

WEEK 1

Activity: *In the Center!*
Truth: God wants to be in the center of our lives.
Scripture: Matthew 6:33– “Seek first the kingdom of God . . .”

Activity

For this activity, you will need a basketball and a hula hoop for each participant. Place the hula hoops on the floor and have the participants stand approximately 10 feet away. Instruct them to roll the ball and make it stop inside the hula hoop. Have assistants ready to retrieve and return basketballs. Play for 60 seconds.

Comments

The object of this game was to roll the basketball into the center of the hula hoop. As you think about what you just saw, I want to ask you a question: *What is in the center of your life?*

All of us get to choose what we are going to center our lives around– what is going to be most important to us . . . and there are many choices: money, possessions, a job or a career, family, pleasure, health . . . and of course, God.

We were made by God, and we were made not to just believe in God in a general sort of way, but to love Him supremely, and to center our lives around Him. When we fail to do so, life becomes difficult and we become unhappy.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said as much when He told us to seek first the kingdom of God and to strive for His righteousness. Jesus said that if we would do that– if we would put God first, everything else in life would find its proper place and we would be blessed, or happy.

This morning, I want to challenge you to do that. I want to challenge you to put God in the center of your life and build your life around Him. I want to challenge you to let God be more important to you than anyone or anything else.

Back to our game. Getting the ball into the center of the hoop wasn't really that hard. Getting it to stay there was much more difficult. In the same way, keeping God first in your life can be difficult, especially with so many distractions around us. Let's pray, and ask God for help.

(Prayer)

Thank you for loving us. Help us love you, too, and help us love you more than we love our job or our family or our possessions or anything else in life. Help us put you in the center of our lives, and help us keep you there in the midst of the distractions and

demands of each day. This is our prayer, and we pray it in the name of Jesus, amen.

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WEEK 2

Activity: *Gorilla! Man! Gun!*
Big Truth: There can only be one number one.
Scripture: Matthew 6:33– “Seek first the kingdom of God . . .”

Activity

Gorilla/Man/Gun is a version of Rock/Paper/Scissors. Here is the pecking order: *Gorilla gets the man; the man gets the gun; the gun gets the gorilla; you tie, you die.* Here are the poses for the game:

Gorilla– hold arms and hands up like a monster about to grab someone
Man– place hand on chin as if deep in thought
Gun– make guns with both hands

Invite folks to join you on the floor for a simple and fun game. The more, the merrier! Explain that Gorilla/Man/Gun is played like Rock/Paper/Scissors. Demonstrate the three poses. Review what beats what.

To play . . . Have each pair of players stand back to back. Chant the order: “*Gorilla gets the man; the man gets the gun; the gun gets the gorilla; you tie, you die.*” Then count to three: “*One, two, three!*” On three, the players assume one of the poses and turn around to face each other. One player will be eliminated– both if they choose the same pose. The players who are out return to their seats. Everyone else finds a new partner and you play again. Continue until only one player is left– your winner!

Comments

On Monday night, college football is going to crown a national champion. When the game is over, the team that wins will be number one. Others may lay claim to that title. They may wave foam fingers and shout, but it won’t make any difference because in the end, there can only be one number one. That was true in the game we just played. It is also true in life. Only one person or thing can claim the top spot.

Here’s the Big Truth: Whatever has first place in your life is your god . . . *whether you think of it that way or not.* The possibilities are almost endless– money, a job, health, family, sports . . . We get to choose what is going to most important.

In Matthew, Jesus encourages us to put God first– to seek God and His kingdom, His ways. (Read Matthew 6:33.) Jesus said that if we will do this, if we will put God first and make Him number one, a lot of other things in life will take care of themselves, and we will be happy.

That’s the big truth. Here’s the big challenge. Give God first place. Make Him number 1.

Prayer

God, help us understand that whatever has first place in our life is our god, whether we think of it that way or not. Remind us that first place should be reserved for You, and help us choose accordingly. Help us make You our number one. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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WEEK 3

Activity: *Computer Line Up*
Truth: God wants to have first place in your life
Scripture: Exodus 20:3

Activity

Call a dozen or more spectators out of the crowd. Explain that when you say “go,” you want them to line up in order, smallest to tallest as fast as they can. That should go pretty quickly. Play again, asking them to get in order by birthday (month and day). Check results, thank them and send them back to their seats.

Comments

This game we just played is all about getting things in proper order. In life, we call that establishing priorities . . . and it’s something we all have to do. We all have to decide who or what is going to be important to us, and how important it is going to be.

