



**LESSON
PACK**

FREEDOM RIDE

**12 LESSONS
OF FAITH
FOR TODAY'S
TEENS**

FREEDOM RIDE

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FREEDOM RIDE

12 Weeks of Sunday School or Youth Group Lessons for High-School Students

Introduction

If you're teaching high-school students, you know that they are often considered the most challenging of any age group! They are well on their way to adulthood, which is to say they don't want to hear from adults about how to do many things. Some have sweet dispositions; some are a bit cynical and withdrawn. Some will talk to you easily; more will not. You have sided yourself up to a very, very private universe—that of today's teenager. And you may sometimes wonder how God can keep them safe from the temptations that constantly creep around them.

Good news in all of this

It seems like the best news about our often silent and stubborn teenagers is that the age will pass. However, there is better news: God is able to work with them now. He works silently and privately at times, more than teens let on. Most every teenager who had a committed, fun, and caring youth group will remember the leader long into adulthood. That former student will bring up your name to his own children, over and over again.

God can and will work through you to meet the needs of these kids deemed “most challenging,” and we're here to give you some of the best help available.

Freedom Ride is Relevant and Able to Meet Many Needs

We are prepared to make your teenagers laugh and cry, talk and listen, and grow in Christ as they proceed through our lessons prepared by experts in teen behavior. Chapters at a glance include the following:

How to Get Started: Building a Sincere and Awesome Relationship with God

1. How to Talk with God (and not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself)
2. How to Hear God (and not scoot under the bed or break out in more hives)
3. Three Reasons We Don't Hear God (and how to get the garbage out of your ears)
4. Following God's Lead (and not ending up in Catawawawanga)

How to Behave: Keeping it Real All Week (especially Friday & Saturday night)

5. Loadies, Cokeheads, Drunks, Stoners (and the psychology of stooping so low)
6. Gossips and Other Trumpet Mouths (and how not to join the band)
7. Peer Pressure 1: You're Not a Zit (so don't let people squeeze you)

8. Peer Pressure 2: You're like a Balloon (so don't end up deflated)
9. Facebook Fights and Texting Wars (and how not to get your face blown off)

How to Grow: Getting Beyond the Self-Esteem Wars

10. Finding Your Gifts from God (and therefore some meaning in life)
11. Putting Yourself in the Other Guy's Shoes (and not catching his foot fungus)
12. Loving Your Brothers 'n' Sisters (even when you feel like clobbering each other)

Why Our Lessons are Different

Having observed the many trends and practices of today's Senior High Youth Groups, we are picking the best ones to help motivate teen involvement.

We have seen many churches let teens off the hook, maybe to a degree that isn't helpful. For example, some churches don't hold a senior-high class on Sunday mornings, having seen how most teens will just sleep in anyway. Some churches have a program for them instead on Wednesday or Thursday nights, realizing that it raises attendance and that the teenage brain seems to function better after sundown.

In many of these cases, the students play games, hang out, and eat pizza. Youth leaders feel that students will have only a nominal interest in commitment to their faith at this age - or that they won't come at all if things aren't completely fun. Friendships can be formed - which are dearly needed - and youth leadership relies on a hope that students will gain a more serious commitment to their faith in later years.

Other churches still plod along with what worked historically—trying to teach teenagers responsibility with serious sessions of Bible study and prayer. This type of youth leadership often springs from the Judeo-Christian belief that children become adults or are responsible for their actions, technically and spiritually, at the age of 14. Some churches believe the way to keep students from today's great pressures and temptations is to keep them active and studious in God's word, regardless of their feelings.

This would still be grand in an ideal world. Between pressures to succeed, extended school days, standardized testing, and finding colleges in an ailing economy, students are often bleary-eyed by the end of the week. Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest. We see the best approach for teens is to present Jesus as "rest for the souls," as he himself attests to in Matthew 11:28. Growing closer to God with some Biblical study will also help students see God as their "freedom ride," above temptation and pressure, as they take shelter in his wings. (Psalm 17:8).

For Your Students

We've designed our format so that your students will have a lesson that's about 15 minutes long, and often includes fun demonstrations that relate to God's presence in their lives. Some are serious; some are zany; some are downright disgusting (also very appealing at this age), having to do with "see-food" and zits.

Once they're intrigued by how God works in all areas, our lessons are followed by small group discussions. These sometimes involve Bible lookups and always involve something that's helpful in getting to know God, themselves, and each other better. As teens often learn best by talking among themselves, the small group discussions give them the fodder to talk at length, with 45 minutes being the average time.

Finally, as we want to help you encourage them to be in touch with God all week, not to be "schizophrenic Christians" who behave well in youth group only. Hence we're providing a Help All Week section, which encourages some journaling or devotions, with suggestions on a take-home sheet.

Our one-hour format works well in youth groups and Sunday school.

Our lessons and small group discussion formats can be completed in an hour. This means that if your church follows a youth group format, two-hour meetings on a week night, you will still have that first hour for them to loosen up, play games, and eat. If you're using a Sunday school format, our format may be just perfect to meet your time schedule.

For You as Leader

We realize that you can best serve your teens when you are best prepared. Therefore, we are serving you *first* in our six-part format. Included are:

- **Lesson Capsule** which gives you an at-a-glance view of what students will learn from the lesson and why it's important.
- **Materials** is a bulleted list that provides everything you will need for the lesson, small group discussion, and Help-All-Week sections. Often what you'll need is quite easy to gather, as most lessons involve household objects plus things from a general supply closet.
- **Preparations** will show you in a few sentences what you need to do before the lesson to make it run smoothly. For the small group discussions and help all week, you will only need to print out or photocopy the sheets students will be working with, and those are listed plainly by title.
- **Lessons contain teachers' words in bold.** If you're a teacher who likes to say things in your own way, these can serve as a guide. If you are intimidated about what to say (Who could blame you in this age group?), the text is there for you to read. If you are reading, we suggest that you read through it once or twice in your prep time so that in front of students, you are adding your own inflections and your own dynamic spirit to the words.
- **Small group Discussion** works even if you only have a few students. Groups can be as small as two or as large as five. As you know your own students, you may decide to allow friends to sit together, stir up the mix, or split by gender in certain cases so that discussions aren't hampered by self-consciousness.
- **Help All Week** should be given out at the end of small group discussion so that the topics can become part of the discussion if students want to get ideas together for the week.

- **Class Conclusion** is a means to have students briefly look back on what they learned that night. It's an important part of reinforcement. It is also a chance to let them know how it will build on what comes in the following week. Often, curiosity about what comes next will bring them back! All Class Conclusions contain **teachers' words in bold**, which you can use as a guide or read verbatim.

How We're Keeping it Interesting

We all know how hard it is to keep students' attention when they're together in a group—and when teachers in school have demanded their attention all week. We're helping you by providing the subjects they need to hear about most or what would be especially interesting.

As lesson titles show, texting, Facebook, peer pressure, gossip, and heavy-duty partying are all addressed in these lessons, with perhaps some of the best practical and spiritual solutions available. Kids tend to listen when the subjects are about them—and when they may be getting help in critical areas, perhaps for the first time!

Encourage the use of their most cherished 'toys'

Using their favorite everyday tools will help students see the Bible as relevant. You should encourage students to use iPhones, cell phones, and laptops in small group discussions. Their everyday toys make lookups so easy that today's students have a great deal more time to discuss what they mean and how they apply, which is a great asset! *Olive Tree* is an iPhone app that makes lookups easy, and students with iPhones can be encouraged to download it and help in class. If you can bring your laptop or find a student willing to do so, great links to easy and insightful lookups include www.biblos.com and www.biblegateway.com.

Encourage them to value each other

As the teenage years provide pressures, temptations, and hardships not known to any other age group, keep in mind how much your teens need each other. Our small group discussions will help them know each other better while learning how to live for Christ. One of the joys of teaching teens is discovering that there are some *who really do want to walk with Jesus, who already rely on him with faith, and who want to learn*. One youth leader called his group "The Chosen Few." True, they may not be the majority, but they are special. Use our tools to build self-esteem and unity as well as faith. This will also be a cherished way to grow your group!

How to Give Teenagers Your Best

Psalm 32:8 God promises, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." God wants teenagers to follow and understand him. If you see yourself merely as a conduit and him as the teacher, you will find yourself able to enjoy your teenagers and create fond memories right along with them. Pray for God's instruction and counsel. Keep students on the golden path with our lessons, guides, and suggestions, and you'll find that working with teens is a highlight of your week, and all the foreseen challenges are in his hands!

LESSON #1

HOW TO TALK WITH GOD

(And not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself)

Lesson Capsule

Teenagers often feel uncomfortable talking to strangers or kids they don't know well. How much more awkward might it feel talking to the Almighty? Yet a relationship with the Most High, like any other great friendship, involves conversation. In this fun first lesson using tongue twisters, students will learn not only why it feels awkward to speak to God, but what to focus on to obliterate those weird feelings.

Materials

Class Activity

- Add-on file: Tongue Twisters
- Candy prize for winner, winners (or all, depending on your budget)
- Small basket, like a collection plate basket
- Printer paper
- Marker pens

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- "Why God Likes Talking to Us," one copy for each student
- Pens

Help All Week

- "Make Up Your Own Lord's Prayer," one copy for each student (double sided)

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Cut up the tongue twisters and put them in a basket, folded or rolled-up so that students can't see what they say.
2. Take the 10 parts of the Lord's Prayer that are numbered and in CAPS in the Lesson. Write each of those statements on the printer paper or print them on your printer in large type. Throw in some colorful illustrations to add flavor.

Lesson 1: How to Talk to God

(And not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself)

LESSON

Did you ever have a day so awful that you just wished God would come down from the clouds in heaven, sweep you up, and you could just go up to heaven for a little vacation?

Did you ever have friends get mad at you? Have people ever made fun of you?

Have you ever gone on Facebook to see that someone was being mean? Trying to provoke you into a Facebook fight?

Have you ever had friends who were trying to pressure you into doing stuff that you knew was wrong?

And while it was going on, did God feel like a far-off person who sat up in the sky and just kind of stared at you?

Over the next 12 weeks, we're going to take you on a "freedom ride." We know that being a teenager is high stress. We're going to teach you how to get away from the stress and feel a newly found sense of freedom from it.

That last thing I mentioned—feeling like God is a far-off and staring individual, we're going to start there. Because nothing could be further from the truth. God loves you more than the best dad.

He loves you for you. He hears everything you say to him—and to others.

He knows the drill, that you're not perfect. Jesus said in Mark 2:17, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Jesus came for the stressed-out, the anxious, the picked-upon, the pressured. You will never have a better friend.

This first leg of our freedom ride involves learning how to speak to God and Jesus, and if you're used to speaking to them, how to speak in a deeper way. Jesus doesn't bite, and he does hear. You can talk to him without breaking out in hives—and actually enjoy yourself. Let's try an experiment that shows how things can go.

Ask for a volunteer who either wants to have public speaking as part of his or her job someday and doesn't mind it.

Have that student reach in the jar without looking, pull out a tongue twister, and try to repeat it THREE TIMES.

If the student says the tongue twister without stumbling three times, she holds on to it and sits down. If she doesn't get it, she sits down and may give it to a volunteer who also wants to try it. Keep passing the

tongue twister until someone is able to say it THREE TIMES. The person who finally says all correctly gets to keep it and sit down.

Go to the next volunteer. Let that person pick a new tongue twister from the basket and try to repeat it THREE TIMES. Repeat the process above until everyone has picked and/or tried a tongue twister.

Have a prize for the person who has retained the most tongue twisters at the end.

When you're saying a tongue twister, you might feel some of the same feelings as the first few times you try to talk to God - and I mean really talk to him.

- You might stumble over your words a bit.
- You might feel like you got it all wrong, or you'll get it all wrong with what you say.
- It might feel really awkward.
- You might feel stupid or like you want to laugh, or like people would laugh at you if they saw you talking to God.

God is huge. He is ancient. He did create the universe. There is a split between the natural and spiritual realms because we mess things up, and he never does.

If you're new to Christ or you haven't been paying attention to him for a while, you might be thinking, "What do I say to this person if I talk to him for real?" Or "How do I do it and not break out in hives?"

Guess what? Some of the most important people in human history have asked the very same question. In Luke 11, we find Jesus' own disciples watching him off in a distance.

"What's he doing over there, all by himself?" one of them probably asked.

"He's talking to God," another answered. "The usual." And it's quite likely they all just stared... And thoughts probably ran through their heads:

- "When I talk to God, it doesn't feel great. I feel small and awkward and stupid."
- "The way he does it, it has to be fun, or he wouldn't do it so much. "
- "I would like to talk to God and not feel awkward and stupid. I would like to talk to God the way that he talks to God."

"Hey, Jesus!"

"Yo."

"What are we supposed to say when we talk to God?"

We're calling this lesson "How to talk to God (and not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself), because speaking with the Creator of the Universe is supposed to be fun! Hello! It's supposed to be joyous! It's not supposed to feel like a tongue twister!

Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. But a lot of people have had the wrong idea about the Lord's Prayer. Jesus wasn't trying to teach them to recite. In fact he warned in the Sermon on the Mount, "When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again."

He was suggesting topics because he knows that people can feel really stupid, and he wanted to help out. Let's look at the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Back then, that was like saying, "Father, you are very, very awesome and cool." You're supposed to:

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up so the others can see while you're talking.

1. *Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name* = THINK UP SOME NICE WAY TO SAY HELLO.

Thy kingdom come has some history to it. The disciples knew what it meant—the Messiah would bring peace on earth. It means, "I can't wait for you to come back and all the horrible stuff in the world to end."

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

2. *Thy kingdom come* = TELL HIM YOU ARE EXCITED TO SEE HIM SOME DAY.

Thy will be done. We all like to have fun. But the best way to have the longest, most peaceful, and most enduring fun is to get in line with what he wants. It means, "Show me the way, every day."

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

3. *Thy will be done* = TELL HIM TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH SOMETHING DIFFICULT.

Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus was great for not getting all in a sweat over tomorrow. He taught in the synagogue the day before he got killed! As he says in Matthew 6:34, "...do not worry about tomorrow...Each day has enough trouble of its own." It means thanks for what I have—today—and make sure today works out good.

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

4. *Give us this day our daily bread* = TELL HIM WHAT YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR AND WHAT YOU WANT.

And forgive us our trespasses. Tell him if you feel guilty about something. Or stupid. Or embarrassed. He doesn't want us feeling guilty or stupid or embarrassed. That isn't why he died.

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

5. *And forgive us our trespasses*= TELL HIM TO TAKE AWAY YOUR GUILTY FEELINGS AND WHAT CAUSED THEM.

As we forgive those who trespass against us. Let go of whatever is stealing your joy. Did someone do something to you? Are you fuming about it? Then, that person has won. That person stole your joy and your peace with yourself. Jesus wants to you have that.

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

6. *As we forgive those who trespass against us*= TELL HIM TO TAKE AWAY ANGRY FEELINGS.

Lead us not into temptation. THAT ought to be the biggest prayer a teenager has. You're surrounded by temptations—on the hour—to choose something over him. When you look back in 40 years, trust me: You may not remember what you chose over him. But you will remember making the choice. It's unnatural, when you're his. Think of things coming up like parties and sports and school.

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

7. *Lead us not into temptation*= ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU FROM DOING THE WRONG THING.

Deliver us from evil. Protect us—from others, as well as from our own desires to be awful sometimes.

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

8. *Deliver us from evil*= ASK FOR A WALL OF PROTECTION AROUND YOU.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. That is just some of those old-fashioned words again. To us they mean, "You are the strongest, most awesome, and I know you can do all the things I just asked."

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

9. *For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever* = TELL HIM YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIS LISTENING AND HIS POWER.

Amen! Amen actually means SO BE IT! Or TRULY! Or TOTALLY! Or EMPHATICALLY! Or WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS ALL TRUE!

Give the sheet containing the statement below to a student to hold up:

10. *Amen* = SIGN OFF IN A WAY THAT TELLS HIM YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT ALL THIS.

FREEDOM RIDE

Have the student who won the tongue twisters try another one. Let her say it until she gets it without stumbling.

When talking to God, it can start out feeling like we're stumbling all over and sounding awkward. If we practice, it starts to feel normal-and good.

Conclusion:

You can say your own version of the Lord's Prayer, using the suggestions of Jesus to remind you of what you might want to say. The important thing is not to simply utter words. God wants to hear what you really think and want and wonder about and are afraid of. He wants you to sense him when you're in trouble so that he can get you out of it.

Lesson #1: How to Talk with God

TONGUE TWISTERS

Cut up these tongue twisters, fold them, and put them in a basket for choosing:

1. White eraser? Right away, sir!
2. Tim, the thin twin tinsmith.
3. Sure the ship's shipshape, sir.
4. Strange strategic statistics.
5. The sinking steamer sank.
6. Sam's shop stocks short spotted socks.
7. Shy Shelly says she shall sew sheets.
8. Mix, Miss, Mix!
9. Fat frogs flying past fast.
10. Lesser leather never weathered wetter weather better.
11. What noise annoys a noisy oyster? A noisy noise annoys a noisy oyster.
12. Can you imagine an imaginary menagerie manager imagining managing an imaginary menagerie?

