

NAMES & LABELS

Nicknames can be used as signs of affection or as weapons of mass destruction. There can be a big difference between the labels that people around us try to stick on us and the words that God wants to speak over us.

CONNECT

Have your group discuss the answers to a couple of these questions.

If it is always the same people answering, do something different by having the questions printed and available. The first person picks a question to ask and picks who they want to aim it at, then that person who has answered picks a question they want to ask someone else.

Keep going until everyone has answered and asked a question.

- Which is worse: telling a lie or hurting someone's feelings? Why?
- Who do you most admire? Why?
- If you could change one thing about your life what would it be?
- What do you want people to say about you at your funeral?
- If you got to choose your own name what would you choose?

DISCUSS

Have your group read the following verses from Proverbs:
Proverbs 10:11, Proverbs 12:18, Proverbs 15:4, Proverbs 18:21.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever been given a nickname? What was it? Was it positive or negative?
- What are some positive names you have heard given to people? (E.g. 'beautiful', 'princess' or 'legend'.)
- What are some negative names you have heard given to people? (E.g. 'loser', 'freak', 'nigel no-friends'.)
- There is an old saying 'sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me'. What are your thoughts on this saying?
- Some of the proverbs talk about the potential for our words to be 'life giving'. What do you think this means? How can we start?
- When someone is being teased or we hear others gossiping behind someone's back, what should our response be?



IDENTITY & SELF-ESTEEM

NAMES & LABELS

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you the most from the Scripture we've read?
- Throughout the Old and New Testaments God gives people new names (e.g. Jacob, Joshua, Saul - check out Genesis 32:28 and Mark 3:16 for examples). Why do you think He did this? What is the significance?
- Many people don't have a new name given to them but a label is attached to their name. Have a look at Genesis 10:8,9. Read it out loud.
 - * Is there anyone in your school or workplace that has a label that follows their name? (E.g. Jethro the smelly kid).
 - * What kind of label would you like to have attached to your name whenever you are spoken about?
- Proverbs 18:21 says the tongue carries the power of life and death. Can you think of ways you have seen this in your life?
- What are some of the words God uses to describe us? Are there any names or labels he has given us?
- Have you ever seen someone really effectively step in to stop others from teasing or gossiping? How did they handle the situation?

INVOLVE

Across this series we will feature a recurring encouragement time.

Pick someone from your group to be the focus of the encouragement time. Go around the circle and give everyone else the opportunity to encourage and speak life into that person. When everyone has shared, have a volunteer pray for the person.

If your group is struggling to express encouragement, the following sentence-starters should help.

- Something I really admire about you is...
- I want to thank you because...
- I really value our friendship because...
- You've been an inspiration to me through...

Note: In order to allow time for everyone to be encouraged, we will use the same activity over the entire five-week series. (For the mathematically challenged: Five people in your group = one person per group meeting. 10 people in your group = two people per meeting.)



NAMES & LABELS

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Is anyone carrying hurt from the words of others? Take some time to pray for each other for healing and for forgiving hearts.

Is anyone carrying a conviction about something negative they've spoken over someone else? Ask your group to this week commit to extending an apology to anyone they have unfairly labelled.

Throughout the week try and be conscious of the things you are saying to others and about others. A good rule to follow when speaking of someone is to ask yourself "is it true, is it kind, is it necessary," and make sure it is at least 2 of these things before saying it.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Being able to encourage is a skill that needs to be developed rather than an innate ability for most people. During the encouragement time, some young people might try to simply tell stories about the person being focused on. Others might speak entirely in religious clichés without saying anything personal. If you find this happening, you may want to offer a little bit of teaching on what healthy encouragement looks like. Encourage means 'to add courage' - it should lift a person's confidence, self-value, and belief in who God has created them to be.
- Make the encouragement time fun and unique to your group. Here's some ideas to continue across the series...
 - * Maybe you've got an especially comfortable chair that you can set aside for the person being encouraged.
 - * Maybe in advance you prepare a card or gift for the person
 - * Maybe the person being encouraged receives a 'special privilege' - e.g. choosing what the group will do during the fun/social part of the group time.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY.



IMAGE

TV, magazines, internet, shopping centres - it seems that everywhere we turn we're being bombarded with unrealistic images of beauty, of value, and of happiness. This week we seek to cut through the lies to make sure we don't lose sight of God's image of us.

This week you'll need:

- Some teen magazines (Dolly, Cosmo, NW, OK, FAMOUS, etc.) You'll need to check these magazines beforehand and remove any articles or images that you don't feel are appropriate for your group to see.
- A sheet of paper and a pen for each group member

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- What's one thing you really like about the person sitting on your right?
- Which celebrity would you most like to switch places with and why?
- What's one area you feel God is stretching or growing you in?
- What's one thing that you've done for someone else this week?

