

YOUTH
11-14s

GROWING UP

God's
Good
Story



SESSION 2

I am male or female

Genesis 1:27, 2:7, 22 ▪ Ecclesiastes 12:1

faith  kids

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Growing Up - God's Good Story 11-14s

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"All for the glory of God alone" (1 Corinthians 10:31)



SESSION 2

I am male or female

Genesis 1:27, 2:7, 22
Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Truth that changes me:

Our body tells us whether God made us male or female. Puberty is when our body changes, but our sex does not.

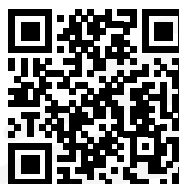


Faith in Youth looks like:

Young people who understand that their sex has been chosen by their loving creator and that growing up is good.

Preparation

As you prepare this session, we recommend watching the series introductory video if you haven't seen it.



Notes



Where are we going?

We want to give our young people a Biblical foundation for understanding their bodies. We want them to hear that they are made by God to be male or female - this difference is built into every cell of their bodies and is part of God's good design. During puberty our bodies grow and physically develop, but our God-given sex does not change.

*Pray and read the Bible passage. Read **Where are we going**, **The world our young people live in** and **Look at the passage** to give you a better understanding of how to apply the truth.*



The world our young people live in

Our young people are growing up in a world where gender and bodies are a hot topic. They hear that their biological sex is changeable - if their feelings don't match their sex they can change their body to align with their feelings. This is not what God tells us.

We have a better story. Our loving creator gives us our bodies, male or female. Every cell contains either male or female DNA. As people grow up they have to work out for themselves what they believe, what they like, how they feel. There's a lot of change as their bodies develop through puberty - this is part of God's amazing design. What doesn't change is their male or female identity.

We'd love our young people to know that it is good to be a woman and it is good to be a man and they can thank God for the sex he made them.



A note on terminology

In this session we are focusing on "sex", whether a person is male or female based on physical anatomy (chromosomes, hormones, genitals). Beyond that simple principle it is helpful to know where there is confusion, hurt and real freedom.

There are some people who are born with differences of sexual development, sometimes referred to as intersex conditions. In very rare cases, this can lead to ambiguity about sex but in most cases, although there is variation from the expected patterns for male and female, the person's sex is not ambiguous.

"Gender" is defined as an individual's personal, internal sense of being a man or woman. That may well change through the life of an individual. Culture says that we discover our gender from our internal feelings and can change our sex to match. The Bible teaches us that God gives us the identity of being a man or a woman through the body with which he has created us. So it is our body, not our feelings or decisions that determines who we are. We believe that God has given us our sex as an unchangeable part of who we are.

The Bible gives us freedom in how we express ourselves. Culture, fashion and personal preference allow individuals great freedom in their choices. Gender stereotypes are usually unhelpful. Girls don't need to wear skirts and they are free to play rough sports. Boys can take great care of their appearance and prefer poetry over sport.



Some young people feel that there is a disconnect between their biological sex and their internal sense of being a boy or a girl. Gender Dysphoria is the medical diagnosis for when someone experiences considerable distress because of their transgender experience. Evidence shows that the vast majority of pre-teens who experience gender dysphoria will find those feelings fade over time, usually during or soon after puberty.



Look at the passage

God's Image Bearers

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." GENESIS 1:27

Before we hear how male and female differ, the overriding principle is set. To be male is to be an image bearer of God, to be female is to be an image bearer of God. Both male and female are good; God says it himself! (Gen 1:31) And both are necessary for God's character to be seen – something would be lacking without the other.

God Created Man

"The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." GENESIS 2:7

Making a man was God's idea – he formed and shaped the man's body and breathed life into him. The man's body and soul are purposefully woven together, both part of God's good design. God did not make Adam and then decide what body to put him in, his body is essential to his identity.

It is good to be a man and have a man's body.

God Created Woman

"Then to Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man." **GENESIS 2:22**

Making a woman was God's idea - he formed and shaped her body. A different process for a different person with a deliberately different but equally careful design. Eve was not created as a female soul that could put on any body like clothing, God created a female body and soul, purposefully woven together. The body Eve was given was essential to her identity. Without Eve in the picture something was missing.

