



# REAL RELATIONSHIPS

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Middle school is full of changing friendships, big feelings, and new relationships. In this series, students will discover that God cares about every relationship in their lives and shows us how to treat others well. Following Jesus helps us build relationships that are healthy, respectful, and help us grow.

### WEEK 1 – Christ-Centered and Respectful

**TEXT:** Philippians 2:1-5

**BIG IDEA:** Healthy relationships are Christ-centered and respectful.

**SUMMARY:** Jesus shows us what real love looks like—putting others first, showing kindness, and choosing respect. This week, students will learn that whether it's a friendship, a crush, or dating, our relationships should reflect the way Jesus loves people. Being Christ-centered means we think about how our words, actions, and choices affect others and honor God.

**DATING HIGHLIGHT:** This same idea applies to dating. When you eventually meet someone you're interested in, the concept doesn't change. We're meant to treat that person the same way we would anyone else who's made in the image of God.

### WEEK 2 – Healthy Boundaries

**TEXT:** Proverbs 4:23

**BIG IDEA:** Healthy relationships have healthy boundaries

**SUMMARY:** God tells us to “guard our hearts” because our hearts matter to Him. This week, students will learn that boundaries aren't about rules or fear—they're about making wise choices that keep us safe emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Students will explore age-appropriate boundaries in friendships and dating and learn that healthy boundaries help relationships stay healthy.

**DEFINITION OF BOUNDARIES:** Boundaries are decisions we make ahead of time that help us honor God and protect people

**DATING HIGHLIGHT:** When people start dating, if they haven't established these boundaries early, we become reactive and usually it's too late. As middle schoolers, you have the opportunity to establish healthy boundaries now that will protect you from pain later.

### WEEK 3 – REALationships Help Us Grow

**TEXT:** Proverbs 27:17

**BIG IDEA:** Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus.

**SECONDARY POINT:** Your best friend isn't the one you're closest to. Your best friends are the ones who consistently point you to Jesus.

**SUMMARY:** The people we spend time with influence who we become. This week, students will learn that good friends—and healthy dating relationships—encourage us to grow, make wise choices, and follow Jesus more closely. Students will be challenged to think about whether their relationships help them grow in kindness, faith, and character.

**DATING HIGHLIGHT:** This same principle applies to dating. The person you date, and maybe even marry one day, is someone you are choosing to tether your life to. They can either be a weight that drags you down or a floaty that helps keep you afloat. Choosing who you date is an essential decision because your goal is to choose someone who enables you to become more like Christ.



#### PARENT EMAIL:

Hi Parents,

We wanted to take a moment to let you know about an upcoming teaching series in our Middle School Ministry called **REALationships**, starting **THIS SUNDAY**.

Middle school is a season full of changing friendships, big emotions, and growing social awareness. Because of that, we believe it's important to help students think biblically about relationships in a way that is **age-appropriate, respectful, and rooted in following Jesus**.

Over the next 3 weeks, we will engage with this series and discuss:

- How Jesus' way of living applies to *every* relationship (friends, family, classmates, and social circles)
- Why healthy relationships require healthy boundaries
- How the people we surround ourselves with shape who we're becoming

We also want you to be aware that **each week we will briefly address dating and crushes**. We know this is something many middle school students are already thinking about or encountering, and we don't want to ignore that reality. At the same time, we are being very intentional to approach this in a way that is **not premature for their age**.

When dating is mentioned, it will be limited to a few sentences and framed around:

- Character over behavior
- Wisdom over rules
- Respect, boundaries, and honoring God and others

This series is **not focused on encouraging dating**, nor does it include graphic or mature content. Our goal is to give students a healthy, biblical framework that will serve them now in friendships and later in life as relationships become more complex.

We approach this topic with **reverence, intentionality, and great care**, and we see this teaching as a way to *support* the conversations you're already having at home—not replace them. If you don't feel comfortable having your student participate, we invite them to attend service with you for the next 3 weeks.

If you have any questions or would like more details about what your student will be learning, we'd love to connect with you. Thank you for partnering with us as we help students grow in faith and wisdom.

