

LESSON 1: THANKFUL FOR MEAN PEOPLE?

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: When people are mean for no reason, they should see it as a blessing, not a bad situation.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To identify a time when someone has been mean to them, even though they did nothing wrong, and to see if they can see how God might have worked something positive as a result.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 5:10-12

OVERVIEW: The unfortunate truth about most mean people is that they rarely need a reason to be mean. Every one of your students has experienced a time where they found themselves in a mean person's crosshairs due to no fault of their own. Jesus speaks to this very issue in Matthew. He says that when we're living as Christ-followers and people are mean to us, we should count it as a blessing. Of course, we realize that this is completely counterintuitive to how we think about people being mean to us. This lesson will challenge your students to look for positives in the midst of people mistreating them, especially if that positive is God gaining glory from it.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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BIBLE BACKGROUND

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

THE DETAILS

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

THE SETTING

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

THE MAIN POINT

In this passage, Jesus talks about what our attitude should be when we’re treated unkindly. Jesus is painting a picture of a people who are living out their identities as Christ-followers, doing their best to represent God in this world, and publicly identifying with Christ. When, in the course of living a Christ-like life, we find others being unfairly mean to us, Jesus says we should see it as a blessing. This is a remarkable teaching, as it flies in the face of our notion of right and wrong. When we are unfairly treated meanly, our default is to often take a “woe is me” approach, and focus on how we were wronged. Jesus says the opposite: if we’re living Christ-like lives and a mean person cuts loose on us, then we should rejoice. This lesson will help your students flesh out this dynamic in their own lives.

LESSON PLAN

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

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about mean people and the impact these mean people have on their lives.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry-erase board and something to write with. If you choose, you could also do a Google image search for your "favorite" fictional villains and arrange to display a few of their images.

FIRST, explain to your students that you're going to be starting a new four-lesson look at what Jesus had to say about mean people. Before you jump into the Bible study, however, explain that you want to begin the lesson by taking a look at some of the most famous (or infamous) fictional villains from movies, books, TV shows, and so on. If you have collected some images of your favorite fictional villains, display them for your group now explaining to the group, if needed, who the villains are.

THEN, ask students to take turns naming their favorite "villains." Write these on the board as they call them out. Then, when you have a good list built up, go back through and ask students what it is about these villains that made them stand out in students' minds. Allow students to share their responses. Then, for some fun, ask whom they think is the most villainous villain on the board.

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

- **It's kind of fun to think about all the super villains we encounter in movies, comic books, and TV shows. Part of why this is so fun is because it's safe. These "mean people" don't impact our lives. We can observe their wickedness from afar. But if we're all honest, we'll admit there are times in our lives when real mean people have a major impact on us. We've all had someone act mean toward us for no real reason. It stinks. It's not cool at all. But the good thing is that Jesus had a lot to say about how we should respond to mean people. We're going to take a look at a passage today that will help lay the groundwork for our discussion of mean people. Let's jump in.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand that when people are mean to them for no reason, we should see it as a blessing, not a bad situation.
- **Set-Up:** None.

FIRST, take a second to make a brief but important statement before you get into your Bible study. **Say something like:**

- **Before we go much further, I want to make one thing clear: most mean people are not entirely mean. We're going to be talking about mean people. And if we're not careful, we can operate with the idea that the mean people we're talking about are super bad folks with no good in them at all. But this isn't accurate. The truth is that people you love can be mean to you. Your best friend can be mean to you at times. Maybe your brother or sibling can be mean. And let's face it: you might have actually been the mean person to someone else before. As we talk about mean people, let's make sure we're not categorizing people as entirely bad or mean. Got it?**

THEN, have students turn in their Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. As they are finding it, make sure you provide some context for the passage by referencing the Details and maybe the Setting section of the Bible Background. When students have found the passage, read or have a student read Matthew 5:10-12. When you've finished, lead students in a discussion. **Ask something like the following:**

- **Look at verse 10. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.” Let’s break this down a bit. What does it mean to be persecuted?**
Answers may vary some. Help students see that persecution in its simplest form is unjust or undeserved punishment or ridicule.
- **Think about Jesus’ original audience. Why would they have experienced persecution?**
Answer: At the time Jesus spoke these words, most of the persecution His audience would have experienced would have been at the hands of the Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah and would have sought to punish His followers. Several decades later, persecution would become more extreme and widespread at the hands of the Romans.
- **Jesus was speaking to people who would have been persecuted because of righteousness. What do you think He meant?**
Answer: Persecuted for doing good, or probably more accurately, persecuted innocently. In other words, persecuted unfairly for doing nothing other than living a godly life.
- **What is the alternative to being persecuted because of righteousness?**
Answer: Being persecuted for unrighteousness, or for doing wrong.
- **What is the difference between being persecuted for doing good and being persecuted for doing wrong?**
Answer: There is no justification for being persecuted for doing good. When you do wrong, persecution can be justified or at least explained.
- **OK, so, now that we’ve unpacked this some, for those who found themselves unjustly persecuted, how did Jesus say that they should look at their persecution?**
Answer: They should consider themselves blessed. Help students understand that the simplest way of thinking about being blessed is to view it as simply experiencing God’s favor or delight.
- **Be honest: How does this hit you? You’ve probably had people be rude or mean to you for no reason. How did you feel at the time? Did any of you feel blessed?**
Answers will vary.
- **Why is it so hard to see people’s meanness toward us as something that results in God’s blessing us?**
Answers will vary.

