

EXPLORE
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YEAR TWO





[Mentor Curriculum Guide]

[DEAR MENTOR,]

Thank you for being a part of an Explore Discipleship Group for Middle School students! The purpose of Discipleship Groups is to engage students in an intentional faith community and encourage them in their spiritual journey. You play an instrumental role in this process. By your investment of time and compassion for students, you help provide a safe and welcoming space to dig deeper into faith. So, thank you!

The Explore curriculum is designed as a two-year track, to help students explore and apply Biblical stories to their everyday life. We begin with the idea of calling – how God calls us to action through other people and motivating circumstances. This calling is demonstrated through how God called people, specifically the Israelites, to do particular things. We move from calling to exile and begin to look at how people react to experiences when they feel far from God. This moves us into gratitude and the compassion of Jesus, culminating with the Sermon on the Mount. We end with the Acts of the Apostles and what they did to communicate the amazing life and resurrection of Jesus.

The discussion questions are a guide for discussion. You have the freedom as the mentor to dig deeper or omit certain elements you see fit for your group. The purpose of small groups is to create a safe and welcoming community where students can build community and explore their faith. Always be mindful of students' needs each week and how you (the mentor) can best encourage the group of students in their faith.

Thank you for mentoring students as they explore Scripture!

[The Purpose of Resurrection]

The Explore curriculum is fashioned around the church's purpose. Everything the church does points to some element of this statement.

Our Purpose is to build a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians.

The curriculum is meant to take student from Kids Ministry into Student Ministry where they will read familiar Biblical stories and explore them at a slightly deeper level. It is meant to be a safe place for non, nominal and developing Christians to learn the stories and apply their meaning to their lives.

[Student Ministry Statement]

Students developed a statement that describes how they intend to live into the Resurrection purpose. It says this:

Resurrection Students will create a safe, authentic and inclusive community where everyone belongs and has the opportunity to choose to grow and live out their faith.

Our goal as students, mentors and parents is to continue to work towards creating a place where "students belong so they can choose to grow and live out their faith." It isn't always easy and formulaic. But we believe if we keep the Resurrection purpose and the Student Ministry statement in mind when we are interacting with students, planning programs and lessons, then we will move closer to these ideals.

[Desired Outcomes]

When a student graduates from student ministry and moves out into the world, we want them to understand the complexities of their faith as differentiated from others. We want them to express their faith in meaningful and empathic ways, providing tangible leadership to others. And we want them to be in non-judgmental caring relationships with their peers and mentors. We break this down into specific objectives by age groupings. The Explore Discipleship Group, focused on middle school students, will have the following objectives.



[Specific Outcomes]

We see students potentially exploring their faith through their middle school experience in the following ways:

In their Expression

- Embrace the church as a safe and fun place where they can share the highs and lows of life.
- Learn how to be engaged in a small group discussion.
- Begin to appreciate inequities in how people are treated and how all people belong to God.
- Experience serving in meaningful ways.
- Experience worship in a way that connects them to God and others.

In their Faith

- Begin to discover who God made them to be.
- Know they are loved by God and others no matter what.
- Understand the Bible and be able to talk about the meaning of important stories or passages.
- Understand the impact of Jesus's life on people and the world.
- Rely on prayer as a way to connect with God.

In their Relationships

- Extend kindness to others without judgement.
- Establish friendships that are dependable, where they feel safe in inviting school friends.
- Discern when to say "yes" when to say "no" when it comes to their relationships.

[How Does Curriculum Do These Things?]

It doesn't. Caring mentors do. The subject isn't math or history or reading or writing. The subject is the student. The curriculum will open doors that will reveal who students are and will allow them to explore who they are becoming. This doesn't mean we don't pay attention to God or Jesus's life, sacrifice and resurrection. In fact, we allow the student to view themselves through all of these lenses.

Explore is a two-year Discipleship Curriculum designed for students in middle school. Students will explore and apply Biblical stories in the Old and New Testament to their everyday life, focusing on how they were created, called and named by God. They will also explore the promises God makes to us and how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise through Jesus' early ministry, inclusion of others and his teaching using parables.



[Discipleship Group: Weekly Session Overview]

Each session will have a similar flow and rhythm. There may be more content than you will need for your group time, and you might not cover it all. That is okay! Figure out what works best for your group and adapt. The first section will give you a brief overview of the session and an outline of the video. Review this in enough time to prepare for the session. It will include the Big Idea, which is the main point of the session, a summary, the scripture focus and a supply list. These things are helpful to read ahead of time and immediately before the session. There are two other items in this section that may need more preparation.

Parent Connection: Following your session, you may want to communicate with parents so they can engage in a conversation with their middle school student about the topic. These prompts are simple and can be included on handwritten card or an email.

Video Outline: There is companion video that you can access on YouTube. Begin your session with the video after brief introductions. You can also use the video outline as a starting point to teach your own lesson in person without the video. Your choice! If you decide not to use the video, you may want to decide how you might teach the content. You can choose to integrate it throughout the session, rather than all at once at the beginning. Again, your choice!

[Small Group Time]

This is where the session begins following the video or however you plan to integrate your own teaching based on the video outline. Each session follows this basic formula.

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be themselves. If your group has new faces, share names and one fun fact that can be memorable. This will help everyone know them just a little bit better.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1

This is always an introductory activity that allows students to engage more of their senses.

>> OPENING QUESTION

This prompt will get students thinking and focused on the big idea of the session.



>> DISCUSSION

This is the central part of the session where students can share their reflection on Scripture and how it relates to their lives. This is where you will want to facilitate their connection to the big idea of the session.

>> ACTIVITY #2

This will often be an activity that summarizes and brings closure to the session.

>> CHALLENGE

This will be something active students can do or think about in the coming week so they can solidify what they learned in the session.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER

Have students share their joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests). You may want to refer to the highs and lows they shared earlier. You can close in prayer or invite a specific student to pray for the group. You may want to model this prayer for weeks before asking a student to pray.

>> CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Call everyone by their name. Ask when you forget.
- Know something about everyone – their interests, sports, etc. Take notes if it helps you remember. Refer to what you know about them on occasion in group and personal conversation.
- Make eye contact. Never turn your back on your students.
- Sit in a circle, if possible. Make sure the adults are evenly distributed.
- Sit close (or next to) students that have the most difficult time behaving. Conversely, always sit across from the best behaved and engaged students.
- Affirm and amplify good behavior and engagement often. Deal with bad behavior and lack of engagement more quietly.
- Use the words of students to ask the next question or to introduce the next topic or activity.
- Keep your questions simple and to the point, attempting to draw on a student's own experience to frame the question.
- Only ask one question at a time.
- Use fidget tools to keep the brains of active students busy. This will help them focus on what you and others are saying.
- Be sure to keep the session moving by using various types of activities and discussion. Don't stay on any one activity or discussion for longer than 15-20 minutes.
- Always ask for help. Staff and other mentors may have strategies that may address exactly what you need.



YEAR 2 Curriculum Overview

UNIT 1: COMMUNITY (2 SESSIONS)

1. Called to Community
2. Growing Community

UNIT 2: CALLED (3 SESSIONS)

1. Do Big Things
2. Because You Are Young
3. Promises – Out of Context

UNIT 3: CROWNED (3 SESSIONS)

1. David's Anointing/Goliath
2. David's Misdeeds
3. David's Legacy/Solomon

UNIT 4: EXILED (5 SESSIONS)

1. Surviving Difficulty
2. Peer Pressure
3. Gratitude
4. Being Brave
5. Returned – Welcome Home

UNIT 5: COMPASSION OF JESUS (2 SESSIONS)

1. Feeding 5000
2. Friends with the Paralyzed Man

UNIT 6: LESSONS FROM JESUS (3 SESSIONS)

1. Sermon on the Mount Part 1
2. Sermon on the Mount Part 2
3. The Great Commission

UNIT 7: WHAT'S NEXT? (3 SESSIONS)

1. Acts - Pentecost
2. Acts – Peter, John, and the Lame Man
3. Acts – Philip and the Ethiopian Treasurer

UNIT 8: PAUL AND HIS LETTERS

1. Paul, Sin, and Grace
2. Paul on Being Worthy of God's Calling

SEASONAL

1. Advent – Quiet Anticipation
2. Lent – Holy Week



UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 1: Community Building

It's the beginning of the school year and it's vital that small groups set a strong foundation based on a community centric atmosphere. Why is building community so important? Because Jesus calls us to be in community and those communities are called to invite others into it. Use this unit to help build community as a group.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - Called to Community

Take a look at the way Jesus built community so that you can build it within your small group! Those who were in Jesus' community were all from different backgrounds and had different life goals and motivations...kinda like we do! Dive into what it was like for those first few people Jesus called to be in a group together. Much like our groups, they had to overcome differences and build trust. The goal is for us to do the same.

2 - Growing Community

After Jesus created His initial group of people in His community, He did ministry but ultimately had to do what He came here to do and die on the cross for our redemption. But Jesus still had community on His mind—even in his last few moments on earth before His death and even after His Resurrection. He left the people of His time, and all those that were to follow, some important instructions on how to grow community.



Called to Community

>> **BIG IDEA:** We are called to community with Jesus and each other.

>> **SUMMARY:** Take a look at the way Jesus built community so that you can build it within your small group! Those who were in Jesus' community were all from different backgrounds and had different life goals and motivations...kinda like we do! Dive into what it was like for those first few people Jesus called to be in a group together, much like our groups, they had to overcome differences and build trust. The goal is for us to do the same.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Matthew 4:18-11, 9:9-10; Luke 6:12-16

Matthew 4:18-22

18 As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." 20 Right away, they left their nets and followed him. 21 Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and 22 immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Matthew 9:9-10

9 As Jesus continued on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. He said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him. 10 As Jesus sat down to eat in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and his disciples at the table.

Luke 6:12-16

12 During that time, Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night long. 13 At daybreak, he called together his disciples. He chose twelve of them whom he called apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter; his brother Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; 15 Matthew; Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called a zealot; 16 Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.



>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Bible, paper, pens, markers, index cards, chairs

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This session we talk about being called to community. As you prepare for the week, think about what attracted you to this community, this church. Think about what YOU bring to this community. What do you wish other people would bring to the community? We are so grateful that you answered the call to work with students! Your unique perspective and listening ear creates space for students to grow and thrive in their relationship with God.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students discussed how we are called to be in community with one another. Think of communities you have been part of (ex. clubs, sports teams, social groups).

- Share what those communities meant to you and how they helped you understand yourself better.
- Share the common values or interests that pulled your community together more tightly.
- Discuss communities your student is currently part of or interested in joining.

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Understanding Community through Jesus' Example

1. Introduction to Community and the Concept of WWJD

- Introduce the theme of community.
- Refer to WWJD bracelets and the modern version "H.W.L.F." (He Would Love First).
- The core question: "What did Jesus do?" encourages us to look at Jesus' life to follow His example.

2. Back to School and New Communities

- The back-to-school season as a time of reconnecting or meeting new people (teachers, friends, church members).
- Some may be meeting small group members for the first time, while others may be reconnecting after a long time.

3. Jesus Builds His Community (Matthew 4:18-22)

- Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him, even though they were strangers to Him at first.
- The act of following Jesus forms a community, as each disciple answers the call.

4. The Calling of Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)

- Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him, not knowing who else is in the community.
- Jesus creates a diverse group, which grows stronger by forming bonds.

5. Jesus Chooses His 12 Apostles (Luke 6:12-16)

- Jesus chooses twelve disciples to become apostles, calling them into a shared mission.
- Emphasizes that Jesus invited these individuals to not only follow Him but also to be in community with one another.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1:

On a sheet of paper, brainstorm with your group some important “community rules” that everyone should have to follow in order to make and keep small group a safe place for building community. Have everyone take a picture of the final document so that everyone is held accountable to it (if some in your group don’t have phones, make a copy and pass them out next week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is one thing you’re looking forward to about this school year and one thing you’re dreading? Why?
- What do you think the disciple’s friendships and family lives were like before Jesus called them into community?

>> ACTIVITY #2:

Split the group in half. Give each team a piece of paper and when you say, “go,” have them try to write down as many of the 12 disciples’ names as they can (without looking them up). The group that gets the most (real names) in 30 (or 60) seconds wins! Once you’ve established a winner, take the time to look up any additional names they didn’t get on their lists.

>> DISCUSSION:

Each of the disciples were called to community! Read Matthew 4:18-22

- Why do you think the disciples, Peter and Andrew, decided to follow Jesus right away, even though they were in the middle of fishing?
- The brothers, James and John, also left their boats right away, but they left their dad behind in order to follow Jesus. What do you think their dad, Zebedee, was thinking? What do you think their motivation for leaving was?
- Jesus invited more than fishermen to join his community. Read Matthew 9:9-10



- If Matthew was a tax collector, he probably had a cushy life because of all the money he made scamming others. What do you think made him leave his job in the middle of work when Jesus called him?
- What differences and similarities do you think there were between Matthew, the tax collector, and the fishermen?
- Read Luke 6:12-16. So many different people join Jesus when he calls them to community!
- How is this like our small groups at church? Do we all have the same home or social life? Do we all have the same hobbies or interests?
- Why do you think we use small groups to build community in student ministry? In what ways are our small groups similar and different to Jesus' group of disciples?
- What are some ways you've seen people diffuse a situation or keep the peace instead of fighting over their differences?
- What are some ways everyone in your group can make sure you all value the time spent in small group?

>> **ACTIVITY #3: SPEED FRIENDING**

Set up two rows of chairs facing each other and have half the group sit on one side and half on the other. Give them two minutes (set a timer, one minute on each side) and have them share and discover as much as they can about the person across from them. Pick one row of chairs to be the designated rotators, after two minutes have the rotators shift down a seat so they are in front of a new person. Do this until everyone has been able to share with each other.

>> **DISCUSSION:**

1. What character from a book/tv/video game do you feel has a life that is completely different than you?
2. Who in your life do you feel like you have things in common with?
3. Why do you think community matters to Jesus?
4. Why does community matter inside of the church?

On an index card or a note on your phone, jot down a few points regarding what YOU bring to this community. Do you bring laughter? Do you bring a different perspective? Do you bring a listening ear? If you can't think of anything...what do you wish other people bring to the community?

>> **CHALLENGE:**

Look up all the places Jesus' disciples appear in the Bible, decide who you think is the most interesting -- or, who you think you might be most like.

>> **JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:**

Take time to go around the room and share joys and concerns and pray for each other. If you do this at the beginning, just close out in prayer.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page.



Growing Community

>> **BIG IDEA:** Our community is called to grow!

>> **SUMMARY:** After Jesus created His initial group of people in His community, He did ministry but ultimately had to do what He came here to do and die on the cross for our redemption. But Jesus still had community on His mind—even in his last few moments on earth before His death and even after His Resurrection. He left the people of His time, and all those that were to follow, some important instructions on how to grow community.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** John 19:26-27; John 20:17-18; Matthew 28:16-20

John 19:26-27

26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 20:17-18

17 Jesus said to her, “Don’t hold on to me, for I haven’t yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I’ve seen the Lord.” Then she told them what he said to her.

Matthew 28:16-20

Commissioning of the disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”



>> **SUPPLY LIST:** printed community connections bingo cards for each student, whiteboard/dry erase markers or paper/markers

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** The first step in community is creating it. Once they have community, it is easy for people, and especially students, to keep only their specific community intact. These are called cliques and can become very exclusive and insular quickly. Focusing outward, instead of inward, is the mark of healthy Christian community. It is clear from the start that Jesus focused first on building community and then quickly moved to growing a larger community of people that cared deeply for one another.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students discussed how to grow a community once it is formed. Knowing that it is easy to create closed groups of friends, how might you encourage your student to look beyond their groups of friends to others? Discuss the following:

- How do you care well for your friends?
- How do you open your friend group to others?
- How well do you introduce your friends to other people they don't know?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Building and Growing Community through Jesus' Example

1. Introduction: Community in Different Forms

- Community can take many forms (e.g., social media interactions, favorite brands, shared experiences).
- We naturally share what we love (e.g., memes, music, food) but sometimes hold back to keep things exclusive.

2. Jesus' Intentional Community

- Jesus was very intentional about building His community.
- He not only called disciples but gave them specific instructions on how to live in community.
- Example: Jesus' last moments on the cross (John 19:26-27) – He instructed His mother and disciple to care for each other.

3. Jesus' Resurrection and Community Growth

- After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and told her to share the news (John 20:17-18).
- Mary, one of Jesus' closest followers, was tasked with sharing His resurrection with the disciples, continuing the spread of the community.

4. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

- Jesus' final instructions to His disciples: Go and make disciples of all nations.
- The community is meant to grow and share God's love with others, not stay the same or exclusive.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- Who's your favorite artist (of any art form) or brand (X-box vs PlayStation? Nike vs Adidas? Birks vs Hey Dudes?)
- What's one thing you like so much that you often talk or post about it?

>> ACTIVITY #1: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS BINGO

Help students discover common ground and fun facts about each other—building the foundation for a growing community.

- Either use the provided BINGO cards or the blank ones to make your own.
- Students mingle and ask each other questions to get 5 in row.
 - Here's the twist: they cannot ask the direct question! Cannot ask, "Do you have a pet?" Can ask, "Do you help take care of any living things at home?" Cannot ask, "Do you love pizza?" Can ask, "What is your favorite food?"
 - When they find a match, that person signs or initials the square.
 - They can only have one person fill one square. (If you have less students, adjust this as needed!)
 - When someone gets 5 in a row, they shout, "COMMUNITY!"

Ask:

- What was something surprising you learned about someone?
- How can learning about others help our group grow together?

>> DISCUSSION:

- What is something you learned from the teaching time that was brand new, or you heard in a different way?
- Read our scripture passages: John 19:26-27
- What do you think John and Jesus' mother, Mary were thinking when He called them into even closer community with each other? Do you think it was...awkward? Scary? Sad? Helpful? Comforting?
- Why do you think it's important that the community Jesus built kept going even after He died on the cross?



Read the passages: John 20:17-18

- How do you think Mary Magdalene might describe her encounter with Jesus in the garden after He was Resurrected? How might she have felt, what might she have thought?
- Why are Jesus' instructions to Mary significant, why is it important that she followed His instructions?

Read the passages: Matthew 28:16-20

- Why do you think some of the disciples worshipped and some doubted when they encountered Jesus after His Resurrection?
- Why do you think Jesus didn't give the disciples specific instructions on how to make disciples of all nations?
- Why is it important that Jesus promises to be with the disciples (with us), "every day" verse 20?

>> ACTIVITY #2: MAKE A PLAN

Using a sheet of paper or a whiteboard, brainstorm the various ways your group will commit to growing community like Jesus calls us to do. Write 3 things: "Share Experiences," "Share the Message," and "Serve." Under each word, have your group brainstorm how they can do each of these in their lives and grow your specific small group community. In the serve column, brainstorm ideas of how your group can serve together this year and make a plan to schedule a serve day.

>> DISCUSSION:

- Why is it important that we do each of the above things in our lives?
- How can this group help encourage and support each other as we try to incorporate these ideas into your lives?
- Why does it matter that this group serves together and not just solo?
- How can you make sure that your small group community is willing to create space for those that aren't there yet? Why is it important to create that space?

>> CHALLENGE:

Work on memorizing Matthew 28:19-20, it's a very important verse for those of us that follow Christ!





community connections BINGO

has a pet	plays a sport you have played	has the same favorite color as you	loves pizza	has been to another state
likes the same music artist as you	can whistle	has a birthday in the same month as you	has a younger sibling	knows how to do a tiktok dance
is wearing blue	has seen all the harry potter movies	SIGN YOUR NAME HERE	is left-handed	has been to a concert
knows how to cook something	knows a cheesy joke	loves to read	has watched a superhero movie recently	is afraid of spiders
has done a serve project before	has more than 1 sibling	can make a duck noise	can play a musical instrument	can do a cartwheel





		SIGN YOUR NAME HERE		



X P L
X P L
X P L



UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 2: Called

Regardless of age, we are all called by God. This two-week unit focuses on the stories of Hannah, Samuel, and the prophet, Jeremiah as they all answer God's call for their lives. We too are being called to God's service, not everyone will be a pastor or missionary, but everyone is called to love God and others and share that love with those they meet. This unit will delve into those biblical callings and help discern what an every day calling in the life of a young person might look like.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - Do Big Things

Session one focuses on Hannah's desperate prayer to God for a child and her promise to commit that child to the Lord's service. She was feeling insignificant and went on to do big things. God heard Hannah calling and crying out from a place of oppression and grief and answered that call as well. God's not the only one who can answer calls like Hannah's, so how can we do the same?

2 - Because You are Young

Jeremiah was a prophet called by God to share messages, both encouraging and scary, to God's people. It wasn't always easy to do and there were ups and downs for Jeremiah as well as many ups and downs for God's people. But through it all, Jeremiah remained confident that God would see the story through to the end. Jeremiah was afraid to answer the call at first--because of his young age--but age shouldn't stop us from serving God in the ways God empowers us to serve. What big or small things might God be calling us to, regardless of age?

3 - Trust in God's Promises That Take a While

God calls us to trust in God's promises. Sometimes we have to be patient when we don't immediately get resolution. Here, you'll dive into the deeper meaning of Jeremiah's instructions to God's exiled people and gain a better understanding of God's promises to us. God chooses all of us to do great things. Our response is to trust God!



Do Big Things

>> **BIG IDEA:** God calls those who may feel insignificant to do big things!

>> **SUMMARY:** Session one focuses on Hannah's desperate prayer to God for a child and her promise to commit that child to the Lord's service. She was feeling insignificant and went on to do big things. God heard Hannah calling and crying out from a place of oppression and grief and answered that call as well. God's not the only one who can answer calls like Hannah's, so how can we do the same?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** 1 Samuel 1:6-18

1 Samuel 1:9-11

9 Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. [a]10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. 11 And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut.[b]"

1 Samuel 1:12-15

12 As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. 13 Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. 14 "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" 15 "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:17-18

17 "In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." 18 "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

1 Samuel 1:6-7

6 So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. 7 Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle.[a] Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.



