



## LESSON 1: IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN:** Denying ourselves means our image is to be driven more by who God is and less by who we are.

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED:** To step back and evaluate the image they present to the world and whether it’s focused more on them or on Christ.

**Scripture Focus:** Mark 8:34-38

**Supporting Scripture:** John 3:27-30

**OVERVIEW:** Your teenagers are brand managers. And they are the brand. With every selfie, every Instagram post, every tweet, they shape how they are perceived. For better or worse, they are extremely image conscious. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing. But what does this idea of image control have to do with being a Christ-follower? Good thing Jesus had a ton to say about this. This first lesson will help define what exactly you mean by “image,” and how your students’ conception of image should be tied more to who God is and less of who they are.

## TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Your Image 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 Image Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video,” click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-your-image-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 Mark was written by its namesake. Mark, also known as John Mark, is believed to have received most of his information for his Gospel from Peter’s firsthand accounts.
- **Time frame:** Mark is thought to have written his Gospel in the mid 50’s AD.
- **Purpose:** Mark was writing primarily for a non-Jewish audience. His Gospel explains Jewish customs to non-Jews in an effort to get them to see the big picture of Jesus’ identity.

## THE SETTING

In the chapters preceding Mark 8, Mark regales his audience with a fast-paced account of Jesus’ early ministry. We read about Jesus traveling in and around Galilee, preaching and healing. We read the story of John the Baptist’s death at the hands of Herod. We read about Jesus feeding the 5,000 and the 4,000. We see Jesus walk on water. We see him rebuking the Pharisees, among other things. These few chapters in Mark contain a wealth of rich stories of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Mark 8:34-38 comes immediately after Mark’s account of Peter’s profession of Christ as the Messiah. Jesus’ words in Mark 8:34-38 are connected to Jesus’ rebuke of Peter. Recall, Peter chastised Jesus for predicting His own death. Jesus’ pointed response was a way of reminding Peter that God’s plan took precedence over any human desire.

## THE MAIN POINT

The world is image obsessed. From the star athlete, to the movie star, to the rock star, and even to the politician, we focus more on image and “brand” than we do talent or substance. This mindset has filtered down to our teenagers, who, often without thinking about it, spend a great deal of their days cultivating a brand that will get them ahead--however they define this. The medium, more often than not, is the vast array of social media-driven tools and apps.

The problem is that this image-based culture is at direct odds with a Christ-centered one, where we are supposed to reflect Christ, not project ourselves. Jesus words will challenge your students to think through what they are projecting to the world, and how this conflicts with Jesus’ call to “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”

# 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 get students thinking about image, and how to begin thinking about why and what we project to the world.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to provide the following supplies for this activity: enough Styrofoam cups for every student in your group to have one; 1 big bag of marshmallows per team; two tables (or other flat surface to build a tower of cups on). Before the activity, you'll need to use a permanent marker to write inside of each cup. In each cup, you're going to write a word that has to do with either an image that a teen might project, or an element of an image. You can come up with your own list, but here are a few examples: Athletic ability, popularity, intelligence, possessions, looks, edgy behavior, fan of a team (or a band, etc.), sexuality, and so on. Set up the tables about 10 feet from each other in the room. Put half the cups and a bag of marshmallows on each table

**FIRST**, as students come in, divide them into two groups. Let them know you're going to be playing a game. Then, tell them they will have two minutes to build a wall out of the cups on the table. (They'll notice the writing on the cup, but don't explain what it is yet.)

**THEN**, once the two minutes are up, set up the ground rules. Explain that the goal is to knock down the other team's wall by throwing marshmallows at it. Each team must stay behind their table at all times. They can't do anything to prevent a marshmallow from hitting the wall, like blocking it with their hands. The first team to knock the other wall down wins. (If you want to make the game last a little longer, make teams knock all the cups off the other team's table.) Don't take too long to explain the rules, just run through them real quick and then say, "GO!" (The game should move rather quickly, but it will be wild and crazy. If you want, you can play a couple more times. Just be sure to find ALL the marshmallows!)

When you're done, have the students pick up all the cups and marshmallows. Before they sit down, they're to grab one cup and hold on to it.

