



STORY 47 September 3

A Marriage Made in Heaven

HOSEA 1–3

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Hosea 1–3.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1
Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2
Teach

Have you ever had to pull weeds? That's a hard job. How about take out the stinky trash? That's a hard (or at least stinky) job too. The prophets—like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—all had hard jobs. The work of a prophet was hard (and sometimes stinky!) work because they often preached an unpopular message to people who didn't want to hear. Some of the prophets had to warn God's people that God was going to judge them. Others had to tell people to turn away from sin and love God. Still others had to tell bad kings and queens to stop behaving badly. But one prophet might have had the hardest assignment of all. His name was Hosea.

The first message Hosea heard from God was this: “Go and find a bad woman to marry. I don’t want you to marry someone who is good and will be faithful to you, but someone who is not good and will continue to be unfaithful.” Normally, this would be very bad advice. But in Hosea’s case it was from a good God who wanted to make an important point. He wanted the prophet’s bad marriage to symbolize how bad God’s people had been to God.

TELL THE STORY

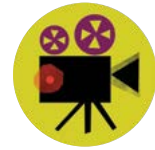
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
God’s love and
mercy is shown
to sinners, who
don’t deserve it.

Hosea obeyed the Lord and married Gomer, a bad woman (with a memorable name). Hosea and Gomer lived happily ever after. The end. Nope. Sorry, wrong story. Their marriage was no fairy tale. It was a true story of two people whose marriage showed the truth about God’s relationship with Israel. Hosea married a woman who promised to love him, but then loved lots of other men instead. She was unfaithful to him, just like Israel was unfaithful to God by loving and serving all sorts of other things besides God.

Hosea and Gomer had three children: Jezreel, Lo-ruhama, and Lo-ammi. These are Hebrew names that mean God Sows (or God will Scatter), No Mercy, and Not My People. They are funny names, but what they represented was no laughing matter. Jezreel was named God Sows because Israel was going to reap rotten fruit from the sowing of her rotten deeds. There are consequences for sin! Lo-ruhama was named No Mercy, and Lo-ammi Not My People, because God’s people had been so disobedient—worshiping the false gods of the nations around them—that they didn’t deserve God’s mercy and they didn’t deserve to be called God’s people.



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Hosea

1-3

But did God stop loving them? He could have—they broke their promises to him. But he didn't. He promised that one day after Israel was scattered, they would repent and call God their husband. Then he would renew their marriage. On that day, God says,

I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, "You are my people";
and he shall say, "You are my God." (Hos. 2:23)

What incredible love!

What then was Hosea to do? He was to act out that incredible love. God asked him to find his promise-breaking wife (who was living with her new boyfriend), pay off whatever money she owed (she was a slave to her sin!), and renew his marriage with her. Imagine how hard that would be to do! Once again, the obedient prophet obeyed God's word. And he once again showed, in his marriage, how God loves sinners and is willing to forgive us and make us his own.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He made a covenant with them. But over and over throughout their history they broke their promises to God. They worshiped him on the weekends, but broke the Ten Commandments throughout the week. They bowed before other gods. They treated the poor poorly. They trusted in the armies of their enemies rather than the Lord Almighty. It looked like the Snake was winning. And God was upset with their bad behavior! He had a right to be upset. They were like a wife who leaves her husband to be with other men. God could have stopped loving them. Instead, he chose to keep loving them—to renew his promises to them and restore his relationship with them.

The short story of Hosea's love for Gomer is like the Big Story of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. We have broken the Ten Commandments. We deserve for God to show us no mercy. We deserve to be crushed along with the Snake. He should not call us his children. But instead God does the unthinkable! He shows his love for us in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Through Jesus's blood (what a loving sacrifice!) we have been forgiven. We have a fresh start. He loves us as his children. Let us love him in return with our whole heart.

3

Engage

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** Why wouldn't someone want to marry Gomer? Why did God ask Hosea to marry her? What did God want to show his people through their marriage?

TAKEAWAY: Just like Gomer broke her promises to love Hosea, God's people have broken their promises to love and obey God.

2. **QUESTION:** How were God's people and Gomer alike? What did they both deserve because of their sin?

TAKEAWAY: Because of their sin, God's people (like Gomer) do not deserve to be welcomed and loved.

3. **QUESTION:** How does the story of Hosea and Gomer end? What does Hosea's love for Gomer tell us about God's love for his people?

TAKEAWAY: The story of Hosea and Gomer is a picture of how God loves his unlovely people.

4. **QUESTION:** Who did God send to show us how much he loved us? How did Jesus show us his love? How can we be welcomed as God's children even though we have sinned and broken our promises to God?

TAKEAWAY: Because Jesus loved us and died for our sin, we can be welcomed as God's children.

Memory Verse

God shows
his love for us
in that while
we were still
sinners, Christ
died for us.

ROMANS 5:8

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Walk in Someone Else's Shoes Relay

Supply List: large, adult-sized shoes (one per team), chairs (one per team)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Set chairs on one side of the room.



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Hosea

1–3

Divide children into teams. Give each team a pair of shoes. The first person on each team puts on the shoes, runs around his team's chair, and returns to his team. He then gives the shoes to the next person in line, who repeats the process. The first team to get all their players down and back is the winning team. Tell children it's easy to think that we are better than Gomer, but in some ways we have all walked in Gomer's shoes by sinning against God.

Option 2: Balloon Competition

Supply List: balloons (one per child), fans

Before Class: Gather supplies. Blow up balloons.

Give each child a balloon. Explain that they need to keep their balloon from touching the floor by tapping it in the air. If a child's balloon hits the floor, she has to sit down where it dropped (becoming an obstacle to others). After a set period of time or when one child remains, start a new game but turn on some fans in the play area to add to the challenge. Remind children that sin, like the fan, makes things out of control, but if we trust God and battle sin, God will keep us from falling.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Seated Bean Bag Challenge

Supply List: bean bags (three per team), buckets (one per team)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Place buckets on one side of the room.

Divide the class into teams. Give each team three bean bags and line teams up across from their bucket. Explain that each team must spread themselves out between the start line and their bucket and sit down. On "Go" they are to toss one bean bag at a time from kid to kid until it reaches the bucket. If a bean bag hits the ground, it has to go back to the start. The first team to get all their bean bags in their bucket wins. Remind children that although Israel wandered far from God, God promised to bring her back to himself.

Option 2: Jesus Paid It All Relay Race

Supply List: coins, bowl, two jars, masking tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Put a bowl on one side of the room and two jars on the other side. Mark a "toss line" 1 foot from each jar.

Divide children into two teams and have them stand by the “toss line.” On “Go” the first child from each team runs down to the bowl, grabs a coin, then runs back to the toss line to try to toss the coin into the jar. If the coin doesn’t go in the jar, leave it. After the toss, the child tags the next person in line to go. Continue relay for a set amount of time. The team with the most coins in their jar at the end wins. Remind children that just as Hosea bought Gomer back at a great price, so too Jesus paid a great price to save us.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Mosaic Cross

Supply List: cardstock, paper, construction paper (two colors per child), glue sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print an outline of a large cross on white cardstock (one per child). Print strips of paper with the Big Truth on it. Make a sample craft.

Give each child the cross paper, Big Truth strip, and two colors of construction paper (one to fill in the cross and one to fill in the background). Set glue sticks on each table. Have children rip their construction papers into small pieces and glue one color to the cross and the other color to the background. Then have them glue on the Big Truth.

Option 2: Keep God at the Center Magnet

Supply List: cardstock, construction paper (three colors per child), pencils, scissors, glue sticks, crayons, magnets (one per child)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make sets of three different-sized circle templates on cardstock and cut out (two sets per table). Make a sample craft.

Give each child three colors of construction paper. Set pencils, scissors, glue sticks, crayons, and circle patterns on each table. Have children trace one of the different-sized circles on each of their colors of paper and then cut the circles out. Have them glue the circles together to form a bull’s-eye target, with the

largest circle on the bottom. Then have them use crayons to write “Keep God at the Center.” Finally, add a magnet to the back.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Heart Puzzle

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, colored pencils, markers, small plastic bags (one per child)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a large heart outline on white cardstock (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a heart paper and bag. Set colored pencils, markers, and scissors on each table. Have children write the Big Truth on the heart and then decorate it. Have them cut around the heart and then cut the heart into six to eight puzzle pieces (place in bag to bring home). Remind children that God’s heart breaks when we are unfaithful, but he still loves us.

Option 2: Salt Art Cross

Supply List: cardstock, food coloring, salt, small plastic bags, liquid glue, scissors, paintbrushes (one per child)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Color salt by adding salt to a bag, adding a few drops of food coloring, resealing the bag, and kneading the salt and food coloring until mixed together (create four to five colors per table). Open bags to allow salt to dry out before use. Print a large cross outline on white cardstock (one per child). Put glue on paper plates (one per table). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a cross paper and paintbrush. Place glue, scissors, and salts at each table. Have children cut out the cross. Have them brush glue onto one section of the cross and then sprinkle colored salt over it. Next have them paint glue onto another section and sprinkle a different-colored salt in that space. Continue this process until the cross is covered. Remind children that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Story

47

Hosea

1–3



Let Justice Roll Down

AMOS 5

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Amos 5.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

The Bible teaches us so many truths about God. God is holy. God is love. God is just (or fair). God is great! The Bible also teaches us a lot about ourselves. We are born sinners who are not holy, loving, and just. Yet we think we are great! We are filled with pride. But when God's Spirit enters into our hearts, he changes us from the inside out. With new hearts we can think, talk, and act like God wants us to. But how does God want us to think, talk, and act? Like God! Because God is holy, he wants us to be different from the evil in the world. Because God is loving, he wants us to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. Because God is just, he wants us to treat others fairly. The prophet Micah put it this way:

[God] has told you . . . what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you

but to do justice, to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8)

The prophet Amos couldn't agree more! Like most of the prophets he tells God's people about God's gracious rescue plan that the Snake Crusher will usher in. But also like most of the prophets, he tells them that they are really big sinners who need to start thinking, speaking, and acting like God. And today, we're going to focus in on one of the ways Amos called people to reflect God.

TELL THE STORY

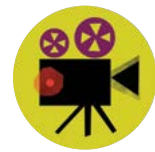
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
*The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook*



Play *The
Biggest Story*
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
God wants his
people to hate
evil, love good,
and seek justice.

Have you ever had someone (maybe a big brother!) steal a piece of pizza from your plate? Or, worse than that, has anyone ever pushed you to the ground on the playground and called you names? People around the world experience lots of injustice. “Injustice” is when people are treated in a way that isn’t right and wouldn’t please God. Like when someone is robbed or when a rich person can get out of trouble just because he is rich.

Amos called God’s people to “seek the LORD and live” (Amos 5:6). They needed to seek God because they had stopped listening to the prophets who spoke God’s words to them. They also needed to seek God because they had forgotten that he was a just God who required them to seek justice. Amos sighs, “You turn justice to wormwood!” (see 5:7). Wormwood is a plant that has an awful taste. It’s like Amos is saying that they are turning sweet justice into a sour, moldy, and stinky sandwich. Yuck!



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Amos

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Now, get this! God’s people were gathering together for religious feasts—they sang praise songs and offered sacrifices—but then they would leave worship and act in unjust ways. The rich and powerful treated the poor and powerless unfairly. They stole land from them. They used their power to push people down instead of picking them up. How foolish! You cannot worship and love God and *not* love your neighbor! God hated what they were doing. “I hate your feasts,” he said, “and I take no delight when you gather for worship. Your songs are noise in my ears and your sacrifices are yuck in my mouth” (see 5:21, 23).

God’s people had made the land dry and dark through their injustice. Amos called them to repent. Turn around! Turn back to God. “Hate evil, and love good, and start acting justly” (see 5:15). Then he gives this beautiful image of the rushing waters of a waterfall flowing into a never-ending river of goodness: “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). Instead of drying up the people and the land by taking away what is good, God wanted Israel to be like those waters—pouring justice and love over everyone.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

From the beginning God made man to be like him, perfect and good. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God and evil entered the world. People were no longer holy and just and loving like God. And yet God promised that one day he would destroy evil and bring about a perfect world again. And he did so through Jesus, the Snake Crusher. When Jesus came to earth, he announced that the perfect kingdom of God had come near (Mark 1:14–15). And then Jesus showed us what that perfect kingdom looks like. The Snake Crusher lived as the prophets asked God’s people to live. He always obeyed God. He was kind and loving. He was just and fair. He lifted up the poor. He was humble.

