



LESSON 1: CREATED TO STAND OUT

WHAT WE WANT OUR STUDENTS TO LEARN: God intends to use their lives to get the attention of the world around them, all for God's glory.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To step back and evaluate exactly what impact their lives are having on the people they encounter on a day-to-day basis.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 5:13-16

Supporting Scripture: 1 Peter 2:12

OVERVIEW: This passage in Matthew speaks to our identity. We were created by God to be difference-makers in this world. Like salt in a bland meal, we are to liven up the world around us for the sake of Christ. Like light, our lives are supposed to dispel the darkness of the fallen world we live in. As Jesus says, our lives are literally to be lived in such a way that people observe us and are left to offer praise to God. And yet, so many students (and adults, too) fail to live up to their God-given identity. This lesson will help your students grasp Jesus' expectations for their life, and will challenge them to really examine how effective they are at making an impact on the world.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Identity 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 Identity Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-identity-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.

- **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:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew’s gospel being written in the late 50’s or 60’s AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

THE SETTING

This passage is a part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and comes at the end of what has traditionally been called “the beatitudes,” the series of couplets that start in Matthew 5: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek . . .” and so on. The Sermon on the Mount serves as a sort of in-depth picture of the moral expectations of God’s children. Jesus spent the Sermon on the Mount contrasting the current, religious understanding of faith practiced by the Jews of His day, with God’s definition of what it means to be a child of God. It would have been revolutionary teaching to His first-century audience.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point we want to make is that in Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus cuts to the chase about what it means to live as a Christ-follower. Our lives are meant to matter. They are to be lived as powerful, impactful forces that transform the world around us, all in the name of Christ. This lesson will help your students understand exactly what this means, while also challenging them to take an honest look at the level of impact their life is actually having.

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 of their lives as “attention-getters.”
- **Set-Up:** Print enough copies of the “Lesson 1 Lead In Activity Sheet” (located in your Lesson 1 folder) so that each group of three to four students can have a copy. (TIP: If you’re using some sort of presentation software, you could convert the PDF to a JPG and drop the file in your presentation software. This way you could show the slide so that all the groups can see it at once.)

FIRST, divide students into groups of three or four and distribute the “Lesson 1 Lead In Activity Sheet” to each group. Explain to groups that you’re going to read them a fictitious scenario where a teenager named Jack finds himself in a tricky spot and must get the attention of his friend, Tyler. Explain that at the right moment, each group will have the opportunity to choose a unique object from their activity sheet and brainstorm a creative way in which Jack can use the object to get the attention of Tyler. The group with the most creative use of the most creative object will be the winner.

NEXT, read the following scenario to your students:

• **Jack and Tyler stopped by their lockers to grab their stuff after lunch. Jack was closing his locker when he looked up and saw Tricia coming down the hall. Jack knew that Tyler had a huge crush on Tricia. So, Jack thought he’d be a good friend and try and get Tricia and Tyler talking. As Tricia approached, Jack said, “Hey, Tricia. Come here for a second. I need to ask you something.” Jack looked over at Tyler to see if he had picked up on what was about to happen, when he noticed that Tyler had a huge glob of ketchup in the corner of his mouth. Jack tried to give Tyler the heads up, but it was too late. Tyler had seen Tricia and was walking over to talk to her. Thinking quickly, Jack reached in his backpack grabbed his _____ and then _____.**

At this point, instruct each group to take 60 seconds to look at their sheets and choose the object that Jack took out of his backpack. Then, brainstorm something funny Jack did with the object to get Tyler’s attention, thus saving him from blowing his chance to impress Tricia.

THEN, when the minute is up, have each group share what object they picked and what they had Jack do to get Tyler’s attention. Inform the group with the best response that they have won. (If your students had fun with this, give them 60 more seconds to do it again, choosing another object and action.)

FINALLY, explain to students that this was a fun way to get them thinking about the idea of getting someone’s attention. Explain that this lesson is all about getting the attention of people around us, but with a purpose in mind that might surprise them. **Say something like:**

• **This is the first in a four-week study on what Jesus has to say about our identity. In this lesson, we’re going to be looking at how Jesus wants our lives to be attention-getters to the world around us. As you may have guessed, though, it’s not to gain attention for us, but for Him. We’re going to see today what this concept of attention-getting has to do with our identities as Christ-followers. Let’s take a closer look.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students define the idea of identity, and to see how God intends to use their lives to get the attention of the world around them, all for His glory.
- **Set-Up:** You'll benefit from a dry-erase board, but it's not critical. Make sure students have a Bible or that they can look along with a friend.

FIRST, lead students to brainstorm a definition for the word "identity." Write the word on a dry erase board, and record their definitions. When they've slowed down supplying answers, or if they get stumped, write the following answer on the board:

- Identity: the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

Explain that our identity is the combination of elements such as our personality, our talents, our experiences, and so on, that make us who we are. And as Christ-followers, there's an added element: our identity as it is found in Christ. Say something similar to the following:

- **In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he described what happens when we come to a saving relationship with Jesus. Paul says that our old identity disappears. It dies. And in its place, a new identity is born. In his letter to the Colossians, he goes deeper in explaining this new identity. He says in Colossians 3:3 that our new identity is "hidden with Christ in God." This is cool and kind of mysterious, isn't it? Well, don't worry. We're going to spend the next four weeks learning what Jesus had to say about our identities as His followers.**

THEN, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the book of Matthew. Instruct students to turn to Matthew 5. 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 Matthew 5:13-16. When students have finished, lead them in a short discussion. Instruct them to look back at verse 13. **Ask something like:**

- **What do you think of when you think of salt?**
Answer: Something along the lines of flavoring, or adding flavor.
- **When is salt used? In other words, what is its essential purpose?**
Answer: To add flavor or distinction to bland or otherwise flavorless food.
- **When Jesus mentions that un-salty salt should be thrown out, what is He trying to say about the nature and purpose of salt?**
Answer: When salt ceases to function as it is intended, it doesn't really have any other purpose. It doesn't have a secondary function. When it is no longer salty, it is no longer useful.

