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BIG IDEA

Real friends comfort each other.

***WEEK 3  
TEACHING GUIDE***

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

BIBLE

Jeremiah 8:18-19a:John 11:1-45: Proverbs 17:17

QUESTION **| "What's your favorite fictional friendship?"**

* Welcome back to Real, where we're talking about what it means to have real friendships. But since it's not always easy to know what "real-life" friendship looks like, **what's your favorite fictional friendship?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond.

DISCUSSION

* + **What's one of the most fun experiences you've ever shared with a friend?**
  + **Which do you think is better at bringing friends closer together: fun experiences or difficult experiences? Why?**

POLL **| Friend Preferences**

* When it comes to both fun moments and difficult moments, we all want different things from our friendships. Let's find out some of the ways we're all similar (or not-so-similar) in our friend preferences.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Poll your students by asking the following multiple choice questions. Invite them to respond by either raising their hands, applauding, or moving to different areas of the room that you designate for each option.
  + **When you're excited about some big news, you want friends who will . . .**
    - Blow up your group text with 300 messages.
    - Go wild on a trampoline with you.
    - Listen intently over coffee.
    - Show up at your house with balloons and confetti.
  + **When you're feeling down, you want friends who will . . .**
    - Make you laugh with their dumbest jokes or memes.
    - Feel every feeling with you.
    - Tell you it's going to be okay.
    - Bring you ice cream or presents or a puppy to snuggle.
  + **When you're stressed out, you want friends who will . . .**
    - Tell you all the reasons you're awesome.
    - Distract you with funny TikToks.
    - Pray with or for you.
    - Check in with you every day.
  + **Yes or no — have you ever needed a friend when . . .**
    - You lost a loved one?
    - You got disappointing news?
    - You were sick or in pain?
    - You were embarrassed about something?
    - You felt like a failure?
* If you've ever experienced any of the situations, you know how powerful friendship can be during the moments when we need comfort.
  + The truth is, life is hard sometimes. As a teenager, you might be juggling the demands of school, sports, clubs, music programs, church, jobs, family, and so much more. It's not easy.
  + When life gets overwhelming, it's okay to want someone to tell you it's going to be okay. Sometimes we all need a real friend who makes us feel safe enough to cry, vent, or ask for help.
* But how do we find real friends like that? And how we can be real friends like that?

**SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?**

STORY **| Talk about a time a friend comforted you.**

* **INSTRUCTION:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time a friend comforted you when you were weren't okay. What did they specifically do to comfort you? How did that make you feel and help you make it through? What did you learn from their example?
* When I've been in difficult situations like these, I've sometimes had friends who stuck by my side and went through it with me. When they did, I'm sure I said something like, "I don't know what I would do without you."
* But the truth is, there have also been moments in my life when my friends weren't around or didn't come through. In those moments:
  + "I don't know what I would do without you" wasn't hypothetical. I actually had to figure out how to survive those tough times without supportive friends.
  + I learned the importance of being the kind of friend who shows up when other people need comfort.
  + And I learned how to find comfort from God — the only one who will always come through for me, no matter what.

DISCUSSION

* + **What are some of the top reasons people your age might need to be comforted?**
  + **Can you think of a time someone comforted you? What happened and what did they do?**

