



LESSON 3: DO YOU BELIEVE?

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: We trust in God to meet our needs according to His plan and timing, not necessarily ours.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To take a look at the nature of their faith in God, to honestly assess any hesitancy or doubt, and to go to God in prayer with their thoughts.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 9:18-31, Matthew 21:17-22

Supporting Scripture: Mark 9:24, Psalms 34:17, Proverbs 15:29

OVERVIEW: It wouldn't be fair to discuss faith without dealing with the tension-filled relationship between faith and prayer. This lesson will show students three stories where people's prayers were answered, due in some small part to their strong faith. Then you'll look at where Jesus says that faithful prayers will always be answered. But, what do we say to the student who says, "I prayed and God didn't answer me"? Here lies the tension. This lesson will equip you to address this topic in a way that shows students their faith should be placed firmly in the character of God, not in human judgments of the relative success or failure of the outcomes of our prayers. You'll help students truly consider their own faith in God, whether it is a strong faith or a weak one. And you'll challenge them to take any questions or doubts to God, trusting that He alone can perfectly answer their concerns.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Your Faith 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 Your Faith Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-your-faith-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 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.

THE SETTING

The setting for Matthew 9 is deep amid Jesus' earthly ministry. Matthew shows Jesus immersed in the business of healing and teaching, performing miracles all around Galilee and Judea. Matthew 21 is a different setting as Jesus is nearing the last moments of His ministry on earth. Immediately before the passage, Jesus had triumphantly entered Jerusalem, and been hailed as the Messiah by His followers. Jesus would later leave the city with His disciples to sleep, as would have more than likely been their custom each Passover feast. He would encounter the barren fig tree the next morning on His way back into Jerusalem.

THE MAIN POINT

This lesson will help you discuss with your students their faith as it intersects with the needs they take to God in prayer. Jesus connects His willingness to heal individuals with the strength of their faith. He affirms the power of faith in Matthew 21. And yet, there are plenty of examples of faithful people who petition Jesus in prayer only to feel as if their prayers have gone unanswered, when in reality they have just not been answered in the way they might want them to. Ultimately, we can know that Jesus answers our prayers in accordance with His perfect plan, for our ultimate good and His glory. You'll engage your students with this line of discussion, challenging them to really think about the strength of their own faith.

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 the idea of God's timing and plan being better than ours.
- **Set-Up:** If you want, show the trailer for the movie *Ender's Game* available by searching on YouTube. It's not essential to the activity, but is a nice visual touch.

FIRST, ask students if they've seen the book or read the movie *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. If you want, you can choose to show the trailer at this time. If students have read or seen it, ask them to summarize the plotline for those who haven't. (If none of your students have read or seen it, you can download a great summary by going to imdb.com and searching for *Ender's Game*.) Then, explain that you're going to look at the last part of the story to make a point about faith.

THEN, explain that the point of the movie was to find suitable International Fleet commanders to defeat an army of insect like aliens called the Formix (or Buggers). The brightest children in the world were recruited to be trained at a space station called Battle School to lead the human army. **Say something like:**

- **The hero of the book, Ender Wiggin, was the best commander of all the genius children. He was fast-tracked through Battle School straight to Command School. He was tasked by the Fleet Generals with leading a hand-picked army of his fellow children through the most rigorous computer battle simulations ever imaginable. His team members started to break from the daily pressure of the simulated battles. Ender did too. Until there was just one more simulation left, the hardest battle simulation of all. With barely any mental or physical capacity left, Ender performed brilliantly, leading his squad leaders to victory in the massive battle simulation. Only then were Ender and the other children told the truth: it hadn't been a simulation at all. What they thought were simulations was the actual war with the Formix. Ender had won, saving humanity from destruction.**

FINALLY, ask a few questions before transitioning into the Main Event. **Ask:**

- **The truth of the real battle was kept from Ender and his companions. They were only ever told they were fighting simulations. What might have been the reason for the deception?**
Answer: There may have been fear that they would have panicked if they knew it was real. Maybe the pressure would be too much.
- **So, it's safe to say in this situation that the higher powers knew best, right? The Generals had all the details in full view when they made their decisions. Ender and the children only had their perspective in view. How is our relationship with God sometimes like this?**
Answer: We only see things, circumstances, problems, etc., through our limited view. God knows how all things will turn out. He has a big picture view.

