

THE THREAD

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

PART 4: THE GOSPEL AT WORK

LESSON 3 || A PICTURE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: Acts 2:42-47

GOSPEL FOCUS: I Corinthians 1:18-24

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

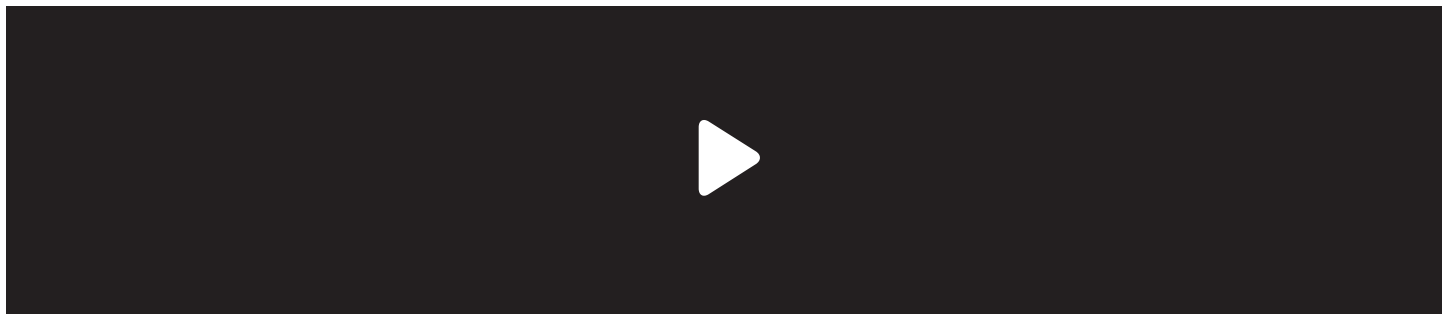
- Understand that what we know as the Church had begun to take shape in Jerusalem.
- Understand that the message of Christ and the cross leads to salvation.
- Grasp their role in sharing their faith and growing the Church.

OVERVIEW:

This week, you'll focus on the early Church and how it got off the ground. Churches today may be different than when the Church first started, but one thing has remained the same: The Gospel. No matter what the color of the carpet is, no matter if you still use hymnals, or how many youth you have in your program, the Gospel is always the same. As you continue your big-picture look at the story of the Bible, your students will see a snapshot of the early Church. Through it, they'll learn that the Gospel is capable of knitting people together in pursuit of Christ, changing the world in the process. Your students will be challenged to imitate the New Testament Church as they pursue Christ in their contexts.

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.

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.

1 CORINTHIANS

- *Author:* The Apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the Church in Corinth.
- *Time frame:* Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus between, most likely, 53 - 55 AD.
- *Purpose:* Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written to a divided church to call them to become united for the sake of the Gospel. He was calling the church to lay down the things that divided them in order to fully embrace the one thing that is strong enough to unite them: Christ!

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 thinking about the Church, its mission and vision, and their role in it.
- *Set-Up:* First, set up a whiteboard with markers.

FIRST, ask your students to write on the board what they think of when they think of church. This can range from “youth group” to “potlucks” to “safe place” to “Fall Festival.” Have fun with this! Let it go on for as long as it’s productive. Then, step back and read the list aloud to the group.

THEN, widen the description. Instruct them to write down what they do at church and maybe words that describe the church’s mission or purpose. Again, have fun with this. When they’ve finished, step back and have them talk about what they wrote.

NEXT, engage students in a big-picture discussion of what people wrote on the board. **Ask questions similar to the following:**

- Which words or phrases stick out to you and why?
- What are some of the things that are in common?
- Why did you choose some of the words you chose?

FINALLY, say something like:

- This week, we’re going to talk about the early Church. After Jesus died, people hurried to continue spreading the Gospel and formed churches to do so. When the Church first started, it grew quickly. But what did the early Church look like? Did it look like today’s Church? And how did it grow so quickly? We’re going to learn the answers to these questions and many more!

TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* To understand that what we know as the Church had begun to take shape in Jerusalem.
- *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.

- Explain to students that unlike some of your lessons this year, there is virtually zero time that has passed from the events of last week's lesson and the events you'll cover in this week's lesson.
- Explain that this description of the early church immediately follows Peter's sermon at Pentecost, part of which you studied in Part 4, Lesson 2.
- Consider asking students what they recall from the last lesson.

THEN, explain to students that you're going to do things a little differently this week. Explain that you're going to read a passage from Acts, and then you're going to look at six different characteristics of the New Testament church, characteristics that serve as a model for us today. Direct students' attention to Acts 2. While they are finding the passage, fill them in on some of the context of the book using the Bible Background section of this lesson plan. Then, read or have a student read Acts 2:42-47.

NEXT, lead students in a look back at the passage. For each of the following six characteristics, read the characteristic out loud. Then, ask students to find where they see the characteristic reflected in the passage they just read. Finally, lead students in a brief discussion about where they see this characteristic at work in your church or youth group and how they might work to see it more prevalent.