Jesus was so humble that he sacrificed his body on the cross so people like us—who aren’t loving, just, and humble—might be part of God’s perfect kingdom. Right now, the earth is full of injustice. Sin. Death. But one day, when Jesus returns to earth, he will make everything new and perfect. Then there will be more than a river of righteousness. The whole “earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Come, Lord Jesus, come! We want to live in that perfect kingdom.

3

Engage

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** What had God's people forgotten in Amos's day? What is God like? And what does he want his people to be like?

TAKEAWAY: God is holy, loving, and fair, and he wants his people to be holy, loving, and fair.

Memory Verse

Let justice
roll down like
waters.

AMOS 5:24

2. **QUESTION:** If we love God, how should we treat the people that God made? How does God feel when we come to worship him and say we love him but then act in unfair and unloving ways to our neighbors? Why?

TAKEAWAY: We can't love and worship God and not love our neighbor.

3. **QUESTION:** Whom did God send to destroy evil and begin his perfect kingdom? Why was Jesus able to destroy evil on the cross? How do sinful people like us get to be a part of God's perfect kingdom?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus was perfectly holy, loving, and fair, and he died so that we could be part of God's perfect kingdom.

4. **QUESTION:** Why is Jesus coming back to earth someday? What will he do?

TAKEAWAY: When Jesus returns, he will make the whole world perfect and new.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Caterpillar Relay

Supply List: plastic toy hoops (one per team)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Assign leaders to hold a plastic toy hoop in front of each team so children can walk through it.



Divide the class into teams of eight to ten children. Each team should line up behind a hoop with their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them. When the leader says “Caterpillars, wiggle!” the teams must go through the hoop, travel to the opposite end of the room, come back through the hoop, and return to the start line—all while staying connected. If a team breaks apart, they must stop and reconnect before continuing. The first team to get all players across the line wins. Remind children that we are to care for those around us and seek justice.

Option 2: Keys Game

Supply List: one set of keys, chairs

Before Class: Gather supplies. Scatter chairs randomly through the room (one chair less than the number of children).

Have everyone sit on a chair. The child that does not have a chair is the leader. Give the leader a large set of keys that jingle. Have the leader grab the hand of someone and lift that person up to join as the leader walks through the chairs. That person then grabs another child’s hand and does the same. Children continue to join the train until the leader drops the keys. When the keys drop, everyone standing runs to sit in a chair. The child who does not get a chair is the leader for the next round. Remind children that as God’s people we want to lift other people up and make them feel welcome.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Jump the Stream Challenge

Supply List: two long strings

Before Class: Gather supplies. Place two strings on the ground parallel to one another, about 1 foot apart.

Explain that between the two strings is a stream that the children need to jump over. Once everyone has jumped over the stream, widen it. If a child lands in the stream when she jumps, that child is out. After each jump, widen the strings until only one child remains. Remind children that God wanted Israel to be like a stream that flowed with justice.

Option 2: Keys Game

Supply List: one set of keys, chairs

Before Class: Gather supplies. Scatter chairs randomly through the room (one chair less than the number of children).

Have everyone sit on a chair. The child that does not have a chair is the leader. Give the leader a large set of keys that jingle. Have the leader grab the hand of someone and lift that person up to join as the leader walks through the chairs. That person then grabs another child's hand and does the same. Children continue to join the train until the leader drops the keys. When the keys drop, everyone standing runs to sit in a chair. The child who does not get a chair is the leader for the next round. Remind children that as God's people we want to lift other people up and make them feel welcome.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Sun Visor

Supply List: paper plates, hole punch, yarn, markers, foam pieces, stickers, jewels, glue sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut paper plates into a crescent shape (one per child). Punch one hole at each end of the crescent. Cut 8-inch pieces of yarn (two per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a prepared paper plate and two pieces of yarn. Place markers, foam pieces, stickers, jewels, and glue sticks on each table. Have children decorate the top side of the paper plate. Then help children attach a piece of yarn to each hole and tie the two pieces of yarn together to fit their head. Remind children that just as visors help us see things when it's sunny, the Lord helps us see how to live justly.

Option 2: Doorknob Hanger

Supply List: cardstock, colored pencils, markers, scissors, glue sticks, sequins, jewels

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a simple doorknob hanger on cardstock. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a doorknob hanger. Set remaining supplies on each table. Have the children write “Let justice roll down” on the hanger and cut it out. Then have them decorate it using the provided supplies.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Paper Wreath

Supply List: 9" x 18" construction paper (one per child), scissors, pencils, stapler, rulers, string

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Set supplies on each table. Have children fold a piece of construction paper lengthwise, then draw a line lengthwise about 2 inches from the edge that is open (not the folded, creased side). This is the “no cutting zone.” Have children cut slits from the folded side to the marked line every inch or half inch. Have them open up the paper, flip it over, and roll it to make a tube shape. Help children staple the tube closed and then staple the two ends of the tube together to form a circle. Have children cut out flowers, shapes, or bows and write words like *Welcome*, *Love*, and *Justice* on the shapes. Then glue the shapes to the wreath and tie a string to the top for hanging. Remind children that through Jesus, God welcomes us into his kingdom of perfect love and perfect justice.

Option 2: Give Generously Bank

Supply List: cardstock, scissors (one per child), tape, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a cube template on cardstock (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a cube template. Set markers, scissors, and tape on each table. Have children cut out the template, then write “Be Generous” on one face of the cube. Next, have them cut a slit in the center of what will be the top section of the cube. Help them fold the sides up and tape the sides together to form a cube-shaped bank. Remind children that God’s justice includes giving generously to those in need. Encourage them to collect money in this bank to give to someone in need.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Story

48

Amos

5



Famine and Feast

AMOS 8–9

BEFORE THE LESSON

- *Read Amos 8–9.*
- *Pray for God’s help. Ask for the Spirit’s help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children’s eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.*
- *Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.*

1
Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week’s story. {5 minutes}

2
Teach

God uses all sorts of people to teach his word to his people. Amos was a prophet but also a shepherd and farmer. He lived in Tekoa, a town on the border of Israel and Judah. The north was ruled by Jeroboam II, a really bad king. He made the kingdom very wealthy. That’s not bad in and of itself. Abraham was rich. Job was rich too. What is not good is when riches make you lazy or, even worse, when they make you forget God’s commands. That’s what happened to King Jeroboam and the people he ruled. They worshiped other gods, worked on the Sabbath, cheated people when they sold things, and ignored the poor. Amos called them people who “trample on the needy” (Amos 8:4). God hates when his people treat other people this way. Big time! So God sent Amos to tell them what he thought of their behavior. God gave Amos visions of his coming judgment. And unlike the picture in the last lesson of a river of justice giving life to the land, these visions were not pretty.

TELL THE STORY

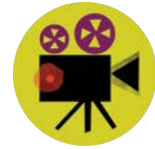
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
God's people
should worship
the God who
speaks and saves
by loving him and
loving others.

Think of all God had done for Israel: rescued them from slavery in Egypt, made them into a mighty nation, delivered them from enemies. Think of what God had called Israel to be: set apart to love him and to love others so that people could see what he was like. What would happen if God's people stopped acting like they are saved and set apart? What would happen if they disobeyed God's commands? They would face consequences. God would have to punish them for their sins—of course.

But here's a little trickier question. What if God's people acted like they were keeping his commands, but their hearts were far from God? That's what the people of the northern kingdom were doing. Some of their actions looked like they loved God. They still went to the temple, offered sacrifices, and sang praises to the Lord. But it was all a big show—they didn't really love God and love others! In fact, they worshiped other gods and cheated the poor. They thought they were *right* with God, but they were *wrong*. They were hypocrites, like an actor who puts on a mask of a certain character and starts acting like that person. God's people were playacting in their worship. They were fakes! As you might have guessed, faking it isn't enough. God doesn't want that kind of worship. He wants us to love him and show that by how we love our neighbors.

So God had enough. He wanted to get Israel's attention. He wanted them to repent. So he held back the rain and made their plants dry up. He sent big bugs to eat their crops. He allowed diseases to make his people sick. And he had their enemies punish them. They were so hungry and so sad. The saddest thing, though, was that God stopped speaking to them. "The days are coming," warned the Lord, "when I will send a famine on the land. But not a famine of bread or water—a famine of hearing



Story

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Amos

8-9

the words of the Lord” (see Amos 8:11). God’s silence was the worst punishment of all. It’s a bit like being in a dark room and then having your flashlight taken away.

Thankfully, that’s not the end of the story. God would not be silent forever. God spoke of a future day when he would raise his people up (like the dry bones!) and restore blessings to them. God promised they would eat and drink on that day until they were completely full, and they would hear him speak again. From famine to feast!

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Because God is good, he must punish evil like the “sinful kingdom” where Amos lived (Amos 9:8). When God’s judgment came on them, they had nowhere to hide. It was a dark day. Amos describes some trying to hide in the mountains and others at the bottom of the sea. He is exaggerating to make the point that no one could escape God’s judgment!

Someday soon there will be a similar but final judgment. Amos describes this future dark day like this: “On that day,” God declares, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. . . . I will make it feel like someone is crying that their only son has died” (see Amos 8:9–10).

This is also how the death of God’s Son, Jesus, is described: “From the sixth hour [noon] there was darkness over all the land” (Matt. 27:45). The darkness lasted until three, when Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you stopped speaking to me?” (see Matt. 27:46) and died. In that moment, when the Snake Crusher died, he provided the way to escape God’s final judgment. How? He took the punishment we deserve for all our sins. He died in our place as the sky went dark with God’s judgment. He died to save us from the final judgment. Then he rose and told his followers that he would be with them always. What a Savior! Let’s run to him so we can escape the judgment we deserve.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** How did God’s people get out of slavery in Egypt? How did God teach them how he wanted them to live? If we truly love God with our whole heart, who else will we love?

3

Engage

TAKEAWAY: After God saved his people from slavery, he taught them to love God and love others.

2. **QUESTION:** The northern kingdom acted like they loved God by singing to him and making sacrifices, but how did God know they were just acting? What did Amos say was coming because God's people didn't love others the way God had commanded?

TAKEAWAY: Because the northern kingdom only pretended to love God, and did not love others, God judged them with a famine.

Memory Verse

Man does not
live by bread
alone, but man
lives by every
word that comes
from the mouth
of the LORD.

DEUTERONOMY 8:3

3. **QUESTION:** What things happened when God judged his people? What was the worst thing God promised to do? What would it be like to never hear from God again? What good news did Amos give about the future?

TAKEAWAY: Amos warned that God would stop speaking to his people because of their sin, but he also promised that one day God would bless his people again and send a feast.

4. **QUESTION:** How did Amos describe the sky when he talked about God's judgment? What was the sky like when Jesus died on the cross? What do you think God was trying to show us? How can we escape God's judgment for our sin and receive his promised blessings?

TAKEAWAY: God punished Jesus on the cross for all our sins so that we could escape his judgment and receive all the promised blessings.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Fruit Basket Upset

Supply List: paper, tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Tape pieces of paper to the floor in a circle (one less than the total number of children).



Story

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Amos

8-9

Have children stand on a piece of paper. Assign each child a fruit name: apple, orange, or grape. Have one child stand in the middle of the circle and call out one of the fruits. The caller and the children who were assigned that fruit must move to a different spot in the circle. The child who is unable to get a spot is the caller for the next round. If the caller yells “Fruit Basket Upset,” all children must find a new spot around the circle. Remind children God sent a famine to get the Israelites’ attention.

Option 2: Rice Relay

Supply List: large sheet, plastic spoons (one per team), bowl of rice (one per team), jars (one per team), scale

Before Class: Gather supplies. Lay the sheet down. Set bowls of rice on the far side of the sheet. On the opposite side, set empty jars.

Divide the group into teams and give each team a spoon. The first person on each team crawls across the sheet to his or her team’s bowl of rice, spoons out some rice, carefully crawls back to his or her team’s jar, and dumps whatever rice is left on the spoon into the jar. The child then tags the next person in line to do the same thing. After all the children have raced, weigh each jar. The heaviest jar wins. Remind children God sent a famine to get the Israelites’ attention.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Don’t Get Caught Tag

Supply List: soft balls (five or more)

Before Class: Gather supplies.

