

“Identity: God Has a Plan for You”

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

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Katie McRee

Key verses:

Jeremiah 29:11

Objectives:

- To consider that no matter what happens, God has a plan for our lives that is more important than we are able to see on our own.
- To know that even when things are not how we would like, we can still prosper while we wait on God’s plan to unfold.

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 lessons can all stand alone, but if you are looking for more resources, you can certainly go back and start the series with the original Job lesson.

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- Hook: Plans Collage (10-mins): Creating one large collage that represents the plans we have as a group.
- Book: Plans for Prosperity (10 mins): Thinking about how God wants us to live our best, even when things are rough.
- Look: Change of Plans: Derrick Tennant (10 mins): watching a video about someone who’s plans for his entire life changed in one night.
- Took: God’s Collage (5 mins): revealing the manipulated collage from the hook section.

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Bibles
- A large piece of butcher paper
- Markers
- A semi-skilled crafty person, or “secret artist”
- Paint and brushes (optional)
- AV equipment to show video
- Sharpies

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

Plans Collage (Hook, 10 mins)

You will be creating one collage that represents all the plans that your group has for their future- both near and distant plans.

- Before the youth arrive, tape a large piece of butcher paper to the wall and leave a basket of markers nearby.
- As they arrive, ask them to think about all the plans they have for their future and to write words, phrases, or draw pictures to represent those prayers. It can be plans that they have for later in the day, or for much later in life. What are they having for lunch? What are they doing for prom? Where are they going to college? How many kids are they going to have? Any and all plans should count!
- Give them about 5 minutes to add stuff. When the energy starts to dwindle, have them take a seat and process what you see:
 - What are some of the things you immediately take note of?
 - Does anyone need to expand on what they shared?
 - Is there anything missing that you should add?
- Take the collage off the wall and pass it off to your “secret artist” who can work on it in another area, out of view from the youth.

Transitional Statement: say something like:

These are all really great plans, and it's not unlikely that some of them will happen just as you hope. But one thing this collage doesn't take into consideration is that we don't always have a say in what happens to us. Let's take a look at more details around that...

In private, the “secret artist” should add some things to the group collage that would indicate that all these small pieces are part of one really big picture. They can do that however they want, but it may include adding some things that connect separate images, or a single color “ribbon” that flows through the entire sheet of paper. Also, feel free to manipulate words and images that the kids have added and make it something totally new! You can use markers or paint... but you can cover more ground and make things look more cohesive with paint! They need to finish their work before the “Took” portion of the lesson

Plans for Prosperity (Book, 10 mins)

In this section, we are looking at a passage from Jeremiah about how to live a life of prosperity. You can go through the verses however you would like, but my suggestion is to read a few at a time, pausing along the way to ask clarifying questions.

- Have everyone look up Jeremiah 29. You will be reading several verses, but I have edited out some that are not necessary for our lesson- feel free to add them back in if you would like.
- Tell them that you are going to take turns reading passages and to keep their bible's open.
- Here are the verses for your planning purposes:

29: 1

Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to
(pause)

- Who is the recipient of this letter?
- What state of mind would they have been in?

29: 4-7

⁴“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ⁵‘Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their ^[a]produce. ⁶Take wives and ^[b]become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. ⁷Seek the ^[c]welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its ^[d]welfare you will have ^[e]welfare.
(pause)

- How would you summarize the instruction that these people were given?
- If you were living in exile, do you think that settling and living a prosperous life would be a natural reaction? Why or why not?

29:10-14

10 This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. ^[b] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

(pause)

- What promises does Jeremiah make on God's behalf in these verses?
- Why might it be difficult for the people in exile to trust the truth of these promises? (they have to remain in exile for 70 years!!!!)
- What about these verses might be frustrating? (sometimes we are left in the dark and confused)
- What instruction is given on how to enjoy the prosperity that God offers? (you have to seek him and his will) How is this different from our natural tendencies? (We often want to seek our own will, and then just invite God to be a part of what we have planned for ourselves!)
- What about these verses offers hope? (God can see what is coming and promises us a good future, even if it's not in the traditional sense.)

Transitional Statement:

Because we were made in God's image, it can be a natural tendency to think that we have control over everything and make detailed plans for our own future, but these verses would suggest otherwise. While God wants us to settle in and enjoy our lives, ultimately, we have to trust that his long-term plan for us (sometimes VERY long term plan) is one that offers hope and prosperity. Furthermore, we are told that we can have a clearer view of those plans when we focus on him, and don't just look to our current circumstances to provide hope. Placing our hope and future in circumstances that we don't know can be tricky since we have a limited view of the future. But God's view is broad, and he is able to see the endgame. Let's learn about one guy who's future did not go as planned...

