

Youth Ministry 2:2
Bible discussion lessons for youth groups
from the Old and New Testaments

Bible 101 - year 1

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The Life of Peter



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'Leap ... and then look?'

Introduction to Peter

1. God has given each of us unique personalities.
2. Peter was very impulsive. When he acted, he did not always think about the consequences. Sometimes the results were good and sometimes they were bad...



Match the situation with Peter's reaction to it.

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Peter is casting his nets into the sea when Jesus calls him (Mark 1:16-18)	A. He rebukes Jesus and contradicts Him.
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Peter walks on the water toward Jesus (Matthew 14:28-29)	B. He denies knowing Jesus three times.
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Peter sees the transfigured Jesus with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28-33)	C. He jumps into the water and swims to shore.
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Jesus asks who they think He is (Mark 8: 27-30)	D. He runs to the grave.
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Peter hears Jesus say that He will suffer and die (Mark 8:32)	E. He suggests building three huts on the mountain.
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Peter is certain that he will never deny Jesus (Mark 14: 27-31; 66-72)	F. He leaves everything and follows Jesus.
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Peter hears from the women that Jesus has risen (Luke 20: 3-9)	G. Peter is the first to recognize that Jesus is the Christ, that is, the King.
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Peter sees the risen Jesus (John 21)	H. He became afraid and almost drowned.

Why do you think Jesus chose Peter to be His disciple?

Peter was very impulsive. But Jesus saw what Peter would become, and changed his name from 'Simon' to 'Peter,' which means _____.

3. Which of these traits most accurately describe you?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive | <input type="checkbox"/> Exacting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serious | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed | <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Determined | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Why did God create people with such different personalities?

4. Write three of your personality traits, and consider how God might use them.

INSTRUCTIONS

Read the instructions to the end, then follow them completely. Do not say anything to anyone. If you have a question, raise your hand and the leader will help you.

Read the instructions to the end before proceeding.

1. Write your name on the back.
2. Count the number of bulbs in the room and record your answer here. _____
3. Write your birth date:
____.____.____
4. When you have written the answers to the previous three questions, stand up and exclaim, "Yay!"
5. Do one push-up.
6. Write your name from right to left
_____.
7. Ask the leader what time it is.
8. Take off one of your shoes.
9. Write three words from the letters in the word, 'company.' _____,
_____ and _____
10. Turn to your neighbor on your right and give him/her your biggest smile.
11. Stand and spin around three times.
12. Circle each number on this sheet.
13. Scribble on this space: _____.
14. Tear the sheet in half.
15. Ignore items 1-14.
16. Sit quietly and watch others.

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“Leap ... and then look!” (Personality - Introduction to Peter)

Significance for teens:

Teens often struggle with feelings of inferiority. They can feel that there is something wrong with them. They compare their personality to others and think, ‘If only I didn't talk so much...,’ ‘if only I wasn't so shy...,’ ‘if only I knew how to share my thoughts, then I could really do something for God...’. Our challenge is to help our kids realize that their personality is God-given, something God can use for His glory.

1. Hook

Begin with prayer. Then give everyone copies of ‘**Instructions**’ and pens. Tell the group to follow the instructions and that those who do it right will get a prize (candy). Some will read the instructions to the end; some will start doing all the actions and only at the end will realize that they shouldn't have. It's fun to watch those who, without reading the instructions completely, start down the list. At the end, you can give prizes to everyone: those who followed the instructions and those who entertained us!

God has given each of us a special personality. In this game, for example we saw those who were more cautious and those who were more impulsive.

2. Book – The Life of Peter

Today we begin a new series of lessons about the apostle Peter. Peter was a very impulsive man. Often, he would act without thinking about the consequences. Sometimes the results were good and sometimes they were bad. *In the chart, match each situation with Peter's reaction.*

If the kids don't know any of the stories, they can read the verses listed in the table. (Answers: 1-F; 2-H; 3-E; 4-G; 5-A; 6-B; 7-D; 8-C).

Ask: ‘*If Peter was so impetuous, why do you think Jesus chose him as a disciple?*’

Possible answers: He saw potential in Peter; He knew Peter would obey; He liked Peter's enthusiasm; He saw that Peter was teachable and had a pure heart.

Peter was very impulsive. He would ‘leap and then look,’ instead of the other way around. But Jesus saw what Peter would become and changed his name: from ‘Simon’ to ‘Peter,’ which means ‘rock,’ that is, very strong and unmovable (Mark 3:16).

In coming lessons we will look at how Peter, having received the Holy Spirit, became a different person. He was still impulsive, but guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Look

People have a wide range of character qualities. On the handout, have the kids mark the traits they see in themselves. They can also add other traits that are not listed here.

If they like, have the kids share with others what they have noted about themselves.

Ask, ‘*Why did God create people with such different personalities?*’

Possible answers: God loves variety; so people would need each other; we learn patience with those who aren't like us; different people have different outlooks on life.

God has given each of you the personality He has seen fit.

There is good in every personality type, as God intended, and there is bad, as a result of our sinful nature. Choose 2 – 3 character traits from the list and discuss in which situations that trait might be good and when it might be bad.

