

Adopted into God's Family—A Bible Study on Bullying

By Mary Rowley

Hello, Youth Leader!

The kind of bullying I see most often in our churches is that of non-acceptance. Although our youth will rarely say it out loud, here's what they're thinking:

"That person is new. Why did they have to come? We were just fine before they showed up."

"That person is different. They're loud / rude / dumb / annoying. They cause trouble and the rest of us have to suffer through another lecture. We don't want them here."

"I'm perfectly happy over here with my friends. If they don't come join us, that's their fault, not mine. It's not my job to make them happy."

Our youth—even our “best” students—will do one of three things: ignore the person, make fun of the person behind their back, or include them in the most minimalist way possible. The goal of this Bible study is to turn the lens back on our youth and help them recognize 1) what Jesus did for them and 2) what they can now do for others.

The movie clips included in this Bible study are easily found on YouTube. You will want to have Bibles available. Leader notes are included in the study guide. Please adjust this study as necessary for your group. Every group is different.

Happy studying!

Mary Rowley

Adopted into God's Family – A Bible Study on Bullying

Introduction – Max and Duke

- ❖ In “The Secret Life of Pets,” the main character is a dog named Max. Max was adopted by his owner, Katie, when he was a puppy. Watch what happens when Katie brings home another dog.
- ❖ Watch “The Secret Life of Pets” Clip One: Max Meets Duke scene
- ❖ Watch “The Secret Life of Pets” Clip Two: Trashing the Apartment scene
- ❖ How does Max react to Duke?
 - *He's aggressive, rude, and manipulative, tries to force Duke to leave, unwilling to accept him, etc.*
- ❖ What word would you use to describe Max in these scenes?
 - *If they don't mention it, bring up the word “bully”*
- ❖ Although Max doesn't see it, Duke is just like him. How is Duke similar to Max?
 - *They were both strays in need of a home, which Katie provided for them*
- ❖ What kind of behavior would have been appropriate for Max?
 - *Recognizing the similarities between him and Duke and welcoming his new brother into his home*

Into the Bible – Pharisees and Tax Collectors/Sinners

- ❖ Read Galatians 4:4-5. What does this tell us about how we become part of God's family?
 - *Just like Max, we are adopted into God's family*
- ❖ Read Matthew 9:9-13. Who was a bully like Max in this account, and why?
 - *The Pharisees – they looked down on the tax collectors and sinners, they weren't willing to accept them*
- ❖ What didn't the Pharisees see about the tax collectors and sinners?
 - *The Pharisees, the tax collectors, and the sinners were all the same – they were sinners in need of a home, which God provided for them*
- ❖ What kind of behavior would have been appropriate for the Pharisees?
 - *Recognizing the similarities between them and the tax collectors and sinners and welcoming their new brothers into their home, the family of God*

Into Our Lives – Us and Others

- ❖ In “The Secret Life of Pets,” Max was aggressive and manipulative. The Pharisees were different; they didn't use threats or trickery, they just used... talk.
- ❖ Have any of you ever used “just talk” to bully someone?
 - *Students may not be eager to give personal examples, but everyone has been a bully at some time or another. It might help for you as the leader to start with a personal example.*
- ❖ Why is that kind of behavior inappropriate? What kind of behavior would be appropriate for us as adopted sons and daughters of God?

- *We are the same as the people we might bully through “just talk” – we should recognize those similarities and welcome others into the family of God*
- ❖ In the story of Jesus calling Matthew, Jesus demonstrates that proper behavior for us. What does He do?
 - *Instead of rejecting Matthew and the other tax collectors and sinners, He invites Matthew to be His disciple and treats the others as friends*
- ❖ Based on Jesus' example, what are some specific ways in which we can welcome others into the family of God?
 - *Answers will vary; ideas include respecting others, listening to them, inviting them to participate in activities, etc.*

Conclusion – Jesus and Us

- ❖ We are called to see the similarities between us and others. Jesus took this one step farther. Read John 1:14-16.
- ❖ Jesus didn't just look at us and see Himself – He *became* us. He took on human flesh and lived and died and rose again for us. Through His sacrifice, He gave us two things.
 - The first is forgiveness. We are sinners, and no matter how hard we try, we cannot stop sinning. Jesus gave us forgiveness and assured us that no matter how many times we sin, that forgiveness will still be there.
 - The second is a calling. We are called to welcome others into His family. We will never be able to do this as perfectly as Jesus, but don't worry – He knows that already, and He chooses to work through us anyway.
- ❖ Close with a prayer, asking God to help us welcome others into His family. Use whatever prayer habit your group has.