

June 6, 2010

L E S S O N 1

UNIT 1: Sharing Our Faith



LESSON SUMMARY

Living It Out

STUDENT TENSION: What is the first step in sharing our faith?

FOCUS: Sharing our faith begins by faithfully living it out.

BIBLICAL REFERENCE:
2 Corinthians 2:12—3:6

OPTIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ *Define the Metaphor* handout
[Youth Connections]
- ▶ *Letters from the Heart* handout
[Youth Connections]
 - ▶ Blindfold
 - ▶ Several items to smell
 - ▶ Art materials, such as paper, old magazines, markers, scissors

The Power of Smell

The family refrigerator is an interesting place. In it, you will usually find a great variety of things. From fresh eggs to last night's meat loaf, looking in the fridge is sometimes an adventure. The thing about refrigerators is that they do not keep food fresh forever. You can try to hold on to that pot of chili for a month, but sooner or later, it *will* go bad. One of the easiest ways to tell whether or not food has gone bad is to smell it. A good rule of thumb when pulling a gallon of milk out of the refrigerator is this: If it smells rotten, it probably is. If nothing else, your nose will tell you that it's time to throw away that month-old hamburger . . . if it smells rotten.

In today's passage, the apostle Paul says that as Christians, we give off a "smell" of sorts. And he is right: non-Christians can pick up on the spiritual scent of someone pretty quickly, and they can usually tell if a person's life reflects what they say they believe. In this unit, we're focusing on sharing our faith. The first step in that process is having a genuine, lived-out faith ourselves.

The Fragrance of Faith

In today's passage, Paul describes his own efforts in spreading the gospel while at the same time affirming the genuine faith of the Corinthian church. After beginning the passage by explaining his recent journey through Troas to Macedonia, Paul speaks of the life of the Christian in terms of fragrances and aromas. He says, "We are to God the aroma of Christ" (**2 Corinthians 2:15**). It is helpful to remember that Paul was once a devout Jew, whose sacrifices and offerings included many different smells and aromas. For Paul, the Christian life is a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1) that gives off an aroma that is pleasing to God.

This aroma is not just for God. Paul says that we are the aroma of Christ "among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life" (**2 Corinthians 2:15-16**). What this means is that when our faith is genuine, everyone around us will notice. To those who are responsive to the gospel, we will be a pleasant smell. To those who are rejecting the Lord, our faith will tend to highlight their own disobedience. The fact is, in a world where some people reject Jesus, there is a social price to pay for being a genuine disciple of Christ.

A Living Letter

Sharing our faith is not like some cheap sales pitch. Paul says, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit" (**v. 17**). Instead, our first task is to have a sincere, genuine faith ourselves. "On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity" (**v. 17**). The words "in Christ" are important here. Paul uses them when he is speaking of a genuine, healthy relationship with Jesus.



THINK ABOUT YOUR TEEN YEARS:

- ▶ How genuine was your relationship with Jesus Christ? Was your faith the real deal?
- ▶ If you were a Christian then, how difficult was it to live out your faith in your daily life?
- ▶ Did you have any examples in your life of people whose faith was genuine and sincere? Who were they? How did their relationship with Jesus inspire you?

THINK ABOUT YOUR LIFE NOW:

- ▶ How is your faith now? Is your life the “fragrance of life” to those around you?
- ▶ What challenges do you face in living out your faith daily?
- ▶ Where does your power come from? Are you trying to live in your own strength, or in the strength that only the Holy Spirit of God can give?

THINK ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS:

- ▶ Are their lives living examples of Jesus Christ?
- ▶ What challenges and pressures are they facing in living out their faith, particularly from those who are not Christians?
- ▶ How can you and other adults in the church encourage them to live out their faith in the face of those pressures?

In chapter 3, Paul begins to address some challenges to the message he preached in Corinth. Instead of having letters of recommendation written to them or by them to counter his opponents, Paul simply states “You yourselves are our letter . . . known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ” (3:2-3). Paul points out that the lives of the believers are the best possible presentation of the true Gospel. The genuine life of faith, lived out for all to see, says more than any written letter.