Examples: a *friendly* person easily creates a warm atmosphere. On the other hand, it can be difficult for them to rebuke someone when necessary; A *responsible* person can be very helpful in planning events and ensuring that tasks are completed on time. On the other hand, he or she can take on too much responsibility, or deprive others of the chance to be involved. Or they may begin to think that everything depends on them rather than trusting the Lord.

It is very important that all of us place our natural tendencies under God's control.

4. Took

Write down three of your personality traits and consider how God might use them, jotting your ideas underneath.

Finish with prayer, thanking God for the beauty of our differences and the ways we complement and learn from each other. Ask for His help in expressing our personalities in ways that honor Him and build others up for His glory.

Leader's Guide

'Hey buddy, can you spare a dime?' Acts 3:1-20

1. Have you ever been seriously sick or injured?

2. Physical healing (vv. 1-10)

Who are the characters in this story?

What did the lame man expect? _____

And what did he get? _____



	Physical healing (v. 1-10)	Spiritual healing (vs.11-20)
Problem		
Healing	_____ in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 6, 16)	_____ and turn to God (v. 19)
Result	The man jumped to his feet, began to walk and _____ (v.8) The people were filled with wonder (v.10)	Your sins are blotted out; let _____ come from the face of the Lord, and let him send Jesus Christ, who is destined for you. (vv. 19-20)

According to Peter's explanation of the miracle, what did he say these same people did to Jesus?

(Mark the correct answers from verses 14-19)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> They betrayed Him | <input type="checkbox"/> They imprisoned Him |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They denied Him before Pilate | <input type="checkbox"/> They chose a murderer to be released over Jesus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They told untruths about Him | <input type="checkbox"/> They killed the Creator of life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> They did not listen to Him | |

3. Why isn't everyone who believes in Jesus healed physically?

What are the benefits of spiritual healing (being forgiven of your sins)?

4. Who do you know who needs physical healing? _____

Who do you know who needs spiritual healing? _____

'Hey buddy, can you spare a dime?' (Healing – Acts 3:1-20)

Significance for teens:

Today's lesson may raise more questions than it answers. Why does God heal some and not others? Why do faithful believers sometimes suffer with illness and pain? Teens may pray for a grandparent, a friend or acquaintance who just keeps getting worse.

We do know that when God supernaturally heals, He does it for His glory. Peter does the same in his explanation of the miracle; he shifts everyone's focus from the man's physical healing to Jesus and the spiritual healing God offers.

1. Hook:

Begin with prayer. Then ask, '*Have you ever been seriously sick or injured?*' Have the kids share their experiences and how they got better.

2. Book – Acts 3:1-10:

Today we will return to the story of Peter. We see three stages of his life in the Bible. Stage 1: In the beginning, he was a simple fisherman (write the word '*fisherman*' on the board). Fishermen were sturdy and strong, but they were not the most educated men in society.

Stage 2: Next, Peter left everything to follow Jesus. In this stage of his life, he became a disciple of Jesus (write down the word '*disciple*'). He followed Jesus and learned from Him.

Step 3: Finally, after Jesus died and rose again, Peter and the other disciples became apostles (write down the word '*apostle*'). This word means, 'sent out.' Jesus gave the apostles His Holy Spirit so

they could spread His message throughout the whole world of their time.

So, Peter went from being a simple fisherman, to becoming a disciple of Jesus, and then an apostle of Christ to the world.

In the story we will read today, we also find John. Like Peter, he also started as a fisherman, became a disciple, and then an apostle. (This is the same John who would write five books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd epistles – or letters – of John, and Revelation).

Read Acts 3: 1-10 and ask, '*Besides Peter and John, who else appears in this story?*' Answer: a man lame since birth. He was carried to the door of the temple every day where he begged for charity.

Ask: '*What did the lame man expect from Peter and John?*' Money. And what did he receive? Healing. He received a lot more than he expected.

Today we will look at two ways the man was healed: physically and spiritually. Fill in the column marked, '*physical healing*.' Answers: problem - lameness; healing - by faith in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 6, 16); result - the man jumped up on his feet, began to walk and praised God (v. 8), and people were filled with wonder (v. 10).

After God healed the lame man, Peter turned everyone's attention from this miracle, to Jesus. Peter used the situation to point to the spiritual healing available to everyone.

Read Acts 3: 11-20 and fill in the '*Spiritual Healing*' column. Answers: problem – sin; healing – through repentance and turning to God (v. 19); result – sins will be blotted out, that times of rejoicing may come on the Lord's behalf, and that He will send Jesus Christ, the one destined for you. (vv. 19-20).

Many of those **in** Peter's audience had participated in accusing and crucifying Jesus.

Ask: '*According to our text, what had these Israelites done to Jesus?*' Mark the correct answers together, based on verses 14-19.

Answers: they betrayed Him; they denied Him; they chose a murderer to be released over Jesus; they killed the Creator of life.

Peter is asking them to come to this same Christ for forgiveness.

3. Look:

Ask, '*why isn't everyone who believes in Jesus healed physically?*' This is a difficult question, but we can make some guesses.