Lesson 1: How to Talk to God

(And not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Why God Likes Talking to Us

To really “get” the value of talking with God, we first have to understand what he feels for us (as much as we can). These scripture LOOKUPS and questions should help.

1. Genesis 3:8 implies that God was in the habit of taking on human form to walk in the garden with Adam and Eve. Why would God like to walk and talk with humans? Why do you hang out with your friends? Why would God want to hang out with us?

LOOKUP: Zephaniah 3:17

2. Think of how you enjoy your friends. How is God’s love the same? How is it different?

LOOKUP: John 15:13

3. How close to death would you let yourself come to save one of your friends? How close to death would one of your parents come to save you? Does God love you more than friends and parents?

LOOKUP: Isaiah 49:15-16

4. Do you think that God misses you when you don’t talk to him for days or even weeks?

LOOKUP: Isaiah 30:18

5. Is God in love with you? How do you want to treat someone when you’re in love with them? Why are some of the reasons God holds back on blessing us?

LOOKUP: Deuteronomy 4:24

6. Have you ever been in love or had a mad crush? Have you ever been in a situation where someone else came along and went out with that person? Were you ever so jealous that you felt like your face or chest was burning? The saying goes, “You can’t feel truly jealous unless you’ve felt love.”

Lesson 1: How to Talk to God

(And not break out in hives and actually enjoy yourself)

HELP ALL WEEK Make Up Your Own Lord's Prayer

Below are the 10 parts of the Lord's Prayer and what each means. Use the blank lines to fill in what you would like to say that makes it personal to your life. You can use this as a prayer guide all week.

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name...

1. THINK UP SOME NICE WAY TO SAY HELLO TO HIM OR START THINGS OFF:

Thy kingdom come.

2. TELL HIM IN YOUR OWN WORDS IF YOU ARE EXCITED TO SEE HIM SOME DAY:

Thy will be done.

3. TELL HIM OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU'RE UNCLEAR ON WHAT TO DO. ASK FOR HIS GUIDANCE:

Give us this day our daily bread.

4. TELL HIM WHAT YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR—AS WELL AS WHAT YOU WANT:

And forgive us our trespasses...

5. TELL HIM ANYTHING YOU MESSED UP AND TO TAKE AWAY YOUR GUILTY-STUPID-EMBARRASSED FEELINGS:

(see other side)

FREEDOM RIDE

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

6. FOR YOUR SAKE AS WELL AS THE HURTFUL PERSON, TELL HIM WHO MESSED WITH YOU AND TO TAKE AWAY THAT PAIN AND SUFFERING:

Lead us not into temptation.

7. THINK OF THINGS COMING UP LIKE PARTIES AND SPORTS AND SCHOOL SITUATIONS. ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU FROM DOING THE WRONG THING:

Deliver us from evil.

8. ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU FROM ANYTHING YOU'RE FEARFUL OR NERVOUS ABOUT:

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

9. TELL HIM IN YOUR OWN WORDS THAT YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIM—THAT HE HEARS AND UNDERSTANDS AND HAS THE POWER:

Amen!

10. SIGN OFF IN A WAY THAT TELLS HIM YOU MEAN IT AND YOU'RE THANKFUL FOR THAT:

Class Conclusion

It comes as a surprise to some that God really enjoys us. He likes our company. He designed us to hang out with us, even though things have gotten messed up on our planet. We get into trouble sometimes, but God does not design something that isn't cool.

He wants to take our troubles away, whether it's our own guilt or somebody else's meanness or sickness or fear or poverty. So, we need to start the joy work of really talking to him if we haven't already. And next week we'll talk about something that seems a lot harder—hearing what he says back.

How'd you like a friend here on earth who never says squat, and you had to do all the talking? Is that any fun?

We'll talk about that next time. For now, talk to Jesus like a real friend! Every day!

LESSON #2

HOW TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

(And not scoot under the bed or break out in more hives)

Lesson Capsule

It's one thing for teenagers to speak to God without having fits about what they're saying. It's quite another to listen for what he might say back. Christians can move into years of maturity and yet admit, quite frankly, that they don't hear his voice in their hearts or don't bother to listen for it. But certain truths we hold to be self-evident: If we're going to make a friend of God and Jesus that's beyond all friendships, it's going to be a two-way conversation. This lesson with basketballs and kazooos will help students realize that hearing from God is a normal part of one's walk—if one knows how to clear one's heart and head.

Materials

Class Activity

- Add-on: Word-of-God Whispers
- Small basket, like a collection plate basket
- Candy prize for winner, winners (or all, depending on your budget)
- Sheets of printer paper
- Marker pen
- Two basketballs or other bouncing balls
- Kazoo

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- "God's Voice or My Imagination? Eight Ways to Tell," one copy for each student
- Help All Week
- "Prayer Requests and Answers", one copy for each student (double-sided)

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Cut up the Word-of-God Whispers and put them in a basket, folded or rolled-up so that students can't see what they say.
2. Write out THREE WAYS TO HEAR GOD BETTER on individual sheets of paper. You will find them in the lesson, all in CAPS.

How to Hear God's Voice

(Without scooting under the bed or breaking out in more hives)

LESSON

Like last week, tell students they're going to play a game—only this one might appeal to more shy people: They have to stand up before the class-but they'll have company, and they hardly have to make any noise!

Have that student reach in the basket without looking, pull out a Word-of-God Whisper. Have three other students come forward. Have two of them bounce balls and another play "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" on the kazoo.

The student should whisper the Word of God while the others are bouncing and playing the kazoo, and they and the remaining students should try and guess what the student whispered.

Have small candy prizes for the people who can repeat most of the whispers correctly with all this clatter going on.

Why was the whispering person so hard to hear? Because of everything going on around here. Too many distractions.

How much more challenging can it be to hear the voice of God in our hearts? He'd have to speak pretty loud to be heard above all the ruckus in our lives. It's no wonder we can't hear him. And if we did, we'd probably scoot under the bed! Or break out in hives!

God does speak clearly in many people's hearts, and depending on where we're at, we do have the ability to understand him. But many Christians who really commune with God and Jesus feel that they need to turn off the TV. Some say they sense God telling them to turn off that iPod or cell phone or television.

Why might God ask that, if he's trying to tell you something? Is he just all conceited and wanting the spotlight? No, he knows we can hear him better in the quiet.

Why is it so hard for teenagers to get quiet these days? They're used to having a lot of input. They feel disconnected from friends without their electronics.

The problem is that when life is so loud and there's so much input, we can sort of get disconnected from God because we can't hear him clearly.

Have a second student come up front, take a Word-of-God whisper, and again, have the bouncing and kazoo going on while he or she is whispering. See if more people don't get it if he or she whispers it a few times.

Notice some things this time. Some of you were leaning in toward the whisperer so you could get what was being said. Some of you were really giving the whisperer all the attention you could.

If we “lean in” to God, if we give him all our attention, it becomes easier to hear him. If we’re made anxious by being alone in the quiet, we need to remember that before radio and television came into being, less than 100 years ago, we lived in a pretty serene world. Most of the noises heard during a day were natural ones—either human voices, or birds, or the wind in the trees, or thunder. We need to return to normalcy once in a while, and talking to God is a great time to “balance out.”

Have a third student come up and whisper a Word-of-God without any of the noise and clatter. See how many can now hear and repeat the student.

Here are three things that can help you hear God’s voice better.

ONE: GET ALONE IN THE QUIET WITH HIM.

And relax. The Holy Spirit is called the Great Comforter. We’re supposed to feel comforted in God’s presence, though that isn’t always what we’re feeling at first.

The bouncing balls and kazoo don’t just symbolize noises. They symbolize thoughts that are distracting us that come with electronics or memories or life in general. Put your cell phone under your pillow. Shut your laptop. If you find yourself thinking, “Did I remember to bring my science book home?” tell yourself that a few minutes alone with God can bring you confidence. Even if you forgot your book, you may have the confidence after some time with him that The Creator of the Universe can help you get it.

TWO: DON’T EXPECT ANYTHING WEIRD.

God is not going to speak aloud. He’s not going to scare you. He’s not going to judge you. He’s not going to prophesy in your face about whom you’re going to marry or how your dog is going to die. He’s not going to give you bad news or “yell” at you.

People are so not used to being in the quiet in our culture, that they can start freaking themselves out. But being alone with God can make you totally relax, and it makes him very happy!

In Matthew 18:12-13, Jesus says, “... If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.”

If you are trying to talk with God for the first time in a while, he is happier about that than about the 100 people nearby who do it all the time.

Just ask him a simple question: “Lord, what do I do about the kid who keeps throwing my sneakers on top of the lockers? I hate him! How am I supposed to not hate him and what should I do?”

God talks to us in many ways. He can put images of the right things to do in our heads, sort of like a daydream. Some people claim to hear “words” in their hearts, something like remembering a song that you’ve heard on the radio or the lines from your favorite movie.

Others claim to get an idea they didn't have earlier. Others claim to simply feel a state of calm, and they wake up the next morning with a new thought they didn't have before.

The important thing is that you ask - without any fears or weird expectations - and this final thing:

THREE: YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT HE WANTS TO SPEAK TO YOU.

Repeat after me: "Father, I am SO thankful that you are happy when I come to talk to you."

Have students shut their eyes and repeat the phrase with you a couple of times.

Sometimes just saying the truth can help to you truly feel it. At first, that may feel strange. "Oh, you big liar," you might tell yourself. "God does not enjoy talking to you!"

Tell that thought to go "bounce around" somewhere else!

Or your mind might be telling yourself, "Yes. I did that really bad thing yesterday. He's disgusted. He won't speak to me today."

God may not be thrilled with what you did yesterday, but he is thrilled that you are talking to him today! He may know you're planning on doing the same thing tomorrow! Maybe he can help you see WHY you want to do certain things and help you gain greater understanding. He may be the only thing that can break you out of a bad habit.

In Philippians 1:6, Paul says, I am "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." We all have faulty starting places. You can't shock God.

Let's discuss in small groups the big major question: How do I know it's God talking, and if it's my imagination? Everyone struggles with this a little. The Word of God and a little common sense—which God gave us for good reason—can help us with that.

How to Hear God's Voice

(Without scooting under the bed or breaking out in more hives)

LESSON 2 ADD-ON: WORD-OF-GOD WHISPERS

Cut up these Word-of-God Whispers, fold them, and put them in a basket for choosing. Have students take turns whispering them with the basketballs bouncing and a kazoo humming.

For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior..."

-- **Zephaniah 3:17**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

--**John 10:11**

I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

-- **Isaiah 49:16**

So the LORD must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the LORD is a faithful God.

--**Isaiah 30:18**

The LORD your God is a devouring fire; he is a jealous God.

--**Deuteronomy 4:24**

Small Group Discussion

GOD'S VOICE OR MY IMAGINATION? Eight Ways to Tell

If you're new at listening for God's voice, here is a checklist of ways that you can tell whether it's him or your imagination! Take turns reading each explanation and completing the Bible LOOKUPS that are included with each one.

1. IT'S NOT TOO HARD.

Say you're struggling with some of your clothes and are feeling too naked or immodest. God is not going to tell you to toss all your clothes in a Dumpster and get by with one pair of ugly sweatpants and a frumpy t-shirt to prove yourself to him. However, the forces of darkness love for you to think these things! Therefore you could imagine it.

LOOKUP: Matthew 11:28

2. IT'S NOT THE EASY WAY OUT

Let's say you got in lazy mode and stayed online all night when you should have been studying for your science test the next day. God is not going to tell you to stay home from school the next day if you ask him, "What now?" For one, the natural consequences of actions are sometimes how he lets us learn. Second, God loves the teacher too, and would feel bad to put her to extra work (giving a make-up test and chasing you around about it) if it wasn't her fault. At worst, you flunk. At best, he could provide you with some words to say to the teacher so that she can cut you some slack.

LOOKUP: Proverbs 13:4

LOOKUP: Proverbs 14:23

3. IT DOESN'T CONTRADICT SOMETHING JESUS SAID

God's voice is often personal. The statement may not be in the Bible, but it won't contradict it either. When in doubt, look it up. There are many ways to surf these days and find out what the Bible says about a certain subject. If you're feeling that God impressed you with something that is contrary to his word, it might be wishful thinking.

LOOKUP: Malachi 3:6

4. IT MAKES SENSE

God's voice brings clarity, not confusion. If God knows the numbers of hairs on your head, he also knows what you're able to process and what you're not. He won't speak over your head. What you hear may make you think, "Wow! Why didn't I think of that?"

LOOKUP: 2 Timothy 1:7

LOOKUP: 1 Corinthians 14:33

5. IT WILL HELP, NOT HURT

One time, a teenager prayed for forgiveness for kicking a kid who wore leg braces. He thought he felt God impressing him to apologize to the parents. The kid had recently died of complications related to his illness. The parents were totally unaware of the kicking incident, and in light of their grief, it may have been really upsetting to hear about it. The teenager did well to reject that as his imagination. God doesn't give advice that is more hurtful than helpful.

LOOKUP: Psalm 32:8

6. IT BRINGS PEACE

Upon Jesus' death and resurrection, he sent the Holy Spirit, who is known as the Great Comforter. When you pray, you should feel comforted after a while, even if the situation is tense.

LOOKUP: Philippians 4:6-7

7. SOMETIMES IT IS SMARTER THAN YOU

Some Christians claim to really enjoy God's voice because, while the answer makes clear sense to them, it often seems a little smarter than the person could have dreamed up on his own. It's like a revelation that makes him say, "Wow! I could surely NOT have thought of that!"

LOOKUP: Proverbs 3:5-6

8. IT LASTS

What God tells you tends to stick with you. Things that you imagine go away. God's word stays in your heart. Many Christians claim to remember things they've heard from God years or even decades after they heard it. It helped them in some way that they just can't forget.

LOOKUP: Hebrews 13:8

Help All Week

PRAYER REQUESTS AND ANSWERS:

Lots of Christians keep 'prayer journals,' lists of things they bring up to the Lord and what answers they get. Again, here are the parts of the Lord's Prayer and what each means. This week, instead of just filling in what you want to say, on the back portion, fill in answers to prayer that you may have heard, felt, stumbled into "seemingly by accident," were strongly impressed to do, etc.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.

1. THINK UP SOME NICE WAY TO SAY HELLO TO HIM TO START THINGS OFF:

2. *Thy kingdom come*

3. TELL HIM IN YOUR OWN WORDS IF YOU ARE EXCITED TO SEE HIM SOME DAY:

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

4. TELL HIM OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU'RE UNCLEAR ON WHAT TO DO. ASK FOR HIS GUIDANCE:

Give us this day our daily bread.

5. TELL HIM WHAT YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR—AS WELL AS WHAT YOU WANT:

And forgive us our trespasses...

6. TELL HIM ANYTHING YOU MESSED UP AND TO TAKE AWAY ANY GUILTY-STUPID-EMBARRASED FEELINGS:

...as we forgive those who trespass against us.

7. FOR YOUR SAKE AS WELL AS THE HURTFUL PERSON, TELL HIM WHO MESSED WITH YOU AND TO TAKE AWAY YOUR PAIN AND SUFFERING:

Lead us not into temptation.

8. THINK OF THINGS COMING UP LIKE PARTIES AND SPORTS AND SCHOOL SITUATIONS. ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU FROM DOING THE WRONG THING:

Deliver us from evil.

9. ASK HIM TO PROTECT YOU FROM ANYTHING YOU'RE FEARFUL OR NERVOUS ABOUT:

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever...

10. TELL HIM IN YOUR OWN WORDS THAT YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIM—THAT HE HEARS AND UNDERSTANDS AND HAS THE POWER:

Amen!

11. SIGN OFF IN A WAY THAT TELLS HIM YOU MEAN IT AND YOU'RE THANKFUL FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO HELP YOU:

Answers to Prayer

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Class Conclusion

A lot of Christians talk to God. Listening to him is a skill that some people get right away, while others have to wait. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't come easily; it does appear that those who honestly believe they can and will hear God have the best results.

Rest assured that he always hears you—wants to hear from you, and enjoys hearing from you.

Next time we'll talk about how you're never alone. You're never really lost in a crowd.

For now, talk to Jesus like a real friend! Every day!

LESSON #3 **THREE REASONS WE DON'T HEAR GOD**

(And how to get the garbage out of your ears)

Lesson Capsule

It's fairly easy to speak to God and Jesus. It's quite another thing to hear God speak back, even if our hearts are listening for it. Beyond "is this my imagination?" there are things that clog our spiritual ears. An illustration using a flashlight in a dark room can help students see how he becomes the friend they need and the beacon they long for.