Instruct students to keep this discussion in mind as they re-read verses 14-15. Lead them in a discussion of these verses. **Ask:**

- **What effect does light have on darkness?**
Answer: It drives it away. It's literally impossible for light and darkness to co-exist. Where there is light, there is no darkness.
- **If it were pitch black dark, especially in a time before electricity, how easy do you think a city on a hill would be to see?**
Answer: Pretty easy.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students step back and evaluate exactly what impact their lives are having on the people they encounter on a day-to-day basis.
- **Set-Up:** You'll want to use a dry erase board or some other means to help students visualize the people in their lives they have an opportunity to impact. You'll want to draw a circle and divide it up into four equal parts. Inside or out beside each part, write the following groups, one in each part: Family, Friends, Acquaintances, and Strangers.

FIRST, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to give them an opportunity to evaluate their lives and how effectively they are using them to make a difference for Jesus.

NEXT, draw the circle diagram as described in the set-up instructions above. Inform students that these represent the various people who could potentially be led closer to Christ through the way your students live their daily lives. Say something like:

Some of us have family members who don't have a saving relationship with Christ, and almost all of us have friends who fall in this category. Acquaintances are those people whom you know but aren't great friends with. Strangers are people you come into contact with but really don't know at all. Each of these people represents an individual that God will lead to come into contact with you. And you can influence each of them for God's glory.

THEN, have students look at the list and identify the group where they would say they are making the most impact at this moment. Remind them that this doesn't mean they are perfect or that there isn't room to improve. Ask students to call out their respective categories. **Then ask:**

- **Can anyone identify any reasons or examples of how you've impacted this specific group?**
Answers will vary. Encourage students and challenge them to think about how they can continue to impact this group of people.

NEXT, have students look back at the categories of people and identify which category they have the most work to do in making more of an impact for Christ. Help them see that this isn't necessarily a negative thing. This simply represents the area of greatest opportunity. Have students share their groups. **Then ask:**

- **Why is this group particularly challenging for you?**
Answers will vary.
- **If you thought about it a while, do you think you could come up with some practical ways to influence this group? Are there things you could pinpoint that would give you the opportunity to use your life to draw their focus to God? What might some of these things be?**
Answers will vary, but challenge students to think of simple, yet practical ways to live as difference-makers for Christ.

FINALLY, ask if students feel the weight of this responsibility. Help them understand that it's OK if they do. When they truly begin to see the potential in their lives, and the way Jesus relies on them to live for Him, it can really change the way they view their lives. **Say something like:**

This idea of living your life in such a way that you stand out in the world for Jesus' sake isn't a suggestion. It's not an advanced plan for only the most spiritually mature among you. It's very literally an essential part of your identities as Christ-followers. And that's according to Jesus Himself. Don't miss the chance to use your life to grow God's Kingdom by pointing people to Jesus.

- **So, what do you think Jesus meant when He said that we are supposed to light up the world like a city on a hill?**

Answers will vary. But lead students to see that Jesus was talking about our ability to impact the world through the way we live our everyday lives. The darkness of the world is in the places where sin is evident. Our lives shine with the light of Christ, driving away and exposing sin.

THEN, bring these two discussions together. Remind them that they just said that salt brought flavor to flavorless food. And they just talked about how light drives away the darkness. **Ask:**

- **What does it mean that the way you live your life in this world is supposed to have the same impact that salt has on bland food? Or the same impact that light has on darkness?**

Answers will vary. Let students answer as they will, without correcting or redirecting. You're about to tie it all together.

Explain to students that the answer is in verse 16 (if they don't already make the connection). Look back at 16. **Then ask something like:**

- **Here, Jesus gives us the reason why our life is supposed to stand out. We're supposed to live like salt and light so that our lives get people's attention. But what is the goal of this attention?**

Answer: The goal is that people see our lives, realize there is something different about us, and attribute that difference to God's presence in our lives.

- **What are some practical ways we can show people our "good deeds"?**

Answers will vary. Encourage students to be practical, and help them see that this goes beyond just their actions. Their words and even their attitudes draw people to God.

NEXT, explain to students that this isn't just a sentiment expressed by Jesus. Peter backs up this concept as well, writing something like 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Read or have a student read 1 Peter 2:12. Explain that Peter is echoing the words of Jesus, further affirming that this is a real part of our identities as Christ-followers. Remind students that when Peter used the word "pagan," he is simply talking about those who do not believe in Christ. Then ask:

- **How is what Peter says here similar to what Jesus says in Matthew 5:16?**

Answer: Both of them see the way we live our lives as having the potential to draw people to a relationship with God.

- **In both Jesus' and Peter's statements, what is the ultimate goal in people acknowledging the source behind our remarkable lives?**

Answer: Help students see that the goal is for people to come to a saving relationship with Jesus. The idea is a powerful one: our lives can be one of the ways Jesus calls people to Him to experience His salvation. Help students see what an amazing truth this is.

FINALLY, explain to students that as Christ-followers, their identities are wrapped up in how they live their lives on mission for God. Seeing their day-to-day lives as rich opportunities to shine for Jesus is a huge part of realizing their identities in Christ. Say something like:

- It's hard to realize sometimes, but you really are a huge part of Jesus' plan to make His name known in the world. As one of His children, Jesus will work through your life to show Himself to other people. Your call as a follower of Christ is to embrace your identity and to truly commit yourself to seizing the opportunities to make a difference in the world for God's glory.