NEXT, have students focus their attention on verses 11-12. Help them see that this is where Jesus provides the answer to the question, “Why is it a blessing to be persecuted for doing nothing wrong”? **Ask something like:**

- Where do we see Jesus provide the answer to why we should consider it a blessing when we’re persecuted?
Answer: Students may very well recite verse 12. That’s fine if they do. But, lead them to go a bit deeper. Lead them to understand that what Jesus means here is that when people persecute us, we are identifying with other children of God, and ultimately, God Himself.
- Let’s do a little contextualization. Let’s apply this truth to our lives as it concerns people who are unjustly mean to us. What are some examples of how someone might be mean to you for no reason?
Answers will vary.
- What are some possible choices for how you might choose to react to someone who has been mean to you for no reason?
Answers will vary. But you’ll want to make sure that at least one of the possibilities is to react in a Christ-like way.

- **We'll get into this a lot more in the next lesson. But for now, think about this: How might responding to a mean person in a Christ-like way bring about God's blessing in your life (and maybe even in the life of the mean person)?**

Answers will vary. But the idea is to help students see that God can and will work through them to impact mean people. But they must choose to respond in a way that gives God the opportunity to work through their example.

FINALLY, wrap up the Bible study portion of your lesson by helping students to understand what Jesus is talking about here. **Say something like:**

- **While being treated meanly by others is not something any of us deserve, if we're honest, there are times in our lives where, because of something wrong we've done, people responding to us in meanness is an understandable response. It doesn't make it right. But we can understand it. In these verses we just looked at, Jesus is reminding us that we have to live in such a way that we identify with Him publicly. And when we do, when we're living as children of God, and people are mean to us, Jesus sees this as a blessing. This is one of those times when we may have a hard time grasping exactly why this is the case. But we can be confident that Jesus knows. And He wants us to embrace this truth in our lives.**

If there are no further questions or comments, transition to the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students identify a time when someone has been mean to them, even though they did nothing wrong, and to see if they can see how God might have worked something positive as a result.
- **Set-Up:** To encourage students to think about other people's meanness through the lens of God's blessing, be prepared to tell a personal story about a time when someone was mean to you but you were able to see a positive come out of it.

BEGIN by helping students to see that we can think of God blessing us in at least two ways: we can experience His blessings in our lives here on this earth, and we can experience His blessings through spending eternity with Him in Heaven. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus said when we're treated poorly even though we're innocent, count it as a blessing. Sometimes we look around for how God will bless us, how He will work through a situation like this, and we can't see it. That doesn't mean it's not there. But, it does mean that often the blessing Jesus is talking about comes through our future with Him in eternity. But, there are times when God chooses to work through our interactions with mean people to bless us (or others) in the here and now. As we wrap the lesson up, I want us to think about this type of interaction.**

THEN, take a moment and share a time when you had someone treat you badly, for no real reason, and you were able to see God work positively through this interaction. Share how it made you feel at the time and, if possible, how you saw God working for good through the situation, and how it helped you look at mean people in a new way.

NEXT, ask students if they can think of their own stories. Give them a moment to think of a time when someone was mean to them, but God was able to work for the good through the situation. **Ask them to think about this in terms of the following questions:**

- *How did God work for good through someone being mean to you?*
- *Did God work just for your good or for the good of others, as well?*
- *How did God bring glory to Himself through this?*
- *What does this say about God's love for you and for others?*

Allow students to share their thoughts, but try not to get in a situation where they're naming names of people who have been mean to them.

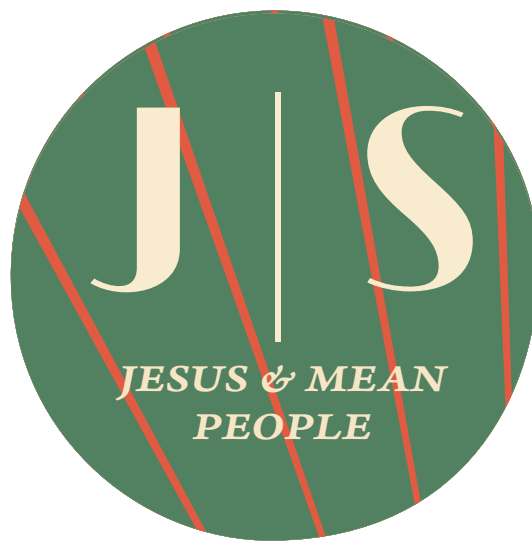
FINALLY, encourage students to begin looking for God to work through their encounters with mean people. Remind them that God is at work all around us; oftentimes we have to be willing to open our eyes and look for the evidence. If there are no more questions or thoughts, close in a time of prayer.

- 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: LOVE THOSE WHO ARE MEAN TO YOU

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: We are called to treat mean people with grace, and in so doing, identify ourselves with God.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To evaluate their own actions and attitudes toward any “mean people” in their lives.