Materials

Class Activity

- Flashlight
- Dark room
- Sheets of printer paper
- Marker pen, some of them light-colored such as very light blue or pink
- Last week's Small Group Discussion sheet "God's Voice or My Imagination: Eight Ways to Tell," several copies for those in need

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- One copy for each student of the following:
 - A. Prayer #1 and Possible Answers
 - B. Prayer #2 and Possible Answers
 - C. Answer Sheet for Prayer #1
 - D. Answer Sheet for Prayer #2

Help All Week

- Your Own Prayer Requests and Answers (double-sided)

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Write out the following scriptures in large letters on individual sheets of paper: Use a highlighter or lighter colored pen, like a very light blue or pink, that will be harder to see—just in case the room you are using can't be darkened enough to hide the words:

FREEDOM RIDE

Scripture #1:

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. – Psalm 32:8

Scripture #2:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; --John 10:27

2. Write your “signs” with one word on a sheet of paper in dark marker (easy to read):

- FEAR
- TRANSFERENCE
- LOW SELF ESTEEM

Lesson 3: Three Reasons We Don't Hear God

(And how to get the garbage out of your ears)

LESSON

So how many of you tried talking to God and listening for his voice last week? How did it go?

It may be that you have several great stories come forth. However it is more likely that students gave up quickly or struggled, (a) with their imaginations versus God's voice, and (b) some new fears.

They may want to ask you whether a certain impression of an answered prayer was God or their imaginations. Use the Small Group Discussion list from last week, "God's Voice or My Imagination? Eight Ways to Tell," and walk one student through to either dismiss or feel more confident.

Acknowledge all stories and confirm that *hearing* is a much more challenging skill than talking.

Following God's voice means getting the most out of the relationship. It's an important skill to develop because of how Christianity is defined. All other religions in the world are based on (a) what you believe, and (b) what you practice. *Ours is the only religion in the world based on a living God, a real and historic man, and a RELATIONSHIP.* Christianity is less about what you do and more about that friendship, that father-son relationship, or however it's easiest for you to see. We don't earn our way into heaven. It is bought and paid for.

To grow in Christ means to know him better and enjoy spending time with him. Obviously, many Christians, even devout ones, do not find prayer "enjoyable," which is why so many go running to God with a pressing need and then forget about prayer when things are going well. Which may be why he allows us to get pressing needs!

If you have found prayer boring, intimidating, or just not all that moving, there are reasons for that. Let's talk about three of them today. I can demonstrate some of this best with the lights out.

Have a student turn off the lights. Have him stand by a blank wall and hold up one of the two scriptures written in highlighter pen in the dark. Turn on the flashlight and run it swiftly back and forth, on and away from the scripture, so that it acts like a strobe light. Ask students to guess what it says, and the first person to get it right wins. Hold up the second scripture and repeat.

When several people have guessed, turn the lights back on so they can see it.

This is very similar to last week, when we were trying to hear above bouncing balls and a kazoo. This week, people came closer to the wall, and looked with all their attention. The truth remains: If you draw closer to God, you are more likely to hear what he has to say.

The flashlight is a symbol in this case, just like the bouncing balls and kazoo symbolized something last time. What did the balls and kazoo symbolize? Distractions—electronics, thoughts, noises.

This week, we're looking at ourselves - and some of the things we might tend to think of while we're praying. They're just "flashes," just thoughts that break through and then might go away again, but they're back 30 seconds later. They have to do with our relationship with Jesus.

Hold up your sign that says FEAR.

Flash Thought #1: Fear. You're afraid of talking to Jesus for some reason.

Give the sign to one of the students to keep holding up where everyone can see.

You're afraid he's going to yell at you for something. You're afraid he's mad at you because you're not perfect. Here's a really big one: You're afraid he might tell you to do something awful.

We call these "Jonah moments." God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell all the heathen there to quit acting up, feel ashamed for all their bad behavior, and come back to God. Jonah was all "Whoa. No way. Those guys are scary. I will embarrass myself." The people of Nineveh were like the bullies of the Tigris River. When Jonah tried to hide from God, he got swallowed by the whale and puked up on the banks of Nineveh. Stunning coincidence!

The story of Jonah is in the Bible because it was highly unusual, even in the days of the prophets, and because God's behavior was highly unusual. We are the norm. Most Christian teenagers are young in Christ. Just like parents don't ask young children to drive cars, God does not ask young Christians to do dangerous, stupid, potentially embarrassing, and awful things.

If you're afraid he is upset with you for something and therefore speaking to him will be uncomfortable, this relates to Flash Thought #2.

Hold up your sign that says TRANSFERENCE.

Flash thought #2: Transference. You're imagining God is like a parent you have or know who is far from perfect.

Give the sign to another student, to keep holding up where everyone can see.

It's a statistic: Kids with very stable, attentive parents have less trouble imagining a kind and welcoming God. A parent who yells or is inconsistent or does not have a trusting relationship with the kids often raises kids who distrust God. People tend to imagine along the lines of their experiences. Kids with a parent prone to anger will often imagine God as angry. Kids with an absentee parent can have trouble believing that God will help them at all. It does help to be aware of "transference." It helps you consider what might actually be real. God's love far exceeds even the best parents. He loves you even more.

Hold up your sign that says LOW SELF ESTEEM.

Flash Thought #3: You don't deserve to hear God, and therefore, you can't.

Give the sign to a final student, to hold up where everyone can see.

Low self-esteem is epidemic in teenagers. Let's look at why this is. Most of you go to school all day with hundreds or even thousands of other kids. You tend to feel like a number, like the invisible person, like you're lost in a crowd. School is not generally helpful in making you feel special. Facebook now has a feature called "compare your friends," where you can find that people are comparing you with someone else and asking questions like "Who is the better catch?" The media are not good at making you feel special either.

A philosopher once said, "Comparison is the root of all unhappiness." Yet we're in school all day, surrounded by people to compare to ourselves to. We're watching television or on the social media a lot of the night, comparing ourselves to movie stars, models, sports heroes, rock stars, or watching our friends' Facebook pages and seeing how their pictures stack up to ours.

In our world, it's hard to understand that God loves us and enjoys watching us—individually—and wants to commune with us anytime we desire. He is not comparing us to each other. He isn't judging us at all.

You're not a number, a Facebook photo, a statistic out there in TV land. Galatians 4:7 says, "...you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." We need to think of ourselves as the princes and princesses the Bible says that we are.

Why did so many people love reading the Harry Potter series? Isn't it because a normal, just-a-number kid gets incredible power? Don't we all want that royal position and the power to enter eternal life? Harry Potter was written for people who want what we Christians have!

When you talk to God, don't be afraid he will yell, be mad, make weird demands, or think some off-the-wall thing like, "Why would I want to talk to her?"

Remember to thank him for being so glad you came before him. Talk to him like a good friend, and listen. When you hear him, you will hear kind and merciful things.

Let's discuss in small groups some kids who tried talking to God...and whether they actually got his messages or whether they had garbage in their ears.

3 Reasons We Don't Hear God

(And how to get the garbage out of your ears)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION **Which is the Real Answer to These Prayers?**

Special instructions for the group leader:

Small Group Discussion this week includes four sheets:

- Prayer #1 and Possible Answers
- Prayer #2 and Possible Answers
- Answer Sheet for Prayer #1
- Answer Sheet for Prayer #2

At first, give each student only the copies of Prayer #1 and Prayer #2. Let them take turns reading, doing LOOKUPS, and guessing which answer is correct and why.

When you feel they have discussed the situation enough and have completed the LOOKUPS, give them the answer sheets to check the answers. Discuss with them some of the points, especially if they picked the wrong answer—or the right answer for wrong or unclear reasons.

PRAYER #1 AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Below is a prayer by a teenager and three possible answers that God gave in his heart. The answers to prayers are not often this clear in the words, but for the sake of the exercise we are making God's words very clear. Look up the Scriptures and then try to tell which of the three possible answers is God's. Say why you think it's him.

Prayer #1: God, my math teacher is a slime ball. She doesn't care about anybody. Today she refused to take my homework late, even though yesterday I wasn't in class. I was at the movies with my history class, which is a cool honor because not everyone got to go. It's like she's jealous or something and trying to make me feel bad, since yesterday I felt good. I really hate that place. Can you please make me not hate school? And take away my evil feelings of Miss Carter? And while you're at it, can you change her mind about taking my homework?

Which answer might be God? Why?

1. Turn the other cheek. There is no room for hatred in my kingdom. Go into school tomorrow, smile at her, and let it go. One assignment won't matter, so don't waste your energy making a big deal over nothing.
2. You know that one assignment won't hurt your grade. What's really bothering you about how she treated you? How does it feel when adults, who are supposed to be good guys, seem like bad guys? Do you feel powerless in school?
3. You need to stand up for yourself and give her a wake-up call. She has a responsibility, and she's not living up to it. Tomorrow, threaten to go to the principal with a list of grievances that will surely shake her up. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free."

LOOKUP: Matthew 5:39

LOOKUP: Psalm 116:1-6

Answer Sheet for Prayer #1

Give this to your student small groups after you are sure the members have discussed each possible answer and have been thoughtful about picking what they think is the best one.

Answer #1: “Turn the other cheek” is in the Bible, but so is that God “will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love;” (Zephaniah 3:17). Just because something is found in the Holy Scriptures does not mean that it applies to your situation. The first answer lacks compassion for you, which God surely has.

Answer #2: It is quite common for God to encourage you to think things through; it leads to greater wisdom. And your honest feelings can lead to deeper truths. In this case, the homework is insignificant, as the teacher’s refusal of it changed nothing important. The student can now pray about the real problem, his feeling of powerlessness in a large institution, and get some ideas, with God’s wisdom, on how to feel his true value therein.

Answer #3: While there are times to stand up for yourself, #3 is obviously inauthentic. First, God does not betray his children by telling one child a serious flaw in another. Second, “going over someone’s head” generally backfires in the workforce, and God would not set you up to get more problems than what you started with. Third, it contains a threat. Christians become aggressive when important things are at stake, like lives, freedoms, safety, or national security.

The best answer is #2.

PRAYER #2 & POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Below is a second prayer by a teenager and three possible answers that God gave in her heart. The answers to prayers are not often this clear in the words, but for the sake of the exercise we are making God's words very clear. Look up the Scriptures and then try to tell which of the three possible answers is God's. Say why you think it's him.

Prayer #2: Lord, I really, really, really would like to go to gymnastics camp this summer. My parents say it's too expensive. And I don't think it's fair that my mom told me it was too expensive—when she was coming in the house from taking my little sister on a shopping spree! Why does my sister get everything?

Which answer might be God? Why?

1. Ask and you shall receive. Pray for the money every day, morning and night, and I will provide it to you. Be nice to your sister and your mother. It's not right to bring strife into your own house.
2. How much money do you need? Have you thought about babysitting? How much could you earn by babysitting every weekend until it's time to pay the tuition? Have you asked your parents if they can pay half?
3. If you point out to your mother that the receipts for your sister's shopping spree would have paid one-fourth of your tuition, she will realize she was wrong. Even more, she will feel guilty, and then she'll be more likely to see it your way.

LOOKUP: Matthew 7:7

LOOKUP: Proverbs 13:4

LOOKUP: Proverbs 2:12

Answer Sheet for Prayer #2

Answer #1: “Ask and you shall receive” often requires some action on our part. When God provides, it is often by leading us, which requires keeping our eyes on him, or by having us earn the privilege. Occasionally a good thing will drop in our laps, but God does not often allow us to be slackers, because he wants us to get stronger and more responsible. It’s good to be nice to your family, but God would be more interested in what’s going on underneath—for example, if there’s a jealousy or favoritism problem that he could help you solve.

Answer #2: Christians who hear God’s voice often attest to his request that they “be specific” about what the request is. Obviously, he knows what you need, but the specifics, when discussed with God, often are gateways to the solutions. Once this girl realizes she needs \$800, she will automatically jump to the next logical step: How to earn some of it so that she can make a fair deal with her family.

Answer #3: Although many families have guilt-trippers and manipulators, God doesn’t want it to be you! It may help in conversations with her parents to point out how much money they spent on an item for someone else. However the reason to do it would be to help the parent see fairness; not to pry funds out of her over guilt.

The correct answer is 2.

THREE REASONS WE DON'T HEAR GOD (And how to get the garbage out of your ears)

Help All Week Your Own Prayer Requests & Answers

When talking to God this week, write out your prayers similar to the two students we looked at in class. Listen, and, having seen some good and bad answers in class, see if you can feel God speaking to you. You can fill in the "possible answers" later if need be, as sometimes we don't hear God on the spot. If you feel you have an answer, either later or at the time, write that down.

Monday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

Tuesday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

Wednesday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

Thursday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

Friday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 3 / THREE REASONS WE DON'T HEAR GOD

Saturday Prayer:

Possible Answers:

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 3 / **THREE REASONS WE DON'T HEAR GOD**

Class Conclusion

If we can get past our fears, our transference of human traits, and our low self-esteem, we often find we can hear God's voice much more clearly in our hearts.

Next week we'll put thought and prayer into action for a final lesson in communicating with God. Until then, let's remember to keep our light steady. When we have flash thoughts, don't give them any attention, and see how God leads and guides!

LESSON #4 **FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD** (And not ending up in Catawawanga)

Lesson Capsule

Walking with Christ involves what is implied: movement, walking, and not just standing around waiting for him to drop prayer requests in our laps. That walk should be joyful, though often we find ourselves second-guessing his wishes, how his word applies, or what impressions we got during prayer. This lesson using a blindfold will illustrate how safe we are when moving in God's direction, even though it seems like we could end up in some far corner of the earth.

Materials

Class Activity

- Blindfold, something like a bandana that comes down low over the cheeks.
- Masking tape
- Marker pen
- Twenty plastic or Styrofoam cups

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- Pens
- One copy for each student of the following:
 - o Prayer #1: Alexa
 - o Prayer #2: David
 - o Explanations and Answer to Prayer #1
 - o Explanation and Answer to Prayer #2

Help All Week

- "Our Prayers that Seem Unanswered," one copy for each student (double-sided)

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Make sure there is a way for the student to walk to reach the Promised Land without it being dangerous. If any chairs are in the way, a student should be sitting in it to make sure that the volunteer you are going to blindfold can't trip over it.
2. Place a piece of masking tape in one corner of the room and write on it with a marker "CATAWAWANGA." Place a second piece in the opposite corner that says "PROMISED LAND."

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 4 / FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD

3. Toss all the plastic cups around in the walkway between Catawungawanga and the Promised Land

Following God's Lead

(And not ending up in Catawangawanga)

LESSON

Today we're talking about following God's lead—and not ending up in Catawangawanga.

Take a volunteer who agrees to “walk with God,” and bring that person to the front of the group. Hold up a blindfold.

You all know the feeling: It's like we're going through life with some sort of a handicap. We don't always know who we are, where we're coming from, or what we should do in situations throughout our day. Because of the gulf between God and man that came with the Fall, God's presence is not naturally easy for us to sense. It's kind of like being blind.

Blindfold the volunteer. Make sure the person can't see out the bottom or top of the blindfold. Spin her five or six times until she is dizzy.

Life can make us dizzy, and we don't know where we're going. [Volunteer's name], I want you to start moving forward in your life. And I don't want you to end up in Catawangawanga—another word for the farthest corner of the earth. Move away from Catawangawanga toward the Promised Land.

Back away from the volunteer toward the middle of the room.

The volunteer may take a few hesitant steps, but without guidance, she will probably ask which way she should go, saying she has no idea.

At this point, if students try to guide her, shush them with the concept that in a perfect analogy, they would be blindfolded and dizzy too!

Often, for your Christian walk, you have to listen to God's voice. Pretend I'm it. Move toward my voice, [Volunteer].

Let her take a step or two toward you.

And while you're at it, don't kick any plastic cups. The plastic cups symbolize sins in the world—things that can influence or infest you if you touch them. You want to stay pure on your journey to the Promised Land, don't you?

The volunteer may insist at this point that she needs help. Tell her this:

Call on your classmates, then. In life, their voices can be louder than God's. Let's see how they can use their voices to direct your feet away from sins. They have to stay seated, meaning we're all a little bit powerless in life sometimes.

Let students tell her where to put her right foot and her left foot. Let them watch as she gets all confused, hearing too many voices at once, then forgetting which is her left and right while blindfolded. Don't let anyone touch her.

Finally tell the volunteer to stop. **[Volunteer], sometimes loudness is not a good thing, is it? What happened with all these well-intending but LOUD voices? There were too many of them, and it was confusing and frustrating.**

Sometimes we have to get away from well-intending people to hear God's voice. As we've said the past three weeks—get in the quiet when you need help and direction. Ask the living God. When you stop trying to do things for yourself, there's a different sort of reaction set off. [Volunteer], call on God to help you through life.

Let her call on God.

Now I am "God" for the purpose of this demonstration. Start picking up some of the cups around her feet. Pick up enough that you can navigate her around the others without stumbling in a moment.

God has the power to remove the "stumbling blocks" from your path. God removes some, but not all. Why is that? Why do we have tribulation on planet earth?

The answer is due to the Fall of Man. God promises to remove all pain and suffering someday, but in the meantime, given our unnatural condition, he uses stumbling blocks to keep us close to him.

Some of us are smart enough to know that we cannot navigate our way into our Promised Land without God, without Jesus Christ, and without the help of the Holy Spirit. Our friends are great. God is far greater. He is powerful. He is love. He has great things in mind for us eventually. [Volunteer], I'm going to lead you into the Promised Land now. Do you trust me?

