

Lost in the Fun House

by Annette Gullick 10/1/2001

Lesson Two

Lesson Objective: That students feel the confusion, frustration and futility of trying to understand who they are based exclusively on the opinions of others.

Bible Passage: the life of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37- 49

Bible Truth: [Gn. 49: 22-24] Like Joseph, we are hurt by the “arrows” people shoot at us (their comments and opinions about us, both positive and negative), but God can hold us firm in the knowledge of our significance.

Memory Verse: Gn. 49: 22-24

Before you begin:

- ◆ two small mirrors
- ◆ Vaseline
- ◆ paper and pens for each group

Opening:

Before class find two small mirrors and smudge them with a small amount of Vaseline. Test out the mirrors to make sure that there is enough Vaseline to distort the reflection but that the reflection is clear enough that with a little effort the students will be able to distinguish how many fingers are being held up by someone close behind them.

A Word to the Leader

Divide the students into two equal teams and have them line up behind the first person on each team. Place the mirrors with the Vaseline on a chair at the other end of the classroom. Choose two people from each team to stand in front of the chairs with their backs to their team. Explain that each person will run up to the chair, pick

up the mirror, use it to look over his shoulder and tell the number of fingers the person behind him is holding up. When he has guessed correctly he runs back to his team to tag the next person. Instruct the person who will be holding up the fingers to hold his hand in front of himself so that the rest of the team members cannot see and shout out the answer to the person with the mirror. If someone does shout out the answer have the person holding up his or her fingers change the number. Congratulate the team who finishes first. Then ask,

- *How were the mirrors different from what you thought they would be?*
- *What could you see reflected in them?*
- *What was difficult to see in them?*

In this series of lessons we have seen that we can't really know ourselves without the perspective we get from finding out about ourselves from God and from other people. But unfortunately, just like these mirrors do not provide a clear reflection, the reflection that we see of ourselves in those around us is distorted, making it hard to figure out exactly what we look like.

Interactive Learning

Tell group members that they are a committee working for a large international magazine that at the end of each year has a cover article and gives an award to a “man or woman of the year”: a well known person who has been significant in the events of that year. Explain that it can be a politician, a celebrity, an athlete, an inventor, or anyone well known. After several candidates have been proposed, vote on a winner. Then ask:

- *What makes these people stand out?*
- *What criteria does the world use to judge the value of a person?*

Using their comments from the previous question explain that just like many parents use a yardstick or marks on the wall to measure the growth of their children, the world around us has “yardsticks” it uses to measure the worth of a person: good looks, money, intelligence, hard work, athletic ability, etc.

[You can be as creative as you have time, inclination, and resources for: You might decide to draw on a chalkboard or put up on the wall something representing “yardsticks” with the titles “good looks”, “money”, “intelligence”, “hard work”, “athletic ability.” Or you can just explain the ideas verbally.]

The world and people around us value and define us by what we can offer: if we are rich, our value and identity lie in our money; if we are beautiful, they lie in our looks; if intelligent or fast or strong, they lie in our abilities. All of us have a deep need to be seen as valuable, so most people spend their lives trying to reach one or more of these standards. And since these standards are impossible for most people to reach, as we look at ourselves in the mirror of the world we see ourselves reflected as being insignificant and maybe even flawed or inferior.

Bible Application

To help us understand the confusion and frustration of trying to figure out who we are based only on the point of view of those around us we will spend some time looking at the life of Joseph as recorded in the book of Genesis. Very few people experience the extreme joys and sorrows that Joseph did. When he was 17 years old he went from being a privileged and especially loved son in his father’s household to being a slave in a far away land. By the time he was thirty years old he had gone from mere slave, to running an important household, to jail, to running the whole country of Egypt. In order to get to know Joseph better we will produce a live in-depth investigative report where we interview people who knew him firsthand and were part of his life story.

If your group has ten or more students, ask someone to be the TV reporter and divide the remaining students in 5 groups. Give each group the names and corresponding verses and ask them to prepare answers for the questions for each of the people listed.

If your group has less than ten students, perform the role of reporter yourself and have the students work individually instead of in groups. The first person in each list is the most important so that, if necessary, you can eliminate the second person so the students don't have to represent two different people.

Assign the following characters:

- 1. Jacob/Israel--Gn. 37: 2-3;**
- 2. Leah--Gn. 29: 16-34, 30: 14-15**
- 3. Jacob's Brothers—Gn. 37: 2-9, 17- 20, 23-28;**
- 4. Reuben—Gn. 37: 2-9, 17-29**
- 5. Potiphar—Gn. 39: 1-6, 17-20;**
- 6. Potiphar's wife—Gn. 39: 6-18**
- 7. Jail Warden—Gn. 39: 20-23;**
- 8. King's Cupbearer—Gn. 40:1-15, 20-23**
- 9. Pharaoh—Gn. 41: 9-15, 28-45**

Write the following questions on a chalkboard or large piece of paper:

What is your name?

