



LESSON 1: THE ANSWER

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: Our faith in Jesus is the means by which we find forgiveness and eternal relationship with Christ.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To really consider the significance of life through faith in Christ and death in separation from Him.

Scripture Focus: John 3:16-18

Supporting Scripture: John 5:24

OVERVIEW: Repetition can cause us to become immune to the very thing we encounter over and over again. This is true with Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3. It's such a familiar passage we miss the power of it. And yet, what discussion of faith is complete without it? It is the Gospel, encapsulated. And these words hold the key to life and purpose in Christ. As you kick off a four-week study of faith, it's only fitting that it starts with a definition of saving faith, and a challenge to consider the amazing impact a relationship with Christ, through faith, has made in your students' lives.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

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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

As you can guess from its nearness to the beginning of John’s Gospel, the encounter with Nicodemus in John chapter 3 is near the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus is encountering Nicodemus in Jerusalem, where Jesus had traveled with His disciples to observe the Passover. By the time Nicodemus sneaks out to meet Jesus, Jesus has already made quite the stir in Jerusalem. He had flipped the moneylender’s tables and run the cattle out of the Temple, leading to a tense interaction with the Pharisees. Nicodemus was one of these Pharisees, but apparently, Jesus had made an impression on him. He had sought out Jesus at night to learn more about Jesus’ identity and mission.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point of John 3:16 is about as clear-cut as you can get. As we talk about what Jesus said about faith, this passage is at the forefront. It is a succinct explanation of both the Gospel and of Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth. Your students will see that their faith is the key that unlocks all that Christ has purchased for them through His life, death, and resurrection.

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 right way and the wrong way to do things.
- **Set-Up:** It would be great to accompany this lesson with images from any of the various “fail” blogs or websites. If you feel brave, you can search the Internet for images that denote specific “fails,” i.e., people riding bikes where the front wheel has come off, people overloading a car and all the tires puncture, and so on. The problem is that there seems to be a lot of relatively objectionable, or off-color material associated with these types of image searches. So, if you decide to try and locate and print images that show examples of how not to do something, exercise good judgment. Don’t do the search with your students present, just in case.

FIRST, introduce students to the idea of the right way and the wrong way of going about things. Explain that there are usually more than one way to go about doing a task. But, there are still some ways that are better than others. There are still right ways and wrong ways.

(NOTE: If you ended up finding some images of people doing things the wrong way, show them as examples of the wrong way to go about a specific activity.)

THEN, lead students in a discussion using the following scenarios and questions. Have fun with this and encourage students to be creative. **Ask:**

- **Let’s say you’re going to (unfortunately) break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. What’s an example of the right way to do this? What are some examples of the wrong way?**
Answers will vary.

Encourage students to be fun and creative in their responses. After students have shared, go on to the following scenarios **asking the same questions after each one:**

- **You have to tell your parents you got a D on your report card. Right way? Wrong way?**
- **You tell your best friend that you just got a new car for your birthday. Right way? Wrong way?**
- **You have to inform your neighbor that you lost their dog while you were taking it for a walk. Right way? Wrong way?**
- **You’re giving a report for your history class. Right way to end your presentation? Wrong way?**

FINALLY, after you’ve had some fun with this, transition to the Main Event by saying something similar to the following:

- **This is the first lesson in a four-week study on what Jesus has to say about our faith. We’re going to cover our faith from quite a few different angles. But in this first lesson, we’re going to start with the basics. You know, people try and find salvation and purpose through a lot of different ways. But only one way is the right way. Let’s see what Jesus had to say about the right way to salvation.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that their faith in Jesus is the means by which they find forgiveness and an eternal relationship with Christ.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, explain to students that you want to get on the same page regarding what you mean when you mention the concept of “faith.”
Ask:

- **When we talk about our faith in general, what are we talking about?**
Answer: It could be that the word faith describes our overall belief system, as in the way we might describe Christianity as a whole.
- **But when we personalize it, when I talk about my faith in Christ, or you talk about your faith in Christ, what are we really saying?**
Answer: We’re talking about our personal belief in God.

Explain that though you might spend some time talking about the big-picture understanding of our faith as a whole, what you’re going to be focused on most is the intimate, personal faith we have in Christ. And you’re going to be talking a lot over the next few weeks about the quality and qualities of this faith. But for today, you’re going to start with the basics using a pretty familiar passage.

THEN, explain that you’re going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of John. Instruct students to turn to John 3. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus’ ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read John 3:16-18. When you’ve finished, lead students in a brief discussion **using questions similar to the following:**

- **This is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. What do you think it is about this passage that makes it widely read and quoted?**
Answers will vary. But the idea is that it contains a very simple, yet powerful summary of the Gospel. It’s “short, but sweet” as the cliché goes.
- **As we think about our faith, our personal belief in God, these verses have a lot to say about it. Let’s start with the beginning. What reason does Jesus give for God sending Him to the world? What was the motivating factor?**
Answer: Love. Because God loved us, He sent His Son.
- **Think for a second about this love God had. What is remarkable about it? What strikes you as significant about Him loving our world?**
Answers may vary. But lead students to see that at least one of the main reasons this is significant is that the world wasn’t and isn’t a very lovable place. People are sinful. And while the world is full of God’s beauty, it’s also full of brokenness. That’s why God’s love as a motivating factor is amazing. We certainly didn’t deserve it.
- **In this verse, we see the means by which we can gain something pretty awesome. What do we gain, and what are the means by which we gain it?**
Answer: Jesus said we gain eternal life instead of death, and He said we gain it through believing in Him.