**NEXT**, lead the students in a little debrief. **Ask something similar to the following questions:**

- **How strong was the "wall of cups"?**  
*Answer:* Not very! The wall was made of weak material; wasn't strong enough to withstand marshmallows, etc.
- **Obviously, if something as strong as a marshmallow could knock it down, our wall wasn't strong at all. It's all in the material we use. What kind of material would you want to build a wall out of?**  
*Answers will vary*, obviously something strong.

**THEN**, transition into the introduction of what you'll be studying for the next four weeks. **Say something like:**

- **For the next 4 weeks, we're going to be talking about image. Specifically, our own self-image and how it relates to our life as Christ-followers. When I talk about self-image, what comes to mind? (Answers will vary, but try to lead them towards something along the lines of "The picture of ourselves we portray to the world.") Image is not necessarily the same as identity. Identity is who we are at our core. Instead, we're going to be talking about image, that picture we show to the world. (Make sure your students understand this difference. We don't want them thinking that they should become mindless robots or brainwashed. Instead, this is about getting rid of an image, a projection, that doesn't take Christ into the equation.)**

**NEXT**, instruct everyone to take a look at the inside of their cups now, if they haven't already. Explain to your students that the words written inside each of the cups represent images that teens like to present to the world. Have students take a moment to think about and answer the following questions about that image:

- **What is the image in your cup?**
- **What would someone do who wanted to project this image to the world?**

**Answers will vary**, but you want to show them that these images, these things people hold onto as so important, won't last. Athletic ability is one injury away from nothingness. Possessions break or are replaced by something shinier six months down the road. Looks fade, and so on.

**FINALLY**, transition to the Main Event by explaining to your students that everyone projects an image, whether we are conscious of it or not. **Say something like:**

- **We have our “brand” that we show the world so that people view us a certain way, one that is beneficial to us. Think about what you choose to share on social media. Most of the time you only share things that put you in a certain well-controlled, positive light. Few people tweet about their failures, their shortcomings, how they hurt people, and so on. We all project an image to the world. One that puts a tremendous focus on us. But starting in this lesson, we’re going to take a look at what Jesus has to say about what we’re supposed to be projecting to the world.**

## THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that “denying ourselves” means our image is to be driven more by who God is and less by who we are.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

**FIRST**, begin by explaining to students that you're going to look at someone who could have been pretty image-driven in his own right. Explain that he was a super-popular guy. He was even called, by Jesus, the greatest human ever to be born! He had crowds following him. Explain that in some circles, he had a bad-boy image with crazy clothes. **Ask:**

- **Can anyone guess whom we're talking about?**

**Answer:** John the Baptist.

**THEN**, instruct students to go to John 3:27-30. While they're finding it, explain a little about the Gospel of John and who John the Baptist was. (He was Jesus' cousin. His birth was announced by angels. He preached repentance and baptized countless individuals, including Jesus.) Then, read or have a student read John 3:27-30. **Ask:**

- **What do you think John meant when he said, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven”?**

**Answer:** His job was to prepare the way for Jesus. His whole image was about the mission God had given him to do.

- **In verse 30, John said about Jesus, “He must become greater; I must become less.” Why did John say that?**

**Answer:** If John held on to his position, his image, he would have both interfered with Jesus' ministry and damaged his own.

- **How hard do you think it was for John to give up his popularity and position to make way for Jesus? Would you be able to do the same thing in his shoes?**

**Answers will vary.**

**Say something like:**

- **As great as John was and as important as his mission was, it could not compare to what Jesus was going to do. John knew that the image he ultimately wanted to project was an image where Christ was at the center, not himself. What about us? We can hold on to our image, and get in the way of what God is doing in us, or we can get out of the way and let our image be one that reflects Christ. Let's see what this looks like.**

**NEXT**, instruct students to turn to Mark 8:34-38. While they're finding the passage, use the Bible Background to explain the setting of the verses. When students have located the passage, read or have a student read the verses. Then, instruct students to focus on verse 34. Lead them in the following discussion. **Ask:**

- **When people ask what it means to be a Christian, you hear a lot of different answers. But Jesus lays it out clearly in verse 34. What three things does Jesus say a person must do if they want to be His disciple?**

**Answer:** Deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him.

- **What does it mean to you to deny yourself and follow Jesus? And what might this have to do with the image you portray to the world?**

**Answer:** This is a very deep question, and your students might struggle with this. Help them find the right answer, but don't give it to them. Help students to see that in the course of your discussion of image, denying themselves means to think less of projecting themselves to the world and more of using their lives to project Christ.