>> **SUPPLY LIST:** blindfold, red paper, white paper, color paper, pens, markers, painters tape

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Hannah's story is a full circle moment. She is extremely sad because she isn't able to have children, which is a familiar story line in the Bible. To make matters worse, her husband has another wife (legal back in the day) who has two sons. This other wife mocks Hannah. Hannah is so sad, the priest, Eli, thinks she is drunk when she is praying to God at the Temple. Hannah promises God that if she is granted a son, she will commit his life to priestly duties. Sure enough, she has a son named Samuel who eventually becomes Eli's apprentice. When Samuel becomes the high priest, he leads Israel and eventually selects it's first king, Saul.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** In the moment it is difficult to realize we are chosen to do big things. It is only when we look back on something, do we realize the pivotal moments in our life and how God was part of them.

- Share a time when you made a decision and it turned out to have pretty large and important outcomes.
- Ask your student what small decisions they might make today that could possibly result in something big happening in their life (ex. the electives they choose in school, the friends they choose, the sports and activities they choose). How might they involve God in some of these decisions?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

God Calls Us

1. Opening Question & Personal Connection

- Key Message: God sees and hears us, even when we feel overlooked. He calls each of us—young and old—to reflect His love in both big and small ways.
- Ask: Have you ever felt overlooked or like no one, not even God, was listening?
- Share a story of feeling unnoticed in middle school, and how finding a youth group or other group of supportive friends helped you realize you had a purpose and a calling.

2. Bible Story – Hannah's Faith (1 Samuel 1–2)

- Hannah was mocked and deeply saddened because she couldn't have children, which at the time made her feel like an outcast.
- She prayed silently and passionately at the temple, promising that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord.
- God answered her prayer, and Hannah had a son named Samuel.
- Hannah kept her promise and brought Samuel to the temple to serve under Eli the priest.
- Samuel grew up to be a great prophet and leader.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have students share their name and someplace new they recently visited (restaurant, sports arena, city, friend's home, etc.)

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1: HEARD IN THE HERD

Supplies Needed: blindfold

Today we heard the story of Hannah and how God answered her prayers for a son. God hears millions of prayers from all over the world every day, and God can pick out every voice and every prayer. God hears you and me when we pray, even among all those millions of other voices. That's amazing! Let's play a game to see how well we can pick out voices in a crowd.

- Invite a willing child to be Caller. Then blindfold the caller and help them to the center of the play area. Have the other kids spread out around it.
- Explain that you'll whisper the name of one of the other kids to the Caller. Caller will continually call out that name and try to find that person by listening for the name in the crowd of other names. The other kids will call out their own names. Kids may move slowly around the room, and Caller will try to find and tag the person they are calling.
- When the Caller tags the person he or she was calling, that person will become the new It. Play as many rounds as you can in about six minutes.

Ask:

- What helped you hear one voice out of many voices?
- Why are you glad God can pick your voice out of millions of voices and hear your prayers?

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What are some things you tend to overlook in your everyday life? Things that you might not notice, but others would? What might your friends or family be frustrated at you for not noticing?

>> DISCUSSION:

Read 1 Samuel 1:9-11

- What does it feel like to be overlooked in situations?
- Why can it sometimes feel like God is overlooking our problems and situations?
- Can you remember a time when someone did listen to you? What did it feel like when someone gave you their attention and listened to what you had to say?
- What does Hannah's prayer teach us about what she knows about God's character?



Continue to read: 1 Samuel 1:12-15

- What do you think Hannah's motivation was behind her prayer that God would give her a child?
- Why do you think Hannah was praying so hard—to the point that Eli thought she was drunk?
- What state of mind do you think Hannah was in while she prayed if Eli thought she was drunk?
- How can we avoid being prideful and arrogant and show compassion to others without judgment?
- Continue to read: 1 Samuel 1:17-18
- God hears every prayer we pray, like Hannah's prayer was heard, but sometimes the answer to our prayers is yes, and sometimes the answer is no—What do you think Hannah was thinking and feeling when God said yes to her prayer?
- How was God's answer to Hannah's prayer a sign that God cares for people who are marginalized and oppressed?
- How can we follow God's call to uplift those who are in need or have been oppressed?

Read the prequel verse: 1 Samuel 1:6-7

- Based on her experiences, why would Hannah warn others against things like pride and arrogance?
- How did Hannah show her faith in God in her story?
- Why do you think Hannah would promise to give her son back to service to God, when a son was her greatest desire?
- How do you think Hannah answered God's call on her life by being a mother to Samuel and then having him serve God in the temple?
- Even in her struggle, Hannah wanted to serve God and for her family to serve God—how can we serve God even when we are struggling or feel insignificant?
- Hannah did something big and gave something up as an act of faith how might God be calling you to act in faith, big or small?

>> ACTIVITY #2: PRAYER EXERCISE

Supplies: red paper, scissors, pens, white paper, markers, painters tape, different colors of paper – examples for each prayer corner

There are lots of ways to pray and we set up four corners of the room for you to practice praying.

- Corner 1: Red paper, pens, scissors, tape – If you choose to come to this corner, you can cut out a heart and write or draw a prayer on it, asking God for your heart's desire. Then tape it to the wall.
- Corner 2: White paper, pens – If you choose this corner, use the word T-H-A-N-K-F-U-L to write 8 things you are thankful for.
- Corner 3: White paper, markers – If you choose to come to this corner, commit to give a gift to God (time, talents, etc)
- Corner 4: Colored paper, markers, taped outline of cross on the wall – If you choose to come to this corner, you can write more praises to God and arrange them in a fun mosaic on the wall.

Let students choose a corner, play some music, and give them time to complete their prayer experience.



UNIT 2 | SESSION 2

Because You Are Young

>> **BIG IDEA:** God is calling you too!

>> **SUMMARY:** Jeremiah was a prophet called by God to share messages, both encouraging and scary, to God's people. It wasn't always easy to do and there were ups and downs for Jeremiah as well as many ups and downs for God's people. But through it all, Jeremiah remained confident that God would see the story through to the end. Jeremiah was afraid to answer the call at first--because of his young age--but age shouldn't stop us from serving God in the ways God empowers us to serve. What big or small things might God be calling us to, regardless of age?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Jeremiah 7:1-11, 10:23-25, 18:1-12, 16:19-21

Jeremiah 7:1-11

7 Jeremiah received the Lord's word: 2 Stand near the gate of the Lord's temple and proclaim there this message: Listen to the Lord's word, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. 3 This is what the Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, says: Improve your conduct and your actions, and I will dwell with you[a] in this place. 4 Don't trust in lies: "This is the Lord's temple! The Lord's temple! The Lord's temple!" 5 No, if you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; 6 if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, 7 only then will I dwell with you[b] in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time. 8 And yet you trust in lies that will only hurt you. 9 Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, sacrifice to Baal and go after other gods that you don't know, 10 and then come and stand before me in this temple that bears my name, and say, "We are safe," only to keep on doing all these detestable things? 11 Do you regard this temple, which bears my name, as a hiding place for criminals? I can see what's going on here, declares the Lord.



Jeremiah 10:23-25

23 I know, Lord, that our lives are not our own,
that we're not able to direct our paths.
24 So correct me, Lord, but with justice,
not in your anger,
or else you will reduce me to nothing.
25 Pour out your wrath on the nations
that ignore you
and on the people
who don't call on you,
since they have devoured Jacob;
they have devoured him completely
and ruined his country.

Jeremiah 18:1-12

18 Jeremiah received the Lord's word: 2 Go down to the potter's house, and I'll give you instructions about what to do there. 3 So I went down to the potter's house; he was working on the potter's wheel. 4 But the piece he was making was flawed while still in his hands, so the potter started on another, as seemed best to him. 5 Then the Lord's word came to me: 6 House of Israel, can't I deal with you like this potter, declares the Lord? Like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in mine, house of Israel! 7 At any time I may announce that I will dig up, pull down, and destroy a nation or kingdom; 8 but if that nation I warned turns from its evil, then I'll relent and not carry out the harm I intended for it. 9 At the same time, I may announce that I will build and plant a nation or kingdom; 10 but if that nation displeases and disobeys me, then I'll relent and not carry out the good I intended for it. 11 Now say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem: This is what the Lord says: I am a potter preparing a disaster for you; I'm working out a plan against you. So each one of you, turn from your evil ways; reform your ways and your actions. 12 But they said, "What's the use! We will follow our own plans and act according to our own willful, evil hearts."

Jeremiah 16:19-21

19 Lord, you are my strength and my stronghold;
you are my refuge in time of trouble.
The nations will flock to you
from the ends of the earth,
and they will say:
"Our ancestors have inherited utter lies,
things that are hollow and useless."
20 Can humans make their own gods?
If so, they are not gods at all!
21 Therefore, I will teach them;
this time I will teach them
my power and my might.
They will understand that I am the Lord.

Supply List: clay, activity sheet, highlighters, pens



>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Jeremiah is a major prophet in the Bible. He foretold the coming of a King (most scholars agree that he is pointing towards Jesus who came hundreds of years later) who would save the southern Kingdom of Judah (following the split of Israel). He uses the imagery of how God will live with them in their homes and will shape them, much like a potter shapes vases and other containers made of clay. Jeremiah was also young when he began to share his wisdom and prophecies. His words shaped generations of people in Judah.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students studied Jeremiah, a young and influential prophet in Biblical times. Consider that your student has wisdom to share. How might you affirm them in a way where they are able to share how they see the world without filtering it with what you want to hear? Ask these questions:

- What is something you feel needs to change?
- What is something that needs to change that will benefit others outside you and your friend groups?
- How and to whom might you start talking about these changes?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

You're Never Too Young for God's Calling

1. Personal Story to Start

- Share about a time when someone was left out because they were “too young”.
- This leads into the theme: You may be too young for some things—but never too young to be used by God.

2. The Question of Being “Too Young”

- Many young people wonder if they're too young to serve at church or understand faith deeply.
- It's easy to feel unqualified, uneasy, or unsure.
- But this doubt is not new—it's found in the Bible too.

3. Jeremiah's Story (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

- God called Jeremiah when he was young.
- Jeremiah responded: “I'm too young, and I don't know how to speak.”
- God answered: “Don't say you're too young... I will be with you.”
- God didn't let age or inexperience stop the calling.

4. God Uses Young People

- David – Fought Goliath and led in battle as a young man.
- Josiah – Became king at 8 and led spiritual reform.
- Timothy – Preached and led while young.
- Your age doesn't limit what God can do through you.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create a confidence for students that they are seen and heard.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1 - THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Supplies: clay

Give each student some clay and instruct them to create a beautiful piece of pottery, like described in the story of Jeremiah. We will come back to this in a bit...

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What are things in life that you are currently too young for?
- What one thing did you want to do as a kid that you finally get to do now?

>> DISCUSSION:

From the teaching -

- Jeremiah felt like he was not a good speaker, why do you think God called him to speak anyway?
- What does it mean to you that God chose Jeremiah to share God's word before Jeremiah was born?
- Why do you think God chose Jeremiah at a young age to be His voice to the people?
- God told Jeremiah, "I promise to be with you and keep you safe, so don't be afraid." do you think Jeremiah felt relieved by this--or still felt a little scared? How would you feel?

Read: Jeremiah 7:1-11 (invite 1-2 students to read from the Bible)

Ask:

- How do you think Jeremiah felt while sharing this message with his people?
- Why do you think God wanted people to have this message?

Read: Jeremiah 10:23-25 (invite 1-2 students to read from the Bible)

Ask:

- What does this prayer say about Jeremiah's character and how he thinks?



>> ACTIVITY #1 - THE POTTER AND THE CLAY CON'T

Read Jeremiah 18:1-12 with emphasis on 18:6

Ask students what they've created and why. Discuss why God would compare the nation of Israel with clay.

Read: Jeremiah 18:18

- Why do you think this was people's response to the messages Jeremiah was sharing?
- How do you think Jeremiah felt knowing that people were plotting against him for doing his job?

Read: Jeremiah 16:19-21

- What does Jeremiah's prayer say about his relationship with God?
- How can you be more like clay in your relationship with God?
- What lessons can we learn from Jeremiah's life and story?
- What message do you think God wants you to share with other people?
- What will you need from God in order to accomplish sharing that message?
- Do you feel like you're allowed to ask God for help when God gives you a job to do?
- Jeremiah had a conversation with God and understood what God was calling him to, how can you discover what God might be calling you to?
- Who are some individuals you can speak to when you know that God is calling you to do something?

>> ACTIVITY #2 - ACTIVITY SHEET

Supplies Needed: printed sheet and highlighters

Circle or highlight the items that God might be calling you to do in your life.

Serving at Church – Memorize a Bible Verse – Be Honest with Someone – Ask for Help – Starting an Inclusive School Club – Send an Encouraging Note to a Friend – Call Out Injustice – Pray for Clarity on Your Calling – Invite a Friend to Church – Figure Out a Way to Share Love with Neighbors – Be Nicer to a Sibling – Read More of the Bible – Stand Up for What's Right

>> CHALLENGE:

Pick one item from the above list and commit to doing it this week. Ask a mentor for help or ideas if you think it would help you answer this calling.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



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UNIT 2 | SESSION 3

Trust in Promises that Take a While

>> **BIG IDEA:** God is a promise keeper.

>> **SUMMARY:** God calls us to trust in God's promises. Sometimes we have to be patient when we don't immediately get resolution. Here, you'll dive into the deeper meaning of Jeremiah's instructions to God's exiled people and gain a better understanding of God's promises to us.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Jeremiah 29:4-7, 10, 11, 12-14

Jeremiah 29:4-7

4 The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. 7 Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.

Jeremiah 29:10

10 The Lord proclaims: When Babylon's seventy years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

Jeremiah 29:11

11 I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.

Jeremiah 29:12-14

12 When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. 13 When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. 14 I will be present for you, declares the Lord, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.



>> **SUPPLY LIST:** activity sheets for both activities, scissors, paper, pens, markers

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Jeremiah is writing to the Israelites who have been exiled in Babylon. He is encouraging them to play the long game, to live their present lives to the fullest and to know that God will be with them and eventually deliver them to their homeland. They would be exiled in Babylon for 70 years, a full generation of people. Imagine how that might feel today where we expect immediate or nearly immediate responses to our requests.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Reflect on something that you needed to wait for. How long did you wait? Patience and resiliency are difficult to develop in today's world, but not impossible. Ask your student:

- What is something you've been patient for? How did it feel? Was it worth the wait?
- What is something in the future you want to be sure to be patient about in order to gain the best result (ex. future partner, career, relationships)?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Trust in God's Promises

1. Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet

- Known for delivering tough messages from God.
- Saddened by the poor choices of his people.
- Continued to speak God's truth, even during the exile of the Hebrew people.

2. Understanding Jeremiah 29:11

- Popular verse: "For I know the plans I have for you... plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope."
- Often used for encouragement at events like graduations.
- Can seem confusing when life feels full of disaster or lacking peace.

3. The Verse in Context

- Spoken to Israelites in exile under Babylonian rule.
- A promise that after 70 years, God would bring them back and restore peace.
- It was a long-term promise to a group, not immediate personal comfort.

4. Real Meaning of Jeremiah 29:11

- Not a quick fix for hard times.
- A reminder that God's plan may take time, but He remains faithful.
- Shows that God brings hope even in difficult seasons.

5. Why It Matters Today

- Even though the verse was written to Israelites, it shows God's character as a promise-keeper.
- Encourages us to trust God's timing and care.



6. Jesus' Words About Worry

- In the New Testament, Jesus reminds us not to worry—God takes care of creation, and He will care for us too.
- Reinforces that God is trustworthy and attentive to our needs.

7. Key Takeaway

- Jeremiah 29:11 is a reminder of God's faithfulness, not a guarantee of an easy life.
- Trust in God's promises, even when the outcome isn't immediate.



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[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create a confidence for students that they are seen and heard.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1: FIND THE REAL MEANING

Supplies Needed: REAL Meaning activity sheet printed

Break the students into groups of 2-3 and have them take turns describing the difference between the meaning of the popular saying on the left and REAL context on the right.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is a song where you or a friend thought the lyrics said one thing, but then you found out you misheard it and it has totally different lyrics!

>> DISCUSSION:

Read Jeremiah 29:11

- What do you think many people assume Jeremiah 29:11 means when they put it on keychains and graduation gifts?

Read Jeremiah 29:4-7

- What does it sound like God is telling the people who are living in exile to do?
- Why would God tell the Israelites to get comfortable in the foreign place they were forced to live?
- When have you had to force yourself to get comfortable in an uncomfortable season of your life?
- What do you do when you are dealing with an uncomfortable situation that is lasting longer than you hoped?
- What is something good you wouldn't have gotten to experience without experiencing difficulty first?

Read Jeremiah 29:10

- What was God's promise to the Israelites?

Read Jeremiah 29: 12-14

- What does God promise in verse 12?
- What about verse 13?
- What about verse 14
- Why do you think these promises mattered to the people of Israel?



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Activity

Finding The REAL Meaning

Break the students into groups of 2-3 and have them take turns describing the difference between the meaning of the popular saying on the left and the REAL context on the right.

Have each group share why they felt like the meaning did or didn't change from the left column to the right.

Great minds think alike.	Great minds think alike, but fools seldom differ. (Great minds think the same, but silly people <i>also</i> think the same.)
Curiosity killed the cat.	Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back. (A cat can get killed trying to get something interesting, but if you give them something interesting first, they'll stay alive!)
Money is the root of all evil.	The love of money is a root of <i>all</i> sorts of evil.
No rest for the wicked.	"There is no peace," God says, "to the wicked." "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."
The world is my oyster.	The world's my oyster but I have to work really hard and use a sword to open it!



Which promises stand out to you and why?

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. John 8:36

He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. 30 Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. 31 But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.

They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:30-31

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." John 8:12

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life.[a] Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. John 11:25

Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. Isaiah 40:28

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. John 10:10

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6



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UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 3: Crowned

Unit Summary - David was many things over the course of his life, a shepherd, a fighter of bears and lions, a defeater of giants, a victim, a king, an abuser of power, a manipulator, a song writer, a follower of God. David has a very complicated story and yet we can learn so much this man whom God decided would be crowned the king!

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - David's Anointing/Goliath

From the time that David was young, he had a special calling on his life. Although he wasn't the oldest, biggest, or most accomplished of Jesse's sons, he was the one that God chose to lead His people. He even defended those same people from certain annihilation by a giant named Goliath! We can learn so much from David's early life and as Israel's future king!

2 - David's Misdeeds

David is lauded throughout history as a great leader and king. He's noted for being royalty in the lineage of Jesus. He won many wars defending Israel. He wrote incredible songs with words and phrases still being used in praise and worship songs to this day. And yet, David was also an abuser and conspired to and did commit murder. It's important to talk about David's flaws and mistakes along with the things for which he is praised. What's more important is the forgiveness God offers and teaches us to offer as well.

3 - David's Legacy/Solomon

King Solomon is the son of David and Bathsheba. There are so many layers and factors in his story, but perhaps the most interesting aspect of Solomon is that regardless of his family's history, he was the wisest man ever. He was wise enough to ask God for wisdom as he rules over his country. God answered that prayer and we get to see how Solomon both used that wisdom and sometimes ignored it.



UNIT 3 | SESSION 1

David's Anointing/Goliath

>> **BIG IDEA:** "Look at the heart...and have heart!"

>> **SUMMARY:** From the time that David was young, he had a special calling on his life. Although he wasn't the oldest, biggest, or most accomplished of Jesse's sons, he was the one that God chose to lead His people. He even defended those same people from certain annihilation by a giant named Goliath! We can learn so much from David's early life and as Israel's future king!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** 1 Samuel 16:7 (CEB)

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart."

1 Samuel 17:1-11

17 The Philistines assembled their troops for war at Socoh of Judah. They camped between Socoh and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. 2 Saul and the Israelite army assembled and camped in the Elah Valley, where they got organized to fight the Philistines. 3 The Philistines took positions on one hill while Israel took positions on the opposite hill. There was a valley between them.

4 A champion named Goliath from Gath came out from the Philistine camp. He was more than nine feet tall. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore bronze scale-armor weighing one hundred twenty-five pounds. 6 He had bronze plates on his shins, and a bronze scimitar hung on his back. 7 His spear shaft was as strong as the bar on a weaver's loom, and its iron head weighed fifteen pounds. His shield-bearer walked in front of him.

8 He stopped and shouted to the Israelite troops, "Why have you come and taken up battle formations? I am the Philistine champion, and you are Saul's servants. Isn't that right? Select one of your men, and let him come down against me. 9 If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will become your slaves, but if I overcome him and kill him, then you will become our slaves and you will serve us. 10 I insult Israel's troops today!" The Philistine continued, "Give me an opponent, and we'll fight!" 11 When Saul and all Israel heard what the Philistine said, they were distressed and terrified.



1 Samuel 17:12-30

12 Now David was Jesse's son, an Ephraimite from Bethlehem in Judah who had eight sons. By Saul's time, Jesse was already quite old and far along in age. 13 Jesse's three oldest sons had gone with Saul to war. Their names were Eliab the oldest, Abinadab the second oldest, and Shammah the third oldest. 14 (David was the youngest.) These three older sons followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul's side to shepherd his father's flock in Bethlehem.

16 For forty days straight the Philistine came out and took his stand, both morning and evening. 17 Jesse said to his son David, "Please take your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread. Deliver them quickly to your brothers in the camp. 18 And here, take these ten wedges of cheese to their unit commander. Find out how your brothers are doing and bring back some sign that they are okay. 19 They are with Saul and all the Israelite troops fighting the Philistines in the Elah Valley."

20 So David got up early in the morning, left someone in charge of the flock, and loaded up and left, just as his father Jesse had instructed him. He reached the camp right when the army was taking up their battle formations and shouting the war cry. 21 Israel and the Philistines took up their battle formations opposite each other. 22 David left his things with an attendant and ran to the front line. When he arrived, he asked how his brothers were doing. 23 Right when David was speaking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came forward from the Philistine ranks and said the same things he had said before. David listened. 24 When the Israelites saw Goliath, every one of them ran away terrified of him. (25 Now the Israelite soldiers had been saying to each other: "Do you see this man who keeps coming out? How he comes to insult Israel? The king will reward with great riches whoever kills that man. The king will give his own daughter to him and make his household exempt from taxes in Israel.")

