



LESSON 1: DEFINING INFLUENCE

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Jesus desires to use our influence to positively impact the world for God.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED: To look at their lives and define the areas in which they have influence, and to begin thinking about how they use their influence to point others to Christ.

Scripture Focus: Mark 1:16-20

OVERVIEW: As Jesus called His first disciples, He made a profound statement about how He would take their influence and use it for His glory. Jesus said that He would make His disciples “fishers of men,” thus redefining both their vocation and the way in which they would be using their lives. No longer would they merely be influential in their families and communities, they would be using their lives to influence their wider world for the sake of Christ. This is the same call Jesus puts on our lives today. In this lesson your students will begin to contemplate where they have influence and begin thinking about how they might use this influence to help others encounter Christ.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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

Have you heard of any of the Executive Book Summary services that are offered? These are quick two or three page summaries of various books for people who want to get the gist of the book but don’t want a long, drawn-out version. This is kind of how Mark’s Gospel functions. It’s the most “to the point,” most succinct of all the Gospels. So it’s no surprise that by verse 16 of chapter 1, Mark already has dealt with John the Baptist’s ministry, Jesus’ baptism, Jesus’ temptation, and Jesus’ beginning of His public ministry. All of this sets up the calling of the disciples in verse 16.

THE MAIN POINT

Influence is something that can be really hard to understand, especially as a student. Young people look around their world and, in their insecurity, don’t feel like they have much influence at all. There is a lot of speculation as to how old Peter, Andrew, James, and John were when Jesus found them out fishing that day. But the belief is that they were probably in their late teens to mid-twenties. Not much older than your students!

Jesus tells them their influence will have a much broader reach than anything they have known before. They are going to leave their tiny boats, where each day they merely fish for a living, and will instead affect the world. Can you imagine being a young adult in today’s world when Jesus comes along and says, “You have more influence for me than you realize; follow me and see what happens”? This is what you’re trying to help your students understand. The influence God gives them goes way beyond everyday activities including things like school, sports, or even youth group.

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 understand that they can use the influence God has given them to make a positive impact.
- **Set-Up:** You will need a pen and paper for every student. Take the time to do a little research on the “Top Ten Inventions of Our Time.” Pick a list and print it out for yourself. You will need to talk about this during the lead-in.

FIRST, set up the time with students by asking students what they think of when they hear the word influence. Then **say something like:**

- **Today we’re going to start talking about this idea of “influence” and what it means for you. To have influence means having an impact or an effect on someone or something. It means doing something that changes someone else. Did you realize we all have influence whether we realize it or not? Let’s talk about influence for a few moments.**

THEN, lead students in a discussion (or you could break students into small groups of three to five students and have them generate lists themselves and then share them with the group). Explain that when we think of the idea of influence, we may never even realize the way we’ve been influenced by others. **Say:**

- **Let’s take five minutes and do some brainstorming. Let’s make a “Top Ten List” of the most influential inventions of all time. These are things that were invented and changed the way we live our lives.**

Record students’ list on a dry-erase board.

NEXT, once you’ve led students to create their “Top Ten” list, read the example of the top ten list you downloaded from the Internet. **Say something like:**

- **I did some research on what the “experts” thought were the top ten inventions of all time. There were things like the wheel, the plow, the printing press, and the Internet. (Read the list you found.) Can you imagine a life without these things?**

Answers will vary.

- **What do you see in common with all of these influential inventions?**

Answers will vary.

Then say something like:

- **Each of these inventions changed the way we think about our every day lives. If there were no computer or Internet we wouldn’t have smart phones. If there were no wheel, transportation over all would be drastically different. Some of these inventions seem so subtle, yet they have affected so much. Behind each invention is a person. Some of them are well known; others are names that we may have never heard of. Yet, each carried an influence that shaped the way each of us go about life. Think about your own lists for a second. What is one thing on there that you can’t imagine living without?**

THEN, explain to students that you're going to begin a four week look at what Jesus had to say about influence. Today you'll look at how Jesus took four guys who were out fishing and empowered them to have an influence that has lasted literally centuries. Often, we think that we are supposed to wait until we "grow up" to make a difference.

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

- **Today we're going to talk about ways we can be influential for the Lord. It's so easy to use the excuse of "when we grow up." However, what if those inventors we talked about had kept putting off inventing? You may not realize this, but most inventors try and fail often before they finally do something that sticks. We all have influence right where we are today, and we are going to take a look at what that means for each of us.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students that Jesus desires to use their influence to positively impact the world for God.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, ask students if they have ever thought about the idea that God wants them to have influence for Him now? Ask how that makes them feel. Then **say something like**:

- **We talked about the type of influence that can last through generations. Sometimes the influence is so powerful it keeps affecting everything around it, while we barely notice, like some of the inventions we talked about. What are some other ways influence can be powerful like this?**

Answers will vary. You want students to begin seeing the ways that influence may not be obvious at the moment. As we start to look at Jesus calling these fishermen to leave their nets and be His disciples, it may not have been obvious that they were going to have the influence they would have. They may not have even really understood the reach their influence would one day have.

THEN, read out loud or ask a student to read, Mark 1:16-20. When you've finished, **say something like**:

- **We have here four guys who had only ever fished for a living. Let's look at the for a second. There is a lot of debate as to how old they were, but most believe they were somewhere between teens and young adults. They thought their lives would only ever be on a fishing boat. James and John probably figured they would one day take over their father's business.**

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

- **What do you think the disciples' influence was like before Jesus called out to them?**
Answer: They were just being guys who fished. Their influence didn't reach much past providing fish for the people in their town. There were other fishermen who also brought fish. They were just ordinary people.
- **When Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people," do you think they had any idea what that meant?**
Answer: We know that Peter and Andrew had met Jesus before. In John 1:35-54, we know that Andrew had been with John the Baptist when he called out and said, "Look there is the Lamb of God." He went home and told his brother that they had found the Messiah. Andrew and Peter went to talk to Jesus. (This is actually when Jesus tells "Simon" he will now be called, "Peter.") This had a lot to do with what Peter's influence would become. So when Jesus came and said, "Follow me" there was probably a part of them that had been hoping for this. We don't think they had any idea what it meant to "fish for men," but they had an idea of what fishing was and that it meant bringing people close. They understood fishing.

