

THE THREAD

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

PART 4: THE GOSPEL AT WORK

LESSON 6 || A LETTER TO THE ROMANS

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10

GOSPEL FOCUS: Matthew 10:32-33

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

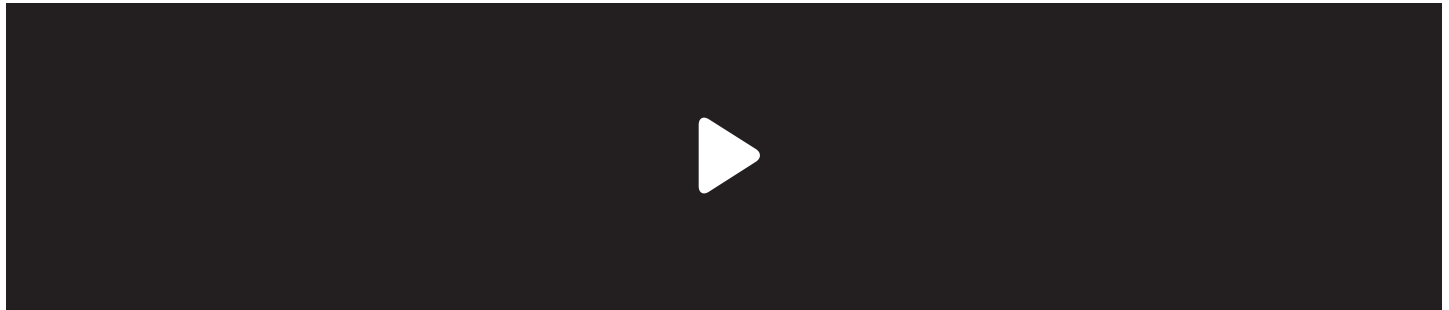
- Understand that we are all sinners and our sin condemns us, but there is salvation through faith in Jesus.
- Understand that publicly identifying ourselves with Jesus is vital to our relationship with Him.
- Examine how effectively their lives bear testimony to their faith.

OVERVIEW:

As you continue your look at the big-picture story of the Bible, this lesson represents a significant change in how you'll be studying the story of the Bible. You're going to be stepping out of the chronological narrative of the Bible. The rest of *The Thread* will be dedicated to looking at some of the letters making up the rest of the New Testament, moving to a final look at Revelation at the end of your study. You'll be building on your students' knowledge of the Bible by dealing with some of the major themes of many of the New Testament epistles.

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.

ROMANS

- *Author:* Paul is the author of Romans.
- *Time frame:* Romans was probably written from Corinth in the winter of 56-57 AD.

- *Purpose:* Since the church in Rome had not received comprehensive theological teaching on salvation and other implications of following Christ, Paul wrote Romans to ensure a good understanding of such things. In addition, since many Jewish Christians were rejecting some of the new Gentile converts, a level playing field needed to be given to all believers. This is what Paul was advocating for in Romans.

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:* To get students thinking about what it’s like to win or receive something amazing they didn’t deserve.
- *Set-Up:* You’ll need to have a way to show your group a YouTube video of someone winning a huge prize from the Publisher’s Clearing House. Just Google “PCH prize patrol” on YouTube or use this video: <https://youtu.be/jA0KaBYOB18>

FIRST, show your group the video. Then, ask:

- **What would be your reaction to winning that much money?**
 - *Answers will vary.*
- **Would you be skeptical that you had won if someone showed up at your door with a huge check?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

THEN, help your students relate to the winner’s experience. Say something like:

- **What is the biggest thing you’ve ever won in a contest that didn’t involve any skill? (That is, not an athletic competition, essay contest, art show, etc.)**
 - *Allow students to answer and share their stories.*
- **What was it like to win something that you didn’t do anything to earn?**
 - *Again, make sure you allow some time for students to share their experiences.*

FINALLY, Introduce the idea of God’s free gift of eternal life. Say something like,

- **These people got an incredible gift that they did nothing to earn. Today, we’re going to hear about a different kind of gift that God has given us—not because we earned it, but because He loves us.**

TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* Students will understand that we are all sinners and our sin condemns us, but there is salvation through faith in Jesus.
- *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, explain that in this lesson, you’ll be looking at a passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans. 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.

- Last lesson, we looked at Paul's conversion. Paul became one of the most significant influences on the Church.
- Paul would go on to write 13 letters that are included in the New Testament.
- Romans contains Paul's most complete theology. It's a powerful book that shapes much of our theology of law, grace, and God's love.

FIRST, provide some background information on what was happening in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. Say something like:

- Before we dive into what we'll talk about today, it'll help us to know a little bit about what was happening in Rome and why Paul was writing to the church there. When Paul wrote this, he had never actually visited the Christians he was writing to, though he was planning a trip there on his way to Spain.
- The Christians in Rome had experienced some difficult persecution. Some of them had been forced to move out of Rome for a few years but were allowed to return by the time Paul wrote this letter.

