

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

LUNCH BOX: The Boy Who Brought Lunch

PROPS

A lunch box

KEY SCRIPTURE

John 6:1-14

How many of you have a lunch box like this? Do most of you carry your lunch to school, or do you buy lunch in the cafeteria? Do you ever trade snacks and goodies with your friends? What's the best lunch trade you were ever able to make?

Today I want to tell you about a boy with a lunch box. In his case, it was probably a basket, and the lunch he took might not be worth much in trade. He had five small loaves of bread and two pieces of fish. How many of you would be willing to give up your Twinkies for a piece of fish?

The boy wasn't going to school that day, but he was going to hear a great teacher: Jesus. He was one in a large number of people who went to hear Jesus that day. The Bible says there were 5,000 men. If we guess there was one woman and two children for every man there, that means this little boy was one of at least 20,000 people gathered to hear Jesus speak!

It was getting late in the day, and Jesus was still speaking to the crowd. It was close to suppertime, and many of the people were probably getting hungry. Very few, if any, of them brought food like the little boy did.

At the front of the crowd, Jesus' disciples were telling him to send the people away so they could get dinner. But then Jesus, as he often did, put a challenge to the disciples: You give them something to eat! The disciples were beside themselves. It would cost a fortune to feed so many people!

Now we don't know how it happened, but somehow, this little boy found out that Jesus was looking to feed the crowd. One of the disciples brought him to Jesus, and the little boy offered the little food that he had: five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus took the food and blessed it. Then he began to break up the food and distribute it among the people with his disciples. Suddenly, one little boy's lunch fed more than 20,000 people—with 12 baskets of food left over besides!

It would have been very easy for the little boy to keep his lunch for himself. He was one person in a crowd of 20,000, and what difference would five loaves of bread and two fish make in a crowd that large? But the little boy didn't keep it to himself. He gave all he had. He placed it in Jesus' hands, and look what Jesus did with it!

No gift is too small when given to the Lord, and no offering is too small to make a difference. Remember that, and look for opportunities to give to God and to others. You'll be amazed at what he can do with a giving heart!

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

iPHONE: Bezalel and Oholiab

PROPS

An iPhone

KEY SCRIPTURE

Exodus 31:1-11

How many of you have had a chance to play with one of these? The iPhone, whether you're a fan or not, completely changed the way people use the telephone. When Apple decided to create the iPhone, they wanted to make it simple, easy to use, and, above all, a work of art.

The "art" of the iPhone was the work of a man named Jonathan Ive. Jonathan Ive is not an engineer or a computer expert. He is an artist, and if you don't believe me, you can go to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to see some of the amazing designs he has created for Apple.

Apple didn't have to make the iPhone, the iPad, or any of its Mac computers beautiful, but the cofounder of Apple, Steve Jobs, insisted on making them that way. Before Jobs hired Jonathan Ive, computers were bulky and boxy. They were functional, but they were not attractive. Steve Jobs changed all that, and Jonathan Ive was the man he chose to make it happen.

Artistic creativity is a gift from God. In the book of Exodus, we see just how much God values this gift. God had just given Moses the Ten Commandments, and he was giving instructions for building the Tabernacle—a traveling temple that would serve as the seat of worship for the Israelites as they traveled to the Promised Land.

God had very specific instructions for the design of the temple, and he chose by name the men who would do the work: Bezalel and Oholiab. God told Moses that he had given both men wisdom, skill, and knowledge to make artistic designs using gold, silver, wood, and other materials. God gave them these skills for the specific purpose of making the Tabernacle, his dwelling place among the Israelites.

God didn't have to make the Tabernacle beautiful. He wanted it to be beautiful. He wanted the Israelites to see a beauty in the Tabernacle and be reminded of their Creator—a God who values not only creativity, but also beauty.

God has given each one of us gifts. Some of us are artists. Some are musicians. Others may be gifted speakers or teachers. Whatever gift you have been given, God has a plan for you, and no gift is insignificant. Whatever you do with your gift, do it as if you are working for the Lord. Always remember that it was he who gave you your gifts, and don't be afraid to let others know that he is your inspiration.

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

VEGGIE STICKS: Daniel

PROPS

A plate of celery and carrots; optional plate of candy bars

KEY SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1

(Offer the veggies to the students.)

Does anyone want a snack this morning? How many of you eat celery or carrots on a regular basis? How many of you, given the choice of anything at home, would pick veggies over crackers, cookies, candy, or anything else?

(Optional: Offer them the candy bars.)

How many of you would rather have a delicious candy bar instead? Before you answer, let me tell you a story about a boy named Daniel.

Daniel was an Israelite. He was still just a boy when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered the Israelites. After conquering Israel, Nebuchadnezzar took hundreds of young boys like Daniel captive, bringing them into his palace. They were not prisoners, however. These boys were enrolled in a special school, where they learned the law of Babylon. If they did well, they would have a chance to serve the king in his palace.

Living in the palace meant the boys in this program got to eat like royalty. They were brought the best-tasting, fattiest, sweetest, tastiest food imaginable. Most of the boys ate it up, but one day, the king's servants received a request from Daniel and his friends to eat vegetables and drink water.

