

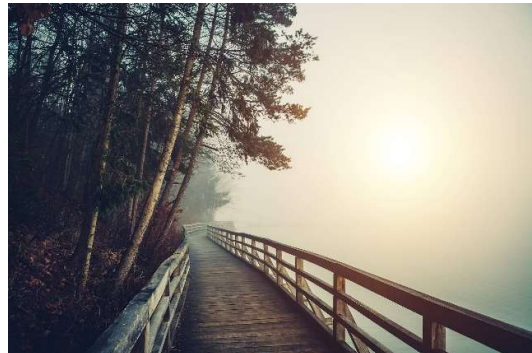


Guarding the avenues of our souls

Week 1	7 September	Fostering a positive mindset
Week 2	4 September	Handling socials- Don't be a slave to likes
Week 3	21 September	Resisting the pressure to conform by listening to conscience and God's guidance
Week 4	28 September	Dysfunctional families can still have righteous children

Welcome to another series: September 2025

The years of youth are years full of challenges as young people try to figure out who they are and where they fit in. And so, the series for this month is intended to help young people understand that their identity comes from being a follower of Christ, rather than conforming to the world's standards. This series seeks to encourage youth to develop spiritual disciplines that will lead to a deeper understanding of God's word and His will for their lives and help them grow in their relationship with God. In the end this will encourage them to live boldly for Christ.



Genesis 2:7 *"The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"*. The way Old Testament uses the word "soul" – a human being becomes alive (that is, "a living being" or "soul") only when the 'breath of God' is breathed into him. The soul then is seen as the life possessing quality of humans, and it is that which makes them living beings. We can say the "soul" is the life-principle, or simply, life. The soul is the self or person. It is said to be the seat of spiritual as well as physical needs and cravings, including one's need for God's presence. It is the state of consciousness itself. The soul can be sad, grieved, weep, rejoice, bless the Lord, be distressed, be anxious and troubled, hate and love. It can stand for the full range of human needs, desires and feelings, including thought, memory and consciousness. The soul is integral to life itself.

The death of the soul then results in the loss of personhood. The soul is not something we possess as such as though the person existed as a person outside the soul. The soul is the person. The soul is what each person is as a human being. So, the word soul stands for the living person as a human being in this life.

Matthew 16:26 *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

The soul in Scripture is really the person as human being, who has been created by God.

A philosopher by the name of Irenaeus viewed “soul” as the “*seat of knowledge, working in conjunction with the body’s senses to gather information, which it then evaluates and uses to form beliefs and understanding*”. He imagines the process by which the soul arrives at knowledge: First, the soul ‘perceives’ external phenomena through the bodily organs of sense perception – the eyes, ears, and so on. Then, the soul may form a “belief” – *pistis*, the biblical word for “faith” – “judgment,” “conception” or “apprehension” of a given aspect of reality. Furthermore, Irenaeus believed the soul, in its interaction with the Holy Spirit, plays a crucial role in humanity’s journey towards spiritual perfection.

Guarding the soul, therefore, means recognizing God’s presence with and for his people and actively fighting against the forces that dehumanizes and marginalize them. Guarding the soul means resisting forces that dehumanizes and diminish the worth of individuals and communities. It means facing the realities of life by drawing strength from scripture and people’s experiences and working towards a future where all people can experience grace and wholeness.

This emphasizes the significance of the soul as a valuable and vulnerable entity that needs careful attention and protection from negative influences. Our souls are vulnerable they need to be protected from harmful influences. This topic suggests avoiding exposure to anything that could corrupt our minds or lead to negative thoughts and desires. It speaks to the importance of the inner world as the source of our actions and words. It is about mindfulness, right speech and right action. We are encouraged to be discerning about the content we consume through our eyes, whether its media, images, or the actions of others. By guarding our souls, we can cultivate inner peace and reduce negativity in our lives and build stronger and more positive relationships with others.

HOME GROUPS AND CLASSES GUIDE:

1. *Open in Worship and Prayer: this is to invite God into the meeting. For example, you can light a candle, sing together, or use a YouTube Hymn or song.*
2. *Open your Bibles and read the Bible verses for this week (take turns?) see below.*
3. *Reflect on the Bible verses and the reflection written by a Minister or Lay Preacher.*
4. *Connect with each other and take the reflection deeper by answering the Questions.*
5. *Works out: What have we learned that we can apply in our lives in this session? Keep each other accountable for promises made or important steps taken. Pray for and over each other (after taking prayer requests).*

*Week 3 - 21 September - Resisting the pressure to conform by listening
to conscience and God's guidance*

READINGS:

Daniel 1:8 - 21.