Ask if there are any questions, then transition into the Last Word.

Encourage them that their lives are making a difference. Challenge them to keep living on mission for Jesus.

Make sure there are no remaining questions, and then close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute devotions 1-3 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.



LESSON 2: THE WORLD, UPSIDE DOWN

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Your identity as a Christ-follower means that greatness is defined differently than the world defines it.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To look around them and identify opportunities to humbly serve others in God's name.

Scripture Focus: Mark 9:33-37

Supporting Scripture: Philippians 2:3-4

OVERVIEW: The world that students live in glorifies the idea of self. You don't need to look much further than their Instagram or Twitter feeds. And while adults must take our share of the blame for our role in enabling much of this behavior, the fact is that this self-focused "me-ism" has plagued people since Adam and Eve decided to play god in the Garden. Self-centeredness is at the heart of all sin. The desire to be great, to be known, to be recognized and applauded is a byproduct of our sinful nature. But in this passage, Jesus flips this understanding on its ear. Jesus says, "to be first is to be last." Grasping this truth is essential if students are to understand their identities as Christ-followers. This lesson will help them understand and apply this life-changing concept.

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THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Gospel of Mark was written by its namesake. Mark, also known as John Mark, is believed to have received most of his information for his gospel from Peter’s firsthand accounts.
- **Time frame:** Mark is thought to have written his gospel in the mid 50’s AD.
- **Purpose:** Mark was writing primarily for a non-Jewish audience. His Gospel explains Jewish customs to non-Jews in an effort to get them to see the big picture of Jesus’ identity.

THE SETTING

This passage comes in the heart of Jesus’ public ministry. He has already called and sent the 12. John the Baptist has already been murdered. Jesus has already fed the 4,000 and the 5,000, walked on water, and performed many healings and miracles. Most notably, it comes on the heels of Jesus’ transfiguration. All this to say, Jesus’ identity and mission were becoming more and more clear to His followers and enemies alike. Immediately before this passage, Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection, though the disciples couldn’t grasp the fullness of what this meant.

THE MAIN POINT

As Christ-followers, our ideals and values run counter to the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in what makes someone “great” in Jesus’ eyes. Here, Jesus says that our identity as Christ-followers is found in serving others before serving ourselves. To be first, we must be last. To see ourselves in a proper light, we must see others as greater than ourselves. This is a difficult principle for all Christ-followers to embrace, especially younger believers, because of the “me-centered” world they are growing up in. But Jesus makes it clear: He expects us to be different than the world.

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 thinking of the idea of an unexpected outcome or result.
- **Set-Up:** None

FIRST, explain to students that you're going to read two short narratives to them. (Both are true stories pulled from older news articles). Explain that you'll discuss the stories briefly once you're done reading them. Then, **read the following stories.**

• STORY 1

Glen James lives in Boston. He is also homeless. One day, Glen was at a shopping mall in Boston when he found a backpack. The interesting thing? The backpack contained over \$40,000 in cash and traveler's checks. How do you think this story ends? Despite his incredible need for the money, James immediately took the backpack to the police where they were able to locate its owner! Why would a homeless man return the backpack without taking even a dollar for his trouble? When asked about his decision, Glen James said "Even if I were desperate for money, I would not have kept even a ... penny of the money I found,". He credited God with taking care of him, even as he is without a home or a steady income.

Source: LA Times, 2013 (article now archived)

• STORY 2

On a normal Wednesday night in August, the owner of a store in northern New Jersey got a call that his store had been broken into. He went to his store and looked at the surveillance tape. What he found shocked him. Four students walked into the empty store (it seems the owner had accidentally left the store unlocked) assuming it was open. They grabbed some batteries and some other items and tried in vain to find a cashier. Captured on the video camera, the teenagers left money for their purchases on the counter, including sales tax, and then left. The owner was so surprised by their honesty that he tracked the students down. The young men were rewarded with gift certificates by the store owner and received tons of support from their community.

Source: <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Honest-Customers-Leave-Money-Items-Inside-Unattended-Store-Wayne-New-Jersey-221363421.html>

NEXT, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask something like the following questions:**

- **What do these stories have in common?**
Answer: The reactions are opposite from what we've come to expect in these types of situations.
- **Do you think most people would have returned the backpack with the money in it? Why or why not?**
Answers will vary.
- **How about the guys in the store? What do you think most people would have done? The same as the guys?**

Or do you think most people would have walked out without paying (and possibly more than just the batteries)?

Answers will vary.

- **Why did these stories gain so much attention?**

Answer: Because it showed surprising honesty in a situation where these people could have been dishonest and probably never been caught.

FINALLY, explain to your students that much like these stories, today you're going to be talking all about a response that is unexpected, one that goes counter to what most people would say is the usual way to do things. **Say something like:**

- **As we continue our discussion of what Jesus has to say about our identities, we're going to look at a truth Jesus passes along that is the exact opposite of what the world leads us to believe. And through looking at this passage, we'll see that by embracing Jesus' approach we'll find ourselves exactly where we need to be for Christ to work through us. Curious? Let's take a closer look.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that their identity as a Christ-follower means greatness is defined differently than the world defines it.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, take a moment and see if anyone can recall what aspect of their identities you discussed in the last session. Use the following bullet points to help:

- Jesus expects us to be "salt" and "light" making an impact in our world for His sake.
- Jesus encourages us to live in such a way that our lives give credit to God for the different, bold way we live.
- We must evaluate our lives to see exactly how well we're making an impact in Jesus' name.

