

Module 2: Let's Get Real

“Let's Get Real” is the second module of Abundant Life: You Were Made for More. The three teachings in this module are focused around the reality of the culture in which our students are immersed. When we look at the reality of what their days are filled with, we can see a clear picture of counterfeit intimacy, distraction, and comparison that is fueled by social media. Online dependency has had some great effects on society, as it has increased our ability to communicate efficiently, but it has also created a dangerous place for unintended loneliness and corruption. As the Church, creating conversations around these cultural topics is so important; I know with certainty that teenagers yearn to have their questions answered about some of their deepest struggles. We must shine the light on struggles like pornography, loneliness, and rejection, and declare that there is hope, because Jesus has already overcome them. After taking a few weeks to study identity in module one, the second module will begin to look at how understanding our identity in Jesus is guaranteed to lead us to freedom. Before we fully live into the abundant life Jesus Christ has provided for us, we have to get real and deal with our relational and sexual brokenness.

- **Teaching 1: Social Media: It's Not What You Think**
 - *Theme: Instagram. Snapchat. Twitter. Facebook. VSCO. Pinterest. Social media is great because it lets us stay connected to friends who live far away from us. Social media is awesome when it gives us the opportunity to encourage friends and stay in touch with them. But these platforms can quickly become dangerous and destructive. We are quick to comment our thoughts, even when they're offensive and discouraging, quick to judge, quick to compare, quick to make assumptions, and quick to react spontaneously, largely because we can't see the other person's face through the screen. While we may think that social media is allowing us to be connected to everything always, it's actually making us less present in everyday life and damaging our relationships. The dangers of social media are real, and until we filter them through a Biblical worldview, the internet can become a place of darkness that enslaves us to perpetual brokenness.*
 - **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why should social media be used to complement our sense of community but not replace it? How has social media changed our relationships? What does it mean to bring struggles into the light? Why is community an essential part of the Christian lifestyle?
 - **Main Points:**
 - When online relationships thrive, real-life relationships can deteriorate.
 - Social media can make us feel like we are gaining connections because we have the power to get anything at our fingertips. The

truth is, research has found we are actually losing connection. Researchers believe that the constant use of social networking affects brain development. They say that young users of online communities become more self-absorbed and may lose key parts of the socialization process that only direct human contact can provide. They point out that meeting people face to face and building personal relationships in real life is crucial for enabling young people to learn what acceptable behavior is in a social group. They also question whether or not it is possible to learn empathy through these social networking sites. Think about your virtual conversations. How do you assess the mood of the other person and communicate your own? Is it by texting in capitals and virtually shouting? Is it by sending a GIF? Or is it by sending an emoji? The answer is simple: you can never feel a person's real reaction through a screen. You'll miss the beauty of their nonverbal communication, the awkwardness of trying to express something through the nerves, the rise and fall of their voice when they get excited about something, and the joy when you really click with someone.

- Mental-health deficit is clearly correlated with screen time, and screen time can affect sleep and general disconnectedness.
 - According to a report released by *USA Today*, your generation is the most connected and engaged online, but you're also the loneliest.
 - So, where SHOULD social media fit into our lives? I'm not going to stand up here and tell you to delete every app and go back to the 18th century. Just like you, I too see the benefits of social media. Technology can be a very useful extension of our embodied relationships, but here's the key: it should never serve as a replacement for them.
 - Face-to-face communication is much fuller than online communication (remember, God created us as holistic beings with emotions, responses, joy and sorrow responses, etc.).
 - Community serves as a protection for our souls in hard and tumultuous times.
 - Comparison thrives on social media and unfortunately, many people see that as being the place where they define their worth.
 - Practical Do's and Don'ts for your group (limits on social media and phone use, etc.)
- *Main Scriptures:*