Scripture Focus: Luke 6:27-36

OVERVIEW: Loving people who are mean to us is one of the absolute hardest things to do. It goes against every urge and emotion within us. But, Jesus doesn't give us much choice. This lesson will help your students see what Jesus expects of them in this regard. But it will also challenge them to focus on Luke 6:31 (better known as the Golden Rule) and consider how a commitment to living out this teaching will impact their relationships, with both “mean people” and “not-so-mean people.”

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THE DETAILS

- **Author:** Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian, and a companion of Paul.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.
- **Purpose:** Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God, and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

THE SETTING

In Luke 6, Jesus is still in the early parts of His earthly ministry. Luke 4 shows Jesus being tempted by Satan, reading Scripture in the synagogue, healing the sick, teaching, and driving out demons. Luke 5 sees Jesus, among other things, calling His disciples. Luke 6 is basically a chapter consisting almost entirely of Jesus’ teaching. This passage on treating mean people with grace is another large block of Jesus’ teachings.

THE MAIN POINT

This lesson will focus on two key points: Luke 6:31 and Luke 6:35-36. In Luke 6:31, we get a view of the Golden Rule. As you discuss with students their attitudes toward mean people, this is an important place in which to camp out. As much as they might want to, students can’t repay meanness with meanness. Jesus encourages us to treat the mean people in our lives as we ourselves would want to be treated. This is significant.

The second important point is what Jesus says in Luke 6:35-36. Here we see Jesus urging us to be merciful to those people who are set against us simply because doing so identifies us with God. As Christ-followers, identifying with God’s person and character is what we are called to do. It’s how we live out our new identities in Christ. This is the ultimate goal in how we approach those people who are mean to us: treating them with mercy because that’s how our Father has treated them.

LESSON PLAN

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

THE LEAD-IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin thinking about how they're affiliated with different groups by the things they wear, their hobbies, and so on.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to provide a way to show the Lesson 2 "Lead-In" Activity Sheet (located in your Lesson 2 folder). If you want to personalize this lesson a bit, arrange to show three pictures of yourself that show you doing something that says something about your identity. (Example: dressed in your favorite team's gear, doing a hobby you love, playing with your children, etc.)

FIRST, explain to students that we can learn a lot about who people are simply by observing them in their everyday activities. Explain that we project a lot about our identities through the clothes we wear, the activities we do, the people we hang out with, and so on. To demonstrate this, display the Lesson 2 "Lead-In" Activity Sheet. For each image, ask what we can learn about this person's identity just by looking at the image. Have some fun with this.

THEN, if you have collected any pictures of yourself, show them pictures and ask the same thing. Ask what the pictures say about your identity. (If you have time and want to open this up a bit, ask if a few volunteers can pull up a picture on their phones that says something about their identities. Have them show or describe the picture, and tell what it says about who they are.)

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

- **Can you list a few ways in which this can be a positive thing? In other words, when is it helpful to be able to make some observations about people based on the way they dress, or the activities they are engaged in?**
Answers will vary, but some examples may include: knowing what team someone pulls for if you're looking for a seat at a game; if you want to play a pick-up game of basketball, you would look for people shooting in the gym; if you need help at the mall, recognizing a security guard by his or her uniform, and so on.
- **Are there times when having someone make an assumption about your identity based on appearance or actions is a negative thing? Give some examples.**
Answers will vary.

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

- **As we kick off our second lesson in our look at what Jesus had to say about mean people, we're going to be thinking about what our response to mean people says about our identities. And just like we noticed that we could tell a lot about someone's identity by his or her appearance or actions, we're going to learn that our response to mean people says a lot about our identities in Christ. Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about this.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand that they're called to treat mean people with grace, and in so doing, identify themselves with God.
- **Set-Up:** None.

FIRST, take a moment and see if anyone can remember what you discussed in Lesson 1. Use the following bullet points to help fill in the gaps:

- *Jesus said that when we're living as Christ-followers and people are mean to us, we should count it as a blessing.*
- *We have to learn to look for how God is working for good through our interactions with mean people.*

THEN, instruct students to turn to Luke 6 in their Bibles. While they're doing so, help provide some of the context for the passage using the Details and Setting sections of your Bible Background. Then, read or have a student read Luke 6:27-36. When you've finished, say something like:

- **In this passage, Jesus is talking about how to treat our enemies. "Enemies" is kind of a big word for us, isn't it? Most of us wouldn't say that we have enemies. So, for our purposes, when Jesus says "enemies," let's think instead of mean people, those who can make our lives miserable by the way they treat us.**

Help students see that it's easy for us to hear Jesus' words here and pass over just how radical they are. If we go back and look more closely, we'll realize that much of what He says here goes against everything in our nature. But, explain that that's why it's even more important to focus on these words and exactly what Jesus is trying to teach us.

NEXT, have students look at verses 27-28. Lead them in a short discussion asking something similar to the following:

- **Jesus says, "I tell you who hear me," and then He gives a sentence made of four clauses or statements. Each of these starts with an action word. What are the four action words Jesus uses?**
Answer: Love, do good, bless, pray (or pray for).
- **Look at these words. Considering whom Jesus is talking about, what is so unusual about the actions these words represent?**
Answer: Jesus is talking about how we are to treat those people who are our "enemies." These actions aren't normally associated with people who are our enemies.
- **If we wanted to try and think of the opposite of these actions, what action words might we come up with?**
Answer: Something like "hate"; "treat poorly"; "curse" or wish for them to experience negative consequences; and maybe something like "ignore them," or even pray against them (as opposed to praying for them).
- **Let's imagine for a moment that you weren't a Christ-follower, and you treated mean people in the ways we just listed. Imagine that you thought ill of them, or that you wished that they would get what they deserved, or that you just ignored them altogether. Would this be acceptable behavior? Why or why not?**
Answers will vary. But help students see that for many people without Christ in their lives, this type of behavior would be "normal."

