

JESUS AND MEAN PEOPLE



Lesson 1: Thankful For Mean People?

What we want students to learn: That when people are mean to us for no reason, we should see it as a blessing, not a bad situation.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To identify a time when someone has been mean to them, even though they did nothing wrong, and to see if they can see how God might have worked something positive as a result.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 5:10-12

Overview: The unfortunate truth about most mean people is that they rarely need a reason to be mean. Every one of your students has experienced a time where they found themselves in a mean person's crosshairs due to no fault of their own. Jesus speaks to this very issue in Matthew. He says that when we're living as Christ-followers and people are mean to us, we should count it as a blessing. Of course, we realize that this is completely counterintuitive to how we think about people being mean to us. This lesson will challenge your students to look for positives in the midst of people mistreating them, especially if that positive is God gaining glory from it.

Teacher Prep Video

The *Jesus And Mean People* 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 Mean People* Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-mean-people-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

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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 passage is a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and comes at the end of what has traditionally been called "the beatitudes," the series of couplets that start in Matthew 5: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek . . ." and so on. The Sermon on the Mount serves as a sort of in-depth picture of the moral expectations of God's children. Jesus spent the Sermon on the Mount contrasting the current, religious understanding of faith practiced by the Jews of His day, with God's definition of what it means to be a child of God. It would have been revolutionary teaching to His first century audience.

The Main Point

In this passage, Jesus talks about what our attitude should be when we're unfairly treated unkindly. Not that there is ever a time when we deserve to have someone be mean to us. But, there are situations where, through some fault of our own, someone lashes out at us. Jesus isn't talking about those situations. Jesus is painting a picture of a people who are living out their identities as Christ-followers, doing their best to represent God in this world, and publicly identifying with Christ. When, in the course of living a Christ-like life, we find others being unfairly mean to us, Jesus says we should see it as a blessing.

This is a remarkable teaching, as it flies in the face of our notion of right and wrong. When we are unfairly treated meanly, our default is to often take a "woe is me" approach, and to focus on how we were wronged. Jesus says the opposite: if we're living Christ-like lives and a mean person cuts lose on us, then we should rejoice. This lesson will help your students flesh out this dynamic in their own lives.

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 mean people and the impact these mean people have on their lives.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry-erase board and something to write with. If you choose, you could also do a Google image search for your "favorite" fictional villains and arrange to display a few of their images.

FIRST, explain to your students that you're going to be starting a new four-lesson look at what Jesus had to say about mean people. Before you jump into the Bible study, however, explain that you want to begin the lesson by taking a look at some of the most famous (or infamous) fictional villains from movies, books, TV shows, and so on. If you have collected some images of your favorite fictional villains, display them for your group now explaining to the group, if needed, who the villains are.

THEN, ask students to take turns naming their favorite "villains." Write these on the board as they call them out. Then, when you have a good list built up, go back through and ask students what it is about these villains that made them stand out in students' minds. Allow students to share their responses. Then, for some fun, ask who they think is the most villainous villain on the board.

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

- **It's kind of fun to think about all the super villains we encounter in movies, comic books, and TV shows. Part of why this is so fun is because it's safe. These mean people don't impact our lives. We can observe their wickedness from afar. But if we're all honest, we'll admit there are times in our lives where real mean people have a major impact on us. We've all had someone act mean toward us for no real reason. It stinks. It's not cool at all. But the good thing is that Jesus had a lot to say about how we should respond to mean people. We're going to take a look at a passage today that will help lay the ground work for our discussion of mean people. Let's jump in.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help students understand that when people are mean to us for no reason, we should see it as a blessing, not a bad situation.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, take a second to make a brief but important statement before you get into your Bible study. Say something like:

- **Before we go much further, I want to make one thing clear: most mean people are not entirely mean. We're going to be talking about mean people. And if we're not careful, we can operate with the idea that the mean people we're talking about are super bad folks with no good in them at all. But this isn't accurate. The truth is that people you love can be mean to you. Your best friend can be mean to you at times. Maybe your brother or sibling can be mean. And let's face it: you might have actually been the mean person to someone else before. As we talk about mean people, let's make sure we're not categorizing people as entirely bad or mean. Got it?**

THEN, have students turn in their Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. As they are finding it, make sure you provide some context for the passage by referencing the Details and maybe the Setting section of the Bible Background. When students have found the passage, read or have a student read Matthew 5:10-12. When you've finished, lead students in a discussion. Ask something like the following:

- **Look at verse 10. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." Let's break this down a bit. What does it mean to be persecuted?**
 - Answers may vary some. Help students see that persecution in its simplest form is unjust or undeserved punishment or ridicule.
- **Think about Jesus' original audience. Why would they have experienced persecution?**
 - Answer: At the time Jesus spoke these words, most of the persecution His audience would have experienced would have been at the hands of the Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah and would have sought to punish His followers. Several decades later, persecution would become more extreme and widespread at the hands of the Romans.
- **Jesus was speaking to people who would have been persecuted because of righteousness. What do you think He meant?**
 - Answer: Persecuted for doing good, or probably more accurately, persecuted innocently. In other words, persecuted unfairly for doing nothing other than living a godly life.
- **What is the alternative to being persecuted because of righteousness?**
 - Answer: Being persecuted for unrighteousness, or for doing wrong.
- **What is the difference between being persecuted for doing good and being persecuted for doing wrong?**

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- o Answer: There is no justification for being persecuted for doing good. When you do wrong, persecution can be justified or at least explained.
- **OK, so, now that we've unpacked this some, for those who found themselves unjustly persecuted, how did Jesus say that they should look at their persecution?**
 - o Answer: They should consider themselves blessed. Help students understand that the simplest way of thinking about being blessed is to view it as simply experiencing God's favor or delight.
- **Be honest: How does this hit you? You've probably had people be rude or mean to you for no reason. How did you feel at the time? Did any of you feel blessed?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Why is it so hard to see people's meanness toward us as something that results in God's blessing us?**
 - o Answers will vary.

NEXT, have students focus their attention on verses 11-12. Help them see that this is where Jesus provides the answer to the question, "Why is it a blessing to be persecuted for doing nothing wrong"? Ask something like:

- **Where do we see Jesus provide the answer to why we should consider it a blessing when we're persecuted?**
 - o Answer: Students may very well recite verse 12. That's fine if they do. But, lead them to go a bit deeper. Lead them to understand that what Jesus means here is that when people persecute us, we are identifying with other children of God, and ultimately, God Himself.
- **Let's do a little contextualization. Let's apply this truth to our lives as it concerns people who are unjustly mean to us. What are some examples of how someone might be mean to you for no reason?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **What are some possible choices for how you might choose to react to someone who has been mean to you for no reason?**
 - o Answers will vary. But you'll want to make sure that at least one of the possibilities is to react in a Christ-like way.
- **We'll get in to this a lot more in the next lesson. But for now, think about this: How might responding to a mean person in a Christ-like way bring about God's blessing in your life (and maybe even in the life of the mean person)?**
 - o Answers will vary. But the idea is to help students see that God can and will work through them to impact mean people. But they must choose to respond in a way that gives God the opportunity to work through their example.

FINALLY, wrap up the Bible study portion of your lesson by helping students to understand what Jesus is talking about here. Say something like:

- **While being treated meanly by others is not something any of us deserve, if we're honest, there are times in our lives where, because of something wrong we've done, people responding to us in meanness is an understandable response. It doesn't make it right. But we can understand it. In these verses we just looked at, Jesus is reminding us that we have to live in such a way that we identify with Him publicly. And when we do, when we're living as children of God, and people are mean to us, Jesus sees this as a blessing. This is one of those times when we may have a hard time grasping exactly why this is the case. But we can be confident that Jesus knows. And He wants us to embrace this truth in our lives.**

If there are no further questions or comments, transition to the Last Word.

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The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help students identify a time when someone has been mean to them, even though they did nothing wrong, and to see if they can see how God might have worked something positive as a result.
- **Set-Up:** To encourage students to think about other people's meanness through the lens of God's blessing, be prepared to tell a personal story about a time when someone was mean to you but you were able to see a positive come out of it.

BEGIN by helping students to see that we can think of God blessing us in at least two ways: we can experience His blessings in our lives here on this earth, and we can experience His blessings through spending eternity with Him heaven. Say something like:

- **Jesus said when we're treated poorly even though we're innocent, count it as a blessing. Sometimes we look around for how God will bless us, how He will work through a situation like this, and we can't see it. That doesn't mean it's not there. But, it does mean that often the blessing Jesus is talking about comes through our future with Him in eternity. But, there are times where God chooses to work through our interactions with mean people to bless us (or others) in the here and now. As we wrap the lesson up, I want us to think about this type of interaction.**

THEN, take a moment and share a time when you had someone treat you badly, for no real reason, and you were able to see God work positively through this interaction. Share how it made you feel at the time and, if possible, how you saw God working for good through the situation, and how it helped you look at mean people in a new way.

NEXT, ask students if they can think of their own stories. Give them a moment to think of a time when someone was mean to them, but God was able to work for the good through the situation. Ask them to think about this in terms of the following questions:

- **How did God work for good through someone being mean to you?**
- **Did God work just for your good or for the good of others, as well?**
- **How did God bring glory to Himself through this?**
- **What does this say about God's love for you and for others?**

Allow students to share their thoughts, but try not to get in a situation where they're naming names of people who have been mean to them.

FINALLY, encourage students to begin looking for God to work through their encounters with mean people. Remind them that God is at work all around us; oftentimes we have to be willing to open our eyes and look for the evidence. If there are no more questions or thoughts, close in a time of 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 and with being mindful of the choices they make during the week.**

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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.