

The 1 John 4:19 Truth Your Teen Needs to Know

For youth leaders, the presence of Jesus is the most powerful “tool” in the youth ministry “toolbox.” It connects to one of the deepest desires of the human heart: the longing for nearness to God without shame.

Young believers long for the assurance of something deeper than being “saved” by God; they long for the assurance that God enjoys them as well. “I believe God loves me,” I’ve heard many students assert, tentatively. Then they add, “But does He *like* me?”

Unfortunately, there often is a huge disparity between these two seemingly similar ideas.

For many Christian teenagers, love means “unconditional forgiveness” when they sin or make a mistake. Somewhere in their mind, they know that “Jesus paid the price” to forgive them of their sins. Usually this is what caused them to respond to the message of the gospel in the first place. But they often believe God loves them because He *has* to. Love is who He is and what He does. But His love has nothing to do with them. God loves them because He is love, not because they are lovable.

As they grope for understanding about this heavenly Father who loves them enough to save them from hell, forgive their sins and help them make life work, the question remains: “Does He like who I am?”

Our teens may know experientially what it’s like to deal with someone who loves them, but can struggle to relate to someone who likes them. They often have to cope with angry, weak, broken and at times (in their view) irrational parents. They struggle with whether or not their fickle friends like them.

They feel they have to project a false self, because if their friends discovered who they really are and what they are really like, they would hate them. And at times, they experience how unenjoyable they are to their parents, friends and even themselves. So they subsequently project these negative dynamics in their personal relationships onto their relationship with God.

When teens try to gravitate toward others who project confidence, they discover those people feel as insecure and fearful as they do.

As youth leaders, we need to know that real confidence is found in the presence of Jesus. His presence reveals to us—and to young people—not only the reality that Jesus forgives sins because of the cross, but also why He chose the cross in the first place. This is the secret every teenager (and youth worker!) deeply desires to know: Jesus went to the cross because He loves each of us individually—and everyone He loves, He likes!

Even in their insecurity, fear, weakness and immaturity, Jesus likes teens. When they step into His presence, they find that He is gentle with them in their failures, and He enjoys them even in their weakness and immaturity. The truth of 1 John 4:19 draws them: “We love Him because He first loved us.”

As teens enter into and experience Jesus’ presence, not only do they find Him lovable and unconditionally loving, but they also discover the love He puts inside of them creates a huge dose of confidence to love themselves and those around them.

The fear of rejection and the trauma of shame can create powerful strongholds in the minds and emotions of teens. Some may feel that God has rejected them because they have gone too far to be forgiven. When those around them shame them, they assume that God does too.

Teenagers will only be satisfied as they step into the

presence of Jesus. The Son of God longs to satisfy their deepest longings to be enjoyed. He wants them to know He enjoys them and pursues them. When teens discover this, they can freely and fully enjoy Him. As they experience the presence of God in their thoughts, emotions and choices, they are empowered to “go all the way” in loving Jesus. {eoa}

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