

KEEPING IT

REAL

Keeping it real...

When you hear that phrase, what comes to mind? With so much in the world that is fake — from special effects to plastic surgery to veggie burgers — it's refreshing to focus on what's real in your life and how to keep it that way.

Relationships are a very real part of our lives, and perhaps the most important part. Just imagine how well you would survive on a tropical island with no other humans in sight. Even if you figured out how to get food, water, and shelter, you would still be starving for conversation and friendship. Ever heard the saying, "No man is an island"? It means that people can't thrive when they're cut off from everyone else, like an island surrounded by water. As complicated as our relationships can become, we really do need each other.

We were created for relationships because we are made in the image of God. He is in Himself a relationship. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was God who didn't want Adam to be lonely in the Garden of Eden, so He made Eve. If relationships are that important to God, they need to be important to us too.

This series is designed to help you get to the heart of your most significant relationships — with your parents, your siblings, your friends, your enemies, and God Himself. As you work through these lessons, pay attention to what God is teaching you through His Word about your interactions with others. Are you keeping it real?

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 1: PARENTS

If you had to choose a TV show or movie that best describes your family, what would it be?

- Cheaper by the Dozen*
- The Simpsons*
- 7th Heaven*
- Home Improvement*
- Gilmore Girls*
- Other: _____

Day 1

1. Often, the greatest problem faced by students today is not peer pressure, or drugs, or sex – it is coping with life at home. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?

- Great
- Pretty good
- So-so
- Not so good
- Bad

2. Take a look at your family life:

How often do you talk to your mom or dad about things that are important in your life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never				Sometimes					All the time

How many nights a week does your family get to have dinner together?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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How many times do you get in trouble in an average week?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
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Do you find yourself wishing you had more time or attention from your parents?

yes no

3. It would be easy to blame everything that's wrong with family relationships on parents. But the truth is that relationships are a two-way street. When you have a bad day, how does it affect the way you treat your parents?

4. Which of the following statements is most true about your parents?

- They really love me, even when they frustrate me.
- They are God's gift to me, and I talk to them about everything.
- I want to show them that I love them, but they make that very difficult.
- I am afraid of my parents. They don't know God.
- My parents don't understand me at all.

5. Why do you think God created families? (Check all that apply.)
- To teach us how to relate to Him and to each other
 - To provide an environment where children can grow and learn
 - To drive us crazy
 - To give us opportunities to take care of each other
 - To teach us about obedience and authority
 - Other: _____
6. The word “father” is used nearly 1,000 times in the Bible! God is the ultimate Father. Even if our earthly fathers have not been good examples, we can know the ultimate Father. Read **John 1:12**. What do you think it means to be His child? (Check all that apply.)
- You will never be disciplined.
 - You can pray to Him anywhere, anytime, about anything.
 - You can experience the blessings of knowing God, including eternal life in Heaven.
 - You are better than everyone else.
 - You have a new nature that desires to obey God and live like Jesus.
 - Other: _____
7. How might being His child affect the way you see and respond to your parents?

Day 2

1. While your parents are not always right, they are still your parents. Put yourself in their shoes. Check true or false:
- T F Raising me would be easy.
 - T F The hardest part about parenting is keeping the house clean.
 - T F I never take my parents for granted.
 - T F I don't need to honor my parents if they're not Christians.
 - T F I don't need to honor my parents if they aren't honoring me.
2. Read **Deuteronomy 5:16** and **Ephesians 6:1-3**. What does it mean to honor your parents?
- Give them trophies.
 - Instruct them on how they can be better parents.
 - Respect and obey them.
 - Do what they tell you if it sounds good to you.
3. What would it look like to dishonor them?
4. What is the promise that goes along with this command?

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 1: PARENTS (cont'd)

5. What does the promise mean?

- If you obey your parents, you will live to be at least 100 years old.
- Obedience leads to a peaceful and fulfilled life because it's God's way.
- You will become rich if you honor your parents.
- Obey, or you're dead. Yikes!

6. What happens to our relationship with our parents when we disrespect, disobey, and dishonor them, and how does that affect our relationship with God?

7. Name three things you can do for your parents this week:

Making It Personal:

Think about your relationship with your parents. Remember that no parent is perfect. Extend grace and forgiveness to them, just as God has done for you. Treat your parents the way you'd like to be treated. Ask God to show you how to take steps to heal any hurts in that relationship, and to give you the love, patience, and courage to follow through.