THEN, explain that you're going to look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking at the Gospel of Mark. Instruct students to turn to Mark 9. 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 Mark 9:33-37. Then, instruct students to focus on verses 33-34 and lead them in the following discussion. **Ask:**

- **It's easy to think that the disciples are being a little bit ridiculous here, right? However, at this point in Jesus' ministry, they probably still thought the Kingdom Jesus kept referring to was going to be an earthly one in which Israel became a nation-state. They envisioned Jesus overthrowing the Romans and leading Israel back to prominence. If this is what they were thinking, why would it matter who was the greatest among them?**
Answer: Because it meant a chance to rule alongside the Messiah in a political sense. They might have envisioned themselves being something like a vice president, or something similar. Basically, they were thinking of power in the world's terms.
- **We know now that this wasn't the kind of Messiah Jesus was going to be. This is kind of a tricky question, but can you describe the kind of Kingdom Jesus actually put into place?**
Answer: This is a difficult question, but it's an important theological one. Help students see that the Kingdom that Jesus set in

motion was one where God ruled the individual lives of His followers. It's a Kingdom of grace and love and mercy. And it's a Kingdom that grows not through military or political conquest, but through the hearts and minds of people devoted to God.

THEN, explain that Jesus' response makes sense in light of this background. Have students look at verse 35. Then, **ask**:

- **What exactly did Jesus mean when He said that those who want to be first must be last?**

Answer: The answer is found in the last part of the verse. We must serve others.

- **Just to make sure we're on the same page, what does Jesus mean when He said that we must be the servant of all?**

Answer: Jesus was most definitely saying that we should serve others, giving of ourselves to meet others' needs. But He was also speaking about our status. He was comparing the thought of being a ruler or an important person with the station of a regular servant.

- **How is this the exact opposite of what the disciples had in mind?**

Answer: They were thinking of greatness in terms of who would be first among them, and thus, have the most power given to them by Jesus. Jesus was of course saying that in God's Kingdom, those who take on the role of a servant are the ones who are truly great.

NEXT, encourage students to focus on verses 36-37. Explain to them that Jesus was using a child as a teaching tool. Explain that in Jewish culture, children were highly loved and valued. And yet, they were seen as being completely reliant upon others for their care, their rights, even their identity. They were valued from an emotional sense, but they had very low social standing. Then, **ask**:

- **Knowing this, how did Jesus' use of this child prove the point He was trying to make about serving others?**

Answer: Welcoming a child would bring the disciples no honor or social status. In a sense, this action would only be seen as valuable by the child. No one else would reward them or look favorably on it. And yet Jesus was saying that showing love and kindness to one of the lowest members of society was like showing love to Him. It perfectly made His point about serving others.

NEXT, explain to students that this is a concept echoed throughout the Bible. Explain that in Paul's letter to the Christ-followers in the city of Philippi, Paul urged them to apply this same concept in their lives. Read Philippians 2:3-4. Then, lead students in a final discussion. **Ask**:

- **Look at verse 3. What different mindsets or attitudes is Paul setting up against each other?**

Answer: Selfish ambition (or vain conceit) is the opposite of humility.

- **In your own words, define what it means to be humble.**

Answer: Lead students to understand that the definition is actually given rather nicely in vs. 4: humility is looking out for others' needs and interests before our own. It is placing our fulfillment second to the fulfillment of others.

- **OK, let's tie all this together: What does humility have to do with being great as Jesus defined it?**

Answer: Without humility, it's impossible to be a servant of all people. We must truly see others as meaningful and valuable before we'll allow ourselves to be in a position to serve others before ourselves.

FINALLY, explain to students that this same level of humble service is exactly what Jesus commands of them today. As Christ-followers, putting others' needs and interests before their own is a major part of their identity. **Say something like**:

- **In a world where so much of our social interaction is self-focused and self-obsessed, this idea of willingly putting others first is totally counter-cultural. It goes against our culture's idea of what greatness is. If you want to make a name for yourself in our world, you do it by making it all about you. But what we've learned today is that this is not Jesus' way. Jesus' way to greatness is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago. To be great is to be unknown so that Christ is made known through us. To be first is to be the servant of all.**

Make sure there are no comments or questions. Then move into the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students look around them and identify opportunities to humbly serve others in God's name.
- **Set-Up:** You're going to set this activity up almost exactly like you set up the Last Word activity from Lesson 1. Whereas in the last lesson you helped students think about impacting others through visualizing people, this week you'll use a dry-erase board, or some other means, to help them visualize the places where they have opportunities to serve others. You'll want to draw a circle, and divide it up into four equal parts. Inside or out beside each part, write the following places, one in each part: Home, School, Hanging Out, and Church.

FIRST, explain to students that as you wrap up your lesson, you want to help them come up with some practical ways they can live out their identity as Christ-followers by serving others.

NEXT, explain that you're going to do this in a similar fashion to how you did it last lesson. Draw the circle diagram as described in the set-up instructions above and inform students that these represent the various places in their lives where they will no doubt encounter people that they can serve. **Say something like:**

• **Each of us have a ton of opportunities to serve our family at home. And we probably have more than we think at school. But I wonder if you've ever thought about how you might model Jesus' call to serve others when you're hanging out with your friends. And finally, we have tons of opportunities to serve others through our Church, specifically the lost and the needy.**

THEN, lead students in a discussion where you challenge them to choose one of the places on the board and list one way that they have served someone there in the past days, weeks, or months. Affirm their service. Encourage students to think of simple acts, not just big ones.

NEXT, once the discussion dies down, challenge students to choose one place as a way of thinking about how they will serve someone there in the upcoming days. Then, guide them to think of a very real, very practical way of doing so. (For example: If they choose "Home," they might set the table one night, or maybe volunteer to take their younger sibling somewhere so that a parent doesn't have to.) Really work to pull some practical examples out of students.