Put the volunteer's hands on your forearm. Guide her along, you walking backward and her walking forward. Kick any further impending cups out of the way easily. When she gets there, lift the blindfold.

Well done, good and faithful servant.

Allow her to sit down.

Catawawawanga is also known as a place in our hearts, where we are doubtful and frustrated, when we've gotten into an area of wrongdoing, where we can't hear the voice of the Lord clearly.

The Promised Land is often used as a word for heaven. But like many of God's metaphors it means other things too. Let's say you pray to be less shy. Getting to a place where shyness is no longer a problem for you is a Promised Land—it works this way also.

We sometimes call our Christianity "our walk" or "walking with Jesus." We don't call it "standing around with Jesus" or our "sitting with Jesus." Why is that? A spiritual walk is a journey; it involves

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moving forward in growth.

God's will is always more fun, more fantastic, more long-term, happier, and more peaceful than what we could dream up on our own. We just have to learn to let him lead us around the obstacles. It's kind of amazing you made it, isn't it? Life can be very dizzying. We have to learn to follow the voice of the Lord, even when we're dizzy.

And beyond that, there are times when God's leading doesn't always make sense—to us. It looks like all bets are off, the game is up, and God didn't hear us at all. How many of you have prayed for something, and it looked like you didn't get it?

Let them offer a few examples of "failed prayers."

Let's take a look at some "alleged failed prayers" in small group, and we'll see that maybe God was leading after all.

Following God's Lead

(And not ending up in Catawawawanga)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: TWO "UNANSWERED PRAYERS"

Special instructions for the group leader:

Small Group Discussion this week includes four sheets:

- Prayer #1: Alexa
- Prayer #2: David
- Explanations and Answer to Prayer #1
- Explanations and Answer to Prayer #2

At first, give each student only the copies of Prayer #1: Alexa and Prayer #2: David. Let them take turns reading, doing LOOKUPS, and guessing which answer is correct and why.

When you feel they have discussed the situation enough and have completed the LOOKUPS, give them the answer sheets to check the answers. Discuss with them some of the points, especially if they picked the wrong answer—or the right answer for wrong or unclear reasons.

TWO "UNANSWERED" PRAYERS

We often ask God for directions in how to change and grow or how to handle a certain situation. Below are two. Take a look at what the kids are doing in each and decide why God's leading might have seemed weak or absent in each.

Prayer #1: Alexa

Alexa got very remorseful after yelling at her younger sister. Granted, her sister was annoying, but Alexa knew God didn't want her ranting or using some of the language she did. She prayed really hard for God to help her love her sister more. She thought she felt God impressing her to consider that fact that she was jealous of her little sister. Alexa had more chores, and, it seemed, Alexa got yelled at for things that her parents let go with the younger sister. She fell asleep resolving to work on this and woke up feeling better. Yet her sister spilled cereal at the breakfast table the next day, and though it didn't get on her, Alexa knew if she herself had done it, Mom would have raised the roof. It made her blood boil when Mom asked Alexa to clean it up with a shrug. She stood up and screamed, "Do you have to be so klutzy?" Then she rolled her eyes at God thinking, "Fine lot of good talking to you does."

Why is Alexa faulty in thinking that her prayer hadn't helped? Pick the best answer:

- A. God obviously heard her; he may have wanted her to pray about it longer, and that way, if she sat and prayed through a lot of boredom, it would show her commitment. Once he was sure she was committed, then he would have stopped her from yelling.
- B. She shouldn't blame God because it was her decision to stand up and yell. He didn't jump into her body and force her to. You shouldn't blame God when you do things wrong. We are free agents with free choice.
- C. Maybe God is helping her. Maybe she would have added to her rant, "You stupid, immature jerk, I hate you!" without him helping. We're like plants. We can't see ourselves grow. We need to have patience and stick with a commitment, even if we feel like we could have done a lot better.
- D. Alexa's prayer was all wrong in the first place. She's praying for patience with her sister, and what she should really have been praying for is greater fairness from her mother. Many kids get upset because parents treat younger kids more leniently. They're adults and should be held responsible for their actions in the family.

LOOKUP: Philippians 1:6

LOOKUP: Romans 5:3-4

Explanations and Answer to Prayer #1

A. Christians can become confused and think that God operates in this way, but it is legalistic and borderline sadistic. A certain amount of boredom will not “buy” an answer to prayer from our Heavenly Father. He feels joy when we call on him as we should and wants to help solve the problem, especially if it is hurting others as well.

B. It may have been Alexa’s response to stand up and yell, but she had called upon God to help her with this. Therefore her confusion is understandable. We are free agents, but when we put our lives into God’s hands, we can start looking for results very quickly. However, some problems, because they involve other free agents—often a family of them—require more patience.

C. When asking for God’s help, it’s often good not to expect immediate or perfect results. We are like plants—we grow slowly. Another great analogy is that we’re like ships, loaded with “baggage,” things from our pasts. We can begin a turn at any time, but it’s a slow turn with a wide arch—we need patience! It could easily be that God is working. Alexa should tell her mom and sister what she’s trying to do and get some support!

D. Parents get blamed for everything in this generation. But the same truth stands today like it always has: God did not give you parents because they are perfect. Alexa’s mom may need to work on her fairness. (Or it could be that Alexa needs reminders of many times Mom has treated her special that she is forgetting.) To blame her mother would be misdirecting an effort. She can pray for her mom, but Alexa is doing right to pray first and foremost that her own flaws be fixed.

The best answer is C.

Prayer #2: David

All through high school, David had his heart set on going to an Ivy League college. He made sure he played two sports a year, was in four clubs, and got straight A's. He applied to Princeton, Harvard, and Dartmouth, fairly confident that he would be accepted. David's dad, a pastor, warned him to apply for all sorts of scholarships because those were among the most expensive schools in the country. David did apply for some, though he assumed he would get merit scholarships from the schools. He was declined at Princeton and Harvard, and while waiting to hear from Dartmouth, David prayed really hard for weeks that God would make the admissions team see his application as outstanding. Dartmouth accepted him, but with not nearly the amount in merit scholarships that he needed. The competition was a lot more than David had bargained for. His father sadly told him that the family did not have \$40,000 a year for his education, and he would have to apply to cheaper schools. David found himself wondering if his life had gone down the toilet, if his father was a failure, and if the God he preached about was a joke.

Who is to blame for this heartache? God, David, his dad, or nobody? Which is the best answer:

- A. God often thwarts our efforts to be successful because he doesn't want us to get full of ourselves. It's important to be humble: In Matthew 19:30, Jesus said that those who are first on earth will be last in heaven. He's only trying to break David, so David will submit to his will.
- B. David is to blame because he didn't do enough research. He should have known that just because he was a big deal in high school, he may not be a big deal in a school that attracts the best students from all over. He should have asked God before he got his hopes up and before he started applying to these schools.
- C. David's dad should have found the money somehow. When you have this great a kid, you ought to be thinking years ahead and try to get the money to support such cool efforts.
- D. While David may have made little mistakes and maybe his father did too, this may be a blessing in disguise. David never said why he wanted to go to a prestigious school. Maybe God is trying to teach him values, all the while knowing he will have a better time at a different school.

LOOKUP: Proverbs 3:5-6

LOOKUP: Proverbs 16:9

Explanations and Answer to Prayer #2: David

A. It is true God doesn't want us to be prideful, and humility is a powerful tool that many of us don't realize without God's help. However, God "breaks" people whose pride is leading them away from his love and protection. This would not be his response to a hardworking and persistent teenager who has the best of intentions.

B. David is not slacking. With studying and carrying a huge load of extra-curriculars, he is already over-extending himself. It's likely that students in his shoes put off a bit of research because they are exhausted, not because they took a stupid pill. If David is guilty of anything, it is not including God in his planning. God knows every nook and molecule in every school, and he knows where David would be happiest - and where he might, ironically, be miserable.

C. It is quite normal for teenagers to think that their parents are similar to God—that they can solve any dilemma. David's dad gave his life, his career, and his finances to the ministry before David was even a twinkle in his eye. It's not right to blame parents because they can't fulfill a child's every wish.

D. God gave David a gift for playing hockey, which David played and enjoyed in high school. But hockey wasn't big at his school, so he didn't give it much thought. God knows that the love of David's life will be attending his local college, the University of Minnesota. And if David will stop blaming God and his dad and fill out the application he "accidentally" picked up in the guidance office, David will have a great marriage and lifelong memories of being part of a hockey championship team during his sophomore year. His dad can help him and feel good about his contribution to David's education. God works in mysterious ways.

The best answer is D.

Help All Week

OUR PRAYERS THAT SEEM UNANSWERED

This week, add to your prayers some things that haven't been answered in exactly the way you hoped. Try to guess if this is something that God might be working on in some other way than you expected—either over the long haul or with encouraging you onto a different path.

Prayer that seems Unanswered:

What God might be up to:

Prayer that seems Unanswered:

What God might be up to:

Prayer that seems Unanswered:

What God might be up to:

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Class Conclusion

We're supposed to pray to God and ask him for things. He hears those prayers; he honors those prayers. But we have to accept that he honors prayers beyond our wildest dreams and surely beyond what we can plan for ourselves.

Next week, we'll be moving out of the subject of building our relationship with God and into help with Christian behavior in today's world.

So, with this being our last week to totally focus on talking to God, let's trust that when we ask him for something, he will lead us to our Promised Land. But he'll do so with what we actually need for ultimate happiness, not what we think we need.

LESSON #5 **LOADIES, COKEHEADS, DRUNKS, STONERS**

(And the psychology of stooping so low)

Lesson Capsule

Kids in high school face a myriad of temptations weekly, often daily, and there is nothing in adult life that will ever compare to this. Fortunately, the phase will pass, but not without a hefty price on many a young person's head that can damage them for decades. This lesson starts at the beginning, explaining these behaviors and using candy to provide a great approximation of real temptation. Sometimes it helps if teenagers can "take a step back" and see the behavior from the outside, then call on the Living God to give them endurance, persistence, and better self-esteem. Our use of M&Ms as temptations and bigger candy as rewards will let them know that we - and God - understand what they're up against.

Materials

Class Activity

- Small bag of M&Ms
- Large bag of the types of candy all students like (maybe from Five Below), enough for everyone to have some
- Paper plate
- Printer paper, six sheets
- Marker pen

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- Understanding Our Self-Esteem, one copy for each student
- Help All Week
- The Toothbrush Prayer, one copy for each student

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Open the small bag of M&Ms and put them on a plate.
2. Hide the large bag of candy, making sure no students have seen it!
3. Write on six different sheets the three challenges and the three answers found IN CAPS in the lesson.

Loadies, Cokeheads, Drunks, Stoners

(And the psychology of stooping so low)

LESSON

Who likes chocolate? Find a volunteer who really likes chocolate and have him sit at the head of the table. Put the plate of M&Ms in front of him, then have him push his chair back so that he is resting his chin on the table. Have the M&M plate pushed right up under his nose.

Whatever you do, [Volunteer], I do not want you to take one of those M&M's, under any circumstances.

Do you think you can do that? If you promise to do that, I will reward you later. And you don't know when. It may be a few minutes from now; it may be a week from now; it may be a year from now. Do you trust me and believe me?

Don't worry about the student's response. If he is noncompliant and eats some, use it to show how hard it is to resist temptation and how we sometimes fail. If he complies, he moves you along.

This is what your lives are like with the temptations you face either in school or from the people who you meet there. Weekends can be tough, can't they? What happens at parties? People drink, there's marijuana, and people look for places to make out.

There are teenagers who don't act like that. But let me raise a difficult question: How many of those who are "on the straight and narrow" are there for lack of options? How many would go wild and crazy if they had the invitations and opportunities? Probably a lot more.

Certain truths we hold to be self-evident: God does not want you to waste these years. He doesn't want you to get trapped or lose your joy.

I have a couple things that can help. First is knowledge. Sometimes if we understand why people do things, it helps us to not want to be another statistic. You can look at others who are damaging themselves and their spirits and say, "Oh yeah. That's the process of 'differentiation' at its worst." Second is...

Move up to the student who is staring at the plate of M&Ms. Pull it away. Put it out of everyone's reach.

...the Power of God, which is able to keep you free from bondage under any circumstances. Does God eliminate temptations? No.

Not entirely. But he is able to keep them from stealing your freedom. Why is it good to have some temptations? They may not know the answer to this. It is as follows:

Many strong Christians say that you're not moving toward greatness until you've had to actually choose to move away from evil. Resisting temptations can end up giving you a lot of confidence.

Why do kids party recklessly and get into unhealthy romances? Let's look at a few reasons.

CHALLENGE #1: THE DIFFERENTIATION PASSAGE. Hold up your sign and pass it to a student who can keep it displayed for everyone.

We're all in phases of development. I am; so is my mom. Yours starts with differentiation from parents. It means that sometime around the age of 12, you came into the knowledge that you are truly separate from other family members and you want to step out as an individual rather than as someone's child. But differentiation is weird in that while giving up reliance on their parents, kids build twice as much reliance on each other. You are in the passage where it is most difficult to resist temptations presented by your peers.

CHALLENGE #2: A NEED TO FIT IN. Hold up your sign and pass it to a student who can keep it displayed for everyone.

Have you ever noticed in school how groups of kids look very much alike? Their hair color might be different and they may be shaped differently from each other. But sometimes in the mall, you see kids going past, and from their makeup to their jeans, they look almost like clones. You will come to a place around the age of 19 where you say, "I'm me, and others are others." Generally, you have to learn how to be alike before you can learn how to be different. But "being alike" puts a lot of pressure on people, often involving not just appearances, but choices, including drinking, drugs, sexual behavior, etc.

CHALLENGE #3: A NEED TO BLOW OFF STEAM. Hold up your sign and pass it to a student who can keep it displayed for everyone.

A famous author for teens noted recently that "Kids can blow their chance in a social crowd in high school with a wrong word or a wrong look. One word. Or at least, they are convinced of such." That's a lot of pressure. Teenagers are phenomenal at reading energy. If someone feels weird or embarrassed or tense, you guys can sense that far better than adults. In school, many of you may feel that you have to keep yourselves very "hemmed in." Drinking and some drugs become "licenses" to act stupid, to mess up, or make mistakes that no one will hold against you. A teenager could always say, even with the worst of behavior, "Well, I was drunk." Or "I was stoned."

So, with all of this... Go and get the plate of M&Ms and put it back on the table. If someone tries to eat one, tell them they will 'have their reward in full' and won't get one reward later. There is not an adult in the world who envies you this situation. Adults are much saner.

Where does God come in to all of this? How does he help you to look back and say that these were your *best* years, and not your worst—that they were not wasted?

First of all, he doesn't want to add to all that pressure. He wants to take away the pressure. He wants to give you back your sense of royalty when you've been feeling like a number. When others give you the message that you don't measure up, he takes the yardstick and throws it away. You're his, and that's all that matters to him.

He can change hearts, if people put him on the throne of their lives—if they give their life to him.

ANSWER #1: JESUS CHANGES HEARTS.

Hand your sign JESUS CHANGES HEARTS to someone to hold up.

Thousands of kids who give their lives to Christ every year attest to these changes of heart. They see the parties, the smoke-filled rooms, the falling-down drunks, the loadies, and suddenly they just don't want to be there. Instead of thinking falling-down-drunk girls are funny, they feel sorry for them. They don't like the smell of puke or cigarette smoke, and they certainly don't like being flirted with by people who are acting out of their minds.

Jesus talks in Matthew 13:14-15 about people who are in the state of being without him. It's a spiritual condition that he describes in this way:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand....

For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

You can't change your own heart. But Jesus can. Go to sleep asking him to, and you may feel a difference already when you wake up.

ANSWER #2: JESUS CAN PROTECT YOU. Hold up your sign JESUS CAN PROTECT YOU.

Teenagers who are Christian attest to asking for God's protection and strange things start to happen. People who were pressuring them to party like mad suddenly didn't seem to be around so much. They were suddenly focused on other people. God put new friends in their paths who are funnier, smarter, better listeners, more loyal. Cars got flat tires when taking a Christian kid to a hazardous hangout, etc.

ANSWER #3: JESUS CAN DISTRACT YOU. Hold up your sign JESUS CAN DISTRACT YOU.

Actually, attempts at a social life are distracting kids from him, but again, teenage Christians attest to suddenly being struck by the important questions: What's my purpose on planet earth? Why do we go through death, and what's on the other side? What are my talents? How can I use them to make the world a better place? What can I become really good at?

In Jeremiah 29:11 God says, “I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God isn't looking to ruin our fun. We're good enough at doing that on our own. But it's like this plate of candy. It looks tempting. Take the M&Ms and throw them in a trash can.

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 5 / **LOADIES, COKEHEADS, DRUNKS, STONERS**

It's insignificant in comparison to what awaits if we don't give into temptations now.

Bring out the big bag of candy. Give the first choice to the kid who had to sit with his face at eye level with the M&Ms.

Help yourselves, good & faithful servants. In small group, let's look at ways to "stay gold," or be in the world of high school but not of it.

Loadies, Cokeheads, Drunks, Stoners

(And the psychology of stooping so low)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION **Understand Our Self-Esteem**

Is it wrong to go to teenage parties where things can get out of hand?