The king's servants were upset by this. They were responsible for keeping the boys well-fed, and if they didn't eat, they were failing in their duties. They and the king were surprised by the request for healthy food. Not only was it bold to challenge the king's rules, but also they were asking for plain old water and vegetables. It didn't make any sense!

Daniel convinced the servants to test them on the veggie diet. If they weren't as healthy as the other students in a few weeks, they would give up the veggies and eat the king's food. Can you guess what happened? Daniel and his friends were healthier than the other boys. They were so healthy, the king ordered that all the students be put on the same veggie diet!

What can we learn from Daniel and his friends? One obvious lesson is to eat your veggies. But there's a bigger lesson to be learned here: self-discipline. The boys could have given in and gone along with the crowd, but they wanted to stick with the healthy diet they had always eaten. They refused to give in to peer pressure, they took the hard road, and they were rewarded. All four of them eventually became officials in the government.

Self-discipline isn't easy, but when it comes to choosing God's way or the world's way, it's the only way to go. It will keep you healthy, wise, strong, and better able to be used by the Lord.

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

DANCING SHOES: David

PROPS

Dancing shoes (tap, ballet, etc.)

KEY SCRIPTURE

2 Samuel 6

Do any of you have a pair of shoes like this? What are these shoes used for?

There are all kinds of shoes for dancing. Ballet dancers have special slippers that give them flexibility and help them move more gracefully. On the other extreme, there are tap shoes and clogs. These shoes are made to make noise when you move.

Whatever your style of dance, there's a perfect shoe, isn't there?

There aren't too many passages in the Bible about dancing, but there is one involving one of the most famous men in the Bible, David. David had just become king of Israel after many years of running and hiding from the former king, Saul. He was a long way from the boy who killed Goliath. He was a grown man, a married man, the most powerful man in Israel.

So why was David dancing? Because he was praising God!

David had decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred treasure in all of Israel, to the capital city of Jerusalem. This was an occasion for worship and celebration, and David was front and center leading the worship. The Bible tells us he was half-naked, dancing and singing and praising the Lord.

Can you imagine the president, the mayor of our town, or even our pastor leading a parade and dancing? It seems a little undignified, doesn't it? These are people who are supposed to look professional, mature, and serious. People in power don't dance half-naked down the street, do they?

That's exactly what David's wife Michal said when he went home that day. She yelled at him for dancing and praising God! She told him straight out: You made a fool of yourself today.

But you know what David told her? He told her he didn't care! He danced for one person and one person only, and that was the Lord. In fact, he told his wife, "I will become even more undignified than this!"

David loved God more than anyone. He cared what God thought more than what his wife or anyone else thought. That's a challenge for all of us, isn't it?

Whose opinion matters most to you: your parents', your friends', or Jesus'?

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

TOILET: Elijah

PROPS

A toilet

KEY SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18

Did you know that there is potty humor in the Bible? Your Sunday school teachers probably forgot to tell you that. Or maybe they didn't know. But there's a really great potty joke in the Bible, and most people never, ever notice it.

It happened during a confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Baal was the popular god in Israel during the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. God had had enough of people worshipping Baal, so he sent Elijah to challenge Baal and his followers.

The challenge was simple: Each side would build an altar and make a sacrifice. They would then call on their god to send fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice. Elijah was nice enough to let the prophets of Baal go first. They started early in the morning, worshipping and crying out to Baal for fire. For hours and hours, they danced and called on their god. But Baal never answered.

Elijah sat back and watched as the prophets danced and called on their god. Then Elijah did something you might expect to see at a sporting event today: He started to trash talk the prophets of Baal! "Shout louder!" he said. "Maybe Baal is asleep and he can't hear you!"

Then Elijah said something else. The literal translation of Elijah's words is "Maybe he has gone aside." Most Bible translations change these words to "Maybe Baal has gone on a trip." But in the original language, "gone aside" is a slang phrase, and it does not mean "gone on a trip."

Elijah was saying, "Maybe Baal is on the toilet!"

Now those are fighting words, right?

Of course Baal wasn't on the toilet, and he wasn't asleep. He wasn't there at all—exactly the point Elijah was trying to make. When Elijah's turn came, he built his altar, made a sacrifice, and had buckets and buckets of water poured over both. He said one prayer, and *boom!* Fire fell from the sky and devoured the sacrifice.

It's a great reminder that our God is a real God. He listens, and he answers our prayers. And God will not take a backseat to false gods that we make up on our own. So next time you take a seat on your "throne," take a moment to thank God for the reminder that he is still on his throne. (No, I don't mean the toilet!)

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

BLANKET: Gideon

PROPS

A fleece blanket

KEY SCRIPTURE

Judges 6

Does anyone have a blanket like this at home? This blanket is made of fleece, and even back in Old Testament times, it was not uncommon for people to have fleece in their homes. Fleece is a very soft, very warm fabric, and it just so happens that a fleece blanket plays a key role in the story of Gideon.

Gideon lived during the time of the judges—a period that follows the Israelites' arrival in Canaan but comes before the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel. God had allowed the Israelites to fall captive to their enemies as punishment for their sins. When the Israelites cried out to God, God called on Gideon.

Now Gideon wasn't exactly the kind of guy you'd figure for a world leader. He was not from a powerful or important family, but God doesn't always call on the "important" people. God knew Gideon was the perfect man for the job. The problem was that Gideon didn't believe he was the man for any job!

