



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.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Influence 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 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:** : 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.

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.