

Real or Counterfeit?

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Buried & Raised · theme **Real or Counterfeit?** · built on **Galatians 1:6–9** · **1 John 5:13** · **Ephesians 2:8–9**

Teens swim in mixed messages about salvation. TikTok says believe in yourself. A relative says be good and God will accept you. A camp speaker says pray this prayer and never doubt again. Another says if you still struggle with sin, you were never really saved. Candidates for baptism need something sturdier than mood swings: the real gospel of grace — and real assurance rooted in Christ's promise, not perfection.

Before you teach anything, pray.

Some students carry secret shame; others carry swagger they can't back up on a hard Tuesday. Ask the Spirit to replace counterfeit confidence and counterfeit despair with the peace that comes from knowing Christ — not from performing Christianity.

The heart of the lesson

Paul was furious when the Galatians drifted from the true gospel. *If anyone preaches another gospel, let him be accursed* (Galatians 1:8–9). Counterfeit gospels always add something — works, feelings, rituals, or self-improvement — to what Christ already finished. The real gospel is grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8–9). You cannot earn what Jesus purchased with blood. You receive it by trusting Him.

Know Christ. Know peace. Not perfect — forgiven.

Counterfeits show up in teen language: "God helps those who help themselves." "I'm basically a good person." "I prayed once, so I'm fine forever." "If I feel saved today, I'm in; if I don't, I'm out." Each one shifts hope from Christ's finished work to something shaky — your performance, your emotions, or a one-time ritual without ongoing faith.

Real assurance rests on God's Word. John wrote so believers *may know* they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Assurance is not arrogance and not guessing. It is confidence in God's promise because you have entrusted yourself to Jesus — even while you are still growing, still fighting sin, still

learning obedience. The Spirit witnesses with your spirit that you are God's child (Romans 8:16). Feelings rise and fall; the cross stands.

Assurance comes from God's promise — not from your perfect week.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

"For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

1 JOHN 5:13

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may **know** that you have eternal life."

GALATIANS 1:6-9

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a **different gospel...**"

How the session flows

- 1 Spot the fake.** Hook with counterfeit slogans teens hear. ~7 min
- 2 Real gospel, real assurance.** Grace, faith, Scripture, Spirit. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** "Real or Counterfeit?" on screen. ~12-15 min
- 4 Honest inventory.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** Gospel and assurance practice. ~15 min
- 6 Stand on the promise.** Invitation and prayer on Christ alone. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed reference cards and worksheets, pens, and leaders ready to pray with students wrestling with doubt or false confidence.

Leading it, part by part

Spot the fake

Read five slogans aloud (write them if you can): "Be good enough." "Believe in yourself." "One prayer, never question again." "Baptism is your ticket." "If you still sin, you're not saved." Ask: which ones sound Christian? Which are counterfeits? Teens often mix real words with fake foundations. Tonight you separate them.

Real gospel, real assurance

Define the real gospel: Christ died for sin, rose, reigns — and whoever repents and trusts Him receives forgiveness and new life by grace, not merit. Ephesians 2:8–9. Then define assurance: knowing you have eternal life because God's Word says so when you believe in the Son (1 John 5:13). Doubt is not always unbelief; sometimes it's an invitation to return to Scripture. False assurance is worse — swagger without surrender.

Warn against Galatians-style drift: adding church performance, baptism, or behavior to grace. Also warn against cheap grace that never produces repentance. Real faith receives Christ and follows Him — but following never earns what receiving already gained.

Play the game

Run "Real or Counterfeit?" — rounds sort gospel statements, Scripture on assurance, scenarios about doubt and pressure, and lightning on key verses. Twelve to fifteen minutes. Bridge: every round trained them to spot what cannot save and cling to what can.

Honest inventory

Hand out the reference card for five quiet minutes. Students can admit whether they lean toward counterfeit despair (never sure) or counterfeit pride (never examining). Nobody collects it. This is where some students finally rest in Christ instead of their mood.

Worksheet

Biblical practice on grace, assurance, and spotting false gospels. Take-home friendly for baptism candidates reviewing before the pool.

Stand on the promise

Invite three responses: (1) "I've been trusting counterfeits — I want the real gospel." (2) "I know Christ but live in fear — I want real assurance." (3) "I want to help friends spot fakes." Pray simply.

Read 1 John 5:13 again. Offer leaders for one-on-one conversations. No emotional manipulation — just Christ's promise held open.

Take it further

- What makes a gospel "different" or counterfeit according to Galatians 1:6–9?
- How does Ephesians 2:8–9 rule out earning salvation by works?
- Why does God want you to *know* you have eternal life? (1 John 5:13)
- What's the difference between doubt and unbelief?
- How does Romans 8:16 connect assurance to the Holy Spirit?
- Why is "I prayed once, so I'm fine forever" a counterfeit?
- How would you answer someone who says baptism alone guarantees heaven?
- What changes when assurance rests on Christ's promise instead of your feelings?

A final word

Baptism candidates should enter the water knowing what saves them — and what doesn't. The water declares faith; it does not replace grace. Give students tools to spot counterfeits, rest in Scripture, and walk forward not perfect but forgiven. That is the peace that survives mood swings, mistakes, and the voices that try to sell a different gospel.