Choose two children to be the taggers. Distribute five soft balls to five children that are not taggers (if you have a large group, add more taggers and balls). Explain the taggers will try to tag the children, but they can only tag someone who is holding a ball. If someone holding a ball is about to be tagged, that person should pass the ball to someone else. If someone gets tagged while holding a ball, that person is out and must sit down. After a few minutes, choose two different taggers and allow those who have been tagged to reenter the game. Remind children that sometimes we think we won’t get caught in our sins, but God sees and punishes all sin.

Option 2: Rice Relay

Supply List: large sheet, plastic spoons (one per team), bowl of rice (one per team), jars (one per team), scale

Before Class: Gather supplies. Lay the sheet down. Set bowls of rice on the far side of the sheet. On the opposite side, set empty jars.

Divide the group into teams and give each team a spoon. The first person on each team crawls across the sheet to his or her team's bowl of rice, spoons out some rice, carefully crawls back to his or her team's jar, and dumps whatever rice is left on the spoon into the jar. The child then tags the next person in line to do the same thing. After all the children have raced, weigh each jar. The heaviest jar wins. Remind children God sent a famine to get the Israelites' attention.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Dried Bean Collage

Supply List: cardstock, a variety of beans (split peas, lima beans, black beans, kidney beans, etc.), glue

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print outlines of simple shapes on cardstock (heart, flower, Bible, butterfly, etc.). Place beans on paper plates. Make a sample craft.

Allow each child to choose a shape. Set glue and beans on each table. Have children glue the beans to fill the shape. Remind children God sent a famine to get the Israelites' attention.

Option 2: Give Us Ears to Hear Headband

Supply List: cardstock, construction paper, copy paper, scissors, glue sticks, crayons, stapler

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a picture of a left ear and a right ear on cardstock. Print and cut out strips that say "Give us ears to hear" (one per child). Cut strips of construction paper 2 inches wide and staple two together for one long strip (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give children the ear paper, the word paper, and the stapled construction strip for the headband. Set scissors, crayons, and glue sticks on each table. Have children color the ears and word paper, then cut out the ears and glue them and the words to the headband. Help the children fit the headband around their heads like a crown and staple ends together. Remind children God's people should have listened to God's word.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Bible Bookmark

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, colored pencils, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print a bookmark with a picture of a Bible on it. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a bookmark paper. Set colored pencils, markers, and scissors on each table. Have the children write “Read Daily” on the bookmark, decorate it, and then cut it out. Remind children what a gift it is to hear from God in his word every day.

Option 2: Dried Bean Collage

See Above



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Story
49

Amos
8–9



Big Fish, Bigger Mercy

JONAH 1–4

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Jonah 1–4.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

Lots of the prophets, like Amos and Ezekiel, were good and godly men. They were humble, obedient, and merciful. The prophet Jonah was different. God spoke to him (like the other prophets) and said, “Get up and go to Nineveh.” Nineveh was a big city, but it was also a bad city. It was the home of the evil Assyrians. God told Jonah to go there and tell them that God had seen their evil deeds and was about to judge them for the terrible things they had done.

But Jonah did the opposite. He ran “from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3). You might think Jonah fled because he was afraid to go. Nineveh was awfully wicked. But that’s not why he fled. He tells us in 4:2 why he fled. He knew God was merciful, forgiving people when they repent. But Jonah wanted Nineveh to get what was coming to them. So instead of bringing God’s message

to them, he boarded a boat for a city that was far, far away. Jonah was trying to get as far away from Nineveh, and as far away from the Lord, as possible. How do you think that will turn out? What will a merciful God do with disobedient Nineveh? What will a merciful God do with his disobedient prophet?

TELL THE STORY

Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
God's people
should reflect
the mercy of
their God.

Can you hide from God's presence? Of course not! God is a spirit, so he can see you when you hide in your closet or at the bottom of a boat. Jonah should have known that. During his boat ride "the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea . . . so that the ship threatened to break up" (1:4). The sailors knew that this big storm was big trouble. And they soon found out that Jonah was the reason for the storm. Jonah told them he was disobeying God, and he suggested a plan. "Throw me overboard and the sea will calm down." Sure enough, once he splashed into the sea, the storm stopped. The sailors were amazed that they had been saved, and they praised the Lord for his mercy. But what about Jonah? Did he drown?

No! God sent a huge fish to swallow and save him! Jonah was amazed and praised the Lord inside the fish. When Jonah was the recipient of God's mercy, he liked it! God told the fish to spit Jonah out on the dry land. The fish obeyed God (maybe God's prophet could learn a thing or two from that fish). Once again God told Jonah, "Go to Nineveh." This time Jonah listened. When he got there, he announced, "In forty days, your city will be overthrown!" Jonah was glad the nasty Ninevites would be judged. But do you know what happened? They believed Jonah's warning, showed they were sorry for their sins, and changed



Story

50

Jonah

1–4

their ways. In response God was merciful on the disobedient Ninevites. Just like he'd been merciful to his disobedient prophet. Nineveh was saved!

Now that's a happy ending for the Ninevites, but it made Jonah mad! He was thankful God forgave him and saved him. But he hated that God would forgive and save his enemies. But God wanted his prophet to repent just like he wanted Nineveh to repent. So the merciful God hatched a plan. While Jonah was sitting in the hot sun, God made a huge plant grow and provide shade for him. Jonah was happy, but not for long. The next day, God destroyed the plant. Jonah was steaming mad! God asked him, "Why do you care more about one plant than the 120,000 people in Nineveh?" The Bible doesn't tell us if Jonah repented or if he learned to be merciful. But it does tell us that we worship a gracious and merciful God who is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love (see 4:2)—even to really bad people who repent.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Even though Jonah was the pouting prophet, Jesus used his story to point to his own death and resurrection.

The scribes and Pharisees shouted at Jesus. "Show us a sign that you are the Messiah!" Jesus had already shown lots of signs. He had cleansed a leper, healed a paralyzed man, and given sight to the blind. He had even raised the dead to life! What kind of sign were they looking for? They wanted a supernatural sign—like water turning to blood. Jesus replied to them, "Only people with no faith want a special sign like that. I will only give you one sure sign that I am the Messiah. Just as Jonah was three days in the belly of the great fish, so will I will be three days in a tomb" (see Matt. 12:39–40). What do you think he is talking about? Yes, he's talking about his death—and resurrection. On Friday he died. That night (day one) and the whole day after (day two) his body was buried. Then, on day three, he rose from the grave!

But Jesus didn't choose the story of Jonah just because the number of days matched. He chose the story because it was all about God's mercy for sinners who repent. Jesus's death and resurrection are the signs that prove he is the Son whom God sent to save us from our sins and the punishment of death. Anyone who trusts in Jesus—disobedient prophets or wicked enemies—can be saved.

3

Engage

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** When God first asked Jonah to go to Nineveh, why didn't Jonah want to go? What did he do? Why was that a silly thing to do?

TAKEAWAY: We cannot hide from God.

2. **QUESTION:** Why did God send the big storm on the boat? How did God save the sailors? How did he save Jonah? How did they both respond to God when he saved them?

TAKEAWAY: God's salvation should cause us to praise him.

3. **QUESTION:** Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? What happened when Jonah told the Ninevites that they were going to be conquered because of their sins? Why did God save them?

TAKEAWAY: God is merciful and saves those who repent.

4. **QUESTION:** What did the Pharisees ask Jesus to give them? What sign did Jesus say he would give them? How does Jesus's death and resurrection remind you of Jonah and the big fish?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus forgives and saves even his enemies by his death and resurrection.

Memory Verse

Salvation belongs
to the LORD!

JONAH 2:9

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Jonah, Jonah!

Supply List: toy fish

Before Class: Gather supplies.

Have children sit in a circle and place their hands behind their backs with palms up. Choose one person to be “Jonah,” and have him carry the fish while walking



Story

50

Jonah

1–4

around the circle. While Jonah walks, the rest of the children say, “Jonah, Jonah disobeyed. Until inside the fish he prayed.” When the children finish, Jonah drops the fish into the hands of the child in front of him. The child with the fish stands up and chases Jonah around the circle. Jonah runs around the circle and tries to sit in that person’s empty spot. If the chaser tags Jonah before he sits down, Jonah must sit in the “belly of the whale” (middle of the circle) for one round. The chaser becomes the new Jonah. Continue play until all children have had a turn.

Option 2: Great Fish and Jonahs

Supply List: none

Have children line up on one side of the room. Choose one “great fish” and have him or her stand in the middle of the room. Tell the class they are all like Jonah, who disobeyed God and ran away from Nineveh. When the great fish yells “Overboard!” the children run to the other side of the room. The great fish tries to tag as many Jonahs as possible. Everyone tagged becomes a great fish. Continue play until one Jonah remains.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Worm Tag

Supply List: streamers (one color per team), tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut streamers into 8-inch pieces (one per child with colors divided equally).

Divide the children evenly into teams. Assign each team a color, and tape streamers to children’s backs to match their team color (the streamers represent worms). On “Go” have children try to pull streamers off opposing teams’ backs. If a child’s streamer gets pulled, he or she is out. The team with the last child in play wins. Remind the children that Jonah cared more about a shade plant than the people of Nineveh. God showed Jonah his sin by sending a worm to kill the plant.

Option 2: Big Fish Tag

Supply List: none

Have children line up on one side of the room. Choose three children to be the “big fish” and to stand in the middle of the room holding hands. The remaining

children are “Jonahs.” Explain that the big fish will move together to swallow up children. To swallow someone, the two children on the ends of the trio clasp hands to complete a circle around a Jonah. Once a child is swallowed, he or she joins the big fish. Continue play until one Jonah remains. For larger groups, start with more than one big fish.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: “God Saves” Worm

Supply List: paper, plastic cups, glue sticks, construction paper, pencils, scissors, wiggly eyes

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print the Big Truth (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a Big Truth paper, plastic cup, pencil, and scissors. Set glue sticks, construction paper, and wiggly eyes on each table. Have children trace around their cup onto construction paper to make six circles. Have them cut out the circles and glue them together (overlapping a bit) to form a worm. Glue the worm onto the Big Truth paper. Attach the wiggly eyes. Remind children God used a worm to teach Jonah that he should be merciful.

Option 2: Jonah Swallowed Up!

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, glue sticks, crayons, brass fasteners

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a sheet of paper that includes a whale template with a simple open mouth, a separate whale mouth (same size as the one on the whale template), and a picture of Jonah that will fit inside the mouth. Make copies on cardstock (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child the printed cardstock and a brass fastener. Set crayons, scissors, and glue sticks on each table. Have children color and cut out the whale pieces and Jonah, then attach the whale’s mouth to the body using the fastener. Have them glue Jonah to the inside of the mouth so that he is visible when the mouth tilts up. Remind children that God had a great fish swallow up Jonah when he was disobedient.



Option 1: Jonah and Fish Cup Game

Supply List: plastic cups, paper, scissors, balloons, string, dried beans, permanent markers, tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a small picture of a whale. Cut string into 18-inch pieces. Poke holes in the bottom of the cups. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a whale picture, plastic cup, balloon, and string. Set tape, markers, and dried beans on the tables. Have children cut and tape the whale picture to the side of the cup. Have children use permanent markers to draw a stick figure man on the deflated balloon. Then have them work with a partner to put dried beans into their balloon until it is about three inches in diameter. Tie the balloon closed. Help children thread the string through the hole in the cup, using a knot and tape to secure it. Tie the other end of the string to the balloon. Challenge the children to try and catch Jonah in the whale's "mouth."