Grateful for you,



#### MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships are Christ-centered and respectful

#### MAIN VERSE

Philippians 2:1-5

#### TEACHING GOAL

Students will understand that healthy relationships – especially friendships, crushes, and dating – should reflect the way Jesus treats people, and they will be challenged to practice respect, humility, and kindness in how they interact with others.

#### HOOK (2 Minutes): Compartmentalizing Jesus

- We often give Jesus authority in some areas of life, but not all
- Jesus gets a say at church, with family, or in certain friendships
- But we excuse behavior in other relationships by saying, “This is different”
- Big question: Does Jesus have authority everywhere, or only where it’s comfortable?

#### SCRIPTURE (2 Minutes): One Way of Living

- Philippians 2:1–5 reviewed from previous week
- Paul gives one standard for how followers of Jesus treat others
- No categories, exceptions, or relationship-specific versions of love
- Jesus models one way of living that applies everywhere

#### TENSION (4–5 Minutes): Where We Make Exceptions

- We don’t usually reject Jesus’ teaching—we limit it
- We excuse impatience, disrespect, or selfishness in certain relationships
- Feelings (especially crushes or dating) often become justification
- Truth: Dating doesn’t change the standard—it reveals our character
- Main Point restated: Jesus’ way applies to every relationship

#### APPLICATION (4 Minutes): Putting Jesus at the Center

- Putting Jesus at the center starts with letting Him shape *us*, not others
- Jesus gets a voice before we react, speak, text, or post
- Pause and ask:
  - “Does this reflect Jesus?”

- \\
  - “Is this loving and respectful?”
  - “Am I choosing my way or His?”
- Following Jesus is about direction, not perfection
- Motives matter as much as actions
- We treat people based on who Jesus is, not how they make us feel

#### **LAND THE POINT (1 Minute)**

- Jesus doesn't give different standards for different relationships
- One Savior. One way. Every relationship.
- The way Jesus calls us to live applies to everyone—always.



## MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships are Christ-centered and respectful.

## MAIN BIBLE VERSE

Philippians 2:1-5

Middle school is full of changing friendships, big feelings, and new relationships. In this series, students will discover that God cares about every relationship in their lives and shows us how to treat others well. Following Jesus helps us build relationships that are healthy, respectful, and help us grow.

## Teaching Script / Guide

### HOOK (2 minutes):

- Let me start off with a question. You don't have to raise your hands, but I want you to think about this:
  - Are there any parts of your life where Jesus has a say...
  - And are there parts where it feels like He doesn't?
- For example:
  - Jesus gets a say in how I act at church
  - Jesus gets a say in how I treat my family
  - Jesus gets a say in how I behave around certain friends
- But there are other times when it feels different:
  - "Well... these friends are different."
  - "This is just how middle school is, so... Jesus understands why I behave this way."
  - "Those rules don't really apply here"

### SCRIPTURE (2 MINUTES):

- If you were with us last week, we finished our series on discipleship called "Follow Me," and we looked at Philippians 2:1-5. This week, we are going to look at that same passage, but we're going to change gears a little bit.
  - Today we are starting a new series called Realationships and it's all about how we treat other people.
    - Whether it's family
    - Or friends
    - Or maybe someone you like, have a crush on, or may be dating.
- Let's read the passage together and then I'll tell you why we're revisiting it again.
  - READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5 NIV

### TENSION (5 MINUTES):

- Here's what's important
  - Paul never says, "Do this in some relationships."
    - He doesn't say
      - Only be humble with your friends or the people you like
      - Only be kind when it's easy
      - Put others first unless you REALLY want something bad enough
    - Paul's message is clear: This standard applies to all relationships!
      - Jesus doesn't model different versions of love. He models one way of living. And that way applies everywhere.