It is good to be a woman and have a woman's body.

God Created Youth

"Remember Your Creator in the days of your youth." **ECCLESIASTES 12:1**

God designed our bodies to amazingly change as we grow up - from a completely dependent baby in the womb, to a child learning to do things for themselves, to a young person going through puberty and growing in independence to become an adult.

During this process of change, wisdom is offered to the young - think about your creator, for you are not your own but his. Remember who made you, loves you, knows you and is wiser than you or your friends.



Win my heart first

How are you tempted to respond to culture's conversation about gender? Bury your head in the sand and hope it will go away? Get frustrated, struggle to explain yourself and come across as clueless? Start wondering if life could have been better as the other sex?

God has deliberately given you the body you have. It's not an insignificant outer shell, it's part of who you are, reflecting God's image. Your body is a good gift (despite its failings). Even if you feel like it falls short in some ways, or you feel limited by cultural stereotypes, you can tell the young people in your group that it is good to be a man and it is good to be a woman. As we thank God for our bodies, we offer the same timeless truth to them, praying it would anchor them through the changes of puberty and the storms of culture's confusion.

- How do you feel about being a man or a woman? Good? Limited? Free?
- What does it look like for you to keep, "remembering your creator" in a world that wants to erase God?



For your heart, before you prepare the lesson.



5 minutes to focus on your group

Do you know how the young people in your group feel about being a young man or a young woman? Are they worried about how they look? Are they entering puberty, in the midst of it or coming out of it? Why might they think having a different body is better? Are they aware of friends or family members struggling with these issues? Do you know of any with strong negative feelings about their own body and sex?



What do the young people in your group need?

Pray for them:
· to grasp the truth
· to live it out
· to rely on the Spirit



In case you're feeling nervous...

- Many young people are growing up in a context of hostility, confusion and tension around sex and gender. The Bible offers clarity with compassion. We have a better story. We can be confident to have this conversation not because we know everything, or because we relish awkwardness but because we take God at his word and we care for these young people.
- This is not a science lesson on puberty. We want the young people to know that their body is changing and to give them a chance to discuss this without the sniggering. If they have questions that are not appropriate for a group discussion, suggest that they speak to their trusted adults at home. Puberty is on the National Curriculum for school years 5/6, so all the young people in an 11+ group should have covered this in school.
- Some in your group may be uncomfortable with the sex God has given them, or may know others who are. We want to show love and compassion, and equip our young people to do the same.
- Tackling a cultural hot-topic means that there will be many, "But what if..." and, "I have heard of a person who..." in the young people's minds. Focus the conversation on what they think and what they see in their friends and peers, on immediate situations not examples from YouTube or other media. Direct them back to the Bible; what do you think God would say? Who can we trust most on this? Encourage them to talk with their parents.
- Be mindful that some young people could say, "I have a friend who..." when sharing their personal feelings or experience. We want to encourage openness and honesty but need to be aware that some might not feel able to open up personally in the group.

We understand this might feel daunting. The intention is to start a conversation, not to complete it.



Series overview visual

The overview visual (see p. 12) helps to explain the foundation of this series. Because God created us, he knows us better than anyone else. He gets to tell us who we are.

The visual shows a person hearing messages from themselves - these are thoughts and feelings (represented by the thought clouds); messages from others - including other people and the media (represented by speech bubbles); and messages from God - what he has written in the Bible. The crown shows that God's messages are the most important - we only let other messages stick if they say the same things as God says. God made us and loves us more than anyone, great delight comes from listening to him.



11-14s Session Plan



Get going

Amazing Bodies Quiz

Here are some facts about how men and women are different, see if you can get the right answer...

1) On average, how much thicker is a man's skin than a woman's?

- A) 5%
- B) 15%
- C) 25%

Answer = 25% - men typically have thicker skin, they also usually have denser bones, tendons and ligaments than women!

2) Who do you think has the most nerve cells (neurons) in the smell processing part of their brain?

- A) Men
- B) Women

Answer = women! Women have nearly 50% more neurons than men in their olfactory bulbs and more taste buds too!

