

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James



Session Snapshot

Narrative Passage: James 2:14-18

Gospel Focus: 1 John 3:16-18

Student Takeaways:

- Students will discover that faith that saves necessarily expresses itself through acts of love.
- Students will learn that although anyone is capable of loving actions, radical extreme love sets Christ-followers apart.
- Students will evaluate what their actions toward the needy says about their faith.



Overview

God's heart breaks for humanity, especially and specifically humanity in need. Needs often take the form of physical poverty: food, clothing, and shelter (see Matthew 25:31-46). But needs can also be more subtle, like belonging, friendship, and a sense of worth. Christ-followers are called to demonstrate their faith through action and just like God's heart, that action needs to especially and specifically benefit humanity in need. This lesson takes a look at the hard topic of faith and works (the book of James) to get at the heart of student's beliefs about what having a heart for the hurting really means and how our actions demonstrate our trust in a God who protects and provides.



Teacher Prep Video

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

To access your *Thread* lesson 49 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 49, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.



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.

James

Author: James, who was Jesus' brother and the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

Time frame: Most people believe the date was sometime in the mid-40s A.D.

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Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James

Purpose: James was seemingly writing to a Jewish audience. His message was pretty straightforward throughout the book: don't let your faith be one of words only, and live your faith powerfully. It's a message that James hammered home in direct, easy-to-grasp language. It's what makes James such a practical book for all believers.

1 John

Author: 1 John was written by John the Apostle. John was one of Jesus' disciples and was referred to as "the beloved disciple." John was probably only a teenager when he spent his three years with Jesus. In addition to 1 John, he authored 2 John, 3 John, the Gospel of John, and Revelation.

Time frame: 1 John was probably written sometime after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but probably no later than 90 AD.

Purpose: John was writing to a population (1st Century Christ-followers) who had seen their ranks diminished at the onset of Roman persecution. John was calling his audience to a faith that was doctrinally sound and application oriented. He reminded his readers of the teachings of Christ, and urged them to put them into practice.



Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- An introductory activity called Getting Started designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- A section entitled The Story featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- A special emphasis entitled The Thread where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- An application-focused segment called Wrapping Up helping teenagers ask the question, "How am I impacted by what I learned today"?

Getting Started

- **Goal:** A physical activity to demonstrate that we can say we trust, but our actions prove our trust.
- **Set-Up:** A method to display a YouTube video would be great, but is not required. No other materials or set up is required.

FIRST, ask students if they are familiar with the idea of a "trust fall." Briefly allow students to describe their experience with trust falls.

THEN, show the Trust Fall Fail video: <https://youtu.be/wPOgvzVOQig>

The Thread

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Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James

NEXT, lead students in the Willow in the Wind (aka Trust Circle) version of a trust fall:

- **One person stands in the middle of a circle of 8-10 people. This person crosses their arms, closes their eyes, and stays very stiff.**
- **Trust Circle participants hold up hands, touching the person in the center, feet braced in a front-to-back stance.**
- **The person in the middle is passed gently around the circle. They can start mostly vertical and, as trust builds, let more and more support be provided by the Trust Circle.**
- **Example video: <https://youtu.be/KRYABWshzfQ>**

If your group is too small for Willow in the Wind, have students performing a Trust Fall in pairs.

EXPLAIN to students that in this lesson you will be talking about trusting God. Ask something like:

- **We've just experienced how easy it can be and how quickly we can learn to trust each other. We've also seen how hilarious it can be when something goes wrong. What would you have done if you knew one of the people in your Trust Circle was going to intentionally let you drop as a joke?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Tonight we're going to talk about trusting God. How do you think trusting God is the same or different than trusting the members of your Trust Circle?**
 - o Answers will vary.

Transition to The Story.

The Story

- **Goal:** Students will discover that faith that saves necessarily expresses itself through acts of love.
- **Set-Up:** Students will need a Bible or a Bible app.

FIRST, explain that in this lesson you'll be looking at the book of James. If you'd like, use the "Connecting The Dots" section below to do a little review and/or fill in the gaps from 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 as a way to review and/or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- **James was Jesus' brother.**
- **Eventually James came to believe Jesus was the Messiah. After Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to James in the same way He appeared to Paul. James became one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. Galatians 2:9 mentions James, along with Peter and John, as "pillars of the church."**
- **At the time, Jewish and pagan religions would have viewed suffering as punishment by God (the gods) for wrongdoing. Prosperity and happiness were God's (the gods') rewards for righteous living.**

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James

THEN, ask something like:

- **What do you think is required for someone to actually be a “Christian?”**
 - o Answers will vary. Use the dry erase board to jot down their answers.

NEXT, read or have a student read James 2:14-18 and ask something like:

- **Does this verse affect your answer? Explain.**
 - o Answers will vary.

THEN, read or have a student read Ephesians 2:8-9 and ask something like:

- **Is anyone confused yet? James seems to be saying that faith without works is dead. Paul seems to be arguing that faith and faith alone is what saves us. What do you think is going on here?**
 - o Answers will vary.

