



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

# EMOTIONS & DATING

Additional Options



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## SESSION I

# FEELINGS OF CONTENTMENT

### STARTER

**Shop 'till You're Happy.** For this option, you will need several different scenes from a television shopping program and a way to show it to your group. Record several scenes of a host selling different items and have them ready to show before the session starts.

Greet the group members and play the shopping television program scenes. Encourage them to pay attention to the kinds of products they see and the sales pitches that are used. Afterward, discuss the following questions:

- Did you see an item that you wanted to buy? What made you want to buy it (color, size, volume)? *(Allow the group members to respond.)*
- Why are there entire television programs devoted solely to getting people to buy their products? *(Because these shows work. People are willing to spend a lot of money if they believe the products they are buying will make them feel better about their lives. People try to buy happiness.)*
- In addition to products, what are some other ways people might try to find happiness? Do you think these ways can really bring a person lasting happiness? *(Allow the group members to respond.)*

- Have you ever felt perfectly content with your life? If so, for how long? What changed that feeling? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)

Explain that one of the reasons people in our society are always buying things is because everyone is looking for contentment. Most of us believe we will be happier and more satisfied with where we are in life if we have more things. However, this is not where we find contentment. As we begin this new series on feelings, we will discover how finding true contentment depends on looking in the right place.

## MESSAGE

**Paul, the Movie.** For this option, you need several Bibles, poster board and markers. Begin by having the group members form teams of three to five people. Explain that the Scripture you are going to read today comes from the book of Philippians. Paul was a prisoner when he wrote it (see Philippians 1:13-14), most likely under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:14-31). In ancient Rome most people awaiting trial were simply restricted to their homes—the actual prisons, as we think of them, served as a holding place for those condemned to die.

Read Philippians 4:10-13 to the group, and then give each team a poster board and some markers. Instruct the team to create a poster that advertises a movie about Paul's life. They will need to give the movie a title and include it as part of the poster. Suggest to the teams that they include any knowledge they have (or can find) about Paul's life that doesn't come from Philippians 4:10-13. (Some passages they might want to use include Acts 9:1-19; 27:39–28:6 and 2 Corinthians 11:24-29).

When the teams have finished creating their movie posters, have them present the posters to the overall group. Next, discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the events Paul faced in his life that you found in the Bible or already know about him? (*He was put in prison; he was blind for a period of time; God used him to heal others; he was in a shipwreck; a deadly snake bit him; he was whipped, beaten, stoned and nearly died.*)
- How do these circumstances normally affect people? (*People who go through these events usually become angry, bitter and depressed.*)
- In Philippians 4:10-13, what bold claim did Paul make about how these circumstances affected him? (*He had learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.*)

- How could he make such a claim? *(Because he had survived these difficulties with the help of Jesus.)*
- What was Paul's secret for being content regardless of what happened? *(He knew that he could rely on Christ to take care of him.)*
- How can we be content no matter what happens to us? *(We develop contentment in all situations as we build our relationship with Christ through prayer and studying the Bible.)*

Explain to the group members that as they spend time with God and study His Word, they will discover a true and lasting contentment that will stay with them no matter what happens in their lives.

## DIG

**Contentment Questions.** For this option, you will just need these questions. Discuss the following as a group.

- What is contentment, anyway? How is it different from what we feel when things are going our way? *(Contentment is a sense of inner strength, peace, wellbeing and satisfaction that isn't dependent on what is going on around us.)*
- If we're trying to depend on Jesus to meet our needs, is it okay to still have sad feelings sometimes? *(It's okay to feel sad, but we can experience contentment in Jesus at the same time. However, if we find ourselves feeling sad a lot of the time, it's important to talk to a trusted Christian. They can pray for us and help us better understand contentment.)*
- How is it possible to allow Jesus to meet our deepest needs? *(When we allow Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, we enter into a relationship with Him that grows deeper every day. As we grow closer to Jesus, He is able to meet our deepest needs and we are able to experience more of His love, peace and contentment in our lives.)*
- So, is it wrong to try to improve our own lives or the lives of others? *(No. Being content doesn't mean we have to keep things as they are. Jesus wants us to make the world a better place, but we aren't dependent on these changes for our contentment.)*

- How can contentment affect our relationships with others? (*When we are content, we don't look to other people to try to meet our needs. We have more to give to others, and when other people notice the contentment in our lives, they will be attracted to Jesus.*)

## APPLY

**The Gift.** For this option you need small gift boxes (or gift bags), gift-wrapping paper, transparent tape, scissors and fine-tipped markers. Begin by reminding the group that Paul discovered the secret of being content, and it changed the way he lived. Have them silently consider these questions:

- Why does God want you to find your source of contentment in Him?
- How would your life be different if you were content in Jesus regardless of what came your way?
- How would that change affect others around you?

Give each person a small box. Set out the gift-wrapping paper, tape, scissors and fine-tipped markers where everyone can use them. Instruct the group members to individually gift-wrap their small boxes, and then on the outside of the boxes write down some areas of their lives they need to commit to Jesus to find contentment in Him. (*For example, "love life," "future plans" or "parents' relationship."*)

Explain that the boxes they have created represent their lives. They can choose to be a "gift" to others who aren't Christians by showing how true contentment is found in Christ alone. When others witness our lives and discover that we are content even when things are not going completely our way, it can serve as a powerful testimony for the power of God. Our contentment can actually attract others to Christ!

Close in prayer, asking God to help the group members find contentment in Jesus, who is the only one who can meet their deepest needs. Ask God to help them exhibit lives that will serve as a gift to others who don't know Jesus and that He is what they have been seeking. After praying, ask the group to take their boxes home so they will remember that their lives can serve as a gift to others.



## SESSION 2

# FEELINGS OF LOVE

### STARTER

**Love Defined.** For this option, you will need paper, pens or pencils, a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker.

Greet the group members, have them form teams of three to five people each, and give each team some paper and a pen or pencil. Instruct each team to come up with a definition for the word “love.” As the teams are working on their definitions, challenge them by suggesting types of love they may not have considered, such as love between family members, love between friends, love between people and their pets, and even people’s love for food.

When teams have created their definitions, allow them to share their findings with the entire group. Write the definitions on the whiteboard as the teams present them, and then have the group choose the best definition on the list. Read the best definition aloud, and then discuss the following questions:

- Why is love so hard to define? *(Because we use one word to describe a number of different feelings, states and attitudes.)*
- How do we know if a person is in love with someone or something? *(People who are in love will treat the person they love in a special way, or they will spend their time, energy and money on the object of their love.)*

- What do you think is the most important kind of love? Why? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- What kind of love have you experienced? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- What kinds of love are guaranteed to last forever? (*Only God's love. All other types of love will fade away.*)

Transition by explaining to the group that today they are going to explore this last point in more detail—that God's love alone is guaranteed to be eternal.

## MESSAGE

**God *Is* Love.** For this option, you need several Bibles, a large piece of paper, a permanent marker, a time-keeping device (large enough for the group to see), a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker. Ahead of time, create a contract on the large piece of paper that simply reads, "I promise to love you forever. God."

Begin by explaining to the group that God can love us forever because God *is* forever. It's hard for our minds to grasp, but God has *always* existed, and He always will. Read Deuteronomy 33:27 to the group and show the time-keeping device so everyone can see it. State that while humans are always at the mercy of time—and are always checking their time-keeping devices—God operates *outside* of space and time. He is eternal, and He is our refuge and our strength! As He told His people in Malachi 3:6, "I the LORD do not change!"

Continue by reading Psalm 136. State that God has shown His love to people since the beginning of time, and He won't ever stop. He keeps His promises, just as He did for the people of Israel in the ways described in this passage. Display the contract you created beforehand and explain that this contract is a reminder of what God has promised us. He will never break His word to us.

Write the words "Love is . . ." on the whiteboard. Ask the group to call out words to fill in the blank, and as they do, write their words below the sentence starter. Read 1 John 4:7-10 and explain that God *invented* love. In fact, as this passage shows, God's *is* love itself, and His ultimate act showing this love to us was by allowing His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross on our behalf. As Paul states in Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Write "God" across the group's list of definitions.

Conclude by stating that God shows His love and mercy to us each and every day, and He has promised that if we love Him and accept Jesus as our Sav-



ior, we will live with Him forever (see John 14:6). God has extended the offer. It is up to us to decide how we will choose to respond to His great love!

## DIG

**Love Questions.** For this option, you will need just these questions. Discuss the following as a group:

- Is it okay to love other people and things besides God? (*Yes. God wants us to love other people and to take joy in the blessings He gives us. However, these things should never get in the way of our love for God.*)
- Does God love some people more than others? (*No. God loves everyone equally. Even though it may seem like God should love Christians more than non-Christians, He doesn't. Although some people have more possessions and advantages in life, it is important to remember that these things aren't indicators of how much God does or doesn't love an individual. Again, Christ died for everyone. That was the ultimate display of His love.*)
- If God's love lasts forever, why does the world seem to be getting worse? (*Because God loves us, He allows us to make our own choices. As people choose to disobey God, the world suffers the consequences of sin. The more time passes, the more the consequences of sin pile up for the world. In addition, Satan is God's enemy and opposes God's plan. Satan uses lies and deceptions to cause trouble in this world.*)
- If God loves people so much, why is there so much suffering? (*Suffering comes as a result of living in an imperfect world. The sad truth is that since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, we have had to live with the consequences of their sin. The good news is that God shows His love to people who are suffering—even though He doesn't always stop it—and He always promises to be with those who are in need. Through His love, God has made a way for us humans to leave this world with him and live with Him in heaven for all eternity. That is love!*)

Conclude by stating that God not only loves us, but He also wants us to love Him. He cares about the relationship that we have with Him and wants it to grow. He wants us to talk to Him about everything that goes on in our lives,

and He also wants us to listen to His voice. He loves us deeply and shows us His love every day.

