



TOP 5 YOUTH GROUP LESSONS OF 2019

Created by Ministry to Youth
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YOUTH MINISTRY LESSON ON JOY

Here's a youth group game on the topic of "joy" that includes a lesson based on John 15:11.

The main point of the lesson is: God's joy dwells in you as you dwell in Him.

My daughter's middle name is Joy. Pretty cool, right?! When Jena was pregnant with Emma (my daughter), she had a strong sense that the child would be full of joy. And that's certainly been the case.

Emma is always smiling and brings joy to others around her. We've even been in the heat of an argument, and she does something to make me laugh or smile. She is a constant reminder of what real joy looks like.

As you know, real joy is different than happiness. It comes from deep within and transcends our circumstances. We experience a deeper sense of joy the more connected we are to God.

Use this lesson to help drive home that point to your students.

– Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

LESSON ON JOY

Bible: John 15:11

Bottom Line: God's joy dwells in you as you dwell in Him.

SUPPLIES

- Index cards
- Timer (optional)

GAME PREP

Before students arrive, write down a variety of items on index cards.

Be sure to choose things that can be easily described.

Some words you might consider using are: candy, kitten, tornado, cheeseburger, elephant, etc.

Divide students into two teams of equal size.

Choose one person from each team to be the “contestant.”

Both people will stand facing each other at the front of the room.

Have a leader stand at the front and hold a timer/stopwatch.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

In this game, students will race against the clock to come up with as many descriptive words as they can to describe an animal, food, object, etc.

When the game begins, the leader will put 10 seconds on the clock and then call out the word on a card.

Each contestant will take turns saying one word that describes the word on the card until one contestant can no longer describe the word or time’s up.

For example, if you call out “trash” one contestant would say, “smelly” and the other would say “gross,” etc.

The winner of each round will be the contestant that can call out the most words to describe the word on the card before time’s up.

Descriptive words must not be duplicated for the same card.

The winning contestant will add one point to his or her team.

Then, two more contestants will be chosen, and the next round will begin.

The team with the most points at the end of the game will win!

TEACH

Say: As we played that game, some of you sounded like you would explode as you were coming up with answers – you wanted your team to win!

Ask: Have you ever been so happy that you felt like you would burst?

What occasion or event caused you to feel that way?

Allow a few responses from students.

Wouldn't it be great if we could continuously feel that kind of happiness?

Ask: Have you ever experienced a disappointment that left you feeling like all happiness was sucked out of your life?

What caused that feeling?

Allow a few responses from students.

Did you notice that everyone's answers were different?

Why? Because our experiences and lives are all different from each other.

One thing all of us have in common is a desire to be happy.

In 2017, *Time Magazine* conducted a survey that found only 33% of the American population says they are happy.

So, that means that if I look around this room about 3 out of every 10 people would say they feel happy.

Ask: If you don't feel happy, then how you do feel?

What do you think people would say who don't feel happy?

Allow a few responses from students.

Unfortunately, happiness is a fleeting feeling – it doesn't last forever because it's a *feeling*.

The Bible makes a significant distinction between joy and happiness.

When the word “happy” or “happiness” is mentioned, it's referring to a feeling, like we just mentioned.

Romans 12:15 (NLT) says... “*Be **happy** with those who are **happy**, and weep with those who weep.*”

2 Corinthians 7:16 (NLT) says “*I am very **happy** now because I have complete confidence in you.*”

But joy is not a feeling or emotion; it goes much deeper than that.

Read John 15:11. (NLT)

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Do you think of God/Jesus as being joyful?

Because in this scripture we read that God desires that His joy will dwell in you and become part of who you are.

It's actually an extension of God's joy that lives in you.

Joy can overcome anything and everything in this world if it's allowed.

If it's chosen.

With joy, there is hope.

With joy, hardship offers growth and opportunity.

Joy is a state of being, a state of peace and content.

Let's also think about this... God always does everything to the fullest.

He doesn't partially save and redeem you – He completely redeems your life.

He doesn't give you partial peace; He gives you total peace in your heart, soul, and mind.

So, of course, God wants your joy to be “full.”

Raise your hand if you've ever thought this before – “I could be happy if _____.”

Maybe the “blank” in your life is....

If I had a best friend or someone to talk to...

If my parents didn't fight...

