



FEAR+LESS DIALOGUES

This lesson will help youth to face the fears and obstacles to having heartfelt and meaningful conversation and connection on the subject of race.

ENHANCER OF JOY

Overcoming Fear to Experience Joy

DURATION

60 minutes

LESSON DEVELOPED BY

Georgette Ledgister with Gregory Ellison, II

GOAL

Overcoming Fear to Experience Joy

TIPS TO PREPARE

Prayerfully read Matthew 17:1-9, and pp. 15-26 of *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*.

MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- Fearless Dialogues Handout
- Gift Name Badges
- 20 images of various current events or social movements (see www.unsplash.com for free high-resolution images. Search keywords “youth,” “justice,” “power,” and “equality”)
- 3-foot measuring tapes
- Laptop or device for music, speaker and projector (optional)
- Access to Wi-Fi if streaming music

SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

Set up the room in circles of 5 chairs, leaving enough room to walk around each group of chairs. Have music playing in the room. Set up a table near the door with the self-adhesive name badges of the following gift groups:

- Activist
- Artist
- Connector
- Educator
- Healer
- Neighbor

Creating Space (1-2 hours prior to the session)

- Prior to the arrival of participants, set up chairs in circles of 5. Place one handout in each chair.
- Print 20 photos on 8 1/2×11 sheets of paper (preferably in color) from unsplash.com, depicting image of young people, activism, justice, hope, despair, power, equality, and fear. These images will be used for the Museum Vox Ocular activity.
- Take a few moments to pray over each chair in the room, setting an atmosphere of peace for the participants.
- Select music that is appropriate for your group and context to welcome participants into the room.
- Set up gift name badges on a table by the entrance to the room. Gift name badges function as an

ice-breaker that disrupts the way participants enter into a space, and creatively invites them to connect with strangers. As participants arrive, greet each one, and invite them to select a name badge that reflects the gifts of their soul—gifts that are important to who they are and how they approach the world around them—and not necessarily the roles they might occupy on a daily basis. Invite them to sit in a circle with others also wearing the same gift name badge. The gift name badges should be labeled as are as following the following gift groups:

- Activist – passionate about being a voice for the voiceless.
- Artist – searches for and finds beauty in the most unlikely places and ways.
- Connector – builds bridge between people.
- Educator – commits to learning and helping others learn.
- Healer – works towards wholeness in people and in community.
- Neighbor – possesses the gift of being present with people from all walks of life.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Matthew 17:1-9

Purpose

The rise of social movements such as the Movement for Black Lives, #MeToo, and #NeverAgain remind us that young people are ready to confront the culture of fear that underlies social injustice. Youth will learn to fear+less, to journey into the unknown, to invite a stranger to become a neighbor, and to take incremental steps towards fostering sustainable change—all key conditions for experiencing joy in self and in community.

Objectives

In this session, youth will discuss the fears that inhibit hard and heartfelt conversation, meaningful connection, and inhibit communal joy and flourishing. Youth will learn tools to engage the stranger and the unknown, to retrain their eyes and ears.

Further Study

Read: Gregory C. Ellison, II, *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), pp 1-34.

Watch: Gregory Ellison, II and Georgette Ledgister, “Creating Space in Youth Ministry,” Yale Youth Ministry Institute, 13 July 2017, <https://youtu.be/zQuCqPo3HOo>.

Introduction for Leaders

Like a piece of discarded gum that we inadvertently step on and that resists all of our attempts at removal, fear clings to our senses coating them with a stickiness that just won't quit. The stickiness is a repeated statement of our helplessness and powerlessness. *I can't. I'm stuck.* Fear makes us hyper-aware of our captive senses and exaggerates our inabilities and vulnerabilities. What was just an inconvenient sticky residue becomes a determining factor of how we will move in a moment, a day, and—in its most extreme expression—in our lives. At its core, fear is about power. It heightens the sense of powerlessness of the one experiencing fear, isolating one from others who are perceived as more powerful. Ellison writes,

An antidote to fear, “lessness” is a posture of humility, perceptiveness, and intention not to lord power over others. This posture resists the temptation of possessing all the answers, and yields to the mysterious journey of raising questions.

In response to the fears that beset young people as they seek to find themselves and God in the beauty and brokenness of the world, Fearless Dialogues offers an approach that invites young people to engage fear, and to create meaningful connections with self, other and God, to overcome those fears.

Fearless Dialogues invites participants into unknown encounters with strangers and the strange world around us. It is in such encounters, that participants might discover the joy that accompanies overcoming fears. In the transfiguration story in Matthew 17:1-9, Peter, James, and John climb a mountain with Jesus to pray. At the summit, the disciples are invited to embrace an unexplainable experience that is fear-inducing, to forego their need to define and explain, and to invite the learning that comes from “unknowing.” In the process of engaging their fear of strangers and the unknown, young people are beckoned into relationships that are characterized by less fear. In circumstances when youth fear+less, connections with others are forged, discovery unfolds, and experience of joy abounds.