Possible answers: we don't know why but we can trust God; sickness helps us learn to trust God and grow in patience; God's power can be shown through a person's weakness; suffering makes us more understanding and caring towards others; suffering makes us long more for Jesus to come back and make things right; etc.

We need to be careful not to pretend that we have the answer to this difficult question. Human suffering is complex. What we do know is that we will suffer in this world, and we know that even Christ entered into the suffering of humanity.

Ask, 'are the benefits of spiritual healing? (being forgiven of your sins)?'

Possible answers: spiritual healing lasts forever; spiritual healing sometimes improves physical health; even if a person is physically healed, he will get sick again sooner or later; eventually we all die physically; spiritual healing has to do with our relationship with God, which can bring emotional healing: peace, comfort, the knowledge we are seen and loved, etc.

4. Took:

Break into small groups and pray for people the kids know who need physical healing, and also pray for those who need to turn to God for forgiveness and spiritual healing.

“We cannot help speaking...” Acts 4:1-22

1. People respond to the message about Christ in different ways

2. Reaction to the message about Christ	Groups of people
They did not believe in the resurrection (vv.1-2)	Priests, temple guard and _____
They believed the message (v.4)	
They marveled at the apostles, but ordered them to be silent (vv. 5, 18)	Rulers, elders and _____
They could not help talking about the message (v. 20)	

Why couldn't the apostles not talk about the message?

What was the message about Christ? (vv. 10-12)



3. Why do not all believe in miracles?

Why do some people actively oppose the message about Christ?

What factors can influence a person's decision to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins?

4. What is your reaction to the message about Christ?

- The message bothers me I don't believe it I believe the message
- I am against the message I can't help but talk about the message.
- Other response _____

“We cannot help speaking...” (The Message of Christ – Acts 4:1-22)

Significance for teens:

Like the apostles, we have been commissioned to spread the message of Christ - peace between us sinners and God through the death of Jesus Christ. When working with teenagers and focusing mainly on the moral side of the lessons, it is easy to forget the spiritual transformation that is possible only in Christ alone.

1. Hook:

Start with a prayer. Then lead a game of **Four Corners**. You will name each corner of the room, and the kids will move to the corner that best fits their answer. If no corner fits them, they can move to the middle of the room. For example, you say, “Your favorite drink.” Then you point to one corner and say, “Coffee,” followed by another corner “Energy drinks,” a third corner “Soft drinks,” and the last corner “Fruit Juice.” The kids take a corner according to which of the named things they like more. If time permits, ask some of them why they chose that answer.

Here are possible categories:

1. Favorite season (Autumn, winter, spring, summer);
2. Favorite subject in school (Science, math, English, history);
3. Favorite team sport (Football, basketball, baseball, don't like sports);
4. Favorite movie series (Star Wars, Avengers, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter);
5. Favorite vacation spot (beach, mountains, at relatives or friends, free time at home);
6. Favorite fast-food place (Macdonald's; Wendy's; Arby's; Chick-fil-A), etc.

2. Book – Acts 4:1-22:

Today we will continue our story about the apostle Peter and see that there were four different reactions to the message about Christ. Read Acts 4:1-22 and fill in the chart: on the left is the reaction to the message about Christ, and on the right are the groups of people who reacted in those ways.

Group № 1. They did not believe in the resurrection (vv. 1-2): Priests, temple guard, and Sadducees; Sadducees were one of the three major religious parties and did not believe in the resurrection from the dead or the afterlife. See Mark 12:18.

Group № 2. They believed the message: 5,000 people (v. 4).

Group № 3. They marveled at the apostles, but ordered them to be silent (vv. 13,18): The rulers, elders, and teachers of the Law;

Group № 4. They could not help but talk about the message (v. 20): Peter and John.

Ask, “*why couldn't the apostles Peter and John not speak about the message?*”

(Answer: They spoke what they had seen and heard while they were with Jesus; they wanted to be obedient to God; Jesus had commanded them to testify about Him.)

Ask, “*according to verses 10-12 what was the message about Christ?*”

(Answer: Salvation is found only through Jesus, who was crucified and rose from the dead.)

3. Look:

We still see these kinds of reactions to the message about Christ today. There are some people who find it hard to believe in miracles. Ask: *“Why doesn’t everyone believe in miracles?”*

(Possible answers: they believe only in the visible; it goes against the laws of nature; they have learned not to believe in anything because in the past, having believed in false things like Santa Claus, etc., they were disappointed.)

There are also those who not only do not believe, but actively oppose the message about Christ. Ask: *“Why do some people actively oppose the message about Christ?”*

(Possible answers: they think the message is dangerous; they don’t fully understand it; if they accept it, they will have to change their lifestyle; they have seen a bad example of believers, etc.).

And there are also many who accept the message in faith. Ask, *“What factors might influence a person’s decision to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins?”* (Possible responses: the reliability of the Bible, its testimony about Jesus; the fulfillment of prophecies about Him; the transformation of the lives of those who believed in Him; the miracles they witnessed and the answers to prayers, etc.).

