

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Lesson 1

WE ALL LONG FOR A FATHER'S LOVE

Purpose: To help students see that everyone needs love but perfect love can only be found in a relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 89:24-28

Lesson Snapshot: This lesson uses *I Can Only Imagine: Part 1* to teach your students about the love of God as our Heavenly Father. The video includes segments from the movie *I Can Only Imagine* along with Bart Millard from *Mercy Me* sharing his personal story of his relationship with his birth father. The scriptures from the 89th psalm will help your students understand the love God has for His children as Abba Father and how He pours out that love without measure each day. Bart's words will cause your students to come face-to-face with their relationships with their fathers or father figures and realize that we are all desperate for a father's love. The video will help your students understand that relationships in this world are not always perfect, but as we desperately search for real love only God's love as the Father is perfect and complete.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called *The Main Event* where you'll watch one of the four *I Can Only Imagine* videos; the Bible study/discussion section called *Digging In*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Set-up:** You'll need the *I Can Only Imagine: Part 1* video clip and a way to show *Part 1*, such as your laptop or a projector and screen. You have access to this file as a part of your purchase. Go to your YM360 User Account to download.

FIRST, prepare your students for the first segment of *I Can Only Imagine*. (If you've had the chance to watch the movie as a group, you may want to alter your intro by asking students to recount their summary of the movie or any thoughts they had after watching it.) Consider saying something like this:

- **During the next four weeks, we are going to be involved in a Bible study based on the movie *I Can Only Imagine*. The movie follows the story of the lead singer from *Mercy Me*, Bart Millard, and his struggles growing up with an abusive father. We will see that even after becoming a Christ-follower Bart had a difficult time with accepting God's pure and perfect love, especially as it pertained to Bart's father. As we move through this Bible study, we will be talking about things like God as our Heavenly Father, forgiveness, redemption, and resolution. Each week we will begin our Bible study by watching a video segment which includes clips from the movie, along with Bart sharing his personal story. Let's get started!**

THEN, if students don't have any questions, play *I Can Only Imagine: Part 1*. When you are ready, transition to the *Digging In* section of the lesson.

DIGGING IN

- **Set-up:** Make sure students have access to a Bible or a device with a Bible app on it, even if it means looking on with a friend.

FIRST, ask the students if any of them have ever heard Bart share his story about his relationship with his dad. Engage your students by getting them to talk about what they saw in the video by using the following questions to help guide the conversation.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Lesson 1

WE ALL LONG FOR A FATHER'S LOVE

- **What caused the change in Bart's father?**
 - *Answer:* He was in a coma after being hit by a semi-truck and when he came to he had issues with rage, anger, and showing love.
- **When his father became abusive, what did Bart say always followed the altercations?**
 - *Answer:* His father would say he was sorry and would show Bart affection.
- **After Bart was tricked into drinking alcohol what did his father say when he was told about the incident? What two things did Bart feel from that point on?**
 - *Answer:* His dad said he didn't care anymore. Bart felt both freedom and intense loneliness.
- **What did Bart say he was drawn to because of the loneliness?**
 - *Answer:* He was drawn to the Gospel and the Good News of God's love.

THEN, move on to the Bible study by saying:

- **Bart said he when he was confronted with God's love he thought, "You mean someone approves of me just the way I am?" God's love for us as our spiritual Father is not only powerful but has many dimensions and characteristics. Let's look at some examples of God's love in our Bible study.**

NEXT, ask your students to find Psalm 89 in their Bibles or on their devices. Provide a little background by telling them that the book of Psalms is a compilation of songs or hymns written by a variety of authors. The 89th psalm was written by a man named Ethan concerning King David and his relationship with God.

THEN, read or have a student read Psalm 89:24-26 and use the following questions to help your students understand the passage as it applies to the love of God the Father:

- **Looking at verse 24, what does the psalmist say God will give to David?**
 - *Answer:* His faithfulness and unfailing love or mercy.
- **What does that mean?**
 - *Answer:* God will be faithful by keeping all His promises and will show love and mercy by going above and beyond in what He said He would do.
- **What three things does David have the privilege of calling God according to verse 26? What is significant about these three things?**
 - *Answer:* "My Father." This is a very personal description of a relationship with God, especially for the Old Testament. "My God." People in the cultures surrounding the Israelites in the Old Testament worshipped many gods, but David only worshipped one god, the true God. "The Rock of my salvation." A relationship with God the Father is rock solid.

Take a moment to tell the students that so far the psalmist has described God as a loving Father who is always faithful, shows mercy and unfailing love, and is the rock of our salvation. Explain that now we will move on and look at some more characteristics of God's love.