Change of Plans: Derrick Tennant (Hook, 10 mins)

In this section, you will be telling the story of a man who lives in the Atlanta area named Derrick Tennant. He had carved out a certain path for himself that was completely altered in one night.

- Tell them the story of Derrick Tennant. Below is a bio that was pulled from one of his websites, thelovechromosome.com

Derrick Tennant, a gifted athlete, was progressing in his dream for a career in sports when one evening he laid down but did not wake up for three days.

He had undergone what doctors would later term random bleeding from point x for an unknown reason. Paralyzed and in a coma, Derrick underwent brain surgery from which he became unable to move his left side. It would take years of therapy to re-learn the basics like walking, talking and simple daily tasks. Derrick is still unable to use his left arm and he walks with a limp, but he has learned a lot through this process.

Derrick credits one thing for his ability to make it through this process not only alive, but also learning and growing: LOVE. Receiving love from his family, his friends, and his God combined with learning to better demonstrate love in the midst of difficulty were essential to Derrick's survival and vitality.

With years of therapy and hard work, Derrick eventually was able to return to the court. In 1993, he played basketball overseas competitively. "You should have seen me when I had two arms", he says. Derrick now travels the world sharing his story and encouraging others to use obstacles as opportunities. He is an internationally known stand up comic and motivational speaker, and even does some one armed MAGIC shows.

- The following link is to a video of Derrick and his sister. It actually focuses much more on his sister (Julie) but I like it because she is also part of his story and they both have the same message: Love Your Life. <http://www.thelovechromosome.com>

Discussion questions:

- How would you describe Derrick's demeanor? Is that what you would expect from someone who's plans for their life came to a screeching halt?
- Did God give Derrick a new set of gifts and talents as a result of his injury? (No! those talents were already there, he just hadn't leaned on them to make a path for his future!)
- Did God's blessings stop as a result of his injury?
- Did GOD'S plans for Derrick's life change as a result of his injury?
- From what little you know of Derrick, would you describe his life as a prosperous one?
- Thinking back to what we talked about in Jeremiah, how did Derrick have to respond to his circumstances in order to receive the blessings that God had for him.

Transitional Statement:

As a young man with plans and a path to become a professional athlete, Derrick could have easily lived the rest of his life being angry and resenting God. And while there were likely times when he was angry and frustrated (and probably still are!), he didn't let those feelings overcome the hope that he has in God's plan. Just like the exiled recipients of the letter in Jeremiah, Derrick found himself in a place he hadn't planned on, and was likely not very thrilled to be there. But instead of settling into his resentment and living his life that way, he settled into his hope in Christ and made a life for himself with his new set of circumstances. Just as God promises, he had a strong hope and sturdy future already in place for Derrick- a future that Derrick was already equipped for given his personality and talents.

God's Collage (Took, 5-10 mins)

In this last section, you will be reminding the youth that ultimately, our future is in God's hands. The part that is in our control is how to respond to our circumstances and where to place our hope.

- Bring the manipulated collage back into the meeting space. Hopefully you have made enough edits/additions that they will take note of the differences. Spend some time processing what you see:
 - What is different about this collage than the last time you saw it? What has remained the same? How does that make you feel?
 - How is this a representation of the verses in Jeremiah that talk about God's plan for our lives?
 - You don't have to answer this out loud, but consider, Are you at a place in your life where you are willing to embrace changes that God may make to your life?
- Once you have talked about God's bigger picture, pass around sharpies and ask the students to spend a minute or so reflecting on the plans and hopes they have for their future. Using the sharpie, they can write a few words or draw pictures on their palms to represent those hopes. (you may want to play some soft music during this personal time of reflection)
- When they have finished writing on their hands, ask them to sit quietly with their hands open, palms up, on their lap. Explain that this stance is one that says they are willing to hold their hopes and plans with open hands, inviting God to make changes that will best provide for a hope and a future for all of his children.
- Close in prayer that has a pause in the middle, allowing them to offer up their plans. Something like:

Father, thank you for creating each of us with our own passions and interests. Thank you that we are all unique and have different plans for how we hope to live our lives. As we sit here, we ask you to see the desires of our hearts and help us to understand that you have a plan for prosperity for each of us. Father, help us to trust you and hold our hopes with open hands, resisting the temptation to fight your will. Hear now the plans that we offer to you.

(pause- they can offer their prayers out loud or in silence)

Because we love you and believe you keep your promises, we will settle in to whatever circumstance we find ourselves, and trust that you have a plan and purpose for each of our lives. Amen.