

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 4/Work to Do

What we want students to learn: That their identity as Christ-followers means they are Jesus' answer to bringing the message of the Gospel to the hurting and the lost.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To commit to being more invested in being messengers of the Gospel to those who most need it.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 9:35-38

Overview: Part of being a Christ-follower is realizing that we are God's vehicle for sharing the Gospel message with the world. The Church (which means you and your students) are Jesus' Plan A, which, when you think about it, is an awesome responsibility. As a Christ-follower, part of your students' identity is to share the Gospel in their actions and in their words. And yet, this is a great challenge for so many of our students. While there are many factors that contribute to this, there is one that seems to be most overlooked: compassion. Jesus didn't share the message of the Kingdom or heal people out of obligation. He did so out of compassion. He was heartbroken at the people's predicament. Part of our students' identity as Christ-followers is developing the compassion of Christ, and acting on it to see people come to know Jesus. This lesson will challenge them to do just that.

Teacher Prep Video

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

• <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-identity-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.

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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 a personal glimpse of an observation Jesus shares with His disciples.

The Main Point

The main point in this lesson is to focus on two aspects of Jesus' remarks to His disciples: the compassion He had for the lost, and His recognition of the Gospel as the solution to their predicament. This lesson will attempt to help your students focus on compassion for the lost as much as you'll focus on the expectation that they will share their faith. Sharing their faith out of obligation is a dead-end. Our sin nature will always keep us from following through. Sharing their faith out of a recognition of the fate that awaits those who are separated from Christ is a much more compelling motivator. This lesson will challenge students to embrace this dual aspect of their identity.

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 communicating a message.
- **Set-Up:** None needed

FIRST, explain to your students that you're going to play a little trivia game about their text messaging habits. Explain that you're going to use statistics from research that shows just how much teenagers LOVE to text. Inform students that this game will be played a little differently than most trivia games. Explain that for each question, there will be two possible answers. You'll read the question, then you'll read both answers. You'll then ask for students who believe Answer 1 is the correct answer to sit down, while those who think Answer 2 is the correct answer to remain standing. Once everyone has made his or her choice, you'll reveal the correct answer.

NEXT, begin the trivia quiz by asking the first question (the correct answer in each couplet is underlined). Ask:

- **Based on research, how many text messages does the average teenager send each day?**
 - o Answer 1: 40-50 messages per day
 - o Answer 2: 60 or more messages a day

Before revealing the answer, ask students who think Answer 1 is correct to sit down. Once students have chosen, reveal that the correct answer was Answer 2. Instruct all students to stand back up and repeat this process for the remainder of the questions.

- **How many texts does the average teenager receive each month?**
 - o Answer 1: Around 1,800
 - o Answer 2: Around 2,500

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- **The average teenager sends _____ times as many text messages as the average 55 year old.**
 - o Answer 1: Almost 10
 - o Answer 2: Almost 30
- **When was the first text message sent?**
 - o Answer 1: 1999
 - o Answer 2: 1992
- **How many text messages are sent each year in the US?**
 - o Answer 1: 2.2 Billion
 - o Answer 2: 2.2 Trillion

THEN, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **Why do you think text messages are so popular as a form of communication among young people?**
- **How many texts do you think you send on an average day?**
- **Who would be the most surprising person you've ever texted with?**
- **What are the drawbacks of text messages?**

FINALLY, transition into the Main Event by saying something similar to the following:

- **As a culture, we've perfected the art of the message. We text while we're walking, while we're eating, while we're watching TV, and just about any other scenario you can imagine. We're really awesome at sending messages. But, there's a very specific message that many of us haven't quite mastered yet, even though it's at the heart of our identity in Christ. Let's hear what Jesus had to say about it.**

Sources:

- <http://live.wsj.com/video/digits-teen-texting-study-offers-surprising-stats/07342DF9-815A-4534-A213-39434C989374.html>
- <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/03/tech/mobile/sms-text-message-20/>
- <http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-number-of-texts-sent-2013-3>

The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that their identity as Christ-followers means they are Jesus' answer to bringing the message of the Gospel to the hurting and the lost.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, explain that this is the last lesson in the four-week look at identity. As you've done in the past few lessons, take some time to review what you've covered up to this point. Use the following bullet points as a guide:

- **Lesson 1: Jesus called us to be salt and light in the world, pointing people toward God.**
- **Lesson 2: To be great in God's eyes you must humbly serve others, putting their needs above your own.**
- **Lesson 3: To live a fruitful life on mission for God, we must stay connected to Him, like a branch connects to a vine.**

Ask if this has been a meaningful study to students, and if they have learned anything new about their identity, or if they have been challenged to change the way they live their day-to-day lives.

THEN, when you've finished, explain that you're going to start today's look at what Jesus had to say about

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our identity by looking 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 9:35-38. Then, lead students in a short discussion. Ask something similar to the following:

- **In verse 35, we see a pretty good picture of what Jesus' mission on earth was all about. What do we see Jesus doing?**
 - o Answer: teaching in the synagogues; preaching the good news of the Kingdom; healing every disease and sickness.
- **Put yourself in the place of Jesus' original audience. What do these actions say about Jesus' identity? Why?**
 - o Answer: These things speak to Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Why? Because no one but the Son of God could do these things. Jesus' teachings and healings speak to His authority.
- **Now look at verse 36. Who does Jesus have compassion on?**
 - o Answer: The crowds.
- **Let's think about this for a second: Why were there crowds always following Jesus?**
 - o Answer: Help students see that there were a few reasons for the crowds that gathered around Jesus, some right and some wrong. Some people believed in Jesus and came to Him for healing or teaching. Others were more interested in the spectacle, almost coming at it from an entertainment perspective where they could see something they'd never seen. And still others, such as the Pharisees, believed Jesus was an imposter, or were at least threatened by the true message of grace and humility He preached.
- **So, when Jesus said that He had compassion on these people, it's pretty cool to think that He would have had compassion on people who were both supportive of Him and His mission, and those who were against it. What does this say to us today about whom we should show compassion to?**
 - o Answer: Not just those who are our friends, or who are like us. We should show compassion to all people, regardless of how easy or hard it is.
- **Why did Matthew give as the reason for the compassion Jesus had on them?**
 - o Answer: They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Explain to students that Jesus was probably speaking to the current state of religious leadership under whom the people lived. The leading religious establishment, particularly the Pharisees and Sadducees, had turned the goodness of God's Law into a burdensome, restrictive, cold set of rules to be followed. Jesus saw that in this environment, the people had been robbed of most of the joy of a relationship with God. Part of Jesus' mission was to change this.

THEN, make sure students are good with the discussion so far before driving home the key point of the passage. Instruct students to focus on verse 37 and 38. Ask them something similar to the following:

- **As we mentioned last lesson, Jesus spoke in terms His audience could understand. What word-picture is Jesus using here, and what does it mean?**
 - o Answer: Jesus is playing on the idea of harvesting a ripe crop. Jesus equates the crowds with the crop, and the disciples with the workers who would harvest the crop.
- **OK, let's unpack this a little bit. We know that Jesus had been preaching the Gospel, the "good news" of the Kingdom of God. Just to get on the same page, what do we mean by "the**

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Gospel"? What is the good news Jesus preached?

o Answer: That Jesus was the Messiah, the promised Son of God, come to take away the sins of the world through His sacrifice on the cross.

- **This is Jesus' message and mission, the reason why He came to earth. Keep that in mind. Now we know Jesus has identified the misguided religious establishment as the source of people's frustration. Knowing what we know, what do you think Jesus wants His followers (the workers heading to the harvest) to go do to relieve the people's burden? What is the solution?**

o Answer: Jesus wants His followers to share the message of the Gospel with the lost and needy in the world.

- **Let's drive this whole metaphor home. Harvesting a crop is the picture of gathering up the crop at the moment it is perfectly ready to be gathered. How is sharing the Gospel with the lost like gathering up a ripe crop?**

o Answer: Because when people come to Christ through faith after hearing the Gospel, it is as if they are being gathered up into God's Kingdom. Through the power of the Spirit, those who hear the Gospel and believe have "ripened" to the point they are ready to embrace salvation.

Make sure students understand the significance of what they just read. Say something like this:

- **When Jesus saw the needs of the people, what did He do? He turned to His followers and identified them as the solution. The same task extends to us. We are Jesus' Plan A for reaching the world. God wants all people to come to faith in Him. And the primary way He has chosen to accomplish this is through me and you and every other believer. We are to be Jesus' messengers of compassion. We are to be messengers of the Gospel.**

FINALLY, explain to students that the call to spread the Gospel is a central aspect of their identity as Christ-followers. This is probably not news to them. And yet, remind them that most Christ-followers don't actively share their faith. While there are a lot of reasons, the main one might be because we don't share Jesus' compassion. Say:

- **If we could see other people like Jesus sees them, if we could get past our own selfishness and the walls other people build around them, we might be more willing to share the Gospel. Sensing people's great needs and knowing we have the ultimate solution is different than sharing our faith out of obligation.**

Take a second and read Paul's words to the Colossians from Colossians 3:1. Emphasize Paul's command to clothe ourselves with compassion. Explain to students that compassionate love for the lost and the needy is the motivation for sharing the good news of the Gospel. This was Jesus' motivation. And it should be ours.

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

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help students commit to being more invested in being messengers of the Gospel to those who most need it.
- **Set-Up:** You might want to provide some music to play in the background of your time of prayer.

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FIRST, encourage students that this has been a really solid last few weeks of learning and growing together. Praise their participation and engagement. Then explain that this is the final time in the course of studying Jesus and identity that you will be challenging them to put what they've just learned to work on their lives.

NEXT, inform students that you're going to provide a time for them to get alone with God for a few moments and talk with Him about His expectation that they would be useful field workers in His harvest. Help them see that this is a good opportunity to grab some alone time with God where nothing is pulling on their attention. Explain that you're going to give them a framework to get them started.

THEN, instruct students to think of one or two people in their lives who do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. Allow them a moment to visualize these people. Then, explain to them that when you tell them to, you want them to spread out around the space in which you're meeting. They are to talk with God in prayer about this person, or people. But, explain that you want them to ask God something specific about this person. Say:

- **I want you to go to God in prayer for this person, specifically asking God that He would make you feel compassion for the needs of this person. Ask God to help you see the brokenness of this person, and to feel compassion for his or her separation from God. Close your prayer by asking God to give you the strength to follow through with talking to him or her about the difference Christ has made in your life.**

NEXT, allow students a few minutes to pray by themselves. If you have some music to play in the background, this isn't a bad idea at all. After a few minutes, close the time of prayer by praying aloud for the students.

FINALLY, remind students that there are opportunities to be messengers of the Gospel all day long, all around them. Remind them that it's not the opportunity that they need to pray for; it's the strength to follow through once the opportunity arises. Encourage them to seek out God as the source of their strength. Challenge them to commit to using more of themselves to bring the message of Jesus' good news to the world.

- Don't forget to distribute devotions 10-12 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.