

THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 2: THE PICTURE OF A DISCIPLE
Unit 1: A Disciple Surrenders To A Gospel-Centered Life
LESSON 13: WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT MY LIFE?

What we want students to learn: That students would grasp the essential nature of the Gospel and how it transforms the way they see their lives.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To begin to identify exactly how God is working in and through them to impact the world around them with the truth of the Gospel.

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 2:4-9

Overview: The Gospel literally translates as the "good news." The good news about Jesus. The good news that we who were once enemies of God have become friends. We who were dead have become alive. The Gospel message is about grace, and love, and victory. As followers of Christ, the Gospel message should be central in your teenagers' lives. Every aspect of who they are should be dripping with the Gospel. This lesson will help you set this standard as something to be pursued in their lives, while at the same time introducing the emphasis of this unit.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 13 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 13, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

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:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- **Time frame:** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.

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- **Purpose:** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

THE SETTING

The letter to the Ephesians was part of Paul's efforts to keep the church focused on the true Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of false teaching in the area. From prison, Paul continued to fight for sound doctrine. This letter seeks to promote unity among believers through a clear understanding of the Gospel. Chapter 2 picks up after Paul has opened by reminding the church of the privilege it is to be recipients of God's grace through Christ's sacrifice.

THE MAIN POINT

Living a Gospel-centered life means just that: our lives should be centered on the Gospel. In everything we say, do, and believe, there should be evidence of Christ at work in us and through us. We are saved from sin, for the purpose of glorifying God.

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 see the importance of clear definition.
- **Set-Up:** You're going to want to choose a picture from the Internet to cut up into pieces. The idea is to pick a picture complex enough that students won't easily be able to guess what it is based on their individual piece, but simple enough that they can actually succeed in doing so. Line drawings work best.

FIRST, as students arrive, give one pre-cut piece of the puzzle to each student until they are all distributed. Instruct them that they are not to show their piece or discuss it with anyone. When you're ready, ask for volunteers to take turns guessing what they think the picture is based on their piece. (Even if they successfully guess, don't reveal the answer just yet.) Ask students to explain why they answered as they did.

TEHN, allow students to come together and complete the puzzle. If any students initially guessed right, acknowledge this.

FINALLY, when everyone is back in their seats say something like:

- **Some of you were able to guess what the picture was because you had a piece that was what we might call a "defining characteristic" of the overall image. Others couldn't come up with it because your piece was too abstract. You had no reason to know what you were looking at. Sometimes we think that our lives look "Christian" and assume that others will see Christ in us. But what if our lives are more generic than we think? Today, we are going to look at what it means to live a Gospel-centered life so we can reflect the defining characteristics of a life rooted in Christ.**

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Transition into the *Main Event* portion of your lesson.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** For students to grasp the essential nature of the Gospel and how it transforms the way they see their lives.
- **Set Up:** You'll benefit from a dry-erase board, but it's not critical. Make sure students have a Bible or that they are able to look along with a friend.

FIRST, open The Main Event by kicking off a discussion. Ask:

- **What does it mean to be a Christian? (If you have a board, this would be a good time to make a list.)**
 - Answers will vary though should include saved from sin, born again, alive in Christ, obedient to God's Word, serving others, etc. (Be prepared to include answers that may be slightly off point as well – we'll get back to those in a second. Students may include thoughts like: going to church, reading your Bible, being good, not cussing or doing bad things, etc. The goal is to map out all of their thoughts in response to the question.)
- **Which of these things might be true of someone who does not know Christ? In other words, which of these descriptors can be faked?**
 - This is where you can start to sort out the responses. Tell students that while all of these may be good things that can be true of a Christian, some of them may also be true of non-believers. Draw a line through any words or phrases that are not essential to the Gospel. Actions such as being good, going to church, etc. can be filtered out as non-essential to salvation. Try and dwindle the list to descriptors that rest on the work of Christ: born again, redeemed, saved by grace, etc.

THEN, tell students that you have a good list of what a Christian might look like, but that now you are going to look at this a little more closely. Remind them that the question is, "What does it mean to BE a Christian"? Say something like:

- **When we think of being a Christian, a lot of things come to mind that may or may not be Gospel-centered. This is the type of thinking that Paul warned the church at Ephesus to avoid. When we over-complicate the Gospel with rules and cultural expectations, we distract from Christ. When we over-simplify the Gospel by only focusing on the parts we like, we undermine the cost that Christ paid. The only solution is a clear, biblical understanding of salvation. Let's look at this passage to see how you did on your list.**

NEXT, instruct students to turn to Ephesians 2:4-9. While they're finding it, provide some context using the Bible Background. When students have found it, read or have a volunteer read the passage. Explain that there is a lot to process in these verses! Have them focus their attention back to verses 4-5. Then, ask:

- **What is the very first phrase here?**
 - Answer: "But God"
- **Take a minute to skim the verses before this one (Eph 2:1-3) and share what you think God's mercy is being compared with.**
 - Answer: Humankind's sin. Not just our actions, but the very nature of our existence: disobedient, fleshly, children of wrath.

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- **Why is it important to keep our sin-nature in mind when we think about God's work of salvation?**
 - Answer: We don't deserve salvation! We cannot earn it. We are bound by our sin and cannot please God. This is critical in understanding salvation as an act of mercy.

