful or righteous... pray about what word to write and take this mirror with you to remind you about who you are in Christ.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your struggle with popularity? What to wear? Actions? Friends?
- What are the ways that you see others around you trying to be popular?
- Are you willing to do these things to be popular?
- How does it make you feel to think about Jesus and how opinions turned so fast on him?
- What word did you write on your mirror?
- How can we pray and be there for one another through the popularity struggles some of us face?

[End]

REAL BEAUTY

When I reflect on my junior high years, *beauty* isn't one of the words that comes to mind.

More like... acne, awkwardness, and a desire to feel 'normal'.

Most of us don't really remember much about those years... and that might be a good thing.

Your junior high students are trying to find a place to fit in, when, in fact, they might not feel like they fit in their own skin.

Use this lesson to remind students that *real* beauty is seeing ourselves as God sees us.

-Nick Diliberto, Junior High Ministry

JR HIGH LESSON ON REAL BEAUTY

Written by: Tiffany Hollums

BIBLE: 1 Peter 3:3-4

BOTTOM LINE: Real beauty is seeing ourselves as God see us.

SUPPLIES

- Makeup (eye shadow, blush, lipstick, fingernail polish) enough for 3 different 'stations'
- Makeup remover wipes
- Nail polish remover
- Beauty 'capes'
- Hair clips
- Blindfolds
- 3 chairs and 3 small tables
- Dry-erase marker board and marker

OPENING GAME: EXTREME MAKEOVER

Say: Today, we are going to test your beauty skills.

Can I have 3 volunteers who think they have some real makeover skills to share with us?

*Have the three volunteers come forward **and then say:*** Now, do I have any contestants who would like to have an extreme makeover?

Ask the 'makeover recipients' to sit in a chair with their makeover artist standing by them.

Say: Now, there is one twist to this makeover... the 'artists' will be blindfolded!

Which also means that each artist needs an assistant to hand them their supplies... do I have any assistants?

Once you have the artists, assistants, and contestants you are ready to go!

Say: I will guide you through this makeover, and the audience can help guide you also... it's time for a makeover!

Let's start with a little bit of blush.

Give the artists and assistants time to 'work their magic' and be sure to have fun!

Next, Move on to the eyeshadow, lipstick and fingernail polish.

You could also have the makeover artists transform the contestant's hair into a new style, depending on how the makeovers seem to be going.

Next, have a 'runway' for the contestants to show off their new looks.

Then, give the contestants a few minutes to clean off their makeup... if they would like.

TEACH

Well, that was a fine display of *real* beauty, right?

When was the last time that any of you walked around the mall?

Think about the stores and the way they advertise: how do they try to sell beauty in the mall?

Wait for responses.

Can you imagine how much money is spent each year on things that we *think* make us beautiful, or handsome?

Maybe you don't really care about all of that stuff... but maybe some of you here spend more time than you would like to admit thinking about how you look... or rather what others will think about how you look.

What do you think the world defines as 'beauty'?

Dove soap actually had a campaign a few years ago in which they tried to change the way that beauty is advertised, by showing how the ‘beauty’ we see is an illusion of what reality is.

[VIEW VIDEO HERE](#)

Isn't it crazy to know that what we see every day, all around us, on the internet, TV, social media, advertising, is something that has been created by Photoshop?

So, have you ever really taken time to think about what is real beauty?

Write ‘Beauty’ on a dry-erase marker board and write down what the students define as real beauty.

Each of us have different ideas about what we think is beautiful.

A few years ago, a study was conducted, in which artists were given a photo of a woman and asked to Photoshop it to ‘make her look beautiful’ and the results were really... well, let's check it out:

[VIEW PHOTOS HERE](#)

Depending on your group, you may need to edit these photos to display more of a ‘headshot’ look... so the young woman doesn't appear to be unclothed.

Spend a few minutes discussing what the various countries viewed as beautiful.

As a group, ask your students if they notice the differences between the photos.

Why do you think people have such different ideas of what *real* beauty is?

Now, think about this: What do you think God considers to be *real* beauty?

Add these answers to the dry-erase board, as well.

Let's read 1 Peter 3: 3-4.

After reading the scripture, ask the following questions and wait for responses.

- From this passage of Scripture, what does God consider to be real beauty?
- What do you think it means to have a gentle spirit?
- Have you ever met someone who you think matches this definition of beauty that is in these verses?
- What did they look like? What did they act like?

See, here is the downside of outer beauty: someday outer beauty will get wrinkly and old, and then the world might try to tell you that you need Botox.

It can feel like the world is telling us that we should add or take away something in order to be beautiful.

But God tells us that beauty is about something much deeper.

Something that doesn't get old and wrinkly... but that gets more and more beautiful the more we start to look, think, and act like Him.

