

**SUB TOPIC THEME:  
LEAVING FRIENDS BEHIND**

**LESSON OBJECTIVE:**

*Identifying feelings and strategies for dealing with leaving a place well. Often military teens do **not** do a good job of this because they really don't know how, but with some helpful*

*approaches that are based on scriptural principles, they can shift from relational failure and regret to relational health and strength as they live their lives of constant movement.*



**Set Up Info:**

***Supplies Needed:***

1. No equipment needed, but rather just asking the question of how many PCS moves a student has made, or how many schools they have attended.
2. Copies of the Student Response sheet (printed below)
3. Bibles so you can look up the Scripture story (or copy the ones below)
4. A passion to see students transformed in their positive influence on friends!

***Instructive Prep:***

Anger, frustration and a general feeling of disequilibrium are all pretty common human responses to change and transition. A typical military teen response to a PCS move is to distance themselves from people they have been close to (including you as the youth worker). Often fights occur in school or at the youth center in April and May between kids who have been good friends. It seems unreasonable to watch them cut themselves off from each other, but it is a defensive technique to keep the pain of separating to a minimum. The subconscious thought goes, "If we're no longer close, then moving away will be easier."

This session is designed to look at ways teens can identify the realities of their feelings and current ways they deal with PCSing, then look at some strategies for actually dealing with relational separations using biblical principles. We will use the concept of the RAFT, which includes the four-step process of Reconciliation, Affirmation, Farewells, and Transition (explained more extensively below)

The progression of these studies is four-fold: *learn, feel, do and what next*. The goal is for students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level to some degree, and participate in doing something during the study (like making a hand gesture as a weapon). Finally, the *what next* focuses on a change in attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, we are moving towards spiritual and emotional transformation in kids' lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together! Have fun and lead well.

## INTRO:

*It's amazing how many fights between good friends in military communities happen around the end of the school year. If you're paying attention, you'll see teens who have been close for the whole year all of a sudden get into some verbal or physical altercation, and, before you know it, they don't want to have anything to do with each other. Then one or both PCS and that's that! But that's actually not the end, because this kind of emotional ripping of relationships takes its toll on us, and everybody suffers. Learning some better coping strategies for handling these inevitable separations will not only strengthen our relational abilities, but they will also help us develop biblical principles into our lives that will serve us for a lifetime.*

## INTRO STORY:

This is a story of deep regret, but it starts out very differently, like all accounts of remorse. My best friend and I were pretty clever as juniors in high school. We decided it was time to meet the girls of the incoming class (sophomores in my 3-year school), and what better way to do that than to volunteer for the yearbook staff and staff the table for the day of class photos. Brilliant! We got every person's name and vital information as they filled out the cards before they got their picture taken. For the girls we thought were cute, we set aside and copied key information for a phone call later. In the days before Facebook, this was a pretty incredible strategy, and effective. That's how I first met her; Bethany!

We began dating and over the year a friendly relationship developed into even more. During my senior year, things were serious and got pretty intimate. I spent a lot of time at her house and around her family (boy was her dad quirky). I even went on vacation with them to the beach. That fall, I went away to college while she was still in high school; and even though I was in a Corps of Cadets, I still found some time to hang out with some *other* young ladies on campus. I kept remembering the song from the 70s, which said, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one

you're with!" (That seemed like a reasonable idea then, but since that time I *highly* disagree with that philosophy...as does God's Word!) But it worked well for me at the time even though we were 'going steady.'

The next fall, Bethany moved to the same college where things got much more intimate as the years went on. We spent a lot of time together, and like all relationships, we had our ups and downs, our starts and stops, and basically were planning to get married when I graduated (I was on an ROTC scholarship, so I knew I was going into the Army after graduation).