- Main Point: The healthiest relationships are Christ-centered and respectful.
  - Here's the question I want to ask you: What would it look like if Jesus were at the center of every relationship in your life?
- Here's where this gets real:
  - When it comes to how to love others, most of us don't reject Jesus' teaching, we limit it.
  - We say things like:
    - "I'll be patient... unless I'm annoyed."
    - "I'll be kind... unless they hurt me."
    - "This is different because we love each other."
  - But the truth is that Jesus' way, what we read about in Philippians 2, applies to all of these relationships.
- NOTE ON DATING:
  - Each week, we're talking about every relationship you have, but I realize that some of you are at a stage where you're either interested in or you are dating someone. So let me say this...
    - Just because you have a crush on someone or just because you like them and they like you, our feelings don't get to cancel out Jesus' way of life.
      - These special relationships are another arena for us to live out what God teaches us.
      - So if God's way says that we should treat one another with humility, respect, and place their needs above our own in a godly way, then that applies to anyone you might be attracted to as well.
      - God's way is better and only leads to healthier relationships.

#### APPLICATION (4-5 minutes):

- So we've learned how we *should* treat one another, but what do we do? How do we put Jesus as the center of the relationships that matter most in our lives?
  - The first thing to remember is that putting Jesus at the center doesn't start with changing other people. It starts with allowing Jesus to change us and become our number 1 priority.
- Think about it this way:
  - When Jesus is at the center of a relationship, it means He gets a voice before you react.
    - So before you clap back at your parents, or join in on the inappropriate group chat, or post the mean comment, or say something you'll probably regret later...
      - Pause and ask...
    - "Does this reflect the way Jesus treats people?"
    - "Is this a loving way to respond?"
    - "Am I pursuing my own way or Jesus' way?"
      - To take that moment and pause and pray is what it means to follow Jesus in real life and in real time. Not only in our everyday lives, but specifically in the relationships that matter most.
- Putting Jesus at the center of our relationships isn't about perfection. It's about direction.
  - Am I learning to handle relationships in a Christlike way?
- But it's important to remember, letting Jesus shape who you're becoming isn't just about your actions... it's about your motives.
  - It's not just:
    - Am I being nice?
    - But
    - Why am I doing this?
  - We begin to ask...
    - Am I being kind because I want something back?
    - Am I being respectful unless my feelings get hurt?
    - Am I treating people differently based on how much I like them or what they can do for me?
- When Jesus is at the center, we don't treat people based on how they make us feel.
  - We treat people based on who Jesus is.

#### LAND THE POINT (1 minute):

- Jesus doesn't give us different standards for different relationships.
  - One Savior.
  - One way.
  - Every relationship.

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- The way Jesus calls us to live applies to everyone — always.
  - *“The rules of love are simple: Everybody, always.” – Bob Goff*

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### TODAY'S MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships are Christ-centered and respectful

### TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE(S)

Philippians 2:1-5

### TEACHING GOAL

Students will understand that healthy relationships – especially friendships, crushes, and dating – should reflect the way Jesus treats people, and they will be challenged to practice respect, humility, and kindness in how they interact with others.

#### Let's Break the Ice:

- What's a habit or hobby you've picked up from a friend without realizing it? (A phrase, hobby, habit, etc.)
- Why do you think we imitate the people we spend the most time with?

#### Transition:

Just like we pick things up from friends, the Bible tells us that following Jesus shapes how we treat people, too.

#### Bible Study:

- Read Together: As a group, read Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV)
  - *Telos Bible Page Numbers: pg. 1161*

#### Discussion Questions:

- What words or ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- How does Paul describe the way Jesus treats people?
- Why do you think humility and respect matter so much in relationships?
- What would change if people treated each other this way at school?

#### Make it Real:

Leader Note: Help students focus on **character and everyday interactions**, not behavior management or dating pressure.

- Are there relationships where it's harder to live like Jesus? Why?
- What does it look like to show respect to someone even when you're annoyed with them?
- How can remembering Jesus' example help you before you react or speak?

(GROW DEEPER - OPTIONAL) Discipleship Moment:

Christ-Centered Relationships Challenge:

Ask students to choose one relationship this week (friend, sibling, teammate) and intentionally practice one of the following:

- Speak kindly instead of reacting
- Show patience when it's hard
- Put someone else first in a small way

Encourage them to come back next week ready to share what they noticed.

