



## LESSON 2: FAITH IN TOUGH TIMES

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN:** Faith in Jesus and His ability to lead them through trials is what will get them through tough times.

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED:** To express faith in God's ability and desire to help them persevere through tough times.

**Scripture Focus:** John 11:1-3; 17-27; 38-44

**Supporting Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**OVERVIEW:** What happens when life is going “wrong?” How are we supposed to react? Each of us on our journey with Christ can shove down our emotions and just pretend that everything is all right. We can tend to run away from God during these times or even blame Him. Our desperation comes in that we think Jesus will take all of the tough times away when we believe in Him. Instead, His promise is to be with us when things are difficult and lead us through those times. This lesson will help your students understand this, and apply it in their own lives.

### TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Tough Times 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 Tough Times Lesson 2 Teacher Prep Video,” click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/pages/jesus-and-tough-times-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

Jesus has reached the point in His ministry when He is beginning to collect enemies. He is no longer viewed as harmless by the religious establishment. He is seen as a threat. By Chapter 11 in John's Gospel, Jesus has already had some serious run-ins with the Pharisees. Has gone back to the area surrounding the Jordan River to meet with the large number of people who flocked to Him. This is where he gets the message from Lazarus' sisters that their brother was dying.

## THE MAIN POINT

The main point of this lesson is that faith in Jesus and His ability to lead them through trials is what will get them through tough times. John 11:1-3; 17-27 & 38-44 tells the story of the death of Lazarus, the reaction of Mary and Martha (his sisters), and how Jesus met this family during this time. Jesus is told that His close friend Lazarus is very ill, and yet He does not run to Bethany to help him. When Jesus finally comes to town, Lazarus has been buried for four days. Martha comes running to meet Jesus wondering why He didn't come more quickly.

Jesus wants Martha to know that no matter what, He is the one that will be with her and Lazarus. In the end, Jesus is moved by sorrow and compassion for this family and does bring His friend out of the grave. Jesus pushes Martha to see that all she needs to do is have faith that He is whom He says He is and that He won't leave her. This is still the case for every believer today. Our focus cannot be on our troubles that last only a moment; we need to focus on Christ who is with 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 aid students in understanding that while their problems don't always go away, Jesus is with them through the tough times.
- **Set-Up:** You will need rolls of paper towels (preferably the "select a size"), a large bowl or bucket of water (maybe more than one depending on your group size), and washable markers for each student. The bowl/bucket of water should be at the front of the room that each student can access.
- **(Alternate Option:** If you don't want your students to do this as individuals, you can do it like an object lesson. All you would do is simply talk about tough times as you write an example on the paper towel. As you talk about how Jesus has the ability to lead us through tough times, helping us deal with our emotions, dip the towel in the basin of water. Then, transition to the discussion at the end of the activity.)

**FIRST**, remind students that this is the second of four lessons that look at what Jesus had to say about the tough times we all experience. As you're saying this, pass out markers, and one paper towel to each student. **Say something like:**

- **Last week we talked about talking to God and being honest with Him about the way we are feeling in the tough times. What we're going to see today is that it doesn't just stop with talking to God about our feelings. We need to learn how to lean on Him when things go wrong. When we have faith in Him, we begin to believe He will help us get through our hardest times.**

**THEN**, ask something like:

- **Think about people around you that have gone through tough times. Think of your own experience. What have you observed about people going through tough times? Do they tend to have faith in Jesus when things are tough? What about you? Why or why not?**

**Answers will vary.** We can have faith in Jesus when we understand we are His, and He cares for us. Often, however, we can get so focused on the bad circumstances that we lose sight of Jesus, and we don't put our faith in Him. It's easy to blame Him for everything going wrong. Sometimes this is because we think He is supposed to change the circumstances. When this doesn't happen, we think He has let us down.

Have students take out their piece of paper towel and markers. **Then say something like:**

- **Today we are going to take a look at what it means to have faith in Jesus when things are not going the way we want. Things can get tough, and it can be hard to really trust in Jesus. We need to know He is the one that is going to help us get through the hardest of times.**

**NEXT**, explain that everyone has a piece of paper towel and a marker. Encourage students to take a few moments and write something tough that's going on in their lives right now. It can be anything big or small. If they can't think of something right now, encourage them to write something recent that's gone on. Explain that if it's too private, they can always write initials or abbreviations.