Option 2: "God Saves" Worm

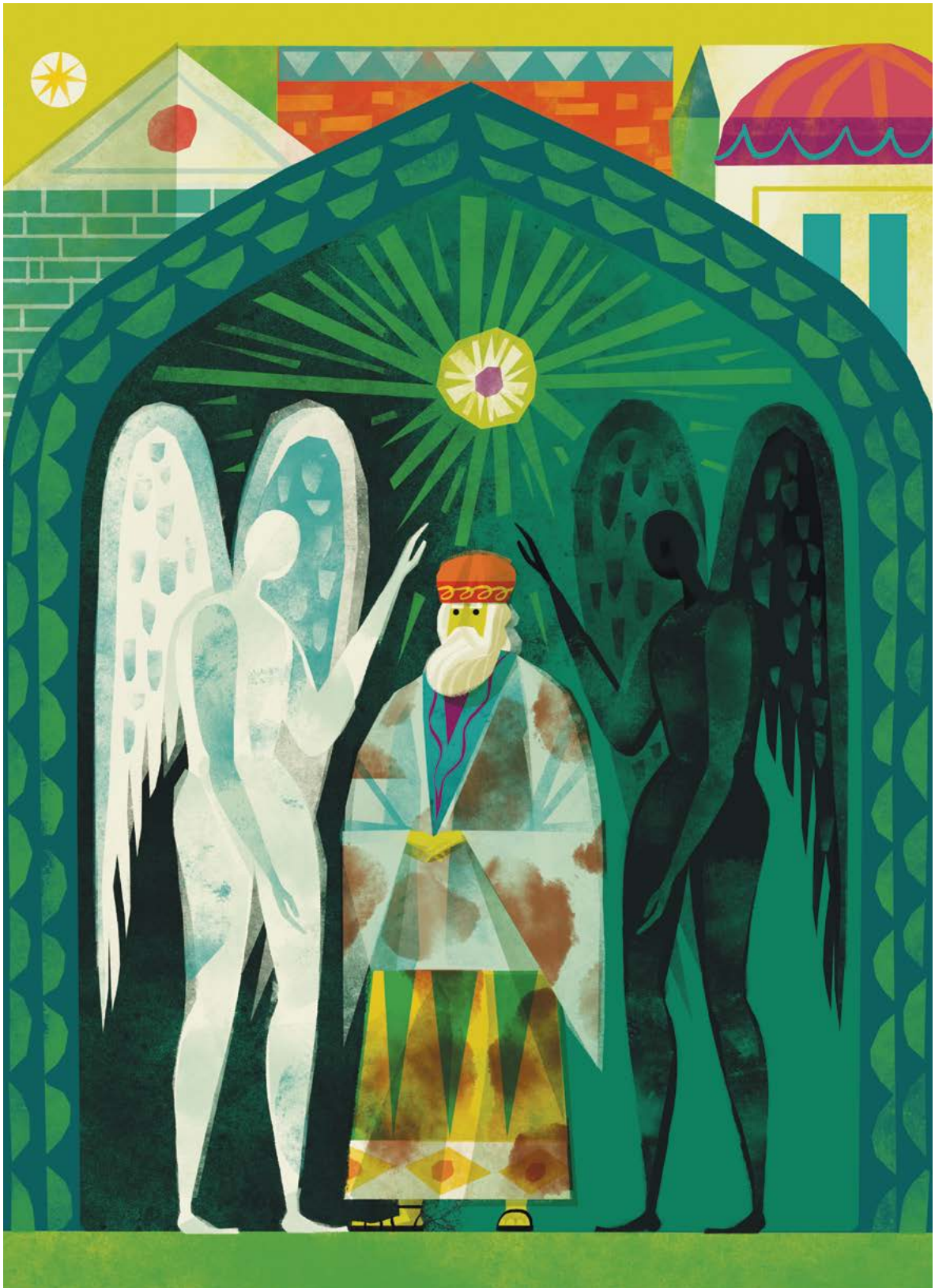
Supply List: paper, plastic cups, glue sticks, construction paper, pencils, scissors, wiggly eyes

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print the Big Truth (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a Big Truth paper, plastic cup, pencil, and scissors. Set glue sticks, construction paper, and wiggly eyes on each table. Have children trace around their cup onto construction paper to make six circles. Have them cut out the circles and glue them together (overlapping a bit) to form a worm. Glue the worm onto the Big Truth paper. Attach the wiggly eyes. Remind children God used a worm to teach Jonah that he should be merciful.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



STORY 51 October 1

A Change of Clothes

ZECHARIAH 3

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Zechariah 3.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

What happens when a nation that was supposed to be holy isn't so holy? Or even worse—what happens when the priests who were supposed to be holy weren't holy? We know that Israel was supposed to be holy. God told them through Moses, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Israel was called to be holy—set apart from the other nations—based on *who* they worshiped (Yahweh alone) and *how* they worshiped (loving God and loving others). But God's people also needed holy priests to lead them, teach them, and model holiness for them. These priests would work in the temple and make sacrifices so God's people could be forgiven. They were very important, and so it was important they remained holy. It was so important, God designed special clothes for them. These special, clean clothes symbolized their important

job. But there was one big problem with these priests. These “holy” men were often not very holy. So what happens? Any guesses? In the story we’re looking at today, something very unexpected happens. And something very important!

TELL THE STORY

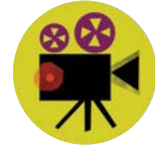
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
We are terribly
dirty, but God
makes us
perfectly clean!

Have you ever been playing outside when it started to rain? I bet when you got home your parent said something like, “Let’s get you out of these filthy clothes and get you cleaned up.” Well, something similar happened to Joshua, the high priest during the days of the prophet Zechariah. He came into the holy place where priests would meet with God, and he did so “clothed with filthy garments” (Zech. 3:3). His “holy” clothing was as dirty as if someone splattered diapers on him. Yuck! Do you know why he looked so filthy to God? Not just because of his filthy clothes but because he had not been acting holy. He was not loving God and his neighbors! This sinner had no right to stand before God and offer sacrifices for other people’s sins.

Now if it wasn’t bad enough that Joshua was filthy, guess who was standing next to him—Satan, that slithering serpent we read about in the garden of Eden. Satan was up to his old tricks. He was accusing Joshua, saying something like, “Ha, some *holy* priest. This man is a mess! God, you should throw him out of your temple and toss him into hell.” God could have listened to Satan, because, after all, Joshua was a mess. But God didn’t. He told Satan to leave. And he showed mercy to sinful, messy Joshua. “This man,” he said to Satan, “is like a stick I have saved from a roaring fire” (see 3:2). God not only saved the high priest from the judgment he deserved but also forgave him and clothed him



Story

51

Zechariah

3

with his own holiness. He stripped him of his yucky garments and clothed him with a clean white robe, a clean white sash, and clean white hat. He then told Joshua to start living like he looked. Pure. Holy. Set apart. No more dirty tricks. No more walking in his own ways. From now on, he was to be holy as the God who saved him is holy.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Do any of you wonder why God told this story about changing the clothes of one of his priests? It's definitely a picture of how God forgives our sins, but it's even more than that. And the clue that there's something more is a strange bit about a "Branch" (3:8). What, or who, is the Branch? The Branch was the better, perfectly holy high priest who was coming. The prophet said that Joshua in his new, clean garments looked like this Branch. That promised, future, perfect high priest is called the "Branch" because he will come from King David's family tree. He might look like just one branch on a tree with lots of branches, but he will do what no high priest has ever done before. He will "remove the sin of God's people in a single day" (see Zech. 3:9). Can you guess who the Branch might be? Yes, it is Jesus, the Snake Crusher! When he died as a punishment for sin on the cross, that very moment, on that one day in history, all our sins—past, present, and future—were paid for. Totally forgiven! This priest took our stinky, filthy clothes and gave us his clean, perfect clothes.

This calls for a celebration, don't you think? Absolutely. And that is absolutely how the story in Zechariah ends. With a celebration. A feast! Come join the party. Grab a seat at the table. Enjoy some figs (or at least some yummy food) with some friends. Grab a glass of grape juice, and let us drink with thanks to the God whose perfect priest makes our terribly dirty selves cleaner than clean!

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

- 1. QUESTION:** When God told his people to be holy like him, how were they supposed to treat other people? And who were they supposed to worship? Why can't God be around unholy people?

TAKEAWAY: Because God is holy, only holy people can be in his presence.

3

Engage

Memory Verse

Behold, I have
taken your
iniquity away
from you, and
I will clothe
you with pure
vestments.

ZECHARIAH 3:4

2. **QUESTION:** If we picture God's holiness as something perfectly clean, what would it look like to be unholy? What things make us unholy, or dirty, in God's eyes (since we know it's not dirt)?

TAKEAWAY: Our sin makes us dirty, or unholy, in God's eyes.

3. **QUESTION:** Why couldn't God's people go into the temple and meet with God? What did the priests have to do to be allowed to be in God's presence? What did Joshua fail to do? What did God do for Joshua?

TAKEAWAY: To be in God's presence we must be cleaned from our sin.

4. **QUESTION:** Who did the angel of the Lord say was coming to remove the sin from Israel in a single day? Who is the Branch? Since we have all sinned and become unholy or dirty, how can we become clean? How does the story in Zechariah end, and why is that the perfect response?

TAKEAWAY: Let's celebrate that Jesus, the promised high priest and Branch from David's family tree, has removed our sin.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Exchange Dirty for Clean Relay

Supply List: cotton balls (two per child), painter's tape, garbage bags, straws

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make dirty cotton balls by coloring them with marker (one per child). Using wide painter's tape, make 10-foot lines perpendicular to the start line (one per team). Place dirty cotton balls at the start of each line, and place garbage bags and clean cotton balls at the far end of each line.

Divide children into teams and assign each team a line of tape. Give each child a straw. The first person on each team blows a dirty cotton ball to the end of her tape, puts the dirty cotton ball into the garbage, picks up a clean cotton ball, and blows it back to the start. If the child blows the cotton ball off the tape, she



must stop and put it back before continuing. The first team to have all its players finish wins. Remind children that through Jesus, God has made us clean.

Option 2: Dirty Swamp

Supply List: none

Have children stand on one end of the room. Have one child be the crocodile and stand in the middle of the room. The children say, “Crocodile, crocodile, may we cross your dirty swamp?” The crocodile replies, “Only if you are wearing the color _____.” Any children wearing that color can pass freely to the other side. Then the crocodile says, “I’m hungry! Try to cross my swamp!” The remaining children try to cross the room without being tagged by the crocodile. If tagged, that child becomes a crocodile and helps tag children in the next round. Continue play until one child remains. Remind children that we make ourselves dirty with sins (not swamps!), but God wipes us clean through Jesus.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Dirty Laundry Relay

Supply List: laundry baskets, robes, sashes, hats

Before Class: Gather supplies. Fill each laundry basket with a robe, sash, and hat (one per team). Place baskets on the far end of the room.

Divide children into teams. The first person on each team must run to the team’s basket, put on the items inside, pick up the empty basket, run back to the team, take off the items, and put them back into the basket. The second child then carries the filled basket down to the other side and repeats the process. The first team to have all its players finish wins. Explain that God gave Joshua new clothes to show that God makes us clean.

Option 2: Exchange Dirty for Clean Relay

Supply List: cotton balls (two per child), painter’s tape, garbage bags, straws

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make dirty cotton balls by coloring them with marker (one per child). Using wide painter’s tape, make 10-foot lines perpendicular to the start line (one per team). Place dirty cotton balls at the start of each line, and place garbage bags and clean cotton balls at the far end of each line.

Divide children into teams and assign each team a line of tape. Give each child a straw. The first person on each team blows a dirty cotton ball to the end of her tape, puts the dirty cotton ball into the garbage, picks up a clean cotton ball, and blows it back to the start. If the child blows the cotton ball off the tape, she must stop and put it back before continuing. The first team to have all its players finish wins. Remind children that through Jesus, God has made us clean.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: A Life Change Picture

Supply List: cardstock, dirt, paper plates, glue sticks, crayons, scissors, wipes, craft sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print pictures of an Israelite priest on cardstock (two per child). Place a small amount of dirt on paper plates. Make a sample craft.

Give each child two priest pictures. Set glue sticks, crayons, scissors, craft sticks, and dirt on each table. Have children color the priests and cut them out. Have them make one of the priests filthy by rubbing dirt on his clothes but keep the other priest “clean” (use wipes to clean children’s hands). Have them glue a craft stick between the two priests (back-to-back). Encourage the children to retell the story of how God made Joshua clean.

Option 2: Bubble Painting

Supply List: bubble solution, tempera paint, bowls, bubble wands, cardstock, crayons

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a variety of colored bubble solutions by mixing half a cup of bubble solution with 1 tablespoon of tempera paint in bowls. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of cardstock. Set crayons, bubble wands, and colored bubble solutions on each table. Have children write “God makes us clean” on the paper, then have them blow bubbles onto the paper and watch as the bubbles pop into interesting patterns.



Option 1: Dry-Erase Plates

Supply List: white plastic plates (not paper), permanent markers, dry-erase markers, paper towels

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a plate. Set permanent markers on each table. Have children decorate the outside edge of the plate, leaving the inside undecorated to be used as a whiteboard. Have them write the Big Truth on the back of the plate with permanent markers. Provide dry-erase markers that children can use to draw or write sins that make a person dirty before God, then use a paper towel to wipe those sins away.

