

THE GREATEST SHOW

BIG IDEA

You are loved.

BIBLE

Genesis 1v27-31; Romans 5v6-8, 6v6, 15v7; John 1v12

WHAT?

POLL: What do you think about the circus? ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *You can conduct this poll in a very informal and unscientific way with just the raising of some hands, but if you'd like to make this poll more involved, you certainly can. Create a live digital poll with a service like polleverywhere.com or keep things analog and use a large white board to tally your results.*
- What's your vote? Does the circus 1) thrill you, 2) chill you, or 3) freak you out? Why? Let's hear your reasons.
- On a scale of 1-5, how much do clowns freak you out?

STORY: Share the story of P.T. Barnum and his circus. ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you share this story, you may want to show some images of P.T. Barnum and his original circus.*
- A couple of hundred years ago, a man named P.T. Barnum had a dream for a traveling oddity museum that turned into what we now know as The Circus. Barnum traveled around looking for a cast of characters who were, in the world's eyes, unattractive, strange and odd, in order to attract a crowd. Weird huh? But it worked.
- Barnum's cast of characters were people who were seen as outcasts and untouchables to most people—"freaks" in the eyes of others. Individually,

these were people who you never get picked for any team, however, people lined up in droves to see this ensemble of freaks.

QUESTION:

- **Have you ever been picked last for a team? How did that make you feel?**
- *Look for a show of hands. Let a few students respond to the second.*
- Yeah, that can be a pretty terrible feeling. But now let's think about the opposite scenario.

QUESTION:

- **Have you ever been picked first for a team? How did that feel?**
- *Look for a show of hands. Let a few students respond to the second.*
- Yeah, that can be the best feeling ever. Maybe you were picked first because the captain saw something in you. Maybe the team believed your leadership, your gifts, or your skills would be the thing that led them to victory. Whether it's getting chosen for the basketball team, the debate team, a group project, or even a seat at the "cool table," it feels great to be chosen and wanted, doesn't it?

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT IDENTITY

- This is all normal, of course. It makes sense that we'd feel a little bit of a sting when we feel like we haven't been chosen or seen. And it makes sense that we'd feel a little bit of pride and satisfaction when we feel like we have. But if we're not careful, we can give these feelings of disappointment or elation a little too much weight.
- Sometimes, we let these moments do more than disappoint or excite us. Sometimes, we let them define us. If we're not careful, we can allow our identities to become wrapped up in how other people see us and treat us.

SO WHAT?

STORY: Talk about a time you allowed someone's opinion of you def ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story (or have another adult or student tell a story) about a time when, as a middle schooler or high schooler, you let something that was said about you—either positive or negative—begin to shape your opinion of yourself. Share what happened and what the effects were.*
- Can you relate? Have you ever cared so much about what someone else said or thought about you that their opinions of you began to shape your opinions of yourself?
- Maybe you've heard people say that you're too slow, or too quiet, or too loud. Maybe you've been told you're funny, or not funny at all, or nice, or bossy. Maybe you've heard that you have so much potential. Or maybe you've been told you won't amount to much at all.
- I don't know what kinds of opinions have been shared about you, but I know that the opinions of others are powerful—especially at your age.
- That's why I'm pretty sure I'm not the only person who has a story like the one I just shared. When you get to your small group, you can share some of your own stories.
- But before we share how the opinions of other people have shaped our identities, I want us to spend time thinking about one specific person's opinion of us—our Creator.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT YOU

ACTIVITY: God Says, I Am, I Will ▲

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Set up a large white board, cork board, or pad of poster-sized paper. Create three columns and label them, "God Says," "I Am," and "I Will." As you teach, fill in each column according to this guide and your students' feedback.*
- In the next few minutes, I want to show you a ton of things that God has to say about you in Scripture. Then, when you get to your small groups, you're going to spend time talking about each of the things God says about who you are, and how God's opinion of you can and should shape your identity.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1v27-31 ▲

- Let's start at the very beginning. I already said that God is our Creator, but let's take a look at a passage in the Bible where our creation is first talked about.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Write "Genesis 1:27-31" in the "God Says" column of your board. Then read it.

QUESTION: What does God say you are? ▲

- This is the first time humans show up in Scripture. In these verses, what does God say about you? God says you are . . .
- Give a few students a chance to respond. Listen for (or suggest), "made in God's image," and "very good." Write each answer in the "You Are" column of your board.
- This is such an important place to start. When God created you, God said you were "very good" because you were God's handiwork, made in God's image.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5v6-8 ▲

- But, unfortunately, that's not all we are. Yes, we were made in God's image and God called creation "very good," it's probably not a surprise that humanity isn't always "good." We've all been known to do, say, think, and believe some pretty "not good" things sometimes. So here are a few more things God says about us.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Write "Romans 5v6-8" in the "God Says" column of your board. Then read it.

QUESTION: What does God say you are? ▲

- In these verses, what does God say about you? God says you are . . .
- Give a few students a chance to respond. Listen for (or suggest), "powerless," "ungodly," "sinners," and "loved."
- Some of these words are pretty ugly, aren't they? I don't like to think about myself in some of these terms, but if I'm honest, I know they're true.
- See, when sin came into the world, it separated us from God. We were outcasts and enemies of God because of sin. But God knew this in

advance. God knew you and I would choose sin and that sin would separate us from God, but God was about redemption, reconciliation and bringing us back into relationship.

- Yes, God says we're sinners. But God also says we're loved. God loved us even when we didn't say it back. When we are outcasts, God says we are loved. When we are at our worst, God shows us God's best. Even when we and everyone else says we're broken, dispensable, ugly, worthless, or unlovable, God says, **"You are loved."**

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6v6, 15v7; John 1v12 ▲

- There is so much more God says about us in Scripture, and so much we can do to respond to the things God says about us, but I'll save that for your small group time.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Write "Romans 6v6, Romans 15v7, and John 1v12" in the "God Says" column of your board. Then write a big question mark in the "I Will" column.

NOW WHAT?

GOD SAYS YOU'RE LOVED

- Has anyone seen the movie *The Greatest Showman*? It may not be a historically accurate movie, but I love this version of P.T. Barnum's story. In the movie, Barnum is like a coach, building a dream team of odd-ball players. He saw something in the Bearded Lady, in Tom Thumb, and in the Wheeler twins. These were people the world has cast aside, but in whom Barnum saw value.
- Before being chosen by Barnum, many of these characters adopted the world's opinions of themselves. They didn't believe they mattered. But when Barnum told them they were valuable, guess what? They began to see themselves the way Barnum saw them: like they were loved.

REFLECTION: Do you believe you're loved? ▲

- As we wrap things up today, here's the question I want you to think about and reflect on: do you believe you're loved?
- When you choose to believe what God says about you—that you're loved beyond measure, designed in God's image, created for good and not for evil—it changes the things you believe about yourself. But that change won't happen until you choose to believe it and then do something about it.
- I know the opinions of others are powerful. They can shape how you see yourself and how you move through the world. So this week, here's what I want you to know, to believe, and to remember: you are so loved. I love you. The people in this room love you. And, most important, you are loved beyond your wildest dreams by the God who created you. **You are loved.** Now go live like it.