LOOKUP: John 2:1-11

LOOKUP: 1 Corinthians 15:33

LOOKUP: Romans 14:2-3, 14-18

In answering the question above, it may help you to do a brief self-evaluation. Rank yourselves from 1-10 in the following, 10 being the strongest and best, one being really weak. Don't tell others in your group your individual scores as you go along.

1. How high is your self-esteem socially?
2. How easy is it for you to say "no" when the pressure is on to indulge in beer, wine, pot, sex, cigarettes, etc.? (10 is extremely easy; one is extremely difficult).
3. How much time do you spend wondering what others think of you? (10 is little if any time; one is a lot of time).
4. How often have you done things like the five mentioned in question #2 so that others would accept you? (10 would be never; one would be often).
5. How strongly do you desire to be in a crowd that everyone looks at as "cool?" (10 would be not at all; one would be all the time).
6. If your score is above 25, you are probably safe at a typical high-school party. If your score is below 25, you should probably hold off until you can improve your confidence and faith.

How can God help you to resist temptations that might be fun for a month or so but will hurt you in the long run?

LOOKUP: 1 Corinthians 10:13

LOOKUP: 2 Peter 2:9

LOOKUP: John 10:3-5

Loadies, Cokeheads, Drunks, Stoners (And the psychology of stooping so low)

Help All Week

THE TOOTHBRUSH PRAYER

Teenage Christians have often joined in the same habit without realizing it. They say a prayer while getting ready to go out. This used to be called "The Mascara Prayer," as it first surfaced by a teen-age girl who always said it while putting on her mascara to go out. However, it works for boys too, and everyone brushes their teeth before going out.

Lord...Be like my jacket and zip around me. Let temptations bounce off of me and rise up to heaven, where you can pop them like bubbles. Help me to keep staying me....in you!

Think of events coming up this week where you might say the Toothbrush Prayer before going to them.

Especially when it gets close to the weekend and invitations start to spring up, be prepared by adding them as the week progresses. Keep the list out, like on your dresser, where you can see it. Say the Toothbrush

Prayer each time you go to one of the places!

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Class Conclusion

God did not create the situation with drugs in America. In fact, “high school” as we now practice it has only been in place since 1908, and the word “teenager” was not even found in Webster’s dictionary before World War II. Throughout nearly all preceding history, you were a child, and then you started working at adult responsibilities - jobs and supporting a family. A lot of what we have today is unnatural to humanity, but God is willing to work in it. He has never been stumped by what man has created—in any era or any civilization.

Next week we’ll look at another big challenge—gossip—how to avoid being a victim or a big mouth. God can work in that too.

God can change hearts, change directions, change outcomes. God understands and is willing to go before you, behind you, and beside you wherever you go.

LESSON #6 **GOSSIPS AND OTHER TRUMPET MOUTHS**

(And ways not to join the band)

Lesson Capsule

One important lesson for teens is to learn to bridle their tongues. It's counterintuitive to their phase of life and therefore is not often a willing addition to Bible study. But this lesson using a game of "see-food" plus a variation of "Whisper Down the Lane" will show the harmful results in a fun (yet disgusting) way.

Materials

Class Activity

- Red licorice
- Plastic cup
- Good candy (like from Five Below) such that every student can have a piece or two

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- How Gossip Starts...And Stops, one copy for each student (double-sided)

Help All Week

- The Anti-Gossip Log, one copy for each student

Preparation

For your new version of "Whisper down the Lane," find a female student before class who is a very good sport. Confide to her that you want to play "Whisper Down the Lane" in a new way, and that you'd like her permission to pass a very bad but untrue secret about her. Promise to tell at the end that the secret was untrue. Tell her she'll be rewarded from a secret candy stash, and prompt her to sit **ON YOUR LEFT** at the top of the lesson

Gossips and Other Trumpet Mouths

(And ways not to join the band)

LESSON

Sometimes people call gossip “chewed up news.” It’s sort of like this braid of licorice. Hold up the braid. This is a little like real news—the kind you see on TV. It’s solid. It’s straight. It looks good.

Take a big bite out of the licorice and begin to chew it. Talk with your mouth full: **Gossip is the like this licorice is now becoming. It’s news that’s “watered down and broken up.” It’s “juicy,” all right... It tastes good, all right... But...**

Spit it out into the plastic cup so everyone can be grossed out. It doesn’t look the same, does it? Push it towards some kids who will back away.

When I was in high school and college, we used to play this game over pizza called “See-food.” Get it? SEE? FOOD? Does anyone in this group think they can make better see-food than I did?

If you have boys in your group (or nervy girls), you will probably get some volunteers. Have them chew up their licorice and spit it on top of yours. Say as they’re chewing, The news goes in solid and straight. The gossip comes out juicy and gemy and broken and, well, generally disgusting.

Let the student spit into the cup and those with cast-iron stomachs can compare and see if his is more disgusting than yours was.

Take as many volunteers as will try.

Okay...now... Hold the cup out towards the students. **Who would like to try and eat this?**

Most should very strongly object. Push it towards some people to make it close up and thereby triply disgusting.

When we gossip, the person we gossip about? It’s like making that person eat this. The victim has to “digest” everything that’s being said about him or her. Have you ever been gossiped about?

Let some of them answer. Put the cup in the trash if it is too disgusting and distracting.

When you heard what was being said about you, didn’t you feel like you’d swallowed a bowling ball? Or something really horrible?

Gossip doesn’t fly as much in high school as it did in younger grades. But it can do more damage, because generally the things being said are more serious. Here is an example:

Meredith had to switch schools in the middle of her sophomore year because her father got a new

job. The new house was an hour away from the old house. However, Meredith had a boy cousin at her new school who was also her Facebook friend, and that got her friends at the new school before she even moved. She thought the transition would be easy.

Meredith was an outstanding gymnast, but a back injury forced her to switch from gymnastics to cheerleading. She arranged to switch schools the week of tryouts so that she could be on the team at her new school too. She could do a couple of tricks that neither cheerleading captain could do.

How do you think that Meredith was received at her new school? The cheerleading team was really glad to have her.

The cheerleading team was glad to have her, and all her Facebook friends had something nice to say to her. Is that what you really think? Let them deliberate if they want to.

Add this: Something kind of bad happened to Meredith before she moved. She had posted on Facebook about it, thinking people would laugh along with her. She had paid for a pair of earrings at one mall store, then walked into another store that sold the same earrings. She had somehow lost the receipt already, and had to wait while the second store called the other to make sure that she had really bought the earrings in that store and wasn't trying to shoplift them from this second store.

She had posted, "OMG, I almost got arrested for shoplifting today." Her friends from her old school knew she had never been in trouble and thought that was hysterical.

What happened at the new school? Let them guess.

Within a week of her being there, the story was flying around that Meredith had been arrested three times for shoplifting. Nobody was *trying* to hurt her. Some of us just have this natural inclination, when passing on a story, to "add" something to it. We feel it makes us better storytellers.

How did cheerleading tryouts play into this? Think of yourself on a sports team—any team. Along comes someone who can play your position far better than you can. How do you feel?

You're supposed to feel glad because it all goes to the team, but you can feel threatened too.

How do you think the cheer captains felt when this story came around about the shoplifting? Do you think they stood up for their new teammate? Or did they - more or less - enjoy passing it along? Did they accidentally add to it? Yes.

Meredith ended up quitting cheerleading, not wanting to go to school, and deleted her Facebook page, because the friends from her old school got in a Facebook war with the kids from her new school. She ended up begging her mom to homeschool her, and her mom had to practically kick her out the door every morning to go to school.

Retrieve the cup and hold it up. This is what Meredith's life felt like after some people got done being jealous, and some people got done "adding" to a story that started out as funny.

As Christians, the term used is to “bridle our tongues.” We have to learn to “bridle our tongues.” Speaking, for us, should be a little like wearing a horse bit. We have to allow the Holy Spirit and Jesus to “rein us in” and “steer us away” from what will feel to some victims like they ate this cup.

Put the cup away again.

I’m going to introduce you to a new variation of “Whisper Down the Lane.” It has new rules. But guess what? I’m not telling you what the new rules are. You have to figure them out for yourselves.

Whisper in the ear of the person sitting to your right: *[Name of Volunteer, to your left], her cousin was on the TV news last night as having been arrested in a drug bust. She was there and high as a kite but she managed to climb out the bathroom window. She acts so straight-edge, but it’s all an act. She’s practically an addict.*

It may be that the very first student figures out this new variation of “Whisper Down the Lane:” The unspoken rule is you’re not supposed to repeat the thing at all. If he or she understands this and refuses to pass it on, do not reward the person or even acknowledge that it was the correct behavior. For now, simply pass him and whisper the same thing to the next person.

If it happens that the rumor goes all the way around, have your volunteer say, instead of what she was whispered: You all played wrong. None of you were supposed to repeat it at all.

If somebody “gets it” and refuses to pass on the rumor, ignore him or her, skip to the person to his right, and whisper it to that person.

Have the volunteer at the end say, **Congratulations to those of you who “got it” and didn’t pass on the rumor—which is false by the way!**

Give out candy to winners.

Gossips and Other Trumpet Mouths

(And ways not to join the band)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION How Gossip Starts...And Stops

1. Think of a time you found out people were gossiping about you, a sibling, or a really close friend, and think of how it may have felt. Why are those gossipers really hurting themselves?

LOOKUP: Proverbs 17:20

LOOKUP: Proverbs 26:22

2. Why is it important to resist the urge to pass on hurtful information about someone—even if it is true?

LOOKUP: Matthew 7:12

3. Why is it often hard to keep quiet about it when someone has told you a secret? Why might you want to share it with “just one person?” (Hint: Think of what prompted the teller to tell you)? If you felt the urge to share something with “just one person,” how do you expect the person you tell to feel?

4. You’ve heard the expression probably from your mom: “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” What’s in it for you if you keep a secret?

5. As Christians, how are we supposed to behave?

LOOKUP: Ephesians 4:29

LOOKUP: Ephesians 4:25

6. God often tells us to do things that are difficult. He’s not being unfair; he is trying to keep us from greater difficulty if we stray from his ways. What’s in it for us if we are fair to everyone in what we say? What kind of trouble can we look to avoid if we don’t pass along negative info?

7. It often looks in school like everyone talks negatively, but that isn’t so. Why might the people who don’t gossip not stand out as much?

Gossips and Other Trumpet Mouths

(And ways not to join the band)

Help All Week

THE ANTI-GOSSIP LOG

Gossip flies around so often that it's safe to assume we will hear some almost every day. Make a resolution not to pass along what you hear. (For some reason, statistically this is much easier for boys than it is for girls.) In fact, make it a game instead to say something nice about a person who is being gossiped about, as that is what the Golden Rule implies is right. Vow to say a prayer for the person. It will shift your energy to make you care about any victims, as opposed to avoiding them or passing it on.

Write any events that happened in the log below. (Use initials and not names in case someone else sees it!)

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Class Conclusion

Next time a juicy piece of gossip comes your way, think of that chewed-up licorice and what it would be like to eat it. And think if it were you, would you want people saying that stuff? What goes around comes around.

Next week we'll look at peer pressure, something nearly every kid falls prey to, and how God would like to keep you from being treated like a zit.

In the meantime, see if you're up to the Golden Rule challenge. When you hear something mean, send something nice around, or don't send anything! See how many times you can come out on top.

LESSON #7

PEER PRESSURE: YOU'RE NOT A ZIT

(So don't let people squeeze you)

Lesson Capsule

Logically speaking: Peer pressure is about 10 times as hard to stop as bullying. Why? (1) Most of it happens off school property and not in the presence of adults. (2) Teens do not use the term "peer pressure" and have trouble identifying it. (3) Unlike bullying, many teens welcome the pressure and do not feel violated by it. As peer pressure is pandemic, we are using two lessons—one to describe it and one to take action against it by using the only power able to prevail: That of the God's love.

Materials

Class Activity

- Several small takeout mayonnaise squeeze tubes from a sandwich shop or fast-food restaurant
- Scissors
- Band-Aid
- Printer paper, 12 sheets
- Markers
- Napkins or paper towels

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- "Who's Being Peer Pressured?" one copy for each student
- Pens

Help All Week

- "Peer Pressure in the Bible," one copy for each student (double-sided)

Preparation

1. Copy onto printer paper the six ways peer pressure differs from bullying in the Lesson in CAPS.
2. Copy onto printer paper the six says to know you're being peer pressured in the Lesson in CAPS.
3. Practice a couple of times getting mayonnaise to squirt from between your palms like this:
 - A. Cut a tiny hole in the corner of a takeout tube of mayonnaise.
 - B. Using a Band-Aid, tape the tube to the center of your palm with the slit facing outward, toward your pinkie or just underneath it.
 - C. Lace your fingers together very loosely.
 - D. Pretend you are squeezing an imaginary zit in your chin with your thumb and a pointer finger
 - E. Press hard on the mayonnaise tube with the ball of your other hand.
 - F. The mayonnaise should jet-rocket out if you didn't cut the hole too big.

Peer Pressure: You're Not a Zit

(So don't let people squeeze you)

LESSON

Sit down with students with your fingers laced together. **When I was your age, this one time, like, right before prom? I got this enormous, killer zit, right on my chin. I was all, "I've got to squeeze this thing. I can't go to prom looking like this. So, I went into the bathroom, looked in the mirror, and started squeezing. And suddenly...**

Pretend you're doing it and squeeze the mayo container. Everyone should be utterly grossed out. Remove the container from your hands. Take a napkin and start cleaning it up.

As the saying goes, "There's only one thing more disgusting than a zit. And that is squeezing a zit." Anyone ever hit the mirror? Don't let them get carried away, as others will be grossed out even worse.

There is one thing actually more disgusting than squeezing a zit—and *it's a lot more* disgusting. It's squeezing a person, and treating a person like a zit. Anybody get what I'm talking about?

It's called being "pressured." Adults call it "peer pressure," though you guys don't use that word a lot. That doesn't mean that peer pressure isn't there with you almost every hour of the day.

Did you know that peer pressure affects six times the number of students that bullying affects? Why is that? We'll talk about that.

Let's talk about what peer pressure really is, how to identify it, and how to not get squeezed. We are not zits, especially us Christians. Nobody should get wrapped around us like we are.

First, you're hearing a lot about bullying in school right now. What's the difference between bullying and peer pressure?

Start passing out your six signs about how peer pressure differs from bullying, one at a time, as you say each item. Have a different student hold up each one:

- 1. PEER PRESSURE IS A MUCH BIGGER PROBLEM.** One in seven kids says they've either bullied or have been a victim of bullying. Nearly all kids in school say they felt pressured to do things they didn't really want to.
- 2. PEER PRESSURE IS HARDER TO IDENTIFY WHEN IT'S HAPPENING.** That's because kids don't realize when they are being pressured. They think what's happening was somehow caused by them. They're having a dorky moment. They did something to cause this.
- 3. BULLYING THREATENS SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM.** Peer pressure threatens

your conscience, character, moral fiber, and your ability to distinguish right from wrong, and most importantly, your spirit. This is one of the reasons God hates peer pressure: It is a direct assault on his relationship with you.

4. **BULLYING TENDS TO BRING FAMILIES TOGETHER** to stand strong against an outsider. **PEER PRESSURE TEARS FAMILIES APART**, as one member starts behaving in ways that are devastating to parents and siblings.
5. **PEER PRESSURE IS HARDER TO STOP.** Bullying is generally loud and catches the attention of others. Peer pressure happens in quiet places, behind closed doors, off of school property, and out of earshot of responsible people. Peer pressure comes from well-intending friends as well as hurtful enemies.
6. **THE EFFECTS OF PEER PRESSURE CAN BE JUST AS DAMAGING** and lifelong as those caused by bullying. Because peer pressure is harder to identify, harder to feel, and harder to stop, the effects are more insidious. Bullying is like being attacked by a lion. Peer pressure is more like being attacked by a snake. It looks cool, almost hypnotizing, and it moves slowly. A snake can draw great feelings of elation while entertaining its victim, until it bites or starts to squeeze.

Peer pressure is largely the reason that more kids are not “walking Christians” as teenagers. Staring life in the face and then reading the way God wants us to live from the Bible - this is just too hard for the many kids who have already been squeezed until they popped.

Those kids feel that God could never want them now. Or they're still at the “elation” stage and feel that God just exists to ruin people's fun. They've never been taught about peer pressure or the powers of Christ, so they're essentially powerless.

Let's start at the beginning—identifying peer pressure—what it looks like and feels like—so next time it happens to you, you can say, “this is pressure. I'm not causing it, but I can stop it. I may need help from above, but *I can keep from being squeezed.*”

Have the students put the old signs in the center of the table or the center of the floor where they can still be seen. Start passing out your six signs about things to think about concerning peer pressure, one at a time, as you say each item. Have a different student hold up each one:

Here are some things to think about concerning peer pressure:

1. You can be peer pressured **WHEN NOBODY IS SAYING ANYTHING DIRECTLY TO YOU.**
2. You can be peer pressured **WHEN NO ONE IS BEING MEAN.**
3. Peer pressure is about **HOW YOU FEEL.** Unlike bullying, it has less to do with what someone is doing to you and **MORE** to do with the effect on **YOU.**

4. If the behavior of people around you is making you think of **DOING SOMETHING NEGATIVE THAT IS OUT OF CHARACTER** with who you are, that's peer pressure.
5. Say you're out with friends. But an hour ago, you were home watching a movie, relaxing with your family. Are you considering doing something immoral or dangerous with those friends that they suggested, something that you would not have even considered an hour ago? If so, **YOU'RE BEING PEER PRESSURED**.
6. Peer pressure applies to breaking the law, such as in cases of **DRINKING, DRUGS, CHEATING, SMOKING, STEALING, and LYING TO AUTHORITIES**.

