



## LESSON 2: THE WORLD, UPSIDE DOWN

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN:** Your identity as a Christ-follower means that greatness is defined differently than the world defines it.

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED:** To look around them and identify opportunities to humbly serve others in God's name.

**Scripture Focus:** Mark 9:33-37

**Supporting Scripture:** Philippians 2:3-4

**OVERVIEW:** The world that students live in glorifies the idea of self. You don't need to look much further than their Instagram or Twitter feeds. And while adults must take our share of the blame for our role in enabling much of this behavior, the fact is that this self-focused "me-ism" has plagued people since Adam and Eve decided to play god in the Garden. Self-centeredness is at the heart of all sin. The desire to be great, to be known, to be recognized and applauded is a byproduct of our sinful nature. But in this passage, Jesus flips this understanding on its ear. Jesus says, "to be first is to be last." Grasping this truth is essential if students are to understand their identities as Christ-followers. This lesson will help them understand and apply this life-changing concept.

### 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 2 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 give you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point give 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 Gospel of Mark was written by its namesake. Mark, also known as John Mark, is believed to have received most of his information for his gospel from Peter’s firsthand accounts.
- **Time frame:** Mark is thought to have written his gospel in the mid 50’s AD.
- **Purpose:** Mark was writing primarily for a non-Jewish audience. His Gospel explains Jewish customs to non-Jews in an effort to get them to see the big picture of Jesus’ identity.

## THE SETTING

This passage comes in the heart of Jesus’ public ministry. He has already called and sent the 12. John the Baptist has already been murdered. Jesus has already fed the 4,000 and the 5,000, walked on water, and performed many healings and miracles. Most notably, it comes on the heels of Jesus’ transfiguration. All this to say, Jesus’ identity and mission were becoming more and more clear to His followers and enemies alike. Immediately before this passage, Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection, though the disciples couldn’t grasp the fullness of what this meant.

## THE MAIN POINT

As Christ-followers, our ideals and values run counter to the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in what makes someone “great” in Jesus’ eyes. Here, Jesus says that our identity as Christ-followers is found in serving others before serving ourselves. To be first, we must be last. To see ourselves in a proper light, we must see others as greater than ourselves. This is a difficult principle for all Christ-followers to embrace, especially younger believers, because of the “me-centered” world they are growing up in. But Jesus makes it clear: He expects us to be different than the world.

## 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 thinking of the idea of an unexpected outcome or result.
- **Set-Up:** None

FIRST, explain to students that you're going to read two short narratives to them. (Both are true stories pulled from older news articles). Explain that you'll discuss the stories briefly once you're done reading them. Then, **read the following stories.**

#### • STORY 1

**Glen James lives in Boston. He is also homeless. One day, Glen was at a shopping mall in Boston when he found a backpack. The interesting thing? The backpack contained over \$40,000 in cash and traveler's checks. How do you think this story ends? Despite his incredible need for the money, James immediately took the backpack to the police where they were able to locate its owner! Why would a homeless man return the backpack without taking even a dollar for his trouble? When asked about his decision, Glen James said "Even if I were desperate for money, I would not have kept even a ... penny of the money I found,". He credited God with taking care of him, even as he is without a home or a steady income.**

Source: LA Times, 2013 (article now archived)

#### • STORY 2

**On a normal Wednesday night in August, the owner of a store in northern New Jersey got a call that his store had been broken into. He went to his store and looked at the surveillance tape. What he found shocked him. Four students walked into the empty store (it seems the owner had accidentally left the store unlocked) assuming it was open. They grabbed some batteries and some other items and tried in vain to find a cashier. Captured on the video camera, the teenagers left money for their purchases on the counter, including sales tax, and then left. The owner was so surprised by their honesty that he tracked the students down. The young men were rewarded with gift certificates by the store owner and received tons of support from their community.**

Source: <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Honest-Customers-Leave-Money-Items-Inside-Unattended-Store-Wayne-New-Jersey-221363421.html>

**NEXT**, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask something like the following questions:**

- **What do these stories have in common?**  
*Answer:* The reactions are opposite from what we've come to expect in these types of situations.
- **Do you think most people would have returned the backpack with the money in it? Why or why not?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **How about the guys in the store? What do you think most people would have done? The same as the guys?**

**Or do you think most people would have walked out without paying (and possibly more than just the batteries)?**

*Answers will vary.*

• **Why did these stories gain so much attention?**

*Answer:* Because it showed surprising honesty in a situation where these people could have been dishonest and probably never been caught.

