

“Identity: You Have New Life”

(Part of the Identity Series, and a follow up the “Job Identity” lesson)

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Katie McRee

Key verses:

2 Corinthians 5:13, Luke 22:39-43

Objectives:

- To understand the freedom of salvation and how it relates to freeing us from our circumstances... sometimes there is space to escape from hardships, but other times the relief comes much later. ((**This lesson has the potential to be heavy and pretty discouraging**... which is not typically what happens when you talk about new life! But the hope is that we can help them see how new life helps us look past our circumstances and focus instead on Christ.))
- Identifying the things in our lives that we have control over and are weighing us down, and praying for relief.

This is part of a series that will be presented throughout the school year, and a follow up to the “Job identity” lesson that was posted in February of 2016.

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- Hook: Push Up Pressure (10 mins): playing a game that will wear you out... but has the potential to offer new energy!
- Book: Paradise After Pain (10 mins): thinking about how, even though God gives us new life, it doesn't always mean we are freed from our circumstances.
- Look: New Life, Old Problems (10 mins): Sharing real stories of when problems from our former lives have come back to haunt us.
- Took: Push Up Prayers (5 mins): Taking a prayerful, physical stance that represents the way we are living into our new lives and shrugging off things that weigh us down

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- A prize of some sort that they WANT all for themselves, but could be split in half (a bag of candy, \$20 (will need to be able to break it), 2 movie tickets, etc.)
- Many items that will work as weights (see the game in hook)- bibles or BCP would work well
- Copies of the small group questions page
- AV equipment to show video (optional)

(Open in prayer, announcements, and any other start of gathering traditions)

Push Up Pressure (Hook, 10 mins)

Playing a physically demanding game to illustrate how life can wear us out... but there is hope for new energy!

Here is the game play:

- Let them know what prize they will be competing for, BEFORE you tell them the details of the game!
- Now, before knowing what the contest is, they will have the option to either work solo, or in pairs. If they work solo, they get to keep the entire prize for themselves, but if they have a pair and they win, they will have to split the prize.
- Let them individually choose if they would like a pair and then choose the person they will work with- only pairs, no trios!
- Once the pair or solo decision have been made, ONE person of the pair (or the only person if they are solo) will be asked to hold a push up position (in proper form, as judged by the adults.). The last person to hold it gets the prize.
- If they chose to work in pairs, just tell the pair to sit tight... they may even be annoyed because they think they wasted the chance for a solo prize!
- Shortly after they start, you will make up random things in their life that could be weighing them down (relationships, school, etc.) and each time you mention something, you place a weight on their back (bibles, BCP, or something else you can stack on them).
 - ****It is important to choose a variety of things that fall into one of two categories- things that they DO have control over (like the choice to be in a relationship, how much energy they put into school work, etc.), and things they DO NOT have control over (illness, divorce in the family, their parent's finances, etc.)**
- When they look like they are about to give up, you will tell them that their partner can take up the position and you will quickly move the weights, allowing the original push up person to stop. They can do this with their partner, if they choose, but they can only switch once!
- Last person/pair to hold the position wins the prize!

Processing Questions:

- For those who played solo, were you happy with your choice? Why or why not?
- For those who played in pairs, were you happy with your choice? Why or why not?
- How was the exhaustion you felt similar to the weight you feel when things in life weigh you down?

Paradise After Pain (Book, 10 mins)

Looking at two different passages that seem a little conflicting and wondering how they fit together. Even though God gives us new life, it doesn't always mean we are freed from our circumstances.

- Break them into small groups of 3 to 4 and pass out the group discussion worksheets (New Life, Pain, and Paradise) located at the end of the lesson.
- Give them about 5 minutes to work through the page, and then have everyone come together to share his or her findings.
- Take some time to debrief, hitting on these points:
 - These two passages, at least at first glance, seem to be in contradiction with each other, but they actually fit together
 - When we know Christ, there is a promise of new life... that is a truth! However, our understanding of new life isn't always quite right.
 - New life means that we have freedom in Christ and promise of eternity with him. Hopefully we experience peace because of that relationship, but there is no promise that we will be freed from our circumstances.
 - The thief on the cross repented and was promised paradise, but that didn't mean that he was relieved from the circumstances that he found himself in.
 - Do you believe that the thief, knowing that he was about ready to enter paradise, would have been able to more easily bear the pain of death on a cross?
 - How can we experience relief and new life in Christ, even when we are still stuck in difficult circumstances?

