



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

EMOTIONS & DATING

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General Editor



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How to Use the Uncommon Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The hand-outs include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

Starter

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

Message

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_emotions_and_dating.zip and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_emotions_and_dating.zip.

UNIT I

Emotions

Think for a moment about some of your junior-highers. Literally picture them in your mind. Think of your most troublesome student and your most attentive one. Now picture them on a path—a desert path that is dry, dusty and lonely. Every day, your students wake up and step onto that path for a new emotional adventure.

On some days, the path is smooth and easy. These are the days when they feel they have friends whom they like and who like them. They wake up, look in the mirror and actually smile at what they see. They feel good about themselves and about those around them. They just plain feel good.

Unfortunately, those days are few and far between. On most days, the path your students walk on is rocky and slippery. Maybe they look into a mirror and dislike what they see. Maybe they discover their friends had a sleepover and didn't invite them. Maybe they are stressed out about their science homework and are sure that the teacher—who they describe as evil—has something against them.

Or maybe your students have come face to face with a huge emotional boulder that has blocked their progress. Their friends are getting involved in sexual relationships and inviting them to do likewise. Their parents are pressuring them to take on new responsibilities, be involved more at school, and get better grades. They are so lonely they just don't feel like living anymore.

A major problem in junior high ministry today is that our goals have degenerated into simply helping students *dodge* the rocks and boulders. We feel that as long as we are helping them get out of the way of danger, we are being victorious. While that might not seem like a bad thing—at least they are surviving, and survival is better than extermination—I don't think God is satisfied with this goal. I think there is much more we should be doing.

I know some 12- to 14-year-old heroes who are doing more than just dodging the emotional rocks and boulders hurtling toward them. These are young people who are taking steps forward and bringing others along with them. There's Kelly, for example, an eighth grader with braces and a lisp who has mustered up enough courage to start a new Christian club on her campus. Then there's Jennifer, whose compassion motivates her to request prayer every week

for a Buddhist friend who seems open to spiritual things but is drifting in the wrong direction.

This curriculum is devoted to helping students experience triumph in the midst of their emotional highs and lows—to move forward and be changed by Christ so they can change the world. To this end, here are a few tips to help you maximize the effectiveness of the following six sessions.

First, *use lessons that fit the needs of your group*. For junior highers, emotions are a rollercoaster ride. As you prayerfully choose each lesson, make sure you select ones that reach the students where they are, whether they are down in the dumps or happy and on top of the world.

Second, *point out the humanness of the biblical characters you're studying*. Biblical characters are often presented as being so perfectly victorious that students are left wondering how they can possibly relate to them. Avoid that distortion by clearly focusing on the despair of Judas, the agony of Job, and the doubt of Jonah.

Third, remember that *smaller groups bring greater results*. If you're not regularly meeting in small groups with your students, experiment by using smaller groups for your discussion time. The smaller the group, the more its members will be able to build their trust in one another; the more trust that is built, the more honest the sharing; and the more honest the sharing, the deeper the healing.

Finally, *leave plenty of time for application and reflection*. The last two steps of each lesson help students answer one major question they are wrestling with regarding their feelings: *What do I do with what I feel right now?* So, for the sake of your students, leave enough time at the end of the lesson for them to pin down an answer.

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FEELINGS OF CONTENTMENT

THE BIG IDEA

The only true way to be content is to be in a relationship with Jesus that grows stronger and deeper each day.

SESSION AIMS

In this session you will guide group members to (1) learn Paul's secret of being content regardless of his circumstances; (2) desire to have contentment in their own lives; and (3) commit themselves to finding contentment in Jesus this week.

THE BIGGEST VERSE

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12).

OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

Psalm 73:26; Matthew 6:19-21; Mark 14:66-72; Acts 28:14-31; 2 Corinthians 11:24-29; Philippians 1:13-14; 4:10-13; 2 Timothy 4:16-18

Note: Additional options and worksheets in 8¹/₂" x 11" format for this session are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_emotions_and_dating.zip.

STARTER

Option 1: Picture-perfect Life. For this option, you will need magazines, newspapers, markers, paper, scissors, glue, construction paper and any other art supplies you feel the kids might need for this project. Ahead of time, have all the supplies set out and ready to use.

When the group members arrive, greet them and tell them that today they will be creating posters of their ideal lives. They can use any of the art supplies provided and be as creative as they want. Each person should create a poster that answers the question of what his or her life would look like if it were “perfect.” When they are finished, discuss the following questions as a group:

- How is your real life different from the perfect one on your poster?
- If you were to try to get that perfect life, what obstacles would be in the way? Do you feel you would ever be able to overcome them?
- What would you need to sacrifice to get this life? Would it be worth it?
- How does the perfect life you depicted on your poster make you feel about your own life today?