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Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 1: PARENTS (leader guide)

Materials for Lesson:

- Copies of Scripture sheet (see last page)
- Pencils or pens
- Shoebox
- Slips of paper
- Optional: Obtain copies of old family TV shows like *Leave It to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Lassie*, *Father Knows Best*, etc. Show a short segment of a different show each week, at least for the first two weeks of this series. Use it as an icebreaker, asking the students questions such as: *Do you think these shows are (or were) true to life? Do these families resemble yours? How is yours the same or different?*

Aim: To teach students how to honor God in their relationships with their parents, regardless of their family structure/situation, and to show them that God has a plan for this area of their lives.

Opener: (15 minutes)

Distribute pencils and copies of the Scripture sheet.

On the back of the Scripture sheet, ask the students to draw a diagram of their kitchen or dining room table, looking down from the top. Next ask them to draw circles at various points around the table indicating where the members of their family usually sit during a meal or where they might sit if they ate together. One by one, have the students explain their diagrams. (This will give you an idea of each person's family situation.) Draw the students out with questions like: *Do you often do things together as a family? If you were to choose one word to describe your family, what would it be?*

Transition: (3-5 minutes)

You may have heard that God has a plan for your life. Often when we hear that, we tend to think that it's written out somewhere in stone and our job is to try to find out what it is. But, actually, it is right in front of us all the time.

God has a job for you right where you are, in your family. Whether your family is great, mediocre, or awful - it is your family. God placed you there. While you cannot change the family you are in, you can contribute to its nature each day as you participate in it. Whether your family is something you must overcome or whether it is something that blesses you, God will use it to help you become the person He wants you to be. It is a part of your story.

Interactive Learning: (30 minutes)

Why do you think God created families?

Spend some time reflecting on a few parent-child relationships in the Bible. If your group is large enough, split into twos or threes and assign each group one of the following passages:

Abraham and Isaac – **Genesis 22:1-19**

Israel (Jacob) and Joseph – **Genesis 37:1-4**

Hannah and Samuel – 1 Samuel 1:21-28

David and Absalom – 2 Samuel 19:1-8

Have each group answer the following questions:

1. *What positive or negative character traits do you see in these parents? How did they obey or disobey God? What do we learn from their experiences?*
2. *What are some of the challenges they faced as parents?*
3. *Do you ever stop to see things from your parents' perspective? What's an area you disagree on where they are really just looking out for your own good?*

Come back together and share answers.

Proverbs places great value on the wisdom of parents. Regardless of how you view your parents, God has placed you in your family to learn from them and to love them. What are some of the lessons you've learned from your parents?

Give the students a few minutes on their own to read over the verses on the Scripture sheet. Instruct them to circle the ones that they think especially apply to them in their current situation. Then, for each verse circled, ask them to share how the verse applies, and how their lives might be different if they acted in a more positive manner. You might also encourage them to put the verses in their own words.

Go over any additional **ABS study questions** that will further your discussion.

Personal Challenge: (3 to 5 minutes)

There is another side to living as a family. Your parents can learn from you. God can speak to your parents through you. Remember the saying, "Your actions speak louder than your words"? Philippians 2:13 says that "God is at work in you, helping you to obey Him." Concentrate on loving your parents through your actions. Is your faith evident in the way you serve them? Be prepared to report back next week on how you followed through.

Group Project: (5 minutes)

Brainstorm ways that children can encourage their parents. Write each one on a slip of paper and collect them in a box or basket. Then have each student draw one out. That will be their assignment for the week.

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Close by praying for each other's families. Ask that God would help these students to honor their parents out of obedience to Christ. Remind the students that if there is something they need to talk about with you before you go, you would be glad to listen and pray for them.