**THEN**, instruct students to fold their paper towel in half, silently make their way to the water upfront, and place their towel in the water. Instruct them to watch as the water washes the ink away. Encourage them to imagine what it's like to give the emotions and the stress of their tough time away to God.

Once every student has gone forward lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **How did this activity make you feel?**

**Answers will vary.**

- **What did you notice when you put the towel in the water?**

**Answer:** The paper towel doesn't dissolve or sink. Your "problems" that you wrote down didn't disappear, but they did run and bleed. They changed. And this change symbolizes how Jesus takes our tough times and leads us through them, helping us deal with the emotions they cause. This is what it's like when we put our faith in Jesus during the hard times.

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

- **Today we're going to talk about this idea of Jesus helping us get through the tough times. Let's get started.**

## THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** That students would understand that faith in Jesus and His ability to lead them through trials is what will get them through tough times.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

**FIRST**, lead students in a brief review if you haven't already. Ask students if they can remember the main points from last week's lesson. Use the following bullet point to help you as a guide:

- **When we experience tough times, we should express our emotions to God in real, honest ways, embracing a more honest dialogue with Him.**

If you want to go a little deeper, ask students about their time with God this past week. **Ask:**

- **Did you feel like you were more open and honest with your feelings with God? Why or why not?**
- **Did you take the chance to write to Him like we talked about?**

Consider bridging the gap from last week to this week by **saying something similar to the following:**

- **Many people struggle with the fact that even when we are honest with God, He doesn't take our problems away. We give Him our struggles and He helps us, even if the circumstances sometimes do not change. During these times we can even tend to blame God for causing the problems, or not doing enough to help us. Let's take a look at a story where this happened.**

**THEN**, instruct students to turn to John 11. While they're turning, see if they can remember some of the details of John's life. Fill in the rest of the context for the book by using the Details (and the Setting) section of the Bible Background. When you've finished setting the context for the passage, read or have a student read John 11:1-3. When the student has finished, make sure everyone is on the same

page with what's happening. Then, read or have a student read verses 17-27. When you've finished, lead students in a short discussion. **Ask:**

- **What is the first detail you notice in verse 17?**

**Answer:** Lazarus is dead and has been for four days.

- **Look back at verses 1-3 and read it again. What do we know about Jesus' feelings toward Lazarus?**

**Answer:** We know that Jesus loved him.

- **Now, read verse 6. What do you think about this? And how does this flavor our expectations about Jesus**

**Answer:** It can be difficult for us to accept that Jesus had a bigger plan here than making Lazarus well. If I sent a message to Jesus that said, "This person that is important to you is really sick," I would have expected Him to come right away. But this speaks to how Jesus views our tough times. Making tough times go away isn't always Jesus' goal. Helping us through a tough time seems to be more important to Jesus.

- **What does Martha say in verses 21-22?**

**Answer:** She pretty boldly told Him that if He would have been there, He could have saved her brother. Martha is very honest with Jesus. She wants to know why He didn't come immediately when He learned that Lazarus was sick. Then she begs Him to do something. She has faith in who Jesus is, even if the circumstances seem bleak. We also see that Martha doesn't fully understand what Jesus is saying to her when He talks about bringing Lazarus back from the dead. This is a great example of how we can say anything to Jesus, "Why weren't you here?" while at the same time believing that He is the one who can take care of us.

- **Does this seem like pretty open and honest communication with Jesus in the midst of a tough time? (Yes) What was Jesus' response?**

**Answer:** It's important to show students that Jesus didn't rebuke Martha, or punish her. She makes a sort of veiled accusation out of a place of deep hurt. Jesus accepts her honesty and responds in a teachable, faith-building way.

Take a moment and explain to students that Jesus wanted Martha to know more about who He was than what He would do for her. **Say something like:**

- **Sometimes when things are tough, we forget the point is to trust in who Jesus is, and that He will be with us. Instead, we sometimes have an attitude that says, "What can you do for me?" Then we are angry when things don't go the way we wanted. Jesus wants Martha to know that regardless of the situation He is the one that brings life. He is the one that is bigger than anything.**

**Ask:**

- **What about you? Do you accept Jesus' desire to walk beside us during tough times? Or do you blame Him for what He does or doesn't do for you?**

**Answers will vary.** However, make sure to share your own story of times when you would rather trust in what Jesus will do, instead of the reality of having faith in who He is.