- **What's another word for belief?**

Answer: Faith

- **So, as we talk about what Jesus has to say about our faith, this is an excellent place to start. We gain eternal life with God simply through our faith in Christ. But let's ask one more question about verse 16. Why is gaining eternal life a big deal? What is the other alternative and why?**

Answer: Sin is rebellion against God and it earns death for us. This is a big deal because we are unable to make up for the debt our sin generates. We are incapable on our own of saving ourselves. We cannot bring ourselves back from death!

- **Verse 17 has something interesting to say about Jesus' role in purchasing eternal life for us. What does it say?**

Answer: It says God saves us through Jesus.

- **How does God save us through Jesus? What did Jesus do to purchase our salvation?**

Answer: Jesus served as the perfect sacrifice in our place. Rebellion against God calls for death. Only the death of something pure can absolve us from our sins. Jesus, the most perfect, pure sacrifice possible, died so all people who would come to faith in Him could be saved from their sins.

Explain that, as everyone can see, this is the Gospel. This is the simple yet amazing message of the good news in Christ. That is why these verses are so meaningful to so many.

THEN, take a moment to drill down and make sure students grasp what this has to do with their faith. **Ask something like:**

- **Our faith in Christ primarily saves us from the penalty of our sins. But it does other things as well. What does our salvation in Christ open up for us?**

Answers will vary. But lead students to see that it's not just eternal life after we die that is made available. We have our entire life's purpose and mission unlocked for us too. We are made free to live and experience this amazing life that God has made possible for us. It's about the here and now as much as it is about the afterlife.

FINALLY, stop a moment and read or have a student read John 5:24. When you have finished, explain that this is exactly what Jesus is talking about. **Say something like:**

- **Through faith, not through works or through any other means that comes out of our own efforts, Jesus makes life possible for us. We were condemned in our sins, looked at as guilty by God. But through Christ's sacrifice, we are made pure and innocent in God's eyes. Jesus unlocks peace and harmony with God for us. As we spend the next few weeks examining our faith, this is an important truth to remember.**

Ask if there are any questions, then transition into the **Last Word**.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students really consider the significance of life through faith in Christ and death in separation from Him.
- **Set-Up:** You can get as elaborate or as simple with this as you want. On the elaborate end, you can provide butcher paper with paint or markers, or a chalkboard wall, or different color construction paper, etc. On the simple end, you could have slips of paper, pens, and tape. The goal is to help students create a visual reminder of their expression of thanks to God for making a way to save them from the penalty of their sins.

FIRST, explain to students that just as the powerful truth of John 3:16 can sometimes be overlooked because it's so familiar to us, we can also get so used to our salvation that we forget what it truly means. Explain that you're going to provide students with a chance to express their thanks to God for making a way for them to be saved from their sins.

Direct students to use whatever means you have pre-determined to allow them to visually express their praise and thanks to God. If it's pen and paper, distribute it to students. If it's markers, chalk, paint, etc., instruct them with how you want it done. Give students the following guidance for expressing their thanks and praise to God:

- **It can be easy for us to forget what Jesus saved us from. When we think of what our sin rightfully earns for us, when we consider that the Bible talks about how Jesus absorbed God's wrath that was intended for us, when we grasp that we would spend eternity separated from God if it weren't for Jesus . . . when we stop and think about it, we should overflow with praise and thankfulness to God. So, using the materials we have today, we're going to take a few minutes and create a means of expressing our thanks to God for who He is.**

Explain to students that they can write a short sentence of praise. They can draw a picture that expresses their emotions. They can simply write a single word of praise to God. They can write down their favorite verse, or the lyrics to their favorite Christian song. Basically, they can say "Thank you" to God however they want. What matters most is that they consider what is in their hearts and express it to God.

FINALLY, wrap up this activity as you see fit. Allow students to look at all the praise that was expressed to God. Encourage them to see this wall as a reminder of God's faithfulness to them, and as a way to continue to strengthen their personal faith in God.

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the "Lesson 1" 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: BE GOOD SOIL

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: A faith in Christ that is pure and persevering goes hand-in-hand with an acceptance and love of God's Word.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To evaluate their attitudes toward knowing and living out God's Word.

Scripture Focus: Luke 8:4-15

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 119:10-11

OVERVIEW: The Bible is how we know God most fully. And so our attitude toward God's Word is intertwined with our faith. Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seed illustrates this perfectly. Jesus describes various ways of responding to God's Word in faith, with only one of them being seen as positive. What can we learn from the way this one positive response is described? Plenty. Jesus praised the goodness and the pureness of the faith that holds tightly to God's Word. The faith that perseveres. This should be the faith our students aspire to. This lesson will challenge them to really consider how they view the Bible, and how embracing God's Word will strengthen their faith in Him.