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IDENTITY & SELF-ESTEEM

IMAGE

DISCUSS

Have someone from your group read out loud the following Scripture verse, but first you should set the scene: Samuel is trying to decide who should be the next king. He's assessing possible candidates one by one, looking them up and down when the Lord speaks to him:

1 Samuel 16:7 - But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

NEW CHRISTIANS

- Who is a famous person that you admire or want to be like? Why do you like them? Is it mainly 'appearance' or 'heart' stuff that you admire them for?
- TV shows and magazines are filled with glamorous and attractive people. How do you feel about yourself after looking at them? Do you feel any pressure to change the way you look?
- What are the physical things that you notice about other people? Do you think it's fair to pay attention to these things?
- Do you think your life would be different if you were more attractive? How so? What would be better and what would be worse?
- Do you think beautiful people with expensive clothes and cars are happier than you? (And if so, what about Britney Spears or Lindsey Lohan?)
- How do you think God wants us to feel about our looks? If God is looking at our hearts, what kind of things do you think are important to him?

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you the most in the passage we've just read?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think the average young person cares about image and appearance? Why do you think looks are so important to young people today?
- Do you think it's right or wrong for Christians to care about their looks? Why?
- Do you think your church or youth group is a place that judges people based on their appearance? Are there other things that people are judged on? How can we start to change this culture?
- Do you think it's possible as Christians to be 100% at peace with our looks no matter how we look? Why/why not?
- What lies does the world tell us about image? What can we do to protect ourselves from believing them?



IMAGE

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Give each individual a magazine (you might want to just tear your magazines into thirds so that you only need one magazine per three people).

Give everyone three minutes to find up to three lies that the magazines are telling them about image (e.g. an advert for spray tan tries to convince us that brown skin = happier).

Next, give each person a piece of paper and give each person opportunity to write down any lies that they've believed about themselves. Let them know that no-one will read their piece of paper. Give some examples like... If I get skinnier life will be better, if I make enough money to get that good car people will finally respect me, my nose is so ugly people shouldn't even have to look at me, God made a mistake when he made me...etc.

If people feel comfortable, have them share with their partner one lie they've been struggling with. Have every person pray for a release of truth in their partner's life. Encourage your group to collect or keep track of the lies about image they notice in magazines or on TV this week.

LEADER'S NOTES

- If you are worried that your young person is struggling with something serious related to image or self-esteem then contact a church leader or your DYS for advice.
- We strongly recommend not letting your group take the magazines home, even if they ask. We've just identified a whole pile of lies, we shouldn't enable young people to engage with them at home.
- How's the atmosphere in the room? Is it relaxed and inviting? Do people feel comfortable when they arrive?
- Are you developing leaders within your group? Check out the LIFE leadership handbook for some simple ideas on how to start.



EMBRACING WEAKNESS

Mistakes, stuff-ups, weaknesses and sins: fear of others and a need to 'keep up appearances' can compel us to keep these things hidden and results in them having power over us. Acknowledging these things and talking about them breaks their power and allows us to begin walking in freedom.

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- What's been your highlight of this school term so far? OR What's been your highlight of the past month?
- What do most enjoying doing during your free time?
- Who have you encouraged recently outside of life group? AND/OR Who is someone you will encourage within the next week?
- How would you rate your relationship with God at the moment on a scale of 1-10? Why?

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IDENTITY & SELF-ESTEEM



EMBRACING WEAKNESS

DISCUSS

Read out loud Luke 12:2-3 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever done something and then tried to hide it or cover it up? What was it? Who did you try to hide it from?
- Why do you think some people are so quick to point out other people's weaknesses and mistakes but so reluctant to admit their own?
- What difference do you think it would make to our lives if we started to own up to all of our mistakes and weaknesses? What would be the pros and cons?
- What do you think 'grace' means? What does God mean when he says 'My grace is all you need'?
- Why do you think God's power might work better when we are weak as opposed to when we are strong?

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most from the passage we read?
- What can we learn by looking at the two given Bible verses side-by-side?
- What do you think Paul is talking about when he says 'weaknesses'? What kinds of things might he be referring to?
- "There are some weaknesses we can change and some we can't do anything about." What is your response to this statement? Which weaknesses would fall into which category?
- Time for some honesty: Is there something that's 'hidden' in your life at the moment that really needs to be brought into the open? What barriers need to be overcome for you to be comfortable speaking that out? What are you concerned about?
- What is the difference between 'boasting about our weaknesses' and 'dwelling on our failures'?



EMBRACING WEAKNESS

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

As a group, make a commitment to complete openness and honesty with each other. Re-affirm your group covenant (or establish a new one) to be completely transparent and to also maintain strict confidentiality with the information that others share within the group.

LEADER'S NOTES

- The recent situation involving Pastor Mike Guglielmucci shows the potential consequences of trying to hide our struggles and weaknesses - you may find it's a helpful way to start conversation about the dangers of keeping our weaknesses a secret. You can find a video clip of Mike's interview with 'Today Tonight' on YouTube when you search for 'Mike Guglielmucci'.
- This week why not take a couple of photos of your group together. Get some silly ones that show your sense of fun. Not only can you use this as an icebreaker but you can print these off and use them as postcards for the future. If someone misses a couple of weeks send them the postcard letting them know they have been missed. It's always nice to get mail and the picture is a good visual reminder of the fun they have with the group.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY – have supper, play a game, or just chill!