Read aloud verses 29-30. **Then say something like:**

- **When we take verses 27-30 together, we see that Jesus is describing a totally unique way of dealing with mean people. There really isn't anywhere else in our culture where we find anyone saying that we should treat mean people in such a generous, gracious, and loving way. In fact, Jesus gives a very powerful sort of "catch-all" instruction in verse 31.**

THEN, have a student read verse 31 aloud again, and **ask the following**:

- **We've probably all heard this before. Of course, it's the Golden Rule, and even those people who don't believe in God know the concept behind this verse. When it comes to how we treat mean people, why is this verse so amazing?**

Answer: Because it puts other's interests on the same level as ours. It puts their well being as equal to ours.

- **Do you really live this out? Seriously. Think about it. How close are you to truly treating mean people the EXACT way you want to be treated? Why is this so hard?**

Answers will vary. Encourage students to really think about this and open up. Explain that this IS a difficult thing to do. In fact, without God, it's pretty near impossible. But, explain that Jesus gives a little more insight into what it means to live out the Golden Rule.

NEXT, have a volunteer or volunteers summarize verses 32-34. Then, begin to wrap up your Bible study time by looking more closely at verses 35-36. Lead students in a short discussion. **Ask:**

- **Jesus repeats the phrase "love your enemies." He really wants to make sure His audience gets it! But Jesus takes a different angle here. In verse 35, He makes a statement that ties our actions to our identities as children of God. What does He say?**

Answer: Jesus says that God is merciful and kind to the wicked. And if we treat mean people with the same mercy and kindness that God does, we will be associated with God as His children. People will be able to identify us as Christ-followers because of our actions.

- **Jesus does this same thing again in verse 36. How does Jesus tie our actions to our identities as Christ-follower?**

Answer: He says that as children of God, we are to mimic the character of our Father.

- **Here's a big question: We just talked about how hard it is to live out the Golden Rule. How does Jesus' teaching about our identity help us see the Golden Rule in a different light?**

Answer: There can be no other motivation for treating our enemies kindly other than living out our identity as children of God. Left to our own desires, we'll never treat mean people with grace and mercy. It's just not in us. But if we live out our faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, we'll identify with God by treating people as He treats people.

FINALLY, remind students of your opening activity and how people make observations about our identity based on our outward appearance and/or actions. Explain that how we treat mean people speaks volumes to others about who we are. **Say something like:**

- **When we treat mean people with grace, forgiveness, and love, we act in a way that is completely different from how the world expects us to treat mean people. And in doing so, we make a huge statement about the power God has to transform our lives. Is it difficult to treat mean people with love? You better believe it is. But it's a mark of God's impact on our lives. As Christ-followers, it's an attitude we must embrace.**

If there are no further questions or comments, transition to the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students evaluate their own actions and attitudes toward any "mean people" in their lives.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry-erase board or some way to display the four action words from Luke 6:27-28.

BEGIN by explaining to students that you want them to end your time today by evaluating their attitudes and behavior toward people in their lives who have a habit of treating them meanly. Remind them that Jesus gives us four really good words to help us think about how we treat people in our lives who are mean to us.

THEN, direct their attention back to Luke 6:27-28 as you write the four action words/phrases on the board. Write: Love, Do Good, Bless, Pray For. Then, work with students to brainstorm a list of ways they might put this teaching to use in their lives today.

Ask something like:

- **Let's make this application relevant to where we are today. For each of these, let's come up with a few examples of what it might look like if you lived these out when it comes to the mean people in your life. What are some practical examples of what it looks like to love the mean people in our lives?**

- *What about a few examples of how we might do good to the mean people we know?*
- *Blessing those people who treat us meanly is a little trickier. What might that look like?*

Praying for mean people is easier said than done. What are some examples of what kinds of prayers we might pray for those people who are mean to us?

NEXT, when you've finished making your list, have students choose the one area of the four they struggle with the most. Encourage them to write this word down on a note-taking app or something similar.

FINALLY, challenge students to remember this word as a way of becoming more Christ-like in how they deal with mean people. Encourage them to lean on the Holy Spirit, trusting that God will give them the strength to follow through. Remind them that the motivation for this is to be identified with God and to show the world the difference Christ makes in their lives.

