



Escaping the Bunny Trap

Author: Dan Istvanik

Project Supervisors Nick Diliberto & Terry Goodwin

Editor: Tom Helm

Graphic Designer: Kate Wardwell with Creative Juice Design

www.creativejuicegraphicdesign.com

www.JuniorHighMinistry.org

Your source for everything junior high

Series Description:

A Lenten/Easter season lesson series allowing students to reflect and prepare themselves for the time of year leading up to resurrection Sunday, by taking some of the usual parts of Easter and infusing them with new meaning

Series: *Escaping the Bunny Trap*

Lesson 01: Empty Your Basket

Key Verse: Phil. 2:6–8

Scripture: Phil. 2:6–8; Heb. 5:11–13; Matt. 6:19–20; Col. 3:1–3; John 10:9–10

Description: A lesson asking the question: “What have you filled your life with?”

Visual: An Easter Basket with candy, toys, and fake grass

WELCOME & PRAYER

LARGE GROUP (TEACH)

[Slide 1 – Series Title Slide]

Explanation and introduction of the series:

Say Something Like- *“We are 4 weeks out from Easter. It’s a special time of year for many different reasons. We enjoy all kind of traditions, fun, and family time. As you might know there is a more important meaning and far more serious side for us as Christians.*

There is nothing necessarily wrong with some of the additions we have made to the Easter season with candy, bunnies, and baskets, but we want to take the next couple weeks to look at a couple of these good things and give them some great new meanings.

We are going to start off our series with a lesson called....

[Slide 2 – Lesson Title Slide—Empty Your Basket]

Say: *“First things first. Let’s start things off with “The Easter Basket!!”. It is the container of all the “good” stuff: candy, toys, money, maybe even a new I-Phone or some Easter underwear from grandma!?”*

Since this lesson IS called “Empty Your Basket” I need two volunteers because we are going to play a quick game called...

GAME: [Slide 3 – Game Slide: “Empty Your Basket”]

“Empty Your Basket” Game

Supplies:

- 2 Easter baskets
- String or something to tie with
- A variety of small Easter-type items: candy, toys, money, etc,
- Fake Easter grass

Instruction:

Similar to the “Minute to Win It” game ‘Junk in the Trunk’ you are going to tie an Easter basket to the lower back of each player. Fill the basket with Easter items (candy toys, money...) Make sure to have a bunch of the fake Easter grass in the bottom, of each basket. The fake grass will be hard to shake out. It is part of the challenge but also will become a teaching point/illustration later in the lesson.

Escaping the Bunny Trap: Lesson 1

Play:

On “Go!” each player will have 60 seconds to hop, jump, shake, and wiggle anyway they can to get as much, if not all of the items out of the basket. The winner will be the person who is the first to get all the items out of the basket or the most out of the basket in 60 seconds.

[Slide 4: Lesson Title Slide (again)]

[Slide 5– Key Verse: Phil. 2:6–8]

Read PHIL. 2:6–8, aloud or have a volunteer read it. Emphasize and explain that the words in verse 7—“made Himself nothing”—also could be translated as “emptied Himself”. (* For additional commentary & study help see: www.biblestudytools.com, or www.biblegateway.com)

Say: *Easter time is a time when we celebrate the reason why Christ “Emptied Himself” to come and be human. He came here and gave up his equality with God the Father, so that he could live a human life, experience human things, understand us, and then die a human death for us.*

Today, I want to challenge you to start looking at what you have filled your life up with and ask you to consider “emptying the basket of your life” as we prepare for the Easter(Lenten) season.

Do This- Hold up and show the visual Easter basket you will be using for your lesson full of candy, toys, and fake grass

[Slide 6- Point #1: Candy: The Sweet Stuff]

Optional Big Group Question: What is your favorite kind of Easter candy?

Say: *“What are you feeding yourself spiritually? Are you feeding yourself the real food of God’s Word that is going to make you grow and mature? Or are you just trying to survive off the “sweet” easy spiritual stuff.*

**Leader Help Note:* Think about your group and your context. Challenge them on the things you see as “spiritual candy” around them—those things that are fun and sweet to do. The stuff that is “good” but not “great”?

* **Optional Video Clips** “Melting Bunny” video on YouTube: “Grote Kunst Voor Kleine Mensen: Chocolate haas” (Chocolate bunny)- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-SZYZLfZ7E>. Use it as a visual for #1: “Candy: Sweet Stuff” (OR could be used at the very beginning as students are coming in?)

[Slide 7- Verse: Heb. 5:11–13]

Read HEB. 5:11–13 aloud or have someone from the group read it aloud. Explain the passage, emphasizing the challenge in Middle School/Jr. High to start growing up in their faith and claiming it as their own.

Reflective Questioning: What would happen if your parents gave you a big basket of Easter candy and told you that was all you had to eat for the next week or two?

Say: *“It might be fun for a day or two, but eventually you would start getting hungry for real food. Many Christians live that way, though. They just want the sweet, easy, fun stuff of Christianity, and they don’t want to do the hard work of really studying the Bible. They fill their lives with “sweet stuff”, but then end up not really growing and stay—as the book of Hebrews says—“Infants.”*

[Slide 8- Challenge #1: Empty Your Basket of Spiritual Candy, Fill it with the Food of the Bible]

Do This: Hold up your visual Easter basket and take out all the pieces of candy, talking about specific things that are sweet, fun things that can become “spiritual candy.”

