

Rooted in Paradoxes

Lesson I: Paradoxes, Paradigms and other fun words that start with P

Objectives:

Students will

- interact with the idea and concept of paradoxes
- learn to recognize paradoxes in the world around them
- explore some of the paradoxes found in the teaching of Jesus

Materials Needed

- ☐ A pack of pictures of random objects for each group of students
- ☐ Paper and pen for each group of students
- ☐ Two socks, one with a hole in it
- ☐ Two handfuls of marbles in separate bowls

Minds On

The goal of this first task is to make students aware of the concept of paradigms by demonstrating their ability to categorize a series of pictures with minimal instruction.

Ask students to divide themselves into groups of 2-4. Stress that it is important that their group contain the right number of people. Give each group a pack of pictures. These pictures can either contain sub-categories, such as food items or modes of transportation, or they can be completely random. (If you choose to use sub-categories, make sure that there are at least some pictures that don't clearly fit in to any of them.)

Instruct the students to group the pictures in a way that makes sense to them. Fight the urge to give any more instructions. Allow the students to sort through the pictures, and give no indication regarding the number, or even the existence, of categories. Give the students a maximum of two minutes.

With the task is completed, compare the categories developed by the students and ask them to explain the reasoning behind their sorting decisions. (Ask them to define each of their categories and the criteria that were met by the items included in it.)

Action

Say something like: All of us have a natural ability to put things into groups, and we do it all the time! We can look at groups of pictures and decide which ones go together, like we just did.

You all managed to form groups with the right number of people, which is another way of categorizing things. We make playlists on our iPods and computers based on the band, or the type of music, or where we are going or what we are doing. We know that chips and pizza go together and that peanut butter and onions don't. We have a whole series of these categories that we work with each and every day. The fancy name for this is a paradigm.

A paradigm is “a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that inform the way we look at the things around us.”¹ (You may want to have this definition written out and posted up somewhere you can refer to it visually.) We use paradigms to make sense of all the different stuff that we hear and see and think about each day, like you just did with those pictures. We all do this naturally, and most of the time we take it for granted, but all of us work with a complex system of paradigms. Paradigms are kind of like a net that we use to catch things. We pick up the random bits of information and ideas that are all around us, and we shove them into our paradigms so we can carry them around more easily.

Get the two socks, ensuring that one has a hole in the toe big enough for the marbles to pass through. Ask for two volunteers and have them stand behind a table with a bowl of marbles in front of each of them. Explain that in a moment you will be giving each of them a sock, and their task is to get all of their marbles into the sock as quickly as they can, holding the sock in one hand and picking up marbles, one at a time, with the other. Give a maximum of 30 seconds.

After the “contest” has finished, debrief the task by helping the students notice the difficulty of putting marbles in a sock with a hole in it because they won’t stay in nicely. (With a smaller group, this could also be done with the whole group racing against each other, but again, one sock has a hole in it.)

Say something like: Sometimes the same thing happens with our paradigms. Things seem to fall out of them. They just don’t fit nicely, and we end up having to try and figure out what to do with them. We have probably all thought one way about a situation, only to find out that we were way off in our thinking. Sometimes things just burst out of our paradigms. Those things are sometimes referred to using another fun word that starts with p – paradoxes.

A paradox is a statement or an idea that seems to contradict itself. It’s like two paradigms come crashing together, and it’s hard for us to figure out where to put it. Paradoxes are holes in our paradigms that push us to think differently or to look at something in a way that we haven’t before. Just like paradigms, we use paradoxes all the time. Think about these statements...

¹www.dictionary.com

- Pretty ugly
- Same difference
- Jumbo shrimp
- Expect the unexpected
- Random Order
- to find your life, you must lose it
- the first will be last

Ask students if they can think of any others. You may wish to record these on chart paper as students are brainstorming.

Consolidate/Debrief

Say something like: We live in a world filled with paradigms and paradoxes. They are all around us. We are constantly trying to put things into categories, but there will often be things that don't fit nicely. It is little wonder then, that there are paradoxes found in the teachings of Jesus as well.

Jesus frequently made people think about things in ways that were different, or that didn't fit with their preconceived ideas. He turned everything on its head and pushed his way through the holes, pulling people into new territory.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at some of the paradoxes that Jesus introduces. For some of us, they will be familiar concepts, and for others they might be stretching and challenging. No matter where you are, I encourage you to come back and explore these paradoxes with us!

If appropriate for your group, invite students to pair up or break off into small groups and share paradoxes that they have come across in the Bible or things that have prompted questions in their mind. Have them choose one or two to discuss, and give them five minutes to do so. Have the groups end by praying for one another.