26 David asked the soldiers standing by him, "What will be done for the person who kills that Philistine over there and removes this insult from Israel? Who is that uncircumcised Philistine, anyway, that he can get away with insulting the army of the living God?"

27 Then the troops repeated to him what they had been saying. "So that's what will be done for the man who kills him," they said.

28 When David's oldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the soldiers, he got very mad at David. "Why did you come down here?" he said. "Who is watching those few sheep for you in the wilderness? I know how arrogant you are and your devious plan: you came down just to see the battle!"

29 "What did I do wrong this time?" David replied. "It was just a question!"

30 So David turned to someone else and asked the same thing, and the people said the same thing in reply.

1 Samuel 17:31-40

31 The things David had said were overheard and reported to Saul, who sent for him.

32 "Don't let anyone lose courage because of this Philistine!" David told Saul. "I, your servant, will go out and fight him!"

33 "You can't go out and fight this Philistine," Saul answered David. "You are still a boy. But he's been a warrior since he was a boy!"



34 “Your servant has kept his father’s sheep,” David replied to Saul, “and if ever a lion or a bear came and carried off one of the flock, 35 I would go after it, strike it, and rescue the animal from its mouth. If it turned on me, I would grab it at its jaw, strike it, and kill it. 36 Your servant has fought both lions and bears. This uncircumcised Philistine will be just like one of them because he has insulted the army of the living God.

37 “The Lord,” David added, “who rescued me from the power of both lions and bears, will rescue me from the power of this Philistine.”

“Go!” Saul replied to David. “And may the Lord be with you!”

38 Then Saul dressed David in his own gear, putting a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. 39 David strapped his sword on over the armor, but he couldn’t walk around well because he’d never tried it before. “I can’t walk in this,” David told Saul, “because I’ve never tried it before.” So he took them off. 40 He then grabbed his staff and chose five smooth stones from the streambed. He put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s bag and with sling in hand went out to the Philistine.

1 Samuel 17:41-51

41 The Philistine got closer and closer to David, and his shield-bearer was in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked David over, he sneered at David because he was just a boy; reddish brown and good-looking.

43 The Philistine asked David, “Am I some sort of dog that you come at me with sticks?” And he cursed David by his gods. 44 “Come here,” he said to David, “and I’ll feed your flesh to the wild birds and the wild animals!”

45 But David told the Philistine, “You are coming against me with sword, spear, and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel’s army, the one you’ve insulted. 46 Today the Lord will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head! Today I will feed your dead body and the dead bodies of the entire Philistine camp to the wild birds and the wild animals. Then the whole world will know that there is a God on Israel’s side. 47 And all those gathered here will know that the Lord doesn’t save by means of sword and spear. The Lord owns this war, and he will hand all of you over to us.”

48 The Philistine got up and moved closer to attack David, and David ran quickly to the front line to face him. 49 David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone. He slung it, and it hit the Philistine on his forehead. The stone penetrated his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. 50 And that’s how David triumphed over the Philistine with just a sling and a stone, striking the Philistine down and killing him—and David didn’t even have a sword! 51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine. He grabbed the Philistine’s sword, drew it from its sheath, and finished him off. Then David cut off the Philistine’s head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they fled.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** hula hoop, colorful soft foam orbs

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This is a familiar story of David and Goliath. It is a classic story of overconfident bully and an undersized young man who also is confident in his abilities, although they may be different from his foe. It is difficult to distinguish between David’s confidence and his naive willingness to embrace the moment.



>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students started a new series today called Crowned, where they will explore the only kings of Israel's kingdom when it was united and prosperous. We meet David, when Saul is king, as a young shepherd, challenging Goliath in battle. This classic story helps us recall when we have stood up against great odds and have succeeded. Ask your student:

- What is something you are doing that seems difficult right now?
- How might I support you in your pursuit of what seems difficult?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

All Heart

1. Introduction – Personal Story

- Share a story of never being picked first for sports.
- Relates the feeling of being overlooked to the story of how kings were picked in Israel.

2. Series Introduction – “Crown”

- Focus on the Kings of Israel and how they were chosen.
- Emphasis on King David as a central figure.
- Importance of understanding the backstory before diving into David's story.

3. First King: Saul

- Saul chosen as king for his outward appearance (tall and strong).
- Quickly proved to be a poor leader—disobedient, selfish, lacked confidence.
- Lesson: Physical traits don't make a good leader; character and faith do.

4. Choosing David as the Next King

- God sends Samuel to Jesse's house in Bethlehem to anoint a new king.
- Jesse presents his older sons, but none are chosen.
- David, the youngest, is brought from the fields where he was tending sheep.
- God emphasizes inner qualities over appearance (1 Samuel 16:7).

5. David and Jesus – Parallels

- Both from Bethlehem and same family line.
- Both were unlikely picks from a human perspective.
- Chosen by God for their hearts and purpose.

6. David vs. Goliath – The Epic Battle

- Goliath, a giant, challenges Israel and instills fear in Saul and the people.
- David volunteers to fight, despite being young and small.
- David trusts in God, not weapons or strength (1 Samuel 17).
- Defeats Goliath with a sling and a stone, showing faith over fear.

7. Main Takeaway – God's Values

- God chooses based on heart, not appearance or status.
- We are all God's first pick when we follow His will.
- Encouragement to seek God first and trust in His plan.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What's your favorite underdog success story--when someone or a team was successful when no one thought they would be?
- What's one of the greatest battles or challenges you have had to face so far?

>> ACTIVITY & DISCUSSION:

For each of these passages, assign a narrator and actors to read and act out the story!

Read together: 1 Samuel 17:1-11

- How do you think the Israelites felt when faced with Goliath's challenge?
- When have you or a friend of yours ever felt overwhelmed or intimidated by a certain situation? Share those experiences.

Read together: 1 Samuel 17:12-30

- What qualities did David display when he volunteered to fight Goliath?
- How can we apply these qualities to our own lives when faced with challenges?

Read together: 1 Samuel 17:31-40

- Why do you think David rejected King Saul's armor and chose to face Goliath with a sling and stones?
- How does this reflect his trust in God's plan?
- Have you ever had to trust in God's plan even though it seemed unconventional or different than what is usually expected?

Read together: 1 Samuel 17:41-51

- What can we learn from David's victory over Goliath?
- How does this inspire you to face your own obstacles with your faith?

>> ACTIVITY #2 - SLING AND STONE CHALLENGE

Use the soft colorful balls for the stones and a hula-hoop as the target. Challenge students to stand a distance away from the hula-hoop target. Have a student or yourself hold the hula-hoop up vertically while students try to "hit the target" (getting the ball through the hula-hoop).



UNIT 3 | SESSION 2

David's Misdeeds

>> **BIG IDEA:** Forgiveness is a two-way gift

>> **SUMMARY:** David is lauded throughout history as a great leader and king. He's noted for being royalty in the lineage of Jesus. He won many wars defending Israel. He wrote incredible songs with words and phrases still being used in praise and worship songs to this day. And yet, David was also an abuser and conspired to and did commit murder. It's important to talk about David's flaws and mistakes along with the things for which he is praised. What's more important is the forgiveness God offers and teaches us to offer as well.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Psalm 51:1-2, 17 and 2 Samuel 11:2-5, 14-18, 26-27

Psalm 51:1-2

51 Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

2 Wash me completely clean of my guilt;

purify me from my sin!

Psalm 51:17

17 A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God.

You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed.

2 Samuel 11:2-5, 14-18, 26-27

2 One evening, David got up from his couch and was pacing back and forth on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. 3 David sent someone and inquired about the woman. The report came back: "Isn't this Eliam's daughter Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 So David sent messengers to take her. When she came to him, he had sex with her. (Now she had been purifying herself after her monthly period.) Then she returned home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to David.

"I'm pregnant," she said.



14 The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 15 He wrote in the letter, "Place Uriah at the front of the fiercest battle, and then pull back from him so that he will be struck down and die."

16 So as Joab was attacking the city, he put Uriah in the place where he knew there were strong warriors. 17 When the city's soldiers came out and attacked Joab, some of the people from David's army fell. Uriah the Hittite was also killed. 18 Joab sent a complete report of the battle to David.

26 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27 After the time of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her back to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.

But what David had done was evil in the Lord's eyes.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Scissors, card stock box template print out, markers/pens, tape/glue sticks, printed page of Psalm 51

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This is another classic story about David, now King David. This records his worst mistake, his infidelity with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, a warrior in his army. David made matters worse by setting up Uriah's death in battle. The Psalms records his guilt and lament, asking for God's mercy.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students continue to study David's life, his success last week and his miserable failure this week. Consider a time you have failed. You may or may not want to share this. Regardless, God's mercy and forgiveness are always available when we fail. Ask your student:

- What have you done recently you have felt wasn't your best?
- How do you move on from things that don't live up to your expectations?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

David: A Great Leader Who Made Big Mistakes and Sought Forgiveness

1. Introduction

- Open with difficult things to say, like "I'm sorry" and "Worcestershire sauce."
- Prepares listeners for a serious story about someone great who made big mistakes.

2. Recap of Previous Week

- Saul was Israel's first king, chosen for his looks and strength, but he was not a good ruler.
- David was chosen for his heart, not his appearance, and he defeated Goliath.

3. David's Mistake

- As king, David let power go to his head.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What mistake did someone make in the last game you played, or show you watched on streaming or YouTube?
- Based on what you know so far, do you feel like God is super angry, uninterested, or super chill when we all make mistakes? Why do you think that?

>> ACTIVITY #1 - BOX IT UP

Using the card stock templates, have each student color and design two different boxes and sign their name on one of them. Have them cut out their two designs and put them together.

Collect each of their boxes that doesn't have their name on it. Split the group in half and have them stand in front of each other. Instruct one half of the group to look at the person across from them and have them say, "I'm sorry for what I did, I know it was wrong, and I will change my behavior. Will you please forgive me?"

Instruct the other half of the group to hand over the box they still have and say, "I forgive you."

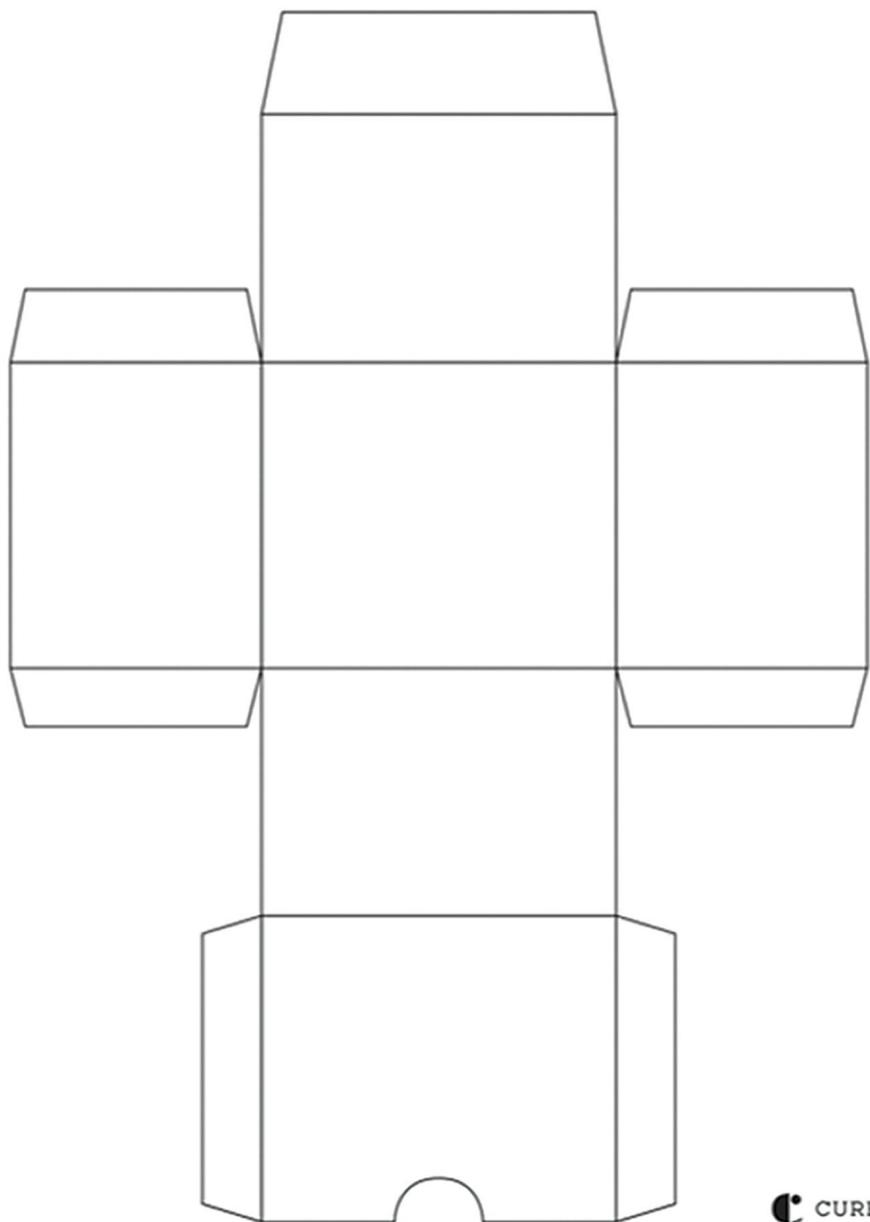
Have a mentor go around and hand the students that gave their boxes/forgiveness away one of the boxes that was collected and say, "Forgiveness is a gift for the giver and receiver, here's one for you."

Repeat this with the other half of the students until everyone has both asked for and been granted forgiveness.

Ask:

- Were you more comfortable giving forgiveness or receiving forgiveness? Why?
- How is giving forgiveness both a gift for the person receiving it AND the person giving it?





 CURBLY



>> DISCUSSION:

Read: Psalm 51:1-2

Ask:

- What is David hoping for in this passage?
- Why might you think David does deserve or doesn't deserve to be forgiven?
- What people in life deserve forgiveness when they do something wrong or harmful to others?
- Who else in this situation, besides God, should David have apologized to?

Read: Psalm 51:17

- What does this passage tell us about David?
- What does this passage inform us about God?
- Why is asking forgiveness so difficult?
- Why is giving forgiveness also difficult?
- How is practicing being forgiving and practicing being forgiven an important life skill?
- How can you give someone forgiveness even if they haven't asked for it?
- How can you stay safe from being hurt again by an unsafe person and still give forgiveness? Is it possible?

>> ACTIVITY #2 PSALM REMIX

Students will remix Psalm 51 in modern language or as a short-spoken poem, text message, song lyric, or letter to God.

- Sample prompt: "God, I really messed up. I need your forgiveness. I don't want to pretend I'm perfect – I just want to be right with you and others again."
- Invite students (optional) to share their remix with the group.



PSALM REMIX

- 51 Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!
Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!
- 2 Wash me completely clean of my guilt;
purify me from my sin!
- 3 Because I know my wrongdoings,
my sin is always right in front of me.
- 4 I've sinned against you—you alone.
I've committed evil in your sight.
That's why you are justified when you render your verdict,
completely correct when you issue your judgment.
- 5 Yes, I was born in guilt, in sin,
from the moment my mother conceived me.
- 6 And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places;
you teach me wisdom in the most secret space.
- 7 Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean;
wash me and I will be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and celebration again;
let the bones you crushed rejoice once more.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins;
wipe away all my guilty deeds!
- 10 Create a clean heart for me, God;
put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!
- 11 Please don't throw me out of your presence;
please don't take your holy spirit away from me.
- 12 Return the joy of your salvation to me
and sustain me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach wrongdoers your ways,
and sinners will come back to you.
- 14 Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation,
so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness.
- 15 Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will proclaim your praise.
- 16 You don't want sacrifices.
If I gave an entirely burned offering,
you wouldn't be pleased.
- 17 A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God.
You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed.
- 18 Do good things for Zion by your favor.
Rebuild Jerusalem's walls.
- 19 Then you will again want sacrifices of righteousness—
entirely burned offerings and complete offerings.
Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.



>> CHALLENGE:

Who comes to mind when you think about asking someone for forgiveness for something you've done? What will it take to get up the courage to ask them for forgiveness? Your challenge is to do the hard work of asking, this week!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines for text entry.



UNIT 3 | SESSION 3

David's Legacy - Solomon

>> **BIG IDEA:** Seek Wisdom.

>> **SUMMARY:** King Solomon is the son of David and Bathsheba. There are so many layers and factors in his story, but perhaps the most interesting aspect of Solomon is that regardless of his family's history, he was the wisest man ever. He was wise enough to ask God for wisdom as he rules over his country. God answered that prayer and we get to see how Solomon both used that wisdom and sometimes ignored it.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** 1 Kings 3:4-9, 10-14; 2 Chronicles 9:1-8

1 Kings 3:4-9

4 The king went to the great shrine at Gibeon in order to sacrifice there. He used to offer a thousand entirely burned offerings on that altar. 5 The Lord appeared to Solomon at Gibeon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you."

6 Solomon responded, "You showed so much kindness to your servant my father David when he walked before you in truth, righteousness, and with a heart true to you. You've kept this great loyalty and kindness for him and have now given him a son to sit on his throne. 7 And now, Lord my God, you have made me, your servant, king in my father David's place. But I'm young and inexperienced. I know next to nothing. 8 But I'm here, your servant, in the middle of the people you have chosen, a large population that can't be numbered or counted due to its vast size. 9 Please give your servant a discerning mind in order to govern your people and to distinguish good from evil, because no one is able to govern this important people of yours without your help."

2 Kings 3:10-14

10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had made this request. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked for this instead of requesting long life, wealth, or victory over your enemies—asking for discernment so as to acquire good judgment— 12 I will now do just what you said. Look, I hereby give you a wise and understanding mind. There has been no one like you before now, nor will there be anyone like you



afterward. 13 I now also give you what you didn't ask for: wealth and fame. There won't be a king like you as long as you live. 14 And if you walk in my ways and obey my laws and commands, just as your father David did, then I will give you a very long life."

2 Chronicles 9:1-8

9 When the queen of Sheba heard reports about Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with riddles. Accompanying her was a huge entourage, with camels carrying spices, large amounts of gold, and precious stones. After she arrived, she told Solomon everything that was on her mind. 2 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too difficult for him to answer. 3 When the queen of Sheba saw how wise Solomon was, the palace he had built, 4 the food on his table, his servants' quarters, the function and dress of his attendants, his cupbearers and their dress, and the entirely burned offerings he offered at the Lord's temple, it took her breath away.

5 "The report I heard about your deeds and wisdom when I was still at home is true," she said to the king. 6 "I didn't believe it until I came and saw it with my own eyes. In fact, the half of it wasn't told to me! You have far more than I was told. 7 Your people and these servants who continually serve you and get to listen to your wisdom are truly happy! 8 Bless the Lord your God because he was pleased to put you on the throne as king for the Lord your God. Because your God loved Israel and wanted to establish them forever, he has made you their king to uphold justice and righteousness."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** pens, markers, paper

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** The third king of Israel, Solomon, David's son, demonstrates wisdom right off the bat by asking for discernment above all else. He projects his wisdom to Queen Sheba and his subjects. While Solomon was wise in most instances, he wasn't perfect. But his wisdom becomes his reputation as evidenced by Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and the many Proverbs he wrote.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week is about wisdom. King Solomon demonstrated a great deal of wisdom that helped many in his time and many others since. Where do you look for wisdom? Share some of your sources. Ask your student?

- Who do you think gives you the best advice?
- Is there an influencer you follow that consistently gives great advice?



>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Solomon: A Humble Request and the Gift of Wisdom

1. Recap of the Series

- Week 1: Saul was chosen for his appearance but failed as king.
- Week 2: David was chosen for his heart, succeeded in many ways, but also made big mistakes and sought forgiveness.
- This week focuses on Solomon, David's son.

2. Solomon's Background

- Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba. Their first child died.
- After David repented, Solomon was born and chosen to be king.

3. Solomon's Request for Wisdom

- Solomon ruled for over 40 years.
- He humbly asked God for wisdom to lead well—not wealth or power.
- God rewarded him with wisdom and also gave him riches, honor, and peace.

4. God's Response and Blessing

- God was pleased with Solomon's selfless request.
- God promised Solomon wisdom like no other king, plus great wealth and success.
- God valued a heart that seeks to serve others and obey Him.

5. Solomon's Wise Sayings

- A fool vents, but the wise hold back.
- A wise person listens to advice.
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
- Iron sharpens iron—choose good friends.

6. Solomon's Downfall

- Despite his wisdom, Solomon was later distracted.
- Married women from other nations, against God's instructions.
- His disobedience led to his downfall.

7. Final Message

- We are all leaders in our own communities, even if not kings or queens.
- We should seek God's wisdom first and use our influence to serve others.
- Surround yourself with wise people and stay focused on what God values.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1 SOLVE IT LIKE SOLOMON

This activity encourages group thinking and creativity. It can help students see that wisdom includes thinking deeply, not just quickly.

Divide students into small groups and give each one a riddle to solve:

- You see a boat filled with people. It hasn't sunk, but when you look again you don't see a single person on board. Why? (Answer: all the people were married.)
- What comes once a month, twice in a moment, but never in a thousand years? (Answer: the letter "M")
- The more you take, the more you leave behind. What am I? (Answer: footsteps)
- What is lighter than a feather, but you can't hold it for more than two minutes? (Answer: your breath)
- What can't be kept until it's given? (Answer: a promise)
- What becomes shorter when you add two letters to it? (Answer: the word "shorter")
- What goes around the world but stays in one place? (Answer: a stamp)
- You can hear me but cannot see me. I don't speak until you do. What am I? (Answer: an echo)

Ask:

- What made it tricky?
- What helped you figure it out?
- How is this like using wisdom in real life?

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could ask God for absolutely anything, what would it be?
- Who in your life gives the best advice?

>> SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

Read 1 Kings 3:4-9

- How did Solomon initially describe himself as a king?
- What is valuable about Solomon's perspective?



Read: 1 Kings 3:10-14

- Why did God decide to grant Solomon's request?
- What do you think Solomon felt after God said yes?
- How do you think you would make decisions if you were the wisest person in the world?

