

YEAR 4, MONTH 1

Part I. Prepare

Topic: Purity of our Souls: Instaurators vs. Instagramers

Key Verses:

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)

James 1:19 Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (NIV)

Key Take-Away:

In a digital world, we have to be extremely purposeful about what we watch, how we interact with technology and determining whether or not we are ready for tools like Instagram (or whatever is the most relevant to your group's cultural norms). There are many good things about the digital world, but we need to remember that it's not all good. For developing girls and their brains, it can create long term issues like attention deficit, emotional outbursts, depression, insecurity, and seriously shapes the way we view ourselves. The world of tech has a strong addiction component (moms are nodding their heads as they recognize their own issues here). A Courageous Girl learns to slow down and talk face to face; learns to communicate well with parents and friends; this is so vital to being healthy and whole.

Important notes for this meeting:

We will be practicing good communication at this initial meeting and set the tone for the entire middle school launch. Good communication is key for both moms and daughters as hormones change, environments are stressful, and tweens are finding their voice; it's more important than ever before. The common complaint, "You never listen to me!" from tweens does not have to be the reality for courageous moms and daughters. Real relationship, where we listen well and empathize, is possible with intentionality.

Materials needed for this meeting:

- Bible
- Notebook. New journals will be created at Lesson 2.
- Memory Verse Notecard Rings
- *Communication Act-it-Out Script* (3 copies needed; CG website Year 4, Lesson 1 Printables)
- *Communication Dialogue* - 1 per person (CG website Year 4, Lesson 1 Printables)
- *Emotion Chart* - 1 per daughter (CG website Year 4, Lesson 1 Printables)
- Crafting supplies: Ribbon (varying colors), scissors, hole punchers

Part II. Lead

First 15:

Gathering time. Welcome everyone. Grab a snack if your group is providing that. Remember, water and a simple snack are best; keep it simple! Gather your group together in a circle (or as close to a circle as you can make). Make sure there is room for everyone and that everyone can sit comfortably. It is not necessary for you to be seated at a table, but you may choose that option.

Note: Since it's the first meeting, consider having everyone share a highlight from their summer to help the girls and moms reconnect.

Let's Go 70:

This is the heart of your gathering time. Use the following outline to help guide you in this process, but don't feel bound by it. Take some time with the material before you lead so that you can adapt things to best meet your group's needs. **The action steps are in bold.**

1. **Open in prayer**

2. **Ask:** What do you think Instaurator means? Any guesses?

■ **Define INSTAURATOR:** "(noun) One that engages in restoring something to a former condition after decay, lapse or diapidation."

3. **Share with the group:** It's hard to know what the 'former condition' was for humans because most of you were born AFTER technology was in the hands of everybody. Let me give you a glimpse of what life was like before there was technology (and before our worlds focused around social media like Instagram). We were more focused on the here and now. We did not worry about taking the perfectly posed "candid" picture, just the right selfie, or if others "liked" our text, picture, or post. If we weren't home when someone called, an large box called an answering machine recorded a fuzzy message that we may or may not have heard hours later when we returned. Often times, a special event, like a big birthday party or a wedding, ended with only a roll or two of film that had captured the moments in photos. Unfortunately, only a small handful of those photos actually turned out weeks later when they were finally developed. Children were forced to stretch phone cords far into the corner of the room if they wanted to find privacy for a chat with a friend, and even then, the chat could only be with a friend who lived locally; it cost TONS of money to make phone calls out of your city or town, and forget about communicating with anyone internationally. Life was different, simpler in many ways.

4. **Ask: What do you imagine the world being like without phones, ipads, Instagram, FaceTime, Facebook, Musically, Youtube, etc.?** Have the girls share what they imagine, or perhaps what they remember from pictures or stories they have heard from parents and grandparents. Remember, they have never known a life without all these digital devices being at their fingertips.

- What is good about social media and our screen time? What are the benefits of having access to it?
- What is not good about social media and our screen time? What problems and consequences have arisen from people's use of it?