But peer pressure also applies to things that are simply unhealthy or make you anxious. Simply say these; no signs are needed. A few examples are

1. **SEX OUTSIDE OF WHAT YOUR OR YOUR FAMILY'S BELIEFS DICTATE**
2. **GETTING IN A CAR WITH AN IRRESPONSIBLE—OR DRUNK—DRIVER**
3. **GOSSIPING ABOUT SOMEONE YOU LIKE BECAUSE FRIENDS DO IT**
4. **WEARING CLOTHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL EXPOSED OR UNCOMFORTABLE**
5. **STAYING AT A HOUSE OR PARTY WHEN YOU'D RATHER LEAVE**

PEER PRESSURE occurs any time the behavior of a group you're with makes you feel manipulated into going along with something you or your family wouldn't otherwise accept.

One thing God can do immediately—to keep you from getting squeezed—is to send out blaring messages to your heart: “Hel-lo! You're being Peer Pressured! Time to find a way out!”

Psalm 34:17 says, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.” He can provide a way for you to leave, an easier way to say “No”, or the power not to care what others think!

Psalm 91:11-13 says, “For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.”

God is able. But a first step is allowing ourselves to hear him - and to identify those times when we're being pressured. It's not as easy as you'd think.

Let's look at some situations in small group, and you decide, based on these signs, whether certain kids are being peer pressured or not.

Peer Pressure: You're Not a Zit

(So don't let people squeeze you)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Who's Being Peer Pressured?

Special instructions for the group leader:

Small Group Discussion this week includes two sheets:

- Who's Being Peer Pressured?
- Who's Being Peer Pressured Answer Sheet

At first, give each student only the copies of Who's Being Peer Pressured. Let them take turns reading, doing LOOKUPS, and guessing which hypothetical students are victims and why.

When you feel they have discussed the situation enough and have completed the LOOKUPS, give them the Answer Sheet. Discuss with them some of the points, especially if they picked the wrong answer—or the right answer for wrong or unclear reasons.

WHO'S BEING PEER PRESSURED?

Take turns with people in your group reading the scenarios of the six teenagers below, and try to determine who is being peer pressured. Say why you think so or why not.

Alexa texts Jon and tells him she's going to sneak out of the house to go to a party her parents said she couldn't go to. The reason they're not letting her go is that one of the kids in the hosting family has been busted several times for possession of marijuana and prescription drugs. Alexa thinks her parents are being overly protective because she would never do that stuff. Jon's parents have said no to him too, and he decides he's not going to sneak out with her. She's disappointed but says, "Just don't tell anyone I'm going..." because Jon is good friends with her older brother. *Has Jon been pressured? Why or why not?*

Troy walks out of the cafeteria after lunch to see a bunch of kids sitting in the corridor, and one is playing guitar. Everyone else is listening. The guitar player is really good. Troy is really good on violin and even gets money playing at weddings and bar mitzvahs, but he's discovering it's just such a not-cool instrument. *I should have picked drums or keyboards or guitar, he tells himself and gets into another silent hate fest with himself for earlier decisions. Is Troy being peer pressured? Why or why not?*

Kobe goes over to his friend Jake's house. Jake's parents are out, and Jake suggests they raid his dad's liquor cabinet—just to chill out while watching a movie. Kobe's family doesn't drink, and he's wary. "Let's just watch the movie," he says. "It's a great flick that doesn't need add-ons to be fun." Jake says, "What's wrong with you?? Nothing will happen!" It is true, Jake's parents just called from California to see how he was doing. They're not coming home. Nobody else is coming over, so it's not like they'd have a busted party on their hands. Kobe says, "Fine, whatever." *Has Kobe been pressured? Why or why not?*

Asa is walking down the corridor in school thinking about when she will ever find time to study for this science test, now that she's babysitting after school for her neighbors. Her thoughts shift until she's looking at the stuff being worn by a crew of really pretty girls. They don't notice her, but she decides she needs a wardrobe makeover. Why am I wearing stuff that I bought with my mom? Asa asks herself, suddenly feeling like she has red flashers all over herself. I've got my own money now. I can afford stuff from their stores. *Is Asa being peer pressured? Why or why not?*

Danielle hates how her best friend Brittany has taken to shoplifting at their favorite accessories store in the mall. Danielle is not the type who cares what others think and has often told Brittany off after one of her klepto attacks. Before going into the store one time, Danielle snarled, "I'll pay for your dumb earrings, klepto moron, but if you do it again and we both get in trouble, I'm not hanging out with you ever again." Brittany says, "Fine! If you're that scared, wait out here." Danielle stands there fuming, thinking about how hard it would be to find new friends, as Brittany has been a friend for 10 years. *Has Danielle been peer pressured? Why or why not?*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Who's Being Peer Pressured? ANSWER SHEET

Actually ALL the teenagers in the five situations have been peer pressured to some extent. Let's look at each scenario to see the details.

Alexa has made Jon an accomplice. Do kids know what they're doing when they make others an accomplice? YES, absolutely. Telling what you did or will do and asking to keep a secret is (a) often manipulative. It's meant to make the person who refuses to go along either feel guilt or feel pressure to change his mind; or (b) using a person. Sometimes kids just want to release their own guilt over doing something wrong by telling someone else. It isn't a great position to put another person in. The friend may either take the bait or feel guilty for not going, or they'll worry. It's just negative energy passed on. To keep from getting squeezed, Jon ought to tell Alexa's brother, at least.

Troy has fallen prey to the one aspect of peer pressure that often gets missed: UNLIKE BULLYING, PEER PRESSURE HAS LESS TO DO WITH WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING TO YOU AND MORE TO DO WITH HOW A SITUATION IS MAKING YOU FEEL. Are Troy's feelings the guitar player's fault? No. Feelings of inadequacy are often nothing more than the responsibility of him who feels them. Which instrument he took up is merely a sidebar to Troy feeling that he would like to be the center of attention. We all would. If he felt grateful to God for the talent he has and asked God to make his style more flexible, he could begin to shed his bad feelings.

Kobe is probably the most typical case of peer pressure, and often kids fall into bad ways exactly like this - this being an early exposure. The problem is not whether they'll get caught. The problem for Kobe will be the nature of guilt itself. The guilt that follows when you do something wrong only flares up a few times or even less, and then it stops. People think their value systems have changed, and a year from now Kobe could be a bit of a lush. They're confusing guilt buttons with belief systems. Nothing may really happen to make Kobe doubt his upbringing; it's just that he will no longer feel the guilt and has been tricked into thinking he's doing okay. A 'no' the first time is far easier than a 'no' after his guilt stopped working for him.

Asa has been pressured in a similar way to Troy. We are surrounded in school constantly with sights and sounds, reminders of clothes we don't have, talents we don't have, social statuses that seem to come to others so easily. A philosopher once said, "Comparison is the root of all bitterness." Asa's quick leap to needing a new wardrobe is a bit more superficial...she's thinking that clothes make the person without even realizing it. In these cases it's more rational—and surely less expensive—to remember that everyone has gifts from God; everyone has good traits. She might start making a list of her own good traits and forcing herself to remember them when she gets into tricky thinking like this.

Danielle, like Jon, has been pressured into being an accomplice. That she tells Brittany off and doesn't go into the store are definitely to her credit. The fact that Brittany has been her friend for so long is a big thing here. It's hard to give up friends and get new ones. Brittany has put Danielle in a state of being torture-squeezed. One person's actions have caused her to fear losing her best friend, to have anxiety about finding other friends, to wonder if she, too, could get in trouble, and to wonder if Brittany is going to snap out of this before something happens. Some friends are more trouble than they're worth—especially when they

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 7 / PEER PRESSURE: YOU'RE NOT A ZIT

refuse to see how their antics hurt the people who love them.

Peer Pressure: You're Not a Zit

(So don't let people squeeze you)

HELP ALL WEEK Study of Peer Pressure in the Bible

Nearly every great person of the Bible was a victim of peer pressure. The reason we still know their names, some of them 4,000 years later, is that they didn't give in. Look up one famous Bible story a day, and answer the questions:

Monday/ Exodus 5: Whom did Moses have to face down that was a royal family? When Pharaoh refused to let the people go and doubled their work instead, how did the Hebrews treat Moses? How were they pressuring him, and to do what?

Tuesday/1 Samuel 17: When David was bullied by Goliath, what line of reasoning prevented him from being scared and running away in terror?

Wednesday/Daniel 3: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego felt pressured to do what? What line of reasoning prevented them from feeling scared?

Thursday/Matthew 14:1-12: King Herod under pressure to do what? Why didn't he just tell his dinner guests to go pound sand?

Friday: Matthew 23:13-27: The most popular people in Jesus' day were the scribes and Pharisees. They were trying to kill Jesus. How did Jesus treat them? When is it good to tell people off?

Saturday: Think of times this year that you felt pressured and write down a few. Here are some guidelines from the last lesson to help you:

- **WHEN NOBODY IS SAYING ANYTHING DIRECTLY TO YOU:**
- **WHEN NOBODY IS BEING MEAN:**
- **WHEN YOU WERE MERELY ASKED TO BE AN ACCOMPLICE:**
- **WHEN SOMEONE ASKED YOU TO BE INVOLVED IN SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T REALLY WANT**

TO BE INVOLVED IN:

Sunday: of the stuff you wrote down yesterday, did you give in or were you able to resist? How would you have reacted differently if you had to do any of these again? How can God help you with peer pressure?

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 7 / **PEER PRESSURE: YOU'RE NOT A ZIT**

Class Conclusion

It's hard enough just to identify when peer pressure is happening to us. It's another thing to resist! We'll talk about ways to help you resist next week and how God helps you in two great ways. For now, ask God to go in front of you and behind you and not let anybody squeeze you this week - and see what happens! You might be amazed.

LESSON #8

PEER PRESSURE 2: YOU'RE LIKE A BALLOON

(So don't end up deflated)

Lesson Capsule

Last week, we helped you to describe peer pressure by comparing it to a skin problem. This week, we'll offer teens both practical and spiritual means to keep from being squeezed, using a blindfold, a bowl of candy, and a "conscience balloon." Kids will get a good idea of why giving into peer pressure train-wrecks our consciences.

Materials

Class Activity

- Bouncy ball
- Bowl of cool candy
- Blindfold
- Sheets from last week telling how peer pressure differs from bullying
- Balloon
- Marker pen

Small Group Discussion

- Extra Bibles for those who came without
- Pens
- "Why God Wants to Help You with Peer Pressure"

Help All Week

- "Seven Ways to Avoid Peer Pressure," one copy for each student

Preparation

Blow up the balloon once before class and, pinching it, write the words YOUR CONSCIENCE on it. Let the air out and put it aside.

Peer Pressure 2: You're like a Balloon

(So don't get all deflated)

LESSON

Last week, we talked about peer pressure and how we're not a zit—so don't let anyone squeeze us. This week, we're going to use two demonstrations to show why peer pressure is so hard to resist and what can happen to our consciences when we let others rule us.

Neither is gross!

Peer pressure is especially hard to resist because often it can seem louder than the voice of God. This first demonstration features a blindfold.

Pick a volunteer and blindfold him or her. Pick three other volunteers and place them in three corners of the room. Quietly hand off the bowl of candy to one of the three so that the blindfolded person can't know where it is.

Being imperfect here on earth is almost like we're going through life blind. We don't know what comes next. We don't know the way we should go when we think we know where to go. [Volunteer], your goal is to find the heavenly treasure. It is in one of the corners of this room. Spin the volunteer, and then take up your bouncy ball.

The game for everyone else is to get [Volunteer] to go with you to your corner and not somebody else's corner. You can come forward and touch her, but you may not pull her or push her. You may not touch the treasure.

Tell her you've got the treasure. Use your sweetest voice or your most threatening voice. Reason with her. Bargain with her. Lie to her. All talk at once.

The bounce of the ball will represent God's voice. Whenever she hears it, she should come toward the bounce. She doesn't know which corner she is supposed to end up in. God will take her in the directions she needs to go—if she can hear it.

Let volunteers come forth and try to convince her to come to their corner. When she starts to move toward one, bounce the ball behind her so that she spins around and starts coming back. Get the enticers to start over, talking to her. Whether she starts going to the same corner as before or another corner, bounce the ball once behind her again. If she doesn't hear, that's okay—she'll just end up in the wrong corner. If she spins around again, have the enticers start over. After that second bounce, go before her, this time bouncing in front of her, to encourage her on, until she gets to the corner.

If she ends up in the wrong corner, say she was enticed by peer pressure.

If she ends up in the right corner, remove the blindfold, give her some candy, and say,

Well done good and faithful servant.

This game is a lot like peer pressure. We can start off with some tough choices or some confusion, and not know how to get to the “treasure,” which is our safety. We don’t know which way to go. If we’re feeling pressured, we’re not sure what the results will be if we give in. We can listen for God’s voice to tell us what to do.

Did you see how I led her away from the treasure once? God works in mysterious ways. Often, we think God’s direction is one way, and it turns out to be another way. We just have to keep listening.

Everybody come back and enjoy some candy at the table. Have everyone come back, sit down, and eat.

God’s voice is there for you when you call on him. But he gives you another tool to work with as well. It’s your conscience. Let me demonstrate. Blow up the balloon so they can see the words on the side.

When you give in to peer pressure, you feel some guilt. Or maybe in your case, that guilt is felt as anxiety. When you’re somewhere like a party where a lot of peer pressure happens, your conscience balloon functions well for you at first.

It’s big and strong and loud. Squeeze the end with both sets of fingers and pull it wide so that it makes that “eeeeek” sound—just for a moment.

But let’s say you give in. People are drinking. You know it’s against the law at your age. You know your parents would have a fit. You know that, essentially, they’re right. And if this party gets busted by the police, you’re in real trouble.

Hold up the conscience balloon. Squeeze the end with both sets of fingers and pull it wide so that it makes that “eeeeek” sound. Let out about one-third of the air.

Pretend you’re part of the sound: “Pleeeeeeeese stop now! You know that’s wrong!”

But you want to be liked and accepted, and for the moment, that is the important thing. Well, guess what? Your conscience will not replenish itself. What’s there is there. Next week, the same thing happens. People are drinking. A bottle is coming your way.

Squeeze the balloon again and make the noise, letting out another third of the air. “Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeese stop now! You know that’s wrong!”

But maybe so far, there has seemed to be no consequence for your action. Maybe you’ve gotten away with it. Maybe some kids even think you’re a lot of fun.

Next weekend... Squeeze the balloon and make the noise until there is no air left in it.

And then the next weekend is the biggie. You've gone from drinking a little to drinking a lot. Your judgment is starting to fail you. What's wrong with getting in this car? The driver isn't that drunk! So what if I flirted like a fool with so-and-so, and did things I'd never dreamed of doing?

Hold up the now airless balloon.

Your conscience balloon is empty. What does that mean? It means you won't feel guilty for stuff when you should.

Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the Lord when he may be found. Call on him while he is near." What does that mean? That's he's not continually calling out. How does the conscience balloon play in? It's God's way of calling out to us, but it gets empty if we don't listen to it.

God gave you your conscience to keep you out of trouble. But the nature of guilt is this: It only works the first few times you step out of line. The rest of the time? You no longer feel anything.

Does it mean that you're no longer doing something you shouldn't be? Does not feeling guilt mean your behavior is okay? No.

Does it mean that God suddenly approves of what you're doing? No; you just can't feel it.

Have you ever heard somebody saying things like, "Oh I used to believe smoking pot was wrong, but I was just being young and naive. It's fine." What's really happened? The person isn't feeling guilt like they're supposed to.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I was taught abstinence, but my parents are just old-fashioned. Nobody abstains these days." What does this probably mean? That the person had multiple sex partners and just isn't feeling the guilt of fornication or adultery.

The good thing about Christians is that, generally speaking, they have bigger consciences than some others due to paying attention to God for years at a time. Blow the balloon back up again, getting it even bigger, but not popping it.

Keep squeezing and making the noise a bunch of times. Generally speaking, they won't run out of guilt so fast. But if they do, understand this tough concept:

CEASING TO FEEL GUILT IS NOT THE SAME AS COGNITIVELY, WITH STUDY, RESEARCH, AND PRAYER, CHANGING YOUR BELIEF SYSTEM. People who fall into sin have been "tricked" into believing that because they don't feel guilt, their former belief must have been wrong, and now, they are right. They don't feel guilt because of the nature of guilt: You only feel it the first couple of times.

Another good thing about Christians. We can come to God, admit where we went wrong, and if we're really sorry and we want our conscience to work again...

