

JESUS AND CULTURE

LESSON 2: Different Then The Rest

What we want students to learn: That Jesus wants His followers to be countercultural in their humility, living in the world as servants of others.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To identify any actions or attitudes in their lives that represent seeking culture's definition of success through selfishness, and to commit to embracing Jesus' idea of success through serving others.

Scripture Focus: Mark 10:35-45

Supporting Scripture: Ephesians 4:2

Overview: The culture most of our students engage with is one of full-fledged "me-ism." This generation of teenagers has been called "Generation Me" for a reason. They're the "selfie" generation. And though adults shoulder our share of the blame for enabling and allowing much of this behavior (even oftentimes mimicking it!), the truth remains: culture sends quite loudly the message that our own interests trump the interests of others. To get ahead is to self promote. Image is everything. Teenagers are their own brand. And getting ahead often means putting others well behind themselves. The only problem is that this is the opposite of how Jesus urges His followers to interact with the world. In this lesson, your students will hear what Jesus had to say about humility and service, and how these attributes are to be hallmarks of the Christ-follower's engagement with the culture.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The *Jesus And Culture* 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 Culture* Lesson 2 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-culture-teacher-prep>

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives 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.

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THE SETTING

This passage comes in the heart of Jesus' public ministry. He has already called and sent the 12. John the Baptist has already been murdered. Jesus has already fed the 4,000 and the 5,000, walked on water, performed many healings and miracles, and maybe most notably, has already experienced His transfiguration. All this to say, Jesus' identity and mission were becoming more and more clear to His followers and enemies alike.

The immediate setting of this passage finds Jesus doing what He so often did: traveling through ancient Palestine, teaching and healing as He went. Mark 10 is a long passage that contains many of Jesus' teachings. The encounter with James and John falls right into line with the theme of the rest of the chapter.

THE MAIN POINT

Jesus makes a point here that was countercultural in His time. It is equally, if not more, countercultural today. Jesus is talking to His disciples about two contrasts: the world's definition of greatness versus God's definition of greatness. Then, as now, our culture defines greatness as arriving at the top. Great people excel. They rise. And this is often done through a me-centered, self-focused ambition. While the resulting success may not always be a negative thing, the process to get there is often in contrast to God's definition of greatness.

Greatness in God's Kingdom is defined by humility and service. To be first is to be last. Jesus makes this clear. And as you help students think about their interactions in and with the world, this teaching is radically countercultural. If students adapt this mindset, if they can grow into this area of Christ-likeness, they will have a powerful effect on culture, simply because of how unique this characteristic is. The goal is to live as Christ commands so that they draw others to God. Humble, sacrificial service of their peers is a powerful way to make this happen.

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 how culture values talent and success.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to access the "Lesson 2 Lead In Activity Sheet" contained in your Lesson 2 folder and arrange to display the images in the medium of your choice.

FIRST, explain to students that you're going to be having a discussion around the concept of what makes someone successful.

THEN, using the "Lesson 2 Lead In Activity" sheet, display the first image of the female business person. Instruct them to imagine that this is a picture of the CEO of a large, traditional company. Maybe it's some type of health insurance, or retail company. Lead students in a discussion to brainstorm what qualities they think this person should have to be a successful leader of her company. Consider asking questions like:

- **What would be the three most important qualities this individual would need to be successful in running her business?**
- **What skills would she need?**
- **What would you imagine her personality might be like?**
- **How would you imagine her leadership style to be?**

NEXT, after you've had a chance to flesh out what qualities students think might make this CEO successful,

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show the second picture from the activity sheet, the young, trendy looking male. Instruct students to imagine this man is the CEO of a technology start-up company. They might be a company that makes apps, or something similar. Ask them something like the following:

- **What about this guy? Are there different qualities that he might need to run his business?**
- **Or do you think the qualities and skills he would need to be successful would generally be the same?**

FINALLY, remind students that you're in the middle of a four-lesson look at what Jesus had to say about how we are to interact with our culture. Explain that in today's lesson you'll look at what Jesus had to say about one of the main qualities needed to be "successful" in this world. Transition to the Main Event by saying something like:

- **We listed quite a few qualities. And you answered more or less in the way we might expect to answer them if we were answering from the world's perspective. But (unless your group is really sharp and actually listed the quality of "servanthood" or "humility") the one quality Jesus mentioned is one we didn't list in our little opening activity. Let's jump in and take a closer look at exactly what Jesus said.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that Jesus wants His followers to be countercultural in their humility, living in the world as servants of others.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, take a moment and see if anyone can recall any aspects of engaging with culture as a Christ-follower that you talked about last lesson. Use the following bullet points to help remind students.