Sharing Your Faith: Step One

I grew up on a hog farm. Needless to say, there are some smells on a hog farm that just don’t wear off. As Christians who are devoted disciples of Jesus, filled with and empowered by His Spirit, we have an aroma that doesn’t wear off. The fragrance of Christ is the starting point for sharing our faith. Only when our faith is genuine, growing, and healthy can we become “letters” ourselves: living, breathing messages of God’s grace sent into a world in desperate need of the Good News. Today’s lesson has the potential for some tough questions. The fact is that hypocrites do not make good witnesses. Don’t miss the opportunity today to challenge your students to go deeper in their faith, not just for their own sake, but for the sake of those with whom they would share their faith.

VISION TRUTH LIFE	LESSON Xpress BEST		DESCRIPTION
	ACTIVITY	FOR	
	Whatcha Smelling?	X M/J/S	An icebreaker where students get to guess about what they’re sticking their nose into.
	Letter of Recommendation	M/J/S	Students write a letter describing themselves to someone who has never met them.
	Pantomime Your Life	M/J	An active exercise to get students thinking about elements of their lives.
	Define the Metaphor	X S	A look at understanding the metaphors of the passage.
	The Testimony of Our Lives	M/J/S	This activity will help students understand Paul’s message of being a living testimony.
	Letters from the Heart	X M/J/S	An activity to help students process the basics of today’s lesson.
	Representative	M/J	A wrap-up activity that is an outlet for the artistically inclined.
	Silent Preacher	M/J/S	A closing discussion about the best way to live out our faith.

Lesson Xpress—if class time is short, consider choosing these activities.
M=Middle School; J=Junior High; S=Senior High

Choose from among the following activities to build your unique lesson plan.

Whatcha Smelling?

Before class buy or find several different items for the students to smell. Some examples are: onion, orange, piece of chocolate, vinegar, dirty socks, sour milk, or perfume. Also bring a blindfold. Do not allow the students to see the various items. Ask for two or three volunteers. Blindfold them and have them take turns smelling and guessing the identity of the items. Once the volunteers have guessed, reveal each of the items to them. Then ask the following questions:

- ▶ Was it easy to identify the items you were smelling? Why, or why not?
- ▶ What makes a smell pleasant?
- ▶ What makes a smell nasty?
- ▶ Why are smells important to us?

TRANSITION: Some things have a very distinct odor about them. Our noses can tell us a lot about the item we smell, whether it is good or bad, pleasant or foul. The apostle Paul wrote that we as Christians are to smell good to those around us because of the way we live our lives. Let's find out what he meant.

Letter of Recommendation

Have pens and paper ready for your students at the beginning of class. Say, **You are going to write a letter describing yourself to someone who has never met you. You can't describe your physical appearance. The reader can only know you by your actions and personality traits.** When your students have had enough time to write a short letter, ask them, **What would you write in a letter about yourself?** Discuss their letters. If time allows, you may ask the following questions:

- ▶ What is the most important action or trait that you described in your letter? Why?
- ▶ Do you think our actions are important? Why, or why not?
- ▶ Can you think of anyone you have followed as an example of how to live? Why did you want to be like that person?

TRANSITION: Paul says we are a living letter for the world to read. While we might not be literally writing a letter to every person we don't know, our lives are an open book for others to read. God has called us to be a living example of those who are living for Christ. Our lives are witnesses of what His love and grace can do. Today we'll see how sharing God's love with others begins with living out God's love ourselves.



Ask your students to vote on which they believe smells better between the following things:

- ▶ A pigpen or stockyard
- ▶ A flower or perfume
- ▶ Body odor or bad breath
- ▶ A shoe or sock
- ▶ Roadkill or trash
- ▶ Used kitty litter or something spoiled in the refrigerator
- ▶ Fresh baked cookies or fresh baked brownies
- ▶ Smoke or a wet dog
- ▶ An orange or french fries



YOUNGER CLASSES

Give your students paper and pens. Ask them to list some things that smell good and things that smell bad. After they have finished, go around the room and have them share their lists. Ask them what makes the good things smell good and the bad things smell bad. Share with them what Paul wrote about our lives being a pleasant odor to those around us by the way we live. Ask for examples of a pleasant-smelling life.



Pantomime Your Life

For this activity you will need some space for the students to use. Consider clearing a space in your classroom for the stage. Explain to your students that they are involved in a one-person act titled, "A Day in the Life of . . ." Each student will be acting out a typical day in his or her life. The twist is that the students will not be allowed to use any words during their performance. The students can pantomime activities they are involved in, such as sports, school, clubs, and so on. The rest of the class must guess what the student has pantomimed after each performance is finished.