CHARACTERISTIC 1: They devoted themselves to growing in their faith.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:42 says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching."
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come alive for our church and/or youth group?

CHARACTERISTIC 2: They experienced God working through them and their friends.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:43 says, "And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come even more alive for our church and/or youth group?

CHARACTERISTIC 3: They selflessly served others.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:44-45 says, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come even more alive for our church and/or youth group?

CHARACTERISTIC 4: They were committed to growing their friendships.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship...” Acts 2:46 says, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes...”
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come even more alive for our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*

CHARACTERISTIC 5: They actively praised God together.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:46-47 says, “[46] And day by day, attending the temple together...[47]praising God.”
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come even more alive for our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*

CHARACTERISTIC 6: They were committed to growing their community.

- Where do we see this pictured in the passage?
 - *Answer:* Acts 2:47 says, “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”
- Where do we see this at work in our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- What are some examples of things we might do to see this characteristic come even more alive for our church and/or youth group?
 - *Answers will vary.*

THEN, when you’ve finished going through all of the characteristics, say something like:

- If we, as a church and/or youth group, could effectively live out all of these characteristics, what kind of impact would we have on the world? A pretty amazing one, right? The tendency is for us to look at this list of characteristics and see it as an ideal, something that can’t ever be achieved across the board. But the problem is that this is not an ideal that can’t be reached. It’s God’s plan for the Church! This is how God expects us to interact with each other and the world.

Allow your students to respond to these remarks if they will. Remind them that pursuing all of these characteristics isn’t an easy task. It takes commitment, transparency, selflessness, and a willingness to rely on the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Challenge them to see that this is how God designed them to interact with one another. Explain that God wants us to be in community with each other. Your youth group is fertile soil for this type of community to be born in.

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

THE THREAD

FIRST, have students turn to 1 Corinthians. While they are finding it, explain that 1 Corinthians is a letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. **Say something like:**

- **Paul helped establish a church in the city of Corinth. We're going to read some of Paul's first letter to Corinth to see what their church talked about and what they were like.**

NEXT, read 1 Corinthians 1:18-24. Explain that in Acts, you just read that the numbers of those who were being saved were growing daily. This passage begins by saying that "the word of the Cross" was the power of God for those who are saved. **Ask:**

- **What does Paul mean when He says "the word of the Cross?"**
 - *Answer:* Have students work out what this means in their own words, and ultimately lead them to the fact that the word of the cross is the Gospel.
- **We've been talking about what the Gospel is for a long time. Why is the Gospel described as "the power of God?" How is the Gospel powerful?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Lead students to see that the good news of Jesus is that through faith in Him, we can be eternally saved from our sin-caused separation from God and have renewed power and purpose on this earth.

FINALLY, focus on the rest of the passage and how Paul compares the Gospel to the "wisdom of the world."

- **In your own words, what is "the wisdom of the world?"**
 - *Answer:* It is human understanding as opposed to a God-driven and God-based understanding.
- **How does the "wisdom of the world" help or distract people from joining the Church?**
 - *Answers will vary.*
- **Focus on verses 22-23. How is the wisdom of God more powerful than the wisdom of the world?**
 - *Answer:* The message of Christ's work on the cross, which is just another way of saying "the Gospel," can cut through any pre-existing barriers or obstacles people have to faith.
- **Paul points out that the Jews look for wisdom one way and the Gentiles in another way. He says that the Gospel confuses both groups yet unites them with its power. How is this true?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

Close this section by reminding students that the Church has always been a place that counters the culture of the world. The wisdom and power in the Gospel message will always be the means by which God draws people to Himself, growing and preserving His Church.

IF THERE ARE NO MORE QUESTIONS, TRANSITION INTO THE WRAPPING UP SECTION OF THE LESSON.

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* To see their role in sharing their faith and growing the Church.
- *Set-Up:* You may find that a dry-erase board is helpful for jotting down some of your students' responses.

FIRST, affirm that the Church is indeed counter-cultural and always has been, which is probably why it grows! **Say something like:**

- **Many people are attracted to Church because it's a place unlike any other they will encounter throughout the week. What are some of the things that make the Church different?**

- o *Answers will vary.* But make sure that there is a focus on the Gospel at work in the body of believers.

NEXT, focus on what it means to help the Church “grow in numbers.” **Ask something like the following:**

- **How can we help grow the church?**
 - o *Answers will vary.* Help students focus on the important aspect of the Gospel being central to that growth.
- **How is the Church different from any other place you visit in a week?**
 - o *Answers will vary.* Encourage students to think about how the Church is a place that is loving, forgiving, and safe to talk about anything, as well as other principles that Jesus taught that the Church should embody.
- **Do you want other people to experience these things? How can you invite people to church so that they, too, can experience the hope that can only be found at church?**
 - o *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think the Gospel is the most powerful aspect of growing the Church?**
 - o *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, close your lesson in prayer that your church and group will begin to pursue the same values the New Testament Church modeled for us.

- If you’ve purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they’ll be working through Week 42 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.