Romans 12: 1-2

John 15:18-19

Worship Song: Konke - We Will Worship <https://youtu.be/wMTXDID43iQ>

RESISTING THE PRESSURE TO CONFORM BY LISTENING TO CONSCIENCE AND GOD'S GUIDANCE

The texts highlight the inherent tension between the believer and the world systems. A conflict between serving God and serving worldly desires. Believers are asked to have the courage to be different. Therefore, it is important to encourage youth to be bold in their faith, stand up for what is right, and not be afraid to be different. Encouraging young people to be a positive influence even if it means being different. To resist the pressure to conform to the opinions and behaviours of others. To choose faith over conformity. To seek God's will and trusting that His path is the best path, even if it's different from what others expect. And that surrendering to the will of God's can bring a sense of peace and fulfilment, even in the face of challenges.

REFLECTION WRITTEN BY: LIMPHO DHLAMINI *(Youth & Young Adults Pastor)*

The pressure to fit in or conform is a reality to all people in all spaces and of all ages. Whether it is conforming to friends and their way of living, workspaces and policies, political or social ideologies, or even the culture of the world today, we all face the pressure to get in and do what everyone else is doing, whether we agree with it or not. It is within our nature to be part of communities and assimilate with others, but to what extent?

In our readings today, we are challenged to resist the pressure to conform. Easier said than done right? Take the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (you may know them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but let us resist even conforming their names as they did). These young men were teenagers of nobility taken from their homes, exiled to Babylon.

As with any conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar sought to assimilate the exiles into Babylonian life by teaching them their culture, literature and way of life. He went so far as to change their names to reflect the Babylonian gods and give them food from his table, a sign that their daily bread and dependence for life came from him. The young Israelites resisted this by choosing to stick with God and trust Him for their provision. They didn't conform but chose to remain distinct, separate from the Babylonians.

In their obedience and faithfulness to God, they found favour with God and with their overseer and came out of their resistance with even greater gifts from God which would in turn be used to bless their enemies. They remained true to God and their faith, even in life and death pressures like the bowing down to an idol or facing the fiery furnace (See Daniel 3).

As Christians, we are called to be set apart, holy, to be in the world but not of the world. Paul in his letter to the Romans urges us to offer up our lives as a living sacrifice to God in response to His immense grace and love shown through Christ Jesus. As we offer ourselves, we must have our minds renewed by His Holy Spirit, which leads to a transformed life. As we live this out, we will see that God's will, His desire for us, is truly good, acceptable, and complete.

And so even in the face of pressure to go along with the crowds, resist. Resist the urge for ease and comfort. Resist the urge for the broad and overflowing road. Resist the urge to deny Truth (Jesus – see John 14:6). Resist, obey and remain faithful to God and you will find favour with Him. As Jesus reminds us *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do*

not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

GROUP/CLASS QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways have you been pressured to conform to the environments around you?
2. How can the renewing of your mind lead to a transformed life?
3. How can we resist being conformed to the patterns of the world?
4. What hope can we find in Jesus’ words in John 15:18-19?

MEMORY VERSES FOR THE WEEK:

Monday

1 Peter 1:15–16 *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*

Tuesday

1 John 2:15 *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”*

Wednesday

Leviticus 18:3 *“You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.”*

Thursday

Ecclesiastes 12:13 *“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”*

Friday

1 Thessalonians 4:7 *“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”*

Saturday

Jeremiah 7:23 *“but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.”*

FAMILY TIME: WRITTEN BY Magogodi Nkuna (Children’s Volunteer)

Week 3: 21 September

Title: Dare to Be Different

Romans 12:2 (NIV)

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Message

As young people, there are so many things competing for our attention. Social media influencers portray lifestyles that seem exciting and desirable. Television shows often depict young people engaging in behaviours that no young person should be involved in. Even our friends sometimes expect us to act a certain way just to fit in.

All of this can be overwhelming. If we’re not careful, we might drift away from the person God has truly called us to be. The world’s voice is loud, but God’s voice is steady, true and life-giving.

So, what do we do?

We stand our ground. We set a different standard for ourselves. We become influencers, not the influenced. We use Romans 12:2 as our compass and refuse to conform. Instead, we choose to be transformed and renew our minds daily through God’s Word, prayer and wise choices.

We remember that we are created in the image of God. That means we reflect Him in the way we live, act, and speak. We dare to be different.

Reflections for Teens

1. How do you handle the different voices telling you who you should be and what you should do?
2. What does it mean to “*renew your mind*” in your everyday life—at school, online, or with friends?

Reflections for Pre-Teens

1. What makes you feel special or different in a good way?
2. Who do you look up to, and what do you admire about them?

Family Activity

Help each family member reflect on who God says they are.

Instructions:

- Read Romans 12:2 together and talk about what it means to “*renew your mind*.”
- Each person to share one way they’ll “*dare to be different*” this week—at school, online, or in their friendships.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to live boldly and reflect Your image in all we do. Strengthen us to stand firm when the world tries to shape us, remind us daily of who we are in You. Let our words, choices and actions be a light that draws others closer to Your truth. Amen