ACTIVATE: Forgiveness

**MS & HS CURRICULUM**

**Connect Groups**

**August 8, 2021**

**Lesson 44:** Forgiveness Made Real

**What we want students to learn:** That through Jesus’ work on the cross, all who believe in Him are presented to God as completely forgiven.

**What we want students to do with what they’ve learned:** To determine your standing with God, and to respond accordingly.

**Scripture Focus:** Colossians 1:21-23

**Overview:** If it's one thing we're good at, it's moving fast. As a culture, we're about as fast-paced as you can get. While this isn't all bad, the issue is that it's easy to miss stuff. Especially stuff that requires us to slow down and process what we're seeing. This is especially true about matters of faith. We move so fast we don't take the time to settle in and process all that God is and has done for us. We know we are forgiven in Christ, we accept this, and we move on. We don't stop and allow ourselves to be absolutely blown away by the profound nature of what this means. This lesson is an attempt to help your students pause and reflect on the power of the truth that Jesus, God Himself, purchased their forgiveness with His life.

**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 of what’s happening in and around the passage. *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**

Colossians

* **Author:** The Apostle Paul identified himself as the author of Colossians.
* **Timeframe:** Most people believe Colossians was written sometime between A.D. 61 and 63, during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:17-31).
* **Purpose:** Ultimately, this letter’s purpose is to emphasize the supremacy of Christ over everything. Paul was writing to combat the spread of false teachings among the church at Colossae. The exact heresy being refuted is not certain and may have been a blend of multiple influences. The legalism, mysticism, and asceticism corrupting the pure faith in Colossae were moving attention away from Christ, placing it instead on self-discipline and the awe of other spiritual things.

**The Main Point**

This passage is an EXCELLENT definition, in relatively few words, of the picture of what the forgiveness Jesus offers us looks like. You'll use the passage as a way of defining for students what forgiveness looks like. It is an encapsulation of the Gospel and of the amazing work Jesus did for us through His incarnation, death, and resurrection. The picture painted here of what Jesus has done for us is POWERFUL. You'll focus on the words "holy and blameless and above reproach" as you teach teenagers about the forgiveness Jesus offers.

**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:** The goal is to get students thinking about the extravagance of the forgiveness Jesus offers.
* **Set-Up:** You may want to prepare a story of the most extravagant thing anyone has ever done for you.

FIRST, explain to students that you’re going to lead them in a brief discussion before you jump into your Bible study.

THEN, share the story you had prepared about a time when someone did something extravagant for you, something truly over the top. Make sure you talk about how it felt and how it changed your life.

NEXT, allow students to share their own stories. Encourage students to share how it made them feel and how it changed their lives, even if it was only in that moment.

THEN, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

* **What is it about really awesome, totally unexpected gifts that just kind of rocks our world?**
* **Have you ever done something really over-the-top amazing for someone else? How did it make them feel? How did it make YOU feel?**

FINALLY, explain to students that you will be looking at the second lesson in a three-lesson look at God’s forgiveness. As they may have guessed, you’re going to spend some time looking at the truly extravagant nature of Jesus’ offer of salvation and how it changes their lives.

If there are no other comments, jump into The Main Event.

**The Main Event**

* **Goal:** To show students that through Jesus’ work on the cross, all who believe in Him are presented to God as completely forgiven.
* **Set-Up:** None

FIRST, have students remind you of what you studied in the last lesson. Feel free to use the following bullet points to help guide your review:

* **God is able and willing to forgive us of our sins.**
* **We saw this desire to forgive over and over again in how God dealt with His chosen people, Israel.**
* **All sin, no matter who is hurt by it, is sin against God.**

THEN, explain to students that this lesson is going to be what you might call Gospel-centered. Ask your students if someone can define the word Gospel for you. Remind them the Greek word for “gospel” translates as “good news.” Ask:

* **Why is the Gospel good news?**

Allow students to offer answers. Affirm responses but don't correct or redirect the conversation. Work the discussion until you feel like a good variety of responses have been provided. Then, explain that today as you continue your look at God’s forgiveness, they are going to look at a really clear, very concise definition of the Gospel, one that is extremely empowering for them as they seek to live the Christian life.