Option 2: Bubble Painting

Supply List: bubble solution, tempera paint, bowls, bubble wands, cardstock, crayons

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a variety of colored bubble solutions by mixing half a cup of bubble solution with 1 tablespoon of tempera paint in bowls. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of cardstock. Set crayons, bubble wands, and colored bubble solutions on each table. Have children write “God makes us clean” on the paper, then have them blow bubbles onto the paper and watch as the bubbles pop into interesting patterns.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



The Great and Awesome Day of the Lord

MALACHI 3–4

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Malachi 3–4.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1
Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2
Teach

We are at the end of the Old Testament! Soon our adventure in the New Testament begins. What are some of your favorite stories so far? Maybe when God brought sad Joseph out of prison and into power over Egypt? Or when God used the birth of a baby to turn Bitter Naomi into Blessed Naomi? Or when God protected Daniel while he was in the lions' den? All these stories tell us more about the Snake Crusher whom God would use to deliver us. He was the promised offspring of Abraham. He was the goat taken outside the camp. He was the Passover Lamb. He was the tabernacle that made a way for sinful people to be with a holy God. The Snake Crusher's entrance is getting closer and closer,

clearer and clearer. But before he comes, we have one more prophet's voice to hear. What will this last prophet say?

TELL THE STORY

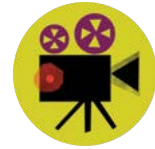
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Because of our
Savior, all who
turn to God have
a great future!

The last prophet's name is Malachi. And he had some pretty hard things to say. Because even after all the other prophets, even after the exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God's people were still turning their backs on God. They were not bringing the right animals into the temple for sacrifice (and the priests didn't care about it). Men were divorcing their wives, marrying women who worshiped pagan gods, and then worshiping those gods too. They stole from God (by not giving him their tithe), treated the poor poorly, and refused to care for those in need (widows, orphans, and refugees). It was like nothing had changed in a hundred years! So Malachi warned that God's day of judgment was coming. On that day, Malachi said, the wicked would be burned and become like ashes in a fireplace: "utter destruction" (Mal. 4:6). Sounds like the Snake Crusher will be crushing more than just Satan.

But the Snake Crusher is also a rescuer. And Malachi didn't just have hard things to say. He also spoke about how the day of judgment would also be a day of salvation for those who trust in the Lord. He uses beautiful poetry to express this good news: "The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall" (4:2). We should be like the righteous. They not only personally trusted in the Lord and obeyed his com-

mands but also got together regularly to read the Bible and to remember how great God is. Blessings always follow those who follow the Lord!

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Through Malachi, God said, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me” (3:1). The messenger will prepare the way for the day of God’s returning and living with his people. The New Testament tells us that John the Baptist is this messenger who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus, Immanuel (God with us). Jesus is the good news God’s people have been promised since the very beginning! He is the Snake Crusher that was promised to Eve. He is Abraham’s offspring bringing a blessing to all nations. He is the Branch from David’s family tree, who rules as the forever King of the forever kingdom. Jesus is the Passover Lamb, the goat taken outside the camp, and the one who delivered from the fiery furnace.

God’s people didn’t know exactly what to look for when God would return to live with his people. But if they paid attention to the Bible, they knew that their coming Savior would be a *teacher* greater than Moses, a *priest* purer than Aaron, and a *king* wiser than Solomon. They knew he would be born of a virgin, preach good news to the poor, heal the sick, and then suffer and die for his people’s sins. They also knew he would rise from the dead and someday return to judge and save. The Bible was full of pictures to show them what their coming Savior was like. And soon he would appear, not as a mighty king, but as a helpless baby.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

- 1. QUESTION:** Have you ever been punished for doing something wrong—and then done it again? Why do you think we do that? After God’s people returned from exile, did they fully obey God?

TAKEAWAY: Even after the judgment of exile, God’s people did not obey God’s word.



Story

52

Malachi

3–4

3

Engage

Memory Verse
For you who
fear my name,
the sun of
righteousness
shall rise with
healing in its
wings.

MALACHI 4:2

2. QUESTION: Since God's people continued to disobey God, what did Malachi say would happen? What would happen if they turned back to God?

TAKEAWAY: Malachi warned that the day of the Lord will mean judgment for those who don't return to God—and salvation for those who do.

3. QUESTION: What were some things we've seen in the Biggest Story so far that pointed to Jesus as the coming Savior?

TAKEAWAY: The whole Old Testament gives us pictures to point us to Jesus, the promised Savior.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Red Light, Green Light

Supply List: none

Line children up on one side of the room. Choose someone to be “It” and have him or her stand at the opposite end of the room and call out “Red Light” or “Green Light.” On Green Light, the players move forward. On Red Light, the players freeze. Any child who “It” sees move returns to the starting line. The winner is the one who reaches the opposite side of the room first. Tell the child who is “It” to take long pauses after calling “Red Light” to remind us that the Israelites waited a long time for the Messiah's coming.

Option 2: Watch for Jesus

Supply List: construction paper

Before Class: Write the name Jesus on a piece of construction paper.

Have children stand in a circle. Instruct them to walk clockwise while keeping an eye on the leader. When the leader holds up the *Jesus* paper, they must freeze. If a child moves when the *Jesus* paper is in the air, he or she is out. Play continues until one child remains.



Option 1: Smile Game

Supply List: chairs

Before Class: Set chairs in a circle (one per child).

Have children sit in chairs. Choose someone to be “It.” Have him or her walk around the circle, stop in front of a seated child, and say, “If you love Jesus, please, please smile,” and do something silly to get the child to smile (without touching the child). Without smiling or laughing, the seated child should reply, “I really love Jesus, but I just can’t smile.” If the seated child smiles, he or she becomes “It.” If not, the child who is “It” must try to make someone else smile.

Option 2: Unscramble Relay

Supply List: plastic cups, permanent marker

Before Class: Write one letter per cup to spell the names Messiah, Savior, and Immanuel (one set per team). Scramble each set of cups and stack them on the opposite side of the room (one stack per team).

Divide children into teams. On “Go” the first person on each team crawls “leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal. 4:2) by moving as fast as he or she can on all fours to the stack of cups. The child then picks up two cups and runs back to the team (on two feet). The next person repeats the process and the team continues until all cups have been collected. To finish the race, the team must unscramble the cups and spell *Messiah*, *Savior*, and *Immanuel*. The first team to finish wins.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

Option 1: Watch for Jesus Craft

Supply List: construction paper (white, black, blue, green, brown), yarn, glue, scissors, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut 1-inch pieces of yarn (twelve to fourteen per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of white paper, black paper, and paper that matches his or her eye color. Set yarn pieces, glue, scissors, and markers on tables. Have children draw two large oval shapes (eyes) on the white paper, two circles on the eye-colored paper, and two smaller circles on the black paper. Instruct the children to cut out the circles and to glue them to the ovals (colored circle first, then black). Glue on yarn pieces for eyelashes. Have children write “Watch for Jesus” on the construction paper.

Option 2: Weaving Placemat

Supply List: construction paper, scissors, rulers, glue sticks, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut various colors of construction paper into 1-inch strips. Make a sample craft.

Set glue sticks and paper strips on tables. Give each child a piece of construction paper, and instruct the children to fold it lengthwise. Have them draw a line down the length of the paper 1 inch from the open edge. Next, draw lines from the folded edge to the line they just drew spaced 1 inch apart. Cut along these lines. Open the paper. Use the precut strips of paper to weave through the slits in the base paper by going over and under. For subsequent rows, alternate the weaving pattern, going under the strips that you had gone over on the last strip. When the placemat is filled, cut the ends of the strips and glue them to the base paper to secure. Write the phrase “Jesus is our hope” on the placemat.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Names of Jesus Mobile

Supply List: large construction paper, scissors, yarn, hole punches, staplers, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut 3-inch strips lengthwise from 11" x 18" construction paper (one per child). Cut a variety of lengths of yarn (ranging from 12 to 16 inches). Make a sample craft.



Story

52

Malachi

3-4

Brainstorm different names of Jesus with the children and display them. Set paper strips, yarn pieces, construction paper, scissors, hole punches, staplers, and markers on tables. Have children write “Jesus Name above All Names” on a paper strip and staple the ends together to form a circle. Have the children write at least five different names of Jesus on construction paper, then cut around each name to form different shapes. Have children punch holes around the paper circle and in the top of each name/shape. Create a mobile by threading yarn through the holes to attach shapes to the circle. Add a piece of yarn to the top for hanging.

Option 2: Weaving Placemat

Supply List: construction paper, scissors, rulers, glue sticks, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut various colors of construction paper into 1-inch strips. Make a sample craft.

Set glue sticks and paper strips on tables. Give each child a piece of construction paper, and instruct the children to fold it lengthwise. Have them draw a line down the length of the paper 1 inch from the open edge. Next, draw lines from the folded edge to the line they just drew spaced 1 inch apart. Cut along these lines. Open the paper. Use the precut strips of paper to weave through the slits in the base paper by going over and under. For subsequent rows, alternate the weaving pattern, going under the strips that you had gone over on the last strip. When the placemat is filled, cut the ends of the strips and glue them to the base paper to secure. Write the phrase “Jesus is our hope” on the placemat.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



A New Baby and a New Beginning

MATTHEW 1

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Matthew 1.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1
Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2
Teach

After a whole year, we finally finished the Old Testament. Now we come to the New Testament! It's kind of like hearing a complicated riddle and then finally finding the answer to the riddle. Think of all the hints we've gotten. The Savior will be a Snake Crusher. He will be the true temple. He will be the sacrifice for our sins. He will be *the prophet* greater than Elijah, *the priest* in the order of Melchizedek, and *the king* greater than David!

And all these Old Testament shadows and symbols point forward to the Jesus we meet in the New Testament. Another way to think about the two big sections in the Bible—Old Testament and New Testament—is with the word *covenant*. And

if you remember, covenants were a special kind of promise. The Old Testament tells what God promised to do for his people and the New Testament tells how Jesus fulfills those promises.

The New Testament starts with four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They tell us the good news (or “gospel”) of Jesus’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. These four Gospels are like four cameras that are filming the same scenes. They give us four different angles on the big stories of the Biggest Story. We turn now to the opening scene. Lights. Cameras. Action!

TELL THE STORY

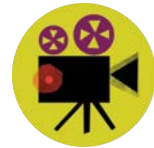
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Jesus was born to
save his people
from their sin.

What do we celebrate on Christmas? The birth of our country? No. The new year? No. When the groundhog sees its shadow? Come on, now. On Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus. You know that. But you may not know the strange way Matthew begins the story of Christmas. He starts with a long list of names, called a *genealogy*. *Genealogy* is just a fancy way of saying family tree. Why would he tell the story of Christmas with a genealogy? One reason would be to remind us that Jesus was a real person. Another reason would be to remind us that he’s the promised Snake Crusher (see Matt. 1:1). Those are important reasons. But there just might be a final one. When we read the long list of names, we’re reminded of how sinful people are. There are some big-time sinners on the list. Even Abraham and David, men of great faith, were big-time sinners.

What does all this have to do with Jesus? Well, Jesus wasn’t a big-time sinner. Instead, he was a big-time Savior from sin. Even though he was fully human, he



Story

53

Matthew 1

was also fully God. And even though he came from a long line of sinners, he was born in a special way so he could do some special rescuing: he was from God. The angel Gabriel explained to Mary how this would happen: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you . . . therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). And since God is without sin, Jesus could be born free from the sin that marked his genealogy.

