



LESSON 3: LOVING THE LEAST

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Jesus desires for His people to actively show love to the poor and needy, those who Jesus called “the least of these.”

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED: To identify practical ways they can demonstrate the love of Christ to the poor and needy in their community.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 25:31-46

Supporting Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:7-8

OVERVIEW: Jesus’ teaching on loving the “least of these” is certainly a topic that should be covered in a Bible study on loving others. Jesus’ command to show love to those who are most in need of love echoes similar commands throughout the Old Testament. It’s obvious that God’s heart is especially tuned to the needs of the poor. The question for your students is who are the “least of these” in their 21st century context, and how can they live out Jesus’ commandment to show love to them. This lesson will help you unpack this verse and its implications, as well as identify ways your students can show love to the needy in your community and around the world.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-loving-others-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

Matthew chapters 24 and 25 include the last words of Christ before His arrest and crucifixion. Matthew places the time of this passage at two days before the Passover celebration, a high and holy day in the life of a Jew. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives, a mountain ridge near Jerusalem. The entire message centers on the last days and judgment and includes some parables. That’s why some view this specific teaching on the least of these as a parable while others see it as prophecy.

THE MAIN POINT

Jesus told a story to demonstrate to His disciples that they are to love the poor and needy, people whom Jesus called the “least of these.” This message is different from the message to love the unlovable because the love for the least of these is intertwined with a teaching on the final judgment. While actually showing love is the main part of the lesson, you cannot avoid the questions that may come up about works and salvation. (You’ll be equipped in the lesson to deal with these questions.)

You will guide your students as they discover the command to love the poor goes back to Old Testament days. They will learn that loving others is not a binding or restrictive law but a natural expression of love that only a true child of God can give.

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 discover some frightening statistics on “the least of these” both in America and around the world.
- **Set-Up:** Arrange to display the “Lesson 3 Lead In Activity Sheet” contained in your lesson 3 folder.

FIRST, tell your students you have some interesting facts to share with them. If possible show the statistics on the Activity Sheet using a PowerPoint presentation, or other means that allows you to present them visually. However you manage to do it, go over the stats as a class. As you do, ask them to note the ones that shock them the most.

THEN, when you’ve finished, have the students share which facts stood out to them and take a few minutes to discuss them. **Ask questions similar to the following:**

- **Why did this question stand out to you?**
- **Did you think it would be lower or higher?**
- **What impact do you think this has on these individuals?**
- **How does this fact make you feel?**
- **How does this impact our society?**

Be sure to allow plenty of time to allow the magnitude of what is on the fact sheet to sink in.

NEXT, ask if they have ever come across someone in their town who does not have access to clean water or who is homeless. Then ask if they have ever driven near the county jail or a prison in your area. Finally, ask if they think anyone in town goes to bed hungry at night. Explain that while some of the situations on the fact sheet are things they may never encounter, other things like poverty and people in jail are realities in every community.

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

- **Jesus had a name for the people we have been talking about in this opening activity. He called them “the least of these.” Believe it or not there were hungry and thirsty people along with those sick, homeless, and in prison even when Jesus was living on the earth 2,000 years ago. In today’s lesson we are going to look at “the least of these” and what Jesus said should be our response to these people. Then we’re going to talk about some ways we can reach out in love by ministering to those in our society who are down and out.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that Jesus desires for His people to actively show love to the poor and needy, those He called “the least of these.”
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, remind your students that this is the third lesson in a four-part Bible study on Jesus and Loving Others. See if your students can review what you’ve covered in the first two lessons so far. Use the following bullet points to help guide the discussion, if need be:

- **Lesson 1:** According to Jesus, loving others is second only to loving God. It's a crucial part of being who God wants us to be.
- **Lesson 2:** It's easy to love people who love us back, but it takes a heart after Christ's to love those who don't like us.

NEXT, remind students that you're going to be looking at what Jesus said about loving others. But, you want to start this lesson out a little differently. Encourage students to turn to Deuteronomy chapter 15. Briefly explain that Moses wrote this book as the Hebrew people were preparing to enter the Promised Land, better known as Israel. Moses was reminding the Israelites of the laws God had given them. The fifteenth chapter includes laws on the treatment of slaves and the poor.

THEN, read or have a student read Deuteronomy 15:7-8. When you've finished, **say**:

I wanted to use this Scripture to help us see that God's idea of the right treatment of the poor and needy goes all the way back to the Old Testament. Taking care of people in need was a requirement in the Law. And God's people were bound to live by that Law. This is the simple foundational truth we need to take from these verses. When you factor in that there are literally hundreds more verses in Scripture that have a similar meaning, it's clear that taking care of those in need is a big part of who God is. Now let's see how Jesus addressed this.

NEXT, instruct students to find Matthew 25 in their Bibles or Bible apps. While they are looking, have volunteers tell you as much as they can about Matthew and his Gospel. Fill in any details and set the passage's context by using the Bible Background. Then, read or have students read Matthew 25:31-34. When you've finished, lead students in a short discussion. **Ask something like:**

- **What event is Jesus presenting here? What situation?**

Answer: A picture of the final judgment of humankind.

- **What two animals are mentioned in verses 31-34?**

Answer: Sheep and goats

- **What was the difference in the fate of these two animals?**

Answer: Sheep and goats were chosen to represent those who would inherit the Kingdom of God and those who would suffer eternal separation from God.

Explain to students that Jesus probably used these animals in His illustration because they were sometimes hard to tell apart as it is also sometimes hard to distinguish believers from non-believers. Remind students that only God knows the true heart of a person. We can only see what is on the outside of people and that is why it would be impossible to judge someone especially when it comes to those who are saved and not saved.