The fourth response is that they believe the message and want others to learn about Jesus. Ask, *“Why is it important to tell others about Jesus?”*

(Possible answers: it is good news for them too; Jesus commanded us to share the Good News; it affects their eternity).

Ask them if they had ever told anyone about Jesus. What was the reaction of their listeners? Have the kids share their story. At the end you can add examples from your own life.

4. Took:

Ask, *“What is your reaction to the message about Christ?”* Have the kids mark their response on the handout or just think about it.

If necessary, go over the main points of the message again: We are all sinners separated from God; Jesus came from God to redeem us for Himself by paying for our sins with His life. He lived without committing a single sin; according to the will of God the Father, He sacrificed Himself and was crucified; after three days He rose from the dead, which means that God accepted His sacrifice. Now anyone who recognizes before God that his sins brought God’s Son to the cross will be forgiven, his sins will be taken away from him, he will be reconciled to God and have access to Him.

Conclude with a prayer of repentance that the kids can repeat after you, such as: *“Father, I know that I am a sinner and that I deserve to be punished, but today I ask for Your forgiveness for the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice. Please give me Your forgiveness and come into my life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.”*

Have the kids write on cards their reaction to the message about Christ and if they repented today or earlier, have them write when it was. Turn in what they have written - only if they wish. Be sure to tell them that even if some of the kids don’t believe in Christ, they are still welcome in your group.

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5: 1-11

1. What is hypocrisy?

2. The main characters

A correct example (Acts 4:36-37)	
An example of hypocrisy	
The apostle	
The unseen person	



In this story, what was the problem?

Why was the punishment (death!) so severe?

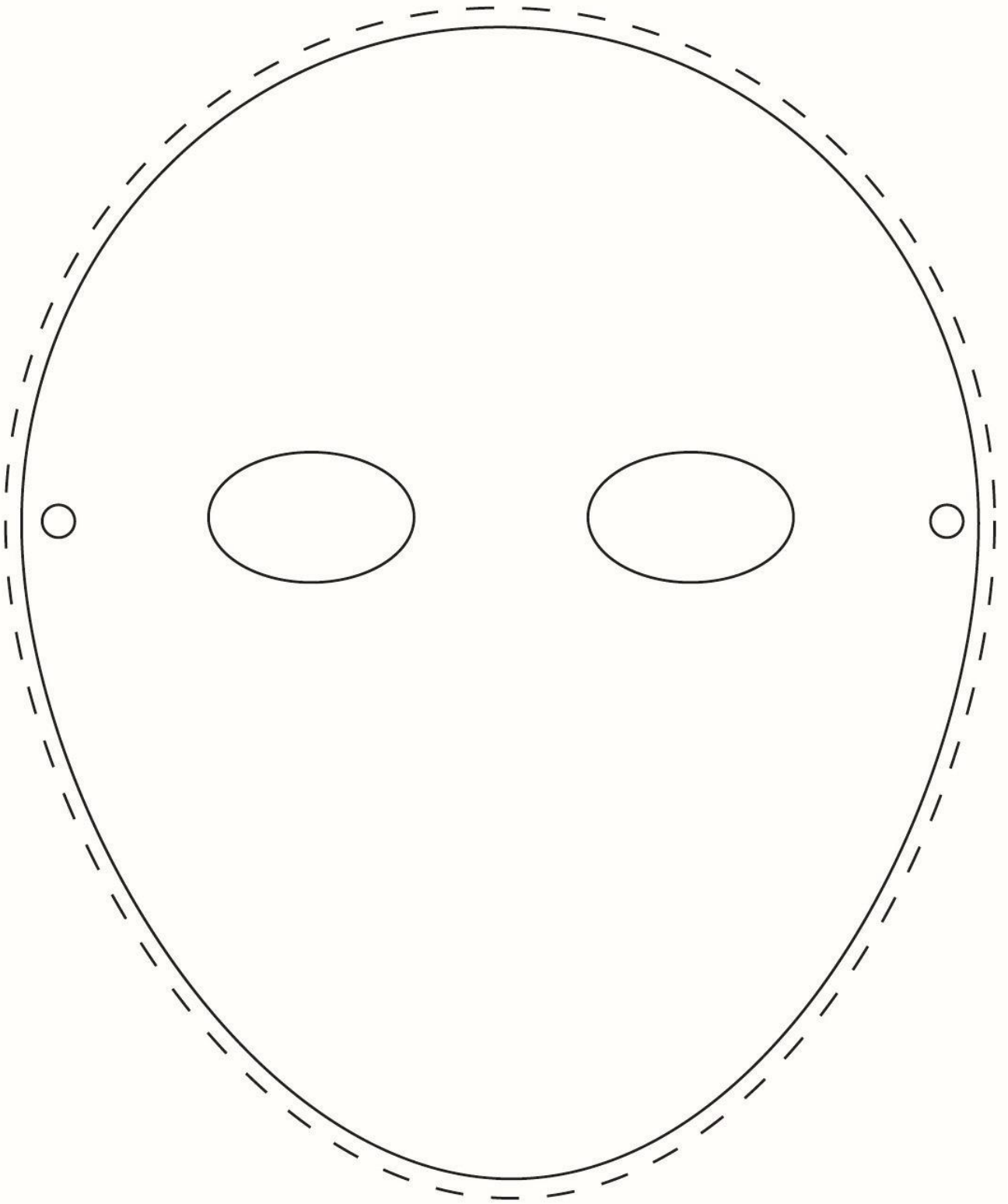
Great fear gripped the church and all who heard about it. Why?