**NEXT,** have students read verses 38-44. Continue your discussion. **Ask:**

- **What does Jesus do? Why do you think He did this?**

**Answer:** We see that Jesus is upset over the fact that Lazarus is dead. It's possible that neither Mary or Martha expected Him to show such great power in what happened next!

- **Take a sneak peek at verse 35. What can we learn from Jesus' tears?**

**Answer:** That He grieves with us. God is not detached from our suffering. If we believe, as those who have been saved by faith in

Christ's person and work on the cross, that God's Spirit is truly with us, we have to believe that God is present in our suffering. Jesus hurt because He loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. HE hurt because they hurt. He hurts for and with us as well.

**FINALLY**, have students look at 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. When you've read it, **ask**:

- **Paul is talking here about the struggles we all face in the course of living out the life of a Christ-follower. He engages in a little paradox shift here, calling the very real, very troubling problems we all experience “light and momentary.” What perspective allows Paul to say this? How could he call our tough times “light and momentary”?**

**Answer:** Paul can say this because he is speaking with eternity in mind. Paul knows that our time on this earth is not the ultimate goal or experience. Our time in eternity in heaven with God is what we were made for. When you take this perspective, even the really tough problems become no big deal.

- **What does Paul mean when he tells us to fix our eyes on the “unseen” instead of the “seen”? How do we see Martha modeling this in her initial response to Jesus in verse 24?**

**Answer:** The “seen” refers to the things of this earth. The things that are temporary and don't last. The “unseen” is the eternal. It is the “heavenly,” the lifetime of relationship with God we have waiting for us after this life. Martha could make sense of her brother's death, and her frustration with Jesus, because she took an eternal perspective.

- **How does this verse give us the strength to deal with tough times?**

**Answer:** There is a life waiting for us that is perfect, with no suffering, sadness, or loss. This life, while awesome and full of God's rich blessing, is a shadow of what's to come. When we keep this perspective, we can deal with tough times.

**FINALLY**, close by saying:

- **At the end of the day, Jesus never promised to take away our troubles. If this were Jesus' main motivation, He wouldn't have waited and allowed Lazarus to die. When sin entered the world, death and suffering did too. And though God is constantly and miraculously intervening to stop pain and suffering, He does not stop it all. God allows us to experience tough times, in part, because during those tough times, we learn more about God and our faith. We experience God in deeper, more profound ways. God is always with us in the midst of our pain. And we can always trust Him to see us through.**

Ask if there are any questions or thoughts. Then transition into the Last Word.

## THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students express faith in God's ability and desire to help them persevere through tough times.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need pens and large Band-Aids for every student.

**FIRST**, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to give them an opportunity to start to express their faith in who Christ is, and that He will be with them no matter what during the toughest of times.

**THEN**, give each student a Band-Aid and a pen. **Say something like:**

- **Each of you has a Band-Aid and a pen. Sometimes we need to be reminded of God being with us during our tough times. On the outside of the Band-Aid wrapper, write one word that represents your tough time write now.**

When students have finished, **say**:

- **Now take the Band-Aid out of the wrapper and put it on your finger. This is a reminder that God is with you during this time. Take a moment to just talk to Jesus and ask Him to help you have faith in who He is.**

**FINALLY**, allow a silent time for prayer. Then, **ask**:

- **What have you learned in this lesson that will help you have faith that Jesus will be with you during your toughest of times?**

**Answers will vary.**

- **How can we start to believe that our problems for today are “temporary” and focus on Jesus and His provision?**

**Answers will vary**

Close by **saying something like**:

- **We can’t trust someone we don’t know. Sometimes we merely wait for what Jesus can do to “solve” our problems because we don’t know Him well enough to trust in who He is. Take the time this week to continue to get to know Him so you can trust He is whom He says He is. Every time you look at the Band-aid this week, talk to Him and ask Him to be with you during this time.**

Make sure there are no closing thoughts and then close in prayer.

- Don’t forget to distribute the student 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](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).