Now here’s where the story gets really interesting. Mary was engaged to Joseph. He was shocked to find out Mary was pregnant! He decided the best course was to quietly break up with her. But God sent an angel to let him in on what God was doing. “Joseph,” the angel told him, “Marry Mary, for the baby in her has been conceived from the Holy Spirit” (see Matt. 1:20). Joseph listened. The angel continued, “The baby will be a boy. When he is born, your job is to name him Jesus.” Joseph must have wondered, “Why that name? It’s not a family name.” The reason was that the name means “Yahweh saves.” The angel explained, “Call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (see v. 21). Joseph and Mary obeyed the angel’s orders. They got married, she gave birth, and Joseph called the baby Jesus.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

The New Testament was written in Greek. We use some Greek words in English—like *galaxy*, *acrobat*, and *dinosaur*. Dinosaur is made from two Greek words: *denios* (which mean “terrible”) and *savra* (which means “lizard”). A dinosaur is a terrible lizard! Guess what is the second word in the New Testament. In Greek, it’s the word *genesis*. In English, it’s “genealogy.” Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew used that word to remind us that when Jesus was born, there was a new beginning—a new genesis! This new genesis in Jesus is an invitation to us to enjoy a new life. If we trust him as our Savior, he gives us a new heart and a new start. Ask yourself today, “Do I have sins that need to be forgiven?” The answer is yes! Then ask yourself, “Who can forgive me?” The answer is Jesus! Remember what his name means? It means “Yahweh saves.” Remember what he did on the cross? He saved “his people from their sins” (1:21). He can save you too! Trust in him today and experience your new genesis.

3

Engage

Memory Verse

She [Mary] will
bear a son, and you
[Joseph] shall call
his name Jesus,
for he will save
his people from
their sins.

MATTHEW 1:21

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** What's the name of the first book in the Bible? How does the Gospel of Matthew begin? By beginning the story of Jesus's birth with a genealogy (which is from the same Greek word as *genesis*), what do you think Matthew is trying to say about the birth of Jesus?

TAKEAWAY: The birth of Jesus gives a new beginning to the world God created.

2. **QUESTION:** Who were some of the people named in Jesus's family tree (or "genealogy")? Did those people always follow God perfectly? If they were sinners, and Jesus came from their family, how could he be born without sin?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus is fully human—but without sin.

3. **QUESTION:** What was Joseph told to name Jesus? Why? How can we be saved from our sin?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus was born to save his people from their sin.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Jump from Old Testament to New Testament Game

Supply List: two ropes

Before Class: Gather supplies.

Place ropes parallel to one another a foot apart. Tell the children that the first rope is called Old Testament and the second rope is called New Testament. Have children form a line perpendicular to the first rope. The children should take turns attempting to jump over both ropes. If a child succeeds, he or she goes to the back of the line. If a child does not clear both ropes, he or she is out. After all children have attempted the jump, increase the distance between the two ropes and have remaining children jump again. Continue to increase the distance



between the ropes until one child remains and is the winner. Explain that in class we will be “leaping” from Old Testament stories to New Testament stories.

Option 2: Matching Wrapping Paper Game

Supply List: wrapping paper (various designs, one design for every two children), envelopes (one per child), scissors

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut three squares from each wrapping paper design. Hide one square of each design around the room, and place the other two each in their own envelope.

Give each child an envelope. On “Go” have children open their envelopes and find the other person with a matching piece. Together they must find their matching square hidden in the room. First team to find it wins. Remind children that the greatest gift is Jesus!

3rd–5th

Option 1: Matching Wrapping Paper Game

Supply List: wrapping paper (various designs, one design for every two children), envelopes (one per child), scissors

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut three squares from each wrapping paper design. Hide one square of each design around the room and place the other two each in their own envelope

Give each child an envelope. On “Go” have children open their envelopes and find the other person with a matching piece. Together they must find their matching square hidden in the room. First team to find it wins. Remind children that the greatest gift is Jesus!

Option 2: Christmas Picture Guessing Game

Supply List: whiteboard, dry-erase marker, notecards, pen

Before Class: Gather supplies. Write things related to Jesus's birth (shepherd, angel, baby Jesus, Mary, stable, star, Joseph, etc.) on cards.

Select a child to pick a card and give him thirty seconds to draw the word. Have the rest of the class try to guess what the child is drawing. If a child guesses correctly, he or she can either draw next or choose who does. If no one guesses correctly, reveal the answer and choose a different child to draw.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Christmas Wreath

Supply List: flat paper plates, scissors, hole punch, string, red and green paper, glue sticks, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Punch a hole in the top of each plate, and tie an 8-inch string to each for hanging (one per child). Cut 1-inch squares of green paper (ten per child). Cut 1-inch circles of red paper. Print bows on red paper. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a paper plate, scissors, and bow. Set green squares, red circles, markers, and glue sticks on tables. Have children write “Thank you for Jesus!” in the center of their plates. Have children glue the green squares on the ridged area of their plates. Have children cut out their bow, then have them glue the bow and four red circle “berries” on top of the green squares. Tell children this Christmas wreath can remind us that we have much to be thankful for in Jesus.

Option 2: Christmas Vase

Supply List: jars (one per child), bowls, glue, yarn (red, green, etc.), paintbrushes

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut assorted colors of yarn into 24-inch pieces. Place glue in bowls. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a jar and a paintbrush. Set yarn and bowls of glue on tables. Starting at the bottom, have children brush glue around a section of their jar. Next, have them wrap a piece of yarn around the jar, keeping each consecutive row tight against the one before it. When the piece of yarn ends, have them choose another piece of yarn to continue wrapping around the jar, brushing on more glue as needed. Continue until the whole jar is wrapped with yarn. Encourage children to give this jar as a gift to someone and to tell that person that Jesus is the greatest gift ever given.



Option 2: God with Us Door Hanger

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, hole punch, yarn, markers, stickers, sequins, glue

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut cardstock in half lengthwise to create door hangers (one door hanger per child). Punch two holes at the top of each door hanger for the yarn. Cut 12-inch pieces of yarn (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a door hanger and a piece of yarn. Place markers, stickers, sequins, and glue on each table. Have children write “Immanuel” vertically on the door hanger and “God with Us” below, then have them decorate with the provided materials. When they are finished decorating, have them string the yarn through the holes and tie a knot so that it can be hung from a doorknob.

Option 2: Christmas Vase

Supply List: jars (one per child), bowls, glue, yarn (red, green, etc.), paintbrushes

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut assorted colors of yarn into 24-inch pieces. Place glue in bowls. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a jar and a paintbrush. Set yarn and bowls of glue on tables. Starting at the bottom, have children brush glue around a section of their jar. Next, have them wrap a piece of yarn around the jar, keeping each consecutive row tight against the one before it. When the piece of yarn ends, have them choose another piece of yarn to continue wrapping around the jar, brushing on more glue as needed. Continue until the whole jar is wrapped with yarn. Encourage children to give this jar as a gift to someone and to tell that person that Jesus is the greatest gift ever given.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Wise Men, Smart Move

MATTHEW 2

BEFORE THE LESSON

- *Read Matthew 2.*
- *Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is, what he has done, and how they should respond to him.*
- *Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.*

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is given many names. Already the angels have called him the “Son of God” (Luke 1:35), “Immanuel” (which means “God with us”; Matt. 1:23), and “Jesus” (which means “Yahweh saves”; 1:21). Matthew also calls Jesus the “Christ” (1:1), because that word means “Anointed” or “King.” The word *king* might remind you of God’s promise to David. God promised David that from his offspring would come an eternal king who would rule an everlasting kingdom. And don’t forget about God’s promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through his Snake-Crushing offspring.

That brings us to one more name for Jesus in our story today. Wise men from the east followed a star a great distance to find the one they called “king of the Jews” (see 2:1–2). Could this king of the Jews also be the King of all the nations?

Let's find out by looking at what the wise men came to do and what that tells us about King Jesus.

TELL THE STORY

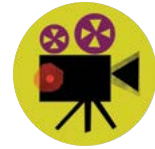
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Jesus is the King
of all nations.

A long, long time ago, God promised that a king would come from the people of Israel who would be worshiped by people from every nation. Jesus is that King, and the story today gives us an early picture of what will one day be the world's biggest worship service.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town outside the big city of Jerusalem. At that time, Herod was the king over the Jews living in that region. One day, wise men from a faraway country came to Jerusalem. These men were called “magi” (from which we get the word “magic”) because they were pagan priests and stargazers. They came because a bright star rose in the sky, and it was a sign to them that a king had been born. In fact, God sent the star to lead them to his Son.

When they arrived, they asked where the new king was so they could worship him. Herod was troubled and asked the religious leaders where the coming “Christ” (or “king”) was to be born; they said Bethlehem. So Herod told the wise men to head to Bethlehem and find the new king. And so they did. In fact, the star led them to Bethlehem and the exact place where Jesus was. They “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matt. 2:10). They were super-duper happy! Then, going into the home, they saw baby Jesus in his mother's arms, and they did what they came to do: “They fell down and worshiped him” (2:11). Part of their worship was to bow before him, acknowledging him as King, and another part

was to give treasures to him—precious gold and expensive, nice-smelling oils (frankincense and myrrh).

The sad part about this story is what Herod did with the news of Jesus's birth. He was jealous of Jesus, and he thought that this new king would take over his kingdom and that he would lose his power. He told the wise men to find Jesus so he could worship him, but he actually wanted to kill him. Imagine that! But God protected his Son (and the wise men too). God warned them in a dream to get out of town. Nothing (not even a king!) would stop Jesus, the baby King, from coming to save his people.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Three times in Matthew 2 Herod is called “king.” This is because Herod ruled over part of Israel. Jesus is called a “king” too. The wise men come to find the one “who has been born *king* of the Jews” (2:2). Of course, Jesus is more than the king of the Jewish people; he is King of all creation. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18). That’s a lot of authority. Total power! Many powerful people, like Herod, are not good people. But Jesus is perfectly good. Unlike Herod, who lived in a stately palace, Jesus was born in a lowly stall. And unlike Herod, who sought to kill all his enemies, Jesus was born to die for his enemies—sinners like us. This is the good news of our good Savior. He is humble and gentle, yet great and powerful; he is King of kings, yet he came to seek and save the lost.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** How long did God say his promised King would rule? What people do we see come worship the King of the Jews in today’s story? What does this show us about God’s promise that all nations would worship Israel’s King?

TAKEAWAY: The wise men show that God is keeping his promise that all nations will worship Israel’s King.

2. **QUESTION:** How did the wise men know a king had been born? Who controls the stars? Who did the wise men tell? What did Herod want to do to



Story
54

Matthew 2

3

Engage

Jesus? How did God protect Jesus? Herod might have thought he was in control, but who controls all things?

TAKEAWAY: From stars to kings, God controls all things.

Memory Verse

Let everything
that has breath
praise the LORD!

PSALM 150:6

3. **QUESTION:** What did the wise men come to do? Why? What should Herod and the people of Jerusalem have done when they learned the promised King had been born? Why? What should we do? Why?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus deserves our worship.

4. **QUESTION:** What did Herod want to do to Jesus? Why? Why can't anyone stop Jesus from saving and ruling over his people? Is Jesus still King today? Will his kingdom ever end?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus is the forever King.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from *TheBiggestStory.com*, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Herod Says

Supply List: none

Have children stand. Give an instruction (e.g., “Jump up and down” or “Turn in circles”). The children should do the actions as commanded. Alternate by sometimes starting commands with “Herod says” (e.g., “Herod says, march in place”). The children should *not* obey Herod’s commands. If they do the “Herod says” action, they are out and should sit down. Continue until one child remains standing. Remind students that King Herod was a jealous, cruel ruler and that the magi did the right thing by not obeying him.

Option 2: Pass the Present

Supply List: empty box, wrapping paper, music

Before Class: Gather supplies. Wrap a box with Christmas wrapping paper.



This game is played like “Hot Potato.” Have children sit in a circle. When the music plays, pass the present around the circle. When the music stops, the person holding the present is out. Continue until one person remains. Remind children the wise men brought gifts to worship Jesus.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Wise Men Balloon Tennis Relay

Supply List: balloons (three colors), large empty boxes (two per team), paint stirrers, paper plates, glue

Before Class: Gather supplies. Blow up balloons (at least one per child). Make one “balloon racket” for each team by gluing paint stirrers to paper plates.

Divide children into teams and have them line up single file behind a box filled with balloons. Tell children the three colors of balloons in their team’s box represent gold, frankincense, and myrrh that need to be brought to king Jesus (represented by a second empty box at the other end of the room). The first child on each team takes a balloon out of his team’s box, hits it with the racket down to the second box, hits it into the box, and runs the racket back to the next player on his team. Play continues until a team gets all their balloons into the box on the far end of the room and has all players back to the starting line.

Option 2: Walk Like a Camel Relay

Supply List: balloons

Before Class: Gather supplies. Blow up balloons (two per team and a few extra).

