

# JESUS AND CULTURE

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## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

**What we want students to learn:** That as Christ-followers committed to the Gospel, they must be willing to bravely impact culture, especially those who the world has cast aside as having little or no value.

**What we want students to do with what they've learned:** To identify the “outcasts” in their world who are most in need of Christ, and to commit to engaging with them with the purpose of sharing the Gospel.

**Scripture Focus:** Matthew 9:9-13

**Supporting Scripture:** James 1:27

**Overview:** As we think about students' influence in culture, there are a few traps they can fall into that prevent them from truly making an impact. One of these traps is to steer clear of people who because of their lifestyle, or socio-economic status, or any other number of variables, have been marginalized by the misplaced values of the world. Yet, Jesus expects His followers to engage the spiritually needy, the outcasts, and the lost in the hopes of bringing them to Him. This lesson will challenge your students to do just that. Through looking at Jesus' example, students will see that they are called to impact their world, especially as it pertains to those in most need of the compassion and salvation Jesus offers.

## 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 3 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:** 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.

# JESUS AND CULTURE

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## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

### THE SETTING

In this point of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is in the early part of His earthly ministry. He is just a chapter or so removed from the Sermon on the Mount. And in the passages surrounding this passage, Matthew is showing us a mix of Jesus' early miracles, teachings, and healings. In the midst of this, we get to watch as Jesus calls a disciple and gives us an inside look at who and what God values.

### THE MAIN POINT

The main point we want students to grasp here is whom Jesus was interacting with in the persons of Matthew and Matthew's peers. Matthew was a tax collector and the Jews despised tax collectors. Keep in mind the Romans had occupied the region that includes what is now present-day Israel. In the regions of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, many tax collectors would have been Jews who took up taxes on behalf of the Roman government, almost always taking extra to pad their own pockets. They were largely viewed as the lowest form of traitors and were despised by their fellow Jews.

This is why Jesus' calling of Matthew as a disciple is profound. Not only did Jesus show kindness to Matthew, He made the man one of His students and closest companions. Furthermore, in the scene you'll witness in this lesson, Jesus made it a point to openly interact with Matthew's peers, described as other tax collectors and "sinners." The religious elite couldn't believe Jesus was doing this. But Jesus promptly set them in their place, informing them that these were exactly the kind of people He came to save.

This lesson will help students follow Jesus' example of seeking out those who need Him the most, especially those whom culture says have little value.

### 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 what it means to seek out those who most need to feel God's love.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to read the narrative listed below of the story of a remarkable teenager, Zach Bonner. If you choose to supplement your narrative of Zach Bonner's story with the movie trailer available on YouTube, you can do so by clicking this link:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY3rh\\_TIWYM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY3rh_TIWYM).

(You'll want to make sure you have the means to show the video to your students.)

Additionally, if you want to show a picture of Zach, you can go to:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zach\\_Bonner\\_head\\_shot\\_2008.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zach_Bonner_head_shot_2008.jpg).

**FIRST**, explain to your students that you're going to share with them the story of a teenager who started doing remarkable things when he was only a small boy. Using the text below, share the story of Zach Bonner. Read the following aloud:

- **Zach Bonner was like a lot of six-year-olds. He knew that the hurricane approaching his city, Hurricane Charley, would cause lots of damage. But, unlike other kids his age, when the hurricane had passed through, Zach actually did something to help those affected by the storm. Taking his little red wagon, Zach went door-to-door and collected water bottles for those who had no drinking water due to the storm. He collected a lot of water bottles. 27 truck loads full! And that was the start of what has so far been an amazing commitment to helping others.**

# JESUS AND CULTURE

## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

Between his escapades at age 6 and today, the now 17-year-old teamed up with a non-profit and provided 10,000 backpacks full of goods for homeless children, organized Christmas presents for Hurricane Katrina victims, routinely hosted parties for people living in homeless shelters, launched a campaign to end childhood homelessness that included walking across the country and walking from Florida to the White House, has received dozens of awards including the Presidential Service Award, and spoke at countless seminars and conferences across the country. Needless to say, Zach Bonner has devoted his life to making an impact, almost exclusively with the poor and the needy in our society.

Bonner wants to go to Law school so he can continue his fight for the homeless people of our country, especially homeless children.

