



LESSON 1: ALIKE BUT NOT ALIKE

WHAT WE WANT OUR STUDENTS TO LEARN: They are called by Jesus to be in the world, but to live as if they were separate.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED: To honestly evaluate their relationship with culture, and who their choices say they more strongly identify with: Christ or the world.

Scripture Focus: John 15:18-21

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 2:15-17

OVERVIEW: Do your students know what Jesus meant when He spoke of “the world”? If they don’t, after this lesson they will. When Jesus referenced “the world” in John 15, He was talking about the world we live in. The one that is defined by its opposition to God and His Kingdom. God and His Kingdom are sacred. The world is secular. The world is where your students live, breathe, and do life. It’s kind of like another way of talking about their culture. And in their particular context, the world is most commonly interacted with through media. Movies, TV, music, the Internet, social networks... each of these are consumed daily by students, and each is a major part of what defines the “world.” So, what is their relationship with culture? How comfortable are they with its messages and values? Do they fit in? Or stand out? In this lesson, you’ll help students see that the nature of their relationship with culture is directly related to the nature of their relationship with Jesus. The closer they identify with Christ, the less they’ll identify with the world.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Culture Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your “Jesus And Culture Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video,” click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-culture-teacher-prep>

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details give you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

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- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By “context” we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a “big picture” understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Gospel of John was written by John, son of Zebedee, a fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus. John also penned the book of Revelation as well as the three letters in the New Testament that bear his name.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 AD. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.
- **Purpose:** John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, the last two verses in his gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John's goal seems to have been to clearly communicate a full theology of Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

THE SETTING

John 15 comes in the midst of what the ESV Study Bible calls, “the farewell discourse.” This is a great term describing exactly what Jesus is doing in chapters 13-20. Jesus is at the end of His earthly ministry and is preparing His disciples to carry on without Him.

John 15 comes shortly after Jesus and His disciples had finished the Last Supper. They were preparing to walk from the city of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives where Jesus would eventually be arrested. Jesus was teaching them as they were going, or at least preparing to go. This passage about “the world” comes immediately after Jesus' teachings on the vine and the branches.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point is that teenagers must see that they are called out by God, set apart to live differently than the world around them. When a person is saved through faith in Christ, he or she is given a new identity, mission, and standard of living. Jesus said the world, those who are opposed to God and His ways, doesn't understand this because it doesn't know God. And thus, the world is hostile to the Christ-follower. Jesus warns that this is exactly what we should expect as the world was hostile to Him, too.

The idea is to help your students grasp the fact that they are different, they are set apart. And because of this, their interactions with culture must be different as well. They can't follow Christ and blend in. The way in which they consume culture and interact with it will show where their hearts are.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about the concept of fitting in and not fitting in.
- **Set-Up:** Arrange to display the “Lesson 1 Lead In Activity Sheet” contained in your lesson 1 folder, either by printing the PDF (which you’ll want to do if you’re doing the activity in groups) or by presenting it digitally. If you do the activity in small groups, you’ll want to make sure students have paper and something to write with.

FIRST, decide if you’ll divide your students into three groups or if you’ll do this as one large group. If you divide up into groups, assign one “people group” to each group by giving them one of the images from the Activity Sheet. If you’re doing the activity as one large group, simply display the pictures of the various people groups as you move through the discussion.

NEXT, explain that you want to take a moment and consider what it means to be a part of various groups. After all, most teenagers would identify with some group of people, such as a team, a club, or even just a group of friends. Explain that you’re going to have a little fun brainstorming what it might be like to be included in a few specific groups.

If you’ve broken up into small groups, you’ll want to give the following instructions to each group. (If you’re doing the activity as a large group, work through the following prompts for each of the three different people groups.) Have students answer some or all of the following about each group:

- What are some examples of how people in this group might talk?
- Where might these people hang out together?
- What kind of music might they like?
- What might their names or nicknames be?
- What kind of car might they drive?
- What might they do for fun?

If you’re doing the activity in small groups, allow a few minutes for students to come up with their answers, then have them take turns sharing with the class what they came up with. Have a lot of fun with this. Encourage creativity and overall fun.

THEN, when you’ve finished brainstorming what it might be like to be in each of these groups, lead students in a brief discussion.