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 8 / PEER PRESSURE 2: YOU'RE LIKE A BALLOON

Blow the balloon back up. **The Bible says that God will not be mocked. But if you want to live for him in his ways, he will refill you and you can start over. They call the gospel “the good news” because it doesn’t get much better than that.**

Small Group Discussion

WHY GOD WANTS TO HELP YOU With Peer Pressure

The biggest reason God wants to help you avoid peer pressure is that it wreaks so much havoc on your spirituality. You can become afraid to commune with him, and your conscience can stop giving you the prompts you need to keep spiritually healthy.

Thousands of teenagers have experienced some of God's promises. They work, daily, often on the spot:

LOOKUP: 2 Peter 2:9

LOOKUP: Jeremiah 20:11

Sometimes in allowing ourselves to be squeezed, we're choosing between a short-term reward (feeling accepted) and a long-term reward (experiencing 60 or more years free of bad memories, embarrassments, and heartbreak). What other great rewards are there for us if we decide to be Christians over the long haul?

LOOKUP: Joshua 1:7

LOOKUP: Psalm 84:11

When does God begin rewarding us when we walk with him?

LOOKUP: Luke 18:30

If people rib us, or simply refuse to accept us because we're not allowing ourselves to be pressured, what's in it for us?

LOOKUP: Luke 9:26

LOOKUP: Matthew 5:10-12

Did Jesus warn his disciples about peer pressure? Did he say it would be easy?

LOOKUP: John 15:18-20

LOOKUP: Exodus 23:2

Help All Week

SEVEN WAYS TO GET OUT OF PEER PRESSURE HOT ZONES Without Losing Your Cool

Read one of the Seven Ways To Get Out Of Peer Pressure each day. Think of whether this would work for you, and if so, why? If not, why not? Think of upcoming events where you might try some of them to stay out of trouble. Write down answers.

Monday: Stay inside at a party and don't go near the bedrooms. Most smoking, drinking, fighting, and other illegal activity at a party takes place outside—in the bushes, up the street, behind all the parked cars. Most make-out sessions occur in rooms farthest away from where the parents are—usually on another floor in the bedrooms or also outside. If you stay in the main party room, kitchen, and living room, you won't find yourself getting knee-deep in invitations that will haunt you.

Thoughts on this method:

Tuesday: Practice in the mirror at home. "Nah." "No." "No thanks." "No." "Uh-uh." "No way!" Statistically, teenagers do much better in situations when they feel prepared. Practice in the mirror until you get a couple that look good. Then pray up and prepare to lay it on.

Thoughts on this method:

Wednesday: The Invisibility Principle. One student said he'd felt like the invisible person through much of high school, and then he suddenly needed to put it to the test. A joint was coming his way at a party. He just turned and walked away. TA-DA! Nobody noticed. After that he always told himself in uncomfortable situations, "I'm invisible." Rarely does anyone say "Where are you going?" when he walks away.

Thoughts on this method:

Thursday: Get a "Hi-Tim" call. Quickly pull out your cell, turn away from the booze/cigarette/joint and say, "Hi Tim!" and keep walking. (Or make up some other name. The kid who uses this says "Hi Tim.")

Thoughts on this method:

Friday: Arrange a “magpie911” text with your parent. Some parents make a promise to their kids or their kids’ friends. If they ever get a text that contains a secret code word (The family attesting to this used magpie911.), it means that the party is getting out of hand, and the parents will come immediately to pick them up, NO QUESTIONS ASKED. The NO QUESTIONS ASKED part is crucial. Reward your parents with trust when they are acting trustworthy.

Thoughts on this method:

Saturday: Pray up. Some kids spend a few minutes saying The Mascara Prayer (also known as the Toothbrush Prayer from lesson 5) while getting dressed on weekend nights. They ask for God’s protection and courage if they should need it. Some have attested that when they remember to do this, they rarely find themselves in “the line trap” where you’re next in line to be passed that bottle or joint. Those activities always seem to happen outside or in another part of the house.

Thoughts on this method:

Sunday: Be willing to say, “I’m Christian. No.” We’re aware that this kind of straightforward courage really takes nerve. For one, a first thought to strike is “when I mess up, someone will throw this in my face.” But things said with humility find great rewards—God makes sure of it. Over time you find out how much of an impression you made on somebody else who was standing there. The three little words, “I’m Christian. No,” have brought other kids to salvation who simply couldn’t forget the person with the nerve to stand up for their faith in public.

Thoughts on this method:

Class Conclusion

Avoiding peer pressure is one of the marks of a maturing Christian. Your rewards in heaven will be great if you can use the means that God gave you to avoid it.

Next week, we'll be looking directly at social media—Facebook and texting—and seeing how we can keep it for peace and not war!

In the meantime, see how well you do this week at deciding on methods to help you avoid peer pressure and putting a few of them to use.

LESSON #9

FACEBOOK FIGHTS AND TEXTING WARS

(And how not to get your face blown off)

Lesson Capsule

Facebook and other social media have become places where kids can hurt each other easily, as they don't have to look anyone in the eye to do so. While marketing themselves through pictures and daily journaling remarks, they can find that the price is high; arguments start easily. We'll illustrate this by using one little word: "Ew," to show how it started a Facebook war that involved 167 kids from five different communities.

Materials

Class activity

- Printer paper, five sheets
- Marker

Small Group Discussion

- List of mean statements
- Scissors
- Small basket, like a collection basket
- Candy rewards

Preparation

Class Activity

1. Write the words "JENA: EW" on a piece of printer paper using large letters.
2. Write out the PRINCIPLES 1, 2, 3 & 4 as are displayed in the Lesson in all CAPS.

Small Group Discussion

1. Cut up the "mean statements" into separate slips and fold them and put them in the basket.

Facebook Fights and Texting Wars

(And how not to get your face blown off)

LESSON

I just recently heard of something that happened on Facebook. It wasn't a suicide—this was more “normal,” but it will take your brain apart if you think about it:

A girl posted something depressed on New Year's Day, something like, “People always make New Year's resolutions, but let's face it, none of us are going to keep ours.” How would you respond to a statement like that? Let them answer; probably “no big deal” variations.

One of the poster's 375 “friends” had just made a New Year's Resolution to go back to the gym. She really wanted to keep it. She was a kind of “up” and bubbly person, so the negative energy coming out of that comment really got to her. Some people posted back something in agreement, and the poster had a lot of “likes.” This girl we'll call Jena posted back “Ew.”

Hold up your sign that says JENA: Ew.

In other words, Jena had read this negative comment, had felt it strike her wrongly, and she posted her feelings about it: “Ew.”

If you posted something on Facebook, no matter how negative, and someone posted back “Ew,” how would you feel? Let them discuss.

It turns out that things had gotten a little tense between the girl and Jena lately. They were in the same math class: no words had been exchanged, just a few dirty looks that probably started with mutual jealousy. The first girl posted back “I hear you're switching high schools. Is it because you don't have any friends at this school?”

Jena's dad had had a serious surgery the year before and they had to move to a house that didn't have as many stairs. They had to move from a beach community, where homes are tall and narrow, to further inland. Switching schools your freshman year is a tremendous stress.

The point is that this Facebook war mushroomed into something that involved three days of posts, over 160 people from five different communities and three different schools.

Some would argue it all started with just TWO LITTLE LETTERS: E-W. Ew.

How can God protect you from things that get started so swiftly and so easily? Let them think of some ways if they can.

First of all, he gives you principles that are meant to protect you.

Philippians 4:8 says, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.” And you can’t say and you can’t “post,” what you’re not thinking about.

Imagine yourself opening Facebook and looking to see if people responded with smiles, giggles, or likes, to something you posted. Imagine you are seeing a response to your post the reply that you are about to put online. How would you feel? Good? Or Bad? If you would not feel good, *don’t post it.*

Principle #1 about posting and texting is just like any other area of life. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus states clearly, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” The Golden Rule sums up almost every other rule in the Bible.

Pass your sign PRINCIPLE #1: GOLDEN RULE to a student so she can hold it up while you talk.

Rule #2 is like a subcategory of Rule #1: Never ever put something in writing that is negative about another person. It always gets back to the source. If you post something negative in public about another person, that’s even worse. If you try to encrypt it so that only a few people know what you’re talking about, it will be sniffed out by the source—and probably 20 other people who are so deeply insecure that they think everyone is referring to them.

Pass your sign PRINCIPLE #2: NEVER PUT ANYTHING NEGATIVE IN WRITING to a student to hold up.

Why is it so easy for people to post negative things on Facebook or text negative things from their phones? Let them discuss. Some answers you’re looking for:

- Because they don’t have to look anybody in the eye.
- Because it’s so easy to hit “SEND” or “POST”
- Because someone did it to you first.

When someone does something evil to us is where Christian kids especially need help. Not returning evil for evil is really hard, and yet it is where the rubber meets the road in relying on Christ. You’re going to need practice.

Pass your sign PRINCIPLE #3: DON’T RETURN EVIL FOR EVIL. RETURN EVIL WITH GOOD. We’ll practice today with live voices and face-to-face, but the same holds true with posts. We’re going to have people say things to you that aren’t very nice. You’re not going to return evil for evil.

Here are some examples:

Evil person says: “Where’d you get those dorky jeans?”

Reply: (roll eyes) “I know...I really love all the stuff you wear.”

Evil person says: “I can’t stand so-and-so. Look at her—she dresses like a ho.”

Reply: "She sits next to me in math. She's really nice once you get to know her."

Evil person says: "So-and-so wrote bad stuff about you on the bathroom wall."

Reply: "You're kidding! Wow. I always really liked her."

Why is it so hard to respond this way, when people either slam us or somebody else? Because people don't deserve it. Because you're just giving them more power, and you need to put it down. It's very hard to return a mean comment with a nice one because we feel like we are giving that mean person even more power. But the opposite is true.

This is a Biblical principle that almost always works. Proverbs 25:21-22 says, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, **YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD**, and the Lord will reward you."

Pass out your PRINCIPLE #4: HEAP BURNING COALS

"Heap burning coals" means that regardless of what they may show on the outside, you will make them burn with regret over what they just said. It's such a well-known tactic that it has a name: It's called "Killing People with Kindness."

That doesn't mean the guilt will show up in people right away. Generally, they will look confused or stunned. Then they'll go away and think about it.

Conversely, if you say something mean back, you are throwing a fire at a fire. What happens to the fire when you add fire to it? It grows and grows. Will fire ever put out a fire?

This is why Jesus says in Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Jesus knows that this is *one of only* two ways to stop a fiery feud from building. The other is to say nothing, which, in the social media, is even harder.

A lot of what God asks us to do feels unnatural. Why is that? Because we live under the Fall.

Let's focus on this game of returning evil with good and see if we can make any headway with it. You will be surprised at how embarrassed, even humiliated, people can feel and even look, when you've heaped hot coals on their heads. Let's try in Small Group Discussion.

Facebook Fights and Texting Wars

(And how not to get your face blown off)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Not Returning Evil for Evil

Have students take turns pulling mean statements, such as the ones below, out of a hat. Have them say the line to a preselected “victim” in the group. Have the “victim” reply with something sincerely nice. Have them run it past you, and when it’s neither sarcastic nor defensive (which will be some students’ temptation at first) reward the victim with candy. If no one can think up a nice reply, suggest the one that’s written below. Some kids may be very adept at this if they were raised on killing with kindness. If any group gets done particularly fast, some Scripture LOOKUPS are included below.

Mean statements:

“Ew, your breath stinks.”

Answer: Wow, thanks for telling me!

“Your dog is really ugly.”

Answer: I know. But she’s so sweet that it makes up for it.

“Why do you bother showing up if all you do is complain?”

Answer: Wow, am I complaining that much? Nudge me next time I do it. I’m really sorry.

“You’ve never had a boyfriend?? (girlfriend?) That’s pathetic.”

Answer: I know, isn’t it? It’s lonely too. You’re lucky.

“Jana says you went after her boyfriend and she’s going to beat the crap out of you at Jon’s party.”

Answer: Trust me, she’s just having a bad week. She’s knows I wouldn’t do that. I’ll talk to her if it would make you feel better.

“You’ve gained a ton of weight. Is it from eating or were you born to do this?”

Answer: I’m not sure, but I hate it. Wish I had your genetics.

LOOKUP: Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 25:15, and Proverbs 25:21-22

What is in it for us when we return evil with goodness? How is our relationship with God improved?

Facebook Fights and Texting Wars

(And how not to get your face blown off)

HELP ALL WEEK Not Having the Last Word

There are seven questions below. Try to answer ONE each day. AS WELL, use the back to keep a daily journal of any times you were (a) able to turn away wrath with a kind answer or (b) resist the temptation to respond to something mean or thoughtless:

1. Monday: There are times when killing with kindness won't work, and Internet exchanges may be among them.

One thing that makes Facebook wars so fiery is that people simply do not have the willpower to resist firing back. Why do you think the phrase "Silence is Golden" became so popular?

2. Tuesday: Some kids say their parents don't punish them, and that they don't have to. "The Look" the parent gives is stressful enough. Why do you think sometimes silence works better than angry words?

3. Wednesday: Do you know how to delete a Facebook post? Why is this sometimes the best idea?

4. Thursday: Why might it be best not to respond at all to a negative Facebook post? Why is it easier for people to be mean on Facebook or the Internet than to your face?

There are times when Jesus chose not to have the last word.

5. Friday: LOOKUP John 8:59. Why did Jesus remove himself? What did he see about this crowd?

6. Saturday: LOOKUP John 19:8-10. Why did Jesus not respond to some questions at his trial?

7. Sunday: LOOKUP Matthew 7:6. What does this statement mean?

LESSON #10

FINDING YOUR GIFTS FROM GOD

(And therefore some meaning in life)

Lesson Capsule

With this lesson, we have moved out of the areas of defining kids' greatest challenges and how to address them. We are now moving into building a future and finding God's plan for tomorrow. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision [or dream], the people perish." With today's teenagers facing such treacherous choices, it is often helpful if they start developing gifts and talents while thinking about their future. Christian teens can start creating their own dreams for the future if they know what they're good at. This lesson using goals and dreams sheets will help.

Materials

Class Activity

- Printer paper, one sheet for each student, plus five more
- Pens, one for each student

Small Group Discussion

- If there is a way to ask students with laptops to bring them, do that for the discussion. If not, they can share their cell phones.

Help All Week

- "Doing Online Quizzes and Personality Tests," one copy for each student.

Preparation

Class Activity

- On separate sheets of printer paper, write out the five ways to know you're following God's will, listed IN CAPS in the lesson.]

Small Group Discussion

- If the church requires a password to use its Internet service remotely, make sure you have it.

Finding Your Gifts from God

(And therefore some meaning in life)

LESSON

In America, teenagers are put to the challenge of choosing a career. There isn't much about this in the Bible. Why not? Because until just recently—and still in many countries—people had no choice in their life's calling. They worked at jobs that had been in their families for generations. There was no one in Biblical times who sat there and thought, "Gee, what university should I go to, or what do I want to major in?"

Because there is no path laid out for us biblically, these are choices we have to take seriously. We have to believe that God will lead us, that we are able to see and hear his voice, and that he would never lead us into something we would hate, dislike, or even be neutral about. God wants us in jobs that bring us joy.

However, we have to take the steps forward. No one will do it for us. What happens if you spend all of your teenage years thinking, "I'll figure that out later, when I have to?" Your career won't be clear to you when you're supposed to start working.

In modern times, you have the power to develop a vision or a dream for yourself and your future. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision [or dream], the people perish." Why do you think teenagers get in so much trouble compared to other age groups? Because they don't have a dream or vision for their lives.

Pass out sheets of paper and pens, so they can write answers down, and if they show interest, they can write down the prompts below. **Write down very quickly 10 details of where you would like to be in 10 years. You can include**

1. the name of a college you graduated from
2. the name of a company you would like to work for
3. a type of job you'd like to have
4. the city you'd like to be living in
5. a type of person you'd like to be married to
6. the type of house you'd like to live in
7. a type of car you would like to drive
8. a charity or charity work you'd like to be involved in
9. whether or not you would like to have children by this age
10. a type of pet you'd like to own
11. a trip you would like to have taken

Let them fill out their pages, leaving any blank if they really can't think of an answer. Encourage them to share their answers with each other.

What is one way we can determine what God would like us to do for our careers? God gave us talents or strengths in certain areas or certain passions. **Would God give you talents that you enjoy and then tell you go to work in totally opposite careers? Would God encourage a really shy person to go into sales? Would he put a really social person in a think tank?**

Have you taken the tests in schools that tell you what your talents are or where your strengths lie? What did those tests tell you about yourself? Let them share their talents and strengths.

What do we mean when we talk about “talents?” Do we mean only the things we see in talent shows? No; talents can be anything from friendliness, to a special way with animals, to being a good listener.

What’s a great way to begin to find your talents if you don’t already know what they are? Thinking of what you love to do.

In Matthew 16:24, Jesus says to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Does this mean that we can’t have the careers of our choosing? This is an awkward question that stumps many Christians and often prevents them from moving forward. The answer is complex but can be derived in the following questions:

Why might God close the door to a career choice? Say that someone wants to become a doctor—one of the highest-paying careers in our country. Why might God not move to help a certain person through medical school? If the person only wanted to do it for the money.