Then, explain that this lesson is all about faith in relation to God's ability to meet our needs. **Say something like:**

- **We're about to see that God knows best. He sees behind the scenes and knows how and when to give us what we need. This fact should serve to provide us with a big faith boost. Let's see what Jesus had to say about this.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that because of our faith, we trust in God to meet our needs according to His plan and timing, not necessarily ours.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, see if anyone can recall what you've studied over the past few weeks. **Use the following bullet points to help you review:**

- **Lesson 1:** That our faith in Jesus is the means by which we find forgiveness and eternal relationship with Christ.
- **Lesson 2:** That a faith in Christ that is pure and persevering goes hand-in-hand with an acceptance and love of God's Word.

THEN, explain that you're going to start by looking at what Jesus had to say in the Gospel of Matthew. Instruct students to turn to Matthew 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 Matthew 9:18-31. If you do get students to read, divide it up into a few parts. Then, lead students in a discussion. **Ask:**

- **First things first, what jumps out at you about what these people asked Jesus to do?**
Answer: These things are practically impossible. To raise a girl from the dead, heal someone who has had chronic hemorrhaging for 12 years, and to make blind men see . . . essentially stuff that only God would be able to do for them.
- **So when Jesus successfully did all these things, what does this say about His true identity?**
Answer: It's pretty clear: Jesus is exactly who He said He was, the Son of God.
- **Looking at all three of these stories, what is the one thing they all have in common (besides the fact that they each had a problem that needed fixing)?**
Answer: In each of the passages, the healing of the individual seems to hinge on their faith.
- **While we don't see it as clearly in the case of the ruler, we do see his faith demonstrated. Where do we see it?**
Answer: The way he approached Jesus in verse 18 shows what great faith he had.
- **What about the faith of the woman? Where do we see it mentioned and how is it described?**
Answer: We hear her internal thoughts to herself, giving us a glimpse of her faith. Jesus affirms that her faith is indeed a strong faith in verse 22.
- **What about the two blind men? What do we learn about their faith?**
Answers: In verses 28-29 we see Jesus seem to imply that their faith is what healed them.
- **OK, so, let's unpack this some. If these people had faith that Jesus would heal them, and yet it wasn't Jesus' will that they should be healed, would they have been?**
Answer: No. Strong faith isn't a magic solution to having our needs met. It's not a way to outsmart God or anything like that. The individuals in this story were healed first and foremost because it was Jesus' will to heal them. In other words, it was in God's plan. And yet, their faith had something to do with it.

THEN, read or have students read Matthew 21:17-21, then lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **Jesus was using this as a chance to teach the disciples. The bit where Jesus was talking about moving mountains shouldn't be taken literally. It was a common phrase in the Jewish culture to describe anything that was a huge task. Knowing this, what was Jesus trying to teach His disciples about faith?**

Answer: He was talking about the strength of their faith. He was saying that if their faith is strong, they could accomplish even the hardest tasks.

- **Jesus ends with a phrase that brings us back to our discussion that started with the last passage we looked at. What does Jesus say in verse 22?**

Answer: That if we have strong faith, we'll receive whatever we ask for in faith.

NEXT, explain that it's here that we have to stop and ask a few questions. Why? Because Jesus' statement that if we have faith anything we ask for will be granted to us, needs to be looked at further. **Say something like the following:**

- **Let's pause for a moment and talk about faith as it pertains to the answering of our prayers. After all, there may be some of us in this room who have prayed for something, in good faith, that wasn't answered exactly how we wanted it to be. Does this conflict with what Jesus is saying? Let's break it down and take a closer look.**

Explain that you're going to look at the concept of answered/unanswered prayers from a few angles. **Ask:**

- **First things first, can you ask for anything you want, anything at all, and have Jesus answer it? Give some examples to support your position.**

Answers will vary, but lead students to see that the only prayers God promises to answer are those that align with His character and plan. Jesus articulated this in John 14:13-14: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