3. What are some things that people often hide about themselves from other Christians?

What harm can hypocrisy cause?

How can we avoid falling into the trap of hypocrisy?

4. How do you need to be more authentic?



Ananias and Sapphira (Hypocrisy – Acts 5:1-11)

Significance for teens:

Some teens behave one way at church, another way at home, and another way at school. Scientists call this split personality 'true self' and 'false self.' But which of these selves is the true self? The personality that acts like it loves Jesus? Or can it be just a show to please other Christians? It is imperative that the kids realize that religious masks will not fool God. He sees the heart.

1. Hook:

Start with prayer, then move on to making masks. Pass out mask templates, colored markers, and scissors. The kids create masks of whatever they want (superhero, clown, actor, animal, etc.). When done, take a picture of the kids in their masks.

Then ask, "What is hypocrisy?"

(Possible answers: when we try – on purpose – to appear better than we are; things a person says or does that are not true to their real selves).

The origin of the word 'hypocrite' is someone who is 'an actor or stage player.'

2. Book – Acts 5:1-11:

Today we return to the story of the apostle Peter and look at one married couple in the early church who were hypocrites. The result for them was disastrous.

Read Acts 5: 1-11 and look at the table. Go back to Acts 4:36-37 to fill in the first answer. The man who set a good example was Barnabas. Ananias and Sapphira probably knew about Barnabas and wanted to show everyone that they were good like that, too.

Our examples of hypocrisy are Ananias and Sapphira. Another person in the story is the apostle, Peter.

But there are two invisible actors: Satan and the Holy Spirit (v. 3). We tend to forget about these active agents from the spiritual realm. But Peter has not forgotten. Ask, 'In this story, what did Satan do?' (Answer: he filled Ananias' heart).

Then, Peter pointed out that Ananias did not lie to him, but to whom? (Answer: the Holy Spirit).

We are not always aware of the influence of the invisible spiritual world on our lives.

Ask: 'So what was the problem in this story?' (Answers: Ananias and Sapphira claimed they had given God everything; they wanted to appear more generous than they were).

Ask: 'What do you think were their motives?'

(Possible answers: They wanted to be praised, but they didn't want to part with all their money; maybe they were afraid of not having enough money).

The text says they didn't have to give everything (v.4), but that they had to be honest (v.5). This is a very sad story. There is an opinion that Ananias died of natural causes, like a heart attack. But this is probably wrong because Sapphira's death was promised before it happened.

Ask: 'Why do you think the punishment was so severe - death?!' (It's not written in the text, so we don't know for sure. Possible answers: to stop hypocrisy in the young church: the Christian church was just starting, and it was necessary to lay a good foundation; so the new church would start with a good reputation; if their

deception had succeeded, hypocrisy might have stopped the gospel from spreading; hypocrisy is serious).

It's a sad, hard story. We prefer to think about the loving, gracious side of God. But He is also holy.

The result of this story was that great fear gripped the church and all who heard about it (vv. 5,11). Why?

(Answer: they were shocked by God's power; they realized they were tempted to be hypocritical, too and it could have happened to them; they realized how important this new Christian movement and its purity was to God).

3. Look:

There are still hypocrites in the church today. Ask, '*What are some things that people often hide about themselves from other Christians?*'

(Possible answers: their sins; their doubts; their lack of relationship with God; their temptations; family problems; why they skip coming to church; their conflict with others, etc.).

Ask, '*Why do we hide these things?*'

(Possible answers: we are afraid people will judge us; we want to be thought of well; we think we will disappoint others; we think we will change; we want to be like everyone else, we don't want to pull others down, etc.)

But we can't hide from God. God sees our hearts; He hates sin and He wants His church to be pure. Ask, '*What harm can hypocrisy do?*'

(Possible answers: it can harm our spiritual growth, our reputation with unbelievers; it keeps us from helping each other with problems; we miss out on the joy of real relationship when we aren't being ourselves; hypocrisy hinders God's power, etc.)

Ask, '*How can we avoid falling into the trap of hypocrisy?*' Note their answers on a board.

(Possible answers: ask God to help us be authentic; find a close friend we can trust to share our struggles with; take time with God and be honest with ourselves and with Him about everything; don't be a harsh judge of others' weaknesses when they are authentic; when we do wrong, admit it to God and repent; confess sins and fears to trusted others; etc.).

Note: hypocrisy is *intentional* deception. Nobody perfectly lives up to even their own standards. Beware of kids who might feel a disproportionate amount of guilt over *unintentional* moments of weakness, or times when they continue to act Christianly when they don't feel very spiritual on the inside. This is not hypocrisy if you are aware of it and talking to God, or trusted others, about it.

