

Mean

Pocket Bible Study & Journal

ADULT LEADERS' GUIDE

Underhanded comments. Snide little jokes. Nasty online posts. When it comes to being mean, some girls seem to have a special gift. You've probably witnessed the casualties of their attacks: From tears and turmoil to angry outbursts and promises of revenge, Mean takes a hefty toll on the hearts of teens.

So is there any way your students can break through the Mean cycle and restore a sisterhood of support? Hayley DiMarco thinks so—and she lays out a biblical vision for fighting female cruelty in the *Mean Pocket Bible Study & Journal*.

This downloadable leaders' guide has everything you need to lead your students through a study of *Mean*; including session outlines, warm-up activities, and helpful tips for diving into God's Word with your girls. So print your copy, gather your girls, and prepare for a transforming look at Mean—and how they can overcome its grip on their lives.

The Plan of Attack

This study requires six group sessions lasting at least one hour each. I also recommend that you keep your discussion group small—no more than eight students. (If your group is larger, recruit additional adult leaders so you can divide into smaller study groups.) Here's the plan of attack for your group sessions:

GET IT ROLLING Here's a low-key discussion starter to get everyone warmed up for the session's topics.

THE KEYS As your discussion unfolds, you may find yourself on a few rabbit trails along the way. With this list of key points in hand, you can monitor the conversation and steer it back on track when the discussion wanders.

THE QS Since you probably won't have time to discuss every single question, I've highlighted some specific questions for group discussion. (You might want to mark these in your book ahead of time.)

WRAP IT UP Here are two tools to help you tie up your sessions:

FINAL Q: This question helps your students connect to the study in a personal way. Allow enough time for each student to share a response with the group.

CHALLENGE: Before students head home, read this parting challenge and encourage them to put it into practice.

A Note about Mean

Before you begin this study, appraise your crew: Are there “mean girl” problems within your own group? Some girls may have difficulty opening up if their “mean girl” is right in the room. Others may act overly defensive if they feel like they’re being accused in front of the group. So be sensitive to your group dynamics, and try these ideas for getting the mean out:

- Keep the focus: Remind girls frequently that this Bible study isn’t about accusing others of “mean girl” behavior—it’s about changing their own hearts.
- No disrespect: If a girl throws out disrespectful comments, address the issue immediately by reminding her to keep a respectful attitude.
- In extreme cases, divide a large study group into smaller groups. That way, you can split up the “mean girl” and the girl she’s been picking on, thus avoiding any potential blow-ups between the two.
- Recognize an opportunity: This Bible study may be your opportunity to lovingly confront students who’ve been stuck in the “mean cycle” and encourage them toward reconciliation. Just remember that any discussion of this sort should happen on an individual basis, not during group time.

Prep Work

To get the most out of your group discussion, students should complete each lesson on their own before your group meets. Hand out copies of the book at least one week before your first session and ask students to complete lesson one.

Wait, you say, do you really expect teenagers to prepare a Bible study ahead of time? Are you nuts? Do you live on Mars? Well, even earthlings can accomplish this feat with the right inspiration. Try these motivation methods on your students:

Break It Down: Each week’s study can be completed in about 10-15 minutes a day, or a marathon session of 1-1.5 hours. Ask students to look at their schedule and identify a regular time to complete the study each week.

Offer Bribes: Bring pizza to the next session if the entire group has their lesson done. Or bring snacks for those who complete the work. Or force those who don’t prepare to wash your car after the lesson . . . You get the idea, right?

Don’t accept excuses: If students come unprepared, ask them to leave the study group and spend the lesson time preparing for next week in another room. (Send the whole group into personal study time, if necessary.) It may sound harsh, but it’s the only way to show your students that you’re serious about prep work.

Pray About It: Ask God for help. If he can move mountains, he can probably find a way to give students the time and motivation they need to get their Bible study done!

A Different Approach

If your students just can’t find the time to prepare their Bible study in advance, you may want to consider a different approach. Here are two alternatives to consider:

- Work through the material together as a group. If you take this approach, plan on sessions lasting **at least one and a half hours** or you won’t have adequate time to work through the lesson. Or, divide the material for each week into two 45 minute sessions, giving you a total of 12 sessions to work through the lessons together.

- **Meet every week for 12 weeks**, but alternate between personal study time and group discussion. So, your first week would be a “study hall” setting with everyone working on the first lesson individually. Then, in week two, you can lead a group discussion, using the activities and questions in this guide. Continue to alternate until you complete the study.

Help Is On the Way!

If you do want to dig a little deeper into any of the topics and passages you find in the study, consider these sources:

iFuse.com Connect with other adults who are leading a PB&J Bible study to share questions and encouragement.

Hungryplanet.tv Download videos of Hayley introducing each section of the PB&J series.

Biblegateway.com A great place to check out verses in multiple versions of the Bible or to look up Bible commentaries about verses that confuse you.

Study Bible You may want to invest in a study bible that offers helps such as historical background, maps, interpretations of confusing passages, and thoughts about how to apply the passages to today’s world.