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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 to present Jesus as Savior, both 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

As we pick up the narrative in Luke 8, Luke had just finished describing several accounts of Jesus teaching and healing people. At the end of Luke 7, Jesus had the meaningful encounter where the “woman who had lived a sinful life” anointed His feet with perfume at the Pharisee's dinner table. Luke tells us that after this encounter, Jesus traveled from town to town preaching and teaching to the crowds who had assembled to get a glimpse of Him.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point you want to make to students is that there is a right attitude to have toward believing God's Word. When we talk to students about their faith in God, it is a discussion that can't neglect God's Word. As the primary means by which God makes Himself known to us, His children, the Bible is a central part of our faith. A love for God and a love for His Word can't be separated. And so this lesson will challenge your students to be “good soil,” having hearts that are receptive and possessive of God's Word. This is the foundation of solid faith.

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 the importance of God’s Word when it comes to their faith.
- **Set-Up:** Print enough copies of the “Lesson 2 Lead In Activity Sheet” (Located in your Lesson 2 Folder) so that each group of three to four students can have one. Provide something to write with.

FIRST, introduce the idea of “dynamic duos” by **saying the following:**

- When I say the word peanut butter, what’s the first thing that comes to most people’s minds? (Most of your students should say jelly.) That’s right: jelly. Peanut butter and jelly are a dynamic duo. They are inseparable. You hardly can think of one without the other. And there are other dynamic duos too, aren’t there?

THEN, explain that you’re going to play a little group game to see who can come up with the most “dynamic duos” in the shortest amount of time. Divide students into groups and distribute the “Lesson 2 Lead In Activity Sheet.” Inform them that they will have one minute to come up with as many dynamic duos as they can think of. Instruct them to think of foods, TV or movie characters, famous friends, inanimate objects, and so on. When they have grasped the rules and are ready to go, say, “start” and let them begin.

NEXT, when the minute is up, allow each group to take turns reading off their duos. Have fun with this, calling out any duos that seem to be a stretch. Award a winner based on who has the most legitimate duos.

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

- **This is our second lesson on what Jesus has to say about our faith. Now, you might be wondering why in the world we just talked about dynamic duos? Good question. In this lesson, we’re going to be looking at the right attitude we’re to have about the Bible. And what we’re going to find is that God’s Word and our faith go hand-in-hand. They form their own dynamic duo. To have a full faith, we have to have a positive attitude toward the Bible. Let’s see how Jesus described this.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that a faith in Christ that is pure and persevering is the key to a life of meaning and purpose.
- **Set Up:** While it’s not crucial, it’s probably beneficial to have a dry-erase board as you’re going to track with the different places the seed fell and what the results were. If you have a board, make the following chart:

| | Where It Landed | Result | Meaning |
|--------|-----------------|--------|---------|
| Seed 1 | | | |
| Seed 2 | | | |
| Seed 3 | | | |
| Seed 4 | | | |

FIRST, do a brief review to see if anyone can recall what you studied last lesson. **Use the following bullet points to remind them:**

- **Students learned that our faith in Jesus is the means by which we find forgiveness and eternal relationship with Christ.**
- **Students were challenged to really consider the significance of life through faith in Christ and death in separation from Him.**

THEN, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of Luke. Instruct students to turn to Luke 8. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus' ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read Luke 8:4-10. When you've finished, lead students in a discussion. **Ask:**

- **Just so we're on the same page, what is a parable?**

Answer: A parable is basically a story with a message, or a way of teaching a particular truth through a story.

- **Knowing Jesus' original audience, why do you think He chose to teach them a truth about faith by telling the story of a farmer planting a crop?**

Answer: Jesus was awesome about using images and concepts that were super-familiar to His audience. First-century Palestine was an agrarian economy. Even if everyone in Jesus' audience weren't farmers, they would still all be intimately familiar with the process of planting fields. (As an aside, it's sometimes interesting to get students thinking about what analogies Jesus might have used today if He were teaching and preaching in modern-day times.)

THEN, explain to students that you're going to unpack the parable using a chart you've made on the board. Work with students to fill in where each seed landed and what the result was. **The answers are as follows:**

- **Seed 1:** Path; trampled on, birds ate
- **Seed 2:** Rock; withered, no moisture
- **Seed 3:** Among the thorns; choked as it grew
- **Seed 4:** In Good soil; yielded huge crop

NEXT, when you've finished the first two parts of the chart, read or have a student read Luke 8:11-15. Explain that Jesus did not often provide the answers to the parables He told. But in this case, He did. Looking at these verses, go back in and fill in the chart with the meaning of what each seed and soil represents, making sure students are first clear on what the seed represents (the Word of God). **The answers are as follows:**

- **Seed 1:** Those who hear God's Word but reject it, and don't place their faith in Christ.
- **Seed 2:** Those who have a positive reaction to the Word, but not true, lasting belief.
- **Seed 3:** Those who hear but don't really pay any attention to God one way or the other.
- **Seed 4:** Those who believe in Christ through His Word.