**NEXT**, when you've finished, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask something like:

- **In your opinion, what makes stories like Zach's so special?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **Have you ever been a part of an organization or a ministry that helped those suffering from poverty? What was it like? How did it make you feel?**
  - Answers will vary.
- **Have you ever felt an urge to play a role in helping others but didn't know exactly how to start? How can Zach's example be an encouragement to you?**
  - Answers will vary.

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

- **Zach's story is meaningful on several levels. But one thing that makes it particularly special is that he focuses almost all of his efforts on helping those who are affected by poverty and homelessness. In essence, Zach helps those who need help the most. Zach's story serves as a perfect introduction for this lesson. As we continue our look at what Jesus had to say about how we engage with culture, in today's lesson we'll see that Jesus picked the most unlikely people to invest in. We can learn from His example. Let's take a closer look.**

## THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that as Christ-followers committed to the Gospel, they must be willing to bravely impact culture, especially those who the world has cast aside as having little or no value.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

**FIRST**, take a moment and see if anyone can recall what you've covered in the first two lessons in this series. Use the following bullet points to help guide your review.

- **Following Christ faithfully means oftentimes we won't fit in with the rest of the world around us.**
- **We are called by Jesus to be in the world, but to live as if we were separate.**
- **That Jesus wants us to be countercultural in our humility, living in the world as servants of others.**

**THEN**, explain that you're going to kick off your time of Bible study 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 9:9-13. When you have finished, explain to students that you are going to go back through the passage and discuss the verses in greater detail. Lead students in the following discussion. Ask something like:

# JESUS AND CULTURE

## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

- **Before we dig in, let's take a big picture look at this account. Who did Jesus call to be His disciple? (Matthew) And who is the author of this Gospel? (Matthew) So, what observations might we make about this particular story?**
  - Answers will vary. Lead students to consider that this must be a very personal story for Matthew. This was more or less the story of a huge identity shift. It had to be a very meaningful, and humbling story to include in his Gospel.

**THEN,** direct students' attention to verse 9. Ask:

- **Do any of you ever remember hearing about the tax collectors in Jesus' time? What do you know about them?**
  - Answer: Their fellow countrymen despised them because they took up taxes for the occupying Roman government. They were seen as major traitors to other Jews.
- **Describe in your own words how you feel about Jesus' disciples, Peter, John, James, the whole gang . . . What thoughts or emotions come to mind when you think about these guys?**
  - Answers will vary. Some students might choose to talk about their humble origins. But lead students to see that the disciples were a remarkable group of men. They turned out to be the fathers of the early Church. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, along with the Apostle Paul, they were largely responsible for the spread of Christianity.
- **So, it's safe to say that the disciples were a pretty select group of guys. Why would it have been so surprising for Jesus to choose Matthew, the tax collector?**
  - Answer: If you were looking for a qualified student, none of the disciples would have really been high on your list. But, of all of them, Matthew may have been the most unlikely.

**NEXT,** direct students' attention to verses 10 and 11. Ask something like:

- **What do we see happening here that would confirm what we just said about what an unlikely disciple Matthew was?**
  - Answer: The Pharisees couldn't believe Jesus would associate with tax collectors and "sinners."
- **What is the great irony about the Pharisees turning their noses up at the "sinners" Jesus was interacting with?**
  - Answer: First, the Pharisees were sinners as well. As the Jewish religious leaders, they should know better than anyone that all people are sinners. But they made it a habit to be judgmental of their society's outcasts. Second, they should know that God's mission was to draw people to Him, and to see them live according to His ways. Instead of playing a part in this, they turned their back on those who weren't following God.
- **Jesus pretty much puts the Pharisees in their places in verses 12 and 13. Summarize what Jesus said here.**
  - Answers will vary. Lead students to see that Jesus sought out those who most needed Him, not those who thought they were above needing a Savior. Jesus gave the Pharisees chance after chance to truly hear His message and follow Him. Some more than likely did. But time after time, they ignored His message. Jesus often found listening ears in those who most vividly recognized their need for Him.

**THEN,** transition into the last part of your Bible study time by leading students in a brief discussion where you concentrate on beginning to consider how to apply this passage in their lives today. Ask something like the following:

- **Jesus modeled for us how we are to view the kind of people the word has wrongly said have little or no value. Describe in your own words the value Jesus places on these kinds of people.**
  - Answer: Jesus made it clear that the lost, the needy, and the outcast were the aim of His mission in this world.
- **Our culture often overlooks those who are the most needy. If you follow Jesus' example, how might you find yourself going against culture's values and embracing God's values?**
  - Answer: Jesus showed that we are to seek out those most in need of God's love and show

# JESUS AND CULTURE

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## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

them the love of Christ, whatever that may look like in any given context. If we do this, we'll find ourselves in places that may be uncomfortable, but places where we are most needed.