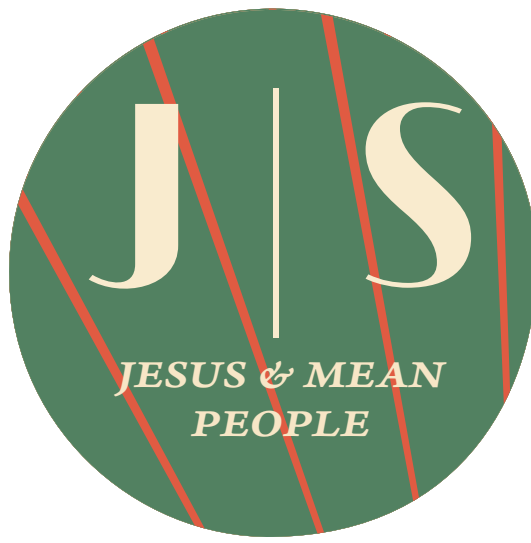
Wrap up by closing in prayer.

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LESSON 3: DON'T BE AFRAID

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: They are to have courage when facing mean people because the Holy Spirit is with them, always.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To commit to listening for the Holy Spirit with they find themselves face-to-face with a mean person

Scripture Focus: Luke 12:4-6, 11-12

OVERVIEW: Fear is a very real emotion when we encounter particularly mean people. And yet Jesus reminds us that this isn't the emotion He wants us to experience. Jesus reminds us that we shouldn't fear people. And more than that, we should be bold, trusting that when people put us in the position to defend our identities, and especially our faith, we can know that the Holy Spirit is giving us the words to say.

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- **Time frame:** The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.
- **Purpose:** Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God, and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

THE SETTING

There’s a lot going on leading up to Luke 12. In Luke 10 Jesus sends out His disciples and tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 11 Jesus teaches His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, and has his “woe to you” confrontation with the Pharisees. By the time we see Jesus in Luke 12, we find Him teaching His disciples amidst a larger crowd. Though the crowd would no doubt hear what Jesus was saying, Luke tells us that the teaching was primarily for His disciples.

THE MAIN POINT

For many teenagers, fear is an emotion that goes hand in hand with their interactions with mean people. The smallish 9th grader lives in fear of the older bully lurking by the lockers. It’s a natural reaction, of course. But Jesus reminds us that what feels natural to us is often counter to what God empowers us to experience. You want to encourage students to see that Jesus desires for them to be bold in the face of mean people. They’re only people, after all (which is Jesus’ point in 12:4-5). More than that, Jesus reminds us that we’re not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us in times where we have to take a stand against those opposed to us. We can be bold precisely because we have God Himself providing us with courage.

LESSON PLAN

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

THE LEAD-IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin thinking about the idea of fear and the role it plays in their lives.
- **Set-Up:** You'll probably want a dry erase board or something similar to record students' responses, though it's not absolutely necessary.

FIRST, explain to students that this lesson is all about fear. And while you'll explain that more in a bit, you want to start off by talking about the most common fears that plague people.

THEN, explain that you're going to see if they can come up with the top 10 most common fears people experience. Have them begin to call out common fears (flying, public speaking, etc.). Write down their answers, limiting them to 10. You may want to do this by starting with more than 10 then voting on which ones to cross out. Write their answers on a dry-erase board.

NEXT, when they have finished, explain that different websites have different lists. But, a sampling of a dozen or so websites and articles reveals a top 10 that looks something like this (in no specific order):

- ***Fear of Spiders***
- ***Fear of Heights***
- ***Fear of Going Out In Public***
- ***Fear of Public Speaking***
- ***Fear of Needles (injections)***
- ***Fear of Flying***
- ***Fear of the Dark***
- ***Fear of Dying***
- ***Fear of Germs***
- ***Fear of the Cramped Spaces***

Have students compare your lists to see how well you matched up. Allow for some fun debate about which ones did or did not justify being included/excluded. Then, **ask students the following questions:**

- ***Which fear would be the most debilitating?***
- ***Which one would be the easiest to conquer?***
- ***Do you have any of the fears mentioned?***
- ***If so, where do you see it pop up most frequently?***

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

- **This lesson is the third lesson in our look at what Jesus had to say about mean people. In this lesson, we're going to all admit that sometimes we can be scared of mean people. Maybe not, knee-knocking,**

lip-trembling fear. Maybe it's more like an uneasiness or a desire to avoid them. But no matter how you look at it, it's born out of a fear of confrontation. But we're also going to learn that Jesus urges us not to fear mean people. In fact, He has some thoughts on how to face the people we fear. Let's take a closer look.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand that they are to have courage when facing mean people because the Holy Spirit is with them, always.
- **Set-Up:** None.

BEGIN by taking a few moments to remind students what you've covered so far in the previous two lessons. Ask if students have any specific truths they remember from earlier lessons. If you need a little help, use the following bullet points:

- **Lesson 1:** Jesus said that when we're living as Christ-followers and people are mean to us, we should count it as a blessing.
- **Lesson 1:** We have to learn to look for how God is working for good through our interactions with mean people.
- **Lesson 2:** Jesus taught that we're called to treat mean people with grace, and in so doing, identify ourselves with God.
- **Lesson 2:** We need to evaluate our own actions and attitudes toward any "mean people" in our lives.