## APPLY

**Love in Action.** For this option, you will need your Bible, paper and pens or pencils.

Begin by stating that God's love demands a response. If we have already responded by accepting it, the next step is for us to show His love to others. Read 1 John 3:16-18 aloud. Explain that once we have experienced God's love, we need to show love to others in the same way. Sometimes this won't be easy for us to do, but God will help us as we try to love others.

Give each group member paper and a writing instrument and ask them to think of someone who needs to know about God's love. Instruct them to write a letter from God's perspective to that person, expressing how God feels about him or her. When everyone is finished, encourage the group members to take the next step by either giving the person the letter or by simply telling him or her about God's love in some other way. Close in prayer, asking God to give the group the opportunities and strength they need to follow through.



## SESSION 3

# FEELINGS OF ACCEPTANCE

### STARTER

**What a Character.** For this option, you need paper, a pen or pencil, and masking tape. Ahead of time, create characters for every student in your group. To do this, write the following on a piece of paper: (1) the character's name and (2) a brief description of the character (physical appearance, what he or she does in life, and so on) on a piece of paper. Make one character for each person in the group, and have some of the characters positive and others negative. For example, you might describe a bank robber on one piece of paper, a suburban mom on another, a gossipy teenager on another, and a church pastor on another.

As the group members arrive, greet them and tape a character sheet on their backs. Be sure they cannot read the character sheet. Next, instruct the group members to walk around the room and read the character sheets that are on other students' backs. Ask them to start conversations with other people in the group and to treat that person according to the type of character listed on the sheet. They cannot reveal the identity of the characters on their backs, but they can give clues by treating each other in certain ways. As they talk with others, they also should try to guess what character they are.

If players think they know the identity of the character on their backs, they should come to you and tell you. If they guess incorrectly, ask them to continue

to participate and to try to figure out what character they are. If they guess correctly, ask them to continue giving clues to others. After several minutes have passed, end the game and discuss the following questions:

- If you guessed what character you were, how did you figure it out?
- If you didn't guess what character you were, what would have helped you figure it out?
- In this activity, what did you do to show another player that he or she was either a good or a bad person? Was showing acceptance and rejection part of this process?
- Do you think that we do the same thing to people in our real lives? Why or why not?
- Why do you think it is important for people to feel accepted?

Explain to the group that *everyone* needs to feel accepted. In today's session, we will learn how the choices we make during the day can show that we either accept or reject other people.

## MESSAGE

**Wiped Away.** For this option, you will need your Bible, a picture of yourself, a computer with PowerPoint, and a way to show the presentation to the group. Ahead of time, create a PowerPoint presentation with the first slide showing your picture. On each of the next slides, type a sin that a person could commit (such as stealing, lying, cheating and so on) over your picture. Add enough sins so that by the end your picture is completely obscured. For the final slide, place your picture with no words over it. (*Note:* For a lower-tech option, you could also use an overhead projector, a picture of you that has been photocopied onto a transparency, a blank transparency, a transparency marker and a screen or a blank wall.)

Read Romans 5:6-8 and explain to the group members that God showed us His acceptance by sending Jesus to die in our place—even though we hadn't done anything for Him or even tried to change our lives. We have all broken God's laws and deserve punishment, and God has never owed us anything. However, God took the punishment for our sin before we even admitted we were wrong!

Read 1 John 1:9 and explain that we all sin<sup>34</sup>we all do things that break God's laws. When we sin, it forms a barrier between God and us. Display the

first slide of your PowerPoint presentation, which should contain a picture of yourself. Explain that the Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We do things that go against God, such as lying, stealing, cheating (or whatever you have written). As you name each sin, cycle to the next slide. (*Note: If you are using an overhead projector, display your picture with a clear transparency on top of it. Ask the group members to name some common sins people commit, and as they call out ideas, write them on the clear transparency so the sins cover the picture.*)

Continue by stating that when God forgives us, He no longer sees all the sins that have covered us. Move to the final slide and state that when we are forgiven, all of these are taken away. (*Note: If you are using an overhead projector, pull away the clear transparency to reveal the clear picture of you again.*) Read John 15:14-15 and explain that God *wants* us to have a relationship with Him. He actually calls His followers friends! But we can only be friends with God because He *accepts* us.

Conclude by asking the group to consider how *anyone* could reject another person after knowing the way God has accepted them! God is so much greater than any of us, and there is nothing we could do to deserve His acceptance. Yet He has chosen to accept us and take us into His family anyway—just because He loves us. Given this, how can we *not* do the same for others?

## DIG

**Acceptance Questions.** For this option, you will need just these questions. Discuss the following as a group:

- Does accepting others mean that we have to let them walk all over us? (*No! Accepting others means not trying to change them or push them away because of who they are or the way they act. However, we should always protect ourselves and respectfully avoid people who mistreat us.*)
- Does accepting others mean we pretend they are perfect? (*No. Accepting others doesn't mean we have to pretend they are flawless. In fact, the highest form of acceptance is to acknowledge that a person isn't perfect, but to love and accept that person anyway. Remember, we all have faults!*)
- Why should we accept people who don't accept us? (*Because God accepts us, even when we reject Him. Remember that Christ gave up His life*

*for us without even waiting for us to change our lives. Our acceptance shouldn't be based on other people's behavior but on a response to God's acceptance of us. However, if someone continues to reject us, it would be a good idea to talk to a Christian adult and get his or her advice about how best to respond.)*

- Why does God care how we treat other people? (*God loves and cares about everyone. He hates to see us mistreat each other, and He wants us to show His love to others. Most times, people get their best glimpses of God through those who follow Him.*)

Conclude by stating that it is not always easy to accept others. Some people are so different from us that it is tough for us to see how we have any common ground. Others are just mean and generally unpleasant. Some don't seem interested at all in our friendship. What do we do in these cases? Perhaps these words from Mother Teresa sum it up best: "People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. . . . The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God."

## APPLY

**Acceptance in Action:** For this option, you will need nada. Zippo. Nothing.

Have the group members sit quietly and perhaps close their eyes. Ask them to think of someone they have been rejecting, either actively or passively. Pause for a few moments, and then ask the group members to think of at least one specific way they will try to show God's love and acceptance to that individual this week.

After a few moments, have the group members form pairs. Ask them to share with their partner the accepting action they are going to put into action. (Be sure the partners talk about their commitments without revealing any names.) The partners should then pray for each other to follow through on their commitments.



## SESSION 4

# FEELINGS OF ABANDONMENT

### STARTER

**Two Circles.** For this option, you will need nothing but this book. Greet the group members and have them count off, “one, two; one two,” until every student has been numbered. Ask all the number “ones” to form a circle, with each person facing outward. Ask all the number “twos” to form a circle around the first circle, with each person facing inward. Each person should be facing someone in the other circle. If you are short a person in either circle, join in to make up the difference.

Tell the group members that you will be asking them some questions, and when you do, they will need to discuss each question with the person whom they are facing. After discussing the question, the inner circle will rotate one person counterclockwise, while the outer circle will rotate one person clockwise. You will then ask the next question. Continue this process until you have asked all of the following questions:

- What are some things people do to try to avoid experiencing loss?
- Have you ever lost *something* important to you? How did it feel?
- Have you ever lost *someone* important to you? How did it feel?
- What did you do to get through that time of loss? Did it help?

Ask the group members to return to their seats, and then continue the discussion by asking the following questions:

- What events in life cause us to feel the most loss? *(Some things that could cause great loss include moving to another place, changing schools, our parents divorcing, the death of a loved one, a friend who suddenly decides not to be our friend, having something stolen or broken, and so on.)*
- What would we have to do to truly avoid experiencing loss? *(We would have to isolate ourselves, not have any relationships or possessions, not make any connections, and so on.)*
- How does losing something or someone important affect our lives? *(It hurts, makes us feel lonely, and can also compel us to not want to be connected to anything or anyone.)*
- What can help us to better handle loss? *(Some things that might help us include having a support group, having family and friends around to comfort us, and knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior.)*
- What are some ways we can deal with extreme loss? *(We can pray; cry; talk with friends, family or other adults; and serve others in need.)*

Explain that each of us has experienced loss in some way. Loss is always painful, and it always changes our lives. The sad truth is that in this world we can't count on *anything* to stay the same or always be there for us. However, in today's session we will see that we can always count on God. He will never leave us.

## MESSAGE

**To Lose Is to Gain.** For this option, you will need several Bibles, a whiteboard, a whiteboard marker, and some group members who like to read out loud.

Distribute the Bibles to the group, and then choose some volunteers to read Job 1:13-22 and Job 2:7-13. After the volunteers have read the passages, explain that today the group is going to pretend that they are all claims adjusters. A claims adjuster is a person who works for an insurance company and looks into a report a person has filed to determine how much the company has to pay. Job has just filed a *huge* claim, and his claim is especially suspicious because up until this time he has led a relatively carefree and blessed life.



Begin by asking the group to name some of the things that Job would claim on his report (*loss of oxen and donkeys, loss of camels, loss of house, loss of servants and family members, loss of health, and so on*). As the group members call out their answers, write them down on the whiteboard.

Next, choose another volunteer to read Job 42:1-17 aloud. After the person has read the passage, ask the group members to help you create a second list that shows what Job ultimately *gained* through this experience. These answers will be less tangible. (*If group members need help with this, some answers might include: a new knowledge of God, insight into who his real friends really were, a new sense of priorities, an appreciation for what God had given him, and even greater blessing than God had given him before.*) When you have compiled the second list, discuss the following questions:

- Why did Job lose so much? (*Because Satan wanted to destroy him.*)
- Do you feel God should have allowed this to happen to Job? Why or why not? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- Why do you think God allowed this to happen? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- How would you feel if you had been in Job's situation? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- How did Job seem to feel about his situation? (*He was sad and hurt, but he still trusted God.*)
- Where was God when Job was suffering? (*He was right there with him the entire time.*)
- How did Job feel at the end of his ordeal? (*He realized that God had a purpose for his life, that God had knowledge of things that he did not, and that it really wasn't His place to question why God did things.*)
- How did this experience change Job? (*He learned more about God—and so did his "friends"!)*

Conclude by stating that God allowed Satan to take away many things in Job's life—including his property, his family and his health. However, even though Job felt abandoned by God, the truth is that God had not left him. He reminded Job of this and then blessed Job by giving him twice as much as he had had before. The greatest thing that Job gained was a new appreciation for God and a deeper relationship with Him.