When God called Gideon to save Israel, Gideon put him to the test. He set a fleece outside and prayed to God. He told God, "If you want me to save Israel, then in the morning, there will be dew in the blanket but none on the ground." The next morning, Gideon saw that the blanket was wet but the ground was dry!

Would one test have been enough for you to believe God? Believe it or not, it wasn't enough for Gideon. The next night, he asked God to make the ground wet but leave the blanket dry! God passed the test once more.

Some people today would look at Gideon and say, "Well, he just didn't have enough faith!" But there's a valuable lesson in Gideon's testing God. Too many people today run out and try to do God's will without ever asking God what he wants! They say, "I will start a Christian band!" or "I will start a Christian TV show!" or "I will start my own ministry." Are their motives right? If they want to serve God, then yes. But just because you want to do something doesn't mean that it's God's will!

God has a plan for all of us, but finding that plan can sometimes feel like a series of tests. Oftentimes when we try and fail, we want to blame God. But maybe those are the times when God is simply saying, "No, this isn't my plan. My plan is over here."

Gideon didn't dare do anything until he knew for sure it was God's plan. And while we shouldn't get into the habit of testing God, we need to take every thought and every idea captive, praying to God and asking, "Is this your will or mine?" If it's yours, then let it go. It's the Lord's, then go, and get ready to see God move.

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TABLOID MAGAZINE: Hezekiah

PROPS

A tabloid magazine—the craziest one you can find
(and still show students)

KEY SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 18-19

How many of you like to read the headlines on these silly magazines in the grocery store? These are called tabloids, and believe it or not, these magazines make a lot of money—in spite of the fact that very few of them tell the truth! These magazines sell copies with stories about Bigfoot, UFOs, and the infamous Bat Boy. They scare people with prophecies about the end of the world. They spread all sorts of stories about famous people and celebrities. And like I said, most of what they say is wrong! Some of them exaggerate. Some of them simply reprint gossip without bothering to check if what they're printing is true. And some just make stuff up. If any of you have any aspirations of being a famous singer or actor, you need to be prepared for someone to print some ugly, untrue things about you one day.

King Hezekiah was one such person. When Hezekiah was king of Judah, the king of Assyria decided to conquer Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem. But the king of Assyria didn't just roll in with his soldiers and chariots. He first attacked Judah with gossip and rumors.

Do you know what the big rumor was? He tried to make the people of Israel believe that God was not going to save them! He told the people that Hezekiah was lying when he said the Lord would save them. He bragged about how many soldiers and horses he had. He bragged that the forces of Israel were no match for him.

Why would he do this? Because he wanted Hezekiah to surrender. The king of Assyria didn't want to go to war. He wanted Hezekiah to give up without a fight. What better way to do that than to convince the people of Judah that their king was powerless to stop them?

But Hezekiah did not listen to gossip and rumors. Hezekiah was a good king, a godly king, and he knew better than to give in to fear and gossip. Hezekiah went to the Lord in prayer. God listened to Hezekiah, and through the prophet Isaiah, he told Hezekiah the truth: Assyria would not conquer Judah. God would save Judah, and the king of Assyria, not Hezekiah, would fall.

Gossip is a powerful and destructive force. If you haven't experienced it in your life up until now, you will. But there's one thing more powerful than gossip—and that's the truth. When rumors and gossip try to make you give up, when they fill you with fear, follow Hezekiah's example and take that fear to the Lord. Ask God to reveal his truth to you, and don't give in to gossip.

Above all else, let gossip end with you. When there's no one left to spread gossip, there's no more gossip.

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

BROKEN POTTERY: Job

PROPS

Pieces of broken pottery

KEY SCRIPTURE

Job 1-2

Can anyone tell me what today's object is—or should I say, was? This used to be something very useful; it was part of a pot that held a flower or some other plant. But now—now it's nothing but a broken shard, good for nothing but to be thrown away.

There's a story in the Bible, however, in which a man found a different use for broken pottery. His name was Job, and he was one of the richest men in the world. Job owned hundreds of animals. He had a big house, lots of land, and a huge family. More importantly, Job was a man who loved God. He loved God so much that the devil went to see the Lord about Job. He told God the only reason Job loved God was because God had blessed him so much. So God allowed Job to be tested.

In one day, everything Job had was taken away. Everything he had was stolen, and all of his children died! Job remained faithful to God, so the devil asked God to test him further. Job got sick and had sores all over his body. The Bible says the pain of the sores was so bad that the only way he could get relief was by scratching his sores with broken pottery.

Can you imagine being in that much pain over your whole body? Job was miserable. His wife told him he should curse God and die. His friends told him that he probably had done something to offend God. But Job knew he had done nothing wrong!

But even through all that suffering, Job did not sin. He did not curse God. He knew that the one thing that could never be taken from him was his faith in God. Only he could give that up, and Job refused to let go. He didn't know that God would restore everything he had and then some. (And God did when Job's test was over.) He just knew that God was still there, and he refused to let go.

You know, when this pottery was intact, it would have made a nice pot for some flowers. In the New Testament, Jesus talks about the flowers. They have no way of making clothing for themselves, and yet God clothes them in the most beautiful of colors.