NEXT, explain the overarching purpose Paul had in writing this letter to the Roman Christians. Say:

- Because of this, most of the Christians in Rome were Gentiles—meaning they weren't Jewish. This caused a lot of disagreements between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians about what it meant to follow Jesus and whether you could follow Jesus without following Jewish customs.
- With those situations in mind, Paul likely wrote his letter to the Romans to explain exactly what the Gospel is, what it means to be saved, and how to follow Jesus together as a diverse community from different backgrounds.

THEN, read or have a student read Romans 3:23. Ask:

- If you walked up to someone at your school and just said this sentence to them, would they think you were being kind to them?
 - *Answers will vary.* You might ask students how someone who had never heard this verse before would react.
- How do you think most people react to the word "sin?" Do you think people generally think calling some behaviors "sin" is judgmental?
 - *Answers will vary.* Help your group begin to unpack this short verse by discussing the concept of sin.

NEXT, help students understand that we all are in the same boat when it comes to sin and disobeying God. Say something like:

- Everyone has different ideas about sin, but no one in this room can claim they've never done it. According to Paul, everyone is on the same level when it comes to sin. Why do you think Paul went out of his way to make sure the Christians in Rome knew this?
 - *Answers will vary.* Help your group land on the idea that sometimes, we downplay our sin and think that we're better than others—which may have been happening in Rome.

THEN, move to chapter 6 and read or have a student read Romans 6:23. Ask:

- What's the difference between "wage" and "gift?"
 - *Answer:* A wage is something you earn; a gift is something you get without earning it.

- So if we combine what we just talked about in Chapter 3 with the fact that a “wage” is something you deserve, what does this say about us in this room?
 - o *Answer:* While it’s a simple concept, the fact that our disobedience against God earned us both physical and spiritual death is difficult to come to terms with. This is especially true since most of us have been told that we are basically good people who sometimes make small mistakes. Give your group time to wrestle and even disagree with this idea.

NEXT, highlight the importance of this verse by helping your group understand that, in many ways, this one sentence is the core of the Gospel. **Say something like:**

- This is a short sentence, but the reality is that it outlines the difference between life and death for us—spiritual life and death. Just so we’re all on the same page, let’s put something on the board to look at the rest of the lesson. What do we deserve—what is our wage?
 - o *Answer:* The answer is death—on the left side of the board near the top, write “What We Deserve.” Below it, write the answer when a student says it: “Death.”
- And why do we deserve death?
 - o *Answer:* Our sin. Below “Death,” writes, “Why: because of our sin.”
- Now, what is the gift God has given us?
 - o *Answer:* Eternal life. On the right side of the board, write “What God Gives Us As a Gift”; below it, write “Eternal Life.”
- Since you’re all so smart, let me ask a harder question: Why did God give us eternal life?
 - o *Answers will vary.* There are many valid answers to this, such as God’s grace, because we believe in Jesus, etc. Help your group work directly from the text in order to land here: Because Jesus died for us. While it’s not stated that way in the text, it’s what Paul means when he says that the “gift of God is eternal life in (or through) Christ Jesus our Lord.” Below “Eternal Life,” write “Why: because Jesus died for us.”
- Now, let’s read our last couple of verses in Romans and see how Paul ties it all together.

THEN, read or have a student read Romans 10:9-10. **Ask:**

- What do these two verses have to do with the gift that we just talked about in verse 6?
 - o *Answers will vary.* Allow your group to discuss this open-ended question for a couple of minutes. The goal here is to get them thinking about this theological idea: If God really does give eternal life as a gift, how does someone come to accept that gift?
- Why do you think Paul says that trusting in Jesus involves both believing in our hearts and confessing with our mouths? Do you think he’s saying that if we don’t say the right words, we can’t be saved?
 - o *Answer:* Paul’s point isn’t that we have to say the right thing but that trusting in Jesus means more than mere words; it involves our heart, the center of our being. The idea is to clarify what Paul is saying about how someone is “saved.”
- So how can something be a gift and require us to take an active part in receiving it?
 - o *Answers will vary.* Again, provide some space for students to work through this concept. Point them in the direction that what Paul is talking about isn’t about doing something but committing ourselves to Jesus as Lord and trusting in Him. However, you don’t need to land on an answer at this point. You’ll do that in a minute.
- The bottom line is this: If someone gives you a gift, the only way you can really enjoy that gift is if you accept it. If we

were to combine the three short passages in one idea, it would be this: God has given us a gift we desperately need: eternal life. There is no other source of eternal life for us because we deserve death for our disobedience against God. But we have to trust Him enough to open it; trust that God loves us, that He sent Jesus to die for us, and that Jesus really did rise from the dead because He is God.