## DIG

**Abandonment Questions.** For this option, you will need just the questions below. Discuss the following as a group:

- How can we be sure that God will never abandon us? *(Being sure is a matter of trust. Because we know God and His character, we can choose to believe His promises in the Bible. God has promised to never abandon us, and He has been faithful to keep that promise for generations.)*
- If God is always with us, why do we sometimes feel as if He is so far away? *(Our feelings aren't always good indicators of God's presence. Our feelings are affected by a variety of factors, and we can't trust them to tell us about God's presence or His feelings toward us. Usually, if we feel as if God is far away, it is because we are feeling bad about ourselves or we've allowed something to block our relationship with God.)*
- What should our feelings be toward the important people and things in our lives? *(We should be grateful for the blessings God gives us and for the benefits we enjoy. However, we should always remember that they tend to be temporary and that only God will never abandon us. Of course, that doesn't mean we have to get rid of everything or refuse to have close relationships! We just have to remember that they don't always last forever.)*
- Is it wrong to feel bad when we lose something or someone important to us? *(It is normal to grieve when we experience loss. We should always acknowledge the fact that we are hurting. Grief should inspire us to turn to God for comfort, which helps us grow closer to Him.)*

Ask the group members to take a few moments to think about in what things they are placing their trust. If they are placing their trust in anyone or anything else besides God, they will one day be let down. Only God can remain strong and steady. God can be their safety net when everything else around them seems unsure.

## APPLY

**Songs of Trust.** For this option, you will need copies of the lyrics to several worship songs that speak of trusting only in God and some type of accompaniment

(if desired). Some examples include *Trust in the Lord; My God, in Him I Will Trust; Walk by Faith* and *God Is with Us*.

As you hand out copies of the lyrics to the worship songs you have chosen, explain to the group that they will have an opportunity to respond to God's constant presence by worshiping Him through song. Have the group sing the worship songs, giving them the opportunity in between each song to confess their tendencies to trust in other people or things besides God.

Close in prayer, confessing our tendencies to place our trust in worldly things and committing to trust in God alone.





## SESSION 5

# FEELINGS OF ANGER

### STARTER

**Anger Clips.** For this option, you will need several video clips from movies and/or television shows that portray someone who is very angry, and a way to show these clips to your group.

Begin by greeting your group members, and then show the clips you have selected. When you are finished, discuss the following questions:

- What were some of the reasons the people in the scenes became angry?
- What were some of the things that happened when the people became angry in these scenes?
- Do you think people really act this way when they get angry?
- What are some things a person might do when he or she is angry?
- What is the connection between anger and violence? *(If you hold on to your anger, it will grow until you end up doing something violent.)*
- Why is it so easy to give in to violence when you are angry? *(It is as if anger prepares you for action. If you don't allow God to direct your actions, your anger will.)*
- What are the results of violence in real life? *(The results of violence might include suffering, injury, death and more violence.)*

- Have you ever been hurt by someone else's actions when that person was angry?
- Have you ever hurt someone when you were angry?

Explain that the Bible has something to say about anger and where it can lead us. Today, we are going to look at this emotion and figure out some ways to control it.

## MESSAGE

**Anger Skits.** For this option, you need several Bibles, paper and pens or pencils.

Divide the group members into teams. Distribute the Bibles, paper and pens or pencils to each team, and have them follow along as you read Genesis 4:1-12. Explain that this passage is about two brothers who both offered a sacrifice to God, but God only accepted one of the brothers' offerings. Why God did this is tricky to understand at first, but we have to recognize that He knew what was in each brother's heart. He knew that Cain was not giving the best of what he had or with the right attitude. Abel was, so God accepted his sacrifice and rejected Cain's.

Continue by stating that as you might expect, this made Cain very angry with his brother. Unfortunately, in spite of a direct warning from God, Cain allowed his anger to get the best of him. He turned that anger into action and murdered his brother.

Explain that each team is now going to create a skit that demonstrates the danger in allowing anger to turn into a violent action. As the teams prepare their skits, they can draw on the story in Genesis 4 for ideas. The teams will need to include the reason for the anger, how the anger turned into an action, and the result of that action.

Give the groups five minutes to prepare their skits. Have the groups present their dramas, and then discuss the following questions:

- What is one thing you learned about anger from the skits that you watched? (*Allow the students to respond.*)
- What is one thing you learned about anger as you prepared your skit? (*Allow the students to respond.*)
- Why was Cain angry? (*Cain was angry because God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but he did not look with favor on him or his offering.*)

- What were the steps between Cain becoming angry and Cain killing his brother? *(He first was very angry and had a bad attitude. Then, when God warned him about his anger leading to something worse, he didn't listen. He acted on his anger by luring his brother into a field where no one would see them. Then he killed his brother.)*
- What causes an angry person to become violent? *(If a person doesn't deal with his or her anger but allows it to grow, it will eventually come out as an action that is usually violent to that person or someone else.)*
- When you become angry, what is the first thing you do? *(Allow the students to respond.)*
- What would God tell you to do differently when you become angry? *(Allow the students to respond.)*

Summarize the message by stating that while we do see instances in the Bible where people engaged in “righteous anger”—such as when Nehemiah got upset over the wealthy Israelites’ treatment of the poor (see Nehemiah 5:1-8)—more often anger is of the negative kind, like we find in this story in Genesis 4. God hates this type of violence, because it hurts people and pushes Him out of their lives.

## DIG

**Anger Questions.** For this option, you will need nothing but the questions below. Discuss the following as a group

- Is it a sin to become angry? *(No. In fact, the Bible records many instances in which people became angry. In one story told in Luke 19:45-46, we find that even Jesus became angry, and He acted on that anger by overturning the moneychangers’ tables in the Temple. However, these are all acts of righteous anger against sin—in Jesus’ case they had made God’s house a “den of robbers” and were cheating the poor. Unfortunately, more often than not the anger we feel comes as a result of personal hurt, and we are tempted to retaliate. When we do this, it can quickly lead to sin.)*
- In Ephesians 4:26-27, why does Paul say, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”? *(Paul was encouraging his readers not to hold on to anger but to let it go. Even though the people of his time didn't have the studies we have today about the negative physical and emotional*

*effects of anger, they recognized that unresolved anger didn't lead to good things.)*

- What does the Bible say we should do when we get into a situation that could make us angry? *(A good rule is found in James 1:19-20: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." In other words, stop yourself from quickly reacting.)*
- Wait a minute. Didn't God tell the Israelites in the Bible to kill the people they were invading in the Promised Land? *(Yes, but you have to remember that this was a different situation. The Canaanites—the people living in the Promised Land—served foreign gods, and God needed to root out this idolatry. In several instances we find places where He extended mercy to the Canaanites who renounced their gods and turned to Him, such as the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 and the story of Ruth in Ruth 1–4).*
- If God hates violence, how can we defend ourselves if we're attacked? *(Sometimes the best thing to do is to just walk away from violence. But if you absolutely have to fight back, it's okay to defend yourself from harm. Just don't get carried away by the desire to hurt someone else.)*
- What should we do when we see violence? *(If it's safe for us to stop the violence, we should stop it. If not, we should get help from someone who can, such as an adult, a school administrator, a police officer or a security guard.)*

Conclude by stating that it is not always easy to control our temper, step away and not lash back at someone. It is especially hard to control our angry words. As James writes, "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (James 3:5). Living a godly life and refusing to act out on our anger will require us to go to God each day and ask Him for help in controlling our words and actions.

## APPLY

**Turn Away from Anger.** For this option, you need a bed sheet or large piece of cloth, colored fabric markers or paints, a plastic tarp and masking tape or tacks.

Explain to the group members that allowing anger and violence to live inside us will often affect our witness for Christ. Angry and violent thoughts and



behaviors will get in the way of us showing other people the difference that Jesus can make in a person's life. We share the gospel by the way we live, and if we are always angry and acting on our bitterness, that won't serve as a good example to others.

Encourage the group members to think of at least one person in their lives with whom they are currently angry. Ask them to consider how others might be affected if they chose to give that anger up to God and allowed God to work through them. As the group is thinking, spread out the plastic tarp. Lay the bed sheet (or large piece of cloth) and the fabric markers or paints on top of the tarp (in case the markers or paints soak through the cloth). Next, instruct the group members to come up and write down the names of the people who came to mind. (*They can just write "parents," "sister," "brother," "friend," "neighbor," "teacher" if they don't want to give names.*) When everyone is finished, hang the banner up in the room as a reminder of the powerful influence that results in turning away from anger and violence.

Challenge the group members to actively turn away from anger and violence during the next month. Close in prayer, asking God to help the group turn away from anger or violence and toward His healing work in their lives. Also ask God to help each person make an impact on someone else's life during the upcoming week.





## SESSION 6

# FEELINGS OF HOPELESSNESS

### STARTER

**What Would You Do?** For this option, you need only this book! Greet the group members and welcome them to this session on how to deal with feelings of hopelessness. Next, ask the group members to discuss what they would do if . . .

- One day they woke up and realized they had shrunk to only an inch tall
- Discovered that some moldy food in the fridge had mutated and was attacking them in their sleep
- They turned on the TV and every station was broadcasting different parts of their lives—someone had been filming them all along
- A group of aliens landed on their lawn and demanded that they go back with them to serve as a cook?

Explain that while these situations were just for fun, in real life we all face desperate times when we feel as if there is no way out. During those times, we may feel despair and hopelessness. Some people may even think that the only way out is to end their lives. However, suicide never solves anything, and it is never the answer. In this session, we will discover that it is during the times of desperation that Jesus wants to give us hope and help us with our problems.