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
 - Galatians 6:2
 - 2 John 12
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. How much time do you think you spend on your phone? What are the apps you think you spend most of your time on?
 2. How has social media changed relationships?
 3. Discuss some healthy ways to utilize social media & why it should not replace our sense of community.
 4. What is the danger of having everything at our fingertips? What does Jesus say about bringing our sins out of the dark and into the light?
 5. Why is face-to-face intimacy needed to develop a relationship?
- **Teaching 2: Pornography: The Culprit of Diminishing Real Relationships**
 - *Theme: Pornography is a phenomenon that not many youth groups are talking about, despite the epidemic running wild within the lives of our young men and women. The statistics are shocking, and if we take time to let them soak in, it becomes more and more clear that relationships are in desperate need of saving. Pornography is easy; it's accessible, requires zero relational effort, and it's safe because there is no vulnerability, no love, and no fear of getting hurt. Pornography is responsible for diminishing real romantic relationships. The saddest part is that if we decided not to give pornography power, it would have none. Pornography is so supplied because we demand it so much. A heart change is needed to tackle this epidemic; at the root of the pornography problem lies a tragic misunderstanding of who we were created to be and what relationships are supposed to be about.*
 - **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why is pornography a problem? What does the Bible say about it? Is there hope for people who struggle with pornography addictions? How is pornography impacting relationships?
 - **Main Points:**
 - Pornography is defined as: "printed or visual material containing the explicit description to display sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic feelings."
 - Identify WHY we are talking about this - whether it affects you personally or it doesn't, you need to hear what God says about it... and if it does affect you, it can be an extremely shameful topic to discuss.

- Now, the first step to changing the game is awareness; that's what we need to be doing with the issue of pornography. Right now, the porn industry is simply supplying what people are demanding. The only way this changes is if people pause, re-examine reality, get educated about the harmful effects of porn, and make adjustments. By stopping the demand for porn, we would be putting an end to something that addicts people, destroys relationships, and affects our society as a whole. It's time to change the statistics. Stopping the demand starts here, with us speaking the Truth. Once we become educated about the risks and consequences, it suddenly looks a lot less appealing. Once we realize that Jesus is the only One that can satisfy what we are looking for, porn suddenly becomes a lot less satisfying.
- *Pornography statistics...*
 - 12% of websites on the internet are pornographic – that's 24,644,172 sites.
 - 1 in 3 porn viewers are women. It's not just a "guy problem."
 - Porn sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined each month.
 - Watching porn diminishes relationship commitment.
 - Porn increased marital infidelity, or cheating, by 300%. A few studies reported in *Psychology Today* show that people who watched porn were more likely to engage in flirting (or more) outside their relationships and were more likely to cheat and hook-up with someone other than their partner.
 - 50% of all adults do not think that porn is wrong – and most teenagers are encouraging, neutral, or indifferent about opinions of pornography. They say it's "not a big deal."
 - Porn is a \$57 billion-dollar industry worldwide - \$14 billion-dollar industry in the US. That's larger than all the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball, and basketball franchises AND more than CBS, NBC, and ABC combined.
 - A pastor in Cincinnati, Ohio polled all the 7th graders in his church and 100% of those 11-year-olds admitted to having exposure to pornography.
 - 50% of Christian men are addicted to pornography. Avg age of exposure is 11 years old.
- Discuss how pornography neurologically rewires your brain.
- Pornography is NOT just guy problem; girls struggle with it, too!

- Pornography is attractive because it gives intimacy without yielding to the risk of rejection.
 - Porn is the opposite of love that is described in the Bible.
 - This is my encouragement to you: Be real. Share your struggles, your hurts, and the hard spots in your life you just can't seem to overcome. Be vulnerable. Start being transparent, raw, and real, showing the true meaning of boasting in the cross of Christ alone. You're not alone. Community is so important, because we weren't meant to fight these struggles alone.
 - In the end, it's not about behavior modification - it's about realizing that Jesus is better than all of the other idols in our lives that we crave - that's the only way freedom from addiction and healing can begin.
 - *Main Scriptures:*
 - Philippians 4:8
 - John 8:32
 - Mark 7:15
 - Hebrews 12:2
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What do you know about pornography and what have you heard about it?
 2. How does the Bible change what you think about pornography?
 3. How does pornography affect the real relationships that we were made for?
 4. What is the hope that Jesus offers to those struggling with pornography addiction?
 5. Leaders, take this time to review the importance of sharing struggles in a Christian community and how bringing them into the light no longer gives them power.
- ***Teaching 3: Uninvited: Loneliness & Rejection***
 - *Theme: We've all been there. And if you haven't yet, you undoubtedly will be. Our hearts feel pain so very deeply. Interestingly enough, tests have shown that the parts of our brain that light up in response to rejection also light up when we experience physical pain. Rejection can cause intense feelings of loneliness and despair and cause us to question the goodness of God. Sometimes, we look for affirmation and acceptance in all the wrong places, and other times, even when we have good intentions, we miss the mark. How do we deal with the negative emotions that we are all bound to face and not let them take root in our souls and start to distort who we are? The truth is, rejection can always grow us and shape us, but*

