

THE THREAD

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

PART 4: THE GOSPEL AT WORK

LESSON 1 || JESUS APPEARS & ASCENDS

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: John 20:19-29; Acts 1:1-11

GOSPEL FOCUS: Matthew 28:18-20

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

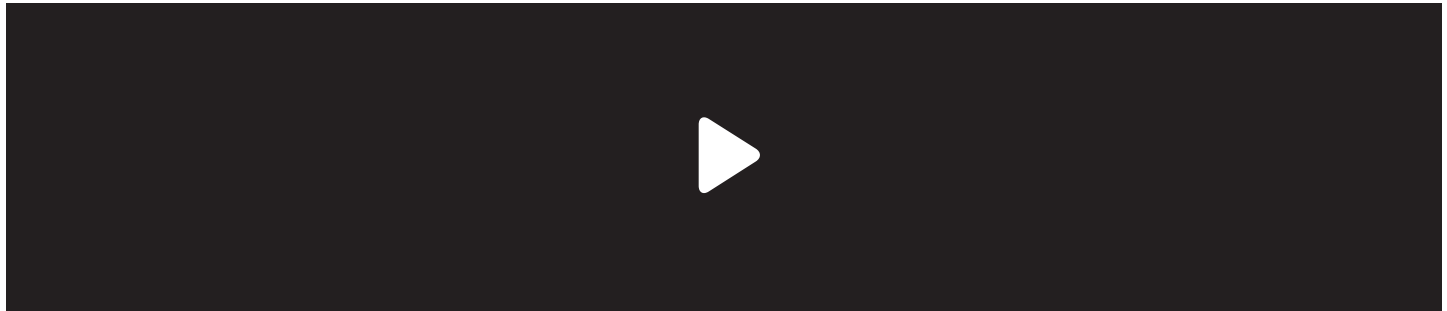
- Understand that after Jesus arose, He appeared to His disciples before ultimately rejoining God the Father in Heaven.
- Understand Jesus' call to share the Gospel with the world.
- Grasp that the Holy Spirit empowers them to be messengers of the Gospel.

OVERVIEW:

This lesson starts a new section in your journey through the big-picture study of the Bible. In this section of 13 lessons, you'll look at the spread of the Gospel and Christianity in a post-crucifixion/resurrection world. As you do, it'll be important to help students transition into seeing the Gospel at work in the world. You'll begin doing this by looking at Jesus' ascension. This lesson will help your students continue to grasp the nature of their call to share the Gospel with those around them.

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.

ACTS

- *Author:* Acts has long been held to be a letter from Luke, a Gentile physician, to a man named Theophilus, possibly a benefactor of some sort.
- *Time frame:* There is some debate over when Acts was written. The suggested dates are between 70 AD and 80 AD.
- *Purpose:* The book of Acts is a second letter to Theophilus that tells the story of the early Church following Jesus' resurrection. The book begins with Jesus' ascension and His command to His followers to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The rest of the book traces this journey as the early Church leaders proclaim the Gospel and plant churches.

MATTHEW

- *Author:* Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the events he details in his gospel.
- *Time frame:* Most people hold to Matthew's gospel being written in the late 50s or 60s AD, though some think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- *Purpose:* Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to persuade them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. He was also probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel declares that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

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:* For students to consider that seeing is not always believing.
- *Set-Up:* Visit the link provided to view the video of the optical illusions. You may want to start the video at the 0:30 mark.
 - o https://youtu.be/2hIo_N-yRyE

FIRST, determine a way to display the video for your students. Once they catch on to how the optical illusions work, see if they can look at the rest of the pictures and see both interpretations in every image.

THEN, when you’ve finished, explain that the funny thing about optical illusions is that people can look at the same thing and see something completely different. For this reason, our sight is not always the most reliable of our senses, yet most people still feel that “seeing is believing!” **Say something like:**

- **In today’s lesson, we will see that the disciples needed to see with their own eyes to believe that Jesus had really been resurrected from the dead. They were undoubtedly traumatized by the events of Christ’s unfair trial, beating, and crucifixion. They barely had time to begin to process this experience when they received the shock of a lifetime – Christ appeared to them after His death!**

FINALLY, explain that it is easy for us to think that the disciples should have expected this, but we have the big picture of Scripture in view. They didn’t! They were living this moment-to-moment! Remind them that Christ knew that for His disciples to fully embrace their mission, they would need the assurance of seeing His victory first-hand. Explain that this is what you’re going to be studying today.

TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* Students will understand that after Jesus arose, He appeared to His disciples before ultimately rejoining God the Father in Heaven.
- *Set-Up:* Students will need a Bible or a Bible app. You may find that a dry-erase board is helpful for jotting down some notes, but it’s not essential.