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### Prayer

- **Share Requests:**

Invite students to share prayer requests or praises.

- **Group Prayer:**

Pray together that God would help each student follow Jesus not just in what they believe, but in how they treat others this week.



#### MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships have healthy boundaries.

#### MAIN VERSE

Proverbs 4:23

#### TEACHING GOAL

Students will understand that boundaries are wise decisions made ahead of time to honor God and protect people emotionally, spiritually, and physically—and that boundaries help relationships stay healthy rather than ruining them.

#### HOOK (2 Minutes): WHY DO WE HAVE BOUNDARIES?

- Boundaries exist everywhere (guardrails, fences, rules)
- Boundaries are not meant to ruin things, but to protect what matters
- Big idea: Boundaries don't limit freedom—they provide safety

#### SCRIPTURE (2 Minutes): GUARD YOUR HEART

- Read Proverbs 4:23
- The heart represents thoughts, desires, and decisions
- What we allow into our hearts shapes everything else
- Boundaries help us guard what matters most

#### TENSION (4–5 Minutes): WHY DON'T WE ALWAYS LIKE BOUNDARIES

- We avoid boundaries to prevent awkwardness, rejection, or discomfort
- We often react in the moment instead of deciding ahead of time
- Feelings make boundaries harder, especially with crushes or dating
- Truth: Boundaries aren't unloving—they're wise

#### NOTE ON DATING/CRUSHES

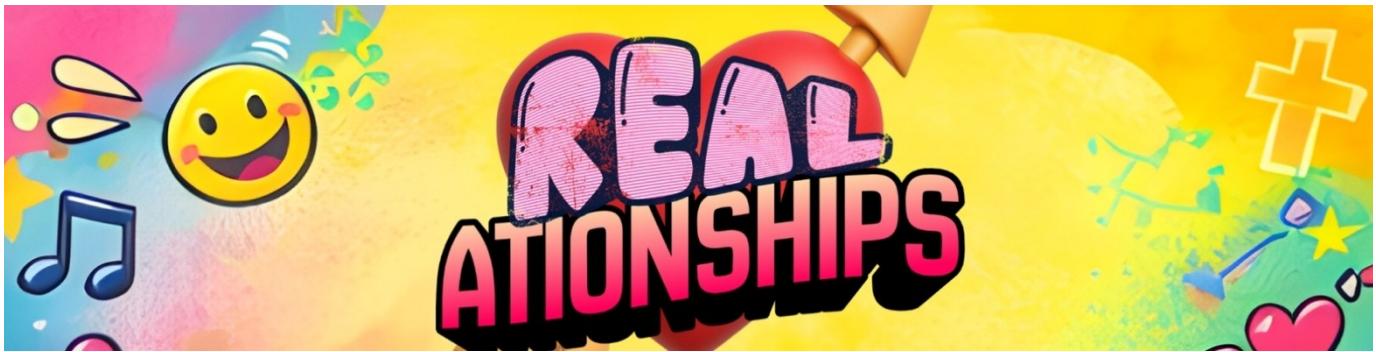
- Emotions can make decision-making difficult
- Boundaries need to be established before feelings take over
- Healthy boundaries protect both people in the relationship
- God's way leads to healthier relationships

**APPLICATION (4 Minutes): WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES REALLY?**

- Definition: Boundaries are decisions made ahead of time that honor God and protect people
- Boundaries apply to conversations, actions, and situations
- Boundaries help us live out Jesus' way consistently
- Boundaries are about wisdom, not fear

**LAND THE POINT (1 Minute)**

- God cares deeply about our hearts
- Healthy relationships don't happen by accident
- **Healthy relationships require healthy boundaries**



#### MAIN POINT

**Healthy relationships have healthy boundaries.**

#### MAIN BIBLE VERSE

Proverbs 4:23

Students will understand that boundaries are wise decisions made ahead of time to honor God and protect people emotionally, spiritually, and physically—and that boundaries help relationships stay healthy rather than ruining them.