New Life, Old Problems (Look, 10 mins)

Take some time to share about more contemporary stories where someone found new life but still had to wade through the consequences of their old life.

- Your objective in this section is to share a story of someone who found freedom and new life in Christ, even if their circumstances didn't change. Someone who was able to find hope because of Christ. You have options!
 1. You can share a personal story
 2. You can allow them to share their own stories, maybe just ask, "How was God present on your very worst day?" **OR**
 3. You can find a story online of something that speaks to you. I have provided one for you that can be controversial, so you will have to decide what works best for your group!

Provided Story of New Life: David Berkowitz, or Son of Sam:

If you are unfamiliar with his story, a quick Google search will provide you with plenty of information, as he is a serial killer that received a lot of media attention. Basically, back in the 70s he murdered several people and hurt many more. He also claimed to be involved in satanic worship and said he sold his soul to the devil. He was definitely mentally unstable! For the first 10 years he was in prison, since he knew there was no chance for parole, he was a terrible inmate and was always getting in trouble. One day, a fellow inmate approached him and shared the Gospel... and his life was changed. He now goes by Son of Hope.

I have to say, I was skeptical of his story, but after watching a video of him, he seems like someone who is at peace and actually has a grasp on the freedom that comes with following Christ. Here is a short video if you would like to show it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qdv78w6MN04>

Discussion questions (feel free to adjust depending on the story that you choose):

- How did this person experience New Life?
- What were they relieved from?
- Do you believe they are happier or more at peace than they were before they knew the truth of Christ?
- Were there things that they were not relieved from?
- How can we reconcile that God gives us new life, even when we still have to deal with the struggles/consequences in our lives?
- If things are difficult, does that mean that God loves us any less?

Push Up Prayers (Took, 5 mins)

In this final section, we will take a prayerful, physical stance that represents the way we are living into our new lives and shrugging off things that weigh us down.

Say something like:

We've spent some time talking about how new life doesn't necessarily free us from our circumstances, but will always offer us hope in the end. It may seem discouraging to think that we have to wait for relief, but that isn't always the case. Many times there is a way out of our circumstances, and when we are properly focused on God, it is easier to see the way out. For example, if we think back to the game in the beginning, some of the things that weighed us down are outside of our control (things like illness and parents getting divorced). But some things we can change! For example, sometimes we have friends that are no longer good for us, and it is best to walk away. Or, sometimes we have put too much pressure on ourselves to perform well at school or in sports and when we focus on God, we will see that those things don't have to define us as much as we originally thought. If we look closely at the stressors in our lives, and keep them in perspective, there are often adjustments we can make to relieve pressure. Let's take some time now to think about where we can find relief, and then offer those weights to God, so that we can experience the freedom of new life in Christ.

- Give the students a few minutes to sit silently and think about the things in their life that are unnecessarily weighing them down and consider if they might be willing to pass those off to God to handle.
- If they are comfortable doing so, have them assume the push-up position again for a simple prayer. Explain that you will allow them to lie down their bodies as a sign that they are laying down their burdens with God.
- Close in a simple prayer, THANKING God for the gift of new life, and ASKING that he shows us the things in our life that we can let go of so that we can see him more clearly and enjoy his peace. (When they are ready, they can lower their bodies to the ground, and you can close with a simple "Amen.")

New Life, Pain, and Paradise

In your small groups, look through the Bible passages that are listed and answer the questions.. take your time and discuss- there isn't one perfect answer!

Passage #1- 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

- What does it mean to be “in Christ” and how can that make you a new creation?
- Do all things have to pass away in order for things to be made new?

Passage #2: Luke 23: 39-43, (this passage is from when Jesus is on the cross)

39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, [j] save Yourself and us.”

40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, [k] remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

- In what ways were the two criminals different in how they interacted with Jesus?
- What did the second criminal request of Jesus?
- Did Jesus grant his request? And if he did, when was the criminal supposed to receive what he asked for?
- When we consider this passage in relationship to the first one, would you consider the criminal to be someone who was “in Christ?”
- Was the criminal “made new?”