If my family had more money...

If I made better grades in school...

The difference between happiness and joy is that you can have empty blanks in your life and still feel peace, hope, and joy.

How? Because God doesn't leave you with empty blanks – He fills them and makes you complete.

Even if everything in your life isn't perfect, God's joy can dwell in you as you dwell in Him.



YOUTH MINISTRY LESSON ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual growth is an invitation and opportunity for those that follow Jesus.

When we think about how spiritual growth happens, the first thing that comes to our minds are the typical habits of going to church, prayer, reading the Bible, having a quiet time, journaling, etc.

While these are important, one practice we don't talk about much is allowing the circumstances of daily life to be the path to spiritual growth.

Let me explain.

I worry and get anxious A LOT. When it comes to just about everything. My business, family, friends, the past, the future...you name it.

I'm learning to pay attention when my mind and heart get anxious. I'm beginning to notice how I feel in that moment. I usually get tension in my jaw, and struggle with racing thoughts that are seemingly out of control.

I'm learning to notice what's going on in the moment. Pause. Take a breath. And surrender my anxiety or worry to God in that moment. I let go and focus on the real calm presence of God right then and there.

The more I do this when life triggers my anxiety and worry....the more peace and calm I experience.

It's a habit. It's a process. Over time, I've grown significantly in this area.

I believe this is a huge part of spiritual growth. Allowing life's circumstances to be your path.

Use this youth group lesson, based on Matthew 13:1-9, to help students grow in their spiritual lives.

The lesson starts off with one of Jesus's parables, and first stresses this important truth:

If you genuinely take God's message to heart, desire to grow in your relationship with Him, and back up that desire with action...then you GROW!

Then, the lesson talks about how to allow life's circumstances to be a path to spiritual growth.

– Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*

LESSON ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Bible: Matthew 13:1-9

Bottom line: Spiritual growth is both an invitation and an opportunity.

SUPPLIES

- Large space, inside or out.

OPENING ACTIVITY: GROW TAG

Before the game, choose one student to be “it.”

Say: When I say, GO, the person who is “it” is going to try to tag you.

If you get tagged, you will now need to hold hands or link arms with the person that tagged you.

Then, you will need to stay together and tag someone else.

You cannot separate and you must stay together.

When the third person is tagged, now only the students on the end can tag people, the person in the middle needs to stay linked with the other people.

The rule is you must remain linked together, and only students on the end can tag others.

As the game continues the link will start to grow and get bigger, making it more difficult for people to escape.

Tag as many students as possible until there is only one student left.

That student is the winner and gets to be “it” for the next round.

TEACH

Ask: In our game, did you notice how quickly the group began to get bigger and grow?

Spiritual growth is something that every follower of Jesus can be a part of. It is both an invitation and an opportunity.

Let’s take a look at a parable in the New Testament.

A parable is a story that Jesus would tell so that others could understand what Jesus was trying to say.

He referenced concepts that the people of the time would understand.

In this case, he talks about sowing seeds – something farmers could relate to.

Basically, Jesus is talking about what is necessary for something to grow.

Read Matthew 13:1-9.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Ask: What do you think Jesus was trying to say?

Allow a few responses from students.

I want you to notice there was a large crowd of people there.

So many people were there that He had to get in a boat so that everyone could see Him.

Then, He told a parable.

Jesus knows the audience He is speaking to, and there were a lot of people present who had to grow their own food to live.

They had to farm, and he was teaching them in a way that they could understand.

This parable was challenging to understand, and so Jesus had to explain what it meant to them.

Let’s read his explanation of this parable.

Matthew 13:18-23.

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Jesus uses the example of growth in comparing it to our relationship with God.

In verse 19, Jesus says if the seed is thrown on the path or if you listen to the message and the evil one, there is no lasting spiritual growth that takes place because the evil one snatches it away.

In verse 20, Jesus says the next seed is thrown onto the rocky ground.

In this instance, Jesus says it's like a person who hears the Word of God and is excited, but since they didn't root themselves in the word of God, they fall away.

The plant only lasted a short time and withered away in the rocks with no soil to take root.

This would be like a person who hears God's Word and says that's great, but then eventually, they turn away from it.

There is no lasting spiritual growth in that.

In verse 22, it talks about seeds that were thrown among the thorns.