THEN, read or have a student read Matthew 25:34-36. Tell the students that the things mentioned in the opening activity are the ways those inheriting the Kingdom of God ministered to Jesus. Point out that being hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison represents man's three basic needs – food, shelter, and companionship. The "sheep" had helped take care of all the basic human needs.

NEXT, read or have a student read Matthew 25:37-40. **Ask the following questions:**

- **Why do you think the people in this passage seemed so surprised?**

Answer: They could not remember ministering to Jesus directly in these situations.

- **Why did Jesus say that they had done those things for Him?**

Answer: Because to minister to those in need is in a way like ministering directly to Christ.

Remind students that Jesus is painting a beautiful picture of people who minister to others with no motive other than pure love. Things done with the love of Christ are like things done for Christ. Continue by reading or having a student read Matthew 25:41-45. You'll want to bring out the contrast in the way the righteous judge addresses the goats or the people on the left by **asking the following:**

- **What words are used when addressing the goats or the people on the left?**

Answer: The cursed or cursed ones. He called the other group on the right blessed ones. The people on the left are cursed because of their own actions, namely not taking the time to have a personal relationship with God. Take some time to explain that these people were not facing damnation because of their actions, but that their actions were a sign they never had a saving relationship with God through Jesus.

- **What fate do these people face?**

Answer: Eternal separation from God.

Point out that the same criterion is used with both groups of people and that is ministering to the least of these. **Say:**

- **God is always fair and just, especially when He is acting as a judge. The second group of people did not minister to the needy. Why? Maybe it was because the sacrificial love of Christ wasn't in them at all. We don't know. But we do know this was a symptom of a heart problem, a heart that had no connection to Jesus.**

THEN, read or have a student read Matthew 25:46. The final verse in today's study reveals that the righteous will go to an eternal relationship with God and the others will go to eternal separation from God. Explain that this passage teaches that our actions bear witness to the change Christ has made in our lives. **Say something like:**

- **Loving others is a litmus test. Our good actions are the result of a life transformed by Christ. Our love is proof of God in us. Showing love to the "least of these" doesn't make us a Christian. But when Christ saves us, our actions are what display the inner transformation.**

FINALLY, before transitioning into the Last Word take some time to allow the students to digest what you have taught them. Be sure to let the students ask as many questions as they need to, then **say something like:**

- **Loving others is not always easy. In last week's lesson, we found out how hard it is to love those who are unlovable and those who hate us. Last week the lesson was about the attitude of love. This week it is about the cost of showing love. It is inconvenient to love "the least of these" and many times their problems are not quick fixes because their lives can be messy. This requires an even higher level of love for others. Loving those in dire need requires an investment of a good bit of our most valuable resource: time. Again, it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can love people the way Jesus taught us to love. Now, let's look at some ways we can actually show the love of God to "the least of these" in our world today.**

Make sure no one has any questions, then move to wrap up the lesson with the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To identify practical ways they can demonstrate the love of Christ to the poor and needy in their community.
- **Set-Up:** You will need some 3x5 index cards, one for each student. Ahead of time take each index card and write one of these on each card: HUNGRY, THIRSTY, HOMELESS, NEEDS CLOTHES, and SICK. You will also need a dry-erase board or some other way of displaying the list of words for the students to see.

FIRST, take the 3x5 cards you made up ahead of time and place them in your hand with the blank side up so that students can't see the word written on the back. Let each student take one card from the group. After all cards have been given out ask the students to group up with all the other people with the same card. (If your group is small you may only have one or two people with the same card and that is okay.) Tell each group you want them to imagine that they've either encountered a person facing the situation on their card, or found out about a need that exists in the world as it relates to what's on their card. Explain that you want them to come up with two action plans:

- One to meet the immediate needs of the person and,
- One to meet the long term needs of the person.

Here are some suggestions to guide you if any of your groups need help.

- **HUNGRY: IMMEDIATE** – provide money for a meal; **LONG TERM**– look for food assistance programs in your area.
- **THIRSTY: IMMEDIATE** – passing out water, helping identify a source of clean water. **LONG TERM** – Partner with one of the many groups helping provide not only clean water but projects to dig wells around the world.
- **HOMELESS: IMMEDIATE** – see if your church has resources to house people overnight, or familiarize yourself with the local shelters. **LONG TERM** – help identify what is keeping them from being in a home. Help find them assistance!
- **NEEDS CLOTHES: IMMEDIATE** – get your youth group to take on a family as a service project. Get sizes for all family members and go purchase clothing. **LONG TERM** – adopt a local family and check with them four times a year for clothing needs
- **SICK: IMMEDIATE** – provide food for the family or transportation to a doctor. **LONG TERM** – make a prayer list and as a group pray for the person each day and each time your group meets.

NEXT, give each group some time to think through their ideas for possible ministry actions to “the least of these” in your area. Use the suggestions above to stir your student’s creative thinking. After 5 to 10 minutes bring the group back together and allow them time to express their ideas for showing the love of Christ to hurting people where they live. Write the list of “the least of these” on a marker board or poster board so the students can see the list. Continue the discussion by **asking the following questions:**

- **Of the people listed on the board, what hurting people group are you most likely to encounter on a regular basis?**
- **What group do you think you are least likely to encounter?**
- **Why do you think we seldom come face to face with hurting people? Is there anything we can do to change that?**

THEN, ask the students what they can do to help increase awareness of the needs of “the least of these” both in their community and around the world. Help them see that by living the Great Commandment and having a real desire to love others, this will create within them a heart to reach out in love to hurting people.

FINALLY, encourage students to be prepared to follow through with any ministry ideas they came up with during today’s lesson. Remind them that ministering to “the least of these” is not a requirement for salvation but rather an outpouring of the love that comes from having a real relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

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@youthministry360.com.