Like the flowers, Job did not worry about losing his possessions or even his life. Even when all he had to relieve his pain was broken pottery, he trusted the Lord.

Let's pray that God will give us the faith to trust him, no matter what our circumstances, and to always remain faithful!

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

CORN: Joseph

PROPS

An ear of corn

KEY SCRIPTURE

Genesis 41

Corn is one of the most amazing crops we have. Corn can be used to make all sorts of useful products: ethanol fuel, shaving cream, paper products, rugs, paint, glue, aspirin, toothpaste, cleaning products, and of course...all kinds of food.

Corn served another purpose back in the book of Genesis: It saved an entire nation!

You see, the ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh, had a dream. Two dreams, in fact. In one dream, he saw seven skinny cows devour seven fat cows. He then saw seven shrunken, shriveled ears of corn devour seven fat, delicious ears of corn. These dreams troubled Pharaoh, and he did not know what they meant!

When Pharaoh's butler heard about the dream, he told him about a prisoner he had met when Pharaoh had thrown the butler in jail. The prisoner's name was Joseph, and he was from the land of Canaan. Joseph had interpreted a dream for the butler, and the butler believed he could also interpret the Pharaoh's dream.

Joseph was brought before Pharaoh, and sure enough, Joseph interpreted the dream. There would be seven years of good harvests, followed by seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he made him his second-in-command and put Joseph in charge of storing food for the famine. By the time the famine struck, Joseph had stored enough food to get the entire nation of Egypt through the famine!

But Egypt is not the nation I was talking about at the beginning of the story! You see, Joseph was the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, whom God had promised to make a mighty nation. Joseph was one of 11 sons of Jacob, and in case you're wondering how he came to be in jail in Egypt, I'll tell you: His brothers had sold him into slavery!

Joseph was the favorite son. His father loved him more than all the rest and made no secret of his favoritism. Not only that, but Joseph also had several dreams that one day his brothers would bow down before him. You can almost understand why his brothers hated him so much, can't you?

But then, one day, Joseph's brothers did bow down before Joseph. The famine hurt them too, and their father sent them to beg for food. Joseph could have refused. He could have put them in prison or worse without even giving them a trial. He was, after all, the second most powerful man in Egypt! But Joseph knew that God had allowed everything to happen so that Joseph could save his family—a family that would become the nation of Israel.

It's not always easy to love your siblings, especially when they do you wrong. But God put them in your life for a reason, the same way he put Joseph in his brothers' lives. Be thankful for the siblings you have. Love them, and always be willing to forgive them. A lot of friends and people will come and go in your life, but your brothers and sisters will always be your brothers and sisters. And you never know—you just may need them one day!

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

GLASS HALF FULL: Joshua and Caleb

PROPS

A half full glass of water

KEY SCRIPTURE

Numbers 13-14

I want all of you to take a close look at this glass of water. Look closely at how much water is in here.

(Give the students a minute to look.)

By show of hands, who thinks the glass is half empty? Who thinks it is half full?

The truth is that you're both right. If the glass is half full, then it is also half empty. But some people like to use this sort of question as a test of your personality. An optimist looks at the positive: The glass is half full. The pessimist looks at the negative: The glass is half empty.

There's a story in the Bible about optimists and pessimists that changed the future for an entire nation. The children of Israel had traveled out of slavery in Egypt toward the Promised Land, the land of Canaan that God promised to their forefather Abraham. When they arrived at the border of Canaan, their leader Moses sent 12 spies into the Promised Land.

When the spies came back, two of the men—Joshua and Caleb—reported that the Promised Land was everything God had said it was. It was a land filled with milk and honey. It was ripe for the taking. God was faithful, and God was going to fulfill his every promise.

But 10 of the spies brought back a different story. Canaan was dangerous, a land filled with giants and terrifying warriors! Their cities were well-fortified, and the people were skilled warriors!

So which of the two groups were right, the 10 who saw giants or Joshua and Caleb?

They were both right. Canaan was the Promised Land, a land of milk and honey. But it was also a country of giants. God had promised to give this land to the Israelites, but after all the miracles God had performed to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, to whom do you think they listened? They listened to the 10 men who talked about the giants. They were so afraid of the giants, some of them said they were better off being slaves in Egypt!

Because the Israelites ignored Joshua and Caleb, God punished the entire nation. They were forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until every one of them had died. God would let their children, led by Joshua, enter the Promised Land instead.

One day, you will be faced with your own giants—challenges that seem impossible to overcome. When that day comes, there may be people telling you to give up. But if God has made a promise to you, be careful that you listen to him and not to the pessimists. Believing in the Lord is not mere optimism. It's called faithfulness, and when you are faithful to the Lord, the Lord will be faithful and bless you with all that he's promised!

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

PURPLE CLOTH: Lydia

PROPS

Some purple cloth, material, or linens

KEY SCRIPTURE

Acts 16:13-15, 40

How many of you like the color purple? Purple was a very special color back in biblical times. Do you know who wore the color purple? Purple was usually reserved for royalty and people who were very wealthy.

The book of Acts tells us a story about a woman whose job was selling purple cloth. Her name was Lydia, and because we know she sold purple cloth, we know that she was a wealthy woman. We also know she was also a believer in God because when we meet her, she is at a prayer meeting with Paul and Silas.

