

BECOMING

A YOUNG WOMAN OF GOD

JEN RAWSON



AN 8-WEEK CURRICULUM FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS

FOR AGES 11-14

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Becoming a Young Woman of God
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LESS THAN BECOMING: A LOOK AT OUR CULTURE

INGREDIENTS

A bag of dried lentil beans, small pieces of paper with the text of Proverbs 3:5 on one side, blindfolds, video clip on how our culture portrays women (prepare ahead of time), magazines, glue, scissors, poster board, out-of-focus/fuzzy photos.

APPETIZER: LENTIL-BEAN LAND MINES

Instructions: Scatter lentil beans on the floor. Have each girl walk across the “mine field” blindfolded with shoes off. This isn’t a race, but you can send more than one person at a time to speed things along. The only directions are that the girls need to get from one side to the other without stepping on the lentil-bean land mines.

After they’ve all crossed, say something like, **You’re growing up in a world that’s telling you what it thinks being a woman means. You probably take what life gives you and assume you have no choice as to what happens next. You may let life happen to you instead of thinking through what life has to offer, instead of choosing what life you will live. You then stop becoming who God created you to be and start trying to be what others want you to be.**

Continue, **It’s like these “land mines.” They make it awkward to walk, but you kept on moving anyway. None of you tried to get away from the land mines. In the same way, it’s hard on your soul and your true self to go through life in our culture. It’s as if you’re blindfolded, and the world around you is full of “bombs” that blow up who God wants you to be.**

APPETIZER: VIDEO CLIP

Show the video on our culture you prepared—it can include commercials, MTV, or anything you feel shows how women are portrayed in our culture. (You can also use go to www.campaignforrealbeauty.com and watch the clip titled “onslaught.”)

After the clip is over say, **Obviously, we're bombarded with messages and images of what we should be as women. Let's look deeper.**

Ask, **What makes you a woman? When does a girl become a woman?** (*Possible answers: When she starts her period, when she first has sex, when she starts to wear makeup, when she can date, when she first goes to college, when she first lives on her own, when she first wears a bra, when she gets married, etc.*)


Then say something like, **We're going to keep working on this answer over the next couple of weeks. This week let's see what the world tells us a woman is.**

SPECIALTY: MAGAZINE COLLAGE

Instructions: Pass out glue, scissors, and poster board and have your girls create collages using pictures and words from magazines (*Seventeen, J-14, Cosmo Girl; People, Us, and Glamour* are all good choices). to answer the questions "What makes you a woman?" and "When does a girl become a woman?" (This is best done as a group or in small groups. However, if you're short on time, you can prepare a collage in advance to show them. But if you're able, give them plenty of time—about 15 minutes.)

Some things I found were:

- ▷ Photos of girls in inappropriate clothes
- ▷ Many article titles about how to get "that guy"
- ▷ How to look sexier
- ▷ Ways to make your man happy
- ▷ Millions of makeup ads
- ▷ How to get the body you want
- ▷ Girls in seductive poses
- ▷ Provocative cartoons
- ▷ Materialism galore
- ▷ Which celebrities pose nude
- ▷ Where to find the hottest parties
- ▷ Makeover tips



Tip: Be sure to keep the finished collages. Use them as decorations in your youth room to refer back to often as reminders of what you and the girls are discussing. Other lessons will also refer back to the collages.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTARY

After the collages are finished, say, **Think of yourself as an alien studying America for the first time. Your crew is getting ready to morph into beings that look just like young American women. It's your job to do the research for your crew so you all don't get found out. You haven't had any contact with American females; you've only been able to look at these magazines. With that in mind, see what conclusions you're able to draw from question 1.**

Reality Check

1. If you were an alien studying American culture...
 - A. What kinds of women are respected?
 - B. What's the normal body shape?
 - C. What's a female's role?
 - D. What are women's interests?

After some time, say, **This is how magazines portray the "ideal" woman. What about other types of media—TV, billboards, music, music videos, etc.? What are they presenting for you? If we could make a collage of these media, what would it look like?**

After some discussion give each student a few minutes alone to answer questions two, three, and four on their Reality Check sheets.

2. What does this teach you about your role and value as a woman in America?
3. How do you feel about all of this?
4. Do you ever get tired of trying to live up to what the world says you should be?