THEN, explain that you want to focus for just a moment on this last verse, specifically how Jesus described the person that represents the "good soil" in the parable. **Ask:**

- **As we're interested in how Jesus describes our faith, let's pay attention to this last phrase in the verse. Jesus says the person with the good heart, the person who accepts Him through hearing God's Word, does so by hearing the word, retaining it, and through perseverance, lives a fruitful life of purpose and meaning (produces a crop). What does hearing God's Word have to do with your faith in God?**

Answer: We came to faith in Christ through His Word. We learned about Jesus through the Bible, and compelled by the Holy Spirit, came to Christ in faith. Without God's Word, it's highly unlikely we come to faith in Christ.

- **What does it mean to retain God's Word?**

Answer: It means when we hear God's Word or when we study the Bible, we hold on to it, making it a part of our life.

- **Do you usually hold on to things you don't care about? What does this say about our attitude toward the Bible?**

Answer: No. We should value it. We should want to meet God in the pages of Scripture, draw closer to Him, and grow more like Him.

- **Jesus said through perseverance our lives would be fruitful. What does perseverance have to do with the quality of our faith?**

Answer: Perseverance means sticking with God through the tough times of life. If our faith is strong, if our belief in God has truly impacted our lives, we will not turn away from God even when things get tough.

FINALLY, transition into the Final Word by saying something similar to the following:

- **At the beginning of this lesson, we looked at the dynamic duos, and talked about how inseparable God's Word and our faith are. This parable helps us understand why. It's through the Bible that we know God. And by accepting and valuing the Bible, we strengthen and grow our faith. The opposite is true, as well. It's very difficult to grow our faith without a strong love for God's Word. That's why as we close the lesson, we're going to focus on our attitudes toward the Bible.**

Make sure there aren't any questions, then transition into the **Last Word**.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students evaluate their attitudes toward knowing and living out God's Word.
- **Set-Up:** Provide note cards and something to write with for each of your students.

FIRST, explain to students that one of the most important keys to a faith that is meaningful is to develop a true love for meeting God in the Bible. Remind students of David's words in Psalm 119:10: "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands." **Say something like:**

- **We tend to have two faults when it comes to engaging with our Bibles. One, we tend to view it like a chore or a habit instead of seeing it as a time to meet God in the pages of His Word. Two, we tend to focus on HOW we study the Bible, not our attitudes behind it. We focus on the next app or Bible plan or devotional journal and we wonder why we can't stick with it. Most of the time, it's because of our attitude toward God's Word.**

THEN, explain to students that you're going to do something very simple to end this lesson, but something that will serve as a reminder to them this week of the call to develop a good attitude toward the Bible. Distribute the note cards and pens/pencils. Once every student has one, **ask them the following question:**

- **On the front of the notecard, I want you to answer this question: When you think of spending time reading the Bible, what's the first word or thought that comes to mind. Don't censor yourself! Be honest with yourself and with God. If you're going to allow God to work on your heart, you first have to recognize that work needs to be done. Write your word or thought on the front of your card. If your word or thought is positive, good. If it's neutral or negative, that's OK too. No one will judge you.**

Allow time for students to write their thoughts on the front of the card. Then, **ask them the following question:**

- **Now, on the back of the card, I want you to write a statement to God that will be your one-sentence prayer this week. In your own words, think about the attitude you want to have when it comes to the Bible and ask God to help work within you to create this attitude in your life. Make it personal. It can be something as simple as, “God help me to enjoy reading the Bible again.” Or it could be something like, “God show me new things about you through your Word.” Whatever you want to see God do when it comes to your attitude, write it on the back of the card.**

FINALLY, when students have finished, encourage them to keep these cards with them this week in a prominent place. Challenge them to make time to read their Bibles this week; after all, they won't know if their prayer is working unless they put it to the test.

Encourage them that this is such a huge part of their faith. Remind them that God will honor their desires and will help change their attitude toward studying the Bible. Then, close in prayer.

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LESSON 3: DO YOU BELIEVE?

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: We trust in God to meet our needs according to His plan and timing, not necessarily ours.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To take a look at the nature of their faith in God, to honestly assess any hesitancy or doubt, and to go to God in prayer with their thoughts.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 9:18-31, Matthew 21:17-22

Supporting Scripture: Mark 9:24, Psalms 34:17, Proverbs 15:29

OVERVIEW: It wouldn't be fair to discuss faith without dealing with the tension-filled relationship between faith and prayer. This lesson will show students three stories where people's prayers were answered, due in some small part to their strong faith. Then you'll look at where Jesus says that faithful prayers will always be answered. But, what do we say to the student who says, "I prayed and God didn't answer me"? Here lies the tension. This lesson will equip you to address this topic in a way that shows students their faith should be placed firmly in the character of God, not in human judgments of the relative success or failure of the outcomes of our prayers. You'll help students truly consider their own faith in God, whether it is a strong faith or a weak one. And you'll challenge them to take any questions or doubts to God, trusting that He alone can perfectly answer their concerns.