NEXT, read or have a student read verses 27-28 use the following questions to help the students find out more about the depth of God's love:

- **According to verse 28, what things will God show or give to David that will never end?**
 - *Answer:* Some Bible versions list three – love or mercy, kindness, and the promise of keeping His covenant.
- **Does anyone know what covenant God made with David and the Hebrew people?**
 - *Answer:* A covenant is an agreement between two parties that is based on mutual promises. God promised to be the God of the Hebrew people and protect them if they would promise to follow and keep His commandments.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Lesson 1

WE ALL LONG FOR A FATHER'S LOVE

Tell your students that the psalms were written before Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. Remind them that today we have a relationship with God that is based on a new covenant. Ask if any student knows what has changed about the new covenant with God. Guide the discussion by pointing out that now if we will repent of our sin and confess Jesus as Savior, then God will save us from our sin be our Father both now and throughout eternity. Say something like:

- **This new covenant is not based on anything we can do, like keep His commandments, but totally on what God did for us at Calvary. Explain that while the covenant between God and man has changed, God's love for us has not changed. He still is always faithful, His love is still unfailing and never-ending, and we still have the joy of calling Him Father.**

FINALLY, begin to wrap up your Bible study time by connecting the Bible passage to the video by saying:

- **In many ways, Bart Millard lost his father after the truck accident. His dad changed into an angry and abusive man who only showed him love after showing him anger. Many experts today say that our image of God as our Heavenly Father is affected by our relationship with our earthly father. Bart was desperately looking for love after his father told him he did not care what he did anymore. What he eventually found was the love of God the Father. This unfailing and never changing love changed Bart's life forever. Has it changed yours?**

Take a few minutes to ask if anyone has recently made their decision to accept Christ or if anyone feels God calling them to make that decision. Then move on to the application part of the lesson, *The Last Word*.

THE LAST WORD

- **Set-up:** Consider doing a Google image search for one of the old balance scales (like the ones seen in front of many court buildings). Provide a way to display the image.

FIRST, if you've planned to show the image of the scale, show your students the picture and ask if anyone knows what it is. If no one guesses, tell them it is called a balance scale. Explain that the balance scale works by placing a measured weight on one side while another item is added to the other side. The weight of the other item and the measured weight would be equal when the two plates on the scale were even.

NEXT, ask the students if they remember the reference Bart made to a balance scale approach to a relationship with God in the movie. Remind them that he said, "My response was I have to do all this stuff to please God or He is going to walk out on me, He's going to be disappointed in me." Trying to please God for His love is an area in which many of your students struggle. Help them understand what a real relationship with God is like by asking the students these questions:

- **The way Bart described his thoughts about a relationship with God, what relationship did he say that sounded like?**
 - *Answer:* He said it sounded like his relationship with his dad. He was constantly trying to be good enough to get his father's affection.
- **How did Bart describe his relationship with God in his early days as a Christian?**
 - *Answer:* He described it as works-based and said if his good works outweighed anything bad he might do then God must be okay with him. He also said he could tell the crowds at the concerts how much God loved them but had a hard time grasping how much God loved him.
- **A friend told Bart there was nothing he could do to make God love him more. How did that statement change the way Bart looked at God's love?**
 - *Answer:* Bart said, "I learned my identity is not wrapped up in the things I do but in what the cross has already done."

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Lesson 1

WE ALL LONG FOR A FATHER'S LOVE

EXPLAIN to the students that Bart experienced a different understanding of God's love for him when he was confronted with the love of God as his Heavenly Father. You may want to take a few minutes to explain the difference in a works-based Gospel and the real Gospel which says there is nothing we can do to make God love us more or less. Remind the students about the example of the balance scale by showing them the picture you brought once again. Say:

- **Imagine a small cross representing God's love for you weighing down one side of the scale. On the other side of the scale, you could put a lifetime of your great and wonderful works for God, as well as pile all your sin on there. It doesn't matter. The scale isn't going to move because God's love for you will never change. Jesus' work on the cross makes sure of that.**

ASK your students if any of them have any relationships that are based on their trying to do enough good things to get a coach or a teacher, or even a parent to like them or love them more. Ask them if they sometimes feel like what they do is never good enough to tip the scales in the relationship. Remind them that it is easy to think of our relationship with God to be like our some of our relationships which are performance-based. One thing Bart said toward the end of the clip was this:

- **"We spend too much time trying to please God instead of trusting Him."**

Take some time to have your students reflect on what their relationship with God would be like if they trusted Him more. Ask how their lives would be different if they relied on trusting God as opposed to trying to control Him with how much they love Him.

FINALLY, bring the Bible study to a close and prepare the students for the next lesson by expounding on the following thoughts:

- Sometimes the lack of love from a father or other significant people in our lives can cloud our understanding of God's love for us as our Heavenly Father.
- God is always faithful, and His love never fails.
- God's kindness and love for us will never end, and He will always keep His promises.
- We are constantly bombarded with the idea that love is based on conditions and our performance. God's love is not based on what we do for Him but what He did for us on the cross.
- In the next lesson, we will see part 2 of the I Can Only Imagine and how to discover the power of forgiveness.

Make sure you don't miss any final questions or thoughts, and then close in prayer. During your prayer time encourage your students to offer simple prayers of thanks to God for the nature of His love for us as our Father such as:

- Thank you for your unfailing love.
- Thank you for your faithfulness.
- Thank you that I can call you my Father.
- Thank you for being the Rock of my salvation.
- Thank you that my relationship with you is all about your great gift of salvation and not about my feeble works.
- Thank you that your love for me will never end.

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.