Leader Note: *Oddly, when asked something like question four, most girls will say they don't feel the pressure. Why? Some haven't hit puberty yet. They're just discovering boys. The culture's pressure that girls fit into a "perfect woman" mold isn't too huge yet. Others, however, may not see anything wrong with this perfect-woman stereotype. Maybe they've bought into what culture's preaching. If they're giving the typical answer (that they don't feel pressure to live up to what the culture says they should be), challenge them. Ask each girl to tell you one thing she doesn't like about her body. Is there a celebrity she'd just die to look like? Has she ever felt ugly because a guy didn't like her? In any case, don't let the girls get away with thinking they really don't care that our culture's telling them who they're supposed to be, how to behave, and what to look like. You might even take a survey of what everyone in the room is wearing to prove your point.*

Reality Check

5. Do you think you'll ever get there?

Leader Note: *This stuff doesn't just go away because you grow up. Cosmo Girl turns into Cosmo, and J-14 turns into Seventeen, which then turns into Elle. The desire to look good never really stops. Tell a story about how you struggle even now. Look at those alien questions again and see if any of them are true. Just discuss these briefly (they're discussed more heavily next week).*

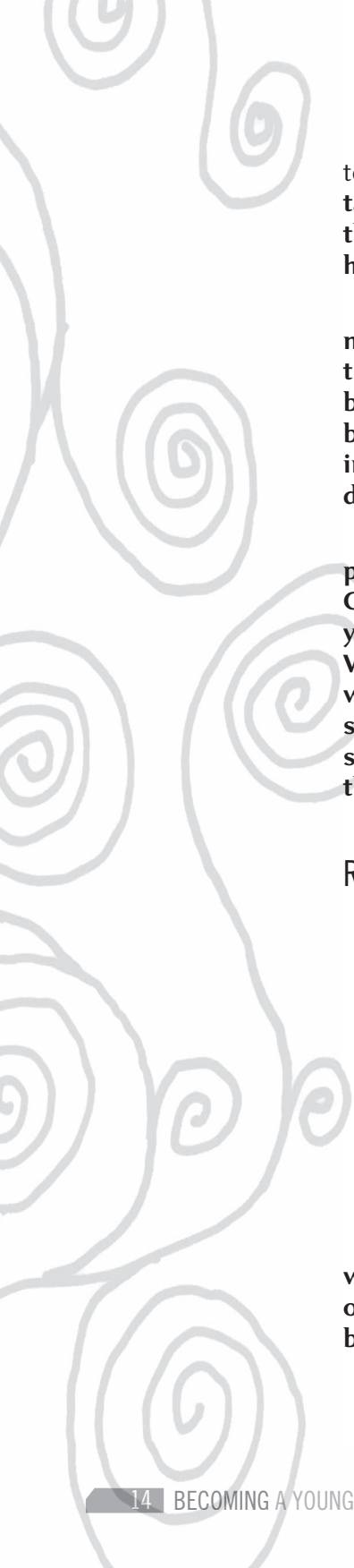
Then say, **This all leads to one more question: What happens when you don't fit this role or appearance? Because most of us won't all the time.**

After you receive some answers, say, **Now check out this verse:**

Reality Check

6. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death."

Ask, **How does the way our culture views women and what it expects from women lead to death?** (Possible answers: It could be a literal death for some, such as runaway teenagers living in prostitution, girls who end up with AIDS, doing drugs, or anorexia.)



Then ask, **What other kinds of death could the verse mean?** After some answers and discussion say something like, **The Bible often talks about death and life in ways meaning true happiness and joy that only come from a relationship with Christ and living within his safety. In that context what does this verse mean?**

After some answers say, **Look at your collage. Where's the information on how to get along with Mom and Dad, deepen your spiritual life, be a better friend (a real one), study more effectively, better your character, be happy with the way your body already is, be kind to the people who drive you nuts, deal with all of the feelings and emotions you experience as a middle schooler, what to do when your parents get a divorce?**

Then say, **Instead culture focuses on how you can look skinnier, prettier, and sexier. Wear the right stuff. Act ditzzy and flirt more. Culture doesn't care about you. Many forces in our culture will kill your self, joy, and happiness and give you no help with real life. When we focus on what our culture tells us, we stop being happy with how we look and start trying to look like everyone else. We see models in magazines and try to copy their hairstyles. We see someone looking good in a pair of jeans, and we assume if we get those same jeans, we, too, will look good and get attention.**

Reality Check

7. Female impersonators:

- A. What's an impersonation?
- B. What does a female impersonator do?
- C. Do you ever feel like you're being a female impersonator?
- D. In what ways do you see girls trying to be like everyone else?

After some time, say, **In the movie *13 Going on 30*, there's a scene where Jenna's at her 13th birthday party, trying to be cool for the other girls and the cool guys. Her best friend is a dorky overweight boy—but he calls her a robot. What do you think he means?**

After getting some answers, say, **Do you know why you can stop trying so hard to be female impersonators? Because you're already females. Don't impersonate someone else—be yourself.**

Reality Check

8. Isaiah 55:8 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”

Specialty: Fuzzy Photos

Instructions: Snap some out-of-focus photos yourself or find some on the Internet and print them or place them in a PowerPoint program. (The photos can be of anything. The point is that we only see a small part of a bigger idea. For instance, if your item is a pencil, then you'd want the photo to be of the sharpened lead point—and out of focus.) Have students guess what the blurry pictures are.