**FINALLY**, explain to your students that much like these stories, today you're going to be talking all about a response that is unexpected, one that goes counter to what most people would say is the usual way to do things. **Say something like:**

• **As we continue our discussion of what Jesus has to say about our identities, we're going to look at a truth Jesus passes along that is the exact opposite of what the world leads us to believe. And through looking at this passage, we'll see that by embracing Jesus' approach we'll find ourselves exactly where we need to be for Christ to work through us. Curious? Let's take a closer look.**

## THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that their identity as a Christ-follower means greatness is defined differently than the world defines it.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

**FIRST**, take a moment and see if anyone can recall what aspect of their identities you discussed in the last session. Use the following bullet points to help:

- Jesus expects us to be "salt" and "light" making an impact in our world for His sake.
- Jesus encourages us to live in such a way that our lives give credit to God for the different, bold way we live.
- We must evaluate our lives to see exactly how well we're making an impact in Jesus' name.

**THEN**, explain that you're going to look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking at the Gospel of Mark. Instruct students to turn to Mark 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 Mark 9:33-37. Then, instruct students to focus on verses 33-34 and lead them in the following discussion. **Ask:**

- **It's easy to think that the disciples are being a little bit ridiculous here, right? However, at this point in Jesus' ministry, they probably still thought the Kingdom Jesus kept referring to was going to be an earthly one in which Israel became a nation-state. They envisioned Jesus overthrowing the Romans and leading Israel back to prominence. If this is what they were thinking, why would it matter who was the greatest among them?**  
*Answer:* Because it meant a chance to rule alongside the Messiah in a political sense. They might have envisioned themselves being something like a vice president, or something similar. Basically, they were thinking of power in the world's terms.
- **We know now that this wasn't the kind of Messiah Jesus was going to be. This is kind of a tricky question, but can you describe the kind of Kingdom Jesus actually put into place?**  
*Answer:* This is a difficult question, but it's an important theological one. Help students see that the Kingdom that Jesus set in

motion was one where God ruled the individual lives of His followers. It's a Kingdom of grace and love and mercy. And it's a Kingdom that grows not through military or political conquest, but through the hearts and minds of people devoted to God.

**THEN**, explain that Jesus' response makes sense in light of this background. Have students look at verse 35. Then, **ask**:

- **What exactly did Jesus mean when He said that those who want to be first must be last?**

**Answer:** The answer is found in the last part of the verse. We must serve others.

- **Just to make sure we're on the same page, what does Jesus mean when He said that we must be the servant of all?**

**Answer:** Jesus was most definitely saying that we should serve others, giving of ourselves to meet others' needs. But He was also speaking about our status. He was comparing the thought of being a ruler or an important person with the station of a regular servant.

- **How is this the exact opposite of what the disciples had in mind?**

**Answer:** They were thinking of greatness in terms of who would be first among them, and thus, have the most power given to them by Jesus. Jesus was of course saying that in God's Kingdom, those who take on the role of a servant are the ones who are truly great.

**NEXT**, encourage students to focus on verses 36-37. Explain to them that Jesus was using a child as a teaching tool. Explain that in Jewish culture, children were highly loved and valued. And yet, they were seen as being completely reliant upon others for their care, their rights, even their identity. They were valued from an emotional sense, but they had very low social standing. Then, **ask**:

- **Knowing this, how did Jesus' use of this child prove the point He was trying to make about serving others?**

**Answer:** Welcoming a child would bring the disciples no honor or social status. In a sense, this action would only be seen as valuable by the child. No one else would reward them or look favorably on it. And yet Jesus was saying that showing love and kindness to one of the lowest members of society was like showing love to Him. It perfectly made His point about serving others.