Read: 2 Chronicles 9:1-8

- Why would a ruler from another country come and talk to Solomon?
- If you could ask Solomon anything, what would you ask?
- What do you think the Queen of Sheba's opinion of God was after talking to Solomon and seeing where and how he lived?
- How do you think the Queen of Sheba's country and people reacted to what the Queen had to say about God, whom Solomon served?
- What do you believe about God after reading these different parts of Solomon's story?

>> ACTIVITY #2 ADVICE COLUMN

Have students make a list of all of the wisest advice they have ever heard from someone else.

On the following pages, highlight the proverbs that seem like good advice for you and your friends to follow and keep in mind.

Many of the proverbs were written by King Solomon, the wisest who ever lived...who got his wisdom straight from God.

It's wise for us to take the advice of the wise...

- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7
- Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. Proverbs 1:29-21
- The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor. Proverbs 15:33
- Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. Proverbs 3:5-7
- For whoever finds me (wisdom) finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death." Proverbs 8:35-36
- Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded. The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death. Proverbs 13:13-14
- The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. Proverbs 12:26
- As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. Proverbs 27:17
- One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24



X P L
X P L
X P L



UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 4: EXILED

Throughout scripture, various people and groups of people were forced to live in a land that wasn't their home. That is what living in "exile" means. It's not a fun or ideal situation, yet we can learn so much from how people in these situations depended on God during such difficult circumstances.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - Surviving Difficulty

It's no secret that in moments and certain life situations, the feeling of being alone or abandoned can creep in, but three friends who had been exiled from their homeland chose to remain faithful to God and learned that God was with them no matter what, even when walking through fire.

2 - Peer Pressure

Peer pressure isn't just a problem for teenagers, and it doesn't go away once you reach adulthood. Daniel, who was living in exile from his homeland, experienced peer pressure and had to decide whether to give in and live the easy life or stand strong no matter what might come of it.

3 - Gratitude

Even when life feels hard, unfair, or unfamiliar—like being in exile—we can still look back and remember all the ways God has been good to us. Psalm 103 was written to help people remember who God is and what He has done, especially when they might feel forgotten or far from Him. God never stops loving us – so we never stop giving thanks.

4 - Being Brave

Not only was Esther living in exile in an unfamiliar land, but she was also living in a royal palace living an unfamiliar life! In a whirlwind, Esther went from being a regular everyday person living with her adoptive uncle, to the queen of a foreign nation and having to lean on her faith when faced with a difficult situation.

5 - Returned

Welcome Home! - Here, we discover what happened to the Hebrew people after God kept the promise to return them to their homeland. The return didn't happen right away, and it happened in shifts, but finally, the Israelites were back in the land God told them about during the times of Moses and Joshua..



Surviving Difficulty

>> **BIG IDEA:** You aren't alone – you can find safety in community and God

>> **SUMMARY:** It's no secret that in moments and certain life situations, the feeling of being alone or abandoned can creep in, but three friends who had been exiled from their homeland chose to remain faithful to God and learned that God was with them no matter what, even when walking through fire.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Daniel 3:1-2, 6, 28; Romans 8:38-39 (CEB)

Daniel 3:1-2

King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up in the Dura Valley in the province of Babylon. 2 King Nebuchadnezzar then ordered the chief administrators, ministers, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to assemble and come for the dedication of the statue that he had set up.

Daniel 3:6

Anyone who will not bow down and worship will be immediately thrown into a furnace of flaming fire.

Daniel 3:28

28 Nebuchadnezzar declared: "May the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be praised! He sent his messenger[a] to rescue his servants who trusted him. They ignored the king's order, sacrificing their bodies, because they wouldn't serve or worship any god but their God.

Romans 8:38-39

I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers 39 or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.



>> **SUPPLY LIST:** paper, pens, markers, smartphone timer, two column table for game, scripture reading printed and cut

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** In this session we will explore Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's commitment to God, which withstood the threat of certain death. While this is an extreme example, it certainly emphasizes how nothing separates us from God. It also demonstrates the power of shared faith in community.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students started the series, Exiled, which emphasizes times when we feel isolated and alone. In this week's session three friends decide to stay true to what they believe in the face of difficulty. Ask your student: How can we encourage each other in our faith while waiting for God to answer our prayers?

- When have you felt like you were in the minority in your opinion about something?
- Did you have friends and others who supported you? Who are those people?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Faith in the Fire

1. Introduction to the Series

- This series called Exiled, explores a time when Jewish people were forced to live outside their homeland.
- Exile meant losing home, identity, and even being given new names.
- Begin with a question: What makes you feel safe?

2. Setting the Scene

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were Jewish exiles living in Babylon.
- They loved God deeply and stuck together in their faith.
- The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, built a giant golden statue (90 feet tall) and demanded everyone worship it.

3. The King's Command

- Worshiping God was illegal; anyone who refused to worship the statue would be thrown into a fiery furnace.
- The three friends refused to bow down because they followed God's command to worship no one else.

4. The Fiery Furnace

- The king was furious and had them thrown into the furnace.
- A miracle happened: the king saw four people in the fire, not three.
- They were unharmed, and the fourth figure appeared to be an angel or divine being.

5. The King's Response

- Nebuchadnezzar was amazed and praised the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- He saw that they were willing to risk their lives rather than disobey God.



6. Lessons from the Story

- Community brings courage and support; their friendship helped them stay strong.
- A strong relationship with God brings safety and confidence, even in dangerous times.
- Their faith was not based on outcomes but on trust in God's love.

7. Connection to Jesus

- Jesus also showed the power of community by sharing meals and relationships.
- The Bible promises that nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8).
- Faith and community don't remove hard times, but they ensure we're never alone.



Handwriting practice area with multiple horizontal lines and a large, faint watermark reading 'XPDI' in the background.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Have each student share their name and what they ate for breakfast or what they are looking forward to having for lunch. (We continue to share names because whether we have new students or not, student attendance fluctuates often and they may not know someone whose last time here was three weeks ago.)

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1

Have a mentor stand in the middle of your space to represent the city/general area your group is in. Without saying what it is, have each student pick a spot to stand in where their distance and direction from the mentor represents how far the farthest place they've ever visited is from your city/area. Once everyone is in place, have them share the farthest place they've visited and see if they stood in an accurate distance/direction based on where the others in the group are standing.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is the hottest day you've ever experienced? Where were you and what were you doing and how did you survive the heat?
- What place have you visited that made you very aware you were not at home because of how different it was?
- Who in your group has travelled the farthest away from your current location?

>> DISCUSSION:

Cut out the story passages, mix them up, and have the students put them in story order: (Use Daniel 3 CEB as a reference)

King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up in the Dura Valley in the province of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar then ordered the chief administrators, ministers, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to assemble and come for the dedication of the statue that he had set up.

So the chief administrators, ministers, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They stood in front of the statue the king had set up. The herald proclaimed loudly: "Peoples, nations, and languages! This is what you must do: When you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and



every kind of instrument, you must bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Anyone who will not bow down and worship will be immediately thrown into a furnace of flaming fire." So because of this order as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute,[a] and every kind of instrument, all the peoples, nations, and languages bowed down and worshipped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

At that moment some Chaldeans came forward, seizing a chance to attack the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Long live the king! Your Majesty, you gave a command that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument should bow down and worship the gold statue. Anyone who wouldn't bow and worship would be thrown into a furnace of flaming fire. Now there are some Jews, ones you appointed to administer the province of Babylon—specifically, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who have ignored your command. They don't serve your gods, and they don't worship the gold statue you've set up."

In a violent rage Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were brought before the king. Nebuchadnezzar said to them: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I've set up? If you are now ready to do so, bow down and worship the gold statue I've made when you hear the sound of horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument. But if you won't worship it, you will be thrown straight into the furnace of flaming fire. Then what god will rescue you from my power?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar: "We don't need to answer your question. If our God—the one we serve—is able to rescue us from the furnace of flaming fire and from your power, Your Majesty, then let him rescue us. But if he doesn't, know this for certain, Your Majesty: we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you've set up."

Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and his face twisted beyond recognition because of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In response he commanded that the furnace be heated to seven times its normal heat. He told some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of flaming fire. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound, still dressed in all their clothes, and thrown into the furnace of flaming fire. (Now the king's command had been rash, and the furnace was heated to such an extreme that the fire's flame killed the very men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to it.) So these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell, bound, into the furnace of flaming fire.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in shock and said to his associates, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" They answered the king, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He replied, "Look! I see four men, unbound, walking around inside the fire, and they aren't hurt! And the fourth one looks like one of the gods." Nebuchadnezzar went near the opening of the furnace of flaming fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" Then Shadrach,



Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. The chief administrators, ministers, governors, and the king's associates crowded around to look at them. The fire hadn't done anything to them: their hair wasn't singed; their garments looked the same as before; they didn't even smell like fire!

Nebuchadnezzar declared: "May the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be praised! He sent his messenger to rescue his servants who trusted him. They ignored the king's order, sacrificing their bodies, because they wouldn't serve or worship any god but their God. I now issue a decree to every people, nation, and language: whoever speaks disrespectfully about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God will be torn limb from limb and their house made a trash heap, because there is no other god who can rescue like this. Then the king made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prosperous in the province of Babylon.

>> ASK:

- Who are people in your life that help you feel safe?
- What does it feel like when someone is alone? What does it feel like knowing you have someone with you?
- Why do you think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the statue the king built?
- Did the King's reaction surprise you at all?
- What do you think it means for God to keep you safe?
- If someone built a giant golden tower in our neighborhood, and told you to bow down to it, how do you think people would react today?
- What does it mean that nothing separates us from the love of Jesus.

>> ACTIVITY #2 SAFETY SCATTEGORIES

Students will play "Scattegories," but instead of specific letters, use these categories: items that keep you safe (round 1) and people that keep you safe (round 2). Students are to quickly brainstorm 12 words that are items or people that keep them safe (1.5 minutes), without repeating another person's answers. After students answer, they'll read off their lists. Whoever gets the most non-duplicated answers wins! Play round 1 and then round 2 if you have time.

>> CHALLENGE:

Use the bible app to send Romans 8:38-39 to people you are glad to have in your community.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



X P L
X P L
X P L



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.



Peer Pressure

>> **BIG IDEA:** You can avoid peer pressure

>> **SUMMARY:** Peer pressure isn't just a problem for teenagers, and it doesn't go away once you reach adulthood. Daniel, who was living in exile from his homeland, experienced peer pressure and had to decide whether to give in and live the easy life or stand strong no matter what might come of it.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Daniel 6:1-9, 10-15, 16-24; Romans 12:2

Daniel 6:1-9

Darius decided to appoint one hundred twenty chief administrators throughout the kingdom, 2 and to set over them three main officers to whom they would report so that the king wouldn't have to be bothered with too much. One of these main officers was Daniel. 3 Because of his extraordinary spirit, Daniel soon surpassed the other officers and the chief administrators—so much so that the king had plans to set him over the entire kingdom. 4 As a result, the other officers and the chief administrators tried to find some problem with Daniel's work for the kingdom. But they couldn't find any problem or corruption at all because Daniel was trustworthy. He wasn't guilty of any negligence or corruption. 5 So these men said, "We won't find any fault in Daniel, unless we can find something to use against him from his religious practice." 6 So these officers and chief administrators ganged together and went to the king. They said to him, "Long live King Darius! 7 All the officers of the kingdom, the ministers, the chief administrators, the royal associates, and the governors advise the king to issue an edict and enforce a law, that for thirty days anyone who says prayers to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, will be thrown into a pit of lions. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the law and sign the document so that it cannot be changed, as per the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled." 9 Because of this, King Darius signed the document containing the law.



Daniel 6:10-15

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. Now his upper room had open windows that faced Jerusalem. Daniel knelt down, prayed, and praised his God three times that day, just like he always did.¹¹ Just then these men, all ganged together, came upon Daniel praying and seeking mercy from his God.

12 They then went and talked to the king about the law: "Your Majesty! Didn't you sign a law, that for thirty days any person who prays to any god or human being besides you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into a pit of lions?" The king replied, "The decision is absolutely firm in accordance with the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled."¹³ So they said to the king, "One of the Judean exiles, Daniel, has ignored you, Your Majesty, as well as the law you signed. He says his prayers three times a day!"

14 When the king heard this report, he was very unhappy. He decided to rescue Daniel and did everything he could do to save Daniel before the sun went down.¹⁵ But these men, all ganged together, came and said to the king, "You must realize, Your Majesty, that the law of Media and Persia, including every law and edict the king has issued, cannot be changed."

Daniel 6:16-24

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and hurled him into the pit of lions. The king said to Daniel: "Your God—the one you serve so consistently—will rescue you."¹⁷ A single stone was brought and placed over the entrance to the pit. The king sealed it with his own ring and with those of his princes so that Daniel's situation couldn't be changed. ¹⁸ The king then went home to his palace and fasted through the night. No pleasures were brought to him, and he couldn't sleep.¹⁹ At dawn, at the first sign of light, the king rose and rushed to the lions' pit.

20 As he approached it, he called out to Daniel, worried: "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God—the one you serve so consistently—able to rescue you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel answered the king: "Long live the king! ²² My God sent his messenger, who shut the lions' mouths. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I

haven't done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty."²³ The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God. ²⁴ The king then ordered that the men who had accused Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions' pit—including their wives and children. They hadn't even reached the bottom of the pit before the lions overpowered them, crushing all their bones.

Daniel 6:25-28

25 Then King Darius wrote the following decree: To all the peoples, nations, and languages inhabiting the entire earth: I wish you much peace. ²⁶ I now issue this command: In every region of my kingdom, all people must fear and revere Daniel's God because:

He is the living God.

God stands firm forever.

His kingship is indestructible.



God's rule will last until the end of time.

27 He is rescuer and savior;

God performs signs and miracles in heaven and on earth.

Here's the proof:

He rescued Daniel from the lions' power.

28 And so Daniel was made prosperous during the rule of Darius and during the rule of Cyrus the Persian.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** 5 small cups, small candy prizes, scripture verse sheets

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Daniel is another example of someone who kept his commitment to God in the face of certain death. Even though he was in exile, away from his home in Jerusalem, King Darius appointed him to one of the top jobs in his government. However, King Darius also made a law that restricted anybody from worshiping or praying to anyone but the king. Daniel prayed to God as was his custom even though there was a great deal of pressure to do otherwise.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week in Explore students looked at how we can make good choices in the face of peer pressure. When have you felt pressured as an adult to do something other adults are doing? Ask your student:

- How does it feel to be pressured to do something you don't want to do?
- How does it feel when you do the right thing in the face of what might be terrible consequences for doing the right thing?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Daniel and the Lion's Den: Standing Strong Against Peer Pressure

1. Introduction

- Recap of last week's story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- This week focuses on Daniel, another Jewish exile in Babylon.
- Daniel is known for being confident in who he is and staying true to God.

2. The Setup

- Daniel was respected by many, but some people were jealous.
- These people tricked King Darius into making a law that banned prayer to anyone except the king.
- Punishment for breaking the law was being thrown into a den of lions.

3. Daniel's Response

- Daniel continued to pray to God three times a day, even after the law was passed.
- He stayed faithful to God and didn't give in to pressure from others.
- This showed strong character and deep trust in God.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1 CUP GAME

Before class, number the bottoms of five small paper cups from one to five. Place the cups upside down in numerical order on a desk. Hide a small prize, such as a piece of wrapped candy, under one of the cups.

To begin class, explain that there is a prize under one of the cups. Ask a volunteer to come to the front of the room. Tell the volunteer that at your signal, they are to pick up the cup that they think is concealing the prize. Tell the rest of the class that they should feel free to call out what they think the volunteer should do.

Allow some time for everyone to call out their advice before having the volunteer begin. After the volunteer has chosen a cup, ask, "Why did you choose that one?"

Without making a comment, allow the volunteer to respond. Then, say, "Today we're going to talk about how hard it can be to stay focused on what you want to do when everyone else is telling you what they want you to do."

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What hill will you die on? What's one silly/non-serious opinion you stand by?

>> ACTIVITY & DISCUSSION:

Story Modernized – Break students into three groups and assign each group to read Daniel 6:1-9; Daniel 6:10-15; Daniel 6:16-24.

- Each group should "modernize" the story to what it would look like if it took place in this day and age.
- Give them 5 minutes to brainstorm and then have them present their ideas.
- Mentors – end the activity by reading Daniel 6:25-28 and putting YOUR modern spin on it.



Gratitude

>> **BIG IDEA:** God never stops loving us – so we never stop giving thanks.

>> **SUMMARY:** Even when life feels hard, unfair, or unfamiliar—like being in exile—we can still look back and remember all the ways God has been good to us. Psalm 103 was written to help people remember who God is and what He has done, especially when they might feel forgotten or far from Him.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Psalm 103 (emphasis on verse 8, 12)

103 Let my whole being bless the Lord!
 Let everything inside me bless his holy name!

2 Let my whole being bless the Lord
 and never forget all his good deeds:

3 how God forgives all your sins,
 heals all your sickness,

4 saves your life from the pit,
 crowns you with faithful love and compassion,

5 and satisfies you with plenty of good things
 so that your youth is made fresh like an eagle's.

6 The Lord works righteousness;
 does justice for all who are oppressed.

7 God made his ways known to Moses;
 made his deeds known to the Israelites.

8 The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
 very patient, and full of faithful love.

9 God won't always play the judge;
 he won't be angry forever.

10 He doesn't deal with us according to our sin
 or repay us according to our wrongdoing,

11 because as high as heaven is above the earth,



that's how large God's faithful love is for those who honor him.
12 As far as east is from west—
that's how far God has removed our sin from us.
13 Like a parent feels compassion for their children—
that's how the Lord feels compassion for those who honor him.
14 Because God knows how we're made,
God remembers we're just dust.
15 The days of a human life are like grass:
they bloom like a wildflower;
16 but when the wind blows through it, it's gone;
even the ground where it stood doesn't remember it.
17 But the Lord's faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now
for those who honor him.

And God's righteousness reaches to the grandchildren
18 of those who keep his covenant
and remember to keep his commands.

19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.

20 You divine messengers,
bless the Lord!

You who are mighty in power and keep his word,
who obey everything he says,
bless him!

21 All you heavenly forces,
bless the Lord!

All you who serve him and do his will,
bless him!

22 All God's creatures,
bless the Lord!

Everywhere, throughout his kingdom,
let my whole being
bless the Lord!

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** timer, paper, alphabet tiles, markers, pens

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** The writer (King David) tells us not to forget God's blessings: forgiving our sins, healing us, loving us like a parent, and showing compassion over and over again. This psalm reminds us that God's love doesn't wear out or run away—it's always working to restore us, even when life is difficult.

As United Methodists, we believe that God's grace is always active—before we even know it (prevenient grace), when we turn to God (justifying grace), and as we grow to become more like Christ (sanctifying grace). Gratitude helps us see that grace and respond with joy.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1 ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Split the group into at least 2 teams.

- First, choose a letter with your alphabet tile or dice. Then each team has 2 minutes to write a list of 10 things they are grateful for that start with that letter.
- One person writes down the responses, but all members of your team need to help come up with the list in 2 minutes that start with the chosen letter.
- After the 2 minutes are up each team shares their responses.
- Options: 1. See who comes up with the most items beyond 10. 2. Cannot have the same answer as another team. 3. Add the ability to object to the responses. For example the letter is F and one team wrote "fleas" so you can say, "I challenge that answer!" Then ask questions—How can anyone be thankful for fleas? Then they have a chance to convince you and explain their answer. If it's done individually then you can vote with thumbs up or down. It's deleted if it doesn't make the vote.

Play a few rounds of this!

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could eat only one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- What's something small that made you smile this week?

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Even in tough times, there's always something we can be grateful for. Let's look at how the Bible teaches us to remember God's goodness – especially when life feels hard.

Read Psalm 103

- What does this Psalm say about who God is?
- What are some things the Psalm tells us to remember or be thankful for?
- How do you think this Psalm helped people who felt far from home or far from God?

Say: Even when God's people were experiencing exile, even when they were hurting, they remembered who God was and gave thanks anyways. Gratitude grounded them in hope.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.



Being Brave

>> **BIG IDEA:** We can talk to God about anything

>> **SUMMARY:** Not only was Esther living in exile in an unfamiliar land, but she was also living in a royal palace living an unfamiliar life! In a whirlwind, Esther went from being a regular everyday person living with her adoptive uncle, to the queen of a foreign nation and having to lean on her faith when faced with a difficult situation.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Esther 4:12-17

12 When they told Mordecai Esther's words, 13 he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. 14 In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family."

15 Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren't to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will." 17 So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** activity sheet with KWL

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Esther is an unexpected heroine because she became queen even though she wasn't a native of the land she ruled. Sometimes we find ourselves in unexpected situations where we might be surprisingly successful.



>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students studied another person in exile who rose into a position of unexpected power and was encouraged to influence her government to do the right thing for her exiled homeland. Ask your student:

- In what situations do you think you have unexpected power (ex. sports teams, friend groups)?
- How do you use your power to stand up for what is right?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Esther: Courage, Faith, and Speaking Up

1. Series Recap

- Week 1: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego taught the value of community and God's constant love.
- Week 2: Daniel showed that we don't have to give in to peer pressure.
- Week 3 focuses on Queen Esther and her courage during exile.

2. Esther's Background

- Esther was a Jewish girl living in exile under Persian rule.
- King Xerxes chose Esther to be queen without knowing she was Jewish.
- A royal advisor convinced the king to plan the destruction of the Jewish people.

3. Esther's Challenge

- Esther's uncle, Mordecai, urged her to speak up for her people.
- Approaching the king without an invitation was risky and could lead to death.
- Mordecai reminded her that she might have been placed in the royal family "for a moment like this."

4. Esther's Response

- Esther asked her people to join her in fasting and praying for three days.
- She believed in the power of talking to God before taking action.
- Esther then courageously approached the king, risking her life.

5. The Outcome

- Esther hosted two feasts for the king to prepare him for her request.
- She eventually revealed her Jewish identity and asked for her people to be saved.
- The king listened and agreed, sparing the Jewish people.