#### Teaching Script / Guide

##### HOOK (2 minutes): WHY DO WE HAVE BOUNDARIES?

- Let me ask you a question:
  - Why do we have boundaries in life?
- Think about it:
  - Guardrails on a road
  - Fences around a yard
  - Rules in a game
- None of those exist to ruin things. They exist to keep things from going wrong.
  - No one looks at a guardrail and says, “Wow! This road would be way more fun without that.”
- Boundaries aren’t about limiting freedom. They’re about protecting what matters most.

##### SCRIPTURE (2 MINUTES): GUARD YOUR HEART

- READ PROVERBS 4:23
  - This verse warns us to protect our hearts.
  - In the Bible, your heart doesn’t just mean your emotions.
  - It’s
    - Your thoughts
    - Your desires
    - Your decisions
- God is basically saying: “Pay close attention to what you let shape your thoughts, desires, and decisions, because it will shape everything else.”
- Boundaries are one of the ways God helps us guard our hearts.

##### TENSION (5 MINUTES): WHY WE DON’T ALWAYS LIKE BOUNDARIES

- But what does this have to do with relationships?
  - The truth is, especially in middle school, boundaries can feel like they limit our fun.
  - If we’re honest, sometimes we don’t want boundaries in our relationships because we don’t want to...
    - Feel left out
    - Hurt someone’s feelings
    - Look weird
    - Say no
  - So instead of making decisions in advance, we just react in the moment.
    - And when feelings get involved, boundaries can feel awkward or unnecessary.

- **NOTE ON DATING:**
  - Each week, we're talking about every relationship you have, but I realize that some of you are at a stage where you're either interested in or you are dating someone. So let me say this about dating and crushes...
  - Here's what matters:
    - If boundaries aren't decided before emotions take over, we usually make choices we never planned to make in the first place.
    - This is an area that can lead to so much pain and heartbreak.
  - When it comes to boundaries, in dating specifically, we have to view them as a good thing and not a bad thing.
    - Boundaries are a way of saying, "I care too much about you and my relationship with God to be careless."
  - Healthy boundaries make healthy relationships possible.

#### APPLICATION (4-5 minutes): WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES REALLY?

- Here's a simple definition to remember:
  - Boundaries are decisions we make ahead of time that help us honor God and protect people... including ourselves.
- Putting boundaries in place looks like:
  - Deciding how you talk to people
  - Deciding what conversations you'll participate in
  - Deciding what situations you'll avoid
  - Deciding when to say no – even when it's uncomfortable.
- Boundaries help us live out what we talked about last week: letting Jesus shape EVERY relationship.
  - Boundaries don't make you mean.
  - Boundaries don't make you boring.
  - They help us make wise choices that make Jesus proud.

#### LAND THE POINT (1 minute):

- God cares about your heart.
- And because He cares about your heart, He invites you to guard it.
- Healthy relationships don't happen by accident. They happen when we choose healthy boundaries.



### TODAY'S MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships have healthy boundaries.

### TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE(S)

Proverbs 4:23 NIV

### TEACHING GOAL

Last week, students learned that the way Jesus calls us to live applies to **every relationship**. This week builds on that foundation by helping students understand why **boundaries matter**. God invites us to guard our hearts—not to limit our lives, but to protect what matters most and help our relationships stay healthy.

#### Let's Break the Ice:

- What's a rule or boundary you have that actually helps you? (At home, in sports, at school, etc.)
- Why do you think boundaries exist in the first place?

#### Transition:

Just like rules in games or guardrails on a road help things work better, God gives us wisdom to help protect our hearts and relationships.

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#### Bible Study:

- Read Together: As a group, read Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)
  - Telos Bible Page Numbers: pg. 612

#### Discussion Questions:

- What does the Bible mean by “heart” in this verse?
- Why do you think God tells us to guard our hearts “above all else?”
- How can what we let into our hearts affect our choices and relationships?

#### Make it Real:

**Leader Note:** Keep this focused on **everyday relationships** (friends, group chats, school, sports). Dating can be mentioned generally, but do not push students ahead of their stage.

- Why do you think boundaries can feel awkward or uncomfortable sometimes?
- What happens when people don't decide boundaries ahead of time?
- How can boundaries actually help relationships stay healthy instead of ruining them?