FIRST, 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.

- The end of Jesus' life was a chaotic and confusing time in history. While John witnessed these events first-hand, his Gospel account was written later in his life as a careful reflection of all that he had experienced.
- Luke wrote the book of Acts. Luke is considered a second-generation Christian, living and serving in the time of the apostle Paul rather than with the original twelve disciples. Luke's purpose in writing Acts was to record an accurate history of the establishment of Christ's Church.

THEN, tell students that today's lesson begins just days after Christ's crucifixion. He has been resurrected, but not everyone knows. In fact, most of the people in town are either temporarily relieved, thinking that they have ended this annoying uprising, or deeply grieved by the loss of Jesus. But, there is not much time for either. Jesus doesn't waste a moment between conquering death and getting back to work! He knows that the disciples need one more lesson from Him before He can send them out into the world.

NEXT, instruct students to turn to John 20. Use the Bible Background section of this lesson to paint a picture of the context for John's gospel. Then, read or have a student read John 20:19-23. Lead your students in a discussion by asking:

- Notice that John says here that **AFTER** Jesus showed them His scars, **THEN** the disciples were glad to see Him. **What do you think their initial reaction might have been?**
 - *Answers will vary.* But fear and/or shock may have been the most prevalent emotion.
- Jesus is standing before the disciples alive and well after a brutal death. **How do you think knowing that He is sending them in the SAME way the Father sent Him might bring them peace?**
 - *Answer:* Seeing the power of the resurrection reminds them that being sent by God means being empowered by God. Even in the face of danger, they can have peace knowing that He is in control.
- **Why do you think that Jesus breathed on them when He told them He was sending them?**
 - *Answer:* The breath of God is an expression of His power. He is literally giving them a measure of His power to carry out His work in His name! (You may want to point out to your students that the extent of the role of the Holy Spirit is unclear at this moment. Some scholars suggest that Jesus is telling them to receive the Holy Spirit when it comes at Pentecost and that He is just giving them a foretaste here.)
- **Can you think of other times in Scripture when the words or breath of God revealed His power?**
 - *Answer:* At creation, God spoke all things into existence. When He created man, it was God's breath that brought him to life in the image of Himself. Remember, Christ was present and active in creation according to John 1:1-5, so the same breath that brought the world into existence has just commissioned the disciples!
- **What do you think Jesus might mean in verse 23? After all, isn't God the only one with the power to forgive sins?**
 - Help students see that the phrases "they are forgiven" and "it is withheld" could also be translated "they have been forgiven" and "it has been withheld." The ESV Study Bible (Crossway) points out that Jesus is not telling them that they have the authority to decide who is forgiven, but rather as they proclaim the Gospel, they will be carrying out what God has already accomplished in the work of salvation. Those who believe have been forgiven and those who do not believe will not have their sins forgiven. He is summing up the effectiveness of the Gospel that they will preach.

THEN, have someone read John 20:24-29. Ask:

- **Have you ever heard anyone use the phrase "Doubting Thomas" to refer to someone?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

- **Do you think that this is a fair description for Thomas? Why or why not?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Remember that the other disciples already saw Jesus' scars when He first appeared to them. When Thomas hears their story, he says that he needs to see it to believe it – just as they had. Jesus points out to them that while they have seen, others will believe who have not seen.
- **Jesus says in verse 29, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” How does this apply to us?**
 - *Answer:* While the disciples were clearly blessed to have walked with Jesus, we are no less His disciples today. As believers who follow Christ after His ascension, we display our faith in Christ and His Word that reveals His works to us.

NEXT, instruct students to turn over to the Book of Acts. Give some of the context for the book using the Bible Background if you choose. **Read or have a student read Acts 1:1-11.**

- **What event is Luke summarizing here? This should sound familiar!**
 - *Answer:* Luke begins this historical account by retelling the same events John described in our previous passage. Explain that Luke is the only one who tells us that Jesus visited His followers for forty days. He reminds us again of the important instructions that Jesus gave the disciples when He told them to wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.
- **This is the last physical conversation that the disciples have with Jesus on earth. Look carefully at the words exchanged. What was the last question the disciples asked Jesus?**
 - *Answer:* “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”
- **Can you guess what the disciples might be implying here?**
 - *Answer:* The same expectation of a military deliverance that misled the Jews at Jesus' birth still consumed the disciples at His ascension. They realized that His earthly work was done and seemed to assume that the Kingdom of God would result in the Israelites being freed from Roman control and returned to a sovereign nation. Jesus quickly corrects them that this was not to be their concern. Instead, He shifts their attention back to spreading the Gospel.
- **What were Jesus' very last words to them?**
 - *Answer:* “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

