



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

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:** 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.