

For Everything a Season

A Bible Study for Youth Grieving Things That Have Changed

By Kristin Schmidt

Change is an inevitable part of life. One of the few things we can rely on is that there are few things we can rely on! A constant certainty is that we have precious little certainty. Even rocks erode over time. Nothing lasts forever. For the most part, this is positive. After all, we wouldn't want a child to remain baby-toothed and toddling into adolescence. Neither would we hope for a perpetual season of winter or the same school teacher in every grade. Seasons, people, events, animals, plants, all go through development and alterations.

However, sometimes it can seem that life shifts too quickly or too greatly. Rapid change can leave us feeling panicked or out of control. Change can force us to idealize and long for things that once were. We cannot live in the past, of course, but it's acceptable to mourn for things that aren't the same as they once were.

By the time students have reached middle or high school, they have likely already experienced a number of transformations. Of course, some teens have gone through more than others, but all adolescents have encountered some form of life being altered. Undergoing puberty is in itself a major change with which to cope. Other changes that students might deal with include things such as:

- Moving to a new place.
- Changing schools.
- Friends moving away.
- Shifts in leadership at church.
- Parents divorcing.
- Relationships changing (friendships separating, dating relationships altering).
- Businesses closing (it might seem petty, but who doesn't sadly reflect on that amazing ice cream shop that's no longer open to satisfy a craving?).
- Brothers or sisters moving to college.
- Changes in body or emotion.
- Parents switching jobs.
- The birth of a younger sibling
- Getting or losing a pet.

There's no doubt that youth have encountered at least a couple of these events in their lives. It's important to allow them to process the grief that accompanies change, and to recognize God's hand in all things. When teens feel out of control, a natural reaction often involves turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms in an attempt to re-gain normalcy or power. This does not always occur consciously, but can have extremely negative results. Make sure students have space to grieve and heal, and to accept change in order to move on to healthy development.

There are a few critical things to keep in mind when dealing with youth who are grieving in any way:

- Acknowledge that grief is normal and acceptable, and experiencing a range of emotions is healthy and appropriate.
- Understand that the way we express grief is as unique as we are. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to grieve.

- Check in regularly on teens, and demonstrate genuine care.
- Avoid providing trite answers like “just look at the positive” or “you’ll be fine; you can get through it.” Teens need space to experience emotions. They might be open to public prayer or Bible verse suggestions, but do not merely toss those things out casually as a quick fix. Let them know you are experiencing true feelings *with* them.
- Be present and ready to listen. You don’t have to “fix” anything. Just be willing to be there for students.
- Grief over things that have changed is just as valid and challenging as other types of mourning.

**Remote Note: If possible, it is helpful to meet grieving teens in person. However, there are times that require meeting from a distance. This study includes suggestions to adapt activities for such conditions.*

Opening: (5-10 Minutes)

The recommended format for a Bible Study on grief is somewhat different than other group studies. While laughter can be a helpful distraction, students in mourning might not feel as energetic about goofy games or wild opener antics. It’s important to allow space for teens to share and participate as much or as little as they prefer. Give them time to talk through feelings and to explore the comfort of God’s Word, but don’t force them to do more than they might want to. Grief over things that have altered can be discussed and addressed through sharing positive memories as well as disappointment and uncertainty over the future. Students might be grieving the same sort of life changes, or their experiences might be quite unique from one another, but they can empathize with the emotions happening and support their friends.

Begin the study by allowing students to discuss changes in their lives, and by providing a visible sense of others in their communities who have gone through similar shifts. Gather students together and have them brainstorm a variety of things that transform or change. This list should encompass a wide range of general elements, such as seasons, animals, plants, etc. You might even suggest things in your area that have changed, like a restaurant that has shut down recently or a newly opened business.

After briefly coming up with such topics, invite students to share things in their lives that have changed, either recently or in the past. Have them come up with these shifts one at a time, and after a student has shared their experience, ask the other group members to stand or raise a hand if they have gone through something similar. Of course, students do not need to feel forced to do so, but remind them that they are a “body” or family of sorts, and that it can be helpful to see that their friends might be encountering circumstances like theirs. Whether grieving something, enjoying it, or just going through life situations, it’s beneficial to recognize that we are not alone. If the group is small, or if students have difficulty identifying changes they’ve experienced, you might consider listing some possibilities (such as the ones above).

**Remote Note: if going through this study virtually, you can still have students chime in with their shared experiences. Instead of standing up, invite students to give a “thumbs up” feedback or hand raise (depending on your communication method), or to physically raise a hand for others to see. You could even display a shared screen with several types of changes, and have students place a “stamp” or check mark next to which ones apply.*

Bible Exploration: (Approximately 20 minutes)

Read through several passages of Scripture related to change. Of course, there are quite a few options from which to choose. Depending on your time and the talkative levels of your group, you might need to select just a few highlights. You can also determine the best method of encountering the passages. This may be simply discussing them, and having students answer questions about what each passage might signify and

how it relates to change.

