

JESUS & TOUGH TIMES

A 4-LESSON BIBLE STUDY

Lesson 1: The God Who Listens

What we want students to learn: That when they experience tough times, they should express their emotions to God in real, honest ways.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To encourage students to reconsider the way they communicate with God, challenging them to embrace a more honest dialogue with Him.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 26:36-46

Supporting Scripture: Hebrews 5:7

Overview: We tell our students that prayer is simply having a conversation with God. However, even as adults we often behave as if we believe there are things we should hold back from telling the Lord. What happens when things get difficult and we are confused, angry or even blaming God for the tough times? We know we need peace, hope, and to know we are loved unconditionally but often we can shut down because we don't think we can truly tell the Lord everything. When Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane He showed us differently. He pleaded with His father and poured out His heart about the way things were, and the way He wished they could be. We learn from Jesus Himself that prayer means many things; one of them is being honest with God about what we're feeling when times are tough.

Teacher Prep Video

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

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-tough-times-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

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

The main point we want to make is that in Matthew 26:36-46, Jesus gives everything He is thinking and feeling to the Father. This is the point in time literally only hours before He will complete what He came to earth to complete. We can tend to believe that because Jesus went to the cross "willingly" He didn't struggle. Instead we see in this passage that His "soul was crushed" about what was to come. It was going to be excruciating and He knew it. He had to talk to the Father about what He was feeling. He told God three times, "I'll do this if it's what you want, but that doesn't make it easy."

God wants to honestly hear how we are feeling when times are really difficult. Jesus knew God was going to be with Him through it all; we may not always be so sure. It's when we tell Him everything that's on our heart and mind that we genuinely can feel "better." Circumstances may not change, however, it's not until we give Him everything (including our honest feelings) that we can really deal with what's going on.

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 know how to be honest with God about what they are feeling.
- **Set-Up:** You will need a large wall and several sticky notes and a pen for each student. This is where you are going to introduce the idea of truly being honest with God.

FIRST, pass out sticky notes, several to each student. Once each student has several and a pen, ask something like:

- **Tell me about prayer. What is its purpose? Why do we do it?**
 - o Answers will vary. You want to lead them into the idea that it is simply having a conversation with God. Remember this is not really a lesson on prayer, but more about God wanting us to be honest with Him. You're not looking to spend the time here exploring all the elements of prayer. Lead students to see that the focus of this lesson is talking to God when things are going wrong.
- **What about when things are "bad," do you talk to God then? What have your results been like?**
 - o Answers will vary. This is where students may talk about how, "God doesn't answer them when they pray."
- **Have you ever gotten upset with God as you pray? Have you ever told Him you blame Him for something that is going wrong?**
 - o Answers will vary. We are beginning here to lead students into understanding what being honest with God is like. They may never have thought about really telling Him all their feelings. Make sure to tell them that at some point most people question God about the "bad stuff" in our lives.



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NEXT, have them take out their sticky notes. Using one note for each thought, say something like:

- **Today we're going to talk about what it means to be honest with God about what we feel, especially when things are not going the way we want. It's the first of four lessons on what Jesus has to say about the tough times we all experience. We may suspect we should go to God, but we aren't always sure we can be honest with Him.**

Using your sticky notes, write down either a phrase you've been afraid to tell God. (Like I'm mad at you) or emotions you think God doesn't want to see. Use one sticky note for each emotion or idea. When you are done come put them up here on this wall. They are going to totally be anonymous. Try and think honestly about times when you feel you have to "hold back" from God for one reason or another.

FINALLY, allow the students several minutes to think about this and write some things and put them up. Give them a little time for the activity, but don't drag it out if not a lot of students really know how to respond. This is a hard concept to wrap your mind around. You may need to direct them a little in what you mean. Also, make sure to add your own "sticky notes" to the activity. When they are done talk about some of the things they wrote and put up. Share ways you have felt the same things.

Transition to the Main Event by saying something like:

- **Today we are going to talk about how Jesus Himself talked to God when He was upset. He didn't hold anything back, and He even felt like God was silent. Don't be afraid to talk to your leader about ways you have felt in tough times and how you want to talk to God compared to how you do talk to Him.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** That when they experience tough times, they should express their emotions to God in real, honest ways.
- **Set Up:** You'll probably want a dry-erase board and something to write with.

FIRST, explain to students that as this is the first lesson of four that look at tough times, you want to make sure you're on the same page about the types of tough times teenagers face. Ask:

- **What are some examples of tough times that teenagers go through?**
 - Answers will vary. Write their responses on the dry-erase board.
- **How do people sometimes feel about God during the tough times?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Are people always honest with God about the way they are feeling?**
 - Answers will vary. Try to draw out of them the ways people feel during these times. Try not to gloss over the times when people feel like God has forgotten about them, or other such emotions.

Remember that since we are trying to get students to be honest with God (who they can't see, or touch or hear audibly) we need to point them back to the understanding that the Lord will love them and take care of them more than we ever can. Say something like:

- **God does want us to be honest with the way we feel about things in life. It's really the first place to start when we are trying to talk with God; we need to be truthful about how we are feeling. As a matter of fact if we are going through a hard time, we need to start with telling God how we are feeling about it. Jesus did this himself when He was trying to work through how He really felt about going to the cross.**

NEXT, have students turn to Matthew 26. While they are searching for it, provide a little



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context using the Details section of the Bible Background. When you're ready, read or ask a student to read Matthew 26:36-46. Take a moment and explain how we often look at this passage to talk about how the disciples couldn't stay awake. However, today explain that you are going to look at how Jesus talked to God during a really hard time.