- **Do you think they understood what it was going to be like to “fish for people?”**

Answer: Jesus tells them He will “show them how” to fish for people. They had to learn how to be fishermen in the earthly sense, and it was clear Jesus was going to show them what this meant. They understood that it was something special.

Then say something like:

- **Can you imagine being one of these four men? You have heard of Jesus, you may even have met Him. You have heard He is the Savior, Messiah everyone has been waiting for. One day while you are doing what you do every day He comes and tells you to follow Him. Would you have followed Jesus that day if He came and told you that He wanted you to?**

THEN, say something like:

- **Jesus comes into our lives and asks the same things as us. We may have heard about Him, we have met Him before in our lives. Then He comes and asks us to be His. Will we follow Him? It is uncomfortable to leave what we know and trade it in for something that might now make total sense to us. The question we have to ask ourselves is if we believe that He will take what we know and make it better.**

As you help students unpack this and what it means for their lives, lead them in a brief, kind of open-ended discussion where they can really think about and respond to these questions:

- **Let’s talk about the influence you have today, where you are. Whom do you influence every day? What is your influence like? The fisherman influenced their family and even their town. What do you do today?**

Answers will vary.

Finally transition to the Last Word by **saying something similar to the following:**

- **The idea behind Jesus’ call on His disciples and on you is that we all have the ability to impact the world around us. We all have an influence of some sort. The real question for us is, “How do we exercise our influence? And for what end?” Let’s take a closer look as we wrap up our time of Bible study.**

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To look at their lives and define the areas in which they have influence, and to begin thinking about how they use their influence to influence others for Christ.
- **Set-Up:** You’ll need paper and pens for each student.

FIRST, say something like:

- **We have been talking about influence. In our opening time, we talked about inventions and the influence they have had on our world. The things that have the most influence on the way we think about life seem the least assuming at the time. When Jesus was alive people barely understood really who He was. They certainly didn’t fully understand the influence Jesus would have for all time. Many Jews who had been waiting for a Savior thought He was coming to “save” them from the Roman government that ruled them. They were looking for a military “king” to rule their nation, not someone who would come to save their souls. They didn’t realize the influence He would have forever. I doubt those fishermen understood the way their influence would change with Him in their life. Let’s take a minute and think about what your influence is right where you are. Make a list of everything you do, and all of the places you know people right now. It could be class, sports teams, clubs, or friends. Where do you know people? That is where you have an influence.**

Give them a few minutes to make a list. **Then say something like:**

- **We all have some form of influence in the lives we live and the things we are involved in. It's our choice what kind of influence it is. Are we not doing anything? Are we helping influence for the good? Are we a bad influence on those around us?**

THEN, instruct students to take a minute to think about the kind of influence they have in all of those places on their lists. If they really don't influence the people or situation at all write an X next to it. If they feel like they have a good influence in that place, like they are a servant to the people, or perhaps even lead people, make a smiley face. If they create a negative influence (like are disrespectful to a teacher, don't listen to your coaches or even are always fooling around) make a frown.

NEXT, explain that no one else has to see this list so they can be honest. Look at your list. Count the X's, Frowns and Smiles. Where do most of your influences lie? Think about it for a moment. Explain that now we can look at the smiley faces. We can have a "good" influence, but that doesn't mean it's an influence for Christ. Look at those influences are they for Christ or not?

Ask:

- **How do you think your list would change at all if you let Christ be the one who influenced you most?**

Answers will vary.

- **How would your list change if you let Christ influence others through you?**

Answers will vary.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **Take a moment to think about your life ahead and your list in front of you. What do you think your life could be like, what kind of influence would you have if you let God make you a "fisher of people?" Your influence starts today right where you are. Now just circle two things on your list that you will ask God to influence today. This week we are going to spend time in your devotionals talking about that.**

If you have no more questions, wrap it up 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.

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LESSON 2: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Their influence is impacted by how their lives do or don't match up with their faith.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To commit to a deeper awareness of any inconsistencies in their lives and to focus on living more in line with their faith.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 23:1-12

OVERVIEW: As Christ-followers in a culture increasingly ambivalent (and maybe even hostile) to religion, we have a strike against us. Students have a target on their backs. People are watching to see if the lives they live match up with the faith they profess. Now, perfection isn't attainable or even expected. But, the truth is that an authentic faith-life leads to tremendous influence. But the opposite is true, as well. The goal of this lesson is simply to help your students be more aware of any inconsistencies in their faith lives, how these might negatively impact their influence, and ways they can focus on a life that is true to Christ.

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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

At this point in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is two chapters removed from His triumphant entry into Jerusalem celebrating what would be His final Passover. After entering into the city, Matthew shows Jesus spending His time in the Temple expertly refuting the Pharisees’ many challenges to His identity. In this passage, Jesus takes aim at the Pharisees and their characters.

THE MAIN POINT

In Romans 6:1-2, Paul has this to say about grace: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” Our society has made many of us believe that grace allows us the freedom to just do what we want. This is not the heart behind this freedom.

On the other hand, it can be easy to “act like a Christian” making a list of do’s and don’ts, and still not truly belong to Jesus. In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus talks to the Pharisees about this very idea. They are judging others on how “religious” (or un-religious) they act. As a matter of fact, Christ says their expectations are crushing others under the weight of a great burden to be righteous. Instead, Jesus tells us we are to have a quiet influence that comes from a life focused solely on who He is.

It’s easy to look on the outside and say someone is acting like a Christian or not acting like a Christian. However, we have to ask ourselves a deeper question: where is our heart? What is the motivation for our actions? Our influence in society comes from the ability to know whom we belong to, and let that take over everything. If we are allowing the love of Christ to transform us, all we can do is live with and for Him and this influences everything.

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 know they can use the influence God has given them to make a positive impact.
- **Set-Up:** You will need enough sticky notes for each student to have 2-4, pens for everyone, and two or three large pieces of paper to hang on the wall. You'll need to hang up two or three of the large pieces of paper. On one large piece, write the word "Christians" on the other write "Non-Christians."