5. Have the girls **update their Bible verses by adding this month's new verses:**
Proverbs 4:23 and James 1:19

6. **Pair/Share:** Read the verses and discuss how they remind and encourage us to return to the way things were before digital devices came into the picture. Why is it necessary to "guard our heart" in order to nurture our relationship with God, our moms, family, and friends? (3 minutes)

7. **Discuss:** Turn back to the large group and share insights. Possible responses might include things like:

- Social media and devices cause our brains to overload and we get cranky.
- We are more likely to compare and feel down about ourselves.
- We get too busy and too distracted to really be connected to God or others.
- Learning to be bored actually helps our emotional, physical, and mental health.
- We miss out on the here and now (explain an example of this) when we are so focussed on the events of yesterday that our friend just uploaded.

8. **Ask: What are some of the reasons it's hard for us to talk to our moms about how we really feel?** (Sample answers: She might not listen. She's too busy. She'll over-react.)

➔ **What are some of the reasons it's hard for us to talk to our friends about how we really feel?** (Sample answers: We might feel judged. It feels awkward to talk about real issues. I'll be the only one who feels this way. No one cares.)

➔ **Can you think of reasons why it might be important to learn how to communicate well?** (Sample answers: So that we can get a job. So people understand us.)

* **Make the Point:** We might never feel known, loved, seen, heard, valued, understood without real, face-to-face, personal interaction/communication. God made us for real human interact and technology can run interference in meeting our core needs.

9. **Play a quick game of charades.** Ask for volunteers to act out a word you give them, without using any talking. The rest of the group tries to guess the word. Here are a few words to start with. Add your own to the list if time permits:

- Rainy day
- Stress/stressful
- Buddies
- Help!
- Overslept

* If there is time, choose additional volunteers and do another round.

10. Follow up the game with some **reflection on what made charades interesting/difficult/frustrating/funny, etc.** What did the experience remind you of? (3 mins)

11. **Share a few facts about communication:**

- Good communication requires us to use words. It's much easier to communicate accurately when you use words than when you post a picture on Instagram. We misread so much without being face-to-face; we can't see every facial movement/expression; non-verbal gestures, hear tone of voice, etc.
- Communication is 90% body language and 10% what we actually say with words. Body language is a large portion of what we think someone is saying. For example, if I say "I love you" in a soft, quiet voice, you might think I am shy or unsure. However, if I say, "I love you" in a loud, aggressive voice with my face showing an angry brow, you might think "Really? Are you sure? Is that love?"
- We are not mind readers and have to use our words and our body language to communicate well. Miscommunication is the most common reason for conflicts in relationships and is often avoided when the communication happens face-to-face
- Go directly to the person. The Bible is very clear (as well as healthy relationship research) that we are to go to the person with whom we are having disagreement directly, and talk about our perspectives to sort through where we both went wrong or misinterpreted. Going to someone else and talking about the miscommunication is called triangulating or gossip. (Ex: Going to your dad to talk about your mom. Or going to one friend to talk about the other friend.)

12. **So how do we get better at communicating well? Select a mother/daughter duo to demonstrate** using the *Communication Act-it-Out Script (Year 4, Lesson 1 Printables)*. Have them read right off the script, adding voice inflection and gesturing for a little more drama. Have fun with it! As the pair reads the script, act as the host of this “show” and pause the dialogue where it says to STOP! At those junctures, read the information in bold to the group before having the pair continue on with the dialogue.

13. **Pair/Share:** Hand out the *Communication Dialogue (Year 4, Month 1 Printables)* to each person. Moms and daughters will now get to work together to practice this kind of dialogue together.

■ **Daughters:** Tell your mom something that she does that keeps you from wanting to talk to her or listen to her wisdom. **Moms:** Practice effective listening while you share and try to understand her by practicing *mirroring, validating, and empathizing*. Pay attention to your body language as you both speak and listen.

