



EMBOLDENED: Who God Says You Are Bible Study Session One

Series Introduction:

Meaningful ministry to young people involves more than slapping pizzas on a table, stocking a room with tattered couches and ping pong tables, and planning silly games. Lasting spiritual transformation occurs when Christian adults invest in the young people of their community, walking with them through the questions that every person wrestles with: who am I, and what is my purpose?

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Through this four-part Bible study series, young people will explore who they are, what purpose God has in store for them, and how they can cling to these truths when facing an inevitable world of crisis and change.

Part 1: EMBOLDENED: Who God Says You Are

Part 2: UNEARTHED: Discovering Your Identity

Part 3: ROOTED: Staying Grounded When Storms Threaten

Part 4: CONNECTED: Identity and Community

Session One: Emboldened: Who God Says You Are

Icebreaker:

Give everyone in the group a scrap of paper. Ask each person to write down what career or roles they wanted to do when they grew up, when they were little kids. If you have discussed vocation before, you could also broaden the question to include vocations like parent, community volunteer, and more. Have them sign their initials, then fold their paper. Collect the responses, reading each one to the group.

Have the group guess who wrote what.

Discuss:

Why do you think you chose that particular career as a little kid? What appealed to you?

Would you still pick that profession now? Why or why not?

How has your opinion about that profession changed as you've gotten older?

Main point: We may not feel the same way about things as we did when we were kids— we all grow up and change. In the same way, our understanding of who we are may change. We may not

feel like the same person we were ten years ago, five years ago, or even one year ago! No matter how we have changed, we can be sure that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Activity:

Hand out a blank piece of paper and markers to everyone. Give the group 60 seconds to draw a sketch of who they are. It can be a combination of words or images.

When done, ask participants to display their images.

Discuss:

Was it challenging or easy to summarize who you are in 60 seconds? Why?

What did you choose to highlight about yourself? Character traits? Hobbies? Likes or dislikes? Why do you think you picked these particular things?

Look at what you doodled. Did you tend to describe yourself positively or negatively?

If Almighty God, your Creator, was making a sketch of who you are, what do you think it would include?

How different would God's description of you be from your own?

Main point: Sometimes the way we identify who we are isn't always accurate. Perhaps we focus on the things we dislike about ourselves, or maybe we try to live up to a certain image. Maybe we aren't even sure of who we are. Our sin and the brokenness of our world may tell us all sorts of lies about our identity.

No matter how we feel about ourselves in this moment, we can be grounded in the truth of who God says we are: His beloved, forgiven children who have the hope of eternal life in their hearts. Our identity is found in Christ, who frees us from sin, calls us to share His message of grace with others, and gives us the gift of heaven.

But before we can live that out, we need to know what God says about us. Let's spend some time studying Scripture to discover who God says we are, and how we can live that out.

Examining Scripture:

Look up the following verses as a group, in partners, or individually. **What does each of these verses say about your identity? If appropriate, write it on a large sheet of paper for the whole group to see.**

1 John 2:12:

"I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus."

My identity: I am forgiven.

Joshua 1:9:

"...Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

My identity: I am never alone.

Ephesians 1:5:

"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure."

My identity: I belong in God's family.

Psalm 139:14:

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

My identity: I was created by God, with purpose.

John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

My identity: Jesus Christ gave His life for me. He gives me worth and value.

Isaiah 53:5:

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

My identity: Where I feel scarred, Jesus heals me.

John 14:27:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

My identity: In Jesus, my worries and anxieties are replaced with peace.

Psalm 18:32:

"God arms me with strength, and he makes my way perfect."

My identity: I have strength and a path forward because of God.

Romans 8:38-39:

"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

My identity: Nothing can take God's love away from me, even if I feel unlovable.

Discuss:

As you look through our list of how God sees us and what He says about us, what stands out?

What difference does it make in your life to know that you are dearly loved and forgiven?

Spend 30 seconds reflecting on where the Holy Spirit might be directing your attention today.

Where are you struggling? What Truth does the Bible speak to you in this challenge?

Closing Prayer:

As we close, reflect back on our time together today. Spend a few moments in silence, thinking about what you want to take with you into the rest of your week. Narrow your reflections into one word—perhaps "peace" or "forgiveness" or "freedom." The choice is totally yours.

Go around in a popcorn prayer, with one person opening the prayer and everyone else "popping in" to share their one reflective word that sums up what they're taking away from this study.