What happens when we don’t think a lot about the tasks and how they fit in with our gifts, and instead, we’re only thinking about having a lot of money? We can lose quality of life because our real talents are being neglected and our real loves are never developed. We could even harm others by not having enough of the natural skills needed to, say, operate on people.

This is why Jesus says in Luke 16:13 that we can’t serve both God and money. If we’re thinking about the money first, we’re not being grateful enough for the talents he created so carefully and so lovingly in each of us. In every career, we are providing some sort of good or service that will help others. We could actually hurt others if we don’t fixate on where our loves and our talents are.

The big question is this: How do we be sure we are serving God while fulfilling all our dreams? Here are three steps.

Pass out signs to students, who can hold them up for others to see:

1. **PRAY FOR GOD’S LIGHT AND GUIDANCE DAILY**, believing you have received it when you ask.
2. **START TO WORK TOWARD THESE DREAMS**, setting small, but regular, goals, believing on him to open doors and light the way.
3. **DON’T EXPECT HIM TO CLOSE A DOOR**—expect him to open doors that you ask, and that unwavering faith is a blessing back to him.

FREEDOM RIDE

4. **PERSIST.**
5. **TRUST HIM.** If, under those circumstances a door closes, what are you to think? That God doesn't care about your feelings or is trying to trip you up? A closed door means that your imagination hasn't gone to the right place yet. He knows a place or a situation where you would be happier, and you just don't know about it yet.

Getting God's best for you is always better than what you can dream up for yourself. But it requires a relationship. Christianity is about that relationship. You can get much closer to God while calling on him to lead you to his best.

Finding Your Gifts from God

(And therefore some meaning in life)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION **Getting a Vision for God's Best**

Very successful people say that one of the secrets of success is having visions and dreams for the future that are very specific. What they can visualize with joy, they can more easily obtain, they say. This has to do with Hebrews 11:1, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." Some say that faith does turn into a substance in the heavens—it is that real. And the clearer our visions are and the happier they make us, the easier it is to have "substance faith."

Have students take the lists they are working on and "go shopping with God." Using their iPhones and what laptops are available, take turns finding pictures of dreams they would like to build for their future—pets and trips and colleges and scholarships, whatever is most exciting to them now.

Have them show each other and discuss their dreams, then e-mail the pictures to themselves at home. Encourage students to make the pictures on their desktops to help them stay focused on the future (and not on the next party).

Finding Your Gifts from God (And therefore some meaning in life)

HELP ALL WEEK **Doing Online Career and Personality Tests**

This week, take some online psychology tests that are designed to tell you a little about yourself. Here are some suggestions:

The Jung Typology Test is used by the FBI when hiring employees and many other large companies also use it. It will tell you a lot about the type of work you are cut out for:

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

Team Technology relies on the same ways of “typing” personalities as the one above. However it gives very detailed reports that may be a little bit harder for high-school students to understand. A good feature is the ability to buy the more detailed tests. If your parents are supportive of this and are encouraging you to find your future, they may agree to pay the moderate fee of \$7.30 to get four detailed analyses about yourself.

<http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/>

Quiz Rocket is loaded with fun tests, from IQ to personality to career personality. If you don't test well, don't be daunted by IQ tests. Nearly every famous author in the literary canon since the mid 1700s either flunked out of school, was expelled, or couldn't get in to begin with.

<http://www.quizrocket.com/>

Simply use all this material as a fun guide. The information can make sure you are accurately identifying your gifts and you're shedding any dreams that would require you to be in a career you might hate.

FREEDOM RIDE

Class Conclusion

“Without a vision, the people perish.” Kids who don’t have hope for tomorrow and a plan of action often get in the most trouble. Another thing that keeps teenagers on the right path is developing a heart for helping others in need. We’ll learn about having empathy next week.

For now, you can stay on God’s path and bring him glory by being a planner and getting a cool vision for your tomorrow.

LESSON #11 **PUTTING YOURSELF IN OTHERS' SHOES**

(And not catching their foot fungus)

Lesson Capsule

Empathy means putting ourselves in the shoes of others and knowing how they feel. Some schools of psychology believe that children are not equipped to empathize well until around the age of 14 (though others feel there simply hasn't been enough done to cultivate empathy at younger ages). We are working with a perfect age group to cultivate the art of empathy, which may work for students in the present, and will certainly help guide them to greater happiness in the future. This lesson uses relaxed imagination and meditation to put kids in the shoes of others.

Materials

Class Activity

- None

Small Group Discussion

- Bibles for those who may come without
- "Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes," one copy for each student
- Pens

Help all Week

- "The Compassion Challenge," one copy for each student (double-sided)

Preparation

- None

Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

(And not catching their foot fungus)

LESSON

Have everyone either lie on the floor or put their heads down on the table and get very comfortable. Have them shut their eyes.

I'm going to take you on a journey. You're going to become someone other than yourself for a few minutes. It's up to you to decide whether this is a person you would want to be, and that isn't even the main point. The point is to use your imagination to totally become this person if you can. Picture this:

You are walking down the corridor in school where your locker is. You are around 4-foot-11, not the height you are now. So adjust your vision so that you are looking at everyone's chest, or whatever. You are shy. Your tendency is to look down, not up. People pass you by, talking to each other loudly. They don't see you. They bang into you a lot. You're used to it. You don't bother to correct big, loud, strong people who step on your feet or almost knock your books out of your arms.

You're shy for lots of reasons. Your mother never cleans up the house. She watches TV all day as the mess grows around her. You keep telling yourself that you should clean it up. Your mom has a blood disorder that probably won't kill her, but it got her out of work and now she just gets disability checks that you and her have to live on. You also sense that your mom's self-esteem is more responsible for the mountains of stuff than her illness is. You wonder secretly why she won't get up and do something for herself. You've tried cleaning up, but you feel betrayed. You feel she is letting you down and not caring. And regardless, it is almost impossible to have friends in here. You've had one friend over sometimes who understands but even she agrees that most people would not. You've taken your mom's lack of confidence into school. You just want to get by without any problems.

Another reason you are shy—skin problems. There's always something swollen that hurts, right in the middle of your face somewhere. It's always throbbing, sore to the touch, so you're always aware. Other kids—with better-off families or more power—get to go to a dermatologist. But your mother's never even brought it up and there's no way to pay for it that you know of. [end imagining]

Give me some words to describe how you feel.... Awful, lonely, discouraged...

Add your own details, ones I haven't talked about. Like what she's wearing... what color hair she has ...how heavy the books she's carrying are...who bangs into her. Then give me more words to describe how you feel. Let them continue.

Note: As this is a pretty difficult exercise, you will most likely get one prankster who makes a wisecrack to break the tension, and everyone will laugh. Don't you laugh, and discourage them. Tell them this is important and give some more details to swing them back into it.

Did you know that this person exists in your school?

That's because she exists in every school. In your school, she may not be as short. She may not have skin problems, but she's got other things that plague her all day—things others never stop to think about. Some may have had the passing thought that they're glad they're not her. But that's it. Nobody's heart ever went out. It's just not their problem.

When you have become this person, when you walk around a little bit in her shoes, how would you like others to treat you? What would make a difference in your life? To be smiled at and talked to and included in some things. To feel connected and not ashamed of your home.

Can you think of someone in your school who might be feeling the bad feelings you first mentioned? Don't say the person's name out loud. Just focus on him or her. Put yourselves in that person's shoes for a minute, just taking a walk down the corridor in school. Give them a minute to focus.

Now that you have walked in that person's shoes, how will you treat that person differently after this? If anyone wants to answer, allow them to.

Have everyone get up slowly and go to small groups. Leave the question hanging.

Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

(And not catching their foot fungus)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

LOOKUP Matthew 5:45. How is the opposite of the statement also true? (The opposite would be that God allows some people to have less, even if they are just and good.) Why is that?

One way that God shows his love for all of mankind (and not just professing Christians) is that he gives great things to people from all faiths and all walks of life. It shows that his love is not partial, that he loves equally those who even don't love him. When it appears that someone has less, does that mean that God loves that person less? Why or why not?

When people who have less down here make it into heaven, what happens to them?

LOOKUP Matthew 19:29-30

If we are thoughtless to the future kings and queens of heaven, how will God feel about that?

If we're among those in school who appear to have less—a small social circle, less beauty, less riches, and/or less raw intelligence—and we've been tormented because of it, why is that not really a bad thing?

LOOKUP Psalm 1:1-4

LOOKUP Luke 16:19-31

How do we become first in the kingdom of heaven?

Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes

(And not catching their foot fungus)

HELP ALL WEEK The Compassion Challenge

We learned this week that empathy and compassion work joyously all around. We make others feel less lonely and able to heal emotionally when we are kind. We also experience a great release of joy into our own lives, which not only helps us, but helps those who live with us or are around us.

Think of a person in your school who has been picked on and may be very lonely. Pray for that person all week. Smile at them. Speak to them occasionally. See how God leads you. He may lead you to a greater friendship or to invite the person to youth group, or he may tell you that that's all he wants and to find a different person.

Be cautious of two things while doing this:

- First, you should pick someone of your own gender, as often being kind to someone of the opposite sex can flare up romantic feelings on their part, which can cloud the issue and, ironically, cause that person more pain than joy.
- Second, keep in mind that some lonely and tormented people live with mental illnesses. That's sad but it's not good if someone is "latching onto you" and following you everywhere, who you may not be qualified to handle.

Try to put yourself in that person's shoes every morning for a week. When you have empathized, pray for that person, asking for some blessings you would want if you were in that situation. Write down anything you want, including what you prayed for, what God led you to do for that person, or any ways you saw their lives improve by your prayers and empathy.

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

FREEDOM RIDE

SENIOR HIGH LESSON 11 / PUTTING YOURSELF IN OTHERS' SHOES

Class Conclusion:

Becoming a person of empathy is a sign of Christian maturity. If you can put yourselves in the shoes of others, you are halfway to fulfilling the Golden Rule at all times in your life.

Next week is the last lesson in this series of 12. It's about loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, and how we all need to stick together.

LESSON #12 **LOVING YOUR BROTHERS 'N' SISTERS**

(Even when you want to clobber each other)

Lesson Capsule

1 Corinthians 15:33 clearly states the truth: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Christian students will have a better chance of making it through high school and college years unscathed if they can hang out together. It’s important to cultivate the relationships in your group, even if your students hang out in different crowds in school and seem to have nothing but Christ in common. Christ is enough. This final series lesson with putting together “garage junk” to make a snow globe will help illustrate.

Materials

Lesson

- Baby-food or mason jar, complete with lid that screws on tightly
- Glitter in a container or sandwich Baggie
- Moon and stars glitter (can be purchased at any craft store)
- Bottle of water (needn't be new)
- Rubber band
- Small, used wooden Christmas ornament, like a toy soldier or cross. It should be small enough to fit inside the baby-food jar or mason jar.
- Piece of fabric cut in a circle, an inch to two inches bigger than the top of the jar
- Epoxy glue that is waterproof.
- Sharpie pen
- Foot-long piece of lace or ribbon

Small Group Discussion

- Construction paper to make Love Cards (Note: you can also use t-shirts, baseball caps, or binders if your budget allows!)
- Marker pens

Help All Week

- Brother or Sister Prayer Journal

Preparation

- Using the epoxy glue, glue the toy to the inside of the lid of the jar. Give it time to dry sufficiently.
- Put all the other items in a paper bag.

Loving Your Brothers 'n' Sisters

(Even when you want to clobber each other)

LESSON

1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." All the people in this room tonight are brothers and sisters in Christ. That is a very special relationship. Why do you think the Bible says that it's so important for Christians to have a close bond with each other? They'll help you stay out of trouble; they're more likely to involve giving and understanding; it's a tough world and we need each other for support and encouragement.

This family is like your brothers and sisters at home. We're all different. How many of you are exactly like your siblings? None. How many find that your siblings can really get on your nerves? All.

In this room, some of us seem more perfect than others. Some of us have fewer problems than others. We may hang out in different crowds in school. But consider: you will be with these people for eternity. That's a long time. We should start to feel like siblings now - no matter how different we feel in school.

I'm a part of this too, and I feel very special towards each of you. And since this is the last lesson in the series, I'd like to celebrate by giving something to each of you guys. Evil grin will help. I've actually cleaned out my garage, and I found some things that remind me of each of you.

Open your bag and give out "gifts" with the following metaphors. If you don't have this many students, repeat. If you have more, split up the glitter into separate bags. Don't worry if the words you're using don't exactly fit the personality of the person getting the "gift." That makes it funny.

[Student 1], you are very "sparkly," so I'm giving you my glitter.

[Student 2], your dreams will take you to the stars, so I'm giving you my stars and moons.

[Student 3], you seem pretty full of the Holy Spirit sometimes, and water is often a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. So I'm giving you this bottle of water. Though it's pretty old, so I'm not sure I'd drink it.

[Student 4], you have a really great imagination that stretches. So I'm giving you this rubber band that reminds me of your great mind.

[Student 5], you always like to play around. Therefore I'm giving you this toy.

[Student 6], you're pretty smooth. You don't have any "rough edges" in your personality. Therefore I'm giving you this smooth circle that reminds me of you.

[Student 7], you're often the peacemaker in the group. You keep people together. Therefore, I'm giving you this tube of epoxy glue.

[Student 8], you're the one who knows the word of God best. So I'm giving you something to write words with. It reminds me of you.

[Student 9], you're kind of ladylike. So I'm giving you this girly ribbon.

Gee, I feel just great about my giving. How do you feel? Are these good gifts for you? Can you take these things home and find some special place to display them or some special way to use them? Some may actually say yes, though some ought to be dubious.

Actually, these aren't very useful gifts, are they? I mean, maybe it was thoughtful - but what can we do with them? Apart from each other, we can do nothing with them. They need to stick together - like us.

Let's put together the jar and the water. Have the recipient of the water fill the jar.

Next, let's sprinkle the glitter and the stars in the water in the jar. Have students comply.

Next, let's put the lid on the jar. Student with the toy should turn it upside down and screw the lid shut so the toy is inside. Screw it very tight!

Next, we'll add the circle and the rubber band. Have students wrap the circle onto the lid and hold it in place with the rubber band so that it makes a little ruffle and is held tight.

Let's add the glue and the lace. Have the student with the glue go once liberally around the rubber band. Put the lace around it and tie a bow on the side if the lace is too long.

Finally, we'll add the Sharpie. Write on top of the fabric, "JOY JAR."

Shake it up so they can see that the snow globe really works and is cute. **Who has a sick parent, grandparent, sibling, or friend? Give the joy jar to someone who raises their hand.**

Give them the JOY JAR, tell her (him) it's from your youth group, and that we all want her to get better soon. Tell her that love works best when love works together. All your "brothers and sisters" in youth group worked together, and now she can feel that love whenever she shakes the globe.

Before we started, we have a bunch of old stuff from the garage. It was me trying to be thoughtful, but it wasn't useful. Once we all joined hands, we could make something, you see? We don't all have to enjoy each other's company and try to spend every minute with each other. Sometimes our own siblings can drive us crazy, and yet we're no less related. If we all stand together as brothers and sisters, we'll be strong and useful - and we'll all sparkle!

Loving Your Brothers 'n Sisters

(Even when you want to clobber each other)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION Love Cards

Note: This idea also works well with t-shirts, ball caps, bouncy balls, posters, or notebook binders. But if you don't have much in your budget, a plain piece of construction paper will also work.

LOOKUP: 1 John 4:7-8

LOOKUP: John 13:34

LOOKUP: Romans 12:10

Give everyone a piece of construction paper and put the colored markers in the middle of the table. Have everyone fold their paper in half and write on the front: I [name] AM A SISTER [BROTHER] IN CHRIST TO...

Students should then pass the paper to the person on their right. That person should write something nice about the person whose paper it is and sign her name, then pass it along to the next person to do the same. Encourage students to write at least two lines. Encourage them to be original and not fall back on words like "you're nice."

After their name, encourage them to add one of the Scriptures in the above lookups that is particularly meaningful to them, or one of their personal faves (just the verse number—not the whole Scripture)

Loving Your Brothers 'n Sisters

(Even when you want to clobber each other)

HELP ALL WEEK Brother or Sister a Day Prayer Journal

This week, when speaking to God, pray for one of your brothers or sisters in Christ each day. Think of things that you know about them, maybe places where they need encouragement or have needs. Put yourself in their shoes and think of things that might bless them and pray for those things too.

Person's Name

Prayer Request

Any Answers/Updates

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday

Class Conclusion

We've learned a lot in the past 12 weeks so that we can have our freedom ride—away from sin, away from being victimized, away from feeling that God is far off. But the most important lesson is this last one. 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 says, “Though I may speak with the tongues of men and angels, and prophesy, and have all understanding and truth. Though I may have all faith so as to remove mountains if I have not love, I am a clanging cymbal or a tinkering bell. *I am nothing.*”

If life gets tough, dark, and confusing such that you can barely remember your name, while you're praying for help, remember this: Love the people in this room. They may go their separate ways, but like your friend Jesus, they'll see you in eternity.