6. Lessons from Esther

- Even when we feel helpless, we can always talk to God.
- We all have influence and can use it to do what is right.
- With courage and faith, we can take bold steps forward in difficult situations.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1

Create a KWL chart (you can use the one on the activity sheet or a whiteboard in your room if you have one) – “Know, Want to Know, Learned.”

At the beginning of the class have everyone write everything they know about Daniel, then add questions they have (want to know), then at the end of the session, have them fill in anything new they learned.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could be an expert in any field of knowledge or activity, what would you choose and why?

>> ACTIVITY & DISCUSSION:

ACT out the story of Esther using the key points:

- Esther becomes queen after winning the heart of the king over all the other women.
- Mordecai saves the king (and the king finds out later!)
- Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman
- Haman hatches and implements an evil plan to get rid of Jewish people in revenge and gets the king's permission through crafty lies of omission.
- Mordecai secretly tells Esther about Haman's evil plan and encourages her to use her power and influence in this specific moment in time to help save them.
- Esther, her court, and the Jewish people fast and pray that when she goes to the king, he will receive her rather than punish her.
- Esther goes before the king not knowing if it will result in her death.
- Esther has dinner with the king and Haman then asks them to dinner again.
- Esther has a second dinner with the king and Haman then asks if her people can defend themselves in battle when Haman's evil plan goes forward.
- The king punishes Haman.
- The battle takes place--the Jewish people win!
- A feast/holiday called Purim is created to celebrate the saving of the Hebrew people from Haman's evil plan--lots of food, drinks, and gifts!



ACTIVITY SHEET



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Returned – Welcome Home!

>> **BIG IDEA:** When we return to God, we are always welcomed home.

>> **SUMMARY:** Here, we discover what happened to the Hebrew people after God kept the promise to return them to their homeland. The return didn't happen right away, and it happened in shifts, but finally, the Israelites were back in the land God told them about during the times of Moses and Joshua.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Ezra 3:10-11

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the Lord's temple, the priests clothed in their vests and carrying their trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, arose to praise the Lord according to the directions of Israel's King David.
11 They praised and gave thanks to the Lord, singing responsively, "He is good, his graciousness for Israel lasts forever."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** party supplies (snacks, favors, balloons, hats, paper, painters tape/sticky tack)

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Even though these students may have never experienced exile, they may have experienced separation from friendships, estrangement from family members, and distance from God. Use this as a metaphor for God's unrelenting love and welcome to students as they repair the damage from being symbolically exiled from groups of people who were meant to be their support. This session will be more of a celebration. So, be sure to make it fun and silly, if necessary.



>> PARENT CONNECTION: This is the last week of the Exile series where we discuss being welcomed home. The metaphor may be difficult. But there might possibly be things that students feel exiled from (friend groups, sports teams, family members, God, etc.). Ask your student:

- Is there anything or anybody where you once felt close that now you feel distant from?
- What might it feel like to feel close to that place or person again?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE: Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Returning Home: The End of Exile and Rebuilding with God

1. Recap of Israel's Exile

- Israel was exiled because they shifted focus from God's desires to their own.
- Exile meant living under foreign laws in a different land.
- The exile lasted a long time, but it was not permanent.

2. Personal Example of Consequences

- Share a personal grounding story that illustrates how consequences help us reflect and realign.
- Just like the punishment of exile, the goal was growth and change.
- Relief and joy followed once the period of discipline ended.

3. Israel's Return Home

- Israel was allowed to return to their land after exile.
- They responded with praise and thanksgiving to God.
- Rebuilding the temple was a top priority to restore worship.

4. Rebuilding Community and Protection

- The return included restoring their way of life and community values.
- They also rebuilt the city wall to protect themselves.
- These actions helped them re-center their lives around God.

5. The Bigger Message

- The story of Israel shows that people often stray from God.
- God always invites us back—He wants relationship and restoration.
- We can rebuild faith, habits, and community to stay close to God.

6. Personal Reflection

- Ask yourself: Do I need to return to God?
- Whether it's a first-time decision or a renewed one, God is ready.
- Turning to God brings healing, protection, and a strong foundation.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Reminder, invite everyone to share their name. Even if everyone seems like they should already know everyone, it is a good reminder and helps create confidence for students that they are seen and known.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> DISCUSSION:

Say – For the past few weeks, we've been learning about the Israelites having to live in exile – away from their home and all the things familiar to them. Today, we will learn about how they were allowed to return home!

- Who can tell us about a time they felt homesick?
- What's the longest you've been away from home?
- What's the worst discipline or punishment you've been given?
- What does it feel like when you've been grounded/disciplined?
- What does it feel like when you make up with a friend after a disagreement or having hurt feelings?
- Why did the Israelites have to go away and live in exile?
- How do you think the Israelites felt when they were able to finally go home?

Say – Returning home was one amazing thing. But by going home, a reconciliation was happening. This return was also symbolic of a group of people returning to God. After learning the hard way how important it is to follow God, the Israelites got to return home and be welcomed back to a healthy relationship with God.

Read: Ezra 3:10-11

Say – After returning home, the people of Israel began rebuilding a place where they could worship God – God's house – just like we worship God in our church. If the Israelites got to celebrate, we should too! Let's have a "welcome home" party in honor of God's people returning home and returning to God!

>> ACTIVITY: WELCOME HOME PARTY

Party Plan - This is a silly session, don't be afraid to join in with the kid's silliness. If you have additional fun games or activities you want to throw in the mix, do that!

Gather your party supplies! Suggested items include:

- Mini party hats (Hand those out and everyone put them together first and put them on!)
- Balloons (Make sure there's enough for everyone in your group and have the students create the best or silliest fact on theirs.)
- Colorful paper (Have everyone create their best, "welcome home" banner from God to them, because God is always willing and waiting to welcome us home!)





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UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 5: Compassion of Jesus

Jesus performed many miracles throughout the New Testament. As we study two of the more famous miracles, we learn about the compassion of Jesus. His heart breaks for the things that break our hearts – people who are hungry, hurting, or oppressed. When Jesus looks upon them with compassion, he moves in miraculous ways to feed the hungry, heal the hurting, and free the oppressed.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - Feeding 5000

Jesus invites everyone to be a part of this miracle! Jesus is teaching thousands at the Sea of Galilee. As the day goes on, the disciples notice that the crowd is getting hungry. Jesus invites the disciples and the crowd to be a part of the miracle as they divide and share the resources available. How can we notice the needs of those around us and join in God's miracles today by sharing our resources?

2 - Friends with the Paralyzed Man

Friends help carry us through tough times. Jesus is teaching in an over-crowded house as a paralytic man is lowered through the ceiling by his friends. His friends had carried him through town on this cot just to realize they would never get to Jesus through the front door. They knew their friend needed Jesus, the healer and bringer of hope. How far will you go to lift your friends up and bring them hope?



Feeding 5000

>> **BIG IDEA:** The compassionate heart of Jesus continues today with us!

>> **SUMMARY:** Jesus invites everyone to be a part of this miracle! Jesus is teaching thousands at the Sea of Galilee. As the day goes on, the disciples notice that the crowd is getting hungry. Jesus invites the disciples and the crowd to be a part of the miracle as they divide and share the resources available. How can we notice the needs of those around us and join in God's miracles today by sharing our resources?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:**

Mark 6:30-44, CEB

30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. 31 Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, "Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while." 32 They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place. 33 Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. 34 When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things. 35 Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, "This is an isolated place, and it's already late in the day. 36 Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves."

37 He replied, "You give them something to eat."

But they said to him, "Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months' pay and give it to them to eat?"

38 He said to them, "How much bread do you have? Take a look."

After checking, they said, "Five loaves of bread and two fish."

39 He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. 40 They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 He took



the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 Everyone ate until they were full. 43 They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. 44 About five thousand had eaten.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** one mini puzzle for each small group

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** There are a number of different teaching angles with this story. You can focus on the miracle itself and how the food was multiplied – maybe by the generosity of the people gathered or some act of wizardry. Either way, God performed a miracle in feeding a large group without apparent resources, other than one another. You can focus on Jesus' emotional and physical exhaustion and, yet, he still made time for people. You can focus on the persistence of the crowd in following Jesus and their desire to grow in their understanding of how God is operating in their world. All of these avenues address compassion in powerful ways.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students looked one of the more famous miracles of Jesus, feeding 5000 people with only minimal resources. This miraculous act of compassion happened when Jesus was likely upset at hearing about the death of his cousin, John. Have you had a time when you have had to find an extra gear to get through something because there were others counting on you? Ask your student:

- When do you feel most overwhelmed?
- How easy or difficult in those moments to turn your attention to someone else who may need your help?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Jesus' Compassion Spreads to Others

1. Introduction to Compassion

- Jesus often showed compassion for those who were suffering.
- Compassion involves seeing others in need and responding with care.
- Jesus's compassion often led to miracles.

2. Jesus's Grief and the Hungry Crowd

- Jesus was grieving John the Baptist's death and sought solitude.
- A large crowd followed him, seeking hope and healing.
- Despite his own pain, Jesus had compassion and chose to teach them.

3. Feeding the 5,000

- The crowd became hungry, and the disciples suggested sending them away.
- Jesus challenged the disciples to feed the crowd themselves.
- With only five loaves and two fish, Jesus miraculously fed everyone.
- 5,000 people were fed, and 12 baskets of leftovers remained.



4. A Teaching Moment

- Jesus chose to involve the disciples in the miracle.
- They organized the crowd and distributed the food.
- This showed that everyone was valued and included.

5. Applying the Lesson

- We are also called to show compassion and serve others.
- Opportunities to help are all around us—through church, school, or family.
- Notice what breaks your heart and ask God how to respond.

6. The Impact of Compassion

- Jesus's compassion changes lives—including ours.
- When we receive and share God's love and compassion, lives are transformed.



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[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1

Before the session hand out pieces of a puzzle for everyone and say: Just as everyone was involved in miracle at the Sea of Galilee, we all bring unique gifts, resources, and perspectives to the problems of our world today. As we build our puzzle, each bringing our own pieces to the table, let's talk about what we can bring to help others in our community (Allow the students to work on the puzzle using the leftover pieces first, then adding in their individual pieces as needed.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What is your favorite meal?
- When is a time that you were really hungry? What happened?

>> DISCUSSION:

As students are working on the puzzle, engage them in this discussion. Have students agree to read the scriptures out loud.

Read: Mark 6:30-32

- Why, do you think, Jesus wanted some time to be alone?
- What do you usually do when you get bad news or are overwhelmed?

Read: Mark 6:33-34

- How, do you think, did the disciples feel when they saw that the crowd wanted Jesus to get back to work?
- Why does Jesus have compassion on them?
- What do you think Jesus taught this large crowd of people?



Read: Mark 6:35-38

- What did the disciples suggest as a solution to the crowd's hunger?
- What, do you think, were the disciples thinking when Jesus told them to give the people something to eat?
- What food did the disciples have available?

Read: Mark 6:39-44

- How, do you think, the disciples felt when they realized that Jesus intended to feed all those people with just that little bit of food?
- What happened?
- In the end, who was involved in the miracle by the Sea of Galilee? (everyone) Why do you think Jesus included everyone in the miracle?
- Why is it important that we know that they gathered up the leftovers? (the abundance of God)

>> FINAL THOUGHTS:

Jesus put aside his own concerns and was compassionate on the crowd that had gathered. In the end, everyone was included in the miracle! Sometimes, we just need to take a look at our own resources, just like the disciples did, and ask God how we can join Him with what we have to serve those in our community.

>> ACTIVITY #2 COMPASSIONATE CHARADES

Prepare slips of paper with short real-life scenarios that involve compassion or need:

- Someone is sitting alone at lunch.
- A neighbor is struggling to carry groceries.
- A classmate is crying after a tough day.
- A friend's family is going through a hard time.
- A sibling is annoying you but might be feeling left out.

Students act them out silently (charades-style), while the group guesses what the situation is.

Once guessed, discuss:

- What's happening here?
- How could someone respond with the heart of Jesus?
- Has anything like this happened to you?

>> CHALLENGE:

We can look for opportunities to share God's love with others. We can serve in our community to help feed the hungry and provide shelter for the homeless. There are lots of opportunities to serve with your church community or through your school or with your family. Take a little time to pay attention to what breaks your heart and ask God how you can be a part of his miracles today.



Friends with a Paralyzed Man

>> **BIG IDEA:** We are called to serve and love our neighbors with compassion.

>> **SUMMARY:** Friends help carry us through tough times. Jesus is teaching in an over-crowded house as a paralytic man is lowered through the ceiling by his friends. His friends had carried him through town on this cot just to realize they would never get to Jesus through the front door. They knew their friend needed Jesus, the healer and bringer of hope. How far will you go to lift your friends up and bring them hope?

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Mark 2:1-12

2 After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home.² So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. 3 Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. 4 They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" 6 Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, 7 "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." 8 Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? 9 Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? 10 But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed,¹¹ "Get up, take your mat, and go home."

12 Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

Supply List: slips of paper to make a paper chain, markers, tape or stapler



>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This is a great story about friendship and how we can choose to do something extra for our friends when they are in need. The task of carrying their sick friend on a stretcher to a rooftop, making a hole in the roof and lowering him down took a great deal of effort. It might be helpful for you to reflect on when you exerted that much effort for a friend or when a friend exerted a lot of effort for you.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Friends are very important. In this week's session Explore students learned about a group of friends that helped a person when they needed the most help. Ask your student:

- How do you help your friends?
- How extreme would you get in helping one of your friends (give examples)?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

The Power of Compassionate Friendship

1. Introduction to Friendship

- True friends support each other through good and bad times.
- Share a personal story of moving and finding meaningful friendships through church and shared experiences.

2. The Story of the Paralyzed Man

- Four friends go to great lengths to help their paralyzed friend reach Jesus.
- They couldn't get through the crowd, so they climbed the roof, broke it open, and lowered him down.

3. Jesus Responds to Their Faith

- Jesus notices the faith of the four friends and forgives the man's sins.
- The man's healing begins with the compassion and belief of his friends.

4. Jesus Heals the Man

- To prove his authority, Jesus tells the man to get up and walk.
- The man is healed and walks out, amazing everyone present.

5. The Impact of Compassionate Action

- The friends didn't give up—they found another way when the first didn't work.
- Their determination brought healing and showed their deep love.

6. Applying the Lesson

- We're called to love and serve others like those friends did.
- When we act with compassion, we participate in God's miracles.
- Everyone has the ability to see people in need and help however they can.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- Do you have a best friend? Share one story of the two of you together.
- What does it take to be a best friend?

>> DISCUSSION:

Read: Mark 2:1-5

- What do you think it was like for the friends trying to get their friend to Jesus? How do you think they felt?
- Imagine you are the paralyzed man. How do you feel as your friends load you up on the stretcher, carry you through the crowd, break the roof and lower you through it?
- Not all of our hurt and brokenness is on the outside. Jesus sees the faith of the friends and forgives the man's sins. Do you have friends you trust enough to see you at your worst, when you are hurting or sad? How can you be that trusted friend for others?
- Verse 5 says, "Jesus saw their faith." What do we think this means? How did Jesus see their faith?
- Jesus' first words to the paralyzed man are, "your sins are forgiven." Do we think this was what the man or his friends expected? What they wanted? Why or why not?

>> ACTIVITY #1: PAPER CHAIN

Take a few minutes to think about those around us that bring us hope. Those that lift us up and encourage us. As you think of a name, write it on one slip of paper. Keep writing every person you think of that brings you hope. Create a paper chain for your small group of all the people that bring you hope and hang it in your room.

Say: This is an awesome group of hope-bringers! When you feel down or hopeless, remember this chain, these friends that will carry your cot, bringing you to the one who deals in HOPE, Jesus.



>> ACTIVITY #2 REFLECTIVE

Once you've explained the activity below, play "You Will Be Found" from the Dear Evan Hansen soundtrack--note, there is also a version of this song by popular worship leaders Natalie Grant and Cory Asbury. The original is longer and by the Broadway artist Ben Platt.

Say: This is a quiet reflective exercise: Intercessory prayer is the spiritual practice of praying for others, to "intercede" or talk to God on their behalf. Everyone, make space and create room for everyone to sit solo. I'm going to read the instructions, then you'll get a copy of them so that you can follow the instructions while we listen to this song.

Think about someone in your life that is going through something. Picture that person lying on a mat. Are there others who will help you carry that person to Jesus? Who are they? Imagine the physical exertion it would take to somehow climb up that ladder while carrying that friend. Feel your fingers as you dig at the roof and break it apart. Slowly and carefully you lower your friend before Jesus.

Then imagine Jesus looking at your friend. What does his face look like? What does compassion, mercy and love look like on the face of the Savior?

Leave your friend there. God has got this. Feel the peace that comes from interceding for someone else.



Bring It to Jesus

Intercessory prayer is the spiritual practice of praying for others, to "intercede" or talk to God on their behalf. Everyone, make space and create room for everyone to sit solo. I'm going to reread the instructions, then you'll get a copy of them so that you can follow the instructions while we listen to this song.

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Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The page features a large, faint watermark in the background that reads "ORDER RE" twice, with the letters "O", "R", and "E" being significantly larger than the "D" and "R".



X P L
X P L
X P L



UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 6: Lessons from Jesus

Unit Summary - This Unit is a very (very) broad overview of Matthew chapters 5-7. These passages that share what Jesus taught have been summarized into two sets of ten points. Do encourage students to dig in a read these scriptures to gain a deeper understanding of all that Jesus has to teach us thousands of years after He returned to heaven to be with His Father.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

1 - Sermon on the Mount Part 1

Session one gives us ten summaries of lessons that Jesus taught during the first part of the "Sermon on the Mount." This list is mostly pulled from Matthew 5, and the last point comes from the first few verses of Matthew 6. Students can begin to pick up on values and behaviors that Jesus encouraged His followers, and all those listening to His teaching. That also includes us!

2 - Sermon on the Mount Part 2

Session two gives us another set of ten summaries of lessons that Jesus taught during the "Sermon on the Mount." This list is pulled from Matthew chapters 6-7. Students can begin to discover the behavioral thought processes that we can use to help us live the way Jesus wants us to. These behaviors are informed by how we think and what we prioritize within our lives.

3 - The Great Commission - Story Time - Light Up the World

Jesus' light helps us through life's darkness and with that light, we can light up the world!



UNIT 6 | SESSION 1

Sermon on the Mount Part 1

>> **BIG IDEA:** Our actions help us look more like Jesus

>> **SUMMARY:** Session one gives us ten summaries of lessons that Jesus taught during the first part of the “Sermon on the Mount.” This list is mostly pulled from Matthew 5, and the last point comes from the first few verses of Matthew 6. Students can begin to pick up on values and behaviors that Jesus encouraged His followers, and all those listening to His teaching. That also includes us!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Matthew 5:3-6:4

3 “Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

5 “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

6 “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

7 “Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

8 “Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

9 “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

10 “Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.



13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

17 "Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them. 18 I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. 19 Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don't commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, 'You idiot,' they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, 'You fool,' they will be in danger of fiery hell. 23 Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift. 25 Be sure to make friends quickly with your opponents while you are with them on the way to court. Otherwise, they will haul you before the judge, the judge will turn you over to the officer of the court, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 I say to you in all seriousness that you won't get out of there until you've paid the very last penny.

27 "You have heard that it was said, Don't commit adultery. 28 But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart. 29 And if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It's better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It's better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body go into hell. 31 "It was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a divorce certificate.' 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife except for sexual unfaithfulness forces her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. 33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago: Don't make a false solemn pledge, but you should follow through on what you have pledged to the Lord. 34 But I say to you that you must not pledge at all. You must not pledge by heaven, because it's God's throne. 35 You must not pledge by the earth, because it's



God's footstool. You must not pledge by Jerusalem, because it's the city of the great king. 36 And you must not pledge by your head, because you can't turn one hair white or black. 37 Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.

38 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. 39 But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. 40 When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. 41 When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't refuse those who wish to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you 45 so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

6 "Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 "Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. 3 But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4 so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Beatitudes worksheet, paper, pens/pencils, index cards, Emoji activity sheet

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (or the Sermon on the Plain in Luke) is thought to be a compilation of many of Jesus' main teachings. So, it is an excellent summary and offers great foundation for understanding Jesus' other teachings.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students began to discuss Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus offers a lot of information for us to explore. Ask your student:

- What are one or two things you understood from Jesus' teaching?
- How might you effectively apply those things to your life on a regular basis?



>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

10 Important Lessons Jesus Taught

1. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)

- Jesus teaches that God blesses those who are humble, merciful, peaceful, and recognize their need for Him. These attitudes lead to a life that pleases God.

2. Salt and Light

- Believers should make the world better, bring healing, and shine truth in dark places—just like salt improves flavor and light brightens darkness.

3. Keep God's Commands

- Jesus helps us understand and live out God's rules. We should follow His example in doing what's right.

4. Anger Can Be Dangerous

- Feeling angry is normal, but holding onto it can lead to harmful actions. Jesus encourages us to resolve conflicts and not let anger take over.

5. Stay Faithful

- Temptations will come, but we must remove distractions and stay loyal to God and those around us.

6. Honor Your Commitments

- We should do our best to keep promises and follow through on what we say we'll do, even if others don't.

7. Let Your Yes Be Yes

- Be trustworthy. Say what you mean and mean what you say, so others know they can count on you.

8. Don't Seek Revenge

- When people hurt us, we shouldn't try to get even. Instead, we should ask for help if needed and set healthy boundaries.

9. Love Your Enemies

- God loves everyone, and so should we. Our kindness and love shouldn't depend on how others treat us.

10. Be Humble

- Do good quietly and for the right reasons—not to show off or get attention.





[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If you have new students, considering opening with an extra question like, 'what is your favorite candy?'

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1: BEATITUDES WORKSHEET

Give each student a copy of the fill-in-the-blank Beatitudes work sheet. Allow them to use their Bibles or a Bible app to fill in the blanks. Have them write (in their own words) what they think the bottom line of these Beatitudes is. Have a few share theirs with the group.

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- What are the biggest life lessons you have learned based on personal experience?
- What do you consider to be your personal rules to live by?

>> DISCUSSION:

Do:

Have everyone identify one way they can be salt & light THIS week.