3) Testosterone is a hormone - a chemical that helps boys' bodies grow into men's bodies. How much testosterone is in an average man's body compared to a woman's?

- A) The same
- B) Twice as much
- C) More than 3 times as much

Answer = C. An average adult female has about 17-70 nanograms per deciliter of testosterone, an average adult male has about 270-1070 ng/dl

4) Calories are in food and they give us energy. Generally do male or female bodies need more calories per day?


- A) Male
- B) Female

Answer = A. The daily calorie count is higher for men than women. Men typically require around 2500 calories and women around 2000 calories per day.

5) During exercise we burn fuel in our bodies to give us energy. Primarily what fuel do we burn?

- A) Both men and women burn carbohydrate
- B) Both men and women burn fat
- C) Men burn mostly carbohydrate and women burn mostly fat

Answer: C. Men and women primarily burn different fuel inside their bodies to give them energy for exercise.

 **Link:** God has made you an amazing body - an amazing male body or an amazing female body. Both types of body are equally good, they are both made in the image of God. But a male body and a female body are also different and we can thank God for his good design.



Notes

You will need: Fact questions ready to read out - add some of your own. Depending on your group, either have the young people move to different parts of the room for each answer - or they could simply put their hands up.



Teaching time



You will need: Bibles, pen, paper, series overview visual (see p. 12)

My Good Body

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." **GENESIS 1:27**

Write out the verse in the centre of a large sheet of paper, scribbling answers and thoughts around it.

If you were here last time, you might remember this verse as we looked at it then. This time we are going to focus on something else that we learn from it.

- Who made us? Who are we made to be like?
- Which two types of bodies did God make? What makes us 'male' and 'female'? *Look to define sex biologically (rather than by our 'inner sense'). Our bodies tell us which sex we are, particularly our chromosomes, hormones and genitals.*
- So, how does the Bible say men and women are the same and different? *Both are created rather than chance, both are equal because both are created in God's image. Male and female bodies are different, not only in their outer appearance but also their details (refer back to quiz).*
- Sex can not be changed. Have you heard people who disagree? *A question to clarify that it is scientifically impossible to change sex. No amount of surgery can change the physiological reality. Clarify that what people want from gender transitioning is impossible, which helps us to think about how we can care for people well.*
- How we present ourselves and what we do, can change. Can we think of godly life choices or activities that we might want to pursue that some think are more for the other sex? *The clothes we wear and the things we enjoy don't tell us if we are a girl or a boy - a boy's favourite colour can be pink, a girl can like football. There could be disagreement about men wearing dresses or piercings and tattoos, but the focus of the conversation is that there is great breadth and freedom available in what a godly man and woman can be like.*

God wants us to know that the good male body or good female body he has given us is an essential part of who we are that can't change. Some find it really hard to have the body God gave them and others might choose to express themselves in ways we find strange. We need to be kind to people who think differently about this.

My Growing Body

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." **ECCLESIASTES 12:1**

Write out the verse in the centre of a large sheet of paper, scribbling answers and thoughts around it.

Ask the young people:

- What's your earliest memory?
- Shout out some things that you can do now, that you couldn't do when you were a baby. *Perhaps through being taller, stronger, more agile, wiser or more intelligent.*

continued →

- Shout out some things that you will be able to do as an adult that you can't do now. *Like driving vehicles, voting, having children (depending on stage of development), piercings, professional sport.*
- 'Remember your Creator': Do you think much about your creator in your everyday life? Turn to your neighbour and tell each other about a moment when you're thankful for your body. That's the moment to remember your creator!



Growing up just happens - God designed our amazing bodies to grow and change without us doing anything! All the details of adult you were there in baby you.

A man is not just a 'big boy' and a woman is not just a 'big girl'. As we get older our bodies physically change, we change shape, get new hair and new feelings. Puberty is God's way of getting our bodies ready for life as an adult. Every adult has experienced it and because we only go through it once, it is new and strange for all of us when it is happening. It is normal to feel uncomfortable with your changing body - it doesn't mean you have the wrong body. We want to understand how trusting our creator in this particular season can help.

