

Better – Week One

We're going to start our time together with a guessing game. I will take five people and give them the opportunity to guess an answer to a mystery question. We're going to write down your guesses, and at the end of our time together we'll find out the real answer. Let's get started.

Here's the question: "How many advertisements does a normal American see in one day?" Now I'm going to invite five people up here and we're going to work on this problem together for a second.

[Bring up five volunteers and have them stand in front of the group.]

I want you to close your eyes and imagine yourself during a normal day, start to finish. You wake up, stretch, and get out of bed. Do you have your phone? How many ads do you see there? Then you go downstairs to get breakfast, you open your cabinets. Do you see any advertisements in your kitchen? What about on your way to school? Maybe a billboard on the side of the road. Have you checked your phone again? Did you see another ad? Okay, now you're at school. Are there any posters, vending machines, t-shirts with a brand or a sports team logo? Maybe even a university's logo. Those are all a kind of advertisement.

Okay, now you're done at school and you're headed to soccer practice or dance rehearsal. Do you see any more ads? Do you look at your phone again?

You get home that night and turn on the TV: did you pay for premium? Or are you getting ads with your streaming content?

Finally, it's time to go to sleep. Did you check your phone again?

OK, now I want each one of you to write down your number on a piece of paper and write your name at the top.

[Have them write down the number & the card then sit back down. Tell them you will open the cards at the end of the message.]

The series we're going to be tracking with for the next couple of weeks is called "Better". We're going to focus on why God is better, and why the simple idea of something being "better" catches our imaginations.

Every ad, brand, or logo you encounter is communicating to you. It's trying to tell you that it is better than something else.

For example, a Nike swoosh on a pair of tennis shoes is trying to convince you that it's better than the Adidas lines on a different pair of tennis shoes. Both companies have spent millions of dollars on advertisements and celebrity endorsements and sponsorships. They have put up billboards and paid brand ambassadors on Instagram. They have run ads during your favorite sports event. And all this money is being spent on you, on all of us, to influence our decisions when it comes time to decide between having a swoosh or the lines on our next pair of shoes.

Some things are up front about saying that they're better. How many of you have ever seen an infomercial? Maybe you've even seen the advertisements for Flex Tape™? Those ads are just statement after statement telling you why it is better. Sometimes we even do research to find out which thing is better. Who here has ever used the Internet to research a product? What product did you research?

[Allow students to respond on what product they've researched.]

The fact that we research products tells us that we're always looking for the thing that is better. We have it in our minds when we're on social media or when we're at school. We're always on the lookout for messages that tell us what is better. We're looking for a better product or better lifestyle or better status symbol.

Think about it. An encounter with your friends might tell you that it's better to be on the football team than the debate team. Perhaps they don't say it outright, but how many people show up to watch the debate team compete? Not as many, right?

Maybe Instagram is telling you that it is better to be dating someone than to be single. Again, it's not obvious, but everyone on there is posing with their SO and you're just taking selfies with your cat.

Or maybe you are just receiving the message that everyone around you is better than you. No one has ever said that to your face, but deep inside your heart there is this longing and emptiness. Your confidence is low, and you begin to compare yourself to those around you. You become unsatisfied and unhappy – believing everyone is better than you.

That dissatisfaction, that emptiness, that longing for something better – the Bible has a lot to say about it. So, today we are going to focus on the truth of scripture that *God is better*. Over the course of this series, we are also going to look at the idea that *we are better with God*. In fact, the whole world is better and is getting better because of the work of Jesus on this earth.

Today's key scripture comes from Psalm 63:1-3.

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." [Psalm 63:1-3 NIV]

I want us to really focus on that phrase, "...your love is better than life." It sounds kind of poetic and maybe over the top, but the Old Testament author meant that quite literally. There is example after example of people putting their lives on the line to honor the love of God. Let's name just a few:

Abraham, the father of all Israel, risked his life and safety to travel to a foreign land because God called him to do so.

Moses returned to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery, even though he was wanted for murder and could have been executed.

Elijah, the great prophet, was being hunted because he was trying to get Israel to turn back to worshipping God when the King and Queen were leading them towards worshipping other gods.

“Better” Small Group Discussion Guide
Week Two

1. Let's share our highs and lows for the week.
2. Have you ever made a New Year's resolution? Was it successful?
3. We talked about the two lies people might believe. The first is that with a lot of work and strong will, we can make ourselves a little better. The second lie is that we can never change. Which lie do you find more compelling?
4. Explain “sanctification” in your own words.
5. What is one area in your life in which you could better love God?
6. What is one area in your life in which you could better love people?
7. Let's close in this prayer based on today's passage from Philippians.

Dear God,

Help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. You are changing our will even as you work through us. Help us to live as your children and shine like stars in the sky, holding firmly to the word of life. Amen.

OR

Consider closing in a 'breath prayer' to reflect on the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification. Guide students in picking a word or phrase to focus on. Then lead the room in slow, deliberate breathing as each person focuses on their word or phrase.

*For Example: *breath in* ...Holy Spirit... *breath out* ...make me better...*

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