Lydia heard a message that day in which Paul told these believers in God that they needed to also believe in God's Son, Jesus. Paul told them that Jesus was a descendant of David and that God had raised him from the grave in order to offer forgiveness of sins.

Lydia believed in Jesus that day, and she and her whole house were saved. But Lydia's story doesn't end with her accepting Christ. Lydia invited the believers to come and meet at her house! In fact, Scripture says she begged Paul and Silas to stay with her so she could take care of their needs.

Later on in this same chapter, we read that Paul and Silas were put in prison. As soon as they were released, guess where they went? They went back to Lydia's house, where they were cared for once more.

A lot of people think that becoming a Christian is all about what we call their personal walk—their relationship with Jesus. They think it's about Bible study, small groups, Sunday school, quiet times, and prayer. It is about those things, but that's not all! Being a Christian means putting our faith into action the way Jesus, his disciples, the apostle Paul, and Lydia did.

Lydia didn't wait two or three years to start serving God. She didn't say, "As soon as I get my walk with God straight, I will serve the Lord." She accepted the Lord, and she immediately offered to God what she had: her home.

Having a personal walk with Jesus is very important, but if we never open our eyes to see others' needs—if we never step out and take action to meet those needs—are we really acting like followers of Christ? Lydia reminds us that you don't need a lot of years of walking with God to serve him. You just need to be willing to take action!

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

COFFEEMAKER: Moses

PROPS

A coffeemaker

KEY SCRIPTURE

Exodus 3

How many of you guys have one of these in the house? How many of you have a mom or dad who can't make it in the mornings without at least one cup of coffee?

For a lot of adults and even teenagers, coffee is an essential part of the day. People can't begin their day without a cup of coffee. But there's a funny irony in people's dependence on coffee to get through the day: Coffee takes a little time to make. You can't just open the fridge, take the cap off the jug of coffee, and pour yourself a tall glass of coffee. You have to wash out the pot, dump out yesterday's coffee grounds and filter, put a new filter in, scoop in some new coffee grounds, pour in the hot water, and then wait for the coffee to slowly drip down and fill the pot.

Imagine how frustrating it can be for some people who desperately "need" that cup of coffee, having to wait as long as five whole minutes to get their coffee so they can begin their work.

Now imagine waiting 40 years before you can get started on your work!

That's the story of Moses. Many of you may know Moses as the man who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. But did you know that Moses had to wait 40 years before he was ready to do the job God had given him?

Moses was raised in the palace by Pharaoh's daughter, but he was an Israelite who was well aware of his heritage thanks to his birth mother. Moses saw the way the Egyptians were treating the Israelites, and he wanted to help them. In fact, one day he killed an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew slave.

But violence was not part of God's plan for Moses, and these actions led to him living in exile as a shepherd. He lived in the wilderness, far from the splendor of Egypt, tending sheep for his father-in-law. Then one day, 40 years after leaving Egypt, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush and told him to return to Egypt.

God has a plan for all of our lives. For some people, those plans are difficult to see. For others, they could not be clearer. But whether God gives you a clear calling or keeps you guessing, remember the story of Moses. Wait on the Lord, and let him tell you when it is time to act. You may think you have it all figured out, but God sees many things we cannot see. Wait on the Lord, and you will be amazed at his perfect timing.

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

WINEGLASS: Nehemiah

PROPS

A wineglass

KEY SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 1-2

Today, I want to tell you about a man whose job was to serve glasses like this. Actually, his job was a little more complicated than just serving drinks. His official title was “cupbearer.” That means he served drinks to the king and his court. But that’s not the end of it either. Sometimes, before serving the king, the cupbearer tasted the king’s drink. Do you know why he did that? Because the king was afraid of being poisoned! If the cupbearer drank and didn’t become ill, the drink was safe. If the cupbearer got sick or died—well, the king didn’t drink the wine. How would you like that job?

Because of the nature of this job, cupbearers were highly paid. They were also among the most trusted people in the palace because the king literally put his life in the cupbearers’ hands. So when I tell you that Nehemiah was a powerful man who had great wealth and the king’s ear in ancient Persia, you get an idea of just what I mean.

But Nehemiah was not a Persian. He was an Israelite, and as a young boy, he was taken from his homeland as a prisoner when Babylon conquered Israel. It says a lot about Nehemiah that a slave boy would grow up to be one of the king’s most trusted servants.

Nehemiah loved the king, and he had a very comfortable life in Persia. But when Nehemiah learned about how things were in his homeland, he became greatly troubled. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins. The walls were still broken down, and the city’s most beautiful places lay in ruins. Nehemiah wanted to do something, so he began to pray.

Nehemiah felt the Lord leading him to go back to Israel. He went to the king and told him about this, and the king allowed his servant to return home. There, Nehemiah became one of the new leaders of Israel. Nehemiah spent the next several years of his life living among ruins and working hard to rebuild a conquered city that was constantly under threat of attack.

Can you imagine giving up a position of power like Nehemiah? Imagine leaving a big, fancy house and an important job to go live in a war zone. Yet that’s what Nehemiah did. He didn’t consider how much harder life would be. He didn’t even think about how dangerous it might be. Someone had to start rebuilding the nation of Israel, and when God called, Nehemiah didn’t hesitate to go.