(If you really want this activity to have teeth, create some way that students can write down their acts of service in a prominent place, such as on poster board on the wall, or something similar. You could even have them text it to you, so you have a record of it. Then, make sure you do two things: text them during the week to remind them of their plan, and follow up next week to see who followed through.)

FINALLY, remind students that the goal is to live our lives embracing our new identity in Christ. Say:

- Being a servant of all puts us right where we need to be. Jesus said that humbly serving others is what defines greatness according to God. Let's all commit this week and beyond to embrace this aspect of our identity in Christ.

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute devotions 4-6 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?*
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We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.



LESSON 3: LIVING AS BRANCHES

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: As Christ-followers, “remaining in Jesus” is essential to their identity, even if it means pruning away other aspects of their lives.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED: To assess where they are in their “connectivity” to Christ, and come up with a plan to get more connected to Him.

Scripture Focus: John 15:1-8

OVERVIEW: When it comes to our students and the world they live in, there is so much that vies for their attention. Sports, friends, hobbies, entertainment, and so on . . . Each of these aspects of their lives (and many more) consumes a part of them. Their passion, energy, time, and pure affection are divided among so many different things, and if they aren’t careful these things can become distractions. But Jesus says in John 15 that part of their identity as a Christ-follower is that He would command the largest part of their attention and affection. That is what it means to “remain” in Jesus. Christ-followers are to be intertwined with Jesus. Our identity is to be found in Him. This means that occasionally, God may bring us to the place where we recognize distractions in our lives for what they really are. In these moments, God leads us to make choices that are sometimes tough. But, this “pruning” is part of growing in our devotion to Christ. This lesson will challenge your students to examine their faith and how fully they are “remaining” in Jesus.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Identity 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 Identity Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video,” click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-identity-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.

- **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 during 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. The “vine and the branches” narrative comes on the heels of the Last Supper. It is as if Jesus is trying to impart some of His deepest teachings as He nears the end of His time with the disciples.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point of this passage is simple: our students can’t embrace their true identity as Christ-followers if they lived disconnected from Christ. To fulfill their calling and to be whom Christ intends them to be, they must strive to stay plugged into Jesus on a daily basis. If we are to live fruitful lives as Christ-followers, Jesus can’t be one of many objects of our affection. He must be primary. That’s what this passage teaches.

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 idea of something being essential to our survival.
- **Set-Up:** Print the “Lesson 3 Lead In Activity Sheet” (located in your Lesson 3 folder). Be prepared to tape each page of the sheet in a prominent location (such as a dry erase board) where all your students can see.

FIRST, explain to students that you want them to imagine the following scenario:

- **Through many mysterious events that are far too complex to get into in this very short introductory activity, they find themselves alone on a deserted tropical island in the middle of the ocean. Alone except for a crate of the following objects.**

(At this time, tape the pictures of the various objects on your dry-erase board while you call out the names of the objects.)

NEXT, explain to students that these objects are the keys to their survival. But, explain that they have a difficult choice to make: they must choose as a group to discard one of the five objects. Allow the class to come up with the object they want to discard. Encourage them to think about why they can do without the item they’ve chosen to toss out. When they’ve come to a consensus, remove the object from the dry erase board.

THEN, do the same thing again. Explain that they now have to part with an additional item. Ask them which one of the four items they think is least essential to their survival. Allow them to debate, removing the one that most of the students have chosen to do without. Repeat this process until you are down to one final object.

NEXT, lead students in a short discussion. **Ask:**

- **Who here thinks he or she could actually survive given this object on a desert island?**

Answers will vary.

- **How long do you think you could make it before help came?**

Answers will vary.

- **In essence, what you were saying in your voting was that the last object on this board was the most important one. How many of you agree that this object is the most important.**

Allow one student who does not agree to explain why he or she disagrees.

FINALLY, explain that this scenario was a fun game, but it had an interesting point: the more we took away objects, the more important the objects were that remained. Explain to students that this lesson is going to look at a similar principle. **Say something like:**

- **As part of your identity as a Christ-follower, Jesus is supposed to be first in your life, the most important**

relationship you have. Jesus is kind of like (insert the final object you left on the board). He is our most important survival resource. We simply can't live without Him. But don't take my word for it. Let's see what Jesus had to say about it. This lesson is a good one. Let's get started.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that as Christ-followers, “remaining in Jesus” is essential to their identity, even if it means pruning away other aspects of their lives.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, make sure you provide a few moments to review what you learned about identity in Lessons 1 and 2. (If you are feeling extra awesome, make up some sort of game with rewards to help them review each week.) Use the following bullet points to review:

- **Lesson 1:** Jesus called us to be salt and light in the world, impacting others in His name.
- **Lesson 1:** The goal of living as salt and light should be that our lives point people toward God.
- **Lesson 2:** To be great in God's eyes you must serve others, putting their needs above your own.
- **Lesson 2:** The key to serving others is to embrace humility, the idea that it's more valuable for others to be fulfilled before you.

THEN, when you've finished, explain that you're going to start today's look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking 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 15:1-8. Then, explain to students that you're going to do something a little out of the ordinary today. Explain that you're going to focus on John 15:5-8 before you focus on John 15:1-4. (NOTE: You certainly don't have to do this. But, it's easier to have the “pruning” discussion once you've already set-up the metaphor of the vine and the branches. But, you can do it in order if you wish, simply by flip-flopping these two sections of questions.) Direct students' attention to John 15:5-8 and **ask something like:**

- **Let's get on the same page. Recall that when Jesus would teach His followers, He would often use metaphors, or word pictures to make His point. These word pictures used images from everyday life that His audience could relate to. What is the word picture Jesus is using here?**

Answer: The image of olive or grapevines and the branches that grow off of them.