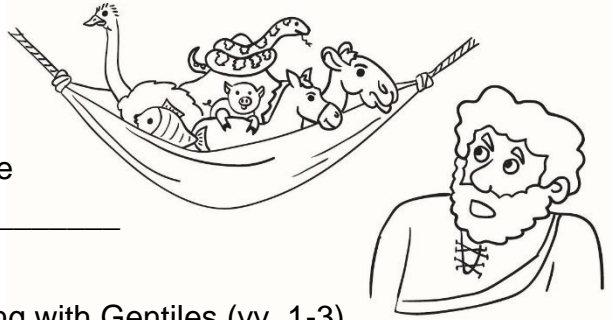
4. Took:

So, God wants us to be real with Him and with others. It is impossible to hide what we think and feel from Him. We can honestly turn to Him with our questions, doubts, hurts and concerns. And it is important that we have at least one person close to us (a friend or family member) with whom we can also share our problems. Group leaders can also be available. Give the kids time to think about how they can be more authentic. Finish by praying for help to be real in every situation.

Some ideas taken from [Bible.org/seriespage/be honest](http://Bible.org/seriespage/be-honest)

Would YOU Eat a Snake?

Acts 11: 1-18



1. What's the most disgusting thing you've ever had to eat? _____

2. Criticism: Peter was criticized for eating with Gentiles (vv. 1-3)

Jews	God's chosen people, circumcised
Gentiles	non-Jews, 'unclean,' uncircumcised.

Three signs from God that He accepted Gentile believers:

1. _____ of unclean food (vv. 4-10)

'Clean' food for Jews	'Unclean' food for Jews
Birds: chicken, pigeon, duck, goose Fish: cod, haddock, salmon, sardine Other: cow, deer, goat, sheep, locusts	Birds: eagle; hawk; ostrich; owl; swan Marine animals: shark; shrimp; crab; oysters Other: pig; bear; camel; donkey; rabbit. All reptiles and amphibians and most insects

2. _____ told Cornelius (a Gentile) to send for Peter (a Jew) (vv.13-14)

3. _____ told Peter to go with the Gentiles (vv.11-12) and descended on the new Gentile believers, just as he had descended on the Jews who believed (v.17).

3. What categories of people are sometimes rejected by us today?

Where do these prejudices come from?

By what criteria does God accept a person (see Acts 10: 34-35)?

Mark the correct answers:

- Fear of God Nationality Gender Right behavior Age
 Parents Faith in Jesus Education Health

Why shouldn't we discriminate against anybody?

4. Self-analysis:

What kind of people do I have the hardest time accepting? _____

Why? _____

What might help me change my attitude? _____

How will my relationship with God be affected by my prejudice? _____

Would YOU Eat a Snake? (Prejudice – Acts 11:1-18)

Significance for teens:

Every culture has its outcasts: groups of people who are looked down upon and rejected by society. Teenagers also tend to look down on members of other subcultures. They even mock those who are not like them. Our kids need to know that God loves all people and does not think that some are better than others.

1. Hook:

Start with prayer. Then play a game with a bag of food items. The kids sit in a circle and, while the music is playing, pass around the bag. As soon as the music stops, whoever is holding the bag should take one thing out **without looking** and eat it. The game continues until the bag is empty. The bag should contain food that kids don't normally like, such as baby food, salted fish, a piece of onion or garlic, olives, strange flavored beef jerky, fig newtons, etc. After the game, ask them what was the most disgusting thing they ever had to eat? In today's story, God uses 'disgusting food' to break through Peter's prejudice against people who were not Jews.

2. Book – Acts 11:1-18

The apostle Peter was a Jew of Jews. He would not willingly go into the home of a Gentile (non-Jew) and he certainly would not eat with him. In our story today we read that God commanded him to do all these things.

Read Acts 11:1-18. In this chapter, we read about Peter briefly telling the leaders of the Jerusalem church what had happened to him (more on this in Acts 10).

Cornelius, a new Gentile believer in Christ, invited Peter to come to his house. In addition to being a Gentile, Cornelius was also a Roman officer. Most Jews intensely disliked the Romans because they were the occupiers of Israel at that time. In verses 1-3 we see that Peter was criticized for associating with Gentiles (See Table #1). The Jews considered themselves a people chosen by God, with special laws about how to be 'clean' before God. They were to be separate from the surrounding people. One symbol of this was circumcision. The Jews regarded the Gentiles as unclean, since they were not circumcised.

God sent three signs to show His acceptance of Gentiles: a vision, an angel, and the Holy Spirit.

1. The first sign was the vision of unclean food (vv. 4-10). Three times God showed Peter unclean animals (beasts, reptiles, birds) and commanded him to eat it, and three times Peter refused. (See a partial list of clean and unclean animals on the handout). A voice from heaven told Peter that these animals were no longer unclean because God had cleansed them (v.9).

2. The second sign was the angel who told Cornelius (a Gentile) to send for Peter (a Jew – v. 13-14).

3. The third sign was the Holy Spirit. We read of Him twice in this story: the first time is when He commanded Peter to go with the Gentiles to Cornelius' house (v.11-12). The second time, was later at Cornelius' house, when the Holy Spirit

came rushing in on the Gentile believers as He had previously come down on the believing Jews (v. 17).