Ask:

- What are common rules we follow in society that line up with God's rules for us (You can use the ten commandments and love God/Your neighbor as references)?
- What are examples of how anger can bring danger if a person isn't careful? What are practical ways to not let anger get the best of a person?
- What are temptations an average middle school student faces when trying to do the right thing...like:
 - Stand up for someone in front of people.
 - Get your homework done when you're supposed to.
 - Be honest with a friend.
 - Be honest with someone who annoys you.
 - Your behavior and habits when no one is looking.
- Why can it be difficult to honor a commitment you have made. What gets in the way?



Do:

- List all the sayings people use when trying to prove that they really mean or promise something? What does it look like for someone to be so trustworthy they never have to use any of those sayings?
- Have every student anonymously write on an index card something wrong that someone did to them (lie, cheat, hurt feelings, steal, etc.). Collect them and read them out loud and have the students brainstorm a better option than payback or revenge.

Ask:

- Who would you consider to be your enemies and why? What are practical and safe ways you can love those individuals?

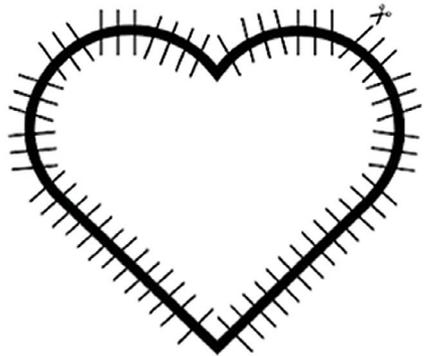
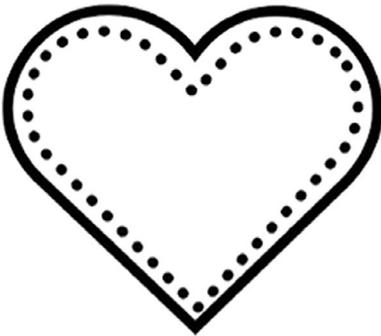
Do:

- Have the group make a list of secret good things anyone can do to make someone else's lives better. Choose things that can't end in receiving public recognition for yourself!

>> ACTIVITY #2 THREAD ART

Prepare cardstock or cardboard hearts with holes around the edges or cut notches around the hearts. (You might be able to find pre-made ones to buy in bulk.)

- In the center, they write one phrase or value from Jesus' teachings that they want to live out (e.g., "Kindness," "Humility," "Mercy").
- They then take yarn, embroidery floss, or string and "thread" through the holes crisscross-style—symbolizing how living out Jesus' values weaves through their life.
- On the back, they write: "Jesus, help me live out Your teaching so others can see You in me."





Activity

The Beatitudes

Let these Be YOUR Attitude...

"God blesses those who are _____ and realize their
_____ for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who _____,
for they will be _____.

God blesses those who are _____,
for they _____.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for _____,
for they will be _____.

God blesses those who are _____,
for they will be shown _____.

God blesses those whose _____,
for they will _____.

God blesses those who _____,
for they will be called the _____.

God blesses those who are _____,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is _____.

"God blesses you when people _____ you and _____
about you and _____ you because you are my
_____.

Be _____ about it! Be very _____! For a great
_____ awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient
prophets were _____ in the same way.





SCRIPTURE

10 Lessons from Jesus - Part 1

1. Let these Be your Attitude
 - a. Matt 5:3-12
2. Be Salt and Light
 - a. Matt 5:13-16
3. Keep these Commands
 - a. Matt 5:17-20
4. Anger can turn into danger
 - a. Matt 5:21-26
5. Stay faithful
 - a. Matt 5:27-30
6. Honor Commitments
 - a. Matt 5:31-23
7. Let your yes be yes
 - a. Matt 5:33-37
8. Don't Seek Vengeance
 - a. Matt 5:38-42
9. Love your Enemies
 - a. Matt 5:43-48
10. Be Humble
 - a. Matt 6:1-4



>> CHALLENGE:

Choose one of the 10 items listed, look up the verse that matches it, and memorize the verse that contains the main point you should remember!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines, with a large, faint watermark reading 'XPDL' in the background.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.



UNIT 6 | SESSION 2

Sermon on the Mount Part 2

>> **BIG IDEA:** Our priorities inform our thoughts and actions.

>> **SUMMARY:** Session two gives us another set of ten summaries of lessons that Jesus taught during the “Sermon on the Mount.” This list is pulled from Matthew chapters 6-7. Students can begin to discover the behavioral thought processes that we can use to help us live the way Jesus wants us to. These behaviors are informed by how we think and what we prioritize within our lives.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Matthew 6:7-7:27

7 “When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. 9 Pray like this:
Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name.

10 Bring in your kingdom
so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.

11 Give us the bread we need for today.

12 Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,
just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.

13 And don’t lead us into temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

14 “If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But
if you don’t forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins.

16 “And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their
faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward.



17 When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. 18 Then you won't look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19 "Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. 20 Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. 21 Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! 24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 "Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? 27 Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. 29 But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. 30 If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? 31 Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?' 32 Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

7 "Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. 2 You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. 3 Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when there's a log in your eye? 5 You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's or sister's eye. 6 Don't give holy things to dogs, and don't throw your pearls in front of pigs. They will stomp on the pearls, then turn around and attack you.

7 "Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened. 9 Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? 10 Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? 11 If you who are evil know



how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. 12 Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

13 "Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. 14 But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruit. Do people get bunches of grapes from thorny weeds, or do they get figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, and every rotten tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can't produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore, you will know them by their fruit.

21 "Not everybody who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 On the Judgment Day, many people will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and expel demons in your name and do lots of miracles in your name?' 23 Then I'll tell them, 'I've never known you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.'

24 "Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. 26 But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. 27 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** prepare priority shuffle cards, paper, pens/pencils, emoji activity sheet

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (or the Sermon on the Plain in Luke) is thought to be a compilation of many of Jesus' main teachings. So, it is an excellent summary and offers great foundation for understanding Jesus' other teachings.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students completed discussing Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus offers a lot more information for us to explore. Ask your student:

- What are one or two things you understood from Jesus' teaching today?
- How might you effectively apply those things to your life on a regular basis?



>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

10 More Lessons Jesus Wants Us to Learn

1. Let God's Kingdom Come

- Jesus taught us to pray for God's goodness, love, and hope to be present on Earth. We get to help bring that to life.

2. Don't Seek Earthly Rewards

- Success and possessions aren't the goal. God's rewards in Heaven are better and lasting.

3. Serve God Only

- We can't fully follow God if we're focused on what we want or what others expect. God should be our top priority.

4. Don't Worry About Tomorrow

- Jesus reminds us to focus on today and trust God with the future. Planning is okay, but worrying isn't helpful.

5. Don't Judge Others

- We should focus on fixing our own flaws before pointing out others' mistakes. Everyone has things to work on.

6. Ask, Seek, and Knock

- God wants us to talk to Him about our hopes, needs, and desires. Be persistent, and focus on growing closer to Him.

7. Follow the Path Less Traveled

- Doing the right thing isn't always easy or popular. Jesus encourages us to choose the harder, better path.

8. Produce Good Fruit

- Our actions show who we are. Be someone who brings kindness, love, and good into the world—be a “good tree.”

9. Do God's Will

- When we live the way God teaches, we make Him happy and grow closer to Him, both now and forever.

10. Have a Solid Foundation

- Build your life on Jesus and His teachings, like building a house on solid rock. It helps you stay strong through life's challenges.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If you have new students, considering opening with an extra question like, 'what is your favorite candy?'

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1 THE PRIORITY SHUFFLE

Not everything can be #1 – how do you choose?

Create cards with various daily activities or values: sleeping, playing video games, helping a friend, finishing homework, playing on your phone, eating tacos, talking to a parent, studying for a test, practicing a talent, making someone laugh.

- In small groups or individually, students rank the cards from most important to least for a normal day.
- Round 2: Now you only have time for 5 – what stays?
- Round 3: Imagine you're having a stressful week – what moves up?
- Reflection: What are you prioritizing without realizing it? What do you want to prioritize more?

>> OPENING QUESTION:

- In what areas of your life are you a part of a plan, project, or team to accomplish a specific goal?
- What are the best examples you have seen of a team working together?

>> DISCUSSION:

Ask:

- How are we a part of God's plan to bring heaven here on earth?

Do:

- Make a list of all the things people try to collect in order to feel good.
- Make a list of all the things that distract us from serving God only.
- Make a list of all of the things an average middle school student stresses or worries about tomorrow, next week, next month, and in the future.

Ask:

- What do all the above lists have in common?
- What do you think Jesus wants us to learn based on these three lists?





SCRIPTURE

10 Lessons from Jesus - Part 1

1. Let these Be your Attitude
 - a. Matt 5:3-12
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 - a. Matt 5:13-16
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 - a. Matt 5:17-20
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 - a. Matt 5:33-37
8. Don't Seek Vengeance
 - a. Matt 5:38-42
9. Love your Enemies
 - a. Matt 5:43-48
10. Be Humble
 - a. Matt 6:1-4



👋 Emoji Lessons from Jesus



Draw emoji symbols that represent
each of the 10 lessons learned today.



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6.

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UNIT 6 | SESSION 3

The Great Commission

>> **BIG IDEA:** Jesus' light helps us through life's darkness and with that light, we can light up the world!

>> **SUMMARY:** Story Time – Light Up the World

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** John 8:12; Matthew 28:18-20

John 8:12

12 Jesus spoke to the people again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Matthew 28:18-20

18 Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth.¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Book: Peppe the Lamplighter by Elisa Bartone; Kiddie style juice boxes and snacks; Cardstock lantern print outs; battery powered lights

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** This week Explore students discussed the Great Commission through John 8:12 and Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus' light helps us through life's darkness. Ask your student:

- Reflect: Who has helped you shine light when life felt a little dark? Share as you feel comfortable with your student.
- Ask your student: Who helps you through life's darkness? How can we help you light up the world?



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS

- If you could glow in the dark any color, what color would you pick and why?
- If your mood today was kind of weather or light, what would it be? (Sunny, stormy, twinkling stars, flickering candle, etc.)

>> ACTIVITY #1: STORY TIME

Story Time is a chance to revisit some of the best parts of childhood and use childlike perspective to apply simpler moral lessons with biblical concepts and a little bit of fun!

Acquire the book *Pepe the Lamplighter* by Elisa Bartone from a local library or bookstore. Where possible, set up the environment to be reminiscent of "preschool story time." Gather students around to sit in on the floor in front of the "teacher" who will be reading the book. Be sure to provide preschool snacks such as juice boxes along with animal crackers or cheddar fish-shaped snacks. Encourage students to take a deep breath and allow themselves to go back to the carefree mindset of being "back in the day" and listen closely to the meaning of the story.

Use your best storytelling and animated voice to share this story with students, being sure to show them the pictures as you read.

>> DISCUSSION:

- Where have you physically experienced the most darkness? What building/place?
- Why do you think Pepe's dad didn't like the idea of Pepe being a lamplighter?
- What are some reasons it might be scary or intimidating to share the light of Jesus with others?
- Every time that Pepe would light the lamps, he would say a prayer for someone he cared about. Who are some of the people in your life you care about that might need you to share Jesus' light?
- What changed Pepe's father's mind about the importance of having lamplighters in



- the community?
- How can you be a lamplighter or bringer of light to people in your community?
 - At school?
 - At home?
 - At your extracurricular activities?
 - At church?
 - With friends/acquaintances?
- Pepe's sister, Assunta, was in darkness and unable to make it to safety without light. What are some of the types of darkness you or your peers experience in life?
- Pepe's sister told him being a lamplighter was "the best job" because it scared the darkness away. How can you use the light of Jesus to scare darkness away for people in your community?
- By the end of the story, each time Pepe lit the lamps, he saw each flame as a "promise for tomorrow." What type of promises for the future does Jesus' light bring us for the future?

>> ALTERNATIVE DISCUSSION (IF NOT USING PEPE THE LAMPLIGHTER):

- Where have you physically experienced the most darkness? What building/place?
- What are some of the dangers of walking around in darkness?
- Jesus said He is the light of the world; in what ways did Jesus bring light to people in His life?
- How does Jesus bring light to the world even now?
- Why would Jesus instruct His disciples to "go and make (more) disciples?"
- Who are some of the people in your life you care about that might need you to share Jesus' light?
- How can you be a bringer of light to people in your community?
 - At school?
 - At home?
 - At your extracurricular activities?
 - At church?
 - With friends/acquaintances?
- What are the good things about having the light of Jesus in a person's life?

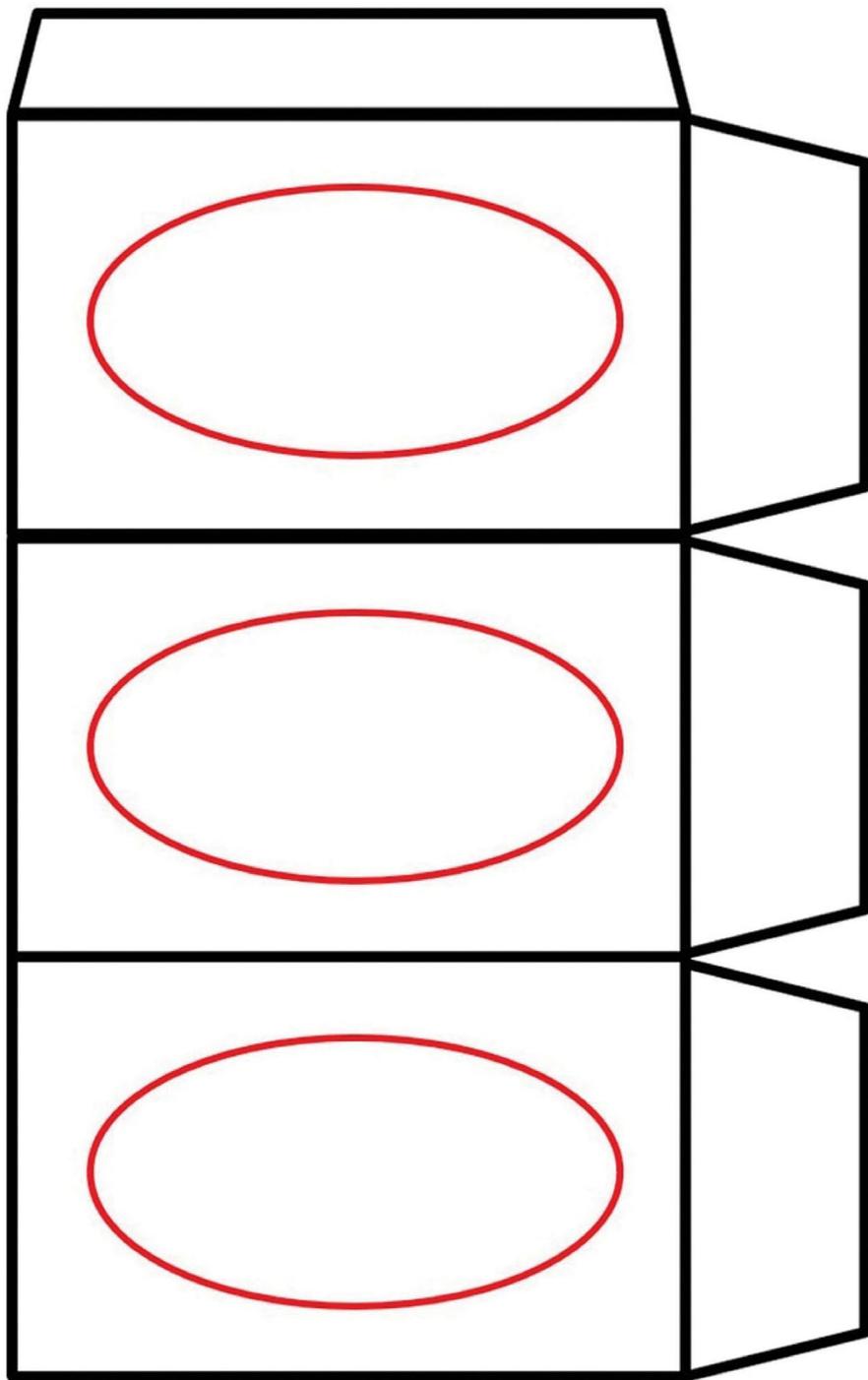
>> ACTIVITY #2: PAPER LANTERNS

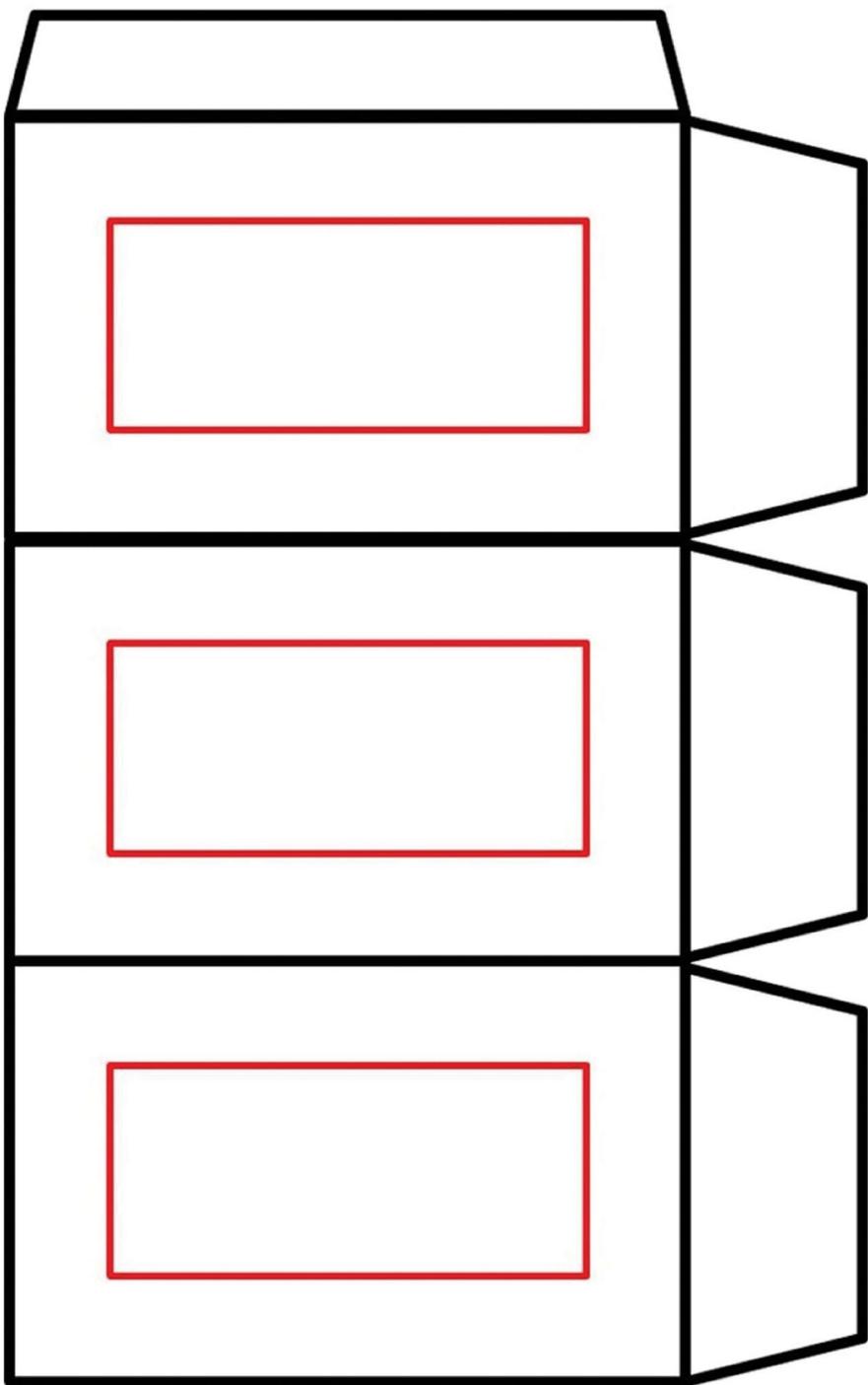
Be sure to use the discussion questions to have conversation with students while completing this activity.

Supplies needed: Multiple copies of lantern templates; Tissue/wax paper to make windows; battery powered tea lights or LED paper lantern lights; tissue paper to crumple and place lights in/on. Print the pdfs at <https://treehut.in/article/440/A4-Printable-Diwali-Christmas-Paper-Lantern-Template>

- Have students cut out their lantern.
- Cut out the windows of the lantern and secure white tissue paper or wax paper to each window.







- Have students create three designs in each window: 1. A sketch of a light bulb to remind them to be light and point people to the light of Jesus. 2. A sketch of Jesus giving the disciples the Great Commission. 3. Write: "Jesus is the light" and or "Go make disciples"
- Glue/tape the bottom tabs together
- Place a crumpled up/fluffy piece of tissue paper inside of the lantern and nestle your battery powered light inside!

>> CHALLENGE:

When the crowd heard the message of Jesus in their own language, they probably felt seen, heard, understood, and cared for. This week, how can you share the message of Jesus with one person on their level, showing that you see, hear, understand, and care for them as you share?

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.



X P L
X P L
X P L



UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 7: What's Next

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples had work to do in His absence. This unit explores some of the meaningful moments post resurrection that help us understand what's next for the Church as a whole, and individual followers of Jesus.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Session 1 - Acts: Pentecost

Pentecost is a celebration of spiritual empowerment and renewal, symbolizing the birth of the Christian church and the commencement of its mission to proclaim the gospel to all nations. It serves as a testament to the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit within the Christian faith, inspiring believers to embrace their calling and share the message of salvation.

Session 2 - Acts: Peter, John, and the Lame Man

In Acts 3, Peter and John follow in the footsteps of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit to heal a lame man outside the temple gate. We can follow Peter and John's example of seeing people in need, offering what we have, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

Session 3 - Acts: Philip and the Man from Ethiopia

In Acts chapter 8, Phillip who was one of Jesus' disciples, had an experience with a stranger that ended up changing that stranger's life for the better. Phillip was able to help someone who was struggling to understand scripture and faith. Phillip was able to help open this person's eyes to a whole new understanding. That means that our eyes can be opened as well!