Leader Tips

When it comes to leading teens, there’s one rule that can’t be overemphasized: Get to know your group. As you meet with your students, pay attention to group dynamics: Do students look comfortable around each other? Are they a talkative group or a quiet bunch? Do they tend to go off topic? Do they prefer going through questions in an ordered way or do they generate good discussion with a less organized approach?

As you gauge your group, develop an approach that will work best for your unique crew. Here are a few common dynamics, with approaches you can try:

If your group seems quiet and uncomfortable, try spending a little more time with the opening activity before diving into the questions.

If they go off topic a lot, introduce the “parking lot” – a piece of paper/posterboard where you can jot down the off-topic idea, “park” it there, and then return to it if there’s time at the end of the session.

If no one responds to questions right away, allow some extra silence. Count to 10 before you say anything further: Someone else may just decide to break the awkward silence before you do!

If they offer short answers with little personal reflection, encourage deeper responses with follow-up questions like “Why do you say that?” “What does that mean to you, personally?” or “Is there anything more God might be telling us here?”

If they don’t respond well to opening activities, skip them! Some groups prefer to dive right into the Bible study, and that’s just fine.

If one or two students are doing all the talking, try taking turns as you answer questions. Or start inviting specific students into the conversation with questions like, “Sara, I’d love to hear what you have to say about that, too.”

SESSION ONE:

MY MEAN, YOUR MEAN, OUR MEAN—WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

Get It Rolling

Work as a group to take a look at classic Mean—the mean stepmother from Cinderella. Everyone knows the story, so have them talk about why they think the stepmother and stepsisters were so mean. What did Cinderella do wrong and do right? Why did they hate her, etc.? Using this story as an example, talk about why Mean thinks it's okay to be Mean.

The Keys

- Instead of having a sisterhood of loving and caring girls, modern girls have started treating each other like archenemies.
- If you want to change the Mean Girl problem, the best place to start is by changing yourself.
- God gives you trials in your life to test you, not to allow you to whine and complain.
- We've all been mean at some point in our life, and we all need to come clean.

The Qs

Taking a Look in the Mirror questions 1–12

Discuss the three rules on page 22:

What will you do to make this a safe place for everyone? What will you *not* do?

What do you consider gossip? What will you do if someone starts gossiping?

Why's it important to keep things confidential?

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Hayley suggested three things this study is *not* about: 1) venting all your personal problems, 2) gossiping, or 3) hiding the truth. Which of these will be most difficult for you to avoid, and how can the group help you stay on track?

CHALLENGE: Write down the names of each girl in this group. Tape your list in a place where you'll see it every day. Pray for each of these girls, by name, throughout the week.

SESSION TWO:

WHAT'S MEAN?

Get It Rolling

Have each person write down a memorable “mean scene” from a popular movie. What’s the meanest thing you’ve ever seen done to a character on the big screen? Take turns sharing your scenes and vote for the meanest scene of all. Who usually instigates the Mean in these movies, the good guy or the bad guy? Or do both sides do mean things? Do you think Mean is ever justified in movies? Why or why not?

The Keys

- No matter what someone else does to you, it’s never an excuse to be mean back.
- Sometimes, telling someone the truth they don’t want to hear is actually the most loving thing you can do—if it’s with their best interests in mind.
- But if you’re saying something truthful just to make someone feel bad, or only to make yourself feel better, then you are being mean.
- You have no way of knowing what’s going on in a Mean Girl’s heart. Leave that up to God.
- You can only change your own heart, so if you want to keep it happy and peaceful, then concentrate on not being mean in return.

The Qs

The Meaning of Mean questions 1 and 5

Find the Mean questions 1, 2, and 5

When Being Mean . . . Nice questions 1 and 4

Galatians 5:26 questions 2 and 3

Galatians 6:1 questions 1 and 2

Ephesians 4:31–32 questions 1 and 3

Psalms 39:1 questions 2 and 3

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Are you quick to *assume the worst* about someone or quick to *give someone the benefit of the doubt* when you feel like they’ve been mean? How do these assumptions impact your feelings about the situation?

CHALLENGE: Take a bite out of Mean by doing something extra nice this week. Identify a friend who you’ve felt some distance between lately. What’s one special thing you could to let her know you still care?

SESSION THREE: GETTING THE MEAN OUT

Get It Rolling

Have each person write down a “Mean List” of five mean things that girls sometimes do to each other. When everyone’s finished, take turns reading your lists and create a Master Mean List combining everyone’s suggestions. Then take a group vote for each item: Sin, or Not a Sin? (In other words, is it something God specifically forbids, or is it just something you don’t like?) How many of the things on your group’s Master Mean List can be categorized as sins? Can something be a sin in one situation but not in another? Why or why not?

The Keys

- Each of us is different, so knowing what each person considers Mean is an impossibility. You can’t judge the motives of the girls around you.
- To understand Mean and how to overcome it, it’s important to understand the things God hates—and to work on eliminating them from our lives.
- Beware of judging others’ actions as sin if they’re not defined as sin by God.
- If you can lighten up about the thing other girls do, you’ll find that Mean has much less of a hold on you.