**NEXT**, read or have a student read James 1:27. When the passage has been read, explain that James was actually one of Jesus' brothers and was the leader of the church in Jerusalem in the years after Jesus' death. Remind your students that in James' time, widows and orphans were the most helpless members of society, except for maybe the diseased or the disabled. They relied totally on the generosity of others for their day-to-day living. Ask:

- **In your own words, how does what James wrote support what Jesus was saying in Matthew 9?**
  - o Answer: James understood the countercultural call to seek out those who most needed Christian compassion.
- **Why do think James mentioned being polluted by the world in the same sentence as taking care of the widows and orphans? (Hint: In other words, how might the world influence a person in a negative way as it pertains to the needy?)**
  - o Answer: Explain to students that this is exactly what had happened to the Pharisees Jesus addresses in Matthew 9. They had become polluted by the world's definition of who was valuable and who wasn't. They had stopped caring for the outcasts, choosing instead to see them as undesirables far away from God's love.

**FINALLY**, wrap up your time in Bible study by saying something similar to the following:

- **God loves and values all people, from the richest to the poorest. But Scripture is clear: God hears the cries of the poor, the needy, and the outcast. Over and over again in the Bible, we see God urging His people to care for those who are most needy. As a Christ-follower, we can be confident that Jesus expects us to go against the values our culture holds about who is valuable, and to seek out those who are the least valuable in the world's eyes. God has chosen us to be His hands and feet to the needy in this world. The question is whether or not we'll obey His calling.**

Make sure students don't have any questions and then transition into the Last Word.

## THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students identify the "outcasts" in their world who are most in need of Christ, and to commit to engaging with them with the purpose of sharing the Gospel.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry-erase board or some other means of drawing a simple diagram and recording students' responses.

**FIRST**, explain to students that you are going to do a closing activity where you begin to visualize the people in their world who are like the tax collectors, those people whom the world would say are "outcasts," but whom God would see as worthy of His love like anyone else. You're going to do this by drawing two circles, one larger circle and a smaller circle inside of it. Explain to students that the larger circle represents your community, and the smaller circle represents their school.

**NEXT**, work with students to brainstorm those people in your community who culture says are outcasts. Be as specific as possible while still being compassionate and respectful. (For example, it's easy to simply write "the homeless," and be done with it. Of course, those who are homeless are as valuable in God's eyes as anyone. But a more specific answer might also include a community of displaced refugees, or even immigrants or migrant workers. Again, you know your community. Guide students to paint an accurate picture here of the those who find themselves on the fringes of your community.)

**THEN**, when you have finished here, delicately guide students to consider people in their schools that the world would consider the "outcasts." (Again, this is definitely supposed to be done on a "category" level.

# JESUS AND CULTURE

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## LESSON 3: Making An Impact

Answers might include students from lower income families, students who struggle with addiction or mental illness, and so on. It's VERY important to make sure you're not saying that YOU place little value on these people, or that you are in any way choosing to see these people as outcasts. (You simply echoing what the world has said about these individuals.) You know your group best; if they are not mature enough to talk about this out loud without disparaging certain groups of people, or naming individuals, have students silently contemplate these individuals.

**NEXT**, carve out space to remind students that the world has wrongly looked at these people much like the Pharisees looked at the tax collectors. Looking through the lens of what culture says is valuable, the world has pushed these people to the fringes. But as Christ-followers, encourage your students that they are to be the ones who seek out these people and show them the love of God. Close by saying something like:

- **This week, I want to challenge you to identify someone in your school who is valuable to God but whom the world has cast off to the side. If you look, you'll find these people. I want to challenge you to follow Jesus' example and make it a point to reach out to these people. If it's a small interaction at first, that's fine. In fact it's awesome. But I want to challenge you to go above and beyond that. I want to challenge you to build to the point where you form a relationship with these people, showing them the love you and Christ has for them. Are you brave enough to accept this challenge?**

**FINALLY**, make it a point to follow up with students mid-week. The second of the three devotions that support this lesson will also be a reminder to students to follow up on this. Encourage students to act on what they learned today and follow through with applying this truth to their lives.

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](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).