

LOVING LIKE JESUS

THE NON-MAINSTREAM WAY
RESOURCES FOR YOUTH 11 - 16



LEPROSY MISSION NEW ZEALAND

OPENING ACTIVITY IDEAS

Memories of 2020

2020 was a challenging year! We all remember the lockdowns and restrictions because of covid-19. Share with the person next to you the hardest time in 2020. Now share the best thing about 2020. Do a show of hands to see if anyone knows someone who got covid. It won't be many in NZ, we are very lucky compared to many countries around the world.

Leprosy vs Covid - 19

Ask the group if they know much about leprosy. In the bible we definitely hear about it, but is leprosy still around today? Test their knowledge with these leprosy vs covid questions.

Q: Leprosy is a biblical disease. We don't hear about leprosy on the news. Does leprosy still exist?

A: Yes, in fact, every 2 minutes someone is diagnosed with leprosy and more than 200,000 new cases of leprosy are detected each year.

Q: Covid-19 is highly contagious. Is leprosy is the same?

A: No, Covid-19 is a highly contagious viral disease but leprosy is a mildly infectious bacterial disease that 95% of the world population is immune to.

Q: I need to keep distance with people contracted by Covid-19. Do I also need to avoid touching people affected by leprosy?

A: No, leprosy is not highly infectious and cannot be spread through touch. It is most common in places of poverty – as factors such as overcrowding, a lack of sanitation and poor nutrition mean people's immune system are simply not strong enough to withstand the disease.

Q: There is no specific medication to prevent or treat Covid-19. Is there a cure for leprosy?

A: Yes, there is a cure for leprosy. A simple, inexpensive, yet highly effective cure known as Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) has been available worldwide since 1995. Treatment can take between 6 months and 12 months. However, people affected by leprosy are considered non-infectious within 48 hours of starting treatment.

Q: If there's a cure, why are people with leprosy rejected by their loved ones and community?

A: Lack of knowledge about the disease, stigma around leprosy which stems from superstitions and religious beliefs, and discriminatory laws and practices. Like Covid-19, leprosy is a disease that often sees those affected face isolation. Unlike those of us in lockdown, the isolation they feel often seems to have no end in sight.

Q: How is the Leprosy Mission responding to Covid-19?

A: In the communities in which we work we are doing our best to share accurate and helpful information about Covid-19 so that the people and communities we support know the signs and symptoms, the necessary preventative steps they can take, and how they can ensure they have enough food and drink for a period of self-isolation.

BIBLE STUDY: LUKE 5:12-14

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

BIBLE STUDY: MARK 3:3-6

And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him."

DISCUSSION

Jesus touching a person affected by leprosy

In biblical times, people with leprosy were seen as dirty and no one wanted to be near them. They often only had torn clothing and by law they had to live away from their families and their community. When they were near other people they had to call out "unclean".

When Jesus reached out and touched a person affected by leprosy he was showing a visible demonstration of God's love. He surely could have healed the man just by saying the words "be clean", but he wanted us to see that God is not afraid. That God cares for even the most outcast and "unclean". Even if the law says not to touch these people, and that they have to be isolated away from the community, Jesus cares more about loving a person than following the mainstream rules.

In the second text from Mark, we see Jesus again demonstrating that it is more important to love and care for people than to blindly follow mainstream rules. Jesus was put in a tricky position by the religious leaders, but for him it was an easy choice. Time and time again throughout the bible Jesus demonstrates the importance of love over everything else.

It is not always easy to do the right thing in life when we are faced with tough choices and difficult circumstances.

Why was Jesus put in a difficult position?

Q: Why was this awkward in Jewish culture?

It was the Sabbath. The rules prevented Jewish people from working on the Sabbath. They took this law very seriously – on a number of occasions the city of Jerusalem was captured on the Sabbath because the Jewish military refused to defend it.

Q: What day of the week was the Sabbath?

It was a Saturday. This is why the body of Jesus was laid to rest on the Friday evening until the Sunday morning, when the woman visited it in order to anoint it for burial.

Q: What did it cost Jesus to heal this man?

In performing this miracle of healing on this particular day, Jesus made some angry enemies in high places. For each of us, there is a cost to helping others.

Q: Can you think of some ways that it might cost us to help others?

It might have a financial cost, a time cost, an expenditure of energy, it might also mean that we miss out on doing things that we want to do. Sometimes if we help someone who others don't like we might find that we are not popular.

Lets finish the session by thinking through some dilemma's that we might face. Print off copies of the dilemma's worksheet to give to the group.

DILEMMA'S WE MIGHT FACE

Do we follow the mainstream or do we follow Jesus?

Discuss what you would do in the following situations. Be honest! And give a reason for your choice...

1. You are winning a cross country race when you notice a sheep caught in barbed wire. Do you:
 - a) keep running, it's not your problem
 - b) stop and help
 - c) assume someone else will help
2. You are watching your favourite TV show when the phone rings. Caller id tells you it's a very chatty relative, who lives alone. Do you:
 - a) answer it and say you'll call back later
 - b) answer it and talk
 - c) let it ring off
3. Your group of friends in school are being nasty about someone in your class. Do you:
 - a) join in
 - b) say nothing
 - c) stand up for them / tell a teacher
4. If there's a new person at school do you?
 - a) introduce yourself, they could be a new friend
 - b) ignore them
 - c) I love my friends, I don't need another friend
5. On their social media platform your friend decides to try out singing. You see there are lots of mean comments under the post and people are mocking them. Do you:
 - a) add another mean comment (she really is bad!)
 - b) post a nice comment in support ("love your confidence")
 - c) pretend you never saw the post and keep scrolling
6. A person in your class that doesn't have many friends comes to school without any lunch. Do you:
 - a) pretend not to notice and go eat with your friends
 - b) gossip to your friends about how embarrassing it is
 - c) give the person half of your lunch

Now, look over each one again and decide what Jesus' response would be. Again, give a reason why.

PRAYER

Dear God,

We come to you today to pray for people affected by leprosy.

Please help them to have access to the cure, and help the hearts of people within their communities to be softened.

Thank you for teaching us that the most important thing is to love others. Help us live by your example and follow what Jesus would do, rather than sticking to the mainstream.

Amen





SHABNAM

Her story with leprosy

Shabnam was 16 years old when she was frightened to see her hands swelling up and discoloured patches appeared on her face. Soon, she had no feeling in her hands at all. Shabnam's leprosy began to destroy her face and her body. Her hands soon became clawed and the patches spread across her face. Then, the bridge of her nose collapsed.

'At first my nose began to bleed a lot and I didn't know why. But now I understand that my condition with my collapsed nasal ridge is as a result of being leprosy affected,' says Shabnam.

She broke down in tears as she talked about how frightened she was.

Immediately, her family took her to the Leprosy Mission's Shahadra Hospital in

Delhi where she was diagnosed with leprosy. Shabnam was put on multi-drug therapy, the cure for leprosy. She needs to take daily antibiotics for 24 months to cure her leprosy.

Shabnam was very insecure about the telltale signs of leprosy on her face, but what broke her heart most of all was being rejected by members from her own family because of her leprosy. She dropped out of school and she felt isolated and alone.

Thankfully things are looking up for Shabnam. She is currently studying tailoring at the Leprosy Mission vocational training center. She has made two good friends who are like sisters to her. Shabnam is also receiving counselling to restore her confidence and physio for her hands.