TRANSITION: Although this activity seemed silly, our lives are a lot like pantomimes. We go throughout our day, doing things, making decisions, and saying things without realizing that others are watching us live. Paul said that our lives are like a letter for the world to read, much like our one-person acts were performed for others to see. Today we're going to learn about how our lives can be a loud witness for Christ, even before speaking with someone.



Truth

Choose from among the following activities to build your unique lesson plan.

Define the Metaphor

Say, **The dictionary defines a metaphor as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them—like when Shakespeare says, "All the world's a stage."** Give each student a copy of the *Define the Metaphor* handout. The handout contains a grid with the elements of metaphors found in the passage: fragrance, letter of recommendation, tablets, triumphal procession, perishing. Other columns on the grid are Physical sense, Spiritual sense.

Have your students read the scripture reference, **2 Corinthians 2:12—3:6**, aloud. Instruct the students to fill in the grid, describing how each element (fragrance, letter, tablet, and so on) is used both physically and spiritually in the scripture passage. Allow your students to work either individually or in pairs.

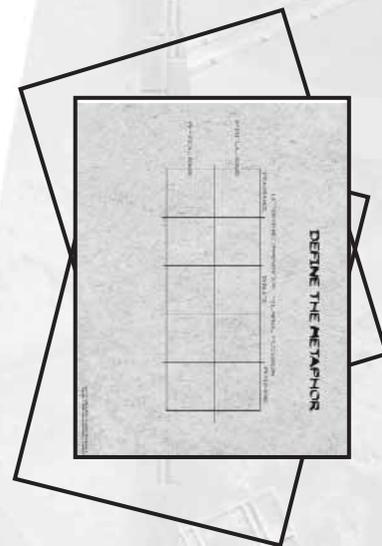
After the students have had enough time to finish their grids, have them come back together and share what they wrote. Begin with the first element on the grid and continue until you have discussed all the elements. Then ask the following questions:

- ▶ **How do our lives give off a smell?**
- ▶ **How can our lives be a sweet fragrance to one person and a foul odor to another?**
- ▶ **What do our lives really smell like? Fragrant or foul?**
- ▶ **To whom do our fragrant lives draw attention—ourselves or Christ?**
- ▶ **Whatever is in our hearts usually ends up showing itself in our words and actions. How does this match what Paul says about what is written on our hearts?**

CO	<i>Creative Option</i>
	Enhance various sections of the lesson by using these great ideas that include media, object lessons, and alternative approaches. Note especially the younger and older class options.

OLDER CLASSES

For a little more challenge and creativity for the Pantomime Your Life activity, have your students act out a silent movie. Explain to your class that they will be the actors of a silent movie titled, "A Day in the Life of a Typical Teen." They must act out the typical day a teenager faces without words. All the students should be involved, so make sure there are parts for all. If you have access to a video camera, you may want to tape it and have a "Movie and Popcorn" night later.



SF	<i>Soul Food</i>
	Spiritual formation tips and insights for maturing teens.

Paul wrote that we are a letter from Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit. The letter is written not on tablets, but on hearts. Long before Paul wrote these words to the struggling Christians in Corinth, prophets in the Old Testament foretold of the Lord making a new covenant that will be written on the hearts of the people. Jeremiah wrote, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (31:33). We truly carry around with us the hope and love of God, as He writes it into the very core of who we are. Allow God to examine your life this week and write His love upon your heart. For more examples of God's promise of the new covenant, read these passages: Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19; 34:26.

The Testimony of Our Lives

Paul shares with the Christians in Corinth about being living testimonies to the world. This activity will help students understand Paul's message by breaking down verses in **2 Corinthians 2:12—3:6**.

Read **verses 2:12-16**.

- ▶ **According to verse 14, who spreads the fragrance and knowledge of God?**
- ▶ **Through whom is this fragrance spread?**
- ▶ **Whose aroma is being spread? (v. 15)**
- ▶ **To whom is the fragrance spread?**
- ▶ **How can we be the fragrance of life to one person and the smell of death to another?**

Read **verses 2:17—3:1**.

- ▶ **What is the difference between selling a product and sharing the gospel?**
- ▶ **How can we each live as a witness, sharing the gospel with those around us?**

Read **verses 3:2-3**.