FIRST, pass out sticky notes and pens. Then set up the time with students by **saying something like this:**

- **Look at the two sheets of paper I have up on the wall. I've given us two categories: Christian and Non-Christian. What I want you to do is to take a moment and write on your sticky notes an action or two that someone might do to show that they are Christians and an action or two that would show that they are not Christians. When you're done, head up to the pieces of paper and stick your notes to the correct category.**

NEXT, after they have all had a chance to stick their notes on the paper, take a moment and read aloud the traits on both pieces of paper. When you've finished, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **What is our list like? Is it pretty comprehensive? Or did we leave out a few?**
Answers will vary. Some students may add traits at this time, which is fine.
- **Do the traits in these lists really make someone a Christian or a Non-Christian? Why or why not?**
Answers will vary. Don't feel like you have to lock down an answer at this point. Allow students to answer and if you get both sides of the argument, all the better.
- **Is there any risk in thinking about people's faith in these terms?**
Again, let students freely voice their opinions. Encourage them to share, but resist locking down a "right" answer at this point.

THEN, begin to transition out of the intro activity and into the Main Thing by **saying something like this:**

- **You know, as some of you hinted at, it's tricky to judge whether someone is a Christian or not by their actions. We all have sin natures. None of us are perfect. And thank goodness we're made righteous not by the things we do or don't do, but through God's mercy as demonstrated by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. This is a good thing! But, the Bible is clear: we can't ignore what our actions say about what's going on in our hearts.**

FINALLY, say:

- **Tonight we are going to look at our second lesson on what Jesus had to say about our influence. And what Jesus says in the passage we'll be studying is going to bring a lot of clarity to this opening discussion. Let's take a closer look.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students see that their influence is impacted by how their lives do or don't match up with their faith.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, see what your students can recall from Lesson 1 of Jesus and Influence. Use the following bullet points to help you:

- They learned that Jesus desires to use their influence to positively impact the world for God.
- They were challenged to look at their lives and define the areas in which they have influence, and to begin thinking about how they use their influence to influence others for Christ.

THEN, ask students something like:

- **What do you think about the influence different famous people have? Has there been anyone famous who has personally influenced you in some way?**

Answers will vary.

- **Has there been anyone famous who has influenced your faith?**

Answers will vary.

- **What about people who aren't famous? Who are those people in your life who have influenced you most in your spiritual lives?**

Answers will vary.

- **What is it about their lives that have been so influential?**

Answers will vary, but you may want to share the story of someone in your life who has influenced you to be closer to Christ and why.

Then say something like:

- **Most of the people in our lives that influence us to follow Christ and be closer to Him, show us something in the way they live. They are close to Jesus. It isn't that they are always perfect, however, there is something in the way they live, in the things they do that inspires, as well. Unfortunately, we're about to see how the opposite can be true.**

NEXT, instruct your students to turn to Matthew 12. While they are doing so, provide some context for the passage by referencing either the Details, the Setting (or both) from your Bible Background. Read or have a student read Matthew 23:1-12. You'll lead students in a short discussion, but not before making sure they remember who the Pharisees were. (Answer: Jewish religious leaders who put an incredible focus on their outward actions and how their hyper-strict focus on doing good things made them more righteous in God's eyes. Unfortunately, many seemed to have the wrong motivations, and harbored ill will toward Jesus and others in their hearts. They were Jesus' chief antagonists throughout His ministry.) **Ask something like:**

- **What does verse 3 tell us about these guys and how others were supposed to react to them?**

Answer: They were saying all of the right things. They were even teaching the right lessons. However, they didn't "practice what they preach." Jesus acknowledged this disconnect was hurting people.

- In verse 4, Jesus talks about tying up heavy loads and putting them on people's backs. He's not talking about real loads. He's talking about how these leaders would burden people with telling them all that they had to do to make themselves good in God's eyes.

- **How was their behavior affecting others trying to follow God?**

Answer: Instead of helping people follow God like they were supposed to do, the burdened people, in effect, coming between God and people with all their rules. (Also, fun fact, Phylacteries were the boxes the Pharisees would wear that had Scripture in them. This was because they practiced a very literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8: “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”)

- **How does Jesus describe them in verse 5-7?**

Answer: These men did everything for “show.” They wanted the world to notice how awesome they were. Wearing extra long tassels and huge scripture boxes were all ways that people could look at them and say, “Oh they are so godly.” However, they demanded others to act this way when they themselves couldn’t keep up. As a matter of fact it crushed others under a burden that made them believe that God would never want them.

Summarize the picture Jesus is painting of the Pharisees. These were some of the main leaders of the Jews. They were supposed to help lead people closer to God. But because they had chosen to make their faith so much about themselves, they actually ended up driving people further away from God.

THEN, keep moving in your discussion. Instruct students to look back at verses 8-10. **Then, ask:**

- **This passage seems kind of odd to our modern ears. What is the point Jesus is trying to make in these verses?**

Answer: Jesus isn’t saying that people aren’t allowed to be Dads or teachers (that’s what rabbi means). He was referring to the titles that these religious people held. They wanted to be called something extraordinary to stand out from the crowd as the best for God. In contrast, Jesus is telling us here that what matters to Him is where our hearts are. Do we belong to Him? Do we only want to influence others with the teaching of Jesus but in a way that leads them closer to Him? He wants us to be less about being “famous” ourselves for the Lord and more about recognizing Jesus is the only one who really shows us truly how to live.

- **Here’s the big finish. Looking at verses 11 and 12, what does Jesus say about those that really have the greatest influence?**

Answer: It surely wasn’t the Pharisees whose actions didn’t line up with their faith. No, the most influential people are those who live out their faith, humbling themselves like Christ repeatedly did, and serving others.

- **How does this look in our lives practically?**

Answer: It can be hard to fully understand what it means that those with the greatest “influence” are truly servants. Those of us who just want to “look” like Christians, God will look at our hearts, those who just want to be close to Jesus have the greatest influence.

Begin to summarize what you’ve looked at and start wrapping your time of Bible study up. **Ask something like the following:**

- **So, did the Pharisees have influence?**

Answer: Yes.

- **How would you describe their influence?**

Answers will vary, but the point is that it wasn’t pretty. It was a negative influence, not a positive influence.

- **At the heart of the matter, why was their influence negative?**

Answers will vary. Lead students to see that ultimately, their influence was negative because their actions, the things they did, didn’t line up with whom they professed to be. They professed to be the righteous leaders of Israel. But their motivations were selfish and focused more on them than God. Some people saw through this. Others tried to follow them and were led astray. Either way, their influence was negative.