Before you really start to talk about the scripture say something like:

- **Here we have Jesus just a couple of hours before He is arrested. He had mentioned to His followers several times about how He was going to die. Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus knew all that was about to happen to Him? Earlier that evening at dinner, He had even pointed out that Judas was going to be the one to betray Him. Jesus was God, but He was also a person, and here we see how the "human" part of Him was dealing with all that was coming.**

Then look at verse 38 and read it again. Ask:

- **What does Jesus say He is feeling at this point? Why do you think He was in this place?**
 - o Answer: To say your soul is "crushed with grief to the point of death" is strong wording. He tells His friends He needs to go talk to the Father about it. He knows what is happening and is dealing with what is coming. He is overwhelmed with how bad everything is.
- **Can you relate? Have you ever felt this way?**

Now look at verses 39-44. Ask:

- **What is Jesus really saying to God here?**
 - o Answer: This is not a short prayer. As we have said before Jesus knew everything that was going to happen. He knew the pain both physically and emotionally that He was going to go through, and really He wasn't "liking" it. He was crying out to God about the way things were going. It was overwhelming and He was literally laying on His face telling God how He wanted it to be.
- **How many times does He go back to talk to God about it?**
 - o Answer: Jesus goes back to talk to God three times about what He is feeling.
- **What does this tell you about what's going on internally with Jesus?**
 - o Answer: He was wrestling. He knows what He has to do, and what He will do, however, in His humanness it is not easy.

THEN, read Hebrews 5:7 and ask:

- **Now that we have looked at these two passages describe the scene to me of Jesus in the Garden. If you could put it in your own words, how is Jesus talking to God?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Would you say Jesus is having a tough time? (Yes) Do you get the sense that Jesus is holding anything back from God? (No) What can we learn from Jesus here?**

Help students see that Jesus is totally and completely honest with God about how He is feeling, the situation, and all that is going on in His heart. Remind them that Jesus tells the Father He will do it the way God wants Him to because it's His will, but He wishes it could be different. Also, remind students that we don't see God responding to Jesus. Say something like:

- **From all we see here, the Father heard Jesus, but He didn't say anything. Jesus screamed and cried and God was silent. That didn't mean He didn't hear Him. God heard Him. When we're totally honest with God that's the point He can help our hearts. Sometimes it feels like nothing changes at all, but our hearts have hope and peace.**

FINALLY, ask:

- **Have you ever felt like Jesus did here? Have you ever felt like things are so awful you don't know what to do? How did you talk to God about it or did you? Why or why not?**
 - o Answers will vary.



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Ask if there are any questions, then transition into the Last Word.

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To encourage students to reconsider the way they communicate with God, challenging them to embrace a more honest dialogue with Him.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need paper and pens for every student. If you would like you can purchase small notebooks for each student to encourage them for the future.

FIRST, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to give them an opportunity to begin that honest dialogue with God. Pass out the paper (or notebooks).

THEN, tell them this story:

- **There is the story of a man who went to his pastor and told him that he didn't know how to pray. He had read books, and searched the Internet, but he couldn't really figure it out. The pastor told him, "Sometimes we just need to remember that God is always with us, and prayer is nothing more than a conversation. From today forward, I want you to try something: Sit across from an empty chair and close your eyes. Picture that Jesus is sitting in that chair, then talk to Him."**

NEXT, say something like:

- **We forget sometimes that our first steps to understanding how to talk with God is to just talk to Him like we would anyone. Think of the person in your life you trust most with all your feelings. How would you talk to him or her? You probably don't hold much back, because you know he or she can handle it. Jesus knew this about the Father, it's why He talked to Him that way in the garden. It may feel weird for you to talk to God that way, especially since we can't see Him with our eyes. That's why we sometimes need to do things to remember He is here with us, even when we can't touch Him.**

THEN, encourage students to take a moment and write God a letter. Encourage them to think about what's something going on in their lives right now that they wish was different. Is there something they blame God for? Remind them that God can handle anything we say or feel and that He can begin to help us work through it. Say something like:

- **There is a great verse in Jeremiah 29: 13 that says, "If you look for me with your whole heart you will find me." It may feel silly, but tell Him what you can. If you don't want to write a whole letter, then write a note. If a note is too long, then think, "How would I text God if I could?" This is just between you and God, no one else has to see it.**

Allow students the time to write their letters or notes. Try to keep it a quiet time for those who need to take it seriously. Remember those who are really uncomfortable may get silly or even chatty during this time. Ask students to be respectful of one another.

FINALLY, when students are done with the activity ask:

- **How did that activity make you feel? How do you feel about God?**
 - o Answers will vary

Encourage students to do this everyday at least for the next week. If you gave them notebooks tell them this is a place for them to write their notes to God. Encourage them to start talking to God honestly. Follow up next week to ask them how it is going. Remind them that God can handle anything and loves us too much to allow us to stay in despair forever.



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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.