The Qs

1 Peter 3:8–9 questions 2 and 4

1 Peter 2:1 questions 3

Proverbs 20:19 questions 2

Psalms 34:12–18 questions 3 and 4

Galatians 5:19–21 questions 2, 4, and 5

Romans 2:1 questions 1–3

Ephesians 5:5 questions 3, 5–7

Galatians 5:26 questions 3

Colossians 3:8 questions 4, 5, and 7

1 John 2:9 questions 2 and 3

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Have the Bible passages we’ve studied this week changed your concept of Mean? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE: Take the focus off your mean problems by focusing on someone else this week. Can you think of anyone who seems to be a frequent victim of Mean Girls? What could you do to protect her or brighten her week? Do it!

SESSION FOUR:

THE OPPOSITE OF MEAN

Get It Rolling

Grab a whiteboard or large sheet of posterboard for this activity. On one side, draw a figure labeled “The Ultimate Mean Girl.” What does she act like? What are her attitudes toward other girls? Write some ideas around her and embellish her face with a glare if you want! On the other side of the board, draw another figure labeled “The Ultimate Not-Mean Girl.” For every item you wrote on the Ultimate Mean Girl, write the exact opposite around your Not-Mean Girl. (Example: if the Mean Girl spreads rumors, the Not-Mean Girl stops rumors.) Do you think most girls act more like the Ultimate Mean Girl or the Ultimate Not-Mean Girl? Why?

The Keys

- The opposite of Mean is love.
- Without love, you don’t have God.
- Love is the ability to let go of yourself and give, even when it hurts.
- Love isn’t a feeling; it’s an action. You don’t have to feel good about someone in order to love them.
- To stop the cycle of Mean, you need to love even those who are mean to you.

The Qs

1 John 4:8–12 questions 2 and 3

Romans 13:9–10 questions 1 and 2

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 questions 2, 4, 5, and 7

Matthew 5:38–42 questions 2, 4, and 5

1 John 5:3 questions 2 and 3

Luke 6:32–36 questions 3–5

Matthew 5:43–48 questions 1

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: How does God’s idea of love seem to be different from the kind of love the world talks about? Which kind of love do you spend more time pursuing?

CHALLENGE: Identify a Mean Girl in your life—someone who’s done mean things to you or whom you just don’t get along with very well. Think of one way you could work at loving her this week. And then do it!

SESSION FIVE:

TAKING THE “ME” OUT OF “MEAN”

Get It Rolling

Give each student a piece of paper. Assign half the group to write down “a situation that would make me very happy.” Assign the other half to write down “a situation that would make me very unhappy.” Ask the “happy” students to share their responses and discuss. What kinds of thoughts could make you feel lousy even during a happy moment? Now ask the “unhappy” students to share their responses and discuss. What could you think about that could make your unhappy situation feel better? In general, what has a bigger impact on your mood: your circumstances or the way you choose to think about those circumstances?

The Keys

- What you think will determine how you feel.
- If you want to change a situation, then all you really have to do is change your attitude.
- Mean Girls really aren't what make your life miserable: it's **your thoughts** about those girls that can make you miserable.
- You are called not to fight the Mean Girl but to fight your mean thoughts. Your real battle isn't against her, but against the spiritual enemy who tries to fill your mind with darkness and lies.

The Qs

Proverbs 23:7 questions 1, 3, 4, and 6

Philippians 4:8–9 questions 3–5

Proverbs 4:23 questions 1 and 2

Romans 8:6–8 questions 2 and 3

Romans 12:2 questions 2 and 3

Galatians 5:19–21 questions 2 and 3

1 Peter 2:23 questions 1, 4, and 6

James 4:7 question 2

Ephesians 6:12 questions 1 and 2

Matthew 4:1–11 questions 2 and 3

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: How does Satan use Mean Girl problems to tear us away from God? How might God use those problems to help you grow in your faith?

CHALLENGE: Choose one verse from this week's study that will remind you not to fight back at Mean Girls, but to fight your spiritual enemy instead. Memorize it!

SESSION SIX

NO MORE MEAN

Get It Rolling

As a group, brainstorm a few ways you could respond to each of these Mean Girl situations in a healthy, godly way:

1. She wrote a nasty post on your Facebook profile.
2. She told everyone that you did something cruel to a friend, but it's not true.
3. She asked your boyfriend to the homecoming dance.
4. She made a snide comment about your choice of clothes.
5. She invited everyone except you to her pool party.

The Keys

- The more you change to follow God's will, the more content and peaceful you'll be—no matter what Mean Girls try to do.
- Always look for the beauty in ugly moments.
- One of the best witnesses to the world would be groups of girls who love God and love each other no matter what.

The Qs

The Meaning of it All questions 1–7, 11–15

No Offense questions 2 and 3

The Peacekeeper questions 1 and 2

Turning the Cheek question 1

Loving Your Enemies question 1

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Check out Hayley's suggestions for getting rid of Mean on pages 125–126. Do you have any other ideas to add to her list? What one idea can *you* commit to carrying out?

CHALLENGE: Jot down each person's response to the Final Q. Set a "checkpoint" meeting with this group for 2–3 weeks from today. Then touch base with each other about your efforts at fighting Mean.