ABS Scripture Sheet (leader guide)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” — Proverbs 1:7-9

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” — Proverbs 3:1-6

“The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.”
— Proverbs 10:1

“A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.” — Proverbs 13:1

“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.” — Proverbs 17:6

“To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool.” — Proverbs 17:21

“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.” — Proverbs 19:18

“He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace.” — Proverbs 19:26

“Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.” — Proverbs 20:11

“If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.” — Proverbs 20:20

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” — Proverbs 22:6

“My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right. Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path.”
— Proverbs 23:15-19

“He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.” — Proverbs 28:7

“He who robs his father or mother and says, ‘It’s not wrong’— he is partner to him who destroys.”
— Proverbs 28:24

“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.” — Proverbs 29:15

“Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.” — Proverbs 29:17

“There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers...” — Proverbs 30:11

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.” — Psalm 68:5

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him...”
— Psalm 103:13

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”
— John 1:12

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 2: SIBLINGS

Day 1

1. We often expect our relationships with family members to be free of problems. But the truth is that the most intimate relationships are the ones with the most potential for problems and pain. Think of a time when you had a problem with a family member. What was it, and how did you handle it?
2. What do you and your brother(s) and/or sister(s) fight about most often? (If you're an only child, substitute a close friend or relative for these questions.)
3. Sibling rivalry—competition between brothers and sisters—is anything but new. Read the story of the very first brothers, Cain and Abel, in **Genesis 4:1-16**. Why was Cain angry with Abel?
 - Some of Abel's sheep got into Cain's garden.
 - Abel teased him that his offerings weren't good enough.
 - Abel was God's favorite because he was the baby of the family.
 - God preferred Abel's offerings to Cain's because Abel gave the best he had.
4. How did Cain deal with his feelings?
 - They talked about it and came to an understanding.
 - He stole some of Abel's sheep for his offering.
 - He murdered his brother and lied to God about it.
 - He asked God to help him be a better brother to Abel.
5. What do you think is the main reason siblings often feel like they have to compete with one another?
 - Each person wants to stand out and be the best.
 - They are afraid their parents won't love them as much if they aren't as good-looking or talented as their sibling(s).
 - They feel like they are always being compared to one another.
 - Deep down, they want to be just like their sibling.
 - Other: _____
6. Cain didn't just want God to be pleased with him, too. He wanted God to NOT be pleased with his brother. That's jealousy. When have you felt like Cain?
 - When my brother or sister got all the attention
 - When my work wasn't good enough
 - When I felt like my brother or sister was trying to make me look bad
 - When I felt badly about myself
 - Other: _____

7. God didn't reject Cain's offering because He didn't like Cain. He rejected it because of what was (or wasn't) in Cain's heart. Rather than deal directly with God and obey Him, Cain chose to take his frustration out on his brother. How often do you get angry with your siblings when they are not the real problem? What issues could you talk to God about today?

Day 2

1. So, is being angry itself wrong? Look up **Ephesians 4:26**.
2. But as you saw, sibling rivalry can be dangerous when it gets out of control. You may be thinking, *Yeah, but I'd never actually kill my brother or sister—even though sometimes I'd like to!* Turn to **Matthew 5:21-22**. What truth do you discover in this passage?
 It's okay to hold onto anger against your sibling as long as you don't act on it.
 Ongoing anger and murder are two very different things.
 When you hold onto anger toward your sibling, you commit murder in your heart.
 It's easy to love your siblings all the time.
3. What was Jesus trying to teach us through this verse? (Check all that apply.)
 God takes our relationships with each other very seriously.
 Your attitude matters as much as your actions.
 Jealousy is no big deal.
 Mismanaged anger can lead to sin.
4. How would you rate your ability to deal with your feelings toward your siblings?
1 2 3 4 5
I keep my cool Mildly annoyed Hot temper—look out!
5. Read over the following list. Put an “H” next to the “healthy” ways to deal with your anger toward your siblings and a “U” next to the “unhealthy” ways.
 Beat them up
 Walk away until you can get control of your anger
 Pray for a better attitude
 Yell at them
 Steal or break something of theirs
 Talk through the problem
 Talk it through with an adult
6. Why do you think we sometimes treat our friends better than our own family?

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 2: SIBLINGS (cont'd)

7. List the names of each of your siblings in the spaces below. (If you are an only child, write down the name of a close relative or friend who fills that role for you.) Next to each name, write down something you like about that person. Think: Have you ever shared that with him or her?

My Sibling(s):

Qualities:

Making It Personal:

Do you ever spend any one-on-one time with your brother(s) and/or sister(s)? How could you do that this week and strengthen your relationship?

Remember, God places us in each other's lives for a reason. You share a bond with your brothers and sisters that you won't find anywhere else. Ask God to open your eyes to see and appreciate the gifts He has given you through your family.