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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

The setting for Matthew 9 is deep amid Jesus' earthly ministry. Matthew shows Jesus immersed in the business of healing and teaching, performing miracles all around Galilee and Judea. Matthew 21 is a different setting as Jesus is nearing the last moments of His ministry on earth. Immediately before the passage, Jesus had triumphantly entered Jerusalem, and been hailed as the Messiah by His followers. Jesus would later leave the city with His disciples to sleep, as would have more than likely been their custom each Passover feast. He would encounter the barren fig tree the next morning on His way back into Jerusalem.

THE MAIN POINT

This lesson will help you discuss with your students their faith as it intersects with the needs they take to God in prayer. Jesus connects His willingness to heal individuals with the strength of their faith. He affirms the power of faith in Matthew 21. And yet, there are plenty of examples of faithful people who petition Jesus in prayer only to feel as if their prayers have gone unanswered, when in reality they have just not been answered in the way they might want them to. Ultimately, we can know that Jesus answers our prayers in accordance with His perfect plan, for our ultimate good and His glory. You'll engage your students with this line of discussion, challenging them to really think about the strength of their own faith.

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 God's timing and plan being better than ours.
- **Set-Up:** If you want, show the trailer for the movie *Ender's Game* available by searching on YouTube. It's not essential to the activity, but is a nice visual touch.

FIRST, ask students if they've seen the book or read the movie *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. If you want, you can choose to show the trailer at this time. If students have read or seen it, ask them to summarize the plotline for those who haven't. (If none of your students have read or seen it, you can download a great summary by going to imdb.com and searching for *Ender's Game*.) Then, explain that you're going to look at the last part of the story to make a point about faith.

THEN, explain that the point of the movie was to find suitable International Fleet commanders to defeat an army of insect like aliens called the Formix (or Buggers). The brightest children in the world were recruited to be trained at a space station called Battle School to lead the human army. **Say something like:**

- **The hero of the book, Ender Wiggin, was the best commander of all the genius children. He was fast-tracked through Battle School straight to Command School. He was tasked by the Fleet Generals with leading a hand-picked army of his fellow children through the most rigorous computer battle simulations ever imaginable. His team members started to break from the daily pressure of the simulated battles. Ender did too. Until there was just one more simulation left, the hardest battle simulation of all. With barely any mental or physical capacity left, Ender performed brilliantly, leading his squad leaders to victory in the massive battle simulation. Only then were Ender and the other children told the truth: it hadn't been a simulation at all. What they thought were simulations was the actual war with the Formix. Ender had won, saving humanity from destruction.**

FINALLY, ask a few questions before transitioning into the Main Event. **Ask:**

- **The truth of the real battle was kept from Ender and his companions. They were only ever told they were fighting simulations. What might have been the reason for the deception?**
Answer: There may have been fear that they would have panicked if they knew it was real. Maybe the pressure would be too much.
- **So, it's safe to say in this situation that the higher powers knew best, right? The Generals had all the details in full view when they made their decisions. Ender and the children only had their perspective in view. How is our relationship with God sometimes like this?**
Answer: We only see things, circumstances, problems, etc., through our limited view. God knows how all things will turn out. He has a big picture view.

Then, explain that this lesson is all about faith in relation to God's ability to meet our needs. **Say something like:**

- **We're about to see that God knows best. He sees behind the scenes and knows how and when to give us what we need. This fact should serve to provide us with a big faith boost. Let's see what Jesus had to say about this.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that because of our faith, we trust in God to meet our needs according to His plan and timing, not necessarily ours.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, see if anyone can recall what you've studied over the past few weeks. **Use the following bullet points to help you review:**

- **Lesson 1:** That our faith in Jesus is the means by which we find forgiveness and eternal relationship with Christ.
- **Lesson 2:** That a faith in Christ that is pure and persevering goes hand-in-hand with an acceptance and love of God's Word.

THEN, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of Matthew. Instruct students to turn to Matthew 9. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus' ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read Matthew 9:18-31. If you do get students to read, divide it up into a few parts. Then, lead students in a discussion. **Ask:**

- **First things first, what jumps out at you about what these people asked Jesus to do?**
Answer: These things are practically impossible. To raise a girl from the dead, heal someone who has had chronic hemorrhaging for 12 years, and to make blind men see . . . essentially stuff that only God would be able to do for them.
- **So when Jesus successfully did all these things, what does this say about His true identity?**
Answer: It's pretty clear: Jesus is exactly who He said He was, the Son of God.
- **Looking at all three of these stories, what is the one thing they all have in common (besides the fact that they each had a problem that needed fixing)?**
Answer: In each of the passages, the healing of the individual seems to hinge on their faith.
- **While we don't see it as clearly in the case of the ruler, we do see his faith demonstrated. Where do we see it?**
Answer: The way he approached Jesus in verse 18 shows what great faith he had.
- **What about the faith of the woman? Where do we see it mentioned and how is it described?**
Answer: We hear her internal thoughts to herself, giving us a glimpse of her faith. Jesus affirms that her faith is indeed a strong faith in verse 22.
- **What about the two blind men? What do we learn about their faith?**
Answers: In verses 28-29 we see Jesus seem to imply that their faith is what healed them.
- **OK, so, let's unpack this some. If these people had faith that Jesus would heal them, and yet it wasn't Jesus' will that they should be healed, would they have been?**
Answer: No. Strong faith isn't a magic solution to having our needs met. It's not a way to outsmart God or anything like that. The individuals in this story were healed first and foremost because it was Jesus' will to heal them. In other words, it was in God's plan. And yet, their faith had something to do with it.