After everyone has shared, have one person wrap up with, "In Jesus' holy name we pray, amen."

UNEARTHED: Discovering Your Identity Bible Study

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Part 2: **UNEARTHED: Discovering Your Identity**

Part 3: ROOTED: Staying Grounded When Storms Threaten

Part 4: CONNECTED: Identity and Community

UNEARTHED: Discovering Your Identity

Opening Activity:

Have each participant share something that makes him or her totally unique in this particular group, such as "I can't whistle" or "I've never been outside of this state." Leaders, give a few examples of unique facts, and be willing to share your answer first to generate some excitement!

Main Point: We spent some time sharing unique facts about ourselves just now, but we know that the topic of identity is deep. Today, we're going to take a look at how understanding our personal values can help us clarify who we are, and what purpose God has in store for us.

Discuss:

Look up Matthew 6:21: "For where our treasure is, there your heart will be also." What does this verse mean?

The word "value" means "worth". In other words, a value is something in your life that has worth. Those things you value—your "treasure"—reflect your heart. With that definition in mind, what things would you say you value?

How do your values differ from the values of your friends? What about your family?

Writing Our Values Activity:

It can be difficult to understand our values and how they factor into our identity. We're going to spend some time today working to identify what matters to us, and how we want to live out those things.

Hand out a piece of paper and a pen to every participant and invite them to complete the following prompts. Spend time discussing their answers to each prompt, as time permits.

Step 1:

How do you figure out your values? First, make a list of the truths you desire to live out. Even if you don't fully live them out right now, they guide how you want to be! If you want, you can do an internet search for "personal values" and see what stands out.

A few examples of values:

Honesty

Truthful

Compassionate

Doing things with excellence

Following Jesus

Growing in faith

Successful

Trustworthy

Step 2:

Spend some time making a list of your own values, rapid fire. Then go back and circle the top three that stand out. What did you write down?

Is there an overall theme to the values that you circled? What is it?

Spend a moment reflecting on role models or mentors in your life. Perhaps it's a teacher, a parent or grandparent, a coach, or a youth leader. Who inspires you?

What values do you see lived out by that person who inspires you?

What values might you want to emulate in your own life, to make a part of your identity?

Step 3:

Sometimes it's easier to nail down our values by taking a look at who we DON'T want to be. Spend two minutes listing out all the values you don't want to be a part of your identity—for instance, "dishonest" or "unhelpful" or "selfish."

As you look over that list of who you don't want to be, what stands out?

How can you have more clarity on what matters to you by understanding who you don't want to be?

Examining Scripture:

Knowing our values are important, but not as valuable as knowing God's value. God tells us about what He values in Scripture. We're going to take a look at a few key verses that show us about some of the values God has—including love, treating others with compassion, being obedient, having good character, practicing stewardship and being generous, and forgiveness.

Matthew 22:34-40:

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

God's value: love

Matthew 9:35-38:

"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"

God's value: compassion

James 1:22-25:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

God's value: obedience

Micah 6:8:

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

God's value: integrity

Genesis 1:28:

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

God's value: good stewardship

Matthew 18:21-22:

"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"

God's value: forgiveness

As you read through those, which story captures your attention the most? Why?

What do you think resonates with what you identified for your personal identity? Where do you feel like sin or brokenness might have caused you to deviate from God's values?

Reflecting honestly on your life right now, what values would you say the Holy Spirit is already helping you live out? Which ones might you be struggling with?

Partner Up Activity:

Pair up with someone else in your group and sit back-to-back, taking turns creating a "summary" of the other person. Ask them to share who they are, and what's important to them. The "writer" should actively listen and write down words that stand out on their paper.

After three minutes, switch interviewing. At the end of your time together, turn to face each other and exchange summaries. Note the words that your partner wrote down about you.

How do you feel about the summary someone else did of you?

How accurately does it capture your identity and values?

What did your partner miss in summarizing you?

Sometimes we can gain insights about our identity by considering what others see in us. What kind of things do your friends come to you for?

How would your friends describe your values and personality?

This activity illustrates that the people around us can sometimes overlook parts of us. Perhaps we intentionally or unintentionally keep those things hidden. Or perhaps others see things in us that we can't see for ourselves. Nothing about us is hidden from God, however. What does Psalm 139:1-16 say about how intimately God knows each of us?

Creating a Personal Mission Statement Activity:

Invite everyone to spend some time quietly reflecting and writing their own answers to the following questions:

What types of things do you do that bring you joy?

