

THE THREAD

DISCOVERING THE THREAD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE BIG-PICTURE STORY OF THE BIBLE

PART 3: THE GOSPEL COME TO LIFE

LESSON 9 || THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: John 11:1-14

GOSPEL FOCUS: John 14:1-6

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

- Understand that Jesus has power over death and the physical laws of our world.
- Grasp that Jesus is the only way to salvation and life.
- Discuss ways they pursue salvation/fulfillment apart from Christ.

OVERVIEW:

You're closing in on the heart of the Gospel, namely, the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. But before you get to all that, you'll spend this week studying an amazing encounter, one of the most fascinating stories in Scripture. You're going to see how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and, in the process, discover how Jesus Himself is the only source of true life. Your students will be challenged to re-focus their devotion on Christ, trusting Him for true life.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

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



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, we encourage teachers to help students know *who* wrote a particular book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHY TEACH CONTEXT?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

JOHN

- *Author:* The Gospel of John was written by John the Apostle, son of Zebedee. A fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus, John also penned the Book of Revelation and the three New Testament letters that bear his name.

- *Time frame:* The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 AD. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.
- *Purpose:* John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, the last two verses in his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John's goal seems to have been to clearly communicate a full theology of Jesus as the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- **GETTING STARTED**– An introductory activity designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- **THE STORY**– A section featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- **THE THREAD**– A special emphasis where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- **WRAPPING UP**– An application-focused segment helping teenagers ask the question, “How am I impacted by what I learned today”?

GETTING STARTED

- *Goal:* To get students talking about what happens when a superstar athlete doesn't save the day when you expect them to.
- *Set-Up:* You'll need to have a way to show the group a YouTube video of NFL player Randy Bullock missing a game-winning field goal: <https://youtu.be/ICFmPvP4JQw>

FIRST, start the conversation by asking:

- If an NFL kicker has a field goal to win a game, would you expect that he should make it just about every time?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- Let's watch an example of that scenario.

THEN, show the group the YouTube video and ask:

- So, Randy Bullock is a pretty good kicker, and he made just about \$2 million the year he missed this kick. He has a chance to win the game by making a field goal, something he's practiced thousands of times. Do you think his team and fans expected him to make it?
 - *Answer:* Most likely.
- What is just about every Tennessee Titans (his team) fan thinking when he misses it?
 - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, let your students know that you'll be talking about a time when some of Jesus' closest friends hoped He'd come through for them. But then things didn't work out the way they wanted. Say something like:

- Today, as we continue our big-picture look at the story of the Bible, we're going to hear about a time when some people hoped that Jesus would come through at the last minute, and Jesus didn't do quite what they hoped He would.

TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* Students will understand that Jesus has power over death and the physical laws of our world.
- *Set-Up:* Students will need a Bible or a Bible app.

FIRST, explain that in this lesson, you'll be looking at the raising of Lazarus from the dead. If you'd like, use the Connecting The Dots section below to review or fill in the gaps between your last lesson and this one.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

As you teach *The Thread*, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it to review or connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- As we pick up this lesson, Jesus is nearing the end of His ministry and life on Earth.
- It's difficult to construct a timeline with much accuracy between the events of the last lesson, the telling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and this lesson. But it's safe to say that Jesus was teaching and healing as He made His way to Jerusalem.

NEXT, set up the passage you're going to walk through. **Say something like:**

- **One of the hardest things about following Jesus is when tragedies tear someone's life apart. I mean, if God really loves us and has the power to do or prevent anything, then why is life so tragic sometimes? Why can it feel to us that God is some times absent during those times? And when miracles do happen, why does it seem they happen in one instance but not in another? It's one thing to ask these questions in theory, but today, we're going to hear an account of some people who wrestled with these very same questions—people who also happened to be close friends of Jesus during His time here on Earth.**

THEN, instruct students to turn to John 11. While they are finding it, give the context for the book using the Bible Background section. Then, read or have a student read John 11:1-16. **Ask:**

- **Before we get into what's happening in this passage, tell me: what do you notice about Jesus' relationship with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha?**
 - *Answer:* They seem to be pretty close friends. We know from other passages in the Gospels that Jesus spent some time at their house and in their town. In addition, John tells us in verse 5 that Jesus loved these three people, and when Mary and Martha send a message to Jesus about Lazarus, all they say is, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
- **So given their friendship with Jesus, what do you think their expectations are when they send a message to Jesus that Lazarus is sick?**
 - *Answers will vary.* They seem to expect that Jesus will be able to intervene with a miracle as He has in other people's lives. If He's done it for perfect strangers, why wouldn't He do it for a friend? Allow students to begin to understand what Mary and Martha are experiencing emotionally.