Explain to students that while the disciples are still focused on the immediate salvation of their people, Jesus turns their attention to the eternal salvation of His people! This sets in motion a historical change in the understanding of God's promise. His salvation is not only for the Jews but for the world. **Say something like:**

- **This sending commission that the disciples receive tells them again that power will come upon them that will equip them to be Jesus' witnesses both at home and afar. They had endured much with Jesus by their side, but He makes it clear that He is not leaving them alone.**

FINALLY, remind students that back in John 20:21, Jesus said that He was sending the disciples in the same way that the Father sent Him. Jesus came to earth to accomplish what only God could accomplish. **Say something like:**

- **God did not send Him here as a man to save the world on His own because only the power of God can save the lost. Similarly, Jesus is not asking us to spread the Gospel as mere people. While we certainly are not God, He promises to fill us with His Spirit as we do His work. Only through His power can we be His witnesses!**

IF STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, TRANSITION TO THE THREAD AND TAKE A LOOK AT WHERE WE SEE THE CONNECTION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE BIG-PICTURE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE.

THE THREAD

FIRST, instruct students to read Matthew 28:18-20. Explain that Jesus tells us that we will be filled with His Spirit and are to be His witnesses, but what does that look like in real life? Remind students that Matthew gives us a more detailed description of Jesus' instructions. **Ask your students:**

- **Why does Jesus begin by telling them that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to” Him?**
 - *Answer:* He knew that they were still insecure in their doubt, and they needed encouragement.
- **What evidence does Jesus have of this authority in both heaven and earth?**
 - *Answer:* The resurrection! Conquering death was a physical victory showing His power over all things. This was demonstrated to proclaim His power in Heaven to forgive sins and offer eternal life.
- **How does this power impact the words He speaks next when He tells them to “go”?**
 - *Answer:* He doesn't just say, “Go.” He says, “Go, therefore.” It is because of His power that He can send them in His authority as His messengers.

Make sure to draw students' attention to the fact that Jesus gives this command to His disciples because He is telling them to go and make more disciples. The years that Jesus spent with these men accomplished many things, not the least of which was to model the process of discipleship that He calls them to replicate. Remind them that He specifically tells the disciples to teach others all that He taught them. He even specifies baptism, which He also modeled for the disciples. In this moment, it is clear that Jesus has shown the disciples everything they need to do.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **In the end, Jesus leaves the earth in the same way He entered it – by the declaration that He is with us! Just like the angels announced His birth as the Immanuel, or God with us, He departs by assuring us that He is with us to the end of the age.**

IF NO ONE HAS ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS, TRANSITION TO THE WRAPPING UP SECTION OF THE LESSON.

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* Students will grasp that the Holy Spirit empowers them to be messengers of the Gospel.
- *Set-Up:* Whiteboard or poster board and a marker.

FIRST, tell students that you are going to split them into two groups to discuss Jesus' commission. The idea is to get them to brainstorm what it looks like to carry this out and realize that they are all in this together. Instruct them as follows:

- Group one will discuss what it looks like to “make disciples.”
- Group two will discuss how we “teach them to observe all (Jesus) commanded.”

NEXT, tell students that they will discuss three questions for the specific part of the commission that they are assigned. On the board, write the following questions for each group:

- What is involved in this task?
- How does the Holy Spirit work in this area?
- How well are we doing this as a church and as individuals?

Give students time to talk in their groups. You may need to help get them started and monitor their discussions. For example, group one may discuss that making disciples means spending time with people to show them who Jesus is. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to point others to Christ and stirs in the lost person's heart, causing them to understand the truth.

THEN, once students have generated some ideas, have them share with the group as a whole. Conclude by helping them see areas where the Great Commission is being followed by your church in various ways. (ex. Foreign missions support and trips, church planting, preaching the Gospel, community service, teaching the Bible.) Make sure to wrap up the discussion by focusing on the fact that this is a command to churches, but first, it is a command to individual believers. We are each accountable for our obedience to this commission!

FINALLY, close by asking students to think about the following questions:

- Who's discipling you?
- Who are you currently discipling?
- How is the Holy Spirit working through you to do this?
- Have you been baptized as Jesus commanded?
- If not, why? If so, when was the last time you talked about it with someone?
- Are you taking advantage of every opportunity to know God's Word so that you can teach it to others?

Remind them that as believers, we must draw near to the Spirit through every opportunity. Say something like:

- **The more we cling to Him, the more effective we can be in carrying out His work through the Great Commission. Ask Him this week to show you how you can share what you know about Christ with someone who needs to hear it – and then be ready! God will place someone in your path and use you to bring others to Him!**

If there are no more questions, close your time in prayer.

- If you've purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they'll be working through Week 40 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.