NOTES



Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 2: SIBLINGS (leader guide)

Materials for Lesson:

- Box or basket
- Pencils or pens
- Slips of paper
- Optional: Show a short segment of an old family TV show (different from the previous week).

Aim: To help students demonstrate love in their relationships with their siblings, and to teach them how to work through conflict in a healthy way.

Opener: (10 minutes)

Icebreaker questions:

Are you the oldest, youngest, or middle child in your family? Or are you the only child?

How do you feel about that?

How do you think your birth order and/or the size of your family has helped shape your personality?

Transition: (3 to 5 minutes)

Do you ever treat your friends better than you treat your own family? It's easy to do, especially with our siblings. Annoyance, jealousy, and hurt feelings tend to surface when people live under the same roof. Sibling relationships, though, can also be extraordinary. Your life story is intertwined with those of your brothers and sisters. No matter how well you do or don't get along, you will share that connection for the rest of your lives. Every day God presents you with opportunities either to respond to Him or to react to one another. Which choice will you make?

Interactive Learning: (25 to 35 minutes)

Have a student read **Ephesians 4:26-32** aloud. Use the following discussion prompts:

Restate these verses in your own words.

What does it mean to "give the devil a foothold"?

What does that look like in real life?

In your interactions with your siblings, do you tend to be rude, angry, or sarcastic? Do you tease until it tears them down, or talk in a way that builds them up (encouragement, speaking the truth in love)?

Discuss the difference between reacting to each other and responding to God.

Talk about the difference between speaking honestly to each other about our feelings in order to diffuse a conflict and blaming your sibling.

Put this lesson into action by doing some role playing to teach students how to handle anger with their siblings effectively. Divide into pairs and assign each pair a situation to work through before the larger group. Some examples:

Your sibling...

- Borrows something from you without asking
- Bullies or makes fun of you
- Tries to hog all the attention from your parents
- Wants to hang out, but you feel annoyed and want to be alone
- Accidentally ruins something that is important to you

Have them try to work through the situations without angry reactions or blame. Use the “I felt _____ when you _____ because _____ . I want you to _____ ” model. (Ex: I felt angry when you made fun of me in front of my friends because it embarrassed me. I want you to apologize and never do that again.)

Talk through each situation as a group. Ask:

How might the devil have gotten a foothold?

How did they avoid that?

What are some other ways they could have worked through their situation?

What if our siblings aren't willing to work through a conflict in a healthy way? What should we do? Are we responsible for their actions, or for our own?

Close by reading **Ephesians 5:15-17** aloud. *How can you make the most of every opportunity to live for God, especially in your sibling relationships?*

Personal Challenge: (3 to 5 minutes)

How did you bless your parents by your actions last week? How could you do the same for your siblings?

Group Project: (10 minutes)

Continue by having each student write down an idea for a way to bless a sibling or close relative. Before the students draw their “mission” for the week, have them report back on last week’s mission. Did they follow through? What was the result?

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Divide the students into pairs. Instruct them to share their siblings’ names with their prayer partner so that they can pray for those relationships specifically. Give them a few minutes to pray together out loud, then lead a group prayer to close the session. Ask God to help all of you to respond to Him rather than react to each other, particularly in your sibling relationships.

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 3: FRIENDS

Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. — **Philippians 2:3-5** (The Message)

Day 1

1. It's been said that "friends are the people who know everything about you and like you anyway." Would you agree? Who are those people in your life?

2. What do you look for in a friend?

- A great sense of humor
- Good looks and popularity
- Brains
- Just anyone to hang out with
- Someone who shares my hobbies/interests

3. Friendships are among the most important relationships we will ever have. Our friends play a big role in shaping who we are, which is why it's so important to choose friends wisely. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think your friends influence you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all				Some					A LOT

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you influence your friends?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all				Some					A LOT

5. Read **Philippians 2:3-5**. What does it mean to "put yourself aside"? (Check all that apply.)

- Realize that others' needs are more important.
- Neglect your own needs.
- Flatter people so they will feel special.
- Treat people with kindness and respect, the way you'd like to be treated.

6. The Bible tells us to have an attitude of humility in our friendships. Being humble means not hogging the spotlight—looking out for others instead of drawing attention to yourself. Which of these are examples of humility?