Ask:

- **Would one of the people from the other groups fit in with the other groups? Why or why not?**
- **Why do you think groups develop their own way of talking, dressing, etc.?**
- **What if one day, one of the members of the group started acting like one of the members of another group? How might they be treated?**

FINALLY, transition to the Main Event by *saying something like the following:*

- **This activity isn't meant to poke fun at anyone, or to say that there is anything wrong with certain groups having their own culture. The idea is to help you begin to think about what it means to fit in. And what it means to not fit in. We're starting a four-week look at what Jesus had to say about how we interact and engage with our culture, you know, the world around us everyday. In today's discussion, you're going to see that Jesus had some pretty straightforward words on the idea of fitting in. Let's take a closer look.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that they are called by Jesus to be in the world, but to live as if they were separate.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, make sure you and your students are on the same page when it comes to the concept of culture. Ask students what they think of when you talk about what it means to interact with culture. Allow for a few responses, engaging students based on correct or incorrect responses. Then, use the following explanation to clear up exactly what you mean when you talk about culture. Say something like:

- The Bible uses the phrase "the world" to talk about the culture we find ourselves living in. When the Bible talks about the world in this way, it's talking about the world around us that is in opposition to God and His Kingdom. God and His Kingdom are sacred. The world is secular. The world is where you live, breathe, and do life. The biblical idea of the world and our understanding of our culture are basically one in the same. We interact with the culture around us, most commonly through media such as movies, magazines, TV, music, the Internet, and social networks. You interact with these each day, consuming so much of our culture's values and characteristics. Over the next few weeks, we'll be looking at exactly what Jesus had to say about how we engage with culture.

NEXT, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of John. Instruct students to turn to John 15. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus' ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read John 15:18-21. Once you've read the passage, explain that you're going to work back through the passage a few verses at a time to see exactly what Jesus was trying to teach His disciples, and by extension, us.

Begin the discussion by drawing students' attention back to verse 18. **Ask something like the following:**

- **What was Jesus' point in trying to compare the way His followers are treated by the world and how He was treated?**

Answer: Jesus was trying to reinforce the connection between His followers and Himself. He was making sure we understand that as Christ-followers, our identities are found in Christ. We will be received like Christ was because we are His children.

- **What do you think Jesus meant when He said that the world might "hate" us?**

Answers will vary. But help students see that Jesus was referring to the hostility we often face because we identify with God and His ways instead of culture's ways.

- **What are some examples where you or others you know have experienced the "hate" of the world simply because you identified with Christ?**

Answers will vary.

THEN, explain that Jesus gets to the heart of the matter in verse 19. Consider reading the verse aloud again **then asking something similar to the following questions:**

- **What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "I have chosen you out of the world"?**

Answer: First, Jesus is speaking of the call to a saving relationship with Him. Second, Jesus is talking about being separate from the world. He called us to be set apart from the culture we find ourselves in.

- **This truth is a pretty powerful one. As a 21st century Christ-follower, what does it mean to be set apart, or separated from the world you live in?**

Answers will vary. This is a pretty big, sort of open-ended question. See how your students respond and then get a little more specific with the following questions.

- **Think for a moment about how we interact with culture through TV, or movies, or the Internet. As Christ-followers, how are our interactions supposed to be different from the rest of the world?**

Answer: Jesus desires for our interactions with these types of media to be impacted by our identity as Christ-followers. He has called us to live differently than the world around us through the choices we make.

- **How does this impact the decisions we make when it comes to what we watch or listen to?**

Answer: We should accept the fact that there will be things we won't watch or listen to because of our relationship with Christ.

- **What other aspects of culture come to mind that present opportunities for us to set ourselves apart as different from the world?**

Answers will vary. These will include a host of moral issues such as attitudes toward sex and sexuality, drinking, relationships, and so on. Encourage students to really think about issues that come up where they see themselves taking a stand that is opposite from the position of those around them.

This is a good time to remind students that we can sometimes drift into legalism when it comes to how we engage with culture. Ask students if anyone knows what legalism means. Help them understand that legalism is the mistaken belief that simply doing the right things and not doing the wrong things somehow makes us a better Christian in God's eyes. Legalism isn't motivated by love for God, it's motivated by rule following. **Say something like:**

• **The idea of not watching certain movies or TV shows, or not listening to certain music is convicting, isn't it? No one has a perfect track record here, but that isn't even the point. The motivation for not watching certain movies, or not doing something everyone else is doing, isn't to somehow be seen as extra super awesome in God's eyes. God sees us through the lens of His Son's sacrifice on the cross. We're awesome in God's eyes only because Jesus washed away our sin. Period. No, the motivation for choosing to live set-apart lives in our culture comes from our identity as Christ-followers. We are God's children. We are in His family. And our character should reflect our Father's character. We should want to live as Christ would live if He were us in our context. And that means saying no to certain aspects of our culture, even though in the moment, it can make life a little tough.**