ACCEPTANCE

Perhaps a better name for this week's guide could be 'anti-bullying'. The fundamental act behind bullying is simple - isolate someone because of a perceived difference or weakness, and attack. The antidote is simple too, but not easy: Acceptance.

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions:

- You have just inherited one million dollars. If you only had 24 hours to spend it what would you do?
- You can have any superhero power for a day. What would you choose and why?
- What's one thing about your week that you're really thankful for?
- What's one thing about your week you wish you could change?

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IDENTITY &
SELF-ESTEEM



ACCEPTANCE

DISCUSS

Get the group to read out loud John 4:1-32.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- What do you think about when you hear the word 'bullying'? What can bullying look like? What kinds of bullying have you seen around your school or workplace?
- Have you ever been teased or bullied before? How did it make you feel? How did you respond at the time? What do you think is the best way to respond?
- Is there anyone or any group at school that gets teased or bullied a lot? Have you ever been involved? As Christians, what do you think is the right thing to do when we see other people getting picked on?
- The acceptance that Jesus showed to an unpopular woman transformed her life. Do you think it's possible for us to have the same effect on others today? What would we need to do?

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out the most for you in this passage?
- Who is someone you know personally who is a real-life equivalent of the woman at the well? How does the way that you treat that person compare to the way Jesus treated the woman? Are there any areas you think you can improve in?
- Jesus knew a lot about the woman even though they had just met. Do you think it's possible for us as Christians to supernaturally know things about people we haven't met? Are there any implications for your own life or ministry?
- Are there any subtle forms of bullying you can identify within your church community? (Subtle bullying can include things like gossip, cliques, racial or socio-economic divides, verbal manipulation.) How do you think God feels about these things being present in his church? What is an appropriate response for us to take?
- Jesus clearly shows that while he knows a lot about the woman's past, he's not going to judge her or look down on her. Is there someone in your own life who you struggle to accept based on something from their past? What factors make it difficult for you to move on?



ACCEPTANCE

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Have everyone think of one person they know who is teased, bullied, gossiped about, or just generally treated badly. Have everyone come up with one idea that they will do to bless and show love to that person this week.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Have you noticed the white space down the right side of every page? It's there to give you space to write comments, notes and ideas to help you plan your group meeting.
- *Don't move to a new question too quickly...* and check out the LIFE leadership handbook for other helpful discussion tips!
- Anyone missing from your group tonight? Don't forget to ask for some volunteers to follow them up during the week.



WORRY

The consequence of low self-esteem is worry - we worry about how we look, we worry about our future, and we worry about what others think about us. This week we take a look at the issue of 'worry' and what we can do about it.

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions:

- How has your week been on a scale of 1-10? Why?
- What's your favourite song at the moment?
- What's something you've achieved recently that you're proud of?
- What's one thing that you think God is trying to teach you at the moment? / What's one area you're trying to grow in?

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IDENTITY & SELF-ESTEEM

WORRY

DISCUSS

Have the group read Matthew 6:25-34 out loud.

NEW CHRISTIANS

- What are some of the things that you worry about? Why do you think you worry about them?
- What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you? How did you respond when it happened? Do you ever worry about embarrassing yourself again? Should we worry?
- Re-read verses 28-30. What stands out to you from these verses? Do you find it easy to believe that God cares for you? Why/Why not?
- What are some ideas for how we can handle worry in a healthy way? Make a list as a group.
- Read verse 33. What do you think this means?
**Leader's theological note included below.*

ESTABLISHED IN FAITH

- What stands out to you most from the passage we've just read?
- What are some of the things that cause you to worry the most? Are there any things you particularly struggle with?
- Jesus says that unbelievers' thoughts are dominated by things such as food, drink and clothes. What do you think it means if/when Christians spend a lot of time thinking about these things?
- Do you think it is possible to never worry about anything? Why? What would a worry-free life look like?
- What do you think are the main challenges or barriers in your own life to completely trusting in God?



WORRY

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing that they are going to do this week based on what they've learned or been challenged about.

AND/OR

Throughout this week take time to memorise Matthew 6:33 and every time you feel yourself start to worry repeat the scripture to yourself.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Random icebreaker idea: Take turns for your group members to put a coin on their forehead and stick a funnel in to their belt/pants. Give them six tries to get the coin into the funnel at least four times by dropping it off their forehead. If they get at least four out of six then give them a prize.
- Theological note - v33: It's good for people to explore ideas like 'The Kingdom of God' through discussion, but your group may not be able to 'talk out' a helpful answer. If this is the case then you should be prepared to do some light teaching.
 - * To explain 'Seek the Kingdom of God above all else', have someone read Matthew 22:37-39, and make sure your group understands that we are seeking the Kingdom when we love God and we love others.
 - * To explain 'live righteously,' have someone read Romans 4:5 and make sure that your group understands that righteous living *isn't* about good behaviour, it's about trusting God.
 - * Finally, you might want to focus in on the fact that the Bible promises that God will give us everything we *need*, not necessarily everything we *want*.
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY - have supper, play a game or just chill!