Explain to students that the phrase "But God" is the most critical turning point in all of human history! This phrase sets the stage for understanding the Gospel. Say something like:

- **God's actions are, by definition, in contrast to the actions of humanity. To understand mercy, we must first understand that God's love was expressed, not just during our rejection of Him, but because of it! This is not like human love. It is because we reject Him that He provided a Savior – because we cannot love Him until His love fills us. In His mercy, His love provided what we lacked, the ability to love Him back!**

THEN, continue your discussion by asking something like:

- **So, Paul is teaching here that we are against God. We reject Him by our very nature, but God is different! What words do you see that describe God's character? Let's make a note of them.**
 - Answer: Rich in mercy and great in love.
- **Because His nature is so different from ours, what does this verse say He did for us through Christ?**
 - Answer: God made us alive in Christ, giving us the opportunity to be saved from the death our sins rightfully earn for us. Explain that Paul makes it clear here that being a Christian is more than just acting differently. We were dead in sin, and through the loving mercy of God, we have been brought to life! Death and life are about as different as two things can be; shouldn't there be some visible difference in our lives before and after Christ? (If it's not already there, go back to your chart and add "received mercy," "made alive," and "saved by grace" to your list of what it means to be a Christian.)

NEXT, re-read Ephesians 2:6-7 and ask:

- **This characteristic is so obvious that we often overlook it. What does this passage describe as a benefit of the gospel?**
 - Answer: We get to go to Heaven!
- **Look carefully at verse 6 and someone tell me how we get to go to heaven. Do we earn it?**
 - Answer: No. We are raised up and seated there by God. That's a big deal! (Add "seat in Heaven" to your list of what it means to be a Christian.)

There is a lot of great news for us in the Gospel. Recap for your students by looking at your list and review: received mercy, made alive, saved by grace, seat in Heaven, and say/ask:

- **With all of this good news for us, it's easy to see why some people get confused and think that the Gospel is about us. But someone read verses 8-9 and share with us what the Gospel is all about.**
 - Answer: The Gospel may be good news FOR us, but it is the good news OF God and that good news IS Jesus Christ. When we understand this, we can surrender to a Gospel-centered life.

FINALLY, remind students that apart from God, we do not have the power to be a Christian. We can't do it on our own. But God makes of us followers of Christ when we understand and submit to the truth of the Gospel. It is not our doing; it is His. Explain that the good we do as His followers is a reaction to our understanding of what He has done for us. Remind them that living a Gospel-centered life means focusing daily on the immeasurable riches God has shown to us, and making that visible to others.

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

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** For students to begin to identify exactly how God is working in and through them to impact the world around them with the truth of the Gospel.
- **Set-Up:** You will need paper or note cards and something for each student to write with.

FIRST, ask students if they have ever wondered why you don't go to heaven the moment you are saved. After all, won't it be easier to know and serve God in heaven than it is here on earth? Explain that if we identify with Christ, then we believe that He will come again and bring us to live with Him for eternity. If He hasn't done that yet, there must be a reason!

THEN, ask:

- **How does thinking about that impact how you spend the days that you wait for His return?**
 - Answer: Don't be too hard on students if they respond with blank stares. This question is essentially the biggest question there is: What is the purpose of life? Every day we live on earth has a purpose to reveal God's grace and yet most of us can go days on end without that crossing our minds.

NEXT, encourage students to look at this question in a practical way. Pass out a piece of paper or note card to students with something to write with. Instruct students to draw a line down the middle of the paper and write today's date at the top of the line. This will divide the paper into two columns. If you are using a note card, label one side "before today," and one "after today."

THEN, say:

- **Ephesians 2:9 makes it clear that we cannot boast in ourselves for our salvation. It is the work of God, not of us. We can't earn God's favor through good works, but we can show Him favor by doing the kind of good works that point others to Him.**

NEXT, instruct students to think about their life up to this point, specifically since they gave their life to Christ and accepted His salvation. Ask:

- **What examples can you think of where there has been evidence in your life of God's grace? (You won't have to show this to anyone, but see if you can think of things that others might see in you that would point them to Him.) List as many as you can.**

Give students a minute or two to think about this. Then, tell students that this may be hard depending on how intentional they have been in their walk with God up to this point. Remind them that salvation is a life change, so there should be something different about them that is visible. Those actions do not save them, but reflect the fact that we are already saved!

THEN, instruct students to look at the next column on their paper. Ask:

- **In light of what we have seen in Scripture today, what do you want people to see in your life from this day forward?**
 - Answers will vary.

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- Do you believe God is calling you to live differently? To serve more boldly? If so, in your second column, list some things that you believe God wants you to demonstrate to those around you. Be specific.

When they have had time to jot down some thoughts, ask a few students to share. Summarize by saying something like:

- **The goal here is not to list rules so we can act more “Christian,” but to look in the mirror and see how well we are reflecting the nature of the God we serve. If we are Gospel-centered, our lives should be characterized by grace, peace, love, service, and above all, a desire for holiness.**

Close in prayer by asking God to give His church a gospel-centered focus. Pray for your group to be convicted of specific ways to reflect the life-changing grace that has been poured out by Christ!

FINALLY, allow time for any closing thoughts or questions from your students.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, 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 Instagram, 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.