Divide the children into teams and line them up single file. Have the first two children on each team become a “camel” by each placing a balloon between their knees and having the person in back hold onto the first person’s shoulders. On “Go” the camels race to a designated spot and back. If either of the balloons drop, the pair must stop and put the balloon back in place before continuing. When they get back to the start, have them pass the balloons to the next two players who will become the next camel. The first team to run all their camels wins. Explain that it is possible the magi rode on camels to find the newborn King because it was a common mode of transportation in that time and place.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: King of Kings Crown

Supply List: paper, cardstock, scissors, tape, markers, jewels, sequins, glue

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print a paper with the sentence, “Jesus is King of kings” written four times in large print. Cut out the sentence strips (one per child). On cardstock, draw a zigzag line down the center lengthwise (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child one piece of cardstock. Place sentence strips and remaining supplies on tables. Have children cut along the zigzag line and tape the two pieces together to form a flat crown. (Do not yet form the circle.) Have them glue the sentence strip to their crown and decorate with markers, jewels, and sequins. Once decorated, form the crown into a circle and tape to secure. Remind children that even though Jesus was born in a stable, he is the King of kings!

Option 2: The Best Gift Picture

Supply List: Christmas wrapping paper, cardstock, markers, scissors, glue sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut Christmas wrapping paper into smaller pieces. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of cardstock. Place markers, scissors, glue sticks, and wrapping paper pieces on tables. Have children write “Jesus is the BEST gift!” on the cardstock. Have children cut wrapping paper into square and rectangular “gifts” and glue them to their paper. Have children add bows to the gifts using markers. Remind children the wise men knew Jesus is the best gift!

**Option 1: Craft Stick Star Ornament**

Supply List: ribbon, string, craft sticks, glue, sequins, jewels, glitter, plates

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut ribbon into 8-inch pieces. Make a sample craft.

Give each child five craft sticks. Place glue, sequins, jewels, glitter, and plates on tables. Have children glue the craft sticks together to make a star shape, then have them tie the ribbon to the top for hanging. Have children glue sequins, jewels, and glitter to their stars. (Have children use the glitter over a plate so excess glitter falls on the plate.) Remind children that the wise men followed a star to Jesus. When they found him, they worshiped him.

Option 2: 3D Hanging Five-Point Star

Supply List: cardstock, crayons, scissors, hole punch, clear tape, string

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut 8-inch pieces of string. Print large star shapes onto cardstock (two per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child two star papers and a string. Place crayons, scissors, a hole punch, and tape on tables. Have children cut out the stars and color them on both sides. Have children take one of their decorated stars and cut a slit from the bottom of the star up to the center (stop halfway). Next, have the children cut a slit on the other star from the top to the center of the star. Slide the stars together to make one 3D star. If needed, use tape to hold the two stars in place. Have children punch a hole at the top of the star and tie a string through for hanging. Remind children a star led the wise men to Jesus.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



The Pointer and the Point

MATTHEW 3

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Matthew 3.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

The prophets in the Old Testament did all sorts of amazing things. Moses's face glowed after he met God on the mountain. Isaiah saw a vision of God on a throne surrounded by angels with six wings. Elijah the Tishbite had a unique name, and he also dressed funny. "He wore a garment of [camel's] hair, with a belt of leather about his waist" (2 Kings 1:8). But these stories paled in comparison to the importance of their message. They not only called God's people to live in a way that rightly reflected God but also pointed forward to a special rescuer. The prophets were pointers. One of them, Malachi, pointed to another prophet—a very special prophet—that would come later. God called this special prophet "my messenger" and "Elijah the prophet." He also said he had a big job: to "prepare the way" for God to come to earth (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). Who could this new Elijah

be? Would he dress funny like Elijah did? What would he do? All four Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell us that this special prophet was John the Baptist. And he was a pointer too. So who will this lesson be about? John the Baptist? Or the one John the Baptist pointed to—Jesus?

TELL THE STORY

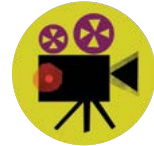
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
John the Baptist
pointed to the
point of the Biggest
Story—Jesus.

John the Baptist was a strange and wonderful person. Like Elijah, he “wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist” (Matt. 3:4). He also ate locusts (yuck!) and wild honey (yum!). This was his food because he lived in the wilderness, and those were the only things available. The first Elijah was called Elijah *the Tishbite* because he was from the town of Tishbe. But John was not called John *the Baptist* because he was from Baptistville or because his parents were Mr. and Mrs. Baptist. He was given that title—*the Baptist*—because, well, he did a lot of *baptizing*.

John’s message was simple: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (3:2). He was telling people to turn from their sin and toward God. And, like the prophets of old, he was warning people to confess their sins and change the way they were living, because God’s judgment was coming. God’s people listened! Thousands and thousands came to John, and he baptized them in the Jordan River. The water rushing over them was a sign that God had cleansed them. A fresh start!

John’s job, however, was not to be a popular preacher. His job was to “prepare the way of the Lord” (3:3, quoting Isa. 40:3). His hashtag was not #Followme but #FollowJesus. Like the prophets before him, John was a pointer. His job was



Story

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Matthew 3

to point people to Jesus. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30) was John’s mission statement. John knew Jesus was the long-awaited King from heaven. The one who would make everything right. John baptized with water, but Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. John prepared the way; Jesus was the way. John was a voice crying in the wilderness; Jesus was the very word of God made flesh. “I am not worthy,” John told people, “even to carry Jesus’s dirty sandals” (see Matt. 3:11). John is a very special person in the Biggest Story, but he thought of himself as nobody compared to the *somebody* that had come.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

John’s baptism was a big deal. It was a sign people were repenting and a sign that God was cleansing. But even John’s baptism was a pointer. John said, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 3:16). Sinners like us don’t just need water. We need our sinful, dead souls to have life breathed into them by the very Spirit of God. John the Baptist couldn’t make that happen. Only Jesus could. And the way Jesus made it happen was by dying on the cross for our sin. With our sin paid for in full, God could now pour his Spirit on us. And that’s exactly what happens for anyone who trusts Jesus. God gives us his Spirit and makes us alive. What a baptism!

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** Who were some of the Old Testament prophets? What funny clothes did Elijah wear? Who did Malachi say would come before the Lord came to earth? How did John the Baptist’s clothes show he was that special prophet?

TAKEAWAY: John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy that a prophet like Elijah would come to prepare the way of the Lord.

2. **QUESTION:** What was the message that John preached? What did John tell people to do to show that they had repented? How did baptizing people prepare the way for Jesus?

3

Engage

Memory Verse
Repent and believe
in the gospel.

MARK 1:15

TAKEAWAY: John baptized as a sign people had confessed and repented of their sin.

- 3. QUESTION:** Were a lot of people coming to hear John? Did that make John think he was really important? Who did he want people to see as really important? How did he tell them that?

TAKEAWAY: John's main job was to point people to Jesus.

- 4. QUESTION:** Why did John baptize people? What did he say when Jesus came to be baptized? Why did Jesus say he must be baptized? What did God say and do to show he was pleased by Jesus's baptism?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus's baptism revealed God's plan to cleanse people of their sins through Jesus.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Telephone

Supply List: none

Have children sit in a circle. Have the first person whisper a message into the ear of the person next to him (e.g., “John wore camel’s hair and ate sticky bugs,” or “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.”) That person whispers the message she thought she heard to the person next to her. The game continues until it reaches the last person in the circle. The last person says the message he heard to the group. Compare the original message to the final one shared. Remind children that John the Baptist was a messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord.

Option 2: Turn from Sin and Run to Jesus

Supply List: paper, marker, scissors

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sign that says Sin and a heart sign that says Jesus.



Have children line up on one side of the room. The teacher stands at the opposite end of the room. When the teacher holds up the “Jesus” sign and calls out “Jesus,” children must run toward the sign. When the teacher holds up the “Sin” sign and calls out “Sin,” children must immediately stop and turn their backs to the sign. If a child does not stop immediately, send him or her back to the starting line. The child who passes the teacher first wins. Remind children sin keeps us from Jesus, but we can always run to Jesus and ask for forgiveness.

3rd–5th**Option 1: Heads or Tails**

Supply List: coin, masking tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Place a piece of masking tape down the center of the room to divide it into two sections.

Tell children that you are going to flip a coin. If the children think it will land on heads, they should go to one side of the room. If they think it will land on tails, they should go to the other side of the room. Flip the coin. The children who guessed correctly are safe, and those who did not are out. Continue play until one child remains. Remind children that in life we have choices to make—not silly choices like heads or tails but choices about whether we will follow Jesus or not. John the Baptist encouraged people to choose repentance and pointed them to Jesus.

Option 2: Throw Away Your Sin

Supply List: masking tape, paper

Before Class: Gather supplies. Place a piece of masking tape down the center of the room to divide it into two sections.

Divide children into two teams and assign one team to each section. Distribute an equal number of pieces of paper to each team, and instruct children to crumple the paper into balls. Explain that the paper represents sin and that they’re trying to get rid of it. On “Go” each team tries to keep the paper off their side by tossing the pieces to the other side for a predetermined amount of time (about 3 minutes). When time is up, the team with the least number of paper balls on their side wins. Play again as time allows. Remind children that to repent of our sin means to get rid of it.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Salt Dough Hearts

Supply List: bowls, spoons, flour, salt, water, pencils, paper plates, ribbon, scissors, one-cup measuring cups, ½ teaspoon measures (optional), gel food coloring (optional)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut ribbon into 8-inch pieces. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a paper plate and a ribbon. Place remaining supplies on tables. Have children take turns mixing 1 cup of salt, 2 cups of flour, 1 cup of warm water, and ½ teaspoon of food coloring (optional). Once mixed, divide the dough so that each child has enough to shape the dough into a heart, using a paper plate as a work surface. Use a pencil to poke a hole in the top of the heart and add a ribbon for hanging. Remind children that when we have soft hearts toward God, we are quick to repent and make choices that please him.

Option 2: Transformations Pencil Topper

Supply List: cardstock, sharpened pencils, scissors, glue sticks, crayons

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print two small, simple, identical pictures of a butterfly on cardstock (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a butterfly paper and a pencil. Set remaining supplies on tables. Have children color both butterflies and cut them out. Have them glue the butterflies together tightly around their pencil eraser so they won't slip. Remind children that just as butterflies go through transformations, Jesus changes us when we repent and come to him.



Option 1: Sand Art

Supply List: paper, cotton swabs, bowls, glue, sand, paper plates

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of paper and a cotton swab. Set bowls of glue and sand on the tables. Have children make a design or picture on the paper by dipping the cotton swab into the glue and “drawing” with the swab. Have them sprinkle sand on their glue design. Shake off excess sand onto paper plates. Remind the children that John the Baptist lived in the sandy desert and prepared the way for Jesus.

Option 2: Paper Sandal

Supply List: cardstock, pencils, scissors, pipe cleaners, hole punches, markers, beads (optional)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of cardstock and have them trace around their shoe with a pencil. Set remaining supplies on tables. Have children cut out their “sandal” and punch three holes in a triangular shape (like a flip flop). Have them insert and secure a pipe cleaner from the top hole to each of the other two holes, adding beads to the pipe cleaners to decorate (optional). Have children write “Jesus > me” on the sandal. Remind children that Jesus is so wonderful that John the Baptist said he was unworthy even to untie Jesus’s sandals.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



The Sin That Wasn't

MATTHEW 4

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Matthew 4.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

"All the promises of God find their Yes" in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20). The Snake Crusher who was promised to Eve? Yes! The long-predicted son of Abraham who would bless the nations? Yes! The long-awaited Son of David who would rule an everlasting kingdom? Yes! Immanuel—God with us? Yes! Jesus is the fulfillment of lots of old prophecies and promises. But he is more! Jesus came and lived perfectly, unlike the people of Israel. And Matthew doesn't want us to miss that point. He shows us how Jesus repeatedly got it right when Israel had gotten it wrong. Jesus left Egypt just like Israel left Egypt (Matthew 2). Jesus entered the Jordan River similar to Israel's crossing the Red Sea (Matthew 3). And Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days just like Israel was tempted in the desert for forty years (Matthew 4). Israel, like Adam before them, failed when

Satan tested them. But what about Jesus? Jesus doesn't fail the test, like Israel did in the wilderness or like Adam did in the garden. Let's see how.

TELL THE STORY

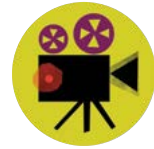
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Jesus resisted
Satan's temptation
through the word
of God.

