

**IDENTITY**  
Finding Truth Among the Lies  
**Lesson 3: Lie #2—Performance Produces Love**

**1. LEADER PREPARATION**

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Is our value as a person or as a Christ-follower based on what we do or how we can perform? Is it possible to make God love us more—or to cause him to love us less? These are significant questions that each of us must answer. Our culture wants us to believe that our worth is based on how well we perform or what we can contribute. But these lies can cause stress and weigh us down on our journey to freedom. This lesson will help your students discover the good news about God’s incredible love for us. This is the best news ever.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. WHAT: Jesus directly challenges the lie that what we do defines our value—a lie that can hinder our journey to freedom.
2. WHY: It is easy for anyone—especially teenagers—to believe that other people’s love and acceptance depend on what they can do or how well they can perform, but this belief is exhausting and leads to lots of pain.
3. HOW: Students will encounter the good news that God freely offers acceptance and unconditional love through Christ.

**PRIMARY SCRIPTURE**

Galatians 2:15-21

**SECONDARY SCRIPTURES**

John 3:16-17 and Ephesians 2:8-10

**TEACHING PREP**

Read Galatians 2:15-21.

As you read these words, you can almost hear Paul’s frustration over how people misunderstand the connection between faith and actions. Paul labeled the way we typically try to “earn” a restored relationship with God as hypocrisy. Do we have to accept Christ as Savior AND also practice the Jewish law? Does simply believing in Jesus make us “clean” or do we have to follow the religious law to become “clean”?

At the heart of it, Paul wants everyone to experience the life that Jesus offers to ALL people—not just his original readers, but everyone else in history, including us. He unpacked the idea that following the religious law was both impossible and, ultimately, not the way to experience forgiveness and acceptances from God. He wasn’t giving people freedom to sin—he was saying people can receive freedom to walk with Jesus without working for it.

In the end, Paul reiterates the truth that Christ died because of God’s love for us, and so that we can have new life in him. Ignoring this truth and working to earn God’s love and new life diminishes the necessity of Christ’s death and resurrection. Jesus’ love is not connected to what we do, but to the truth that God *is* love.

## IDENTITY

### Finding Truth Among the Lies

#### Lesson 3: Lie #2—Performance Produces Love

### 2. LESSON GUIDE

#### GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]

Before your group meets, create a list with 10-15 names of famous people—actors, athletes, musicians, and other celebrities. Make sure students will be able to identify what makes each person famous or popular (such as LeBron James—his basketball skills; Taylor Swift—her music; Jennifer Lawrence—her role in *The Hunger Games* movies; and so on).

Explain that you're going to read a series of names and that you want students to tell you what makes each person famous or popular. After you reach each name, give time for brief answers from your teenagers. Then move into a group discussion.

#### ASK:

- *How does a person's "celebrity status" impact our assessment of them as a person?*
- *Give an example of how our culture adored or worshipped a person one moment but then quickly hated or rejected that same person.*
- *How is our culture's shifting response to a celebrity similar to the way we sometimes think about whether God really loves us or not?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Our culture promotes the message that our value is deeply rooted in what we can do—to be loved and fully accepted we must perform. This lie can leave us paralyzed by the fear of rejection, or we can get so consumed with performing for others that we lose sight of what really matters most. And if we believe this lie, it can affect the way we think about faith—we can attempt to "make" God love us more because of our actions or deeds. Our goal today is to look to the Bible to find the truth about our value.*

#### TEACHING POINTS

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Galatians 2:15-21 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Let's jump in and see what we can learn from these verses about the lie of finding our value through the things we do.*

#### 1. You can't make God love you more

#### ASK:

- *Think about a time your love for another person changed because of something he or she did. Why is human love so vulnerable to those kinds of dynamics?*
- *What are some ways we attempt to make God love us more, or earn God's love, or prove we're worthy of God's love?*

- *Why are all of those efforts flawed?*
- *Look at verse 16—how is faith different from works?*
- *Based on this passage, is Paul saying that our actions and deeds don't matter at all—that we can do whatever we want? Why or why not?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Many of us work so hard to make things right with other people—we attempt to do all the right things in order to be accepted. And then we carry over that same habit into our relationship with God. But Paul says we can only be made right with God through a relationship with Jesus. That's it! It only happens through faith in Christ. We can experience freedom when we recognize that we can't make God love us more and that our value is found in our relationship with Jesus.*

## **2. You can't make God love you less**

### **ASK:**

- *What's something you're REALLY good at? Do you ever worry that people would like you less if you couldn't do that thing anymore? Explain.*
- *Because of our human nature, we are all sinners—none of us is perfect. And even after becoming followers of Jesus and receiving forgiveness, we still sin. If Jesus loves us anyway—and he does—what does that reveal about his heart?*
- *How might things be different if you saw your sin as a reminder of the cross and God's love instead of a reflection of your value?*
- *What does life feel like when you're constantly worried that you're going to do something that will make God stop loving you or make him love you less?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *If our value were based on how perfectly we lived, we would be in trouble. And if God's love quickly disappeared when we messed up, there'd be no hope for any of us. Paul emphasizes that we are all sinners, but God's love through Christ offers us new life and hope. If we get stuck on our sin and our attempts to be sinless, we miss out on the power of the cross. Our sin doesn't determine our value, but it can allow us to see that our true value comes from Jesus, who sacrificed his life for us even though we were sinners.*

## **3. God demonstrated his love for you through Jesus**

### **ASK:**

- *What do verses 19-21 reveal about Jesus' love for you?*
- *What's the difference between conditional love and unconditional love?*
- *What is it like to be loved unconditionally—or what do you think it's like?*
- *Read John 3:16-17. Even if you've read these verses many times before, what is most astounding about the truth of this Scripture?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *When Jesus came to this world and endured his crucifixion, he demonstrated and proved his love for us. We didn't do and can't do anything to earn this love. We can't perform our way into being accepted by him. The world may tell us that in order to be loved or accepted we must work for it, but Jesus says his powerful and true love is a free gift we can choose to accept. We can experience incredible freedom when we realize Jesus loves us unconditionally.*

### **EXTRA DISCUSSION [optional]**

Ask students to form groups of two or three for these questions.

**ASK:**

- *Read Ephesians 2:8-10. These verses talk about grace—how would you explain the idea of grace to someone who isn't a follower of Jesus?*
- *These verses talk about being saved FROM something and being saved FOR something. What's the difference?*
- *What does it mean to be "God's masterpiece"?*
- *Based on this Scripture, what are some RIGHT reasons to do good things and what are some WRONG reasons?*

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

**LIVING IT OUT****ASK:**

- *What's one practical way to avoid the trap or the lie that you have to earn your acceptance into God's family?*
- *If you fully embraced your acceptance and stopped trying to earn your salvation, what are some things you'd stop doing and what are some things you'd start doing?*
- *What's a good reminder that you can't make God love you more or that you can't make God love you less? How can we as a group help you with this?*

**SUMMARY**

Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

**FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]**

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

*"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).*