The plant would grow, but eventually, the thorns would steal nutrients away from the plant that is supposed to produce fruit, and the plant would die.

In this instance, the person let the difficulty of life and distractions around them to overtake any spiritual growth that would have taken place.

They might have grown a little, but eventually, they stop, and no new growth takes place.

In verse 23, it finally talks about the person that is spiritually growing.

If you genuinely take God's message to heart, desire to grow in your relationship with Him, and back up that desire with action... then you GROW!

Let's go back to grapes.

I know I keep coming back to the grapes; it might be because I'm hungry.

If you want to take a grape seed to make more grapes, you need to plant it in the proper place.

You have to water the soil and remove anything that might try to steal its nutrients.

You have to give it the opportunity to grow.

When it grows, it will produce more grapes.

The same thing is true in your life.

One way spiritual growth happens is by creating a healthy environment around you. Like planting seeds in good soil.

Spending time with other Christians can help you grow spiritually and deepen your relationship with God.

Sometimes you will need to remove toxic people from your life so that they don't choke out your faith.

When you pray and spend time in God's Word, you will grow closer to Him.

Those are all some pretty basic things you've probably heard before.

Another way maybe less talked about is to use the circumstances of everyday life to help you grow spiritually.

Let me explain.

(Note: Feel free to use an example of your own here.)

I worry and get anxious A LOT. When it comes to just about everything. My business, family, friends, the past, the future...you name it.

I'm learning to pay attention when my mind and heart get anxious. I'm beginning to notice how I feel in that moment. I usually get tension in my jaw, and struggle with racing thoughts that I can't seem to control.

I'm learning to notice what's going on in the moment. Pause. Take a breath. And surrender my anxiety or worry to God in that moment. I let go and focus on the calm real presence of God right then and there.

The more I do this when life triggers my anxiety and worry....the more peace and calm I experience.

It's a habit. It's a process.

Over time, I've grown significantly in this area.

I believe this is a huge part of spiritual growth. Allowing life's circumstances to be your path.

Maybe you don't struggle with worry or anxiety. It could be something else for you. Whatever it is...

- Pay attention when life circumstances come up that trigger something disturbing to you.
- Notice how you feel.
- Surrender the situation to God. Let go.

This is just another way you're creating good soil in your heart that will lead to spiritual growth. I encourage you to give it a try.

WRAP UP

Spring is here, and if you truly want something to grow you will put it in the right soil, you will water it, you will remove any weeds that might steal its nutrients, and you will do your best to make sure it grows the way it was intended to.

The same is necessary for spiritual growth.

Plant yourself in God's Word, water yourself in prayer, remove any bad habits, and use everyday life as a path to growth.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does spiritual growth mean to you?
2. How have you experienced spiritual growth in the past?
3. What's a difficult situation you're facing right now?
4. Could that situation be an opportunity for growth? Why or why not?
5. In your own words, what does it mean to surrender to God?



YOUTH MINISTRY LESSON ON MAKING A IMPACT

Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others have made a substantial impact on the world. Although your students might not feel like their influence is as significant, God can use their lives to make a huge impact in their schools and homes.

Use this youth group lesson based on John 13:34-35 to teach students that they don't have to be famous to make an impact for Christ; they simply have to follow God's lead.

I remember following God's lead to volunteer in the children's ministry at my church way back in 1997. I was new to church, in my early 20's and was trying to figure out what to do with my life.

As I volunteered with those kids, I felt God urging me to do more. And more. And more. One step at a time, God was leading me. He had a purpose for me. Something he wanted to do in and through me.

I eventually became the full-time Children's Pastor at that church. Over the past 22 years I've had the privilege of overseeing kids, preteen, junior high, and high school ministry. I've also had the honor of starting a youth ministry resource company that impacts churches on a global scale.

That's my story. Well, the cliff note version of it. You have a story too. And so do the students in your ministry. God has created them to impact the world in a specific way. And he's given them guidelines on how to live a life of love and service to others.

We've created this lesson to drive home those points to your students. It uses the example of John the Baptist, Josiah, Jonah and others to show students 5 ways they can make an impact in the lives of others.

– *Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth*

LESSON ON MAKING AN IMPACT

Bible: John 13:34-35; Acts 8:26-40

Bottom Line: You don't have to be famous to make an impact for Christ; you simply have follow God's lead.