- **Following Christ faithfully means oftentimes we won't fit in with the rest of the world around us.**
- **That we are called by Jesus to be in the world, but to live as if we were separate.**
- **That it's helpful to honestly evaluate our relationship with culture, and who our choices say we more strongly identify with: Christ or the world.**

THEN, explain that you're going to start today's look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking in the Gospel of Mark. Instruct students to turn to Mark 10. 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 Mark 10:35-45. When you have finished reading the passage, explain to students that you're going to jump back in and discuss this passage a few verses at a time. Start by looking at verse 35 and 36. Ask something similar to the following:

- **So, out of the gate, do you remember anything about James and John? Who were they?**
 - Answers will vary. Remind them that James and John were brothers who, along with Peter, made up Jesus' inner circle of disciples. This is the same John that wrote the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3, John, and Revelation.
- **Does anything jump out at you about the question James and John asked?**
 - Answer: Even though Jesus had an especially close relationship with James and John, this is a pretty forward question to be asking. While we probably can't read too much into it, it does leave room to wonder if at this point, they truly understood who Jesus was.

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THEN, have students look back at verses 37 and 38. Ask something like:

- **While you may not know exactly what they were asking because of the differences in ancient Jewish culture and our culture today, you can probably guess the meaning of what they were asking Jesus. What do you think they meant?**
 - o Answer: Help students see that James and John were asking for the two places of highest honor when Jesus came into His kingdom. It would be similar to sitting with a king next to his throne. Many Jews expected the Messiah to be a political or military ruler. So the brothers may have very well been asking to be co-rulers with Jesus in His kingdom.
- **What is your initial reaction to this question? How does it make you feel?**
 - o Answers will vary. Some students might feel it sheds a negative light on James and John, others might feel it's a reasonable question to ask.
- **What does it say about how the brothers viewed themselves?**
 - o Answers will vary. But the brothers obviously felt that they were at least somewhat moderately deserving of this honor. Based on their relationship with Jesus, they may not have seen this as unreasonable as we see it today.
- **How about Jesus' response to them? Do you understand what He was saying?**
 - o Answer: Jesus knew what was coming. He knew that His rule would not be as a military or political leader, but as a suffering servant, allowing Himself to be murdered for the sake of all humanity. Jesus knew this. James and John did not. Jesus knew they could not handle the "cup" of suffering He would soon be drinking from.

NEXT, ask if students have any questions or anything to add. Then, move on to verses 42-44. Consider re-reading them aloud. Then, ask students questions similar to the following:

- **Summarize what Jesus is saying in verse 42. What contrast is He making?**
 - o Answer: Jesus is contrasting the way that Gentiles rule, or exert their authority, verses the way God's children should rule. This is a really good parallel as we consider how we should interact with culture. The Gentiles represented "the world."
- **Verses 43-44 get to the heart of the matter. What does Jesus say should be the quality His followers should be recognized for as they engage with the world?**
 - o Answer: Servanthood. We are to serve others, putting their needs before our own.
- **Let's make this super practical: What are some ways in your life that you can put this to practice? After all, you're not literally going to become a slave to someone, right? How do you apply this truth to your life today?**
 - o Answer: Being a servant in the 21st century world of a teenager simply means putting other's interests above their own. It means looking first what they can do for someone else, not what they can do for themselves. It's all about humility and compassion.
- **What has to happen before you can put someone else's needs above your own?**
 - o Answers will vary. But help students see that they first have to acknowledge the needs of others. They have to actually be looking for how other people are hurting or what they need, and then have to follow through to do something about it.
- **Why is this so hard to do in our culture?**
 - o Answer: So much about our culture is geared toward "self." It's a me-first world we live in. Having the Kingdom value of selfless servanthood is highly countercultural.
- **So, what effect would you truly demonstrating Christ-like humility to those around you have on your culture?**
 - o Answers will vary. But help students see that this type of lifestyle is so countercultural it will have an immediate and positive impact on those they serve.