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**(GROW DEEPER - OPTIONAL) Discipleship Moment:**

**Healthy Boundaries Challenge:**

Invite students to think about one area this week where they could practice a healthy boundary, such as:

- choosing what kind of conversations they join in
- knowing when to say no
- taking a break from something that isn't helping them grow

Encourage them to ask God for wisdom before reacting in the moment.

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**Prayer**

**Share Requests:**

Ask students if there are any prayer requests or praises they'd like to share.

**Group Prayer:**

Pray that God would help each student guard their heart, make wise choices, and trust Him to lead their relationships this week.



#### MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus.

#### MAIN VERSE

Proverbs 27:17, Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 15:33

#### TEACHING GOAL

Students will understand that the people they spend time with influence who they are becoming, and they will be challenged to choose relationships—including friendships and dating relationships—that help them grow in wisdom, faith, and Christlikeness.

#### HOOK (2 Minutes): WHO'S SHAPING YOU?

- Relationships don't just reflect who we are
- Relationships shape who we're becoming
- Everyone is being influenced—whether they realize it or not

#### SCRIPTURE (2 Minutes): THE BIBLE ON INFLUENCE

- **Proverbs 27:17** – Relationships sharpen and shape us
- **Proverbs 13:20** – Walking with the wise leads to wisdom
- **1 Corinthians 15:33** – Bad company corrupts good character
- Key idea: Relationships are never neutral

#### TENSION (4–5 Minutes): COMFORTABLE VS. HEALTHY AND HELPFUL RELATIONSHIPS

- We often choose friends based on comfort and inclusion
- Comfort doesn't always lead to growth
- Some relationships help us follow Jesus
- Others slowly pull us away
- Best friends point us toward Jesus, not just fun

#### NOTE ON DATING/CRUSHES

- **Dating increases influence and formation**
- **The person you date shapes your faith and choices**
- **Dating is about direction, not just feelings**

## **APPLICATION (4 Minutes): CHOOSING RELATIONSHIPS THAT HELP YOU GROW**

- Ask better questions about relationships:
  - Do they help me grow?
  - Do they encourage wisdom or excuse bad choices?
  - Be intentional, not reactive
- Healthy relationships sharpen faith and character

## **LAND THE POINT (1 Minute)**

- Every relationship is shaping you somehow
- Scripture is clear about the power of influence
- **Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus**

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#### MAIN POINT

**Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus.**

#### MAIN BIBLE VERSE

Proverbs 27:17; Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33

Students will understand that the people they choose to spend time with shape who they are becoming, and they will be challenged to pursue relationships that encourage growth, wisdom, and faith.

#### Teaching Script / Guide

##### HOOK (2 minutes): WHO'S SHAPING YOU

- If someone watched your life for a month—
  - who you hang out with,
  - who you text,
  - who you listen to...
    - ...what would they say you're becoming?
- Because here's something we don't always realize:
  - Relationships don't just reflect who we are. They shape who we're becoming.
- Whether we notice it or not, the people closest to us are influencing the direction of our lives.

##### SCRIPTURE (3-5 MINUTES): THE BIBLE IS CLEAR ABOUT INFLUENCE

- Consider calling up students to read each of these verses:
- **READ PROVERBS 27:17**
  - This verse means that relationships will naturally shape us.
  - They aren't neutral.
  - They either sharpen us or dull us.
- **READ PROVERBS 13:20**
  - Notice what it doesn't say:
    - It doesn't say "you might become wise."
    - It says "you will"
- **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:33**
  - All three verses point to the same truth: Who you walk with shapes who you become.