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

- **Each of you has some influence on others. You do. The point is that you can positively influence others, or negatively influence them. And the truth is that when our actions don't line up with our professed faith, we turn people away from God. We have a negative influence. Our actions don't make us good or bad in God's eyes. Our "goodness" is accomplished by Jesus' work on the cross. But, our Christ-like actions will positively influence others. Just as our un-Christ-like actions have the real chance to negatively influence them. Let's think about this a little more before we wrap up.**

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To commit to a deeper awareness of any inconsistencies in their lives and to focus on living more in line with their faith.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need paper and pens for each student.

FIRST, remind students that we have to be careful about how we think about our actions. In our walk with Christ, our attitude can sometimes be all about what we can get away with. This means we just want a list of rules to keep, so we don't break them. However, the Bible never says, "Don't go see that movie or listen to that music." Jesus commanded us to live a holy life, and a life of service that brought us closer to Him and encouraged others to do the same. Explain that the Bible gives us some thoughts on how to act, but when our heart is closer to the Lord then our actions follow.

NEXT, distribute paper to your students. **Say something like:**

- **This paper is for your eyes only to be honest with God about where your faith is. The first question you need to ask for yourself is: "Do you want to be closer to Him?" Let's take a few minutes and really think about that. Talk silently with the Lord about that. Now just write down a few thoughts you have. If you want to be closer to Jesus write that down. If you don't know, then write that.**

Allow students a few moments to accomplish this, **then ask:**

- **If you are honest with yourself, what are you doing that really doesn't bring you closer to Jesus, and maybe even farther away from Him? Just write those down.**

THEN, after a few moments for students to record their thoughts, **ask:**

- **What are some ways you know you just go "along with the crowd," but you know it isn't really the way Jesus wants you to be? For example, do you laugh at jokes you shouldn't, or even go along with doing certain things that hurt your influence? Write those down now.**

FINALLY, say something like:

- **Write down some ways you think your influence could be stronger to help others see Jesus more clearly. What could change about the lists you have made? If you don't know that it all right. Keep these papers with you to look back on as you do your devotions this week.**

Close by helping students see that God wants our hearts to be close to Him. When we're close to God, we want to serve Him. Then being a person who chooses to follow Jesus doesn't feel like a burden. Explain that they'll want to do things that align them with Christ. And these actions will in turn influence others in a positive way for God's glory.

Challenge students to really think this week how their actions either positively or negatively influence others. Make sure there are no closing thoughts and then 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.

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LESSON 3: INFLUENTIAL SERVICE

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That real influence comes when they put others' needs before their own.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To identify areas in which they can be influential through serving others.

Scripture Focus: John 13:1-17

OVERVIEW: Jesus amazed the disciples when He lowered Himself (both literally and figuratively) to wash their feet. In doing so, He modeled for them a powerful message: to lead others you must serve others. The world tells us that influence is best achieved by winning, by arriving at the top ahead of everyone else. But Jesus says that real influence is putting the needs of others above our own. This is a relevant, meaningful lesson for your students to internalize.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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To access your "Jesus And Influence Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-influence-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 13 begins what the ESV Study Bible calls, “the farewell discourse.” This is a great term describing exactly what Jesus is doing in chapters 13-20. In the first verse of chapter 13, John gives his readers a clue that what he’s about to tell us is leading up to Jesus’ departure: “Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Jesus is at the end of His earthly ministry and is preparing His disciples to carry on without Him.

John 13 follows shortly after a scene in John 12 where Jesus predicts His own suffering and death. As confusing and unsettling for the disciples as that might have been (though Jesus’ disciples never imagined—even with his predictions about his own death—that his time on Earth would end with him being violently and tortuously killed on a cross), Jesus implies in 12:23-26 that following Him means not only following Him in life, but following Him in suffering and death as well. This idea affirms the expectation that Jesus is not just teaching ideas and principles—He is modeling what he expects His disciples to do after He is gone.

THE MAIN POINT

Through His actions in this passage, Jesus communicates that influence and leadership comes through serving others in ways that would normally be considered unusual. Though foot-washing at a dinner like this one is not unusual, the fact that a Rabbi would wash his disciples’ feet is very strange—usually, Jewish disciples would be expected to wash their Teacher’s feet.

The point Jesus makes is simple to understand, but very difficult to live out: followers of Jesus are to gain and exercise influence not by giving orders and making demands, but by serving others in unusual ways. In short, the teens in your study need to walk away understanding this: If you want to make a difference, serve in unusual ways.

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 understand how counter-cultural it is to serve others.
- **Set-Up:** If you normally have snacks or a meal as part of your Bible study or small group, don't serve any snacks (or let your students have any) until you do this activity. Before you begin, have an ice cream bar set up with different kinds of ice cream and toppings. As you'll see, this activity works best when there is a variety of options to choose from. Make sure you are mindful of any allergies that may be in your group. Set up your room or space so that students can sit in a circle, either on the floor or in chairs—the activity won't work well if students are separated or can't see each other. (If you have the flexibility and extra time, you could do this activity with a full meal; using an ice cream bar will keep the Lead-In from taking up too much time of the study.)

FIRST, explain to your group that you wanted to provide them with a special treat, so you came early to set up an ice cream bar for them. Everyone is welcome to get some ice cream before you dig into the Bible study, but there are a few quick rules:

- **No one is allowed to talk with anyone else for any reason, this includes texting.**
- **No one is allowed to get, prepare, or carry their own ice cream sundae or utensils. The person to your right will fix your ice cream, and you will fix ice cream for the person to your left.**

THEN, let your group know that they can dig in, and make sure you take part in the activity and follow the rules as well. Don't offer any more instruction, except to enforce the two rules above. It will be very difficult for students to keep from communicating in any way, especially when what they are given isn't quite what they wanted! As the group serves one another sundaes, keep an eye out for examples when students serve others or when students get frustrated with the activity because they might have gotten chocolate instead of vanilla. When everyone has a sundae and is sitting back down, let them know that they can talk again (but they still can't serve themselves).

NEXT, have a brief discussion about what the group experienced during the activity. **Ask:**

- **How did you like this activity?**
- **What was frustrating about it?**
- **How hard was it not to talk or secretly communicate to someone what you wanted?**
- **Are you happy with the ice cream sundae you received?**

THEN, help your students to connect the dots between the activity and the fact that serving each other is a very counter-cultural thing. **Ask:**

- **Whether you liked this activity or not, it felt different, right? Why do you think it felt weird or different?**
Answers will vary. But As your group answers, point out the fact that one of the frustrating things about the activity is that we might not have gotten exactly what we wanted because we couldn't communicate. You might bring up different things you noticed during the activity, such as when someone got frustrated that they weren't being served, or when someone seemed disappointed by their sundae.

