



What if?

Expectations

Forgiveness

Safety

Loneliness

FOMO

Baggage

Perfectionism

Self-worth

Help

Embarrassment

The future

Anxiety

Disappointment

Failure

Body image

Falling short

Feelings

Doubts

Rest

Isolation

Purpose

Fears

Identity

Guilt

Overwhelm

Relationships

Strengths

Honesty

Success

Tribe

Contentment

Hopes

Looks

Community

Friendships

Weaknesses

Conflict

Shame

Peace

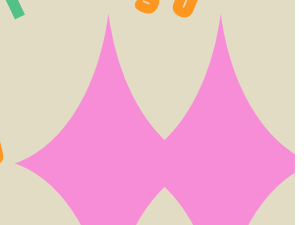
Rejection



# teaching notes

Sample

a ten-week series to help build strong minds



## Introduction

I've been in youth ministry for over 30 years and I've never seen a time like this - where so many of our children and young people are struggling with their minds: social anxiety, school refusal, OCD, depression, disordered eating, self-harm and more... The danger of thinking about something like our mental health is that we end up self-focused (what do I need to do to make my life better?), but we are called to fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb.12.2). There is something about focussing on Jesus that changes everything, including our thought patterns, helping us avoid comparisons with others and an unhealthy focus on self.

Please note that this material was written by a church youth worker, and not a medical expert. Please take time before you start to talk to any local experts that you can find, but also to find resources that you can signpost people towards.

This was written by Dave Thornton, author of Raising the Bar: Nearly Everything You Need to Know about Christian Youth Ministry. The course was tested at Dave's home church - Christ Church, Winchester, UK.

You can find out more details at [www.churchyouthministry.com](http://www.churchyouthministry.com) where you can also buy my book.

I'd love it if you send me any encouragements, feedback, comments, questions or improvements. My email is [churchyouthministry@btinternet.com](mailto:churchyouthministry@btinternet.com).

## Publicity

Included with the course is some publicity for Instagram and some pictures for other use. If there's anything else that would be helpful, please ask. I've still got the original work.

Consider how you talk to parents/carers about this course. I thought I'd been clear, but some were concerned that there would be a focus on self-help rather than what the Bible had to say, also that there might be a lot of over-sharing that confuse their children. I should have been clearer in communication what the course was trying to do and how it would be run.

## Presentation

I normally preach through a Bible passage, but this series is thematic teaching, picking up various verses through the Bible. This is different, but is still biblical! I could have done a series on Genesis and a series on Ephesians, and so on, and eventually if I applied the passages well, I could have covered all the same ground, but it would take much longer, and I think we would lose some of the impact of holding all of this together. Sorry if you don't like thematic teaching, but I think Jesus did it himself in passages like Luke 4.1-13. I do understand the dangers. I hope I've avoided them.



There is a Powerpoint that goes with the series, as well as a participant booklet to take notes and record weekly challenges.

We need to start with our Bible passages: what is there in these verses that shapes our minds? What is there here that, if we really knew this and believed this and lived this, would utterly transform our minds and, if other people knew it, would change their minds too? I've put down some key words to pick up, where I think these verses could challenge our thinking about those key areas. In session 3 for example, 'Who am I?' is about identity, but you can also cover issues like looks, body image, self-worth, strengths/weaknesses, safety, children of God, redeemed etc, made in God's image. Please take these words seriously. When else are we going to be talking about perfectionism or overthinking?

Choose one or two key passages, and have them look up the verses, but make sure that you only use one or two, not four. If you're bringing in other verses, read them but only tell them at the end where they are, then they can make a note and find them later. You can also put the verse on the screen. That keeps it from being a verse hunt with people struggling to keep up. By all means add your own verses (why not let me know what you used?), but beware of exhausting young people by jumping all over the place. As I say in my book, if you want people to look up a verse, give them the verse number before you start reading it; if you don't, don't. At the end of your preparation, always be thinking: Is there enough 'Lift up your eyes!' here? Are we keeping people looking up? This needs to be a golden thread running through each week. Also, what extra resources can I point people towards?

Our minds are difficult for many of us as leaders to talk about, as well as the young people. Mental illness is an illness. Nobody should be coming off medication unless their doctor says so. So we cry out to God for a miracle of healing our minds, but we use the best medical advice we can too.

I've put some links on the notes as illustrations. Always double check that they are right for your context and if you can find better ones, let me know. Also, make sure you've played any advert preceding a video before the session starts. You don't want to be embarrassed.

Make sure when you deliver the course, you encourage them to do each weekly challenge at the back of their booklets and learn the memory verse. If you have time, help them to learn the verse before you finish the week.

## Following up

Take some time at the start of each week to refer back to the memory verse and the weekly challenge. How have people done with it? When we ran the course, at the start of the next week, we asked people to answer a question that followed on from last week e.g. for the start of week 4 we put a flipchart up with the question in the middle: "Write something positive about yourself..." Fascinating to see that even with the prompt, a lot of people still wrote: "I'm friends with Jamie" or "I've got tickets to see X." It shows us something of the challenge we still have.