## MESSAGE

**Judas Drama.** For this option, you need Bibles, paper and pens or pencils.

Distribute the Bibles to the group members. Explain that in Bible, Jesus had a core group of 12 friends who travelled with Him wherever He went to teach and heal the people. These men were known as Jesus' disciples, and they had given up their lives to follow Christ and be with Him. But then, in Matthew 26, we find out that one of these disciples, named Judas, betrayed Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders. These leaders didn't like Jesus saying that He was the Son of God, and they wanted Him dead.

Choose three volunteers to read Matthew 27:1-10 aloud. Have one volunteer read the narration, another read what Judas says, and the third read what the priests say. After the reading, discuss the following questions:

- How did Judas respond after the Jewish leaders bound Jesus and led Him away? (*He was extremely sorry for his actions.*)
- Why did he try to return the money he had received to the priests? (*He realized that he had sinned. He had sold Jesus out for money and caused Him to be condemned to death when He was innocent man.*)
- What caused Judas to throw the money down and leave the Temple? (*The Jewish leaders told him that they didn't care if Jesus was innocent—it was his responsibility for agreeing to their deal.*)
- What did Judas do next? (*He hung himself.*)
- What other options did Judas have besides suicide? (*He could have turned back to God, confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness.*)

Explain to the group members that you are now going to move ahead in time a bit. Jesus has been tried before the Jewish courts and has also appeared before Pilate, the Roman ruler in the region. He has been sentenced to death and is now hanging on a cross. Somewhere near him are two other men, who have also been sentenced to die. Read Luke 23:39-43, and then discuss the following questions with the group:

- What did the first criminal say and do? (*He hurled insults at Jesus and said that if He were really the Messiah, He could save Himself and them.*)
- What did the second criminal say and do? (*He rebuked the first criminal and said that they were being punished for the deeds they had committed, but Jesus had done nothing wrong.*)

- What did this man then say to Jesus? *(He asked Jesus to remember him, or give him eternal life after his death.)*
- How did Jesus offer this man hope? *(He said that today they would both be together in paradise, or heaven.)*
- What kind of hope does Jesus offer people in desperate situations? *(He promises to be there for them, helping them through the tough times.)*

Conclude by stating that each of us will go through extremely difficult times in our lives. Sometimes, it will seem as if there is no way out of our situation, and we may be tempted to just “end it all.” During such moments, we have to turn to God and allow Him to provide the way out. He can fill us with His hope and help us get through whatever we are facing—but we have to choose the road to life. We have to trust that God is powerful enough to deliver us, and that He was to give us His hope. We have to trust that when God says He loves us and will take care of us, He means it.

## DIG

**Hopelessness Questions.** For this option, you will need just these questions. Discuss the following as a group:

- How can we find Jesus’ hope in this depressing world? *(Jesus provides hope all around us—often in ways we tend to take for granted. One way to recognize this hope is to keep a journal of all the times during our day when someone says or does something to speak encouragement into our lives. Before long, we will be able to see all of the little ways that God is there for us, encouraging us on and filling us with His hope!)*
- Does Jesus really provide hope for everyone? Aren’t some people beyond all hope? *(No one is beyond hope. Jesus is much bigger than our circumstances. He can bring hope to any situation in any person’s life.)*
- Why does God care if a person commits suicide? *(God cares about everyone—including the person who kills himself or herself and the people that individual leaves behind. He knows how much suicide hurts, and He also knows that when people commit suicide, they’ve given up on Him. He wants us always to turn to Him for hope and meaning in life.)*

- What should we do when a friend tells us that he or she is thinking about committing suicide? (*The first thing we should do is to listen and share with that person the hope we've experienced in knowing Jesus. The next thing to do is refer that person to an adult who can help him or her. It's important to take that person seriously and involve an adult who can give him or her counseling instead of keeping it a secret.*)
- What if our friend tells us that it's a secret and asks us not to tell anyone? (*Although it might feel like you are betraying that friend if you tell someone, the ultimate betrayal is to let that person hurt himself or herself. If you think someone is serious about committing suicide, tell your parent[s] or a trusted Christian adult, and let them help you figure out what to do.*)

Conclude by stating that when we belong Jesus, we are never without hope. When we feel hopeless, God wants us to take those feelings to Him and rely on His strength. He will see us through every situation—we just have to trust in Him!

## APPLY

**Celebration Mural.** For this option, you will need a cake, drinks, party decorations, the words to several worship songs, music to accompany the worship songs, a large piece of paper or fabric, and colored markers. Ahead of time, make copies of the lyrics to the worship songs—one for each person in the group. Place the large piece of paper or fabric and the markers where everyone will have access to them.

Explain that the group is going to close today's session by having a spontaneous celebration of life in Jesus. Ask the group members to help decorate the room, and when everything is ready, serve the cake and drinks. Follow this by spending some time singing worship songs. As the group members are celebrating, ask them to use the markers and paper or fabric to create a mural of all the things that make life in Jesus worth living.

When the group members have finished the mural, ask them to think up some ideas of how they might be able to celebrate life in Jesus every day. Allow the group to discuss their ideas, and then have everyone gather around the mural and hold hands. Close in prayer, asking God to help you and your group members celebrate your lives in Jesus each day. Hang the mural in your meeting room as a reminder of hope in Jesus.



## SESSION 7

# DEFINING LOVE

### STARTER

**Many Meanings.** For this option, you will need a whiteboard, whiteboard markers, and some pens and paper.

Greet the group members and place them in teams ranging from three to eight people. Provide each team with a pen and piece of paper. Explain that during the last six weeks, the group has been looking at emotions and how to deal with them. One of the emotions we discussed was love, and when that emotion is focused on members of the opposite sex, it can lead to relationships and dating. This, in turn, can lead to a host of other new issues and problems, which will be the focus of this next unit.

Explain to the group that the word “love” means different things to different people. In fact, like many words, love can have double—and even triple—meanings. On the whiteboard, write each of the following words in turn, explaining that these are some examples of words that also have more than one meaning.

- *Trunk*: You can see an elephant use its *trunk* at the zoo, or see the *trunk* of a tree, or you can pack your luggage in the *trunk* of your car.
- *Buckle*: You can fasten your belt *buckle*, or *buckle* your seat belt, or watch a bridge *buckle* and fail when too much weight is on it.

- *Hysterical*: If you dent your dad's car he will become *hysterical*, or the joke your friend tells might be *hysterical*.
- *Clip*: You can attach a note with a *clip*, or *clip* your cat's claws, or you can show a movie *clip* to a group.
- *Right*: You can be *right* when your friend is wrong, or you can take a *right* to get to the movies, or your parent's candidate for governor may be more on the *right* (meaning he or she is more conservative).
- *Fire*: You can build a *fire*, or you can *fire* a cannon, or your uncle might get *fired* at work, or the local football team might get *fired* up for the next game.

State that because you will be discussing love for the next six sessions, we should probably figure out what the word means. For like these examples of words with different meanings, love also has many meanings. Love can also look different to each person depending on the object of his or her affection. To illustrate this idea, ask the teams to come up with a list of some of the things that they "love." Allow them a few minutes to do this, and then ask the teams to share. (Their answers should be all over the map, from their step-mother to pizza.)

For added fun, pick two items from the lists the teams provide that are very different from each other, such as "ice cream" and "my dog." Invite some brave volunteer to act out what it would be like to love ice cream in the same way he or she loves his or her dog (or whichever example you chose). When you are finished, discuss the following questions with the group:

- What is the difference between loving something and loving someone? (*Generally, our love for people is stronger than our love for material items such as skateboards and snow cones.*)
- What is the difference between being attracted to a person and loving him or her? (*While being attracted to someone can bring out strong emotions, it generally doesn't last as long as true love.*)
- What does it mean to be "dating" someone? (*Dating is usually the first step you take in forming a romantic relationship with a person of the opposite sex. It is a way to get to know that person better and to find out if you really love him or her.*)



Conclude by stating that while we love many things, the truth is we often mean something different when we refer to loving *someone* or *something*. Today, we will take a look at how the Bible defines love and see what we should do when we start to like—or maybe even love—another person.

## MESSAGE

**Puppy Love.** For this option, you will need a Bible, a white T-shirt, magic markers, a newborn baby and a puppy. (*Note:* If you can pull this off, it will be memorable. If you can't, just have a picture of the baby and puppy ready to show.)

Explain to the group that when we like someone, we work hard to get that person to notice us. We try to dress or act nicer than usual just so the person will think we are special. But is this all there is to love?

Read John 15:12-13. State that in these verses, Jesus doesn't talk about how we should be *lovable* but how we should *show love* to others. Of course, while the ultimate act of love is to give up our lives for someone else—just like Jesus did for us—there are other ways to show love while we are still living! One way is to *be obvious about our love*. If we love someone, that person should be 100 percent certain of it. Our love shouldn't be a mystery.

Ask a male student (choose only a guy for some soon-to-be-obvious reasons) to put on the T-shirt. Make sure he puts the shirt on over his skin, rather than over another shirt. Have an assortment of magic markers available, and ask people to come up and write words of encouragement and love all over his shirt. After a couple of minutes, his shirt should be filled with affirming words and decorations. Explain that while our love for others won't always be this obvious, it should still be easy for other people to tell.

Another way to show genuine love is to *care for and protect others*. Bring out the newborn baby (or the picture) and walk around, cuddling him or her and allowing all the group members to see and say hello. (*Note:* It is best if only you or another adult handles the baby!) Explain that for new parents, a baby is one of the most important things in their lives. They would be terrified if someone ever tried to harm their baby. In fact, they would do everything possible to care for it and protect it. They would make sure the baby received all the care and nourishment it needed. God wants us to show this same kind of love to others. He wants us to go out of our way to make sure others are cared for and protected, just like parents do, and just like He does too!

A third way to show genuine love is *not to place conditions on that love*. Ask the group what they think the difference is between “conditional” and

“unconditional” love. Explain that conditional love is based on getting something in return from the other person in exchange for our affections. Unconditional love is a no-matter-what kind of love. It is showing love even if the other person doesn’t return that love or doesn’t do anything that makes him or her seem lovable.