How do you know Joseph?

What do you think of him? Why?

Have you ever let him know what you think of him by your words or actions?

If yes, how?

Allow enough time for each group or person to read their passages and prepare the answers to the questions. Then have the "TV reporter" interview each character asking them the four questions. After each interview have the class comment on how Joseph would have seen himself based on the opinion of that person.

When all of the characters have been interviewed ask someone to read out loud Gn. 45: 1-15. Discuss how Joseph actually saw himself and his life. Focus on the fact that he was neither proud nor arrogant. Nor was he bitter towards his brothers or the others who had criticized him and treated him badly. Instead, he loved his brothers

and trusted that God had a purpose for his life. Highlight 45:8, “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” Read together Genesis 49: 22-24 and ask

- ***How was Joseph’s life fruitful?*** [God used him to save the lives of the people of Egypt, the surrounding countries and his own family.]
- ***Who were the archers who attacked him?*** [people who tried to harm him, like his brothers and Potiphar’s wife.]
- ***We have seen that not only did Joseph survive the attacks but also he proved himself as a wise leader and forgiving brother. How did he “remain steady”?*** [by trusting in God and receiving God’s help.]

Commitment

Give each student a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Have them write down three places or people who make them feel good about themselves and three people or places that make them feel bad about themselves. When you see that they have finished hold up one the Vaseline covered “mirrors” from the opening and explain:

Just as it is difficult to see ourselves in this mirror because it does not give us a clear reflection of who we are, the reflection of ourselves that we see in the “mirror” of other people is not perfectly clear. Sin in the lives of other people causes them to distort how they perceive us and what they reflect to us about ourselves.

For example, just like Joseph’s brothers hated him not because he was a bad guy but because they were jealous of his father’s love, a manipulative or abusive person will make another person feel worthless or insufficient with no basis in the actual worth of the object of their abuse. On the other hand, just like Joseph’s father didn’t help him be more sensitive to his brothers but instead made the situation worse by giving him a special coat for everyone to see, a proud parent or grandparent might overestimate the talents or virtues of their offspring, causing, for example, a selfish, spoiled child to think of themselves as quite giving and virtuous.

With great frequency what people reflect to us has much more to do with what they think about themselves or with something going on in their lives at the moment than with who we are. An alcoholic parent may cause their child think that if only they were more obedient or didn’t fight so much with their siblings the parent wouldn’t drink, but it is clear to everyone else that the parent’s drinking is not dependent on the child’s behavior at all.

Closing

ILLUSTRATION: It's extremely important that learn to reflect accurately on the criticisms that people throw our way. For example, one guy wanted with everything to be a cartoonist. But when he applied to work for a newspaper the editor told him, "It's easy to see from these sketches that you have no talent." Fortunately, he didn't believe that reflection. Since no studio would hire him, he went to work in an old garage, doing drawings for a church. The garage had mice, and he decided to sketch one of them, which he named Mickey. That's right, Walt Disney, a man who was told he had no talent, became probably the most successful cartoonist in history. Incredibly successful children's author Dr. Seuss was rejected by his first 23 publishers.

Ask if any of the students have ever been in a "hall of mirrors" or seen mirrors that are warped, either in person, in a movie or on TV. If they have ask them how it made them (or the person they saw looking into it) look. If they haven't, explain how it exaggerates parts of the person depending on the shape of the mirror, not the shape of the person. It might make someone look very tall and thin or very short and fat or have a huge head or nose.

- *In a warped mirror can you see anything true about yourself?* [yes, colors, like your hair, eyes, and clothing. What you have on, jeans, skirt, sweater, etc]
- *In a warped mirror what can you not trust about what you see?*
- *How can you know if you can trust what you see or not?* [the best way is to know what you look like in a good mirror.]

Have the students review what they have written down on the paper and then spend a few moments praying that God would help them be able to discern in these situations what is an accurate reflection of themselves. (For example, a teacher being upset with them because they are always talking in class.) Review what is not an accurate reflection of them (for example, someone who criticizes them because of their own low self esteem, or a parent who continually says, "You'll never amount to anything.").

Have them pray the following prayer with you: "Father, this week I pray that I can discern between the accurate and inaccurate reflections of myself in the mirrors of those around me."