

LESSON 1: BULLYING

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

When it comes to bullying, our society has drawn pretty clear lines about certain types of mistreatment. Yet Jesus says that line might be finer than we realize. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus affirms that extreme violence is wrong, as “You’ve heard.” But then he maintains that calling someone a derogatory name or harboring anger against someone is just as sinful. In this lesson, students will see how Jesus challenges not only harmful actions but also hurtful statements and attitudes.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Students have heard that bullying behavior is wrong, but Jesus says derogatory words and thoughts are just as bad.
- 2. WHY:** Jesus expands our understanding of sin to include anything that goes against his patterns of integrity.
- 3. HOW:** Students will consider how they treat others by exploring Jesus’ comparison of name-calling to murder.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:20-26

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Colossians 3:16-17

TEACHING PREP

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you’ll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.



**LEADER
TIP**

Read Matthew 5:20-26. (For context, begin your preparation reading at verse 1.)

This passage is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), a radical discourse instructing people to follow God’s patterns in their daily routines. In his message, Jesus affirms a purity of heart and action that has encouraged and challenged people around the world for over 2,000 years. This sermon contains some of the most daring and profound instructions for living that the world has ever known, including the Beatitudes, the Golden Rule, the House Built on Sand, Loving Your Enemies, Do Not Worry, and more.

Jesus' words are simultaneously very personal and world-shattering. The Gospel of Matthew offers an eyewitness perspective from one of Jesus' disciples, a tax collector who suddenly discarded his seedy business and questionable way of life to follow Jesus. Because of Matthew's transformative experience, the life-changing instructions from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount would have resonated with him deeply.

According to Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount occurred early in Jesus' ministry. As news spread about Jesus, people were drawn to his miraculous healings and authoritative teaching. One day, crowds of people gathered on a mountainside in Galilee, where Jesus transformed the world's understanding of God's blessing (Matthew 5:3-12). Jesus then challenged people to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," a message that empowered people who'd been subjected to oppressive Roman rule (verses 13-16).

Then, just prior to the passages we'll be studying for this series, Jesus affirmed that he himself had come to fulfill the Old Testament laws and prophecies (verses 17-20). Yet he warned that God's laws were more profound than anyone had realized (verse 20). These words set the stage for six dramatic challenges to common ways of thinking in that culture (verses 21-48).

Verses 21-26 begin a dramatic series of teachings in which Jesus challenges what the crowds had been taught by their society. Jesus starts each section with the phrase "You've heard it said..." and then expounds on God's truth about the topic. In the passage for this lesson, Jesus challenges our hateful actions and attitudes. Instead of hurting one another in anger, we are called to humble ourselves and resolve any issues, seeking the other person's best interests above our own.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Where do you rank on the lists of the all-time best and all-time worst people? Come figure it out this week!
- What kind of insults do you hear throughout the week? Get ready to tackle bullying from Jesus' perspective.

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've launched a new series comparing what culture tells us and what Jesus tells us. Each week, students will examine a different passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to discern between the voices of our culture and true Jesus-centered living.

In this first lesson, we explored Matthew 5:20-26, where Jesus challenges our assumptions about hatred and bullying. He expands our understanding of sin to include anything that goes against God's patterns. Although teenagers have heard that actions such as murder and bullying are wrong, they discovered that Jesus considers hateful words and thoughts to be just as harmful—to us and to others.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- What's the worst sin anyone could ever commit?
- Respond to this statement: All sins are equal in Jesus' eyes.
- What types of name-calling or bullying have you witnessed or experienced? How have you handled it?
- What aspect of your conversation about harmful words and thoughts challenged you the most, and why?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students and our ministry. Have an amazing week!

LESSON 1: BULLYING**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

You'll need paper and pens or pencils for the opening activity.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Have students write atop their paper "The Worst Sins Ever." Then ask them to brainstorm their list of the top sins anyone could ever commit. After a few minutes, ask a few students to share their lists with everyone. Then transition into a group discussion.

ASK:

- *How easy or difficult was this exercise?*
- *Why did you choose this particular list of sins? Which sin would you consider the very worst of all, and why?*
- *Where do you think sins such as lying and name-calling fit on this list? Explain.*
- *Why is it so tempting to compare our sins with other people's sins?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *As we saw in this activity, it's pretty easy for us to point out how wrong "big" sins are and to ignore how wrong "small" sins are. Today we'll be challenged to reconsider how we rank sins—both ours and other people's.*

TEACHING POINTS**LEADER
TIP**

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 5:20-26 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Our lesson is based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a message he gave to a crowd near the beginning of his ministry. It contains profound and memorable truths about loving our enemies, the Golden Rule, and blessings called the Beatitudes. Today we'll explore Jesus' thoughts about hatred, bullying, and murder. We'll find out which sins he thinks are the worst and what difference that might make in how we live.*

1. WE'VE HEARD THAT CERTAIN SINS ARE WORSE THAN OTHERS

ASK:

- *Think about the way you identify people. Do you ever place people in categories? Why or why not?*
- *What is Jesus' main focus in verse 15? How do you know?*
- *Explain what you believe Jesus is referring to by "good fruit" and "bad fruit" in this passage.*
- *Why does Jesus give us a choice when it comes to the direction we take with our faith? Why not just force us to live in a way that automatically produces good fruit?*
- *Jesus said, "You can identify people by their actions." Is he talking about all people, or just people who claim to be his followers? What do you think, and why?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Sometimes we feel as if we're good people because we compare the "little" things we do wrong to the "big" sins of others. But the truth is that every sin is a violation of God's law.*

2. JESUS SAYS EVERY SIN IS WORTHY OF JUDGMENT

ASK:

- *Look at verse 20. The culture considered the Pharisees and teachers of the law to be "good"—what does Jesus say about their "ticket" into heaven?*
- *How does it feel to know that you can never be good enough to get into heaven? How does it feel to know that Jesus already took care of that for you by dying on the cross?*
- *When are we obligated to point out other people's sins, and when does that become a form of judgment?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Following all of God's commands isn't just hard; it's impossible. But how we behave in the "small," everyday aspects of our lives and relationships is just as important to Jesus as how we behave in the "big" things.*

3. JESUS WANTS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORDS AND ATTITUDES, NOT JUST OUR BEHAVIOR

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he challenges us to take action against any hatred or wrongdoing that takes hold of our hearts. Those inward changes are just as important as anything on the outside.*

ASK:

- *According to Jesus' words in verses 23-26, what effects can harboring anger and holding grudges have on people and their relationships?*
- *Why does Jesus want us to resolve our problems with other people before we worship him?*
- *How do you think Jesus might want us to interact with people who call themselves Christians but hold hatred in their heart toward others? Why?*
- *How might you need to think differently about the words you use to talk to—and about—other people?*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



ASK:

- Read Colossians 3:16-17. How well have you your words been representing Jesus recently?
- How can our words empower us to live boldly rather than in fear of judgment?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- If you've been bullied or know someone who's been bullied, what part of this lesson can encourage you?
- If you've bullied someone, whether through actions or in your heart, what part of this lesson can you begin living out this week?
- During the next week, how can you challenge our culture's assumptions about bullying?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus doesn't expect us to change on our own. We have the gift of God's Holy Spirit to direct us, and we also have each other. Jesus taught about going to one another for restoration before we proceed in worship or everyday life. Each of us can do the same right now. If you'd like to talk to someone about anything we discussed today, please see a leader, a parent, or a friend.*



Ask students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Consider praying together as a group or asking if any students would like prayer from the rest of the group.

SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives" (Colossians 3:16).