- Puberty is a big mix of feelings and experiences. New strength. New opportunities. New fears. As we go through puberty and our bodies change, we discover we can do new amazing things and we're thankful - how can we remember our creator in that situation? There might also be things that are difficult or confusing - how can remembering that your body has a good creator help in those times? *The hope is that this is a constructive, open conversation that does not need to tackle the more intimate topics. You could frame the conversation by acknowledging that puberty is difficult because it is the unknown, with new hormones that change our responses.*



Brain break

Balance challenge

Attempt the balance challenge. Ask each young person to get down on their knees, resting their forearms on the floor in front of them. Then lift their hands up so they are resting on their elbows. Finally, without moving their head, put their hands behind their backs. On each person's first attempt put a cushion under their head, so that when/if they collapse they don't hit their face on the floor. You can see it explained and demonstrated [here](#).

You will need: some cushions



Link: Amongst adults, most men can not do this and most women can. (Emphasise that this is a general trend, not a rule - some women can't, some men can.) It's not about skill, weight or strength. God has designed men so that they usually have a higher centre of gravity - more of their weight is higher up their body, towards their shoulders. A woman's centre of gravity is usually lower, so they can balance more easily. God has created men and women with different bodies, good at different things and equally precious. .

NB: This may not work with children who have not developed through puberty. Try to make sure you have some adults or older youth to demonstrate. Explain that this difference becomes clearer as our bodies change and develop.

continued →



Heart & hands

Did you spot it?

- What does the Bible say about men and women? *Created different but equal with a given sex.*
- What is God's purpose in puberty? *To prepare our bodies for adulthood. To remind us that we have a creator.*
- What are we told to remember while we are young? *Remember your creator! And perhaps... My body is a gift. My creator has chosen my sex and body.*

Work it out

- *Using the series overview visual: We pick up messages from others and from our own thoughts and feelings, but only God can tell us who we really are. What messages are you hearing from others about your sex or your growing body? Prompt if there are few answers: From friends? From your year group or older years? From teachers? From influencers? From parents?*
- *Could you write on a piece of paper one or two messages that you find coming from your own thoughts about your sex and your growing body? Either encouraging or discouraging. No one will ever see your piece of paper. It's just a way of thinking hard about what you secretly say to yourself.*
- *And what are the key messages you hear God saying today? Are they better or worse than the other messages we have just considered? God tells us in our bodies whether we are a boy or a girl. Imagine if we had to choose our own sex! How would we ever decide? Listen to God your loving creator - he doesn't change his mind, the body he has given you isn't a mistake, it is a good gift.*

Live it out

Look at Case Study Picture A (see p. 13) with the girl getting changed for PE. She is feeling self-conscious about her body and is thinking, "I wish my body was like theirs".

- What might she be feeling? What are some of the causes that you can imagine?
- What is the better story about her body from today's truth that you would love her to know? *Acknowledge that it would be hard to feel this way. What would you like her to know from today's session? How would you explain it to her? If the young people have more questions, encourage them to talk to their parents or a trusted adult.*
- What if she said that she wanted to be a boy because it would solve her problems? If she was your friend, how would you talk to her about it?



We have found that this is where children make the most progress relating the Bible to their everyday lives. Please leave enough time for this section.

Given the topic, it probably makes sense to split into single sex groups for this Heart & Hands. It might help to stay in the same room so that the groups can see each other discussing things seriously, but feel comfortable to discuss things openly. Decide what would be best for your group.

Even with closed questions, take answers from multiple young people. This gets everyone talking when the questions are straight forward, building confidence and reducing tension.

Look at Case Study Picture B (see p. 14) with a boy standing in the middle being asked to split into 'boys' and 'girls' groups. He is heading towards the boys group but is looking longingly over at the girls' group thinking "Why do we have to split up into boys and girls?".