Acts - Pentecost

>> **BIG IDEA:** The Holy Spirit connects us with God and to each other.

>> **SUMMARY:** Pentecost is a celebration of spiritual empowerment and renewal, symbolizing the birth of the Christian church and the commencement of its mission to proclaim the gospel to all nations. It serves as a testament to the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit within the Christian faith, inspiring believers to embrace their calling and share the message of salvation.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Acts 2:1-15; Acts 1:1-5; Acts 2:38-42

Acts 2:1-15

2 When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. 4 They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

5 There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. 7 They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? 8 How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!" 12 They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, "What does this mean?" 13 Others jeered at them, saying, "They're full of new wine!"



14 Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! 15 These people aren't drunk, as you suspect; after all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning!"

Acts 1:1-5

1 Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, 2 right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God's kingdom. 4 While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "This is what you heard from me: 5 John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38-42

38 Peter replied, "Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites." 40 With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** poster board, paint (red, orange, yellow), foam paint brush, paper, pencil/pen, glue sticks, blank puzzles and plate to easily take craft home

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Pentecost occurred 50 days after Jesus was resurrected. We celebrate this as the birth of the church because Jesus was no longer humanly present. The Holy Spirit moved within the believers individually and communally to mark God's active role in our life in spreading God's love to others.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students studied Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church, this week. There was an amazing explosion of believers during this period of time. The excitement was contagious. Ask your student:

- What is something you experienced that you couldn't wait to tell others about (a sports championship, an accomplishment at school)?
- What has turned out unexpectedly great?



>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

Belonging, Pentecost, and the Power of the Holy Spirit

1. Introduction – Personal Story

- Share a story from your childhood where you didn't measure up but that caused a greater sense of belonging and purpose for you.

2. God's Promise of Belonging

- In the Old Testament, the Jewish people had a covenant with God.
- Despite breaking their promises, God still loved them and sent Jesus as a new promise.

3. Jesus Calls Ordinary People

- Jesus invited regular people to be his disciples, not powerful leaders.
- These everyday people witnessed Jesus perform miracles and were part of something greater.

4. Jesus's Death and the Disciples' Fear

- After Jesus died, the disciples were scared and unsure of what to do.
- They forgot his promise that they wouldn't be left alone.

5. Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

- In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit arrived as wind and flames.
- The disciples spoke in many languages, and people from all nations understood them.

6. The Power of Connection

- The Holy Spirit broke down language and social barriers.
- It fulfilled the promise of God's ongoing presence and gave people the ability to share His love.

7. Pentecost: The Birth of the Church

- Pentecost marks the start of the Christian church.
- It represents empowerment, spiritual renewal, and the mission to spread the gospel.

8. Conclusion

- Sometimes when life takes an unexpected turn God can turn that into purpose.
- God's greater calling is for us to follow Jesus and help others know they are loved through the power of the Holy Spirit.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS

Say: Starting in 2020, the beginning of the pandemic, there was a series called Some Good News. [Mentor might pull up a YouTube video of SGN to watch together.] In the midst of separation and fear of the unknown, there were people looking to share Some Good News with the world. What are some good things you have going on in your life? Or share good news you heard from a friend or in the news!

>> ACTIVITY #1: PENTECOST CRAFT

[Recommendation: Set this activity up, then have students work on it while doing discussion questions. See photo for inspiration.] Prepare – On the poster board (landscape orientation) write, “They were filled with the Holy Spirit” Give each student 1/3-1/4 of a piece of paper and ask them to draw a self-portrait. At the end of the session collect their self-portraits, glue them to the bottom of the page in a group.

As you glue them to the poster board say: Just like the disciples, we are all gathered here to learn about God and worship him. Invite them to have their hand painted in fire colors and place them over the crowd (Alternate: Cut out handprints using red/orange paper).

Say: Just like the disciples, we have the Holy Spirit with us to help us connect with God and each other. Hang the poster board in your space for the duration of the Acts series (If you don't have a permanent space, store it and bring it out before each session).



>> DISCUSSION:

Say: In the Old Testament, before Jesus, the Holy Spirit was only present with specific people for a certain amount of time.

Read Acts 2:1-4.

- Who is filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost?

Say: On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in the form of wind and fire. It was an experience they would never forget!

- What's the best fire you have enjoyed?
- What is the strongest wind you have experienced?

Read Acts 1:1-5.

Say: Jesus had promised the gift of a helper, the Holy Spirit, to guide them after He was gone. And so, they were waiting.

- What would you think Jesus meant? What kind of helper would you expect from Jesus? Do you think they expected wind and fire?
- What is something that you had to wait for to receive and then the experience or gift exceeded your expectations?

Read Acts 2:5-12

Say: The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. They were so loud that a crowd gathered.

- What message do you think the disciples were sharing? (verse 11)
- How would you feel in room full of people from every corner of the world and hearing this message in your own language?
- Why would it be a big deal that people from these different places were gathered?

Say: Up until this point, the good news of Jesus had been kept really close. But at this time, all of these different people were gathered from all over in Jerusalem. And they couldn't believe what they were seeing and hearing. So much so that others in the crowd made fun of them and thought they had been drinking. Peter quickly raises his voice to eliminate this rumor.

Read Acts 2:13-16

- What do you think it feels like to be so misunderstood that others think something is wrong with you?
- How does it feel when someone stands up for you?

Read Acts 2:38-42

Say: Peter goes on to preach to everyone in attendance. He shares the story of Jesus and the promise of grace. Then all these people, from every nation—go home. Just imagine when you left this place after the Holy Spirit literally coming over you like fire. You go back home. Nothing is the same because you are not the same. The Holy Spirit that worked through the disciples to bring people the story of grace and love through God is the same Holy Spirit connecting us to God and to each other today.



Acts – Peter, John, and the Lame Man

>> **BIG IDEA:** The power of the Holy Spirit moves through us to help those in need.

>> **SUMMARY:** In Acts 3, Peter and John follow in the footsteps of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit to heal a lame man outside the temple gate. We can follow Peter and John's example of seeing people in need, offering what we have, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Acts 2:42-47; Acts 3:1-10

Acts 2:42-47

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. 43 A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. 44 All the believers were united and shared everything. 45 They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. 46 Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. 47 They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

Acts 3:1-10

3 Peter and John were going up to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon, the established prayer time. 2 Meanwhile, a man crippled since birth was being carried in. Every day, people would place him at the temple gate known as the Beautiful Gate so he could ask for money from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he began to ask them for a gift. 4 Peter and John stared at him. Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gazed at them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Peter said, "I don't have any money, but I will give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk!" 7 Then he grasped the man's right hand and raised him up. At once his feet and ankles became strong. 8 Jumping up, he began to walk around. He entered the temple with them, walking,



leaping, and praising God. 9 All the people saw him walking and praising God.10 They recognized him as the same one who used to sit at the temple's Beautiful Gate asking for money. They were filled with amazement and surprise at what had happened to him.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Printed crossword puzzle, pencils/pens

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This is the first healing done by someone other than Jesus. Peter and John seem to be surprised with themselves and God's power that is flowing through them. God surprises us from time to time and uses us in ways that we couldn't have previously fathomed.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students learned about the first healing other than Jesus following Pentecost. God uses us in surprising ways sometimes. Think of a time where you did something with a surprisingly positive result. Share this with your student. Then, ask:

- When have you surprised yourself by your abilities (you may want to have some observations about their abilities ready to share)?
- What has been the result of your effort to do the right thing for someone else?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** Use this to follow the video on YouTube or to create your own talking points.

The Healing at the Beautiful Gate and Our Call to Love

1. Peter and John at the Temple

- Peter and John went to the temple at the regular prayer time (3:00 PM).
- A man, crippled from birth, was placed daily at the Beautiful Gate to beg for money.
- The man asked Peter and John for help as they entered the temple.

2. The Healing in Jesus' Name

- Peter told the man he didn't have money but would give what he had: healing through Jesus.
- Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."
- The man was immediately healed, stood up, walked, and praised God.

3. Public Reaction to the Miracle

- Everyone recognized the healed man as the one who had always begged at the gate.
- People were amazed and shocked at the miracle they witnessed.
- The timing and location made the miracle widely visible and impactful.

4. Pointing Glory to Jesus

- Peter and John did not take credit for the healing.
- They used the moment to share about Jesus' power, resurrection, and forgiveness.



- The miracle was a witness to the truth of the gospel and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

5. Our Role Today

- While we may not have the power to physically heal, we are still called to act.
- We can love others, support those in need, and be a light in the world.
- Everyone has unique gifts from God to make a difference.

6. A Personal Challenge

- Think about who in your life needs help, kindness, or encouragement.
- Look for opportunities to share love in small but powerful ways.
- Be the next generation of the church, living out God's love in action.



Lined writing area for personal reflection or notes.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

When have you experienced the joy of having BIG news in your life—with your family or in your community whether recent or in the past? Maybe it's your favorite team going to the playoffs and winning it all. Maybe it's making the team or show you have been working towards. Maybe it's a new child or a new home or a new pet. Share examples of your BIG news with the group!

>> ACTIVITY #1

Hand out copies of the word search puzzle* on the next page. Feel free to have students work on it during the following small group discussion. (<https://sundayschoolzone.com>)

>> DISCUSSION:

Say: Today's message comes immediately after Pentecost where the Holy Spirit connects us to God and each other. In Acts 2:42-47 at the end of Peter's preaching, 3000 new believers joined the church. This is the beginning of the church in the New Testament, the beginning of who we are today.

Read Acts 2:42-47

- What stands out to you about what the believers did?
- How many of those things are things we still do today as believers?

Say: Now we get to the story of healing! Let's start at the very beginning,

Read Acts 3:1.

- Do you think going to the temple at this time was a special service or a part of their normal routine? Why?

Read Acts 3:2-4.

- If this man is brought to this gate every day, do you think people saw him or do you think they hurried by on their way late to Temple?



- As a group choose one: What do you feel as you imagine yourself in this scene as...
 - The man being carried to the temple gate to beg.
 - A member of the crowd passing by this man begging every day.
 - One of the people bringing this man to the gate.

Read Acts 3:4-6. Peter and John saw the lame man – saw his humanity and preserved his dignity. He asked for money, but Peter and John had none.

- What exactly are Peter and John offering to give to the man? List out all the ways their offer might have impacted his community, themselves, and the crowds.
- Peter and John are in the ministry of “seeing” people and meeting a need. What are the ways in which our church community or your family excels at seeing people and meeting a need? In what ways do we struggle? Ask God to highlight who you might be mission or not seeing (since Peter and John probably saw this man before but only stopped this day).

Say: “Let’s get to the healing part of it! Today, if I were to say, “he had an infinity stone” or “the force was strong with this Jedi” you’d likely know immediately the epic story I was referring to (Avengers or Star Wars, respectively). When Peter said, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” what epic story was he connecting to? Well, he was connecting to Israel’s ancient redemptive story by the words “in the name of” (meaning under the authority and power of). “Christ” means anointed King or Israel’s Messiah. But “Jesus of Nazareth” indicated this Messiah was a regular man from nowhere’sville! Those words would have been meaningless except that it worked.

What Peter and John did was natural – stopping to see someone in need and offering what they had – deep belief and hope that the Holy Spirit would heal him. What God did through their bold faith was supernatural.”*(<https://churchonthemove.com/going-deeper-acts-3-4-12-minute-bible-study/>)

Before continuing the discussion, do The Get Up Challenge on the next page...

>> ACTIVITY #2: THE GET UP CHALLENGE

Have fun as you try to do these getting up activities: imagine what it might have felt like to not be able to stand easily.

- Back to back
 - Sit on the floor back to back with your partner. Bring your arms round the side and link arms with each other. When you are ready try to stand up.
- Don’t get cross
 - Sit on the floor with your legs crossed and your arms straight out in front. When you are ready, stand up. (this one’s tricky)
- Take it easy
 - Lie down on the floor, face up. Clasp your hands together. Now try to stand as quickly as you can.
- Row boat
 - Sit on the floor facing your partner, toes touching each other and holding hands (as if you are going to do the row boat song). When you are ready, try to stand up. Is it easier if you cross over your hands?



Discuss - Which one was the hardest and why? Was it easier to do the ones where you have a partner to lean on? Were there times when you felt you didn't have enough strength in your feet, ankles, knees etc.? Imagine not been able to walk from birth, spending all your days sitting on the floor, then one day, feeling the strength suddenly return to your joints and limbs. How would you be feeling? What would you be thinking? What would be the first thing you would want to do?

Peter and the Lame Man Word Search

Find the words on the list that are hidden in the puzzle. The words can be right to left, up and down, or diagonally.



- | | |
|----------|--------|
| ANKLES | JOHN |
| APOSTLES | MONEY |
| FEET | PETER |
| HEAL | TEMPLE |
| HELP | WALK |

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The page features a large, faint watermark in the background that reads "ORDER RE" in a stylized font.



Acts – Philip and the Ethiopian Treasurer

>> **BIG IDEA:** The Holy Spirit meets those that need to hear The Gospel through our story.

>> **SUMMARY:** In Acts chapter 8, Phillip who was one of Jesus' disciples, had an experience with a stranger that ended up changing that stranger's life for the better. Phillip was able to help someone who was struggling to understand scripture and faith. Phillip was able to help open this person's eyes to a whole new understanding. That means that our eyes can be opened as well!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Acts 8:26-38; Isaiah 53:7-8 (CEB)

Acts 8:26-38

26 An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, "At noon, take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of Candace. (Candace is the title given to the Ethiopian queen.) 28 He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Approach this carriage and stay with it."

30 Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?"

31 The man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him. 32 This was the passage of scripture he was reading:

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent
so he didn't open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was taken away from him.

Who can tell the story of his descendants
because his life was taken from the earth?



34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?” 35 Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. 36 As they went down the road, they came to some water.

The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?” 38 He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him.

Isaiah 53:7-8

7 He was oppressed and tormented,
but didn't open his mouth.

Like a lamb being brought to slaughter,
like a ewe silent before her shearers,
he didn't open his mouth.

8 Due to an unjust ruling he was taken away,
and his fate—who will think about it?

He was eliminated from the land of the living,
struck dead because of my people's rebellion.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** scroll activity sheet, share your story activity sheet, pencils/pens

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** This is a unique story in many ways. Phillip runs into an official from the queen of Ethiopia's entourage and he is by himself reading the Hebrew bible. This is a chance meeting with the dialogue between the two, somewhat of a cat and mouse game of interpreting what he is reading. And then he gets baptized, likely the first person outside of the region around Jerusalem to do so.

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students this week learned about sharing their faith with someone else. This can be scary and it usually takes an openness communicated by the other person. Ask your student:

- Why would someone share their faith with someone else?
- How might you share your faith in a meaningful way that results in the other person feeling supported and cared for?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

The Holy Spirit and the Power of a Nudge

1. Introduction: Wanting to Understand

- Sometimes we feel like we don't understand or fit in.
- A small moment or person can create an “aha” moment of clarity.
- Example: Visiting Harry Potter at Universal Studios helped see the depth of a story already known.



2. The Role of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us after Jesus ascended to heaven.
- The Spirit helps us see things more clearly, just like a helpful guide.

3. The Story of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8)

- God tells Philip to travel a long way with no clear reason.
- Philip obeys and sees an Ethiopian man reading the Old Testament (Isaiah).
- The man doesn't understand the scripture, and Philip offers to explain.
- Philip shares that the scripture points to Jesus, the Lamb who died for our sins.
- The Ethiopian believes and is baptized immediately.

4. Faith and Obedience

- Philip shows faith by following the Spirit without full instructions.
- The Ethiopian shows faith by believing the message and acting on it right away.
- This story shows that God's love is for everyone, not just one group.

5. The Bigger Picture of the Holy Spirit's Work

- At Pentecost, the Spirit brought unity and power to the disciples.
- The Spirit later sent Peter and John to heal and help others.
- Philip's story proves the gospel is for all people, everywhere, including us today.

6. Living with Spiritual Awareness

- Just like seeing Harry Potter World in a new way, God opens our eyes in unexpected moments.
- The Holy Spirit nudges us—to act, to love, to help.
- We are called to listen and respond with love and grace in the world around us.

>> SMALL GROUP TIME

Introductions

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think people care about sharing Jesus with other people?



>> ACTIVITY #1:

Give the scroll activity sheet of paper to each pair of students.

- Have them list all the things they know and have learned about God and Jesus
- Have them list the names or titles of people who helped them learn about God and Jesus in their lives.
- Lastly, have them list the things they don't understand or wish they knew about God and Jesus.

>> DISCUSSION:

- Read: Acts 8:26-29
- What was the reason Philip walked over the man from Ethiopia?
- How do you think Philip felt approaching the carriage of an important official from a foreign country?
- The Ethiopian Treasurer was reading the book of Isaiah from the Bible, what are some of your favorite Bible verses or stories?

Read: Acts 8:30-31

- How do you think Philip felt when he heard the Holy Spirit tell him to go speak to someone he'd never met?
- Why do you think the Ethiopian Treasurer was reading the Bible even if he struggled to understand what he was reading?

Read: Isaiah 53:7-8

Who in the Bible fits the description laid out in these verses?

- Oppressed
- Treated harshly
- Slaughtered (or killed) like a sacrificial lamb
- Unfairly condemned to die
- Died for people who were being rebellious (sinful)

Read: Acts 8:34-38

- If you were Philip trying to tell someone else the good news about Jesus, what would you say?
- How do you think the Ethiopian Treasurer felt after learning about Jesus and being baptized?
- How do you think Philip felt after sharing his faith with someone else?



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UNIT OVERVIEW

Unit 8: Paul and His Letters

Paul was a person who had a radical encounter with Jesus, and he became a radical follower of Jesus. Paul would travel around to different places, telling the story of Jesus and inviting people to be a part of it. As groups started believing, Paul would help them get organized to meet together to encourage each other. Then Paul would leave to go to another town and do it all over again. Sometimes, Paul would write letters back to these groups, explaining things to them or helping them work through issues. We will explore Paul's understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus and how he set us free – from sin and death and how we can lead lives full of the love of Jesus.

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Session 1 – Paul, Sin, and Grace

Paul would write letters back to these groups, explaining things to them or helping them work through issues. Paul sent one of those letters to the church in Rome, and it's in our Bible as the book of Romans. Week 1, we explore through Romans how Paul understood sin and grace through the life of Jesus and how we can be free from sin.

Session 2 – Paul on Being Worthy of God's Calling

At first, Paul was a man vehemently opposed to all things connected to Jesus and his movement, eventually called "Christianity." But Paul learned that God calls us as Christians to live in very certain and specific ways. Not only are we called, but we must live a life worthy of our calling as well!



UNIT 8 | SESSION 1

Paul, Sin, and Grace

>> **BIG IDEA:** Acknowledge our slip-ups, but don't let them define us.

>> **SUMMARY:** Paul would write letters back to these groups, explaining things to them or helping them work through issues. Paul sent one of those letters to the church in Rome, and it's in our Bible as the book of Romans. This week, we explore through Romans how Paul understood sin and grace through the life of Jesus and how we can be free from sin.

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Romans 6:14-18 & 7:15-23 (Sin), Romans 5:20-21 & Hebrews 4:14-16 (Grace), Romans 12:2 (Transformation)

Romans 6:14-18

14 Sin will have no power over you, because you aren't under Law but under grace. 15 So what? Should we sin because we aren't under Law but under grace? Absolutely not! 16 Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey? That's true whether you serve as slaves of sin, which leads to death, or as slaves of the kind of obedience that leads to righteousness. 17 But thank God that although you used to be slaves of sin, you gave wholehearted obedience to the teaching that was handed down to you, which provides a pattern. 18 Now that you have been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.

Romans 7:15-23

15 I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. 16 But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right. 17 But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. 18 I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. 19 I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. 20 But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it.



21 So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. 22 I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, 23 but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body.

Romans 5:20-21

20 The Law stepped in to amplify the failure, but where sin increased, grace multiplied even more. 21 The result is that grace will rule through God's righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, just as sin ruled in death.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; 15 because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

16 Finally, let's draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.

Romans 12:2

2 Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Paper, pens/markers, marshmallows/cotton balls/crumpled paper

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** Explore students this week learned through Romans how Paul understood sin and grace through the life of Jesus and how we can be free from sin. Ask your student:

- Why would someone share their faith with someone else?
- How might you share your faith in a meaningful way that results in the other person feeling supported and cared for?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:**

Sin, Self-Control, and God's Grace

1. Understanding Temptation

- Everyone struggles with doing things they know are wrong.
- Example: eating someone else's candy or cheating on a test.
- A famous experiment showed kids trying not to eat a marshmallow to earn a bigger reward—just like resisting sin can be hard but rewarding.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What is the ONE food item you could not live without?
- What is something you wanted right away but had to wait for (like the kids and marshmallows in the video)?

Discussion:

- The Oxford definition for Self-Control is: the ability to control oneself, in particular one's emotions and desires or the expression of them in one's behavior, especially in difficult situations. How would you define "self-control" in your own words?
- Share a time when you lacked self-control or made a decision you knew was wrong.
- Do you trust yourself to always make the right decision in every circumstance?
- Have you ever done exactly what you wanted and gotten a disappointing result?
- Have you ever done something that you've regretted?

Read: Romans 6:14

- Sin is anything that goes against God's greatest commandment to love God and love others. So, what does it mean to get a "do-over"?
- How can we ask God for forgiveness and grace?
- Does Prayer, small groups, reading the bible, and asking for help from others play a role?

>> ACTIVITY #1:

Romans 7:15-23

Pair students off and tell them they need to create a 60-90 second play based on the above verses, something where the characters depict the internal struggle that Paul is describing. These mini plays can be silly or dramatic. Use the students in the audience as critics for each performance. Have them all create sheets of paper to give their scores but only use symbols like hearts and stars as their critique options!



Discussion:

- Why do you think it can be difficult to make the right?
- What are some practical things you can do when you feel caught between two choices?

Read Romans 12:2

- How can changing the way you think impact your behavior?

Read Romans 5:20-21; Hebrews 4:16

- What do you think it looks like for God's grace to rule in your life?
- Why should it matter to us that God gives us "wonderful abundant grace?"
- What does it look like to be able to "go boldly to God's throne?"