- **Looking at verses 5-6, can you tell what truth Jesus is teaching through this word picture? What is He trying to say about our lives/identity?**

Answer: Jesus is like the main vine that grows out of the ground. The branches grow out of the vine and get all of their life from the vine.

- **What does Jesus mean when He says that we are to “remain in Him”?**

Answer: Guide students to grasp the idea that just like a branch is connected to the vine, we are to remain connected to Jesus.

- **It's easy for a branch to “remain” in the vine. How do we, as real people serving a real God, “remain” in Christ? In other words, how do we practically stay connected to Jesus?**

Answer: Through meeting Jesus regularly by reading and meditating on His Word; by talking and listening to God in prayer; by praising and worshipping Him both individually and in community with our church; by recognizing evidence of God in nature, and so on.

THEN, explain that when Jesus said that by remaining in Him we will “bear much fruit,” He was once again using the vine and the branch as a metaphor. Explain to students that the fruit an olive branch produces is olives. That’s the nature of the branch’s identity. To produce olives, the branch must stay connected to the vine. Explain that we produce fruit as well. Ask:

- **As Christ-followers, what does it mean that we produce fruit?**

Answer: Our fruit is the evidence of God in us. It’s the outflow of the Holy Spirit working in and through us as a result of the salvation we have through faith in Jesus.

- **What is an example of this fruit?**

Answers will vary. Lead students to see that the fruit we produce is all of the godly aspects of our characters and all of the Christ-like actions in our lives. Ultimately, if it is good and pleasing to God, it’s the fruit (or evidence) of Jesus working through us.

- **In verse 8, Jesus gives a glimpse into the purpose of the fruit we bear as Christ-followers. What did He say it is?**

Answer: To bring glory to God.

NEXT, challenge students to grasp this idea that a major part of their identity as Christ-followers is their connectedness to Jesus. Part of being a follower is remaining in Christ, through the ways you discussed earlier. Explain that this is the key to having a meaningful, productive life as a Christ-follower. But, explain that there is an aspect of remaining in Christ that’s worth a second look.

Explain to students that now that they have this whole word picture figured out, you’re going to jump back up to verses 1-2 to look at a unique aspect of their relationship with God. Direct students’ attention to these verses, re-reading them if you choose. **Then, ask:**

- **Jesus passes along a huge insight into the roles of the Trinity. Jesus said He is the vine, but the Father is the gardener. What role does Jesus say that the gardener plays?**

Answer: The gardener tends to the vine, removing the branches that bear no fruit (i.e., those who do not believe in Jesus) and pruning those that do.

- **Who knows what it means to prune a plant, and why you do it?**

Answer: OK, time for a little gardening 101. To prune a plant is to cut off selected branches. The reason for pruning is to both encourage growth and to shape a plant into the desired form.

- **So, let’s connect the dots: If you are a branch that produces fruit, then God will occasionally prune you. What do you think this means?**

Answer: This means that out of His desire to see you grow healthy and reach your potential, God will cut away or lead you to cut away things in your life that are keeping you from perfectly remaining in Christ.

- **What kinds of things might these be?**

Answers will vary. But lead students to see that this could be relationships, misguided plans, bad habits, and so on.

FINALLY, explain to students that pruning is not always, or maybe ever, a pleasant experience. **Say:**

- **When God shows us areas of our lives that are getting in the way of our commitment to Christ, it’s not always easy or fun. And because of our sinful nature, it can be especially hard for us to lose something, even if it is something that’s not good for us. But, God is a good and loving gardener. He prunes because He loves! And though it may not be enjoyable, it is essential to our identity. Pruning allows us to stay strongly connected to Jesus, the Vine.**

Make sure there are no questions before transitioning to the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students assess where they are in their “connectivity” to Christ, and come up with a plan to get more connected to Him.
- **Set-Up:** Print the “Lesson 3 Last Word Activity Sheet” (located in your Lesson 3 folder). Cut out the cards on the sheet so that each student has one card. Provide something for students to write with. A dry-erase board might also prove helpful, though not essential.

FIRST, explain to students that you’re going to wrap up the lesson by helping them think about where they are as it pertains to their connectivity to God, and to help them commit to growing more connected to Him in the near future.

NEXT, remind students that, as you discussed earlier, there are a few key ways that we practice “remaining in Christ.” In other words, there are some things we can do to help grow more closely connected to Him. If you have a dry-erase board, ask students if they remember what these ways were from your discussion. Write some form of the following list on the board: Reading and meditating on God’s Word; Talking and listening to God in prayer; Praising and worshipping God as individuals and as a Church; Recognizing evidence of God in nature, and any more you may list.

THEN, distribute the cards you have cut out from the “Last Word Activity Sheet” and something to write with. Explain to students that these cards are going to help them follow through on growing closer to God this week. **Say something like:**

• **We know that part of our identity is staying connected to God. And we can’t stay connected to Him if we don’t practice these spiritual habits we just mentioned. If you look at those things we listed on the board, there are some we will be stronger in than others. Take a moment and choose your weakest area of the habits we listed on the board.**

Allow students a moment to do this. You may also want to tell the students the area you could most improve in. Once they have chosen their habit, instruct them to look at their card. **Say:**

• **This card represents a scale. Think of the left side of the line as 0, and the right side is 10. Think about the specific habit you selected as the one you could stand to improve in. Without writing anything on your card, figure out where your current level of engagement is. For instance, if you chose Bible reading as the habit you want to focus on, and you’re currently really struggling here, you might be at a 1, or a 3. Make sense?**

Allow students a moment to think about this. **Then say:**

• **Now, I want you to pick a spot on the scale that would represent progress for you. Maybe if you’re a 3 progress would be a 6. Take a moment and think about this. Then, I want you to color in the scale to the point that you have chosen to represent progress.**

NEXT, explain that what they are doing is helping make a reminder for themselves in the upcoming week to grow more connected to God. Reading their Bibles or praying isn’t just another thing to do. It’s a way they grow closer to Christ. Instruct them to keep these cards visible this week as a reminder to follow through on being more diligent in seeking Christ through the habit they have chosen to focus on.