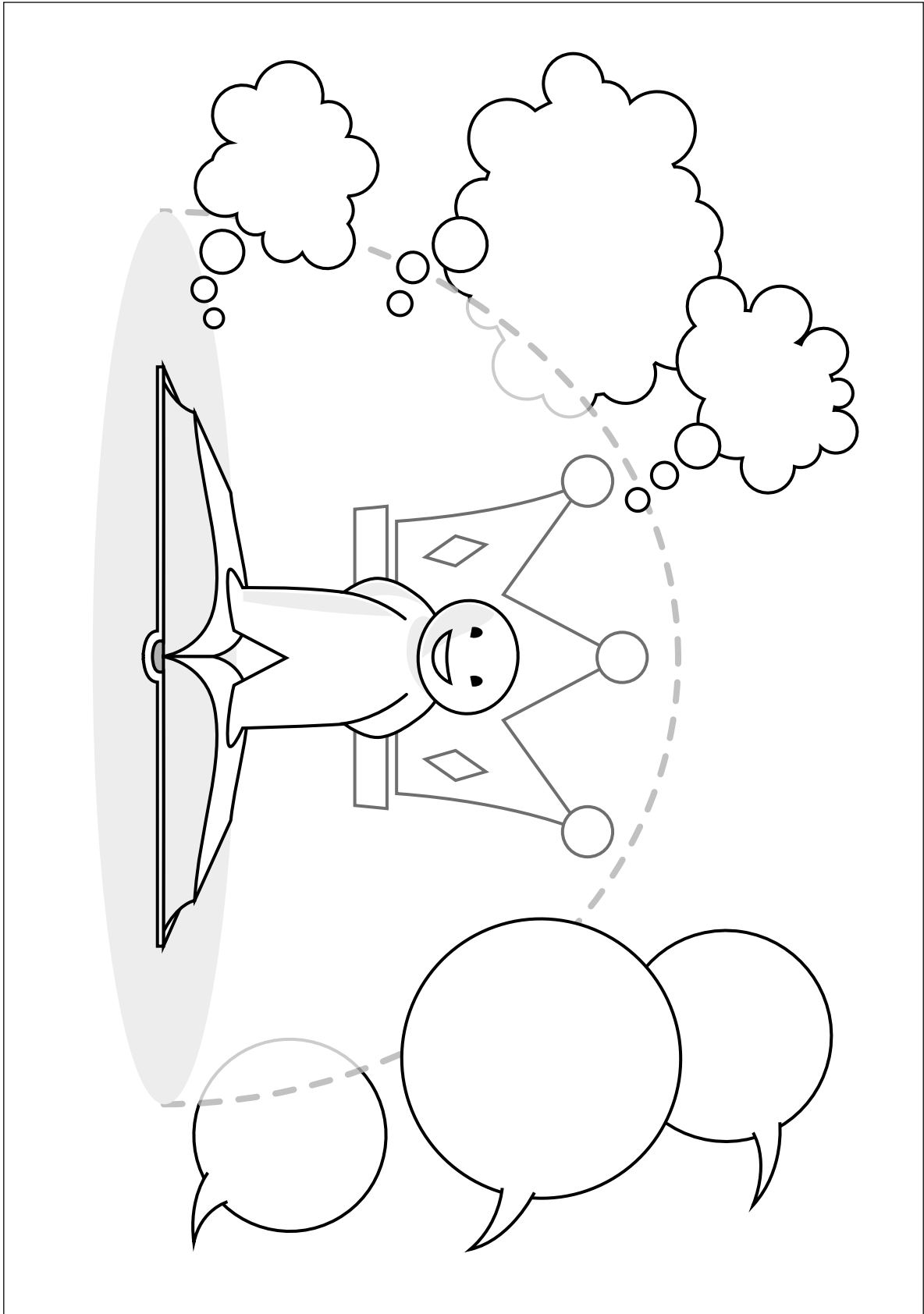
- What could cause the boy to wish he could sit with the girls? *Let the young people suggest!*
- What might the boy be thinking and feeling about his body?
- What does God want him to know about his body? How could you encourage him to trust God? *Acknowledge that it would be hard to feel this way. What truth would you like him to know? How would you explain it to him? If the young people have more questions, encourage them to talk to their parents or a trusted adult.*
- How could we show kindness to a boy who loves textiles and hanging out with girls? (Or a girl who likes rugby and hanging out with boys?) *What would kindness look like? How hard would you find it to be their friend?*

