

JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

Week 3:
Jesus and His Best Friends

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson you'll help your students explore one of the primary characteristics exhibited by the people Jesus loved to hang around—they were all people who were, for one reason or another, desperate for Jesus. We all love to hang around people who see us for who we really are, and the desperate people who were Jesus' best friends all saw him for who he really is—a rescuer, a savior, the Messiah. Here, your students will experience how desperation is a lot like thirst, and learn how to quench their thirst by “drinking in” more of Jesus.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: Students will consider how a thirst for Jesus can draw them into a deeper and deeper relationship with him.
2. WHY: Because Jesus hung out with people who were fundamentally thirsty for “rescue,” our path to relationship with him is through admitting our need for him.
3. HOW: Your students will experience thirst and explore the stories of thirsty people in the Bible to discover what was different about them.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

John 7:37-38

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 3:1-5; Psalm 42:1-2; Matthew 4:18-22; 9:18-22; 15:21-28; Luke 7:36-50; 19:1-10

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead.



Read John 7:37-38.



We almost always know the short-term causes of why we feel thirsty—something bad happens to a friend or a family member, you face a challenge that seems scary, or you feel rejected or ridiculed. But we don't always know the root of our thirst at a deeper level. If we look at our history as human beings—all the way back to Adam and Eve—we find all the clues we need. Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation of sin because, essentially, they wanted to be equal to God.

Eve ate the fruit, and then gave it to Adam to eat. Because of what Satan told her—or dangled in front of her—she was drawn to the forbidden fruit. What drew her? Satan promised she could become like God—self-sufficient and in charge of her own destiny. Adam quickly followed her lead. Together, they put their faith in the false hope that they could be gods. But in the kingdom of God, if you believe you're a god, you're outside of relationship with the one true God.

We're literally sick with this idea that we can be self-sufficient, without God. Our thirst—our desperation—is like a medicine that can help make us well. This feeling reminds us that we're not God—we never have been, we're not right now, and we never will be. It tells us we're not in control. People who think they don't need God because they're self-sufficient live in bondage to a lie. They say they don't need God. But deep down they doubt their own claims. During Jesus' ministry on earth, the people who seemed to “get” this also got to hang out with Jesus. Jesus preferred hanging out with desperate people. They were his closest friends—his disciples. Jesus was drawn to their desperate hearts like a magnet.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Thirsty? Come to small group to discover how to get your thirst quenched, now and for the rest of your life.
- Wonder why Jesus chose to hang out with particular people? Come to small group and discover why.



Parent Email

We've provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We're in the third week of our six-week study that's focused on answering the question Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" In this lesson, we explored a common characteristic that all of the people who were closest to Jesus shared—they were all desperate for him. And that means they were thirsty for him—they needed him the same way a "deer pants for water" (Psalm 42:1).

As you go throughout the week, help reinforce this lesson in your child's life by asking the following questions when you have the opportunity.

- Because we're ultimately related to Adam and Eve, we're infected with the same virus that destroyed their relationship with God—the hunger to "be our own god." How do you see that "infection" showing up in our culture?
- Why is an attitude of self-sufficiency—"I can depend on myself for everything I need, and I don't need God for anything"—so harmful and dangerous to us?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students. Have an amazing week!



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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then jump into today's lesson.



LEADER
TIP

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.



LEADER
TIP

TEACHING GUIDE

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen are (1) Got desperation?, and (2) Jesus and the desperate people.



LEADER
TIP

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read John 7:37-38 to your group as part of this experience:

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Give each person a small cup with some salt in it. Ask students to put a pinch of salt on their tongues, then close their eyes and listen as you read aloud (very slowly, with meaning) John 7:37-38 (NASB):

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' "

Then pause in silence for about 10 seconds. Tell students to open their eyes. Tell them you know they're probably thirsty right now, but to wait to get a drink.



ASK:

- *What are some typical signs that you're really thirsty?*
- *What kind of thirst is Jesus talking about in this passage?*
- *What are some signs that tell you your own soul is thirsty?*
- *How can Jesus quench this kind of thirst—what do we get from him that's like drinking a big glass of water?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If you think about many of the interactions Jesus had, the stories he told, and the life he lived, thirst is a part of all of them. It's really a central aspect of most of his relationships—people who are thirsty are drawn to him. Desperation is like a basic thirst. Thirst, or desperation, is also the theme of his most famous parable, the parable of the prodigal son. And desperation often crawls into the shadows of our lives, too.*

Now briefly share—no more than three minutes or so—your own experience or example of thirst or desperation in your life. For example, you could share a relational hardship, a health concern, or any other significant challenge in your life. The closer your story is to the present the better, because it's far less compelling to share a story from 10 years ago. Talk about your experience with desperation: What did you do to deal with it? What did you learn from it? What are your feelings about it today? Finally, talk about how, during this time of desperation, you focused on Jesus—or didn't. End your story by reading aloud Psalm 42:1-2 (NASB): *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

1. Got desperation?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Desperation is a central element in nearly every good film, because we're drawn to people facing desperation. We're fascinated by how people respond to desperation. We're eager to learn from their responses. Let's watch a desperation scene from a classic holiday movie that many of us have seen.*

Show George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) in the bar scene from *It's a Wonderful Life* (cue up the DVD to 1:35:23, and then play the scene to 1:37:30). After the clip, have students pair up and discuss these questions for five minutes or so.