■ After you have heard your daughters well, **Moms:** Share something your daughter does that makes it hard to communicate or listen to her well. Your daughter will practice effective listening now. Pay attention to your body language as you both speak and listen.

■ Innovate together and commit to ONE behavior change that will allow you both to speak and listen in a more powerful and loving way toward one another. Talk about ONE change you might commit to, in regards to your digital use that will help you both connect more face to face.

14. **Create a Door Hanger that communicates your current feelings.** (Year 4, Month 1 Printables) Each girl can cut the emotions out, punch a hole in the top of each and thread ribbon through to make a door hanger. She can keep these in her room to hang on her door to communicate how she is feeling for the day.

💚 **Getting to the HEART of the issue:** There are so many voices and distractions coming at both moms and daughters today. It’s so hard to just slow down, check in with our own hearts, with God, and then still make time to check in with our key relationships. We have become so used to the Instagram age and have lost key aspects of good care and love, such as looking each other in the eyes or taking time to really hear concerns. Focus on being more of an instaurator (and getting back to the way God created you to live in relationship with one another, and less of an instagramer). Girls, your moms are here for you. They want to listen well, so help them by being slow to speak and slow to anger; be quick to listen, as well. Moms, being slow to speak and slow to anger will help you listen to your daughter's heart and not always

hear just her delivery. Have grace with one another. Practice with your friends and family.

Final 5:

Gather everyone back together to wrap up the meeting. **Circle up and pray** over this sweet tribe that has come together. Make sure to dismiss on time; it is extremely important to honor everyone's time, especially those that desire structure and schedules.

Suggested Homework for the Month: Use the door hanger to begin the process of knowing your starting point, emotionally, and to give an indication whether or not you are ready to talk. Needing space is okay, for a time. Use the communication dialogue to practice effective listening skills at least two times in the next month. When you practice talking, discuss your screen time and your exposure to social media or other digital images. Be open to your mom's wisdom, after she has heard your perspective. Take a short break if you both are not able to stick with the communication dialogue and ask forgiveness if you speak harshly with one another this month. Consider taking a technology break together or as a family for one weekend to see how much different your life, attitude, outlook and relationships are without that added distraction.

*Challenge: Use your communication dialogue to practice healthy communication within other relationships. The more you practice, the more you will find yourself able to listen well when it really matters most.

Part III: Reflect and Connect

Email out the 'Suggested Homework for the Month' (printed above; do this even if you printed it out already for your group). This year is going to walk you through some challenging discussions with your girls. You are going to need to be prepared yourselves, as moms, to tackle these topics head on. It is normal to fear some of the topics ahead, but we can have courage to lead our daughters well. Thankfully, God equips us to do this, but it is important that we are also well-counseled and resourced ourselves. Encourage your moms to visit the CG website to find a wide variety of resources for moms in all life stages and challenge each of them to read a few this year. Take an inventory of this year's topics that will be discussed (the annual overview is listed on the website under Year 4 Overview) and encourage the moms in your group to do the same. Look for any topics that bring you a feeling of discomfort or uncertainty. There are many things we NEVER talked about when we were growing up and times have changed drastically since we were in middle school. Our girls still need us, and hopefully, all the time and energy you have spent building your relationship and trust with her through the elementary years will pay off as you face some of the normal challenges of middle school. We want to be the ones who teach our girls truth in a world of confusing messages. Keep spending time with her, in areas SHE enjoys. Practice communicating well during 'neutral' times, so that when conflict or concern arises, you both have strong skills already in place.

Courageous Girls was created with these years in mind. The topics of the elementary curriculum that you have already been through, lay a key foundation so that you and your daughter can talk about what is really going on. We will revisit many of the same themes, but go deeper in specific challenges like purity, digital boundaries, bullying, and body image issues than we did in past years. Praying and being a listening ear to one another is a powerful way to calm anyone's fears. Encourage moms to be honest with one another and lean on one another's wisdom as the girls venture into these uncertain years. These really can be special years, so do not fear. The Lord, your God, is with and in you!