##### TENSION (5 MINUTES): COMFORTABLE VS. HEALTHY AND HELPFUL RELATIONSHIPS

- Most of us choose our friends based on:
  - Who makes us laugh
  - Who makes us feel included
  - Who's easy to be around
    - And none of that is bad
    - But comfort isn't the same thing as growth.
- Some relationships – the best ones...
  - Encourage you to follow Jesus
  - Encourage good decisions
  - Challenge you even when you drift

- **Others**
  - Normalize bad choices
  - Pull you away from Jesus
  - Make following Jesus harder
- **Here's a line worth remembering:**
  - Your best friends aren't the ones you're closest to. Your best friends are the ones who consistently point you to Jesus.
- **And here is a word to the wise from a pastor named Jonathan Pokluda:**
  - *"If you want to see real change in your life, change your playmates and your playground. Where you go and who you go with is half the battle in life. If you want to change your life, change where you go and who you go with. That's going to be half the battle."*
- **NOTE ON DATING:**
  - Each week, we're talking about every relationship you have, but I realize that some of you are at a stage where you're either interested in or you are dating someone. So let me say this about dating and crushes...
  - Here's what matters:
    - The person you choose to be with one day is the person you choose to
      - Listen to
      - Trust
      - Be influenced by
    - That's why dating isn't just about feelings. It's about formation.
    - The person you date will either:
      - Help sharpen your faith
      - Or slowly shape you away from Jesus.
    - That's why choosing healthy relationships wisely is so important.

#### APPLICATION (4-5 minutes): CHOOSING RELATIONSHIPS THAT HELP YOU GROW

- So what do we do with this?
- Start by asking important, honest questions:
  - Are my relationships help me grow or holding me back?
  - Do the people closest to me encourage wisdom or excuse bad choices?
  - Am I becoming more like Jesus because of these relationships?
  - Is there a place for me to influence others towards Jesus?
- Healthy relationships:
  - Sharpen your faith
  - Tell the truth in love
  - Help you grow, even when it's uncomfortable.
- Remember:
  - Every relationship is shaping you somehow

#### LAND THE POINT (1 minute):

- Proverbs tells us to walk with the wise
- Paul warns us that bad company corrupts good character
- God reminds us that growth happens in community.
- Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus.
  - Choose relationships that help you grow.



#### TODAY'S MAIN POINT

Healthy relationships help us become more like Jesus.

#### TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE(S)

Proverbs 27:17; Proverbs 13:20

#### TEACHING GOAL

Over the last two weeks, students learned that Jesus' way applies to every relationship and that healthy relationships require healthy boundaries. This week brings it all together by helping students see that the people they spend the most time with influence who they are becoming. God designed relationships to help us grow in wisdom, character, and faith—not pull us away from Him.

#### Let's Break the Ice:

- What's one quality you appreciate most in a friend?

#### Transition:

The Bible says the people we spend time with don't just affect what we do—they affect who we become.

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#### Bible Study:

- Read Together: As a group, read Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)
  - Telos Bible Page Numbers: pg. 635

#### Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean for iron to "sharpen" iron?
- Does sharpening sound easy or hard? Why?
- Why do you think God uses friendships as a way to help us grow?

#### Leader Add-On (Optional):

Briefly reference **Proverbs 13:20** and summarize:

Walking with wise people helps us grow wise.

#### Make it Real:

- What are some ways friends can help us grow in good ways?
- What are some ways friends can make it harder to make wise choices?
- How can you be a friend who helps others grow?

#### Optional prompt:

Do friends act more like **mirrors** (reflecting who you already are) or **windows** (showing you who you could become)?

- Why do you think choosing who you spend time with becomes even more important as you get older?

**LEADER NOTE:** If students bring up dating naturally, affirm it and say something like: “Yeah—that’s something we’ll talk more about when you’re older or that you should bring up with your parents, but the same wisdom starts now.”

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### **(GROW DEEPER - OPTIONAL) Discipleship Moment:**

#### **Wise Direction Challenge:**

Invite students to silently think about:

- One person who helps them make good choices
- One way they can be a better influence this week

Challenge them to practice intentional friendship by:

- encouraging someone
- making a wise choice even if friends don’t
- choosing kindness when it’s not popular

Encourage them to pray:

“Jesus, help me walk with people who help me grow—and help me be that kind of friend too.”

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#### **Prayer**

#### **Share Requests:**

Invite students to share prayer requests or praises.

#### **Group Prayer:**

Pray that God would give students wisdom in their friendships and help them choose relationships that lead them closer to Him.