THEN, when you've finished, instruct students to turn to Luke 12. As they are doing so, see if anyone can remember the details of who wrote Luke (and who Luke was), and maybe the date and purpose for its writing. If you need help filling in the gaps, reference the Details and Setting sections of your Bible Background. When students have turned to Luke 12, read or have a student read Luke 12:4-6 and 11-12. When they've finished, lead students in a discussion. Ask something like:

- **Let's look first at verses 4 and 5. Let's summarize what Jesus is saying here. When Jesus said, "Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell," who was He talking about being afraid of?**
Answer: He was talking about fearing God.
- **Who was Jesus urging His audience not to be afraid of?**
Answer: Human beings. Better known as mean people.
- **Jesus helps provide the reasons for this. Why does He say we shouldn't fear what people can do to us?**
Answer: Jesus makes it clear that no matter what the meanest of people can do to us, even take our lives, they do not have the power to affect our souls.
- **Why is this counterintuitive to how we are inclined to feel about people who are mean to us? Why is it easy for us to feel fear when it comes to mean people?**
Answer: Because they can make our lives miserable. Mean people can embarrass us, humiliate us, and maybe even hurt us physically. Fear is our human response to such people.

Explain to students that being afraid of mean people is something most of us struggle with at some point. But Jesus is helping us understand the difference between the fleeting things of this earth and the forever things of the spiritual realm. **Say something like:**

- **Consider the worst thing the meanest person might do to you. Whatever it is, when you see it in view of eternity, no matter how bad it is, it's not that bad. Though it definitely causes a ton of unpleasant emotions, we can treat these mean people with the right kind of attitude because of what Jesus says in verse 6.**

NEXT, have students look at verse 6. See if anyone can grasp what Jesus is saying here. Allow him or her to share his or her thoughts with the class. If you need to reframe or address any loose ends, summarize the verse by **saying something like**:

- **Jesus is saying here that sparrows have very little value. In fact, they are so valueless that five of them are only worth two pennies. And yet, the amazing thing is that God remembers each of them. God places tremendous value on the valueless. The point Jesus is making? If sparrows, which have no value, are important to God, how much more important are you? God values us so much that He promises to be by our side through the worst of what we may experience at the hands of mean people.**

THEN, once you've made this point, tell students to hold that thought for one moment. Tell them to look at verses 11-12. **Ask the following**:

- **What is a synagogue and why would Jesus' audience have to worry about defending themselves in front of it?**
Answer: A synagogue was the Jewish place of worship in any city not named Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the Jews had the Temple to worship in. But in cities outside of Jerusalem, they would have worshipped in a synagogue. Christ-followers would routinely be brought before the Jewish rulers in the synagogues to have to defend their faith in Christ, as many Jews did not believe Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- **We can imagine why this would be a scary time, a time that would lead people to be afraid. Why did Jesus say that His followers shouldn't be afraid?**
Answer: The Holy Spirit would give them the words to defend themselves.
- **So, let's tie these verses together, and make some modern-day applications. God values His children greatly. So greatly that in the face of mean people, He promises the Holy Spirit will be with us. How does this make you feel?**
Answers will vary.
- **How does this give you the strength to deal with the mean people in your life?**
- **What does it look like to rely on the Holy Spirit for strength when you find yourself face-to-face with a mean person?**
Answers will vary.
- **How does this keep you from being fearful?**
Answers will vary.

*Depending on your group, you may need to take this moment and make a distinction that this verse is not implying that it is their job to endure domestic violence. If they are experiencing abuse at home, they should reach out to a trusted adult for help.

FINALLY, make sure students understand the relationship between boldness and the presence of the Holy Spirit. **Say something like**:

- **The most amazing thing is that God Himself lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit is God with us, each and every day. And when God is with us, promising to see us through the worst encounters with mean people, we do not have anything to be afraid of. There is nothing a mean person can do to us to separate us from God. We simply have to begin to learn to listen for the Holy Spirit in times when we're confronted by mean people. We'll wrap the lesson up talking about this very thing.**

If there are no further questions or comments, transition to the Last Word.

- **Goal:** To help students commit to listening for the Holy Spirit with they find themselves face-to-face with a mean person.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

BEGIN by asking students a simple question. **Ask:**

- **Can you believe Jesus? Can you take Him at His word?**

You're not necessarily looking for an answer from your students, so don't force them to respond. If they do, great. If not, let it hang in the air for a bit. Follow this up by **saying the following:**

- **If you do think that Jesus can be believed, then that's a good thing. I think He can too. And Scripture is pretty clear that God is Truth, literally incapable of falsehood. We can believe Jesus when He tells us something. And we just saw where He told us something pretty cool. He said that when we're confronted by mean people, the Holy Spirit will guide us in how to deal with it.**

THEN, ask:

- **So, here's the next question: think back on the last time you encountered a mean person. Did you hear or feel the Holy Spirit talking to you? Could you tell that He was giving you the words to say and the thoughts to think?**

Again, allow this to hang out in the air for a bit. Then, **say something like:**

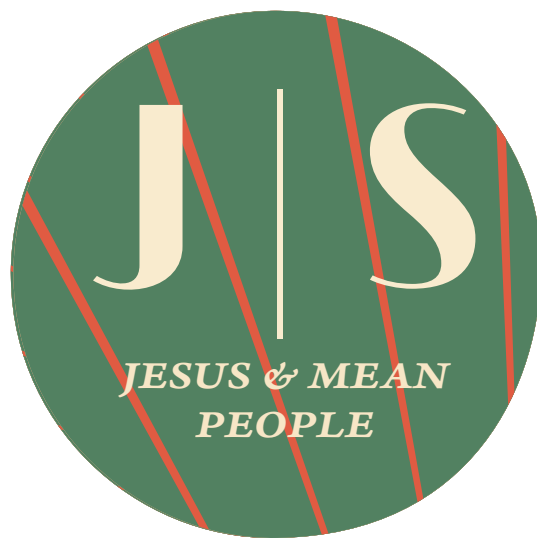
- **Many of you would say that you haven't heard the Holy Spirit in these situations. And most people would have a similar response. But, if we believe Jesus, we have to believe that our inability to hear the Spirit is a problem with us, and not with God.**