Explain that each of us is looking for “contentment,” or a feeling of satisfaction with where we are in life. Usually, however, our feeling of contentment depends on how we feel our lives are going at a given moment. If we are going through a hard time, we feel dissatisfied with our lives. If good and exciting things are happening, we feel contented with our lives. As we start this new series about our feelings, we will see that *true* contentment does not depend on good things happening around us, but it does depend on where we look for it.

Option 2: Kingpin. For this option, you will need five clothespins per student. Greet the group members and give each person five clothespins. Have the students pin the clothespins on their clothes where other people can see them and grab them. Explain that in the game they will be playing, they will need to get



Youth Leader Tip

Youth workers who avoid parents shoot themselves and their ministries in the foot. Instead of avoiding parents, work to build good relationships with them and make them your allies.

as many clothespins as they can. To do this, they must grab clothespins from other people and put them on their own clothes. At the same time, however, other people will be trying to get their clothespins. The one who has the most at the end of the game wins.

Play the game for five minutes. End the game, and then announce the winner. When you are finished, discuss the following questions as a group:

- How is the game we played today similar to the way many people live in our society? (*Most people want what other people have and are willing to take it from them!*)
- Why do you think so many people are willing to do whatever it takes—even hurting others—to get what they want? (*They think they deserve it or that having more stuff will make them happy.*)
- What one thing would make you happier? Why? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)

Explain that one of the reasons we fail to be content (and stay content) is because we use *things* to satisfy our wants and needs. However, true contentment doesn't come from having a lot of stuff. As we begin this new series on feelings, we will discover that in order to find true contentment, we need to look in the right place.

MESSAGE

Option 1: No Matter What. For this option, you will need several Bibles. Divide the group members into four teams. Explain that the Scripture you are going to examine today comes from a letter written by Paul to the people who lived in a city called Philippi. The amazing part of this story is that Paul was a prisoner when he wrote it (see Philippians 1:13-14), most likely under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:14-31). For two years people could come and visit him, but his movement was restricted.

Read Philippians 4:10-13 to the group.¹ After you have finished, assign one verse from this passage to each team. Ask the teams to create a pantomime to illustrate their verses. The teams are not allowed to use any words to do this—they can only use body movements and their best acting skills.

After the teams have come up with their pantomimes, read Philippians 4:10-13 again. Have the different teams stand up and perform their pantomimes as

you read their assigned verse. When the teams are finished, give everyone a round of applause and discuss the following questions:

- What situations did Paul say he had been in during his life? (*He had lived in need and lived in plenty. He had been well fed and hungry.*)
- What did Paul say he had learned from these experiences? (*He learned to be content in any circumstance, whether it was good or bad.*)
- What was Paul's secret for being content no matter what happened? (*He knew that he could rely on Christ to take care of him.*)
- What does this passage teach us about circumstances? (*We will experience good times and bad times, but we can trust that God is in control and will give us what we need when we need it.*)
- What does it teach us about contentment? (*That contentment depends on our attitude and our relationship with Christ, not on our circumstances.*)
- How does a person get to the place where he or she can live in contentment no matter what happens? (*It happens as a person builds his or her relationship with Christ through prayer and studying the Bible.*)

Share with the group members that if they build their relationship with Jesus, they will uncover a sense of true and lasting contentment that will be with them no matter what happens in their lives.

Option 2: What We Need. For this option, you will need several Bibles, a whiteboard, a whiteboard marker and a package of motion sickness tablets.

Begin by asking the group members to name some significant needs that people have in life, such as the need for comfort, love and security. As they call out needs, list them on the whiteboard. Next, ask the group members to name some of the ways that people try to meet the needs they have listed. Write these on the whiteboard as well.

Explain to the groups that the passage of Scripture you are going to read today comes from the book of Philippians. This was originally a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to a group of believers in a church he had founded. The amazing thing is that Paul was likely under house arrest when he wrote the letter (see Philippians 1:13-14; Acts 28:14-31). For two long years, Paul could meet with people and teach them in his home, but he always had a soldier guarding him.

Read Philippians 4:10-13 aloud to the group. After reading the passage, cross out the items, one by one, from the list of the ways people try to meet their needs. Explain that when we are unable to meet our own needs, our sense

of contentment is affected. We might become angry, bitter or depressed. Now point to the Bible and explain that if our eyes are on Jesus, however, and we are looking to *Him* to meet our needs, we will be content regardless of our situation.