Then, spring break of my senior year, it happened. I met Megan on a Campus Crusade trip to Florida where we were supposed to learn about our faith and share it with other college kids at the beach for spring break. I was struck! Even in the midst of the other serious relationship, I was captivated by Megan. Trust me when I say that I was not looking for this, but there she was. Over the next three months, I began to fall in love with her, almost against my will and better judgment. I took a long walk one day and read Scripture and prayed and prayed that God would show me what on earth was happening. Somehow in that hour, I became convinced that Megan was the person I was supposed to spend my life with, not Bethany. During those three months, Bethany actually met with Megan and told her that she was just another one of my 'flings.' (That may be, but I am still 'flinging' with Megan over 30 years later!)

But this is where the story really gets bad relationally. Looking back, I realize what a jerk I was, and how awfully wrong I handled the 'goodbye' with Bethany. Maybe you can relate.

I almost immediately began pulling back from Bethany once I felt I should pursue the other relationship with Megan. I became distant and didn't want to eat lunch or hang out very much. I avoided contact with Bethany and her friends whenever I could. I made up excuses. Then graduation happened and I got commissioned and I went back home for a few weeks before officer basic. I wanted to call Bethany, but didn't really know what to say. We had been very close for five years, and now it seemed so distant. (Megan and I had already discussed marriage, and planned for an October wedding after my basic course and before my first assignment.) One evening I packed up all of the things that represented our relationship together (like photos, and books, and cards, and small trinkets, and rings and poems and everything I could find), then I took them over to her house, walked up to her front door, left them on the porch (even though I could hear voices inside the home where I spent many an evening), turned and walked away – back to the car. I got in, started the car, told myself not to look back, and I drove away! It was now officially over as far as I was concerned.

A couple of years later, my wife, Megan, and I were in my hometown on leave. We decided to go shopping at the mall, and as we often did; she went into one store and I went into another with plans to link back up in 15 minutes. During that 15 minutes, I caught a glimpse of someone I thought looked like Bethany. A literal chill went down my spine. I almost felt sick to my stomach with a deeply guilty nervousness. I followed her from a distance until I confirmed that it was her! Feeling so uncomfortable, I made a bee-line for the store where Megan was. When she saw me, she immediately knew something wasn't right and asked what was going on. I told her I had seen Bethany, and I wanted to get out of there as soon as we could. She was amused at how weird I was acting, but she agreed to make our way out of the mall. We browsed a little bit more through Sears, then headed for a back entrance to the mall in the lower level of the Sears auto section. We turned the corner down a single aisle with the door about 40 feet away, and who should be walking directly toward us but Bethany and her new husband. Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide!! Megan grabbed me by the arm as my legs weakened and I went into this zombie-like trance passing by each other with a polite "hi." I thought I was gonna hurl. I broke out into a cold sweat. I was embarrassed and flustered and ashamed and remorseful and a thousand other feelings I couldn't pin down. I thought about all of the hurtful ways I had disconnected from that relationship and how much pain I had caused – her and me – after sharing such longevity and intimacy. I never once questioned my marriage to Megan! I was certain and thankful to God for that (and still am)!! But what I was so sorry for was the incapacity I had for dealing with a breakup with Bethany. Even if I wanted to, I didn't know how to make it better.

My emotional collapse was a testimony of how miserable a job I had done and how hurtful and shameful my actions were. I learned a lot from that one. I share it with you so that you might learn something, too. God has some much better strategies for coping with relational separations. Had I known them and implemented them, while we would still have experienced some heartache, it would have been without the guilt and shame and deep regret. Oh, to be reconciled in all of my relationships! That's my prayer these days.