NEXT, explain to students that Jesus' words here made an impact on John. How do we know? Because years later, we see in 1 John 2 that John has picked back up this thread and fleshed out even more what it means to live as those set apart from the world. Instruct students to turn to 1 John 2:15-17. Read or have a student read the passage. Then, lead them in a brief discussion before transitioning into the Last Word. **Ask something similar to the following:**

- **How do you tie this to what Jesus was saying in the passage we read earlier? How is what John is saying here similar to what Jesus was saying in John 15?**

Answers will vary. But help students see that when John was saying that we shouldn't love the world, he was talking about this concept of being called out from the world, living in it, but being separated from the world by our actions and attitudes.

- **Define what it means in your own words to "love the world"? What does that look like to you?**

Answers will vary. Allow students a chance to think through this.

- **Do you feel tension here? Why is it so easy to fall into a habit of "loving the world"? Why do we sometimes want to go with the flow and just live like everyone else around us?**

Answer: It's our sin nature. It's the part of us that wants to fit in and to not call attention to ourselves. But because of our identity as Christ-followers, we're called to struggle with our sin nature and to live differently from the world around us, no matter how challenging.

FINALLY, transition into the Last Word by *saying something similar to the following*:

• Just like we talked about in the first activity, there is a desire in all of us to fit in and to go along with the crowd. But, this desire isn't one we need to make a habit of giving into. Jesus called us to new life in Him through faith. And He desires that we would live a life worthy of being His children. It's a matter of embracing the awesome privilege of being in God's family. Out of our love for God and our thankfulness for all He has given us, we should desire to live our lives in this world as He would, even though this will often put us at odds with the culture around us.

Make sure no one has any questions, then move to wrap up the lesson with the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students honestly evaluate their relationship with culture, and who their choices say they more strongly identify with: Christ or the world.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry erase board, or some other way to represent a few categories for students to consider.

FIRST, explain to students that you want to finish the lesson with a time where everyone, you included, can step back and think about how they interact with culture. Explain that you want this to be a chance for students to consider how their choices reflect their identities: do their choices show more of a closeness with culture? Or with Christ? *Say something like:*

• The point of this isn't to make you feel guilty, or to shame you. The goal for each of us here is that we would grow to be more like Christ every day of our lives. This is simply a way that we can all be reminded of areas in our lives in which we need to grow. Yes, it might be a little convicting. But it's a healthy thing. It's good to see parts of our lives that need to come more in line with what it means to be a Christ-follower. This group is a safe place. We can be honest about which areas are the toughest for us. And our honesty will help others in the group.

THEN, recreate the following diagram on the board:

Movies/TV	Internet
Music	Relationships

Explain to students that you're going to think about the choices they make in regards to these four different aspects of culture. First, start by asking students which one of these areas is the hardest for them to consistently make choices that reflect their identities as Christ-followers. You can do so by first telling them which one is the hardest for you. You might even go through the categories asking students to raise their hands for which one is their particular struggle.

NEXT, see if you can get students to articulate why the specific category is so tricky for them. (Example: Some students love to dance, and while a lot of pop music is great to dance to it contains messages and lyrics that don't line up with Christ's character and teachings.) Allow openness and encourage students to share.

THEN, encourage students to define what it would mean in their lives to take a step toward identifying more strongly with Christ in their choices. For some, this might mean there are certain websites they need to stop visiting, or some behaviors with friends they know they need to stop. Again, make sure they grasp the motivation behind this: it's not about legalism, it's about being obedient to Jesus' call to be set apart from culture because of their identity as God's children. Encourage students to vocalize their thoughts, sharing as much as they feel comfortable with the group.

FINALLY, encourage students to do what it takes to follow through on their thoughts, but to also be more aware of the choices they're faced with each day. Encourage them to listen to the Holy Spirit as He shows them opportunities they have to more closely identify with Him as they interact with culture.

If there are no more thoughts or questions, close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Social Media, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU ...

- ♦ *Do you have questions about a lesson?*
- ♦ *Something that worked particularly well you want to share?*
- ♦ *Something that didn't work you want to bring up?*

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.