THEN, read or have students read Matthew 21:17-21, then lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **Jesus was using this as a chance to teach the disciples. The bit where Jesus was talking about moving mountains shouldn't be taken literally. It was a common phrase in the Jewish culture to describe anything that was a huge task. Knowing this, what was Jesus trying to teach His disciples about faith?**

Answer: He was talking about the strength of their faith. He was saying that if their faith is strong, they could accomplish even the hardest tasks.

- **Jesus ends with a phrase that brings us back to our discussion that started with the last passage we looked at. What does Jesus say in verse 22?**

Answer: That if we have strong faith, we'll receive whatever we ask for in faith.

NEXT, explain that it's here that we have to stop and ask a few questions. Why? Because Jesus' statement that if we have faith anything we ask for will be granted to us, needs to be looked at further. **Say something like the following:**

- **Let's pause for a moment and talk about faith as it pertains to the answering of our prayers. After all, there may be some of us in this room who have prayed for something, in good faith, that wasn't answered exactly how we wanted it to be. Does this conflict with what Jesus is saying? Let's break it down and take a closer look.**

Explain that you're going to look at the concept of answered/unanswered prayers from a few angles. **Ask:**

- **First things first, can you ask for anything you want, anything at all, and have Jesus answer it? Give some examples to support your position.**

Answers will vary, but lead students to see that the only prayers God promises to answer are those that align with His character and plan. Jesus articulated this in John 14:13-14: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

- **So, out of the gate, God only promises to answer those prayers that are in line with who He is. But what about the times when we pray and it doesn't go how we want it to? What if it's a prayer that a relative gets well? What if he or she doesn't get well? Does this mean we have weak faith? What do you think?**

- **Help students see that it may very well be that we have weak faith. And yet, in Mark 9 Jesus healed the boy of a father who seemed to have a wavering faith: "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). So, God can and will answer our prayers even though we may not have the strongest faith in the moment. He will answer simply because it is His will to answer them.**

- **So what is there left to say? Do we say that sometimes God simply doesn't want to answer our prayers? What do you think? Does God always answer our prayers?**

Answer: The Bible says over and over again that God does indeed hear our prayers. Psalms 34:17 says, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. Proverbs 15:29 says, "The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous." We can know that God hears and answers our prayers.

- **How do we leave it? What about those times where God doesn't seem to answer our prayers? How do you think we can explain this?**

Answer: Help students understand that God never promises to answer our prayers exactly as we want Him to. He promises to answer them in accordance with who He is as God. He may take longer to answer them. He may answer them in a way that we may not understand for years. But He will answer them. We can take great faith in that. And we can know that there is great purpose behind by He answers them the way He does. It is always about teaching and growing us, and bringing glory and honor to Him.

Ask if students have any questions. Then, transition to the Last Word by **saying something similar to the following:**

- **We learned from the three stories we read in Matthew 9:18-31 that faith does absolutely play a role in God answering our prayers. God wants us to have a strong faith in Him, trusting that He will meet our needs according to what is ultimately best for us, and to God’s ultimate glory. God will always answer our prayers according to His perfect plan, because He loves us. We must have a strong faith that allows God to answer our prayers as He sees fit, not as we see fit. Sometimes this might mean we hurt a little bit. Sometimes it means we might have to wait a little bit. But our faith allows us to learn from our trials, and love God even more.**

Make sure there aren’t any questions, then transition into the **Last Word**.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** Help students take a look at the nature of their faith in God, honestly assess any hesitancy or doubt, and go to God in prayer with their thoughts.
- **Set-Up:** You’re going to be facilitating a time of reflection using the “Lesson 3 Last Word Activity Sheet” (Located in your Lesson 3 Folder). The PDF has three pages, each with a symbol and a reflection prompt. You’ll want to print the PDF, find three spots in the room where students can go to reflect, and hang up each page as a separate reflection station. (If you have a large group, you may want to create at least one more duplicate set-up in another room and divide your class for the activity.) Students are going to divide into groups and rotate through the reflection stations, quietly reflecting on the prompts. You may also want to provide students with something to write with.

FIRST, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to give them an opportunity to think about the nature of their faith in light of what you covered in the lesson. Divide the class into three groups. Explain that around the room, they should see three reflection stations. At each station, there is a prompt to encourage prayer or reflection, or both. Explain that groups will have two or three minutes to quietly read the prompts and reflect on what is being asked. **Say:**

- **This can be a really important time for you to evaluate your faith and ask yourself questions you maybe haven’t before. Take it seriously, even though for many of you it might feel kind of odd or different. Our culture is so fast-paced. Getting a few minutes of quiet time with God isn’t a bad idea at all.**

THEN, ask if any students have questions. Make sure they have some way to take notes or jot thoughts down if they want, but it’s certainly not a necessity. If you have music to play in the background, it wouldn’t be a bad idea. If they are good to go, start the activity. After three minutes, rotate groups. When all groups have been to all of the stations, you’re done.