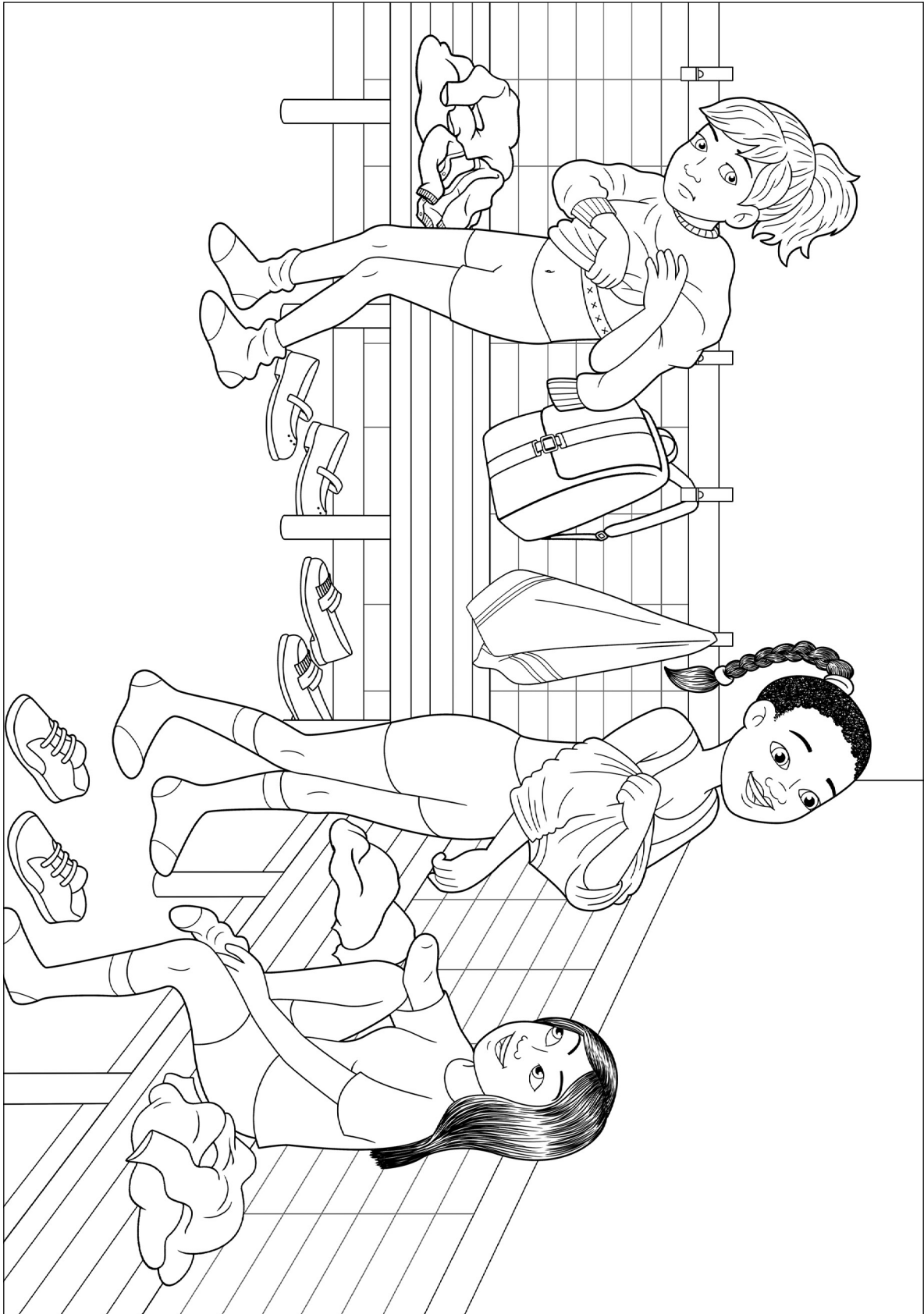
Prayer

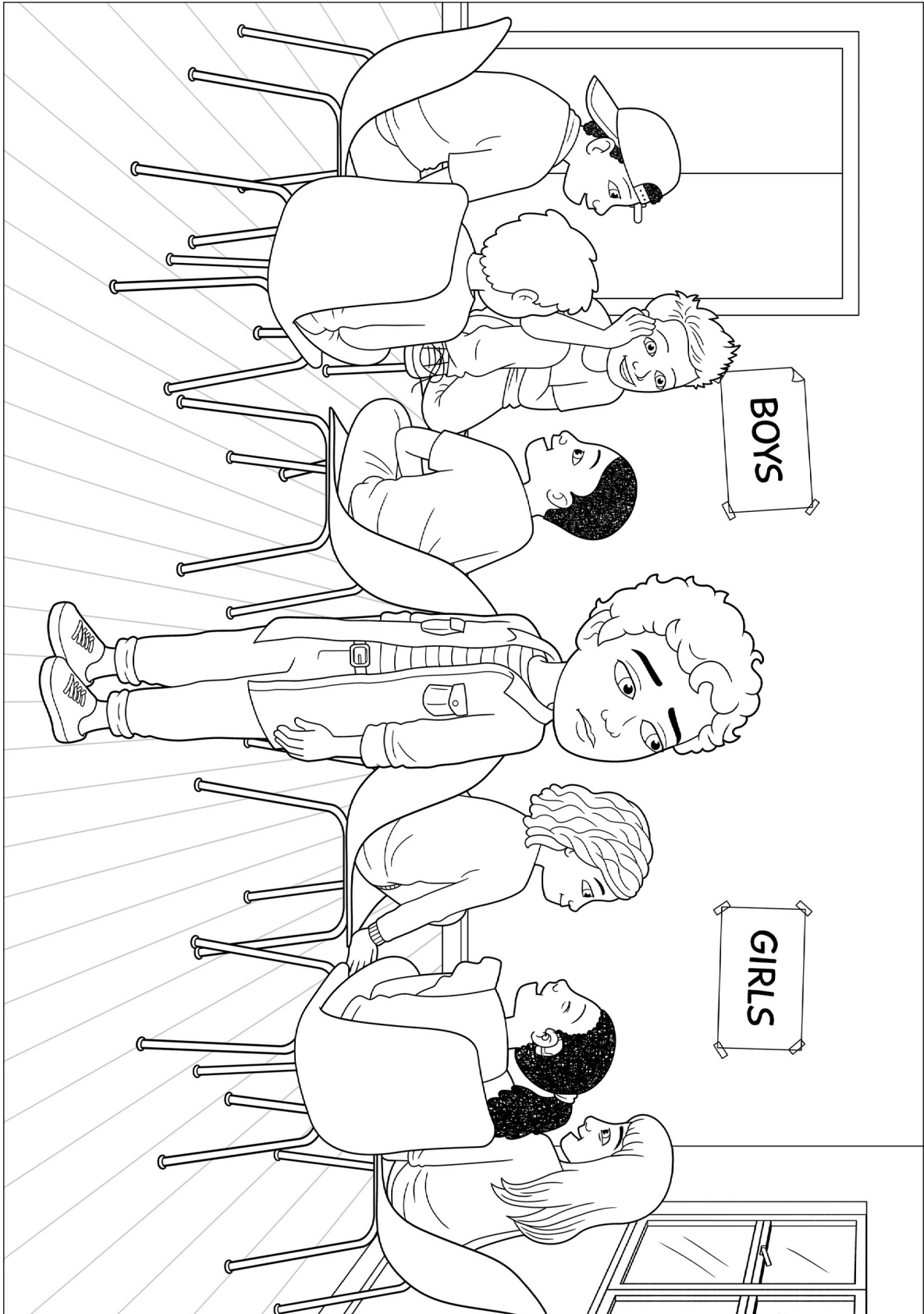
What truth do you need to remember about who you are, and the body God has given you? Ask God to help you feel his peace about the body you have and for his help to trust and honour God with your body as it grows and changes.



If you have separated into single sex groups for discussion, come back together for a final summary and time of prayer. You could pray about specific things the young people have raised in single-sex groups before coming back together if you think that would encourage openness. Do what works best for your young people.









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