# 4. What if I'm never famous?

CHANGING MINDS

## Big idea:

**God calls us to follow Jesus, whatever situations we find ourselves in.**

### Key passages:

Jeremiah 29.11-13 (We can be known by God)

Mark 1.16-20 (Jesus calls Peter and Andrew)

Matthew 9.9-13 (Jesus calls Matthew)

John 1.43-51 (Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael) (Jesus says 'Follow me!' to all of them)

Matthew 11.28-30 (Come to me, take my yoke)

John 3.1-21 (Purpose to be saved to eternal life)

Ephesians 2.10 (Good works planned)

### Key words to pick up:

Calling, purpose, disappointment, failure vs. success, expectations, comfort, hopes, fears, doubts, falling short, what if? Knowing God/loving Him.

### Notes for teaching:

Culture often says we should be achieving loads e.g. climbing Everest, getting straight As, having a six-pack, going to college/uni, being in a relationship, etc. Maybe we end up feeling like under-achievers. What are our expectations from each day and our whole lives? Do we think we need to have achieved something huge? What are our hopes and fears? What if everyone else is having more fun than we are? What if everyone else is more liked than me? What are our doubts about ourselves? What are they stopping us doing? William Shakespeare wrote in Measure for Measure:

ISABELLA: Alas, what poor ability's in me to do him good?

LUCIO: Assay the power you have.

ISABELLA: My power? Alas, I doubt—

LUCIO: Our doubts are traitors and makes us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.

God says our purpose is to follow him, whoever we are and wherever we find ourselves (Mark 1.16-20, Matt.9.9-13, John 1.43-51). The disciples' purpose became being with Jesus. Our purpose is to come to Jesus to find salvation in him, coming out of the darkness and into the light (John 3.1-21). When we come to him, we find his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt.11.28-30).

Culture says you deserve comfort. If only you started your own business/invested in Bitcoin/have loads of followers, whatever... The reality? Life will be a mixture. All of us at times will suffer. Don't dwell on "What if?"s. God says we can expect life to be hard, even as Christians (Luke 9.23 (carrying cross) and 2 Timothy 3.12 (godly lives lead to persecution)). Sometimes we'll succeed and sometimes fail. We can be realistic without being pessimistic. Maybe 'What if?' should be replaced by 'Even if...' 'What if I get it wrong?' becomes 'Even if I get it wrong, God will still love me, God's people will still love me and I'll still follow Jesus.'

God wants to prosper us, but what does that look like? Calling on him and coming to him, seeking after him. (Jer.29.11-13) Those are good plans! He has a purpose for us, already marked out. Not to be a lawyer (though we might be). Nor to get married (though we



might). Nor to have a long life (though we might). Christians all have spiritual gifts to use (1 Cor. 12). He has good works ready for us, and we can do those things however things turn out (Eph.2.10).

The speech from the Barbie movie “Impossible to be a woman” America Ferrera's Iconic Barbie Speech is an interesting one. In summary, you can’t win. Be aware of the connotations of the movie as a whole, and it’s fair to say it’s impossible to be a man too, often for very similar reasons.

What are we pinning our identity on? What will fulfil us? Things turning out just the way we planned them? One military general said, ‘No plan survives first contact with the enemy.’ Our expectations need to change. We can trust God and enjoy without controlling. Imagine a partner dancing lesson. What’s the worst that can happen? Tripping over? Not being able to do it? Someone saying no to dancing with us? The author elbowed two women in the head during his first dancing lesson and now teaches his youth group to dance. Don’t dwell on the ‘What if?’s, instead throw yourself into it, and even if it all goes wrong, you may find success and even joy! The worst thing is never stepping forward at all. What if the disciples never followed?

Sometimes we think God’s calling is mainly about career or success. We think: “What if I choose the wrong job? “What if I never become successful?” “What if my life looks ordinary?” God is powerful and loving enough to get us where He wants us to be doing his good works (Eph.2.10), so let’s enjoy the journey. Follow Him in worship and prayer, godliness and witness.

Compare ‘What if I’m never famous...?’ to 1 Thess. 4. 1-12 (Ambition to lead a quiet life and work with your hands). You might want to invite some people in to talk about what people have found about their purpose. Not all will have run a marathon or gone to college/ university. People may be staying at home and looking after children, or being an eye surgeon. Some will have done both.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is helpful. Lowest is Physiological. Then Safety (including emotional as well as physical), then Love and belonging. Do young people feel they are loved and belong? Then is Esteem (i.e. status and respect). Top is Self-actualisation (which is about legacy) and then Transcendence. But Jesus is with us, even right at the bottom, when only our physical needs are being met and we don’t feel safe or loved. We don’t need to be worthy to worship God. We don’t even need to be the best servant. We don’t ever need to be esteemed or be self-actualised and achieve a worldly legacy. We know because we have the example of Christ (Isa.53.3).

God’s calling for our lives makes a difference to our minds. Jesus gives us a ‘cheat code’ that frees us from being addicted to achievement and allows us to be content. Think more about God’s plan for our lives here: [What is God’s plan for my life? | GotQuestions.org](#)

### **Songs:**

“Yet not I but through Christ in me” by CityAlight

“Mighty to save” by Hillsong Worship, Reuben Morgan & Brad Gillies

**Memory verse:** Jeremiah 29.11

### **Weekly challenge (in the booklet):**

What are the must-haves for your life? What are the would-likes?



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