

## CREW Bible Study

### Message – LOVE/HATE Week 3

- **BOTTOM LINE:** Let love fill in the blank.
- **GOAL:** To help students recognize and guard their assumptions about other people by seeing them as Jesus sees them.
- **SCRIPTURE:** *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." – John 8: 3-11*

### MESSAGE

Think of the last time you were at a mall. I know...it probably seems like ages ago, right? But think about the variety of stores you can go to at the mall. So many stores with such different styles, different vibes, different "personalities." And they're right next door to one another.

Maybe you've never thought about a store having a vibe or a personality, but they do. Think about it....there's a difference between Vans and Nike, right? They both sell shoes, but you instantly know when you walk past the window which is which. And there's a very different atmosphere between the two stores. Or what about American Eagle and Hollister? They literally sell many of the same items, but there's a very different vibe you get when you shop at either one.

That's intentional. These companies spend billions of dollars and go to great effort to shape and control that vibe or personality. It forms their reputation and that reputation leads to assumptions you will make as the customer. So, when you need a new pair of shoes and you're trying to decide where to shop, you'll think of *Vans* for instance, because you want something with the vibe they offer. And you know if you go to that store, you'll get it. Companies build their brand on that.

But what's interesting is that just like we make assumptions about stores based on a reputation they've cultivated, we do the same thing with groups of people. Although, maybe *they* haven't cultivated that reputation like we think they have.

Think about your school and what you see and hear. There are probably assumptions like....

- the "rich" kids are \_\_\_\_\_
- the kids who like anime are \_\_\_\_\_
- the theatre kids are \_\_\_\_\_
- the basketball cheerleaders are \_\_\_\_\_
- the band kids are \_\_\_\_\_

I'm sure you can relate. We all tend to fill in the blanks about other people. That's not just a teenager thing – that's an everybody thing.

We build a reputation for someone in our mind based on the vibe of the group they associate with. And we assume things about their personality because of it. We assume they are a part of that "brand."

But who are we to make these assumptions, right? We could be totally off.

Two things can be at play here: experiences and insecurities. We might have a past experience with someone "like them". The thing that person said or did to us has stayed with us. And now we use that to prejudge what others in that group are like. We assume they're all the same. All the same brand.

Or that person we're trying to stick a label on has something we want or wish we had. And out of anger, frustration or jealousy, we automatically assume the worst because they remind us of how far we feel from being the best. Think about that for a second.

Our experiences and insecurities cause us to convince ourselves that we know *way* more about someone than we actually do. We predict what they will think, say or do because of a "brand" we associate them with.

But if we want to be known for love and not hate, we've got to resist the temptation to do this.

There's a moment from Jesus' life that may be able to help us. Jesus was in the middle of a very tense encounter with some of the religious leaders in Israel at the time, the Pharisees and Scribes. The Pharisees and Scribes were a *big deal* in the religious circles. They had a "brand" of being self-righteous. They thought they were better than everyone else. And they pushed that brand. They "advertised" it. So, when Jesus came around and started spending time with the people who these religious leaders had branded as sinners, things got really tense. The Pharisees and Scribes didn't like him.

They actually started trying to catch Jesus off guard with questions they hoped would prove He was a fake and a fraud. They wanted Him to slip up and answer something in a way that took away his credibility. They wanted to call him out.

During one of these encounters, people had gathered to listen to Jesus teach in the temple. While he was there, the religious leaders caught a woman in a sinful, R-rated situation, and they dragged her in front of Jesus to see how he would handle her punishment. And check out what happens in John, chapter 8 beginning with verse 3....

*"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him."*

So we hear in this story that this woman was literally caught in the act. We can assume she was already pretty humiliated, and the law demanded that she be punished by having people throw rocks at her until she died. And so, the religious leaders wanted to force Jesus to make a choice in front of a crowd of people:

- Would he overlook this woman's obvious sin and ignore the law of Moses? What kind of religious leader would ignore the law of Moses?
- Or would he allow her to be stoned, causing the crowd to turn on him as a fraud? He preached about forgiveness, right?

It was a trap. That was the point.

And the story goes on.....

*"But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

Now that's a mic drop moment. These religious leaders who built their brand on appearing better than others and pointing out the sins of others, are totally put in their place. The plan backfired. Jesus finds a way through this based out of love and not hate. He releases the woman, tells her she's free, and encourages her to go and live her life differently.

That's a moment with a message that you don't want to miss. The message Jesus had for everyone involved was this: What is possible for your future is not determined by your past.

Jesus showed that this woman deserved more than the assumptions or judgements others made of her. And that applies to each one of us too. We are worthy of forgiveness, grace, and second chances. And when it comes to other people, when we fill in the blank about them with love and not hate, we can offer them forgiveness, grace and a second chance too.

Think about these three things:

1. When and how have others filled in the blanks about you? How did that feel?
2. When and how have you filled in the blanks about someone else? And why?
3. Have you ever made statements like:
  - They don't belong here.
  - They're all the same.
  - People like that always do this.

Assumptions and judgements about people are easy to make, but there's no Jesus in them. Jesus taught that everyone is worthy of love, everyone is worthy of grace, and everyone is worthy of the opportunity to become a better version of themselves. That's a brand worth buying into. A brand based on love, not hate.

#### **FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Companies spend billions of dollars each year trying to shape and control the reputation and assumptions people make about their brand. What are the assumptions you make about the following brands based on their reputation? Amazon Prime; Walmart; Chick-fil-A; Apple; Disney
2. How do students make assumptions about people? What factors go into making the assumptions? (clubs; appearance; brands or clothing people wear, etc.)
3. In our world in general, where do you notice people making assumptions about others?
4. Read John 8:3-11. What was so radically different about the way Jesus handled this situation?
5. Why do you think the religious leaders felt they were better than the other people? Sometimes we act like the religious leaders in our own lives. Share an experience where someone was so self-righteous, they thought that they were better than everyone else. How did that make you feel to watch it or experience it?
6. When have you made a wrong assumption about someone?
7. There are two sides to a coin, and there can be two sides to every story. Discuss these scenarios and imagine two explanations for each. First, give a negative explanation for why this person did what they did. Then, flip the coin. Give a grace-filled explanation for what happened.
  - Your brother or sister took your favorite pair of shoes without asking.
  - Your coach gave your starting spot on the team to someone else.

- Your parent yelled at you as soon as they walked in the door.
- Your boyfriend or girlfriend isn't returning your texts.
- Your best friend just posted a picture of everyone in your friend group hanging out without you. (Well, imagine this BEFORE social distancing!)