Or, in order to encourage creativity in students, you might invite them to select a verse or two and create a small illustration to accompany it. This could be a simple cartoon or a more complex interpretation. Allow students to share their drawings, if they wish to do so. Consider any combination of the following verses for starting possibilities:

- Numbers 20:2-5 (the Israelites glamorize the past, not recognizing current blessings but choosing to dwell on what they do not have)
- Deuteronomy 31:6-8 (God will never leave you or forsake you)
- Psalm 42:4-5 (remembrance of former joys)
- Psalm 56:1-4 (flesh cannot harm us; hope is in God)
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 (There is a season for all things; our task is to live and work and trust God daily)
- Isaiah 40:8 (Most things in life perish; God's Word remains)
- Isaiah 41:10 (fear not; God is present)
- Job 19:25 ("I know that my redeemer lives"; no matter what happens, we know that Christ is risen and abides with us)
- Matthew 28:20 (Jesus promises to be with us always, no matter what else happens)
- Matthew 6:25-34 (We don't need to worry because God promises to always provide, even when things shift)
- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (Our bodies will change and be transformed into something new)
- Hebrews 13:8 (Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever)
- James 4:8 (Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you)
- Revelation 21:1-7 (God is the beginning and end; He makes all things new and brings about change in a good way)
- Romans 8:28-39 (God is at work in all circumstances to work good and blessing out of the worst things)

Encourage students to brainstorm some examples of figures in the Bible who were forced to go through dramatic changes, for better or worse. Examples may include:

- Abraham, called by God to leave his country and travel into the unknown (okay, cue *Frozen II*) where God would lead.
- Moses, transitioned from growing up in the Egyptian palace to being a shepherd to leading people against oppression to leading whining Israelites in the desert.
- Joseph, sold into slavery and then forced into prison.
- Ruth, a young widow choosing to leave her home and follow her mother-in-law to a foreign land without knowing what awaited.
- David, shifting from a young shepherd to king of Israel
- Esther, becoming a queen and finding herself in position to save her people.
- Job, losing all he had and remaining faithful to God.
- Jews forced into Babylonian captivity (such as Daniel), who had to live in a strange country and stay true to their faith in the one true God.
- Really most of the prophets, following God's call and directions.
- The disciples, called away from their jobs to follow Christ.
- Paul, transforming from Christ-persecutor to Christ-follower.

The list continues. Most Biblical stories involve elements of transition and change. We are not promised that life will be comfortable or stay stagnant. In fact, for those following the Lord, there will likely be

discomfort and shifts over time. We look to the example God Himself gave us in Christ, “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Follow-up and Fellowship: (10-15 minutes)

After going through the Scripture passages, spend a few minutes discussing which ones students considered most comforting or helpful to them. Encourage them to keep these handy, and maybe even select a couple to memorize or write down and carry in a purse or pocket.

Following that, continue with an opportunity to release and let go of things that have changed. Have students talk about or write down things that they miss. Perhaps there have been changes that the whole group felt, such as a transition in church leadership, or a global pandemic that forced them out of school! Recognize that grieving such things is acceptable. Sometimes changes seem out of our control and frustrating. Encourage teens to write down a few things that have changed in a painful way. Then invite them to consider things about the altered situation that they can control. For example, maybe a sibling moved out of the home. That is out of individual control, but they can still talk on the phone or send messages. And maybe they can take over part of the sibling’s old room! Some things might require focusing on a complete shift. For example, maybe a friendship has dissolved, or parents have divorced. That is extremely challenging, but perhaps a teen can focus on something else they are able to do, such as playing an instrument or learning to crochet. Emphasize that they should mourn things that change, in order to gain closure. Even things like body transitions can get a parting farewell. They can say a verbal or mental goodbye to things that they miss.

To finish on a positive note, have students write down or converse about a change they are looking forward to. This might be as simple as weather getting warmer or going to a newly opened (or re-opened, post-quarantine) restaurant. Or maybe they are preparing to begin high school or college. Remind teens that there can be fears as well as blessings that accompany transitions. Consider the benefits of upcoming changes, and how they can be a source of hope and excitement. Above all, though, stress the importance of recognizing and embracing the one thing in life that does not change. God will not move away, age, or abandon us. He promises to guide us, love us, and leave us. When all else seems in chaos, He is the calm in the storm. Focus on that consistency!

Close with a prayer. If time and willingness allow, have students share prayer requests and pray for one another. Otherwise, offer a general prayer asking for God’s comfort and peace.

If space and time offer availability, let students have a few minutes to chat and fellowship before they depart. If you are using an online format, and have a large group, you might even split students into “breakout rooms” for them to talk in smaller clusters of friends. (Close: 2-5 minutes)