When we are surrounded by people at school and in the world, that are concerned with how they look, it is sometimes easier to live out God's idea of beauty.

This is something that older people will tell you... and at your age, they wish they had believed: "Beauty that is only skin deep will always fade and will always disappoint. But, the beauty that goes deep into your soul never gets old."

So, how do you get this *real* beauty?

Write down their thoughts on the marker board.

Beauty that really shines through happens when we remember this: Our worth comes from who we are in Christ.

The opinions of others and the world will change more quickly than you can imagine, and if you try to make others think that you are beautiful, then you're giving them control over you in a way that can make you forget that you are a person of great worth.

You don't have to change to please anyone.

I know, I know, that's easy to say and difficult to live.

But today, when you go home, or the next time you are near a mirror, take a moment to really look at yourself.

Not to critique yourself or count all of your pimples or look at your crazy eyebrows... look beyond that and at your real self, and ask God to help you see yourself through His eyes.

Because when God looks at you, he looks deep into who you are and He loves you.

Just as you are.

And it is when you really start to see yourself as God sees you that you realize that beauty and worth come from deep within your soul.

You are made in the image of God and He loves you.

Let that reality sink deep into your soul and begin loving who you really are.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the world thinks of as beautiful? Do you agree or disagree, and why?
2. What is something about yourself that you think is beautiful?
3. How big of a struggle do you think the topic of real beauty is for people your age? Why do you think it is such a struggle?
4. Who is someone you think is really beautiful, at a soul level, and why?
5. When God sees you, what do you think He loves about you?
6. If you have time, go around the group and share something you think is beautiful about each person – think about what you say and try to speak life.

[End]

CLIQUEES

When students are around a group of friends for a long time, they start to become like one another – they develop their own language, their own look, and a certain way of doing things.

While it feels good to the people *in* the group, those on the outside can feel rejected and lonely, as they long for the closeness that the group feels.

Use this lesson to encourage your students to think about this question, “Who is *outside* that you need to invite *in*?”

– Nick Diliberto, Junior High Ministry

JUNIOR HIGH LESSON ON CLIQUES

Written by: Mike Sheley

Bible: Matthew 9:10-13

Bottom Line: Who is *outside* that you need to invite *in*?

SUPPLIES

- Candy that has a flavor that doesn’t match the appearance. (*Beanboozled Beans* by Jelly Belly or *Trick Plays Skittles*) along with its normal counterpart (regular bag of Jelly Belly beans and/or regular bag of Skittles)
- Paper Plates
- Styrofoam or plastic cups

OPENING ACTIVITY: SWEET SORTING

To really sell this game, do a little trick work ahead of time.

Empty out the regular bag of candy.

Fill it with the “mixed up flavors” version of the candy.

Now, set these aside.

On a table, set out paper plates and cups.

You’ll want one plate per team and one cup per color of candy.

You can play this with two people or two teams or you can make this as competitive as you want with more players and teams.

You'll just need to purchase enough candy to make it work.

As the students gather around, grab the bags of candy and begin pouring them onto the paper plates.

Remember, they'll think this is regular, not mixed up candy... That's your little secret.

Say: We are preparing for a party and we need your help.

The person organizing the party wants the candy to be sorted and put into cups with all the others that are like it.

We only have three minutes to get this done.

When I say "Go," your job is to get all of the candy on your team's plate sorted into cups with others like it.

The team that gets the most sorted in three minutes will be our winner.

No one gets to eat the candy until the game is done.

Ready? GO!

Have a running clock or 3-minute countdown playing.

For a little more fun, you could play the song or the music video for "In Crowd" by Rapture Ruckus – [Click here to listen](#).

When time is up, congratulate the team that successfully sorted the most candy into cups with like kinds.

Then, ask each group why they sorted the candy the way they did.

Most likely, they will say 'because they were all the same flavor or color.'

So, have them tell you what flavor the candy is in each cup.

Then, have them taste it.

If you are using Beanboozled Beans you might want to have a trash can handy... some flavors are GROSS!

When they see that the flavor doesn't match what it looks like, transition to the Bible study with the following...

Say: When you saw the candy, without knowing anything other than the color, you quickly assumed what the flavor would be.

Now, after tasting what is inside, you are realizing that sometimes what we see on the outside is not an accurate representation of what is inside.

And unfortunately, we too often use just what we see on the outside to not just group objects, but to group people too.

TEACH

Tell your own personal illustration that is similar to this...

Say: When I was in middle school, I had a few friends.

But, I also knew students that it would be almost impossible for me to be friends with because I wasn't already 'part of their group.'

I wasn't cool enough or popular enough or smart enough or good enough at whatever everyone in their group was good at doing or being.

It was frustrating on a good day and sometimes made me feel lonely on a bad day.

If we were to ask every person here, I imagine most of you have at least one close friend.