The very first of the Ten Commandments says, “Do not have any other gods before me.” In other words, God say, “Don’t put anything or anyone ahead of me as you order your life.” We sometimes struggle with that.

A wise man named Augustine once said, “Our loves are not rightly ordered.” That was a nice way of saying that we tend to make the wrong things too important. In the process, we often forget about God, or put something or someone else in His place. When we do that, life becomes difficult and we become unhappy.

This morning as you think about what you have just seen, I want to challenge you to also think about your relationship with God. Is God in the right place in your life? Is He in first place, or have you moved Him down the line or even out of your life completely?

(Prayer)

God, you made us; you made everything; there is none like you. Help us remember the first commandment. Help us be wise enough to give you first place in our lives and not let anything or anyone else be more important to us than our relationship with you. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

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WEEK 4

Activity: *The Selfie!*
Big Truth: God wants us to put others first!
Scripture: Philippians 2:4-5a

Activity

Use a smart phone to take a selfie! Encourage the fans in the stands to move so that as many of them as possible will be in the picture. Remind the folks not to do anything stupid! Have fun with this! After you take the first picture check it and then say, "Wait a minute. Let's take another. Somebody had their eyes closed!" Promise to post the picture on your league website or facebook page. Tweet it immediately if you can.

Comments

The selfie has become a phenomenon of our social media-crazy world. Go on Twitter or Facebook and search "selfie." You will be astounded at the number of hits! We are all to blame. Admit it– most of us have taken a "selfie" at some point!

The proliferation of the "selfie" may tell us something about ourselves. What other word do you see when you look at the word "selfie?" That's right– "self!" In many ways, we have become a self-absorbed, self-centered world– a world in which everyone looks out for themselves and their own interests first.

It seems that to some extent we are all wired this way. Think about it . . . when someone posts or shows you a picture that you are in, where do you look first? That's right . . . you look for yourself! It's only natural!

Jesus showed us a different way. Jesus said, "I have not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life away." In the garden he prayed, "Not my will but yours be done." Jesus consistently set aside self-interests for the good of others– even to the point that it cost him his life . . . and he challenges us to do the same.

Philippians 2:4-5a says, "*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus . . .*"

Prayer

God, in a world that encourages us to focus on ourselves, help us live differently. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

WEEK 5

Activity: *The Clothespin Game!*

Big Truth: Life is more than stuff!

Scripture: Luke 12:15

Activity

You will need a bag of clothespins. Invite about 20 adults to play and give each a clothespin. The object of the game is to clip your clothespin on someone else while keeping others from clipping their clothespins on you!

Players can move away from someone attempting to clip a clothespin on them but they cannot block the attempt with their hand. Players should take any clothespins that get clipped onto them and try to clip them onto someone else but they can only handle one clothespin at a time. Play for one minute.

Comments

In our game, the player who ends up with the most clothespins is the loser . . . and yet the world in which we live would probably declare them the winner. Have you ever heard the saying, "He who dies with the most toys wins?" That statement reflects the belief that life is about possessions and stuff. The more you have, the better it is and the more successful you are.

Not according to the Bible.

In the book of Luke there is a story about a man who had lots of toys— lots of stuff. He had so much stuff that he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to hold it all. He was raking it in. He was feeling pretty good about himself. As the saying goes, "He had the world by the tail." And then he found out that he was going to die before the day was over.

Jesus is the one who told the story. He summed it up by saying, "Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Translation: Life is more than stuff!

The truth is that someday, you are going to die and somebody else is going to get your stuff! When that day comes, all the stuff in the world won't do you any good. That is why Jesus said, "Don't get caught up in the chase for material possessions and in the accumulation of stuff. Instead, be rich toward God." Give God first place in your life. Put your trust in Him. Remember . . . life is more than stuff!

Prayer

God, remind us that all we have comes from you. Help us not to let our possessions and our stuff become so important that they cause us to forget about You. Help us

learn what it means to be rich toward God. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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WEEK 6

Activity: *Rainstorm!*
Big Truth: Things Go Better with God
Scripture: Matthew 7:24-25

Activity

Divide the crowd into four groups. Explain that when you point to a group, they are to start doing what you are doing and they are to keep doing it until you point to them again and change their motion. Ask everyone to be as quiet as possible. Explain that this will enhance the effect of what is about to happen.

Point to the first group and begin rubbing your hands together. Once they have started doing the same, move to the second group and get them to start rubbing their hands together. Continue around the gym, adding groups three and four until everyone is rubbing their hands together.

When you get back to group one, motion for them to begin snapping their fingers. Once they start, move around the gym, bringing in the other groups one at a time until everyone is snapping their fingers. At this point, it should sound like a gentle rain is falling!