Someday, God may call on you to leave your nice home, your safe city, or maybe even your country. He may call you to go someplace dangerous. He may send you into a war zone. Someday, God might call you to do something even more terrifying—like becoming friends with a kid at school nobody likes or standing up for the truth when no one else will. When that time comes, remember the man who held the king’s cup. He didn’t stop to think about all that it would cost him to obey God. He simply obeyed.

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5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

FLASHLIGHT: Nicodemus

PROPS

A flashlight

KEY SCRIPTURE

John 3

How many of you have ever had the chance to play around with a flashlight? A flashlight can be a fun thing to play with, but it's also a very useful tool. What are some of the ways we can use flashlights in a helpful way?

If you had to go out after dark looking for something or someone, a flashlight would be very helpful, wouldn't it? Today, I want to tell you about someone who went looking for something after dark—someone who, if he had had one, might have used a flashlight. His name was Nicodemus, and he was looking for a very important person: Jesus.

Like many people who heard Jesus speak, Nicodemus was intrigued by Jesus' teachings. He wanted to know more about who Jesus was and what he had to say. But Nicodemus was afraid to go and see Jesus in the daytime. Why? Because Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees, and the Pharisees, as a rule, did not like Jesus.

The Pharisees were a crooked and greedy group. They were entrusted with teaching the Word of God to God's people, but they had become corrupted by their own power. So when Jesus showed up, the Pharisees did everything they could to discredit him without bothering to listen.

But Nicodemus did listen, and a lot of what Jesus said made sense to him. Still, Nicodemus was afraid to be seen talking to Jesus because of his position. So Nicodemus went to see Jesus after dark, late at night.

It's not always popular to be a fan of Jesus, especially today. You've probably encountered friends, teachers, and other people who don't believe in Jesus. Some may even mock or laugh at those who do believe. It's tempting to stay quiet and hide our faith around people like that, but Jesus doesn't want us to hide. Jesus loves the mockers and the nonbelievers just as much as he loves us, and he wants us to shine our light in this dark world.

There's a neat ending to Nicodemus' story that comes much later. After Jesus was crucified, a man named Joseph claimed Jesus' body and buried it in his family tomb. Guess who helped him to bury Jesus? Nicodemus! Even after all the disciples but one had abandoned Jesus, Nicodemus came forward to help bury the man he had come to believe in as a savior. He was no longer afraid because he had come to believe what Jesus had told him was true.

One of the things that Jesus told Nicodemus is probably the first verse you ever memorized. Nicodemus' story comes from John 3, and right in the middle of that chapter is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not die, but have eternal life."

Jesus died for Nicodemus, for the Pharisees, for us, and for those who would make fun of our beliefs. If we hide our faith, we might spare ourselves some embarrassment, but we'd be keeping a secret the world desperately needs to hear!

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

TENTS: Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul

PROPS

Tent

KEY SCRIPTURE

Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 16:19

Here's a question for you: Can you tell me which of the apostles made his living making tents? The answer may surprise you: It was Paul!

Paul is considered perhaps the most important teacher out of the apostles. He traveled all around the Middle East and Europe. He was in and out of prison on numerous occasions, and he even survived a shipwreck. He wrote more than half of the books that make up the New Testament. He preached the gospel in palaces and throne rooms all the way up to the Emperor of Rome.

And yet Paul still had to go to work and make a living—making tents!

A lot of Christians have the mistaken idea that if they're not a full-time minister or a Christian singer or in some other full-time ministry position, they are of no use to the Lord. The Bible tells us that's just not so. Paul is one of many people in the Bible whose primary income came from a regular job.

Paul wasn't the only tentmaker serving the Lord either. The book of Acts and Paul's letters make several references to a married couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who were tentmakers. As far as we know, Priscilla and Aquila didn't travel, and they probably never preached before a king. But they were important teachers in the early church, instructing not only new believers, but also their fellow teachers of the gospel!

Being a full-time minister is a special calling, and it's not for everyone. God chooses who he wants to serve in those positions, and those people face enormous scrutiny and pressure being in those positions.

For those who aren't called to full-time ministry, there's still a calling to teach the gospel, to love others, and to be the living presence of Christ. God wants us to do whatever work we are given—from homework to being a doctor to riding a garbage truck—as if we were doing it for the Lord. And as Aquila and Priscilla show us, God can use anyone who chooses to serve him right where they are!

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

SCARLET THREAD: Rahab

PROPS

A scarlet thread

KEY SCRIPTURE

Joshua 2

Would you believe me if I told you that a simple scarlet cord like this saved a woman's life? And not only the woman, but also her whole family? Actually, it wasn't the thread that saved her; it was God. And the woman wasn't exactly the kind of person you'd expect God to save. But this woman played an important part in the Old and New Testaments.

Rahab lived in the city of Jericho, which was in the land of Canaan. The Lord had promised to give Canaan to the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, and when the Israelites crossed into Canaan, Jericho was the first city they came to.

The people of Canaan were strong and powerful, and they were not about to just hand their land over to the Israelites. They knew about the Israelites, and they knew about all the Lord had done to help them since they left Egypt. In spite of all this, the people of Jericho believed they would be victorious over Israel.