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

- **One thing this activity has shown us is that serving each other is different from the way we usually operate. Sure, many of us do love to serve others or do service projects, but when all we're allowed to do is serve others and we can't communicate what we want, it feels very, very strange. Today, we're going to look at another lesson in our study of Jesus and Influence. And we'll see a scene from near the end of Jesus' life that also looked and felt very strange.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand that real influence comes through serving others.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, see what your students can recall from Lessons 1 and 2 of Jesus and Influence. Use the following bullet points to help you:

- **Lesson 1:** They learned that Jesus desires to use their influence to positively impact the world for God.
- **Lesson 1:** They were challenged to look at their lives and define the areas in which they have influence, and to begin thinking about how they use their influence to influence others for Christ.
- **Lesson 2:** They learned that their influence is impacted by how their lives do or don't match up with their faith.
- **Lesson 2:** They were challenged to commit to a deeper awareness of any inconsistencies in their lives and to focus on living more in line with their faith.

FIRST, set the stage by pointing out that Jesus led and influenced His disciples during His earthly ministry. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus' time and ministry on Earth included a lot of different teachings, and He did a lot of different things. But He had one ultimate mission: to rescue us by dying on the cross. What's interesting about that is Jesus could have done that all on His own. But for some reason, He chose to work with a bunch of human beings who didn't really understand who He was or what He was trying to accomplish until the very end. He had to lead them and influence them. As we dive into our study today, an important question we'll ask is how did Jesus try to influence others? I think what we find out is going to surprise you.**

NEXT, explain that you're going to look at a scene that happened on Jesus' last night with His disciples. Instruct students to turn to John 13. 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.

THEN, have a student read John 13:1-2. After, explain that in 13:1, John tells us that Jesus knew His time was short, and that what Jesus says in chapter 13 and the chapters that follow is His last instructions to His disciples—the things that Jesus thought were the most important for His disciples to know before He died. Then, highlight 13:2 and point out that Jesus knew (as we'll find out in 13:10-11) Judas had plans to betray Him that very night and incite the series of events that would eventually lead to Jesus' painful and excruciating death. **Ask something like the following:**

- **What would be going through your mind if you knew that a close friend was making plans to stab you in the back?**
Allow room for answers; some in your group might have experienced being betrayed first-hand. Later on, you'll refer back to the answers to this question when you point out that Jesus served Judas by washing his feet as well.

- **For some reason, Jesus doesn't reveal Judas' plans to the rest of the disciples; would you have done the same thing, or would you have called Judas out? Explain your answer.**

After a couple of students have shared, you might take a vote in your group and ask everybody to indicate whether they would have kept the information to themselves, or if they would have called Judas out.

NEXT, have students read John 13:3-5. Highlight the fact that John stresses in 13:3 Jesus' standing as the Son of God by **saying something like**,

- **Jesus knew who He was; the Son of God and the Messiah. Other parts of the Bible call Him the Lord of lords and the King of kings. That's what makes what Jesus does here all the more strange and incredible.**

THEN, lead a discussion about the significance of what Jesus was doing:

- **What is the most disgusting thing you have ever stepped in?**

Encourage students to share the gory details; it will help paint a realistic picture of what Jesus is doing in this scene.

- **When you stepped in that, did anyone offer to clean your shoes or your feet for you? Why not?**

The answers will be obvious: because it would have been disgusting. On the off chance that a student has a story about a friend who did help them clean it up, ask them why their friend did that and how it made them feel.

- **Washing people's feet in Jesus' culture was important, because the streets were anything but clean. There was no such thing as a street sweeper. Usually, you would walk in the same path as work animals carrying their loads or pulling a cart. Those animals probably didn't run to a port-a-potty when they had to go to the bathroom. In addition, people wore sandals; not anything like boots that would protect your feet from that stuff. By the time you walked anywhere, your feet would have dirt, dust, and all kinds of nasty stuff on them. It was common at a dinner or an event that guests would have their feet washed when they arrived. Who do you think did the washing?**

Answer: Usually, it was the lowest servant on the proverbial totem pole. If it were a household who couldn't afford a servant, a member of the household would perform the foot washing as a sign of honor to the guest. In addition, when a Rabbi needed his feet washed, it was expected that one of his disciples would wash his feet; a Rabbi would never even think of washing his followers' feet.

NEXT, highlight the fact that what Jesus did was strange **by asking something like**:

- **Foot washing may not be part of our culture, but what is something else—some action or some job—that a "lower" person is expected to do that someone in authority would usually never do, like a boss, coach, teacher, or maybe a senior in high school?**

Possible examples are cleaning the bathroom at a fast food job; carrying athletic equipment; a senior in high school getting lunch or a freshman. Push your group to come up with examples from their own lives.

- **Not only would it have surprised the disciples that their leader would ever think to get up and wash their feet, the timing of the event is strange as well; foot washing was supposed to happen before dinner, not during it. Let's see how the disciples respond.**

THEN, have a student read John 13:6-11. Start a discussion about Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet, **asking something similar to the following questions**:

- **Why do you think Peter was so adamant at first that Jesus would never wash his feet?**

Possible answers are that he respected Jesus too much to let Him act as his servant, or that Peter thought that it went against his image of what he thought a Messiah should be.

- **Has anyone ever served you or done something so incredible for you that it almost embarrassed you or you weren't sure you should accept the favor or gift?**

Answers will vary. It may help for you or another leader to share something personal, such as a time when someone gave you some money when you were in a tight spot or went out of his or her way to help them in some way.

- **Peter obviously misses Jesus' point, as he does a complete one-eighty in verse 9, and Jesus has to correct him again. We can't really blame Peter, though, because I'm not sure I would have really understood what Jesus was doing at this point, either. After all, Jesus is going against a ton of cultural rules here, and His behavior was really strange to the disciples. So let's hear what Jesus says after He finishes washing everyone's feet.**

NEXT, ask a student to read John 13:12-17. The purpose of the discussion that follows is to help students understand what Jesus is asking his followers to do. Ask something like,

- **Jesus gives His followers a command in the middle of these verses. What is that command?**

Answer: verse 14, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."