FINALLY, read the last verse in the passage, verse 45 aloud. After doing so, ask a student to turn to Ephesians 4:2 and read the verse aloud. Then, begin to transition to the Last Word by saying something like:

- **These words from Paul shed some light on the motivation behind seeking to identify with Christ through serving others. What does Paul say is the key? Our service and compassion come from**

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loving others. Again, this is pretty opposite of the way the world can often communicate how we're supposed to get by. But as Christ-followers, we are to look for how we can serve others because of the love, in Christ, we have for them.

Make sure students don't have anything to add or any questions, then move to the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students identify any actions or attitudes in their lives that represent seeking culture's definition of success through selfishness, and to commit to embracing Jesus' idea of success through serving others.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to print the "Lesson 2 Last Word Activity Sheet" available in your Lesson 2 folder. Each page contains 4 ladder icons. You'll want to cut the ladders out and print enough copies for each of your students to have their own ladder. You'll need to provide something for each student to write with as well.

FIRST, explain that similar to last lesson, the idea here is to step back and evaluate their actions and attitudes as it pertains to how they've been seeking "success" in certain areas of their life. While you're passing out the "ladder cards" to each student, instruct students to think of one or two areas in their lives where they would say that they spend a great deal of time and energy trying to excel. This could be something like academics, sports, band, an after school job, a club or organization, even certain relationships. Have students visualize a few of the things they are involved in that fit this bill.

THEN, instruct them to look at the ladder they see on their card. Say something like:

- **Often in our world we use the metaphor of a ladder to talk about success. We "climb the ladder" in business, or on a team, going from the bottom to the top. That's the goal anyway. And while there is nothing wrong with wanting to excel and achieve competence in school, or sports, or any other pursuit, it's important to ask how we're going about it. Today, we're going to do that.**

NEXT, explain to students that you're going to read off a list of statements. The statements will describe how we can sometimes seek to get ahead by looking out for ourselves rather than looking out for others. For each statement you read that a student would admit describes his or her actions in the past, have them color in a step of the ladder, starting with the first one.

Read the following list of statements aloud:

- **When I have finished ahead of others, I made them feel badly about it.**
- **I sometimes hold back information that would help a teammate or friend because I want to have an advantage over them.**
- **I sometimes struggle with pride because of my success in a given area.**
- **I can work so hard at something that I can neglect family and friends.**
- **I would rather not work in groups because I want the credit I deserve.**
- **I have resisted helping someone whom I knew needed it because I worried it would give them an advantage, or lessen my advantage.**
- **I am motivated more by finishing ahead of others than I am by simply giving it my best.**
- **I have sometimes had to apologize after a competition because of the way I treated people during it.**

THEN, when you've finished, ask how this exercise felt. Ask if anyone's ladder presented a bit of a wake-up call for how their actions and attitude have been lately. Remind students that this exercise has nothing to do about shaming them, or pointing out their flaws. The goal is for them to grow in their faith, becoming more like Christ in how they interact with the world. To do this can sometimes be uncomfortable. But it's 100% worth it every time.

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FINALLY, encourage students that this activity was simply intended to help them shed light on their actions and attitudes. Challenge them to use this time to commit to embracing Jesus' call to serve others. Close by saying something like:

- **It's not easy. And it won't happen overnight. But accepting Jesus' call to engage with your culture as someone who humbly serves others is a must for anyone who follows Christ. It's such a powerful statement to the world about who you are and where your priorities lie. Remember as you go throughout the week to look for opportunities to serve others. These acts can be big or small. Either way, it will have a major impact on those you serve.**

Make sure there are no closing thoughts and then 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 Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

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.