Gather

Gather (5 minutes)

- Once participants are seated in their groups of 5, ask them to share with their group why they selected that gift name badge.
- When everyone in the group is done sharing, all in the group respond, “God, we give thanks for the [gift group] amongst us.”
- If time permits, invite a young person to offer a prayer to open the rest of the session.

Engage

Engage (20 minutes)

- **Activity 1: “The Museum Vox Ocularô”** [15 minutes combined for introduction, questions and activity]
 - The Museum Vox Ocularô is an activity designed to help young people to develop practices of deep reflection, seeing intentionally and listening meaningfully when encountering difference. Remember, “lessness” or humility, is the antidote to fear!
 - Offer the following introduction for the activity:

Welcome to the Museum Vox Ocular! For the next 10 minutes, in groups of 2 or 3, you will take a self-guided tour of striking images displayed throughout the room. These images are strategically placed in unexpected places, so we invite you to look carefully and to see intentionally. The name of this experiment draws attention to the two senses that you will engage during the Museum Vox Ocular. Vox, which is Latin for voice points to the musical voices that set the tone for the experiment. The second sense that you will engage during the activity is sight—hence the term, ocular. Look into the eyes that are pictured in the images and see beyond who or what you would expect to see. In your groups of 2 or 3, look at these images and answer the following questions (please carry some paper and a pen to note your responses):

- Who do you **see**?

Look deeply into the eyes of the person or persons pictured in the image. Who do you see? Do you see a loved one? A parent? A classmate? Yourself?

- Who **don’t** you **hear**?

The saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” is a familiar one to many. Each image communicates a world of stories, if one engages closely enough to hear those stories. However, this question is a counterintuitive one, as it asks you to attend to the stories that the image does not tell, and to note the voices behind those stories that might be silent.

- Where is **hope**?

Hope is the engine that drives the work of Fearless Dialogues. A number of the images you will see will depict difficult and painful situations. If you can see a glimmer of hope in the bleakest of contexts, then you can begin building the momentum necessary to work towards incremental change.

- Who **cares**?

We ask this final question in two ways. In the first, we seek to discover the sources of care, the people who offer care, in the scenarios that you will encounter in these images. The second way we ask this question is quite pessimistic—who cares? The fact is, too many persons and too many communities have been marginalized for far too long, and naming this exclusion important in

combatting a culture of fear.

Reflect

Reflect (20 minutes)

- **Activity 3:** “The Five Fears that Stifle Conversation”
 - Invite one of the participants to read Matthew 17:1-9 (it might be helpful to project the passage from a laptop, onto a screen for others to follow along).
 - Offer the following introduction for this activity:

Difficult situations and injustice make it difficult for people to connect with one another in a meaningful way. When there is a power imbalance, people often respond with fear. Fearless Dialogues has identified five types of fear that stifle conversation and meaningful connection. These are:

1. *The fear of the unknown;*
2. *The fear of strangers;*
3. *The fear of appearing ignorant;*
4. *The fear of being unseen and unheard;*
5. *The fear of oppressive systems.*

In groups of two or three, answer the following questions:

1. Which of the following fears do you see reflected in the story of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9)?
 2. Which of the five fears do you struggle with the most in your life?
 3. How can you contribute to a culture of fearing less or being fear+less in your home, school, church, and community?
-

Send Forth

Send Forth (15 minutes)

- **Activity 4:** “The 3-Foot Challenge: Cultivating a Fear+Less Culture”
 - Hand each participant a 3-foot measuring tape.
 - Invite each participant to stand as they are able, and to stretch the measuring tape in front of them.
 - Instruct them to hold one end of the measuring tape against their midsection and to extend the other end as far away from their body as they can. As they hold out the measuring tape in this manner, instruct them to rotate in a full circle, and to note how many other hands holding measuring tapes they cross.

- Offer the following closing words to them as they prepare to leave:

The injustices that our society faces, and the challenges that you as young people have chosen to confront in yourselves, your homes, your churches, your schools, and in public places are immense. Sometimes, the oppressive nature of these injustices and challenges seem overwhelming for one young person to tackle. These injustices cause great fear and make us feel helpless and powerless. However, remember that the antidote to fear is “lessness” or humility. The Fearless Dialogues approach does not require you, alone, to be responsible for changing the world. Fearless Dialogues is an invitation for you take responsibility for the three feet around you. Imagine if all of us in this room were to take responsibility for the three feet around us? How much change could we create in our communities and our churches?

*You have gone through activities today that have helped you to see and to hear more deeply. Here is your challenge as you leave today: **for the next three days, take the time to see three people that cross into your three feet, and to hear their stories. Write their names on this measuring tape and keep this measuring tape as a visual reminder to see the unseen and to hear the unheard.***

- If time permits, invite a young person to offer a closing prayer.