**NEXT**, explain to students that this is a concept echoed throughout the Bible. Explain that in Paul's letter to the Christ-followers in the city of Philippi, Paul urged them to apply this same concept in their lives. Read Philippians 2:3-4. Then, lead students in a final discussion. **Ask**:

- **Look at verse 3. What different mindsets or attitudes is Paul setting up against each other?**

**Answer:** Selfish ambition (or vain conceit) is the opposite of humility.

- **In your own words, define what it means to be humble.**

**Answer:** Lead students to understand that the definition is actually given rather nicely in vs. 4: humility is looking out for others' needs and interests before our own. It is placing our fulfillment second to the fulfillment of others.

- **OK, let's tie all this together: What does humility have to do with being great as Jesus defined it?**

**Answer:** Without humility, it's impossible to be a servant of all people. We must truly see others as meaningful and valuable before we'll allow ourselves to be in a position to serve others before ourselves.

**FINALLY**, explain to students that this same level of humble service is exactly what Jesus commands of them today. As Christ-followers, putting others' needs and interests before their own is a major part of their identity. **Say something like**:

- **In a world where so much of our social interaction is self-focused and self-obsessed, this idea of willingly putting others first is totally counter-cultural. It goes against our culture's idea of what greatness is. If you want to make a name for yourself in our world, you do it by making it all about you. But what we've learned today is that this is not Jesus' way. Jesus' way to greatness is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago. To be great is to be unknown so that Christ is made known through us. To be first is to be the servant of all.**

Make sure there are no comments or questions. Then move into the Last Word.

## THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students look around them and identify opportunities to humbly serve others in God's name.
- **Set-Up:** You're going to set this activity up almost exactly like you set up the Last Word activity from Lesson 1. Whereas in the last lesson you helped students think about impacting others through visualizing people, this week you'll use a dry-erase board, or some other means, to help them visualize the places where they have opportunities to serve others. You'll want to draw a circle, and divide it up into four equal parts. Inside or out beside each part, write the following places, one in each part: Home, School, Hanging Out, and Church.

**FIRST**, explain to students that as you wrap up your lesson, you want to help them come up with some practical ways they can live out their identity as Christ-followers by serving others.

**NEXT**, explain that you're going to do this in a similar fashion to how you did it last lesson. Draw the circle diagram as described in the set-up instructions above and inform students that these represent the various places in their lives where they will no doubt encounter people that they can serve. **Say something like:**

- **Each of us have a ton of opportunities to serve our family at home. And we probably have more than we think at school. But I wonder if you've ever thought about how you might model Jesus' call to serve others when you're hanging out with your friends. And finally, we have tons of opportunities to serve others through our Church, specifically the lost and the needy.**

**THEN**, lead students in a discussion where you challenge them to choose one of the places on the board and list one way that they have served someone there in the past days, weeks, or months. Affirm their service. Encourage students to think of simple acts, not just big ones.

**NEXT**, once the discussion dies down, challenge students to choose one place as a way of thinking about how they will serve someone there in the upcoming days. Then, guide them to think of a very real, very practical way of doing so. (For example: If they choose "Home," they might set the table one night, or maybe volunteer to take their younger sibling somewhere so that a parent doesn't have to.) Really work to pull some practical examples out of students.

(If you really want this activity to have teeth, create some way that students can write down their acts of service in a prominent place, such as on poster board on the wall, or something similar. You could even have them text it to you, so you have a record of it. Then, make sure you do two things: text them during the week to remind them of their plan, and follow up next week to see who followed through.)

**FINALLY**, remind students that the goal is to live our lives embracing our new identity in Christ. Say:

- Being a servant of all puts us right where we need to be. Jesus said that humbly serving others is what defines greatness according to God. Let's all commit this week and beyond to embrace this aspect of our identity in Christ.

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute devotions 4-6 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 social media, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

## 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](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).