

Transformative Relationships

By RLD Editorial Team

for use as
STEP 1**Lesson 1****Focus:**

Empty religion can't replace your relationship with God.

Lesson 1**Bible Basis:**

Isaiah 1:10-18

Lesson 1**Memory Verse:**

You will be my people,
and I will be your God.
—Ezekiel 36:28b

Students will learn that while spiritual activities can help us deepen our relationship with God, they're never a substitute for the relationship itself.

Materials:

- None

Imagine I told you I read the Bible and prayed every day. I volunteer with my church family, participate in a small group, and give generously to those in need. You saw me treating other people with kindness, sharing God's love with others, and growing in faith.

- **What might you guess about my relationship with Jesus?** (Students might assume that I had a growing relationship with Jesus, that I was allowing my faith to guide my actions, that God's love flowed through me, etc.)

Now, suppose I told you I read the Bible and prayed every day. I was often rude and harsh with the people around me. I never gave of my time or resources to other people. I often used foul language towards others.

- **What might you guess about my relationship with Jesus?** (Students might assume that my relationship with Jesus was superficial because it wasn't challenging me to grow in faith, become more like God, love others, etc.)

While I claimed to read the Bible and pray in both scenarios, my actions looked very different.

- **What are some of the positive ways that our lives change after we begin relationships with Jesus?** (We allow Him to transform our hearts and lives, we begin to see other people as loved by God, we learn to live out our faith, etc.)

While spiritual practices are a great way to draw close to God, they aren't a substitute for the relationship with God. In the first scenario, my relationship with God was evident because of how it affected my life. In the second scenario, while I followed spiritual

practices, there wasn't evidence of a real relationship with Jesus. We can choose to read the Bible and go to church in order to love and worship God. Or, we can do it for all the wrong reasons, such as trying to "earn points" to get into heaven.

As Christians, most of us do a lot of spiritual things. We go to church, read the Bible, pray . . . you get the idea. Often, that stuff draws us closer to God. Hopefully, *your* spiritual activities have the same effect of helping you love God and people.

But we have to guard against a dangerous trap: Doing spiritual stuff just because it seems spiritual or because everyone else in your group is doing it. Praying doesn't automatically make you a good Christian. Religious practices are only worthwhile when they bring us closer to the Living God.

The prophet Isaiah had some pretty strong words for people who did spiritual things but were far away from God. Let's look at what God says about the difference between religion and relationship.

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your teacher's guide; your Step 4 appears below.)

Lesson 1 / March 6, 2022

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STEP 4 

Lesson 1

Focus:

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Bible Basis:

Isaiah 1:10-18

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Memory Verse:

You will be my people, and I will be your God.
—Ezekiel 36:28b

Materials:

- Index cards (1 per student)
- Pens/pencils (1 per student)
- Whiteboard or screenshared document (optional)

If your class is meeting online, invite your students to bring a pen/pencil and index card with them to class.

Think about the beginning of one of your relationships. It doesn't have to be a dating relationship—it can be a close friendship, or even the first time you met a family member. Think about how exciting it was getting to know that person for the first time.

No relationship stays new and exciting forever. We usually get tired of everyone eventually, even our BFFs. They tick us off, or we get bored doing the same things every time we hang out, or we run out of stuff to talk about. We may wish the relationship could go back to the way it was in the beginning.

That can happen in our relationship with God, too. Maybe there have been times when you had a really great prayer time, and you wished it could be like that every day. Maybe you watched God change someone's life on a mission's trip, and you'll never forget it. Maybe you remember this one church service or retreat where God seemed so close you could almost touch Him. But if you're honest, those same things—praying, or ministering, or going to church—may seem boring at times.

Every relationship gets a little dry sometimes—even our relationship with God. Sometimes, the “spiritual” activities that used to make us feel close to Him feel dry and worn out. But the solution isn't giving up on God! Instead, you need to look for a way to make your relationship fresh again.

That's your challenge this week: *Try something different* in your relationship with God. That doesn't mean pick something that's hard to do—in fact, that may be self-defeating, because you might procrastinate. Instead, just pick something *different*.

Do you *always* pray silently? Try doing it out loud in the privacy of your own room. Better yet, grab a friend and do it out loud *together*. If you don't have a friend handy, write

a short prayer on paper like a letter to God.

Do you *always* read a chapter from the Bible? Try reading just a verse or two, then “meditate” on it—in other words, focus your thoughts on what it means for a few minutes. Or maybe you *always* use a devotional book. Skip it for a few days and just read a chapter from one of the Gospels.

Do you *always* sit in the back during worship? Try sitting up front instead. Take notes on the preacher’s message and talk with your family about it later.

Maybe the most important thing you can do to refresh your relationship with God is to find a way to serve people. That can be as simple as offering to help a teacher clean up his room, or as complicated as starting to volunteer every month at a food bank. Nothing will improve your relationship with God faster than taking your focus off yourself.

Bottom line: Change up your spiritual life this week! As we’ve been learning from Isaiah, doing “religious stuff” is no substitute for a strong relationship with God. So don’t pick something to do just so you can check it off a list. Find a way to experience your friendship with God in a new, fresh way—with a heart to drawing closer to Jesus!

Hand out index cards and pens/pencils to your students. If your class is meeting online, invite them to have those items ready. Have your students write out Ezekiel 36:28b and 1 John 4:20 on their index card (you may want to write out the verses in their entirety on the whiteboard or screenshared document). Encourage your teens to write down one spiritual experience they’re going to try this week that isn’t a part of their usual routine—something that embraces one or both of the verses they just wrote down.

Close in prayer, asking God to keep your teens’ “spiritual experiences” from being empty rituals. Instead, ask God to make Himself real to your teens in a fresh way as they try to draw closer to Him relationally.

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