SCRIPTURE **| John 11:1-45**

* Maybe it's easy for you to grasp the idea of God comforting you when you're hurting or grieving. But have you ever thought about God hurting or grieving too? Is that even possible?
  + To answer that question, I want to show you a story about an interaction Jesus had with a few of his friends. Maybe you've never really thought about Jesus having friends, but he did! The friends in this story were some of his closest.
  + When the story begins, Jesus is traveling, teaching, and healing people in different cities. But then he gets word his good friend, Lazarus, is deathly sick.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read or summarize John 11:1-45.
* Clearly, Jesus is no stranger to grief. Not only did he experience it, but he also comforted others while they were grieving too. Jesus comforted his friends . . .
  + **WITH HIS WORDS.** We don't know all the words Jesus spoke to his friends, but we know a few. With his words, he:
    - Reminded his friends to trust God.
    - Prayed with and in front of them.
    - Spoke life-giving words to Lazarus (literally) and to those who were mourning his loss. With his words alone, Lazarus returned to life.
  + **WITH HIS PRESENCE.** Jesus had really important work to do, but he didn't let that stop him from being with his friends while they mourned. Even though returning to Judea was extremely dangerous, Jesus went, because real friends show up for each other.
  + **WITH HIS ACTIONS.** Jesus, of course, knew he was capable of bringing Lazarus back to life. But this didn't stop him from mourning Lazarus' death and the pain his death caused others. Jesus didn't shame anyone for crying. He joined in and mourned along with them — because that's what real friendship does.
* When your friend is in need of comfort, it might feel like a challenge to find ways to comfort them.
  + But with his example, Jesus shows us comforting each other isn't as complicated as we might fear it is.
  + It's not always easy to put yourself in a situation to feel someone else's pain, but Jesus gives us clues.
* And when you could really use some help or comfort but can't seem to find a friend who can give you the support you need, Jesus is the friend who understands and will never let you down.

DISCUSSION

* + **Can you think of a time you wanted comfort from a friend, but didn't get it? What happened?**
  + **What are some of the ways God can comfort us? Have you ever experienced any of them?**

SCRIPTURE **| Jeremiah 8:18-19**

* In the Old Testament of the Bible (that's the part that was written before Jesus arrived), there was a prophet named Jeremiah who is sometimes called "the weeping prophet." You see, Jeremiah saw and experienced a lot of heartbreak during his time as a prophet.
  + But the grief Jeremiah experienced was different from the grief we just saw in the story of Jesus and Lazarus. While the death of a loved one is terrible, it's often unavoidable. Death is just part of life.
  + Instead, Jeremiah wept because of the terrible things he saw people do to each other, to God, and to themselves. He wept over the sins of God's people and the consequences they faced because of that sin.
  + One of the consequences God's people faced for their sin was the destruction of their whole city.
* Being a prophet like Jeremiah would have been a lonely job. As a prophet, it was Jeremiah's job to deliver messages from God to God's people — and those messages were often not what people wanted to hear. As a result, Jeremiah would have had to carry much of this burden without the support of a large group of friends. But let's see what Jeremiah says in the midst of all of this hurt.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Jeremiah 8:18-19a.
* "You who are my Comforter in sorrow." This is how Jeremiah saw God. When Jeremiah was grieving, afraid, and helpless, he cried out to God and trusted God would hear him.
* I don't know what you and your friends are dealing with right now, but I'm guessing someone in your friend group is in need of some comfort — and maybe it's you.
  + If you need comfort, encouragement, kindness, or care, I hope you're getting it from your friends. But if you're not, I hope you know that God is your ultimate source of comfort. When we struggle to find real friendships here on earth, Jesus is always the truest friend we could ever have.
  + If you know someone who needs comfort, encouragement, kindness, or cafe, I hope you'll learn from Jesus' example and show that person what a real friend could look like.
* Sometimes, you'll be the friend in need of comfort. Sometimes, you'll be the friend who can comfort someone who's struggling. Either way, real friendships are an opportunity for us to love and care for each other the way God loves and cares for us. Because **real friends comfort each other.**

**NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?**

VIDEO **| A Clip from Inside Out** — **Sadness Comforts Bing Bong**

* When a friend is struggling, maybe because they're grieving, disappointed, overwhelmed, or afraid, it's not always easy to figure out how to comfort them.
  + Sometimes their need for comfort makes us uncomfortable. Because we don't know what to do, we either ignore their pain or try to distract them from it.
  + Maybe sometimes that approach is helpful. But most of the time, our friends don't need us to ignore their pain. They need us to feel it with them.
* If you've seen the movie Inside Out, you might remember a scene where this happens.
  + The character Bing Bong was simultaneously mourning the loss of his wagon rocket and coming to terms with the reality that he had been forgotten by a little girl named Riley who he loved.
  + The character Joy unsuccessfully tries to snap Bing Bong out of his pain, while the character Sadness tries a different approach.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](https://growcurriculum.org/InsideOutSadnessComfortsBingBong) (0:00-2:15) from [Inside Out](https://growcurriculum.org/InsideOutAmazon), where Sadness comforts Bing Bong.
* Joy tried to quickly move past her friend's pain, but Sadness was ready to feel it with him.
* Like Sadness, we don't need to have the perfect words or a well-planned strategy for comforting someone. When we're willing to show up, be with them, and simply listen, it's often enough.

DISCUSSION **| When We Need Comfort**

* But can we be honest for a second? When our lives are good, it can be hard to notice when our friends' lives aren't so good. Maybe if there's a big crisis, like a death or illness in their family, we'll know about it.
  + But how many of your friends might be struggling and in need of comfort right now, but you're unaware of it?
  + How many of you are struggling and in need of comfort right now, but you haven't figured out how to tell your friends you need help?
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Spend a few moments listing situations when teenagers might need comfort from their friends. Encourage both broad answers (grief, stress, anxiety) and specific answers (a breakup, getting cut from a team, scary events in the world). As they discuss, write key words, ideas, and examples on [sticky notes](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-real-amazon/) or note cards and display them on a board. Be sure students know there are no wrong answers for these questions!
  + **What are some specific reasons a friend might need comfort?**
  + **How can you know when a friend needs comfort?**
  + **If you are the friend who needs comfort, how can you let your friends know how to support you?**
* So how can we be "real" friends for each other when we need comfort? Let's take a hint from Jesus.
  + **COMFORT WITH YOUR WORDS.** Your words are powerful, but you don't have to prepare a whole speech or write an essay to comfort someone. Simple words like "I'm so sorry," "I'm here," "I love you," and "I'm listening" are often all you need. Simple questions like, "How are you feeling?" or "Do you want to talk about it?" are often even better.
  + **COMFORT WITH YOUR PRESENCE.** Sometimes just your quiet presence can be even more powerful than your words. Your friend may not need advice. They might just need someone to reach out, listen, and remind them they care.
  + **COMFORT WITH YOUR ACTIONS.** When a friend is crying, cry with them. When they're having a hard time, text them, send them a gift, make them a meal, give them a hug, or simply ask them what they need.
  + **POINT THEM TOWARD GOD, OUR COMFORTER.** Like the prophet Jeremiah said, God is our Comforter in sorrow. If you know this to be true about God, then a real friend wouldn't keep that to themselves. When your friends need comfort, remember you're not the only comforter they need. Point them toward Jesus, who understands what they're experiencing better than any other friend ever could.
* And, hey. If you need some extra comfort or support right now, don't be afraid or ashamed to say so. This is the perfect opportunity to let someone in this room know you could use a real friend right now. Don't go home today without saying something.
* I wish I could tell you life with Jesus means a life without grief, loss, disappointment, or stress, but I can't. Even Jesus himself experienced it. But I can tell you this:
  + With God, we have a source of Comfort always available to us.
  + And with Jesus, we have a model for what real friendship can look like here on earth. Like Jesus demonstrated, **real friends comfort each other.**

DISCUSSION

* .
  + **Read Proverbs 17:17. Who's a friend who has your back the way a good sibling would? How do you know they do?**
  + **When a friend needs comfort, what sometimes keeps you from reaching out to them? What could you do differently next time?**
  + **When you need comfort, what sometimes keeps you from letting your friends know you need support? What could you do differently next time?**
  + **This week, what's one way you and your friends can comfort each other like God comforts us?**