FINALLY, encourage them to remember the goal behind this. Remind them that this is who they are as Christ-followers. Staying connected to Christ means producing more fruit in their lives, which in turn means bringing more glory and honor to God. What an awesome way to live out their identity as Christ-followers!

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute devotions 7-9 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.

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LESSON 4: WORK TO DO

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Their identity as Christ-followers means they are Jesus' answer to bringing the message of the Gospel to the hurting and the lost.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To commit to being more invested in being messengers of the Gospel to those who most need it.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 9:35-38

Supporting Scripture: Colossians 3:12

OVERVIEW: Part of being a Christ-follower is realizing that we are God's vehicle for sharing the Gospel message with the world. The Church (which means you and your students) are Jesus' Plan A, which, when you think about it, is an awesome responsibility. As a Christ-follower, part of your students' identity is to share the Gospel in their actions and in their words. And yet, this is a great challenge for so many of our students. While there are many factors that contribute to this, there is one that seems to be most overlooked: compassion. Jesus didn't share the message of the Kingdom or heal people out of obligation. He did so out of compassion. He was heartbroken at the people's predicament. Part of our students' identity as Christ-followers is developing the compassion of Christ, and acting on it to see people come to know Jesus. This lesson will challenge them to do just that.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Identity 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 Identity Lesson 4 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-identity-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.

- 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:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew’s Gospel is written in the late 50’s or 60’s AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

THE SETTING

At this point in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is in the early part of His earthly ministry. He is just a chapter or so removed from the Sermon on the Mount. And in the passages surrounding this passage, Matthew is showing us a mix of Jesus’ early miracles, teachings, and healings. In the midst of this, we get a personal glimpse of an observation Jesus shares with His disciples.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point in this lesson is to focus on two aspects of Jesus’ remarks to His disciples: the compassion He had for the lost, and His recognition of the Gospel as the solution to their predicament. This lesson will help your students focus on compassion for the lost, as much as it focuses on the expectation to share their faith. Sharing their faith out of obligation leads to a dead-end. Our sinful nature will always keep us from following through. Sharing their faith out of a recognition of the fate that awaits those who are separated from Christ is a much more compelling motivator. This lesson will challenge students to embrace this dual aspect of their identity.

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 idea of communicating effectively.
- **Set-Up:** Paper, pens, and blindfolds. (One student in every group is going to be blindfolded for this activity.)

FIRST, have students divide themselves into groups of 3. Explain that once they have found their teams, each team must gather one piece of paper, a pen, and a blindfold. Ask the students to draw a large tic-tac-toe board on a piece of paper. Then explain that one member of their group is going to be playing tic-tac-toe wearing the blindfold, while another will not. The good news is that the blindfolded player will have help. The third member of each group will talk to them about what is happening on the board and where they should draw their X or O. The only catch? They can only help by giving verbal directions. No touching!

AFTER explaining the rules, ask students to decide within their groups who will be doing what. (If there is an odd group of four, allow that group to blindfold both players. The two non-blindfolded students can each be directors.) Once students have picked the regular player, the blindfolded player, and the helper, they can begin playing!

This activity does not take very long, so if your group has time, students may want to play again with different people in different roles.

FINALLY, when students have finished, ask a few of these questions:

- **What was the most difficult part of this activity?**
Answers will vary, but may sound like “giving clear instructions about where they could draw the X or O”
- **Why is it difficult sometimes to explain what others are not able to see for themselves?**
Answers will vary
- **What do you think worked best for the directors?**
Answers will vary, but could include “patience, clarity, kind or direct language”

If there are no remaining questions or comments from your students, it is time to transition to The Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that their identity as Christ-followers means they are Jesus’ answer to bringing the message of the Gospel to the hurting and the lost.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, explain that this is the last lesson in the four-week look at identity. As you’ve done in the past few lessons, take some time to review what you’ve covered up to this point. Use the following bullet points as a guide:

- **Lesson 1:** Jesus called us to be salt and light in the world, pointing people toward God.
- **Lesson 2:** To be great in God’s eyes you must humbly serve others, putting their needs above your own.
- **Lesson 3:** To live a fruitful life on mission for God, we must stay connected to Him, like a branch connects to a vine.

Ask if this has been a meaningful study to students, and if they have learned anything new about their identity, or if they have been challenged to change the way they live their day-to-day lives.