NEXT, have students turn to Colossians 1:21-23. While they are finding it, provide some context for the book by referencing the Bible Background portion of your lesson. When you’re ready, read or have a student read the verses. When they’ve finished, explain that while this is only a few verses, there is a ton of depth here. Then, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

* **In verse 21 Paul makes a statement about our STATUS before coming to saving faith in Jesus. How does Paul describe us?**
  + *Answer*: Alienated from God, hostile against God, and doing evil deeds
* **How does this sound to you? Does it sound overly harsh?** 
  + Answers will vary. Help students see that if we have a proper understanding of what our sin truly is, we won’t think it’s too harsh.
* **The first sign here of the concept of forgiveness is in verse 22. We see a big, important word pop up: reconciliation. What does reconciliation mean in general?** 
  + *Answer*: Reconciliation means to make peace, or to restore friendly relations between two people or parties.
* **OK, so let’s spiritualize it. Paul says that Jesus reconciled us to God. Why did we need reconciling?**
  + *Answer*: Because Scripture tells us that our sin creates animosity between God and us. A holy, perfect God cannot be in a relationship with anything that is less than holy. Because of our sin, we are unholy. Furthermore, our sin puts us in rebellion against God. Our sin is our way of rejecting God as God. It creates disharmony between us.
* **Here’s a question before we move on: Is there anything we can do on our own to reconcile ourselves to God? Why or why not?** 
  + *Answer*: Because we are sinful, we’ll never be able, on our own accord, to reconcile ourselves to God. We are incapable of solving our sin problem.
* **With this as our backdrop, Jesus broke through. He came to earth, fully God and fully man, to live a perfect life and die in our place so that through faith in Him, we might be freed from the death our sin earns. But sometimes we fail to look deep enough at what Jesus does for us when we come to saving faith in Him. Look at the second part of vs. 22. Paul says Jesus presents us to God in a certain way. How does God see us because of the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf?**
  + *Answer*: Holy, blameless, and above reproach
* **Each one of these words has a slightly different meaning. Taken together, what picture do they paint of us?**
  + *Answer*: Innocent. Free from the guilt of our sin. God sees us through a lens of Jesus’ sacrifice. He sees us as completely sin-free.

THEN, allow this final thought to soak in a bit. Ask students if they feel sinless. (You're not looking for an answer. It's more of a rhetorical question to prove a point.) Ask them if, when they think of their thoughts and actions and words, do they feel holy. Ask them if they feel innocent of any sin. The answer is that none of you in the room you're in could feel this way. Why? Because you know your heart. You know you still sin and still struggle with sin. How beautiful a thing it is, then, that your holiness doesn't depend on you!

FINALLY, say something like:

* **As we consider the forgiveness offered to us through Jesus, we should all be a little in awe of God’s unyielding love for us. His plan to extend forgiveness to us through faith in Christ changes everything. It is nothing short of a miracle that God, in His grace, chooses to see us as sinless through the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. It is a life-giving, reconciling forgiveness. It calls us to consider our standing with God.**

**The Last Word**

* **Goal:** To determine your standing with God, and to respond accordingly.
* **Set-Up:** A note

FIRST, explain to students that more than anything, a time of Bible study like this demands that they evaluate where they are with the Lord. Some of your students may have a strong faith that is primary in their lives. Others of your students may have a saving relationship with Jesus, but not one that they take very seriously. Still others of your students may not have ever made a first-time decision for faith in Christ. This is your chance to challenge each one of these students represented to respond to God depending on where they stand with Him.

NEXT, in a way that is appropriate to your church’s specific context, allow space for each of these types of responses. You know your group best. If this can be handed in a public way, then do so. If it needs to be done in private, make allowances for that to happen. The goal is to allow a moment for students who have never professed saving faith in Jesus a chance to do so. Again, make sure it’s done in a way that is in line with your church and its practices.

Equally important is a chance for students who have been saved by faith in Christ but who aren’t truly following Him to have a chance to re-focus on their faith. There is no time like the present to call students to repentance and a more active faith life. Determine the best way to handle this in your group, but don't miss the chance to challenge students.

FINALLY, for students who are walking with the Lord, and are taking their faith seriously, provide an avenue for them to have a time of prayer, thanking God and praising Him for His role in their life. Encourage these students. Urge them to continue to walk faithfully with the Lord and grow in their faith.

When is it time to end your group time, close in prayer.

* 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.