- **So, out of the gate, God only promises to answer those prayers that are in line with who He is. But what about the times when we pray and it doesn't go how we want it to? What if it's a prayer that a relative gets well? What if he or she doesn't get well? Does this mean we have weak faith? What do you think?**

- **Help students see that it may very well be that we have weak faith. And yet, in Mark 9 Jesus healed the boy of a father who seemed to have a wavering faith: "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). So, God can and will answer our prayers even though we may not have the strongest faith in the moment. He will answer simply because it is His will to answer them.**

- **So what is there left to say? Do we say that sometimes God simply doesn't want to answer our prayers? What do you think? Does God always answer our prayers?**

Answer: The Bible says over and over again that God does indeed hear our prayers. Psalms 34:17 says, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. Proverbs 15:29 says, "The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous." We can know that God hears and answers our prayers.

- **How do we leave it? What about those times where God doesn't seem to answer our prayers? How do you think we can explain this?**

Answer: Help students understand that God never promises to answer our prayers exactly as we want Him to. He promises to answer them in accordance with who He is as God. He may take longer to answer them. He may answer them in a way that we may not understand for years. But He will answer them. We can take great faith in that. And we can know that there is great purpose behind by He answers them the way He does. It is always about teaching and growing us, and bringing glory and honor to Him.

Ask if students have any questions. Then, transition to the Last Word by **saying something similar to the following:**

- **We learned from the three stories we read in Matthew 9:18-31 that faith does absolutely play a role in God answering our prayers. God wants us to have a strong faith in Him, trusting that He will meet our needs according to what is ultimately best for us, and to God’s ultimate glory. God will always answer our prayers according to His perfect plan, because He loves us. We must have a strong faith that allows God to answer our prayers as He sees fit, not as we see fit. Sometimes this might mean we hurt a little bit. Sometimes it means we might have to wait a little bit. But our faith allows us to learn from our trials, and love God even more.**

Make sure there aren’t any questions, then transition into the **Last Word**.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** Help students take a look at the nature of their faith in God, honestly assess any hesitancy or doubt, and go to God in prayer with their thoughts.
- **Set-Up:** You’re going to be facilitating a time of reflection using the “Lesson 3 Last Word Activity Sheet” (Located in your Lesson 3 Folder). The PDF has three pages, each with a symbol and a reflection prompt. You’ll want to print the PDF, find three spots in the room where students can go to reflect, and hang up each page as a separate reflection station. (If you have a large group, you may want to create at least one more duplicate set-up in another room and divide your class for the activity.) Students are going to divide into groups and rotate through the reflection stations, quietly reflecting on the prompts. You may also want to provide students with something to write with.

FIRST, explain to students that as you begin to wrap up your lesson, you want to give them an opportunity to think about the nature of their faith in light of what you covered in the lesson. Divide the class into three groups. Explain that around the room, they should see three reflection stations. At each station, there is a prompt to encourage prayer or reflection, or both. Explain that groups will have two or three minutes to quietly read the prompts and reflect on what is being asked. **Say:**

- **This can be a really important time for you to evaluate your faith and ask yourself questions you maybe haven’t before. Take it seriously, even though for many of you it might feel kind of odd or different. Our culture is so fast-paced. Getting a few minutes of quiet time with God isn’t a bad idea at all.**

THEN, ask if any students have questions. Make sure they have some way to take notes or jot thoughts down if they want, but it’s certainly not a necessity. If you have music to play in the background, it wouldn’t be a bad idea. If they are good to go, start the activity. After three minutes, rotate groups. When all groups have been to all of the stations, you’re done.

FINALLY, ask if the experience was super-weird or if they truly got something out of it. You’ll probably get some mixed reviews, but that’s OK. The point is that for many students, this will be one of the few times they’ve sat quietly and thought of this kind of spiritual reflection. Ask if anyone has any points they’d like to share. Close by challenging them to keep the reflections in the forefront of their minds as they go through the week. Encourage them to let this be a stepping-stone to thinking about their faith on this level.

Close in prayer.

- Don’t forget to distribute the “Lesson 3” 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 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.