Conclude by stating that you brought in a great example of what it means to be loved unconditionally. Bring in the puppy and let it run around and greet everyone (or just show the picture). After several minutes of puppy love, ask the group members to share their feelings about the visit (or the picture). Explain that a puppy is like unconditional love because the little doggie likes everyone right away no matter what. God wants us to care for people and love them in the same way.

## DIG

**Relationship Questions.** For this option, you will need the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God. (We mean that literally). Discuss the following questions as a group:

- Let’s say you like someone at school. What do you do now? *(Begin by being that person’s friend. It can be tempting to try to manipulate the person or the circumstances to get him or her to be interested in you, but the best thing you can do is simply show him or her you care. Just remember what Paul says about love in 1 Corinthians 13. Be yourself and be a friend!)*
- How long do you have to be loving toward someone who is mean to you? *(Unfortunately, forever. It doesn’t seem fair, but that is what love is about. Remember the definition of love from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7? True love is not based on how others treat you. However, if someone is becoming verbally, emotionally or physically abusive, you should talk to a wise Christian adult you respect and remove yourself from the situation.)*
- How do you break up with my someone without hurting his or her feelings? *(Ouch . . . that’s a tough one, and the truth is that there really is no way to do it. The best thing you can do is to be honest and to talk to the person in a way that matches what Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Remember to keep being a friend and to continue to talk positively about him or her.)*

- Is there a difference between love and sex? (*Important question! The answer is YES . . . definitely yes. If you look at 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, you will see that sex is not mentioned. Instead, Paul focuses on showing care and concern for others—on putting their needs first. Waiting to have sex until you are married is the perfect way to show love for another person.*)

## APPLY

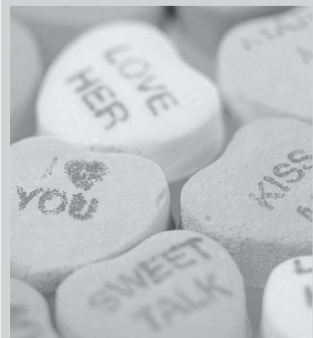
**Loving Lists.** For this option, you will need one die for each group, and a blank piece of paper and pen for each student.

Ask the group members to get into teams of three to eight people, and then give a piece of paper and a pen to each person. Also give each team one die. Explain that the teams need to make a list of six different ways they can show love to the opposite gender and to the same gender. This can be as specific and practical as the teams want to make it, but make sure they don't mention any names.

After the teams are finished with their lists, have each person roll the die. If that person rolls a one, two or three, he or she needs to select one thing to do this week from the "opposite gender" list. If that person rolls a four, five or six, he or she needs to select one thing to do this week from the "same gender" list. (Feel free to encourage students to do additional things as well!)

Conclude by stating that when it comes down to it, we should be showing the kind of love Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 to everyone—regardless of whether the person is someone we are dating or is just a friend. Close in prayer, asking God to help the group members be truly loving to others.





## SESSION 8

# SETTING BOUNDARIES IN DATING

### STARTER

***Blues Brothers 2000.*** For this option, you will need a scene from the movie *Blues Brother 2000* and a way to show it to your group. Ahead of time, find the scene near the opening of the movie that shows police officers racing to their cars to begin a chase. You will want to end the clip where all the cars are all piled up. (Note: The movie is rated PG-13, so be sure to just show this scene to the group.)

Begin the session by greeting the group members. When everyone is settled in, discuss the following questions:

- How many of you wish you could drive right now?
- Are you looking forward to being able to drive? Why?
- Does the thought of driving make you afraid? Why?
- Who has ever been in a car accident before? What happened? Do you think it could have been avoided?
- In general, what kinds of things could drivers do to be safer and have fewer accidents?

Let the group members know that you will be showing them a scene from the movie *Blues Brothers 2000*. Play the scene, and then ask if they think drivers

who are out of control emotionally while driving are more likely to get into an accident. (*The answer should be yes.*) Explain that when you are angry, or on the verge of tears, or laughing so hard that you can't stop shaking, it will have an effect on how you drive.

State that we can apply the same principle to our lives. Ask the group members to line up on one side of the room (note that they can be bunched together—they don't have to be in a neat row). Have the group members walk until you tell them to stop. Then ask them how long it took them to come to a complete stop.

Next, have the group members run until you tell them to stop. Then ask them how long it took them to come to a complete stop. Do they think it was as easy to stop as when they were walking? Why or why not? Explain that just as it was more difficult for them to stop when they were running, it will also be more difficult for them to stop themselves when they are in a situation with a person of the opposite sex.

Conclude by stating that teenagers often ask how far is "too far"? Part of that answer comes from what we have just observed—the further we go, and the faster we go, the harder it is to stop. Today, we will study what the Bible says about this.

## MESSAGE

**Where to Draw the Line.** For this option, you will need Bibles, a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker. Ahead of time, obtain some family pictures of your group members. Make sure you choose individuals who won't be too embarrassed by what their friends learn about them.

Introduce the discussion by explaining that many teens wonder how far is too far when it comes to being physical in a relationship. We can know for certain that sexual intercourse is too far, because Hebrews 13:4 says to "keep the marriage bed pure," which means a couple reserves sex for the two of them only—when they are married. However, what about kissing . . . and everything else in between?

Ask the group members how far they think is too far. After a few individuals have shared, state that you have some thoughts that you believe will help them make a healthy decision about where to draw the line in a physical relationship. The first is that they will know they have gone too far *if they are embarrassed about what they did*. Show the family pictures of group members. As you do, ask the person in that picture how far he or she would go if he knew

these family members were in the same room with him or her. Chances are the person won't want to go very far.

A second way for them to know they have gone too far is too *look for the signs of arousal*. Explain that God designed their body in such a way that when it is stimulated, it automatically begins to prepare itself for sexual intercourse. This doesn't mean that God is against sex—in fact, He invented it and wants us to enjoy it . . . as married people. Read Proverbs 5:18-20, and explain that these verses are a great reminder to us that God wants us to enjoy sex in the confines of marriage.

A third way for them to know they have gone too far is *if they are frightened by what they did*. Ask the group members to think about what some of the potential negative consequences might be for a sexually active couple. (*Some answers include unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and emotional issues such as regret, low self-esteem and guilt.*) Explain that the media—and even public schools—often emphasize the use of contraceptives in an effort to reduce some of the physical consequences teens face by having premarital sex, but they rarely address the emotional issues. The truth is that sex is so much more than just a physical act. In fact, as any married couple will tell you, it is much more emotional than physical.

A final way for the group members to know if they have gone too far is for them to consider whether their behavior shows love to God and others. Read Romans 13:8 and Matthew 22:37-39 aloud. Explain that instead of focusing on how far we can go physically, we should put our energy and effort into loving God and loving others.

Conclude by stating that not every dating couple chooses to focus on loving God and the other person. Instead, some couples choose to focus only on themselves and end up having sex or going further sexually than they know is right. This comes with consequences, as we will examine in the next step.

## DIG

**Sex Questions.** For this option, you will need some students who want to talk about sex. Discuss the following as a group:

- What is the big deal about two people having sex before they are married? If you are in a relationship and both you and the other person want to do it, shouldn't that make it okay? (*Sex is great, and it is God's idea, but when you have sex outside of marriage you just end up getting*

*hurt. You can be hurt physically, emotionally and spiritually. Your body, mind and heart are not ready for the things that will happen when you have sex. You can also catch sexually transmitted diseases, become a young parent, wreck your friendships, suffer loss and guilt, and start a destructive pattern in your life that will be extremely difficult to change.)*

- What if you use condoms? If there is no chance of getting pregnant or getting a disease, why can't you have sex? (*Sex is much more than a physical act—it's highly emotional! Condoms may help prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases—though even the manufacturers will tell you that they are not always 100 percent effective—but they can't protect your heart. Often, once people start getting sexually active, their emotional relationship with the other person stops growing. Instead of getting together to hang out and talk, they simply get together for physical pleasure. Over time, that kills their relationship.*)
- What if you're not having sex but just "fooling around"? That's okay, isn't it? (*It's okay if you don't mind getting burned. Have you ever moved your finger quickly through a candle flame? It's kind of fun, but after a while the thrill goes away, and so you hold your finger over the flame longer and longer until you end up getting burned—ouch! Proverbs 6:27 talks about the same idea. Fooling around sounds innocent, but it only makes you hungry to go further and further until you and the other person end up getting burned.*)
- Are there really any benefits for waiting to have sex? (*Besides the joy of obeying God and developing self-control in your life, one of the greatest benefits of waiting to have sex is going into marriage without any expectations from your spouse. Because you're sexually "inexperienced," you'll have no one with whom to compare your spouse, which will make sex far more enjoyable for the rest of your life together!*)
- What if a person has already had sex, but wishes he or she didn't? (*God is so awesome that He gives second and third and fourth chances! Check out the incredible promise in Hebrews 8:12. If you have had sex or have gone further than you wanted, God is ready to forgive you. You just need to ask! The next step is to begin over again. Live the way you know God wants you to live. For help, talk to a parent or an adult you trust*



*about your decision to start again. It may be difficult to share—but you'll be SO GLAD you did!)*

Conclude by stating to the group members that many people may put pressure on them to have sexual relationships as soon as possible. However, this is the time when they need to slow down and think about the consequences of having sex before marriage—or make the decision to abstain from having sex from now on. When they do, they will experience the many blessings that come from having godly relationships.

## APPLY

**Raging Hormones 3.** For this option, you will need copies of “Raging Hormones (found on the next page), a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker. Ahead of time, write the line of progression from the handout on the whiteboard. Make sure you write each word or phrase without the number and in a horizontal line across the whiteboard.

Hand out the “Raging Hormones” sheet to the group members. Ask each person to imagine that two junior-highers at their school are dating and are having trouble in figuring out how far they should go without having sex. This couple would really like to hear their opinions on the matter. Have the group members look at their handouts and draw a line where they think the couple should stop.