These three signs showed that God accepted Gentile believers just as He did Jewish believers. Often in the Bible, we see miracles when it's important to confirm things that have never happened before (examples: the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; the first coming of Christ; the beginning of Christ's Church after He went back to heaven).

Peter learned a very important lesson: God has no prejudice and His plan all along was that everyone could be saved through Christ. Read Acts 10:34-35.

After this event, did Peter remember this lesson forever? Sadly, no. Read Galatians 2:11-14. Paul had to remind Peter again that they, Jews who followed Christ, could now have fellowship with the Gentiles, even if other Jews judged them.

3. Look:

Today, we also have a tendency to treat some groups of people as more deserving of God's grace than others. Ask: '*What categories of people does our culture tend to reject?*' Write down the kids' answers. (Possible answers: not attractive people; migrants or refugees; drug addicts; rich people; believers, etc.).

Ask: '*Where do such prejudices come from?*'

(Possible answers: from friends' attitudes; media; Internet; our own experiences; parents, lack of understanding of people who aren't like us, etc.).

Ask: '*Why do some people discriminate against others?*'

(Possible answers: ignorance; ill-mannered; self-protection; negative social experiences; stereotypical attitudes, etc.).

God does not have prejudices like we do, yet He does have His criteria for accepting people into His family. '*According to our story and Acts 10:34-35, what are His criteria?* Mark the correct answers.

(The correct answers are: fear of God; doing good; faith in Jesus).

Like Peter, you may be criticized for associating with some people. But *why should we not reject any group of people?*

(Answer: these people are created by God in His image, He does not see them as 'unclean')

Ask, '*Are there some people with whom we are better off not associating?*'

(Answer: yes; those who are a bad influence on us; those who can do us harm).

So, let's think about how we can look at people who are different from us with God's eyes. Believe the best in them, know that they are invited to know Jesus, too, even if you don't understand yet how that will happen. Consider how God treated you; He was patient with you, merciful, and forgiving. Learn to see people through His eyes.

4. Took:

Give the group time to think, evaluate their own attitudes and answer the questions. It is good if anyone wants to share their answers, but do not force them to do so. End with prayer, asking God to show us how to accept those who are different from us and who seem far away from Him.

'Remember My Chains'

Acts 12: 1-19

1. How many school friends know you go to church?

_ None _ 2-3 friends _ A few people

_ Many _ Everyone knows

Other answer _____

How would they treat you if everyone knew you were involved at church or Bible study?

2. Who was King Herod persecuting? (vv. 1-3)

How was Peter guarded? (vv. 4 and 10)

What did the church do? (v. 5)

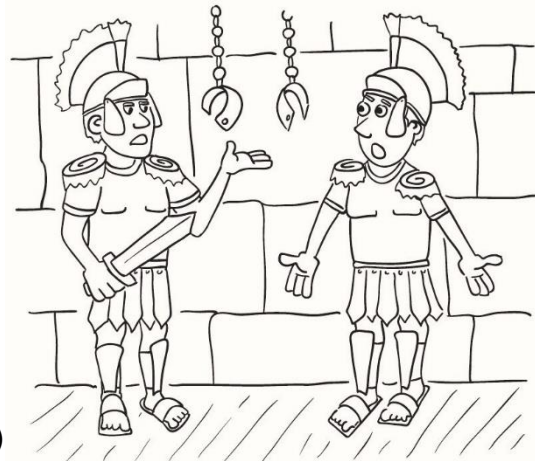
3. In what ways have Christians been persecuted?

In what countries are Christians persecuted today?

What can we ask for as we pray for the persecuted church?

4. Pray for the persecuted church!

'We'll say Bigfoot took him.'



Persecution of Christians in the Past and Present

All of the apostles (according to tradition) were executed for their faith except John, who was exiled to the island of Patmos: Peter was crucified head downward; James was killed by a sword; Paul was beheaded; Andrew was crucified; Thomas was pierced with spears; Matthew was stabbed.

In Roman times: Christians were falsely accused of setting fire to Rome, which unleashed heavy persecution. They were thrown to the lions in amphitheaters in front of spectators; they were burned alive, used as torches in the emperor's garden. Christians gathered secretly in the catacombs to pray and worship together.

Soviet period in Russia: Christians were arrested for distributing Bibles and other Christian literature; Sunday schools were banned, Christians gathering as a church without a legal registration were sent to labor camps or prison for up to three years. Many pastors were imprisoned much longer. Christians were not allowed to get higher education and had difficulty finding employment.

Afghanistan: All Afghan Christians are converts from Islam. If they openly confess Christ, they are killed. Not only radical Islamists treat them ruthlessly, but also their own families. Christians are declared insane, put in mental hospitals, and their homes destroyed. A family, clan or tribe can only preserve its 'honor' by getting rid of a Christian.