- Being excited for a friend when he/she makes the team
- Not rubbing it in when you get a good grade
- Getting angry when your friends have other friends besides you
- Being willing to let your friends copy your homework
- Listening more than you talk

Jesus, even though He was God's own Son and the King of Kings, called us His "friends" rather than His "servants" (**John 15:15**). His humility is our example. It's important that we demonstrate the same attitude of love toward the people around us, even the people we wouldn't ordinarily think of as friends.

Day 2

1. Do you consider yourself to be a good friend? Why/why not?
2. Read about four very good friends in **Mark 2:1-12** to answer the following questions. If you had been one of them, what would you have done?
 - Waited outside
 - Suggested you all go back home
 - Exactly what they did
 - Pushed your way through the crowd
3. What quality impresses you the most about these four?
 - Concern for their friend
 - Determination—they wouldn't give up
 - Cleverness
 - Faith
4. These friends didn't help the paralyzed man because of what he could do for them in return; they helped him because he was in need and they wanted to serve him. Think of a time when you were in need and a friend helped you. What did he or she do? How did that make you feel?
5. Describe a time when you were a good friend to someone else. What did you do?
6. Think about the friends you have now. Are they the type that would do anything for you, or are they always expecting something in return? What are some of the dangers of making the wrong kind of friends?

Making It Personal

Proverbs 17:17 says that "friends love through all kinds of weather." This week, concentrate on being a good friend. Try thinking of other's needs as being as important as your own. Friendship gives plenty of opportunities to be like Jesus.

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 3: FRIENDS (leader guide)

Materials for Lesson:

- Box or basket
- Pencils or pens
- Slips of paper
- Optional: Show a short segment of an old family TV show (different from the previous week).

Aim: To teach students how to be a good friend and the importance of choosing friends wisely.

Opener: (10 minutes)

Icebreaker questions:

If you could be friends with a celebrity, who would you choose? Why?

What would you say are the qualities that make a good friend?

Transition: (3 to 5 minutes)

This week we'll read one of the greatest stories of friendship in the Bible: the friendship between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the son of Saul, the first king of Israel, and it's likely he anticipated becoming king himself one day. But rather than considering himself a big shot around David the shepherd, Jonathan loved David like a brother. He even recognized David as God's pick for Israel's next king.

Interactive Learning: (30 minutes)

Assign different students to read the following Bible passages aloud:

1 Samuel 18:1-4

1 Samuel 19:1-6

1 Samuel 20:1-4

1 Samuel 20:12-17

1 Samuel 20:35-42

Ask:

What made Jonathan a good friend to David?

How did Jonathan demonstrate humility in his friendship with David?

What did he do for David? What did it cost him?

How did David remain loyal to Jonathan in 2 Samuel 9:1-8? (Have a student read the passage aloud.)

Do you have someone like Jonathan in your life, or are you that kind of friend to someone else?

Jonathan and David had a big impact on each other's lives. We may not even realize it, but our friendships play a large part in shaping the people we become.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most), how much would you say your friends influence you?

What are some of the ways they've helped shape who you are?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think you influence your friends?

Why is it so important to choose our friends wisely?

Does choosing friends wisely mean we should stay away from non-Christians? Why or why not?

Personal Challenge: (3 to 5 minutes)

John 15:12-14 says: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." Friendship requires obedience to God. It challenges us to put others before ourselves. How can you act more like Jesus in your friendships?

Group Project: (10 minutes)

Repeat last week's exercise by having each student write down an idea for a way to encourage a friend. Before the students draw their mission for the week, have them report back on last week's mission. Did they follow through? What was the result?

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Praise God that He doesn't call us "servants," but "friends" (**John 15:15**). Thank Him for loving us sacrificially. Pray for His help in demonstrating Jesus' love in our friendships, and for Him to help us follow Him even when our friendships try to pull us in another direction.