SUPPLIES

- Pens or pencils (one per student)
- Paper

OPENING ACTIVITY: IMPACT SURVEY

For today's activity, you will survey your students to get their honest opinions about some issues related to "making an impact."

Have students number their papers from 1-5.

Then, out loud, read each of the following statements and ask students to write "Agree" or "Disagree."

Make it difficult for the students by telling them that they should pick whatever answer pops into their heads first – no “Somewhat Agree” answers allowed.

It will make for better conversation later.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. One person can have a positive impact on thousands.
2. The most powerful people make the biggest impact.
3. A celebrity has more opportunities to influence others than the person sitting next to you.
4. A small group of people can change the world.
5. Inaction is as powerful as action.

Use these statements as a springboard for some interesting debate.

Allow the students to explain why they agreed or disagreed with the statements above.

Play “devil’s advocate” by giving them examples that contradict their view.

For example, if students disagree that a small group of people can change

the world, talk to them about the disciples and their impact on the world through spreading the Gospel.

TEACH

Say: You don't have to be a Hollywood star or an Instagram influencer to make an impact.

In fact, the Bible gives us example after example of people who, despite feeling inadequate, made a huge impact in their area of influence, and ultimately, the world.

Nope, they weren't perfect.

But they recognized what mattered, and they got up off their couches (okay, maybe not "couches") and did something!

Likewise, there are so many ways that you can impact the world!

Today, we're going to go over seven of them.

But first, let's meet some people who did extraordinary things for God just by being obedient to the call.

John the Baptist recognized Jesus before he was even born.

Crazy!

And John preached the same message over and over again until people began to listen!

Side note. He ate locusts. I'm sure you wouldn't want to find that on your dinner plate.

Anyway, John the Baptist was just one man.

In fact, he referred to himself as “just a voice,” but he was the one who told anyone who would listen that Jesus was coming.

His message was simple: “Behold the lamb!”

Put in today's terms, John the Baptist was simply saying, “Here is your savior!”

A simple message with lasting spiritual impact.

Despite his doubt (when things got tough) and his strange diet choices, John the Baptist is a Biblical hero, ranking alongside Moses and Noah.

Why?

Because it was John's **goal** to make an impact for Christ.

What about an Old Testament figure who made an impact?

Jonah, despite making the really poor decision to run from God, ended up learning his lesson and obeying God's call to bring a warning of destruction to Nineveh, a city filled to the brim with sin.

Jonah was terrified, and he didn't believe that any good could come of walking into this deathtrap.

He was convinced that Nineveh would reject his message.

Instead, because of Jonah's obedience, Nineveh's people, from "the greatest to the least," repented and believed in God.

Even the king himself turned to God.

And when God saw what had happened in that city, he relented and did not destroy them.

Talk about an impact!

Okay, one more.

Let's talk about a lesser-known biblical account.

Josiah, one of the greatest kings to ever rule in Israel.

You want to talk about feelings of inadequacy?

Josiah was only 8 years old when he began his reign!!!

Despite his youth, God looked at him with favor because he did what “was right in the eyes of the Lord.”

Later, Josiah repented on behalf of Israel’s disobedience and made a covenant with God (and all of his people) to follow Him.

He read the Book of the Law to the people and vowed before God to follow it.

Now, imagine how Israel would have fared under the reign of a disobedient king?

Well, we don’t have to, because this young king made a huge impact by following God’s call on his life.

You might be thinking that you can’t make an impact like the people we just discussed.

But there’s where you’d be wrong.

The obstacles that stood in the way of John the Baptist, Jonah, and even Josiah weren't any different than the obstacles that stand in your way right now.

Are you worried that no one would take you seriously?

So were they.

Are you worried that you can't do it alone?

So were they.

Are you worried that no one will listen?

So were they.

Yes, the task can seem overwhelming.

But each of the people we've discussed today made simple daily decisions to follow God in their everyday lives.

Here are 7 things you can do to make an impact in your world:

1. Love Others.

Read John 13:34-35.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

By “this,” by love, others will know that we follow Christ.

When we begin loving others, not preaching at them, we begin to make an impact for Christ.

He asks us to love people in order to show them what a Christian truly is.

And it’s that love- that surprising, unexpected, generous love- that will get others to crave what you have.