**NEXT**, have students look back at verses 35 and 36. **Ask:**

- **Jesus almost gives us a riddle: "Whoever wants to save his or her life will lose it, but whoever loses his or her life for Me and for the Gospel will save it." Relating this to the picture we project to the world, how can someone lose their life by saving it? On the flip side, how does someone save their life by losing it, especially when we think about our image?**

**Answer:** When people try to hold on tightly to how they craft their image, be it popularity or athletic ability or whatever, they will eventually find that this focus on themselves draws their focus off Christ. In a sense, they waste the influence they have. But when they give up constantly projecting a self-driven image for the sake of a Christ-driven one, it's a sign that they have given over their lives to Christ.

- **Along the same lines, Jesus asks a rhetorical question in verse 36. So, what's the answer? What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?**

**Answers will vary.**

- **Then why do people try to gain the whole world, all the while losing their soul? Why do we want to hold on so tightly to ourselves and our image that we would fail to focus on Christ?**

**Answers will vary.**

**FINALLY**, explain to the students that living the life of a Christ-follower is not about the image we project to the world. It's not about the half-true, self-focused, heavily cultivated picture we paint through social media and our daily interactions with others. Living as a Christ-follower means that we think of our image in terms of what it can do to reflect Christ and grow His Kingdom. **Say something like:**

- **When it comes to how we project our image to the world, this is what it means to deny ourselves.**

**Our world is all about “self.” We build walls around who we really are, and we project what we think the world wants to see. Jesus turns everything upside down. He tells us to give up pursuing our own agenda, embrace Him, and then follow Him. You can’t project a self-driven image and reflect Christ at the same time.**

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

## THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students evaluate the image they present to the world and whether it’s focused more on them or on Christ.
- **Set-Up:** Go to YouTube and search for “I Am Second” videos. Choose one that you think would resonate with your students. Arrange to show the video, or a clip of the video, to your group.

**FIRST**, explain to students that as you wrap up your lesson, you want them to realize what this looks like in real life. Explain that you want to show them an example of someone who previously held tight to his or her image, but at some point discovered what John meant when he said, “He must become greater; I must become less”

**THEN**, show the video. Once it is over, have students reflect on the video by **asking something similar to the following:**

- **What image was this person projecting before they committed to using his or her life as a credit to Christ?**
- **Remember what Jesus said about saving our lives versus losing them? How did this realization lead to this person saving his or her life by losing it?**
- **How did he or she turn things around? How did he or she change?**

**NEXT**, have students take a few minutes to reflect on their own lives. Ask them to consider what they post on social media; how they interact with friends, parents, and other adults; how they think about themselves. Ask the following questions to help them evaluate the image they project:

- **What image are you projecting to the world?**
- **Are you projecting an image that is more you-centered or Jesus-centered?**
- **What do you think motivates you to focus so intently on shaping and projecting the image that you do?**
- **What’s keeping you from using your life to put Jesus forward instead of you yourself?**

Allow students time to answer these questions, or have them consider them silently depending on the openness of your group. Be prepared to talk about your own struggles in this area.

**FINALLY**, close by **saying something like the following:**

- **Our image, that person we project to the world, might seem strong and powerful. But it’s just like the Styrofoam cups we made the wall out of earlier. Our self-driven image is pretty weak and empty, and ultimately it will let us down. But when we give this up, and allow Jesus to become greater in our lives, we find who we truly were meant to be.**

If no one has any questions or observations, close in prayer.

- Don’t forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you’re printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you’re texting a link, posting them on Social Media, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...

*Do you have questions about a lesson?*

*Something that worked particularly well you want to share?*

*Something that didn't work you want to bring up?*

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at [feedback@yothministry360.com](mailto:feedback@yothministry360.com).