But not Rahab! When two spies entered the city and needed a place to hide, Rahab helped them. She knew that God would give Israel victory over Jericho, and she was not about to stand against God.

Because Rahab helped the two spies, God spared Rahab and her family. The spies told Rahab to hang a scarlet cord out the window of her apartment. When the city of Jericho fell, Rahab's house was unharmed. And when the Israelites invaded, they spared everyone in Rahab's house. Rahab went on to marry an Israelite man. In fact, in the book of Matthew, Rahab is listed in the genealogy of Jesus, making her one of Jesus' earthly great-great-great-great-great-grandmothers.

Sometimes in our lives, we try to resist God's will. We know what God wants and what he wants from us, but we think we can do things on our own. We live in a world that tries to defy God in almost everything, don't we? But God has a way of getting what he wants, whether we like it or not, and Scripture tells us that in the end, God will be victorious.

Rahab knew better than to try to resist God. Rather than stand with the people of Jericho, she surrendered. She risked her life to help the spies because she knew God would have the victory. It takes a lot of courage to stand with God when the whole world is against him, but if we do, we will stand victorious with him in the end!

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

WATER BOTTLE: Rebekah

PROPS

A bottle of water

If you were outside and you had a bottle of water, and someone came and asked you for a drink, would you give it to him or her? What if it were a good friend? What if it were a total stranger?

There's a story about a thirsty stranger in Genesis 24. He was a servant of Abraham—the man chosen by God to father the nation of Israel. Abraham lived in the distant land of Canaan, and when his son Isaac was old enough, he knew he had to find a wife for him.

Finding a wife for his son was a very important task and not one Abraham could trust to just anyone. The man Abraham chose to find a wife for Isaac was a man who believed in God the same as his master. We know this because the man asked the Lord to help him find a wife for Isaac.

When the servant arrived in Abraham's homeland, he asked for a sign. He would ask a woman at the well for a drink, and if the woman offered to water his camels, he would know she was the one.

No sooner did he finish praying than a woman named Rebekah arrived at the well. The servant asked her for a drink, and Rebekah offered to water his camels as well. The servant had his sign. He had found a wife for Isaac!

Most people who read this story stop there. They see God giving a sign, a miracle, and that's all. But let me ask you this: What did Rebekah's actions say about her?

In biblical times, people did not have running water in their homes. Everyone had to go to the well in the center of town daily to get water. It was a hard task, and the water jugs were very heavy. Rebekah was offering to get water for a stranger and a group of camels in addition to the water she had to draw for her family.

She was also offering to do something she had not been asked to do. It's one thing to respond to a person in need asking for water, but Rebekah saw the camels. She knew the man needed water for the animals, and rather than just doing what she was asked, she offered to meet the needs of his animals.

Jesus once said that if a soldier asked you to carry his pack one mile, you should go with him two. It's never easy to stop what we're doing and help a person in need. It's even harder to go the second mile. But there's no better way to share the love of God than going that extra mile.

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

HAIRCUT: Samson

PROPS

A comb and haircutting shears

Do you guys recognize these items? Where would you normally see these items together? Probably the place where you get your hair cut, right? How many of you like getting haircuts? How many of you hate haircuts? Those of you who just raised your hand, I want you to remember something. This is something you can tell your mom the next time she tells you to get a haircut. Are you ready?

There's only one time in the entire Bible that mentions someone getting a haircut, and that guy ended up getting his eyes gouged out!

It's true! His name was Samson, and he lived in Israel in the time between Moses and King David. Back then, Israel did not have a king. God appointed judges to rule over his people, and Samson was one of those judges. Before he was born, God told Samson's parents that he had a plan for Samson. He instructed his parents to raise him as a Nazirite—a special person set aside to serve the Lord. Nazirites were supposed to follow a number of strict rules. Can you guess what one of those rules was? He could never cut his hair!

Before Samson came along, the Israelites were living in constant fear of their neighbors, especially the fierce warriors known as the Philistines. But when Samson was born, the tables turned quickly. Samson grew up to be strong and powerful. He was a fearsome warrior who struck fear in the hearts of Israel's enemies.

Samson won many battles against the Philistines, and he became a great hero. But over time, Samson became a very proud person. He forgot that it was God who had made him strong and given him a purpose. Samson trusted in his strength and his size more than he trusted in the Lord—and that led him into trouble.

Samson married a Philistine woman named Delilah. Samson loved Delilah, but Delilah's people forced her to betray her husband. It was Delilah who was able to get Samson to reveal the secret of his strength. "If you cut off my hair, I will become as weak as any man," he told her. Delilah cut Samson's hair off while he slept, and when he woke up, he was as weak as he said he would be. The Philistines took him prisoner, cut out his eyes, and made him a slave.

But that's not the end of the story. One night after he was made a slave, Samson was put on display at a party for the Philistine leaders. He had a little boy lead him to where the two main support columns for the building stood. He called on God to give him strength one last time. Samson knocked down the pillars, killing himself and hundreds of Israel's enemies.