On the whiteboard, draw a vertical line after “simple kiss.” On the left hand side above “hold hands,” “cuddle” and “simple kiss,” write the words “safe zone.” On the right hand side above “prolonged kiss,” “French kiss,” “light petting,” “heavy petting” and “sexual intercourse,” write the words “danger zone.”

Divide the group members into two teams—“Team 1” and “Team 2.” Explain that Team 1 is going to take the position that each of these actions is correctly listed under “safe zone” and “danger zone.” Team 2, however, is going to disagree with the actions listed and believe that everything but sexual intercourse should be part of the “safe zone.” Let the group members know that they will have five minutes to prepare a quick defense of their team’s position, and then the two teams will debate.

End the debate after five minutes or so. When this is done, gather the group back together and discuss the following questions:

- What did you learn during the debate? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)



Imagine that two junior-highers at your school are dating. They want to save sex until they are married, but they really like each other and are having trouble in figuring out how far they should go. Where would you draw the line?

1. Hold hands
2. Cuddle
3. Simple kiss
4. Prolonged kiss
5. French kiss
6. Light petting (over clothing)
7. Heavy petting (under clothing)
8. Sexual intercourse

- What types of locations make it easier for a couple to enter the “danger zone”? (*Usually, a location where they are away from others or where others cannot see what they are doing. Sometimes this might be at a house where the parents are gone, or in a locked room, or in a dark movie theater.*)
- What kinds of locations should you frequent if you want to stay in the “safe zone”? (*Generally, it is best to hang out in locations where there are other people instead of just being alone as a couple.*)

Close by giving the group members some time to think about how all of this will affect their dating choices. Ask them to think about where they would draw their own line and how they plan to avoid their own personal danger zone. Pray for the group, asking God to help them not go too far. Also pray that they will glorify God and love others in everything that they do and say.





# REMAINING PURE IN DATING

## STARTER

**Group Member Trivia.** For this option, you will need some small prizes, a student volunteer, some trivia questions, a way to film the volunteer, and a way to show the film to the group. Ahead of time, conduct an interview with the volunteer by asking him or her five trivia questions about people in the youth group. Some examples of questions would include:

- How many brothers does Kimberly have? (A. 1; B. 2; C. 4)
- Which adult staff member in our group is a traffic engineer? (A. Betsy; B. Sarah; C. Wendy)
- Who in the group lives in a house with a red door? (A. Ben; B. Susan; C. Bradley)

Ideally, some of the questions should be fairly hard. In addition, you will want to practice with the person who will be showing the interview during the session so that he or she will know exactly when to stop and start the film.

Begin by asking the group members how much they think they know about the others in the group. State that today you will be putting their knowledge

to the test. They will watch an interview in which one person from the group answers a question about someone else in the group. Right after the person gives his or her answer, you will stop the film. If they think the person being interviewed is correct, they will need to stand up. If they think he or she is wrong, they should stay seated.

Show the interview, pausing after each question to allow the group members to guess. Give the correct answer, and then toss small prizes to those who are correct. When you are done, explain that in this game, they had to make some choices. Their choices had a consequence—they either won a prize or received nothing. While that is a small consequence, there will be times when the choices they make will have much greater impact.

## MESSAGE

**Unwise Balloons.** For this option, you will need Bibles, a balloon for each group member, and enough permanent markers for every three to four individuals. Ahead of time, experiment with the balloons to see how many breaths it takes to pop them.

Distribute the balloons and pens and explain to the group that we all face situations that are tempting. Share a story about something you have been tempted to do or not to do. Continue by asking the students to think about the temptations they face, and have them write one of their temptations on the face of their balloon. If they don't want others to know what that temptation is, they can write a letter (like C) or a symbol (like #) to remind them what it is.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22. Explain to the group that you will read the same passage again, and every time Amnon makes an unwise decision, the group members are to raise their hands. Begin to reread the passage. When the group members raise their hands, choose one person to explain what Amnon did that was unwise. After that person answers, have the whole group blow once or twice into their balloons (depending on how big the balloons are). Eventually, the balloons will pop, as our buddy Amnon makes many unwise choices. If some of the balloons don't pop, explain that even though they didn't pop, the balloons are closer to popping now than when the group members first received them.

Continue by stating that just as Amnon's life "popped," so do our lives when we give in to temptation. Ask the group what Amnon could have done differently, and then choose a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Explain that temptation in itself is not sin—it is how we respond to temptation that de-

termines whether or not we sin. Point to one of the exit doors in your room. State that God always gives us an exit door so we can walk away from the temptation and not give in to it.

Introduce the subject of purity by asking the group the following questions:

- What do you think it means to be pure? *(It means to be 100 percent devoted to one thing.)*
- How do exit doors relate to purity? *(There are some temptations that none of us can resist on our own, which is why God always gives us a door out of the situation. We just have to choose to go through that door and get away from the temptation. It is our choice to exit or not to exit. If we exit, we remain pure. If we do not, we will end up giving in to temptation.)*
- Do you think it is possible to stay pure on your own, without God's help? *(No, the temptations are just too strong.)*

Explain that God wants us to be pure, but He doesn't expect us to do it alone. He offers His strength and grace to help us. In the next step, we will examine the types of temptations we wrote on these balloons and try to figure out what kind of escape routes—or exit doors—God might want us to take.

## DIG

**Temptation Questions.** For this option, you will need some courage to talk about these tough questions with the group members.

- Why is it important to avoid “sexual immorality”? *(The main reason is because the Bible tells us that it is God's will for us to do so. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Paul says, “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God.)*
- How do we avoid temptation? *(We can't—things that entice us and stimulate us will surround us at all times. However, this doesn't mean we have to give in to the temptation. Our thought life is the key. It is always good to focus on things that please God rather than those things that don't [see 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:8].)*

- What if we're fooling around with our boyfriend/girlfriend, and we find we can't stop? (*Once our bodies are physically stimulated, they want to just keep on going. That is the way our bodies are wired. But we can always choose to stop. Just think about it this way—if a guy was fooling around with his girlfriend and her dad unexpectedly walked into the room, the guy would figure out a way to stop quickly!*)
- What does God think about us when we're not living a pure life? (*God loves us no matter what. His heart hurts for us when we make poor choices, but that doesn't affect His love for us [see Romans 8:38-39]. At the same time, we shouldn't take His love for granted. After all, He loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us. It seems like the least we can do to thank Him is to try to do what He says, and that includes staying pure.*)

Conclude by stating to the group members that there is no doubt that we are surrounded by temptations each day. This is part of the enemy's strategy—to throw as many temptations at us as he can so we will fail. Always remember that we don't have to face these temptations on our own. God is there, and if we ask the Holy Spirit will empower us to overcome the struggles we face.

## APPLY

**Four Signs.** For this option, you will need pencils, index cards, four large poster boards, permanent markers and tape. Ahead of time, use the poster boards and permanent markers to make four signs with the following words (you will want to tape up the signs around the room):

1. FRIENDS
2. DATING
3. MEDIA
4. ALONE

Explain to the group members that often Christians focus more on no than on yes. We get consumed with what we *cannot* do, the places we *should not* go, or things that are *wrong*. Instead, we should focus on the things we *can* do and *should* do, and on those things that are *right*! Because God has given us an escape route when temptation comes, we should always be able to figure out something we can do that is right.



Ask the group to take a look at the four signs. Instruct them to go and sit by the FRIENDS sign if they want to talk about the right things to do when they are with their friends. Ask them to sit by the DATING sign if they want to discuss things they should do in their dating relationships. Have them sit by the MEDIA sign if they want to chat about the best way to respond to temptations and to stay pure when it comes to the media. Finally, they should go and sit by the ALONE sign if they want to figure out how to stay pure when they are alone.

Once the group members are seated next to the signs, distribute the index cards and pencils. Ask each person to write down a tempting situation that he or she has faced that relates to the sign next to which they are sitting. They should *not* write their names on their cards. When the group is finished, have them put the cards face down in the center of where they are seated. Have each group shuffle its cards.

Explain to the groups that one person needs to pick up the first card and read the situation that is on it. The group will then discuss positive ways that the person could avoid the tempting situation and remain pure. When they are finished discussing the first card, the next person will choose another card and read it. The group will then discuss that situation, and so on until there are no more cards left.

After 10 minutes, tell the groups that you are going to have a short time of prayer. Walk around to each group, praying that God will help those in that group to be pure in the category they have chosen.





## SESSION 10

# WHY MARRIAGE IS THE BEST PLACE FOR SEX

### STARTER

**The Life of Pie.** For this option, you will need a tarp or a large piece of plastic, two large garbage bags, scissors, a few towels, two pies and one spoon. Ahead of time, designate a pie-eating area and spread out the tarp. Cut holes in the garbage bags for a person's head and arms to go through.

Greet the group members and explain that as their mothers have undoubtedly told them, it is polite to use utensils when eating pie . . . but it is not much fun. So, today the group members will be having an old-fashioned, no-hands pie-eating contest. Choose two volunteers to come up to the pie-eating area. (*Note: You want to select volunteers that you know will not like having pie on their faces. Having a volunteer jumping all over the room and yelling about how much he or she likes the mess on his or her face will somewhat defeat the point.*)

Have the volunteers put on the garbage bags to protect their clothing. On the count of three, have each person try to eat as much pie as possible in 60 seconds (and without choking). Make sure the volunteers do not have any utensils as they do this—they need to lean down and eat up the pie. When time is up, pass out towels to the participants and declare the winner.

Following this, ask the volunteers these questions:

- Did you have fun? Why or why not?
- Do you think spoons are an important part of eating? Why?
- Did you get messy? If so, did you enjoy this?

Explain that sin is like eating pie without a spoon. It can be fun, but it can really make a mess in our lives. Utensils help us eat politely so we can put food in our mouths without making a mess and without grossing out other people every time we sit down for a meal. In the same way, God has given us instructions about how to live so that we will receive the most benefit from life and not make a mess that hurts others and ourselves. In today's session, we will examine whether God's rules about sex make sense and should be followed, or if they are foolish and should be ignored.

