

Don't Judge a Man by His Meme

(A lesson about not judging others or ourselves by a single moment in our lives)

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Katie McRee

Key verses:

Romans 2:1-3

Objective: To consider how we make the mistake of judging people by a single moment in their lives. How are these views in contrast to the broader picture that God has of them? Why do we have the tendency to judge with so little information?

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- **Hook:** Share your Meme (10- 15 mins)
 - Youth will have the opportunity to share their favorite memes with the larger group
- **Book:** Don't Judge (5- 10 mins)
 - Reading verses from Romans that discourage us from judging each other.
- **Look:** Don't Judge a Man by His Meme (10 mins)
 - Taking a closer look at the memes shared earlier in the lesson and considering how God sees the people in the photos.
- **Took:** A Single Snapshot (5-8 mins)
 - A meditation that helps us think about gentle and generous ways to respond when we see people in unflattering situations.

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- A chosen meme of your own
- (optional) A way to project memes that kids want to present
- Bibles
- (optional) copies of pictures from the guy in the first meme (back of lesson)
- (optional) candles and ambient music for the closing meditation

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

Share your Meme (Hook, 10- 15 mins.)

In this section, the youth will be invited to share their favorite memes, and you will casually introduce one of your “favorites” that can later be used for conversation. **DO NOT FORGET TO SHOW ONE OF THE ONES THAT ARE SUGGESTED-** the rest of the lesson hinges on it.

- Tell the youth that if they have a smart phone, they should get it out (the peasants rejoice!) and if they don't pair up with someone that does have one.
- Have them look up one of their favorite (appropriate) memes to share with the group.
- Before you let the kids present, you will likely want to screen the images for appropriateness. Part of what will make this lesson work is if there are some memes that are snarky, but obviously you don't want to use anything that is inappropriate or cruel.
- If you have a way of setting up a computer/phone to a larger screen and projecting the chosen memes, that would be ideal. Otherwise, just allow the students to walk though the room and quickly show the other students their chosen meme.
- *** **you will also need to casually share one of the following memes, telling the students that it is one of your favorites.** You have 3 options:
 - **Option 1:** <http://www.humoar.com/official-uniform-of-you-cant-arrest-me-my-dad-is-a-lawyer/>
I'm a little biased, but I think this is hands down the best option, simply because I have a lot more background information about one of the guys in the photo. It's an image of some preppy looking college guys and it says, "The official uniform of you can't arrest me, my dad is a lawyer." It features a kid named Casey that grew up at St. David's in Roswell and went viral several years ago. Later in the lesson, with Casey's permission, there are several other details and pictures about his life to emphasize that the single image and statement does not fully define him. OR
 - **Option 2:** <http://9gag.com/gag/4089731/plastic-surgery-you-can-t-hide-it-forever>
it's a meme that reads, "Plastic Surgery: you can't hide it forever." It's a picture of a family and the parents look much different from the kids. There is an article in the "look" section that shares more about the woman in the picture and how that meme has damaged her carrier. OR
 - **Option 3:** Choose one of the many memes from this link. You will then have to use the corresponding story for the "look" part of the lesson.

Please note that there is some inappropriate language that you will want to edit out before sharing with your students.

http://www.suggest.com/lifestyle/49361/18-real-life-people-who-inspired-some-of-the-most-viral-internet-memes-ever?utm_source=fbk&utm_campaign=fb-de-49361&utm_medium=referral&pid=null#slide/0

Discussion Questions (5 mins)

- What makes for a good meme?
- Have you ever seen a meme that you thought about long after the fact? Why was that?

Transition:

A well crafted meme is like a piece of art, but sometimes they can be a little hurtful. Let's take a look at what the bible might have to say about memes...

Don't Judge (Book, 5-10 mins)

In this section, we are having a quick discussion about the dangers of judging others

- Have everyone look up Romans 2:1-3
- Choose one person to read it out loud. (here it is for your planning purposes)

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. **2** Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. **3** So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*

Discussion Questions:

- What was the feeling/mood of these verses?
- What are the recipients of this letter (the Christians in the city of Rome) being reprimanded for?
- What is the consequence of passing judgement on someone?
- Why do you think Paul's message is so passionate?
- How do you think Paul would feel about memes?

Don't Judge a Man by His Meme (Look, 10 mins)

In this section we are looking back at the memes from the first section and thinking about how God sees those people. Specifically, we will talk about how a meme offers a tiny snapshot of someone's life, but God can see the entire picture.

- Choose the option that matches up with the meme that you used in the "hook" section:
 - **Option 1:** Lawyer Dad- if you used this one, look at the back of the lesson for more information and pictures of Casey, and an explanation of how that meme came to be.
 - **Option 2:** Plastic Surgery- if you used this one, take a look at this article to see how that picture and meme has changed that lady's life: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/taiwanese-model-sue-plastic-surgery-ad-article-1.2431054>
 - **Option 3:** If you chose one of the memes from the article, follow up with the corresponding story: http://www.suggest.com/lifestyle/49361/18-real-life-people-who-inspired-some-of-the-most-viral-internet-memes-ever?utm_source=fbk&utm_campaign=fb-de-49361&utm_medium=referral&pid=null#slide/0
- After taking a closer look at the people featured in your meme, invite the youth to reflect with the discussion questions:

Discussion Questions:

- If you had to guess at the background story about the person in the meme, do you think you would have gotten close?
- Can one picture sum up someone's entire character?
- Is it fair to make assumptions about people based on one picture, or one moment in their life?
- How do you think you would respond if a random picture of you was turned into a joke that millions of people laughed at?
- How do you think God views the people that are in the memes that you shared at the beginning of the lesson?
- How should we respond to memes given what we learned from the verses we read earlier in Romans?