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/afghanistan/>

India: Radical Hindu nationalists consider followers of Jesus to be alien to the nation, so all Christians in India are threatened by persecution. Converts to Christianity from Hinduism are constantly under pressure from the state, their community, and family. These Christians are often physically abused and sometimes killed.

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/india/>

North Korea: If Christians are discovered, they are declared political criminals and exiled to labor camps or killed on the spot, along with their entire family. Meeting with other Christians for worship is impossible or takes place under conditions of maximum secrecy.

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea/>

Since the time of Jesus' death on the cross, 43 million Christians have been martyred. Currently 200 million people are suffering for their faith in Jesus; 60% of them are kids.

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/pray-for-persecuted-church.html>

BOOKMARK for your Bible

Pray for the persecuted church

Currently, 200 million people are suffering for their faith in Jesus; 60% of them are kids.

Some countries, where Christians are persecuted:

North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Iran, Syria (and many others)



How to pray!

- ...that persecuted believers will not lose the hope that God provides (Eph. 1:18).
- ...that the Holy Spirit would strengthen them (Eph. 3:16).
- ...that persecuted believers know how much God loves them (Eph 3:17).
- ...that persecuted believers will fearlessly tell others about Jesus (Eph 6:20).
- ...that persecuted believers would have access to the Bible.
- ...that believers would have the courage to stay in their homeland.
- ...that believers who have been rejected by family and friends would be surrounded by a new Christian 'family' for support.
- ...that God would protect women: they are especially vulnerable and can lose their kids.
- ...that God would give persecuted believers jobs and safe places to live.
- That their endurance would produce fruit.

Information from the website
<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/pray-for-persecuted-church.html>

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'Remember My Chains' (The Persecuted Church – Acts 12:1-19)

Significance for teens:

Our kids have the great advantage of being able to gather and study the Bible openly. In many countries, it is against the law. Thank God for our freedoms! However, Christians are still being persecuted in many countries around the world. This lesson will remind us to pray for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for Christ.

1. Hook:

Start with prayer. Begin with asking the kids to note how many of their school friends know that they go to church or Bible study? Have them share their answers. Then ask: 'How would you be treated if everyone knew you go to church or study the Bible?'

2. Book – Acts 12:1-19:

Today is our last lesson on the apostle Peter. Today, we look at a time when he got into trouble for his faith, and how God delivered him.

Thousands were coming to Christ, and the church was growing rapidly, which made the Jewish elders move from threats to outright persecution of Christians. One of the main instigators of this persecution was King Herod. This was the grandson of Herod the Great, who killed babies in Bethlehem after Jesus was born.

Read Acts 12:1-19 and ask, '*Who was King Herod persecuting (vv. 1-3)?*'

Answers: some church members; James, John's brother, was killed by the sword; Peter was arrested.

'Why did Herod persecute the church?'

Answer: because he saw that it pleased the Jewish leaders.

Herod was determined to guard Peter in the most secure way possible. Ask, '*How was Peter guarded (vv. 4 and 10)?*'

Answers: two guards beside him; bound with two chains; guards at the gate (16 guards in all); the gate was made of iron.

'Under these conditions, what did Peter do (v. 7)?'

Answer: He slept; he slept so soundly that the angel had to shake him to wake him up.

'At this time, what was the church doing (v. 5)?' (Answer: praying tirelessly for Peter.)

They prayed, but they had trouble believing that their prayer was answered. Even prayers with no hope of a good outcome proved stronger than Herod!

Ask, '*What happened when Peter reached Mary's house?'*

Answer: Rhoda the maid didn't let him in, the others didn't believe her.

If the group had expected an answer to their prayers, they would have immediately rejoiced! Sometimes we don't expect an answer, yet it comes. In this story we see two different kinds of answers to prayer. The church most likely prayed for James as well, but he was killed; God's answer was, 'no.' When they prayed for Peter, he was delivered. God loved both Peter and James, so we trust He had a good reason for letting James be martyred. We pray, and we leave the results to God. He knows what He is doing.

3. Look:

The church has a long history of persecution. Jesus said that in the same way He was persecuted, so the church would be persecuted (John 15:18, 20). *How have Christians been persecuted in the past?* The handout provides a partial list of ways that Christians have faced persecution up to the present time. Have teens take turns reading about the persecution of Christians of the past.

Moving to the present, ask the group if anyone has stories of persecution to share. Or you can also show a video about the persecuted church today. Ask kids if they can name countries where Christians are especially in danger today.

Some answers: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, and many others.

(An additional idea: before the lesson assign kids a particular country and at home have them find information about persecution in that country. Then the kids can present what they found during the lesson.)

When the apostle Paul was in prison for preaching about Christ, he wrote to the church, 'remember my bonds (Colossians 4:18).' In the same way, we need to remember to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering for their faith today.

When we pray for the persecuted church, what should we pray about?

Pass out the **bookmarks** that list prayer requests for everyday needs of Christians in countries where persecution is severe today. Read this information together.

4. Took:

Break into small groups or pairs and take time to pray for one or two countries and for Christians in those countries. Invite the group to take the bookmarks home and continue to pray for the persecuted church.

Material partly borrowed from the website <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/pray-for-persecuted-church.html>