- ▶ **How are the Corinthian Christians Paul's letter?**
- ▶ **Why doesn't Paul need to write another letter?**
- ▶ **According to verse 3, how is this "new" letter written? (With the Spirit)**

Read **verses 3:4-6**.

- ▶ **Where have you found your confidence in the past?**
- ▶ **From whom does our confidence come?**
- ▶ **Who is the Giver of life?**
- ▶ **In light of these questions, how do we live out our Christian life?**



VISION

Choose from among the following activities to build your unique lesson plan.

Letters from the Heart

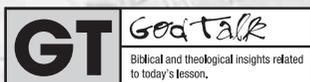
Distribute the *Letters from the Heart* handout and pens. The handout is divided into two sections. On one side of the handout is a letter from Jesus to the students, which reads:

My beloved,

I want you to know that I love you very much. I know sometimes it is hard to remember and hard to feel, but know that I loved you even before you were born! You are so special to Me. I have loved you before you knew Me. I love you so much that I came to earth, lived, died, and was raised again. I understand how hard and painful life can be at times—life isn't always easy. Because I know this, I offer to you hope and peace. Come and spend time with Me. Lean on Me during the hard times and the good times. Let Me guide you as you face each day. And as we grow closer, help Me show my hope and peace to those around you. Remember—I love you.

Grace, Peace, and Love,

Jesus.



Evangelism is essential to the Christian faith. Christianity has been passed down generation to generation through the sharing of the faith. Most Christians, however, are afraid to share their faith with someone. Fear of rejection or not knowing what to say are often given as reason for not sharing our faith. What we often forget is that God's grace, through the Holy Spirit, reaches out to people and draws them close to himself before they ever know Him. When we share our faith with others, we aren't going to anyone to whom the Spirit hasn't already gone!

The second half of the handout is blank. The students are to write a letter to the world about how they themselves can live in such a way that reflects Christ to the world. You will want to encourage them to include how Christ loves them and ways they can show others the love and grace of Christ in the letters. After the students have finished writing, you may want to have volunteers share different ways Christians can be living reflections of Christ.

Representative

Bring art materials to class, such as paper, old magazines, markers, scissors, and so on. Allow your students to make a visual representation of how they will be a living letter for Christ. Have your students keep in mind their family, friends, classmates, fellow employees, and whoever they are around, when making their projects.

Invite several students to share their visual representation. Close in prayer, having each student ask God to help them live as a letter sent by Christ to the world.

Silent Preacher

Since the beginning of the Church, the Christian faith has been passed on by telling others about Christ. As we have learned today, part of telling others is showing Christ through our lives. Have students respond to the following quote by St. Francis of Assisi: **“Preach the Gospel always; when necessary, use words.”** Allow time for your students to respond to the quote. Below are some questions for your discussion.

- ▶ **Do you think the saying, “Actions speak louder than words,” is true? Why, or why not?**
- ▶ **Have you ever noticed someone who says one thing and does another? What is your reaction to such a person?**
- ▶ **Is it possible to live as a Christian and have your words and actions line up? Why, or why not?**
- ▶ **In what ways can our actions speak so loud that they are communicating the gospel to those around us?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can preach without words this week?**

Following the discussion, lead your students in prayer. Be sure to ask God for the courage and grace to be a reflection for Him this week. Also pray that each student's actions might show Christ's love to someone this week.

30

30-Second Skill Builder

Helpful ideas to build your skills as youth leader and teacher.

Many students in your class come each week never really getting to know one another. Groups of friends who attend each Sunday probably know each other pretty well. Yet they may never reach beyond that group to get to know others in the class. Periodically take a few moments to have students pair up with students who they do not know. Allow a few moments for the students to share the following, nonthreatening, information with each other:

- ▶ Name
- ▶ Grade in school
- ▶ Favorite things to do
- ▶ Activities they are involved in inside and outside of school

This gives your students the opportunity to know other students who they may have never taken a step to get to know otherwise.

CO

Creative Option

Enhance various sections of the lesson by using these great ideas that include media, object lessons, and alternative approaches. Note especially the younger and older class options.

Place incense in a bowl in the middle of a table. Light the incense and give a few seconds for the smoke and smell to build. Say, **Notice the smoke-filled aroma rising into the air. Think about your lives. What aroma are you giving to the world?**

Close in prayer, asking God to help your students be a fragrance pleasing to God and to those around them.