THEN, explain that you're going to start today's look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking at the Gospel of Matthew. Instruct students to turn to Matthew 9. 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 Matthew 9:35-38. Then, lead students in a short discussion. **Ask something similar to the following:**

- **In verse 35, we see a pretty good picture of what Jesus' mission on earth was all about. What do we see Jesus doing?**
Answer: teaching in the synagogues; preaching the good news of the Kingdom; healing every disease and sickness.
- **Put yourself in the place of Jesus' original audience. What do these actions say about Jesus' identity? Why?**
Answer: These things speak to Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Why? Because no one but the Son of God could do these things. Jesus' teachings and healings speak to His authority.
- **Now, look at verse 36. Who does Jesus have compassion on?**
Answer: The crowds.
- **Let's think about this for a second: Why were there crowds always following Jesus?**
Answer: Help students see that there were a few reasons for the crowds that gathered around Jesus, some right and some wrong. Some people believed in Jesus and came to Him for healing or teaching. Others were more interested in the spectacle, almost coming at it from an entertainment perspective where they could see something they'd never seen. And still others, such as the Pharisees, believed Jesus was an imposter, or were at least threatened by the true message of grace and humility He preached.
- **So, when Jesus said that He had compassion on these people, it's pretty cool to think that He would have had compassion on people who were both supportive of Him and His mission, and those who were against it. What does this say to us today about whom we should show compassion to?**
Answer: Not just those who are our friends, or who are like us. We should show compassion to all people, regardless of how easy or hard it is.
- **Why did Matthew give as the reason for the compassion Jesus had on them?**
Answer: They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Explain to students that Jesus was probably speaking to the current state of religious leadership under whom the people lived. The leading religious establishment, particularly the Pharisees and Sadducees, had turned the goodness of God's Law into a burdensome, restrictive, cold set of rules to be followed. Jesus saw that in this environment, the people had been robbed of most of the joy of a relationship with God. Part of Jesus' mission was to change this.

THEN, make sure students are good with the discussion so far before driving home the key point of the passage. Instruct students to focus on verses 37 and 38. **Ask them something similar to the following:**

- **As we mentioned in the last lesson, Jesus spoke in terms His audience could understand. What word-picture is Jesus using here, and what does it mean?**

Answer: Jesus is playing on the idea of harvesting a ripe crop. Jesus equates the crowds with the crop and the disciples with the workers who would harvest the crop.

- **OK, let's unpack this a little bit. We know that Jesus had been preaching the Gospel, the "good news" of the Kingdom of God. Just to get on the same page, what do we mean by "the Gospel"? What is the good news Jesus preached?**

Answer: That Jesus was the Messiah, the promised Son of God, come to take away the sins of the world through His sacrifice on the cross.

- **This is Jesus' message and mission, the reason why He came to earth. Keep that in mind. Now we know Jesus has identified the misguided religious establishment as the source of people's frustration. Knowing what we know, what do you think Jesus wants His followers (the workers heading to the harvest) to go do to relieve the people's burden? What is the solution?**

Answer: Jesus wants His followers to share the message of the Gospel with the lost and needy in the world.

- **Let's drive this whole metaphor home. Harvesting a crop is the picture of gathering up the crop at the moment it is perfectly ready to be gathered. How is sharing the Gospel with the lost like gathering up a ripe crop?**

Answer: Because when people come to Christ through faith after hearing the Gospel, it is as if they are being gathered up into God's Kingdom. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, those who hear the Gospel and believe have "ripened" to the point they are ready to embrace salvation.

Make sure students understand the significance of what they just read. **Say something like this:**

- **When Jesus saw the needs of the people, what did He do? He turned to His followers and identified them as the solution. The same task extends to us. We are Jesus' Plan A for reaching the world. God wants all people to come to faith in Him. And the primary way He has chosen to accomplish this is through me and you and every other believer. We are to be Jesus' messengers of compassion. We are to be messengers of the Gospel.**

FINALLY, explain to students that the call to spread the Gospel is a central aspect of their identity as Christ-followers. This is probably not news to them. And yet, remind them that most Christ-followers don't actively share their faith. While there are a lot of reasons, the main one might be because we don't share Jesus' compassion. **Say:**

- **If we could see other people like Jesus sees them, if we could get past our own selfishness and the walls other people build around them, we might be more willing to share the Gospel. Sensing people's great needs and knowing we have the ultimate solution is different from sharing our faith out of obligation.**

Take a second and read Paul's words to the Colossians from Colossians 3:1. Emphasize Paul's command to clothe ourselves with compassion. Explain to students that compassionate love for the lost and the needy is the motivation for sharing the good news of the Gospel. This was Jesus' motivation. And it should be ours.

Make sure students don't have any questions, then transition into the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students commit to being more invested in being messengers of the Gospel to those who most need it.
- **Set-Up:** You might want to provide some music to play in the background of your time of prayer.

FIRST, encourage students that this has been a great last few weeks of learning and growing together. Praise their participation and engagement. Then explain that this is the final time in the course of studying Jesus and identity that you will be challenging them to put what they've just learned to work on their lives.

NEXT, inform students that you're going to provide a time for them to get alone with God for a few moments and talk with Him about His expectation that they would be useful field workers in His harvest. Help them see that this is a good opportunity to grab some alone time with God where nothing is pulling on their attention. Explain that you're going to give them a framework to get them started.

THEN, instruct students to think of one or two people in their lives who do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. Allow them a moment to visualize these people. Explain to them that when you tell them to, you want them to spread out around the space in which you're meeting. They are to talk with God in prayer about this person, or people. But, explain that you want them to ask God something specific about this person. **Say:**

• **I want you to go to God in prayer for this person, specifically asking God that He would make you feel compassion for the needs of this person. Ask God to help you see the brokenness of this person, and to feel compassion for his or her separation from God. Close your prayer by asking God to give you the strength to follow through with talking to him or her about the difference Christ has made in your life.**

NEXT, allow students a few minutes to pray by themselves. If you have some music to play in the background, this isn't a bad idea at all. After a few minutes, close the time of prayer by praying aloud for the students.

FINALLY, remind students that there are opportunities to be messengers of the Gospel all day long, all around them. Remind them that it's not the opportunity that they need to pray for; it's the strength to follow through once the opportunity arises. Encourage them to seek out God as the source of their strength. Challenge them to commit to using more of themselves to bring the message of Jesus' good news to the world.

• Don't forget to distribute devotions 10-12 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.