A Single Snapshot (Took, 5-8 mins)

In this section, we will challenge the youth to not let any single moment define them selves or anyone else.

- Tell the youth to find a space in the room where they can sit comfortably and can be free of distractions.
- Explain that you will slowly be reading a meditation. You will ask questions and there will be long pauses. They should offer up their answers silently to God.
- If you would like, this would be a good time to turn down the lights, light some candles, and turn on some ambient music.
- Invite the youth to close their eyes and keep them closed for the duration of meditation. You will let them know when they can open their eyes.
- *Slowly* read the meditation, pausing after each question so that they can think of how they would answer:

Meditation:

Close your eyes, find a comfortable position, and take a few deep breaths...

Think back to one of the memes that we saw at the beginning of the lesson, but not the one that we discussed. Was there one that you found particularly funny? What about it made you laugh?

What do you imagine the person in the meme was doing in hours leading up to when that picture was taken?... What do you think their day looked like after the picture was taken?... How do you think they felt the first time they saw the meme?

How do you think God feels about that person?

Take another deep breath and think of a recent time when you found yourself judging someone... was it a brother or sister... someone from school... a stranger at the store... someone on TV?... What was it about them that you were judging? ... What do you think that person's day had looked like up until when you saw them? ... How do you think they felt in the moment that you were judging them? Do you think others were judging them?

How do you think God feels about that person?

Take another deep breath and think about a time when you made a mistake and was angry with yourself, or a time when you felt foolish... What had happened that got you in that position? ...How did you feel in that moment?... How long did you let those negative feelings about yourself linger? ... Are they still lingering?

How do you think God feels about you?

Take another deep breath, and ask God to be with you.

Father, forgive us for taking a small glimpse at someone's life and thinking that we have the right to judge. Forgive us for focusing on negative qualities in others as well as ourselves.

Thank you God, that you have examined each of us and know us intimately. You know our comings and our goings, when we lie and when we wake, and what we are going to say before we say it. Thank you that you love us so completely.

Help us to see ourselves and others the way that you do. Help us to appreciate the positive attributes of an individual, and not focus on the less attractive qualities. Help us to be patient, kind, and humble. Help us to be a reflection of you.

All this we ask in your name. Amen.

The Man in the Meme: Casey Ward

If you chose the “Lawyer Dad” meme, here is some background information about one of the guys in the picture. The guy in the pink shirt with wild hair is named Casey and grew up at St. David’s in Roswell. Before diving into who Casey is outside of the meme, here is the story of how that meme came to be, according to Casey:

When was that picture taken?

Casey: “It’s this party the first week of freshmen year at Princeton called ‘Lawn Parties’ where a bunch of bands come and play. As a result Princeton students ironically self fulfill the ‘Entitled Ivy League Brat’ stereotype and wear super preppy outfits on that day.

We were literally just walking down the street on our way to meet our friends, but also looked no different than any other person that day.

Someone took that photo and put it on Pinterest. It went viral from repins. Then ‘totalfratmove.com’ posted it on a blog. Then someone memed it, and it REALLY blew up. Then Snoop Dog and Thefatjewish Instagram accounts posted it. And now millions of people have seen it.

So that’s the whole story.”

Moral of the Story:

Ultimately, that picture was taken without Casey’s knowledge or consent and spread like wildfire without any of his doing. The millions of people who have seen that picture may think that the single snapshot sums up who Casey is (yes, he does get recognized by total strangers), but in reality, it was a single moment from his life, and Casey is a much more dynamic person than what that picture would suggest.

The view that I had/have as his old youth minister tells me this story:

(see the pictures at the end)

Casey is incredibly unique, silly and is adventurous in his fashion choices. He would wear these ridiculous tight, purple pants all the time- even when he was reading in church. When he was in middle school, he looked a lot older than the other kids his age because he had already hit his growth spurt. Sometimes he would be sensitive or upset and it would throw me off as to why he was responding like a little kid, and I would have to remind myself that he WAS a little kid, just in a big kid body!

He has a really close relationship with his family, especially his sister, and has a large group of friends that love him and he loves in return.

He is an amazing athlete and an exceptionally hard worker. I’ve seen few people be so committed to the degree of training that he dedicates himself to, including hours of hard work and a strict diet. He had a successful rowing career in high school, which ultimately earned him a scholarship to Princeton, where he became the captain of the rowing team.

More than anything else, Casey is kind and has a generous spirit. He has a way of making people happy and inviting them to experience joy. As college graduation approached, he veered away from employment options that would be lucrative, but would have him in an office all day. Instead he decided he had time for another adventure before he tied down to a more traditional job. He accepted a job in Mexico City where he is currently working for a non-profit organization that focuses on education reform. He does data analysis, research design, translations, grant proposals, and curriculum development for a company that is trying to help improve the quality of education in highly marginalized, rural, and indigenous communities.

That description of Casey is so much richer and broader than that single, snarky meme would suggest, and that is just from the viewpoint of someone who spends a very limited amount of time with him. **Imagine if God had described Casey. How much more dynamic would that description be!**

Casey with his family:



And with his sister, Kristen:



Pictures of Casey (front and center) from youth group:



One of multiple trips to Honduras in high school:



Casey with the Princeton rowing team (back of the boat):



Casey just a few weeks ago, working with children in Mexico City:

