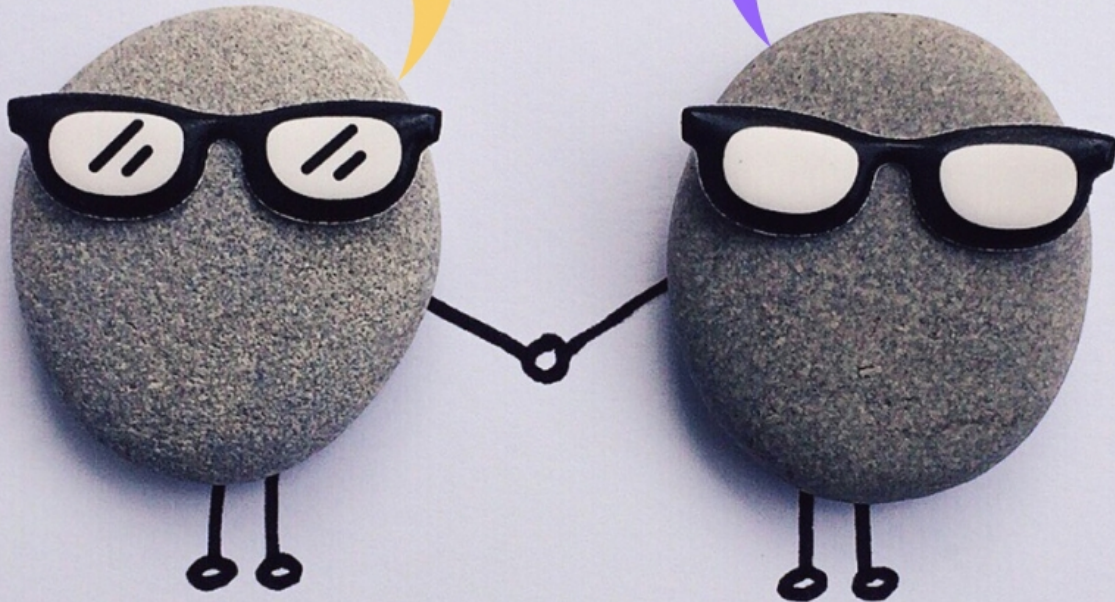


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Friends with Everyone ...

Tween Small Group

Week 5: The Strength to be a Good Friend.

ACTIVITY: Frame it.

Supplies: Have each participant bring a photo of themselves. Piece of oversized scrap book paper. Gel pens. Glue or tape.

Activity: Glue/Tape the picture to the paper. Each participant writes something nice about each person around their photo.

We frame the extra special memories to put up on the walls of our homes. We stick our favorites up on the walls of our rooms and use them as the wallpaper on our phones. This picture you are holding, is framed and hanging in heaven. God loves that picture, and every other picture of you. Even the outtakes and the funny ones. Especially the funny ones. He loves the WHOLE you, because he made you.

Sometimes, we can have days when we feel like we just don't fit in at school, on our teams, and even in our families ...some days we don't understand our place in this WORLD. These feelings are not only OK, they are normal. When we have these thoughts, it's important to fully feel the emotions they bring along with them, talk to God and to the person we trust the most. But then ...we need to re-frame these thoughts, and remind ourselves who we REALLY are.

God says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I've already written Psalm 139:14 on every frame. Remember, that is who you are. All of the nice things that your mom and your friends here have written about you ...THAT is who you are, and SO MUCH MORE.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Psalm 139:14 NIV

The best way to flip frustrating feelings around is to think about the things we are thankful for, and to get up and do something to help someone. Look at this picture, framed. That girl ...she can change the world, just by doing something to make a dent in her corner of it. God places people in our lives PURPOSEFULLY. Look around, and do something to help others reframe how they see themselves, too.

This week's challenge is going to help us do that. But for now, remember ...

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: "Consider the power of your presence in another person's life."

How do we get strong?

"Be strong in the Lord, and mighty in His power." Ephesians 6:10

Get quiet to hear God. Prayer is powerful, and making efforts to pray often help us to be strong. In order to be a good friend to someone else, we have to be strong, ourselves. It helps to have a strong faith, but that takes some spiritual push-ups!

Just like we work hard and practice to get in shape and get better at our hobbies, we have to work out our minds mentally and spiritually. Just like there are many different muscles in our minds and bodies, there are many parts of our faith that strengthen us. Here are some of them:

Joy

The strength to find joy comes from Jesus.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11 NIV

Obedience

The strength to obey comes from listening to the One who loves us.

"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love." John 15:10 NIV

Learning

The strength to be imperfect comes from Christ.

"There is no fear in love." 1 John 4:18a NIV

"There is no one righteous, not even one." Romans 3:10 NIV

Love

The strength to love comes from God.

"Do everything in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14 NIV

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8 NIV

Befriend

The strength to be a good friend comes from knowing who we are in Christ.

"For greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 NIV

"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

John 15:15 NIV

On days when we don't feel strong, remember that WE aren't strong. When it feels like the world is too hard for us, and life is too big for us to handle, it's because IT IS. It is Christ in us that makes us strong. Team up and talk to Him, often. Pray to God on the hard days and the happy days. He understands. Jesus knows what it's like to be talked about, laughed at, hungry, tired, and overwhelmed. He knows what it is to be in deep pain, emotionally and physically. He was tempted by the devil, too. There were a few things Jesus did to stay strong. Yes! Even Jesus!

1. He prayed. Many times in the Bible we find Jesus getting up early in the morning to be by himself and pray to God. If it was important to Jesus ... it's REALLY important for us.
2. He knew God's word. Whenever someone questioned Jesus about who He was, He quoted Scripture. When the devil tempted Him, He quoted Scripture. When He was talking to His friends and teaching others, HE

QUOTED SCRIPTURE! The Bible is alive and active. It was a big source of Jesus' strength on earth, and an essential part of ours. It's not necessary to memorize verses in order to live them out in our lives. The more we read it and pray on it, the more it strengthens us.

3. He loved others, well. Jesus' strength came from God's love for Him. So, too, does ours. We are SO LOVED, that God gave His only Son. SO LOVED, that Jesus died on the cross. Love strengthens us when we accept and receive it.

Ephesians 6:11-20 talks about putting on the full armor of God. This picture describes it best. This, is how we get strong.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: "You are always forgiven, and never loved less."

In a world where everyone screams loud about living their "truth," we are called to live His.

What does it mean to be authentic?

Authentic means to be real, or genuine. It's the opposite of fake. It's not always easy to be authentic. Most people don't try to be fake, they are just afraid to be real. When we're worried about what other people might think of us, or scared to be made fun of, we may try to hide certain things about ourselves. It's normal to want to fit in with our peers (people the same age as we are). We are made to live in communities and have friends. Wanting to fit in and share life and things in common with people is OK.

But when we hide who we are, two things start to happen.

1. We can only go so far before our dishonesty about our interests gets us in trouble. For example, pretending to love to play a sport we actually don't like at all.
2. Others don't get to see what makes us special. For example, if we pretend not to like a sport we are really good at, no one gets to see the special gifts and talents we've been given to share.

Following others can be dangerous. We can find ourselves in situations we never thought we would be in, and go against everything we know is right, in order to fit in. We are all capable of making this mistake, but it's never too late to flip the script on our lives and decide to be a leader. At the very least, be authentic.

The strength to be authentic comes from Christ. It's normal and healthy to feel stressed and anxious sometimes. It's how we learn to be responsible, aware, and cautious of things that really are scary! Growing up, everything changes, from our bodies to some of our friendships and sometimes our schools, homes and families. Our emotions can become overwhelming, and lead us to act out of character. AKA ...melt down ...TO THE GROUND. With every new change, comes a little stress while we adjust. It's OK. We can take care of ourselves by getting enough rest, especially during stressful times. It takes time.

Tween and teen life can make us sensitive to the reactions of those around us, especially adults. One of my distance running coach's took the time to draw me a picture of someone running, from the knees down. Inside the hand-made card, was a hand-written note encouraging me to keep my feet moving. "You have only just begun to discover your potential." It made me cry on the spot, and caused me to have faith in my ability. He was only my coach for one season, but the way he went out of his way to encourage me still resonates today, thirty years later.

Unfortunately, not all impressions about ourselves we receive from the people in our lives are positive. Hold on to the ones that are, and let the rest go. No-one is perfect. The best way to handle hurt feelings ...is to feel them ...fully, with someone we are close to and trust. Talking it out helps us have the right perspective before reacting. Sometimes, it's healthy to then ask the person who hurt us ...why?

If a situation is giving us anxiety, the worst thing we can do is avoid it. When we face it, it makes our brains stronger. It gives us the ability to learn how to be brave. Being brave is BEING AFRAID ...but doing it anyway. It's good talk to the people we trust, and then talk to the people that hurt us. We may find out they didn't mean to hurt us at all! Worst case scenario? They did, and they stand by their hurtful words. If that happens, forgive, and exercise healthy boundaries. Before absorbing their negative words, consider if there is something constructive in their criticism to grow from, but remember the frame ...REFRAME it and REMEMBER who you are.

With every difficult and stressful situation we deal with, we become stronger and more able to deal with them while remembering who we are without melting DOWN TO THE GROUND. Everything we go through has the potential to make us better versions of ourselves.

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Psalm 56:3 ESV

Good friends are genuine.

"We also celebrate in seasons of suffering because we know that when we suffer we develop endurance, which shapes our characters. When our characters are refined, we learn what it means to hope and anticipate God's goodness." Romans 5:3-4 VOICE

Talking about our fears and hurts helps us grow our faith. Asking questions, to our parents, friends, and most importantly to God, helps us to grow into wise and loving people. We learn the most from the hard stuff.

Guess what? As we grow and learn from our mistakes, we will have the opportunity to help others going through the same thing! Remember, we have been talking all about how God places people purposefully in our lives. Talk to them! Keep the conversation going with God and trusted people, and then enjoy the opportunity and important privilege to pay it forward in helping someone else.

THIS IS WHAT BEING A GENUINE PERSON AND FRIEND IS ALL ABOUT. Talking about it. ALL OF THE STUFF. Doing something about it. LEARNING TO BE BRAVE. And paying it forward. GENUINELY HELPING SOMEONE WHO IS GOING THROUGH WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH. Friendship is so much more than fun times and crazy sleepovers. It's love in action. It's our faith in action. Life is going to be stressful and hard sometimes, but knowing what to do about it is EVERYTHING.

We may not ever understand why we go through somethings in life. We may never know why people hurt us, or never collect all of the apologies we deserve, but God is bigger than all of it. He is good, and He makes good of all things. He's there for us when we are brokenhearted, and to celebrate with us we've been brave and victorious. We can trust Him.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord.'" Isaiah 55:8 NIV

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: "Keep the conversation going.

This week's challenge: Send 7.

Send 7 notes to 7 different people and include these 7somethings.

3. ***Hello!***
4. ***A Compliment***
5. ***A Challenge***
6. ***A Common Interest***
7. ***Have a Nice Day!***
8. ***Sign your name.***
9. ***Put a smile on it.***

Tween Break Out:

Write out the seven notes you are going to send to seven different people.

Paper folding challenge for folding notes and tips passing them without being caught.

Mom Discussion:

Pick 7 cards from the pile.

Write a name on each card.