

## **Jesus and Ugly the Cat—a lesson on appearances**



Start by showing the group the two pictures above (or your own ugly cat/cute kitten pictures), then ask, “Which cat would you rather have as a pet? Why?”



Ask the group to think about their friends... how important is it to you that they look nice? On a scale of 1-10 (10 being HUGELY important), where do you think most teenagers would rank attractiveness as a characteristic that is important in another person? Why?

Transition:

“Today we are going to talk about appearances, and when what’s on the outside can get in the way of seeing what is truly beautiful on the inside. And, with your help, we’ll talk about how God might ask us to change the way we view the importance of outward appearances. I’d like to continue our time by reading a short story about a cat named Ugly...”

### **Trying to be "Ugly" by Donna Martin**

Everyone in the apartment complex I lived in knew who Ugly was. Ugly was the resident tomcat. Ugly loved three things in this world: fighting, eating garbage, and trying to show love.

The combination of these things combined with a life spent outside had their effect on Ugly. To start with, he had only one eye and where the other should have been was a gaping hole. He was also missing his ear on the same side, his left foot appeared to have been badly broken at one time, and had healed at an unnatural angle, making him look like he was always turning the corner. His tail has long ago been lost, leaving only the smallest stub, which he would constantly jerk and twitch.

Ugly would have been a dark grey tabby, striped-type, except for the sores covering his head,

neck, even his shoulders with thick, yellowing scabs. Every time someone saw Ugly there was the same reaction. **"That's one UGLY cat!!"**

All the children were warned not to touch him, the adults threw rocks at him, hosed him down, squirted him when he tried to come in their homes, or shut his paws in the door when he would not leave. Ugly always had the same reaction. If you turned the hose on him, he would stand there, getting soaked until you gave up and quit. If you threw things at him, he would curl his lanky body around your feet in forgiveness.

Whenever he spied children, he would come running, meowing frantically and bump his head against their hands, begging for their love. If you ever picked him, up he would immediately begin tugging on your shirt, earrings, whatever he could find.

One day Ugly tried to share his love with the neighbor's dogs. They did not respond kindly, and Ugly was badly mauled. From my apartment I could hear his screams, and I tried to rush to his aid. By the time I got to where he was laying, it was apparent Ugly's sad life was almost at an end.

Ugly lay in a wet circle, his back legs and lower back twisted grossly out of shape, a gaping tear in the white strip of fur that ran down his front. As I picked him up and tried to carry him home, I could hear him wheezing and gasping, and could feel him struggling. It must be hurting him terribly, I thought.

Then I felt a familiar tugging sensation on my ear. Ugly, in so much pain, suffering and obviously dying, was nuzzling my ear. I pulled him closer to me, and he bumped the palm of my hand with his head, then he turned his one golden eye towards me, and I could hear the distinct sound of purring. Even in the greatest pain, that ugly battled-scarred cat was asking only for a little love, perhaps some compassion.

At that moment I thought Ugly was the most beautiful, loving creature I had ever seen. Never once did he try to bite or scratch me, or even try to get away from me, or struggle in any way. Ugly just looked up at me completely trusting in me to relieve his pain.

Ugly died in my arms before I could get inside, but I sat and held him for a long time afterwards, thinking about how one scarred, deformed little stray could so alter my opinion about what it means to have true pureness of spirit, to love so totally and truly.

Ugly taught me more about giving and compassion than a thousand books, lectures, or talk show specials ever could, and for that I will always be thankful. He had been scarred on the outside, but I was scarred on the inside, and it was time for me to move on and learn to love truly and deeply.

Many people want to be richer, more successful, well liked, beautiful, but for me, I will always try to be Ugly.

[give students a chance to pause/reflect... sometimes you can transition effectively by playing a song, singing a worship chorus, etc.]

Transition to Bible content:

“Now... let’s read the following passage from Isaiah, describing the ‘suffering Savior,’ Jesus. As you read it, compare in your mind the image you have of Jesus and the description here:”

**Isaiah 53:1-3 (from The Message translation by Eugene Peterson)**

<sup>1</sup> Who believes what we've heard and seen? Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?

<sup>2-3</sup> The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling,  
a scrubby plant in a parched field.

There was nothing attractive about him,  
nothing to cause us to take a second look.

He was looked down on and passed over,  
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.

One look at him and people turned away.

We looked down on him, thought he was scum.

Discussion:

1. As Christians, we are supposed to look and act like Jesus. If Jesus was looked down upon and treated like scum, how should we expect to be treated by those outside this group? Why?
2. Are there any people in the church or in this youth group that are afraid of being called ugly or unattractive? Why does this hurt so much when people call us these names or treat us this way?
3. God doesn't judge our beauty by what is on the outside, but what is on the inside—in our hearts and minds. How can we improve the appearance of our hearts?
4. What have we talked about tonight leaves you thinking that there might be something you want to change about your attitudes, actions, or thoughts towards yourself or others?

Close in prayer.