## MESSAGE

**Consequences of Sexual Sin.** For this option, you will need a Bible, a rose and a roll of duct tape.

Begin by stating that God is pro-sex. In fact, He invented it! However, He wants us to obey the rules that He has set up so that we can enjoy sex safely. Those rules state that we are to have sex only with the person to whom we are married. When people go outside of this plan, they open themselves up to three possible consequences.

The first consequence is *emotional pain*. Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5 and explain that choosing to have sex outside of marriage affects not only us but also many people around us. Ask the following questions:

- How did David hurt Bathsheba? (*He used his influence to have sex with her even though she was married.*)
- How did David hurt Bathsheba's husband? (*He went behind Uriah's back while he was serving in King David's army and slept with his wife.*)
- How did David hurt himself? (*He hurt his relationship with God, with Bathsheba and with her husband.*)

Tear off a piece of duct tape about 12 inches long. Ask the group members to describe the tape. They might say that it is gray, strong and sticky. Ask them

to imagine what would happen if you invited a volunteer with hair on his arm to come up front and then applied the duct tape to his arm. What would they see on the tape after you ripped it from the volunteer's arm? (*Hair.*) Would the person get hurt? (*Yes!*) In the same way that using duct tape in a way it was not intended would cause pain to someone, choosing to have sex outside of marriage will cause others to experience pain.

Continue by stating that a second consequence of acting in a sexually immoral way is that it brings *fear into our lives of getting caught*. Read 2 Samuel 11:6-13. Ask the group the following questions:

- What did David do after he found out Bathsheba was pregnant? (*He invited her husband home from the battlefield, hoping that he would have sex with his wife and think that he had gotten her pregnant instead of David.*)
- What should David have done? (*He should have confessed what he had done and asked for forgiveness. When we go against God's plan, we should always make things right by asking for forgiveness and starting over. When we don't, we are forced to hide what we have done and live in fear that someone will find out the truth.*)

Explain that if you had applied the duct tape to a person's arm and ripped it off, it would likely create a bald spot on his arm. If he were afraid to say what had happened, he would be forced to cover up that spot. Then he might worry that someone would accidentally see it. Similarly, trying to cover up our mistakes causes us to live in fear—and that is not fun.

Now state that a third consequence of having sex outside of marriage is that it brings other painful outcomes into our lives. Read 2 Samuel 11:14-17 and ask what David's alternate plan was when his first plan failed. (*The answer would be that he had Bathsheba's husband killed.*) Explain that while our choice to have sex outside of marriage might not end in murder like David, it will still have some painful consequences.

Hold up the rose. Explain that when we have sex with someone we don't marry, it is like ripping a petal off this flower. Rip off a petal, and then state that the next time we have sex with someone we don't marry, it is as if another petal gets ripped off. Rip off a few more petals, and explain that before long we no longer feel like a beautiful rose but just like a stick with thorns. We don't feel good about ourselves anymore. This feeling is just one of many potential painful consequences that come when we have sex with someone to whom we are not married.

## DIG

**Consequences Questions.** For this option, you will need only this book. Discuss the following as a group:

- If God invented sex only for marriage, why do we desire it so much now? (*Certain things have changed since the Bible was written, particularly the fact that people get married later in life. Our society has gone from one that sees couples as being a man and a woman who are married, to anyone living together and having sex. Today, there is a lot of sexual stimulation, especially through the media, which causes us to desire sex even though we are not married. Yet the benefits of waiting to have sex until we are married still far outweigh the consequences of having premarital sex.*)
- What if we can't wait to have sex until we are married? (*Can't . . . or won't? No one is forcing us to have sex [except of course in a rape situation, but that is a different issue]. Sexuality is all about our choices and the expectations we and our friends share.*)
- What if we have already had sex? (*We can choose to start over! We can't change our past and the consequences we have already faced, but we can determine the direction of our future. God offers us a fresh start every day. Instead of beating ourselves up over unwise choices, we need to accept God's gracious gift and allow Him to forgive us and make us new every day.*)
- If we get married without having sex before, we won't know what to do. Shouldn't we practice and get some sexual experience now? (*No, wait to practice when we are married! Our spouses will love the fact that we are inexperienced—and that will make the sexual times together all the more fun.*)
- Since most marriages end in divorce, why bother waiting to have sex? (*Perhaps one of the reasons marriages end in divorce is because so many people choose to have premarital sex and to bring those memories and experiences into the marriage. You can begin preventing the possibility of divorce in the future by making good decisions about love, sex and dating today!*)

Conclude by stating to the group members that as they can see from these questions, there are many negative consequences that come about when we

have sex with someone to whom we are not married. While our desires for sex won't necessarily go away, we do have the ability—with the help of the Holy Spirit—to resist the temptation to have sex. When we look at the big picture, we will be so glad we waited!

## APPLY

**Panel Discussion.** For this option, you will need worship music, a way to play it for the group, three married couples who are willing to talk to the group, and questions to ask the couples. Ahead of time, choose the married couples to come and share with the students. Ideally, the group should be a mixture of couples in which both people were virgins when they got married, couples in which only one was a virgin, and couples in which neither were virgins.

Let the couples know that they will be part of a panel discussion. You will need to come up with several questions to ask them. Some questions you might want to use include the following:

- What was your physical relationship like before you were married?
- How do you think that affected your physical relationship after you were married?
- If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?
- What advice do you have for teenagers who are interested in dating?

Give the couples the questions you will ask ahead of time so they can think through their comments. Encourage them to share as honestly and as vulnerably as possible about their emotions, but ask them to avoid dwelling too much on their actual physical acts. Let them know that they will be praying with any students who request it after the panel discussion is finished.

Begin this step by introducing the couples to the group, and then ask the couples the questions you have prepared ahead of time. When you come to the end of your questions, allow the group members to ask any questions they have. Close by explaining to the group that they have just heard some powerful things about sex and marriage, and then end with a time of prayer and worship.

Be sure to allow your group members to have any couple pray for him or her during this time. The students can also pray alone or with a friend. Continue to play worship music during this time.







## SESSION II

# BEING A FRIEND

### STARTER

**Tongue Twister Slips.** For this option, you will need several copies of “Tongue Twister Slips” (found on the following page, a small prize and a sense of humor. (Note: For another option, you can create and use your own tongue twisters.) Ahead of time, print out the handouts and cut out the tongue twisters. You will need four to eight strips for each small group.

Greet the students and have them get into teams of four to eight people. Give each team four to eight strips of the same tongue twister (so each person on the team has the same strip). Have everyone practice their tongue twisters, and then ask each team to pick one person who is best at saying the tongue twister three times fast.) Have these most-talented-tongue-twister-tellers come forward, and give each the championship slip (“unique New York”). The player who says the tongue twister the best wins a prize.

Conclude by stating that sometimes it can feel awkward and strange when we try to successfully say a tongue twister. It can also feel awkward and strange when we try to develop deep friendships with people who aren’t like us—including people of the opposite gender. However, today we are going to learn about a guy and a girl who were able to get past all of that and have a good friendship.



# Tongue Twister Slips

## Team Tongue Twisters

Six sick slick slim sycamore saplings.

A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump stunk,  
but the stump thunk the skunk stunk.

Six thick thistle sticks. Six thick thistles stick.

## Championship Round

Unique New York.

## MESSAGE

**Option 2: *Never Been Kissed*.** For this option, you will need a Bible, the movie *Never Been Kissed* and a way to show it to the group. Ahead of time, find the scene in the movie where Josie has fallen asleep while sitting at the counter. You will want to stop the scene when she gets knocked out after walking into the door. (*Note: The movie is rated PG-13, so be sure to just show this scene to the group.*)

Begin by stating that the group members will be watching a scene from the movie *Never Been Kissed*. In this scene, Josie, played by Drew Barrymore, is a journalist posing as a student so she can write an article on life as a teenager. As she struggles to fit in, she recalls a scene from her own high school days in which she was humiliated by a boy who pretended to want to take her to the prom.

Show the movie clip, and then discuss the following questions with the group:

- So, what just happened? (*While waiting, Billy and his real date for the prom waved to Josie. Billy then threw an egg at Josie, hitting her in the face. Josie, humiliated, ran away.*)
- What words would you use to describe how Josie felt? (*Some descriptions would be humiliated, angry, depressed and worthless.*)
- What words would you use to describe Billy? (*He was inconsiderate, cruel, mean, selfish, uncaring and insensitive.*)
- What are some of the positive things that come out of guy-girl friendships? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- Do you think it is possible for a guy and a girl to truly be good friends? Why or why not? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- What does that friendship need for it to work? (*They would need to be kind to one another, listen and laugh together, be honest with one another, and so on.*)

Explain that the group will now be examining a unique friendship that happened in the Bible between a guy named Boaz and a girl named Ruth. Ruth was a widow living with her mother-in-law, Naomi. They had nothing to eat, so Ruth decided to go pick grain from Boaz's field, hoping that he would

be kind to her. Read Ruth 2:1-13, and then discuss the following questions with the students:

- Whose field did Ruth end up in? (*Ruth ended up in Boaz's field.*)
- Who was Boaz? (*He was an honorable man who owned land and crops. He kindly greeted his workers, and they kindly greeted him back.*)
- After discovering why Ruth was in his field, how did Boaz respond? (*He invited her to stay and pick grain in his field, he provided her with water and protection. He instructed the other workers to look out for her.*)
- How did Ruth respond to Boaz? (*She was thankful and surprised because she didn't feel she was worthy to even be one of Boaz's servants, yet he was showing her special favor.*)
- What impressed Boaz about Ruth? (*He was impressed by her faithfulness to God and to Naomi.*)

Continue by reading Ruth 2:14-23, and then discuss the following:

- What are some practical ways Boaz showed kindness to Ruth? (*He let her eat all she wanted, and he instructed his workers to leave extra grain behind for her.*)
- What did Naomi say when she discovered the way in which Boaz had treated Ruth? (*She said that he was one of her relatives and that he was very kind. She instructed Ruth to stay in his field with his workers where she would be safe.*)

Explain that in a day and age when women were not treated with respect, Boaz was kind to Ruth. In fact, he was so kind that they eventually married (see Ruth 4:13). Today, it can be just as tough to develop a friendship with a member of the opposite sex. However, even though it is difficult, one of the best ways to build these kinds of relationships is to include the characteristics we are going to talk about next.