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Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 4: GUY/GIRL FRIENDSHIPS

Day 1

1. What current relationships will prepare you to someday have a serious relationship with a member of the opposite gender? (Check all that apply.)
 - My brothers
 - My sisters
 - My friends
 - My parents
2. What do you think are the most important qualities for you to have in order to be a “great date”?
 - Be funny
 - Be good-looking
 - Be popular
 - Be well-mannered and courteous
3. Read **Ephesians 5:3-6**. Which of these don't fit with being a follower of Jesus?
 - Encouragement
 - Bad words
 - Obscene gestures
 - Laughter
 - Telling stories
 - Dirty jokes
 - Giving thanks
 - Gossip
 - Vandalism
 - Practical jokes
4. So what's wrong with “silly talk and course joking”? (Check all that apply.)
 - It is hurtful to people .
 - God doesn't want you to have any fun.
 - It can be embarrassing to the opposite gender.
 - It just isn't funny.
 - Other: _____

You might think that Christians are just boring people who look down on others. But Jesus actually made the religious people of His time angry by hanging out with some shady characters. He showed that it's possible to love the people without becoming just like them. So ask yourself: Are your friendships making you more or less like Jesus?

Day 2

1. What do you think is the purpose of friendships between guys and girls?

- Flirting, flirting, and more flirting
- Having a good time
- Getting a different perspective
- Learning about ourselves and God
- Feeling attractive to someone else

2. What do you think about dating?

- It's a waste of time.
- I can't wait to have a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- I'm scared of dating.
- I'm not allowed.
- Other: _____

3. In the columns below, list some of the positive and negative things about dating.

Positive:

Negative:

4. Whether or not you believe in dating, friendships between guys and girls are special. They can be very important as you develop. According to **1 Peter 2:17**, what is the key to these relationships?

- Chemistry
- Respect
- Generosity
- Honesty

5. What are some ways that you can show your friends of the opposite gender that you respect them and understand that your friendship is special?

6. Read **1 Timothy 4:12** (NIV) and fill in the blanks below:

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are _____, but set an _____ for the believers in _____, in _____, in _____, in _____, and in _____."

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 4: GUY/GIRL FRIENDSHIPS (cont'd)

7. Rewrite 1 Timothy 4:12 below in your own words..

8. What does this have to do with guy/girl friendships?

Making It Personal

What Jesus cares most about is what's in our hearts. When we know Him, we discover that we want to obey Him. That begins with our thoughts. It's important to let our friends—especially our non-Christian friends—see that we are different because of Jesus. Where is that true for you today?



NOTES



Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 4: GUY/GIRL FRIENDSHIPS (leader guide)

Materials for Lesson:

- Box or basket
- Pencils or pens
- Slips of paper

Aim: To examine guy/girl friendships from a biblical perspective, and to look at some practical ways to learn to respect the opposite gender.

Opener: (10 minutes)

Icebreaker question:

What pet peeves do you have about the ways guys treat girls? (Or vice versa, depending on the gender of your group) How would you prefer for them to act?

Transition: (3 to 5 minutes)

Guy/girl relationships definitely carry with them a lot of unspoken rules—some obvious, and some not so obvious. It's a good thing God doesn't leave us in the dark on this subject. Whether or not you're ready to start dating, and whether or not you believe in dating, it's important to look at what God says about how to treat members of the opposite gender.

Interactive Learning: (30 minutes)

Discussion questions:

What makes friendships with girls different from your friendships with other guys? (Vice versa for a girls' ABS group) Or is there no difference?

*Turn to **Ephesians 5:1-4**. What "ground rules" do you find there for God's people? (Take time to unpack each one of these; for example—Foolish talk. What is that? Why isn't it appropriate for a child of God? How might foolish talk get you into trouble with a member of the opposite gender?)*

God always has reasons behind His rules. He doesn't instruct us to respect others just so we'll be nice people. God created us for relationships—with Him, first and foremost, and with each other. When we live life His way, we avoid the pitfalls that can lead to hurt feelings and broken relationships. How have you found this to be true in your own life? In which area(s) are you struggling to obey? When you hear the word "dating," what's your reaction? (Do you cringe, or does your heart beat faster?)

It's normal to get silly when we are embarrassed or don't know how to act. But did you know, that is the thinking behind learning appropriate manners? Manners are about treating the people around you with respect. List as many "good manners" as you can think of.

Group Project: (15 minutes)

As a group, compile a list of "Things we wish middle school guys knew about how to act around girls" (and vice versa, for a guys' group). Encourage your students to list things that are genuinely helpful, not just silly. Your job as the leader is to contact an ABS trainer of the opposite gender and exchange lists before your next meeting so that each of you can share these insights with your respective groups the following week.