it was never meant to define us. Jesus wants to do something more with it, if we will let Him. They say hindsight is 20/20. It can be hard to look past our circumstances and look up at God. When we're in the middle of hard circumstances, our outlooks can be a little blurry. While we are waiting for God to come through on His promises, it can be hard to adopt a hopeful perspective. But so many times we can look back on God's past faithfulness and see clearly that He had a plan. He came through for you then, and He will come through for you again. This message is an invitation of hope from the God of the Universe – specifically for those students struggling with suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety. We'll take a look at the lies. And we'll invite them back to the Truth.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why is loneliness such an epidemic in our society? What does the Bible say about suicide? How do we deal with loneliness and rejection? What does the Bible teach us about these emotions, and how can knowing more about Jesus help us to navigate these?
- **Main Points:**
 - Even if we know what Jesus says about us, it's still more than likely we will feel things like rejection and loneliness. We still feel the weight of what other people think about us and what they say about us, or the lack thereof. We still yearn to be loved, and when we aren't, at times, it can feel like we are being crushed to a point that we can never come back from.
 - MRI studies show that the same areas of the brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain.
 - Cultural phenomenons that glorify suicide like *13 Reasons Why* - what they fail to show, and how we need to evaluate them.
 - *Purse snatching analogy:* Many times, feeling lonely, rejected, or abandoned comes from the sting of betrayal or deception or the hurt of someone deliberately choosing to end a friendship or relationship with us. I once heard a story about a woman getting her purse stolen while she was shopping for shoes. She bent over to put a box back on the shelf, and in that instant a thief grabbed her purse and started running like a bolt of lightning through the store. Naturally, she started chasing him, and as many of us would do, she chased him out of the store, flailing her arms in the air and screaming at the top of her lungs, desperate for someone to help her get her belongings back. Interestingly enough, she chased the thief about two blocks, still screaming and flailing, when he decided that it wasn't worth it. People were staring, and he knew this woman

wasn't going to give up; so, he threw the purse behind him. The woman picked up her mangled purse off the ground, panting from the chase, and walked back to the shoe store in shock. Despite her belongings being jumbled, nothing really was ruined or destroyed. Sometimes, I wish that life was like this purse snatching incident. We are used to our "normal," and then suddenly, something alters that normal, rips away from us something that we hold dear, and it leaves us in shock. When my normal has been taken from me, I wish I could run down the street, flailing and crying, and get the same result as that woman. I wish life would change its mind, tossing back what I lost. That's not always the way that things work out. Unfortunately, life doesn't just throw back our "normal" at us; instead, we are left in the aftermath of our normal being snatched and figuring out how to live in a new normal. Parents getting divorced. A significant other dumping you. A friend group deliberately excluding you and leaving you out. Feelings of depression or anxiety that seem to come out of nowhere.

- Make sure to stop and acknowledge - no one, and I mean no one is immune to feelings of depression, anxiety, rejection, loneliness, or suicidal thoughts. No one. Take out your phone, lay down your pride, and before we go any further, type these numbers into your contacts. Some of you will need it personally, and some of you will need it to help a friend. None of us are above or beyond the reach of lies taking root in our souls. That's Satan's primary goal. To make you believe that you are in fact alone and worthless.
 - *Share...* National Suicide Prevention Line: 1-800-273-8255, Youth Pastor Email or Phone (whichever one you are comfortable giving out – but, take this opportunity to speak to kids that you are there for them... that you're a safe place).
 - Tonight's conversation really should be a wake-up call. Jesus is calling you and saying: "I see you, I care about you, and I want you to live." This is an invitation to take a step toward hope.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Ephesians 3:18-19
 - John 10:10
 - 1 Peter 5:7
 - Isaiah 41:10
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Discuss feelings and truth – what is the difference between them, and how can we combat feelings with Truth?

2. How does being vulnerable open us up for disappointment?
3. What does the Bible say about us casting our fears and anxieties on Jesus?
4. How do you tend to react when you feel betrayed, lonely, rejected, or taken advantage of? How do you react when your normal is stolen?
5. How do we go about taking up a posture of freedom and identity in Christ?