A lot of people fall into the same trap as Samson. When good things happen, it's easy to forget about God and to think we need to depend only on ourselves. But the good news is that God is always willing to forgive and give us a second chance, just like he did for Samson. Let's ask the Lord to help us remember the blessings he's given us and never take them for granted.

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

CRUTCHES: Ten Lepers

PROPS

A pair of crutches

KEY SCRIPTURE

Luke 17:11-19

Can someone tell me what these are? These are crutches. And what are they used for? They're used to help someone walk who has had a leg injury, like a broken leg or a sprained ankle. Have any of you ever had to use a pair of these? Do any of you have crutches in your house?

The hope with crutches is that the person who uses them won't have to use them forever. When the ankle or leg heals, the person puts the crutches away and begins to walk like normal. The crutches go to the basement or the attic, or sometimes they get thrown away.

Whatever happens to them, it's very unlikely that you'll see crutches put in a place of honor, where everyone can see and remember that injury. Why? Because we don't like to remember those things. How many of you like to sit around and remember the time you hurt your leg or the time you got sick at school? When we're sick or injured, we want that to go away. As soon as we're healed, we want to forget all about it.

There's a story in the Bible about a group of men who had a terrible illness called leprosy. Unlike a broken leg, leprosy was incurable. Once you had leprosy, you had it until the day you died.

That is, unless you happened to meet a man named Jesus. The 10 men heard that Jesus was in town, and they knew about the miraculous healing Jesus had done. They went to him and pleaded with him to heal them. Jesus told the men to go and show themselves to the priests—the only men who could legally pronounce them cured.

The men went, and on the way to see the priests, they saw that their leprosy had been cured. The men threw their bandages off and cheered as they raced off to see the priests. They were ready to start their life over now that they were healed, and they never wanted to look back.

But one man did turn back. That man raced back to Jesus and thanked him. The Bible tells us the man was a Samaritan, and if you remember the story of the Good Samaritan, you know that these were a people who did not get along with the Jews. But in spite of their cultural differences, he was the only one to show thanks.

It's easy to put our bad times behind us, to store them away, and to hide them. But we need to remember who it is that carries us through hardships. We need to remember to give thanks to God, knowing that he will always be there to carry us through any hardship.

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

CHRISTMAS GIFT: The Magi

PROPS

A wrapped Christmas gift

KEY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2

Does anyone remember what gifts were given at the very first Christmas? There were three gifts presented to the baby Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—and the gifts came from the men we call the three kings, or the Magi.

Have any of you ever wondered who the Magi were or where they came from? The book of Matthew describes them as traveling from the East. According to tradition, they arrived two years after the birth of Christ. Mary and Joseph were still in Bethlehem, but they were probably living in a house or inn by the time the Magi arrived.

The birth of Christ had been prophesied for centuries, but their prophecies were only spoken to and for the Jews. The Magi were not Jewish. They came from Persia. They were scientists, mathematicians, and astronomers. So how did they come to know about the birth of Jesus?

They knew because of the prophet Daniel.

Yes, this is the same Daniel who was thrown into a den of lions. Daniel was a Jew, and as a boy, he was taken prisoner by King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was raised and trained to be a Magi who served as an advisor to the king in addition to all his scientific studies. When Daniel grew up, he became one of the Magi. He served as advisor to the kings of both Babylon and Persia. He was one of the most powerful men in the world, and he was the leader of the Magi.

It was Daniel who introduced the Magi to the writings of Moses and the prophets. It was Daniel who taught them about God and God's promise to redeem the world through the Messiah. Daniel shared with them the prophecies about the Messiah. When the star appeared over Bethlehem, the Magi saw and recognized it as the sign that the Messiah had been born.

The Magi came to worship God and also to confirm for themselves the truth of what their forefather Daniel had taught them. They were ready and waiting, and when the Messiah was born, they were ready.

How sad that the people who were originally given the prophecies—the Jews—were not ready. In fact, the king of the Jews, Herod, attempted to kill the baby Jesus when he learned about the Magi and their quest to find the Messiah!

The Magi are a reminder that the gift of Christmas—Jesus—is for all people. They also remind us that we all need to keep watch. Jesus is going to come back. Will we recognize the signs when he does? Or is there a chance that we, like Herod, might stand against him?

21

5-minute Children's Messages for Sunday Morning!

MINI-MARKER BOARD: Zechariah

PROPS

A mini-marker board, an erasable marker, and an eraser

KEY SCRIPTURE

Luke 1

(For this object lesson, the leader will not speak. Everything will be written on the marker board. Write each part of the story, let the older kids read it so the younger know what the story is, and then erase and write the next part.)

How would you like it if this were the only way you could communicate?

Imagine if you had some great news and you couldn't tell anyone...

Because you could not speak?

That happened to Zechariah.

Zechariah was a priest. He and his wife had no children.

One day, an angel appeared to Zechariah.

The angel said that he would have a son, and his son would be a prophet.

Zechariah did not believe the angel.

Because he didn't believe, God took away his ability to speak.

Zechariah's wife became pregnant just as the angel said.

Zechariah did not speak until the day his son was born.

He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

His son was John the Baptist, and when he grew up...

He had even bigger news than his father.

He got to tell the world that Jesus was coming.

We can tell the world about Jesus too.

We can tell them that Jesus will forgive their sins.

Don't be silent. You have good news to share too.