FINALLY, ask if the experience was super-weird or if they truly got something out of it. You’ll probably get some mixed reviews, but that’s OK. The point is that for many students, this will be one of the few times they’ve sat quietly and thought of this kind of spiritual reflection. Ask if anyone has any points they’d like to share. Close by challenging them to keep the reflections in the forefront of their minds as they go through the week. Encourage them to let this be a stepping-stone to thinking about their faith on this level.

Close in prayer.

- Don’t forget to distribute the “Lesson 3” 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.



LESSON 4: ROCK SOLID

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That our faith is designed to be an active faith that guides their everyday lives.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To think about how their faith really impacts their day-to-day decisions, thoughts, and attitude.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 7:24-27

Supporting Scripture: James 1:22

OVERVIEW: As we teach our students about their faith, one of the most important things we can do is bring their faith out of the realm of head-knowledge or something that only happens on Sundays at church, and show them that it should permeate their lives. It should be an active faith, a faith that drives their decisions, thoughts, and attitudes. The first man Jesus describes in Matthew 7 was this kind of man. This man had put his faith in God and His Word, to the point where it served as the foundation for his life. When things got hard, he prevailed because of his faith. You'll have the opportunity in this lesson to challenge your students to embrace a similar brand of faith in their own lives.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Your Faith 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 Your Faith Lesson 4 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-your-faith-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

This narrative occurs near the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. This is a part of what is called the Sermon on the Mount, the occasion where Jesus sat down and more or less spelled out the Kingdom criteria for God’s children. This parable of the man who built his house on a rock serves as a fitting endnote for the Sermon on the Mount. It is as if Jesus is saying, If you’ll build your on the Kingdom principles I just laid out, you’ll be able to weather life’s storms.

THE MAIN POINT

The key here, as it pertains to faith, is captured in the very first line in the passage: “whoever hears these words and puts them into practice.” It is one thing to hear and to agree, or to hear and to like. This is the kind of “rocky soil” faith that Jesus described in the parable of the sower and the seed. It is another thing entirely to hear and believe. To hear and act! That is the kind of faith we want in our students. We want to see a faith that is action-oriented, that serves as a foundation for a life well-lived. This is the challenge for your students, and this lesson will equip you to challenge them accordingly.

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:** Help students begin to think about the difference between having a faith that is fully integrated with their lives versus a faith that is more compartmentalized.
- **Set-Up:** You will need a puzzle, a small table, and some sort of alert-sounding object (you can use an air horn app on your phone, or an actual air horn.) and a “prize”. The prize can be small, like candy. Before the lesson begins, have a table off to the side that has puzzle pieces all over it. Try to use a smaller puzzle that is around 25-50 pieces.

FIRST, depending on the size and personality of your group, you need to decide if everyone can participate, or if you will call on a few volunteers. Once you’ve decided, show them the box and ask the group how quickly they believe they can put the puzzle together. (If you know a particularly overconfident student, that could be the best person to ask). Because the puzzle is so small, their answer may be anywhere from 5-10 minutes.

AFTER the students have given you the “time to beat”, explain to your students that you have a prize waiting for them if they can put this puzzle together as a group in that amount of time. But, warn them that once they start, you will randomly be sounding the “alarm” which means they will have to put down their pieces immediately, run to the other side of the room, and do 10 jumping jacks before they can resume putting the puzzle back together. Ask them if they still believe they can complete it in under 5 minutes. Once they have agreed, set a timer and get ready!

Note: Try to sound the alarm once every 30 seconds or so. Give them enough time to get back and make some progress, but not so much time that they actually finish.

THEN, once the students have either beaten the timer or failed to put the puzzle together, **say something like this:**

- **Good effort everyone! Putting together a puzzle is hard enough as it is. But add in a time limit and distractions... that’s almost impossible! One of the reasons that this was so difficult is because when I sounded the alarm, you were forced to put down the puzzle and focus on something else.**

Ask students something like,

- **Do you think that you would have been able to put the puzzle together more easily if you could have focused on it the whole time, rather than running around when I sounded the alarm?**

Answer: The answer should be yes!

NEXT, help your students make the connection between completing the puzzle and growing in our faith. Both things are difficult! But they are made even more difficult when we are distracted and unable to give ourselves fully to them. **Say something like:**

- **Today we are going to look at why it is so important to have a faith that is our primary focus. Earlier, you were determined to finish the puzzle and fought hard against the distraction of running across the room. What if we practiced growing our relationship with Christ with that same passion? Let’s take a moment to pray that God**

would have our full attention tonight, as we talk about the importance of building a faith without distraction.