NEXT, help students wrestle through the fact that Jesus does not go to help Mary and Martha right away. **Say:**

- **If you've got a friend who can work miracles and heal people, surely they'd come through for you if someone you really loved were sick, right? But does Jesus go to see them right away?**
 - *Answer:* No, He stays where He is for a couple more days.
- **This seems like a weird response, but Jesus gives His followers a clue about what He's up to when He talks with them about Lazarus. What does He say about Lazarus' illness and eventual death?**
 - *Answer:* Point students to verses 4 and 14-15 if they need some direction. Jesus says that the end result of Lazarus' illness and death is that God (and His Son, Jesus) will be glorified and that Jesus' disciples will believe.

THEN, read or have a student read 11:17-37. **Say:**

- **This is an incredibly tense scene. Both Mary and Martha say to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Have you ever wanted to say something like that to God?**
 - *Answer:* It may take students a bit to grasp the question and open up with an honest answer. Silence at this point is okay. The goal is that students would put themselves in Martha's and Mary's shoes and feel a little bit of what they were feeling.

- In Jesus' conversation with Martha, Jesus tells her that those who believe in Him will have eternal life. Do you think that comforted Martha, or do you think it didn't really help her grief at that moment?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- What do you think it would have taken for Martha to 100% believe what Jesus was saying at that moment?
 - *Answers will vary.* Some may say it would have taken a miracle.
- Jesus becomes very emotional as He is taken to where Lazarus is buried. If you don't know how this story ends, spoiler alert: Jesus brings Lazarus back to life. If Jesus knew that's what was going to happen, why do you think He cried?
 - *Answers will vary.* But point out that it most likely points to Jesus caring deeply for this family; their grief, and His, moved Him to tears.

NEXT, read or have a student read 11:38-44. Ask:

- If you've been around church for any period of time, chances are you already knew at the beginning of this story how it would end. But the people there with Jesus didn't know how it would end. What do you think Martha was feeling at this point?
 - *Answers will vary.* Allow students to think of a variety of possibilities. It could be that she was getting annoyed at this point and was still frustrated with Jesus.
- It's interesting that in verse 40, Jesus says that if Martha believes, she'll see the glory of God. Basically, Jesus is saying that she'll see how amazing God is. Why do you think He put it that way instead of saying something along the lines of "If you believe, everything will work out?"
 - *Answers will vary.* You may need to help your group walk through this question.

THEN, help your students wrestle with the concept that God doesn't primarily perform miracles for our comfort but rather for His glory. Say something like:

- At the beginning of our conversation, we talked about the fact that one of the hardest things Christians wrestle with is the question of why God—who is all-powerful and loves us unconditionally—seems to intervene with miracles in some situations and tragedies but not in others. What do you think this story about Lazarus has to do with that issue?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- No matter what we do with this passage, one thing is clear: Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead wasn't just about raising Lazarus from the dead. Think about it: One day, Lazarus would die again. Jesus was making a more significant point: that He is the source of life—eternal life. Do you think Mary and Martha began to grasp that through this experience? Why or why not?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- So if someone randomly asked you at school this week, "Why did Jesus bring Lazarus back to life?" what would you say?
 - The goal is to help students learn that Jesus brought Lazarus back to life to show Jesus' glory as the Son of God, the source of eternal life.

THE THREAD

Have your group turn to John 14. Before diving into the passage, provide some background information on John 14:1-6 for your group. Say something like:

- What we're about to read happened during the Last Supper. It was Jesus' last night before He would be arrested, tried, and killed. During the evening, Jesus tries to help His followers understand what's about to happen and what He has planned for afterward. However, most of them are upset at His revealing that one of them will betray Him and that His time on Earth is almost done.