Reread Philippians 4:13 and explain that this verse provides the secret to Paul's contentment: Paul found his strength in Christ and Christ alone. Hold up a package of motion sickness tablets and state that just as these tablets can help us remain steady and comfortable on a rough ride, finding contentment in Jesus can help us remain strong and content during the storms of life. Of course, this doesn't mean we won't *notice* life's trials or experience pain, but as we focus on Jesus and not our problems, we will find the strength to handle what comes our way.

Conclude by sharing about a time in your own life when you experienced God's steadying strength in the midst of a problem or tough situation.

DIG

Option 1: *Madame Blueberry*. For this option, you will need a scene from the Veggie Tales movie *Madame Blueberry* and a way to show it to your group. Ahead of time, find the scene where Larry is talking to Bob about how he wishes he had more than just a new SUV. (He also wishes he had an RV, a trailer and a boat.) Have the scene ready to play for your group before the session begins.

Play the scene for the group, and then discuss the following questions:

- What did Larry want? (*He wanted the trailer and Jet Ski accessories for his new SUV.*)
- Do you think Larry would have been satisfied if he got all this? (*No. Like all of us, Larry will never be satisfied if he is trying to find happiness by owning more things. No matter how much he has, he will always want more!*)
- Do people at your school have this attitude? How can you tell? (*Most likely yes!*)
- Do you have this attitude? Why or why not? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- If you were Bob, what would you say to Larry? (*Allow the group members to respond.*)
- What do you think God would say to Larry? (*True contentment only comes from having a personal relationship with Me!*)

Explain that many of us believe that if we can just get the things we want, we will be happy and content. However, the result of getting what we want—

when we want it—is usually very different. While it may bring happiness for a short time, in the end it leaves us wanting more, and at its worst it can bring horrible consequences. God created us to find our happiness and contentment *in Him*. As we get to know God better each day, we will gain the happiness and contentment that He gives—and it will be more than we could hope for or ever dream of having.

Option 2: Note from a Friend. For this option, you will need copies of handout “Note from a Friend” (found on the next page) and pens or pencils.

Distribute the handout and the pens or pencils to the group members. Explain that this represents a note a friend wrote to them during study hall. Ask them to read the note, paying special attention to how circumstances have seemed to affect their friend’s contentment. After reading the note, have the group members use the back of their handouts to write a response. Have them explain what they have learned about contentment and discontentment in life.

When the group members are finished, choose a few volunteers to share what they have written. Explain that many people believe that if they can just get something they want, they will be happy and content. However, the actual result of getting what we want usually doesn’t bring lasting happiness. In fact, it can actually bring negative consequences—such as an attitude of selfishness—and end up being destructive.

Conclude by stating that God created us to find our happiness and contentment *in Him*. As we get to know God better every day by communicating with Him in prayer and by reading the Bible, we gain happiness and contentment. This is a *lasting* contentment that doesn’t fade away or have any bad effects in our lives.

APPLY

Option 1: To Be Content or Not to Be Content. For this option, you will need copies of “To Be Content or Not to Be Content” (found on page 18) and pens or pencils.

Begin by distributing the handout and pens or pencils to the group members. Instruct them to work through the sheet by themselves, listing areas in their lives right now where they *are content* and where they are *not content*. After they are finished, discuss the following questions as a group:

- What are you relying on to make you content?
- If you are discontented, what do you think is causing this?

Note from a Friend

Hey there . . .

Well, I hope your day is going better than mine. I got up late this morning and missed the bus. My mom was really mad because she had to drive me to school. I guess it makes her late to work. Then we had a pop quiz in English. We were supposed to know all these vocabulary words, but I didn't have a chance to study them. I bombed the quiz. Don't you hate it when teachers do that?

Did you know Jordan is having a party? Were you invited? I just found out about it today, and I haven't gotten an invitation. I'm so mad.

But I'm so excited about the dance on Friday! I still can't believe I'm going with Chris. I think it will be really fun. You'll be there, right? Are you going to try to find someone to go with you?

My parents are driving me crazy. They have this idea that we don't spend enough time together as a family, so they're always bugging me to hang out in the living room and play board games with them. I hate it. I hardly get to watch TV or go online anymore. I mean, it's nice to hang out with them a little, but I need my space! What do you think I should do?

I hope I get that new phone for my birthday. It has way more memory, and I can download more of my music and games on it. Shouldn't that be so great?

Anyway, I'll talk to you later. Don't you hate study hall? It's so boring.