What types of things do you do well?

What brings you meaning?

Now, fill in the blanks:

Because I am loved by God, I value _____ (list some of your values from earlier in this lesson) and through the Holy Spirit, I want to use my God-given ability of _____ (list some of your skills) to _____ (list something that brings you meaning).

Have participants share their mission statements with the group and share what they learned about themselves in this process.

Discuss:

How does clarifying a personal mission statement speak to your identity? How is your statement centered in Jesus?

How might your mission statement change, over time?

What values are so deep that you can't ever imagine them changing?

We are who we uniquely made by a God who loves us and died for us. All our statements are in some ways the same because of our shared gift of faith in Jesus. We may try to live this out, but we can't on our own. Sometimes we set out with the best intentions, but we fail. Perhaps we make a major mistake, or maybe we fall short of the standards that we know God has for us. What comfort can we take from knowing that God's love for us will never falter, even when we screw up?

Examining Scripture:

The Bible is full of stories of God using broken, sinful people to achieve His purposes— despite their own shortcomings.

Think of Saul, who went from persecuting Christians to sharing Jesus all over the world (Acts 9)...or Rahab, who bravely assisted the Israelite scouts despite the fact that she was a prostitute (Joshua 2)...or Zacchaeus, who was hated by his peers for being a tax collector, but changed his life when he encountered Jesus (Luke 19)...or Moses, who fled his hometown on a murder charge and argued about God's calling on his life to go back to Egypt (Exodus 3 and 4).

These stories remind us that all the people that God uses to accomplish important things in this world are broken and sinful. Perhaps they weren't sure of their identity or purpose, at times. Yet God still loved them, offered forgiveness, and used them for His will, to accomplish His purposes!

Discuss:

How does knowing that the Holy Spirit can use even the most broken person to accomplish His purpose make you feel?

We each have a unique, God-given role to play in the world. How can you remember that as you go about your week, after leaving here today?

Closing Activity:

Have each person write their personal mission statement on a large piece of paper. When everyone is done writing, invite the group to pray for each other, offering these mission statements to the Holy Spirit to use as He will.

Explain that no matter what we face in life, or how we fail, we can be sure that God has given us a special identity as His beloved child, that He will use us to make a difference in this world, and that nothing can ever separate us from His love.

We can experience deep hope and peace when we live in this Truth!

ROOTED: Staying Grounded When Storms Threaten Bible Study

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ROOTED: Staying Grounded When Storms Threaten

Icebreaker: Ask the group the following questions. Allow time for discussion. If appropriate, share some pictures or video clips of these storms as you discuss.

What type of storm would you most prefer to face: a tornado, hurricane, severe thunder storm, blizzard, dust storm, or ice storm? Why?

Which of these storms have personally experienced?

Besides these physical storms we see in nature, what other storms do people your age face?

Main point: We're talking about storms today—not just the storms we experience in nature, but also the storms we face in life. Maybe the storm you're currently battling is homework, chores, difficult classes, or relationship drama. Or maybe you're dealing with problems at home, tragedy, or mistakes you've made. We're going to discuss our personal storms, and what the Bible says about Jesus' unending love and peace even in the middle of difficult situations.

Discuss:

What's the worst storm you've ever been in? What was it like?

What did you feel as you dealt with that storm?

As you think about your life, what's the biggest storm you're facing right now?

How have you reacted to these personal storms? Have you dealt with fear or loss? Confusion about your emotions and identity?

How can storms challenge our understanding of who we are?

Examining Scripture:

Look up the following Bible story as a group, in partners, or individually. Read through it once, and then invite participants to close their eyes and relax. Explain that you are going to guide them through an "imaginative reading" of this story. Ask them to keep their eyes closed, to stay silent, and to imagine that they're in this scene themselves.

You'll be asking them some questions after you read, but they do not need to answer aloud—only imagine what's around them, as they consider the questions.

Bible story: Jesus calms the sea (Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25) Slowly read the Bible verses again, then ask the following questions :

What do you smell?

What do you hear?

Who is around you?

What do you feel?

Who is around you?

What are your concerns?

How do you feel as Jesus wakes up?

What emotions go through you as the wind and waves start to calm?

How do you look at Jesus now, knowing He's saved you?

After a few moments of silent contemplation, invite participants to open their eyes again. Maintain a contemplative tone as you discuss the experience. What stood out to you as you imagined this scene? How did it feel, knowing that Jesus attuned to your fears rather than continued to sleep and leave you to fight on your own?