THEN, read or have a student read John 14:1-6. Ask:

- Because we get to read this after Jesus died and rose again, we understand what He's talking about. But what does Thomas think Jesus is talking about in verse 5?
 - *Answer:* That Jesus is planning on taking a physical trip to another town. They knew that the religious leaders wanted to kill Him after He raised Lazarus from the dead, so it's possible Thomas thought Jesus would flee to protect His life.

FINALLY, connect the dots between Jesus' conversations with Mary and Martha in John 11 with Jesus' conversations with His disciples here. Say,

- In a way, this conversation has a lot in common with what happened between Jesus, Mary, and Martha when Lazarus died. Mary and Martha had a very real, difficult, and immediate concern: their brother had died. But though Jesus cared about what they were going through—remember, Jesus cried when they took Him to Lazarus' tomb—He was pointing to an even greater need: eternal life. How does that relate to Thomas' question and Jesus' answer?
 - *Answers will vary.* Thomas was concerned about what would happen to Jesus in the short term. This was a valid concern because Jesus' life really was in danger. But while Jesus' disciples were concerned about whether He would continue to be with them physically, Jesus was pointing to a greater need, just like He did with Mary and Martha: eternal life.
- Jesus told Martha that whoever believes in Him will never die. However, He doesn't explain what that means during the conversation. Here, just a few chapters later, in this conversation with Thomas and the other disciples, what does Jesus say about eternal life and a relationship with Him?
 - *Answer:* Jesus says that He is the only way to eternal life.
- When you think about it, that's kind of a weird way to put it. Usually, when we describe how to do something or get some where, we talk about the steps we need to take. But Jesus doesn't just say that there is a way to be reconciled to God or give steps for how to do it. He says that He is the way back to God. What do you think that means?
 - *Answers will vary.* Allow room for some conversation, but help students land here: Trusting in Jesus and His sacrifice is the only way to be reconciled to God because we are powerless to do it ourselves.

IF YOUR STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS, TRANSITION INTO THE WRAPPING UP SECTION.

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* Students will discuss ways they pursue salvation/fulfillment apart from Christ.
- *Set-Up:* None.

FIRST, help your students connect what happened to Mary and Martha to some of the things their friends are going through. Ask:

- Before Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, Mary and Martha were upset with Him because they thought He should have been there to prevent Lazarus' death. Without using names, can you think of anything your friends are going through that might cause them to wonder why God is absent or not there to help them?
 - *Answers will vary.* Provide enough time and space for them to tell stories. Some students might share how this is true in their lives. That's okay, too.
- Have you ever felt like there was nothing you could do to help friends going through that kind of thing?
 - *Answers will vary.* Again, give space for students to have a discussion. The idea is to help them connect with the story emotionally.

NEXT, lead a discussion about how it's easy to try to find fulfillment apart from Jesus. Say:

- When our friends are hurting, it affects us, right? We saw that Jesus hurt for His friends who were grieving. What Mary and Martha wanted most at that moment was to have their brother Lazarus back. And we know Jesus was more than capable of doing that because He eventually brought Lazarus back to life. Losing a brother is a real tragedy, but what did Mary and Martha need even more than having their brother back?
 - *Answer:* Mary and Martha needed forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with God more than they needed Lazarus back.
- Think about the friends you have who are hurting. What are some of the things they hope will happen in their life?
 - *Answers will vary.* Help them refer back to the friends they mentioned a few minutes ago who are hurting right now.
- Those are genuine needs, and God cares about your friends and their needs. But if we take seriously what we've heard Jesus say to Martha and Thomas today, what do your friends need even more than that?
 - *Answer:* To understand that Jesus is the only way to true life and to come to Him for salvation.

FINALLY, help your students understand how to love and pray for their friends. Say something like:

- Of course, this can be hard to talk about with our friends, right? There is no formula for how to help friends who don't yet know Jesus or understand their need for Him, but we can take a cue from Jesus. He doesn't just start preaching at Martha and Mary; He's a friend to them and cares for them in their tragic loss. How can you share about God's love when a friend is going through a tough time?
 - *Answers will vary.* Encourage your group to share their experiences, but don't force students to share if they don't want to.

Close your Bible study in prayer, perhaps praying for friends who don't yet have a relationship with Jesus.

- If you've purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they'll be working through Week 35 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.
- If you're utilizing the digital devotions included in the Thread curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well that you want to share?
- Something that didn't work that 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.