NEXT, engage in a little exercise to drive home your point. Instruct students to cover their ears with their hands and to block out any noise as effectively as possible. Lower your voice to a whisper. Ask who can hear you. If students are complying, no one will be able to hear what you're saying. Then, in a loud voice, ask students to unplug their ears. When they all have, **say:**

- **None of you could hear me speaking. But I was talking wasn't I? (Yes) Just because you couldn't hear me didn't change the fact that I was speaking. The same is true with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to us when we encounter mean people, and in plenty of other instances in our lives. (Jesus promised us this.) If we can't hear Him, it's because we're not listening.**

FINALLY, encourage your students to engage in a time of silent reflection. Have them take a moment to talk with the Holy Spirit in prayer, maybe confessing their belief that He speaks to them, and asking the Spirit to help them be more ready listeners. When they've had a few moments to pray silently, close in prayer, thanking the Spirit that He gives us the words to say when we encounter mean people.

- 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.



LESSON 4: FORGIVING THOSE WHO ARE THE MEANEST

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Jesus modeled how we're to treat the meanest the mean of people in our lives.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To extend forgiveness to the mean people in their lives who've hurt them the most.

Scripture Focus: Luke 23:26-34

OVERVIEW: Jesus gave us what is perhaps the most extreme example of how to deal with mean people: He forgave the very people who crucified Him. Has there ever been a more extreme example of an innocent person finding himself more unjustly punished? And there was so much hatred for Jesus from His tormentors. And yet, He modeled the kind of grace and mercy that He expects His children to model. If Jesus can forgive His murderers, we can forgive those people who are mean to us. This lesson will challenge your students to do just that.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-mean-people-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:** Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian and a companion of Paul.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.
- **Purpose:** Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

THE SETTING

Luke 23 finds Jesus at the very end of His time on this earth. At the point we pick up in verses 26-34, Jesus has already been arrested and forced to undergo the farce of a trial that led to His being sent to the Roman officials. Both Pilot and Herod found no fault with Jesus, but the Jews demanded His crucifixion. We pick up the narrative as Jesus is being led to Calvary to be crucified.

THE MAIN POINT

This lesson is pretty straightforward and hopefully serves as a real punch at the end of your time studying what Jesus had to say about mean people. Ultimately, you’ll look at a snapshot of Jesus’ crucifixion with the intent of seeing His reaction to the mean people that drove the final moments of His earthly life. In this snapshot, you’ll help students see that Jesus’ reaction to the enemies that surrounded Him is so incredibly gracious and noble as to be shocking. And yet, it’s the very reaction He wants them to have toward the mean people in their lives. Love. Mercy. Forgiveness. If Jesus could extend it to the people who essentially murdered Him, we can extend it to those people who are mean to us.

LESSON PLAN

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

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about the idea of unexpected responses.
- **Set-Up:** Sour candy of some sort- preferably sour patch kids. Have enough that everyone can grab a piece. You can even show the classic “first they’re sour, then they’re sweet” commercial on your screen if you want to take this demonstration further.

FIRST, explain to students that the contents of this final lesson are a lot like sour candy. **Say something like this:**

- **Some people love the taste of sour candy, and others avoid them at all cost. But imagine for a minute that I gave you a whole bowl of sour candy and lied to you about the taste. Maybe I told you it was sweet or salty. And not knowing any better, you took a whole handful and put it in your mouth... (If you want to create a funny moment for your students, you might bravely take a whole handful of sour candy and put them in your mouth right here so they can see the response.)**

Even if you like sour candy, expecting one thing and getting another is still a bitter experience.

NEXT, allow students to grab some of the sour candy if they want, or pass them out.

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

- **This is the last lesson in our four-lesson look at what Jesus had to say about mean people. We’re going to see that Jesus had a meaningful and at the time unexpected reaction to some mean people. And from this, we’ll take away a powerful truth about how we’re supposed to deal with mean people.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand that Jesus modeled how we’re to treat the meanest the mean of people in our lives.
- **Set-Up:** You’ll have a moment where your students will more or less “crowdsource” the narrative of Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion. You may want to have your Bible open to Luke 22:47-23:25, however, it’s probably more practical to spend some time refreshing your memory by studying the passage prior to teaching.

BEGIN by having students review what you’ve learned so far. To help them think back on what you’ve covered in the first three lessons, refer to the following bullet points:

- **Lesson 1:** Jesus said that when we’re living as Christ-followers and people are mean to us, we should count it as a blessing.
- **Lesson 2:** Jesus taught that we’re called to treat mean people with grace, and in so doing, identify ourselves with God.
- **Lesson 3:** That they are to have courage when facing mean people because the Holy Spirit is with them, always.