2. Determine Your Area of Influence.

Make a list of the people you interact with on a daily basis.

Then, think about some simple ways that you can bless them.

Sometimes, a simple act of kindness can change the trajectory of someone’s day.

You'll never know how much of a difference you can make by simply recognizing that your words and actions do affect those around you.

3. Get Involved.

Kingdom work is going on all over the world, and probably right in your hometown.

Check with your church office to see what you can do to be a part of that crucial work.

If you're having trouble getting involved, why not spend some time thinking about a

If you can't find anything, start something.

Think about a gift or ability that God's given you, and figure out a way to put it to good use.

Someone who is busy doing work for the Lord should be able to see the impact!

4. Incorporate the Gospel Story into Your Daily Conversations.

Read Acts 8:26-40.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place.

And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.”

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

What an amazing story.

And all Philip did was take an open opportunity to tell someone about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit was there, guiding and prodding like He does, and Philip was simply obedient.

Can you take your conversations and turn them into opportunities to spread the Gospel?

Of course, you can!

Practice giving a 2-3 sentence summary of the Gospel, so that when the opportunity arises, you can do so without thinking.

If talking about Jesus becomes second nature to you, you'll make an impact wherever you go.

And remember: It's not your job to lead someone to Jesus – that's God's!

All you have to do is follow God's lead.

5. Forgive.

We can't be a very fruitful vessel for Christ if we hold on to grudges and un-forgiveness.

Not only can un-forgiveness get in between you and God (it's a sin that God wants us to repent of), it can also ruin our chance to show others what God's love looks like.

When we offer forgiveness to others, even though they may not seem to deserve it, we do the difficult work on being obedient to God's Word.

It will make an impact because the world does not forgive like God forgives.

People will be shocked by this undeserved mercy and grace, and you'll get an opportunity to tell people why you're able to forgive: because God forgave you first!

6. Pray for Others.

This is simple.

Pray for people, whether Christians or not.

When we go to God with the needs and cares of others, it shows that we depend on Him.

Plus, it models for others how to call on Jesus.

7. Stay in the Word.

When you spend time reading the Bible, it naturally flows out into how you treat others.

God also uses His Word to transform you daily.

This transformation will be evident to those around you, even though you might not realize it!

It's important to grow in the knowledge of God's Word because, in it, we find out who God is and who we are.

We can't make a great impact for Christ if we don't allow his Word to transform us.

There's no doubt that you've heard of all or some of these seven ways to make an impact.

Notice that each, in itself, is not a huge feat.

You can do this, by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in you, not by your own strength.

Before we go into discussion time, let's pray for each other.

Let's also pray that God will create in us a desire to make an impact for His name.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When we considered our area of influence, who popped into your mind?
In what ways can you show love, forgiveness, or mercy to that person?
2. Why is it so hard to believe that we can influence our culture for Christ?
3. Think of another biblical account that features a person whose obedience makes an impact for God. In what ways was he or she obedient to God?
4. Why do you think God uses imperfect people for His work?
5. Which of the seven steps for making an impact do you think will be hardest for you to implement in your daily life? How so?
6. Try to think of someone who has made an impact on your spiritual life? What did that person do to positively affect you?
7. Think of a time when someone blessed you with something simple. What makes a simple act of kindness have lasting impact?

8. Which of the seven steps for making an impact do you already implement?

9. What is your community or church currently doing to make an impact on your city? How could your gifts and talents be used for such work?

10. What challenges do you foresee as you begin to focus on your mission to impact the world for Christ?



YOUTH MINISTRY LESSON ON JESUS' PARABLES

Jesus was a gifted storyteller. He spoke in parables people could understand because they were relatable to their everyday lives.

As youth leaders, we still do this today – take biblical principles and make them engaging and understandable for our students.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed gives you an amazing opportunity to share one of these parables with your students.

Use this youth group lesson to teach students that God can turn something small into something HUGE.

– *Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth*

LESSON ON JESUS' PARABLES

Bible: Matthew 13:31-32; 2 Corinthians 4:7-8

Bottom line: God can turn something small into something HUGE.

SUPPLIES

- Balloons (optional)
- Mustard seeds

OPENING GAME: SMALL TO HUGE

Have students form pairs and sit back to back.