## DIG

**Friendship and Dating Questions.** For this option, you will only need these tricky questions.

- What if we're attracted to a person of the opposite sex but he or she just wants to be friends? (*Our best bet is to simply be that person's friend. If we REALLY like him or her, we will be more concerned about what is best for that person than for ourselves. Trying to force that individual to like us isn't the best way to do this! What it really shows is that we are more interested in what we want rather than what he or she wants.*)
- What if we both want to date each other? (*Great! But it's important to talk about what each of us want and expect in a dating relationship and about the role of friendship. Is it somewhat important or super important? This may sound strange, but it's a good idea to evaluate the relationship every two weeks. If the friendship is not growing, we should commit to stop dating.*)
- What if we have friends of the opposite gender but others make fun of us because we're not having sex? (*Take it as a compliment! After all, would it really be better to have people talking about us because they think we are having sex? If we choose to date, we need to do it with the goal of learning to be friends. In fact, it's certainly possible to do that without dating!*)
- What if we have a boyfriend/girlfriend who is jealous of our friendship with this person of the opposite sex? (*We need to talk about it with the person. It's important to be honest with one another and get specific examples about what is concerning him or her. Also, we can try to do things with our boyfriend/girlfriend and the friend. This will allow the two to get know each other better, and perhaps become friends as well.*)
- What if no one will be our friend? (*Part of developing a friendship is learning to be a friend. Our faithfulness and kindness as a friend to others will pay off. Unfortunately, it takes time. We have to keep up the good example!*)

## APPLY

**Talk to Your Friends.** For this option, you will need only this book. Discuss the following questions with the group:

- What types of things in general do you and your friends talk about? (*The opposite gender, memories, jokes, fears, secrets and so on.*)
- When you speak to a friend of the opposite gender, do you talk about different things than you normally would? If so, why? (*Probably yes—*

*because you are afraid or embarrassed, or because some things are easier to talk about with people of the same gender.)*

Continue the discussion by asking each person to think of one friend from the opposite gender who is not a Christian. Does that person know . . .

- That you're a Christian?
- How you became a Christian?
- Your favorite verse?
- What scares you about your faith?
- What you struggle with in your faith?

Encourage the group members to pick a friend of the opposite gender and share their answers to these questions with that person this week. State that while this might be a bit tough at first, their honesty will pay off. Their non-Christian friends will hear more about Jesus, and their Christian friends will be better able to support them in what they are going through.

Close in prayer, giving the group members 30 seconds to pray silently for the friends who came to mind during this exercise. Then pray for the students, asking God to help them be more honest with their friends about how they are doing spiritually.



## SESSION 12

# KEEPING YOUR FOCUS ON GOD

### STARTER

**The ABCs of Dating.** For this option, you will need a pen and a piece of paper for each group.

Greet the group members and place them into teams of three to eight people. Give a pen and a piece of paper to each team and ask them to come up with characteristics that describe a successful dating relationship. The only catch is that they must list their descriptions alphabetically. Some examples would be:

- A: Accepts you as you are.
- B: Believes in you.
- C: Calls you just to say hi.
- D: Doesn't force you to do things you don't want to do.

Start the game. After two minutes, have the teams stop writing, and determine which has the most characteristics. Allow that team to share what it has written. Then ask the group members the following questions:

- Which characteristic is the most important to you? Why?
- Which characteristic would be the hardest for you to do in a dating relationship? Why?

- What is one thing you learned today by going through the lists of dating characteristics?

Explain that one of the most important characteristics in a dating relationship is that the two people have given their lives to God and are focused on serving Him. When this is missing in a relationship, it can lead to disastrous consequences. While it is likely that some of the group members have already started dating and others haven't yet, it is still important to consider the qualities of what to look for in a boyfriend or girlfriend. They need to think about the kinds of relationships they want to have and make sure they settle for nothing less.

## MESSAGE

**Three Habits for Healthy Dating.** For this option, you will need a whiteboard, some whiteboard markers, and a Bible for every group member.

Explain that in Proverbs 14:7 we read, "Stay away from a fool, for you will not find knowledge on their lips." Ask the group members to think about the person they are dating (if they are dating anyone). What is this person like? Would they describe this person as wise or foolish? Does this person have godly or ungodly habits?

State that these questions are important to think about because we tend to become like the people with whom we spend time. Just as we tend to use the same slang words and phrases as the people we are around, we also tend to start acting and thinking like those people. For this reason, we need to make sure we are picking people to date that share the following three habits.

Explain that the first habit is that the person *thinks more about love than lust*. In a previous session, we talked about the difference between love and lust and where to "draw the line" so we don't get too physical. When we are in love, we focus more on others; but when we are in lust, we focus on ourselves. Love leads to mutual caring and keeping the other person's best interests at heart; but lust leads to mistrust, hurt feelings and other consequences. We need to always consider whether the person we are dating is more interested in loving us or satisfying his or her own lust.

A second habit is that the person *focuses more on kindness than selfishness*. In any dating relationship, we need to consider whether the person is interested only in meeting his or her needs. The following story illustrates this idea:

A teenage boy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, had cancer and was in the hospital for several weeks to undergo radiation treatments and chemother-



apy. During that time, he lost all of his hair. On the way home from the hospital, he was worried—not about the cancer, but about the embarrassment of going back to school with a bald head. He had already decided not to wear a wig or a hat.

When he arrived home, he walked in the front door and turned on the lights. To his surprise, about fifty of his friends jumped up and shouted, “Welcome home!” The boy looked around the room and could hardly believe his eyes—all fifty of his friends had shaved their heads!<sup>1</sup>

Ask the group to think about whether or not the person they are dating (or are attracted to) would do something like this for them.

A third habit is that the person *values what God says more than what others say*. Ask the group if the people they are dating care about what the Bible says. If so, do they live those words out in their lives? On the whiteboard, write the words “ONE ANOTHER” at the top. Ask the group members to look up the following verses as you write the references on the board: John 13:34; Romans 12:10,16; 15:7; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2,32; 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Have the group members search these verses and call out anything that is associated with the words “one another.” As they call out phrases from these verses, write them on the whiteboard.

Conclude by stating that we don’t need to look for perfection in a dating relationship, but going out with someone with a true heart for God is key!

## DIG

**Unequally Yoked Questions.** For this option, you will need just these questions. Discuss the following as a group:

- Is it okay to date someone if it gives us a chance to tell him or her about Jesus? Isn’t that what God wants? (No. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 we read, *“Do not be yoked with unbelievers.”* This doesn’t mean that we avoid all unbelievers [see 1 Corinthians 5:9-10] or not share God’s love with the person. However, it also doesn’t mean that we disobey God’s rules in order to do something good. We need to keep developing a friendship with this person and tell him or her about Jesus as a friend.)
- What does Paul mean when he says we shouldn’t be “yoked” to unbelievers? (The image is of the yoking of two unequal types of animals,

*such as an ox and a donkey. The two do not have anything in common, so they shouldn't be placed together to pull a cart. Paul is clearly thinking of associations that involve a partnership—including business relationships and marriage relationships.)*

- That stuff about what “righteousness and wickedness” have in common seems kind of harsh. What is that about? *(Paul was writing this letter to a specific group of people—the Corinthians—who had a continual problem with getting involved in pagan relationships. Paul needed to point out that when they came to Christ, they left behind their former lives [which included idol worship] and adopted the truth of Christ [see Ephesians 4:22]. They needed to break off these associations because they were dragging them back into their former sinful practices. While we might not see it the same way with a non-Christian we want to date, the truth is it is easier for us to be dragged down spiritually than it is for us to lift the other person up.)*
- But what's wrong with *dating* a non-Christian? After all, it's not like we're going to get married. *(While this is likely true, dating a non-believer establishes habits today that will define the type of person we will one day marry. So it is important to begin setting some standards and living them out—it is great practice for a future marriage.)*
- How do I get out of this relationship without hurting the other person's feelings? *(Try the “sandwich” method, where you give two compliments [the bread] with the news [the meat] in between. For example, say, “I really enjoy spending time with you [compliment], but I believe we shouldn't date anymore [the news]. But a bunch of my friends are going to the movies this weekend, and I'd love it if you would come with us” [the compliment].)*

Conclude by stating that the person we date will affect the way we live. For this reason, it is always best to be friends with unbelievers and influence them with our lives, but not date them. When we do, we will be following Jesus' instructions to “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

## APPLY

**Repent!** For this option, you will only need your group.

Explain that sometimes in life, we are the ones who get pulled down. Maybe we got involved with someone who wasn't as close to God as we were,

and the more time we spent with them, the more we fought with our parents, ignored our other friends, and even neglected our relationship with God. However, at other times perhaps we are the ones dragging others down. Maybe we have been pressuring someone to do things that we know God wouldn't want him or her to do. We might be influencing that person to cheat, ditch class, or gossip about his or her friends.

Continue by stating that if that is the case, God wants us to stop and do something about it. He wants us to *repent*. What does it mean to repent? It means to do a U-turn. It means to admit that we have been headed in one direction—the *wrong* direction—and that now we want to turn around and go in a different direction.

Give the group a few minutes to pray on their own. Ask them to confess anything they have been doing that needs to change and to ask God for help in going a completely different direction. Close in a general prayer, asking God to help the group members honor their commitments and serve Him with their lives. Let them know that you will be praying for them—and then make sure to do so!

**Note**

1. Wayne Rice, *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Used by permission.