And many of you probably have a group of friends.

I also believe there are students your age that you see but don't know as well as you do your friends.

Friendships can be awesome and are a wonderful gift for us in life.

But, sometimes these close groups of friends can go from being close people to an exclusive group.

A healthy group of friends allows others to join in at any time.

An unhealthy group of friends wants to keep just those who are already part of the group as the only people in the group and everyone else is on the outside.

Often, this gets labeled as a "clique."

Have any of you seen *cliques* at your school? Or in your sports league? Or even... here at church?

Is this just a part of life? Is this just what happens when you get close to a group of people? Or is there a different way Jesus wants us to live?

It may surprise you, but this issue came up quite often when Jesus was going around with his disciples.

Often, people invited Jesus to come to their house for dinner.

And people saw who he ate with and made judgements, and sometimes even comments, on what they thought about the people he was hanging out with.

Let's look at one example and see how it connects to the challenge of cliques.

Read Matthew 9:10-13.

The first thing we have to realize here is how brutally honest Matthew, the author, is when he describes the people at this meal.

In verse 10, he writes that Jesus and his disciples came to Matthew's house, along with "many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners."

I'll save you the long explanation today.

All you need to know right now is that these were not the popular people.

In fact, these were the people that the popular people made fun of or ignored.

Some people actually thought these people weren't good enough for God.

In verse 11, we see that, unfortunately, the people who were being judgmental were the *Pharisees*.

Again, I will save the long explanation for another time.

What you really need to know is that Pharisees were people who followed God and the teachings of the Bible.

However, they were so caught up in obeying the rules that they ended up making God's people a clique instead of a community.

A community is a group of people who share things in common, but are open to new people joining the group – when it is healthy.

When it becomes unhealthy, that community turns into a clique, where the things the people have in common become the test for whether or not anyone is allowed to be part of the group.

Jesus and his disciples were eating with people who did not follow all the rules in the Bible and, therefore, were not acceptable people to be hanging around or having a meal with, according to the Pharisees.

However, Jesus addresses this very boldly, directly and simply by saying: “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.”

Think about that.

What if hospitals only allowed healthy people inside.

Would that make any sense?! No!

No one could get help and become healthy if they weren’t allowed inside when they were sick or injured.

Jesus sees the church in the same way.

The church is not for people who are doing everything right.

The church is for people who need God’s help and come asking for it.

The church is where we find out just how much God loves us through Jesus and wants us to be part of his community... a community of imperfect people working together to live more and more in every way like Jesus.

What does this have to do with being in junior high?

Jesus knew about good and bad relationships and good and bad friendships.

Even if you are not a Christian, his response here should make you hit the pause button on how you think about cliques.

Any group of friends who exist only for themselves and don’t want anyone new to join is an unhealthy group.

That’s not a community – that’s a clique.

The challenge for us is to look at our friendships and see which one we have: a community or a clique.

The way to test this is to look around for a student who isn’t part of the group.

Get to know him or her and introduce him or her to your friends.

If you have a healthy community, your friends will welcome the new person to be part of your group.

If you have an unhealthy clique, your friends will get mad, jealous or upset with you for inviting someone new into the group.

Imagine you walk into school this week and in your hallways, you find one of two scenarios.

1. You could walk past groups who give you dirty looks and totally ignore you because they are so focused on each other and their little group.
2. You could walk down the hallway and be greeted with smiles and people asking if you want to join them in what they are talking about, or just hang out with them.

You may not be able to change your whole school this week, but you can change the groups of friends you hang out with tomorrow.

The choice is yours.

Will you take the challenge to eliminate a clique so you can build a community?

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If I were to walk into your school, describe the groups of students I would find. (skaters, punks, goth, gamers, athletes, etc.)
- Is it hard or easy for you to make friends with students who are different than you?
- Sometimes, it can be an innocent mistake for a group of friends who have a lot in common to exclude others from joining their circle of friends. What tips do you have for how we can be intentional in preventing this from happening?
- Everyone, deep down inside, wants some friends who know them and some friends whom they know well. How can we help develop that kind of atmosphere here at church? At school? When we're hanging out?
- Why is Jesus' illustration about sick people needing doctors so powerful? How does it connect with the need for the church to be open to non-Christians? How does it connect with the need for us to be open to making new friends?
- What do we like about our closest friends? How can we have that together but still keep our group open to someone who is looking for that in some new friends?
- In the game, the color of the candy is what we used to judge what we thought the flavor was on the inside. In life, what are some external qualities that we use to judge other people and what we think we know about them? How accurate are these?

- What is one specific way you can think like a doctor this week and keep your eye out for someone “sick.” Or in plain English: How can you enjoy your friends while making sure you are inviting someone into your friendship who doesn’t have what you do?

[End]