Then say, **God does things differently than we do. We can clearly see in our collages how the world values women and girls. But God sees things differently. And even though it makes sense to you to dress as our culture requires and act the way our culture tells you to—and find value in those things—God sees life differently...and sees clearly in all the places where we can't! Our vision is blurry—just like these pictures. God's thoughts aren't the same as ours.**

Then ask, **Have you ever thought you had something in life all figured out and then later said, “Well, if I'd known that, then I would've...”?**

After any discussion say, **God knows it all already and has something to say about what our culture tells us is okay. We can't always understand or see clearly why God says do this or that or don't, but that's what trust is all about.**

Reality Check

9. Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”



SPECIALTY: LAND MINE REPRISE

Let your girls walk through the lentil-bean land mines again—only this time without blindfolds. The only rule this time is that the girls have to stay in the land-mine area...just like we have to live in this world.

Ask, **How was this time different?**

After your girls answer, say, **What we're going to do during the next few weeks together is like taking off the blindfolds to cross these land mines. We're going to help open your eyes so you can see and be able to live in this culture without it wearing you down. So even when no one else understands why you aren't like them, why you dress differently, act differently, or talk differently, you can know you're going to be happier, healthier, and whole because of being different. I hope to help you see with God's eyes so you can see clearly where everyone else sees a fuzzy picture. But others will be walking on "bombs" and getting hurt, while you'll be able to walk around the bombs and be protected from some of the damage our culture can cause.**

TAKE OUT

Give each girl one of the tiny pieces of paper with the text from Proverbs 3:5—this will help remind her to keep her eyes open and start looking at the world differently.

CLOSING ACTIVITY: EXPLAIN SOUL WORK

Say, **We'll be having Soul Work every week to help you process what we're talking about. We'll be journaling, filling out quizzes, doing multiple-choice questions, and even interviewing friends and other people. This is fun, not work. That's why we'll call it Soul Work instead of homework. You'll have the opportunity to share your ideas and thoughts when we meet as a group. All I ask is that you be completely honest and spend time truly thinking about your answers. The more effort you put into Soul Work, the more you'll grow and become who God designed you to be.**

Pass out **Soul Work** sheets, then close in prayer.

REALITY CHECK

LESS THAN BECOMING: A LOOK AT OUR CULTURE

1. If you were an alien studying American culture...
 - A. What kinds of women are respected?
 - B. What's the normal body shape?
 - C. What's a female's role?
 - D. What are women's interests?

2. What does this teach you about your role and value as a woman in America?

3. How do you feel about all of this?

4. Do you ever get tired of trying to live up to what the world says you should be?

5. Do you think you'll ever get there?

6. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be _____, but in the end it leads to_____."

7. Female impersonators:
 - A. What's an impersonation?

- B. What does a female impersonator do?
- C. Do you ever feel like you're being a female impersonator?
- D. In what ways do you see girls trying to be like everyone else?
8. Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my_____ are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my_____."
9. Proverbs 3:5-6: "_____ in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your_____ straight."

SOUL WORK

LESS THAN BECOMING: A LOOK AT OUR CULTURE

Every week I want to get your brain moving and your pens grooving. This first week I'll let you be the one who knows the answer!

Brainteaser

Find a friend or parent and try this out. Have him pick a number, keeping it a secret. Then have him double it, then multiply it by five, and then tell you that number. All you have to do is knock off the final digit and you'll have his original number. Be sure to practice on your own first so you can see that it works.

Soul Work questions

Okay, now that you have those brain juices flowing, let's get started. You're going to evaluate television. Pick one or two shows you regularly watch or enjoy watching when you have a chance. (Wait until your parents find out that your "assignment" for church is to watch TV!) You'll want to grab a pen. As you watch this show, try to be like the aliens we pretended to be when we made our collages in class. You're going to evaluate how media is trying to portray women in our culture. See what TV is telling you personally about what you should be. TV teaches good things and bad things, so look for both.

Here are some questions to answer while you watch your show.

1. How are the women dressed?

2. What role(s) do(es) the character(s) play? If there's more than one female character who plays a significant role in the show, circle all that apply.

Funny

Sexy

Strong

Dorky

Wife

Seductive

Intelligent

Desperate

Stupid

Independent

Loving

Rude

3. How do men respond to her/them?

4. How do women respond to her/them?

5. What does this teach you about your value as a woman in America?

6. Finish this sentence according to your own thoughts (not according to the show you watched). To be the "perfect woman" I need to...