Your friend

- Are you trying to find contentment or to fix the problems in your life without Jesus? If so, how is this working out for you?
- What do you think you would need to change in your life to be able to rely on Jesus for these things?

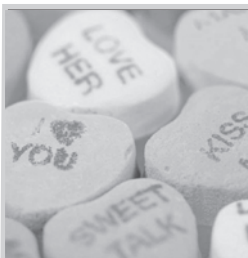
Ask the group members to circle two items on their handout where they indicated they are not feeling content. Next, have them write something they could do that they believe would help them be more content in those areas. Close in prayer, asking God to help the group to experience life-changing contentment this week.

Option 2: Stop the Chase. For this option, you need a whiteboard, a whiteboard marker, index cards, pens or pencils and an offering plate or basket.

Begin by asking the group members to name some things that people chase to try to bring contentment to their lives (*money, romance, academic success, entertainment*). As they call out ideas, list them on the whiteboard. When you have compiled a good list, instruct the group members to sit silently and consider these questions *without* answering them out loud:

- What are you personally chasing to try to bring yourself contentment?
- What would you need to change or give up in order to find contentment in Jesus instead?
- What step can you take toward finding contentment in Jesus today?

Give each person an index card and a pen or pencil and instruct the group to write on their cards the things they need to stop chasing. Send around an offering plate or basket in which the students can drop their cards. Explain that by doing so, they are showing their commitment to give up the things they have been chasing and to instead seek contentment in Jesus.



Youth Leader Tip

Before you challenge your group to do something, make sure it is something that you would be willing to do yourself. Always lead by example!

REFLECT

The following short devotions are for the group members to reflect on and answer during the week. You can make a copy of these pages and distribute them to your class or download and print them from www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_emotions_and_dating.zip.

1—BUGS, RATS AND THIEVES

Turn to Matthew 6:19-21 to read about bugs, rats and thieves!

Suzie had her fourteenth birthday the day before youth group meeting. She came to the meeting wearing her new clothes, new watch and new shoes. She was so proud of her new things that it affected her attitude—and it wasn't a kind attitude. When her friends confronted her about how she was acting, Suzie just said they were jealous of her. She thought that her friends would like her better because of the cool new stuff she got, but boy was *she* wrong!

Have you ever thought your life would be better if only you could own a new piece of clothing, or some new electronic equipment, or something else your friends had? If so, why did you think it would make your life better?

When you feel empty or down, what do you rely on to make you feel better? Does it work? Why or why not?

After reading Matthew 6:19-21, what is God's opinion regarding things on earth? What is His opinion regarding things in heaven?

Today, ask God to completely satisfy the feelings of need and want that are in you.

2—YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

If you've ever felt totally alone, read 2 Timothy 4:16-18 to find out that you are not! Check the boxes that apply to you:

- You have been picked last for a team sport at school
- You have sat alone at home all weekend.
- You have had plans to go somewhere with friends but they backed out.
- You have walked home from school alone.

Do you ever feel like other people have tons of friends but you don't? Why do you think you feel this way?

According to 2 Timothy 4:16-18, what does God do when you are alone and need the support and help of a friend?

God is *always* there beside you. So today, ask God to help you realize His presence in your life. You might be surprised how He answers your request!

3—ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

Read Mark 14:66-72. It's interesting . . . trust me.

Over the summer, Miguel had decided to follow Jesus. One day he noticed that some of the Christian kids had gathered around the flagpole at the entrance to the school to pray. Miguel wanted to join them, but he was afraid of what his other friends might think of him. As he wrestled with his choice, he thought that his life had been much easier when he was *not* a Christian!

In Mark 14:66-72, what did Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, do to show others that he did *not* belong to Jesus? How did Peter feel about his decision afterward?

Have you ever thought your life might be easier if you were not a Christian? Why or why not?

Have you ever told someone you weren't a Christian because you were afraid of what that person might think of you? How did you feel after you did this?

As you pray today, ask God to show you how life with Him is supposed to be. Ask Him to be your strength when it is hard to be a Christian.

4—ALL YOU CAN EAT!

Turn to Psalm 73:26—and *hurry!* Suppose you were going to eat only one meal for the next week. What would you choose?

- Ice cream with pickles
- Eggs with chocolate syrup
- Hot dogs and Top Ramen
- Chicken, salad and rolls

According to Psalm 73:26, what happens when we fail?

What do you think the word "portion" means in this verse?

When you eat a really good meal full of your favorite foods, you feel satisfied. In the same way, God wants you to know that you can rely on Him to satisfy every need you have! So today, think of one need that you will completely rely on God to fulfill this week. Then trust Him to do it!