- **So, as long as we get out the soap and water every Bible study and wash some feet, we can just check this command off our list, right? (The obvious answer is "no.") Why not? What is Jesus asking us to do here? The bottom-line answer is "to serve," but push for answers beyond that, allowing your group to wrestle for a moment with the implications of what Jesus is saying.**

- **Here's an important detail that we need to pay attention to: whose feet did Jesus wash?**

The obvious answer is "the disciples' feet." However, keep pressing the question until someone points out that Jesus also washed Judas' feet, who had already made plans to betray Jesus.

- **Wow. What do you think it was like for Jesus to so lovingly serve the person He knew would essentially get Him killed?**

Allow your group to share; if appropriate, refer back to the question you asked about what would be going through their mind if they knew a close friend was about to stab them in the back, especially if anyone shared about a personal experience of that.

- **Putting together all that we know from this passage, what do you think the hardest part of what Jesus is asking us to do?**

Possible answers: serving someone when we feel like they should (or would normally serve us); doing something that might not be all that fun in order to serve someone; serving someone who hasn't always been that nice to us.

- **Jesus knew that He would soon leave the disciples and that they would be left to lead a movement that would eventually spread the news of who Jesus is and what He did on the cross to the entire world. In essence, Jesus' disciples were the first leaders of the Church. What do you think the disciples learned from this scene that helped them lead this movement once Jesus left the earth?**

Lead a good discussion, but here's where you should guide the conversation: Jesus taught them by washing their feet that we lead and influence not by demanding or being the boss, but by serving others in unusual ways.

Explain to students that the bottom line is this: real influence comes when we serve others; not when they demand that they follow us.

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

• Here's the bottom line of what we just witnessed Jesus do for His disciples, and how He asked them to follow His example: real influence—and making a difference in our world—comes when we serve others; not when they demand that they follow us. As we learned from trying to serve each other ice cream, serving others and putting their needs before our own is not normal. Maybe that's why when we do it—I mean really serve others at our own expense—we have an even greater opportunity to influence others and point them to Jesus, who served them by handing over His own life and dying for them on the cross.

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 understand what it means to wash others' feet in their own lives, and to identify practical ways to live that out.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need the "Last Word" Activity Sheet found in your Lesson 3 folder. You'll want to print enough for each student to have a copy. You'll also need to provide something with them to write with.

FIRST, explain that it's easy to feel inspired to serve others, but it's another thing to actually do it. Say something like:

• If we really want to influence others in a positive way, then this is something that we can't just talk about—we actually have to do it. But here's the problem: when we leave this room, it's going to be a lot harder to do. In the places we spend most of our time—at home, at school, athletic teams, dance companies, after-school jobs—people don't usually try to gain influence by serving, do they? For the most part, people expect others to follow them because they're the boss, the teacher, the oldest sibling, the class president, or the team captain, and they expect people to do what they say. And when you're in a position to influence someone—whether as a team captain or simply as an older friend—people will expect you to do the same. In fact, if you try to do what Jesus asks us to do, it will shake things up. People might be confused or perhaps won't trust you at all, because they won't think you're being genuine. But if you really live this out, over time, you'll gain people's trust and influence them in positive ways, because you were willing to serve them.

NEXT, hand out the "Last Word" Activity Sheet and make sure everyone has something to write with. Explain to the group that they will have five minutes to fill it out. Each person will choose three situations where they have some form of leadership or influence (or where they could have influence if they wanted to). Don't let students get limit their responses to "official" positions of leadership. Being an older sibling (or aunt, uncle, or cousin), having friends who trust them, a kid in the neighborhood who looks up to them, or being talented at something are all positions of influence. Push students to write down three areas of influence, even if they are skeptical that they have any influence at all. **Say:**

• Everyone will come up with three areas that they have some influence or could have influence in their lives. For each area of influence, describe a way that you could practice "Selfish Influence" (a way of leading that does not include serving). Next to it, describe how you could influence others in the way Jesus asks us to by practicing "Influence through serving." There are a couple of examples there to get you started. You only have five minutes, so get going!

THEN, when everyone has finished, ask everyone to share one example. Depending on your comfort level with your group, don't be afraid to push them. For instance, if a student says they'll serve someone by "being nice," press that student for a more specific (and perhaps difficult) answer.

When everyone has shared, wrap up the conversation by **saying**,

• **This is really, really hard stuff. Most of us have never really approached our lives this way. Sure, we might do a service project every now and again or do the dishes at home without being asked, but to serve others as a way of life—that's different. We won't change overnight, but this week we can take the first step. I want you to choose one of these areas of influence and commit to doing everything you can to influence people in that area only by serving them. You never know what will happen. Know that I'll be praying for you this week, and you can pray for me, too, because this is something I need to work on, too! Oh, and I'll be following up with you on this; I can't wait to hear how it goes.**

FINALLY, encourage students that God has put each of them in their areas of influence for a reason. Let them know that you'll talk about that more the next time you meet.

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@yothministry360.com.



LESSON 4: ULTIMATE INFLUENCE

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: The ultimate use of their influence is leading others to Christ.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED: To identify opportunities they have to use their influence to bring people into a saving relationship with Jesus and to commit to doing something about it.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 28:16-20

OVERVIEW: The Great Commission serves as a great send-off in your study of Jesus and influence. There is no greater use of our influence than to use it to lead others to know Christ in a saving relationship. The first lesson had your students consider where they have influence. This final lesson will challenge them to use their influence to lead others to Christ. Your challenge will be to help them consider what this looks like practically and then to challenge them to follow through with being influential for Christ’s sake.

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- **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

Matthew recounts in chapter 28 the events surrounding Jesus’ resurrection. There are two surprising events in this chapter. The first is the fact that Jesus is alive. It is easy to read the account of Jesus’ resurrection without any anticipation if we have read it or heard it many times before. The last thing the women expected to find was a living Jesus. They had gone to the tomb to mourn, to carry out the Jewish rituals of caring for their friend and Master’s body that would somehow help them move on after Jesus’ tragic and sudden death. Matthew 28 is the surprise twist that no one expected.