Each student should pull their knees to their chest and have their feet flat on the floor with their arms linked from behind.

Next, have everyone stand up.

With a little bit of work, the students should be able to figure out how to stand up.

Give everyone a few opportunities to try this out. Then have the students form groups of four, sit back to back, and then try to stand up.

See how many different people you can add to the chain to see how big the group can be.

Do this until you have a giant group of students, who are unable to stand up.

It will be fun to watch them struggle.

Option: Blow up a few balloons to have on hand – filled to capacity right before they burst.

After students understand how to play the game, have them return to their groups of two and attempt to stand up with a balloon placed behind their backs.

The first team to stand up without popping their balloon – wins!

TEACH

Say: That game was easy at first, and then got quite a bit more challenging.

Even though we started small, eventually, our groups were too big to do anything.

In life, we all start small – literally, and eventually, we get bigger, older, and wiser.

There's a parable in the Bible that helps us understand how God can take something that's small and into turning it into something huge.

You see, Jesus was a gifted storyteller.

He spoke in “parables” people could understand because they were relatable to their everyday lives.

Let's take a look at one of Jesus' shorter parables found in Matthew 13.

The Bible says Jesus was sitting by a lake and such large crowds gathered that He got in a boat and sat in it while the people stood on the shore.

Read Matthew 13:31-32.

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

In this passage, Jesus is sharing how this smallest of seeds can blossom into something big.

Think about this... Jesus spent a small amount of time on earth, but the results were tremendous.

When you look at a tiny mustard seed, it is barely even visible.

Give each student a mustard seed.

The small mustard seed you are holding in your hand can grow to be a large tree between 6 to 20-feet tall, depending on the variety of mustard seed.

That might not seem like a big deal to you but look at how small it is.

At the time Jesus shared this He was about to start his earthly ministry.

Although it was small in numbers, it would have an impact on all of mankind.

The effects would be so huge, that throughout history everyone would see it.

Jesus took a group of disciples, just a few people, and changed the world... and our lives here today.

You may have times that you feel insignificant or very small.

Sometimes you may feel like there is not much you can do, but that couldn't be further from the truth!

God can use you to accomplish great things for His kingdom and only He knows your full potential.

In this parable, He was trying to show how something so small could grow significantly large.

God can take the smallest thing and make it huge; He can use you to grow the kingdom if you allow Him to work through your life.

Let's look at another passage that shows how He makes that happen.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-8.

...but we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.

God is doing the work in us – it's not us, it's Him.

When you surrender your life to Christ, you don't have to feel small like a mustard seed.

Because God is actually living inside of you – and He's not small.

God will use you to multiply His kingdom as you share His Gospel with those around you.

Sometimes that happens just by how you live around other people because you're different.

Other times you need to share what God puts in your heart with others.

You might face difficulties or circumstances that make you feel small, but remember that God knows who you are, what's going on, and He will never leave you.

When you think you are too small, remind yourself that you belong to an AWESOME HUGE GOD who will take something that appears small (YOU) and grow His kingdom.

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus talk in parables?
2. Do you ever feel like you are a mustard seed in this big world? If so, how?
3. What is the “kingdom” Jesus is talking about in the passage of scripture we read?
4. Who will be in this kingdom?
5. How can God use your life in His great plan?
6. Why do you think Jesus uses people to grow His kingdom?
7. What are some things that get in the way of you making an impact for the kingdom of God?
8. Did God equip you with everything you need to accomplish His work?
9. Where do we get our strength to help grow the kingdom?
10. What are some ways you can make an impact for the kingdom?



YOUTH MINISTRY LESSON ON COMPARISON

As you probably know, students constantly compare themselves to others. And if they don't do it themselves, someone else is happy to point out how they are different, better, or not as good as their peers.

It's overwhelming for students who feel like the world is pointing out their flaws or comparing them to everyone else – it can make them feel like they never measure up.

Students need to know they can find peace and contentment in how God views them – He loves them just the way they are! Use this youth group lesson to remind students – don't compare yourself to others, instead choose to be content.

- Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth

LESSON ON COMPARISON

Bible: Philippians 4:10-13

Bottom line: Don't compare yourself to others, instead choose to be content.

SUPPLIES

- 2 Large bags of wrapped candy
- Blindfolds (one per student)

OPENING ACTIVITY: CANDY STEAL

GAME PREP

Play this game in a large room or gym.