THEN, when you have finished, instruct students to turn to Luke 23. Provide some context for what you’ll be studying, possibly referring to the Setting section of the Bible Background. After you’ve provided the context, read or have a student read Luke 23:26-34. Then, lead students in a short discussion. **Ask something like:**

- **Focus back on verses 26-31. Describe the setting. What is happening?**

Answers will vary.

- **What would you say is the tone of the events that Luke is describing?**

Answers will vary. But, words like hopeless, sad, tragic, and so on would be appropriate.

- **What do verses 32-33 say about the status being attached to Jesus? In other words, how is Jesus being perceived at this point?**

Answers will vary. But it's interesting to note that Jesus is being crucified with criminals, even though He was never truly found to be guilty of anything.

Before focusing on verse 34, explain to students that now is the time you need to back up and really focus on what happened at the end of Jesus' life. After all, Jesus was being given a punishment that was reserved for the worst criminals. **Say something similar to the following:**

- **As a group, starting with Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, after the Last Supper, we are going to piece together the narrative of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Let's all try and remember what we can about these events.**

NEXT, start the reconstruction of the narrative by asking: Who remembers what happened in the Garden when Jesus got arrested? Allow students to share as much as they can remember, encouraging their participation. Using Luke 22:47-23:25 as your guide, help fill in the gaps where they might be missing or misremembering the facts of Jesus' final moments on earth. Once you feel like you have captured the story, **ask the following questions:**

- **Thinking about the narrative we just recreated, what crime did Jesus commit worthy of crucifixion?**

Answer: Jesus was ultimately crucified for claiming to be the Son of God. However, this was not a crime because it was a true fact about His identity.

- **Was Jesus treated fairly? Give examples to support your answer.**
- **In your opinion, would Jesus had been within His rights if He had suddenly come down from the cross and wiped out every person who had accused Him, beat Him, or otherwise mocked Him? Why or why not?**

Answers will vary.

THEN, make the transition back to looking at Jesus' reaction in verse 34. **Say something like:**

• **Jesus was arrested and initially tried in a deceitful manner that actually violated Jewish law. He was found to be innocent by Pilate and Herod, and yet He was still abused and murdered. If Jesus had chosen to punish everyone who had wrongfully accused Him, or beat Him, or played a role in His crucifixion, it's not like He would have been wrong. Jesus is God. We know from Paul's words in Romans that the result of all sin is death. And we've seen in countless places in the Old Testament what the results of rebellion against God looks like (hint: it doesn't end well for those who rebel). And so, had Jesus chosen to express His perfect and righteous judgment against all who had a role in His arrest, trial, and death, He would have been within His rights as God. Knowing this, let's take one last look back at the original passage we started with.**

NEXT, instruct students to look back at verse 34. Have a student read it out loud. **Then, ask:**

- **Why is this so remarkable?**

Answers will vary.

- **How does this make you feel about Jesus?**

Answers will vary.

- **How does it make you feel about Jesus' willingness to forgive your sin?**

Answers will vary.

- **Remember, we're here to talk about what Jesus had to say about mean people. Considering that the people who played a role in Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion were about as mean as they come, what does Jesus teach us here about how to respond to our worst enemies?**

Answer: Jesus models radical grace, mercy, and forgiveness. To those who had wronged Him the most, He extended nothing but grace.

- **If innocent Jesus, who was hanging on the cross as a beaten and broken man, could look down on His accusers and ask God to forgive them, what excuse do we have for not forgiving the mean people we encounter in our own lives?**

Answer: We really don't have any excuse at all.

FINALLY, help students see that when it comes to how we deal with mean people, this is the ultimate calling for any Christ-follower. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus gave us an incredible example of how we have to approach the mean people in our lives. We have to meet anger, jealousy and lies with mercy. By doing so, we model the example of Jesus, our Lord, and Savior. As we get ready to wrap up, let's talk a few minutes about what this looks like in our lives.**

If there are no further questions or comments, transition to the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students extend forgiveness to the mean people in their lives who've hurt them the most.
- **Set-Up:** You might need a notecard or scratch paper for students to write with, though you can also take advantage of their smartphones for those who have them.

BEGIN by encouraging students to take a moment and think about the last few weeks. Have them think about the last time they had a painful encounter with a mean person. It could have been a week ago, or several months ago. Instruct students to take a moment to visualize this person.

THEN, say something like:

- **What are you feeling right now? It depends on how poorly you were treated. For some of you, the wrong that a mean person did to you hurt but was maybe kind of minor in the grand scheme of things. For others, you're thinking of a person right now that rocked your world with what he or she did. Your emotions run high. You get angry, and anger is the natural reaction. But what we learned today from Jesus is that we must meet all these emotions with grace. We have to be able to draw upon the strength God gives us to forgive the mean people in our lives.**

NEXT, instruct students to grab a notecard, scratch paper, or a note-taking app on their phone. Instruct them to write down the initials of the mean person they are thinking about. Challenge them to keep these initials where they can see them for one week and pray every day that God would work in their hearts to help them forgive this person. Encourage them by letting them know that you're aware of how difficult this can be, but that you'll be praying for them as well.

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

- For added accountability, text your students this week and remind them to continue to pray that God would help them forgive the mean people in their lives.
- 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.