

Series: On the Fringe

Lesson 1: Group Identity

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Explore Jesus' approach to group identity
- Explore their own group identity

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Scrap paper
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Copies of handout "On the Fringe: One"

Lead In:

Give every student a piece of scrap paper and a pen. Instruct each student to write numbers 1 to 3 on the side of the page, as in a dictation. Now instruct students to write the following things next to the corresponding number:

1. Write down the name of a group that you are definitely a part of. (Examples could include family, sports teams, church, youth group, interest groups, dance classes, friend groups, and just about any other thing the students are involved in).
2. Write down the name of a group that you are definitely not part of.
3. Write down the name of a group that you kind of feel a part of and kind of not.

When they are finished, ask students to circle the one that was easiest to answer. Ask some students to share their answers to all four parts (the three groups and the easiest question to answer). Ask them why it was easiest to answer whichever one they circled. For example, I would say that 1) I am definitely a part of my immediate family, 2) I am definitely not part of the Ottawa Senators, 3) not sure if I am part of my fitness club, and that the first one was the easiest to answer because our family identity is so strong.

Finally, ask students what it is about groups that make some people feel inside or outside. Ask them whether they think this is a bad thing or a good thing and guide some debate around the issue. Allow them to give reasons why group exclusivity is good (because groups have to have identities in order to exist) and bad (because it makes it hard for others to get into the group).

Task One:

Transition by saying something like, *It is definitely hard to walk the line between being inclusive and exclusive when we are part of a group. Some groups need to be exclusive. Can you imagine if I was allowed to be on the (insert sport team of choice here)? The*

(team) needs to exclude people so that they can win games. If they let anyone on their team, it wouldn't be a very good team, would it? On the other hand, they have to be careful not to exclude people for the wrong reasons, like race, religion, and so on. I can tell you that every group in history had to walk the line between having a group identity that was fixed (being exclusive) and allowing new people in (being inclusive). How do you think that Jesus walked the line? How do you think that we should walk the line?

Ask for a volunteer to go to the board to record the group's thoughts. The volunteer can divide the board into two columns, "Exclusive" and "Inclusive". You may need to define those terms for the students. Remind students that "exclusive" isn't necessarily bad and "inclusive" isn't necessarily good in this context. Ask the students to think of ways in which Jesus himself was exclusive and inclusive. Require concrete examples of each and record as many as you can think of on the board. For example, Jesus was exclusive in that he mostly ministered to Jewish people. He also chose only twelve disciples to train up directly. He also lived only at one time and place instead of visiting all the people that ever lived on earth. At the same time, Jesus was inclusive. He ministered to people on the fringe of society, like women, children, Samaritans, tax collectors, and adulterers, and included them in his wider ministry circle.

Task Two:

Tell students that they are going to work in pairs to apply some of this discussion to their own group. Have them divide into pairs and give each pair a copy of the handout, "On the Fringe: One", and a pen.

When the pairs are finished with their sheets, solicit answers and give feedback. You can do this orally, on a board, an overhead, or however it suits your group. Allow students to give their answers and work together to decide on a complete and final list of answers. Your job will be to guide the conversation, stopping in places of interest to you and your group. A sample set of answers is provided below in case it is helpful to you.

Task Three:

Say something like, *The connection between a healthy group and a healthy mission is a close one, but we don't often talk about it or even think about it. If our group is healthy, we are better able to spread God's love to each other and to people on the fringe. If our group is unhealthy, we make it harder for each other and other people to access God's love through us. Spending time together—playing games, going camping, volunteering at the food bank, and so on—doesn't always seem like a spiritual thing but building up community is a spiritual thing and it enables us to follow God better. Just like Jesus gathered a group of disciples and sent them out in pairs, Jesus also wants us to be united both for our sakes and for the sakes of the people on the fringe that we could minister to.*

While still in their pairs, ask students to identify and share the one thing that they could do to contribute to a healthier group identity and culture. Have the pairs pray together if they are willing.

Closing:

Conclude by saying something like, *Today we have started talking about what our group is all about and how that could affect people on the fringe. That is the title of this series, On the Fringe, and in the weeks that remain we are going to look at some issues and people who are on the fringe and what we might be able to do to love them.*

Group Identity (Sample Answers)

1. Jesus gathered a group around him. Who were they and what did he teach them to do? Check out Mark 6:7-12, Matthew 10:5-8, Luke 10: 1-4.
 - Jesus called a core of 12 disciples and commissioned them to go and change the world; he also called a larger group of disciples to do the same.
2. Why did Jesus send them out in pairs?
 - For all kinds of reasons (spiritual, physical, emotional) we need other disciples in order to fulfill the commission.
3. How is our group similar to Jesus' group of disciples?
 - Jesus calls us to be his disciples, we learn about his commission to us, and we work together to try to do it. We also need each other in order to do what God wants us to do.
4. What are some of the good things that will happen if we have a healthy group unity?
 - We will be better able to love each other and to love people on the fringes of our group and community. We will be better able to love God and learn to be like God.
 - People will be able to know what we stand for and whether they are interested in that.
5. What are some of the bad things that could happen if we do not have a healthy group unity?
 - New people won't know what we are all about.
 - People will not be sure whether they are welcome or not.
6. What are the things this group definitely stands for?
 - Depending on your group, you might see answers such as friendship, inclusivity, diversity, humour, mission, and so on.
7. What are some of the things we could do to improve our group health in order to be better connected in community and better able to fulfill Jesus' commission?
 - Depending on your group, you may need to make a greater effort to talk to new people, have more or less social times together, confront past problems, do more service together, and so on.