The second surprising event in this chapter is how Jesus interacts with His disciples (at least the eleven who are still alive). It should not be overlooked that this scene not only comes after Jesus’ death, but after the disciples’ failure as well. The significance of Jesus’ instructions lay not just in the fact that He was asking His human followers to carry on this movement after He left the Earth, but in the fact that the movement would be carried on by His human followers who had utterly failed Him. Jesus was putting this movement into the hands of people who by all human accounts should have been “fired” on the spot from their roles. However, Jesus still commissioned them. The reason why the disciples are up to the “job” is not because of their abilities, but rather because of Jesus’ promise: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

THE MAIN POINT

Jesus’ followers were anything but qualified for the task He gives them in Matthew 28:16-20 by human standards. They were not trained religious leaders, and they had only recently abandoned (and worse, in some cases) the leader they had pledged to remain loyal to until death. By all accounts, Jesus’ expectation of His followers to make disciples of all the nations was very unreasonable, and perhaps impossible. Yet your youth group or Bible study likely meets thousands of miles from the dirt Jesus walked upon during His earthly ministry. Through Jesus’ power and presence, His followers utilized their influence to accomplish the impossible.

We are not given influence, nor should we seek it, for our own benefit. The mission Jesus has given His followers is singular and very, very clear: to make disciples of all the nations. If we have any influence (and we all do), we should use it to point others to Jesus and lead them into a saving relationship with Him.

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 introduce the idea that we all have influence to “spend” and that we get to choose how to spend it.
- **Set-Up:** Have the Lesson 4 “Lead-In” PowerPoint slideshow, located in your Lesson 4 folder, ready to go (or print a copy of Lesson 4 Lead-In PDF to read if you don’t have access to a projector).

FIRST, introduce the activity by explaining that the group has been given the power to change the world. However, there are a few limitations to their power. **Say something like:**

- **I will give you a list of five things you can change in the world. For each of those scenarios, you have three options you need to choose from, and you can only choose one. Ready? Let’s go.**

THEN, show (or say) each way they can change the world by referencing the scenarios on the PowerPoint slides or PDF, having a discussion about each scenario. Depending on the size of your group, you can simply ask people to share which option they would choose for each scenario, or you can have the group vote. To encourage discussion, **ask questions such as:**

- **Why would you choose that one?**
- **What makes it more “worthy” of your powers than the other options?**

Have fun with the ones that are fun, allowing students to really defend their choices against others.

FINALLY, when you’ve walked through all five scenarios, **transition to the Main Event by saying:**

- **So, maybe we don’t have that exact kind of power, and yeah, some of the examples were more serious than others. But the reality is, we all have the ability to influence others, and we choose every day how to “spend” that influence. At the end of our study last week, we talked a little about how even if we don’t hold “official” leadership positions, everyone has the ability to influence someone else, whether it’s a friend, a younger sibling, or a basketball team. And though the choices may not be laid out for us every day like they were in our exercise, we still have the ability to use that influence however we want. Today, we’re going to talk about what Jesus might have to say about how we use our influence.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To inspire students to use their influence to point others to Jesus.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, see what your students can recall from your study of Jesus and Influence. **Use the following bullet points to help you:**

- **Lesson 1:** They learned that Jesus desires to use their influence to positively impact the world for God.
- **Lesson 2:** They learned that their influence is impacted by how their lives do or don’t match up with their faith.
- **Lesson 3:** They learned that real influence comes when they put others’ needs before their own.

FIRST, set the stage by leading a discussion about how the disciples had failed at being followers of Jesus by abandoning Him before His death:

- **What can you tell me about the events leading up to Jesus' death?**

The question is intentionally open-ended. Allow students to answer, making sure that important points such as the entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper (with foot washing included), Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His trial.

- **Explain what the disciples were doing during those events.**

Answer: They were with Jesus at the last supper and up to the garden scene (except for Judas), where they abandoned Jesus when the guards came to take Him away. Peter followed at a distance until he denied Jesus a few times, and only John was present at Jesus' crucifixion. The bottom line is this: none of them stood by their friend and leader as they had promised at the Last Supper, all of them abandoned Jesus at some point.

NEXT, tell your group that as you walk through this last session, you want them to keep in mind the fact that Jesus' disciples had abandoned and failed Him in some way before he died. Have a student read Matthew 28:16-17. **Ask:**

- **What sticks out to you in these two verses, especially verse 17?**

Allow students to share their thoughts. Make sure someone notes the fact that some "doubted" (NIV) when they saw Jesus.

- **This word "doubted" has the sense of hesitating, kind of going back and forth. In a sense, some weren't really sure that what they were experiencing was real. Why do you think Jesus doesn't address their hesitations and doubts or say something like, "Hey, I'm here! Why can't you just believe already?"**

Possible answers: Jesus knew they would eventually get there, or he was just used to them not quite being perfect.

- **The incredible thing about this is that having doubts or hesitating about who Jesus is doesn't seem to disqualify His disciples from what Jesus is about to ask them to do. In fact, Jesus isn't even phased by their doubts. Let's see what He asks them to do.**

THEN, ask student read Matthew 28:18-20. As you lead the following discussion, your goal is to help students start to grasp what Jesus was asking His followers to do. **Ask:**

- **Jesus says that He wants His followers to "make disciples." What does that even mean?**

Allow room for answers, but try to land here: the word disciple simply means "one who learns." However, this kind of learning is more than just learning from a book; it's about submitting to a teacher and committing yourself to follow Him. Jesus' disciples have spent around three years following Him and learning from Him, and despite their failings, they truly are committed to Him. To make disciples simply means helping others do the same thing.

- **Of all nations? Seriously? That's a big goal. Do you think Jesus really expected His original followers to accomplish that?**

The idea is to help your group begin to grasp the fact that those original followers set off a movement that has impacted more people than they could ever imagine.

Make sure your students grasp how interesting it is that here you are, sitting in a room worlds away from the relatively small area in the Middle East Jesus spent all of His life on Earth, thousands of years after His death and resurrection. His followers helped to set something off that would go further than they ever could have dreamed!

NEXT, focus on the fact that the Church is to be defined more by its mission than by a building, or set of buildings. **Ask:**

- **Now, most historians—whether they believe that Jesus was God or not—would say that the Church began shortly after Jesus’ death. What do you think pops into most people’s minds when someone says the word church?**

Possible answers: worship services, a building with a cross, Christians, possibly some negative ideas about the church as well.