Escaping the Bunny Trap: Lesson 1

[Slide 9-Point #2: Toys: The Good Stuff]

Optional Group Questions: What is/was your favorite toy you ever had? (Maybe it was something you received in an Easter basket?)

Say: *Another good thing you get in your Easter basket is cool little toys. I love those cool little fun Easter toys like the little bendy bunny, or wind-up, hopping chicks are something cheesy like that. They are cool and fun, but they get old quick, and most of the time they are cheap and break."*

***Optional Video:** Movie: *Big* "toy testing scene". Use it for a visual illustration talking about the toys of our life.

[Slide 10- Verse: Matt. 6:19–20]

Read Matt 6:19–20 aloud or have some from the group read it aloud. Explain the passage. Talk about the objects and "toys" that we spend so much of our time, energy and attention on.

Reflective Question: What is the one thing that you just feel like you can't live without? What is the object that, if you went a day without it, you would feel like you would be "incomplete"? Is it your phone, iPod, iPad, computer, game system?

Say: *All these things are good, but they are not GREAT! God has blessed you with good stuff, but when you start spending all your time, attention, energy, and life on the things you are blessed with, you start missing out on the ONE who BLESSED you. Check out this other verse.*

[Slide 11- Verse: Col. 3:1–3]

Read COL. 3:1–3 aloud for the group.

Say: *See Easter is a time for us to talk about and think about new life and the resurrection not only of Christ, but also of our own lives. We were dead in sin, and because of the cross and the resurrection we also can have new life. Our focus here on earth needs to be on the "things above." It is time for us to:*

[Slide 12- Challenge #2: Empty your Basket of the good stuff and fill it with the Great stuff]

Do This: Hold up your visual Easter basket and take out all the little toys, talking about specific things/toys in our lives that are good—but not great—and take our focus off God.

[Slide 13- Point #3: Easter Grass: The Fake Stuff]

Say: *So the candy—the sweet stuff—is gone. The toys, the fun, the good stuff is gone. What are we left with that is still filling our basket? Yep, it's this weird plastic Easter grass! What is this stuff? Why do our parents always insist on buying it?*

Optional Group Questions: "What is one of the biggest complaints about Christians and the Church? Answer: FAKENESS!

Say: *As we go into this season of the year, as we get past the sweet shallowness of spiritual candy and get over the good but not great toys and junk of our life, we find at the bottom of our lives, that there might not really be LIFE. This Easter grass is FAKE and not really alive. It is green and, from a distance, looks like it might be alive, but it is NOT!*

Think back about the game we started off with. It was easy to get rid of the candy and toys, but the fake grass was the hardest to get rid of. It almost seemed to get stuck or "cling" to the basket. It is kind of same with us, the fake stuff of life is the hardest really let go of.

Reflective questions: "Are you ALIVE in Christ?"

Say: *Think about the verse we read, Col 3:1–3. We were all dead in our sins, and then Christ came, gave us life and then "hides us in Him." Check out this verse:*

Escaping the Bunny Trap: Lesson 1

[Slide 14- Verse: John 10:9–10.]

Read JOHN 10:9–10 aloud or have some from the group read it aloud. Explain the passage and analogy of the shepherd and sheep.

Say: *Christ came to lay down his life for us and to give us new life, but not just any life. He came to give us life to the FULL; a life that is not empty, plastic, or fake but a life that's FULLY ALIVE, living and growing.*

Do this: Hold up a clump of the Easter grass.

Say: *He promises us wherever we go we can “come in and out and find green grass.” He wants to feed us the real, living, powerful Word of God that we need to grow. He wants to direct us to a life that is more than just here and now but is about eternity. HE wants to give you a REAL life—no more fakeness!*

Do This: Empty the rest of the basket of grass and anything else.

[Slide 15- Challenge #3: Empty your Basket of the fake stuff and fill it with Real Living Faith]

[Slide 16- Have You Ever Started a New Life With Christ??]

Escaping the Bunny Trap: Lesson 1

SMALL GROUP/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Fun/Bonding:

- What is your favorite memory of Easter?
- What is your favorite part of Easter?
- Do you have any family traditions for Easter?

Lesson Discussion/Reflection:

- Of the things we talked about today, which was the most challenging for you and why?
- What are some things that you would define or think of as “spiritual candy”?
- What are some of the things that people use as replacements or sweet fillers for God’s word in their life?
- What are some of the “Big Toys” that people spend much of their time on?
- Is it only objects or are there other things that can become “toys”? Think about activities? Relationships? Hobbies?
- What else can you think of that are “good” things that God gives us that can become replacements or distractions from the “great” stuff of God?
- Do you know anyone who thinks that Christians are “Fakes”? Are they right? Why or Why Not?
- Are there ways that we can “fake ourselves out” and convince ourselves that we are good Christians when we are really just putting on a good show?

Prayer Challenge:

- Which one of these areas can we pray for you about this week?
- Who is someone that we can pray for that you could invite next week?
- What is one place that are going to be this week that we can pray for you about that you would be able to “empty your basket” of the things that are part of that place?

ADDITIONAL IDEA:

Dress Up Option: Oh Yes!! Consider renting a bunny costume to kick off the series. It would be a great attention grabber and will help students remember the lesson. Although you might think it is a bit cheesy and little childish? You might be surprised at how well it might draw in your students.

You know your group better than anyone else, do it only if you think it will work and won't be a distraction