IF STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, TRANSITION INTO THE THREAD TO SEE WHERE YOU FIND THE CONNECTION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE BIG-PICTURE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE.

THE THREAD

FIRST, have your group turn to Matthew 10. Before diving into the passage, provide some background information on Matthew 10:32-33 for your group. Say something like:

- We're about to read two verses that Matthew wrote. These two verses are part of some instructions that Jesus gave His disciples before sending them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God that Jesus was ushering in. They really hadn't been around Jesus very long. Basically, Jesus is saying, "Okay, everything I've been doing—healing people and telling people about the Kingdom of God—now, it's your turn." What do you think that would have been like?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- Jesus also told them it would be dangerous, that there may be people who want to hurt them. That brings us to the two verses we'll be looking at.

THEN, read or have a student read Matthew 10:32-33. Say:

- Remember, Jesus warned them they would face danger and maybe even physical harm. Do you think what He says in these two verses is too harsh? Why or why not?
 - *Answers will vary.* Allow your group to have a short debate if there are strong feelings about the topic.
- What do you think Jesus means by "acknowledge" and "disown"?
 - *Answer:* These words can have a wide range of connotations, but here Jesus likely meant either admitting or denying that they were His followers in the face of persecution.

FINALLY, help your group understand that Jesus is highlighting what it means to put our trust in Him and call Him "Lord." Ask:

- The thing is, all of us who have been following Jesus for any length of time have blown an opportunity to acknowledge Jesus before others. Maybe there was a conversation where you knew God wanted you to speak up and tell someone about Jesus, but you just couldn't find the right words. Do you think that's the kind of thing Jesus is talking about in these two verses?
 - *Answers will vary.* Again, allow your group to wrestle with the idea. Help them out by reminding them that Jesus was warning them that people would specifically try to get them to deny Jesus by harming them.
- Jesus' point was this: If we claim to follow Jesus, there will be times when our commitment to Him will be challenged by others. For the disciples and many Christians in our world today, that includes physical punishment for not denying Jesus. In our culture, it might mean being made fun of or some other social pressure. Why do you think people have such strong reactions to Jesus and the people who follow Him?
 - *Answers will vary.* Try to guide the conversation to the fact that following Jesus requires us to admit that we are sinners and deserve death, as Paul said.
- So according to what Jesus told His disciples, what is He asking us to do?
 - *Answer:* To publicly acknowledge Him, even when people put pressure on us to deny Him with our words or actions.

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

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* Students will examine how effectively their lives bear testimony to their faith.
- *Set-Up:* Everyone will need a 3x5 card and something to write with.

FIRST, help your students bridge what Jesus told His disciples to their own lives. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus was being honest with His disciples that it would be difficult on them—and people might even be upset with them—if they tried to convince others to follow Him. Have you ever experienced that in your own life?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Make sure you provide enough time for students to answer. If no one is willing to answer first, feel free to relate one of your own experiences.
- **Do you think there were times when Jesus' disciples may have thought that all the difficulty and pain weren't worth it?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

NEXT, lead a discussion that will help your group examine what their own lives say about their faith. **Ask:**

- **For us in our culture and time, how could someone who claimed to follow Jesus disown or deny Jesus?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Possible answers are not speaking up when someone makes fun of Jesus or Christians; not making a Christ-like choice because it would be unpopular or might make you lose friends.
- **What are some ways that someone can acknowledge Jesus?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Possible answers are inviting someone to church, making the right choice, even when it's hard, posting helpful and true things about Jesus on social media, and praying for and with friends who don't yet follow Jesus.
- **Do you think these kinds of things always have to be "in your face?"**
 - *Answer:* Acknowledging Jesus doesn't always have to be. There may be times that someone will put you on the spot, but it also involves simply and consistently living for Jesus in a world that often does not honor or acknowledge Him.

FINALLY, find one practical way they can acknowledge Jesus publicly. **Say something like:**

- **This is easier said than done, right? It's one of those things that makes sense in theory, but it's hard when we're in the moment. To wrap up, we're going to commit to doing this by writing down one specific way to publicly acknowledge Jesus this week among those we usually spend time with. It might mean sharing with someone about Jesus you know God has put on your heart or speaking up kindly in a conversation with someone who usually makes fun of Jesus and those who follow Him. Take a minute to think about it and write down one thing.**
 - Encourage your group to share what they wrote on their card, but don't force students to share if they don't want to.

If there are no further questions, close your Bible study in prayer, perhaps praying for what your group wrote on their cards.

- If you've purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they'll be working through Week 45 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.