- **By and large, in our culture, a “church” is a building, just a piece of real estate. Some people might have negative things to say about church if they’ve had a bad church experience. But what if the only thing we knew about Church function was from these five verses? How would we describe the Church, or what is it supposed to be like?**

Allow for a good discussion here. This is a higher-level question, so it may take some prodding to get the discussion going, depending on your group. Some possible answers might include: to teach people about Jesus, to baptize them, to love people (because that’s what Jesus taught). Once your group has wrestled with the idea for a while, make sure you land here:

Help students see that if we take what Jesus says here seriously, then the whole purpose of the Church is to help people become followers of Jesus. **Say something like:**

- **We think of Church as a building, but Jesus said that the Church is really a mission, a mission to help people be rescued through a relationship with Jesus. And to be honest, this is really hard for a lot of Christians to grasp. We often believe that church exists for us, to have a great youth group, experience God, or just live a better life. But if the Church really is a mission, then maybe it doesn’t exist for us. Maybe we are the Church, and our purpose is to help people experience a saving relationship with Jesus.**

THEN, help students start to connect the dots between their influence and the mission Jesus has given us. **Ask:**

- **Do you remember the activity about changing the world we did to start this study? Most of those scenarios were kind of goofy, so let me bring the topic of changing the world to a more serious level. Do you think it’s really possible for someone to change the world? If so, how can that even happen?**

As students share their views, encourage them to respond to one another. Why do some say someone can change the world, and why do others say they can’t? Ask students for real-life examples if they get stuck. Throughout the discussion, look for things students say about someone influencing others, even if they don’t use that term.

- **What’s interesting is that those of you who said it was possible to change the world kind of said this, even if you didn’t use the same words: the way we can change the world is by influencing others. Who are the people you influence in your life?**

If your group has trouble coming up with answers, remind them of the worksheet they filled out at the end of the Bible study last week.

- **The bottom line is this: we all have the ability to influence others in some way. And if our mission as followers of Jesus is to point others to Him and begin a relationship with Him, then the ultimate use of our influence is to point people to Jesus.**

NEXT, wind down the Main Event by helping your group understand that Jesus expects all of His followers to be a part of making disciples, even though we sometimes we don’t feel qualified to do it.

- **At the beginning of this study, we talked about the fact that all of Jesus’ disciples He was talking to in this passage failed Him in some way. But He still entrusts this mission to them. Let’s recap the ways that they weren’t exactly qualified for the job. What did they have going against them?**

Possible answers: They were not educated like other religious leaders; they doubted; they had abandoned Jesus.

- **Since Jesus tells His disciples that they are to also make disciples and point people to Jesus, we have the same mission, too. And just like those first disciples, no one in here is perfect, either. What are ways that might not feel qualified to point people to Jesus and use our influence to help them begin a relationship with Him?**

As the leader, you might consider answering first to encourage others to be vulnerable. Share ways that you feel like you aren't exactly the best candidate to tell people about Jesus, both in terms of your talents and in terms of personal failings. Then, encourage others to do the same.

- **We're a mess! But Jesus' disciples were, too, and God used them to begin a movement that has reached even to here in our town. The cool thing is that Jesus can use imperfect people to point other people toward Him, and not because we're so great, but because of what we see in Matthew 28:18 and at the end of 28:20. What do you see there that makes it possible for us to be able to use our influence to point others to Jesus?**

Answer: Jesus' authority (and by extension, power), and his presence with us, even today.

- **The great news is that we aren't doing this by our own power, but that it's really Jesus doing it through us. All he asks us to do is to choose to use our influence to help people learn to follow Jesus.**

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

- **As we finish up, think about this: the only reason any of us here follows Jesus is because someone told us about Him, and used his or her influence in our lives to point us toward Jesus. And because of that, we not only have a relationship with Jesus in this life, but in Heaven with Him forever. That's a big deal. God wants to use you to influence someone else to follow Jesus. And since we get to choose to spend our influence in any way we want, the choice is yours: to spend your influence in ways that help you only get what you want, or to spend it in a way that points people to Jesus.**

Note: if there are students in your group who have not yet made a commitment to follow Jesus (and given what we just studied, hopefully, there are!), don't be shy about communicating that your hope is that those who don't yet follow Jesus would one day make the decision to follow Him.

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 identify at least one way God is asking them to use their influence to point someone to Jesus.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a whiteboard and a dry erase marker to write with, as well as a 3 x 5 card and writing utensil for everyone.

FIRST, explain that you want to finish the Jesus and Your Influence series by making a commitment to using the influence God has given each of us in a way that really matters:

- **Pointing others toward Jesus is one of those things that, when we hear what Jesus said today, we know we should do. But how to do it is another thing. What are some things that make pointing others to Jesus difficult or hard?**

Possible answers: Some people really don't want to hear about Jesus; we're worried about what people might think; we're worried we won't have all the answers.

- **In Jesus’ instructions to His disciples, He didn’t exactly leave a detailed “how-to” list. However, in this series, we’ve learned a lot about what it means to influence others. Do you remember what those things were?**

Again, you can use the bullet points at the beginning of the Main Event to help you here. Make sure you write those answers along the top of the board.

- **So in many ways, you know what to do, right? I mean, none of this is easy stuff. And usually, we don’t influence people overnight. But what Jesus is asking us to do is to invest in people—which usually means a long period of time—and to use our influence to point them to Jesus. We’re going to finish this series with each of us identifying one person (or group of people) that we believe God is asking us to use our influence to point them to Jesus.**

Have each person share whom they believe God is asking them to invest in and write those on the board. Specific people make the best goals, so if students want to name a group of people, help them narrow down their answers from things like “my school” to “the people I study with after school” or “(Name) on my soccer team.”

NEXT, commend your group for wanting to use their influence to point people to Jesus. **Say something like,**

- **This is a big deal, because a lot of people are represented on this board here. And remember, we aren’t doing this alone, which is a good thing, because we’re all messed up, imperfect followers of Jesus. So it’s important that we start off this huge goal of influencing people to consider a relationship with Jesus by asking God for help.**

FINALLY, have each student write down the people they named on their 3 x 5 card, and explain that they are to keep that card in a place where they will see it every day, so they remember to pray for the person or people they hope to influence.

If there are no more thoughts or questions, close in prayer for the names your group wrote down, perhaps asking some students to pray for a few names each.

- 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@yothministry360.com.