Go back to group one and motion for them to begin patting their knees. Bring in the other three groups. When you get back to group one, have them begin stamping their feet. Add the other groups, one at a time. It should now sound like a full blown storm!

Go back to group one and begin reversing the motions, having them go back to patting their knees. Change the other groups. Then change each group to finger snapping and finally back to rubbing their hands together. Finish by having each group stop, one at a time.

Comments

We just made a pretend rain storm and it was pretty fun. However, real storms are not fun. They can be dangerous. They can do plenty of damage. They can cause plenty of problems. That may be why we often describe difficult times in life as the “storms of life”— losing a job, sickness, death, family problems, financial stress, tragedies— the many hard things that happen every day, and that perhaps have happened to some of you.

How does faith make a difference when the storms of life strike?

After Hurricane Andrew struck the Florida coast in 1992, a news crew was filming the devastation. In one case, an entire block was wiped out except for one house that was left standing. As the homeowner picked up debris in the yard, a reporter asked “Why is

yours the only home in the neighborhood left standing?” The man responded, “I built this house myself, and I was careful to build it according to the Florida State Building Codes. I was told that a house built according to that code would stand up to a hurricane . . . and it did. Maybe some of the other builders didn’t follow the code.”

This man built his house by the book. He followed every rule and every regulation. The storms still came, but when it was all over, his house was still standing. He did what he was supposed to, and in the end, things went better for him.

That brings us to today’s Big Truth: Life goes better– *all parts of it*– the good things; the bad things; the happy things; the sad things; the ups and downs; whatever life sends our way– in the end, it all goes better when we put our trust in God and choose to live by His rules.

Jesus put it this way: (read Matthew 7:24-25).

Jesus doesn’t promise that if we love God and put our trust in Him we will never have any problems, troubles or trials. He doesn’t promise that nothing bad or sad will ever happen to us. He doesn’t promise that there will be no storms. He does promise that if we will put our trust in God, He will walk with us, and He promises that when the storms have passed, we will still be standing.

Prayer

God, we know that storms sometimes come, even when we are doing our best to love and follow You. Thank you for the promise of your presence when the days are dark and difficult. Help us learn to walk with you no matter what happens to us or around us. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

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WEEK 7

Activity: *Text the Answer*
Big Truth: God wants us to communicate with Him.
Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:7

Activity

Print your cell number on several large posters. Enlist helpers to display the posters so everyone can see the number.

Explain. "I am going to ask several questions. The object of the game is to be the first person to text me the correct answer!"

Possible questions:

1. Name one of the teams playing in today's game.
2. Name one of the coaches.
3. Text me your name AND a selfie!
4. How much are (name an item at your concession stand)?
5. When is Awards Night?.

Play the game and award each winner a simple prize— concession item, etc.

Comments

Now you have my number and I have yours. If we ever need or want to communicate again we will be all set! With that thought in mind, let me ask you several more questions:

1. If God used a cell phone would you have the number?
2. If so, would it be buried in the with the other G's only to be used in case of an emergency, or would God's number be in your Favorites list?
3. Would your call and message log show any recent calls?
4. Has God been trying to reach you? Are there any voice mails you to listen to or calls you need to return?

Prayer

God, help us take time to talk with you. Help us be careful to listen to you. Thank you for hearing this prayer, which we pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

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WEEK 8

Activity: Yes! No!
Big Truth: What we believe about Jesus matters!
Scripture: John 11:25-26

Activity

You will need two large posters, one with the word “YES” printed on it and one with the word “NO.” Give these to two volunteers and have them stand at opposite ends of your court– maybe under the baskets. Invite *everyone* to join you in the center of the floor. The more, the better!

The game is simple. You read a question. If their answer is “Yes” they go stand under the “Yes” sign. If “No,” they stand under the “No” sign. Make up your own questions or use these:

Do you like spinach?
Do you live in the same state you were born in?
Have you ever broken a bone?
Did you brush your teeth this morning?
Do you sing in the shower?
Are you UK fan?

Comments

We would probably consider the questions that we asked in our game today as unimportant, even trivial– except of course the question about whether or not you are a UK fan! It was fun and entertaining to see how our friends answered but in the big picture how they answered really doesn’t matter.

However, there *are* questions that *are* important, and how we answer them *does* matter. Jesus posed just such a question to his friend Martha after the death of her brother. We find it in John 11:

Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

How would you have answered? What do you believe about Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus? It’s an important question . . . and according to Jesus, the answer is a matter of life and death.

Prayer

I pray that everyone here would seriously consider the claims of Jesus, and I pray in

Jesus' name, amen.

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