

More Than a Name

Module: WHO ARE YOU?

Lesson 2: INFLUENCES ON IDENTITY

Objectives:

- Students will identify the key influences in their own identity
- Students will come to terms with the influences they cannot control

Materials Needed

- ☐ Slips of paper prepared for the opening game
- ☐ Copies of handout “Influences on Identity”

Minds On

As an opening game, prepare slips of paper ahead of time with the names of famous people on them. You will need one piece for each student who will be attending so prepare extra slips to be prepared for guests. When students arrive tape one of these slips of paper onto their backs. The object of this game will be for students to figure out who is taped to their backs by asking the other students questions that can only be answered with a yes or a no. As students guess their names you can give them a new identity. Allow as much time as you see fit for this game!

Action

Say something like: Last week we introduced the concept of our identities and talked about how identity is who we are and the qualities that define us. This week we will be looking at various influences upon our identities, many of which are entirely beyond our control.

Begin this week's lesson reading Genesis 1:26 and have the students reflect on the foundational passage from the Bible that speaks of our identity. As a large group, have your students first respond to the question, "What does it mean that we were created in God's image?"

While it is important for the students to discuss this amongst themselves, guide the conversation so that they will come to an understanding that we are created in God's image in a spiritual sense and not necessarily physical one. This passage forms the foundation of our understanding of ourselves, because at our core we bear the image of God. How we see ourselves must start from that foundation.

The second point you want to get across is the reality that there are influences in our lives that will impact how we see ourselves. These influences will either be positive or negative. This lesson will be a general look at some of the ways our self image is impacted by the world around us.

Continue this discussion by splitting your students into groups and have them work through “Influences on Identity” handout. The object of this exercise is to get your students thinking about the things in their lives that influence who they are. Using the handout students will write down influences in each category that impact them. Give them 10 minutes to work through the sheet. Bring them back together as a large group and have each group share their thoughts on what has shaped them.

Spend some time now working through each of the four areas. The first and probably most important influence that we will be looking at is our family. Our families hold a primary role in shaping our beliefs, our morals and even how we see ourselves. Give your students 2 minutes to discuss all the ways a family can shape our identity. Appoint a student to keep track of the responses using a white board / chalk board or a sheet of paper.

Ask if any of the students prepared family trees during the past week and whether or not they would be interested in sharing their family trees. If the students are willing, have them talk about some of the ways their own family has impacted their view of themselves.

Help students begin to recognize the influence their upbringing has had on their identities. Again, families are key in shaping our morals, our beliefs, how we respond to others and how we see ourselves.

Say something like: Another key influence that comes from our families is our ethnic backgrounds.

In a survey conducted of immigrants by CBCNews, people see Canadians as people who believe in universal health care, in peacekeeping, in immigration, are democratic, and are environmentally conscious. That part of our ethnic background is imprinted on our identities at a young age. Understanding your ethnic heritage can help you understand how you view yourself.

To help students understand these influences, have them spend 2 minutes on their own thinking about their ethnic backgrounds. Then, have them pair up and talk to their partner about how

their ethnicity has impacted their self image. After each partner has had a chance to share, bring all the groups together and have them share one or two highlights from their talks. Perhaps consider having one person write down the various ethnicities that are represented in your group and some of the unique ways each ethnicity impacts a person's self image.

The third influence is often a part of both our family heritage and our ethnicity. It is important that we recognize that religion plays a significant part in shaping who we are. Whether you grew up with a belief in a god or not, how you view the existence of God impacts how you view yourself. Have your group spend 5 minutes formulating a list of all the ways religion shapes us. Help steer the conversation so that they cover areas such as our morals, our view and treatment of others, the way we respond to people, etc.

The fourth influence we will talk about is social. Next week we will look at the negative influence society has on our identity. This week have your students spend a few minutes considering how society has a positive influence on our identities. While they discuss this, help them understand the role society places in our adoption of societal norms of behaviour. For example, respect for authority, education, medical care, justice, treatment of the poor. As well, help them understand the role that our occupations can play on our identities. Our society places a high value on the careers we have. As such, much of people's identities can be wrapped up in the jobs they perform. Have your youth spend some of their time focusing specifically on the question of how our careers impact the way we see ourselves.

Consolidate/Debrief

Say something like: While there are many more influences on our identities we have chosen to look at what can be considered the four primary influences. This list is neither exhaustive nor is it designed to be the definitive look at what shapes us. However, when we gain an understanding of how our lives are shaped by these influences we can better understand who we are.

Have your youth spend the coming week considering how the four influences mentioned in this lesson: family, ethnicity, religion and social, have shaped who they are today.

Close your time in prayer.

Influences on Identity