Some strategies I've learned since that time include the building of a RAFT:

- **Reconciliation** = taking care of unfinished business if there are folks with whom you need to reconcile (put things right, get back on friendly terms)
- **Affirmation** = thanking those who have been important in your life
- **Farewell** = saying goodbye to people, places, pets and possessions
- **Think destination** = planning ahead for what you will need to live successfully in the next place

**Intro Questions:**

1. Have you experienced a bad relational breakup with a friend?
2. Who do you identify with most in this story?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

*Ask the group how many PCS moves a student has made and how many schools they have attended. Add the numbers together to determine who goes first. Highest number wins. If there is a tie, go with highest number of moves. If still a tie, be creative. Go clockwise for the subsequent questions.*

1. The story begins with the guy describing a strategy he and his friend used to meet new people (especially girls). What strategies do you use to meet new arrivals when they move in, or when you're the new person?
2. Are there people who have hurt you in the process of a move? Write down their names below. Are there people you believe that you have hurt through a PCS move? Write their names down below. (see Student Response sheet)
3. Look at the idea of the RAFT with its different 'logs.' Which ones are you good at doing and which ones are you not so good at doing?
4. Make a list of the positive ways you have used the ideas behind the RAFT. Mention times when you did it well and how you did it. (see Student Response sheet)
5. Write your own questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES**

The following Scriptures offer some Godly advice on making relations right and on saying goodbyes well for proper closure. It becomes obvious how important reconciled relationships are to God by his very specific direction in Matthew. Then Paul shows us how to do a good farewell. The final proverb is simply a reality that scripture embraces as a human truth.

**Matthew 5:21-24** (*Making things right with another person is critical to God*)

<sup>21</sup> (A) You have heard that people were told in the past,

Do not commit murder; anyone who does will be brought to trial.<sup>22</sup> But now I tell you: if you are angry<sup>[a]</sup> with your brother you will be brought to trial, if you call your brother

You good-for-nothing! you will be brought before the Council, and if you call your brother a worthless fool you will be in danger of going to the fire of hell.<sup>23</sup> So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

**Acts 20:32-38**

<sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to the care of God and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the blessings God has for all his people. <sup>33</sup> I have not wanted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that I have worked with these hands of mine to provide everything that my companions and I have needed. <sup>35</sup> I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving." " <sup>36</sup> When Paul finished, he knelt down with them and prayed. <sup>37</sup> They were all crying as they hugged him and kissed him good-bye. <sup>38</sup> They were especially sad because he had said that they would never see him again. And so they went with him to the ship.

**Proverbs 18:24** – *sometimes friendships end, and that's OK because of other friends.*

<sup>24</sup> Some *friendships* do not last, but some *friends* are more loyal than brothers.

**LIFE APPLICATION:**

1. ("Raca" is an Aramaic transliteration for "reka," a term expressing contempt, scorn, or disdain. The Greek word "rhaka" means empty, vain or worthless one, signifying a lack of intellect (i.e. good for nothing, imbecile or blockhead). It is only found in Matthew 5:22. The Jews used it as a word of contempt. It is derived from a root meaning, "to spit.") Knowing the meaning of Raca, discuss why this word has such a strong response from Jesus.
2. Look up 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, and make a drawing/chart of the reconciliation process as God describes it. (use Student response sheet)
3. What is unique about Paul's farewell to his friends from Ephesus? As a group, develop a strategy for a good farewell from Paul's example and write it out below. (use Student response sheet)

4. Take the concept of the RAFT and make a personal action list beside each 'log' of things you would like to do for your next PCS move. Share with the group. (use Student response sheet)

5. Write your own challenge: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## STUDENT RESPONSES:

1. WRITE DOWN NAMES OF PEOPLE...

WHO HAVE HURT YOU IN A MOVE:

YOU HAVE HURT IN A MOVE:

2. LIST POSITIVE WAYS THAT YOU HAVE IMPLEMENTED SOME **RAFT** IDEAS:

3. DIAGRAM THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS FROM 2 Corinthians 5:16-21:

4. WRITE A GROUP STRATEGY BASED ON PAUL'S FAREWELL EXAMPLE:

5. MAKE A PERSONAL ACTION LIST FOR YOUR NEXT PCS MOVE USING **RAFT**:

- RECONCILIATION
- AFFIRMATION
- FAREWELL
- TRANSITION