>> ACTIVITY #2: PUSH AWAY

[With Marshmallows / cotton balls / or balled-up pieces of paper]

Divide your students into two teams. Using a piece of tape, create a boundary between the two teams. Instruct your students to sit down on their side of the line facing those on the opposite team, leaving only a couple of feet between the two teams. Pour out several bags of marshmallows between them. When you say go, they will try to push (not throw) the marshmallows onto the other team's side using only one finger. At the end of one-minute, whichever side has the least marshmallows is the winning team.

Discussion:

- What are things that God wants us to push away or walk away from because they're not allowing us to love God and love others.
- How can we ask God for forgiveness and grace? How does prayer, small groups, reading the bible, and asking for help from others play a role?
- Do Paul's teachings on sin and grace resonate with you personally? Why or why not?
- How can understanding Paul's words on sin and grace impact our relationships with God and others?
- How can you help others walk away from sin, not toward it?
- How can you show grace to others?

Create three columns on the board with the titles, "Thoughts, Words, and Actions." As a group, discuss the ways students this age might struggle with in each column and discuss how this specific group can be an encouragement to each other with all of these.

>> CHALLENGE:

Choose one way you will show grace 1. To yourself 2. To someone that lives in your house this week!



>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, intended for sharing joys, concerns, and prayer requests.



UNIT 8 | SESSION 2

Paul on Being Worthy of God's Calling

>> **BIG IDEA:** Unity and peace are our calling

>> **SUMMARY:** At first, Paul was a man vehemently opposed to all things connected to Jesus and his movement, eventually called "Christianity." But Paul learned that God calls us as Christians to live in very certain and specific ways. Not only are we called, but we must live a life worthy of our calling as well!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Ephesians 4:1-4; 14-16

Ephesians 4:1-4

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. 2 Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, 3 and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. 4 You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope.

Ephesians 4:14-16

14 As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. 15 Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, 16 who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Chairs, Pens/Paper



>> PARENT CONNECTION: This week in Explore students learned through Ephesians that we are called to live a life of unity and peace through Jesus. Ask your student:

- What does it mean to “speak the truth in love?”
- What can we do to make every effort to be united and keep the peace?

>> VIDEO OUTLINE:

Understanding God’s Calling for Us

1. A Personal Story About Being Called

- As a child, tell a story about a parent calling a child to do something.
- Adults often call kids to action—and God does the same in a different way.

2. What is a Calling?

- “Calling” is not just someone yelling your name—it’s also a strong inner pull toward a specific action.
- A true calling often comes with a sense of divine influence—something God wants you to do.

3. How We Discover God’s Calling

- God doesn’t yell out instructions like people do.
- We learn about God’s calling by reading the Bible.

4. Paul’s Message in Ephesians 4

- Paul urges us to live a life worthy of God’s calling.
- He gives a list of how to treat others:
 - Be humble—don’t act like you’re better than others.
 - Be gentle—treat people with care, like you would a small child or pet.
 - Be patient—allow people to make mistakes and grow without judgment.
 - Promote peace—bring people together, avoid causing drama.

5. Why It Matters

- These actions help create unity and reflect God’s calling for our lives.
- Paul says there is “one body and one Spirit” and we are all called to one hope.
- When we live this way, we help bring hope for the future.

6. The Challenge

- Your behavior and how you treat others makes a real difference.
- Practice humility, gentleness, patience, and peace this week.
- Help build a future filled with unity and hope.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What's something silly you and a friend or sibling always disagree on? (pineapple on pizza? Best superhero?)
- If you were in charge of "World Peace Day," what would be the first rule?

>> ACTIVITY #1: HOT SEAT*

Split your class into two different teams and sit the students facing the forward. Put one empty chair at the front of the class, facing the team members. These are the 'hot seats.' Pull one member of each team to sit in each chair, so they are facing their teammates and can't see behind them. Have a leader pick and hold up a word for each team to try and get the person in the hot seat to guess. Students need to describe that word using synonyms, antonyms, definitions etc. to their teammate who is in the hot seat - that person can't see the word! The first hot seat student to say the word wins a point for their team. Then change the students over, with a new member of each team taking their place in their team's hot seat. Then write the next word...

* <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources/teaching-primary/activities/level-3/hot-seat>

>> DISCUSSION:

- What are some of the ways you've seen people struggle to work together in unity?
- Why can it be difficult for people to collaborate and work as a team?
- What are your favorite things to do that involved working with other people to accomplish?

Read Ephesians 4:1-4

- What are the things Paul lists in these verses as part of our calling?
- Why do you think God would want each of us to incorporate these things in our lives?



- What do you think it looks like to make an effort to be at peace:
 - In your home?
 - With friends or acquaintances at school?
 - With people you interact with randomly?
- If God calls us to live in this way, what do you think the “glorious hope for the future” might look like?

Read Ephesians 4: 14

Why does it take a certain level of maturity to live the way God wants us to?

- In what ways do you think people might try to influence, trick, or lie to us and convince us things are true when they are not?
- In your life, how can you make sure you practice maturity and keep from being convinced that lies are true?

Read Ephesians 4:15-16

- What does it mean to “speak the truth in love” what are some examples of what it could look like?
- What are some ways you’ve seen people choose not to speak the truth in love?
- If God helps people who choose to love and follow God work together, what do you think the future of the church look like?

>> ACTIVITY #2: THE BUCKET LIST

Have each student think of the top three things they would have on their bucket list (a list of things you would absolutely love to do before the end of your life). Compile a list of all the things from everyone in your group. Circle the ones that are similar to other items on the list and put an asterisk next to the ones that are different. Once you’ve worked through the list ask:

- What would it take for each student to accomplish their three things?
- What would it look like if your group worked together to accomplish the things on the list?
 - How long would it take?
 - Would it be impossible?
 - What would it take to make any of the impossible things possible?

>> ACTIVITY #3: DO THE QUAD

Have each student divide a sheet of paper into four squares. Tell them to draw the answers to each of these questions in each quadrant:

- What do I have to offer my community?
- What are things I need from my community?
- What are my hobbies or fun activities?
- What do I hope for my community and the world?
- * <https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/break-the-ice-with-the-four-quadrants-activity>



>> CHALLENGE:

This week, either on your bathroom mirror, a notebook for school, or on your phone's wallpaper background, put the reminder: "Make every effort to be united and keep the peace." Every time you see this reminder, check-in with yourself and see how your efforts for peace are working out!

>> JOYS/CONCERNS & PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



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X P L
X P L
X P L



UNIT OVERVIEW

SEASONAL OVERVIEW

Use these sessions whenever they work for your team's schedule!

>> SESSION SUMMARIES

Advent: Quiet Anticipation

Gabriel announced a miraculous pregnancy to two older people, the parents of John the Baptist. As a sign that it was from God, Gabriel made Zechariah mute. His silence allowed him time to absorb what was happening around him. What if we blocked out some of the noisy chatter in our lives over the four weeks of Advent to listen to what God may be saying to us?"

Lent: Holy Week

The Gospel is Good News. At first, Paul was a man vehemently opposed to all things Jesus and Christianity. But Paul learned that God calls us as Christians to live in very certain and specific ways. Not only are we called, but we must live a life worthy of our calling as well!



SEASONAL

Advent: Quiet Anticipation

>> **BIG IDEA:** Quiet helps us hear and see God better

>> **SUMMARY:** Gabriel announced a miraculous pregnancy to two older people, the parents of John the Baptist. As a sign that it was from God, Gabriel made Zechariah mute. His silence allowed him time to absorb what was happening around him. What if we blocked out some of the noisy chatter in our lives over the four weeks of Advent to listen to what God may be saying to us?"

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Luke 1:1-15, 76-79 (MSG)

Luke 1:1-15 (MSG)

1 1-4 So many others have tried their hand at putting together a story of the wonderful harvest of Scripture and history that took place among us, using reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught.

5-7 During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.

8-12 It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.



13-15 But the angel reassured him, “Don’t fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You’re going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—many will delight in his birth. He’ll achieve great stature with God.

Luke 1:76-79 (MSG)

And you, my child, “Prophet of the Highest,”
will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways,
Present the offer of salvation to his people,
the forgiveness of their sins.
Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
God’s Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,
those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
down the path of peace.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** journal sheet, paper, markers, pens

>> **MENTOR NOTES:** Quiet is a difficult in a time when we are constantly distracted by our devices and other stimuli. Reflect on how difficult it might be for you to find quiet times to reconnect with yourself and God. In the scripture, Zechariah was forced into listening at a time where he had news to share but couldn’t. What might that look like when we choose to listen?

>> **PARENT CONNECTION:** In Explore this week, your student did a listening exercise. I’m sure you want this to happen more often in your household. Ask these questions:

- What would it look like if we listened really well to one another?
- What does it look like to listen to God?

>> **VIDEO OUTLINE:** There is not a video for this session.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and how their best friend/close family member would describe them.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> ACTIVITY #1

Have students sit outside (weather permitting), or in individual spaces around the room. Using the reflection sheet and a pen, have students quietly reflect on what noises they hear. Wind, birds, cars...lights, fans, chatter. Then invite them into 3-5 minutes of silent prayer, no phones (leave them in the middle of the room. Come back together and reflect on the silence and that quiet time.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Was it easier or harder than you thought to be quiet for so long?
- How often are you truly quiet in a day?
- What do you think people can learn from being quiet?

>> DISCUSSION:

Have a student stand up and read Luke 1:5-7 in "The Message" version:

5-7 During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.

- Who are the characters we've been introduced to so far?
- What do we know about each of them so far?

Have a student stand and read Luke 1:8-12

8-12 It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God



appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.

- How do you think Zachariah was feeling about his one chance to enter one of the holiest places in the sanctuary?
- What are some of the reasons you think Zachariah was so scared he couldn't move when he saw the angel appear?

Have a student stand and read Luke 1:13-15

13-15 But the angel reassured him, "Don't fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You're going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—many will delight in his birth. He'll achieve great stature with God.

- What do you think was going through Zachariah's mind when he found out he would have a child after all that time? What emotions might he feel?

Mentor, say: Zachariah had a hard time believing that what the angel told him would come true. He asked the angel how it could even be possible but because he, a man of faith, didn't have faith that what the angel said was true, he was made to become mute--no talking until the baby was born!

>> ACTIVITY #2 SING A SONG

Mentor, say: When the baby was born and Zachariah was finally able to speak, he sang a song to express what God told him would happen in the future. Now, it's your job to break into groups and put your own interpretation on this song. Rap, jazz, rock, lullaby. Break up into groups of 2-3 and turn this song into a top 10 hit!

And you, my child,
"Prophet of the Highest,"
will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways,
Present the offer of salvation to his people,
the forgiveness of their sins.
Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
God's Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,
those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
down the path of peace.

>> CHALLENGE:

Zachariah learned a lot in his time of silence. It helped prepare him for the future God had for him. How can you plan to have quiet time in your life each week so you can learn from God? Choose one time this week to sit quietly, without talking, and practice listening for God and God's creation.



>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, spanning the width of the page. The lines are evenly spaced and provide a guide for text entry.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The page features a large, faint watermark in the background that reads "ORDER RE" in a stylized font.



SEASONAL

Lent: Holy Week

>> **BIG IDEA:** The Gospel is Good News

>> **SUMMARY:** This Easter season, we get to experience the great love that God has for us by celebrating all that Jesus has done for us—the life Jesus lived, the death Jesus endured through crucifixion, and Jesus' conquering death through the miraculous resurrection!

>> **SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Matthew 26:26-28

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take and eat. This is my body." 27 He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from this, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many so that their sins may be forgiven.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread.²⁴ After giving thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me." 25 He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me."²⁶ Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

>> **SUPPLY LIST:** Holy Week Connection Plan sheet, Lesson visuals print out, Paper Seder print out, pens/markers



>>PARENT CONNECTION: This week in Explore students discussed the great love that God has for us by celebrating all that Jesus has done for us—the life Jesus lived, the death Jesus endured through crucifixion, and Jesus' conquering death through the miraculous resurrection! Ask your student:

- What does it mean to you that the Gospel is Good News?
- Discuss the meaning of communion with your student and what it means to you.

>>VIDEO OUTLINE:

The Good News of Easter

1. The Events of Holy Week

- Holy Week includes the Last Supper, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and ends with his resurrection.
- Easter celebrates Jesus's return to life, fulfilling prophecy and showing God's love.

2. Paul's Transformation

- Paul began as someone who hated Jesus and his followers.
- After encountering Jesus, Paul's life completely changed—he became a leader in spreading Jesus's message.
- Paul teaches us that mistakes don't define us and that we are made new through Jesus.

3. The Role of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit guides us in living like Jesus.
- It helps communicate our thoughts and feelings to God.
- Through the Holy Spirit, we learn to treat others with love, peace, and unity.

4. The Meaning of the Good News

- The Good News (gospel) is the core of Christian faith: Jesus's life, death, and resurrection allow us to have a lasting relationship with God.
- Paul reminds us that many people witnessed Jesus after his resurrection, making this truth trustworthy.

5. God's Grace and Our Salvation

- Paul says in Ephesians that we are saved by God's grace, not by our own actions.
- Salvation is a free gift because of God's mercy and love.
- We are made new in Christ to do good things that God planned for us.

6. Why Easter Matters

- Easter is about celebrating Jesus's victory over death and what it means for us.
- It is a reminder of God's deep love and the new life we have through Jesus.
- We are invited to live with hope, love, and purpose because of what Jesus has done.



[Small Group Time]

>> INTRODUCTIONS

Even if your group knows each other, take the time to make some introductions. Have everyone say their name and a little bit about who they are. Students are growing and changing; make space for them to be different than they were last year in whatever way they care to share. If your group has new faces, share names and one thing they really love to do in this season.

>> HIGHS, LOWS, AND BUFFALOS

Take a few minutes to have students share a high, low, or buffalo (something wild and crazy) about their week.

>> OPENING QUESTIONS:

- If you could invent a new holiday candy, what would it be and what would it taste like?
- If you could bring something “back to life” (like a trend, toy, or snack), what would it be?

>> ACTIVITY #1: SAY

Name something different you did each day of the previous week.

For the activity on the following page, print out the Holy Week Connection Plan page for each student. Explain that you will be discussing Jesus final week before dying on the cross. Assign one day of the week to one or two students per day. In order, have those students say which day they have and read the coinciding scripture.

After each reading ask and discuss how the people who are described in the verses might've felt in those moments



Holy Week

CONNECTION PLAN

— —
MON

Jesus: Angriily Clears the Temple
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
TUE

Jesus: Asserts that He is a cornerstone
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
WED

Jesus: Continues teaching a plot to kill Him begins.
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
THU

Jesus: Celebrates Passover and has The Last Supper
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
FRI

Jesus: Accepts a sinner on the cross, is crucified, and the temple veil tears.
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
SAT

Jesus' followers: Hide from Jesus' enemies.
Today I will connect with God by:

— —
SUN

Jesus: Defeats death with the Resurrection.
Today I will connect with God by:



>> ACTIVITY #2

Sometimes it can be beneficial to go back to basics while learning certain topics, so today, we're using the simplest items to learn about the origins of The Last Supper. Use the below outline to walk your students through an understanding of the Passover meal Jesus attended that we now know as The Last Supper. With the paper seder activity sheet, print out enough of the Seder plate activity sheets for students to cut out, color, and tape/clue in the proper spaces on the plate.

After, discuss the elements of communion.

MENTOR: Visually Walk Through the Meaning of Items on the Plate:

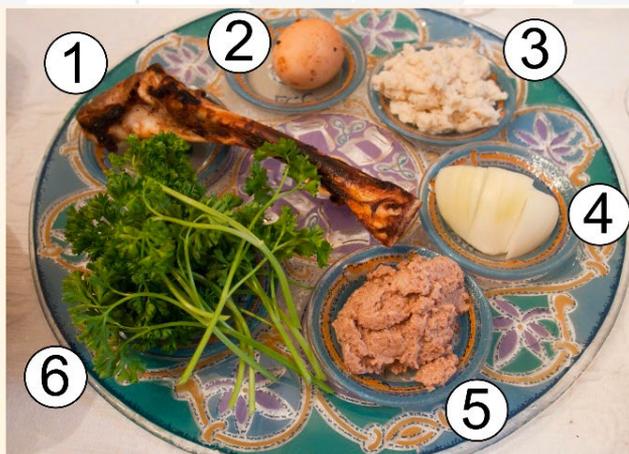
Shankbone: Roasted lamb shank bone—the only meat served. Symbolizes the sacrificial lamb whose blood was used to mark the doorways of God's people on the night the Angel of Death passed over their homes.

Beitza: Roasted egg—symbolizes a prayer for God to redeem the people as well as a symbol of mourning the destruction of God's temple.

Maror and Chazeret: Bitter herbs (horseradish/romaine lettuce) —symbolizes how bitter it was for the Hebrew people to endure slavery in Egypt. Some Seder plates use both onion and horseradish in two separate places for this symbol.

Charoset: Mix of nuts, apples, cinnamon, and sweet red wine—symbolizes the mortar and brick enslaved Hebrews used to build in Egypt.

Karpas: Parsley or other green vegetable that must be dipped in salt water prior to the seder—symbolizes tears shed during slavery.



Passover Seder plate.

Categories (with imaged examples in brackets): [edit](#)

1. Zeroa (shank bone)
2. Beitza (roasted hard-boiled egg)
3. Maror/Chazeret (horseradish)
4. Maror/Chazeret (onion)
5. Charoset
6. Karpas (parsley)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanhedrin>



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.





CHAG PESACH SAMEACH

(Happy Passover Holidays)

STEP 1: Print both pages.

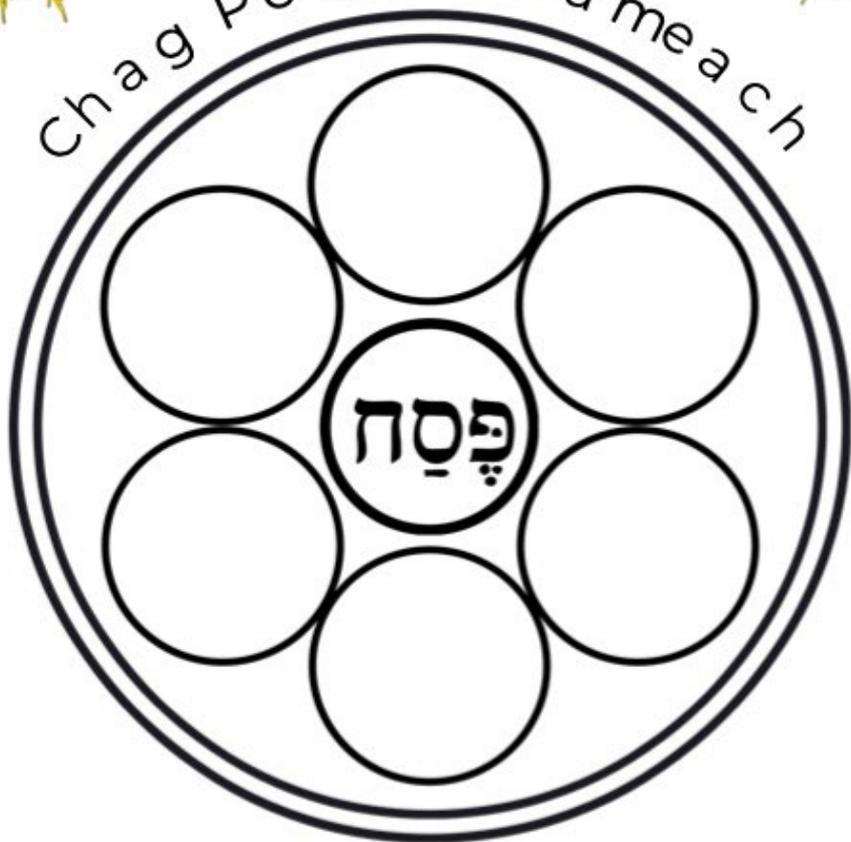
STEP 2: Color the seder plate on page 2.

STEP 3: Color and cut out the items below. Paste the zeroah (shank bone), chazeret (lettuce), karpas (parsley), charoset (apple and nuts), maror (horseradish), and beitzah (hard boiled egg) onto the plate on page 2.





Chag Pesach sameach



MADE WITH LOVE BY: _____



>> ACTIVITY #3: FROM SEDER TO COMMUNION

Ask your students to enter into a time of quiet attention to the next few minutes.

Present the following:

- **At Passover**, Jewish people have a seder to remember the time God protected their people from the angel of death. Each item on the seder plate symbolizes something to help them remember. Why do you think it's so important for Jewish people to remember this history?
- **The Last Supper** is when Jesus and His disciples gathered for a Passover (seder) meal and added new meaning to the ancient tradition.
 - **Have a student read:** As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body." [Matthew 26:26]
 - **Have a student read:** And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. [Matthew 26:27-28]
 - **Have a student read:** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. **Do this in remembrance of me.**" In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. **Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.**" [1 Corinthians 11:23-26]
 - Why would Jesus want His followers to repeat that new tradition He started?
- **Communion** is the Church carrying on the tradition Jesus started with The Last Supper. Symbolically, we eat bread and drink juice and take time to remember the sacrifice Jesus made with His death on the cross.
 - What are your favorite Easter traditions or activities?
- End this time together by saying:
 - The next time you participate in communion, think back on its history.
 - This week, take time each day to pause and reflect on what Jesus did on that day of Holy Week. Plan to do one thing each day that helps you connect with God during this Holy Week as we await Easter.
 - On Easter Sunday, remember that we are people of the Resurrection. We get to accept The Gospel message—the good news! We get to live in the freedom Jesus' sacrifice gives us, and we get to share that message and love with others. Happy Easter!



Lesson Visuals



Passover Seder



The Last Supper



Communion



>> CHALLENGE:

Remember the Seder and Communion when you are eating a meal with others this week. Say a silent prayer of thanks to God for your community of people and the bond you share with them.

>> JOYS/CONCERNS AND PRAYER:

Go around and share your joys and concerns (praises and prayer requests) and close your time in prayer.



Lined writing area for notes, featuring horizontal lines and a large, faint watermark reading 'XPDL' in the background.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