NEXT, say something like:

- **As usual, if we take a verse out of context, things can get pretty confusing. However, if look at the broader context of the Ephesians passage, we’ll start to see that Paul and James aren’t so different on this issue.**

THEN, broaden the context of the Ephesians passage by reading or having a student read Ephesians 2:8-10. Ask something like:

- **Now that we’ve read a little bit more from Paul, what do you think is going on? What are both authors getting at?**
 - o Answers will vary. Both writers are telling us that true faith results in good, loving works.

NEXT, ask a series of questions like this to get the students thinking about the problem with faith, but no works:

- **What does the phrase “talk is cheap” mean?**
 - o Answer: Words are easy to say. Actions that back them are what take effort. So, “talk is cheap” means that words are easy to come by and don’t demand much of the person saying them.
- **How is looking at someone in need and saying, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed” an example of cheap talk?**
 - o Answer: Refusing to help someone in need, but masking it with a statement that appears to show concern reveals what is really in someone’s heart. Saying something like that without doing anything is easy.
- **What is the problem with faith that isn’t backed up by any works?**
 - o Answer: True faith in Christ results in undeniable life change. It results in love and care for others. If that isn’t evident in someone’s life, it’s evidence that Christ hasn’t changed his life.
- **What does James mean when he writes, “I’ll show you my faith by my deeds”?**
 - o Answer: He means that our faith will be evident by the way we care for a love those around us. True faith is active.
- **Let’s think about the scenario depicted in verse 15. How should a Christ-follower respond to that situation?**
 - o Answers will vary. Some possible answers include buying the individual food and clothes or directing them to local ministries in town that can help meet those needs.

The Thread

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Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James

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

BEGIN by saying something like:

- **We've talked about what it looks like to say you have faith, but to not back it up with works. Now, we're going to take a look at the type of loving actions that should be a result of true faith in Christ.**

THEN, ask something like:

- **People that don't follow Jesus are capable of love. So, what kind of love should Christians be known for? Explain your answer.**
 - o Answers will vary. We'll get to the heart of the answer in a little bit, so let them discuss a little bit and don't give much of an answer yourself.

NEXT, read or have a student read 1 John 3:16-18 and ask something like:

- **What type of love is this passage calling us to?**
 - o Answer: This passage calls us to a different level of love. It calls us to a love that's willing to lay down its life for a brother. It calls us to keep our hearts open to those in need.
- **What does it mean to love "with actions"?**
 - o Answer: It means that it isn't just empty talk. It means that our love is real and leads to actions that put others' needs before our own.
- **How does this type of love set Christ-followers apart?**
 - o Answer: This radical, self-sacrificing love should set Christians apart in a world that is primarily concerned with self. This type of love isn't just reserved for close friends or family, it's to be freely given to those in need all around us.

If your students don't have any more questions, transition into the Wrapping Up section.

Wrapping Up

- **Goal:** Students will evaluate what their actions toward the needy says about their faith.
- **Set-Up:** You will probably use a dry-erase board for this section.

FIRST, look back at our two main verses by reading or having a student(s) read James 2:14-18 and 1 John 3:16-18. Ask something like:

- **What is the main point that both passages are driving home?**
 - o Answer: That our actions towards those in need are evidence of our faith, or lack of it.

THEN, ask students to make this personal by asking something like:

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 4: The Gospel At Work

Lesson 49: A Letter From James

- **Do you struggle to engage with those that are in need all around you? If so, why?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What are some needs you are confronted with on a regular basis? They don't have to just be physical needs.**
 - Answers will vary. Possible answers could include lonely and ostracized peers, the poor in your city, or what they read or see on TV about the poor around the world.
- **If radical love towards those in need is evidence of your faith, what kind of faith does it seem like you have?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What are some of the ways you could engage the issues of those in need at your school?**
 - Answers will vary. Possible answers could include being friendly with a hurting classmate, inviting the unlovable ones to join your group for lunch, tutoring for free, etc.
- **What are some of the ways you address these needs on a local, regional, or global scale?**
 - Answers will vary. Possible answers could include things like serving with or giving to local food pantries, homeless ministries, Big Brother/Big Sister, Compassion International, or other like-minded organizations.
- **How can you increase your love towards those in need?**
 - Answer: The more we understand how in need we are of a Savior and how much grace we've been shown, the more we'll be willing and able to extend that type of love and grace towards those in need. Our lack of love for those in need is a result of a lack of wonder and awe at what Christ has done for us.

FINALLY, ask students to commit to trusting God and demonstrating that trust with "radical" generosity toward people in need. Ask if anyone wants to share their commitment with the group. Once students have had a chance to respond, ask if anyone has any further thoughts or questions. Then, close your Bible study in prayer.

- **If you've purchased the *Tracing The Thread* devotional journal, remind students that they'll be working through Week 49 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions, and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.**
- **If you'll be utilizing the digital devotions included in the *Thread* curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, 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.