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Pray that God would shape you into men and women who are passionate about respecting others as you respect Him. Pray for purity and self-control in your relationships with guys/girls.

NOTES

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 5: GOD

Have you ever wondered why we are here, on the earth? Why God created us? It's a big thought.

Day 1

1. What things most often make you happy?

Being with friends

Spring break

Hot chocolate on a cold day

Other: _____

2. All human beings, no matter who we are, want to be happy. But the trouble with happiness (in case you haven't noticed) is that it depends on circumstances. There is something more solid, more lasting, than happiness: joy. God designed us for joy. The word "joy" is used more than 200 times in the Bible. Read a few of those verses right now and write out one thing that each verse tells you about God's plan for joy in our lives:

Nehemiah 8:10 _____

Psalm 30:11 _____

Psalm 92:4 _____

Psalm 94:19 _____

3. Which phrase below best describes your view of God?

Dull, boring, and far away

Very frightening—just waiting for me to make a mistake

Like Santa—He is there to give me whatever I want

Like a friend—He is there to be with me no matter what I am going through

Other: _____

4. How does a person's view of God affect his or her response to Him?

5. For the last several weeks, we have talked a lot about family and friends. Do you consider God a friend? As family? Why or why not?

6. That is what He wants to be. In fact, He gives us family and friends to teach us about Him and how He cares for us. Talk to Him today like you would talk to a friend. Tell Him your hopes, fears, problems, and frustrations. David modeled this kind of conversation with God for us. Look at **Psalm 13:1-6**.

How many feelings can you list that David expressed to God here?

7. How did David's heart appear to change over the course of his prayer?

God knows our thoughts and our hearts. But expressing them to Him changes us. Practice doing that today.

Day 2

1. God wants us to *enjoy* spending time with Him. But have you ever realized that *you* make God happy?

Zephaniah 3:17 says:

For the Lord your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

Psalms 147:11 says:

...the LORD delights in those who fear him,

who put their hope in his unfailing love.

In **Jeremiah 32:41**, God says of His people:

...I will rejoice in doing them good.

2. Look up **1 Peter 1:8-9**. Does this verse describe you? Why or why not?

3. When you have difficult times, disappointments, or sadness, do you quickly turn to God?

Yes No

4. Read **Psalms 61:1-4**. Does this describe how you feel when you pray?

Yes No

5. God doesn't want our relationship with Him to be just something we have to do. His goal is for us to look forward to the times we have to talk and listen to Him. What would it take for you to have that kind of relationship with Him?

6. Consider doing something you enjoy today, and making it about God. Go for a walk, a run, or a bike ride. As you go, talk to God about what is going on in your head, or about the things you see. Pray as you go, for the neighbors you pass, the schools you go by, and the things going on in your mind. Time with God doesn't have to be spent sitting in your room. He enjoys us the most when we are enjoying Him!

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 5: GOD (cont'd)

Making It Personal

Do a very risky thing today. Ask God to make you hungry for Him. But watch out—He will! Think about what you want your relationship with God to be like, then tell Him and ask for His help. Ask Him to show you those areas of your life where He wants you to rejoice.



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Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 5: GOD (leader guide)

Materials for Lesson:

- Random props for icebreaker game
- Box or basket
- Pencils or pens
- Slips of paper

Aim: To remind students that God designed us to find our deepest joy in Him, and to encourage them to pursue a passionate relationship with Him.

Opener: (10 to 15 minutes) “Props” Icebreaker Game

Divide the students into pairs. Give each pair a random household object, which will serve as their “prop” for this game (examples: vacuum hose, hanger, hula hoop, kitchen utensil). Each pair must then improvise short scenes finding as many uses for their prop as possible. (This was a popular skit on the TV show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*). For example, a hula hoop might become a giant earring, or a halo for an oversized angel. Go from pair to pair, and see who can come up with the most uses for their prop.

Transition: (15 minutes)

In our lives, we tend to have a lot of “props”—objects that clutter up our physical and mental space. They may be clothes, CDs, trophies, game systems... Or even things you can’t hold in your hand, like popularity or the desire to be supersmart. Many of these props aren’t bad in themselves, but they become a problem when we try to use them to find real joy.

Ask: *What props do you think students use today to fill the emptiness of their lives?*

God designed us to find our most lasting joy in Him. When we look outside of our relationship with God to satisfy our need for meaning and fulfillment, we will never have enough “stuff” to fill the God-shaped hole in our hearts. Saint Augustine, one of our church fathers, wrote: “God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.”