Main point: Sometimes we read Scripture and forget that it shares real stories of real people. When we imagine ourselves in this scene, being terrified about the storm around us, we start to see the difference that Jesus makes. His presence in the disciples' lives—and in our lives—literally saves them and restores hope.

Discuss:

What comfort does the Bible share about the storms that you're facing? Consider the following verses:

Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

John 16:33: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Romans 8:26-28: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Read Colossians 2:6-8: *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."*

How can you stay rooted in the knowledge that you are loved and secure in Jesus, even when you face these storms?

What reminders has God given us of His promises and work in our lives, even in difficult times?

When might you be at danger of being taken captive by "hollow and deceptive philosophy"? How can God help you guard against this?

Activity:

Invite participants to put both hands on their laps. Give them a moment to think about how many storms they're currently dealing with. On the count of three, have them hold up their hands and display a number of fingers that correspond with the number of storms in their life.

Discuss:

Looking at your life right now, how many storms are you facing? How does it make you feel to consider the storms you're grappling with?

Be honest, but don't share specifics unless you feel comfortable. What's the top issue you're struggling with right now? (*You can say "temptation" or "loss" without getting too personal!!*)

What do you wish you could share with adults about being a teen? What do they not understand about being your age?

How does it make you feel to know that someone else can't totally understand you?

Read Psalm 139:1-16. What do these verses say about how God understands you? How does that make you feel, to be known so completely and loved so dearly?

Main Point: God understands us completely—in fact, He sent His Son Jesus, to experience life just like we do. Imagine that: Jesus felt the pain of blisters and sore muscles, the frustration of friends hurting his feelings, all the emotions that come with living life.

Yet His sacrifice on the cross was one He made for each of us, in order to save us from the storms that we face. His crucifixion rescued us from the storms of despair, death, and the devil that would otherwise overtake us. Praise God for His incredible mercy!

Closing Activity:

Grab a cup or water bottle of clean water and share that you're going to close with a "shower of blessings."

As we close in the knowledge of how Jesus Christ has rescued us from the storms in our lives, we're going to shift our perspective on rain.

Though we're often upset that rain ruins our day, rain in biblical times was considered a great blessing. It brought dry, barren land to life and yielded crops that animals and people could enjoy. It was a reminder of rescue, of baptism, and of sustenance.

Invite participants to hold their hands out in front of them, palms up, in order to physically remind themselves the blessings that God is pouring out in their lives— perhaps even blessings hiding in the middle of the storms they're facing.

Ask them to close their eyes as you sprinkle water on their palms, reminding them that no matter what they encounter, they are firm in the truth of being God's beloved, baptized child, held secure in His love.

Alternatively, you may ask your pastor to come to do a remembrance of their Baptism.

CONNECTED: Identity and Community Bible Study

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Icebreaker:

Hand out pieces of paper and invite participants to draw a picture of their ideal home. Make sure they don't put their name or any identifying marks on the paper. The room itself doesn't need to be practical—maybe it has an entire room filled with bean bag chairs, or a whole floor that's a basketball court!

After a few moments, invite participants to put their pictures in a pile and scramble them up. Pass out the pictures at random, to others in the group. Explain that you want each person to analyze this "perfect house" like an anthropologist, drawing some conclusions about the personality of the person who drew this picture.

Ask them to come up with three words that they'd use to explain the person who doodled the image, then invite them to share with the group.

Discuss:

How accurate were the conclusions drawn about you by someone else?

Do you feel like your partner understood who you really are, by looking at your perfect house, or did they misjudge you entirely?

You drew pictures of your ideal home just now, without really thinking about what your house said about your personality. As you look back on this activity now, do you think your "ideal home" is a true reflection of who you are? Why or why not?

Whether we realize it or not, we're constantly sharing who we are with the world. What are some ways that you reveal your identity without even thinking about it?

Main Point: As Christians, our identity is clear: we are created with purpose, loved, and forgiven by our Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet it's sometimes a challenge to navigate our relationship with others while remaining grounded in this identity. Our relationships can steer us in all different directions, whether it's making us doubt these truths or even defend our faith. Today, we're going to talk about how we stay true to our identity, as children of God, in the context of the community around us.

Activity:

Invite the group to rate how easy it is to share the following things with their friends. Have the hold up a thumbs up or a thumbs down in response to each topic.

How easy is it to talk to someone else about... Your favorite restaurant?

Your wifi password?

A scary nightmare you had? Your biggest fear?

Your shoe size?

Your favorite social media follows? Your crush's name?

Your faith?

Discuss:

What makes it easy to share something?

What would you hesitate to share with someone else? Why?

What types of things do you tend to keep to yourself?

In general, are you an "open book"—you'll tell anyone anything—or a "clam shell"—you hesitate to open up to anyone? Why?

Main point:

God created each of us unique, with different personalities and passions. Some of us are happy to share who we are with others, but others are cautious. Either way, we know that God designed us for community. Whether we're extroverted or introverted, we're better together. Let's take a look at the blessings and challenges that face us, as we figure out how to live out our identity as children of God in our communities.

Examining Scripture:

Invite participants to look up the following Bible verses in pairs or small groups. Have them summarize what each verse says about Christian community centered in God, in their own words.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

1 Corinthians 1:10:

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

Colossians 3:13:

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Galatians 6:2:

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Proverbs 27:17:

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Discuss:

What do these verses tell us about the importance of Christian community in our lives?

What are the loudest voices in your life—family? Friends? Teachers? Coaches? Cousins?

Who should be the loudest voices and strongest support in your life?

Who do you let into your life, and why? What makes you feel that you can open up and trust someone else?

If you could choose four words to describe your community, what would they be?

What are some of the blessings we experience from others?

As you consider the blessings you receive from community, you might realize that there are areas where your cup isn't being filled. Where might you be dealing with a deficit in your life? (*Perhaps it's a lack of encouragement, or a lack of accountability, or not having someone who will listen to you when you're struggling!*)

God designed us for community, yet we often struggle with others. Where does sin break our community? What makes it hard for you to trust other people?

When can your community become problematic, or even harmful?

How do you know when the people around you are steering you in a direction away from God?

What can you do if you realize that you're turning towards things that aren't true to who you are and what you believe?

Where do you need encouragement in your life, from your community?

Bumper Sticker Activity:

Explain that people put bumper stickers on their cars in order to show what matters to them—it's an insight into someone's identity, shared with strangers! Common bumper stickers are favorite travel destinations, radio stations or musicians, religious beliefs, or thought-provoking quotes.

Have participants look up the following verses in partners, small groups, or individually. Invite them to summarize the main point of the verses into one or two key sentences and come up with a bumper sticker slogan they can share with the group. If time permits, have them doodle the design of their bumper sticker and share it.

1 Peter 4:8-11:

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Romans 15:5-7:

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Ephesians 4:2-6:

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Romans 12:3-13:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

Discuss:

According to these Bible verses, how *should* we treat others? Overall, how well do you live up to the standard God sets for you?

Jesus sets the ultimate example for us, in how He treated those around Him. Consider Jesus feeding the five thousand (Matthew 14), the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18), healing a leper (Mark 1) and the blind men (Matthew 20). How did Jesus treat the people He encountered?

How can the Holy Spirit help us to use Jesus' example of love and compassion to share the Gospel with the people in our lives?

What do you think God may be calling *you* to share with the people around you?

What comfort does it give you to know that even when the people around you let you down, Jesus never abandons you?

Read Matthew 28:19-20. What are we, as Christians, called to do?

Because you are loved by God, what are some ways that you can share the love of Christ with those around you? Who comes to mind that may need to know about the unconditional love Jesus offers us and them?

In Matthew 28:20, what's the very last thing Jesus said to His followers, before He ascended into heaven? What comfort does that give you?

Main Point:

The community of people around us can offer us many blessings, but they can also be a source of pain, distraction, and bad influence. Sin has broken our relationship with God and with other people. Because we are forgiven by God, we can forgive and redeem relationships with others broken by sin. We've spent time discerning how we can live out our identity as children of God no matter where we are, and a large part of that is knowing that we are unconditionally loved and forgiven—and we have the chance to share that love with those around us. No matter where we go, or who or what we encounter in this life, we know that Jesus is always with us, to the very end of the age. That's a source of comfort that gives us hope.

Closing Activity:

Have participants close their eyes and reflect on their community. Consider family, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, youth leaders, bus drivers, and anyone else you may encounter in your day-to-day routine. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring one person to mind that you can pray for today.

Spend a few moments praying that this person feels the compassionate love, abundant forgiveness, and unmistakable peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christ, as you extend the blessing of encouragement to them this week with a smile and kind word.