ASK:

- *When was a time in your life that you felt something like what George Bailey felt in this scene?*



- Was the “fruit” or result of that thirst, or desperation, good or bad in your life? Explain.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We almost always know the short-term causes of why we feel thirsty—something bad happens to a friend or a family member, you face a challenge that seems scary, or you feel rejected or bullied. But we don’t always know the root of our thirst at a deeper level. If we look at our history as human beings—all the way back to Adam and Eve—we find all the clues we need. Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation of sin because, essentially, they wanted to be equal to God. Here’s what Genesis 3:1-5 tells us:*

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ” “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

We all know what happens next! Eve ate the fruit, and then gave it to Adam to eat. Because of what Satan told her—or dangled in front of her—she’s drawn to the forbidden fruit. What drew her? Satan promised she could become like God—self-sufficient and in charge of her own destiny. Adam quickly followed her lead. Together, they put their faith in the false hope that they could be gods. But in the kingdom of God, if you believe you’re a god, you’re outside of relationship with the one true God.

We’re literally sick with this idea that we can be self-sufficient, without God. Our thirst—our desperation—is like a medicine that can help make us well. This feeling reminds us that we’re not God—we never have been, we’re not right now, and we never will be. It tells us we’re not in control. People who think they don’t need God because they’re self-sufficient live in bondage to a lie. They say they don’t need God. But deep down they doubt their own claims. During Jesus’ ministry on earth, the people who seemed to “get” this also got to hang out with Jesus. Jesus preferred hanging out with desperate people. They were his closest friends—his disciples. Jesus was drawn to their desperate hearts like a magnet.



ASK:

- *Because we're ultimately related to Adam and Eve, we're infected with the same virus that destroyed their relationship with God—the hunger to “be our own god.” How do you see that “infection” showing up in our culture?*
- *Why is an attitude of self-sufficiency—“I can depend on myself for everything I need, and I don't need God for anything”—so harmful and dangerous to us?*

2. Jesus and the desperate people

EXPLORATION: Ask students to pair up with one other person to take a deeper dive into the stories of desperate people in Scripture. Have them take five minutes or so to read one of these stories of “The Desperadoes” in the Bible. Ask them to look at the role that desperation might have played in the relationships these people had with Jesus. When kids notice something, they can make a note of it for a discussion afterward. The Desperadoes include:

- *The Disciples (Matthew 4:18-22)*
- *The Woman With an Issue of Blood (Matthew 9:18-22)*
- *The Sinful Woman at the Pharisee's Party (Luke 7:36-50)*
- *Zacchaeus the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1-10)*
- *The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)*

After five minutes or so, gather together to discuss their exploration.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Something sets these people apart from the others surrounding Jesus. Something motivated them to do what they did. Clearly, Jesus was drawn to these people. He had a completely different reaction to them than he had to the Pharisees. With the “teachers of the law,” Jesus was often frustrated, angry, and even harsh because of their hypocritical, judgmental, and rule-keeping attitudes. Let's compare and contrast what we know of both kinds of people.*

On a large sheet or pad of paper, make two columns separated by a vertical line. Title one column “Desperadoes” and the other “Pharisees.” As students respond to the below questions, write their answers in either column. When you get an answer for one column, ask for a comparison to the people in the other column. For example, if someone says the hearts of the Desperadoes were “tender and soft,” ask that person or others in the group to compare that description to what they know about the Pharisees' hearts.



ASK:

- *What was different about the people we're calling the Desperadoes, compared to what we know about the Pharisees?*
- *What were the Desperadoes motivated by in their relationship with Jesus, in comparison to how the Pharisees were motivated?*
- *What drew Jesus to the Desperadoes?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We love to hang out with people who see us well: people who are truthful and loving mirrors of who we are, people who enjoy us for who we really are. That's what makes close relationships possible. And desperate people see Jesus well. They know they're not God. They know that Jesus is God. They sense that he's the source of their life and that they need him. They base their relationship with him on the truth. This allows them to have an intimate relationship with him.*

Invite students to each get a cup of water, then sit in a circle as you pray something like this: "Jesus, thank you for being our cup of water—the one thing that can quench our thirst." Then have kids drink their water.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]**ASK:**

- *Why do we typically hate the feeling of desperation?*
- *If desperation is an open door to our heart that Jesus can walk through, how do we invite him in?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The great Oswald Chambers, author of My Utmost for His Highest, took a stab at answering these questions. He said that "suffering either gives me to myself or it destroys me."*

ASK:

- *Why do you think this is true?*
- *What do you think it means to "receive ourselves" in our suffering?*



SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

End your lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



LEADER
TIP

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37 NASB).