Divide the space into two halves and the students into two teams of equal size.

Empty the bags of wrapped candy and place the contents of each bag on opposite ends of the dividing line or opposite walls.

Have teams stand near the candy on opposite walls.

Make sure all the students are wearing a blindfold.

Option: Instead of using blindfolds, have the students walk on their knees.

HOW TO PLAY

Say: When I say GO, I want you to go to the opposing team's side, try to steal their wrapped candy, and bring it back to your team's side.

You can only grab one piece of candy at a time.

After 4 minutes we will stop and whichever team has the most candy wins the game.

There is no running allowed and be sure to have your hands out in front of you, so you don't run into anyone or a wall.

Repeat if time allows.

Let the winning team keep their candy – even if that means some students on the other team didn't win any candy.

TEACH

Say: I really wish all of you were able to enjoy the candy right now, but some of you might not have won in any the game.

That might not seem fair and you may be comparing what you don't have to what the person beside you is enjoying.

There are times when we find ourselves comparing what we have to what other people have – we call that *comparison*.

The reason we do this is that we desire what someone else has.

Whether it is physical appearance, possessions, or personality characteristics... what we are doing is playing the comparison game.

Nobody ever wins in the comparison game, because there is no end to it.

In fact, sometimes people chase after something that is temporary and unfulfilling.

In the game we just played, you played to win candy.

But once you had that candy, it only brought momentary satisfaction – it doesn't last forever.

Those who didn't receive candy might feel bummed because they don't have what you got.

Both of these feelings lead to unfulfillment and a desire for something you can't obtain.

What we should do is strive for contentment.

God has given every person exactly what they need.

His ultimate desire is not for you to find blessings in the possessions you own, but instead what we have in Christ.

Paul is an excellent example of this, let's look at what he has to say.

Read Philippians 4:10-13.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

In this passage, we see the apostle Paul speaking to the Philippian church.

Earlier in this letter, Paul expresses the value in knowing Christ, the joy of imitating Christ, and then we come to this part where Paul reminds us to be content in Christ.

Paul doesn't talk about the things he has, and he doesn't talk about the things he doesn't have.

Instead, he tells us that in every circumstance he has learned to be content.

There are going to be times in your life where you have more than you need, and there may be times when you don't have the things that you need.

Regardless of your situation, you should find contentment in Christ.

You might be tempted to compare what you have to others.

When you find yourself comparing something you have to what someone else has, you are no longer content with the blessings God has given to you.

In fact, you are essentially saying, "God, why didn't you give me this. I need it."

In essence what you are saying is "God, I think you got it wrong, I need these things."

So how do you fight off the temptation to not compare yourself to others?

Ask God to give you the strength to overcome the desire to compare yourself to others.

Verse 13 is a very popular verse, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

You might see people using this as a slogan in the sports world, like from an athlete looking for the strength he needs during a big moment.

Or maybe you have heard it from somebody who is about to face a difficult task, like a math test.

However, this verse is talking about contentment.

Being satisfied with the things you have or don't have.

Christ is enough, and you don't need anything else.

Are you living with this attitude?

Is Jesus enough, or do you tell yourself, “if I just had this, I would be happy”?

The cold hard truth is that because of our sinful nature, we will never have enough when we compare ourselves to others.

Be content that you have Jesus.

If you don't have a relationship with God, then comparison might be a big struggle in your life.

Jesus wants you to know that He can fill the void of what is missing from your life.

You don't have to live your life always trying to measure up to other people.

God loves you and He thinks you're really great.

Ask Him to help you find peace, joy, and contentment in knowing and trusting in Him.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some things that you often desire that others have?
2. When was the last time you gave something away that you wanted but knew that you didn't need?
3. Do you ever stress out because you don't have the same personality that others have? Why do you think that is?
4. When you compare yourself to others, do you find yourself imitating who they are? What do you do?
5. What are some things in your life that you compare with others?

6. Is it entirely wrong to want to have what someone else has? Why or why not?
7. What do we do if we are struggling with contentment?
8. Why do we struggle with contentment?
9. Often, we are not content in what we have, relationships, and social statuses. What are some other areas we are dissatisfied with in our lives?
10. How can Jesus help us not to compare ourselves to others?