Interactive Learning: (25 minutes)

King David was a man who seemed to have everything—riches, power, fame. And yet he knew where to find true joy.

Read **Psalm 63:1-8** out loud.

How does David describe his longing for God?

How did David respond to God’s love? (vv. 3-8)

How would you describe David’s relationship with God, after reading this Psalm?

Do you think David’s relationship with God was always easy? Is it possible to find joy in God’s love, even when you’re not feeling particularly happy?

When was the last time you were “thirsty” for God?

The Westminster Catechism says that our duty as Christians is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.” Rephrase that in your own words. What does that mean?

(Go over any additional ABS homework questions that will further your discussion.)

Personal Challenge: (3 to 5 minutes)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you enjoy your relationship with God? Do you tend to think about the things you need to do for God rather than just enjoying Him?

Group Project: (10 minutes)

Repeat the exercise from last week by having each student write down an idea for a way to enjoy time with God this week. Before the students draw their mission for the week, have them report back on last week's mission. Did they follow through? What was the result?

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Ask God to help you see past the props in your life and put Him first.

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6. According to **John 13:34-35**, what is the most dramatic way that we can show the world that we are different because Christ lives in us?

If this is so, then that should tell us just how unusual it is when people genuinely love each other and get along. It isn't easy. We can only do it with God's help.

Pray for your friends, your family, and your enemies by name today. Ask God to let good things happen for each of them, and to help you behave in loving ways toward them.

Day 2

1. Which of the following relationships do you struggle with the most?
 - My parents
 - My siblings
 - My teachers
 - My friends
 - Other kids at school
2. Another reason why we struggle in our relationships, in addition to our own selfish nature, is that we have an enemy who works to use our own thoughts, feelings, and desires against us. How does **1 Peter 5:8** describe Satan? What do we need to do to be on our guard?
3. But what if changing our behavior was as easy as changing our clothes? **Romans 13:14** uses this analogy to describe that way we can shed our selfishness and put on Christ's nature. How would you go about clothing yourself with Christ?
4. According to **Galatians 5:22-26**, what gives us the power to be different?
5. When and how have you realized that your relationship with God affects all your other relationships—and vice versa?

Making It Personal

In the battle for good relationships, prayer is one of our best weapons. Go to God when you are tempted to want your own way, or even when you are trying to be loving, but it just isn't being noticed. Ask Him to give you patience and love for others—friends and enemies alike.

Keeping It Real in Relationships

Week 6: ENEMIES (leader guide)

Aim: To teach students that having Christ in their lives, and following His instructions in dealing with problems, is the only way to have ongoing healthy relationships.

Opener: (20 minutes)

This is a game about honesty. On slips of paper, write either the word “truth” or “lie.” Try to have equal numbers of each. Fold the slips of paper and hand them out to your group members. Then tell the students that if their slip says “truth,” they should think of a little known fact about themselves to tell the group. If their slip of paper says “lie,” they must make up something about themselves and try to fool everyone. See who can tell the truth from the lies.

Transition: (5 minutes)

Honesty is a huge key in relationships. Not many of us are as brave when it comes to telling the truth as we want to think we are.

Consider this:

Have you ever had a problem with someone, and he/she talked to everyone else about the problem except you?

Have you ever found out too late that someone who acted friendly to your face was really talking about you behind your back?

Today we are going to see what the Bible has to say about that kind of behavior, and how important dealing with problems is to God.

Interactive Learning: (30 minutes)

If your group is large, divide into groups of four or five for this activity:

Read **Matthew 18:15-17** together. Then role-play scenarios where one friend goes to another to deal with an issue.

Discuss why this is hard to do, and how to help one another develop this habit. Talk about how friendships would be different if everyone practiced this.

Return to the large group and read **Matthew 5:23-24**. Talk about how important relationships are to God, and how our relationships with others affect our relationship with God.

Personal Challenge: (3 minutes)

Challenge students to think about the relationships they have that they need to be big enough to be honest about. What issues do they need to address directly, giving the others involved a chance to make things right?

Prayer: (5 minutes)

Thank God that He is able to restore our relationships. Thank Him that He restores our relationship with Him.

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