FINALLY, pray over your students and transition into **The Main Event**.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** Help your students understand that our faith is designed to be an active faith that guides our everyday lives.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, remind students that this is the last lesson in your four-week look at what Jesus had to say about their faith. See if anyone has a particular truth they remember from one of the lessons, or an application point that was particularly meaningful. The hope is that something you've said over the last few weeks has challenged them to see their faith differently. **Use the following bullet points to help you review:**

- **Lesson 1:** Our faith in Jesus is the means by which we find forgiveness and an eternal relationship with Christ.
- **Lesson 2:** A faith in Christ that is pure and persevering goes hand-in-hand with an acceptance and love of God's Word.
- **Lesson 3:** Because of our faith, we trust in God to meet our needs according to His plan and timing, not necessarily ours.

THEN, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of Matthew. Instruct students to turn to Matthew 7. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus' ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read Matthew 7:24-27, then lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **Let's make sure we grasp what Jesus is doing here. It's another metaphor, right? What are the two main characters in this metaphor?**
Answer: Two men who are building houses. One is wise and one is maybe not-so-wise.
- **Describe the two different foundations the houses are built on.**
Answer: One is rock. It's solid, a good foundation to build on. The other is sand, a not-so-good foundation.
- **And what happens to the two houses when the storms come?**
Answer: One stands strong, and one blows away.
- **Now that we're all on the same page, let's go a little deeper here. Jesus actually tells us why the wise man is wise. What did He say?**
Answer: The wise man was wise because he heard Jesus' words and put them into practice.
- **How do we encounter God's Word today?**
Answer: While there are multiple ways to encounter God's Word, the primary way is through reading and interacting with the Bible.
- **So, if we are to be wise like the man Jesus extols in this parable, what does that look like? What is the modern-day equivalent of putting down a strong foundation of God's Word in our life?**
Answers will vary. But lead students to see that our faith in Christ must be an active faith. It must be a faith that goes beyond head-knowledge. We must incorporate our faith into every aspect of our lives. This happens primarily when we study God's teachings and, under the power of the Spirit, seek to and put it to use in our lives. Not just some of the time. . . ALL of the time.

THEN, explain to students that this is one of the more vital aspects of our faith. **Say:**

- **Just like in the parable, life deals us plenty of storms. If we have an active faith that seeks to grow in the knowledge of God, apply God’s ways and teachings in our lives, and seek to become more like Christ, we will ultimately deal with the tough times of life in a godly way. The opposite of this is to deal with it like the man who built his house on a sandy foundation.**

Ask:

- **What is the modern-day equivalent of the person who hears Jesus’ words and doesn’t put them into practice? Describe how that happens?**

Answer: Help students see that this is when we compartmentalize our faith, when we see God as just someone we only engage with on Sundays or maybe Wednesday nights. We see this when we sit through small group time, or a lesson and don’t try to engage with God’s Word. We see it when we go through the motions of reading a verse here or there in our personal devotion time, not really seeking to grow in the knowledge of God and His ways.

FINALLY, close by reminding students of James’ words in James 1:22. **Say:**

- **James urges his readers not to only listen to God’s Word, but to put it to work in their lives. When we hear the Word and don’t do the Word, James says we fool ourselves. We fool ourselves into thinking this watered-down kind of faith is what God expects, when in reality, Jesus desires that we have a rock-solid faith that can weather any storm. This is the kind of faith we should aim for.**

Make sure there aren’t any questions, then transition into the **Last Word**.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students think about how their faith really impacts their day-to-day decisions, thoughts, and attitude.
- **Set-Up:** You’ll benefit from a dry-erase board or something similar where you can make a list where students can see it.

FIRST, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to help them think about how their faith impacts their day-to-day lives. Remind them, to make sure they grasp the point, that the worst way to interact with their faith is to compartmentalize it, to act one way when they have their “faith face” on and another when they don’t. So, explain that the point of this activity is to let them paint a picture of all the places their faith impacts their daily lives.

THEN, inform students that you want them to help you define the different ways faith comes into play in their lives each day. Draw a line down the center of the board.

First, get them to think in terms of categories of people. Ask them to brainstorm the different categories of people they interact with on a daily basis. Write these answers on the left side of the line on the board, with plenty of room to write underneath each category.

Then have them think of some the different ways that their faith comes up in their interactions with these people. (Examples may include how they engage in conversations, specific decisions they have to make, whether or not they develop close relationships with certain people, and so on.)

Next, on the right side of the line, have them list some of the responsibilities they have on a daily or weekly basis, where their faith might come into play. (Examples might include a job, or a sport, or a club, and so on.)

Again, have them brainstorm some ways their commitment to their faith crops up as they go about their responsibilities in these areas. Write their answers down on the board.

NEXT, ask students the following questions:

- **Why is it hard to always stay consistent with our faith in how we live our lives? Why is it tempting to have some areas where our faith doesn't guide us as closely as others?**

Answers will vary.

- **What do you think it takes to make sure you're not compartmentalizing your faith? In other words, what can you do to be more consistent in all areas of your life?**

Answers will vary, but lead them to see it won't happen by accident. It takes awareness, commitment, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

FINALLY, encourage students that this is an area that we all can grow in, but it's one that's important to really focus on. Remind them that people watch their lives to see if God really makes a difference. We don't do God any favors when we live two different lives. Our goal should be to live a strong faith, in any situation, at all times.

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the "Lesson 4" 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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