After Jesus's baptism, "the Spirit [led him] into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1). The fact that the Holy Spirit was leading Jesus shows us that Jesus's temptation was part of God's plan. While in the desert, Jesus fasted from food. That means he stopped eating for a reason. No peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. No apples and oranges. No cheeseburgers and fries. Not even wild honey and locusts! The Bible says "he was hungry" (4:2). He sure was! So, guess what temptation Satan ("the tempter"; 4:3) started with? He said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (4:3). That must have been so tempting! Jesus was really hungry, and he had the power to do what Satan asked him to do. Fresh warm bread—so good! But not on that day. He knew that obeying God's word was more important than obeying his stomach's cry for food! He answered Satan with a Bible verse, "It is written, 'Man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God'" (see 4:4). Jesus passed the first test.

For the second test, the devil took him to the top of the temple. "Jump, Jesus," he told him. "Because if you are God's Son, the Bible says that God will send angels to rescue you." Satan was twisting the Bible, and Jesus knew this. That is why he responded with another Bible verse, "It is wrong to put God to the test" (see 4:7). Jesus passed the second test.



Story

56

Matthew 4

The final test was perhaps the toughest. Satan brought Jesus to a very high mountain, and as they looked down as far as the eye could see, Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. He saw their riches and power. Their earthly glory! “If you bow down before me,” Satan said, “then I will let you rule over these kingdoms.” Jesus refused. “We should worship God and him alone!” Jesus also told the devil to get lost: “Be gone, Satan!” (4:10). Jesus passed the third test. Where Adam and Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. A+++.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

The devil wanted Jesus to clamor for bread (like Israel had done), to put God to the test (like Israel had done), and to worship other gods (like Israel had also done). Three times the devil tried; three times he failed. Three times the Son of God was tempted; three times he passed the test. The third test, however, wasn’t Jesus’s last test. He was tested throughout his life to skip suffering and go straight to ruling as king—to take the crown before the cross. His final temptation was on the cross, moments before he died. People who walked by him, as he was suffering on the cross, said to him, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:40). Imagine how tempting that must have been. Jesus the powerful Son of God, could have pushed the nails out of his hands and feet, jumped to the ground, and saved himself from death. But he didn’t! Why? Because he knew that the only way to save sinners was to die for sinners, the only way to offer the good news of salvation was to die. How wonderful that Jesus succeeded on the final test so now all who trust in him can be saved.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

- 1. QUESTION:** What were some ways that Jesus’s life was similar to Israel’s? What happened to both of them in the wilderness? How did Jesus’s temptations end differently?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus relived Israel’s story and got it right.

3

Engage

Memory Verse
You shall worship
the Lord your God
and him only shall
you serve.

MATTHEW 4:10

2. **QUESTION:** How did Satan first tempt Jesus? What did Jesus use to resist? What was the second temptation? How did Jesus respond? And what was the third temptation? Did Jesus give in? What did he say to Satan?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus resisted Satan's temptation through the word of God.

3. **QUESTION:** Did Jesus stop being tempted by Satan after he left the wilderness? What was the final temptation he experienced? What does it mean for all of us that Jesus did not leave the cross but stayed and died?

TAKEAWAY: Because Jesus passed the final test on the cross, we can be saved.

4. **QUESTION:** Even though Jesus's death means that we all can be saved from our sins, will we still be tempted to disobey God? How can we resist Satan's lies like Jesus did in the wilderness?

TAKEAWAY: When we are tempted, we should follow Jesus's example and trust God's word more than Satan's lies.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: The Floor Is Lava

Supply List: paper, tape, marker

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make safe spots around the room by writing “God’s word” on paper and taping the papers to the floor.

Tell children that they should move around the room until the leader calls out, “The floor is lava!” They will then have until the count of five to get both feet onto a safe spot. Anyone who is not on a safe spot after the count of five is out. Continue play until one child remains, removing “safe spots” as the number of children in the game gets smaller. Remind children to run to the safety found in God’s word to resist temptations.



Story

56

Matthew 4

Option 2: Temptation Tag

Supply List: paper, tape, marker

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make safe spots by writing Prayer, Scripture, Worship, and Fellowship on paper (or using pictures) and taping the papers to the floor.

Assign one child to be “It.” Begin a game of tag. A child is safe from being tagged when standing on a safe spot, but they may only stand on the safe spot for ten seconds before running again. If a child is tagged, he or she becomes “It.” Play continues as time allows. Remind children that resisting temptation is possible with prayer, God’s word, worship, and help from friends who love Jesus.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Hit Away Temptations Relay

Supply List: paper, marker, pool noodles, trash cans

Before Class: Gather supplies. Write different temptations (e.g., cheat, steal, lie, disobey, unkind words, etc.) on papers (one word per paper, one set per team). Set up pool noodles at starting line and trash cans on the opposite side of the room.

Divide children into teams, line them up by the pool noodles, and give them a set of “temptation” papers. The first child on each team takes a temptation paper, crumples it into a ball, and tries to hit the temptation into the trash can using the pool noodle. The child must keep trying until she gets it in. Once it lands in the trash can, she can hand the pool noodle to the next player, who repeats the process. The first team to hit all their temptations into the trash wins.

Option 2: Resist Temptation

Supply List: cups, permanent marker, balls

Before Class: Gather supplies. Write Temptation on nine cups per team, and write Truth on one cup per team.

Set the cups right side up in a bowling pin formation about 15 feet from the starting line. Divide children into teams of two to three. Give each team a ball. On “Go” one person from each team rolls the ball to try to knock over his team’s Temptation cups without knocking down the Truth cup. He then retrieves the

ball and hands it to the next player, who rolls next. If someone knocks down the Truth cup, that person must set all the cups back upright and start over. Play continues until a team knocks down all their Temptations cups without knocking down their Truth cup.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Rock Decorating

Supply List: rocks, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Satan tempted Jesus to show his power by turning stones into bread. Give each child a 4- to 6-inch smooth rock. Have the children color/decorate their rock then write *NO!* with markers to remind them to resist temptation like Jesus did.

Option 2: Victory Ribbon

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, markers, stickers

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print out award ribbon templates (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child an award ribbon template. Set scissors, markers, and stickers on tables. Have children write “I can win over sin!” on the circular part of the ribbon, then decorate it using provided supplies. Have children cut out their decorated ribbons. Remind children that Jesus can help us have victory over sin.

**Option 1: 3D Heart**

Supply List: cardstock, yarn, colored pencils, markers, scissors, hole punches, glue sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print 6-inch hearts (three per child). Cut yarn into 8-inch pieces (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child three hearts and one piece of yarn. Set remaining supplies on tables. Have children write the Big Truth on the first heart, the Memory Verse on the second heart, and their own message on the third heart. Decorate all three hearts. Cut out hearts and fold them in half. Have children glue the back of one half of a heart to the back of another half of a heart. Repeat the process so all three hearts are connected. Have children punch a hole through the hearts and thread the yarn through for hanging. Remind children that God loves us and we can trust his word.

Option 2: Stone Tic-Tac-Toe

Supply List: large resealable plastic bags, small stones (ten per child), masking tape, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a plastic bag. Have them use masking tape to make a tic-tac-toe board on the outside of the bag. Have them decorate the tape with markers. Give each child ten small stones that will fit in the tic-tac-toe gameboard spaces. Have them color or mark five of the stones with markers so there are five marked stones and five unmarked stones. The stones can be stored in the bag and taken out to play on the taped board. Tell children that the stones can be reminders that when Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, he resisted temptation and trusted God. When we are tempted, we can also trust God and resist temptation.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



The Sermon That Was

MATTHEW 5–7

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Matthew 5–7.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

When you think about Jesus, do you think of him most when he was a baby, a boy, or a grown man? At Christmas, most of us think about Jesus when he was a baby. But, the rest of the time, we likely think about him as a man. This makes sense, because the Gospels focus most on what Jesus did when he was a man. And what do they focus on? His death and resurrection—that's for sure. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all end with stories about Jesus's death and resurrection. But they also focus on Jesus's making disciples, healing the sick, casting out demons, caring for people's physical needs, and performing miracles that showed he was God's heaven-sent Son (like walking on water!). This is why Jesus was called the Son of God, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God, and Lord. Jesus was also called Teacher, and that is because he was a teacher, or

what we'd call a "preacher." Like your pastor, he regularly preached sermons. In fact, Jesus once told his disciples that the reason that he came was so he could preach the good news of God's kingdom (see Mark 1:38). Today, we will learn about his most famous sermon—the Sermon on the Mount.

TELL THE STORY

Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
*The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook*



Play *The
Biggest Story*
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Jesus proclaimed
that he had come
to crush the snake's
rule and bring in
his own kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount is called a *sermon* because, like the sermons we are used to hearing, it was preached to people who gathered around Jesus to listen to God's word. It is called the Sermon *on the Mount* because Jesus preached it on a mountain. On the one hand, Jesus was like Moses who received and explained God's word on a mountain; on the other hand, he was greater than Moses because God didn't have to meet with him to give him the words to say. Jesus simply spoke the very words of God. Words that are famous like, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14); "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek" (see 5:39); "Love your enemies" (5:44); "Pray . . . 'Our Father in heaven'" (6:9); "You cannot serve God and money" (6:24); "Seek first the kingdom of God" (6:33); and "Whatever you wish others would do to you, do also to them" (7:12).

And while Jesus gave many commands, he was giving more than a new set of laws. He was announcing what *his* kingdom was like. Did you catch that? His focus was on himself as King and the wonderful kingdom he was bringing! The prophets said, "Here is what God has to say to you"; Jesus said, "Here is what *I* have to say to you." And he made statements like, "You are blessed if people say evil things against you because you follow *me*"; "*I* came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets [the whole Old Testament!];" "Everyone will stand *before me*



Story

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Matthew

5-7

as the judge, and *I will decide* who makes it into heaven”; and “The wise person hears *my words* and builds his life on their sure and solid foundation” (see 5:11; 5:17; 7:21–23, 24). King Jesus was the center of his sermon because it was about his new and wonderful kingdom! This is why, when he finished, people were amazed at his teaching and said, “Wow! Jesus speaks with such authority!” (see 7:28–29).

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

A lot of people think that religion is all about keeping rules. Be good. Avoid these sins. Do these good deeds. Sometimes even Christians can think this way. If we just go to church, don’t swear, and pray before bed, then we’re good. But Jesus’s sermon shows how silly that kind of thinking is. Jesus says that in his kingdom, righteousness has to flow from our hearts. It has to flow out of who we are. But there’s a problem with that. It’s one thing to expect us to do good things. We can try to do that. But how can I change my heart? How can I change who I am? Only God can do that! And that’s exactly why Jesus came. To die for our sins and allow us to receive new hearts—to be “born again” (John 3:3). When we trust Jesus, he changes our hearts. People who trust King Jesus are changed from within. Now that’s the kind of people God wants in his kingdom. Not self-righteous people who think they’ve done enough good works, but meek people who mourn over their sin and love Jesus with all their hearts.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** What did Jesus tell his disciples was the reason he came? What was Jesus doing on the mountain? Why do you think Jesus focuses so much on himself when he taught?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus came to preach the good news, and his message focused on himself as Lord and Savior.

2. **QUESTION:** Where was Moses when he gave the Ten Commandments? Where was Jesus when he gave the Sermon on the Mount? What were some commands Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount?

3

Engage

Memory Verse

Whatever you
wish that others
would do to you,
do also to them,
for this is the
Law and the
Prophets.

MATTHEW 7:12

TAKEAWAY: Jesus, like Moses, gave God's law to God's people on a mountain.

3. **QUESTION:** How did Moses and the prophets know what God wanted them to say to the people? What was different when Jesus spoke God's word? Why did Jesus not need God to tell him what to say?

TAKEAWAY: Unlike Moses and the prophets, when Jesus preached, he spoke God's word directly and with authority.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: A Game of Opposites

Supply List: none

Have children spread out in front of the leader. Tell children that the leader will call out commands (using words like loud/quiet, backwards/forwards, and big/small) and that they must do the opposite of what is called out. (If the leader says, "Walk forward three steps," then the whole class should walk backwards three steps). If a child does what is called out (instead of the opposite), he is out. Call out commands until one child remains or until time is up. Remind children that Jesus instructed people to live in ways that are opposite of how the world lives.

Option 2: Can Stacking Relay

Supply List: canned goods

Before Class: Gather supplies. Set canned goods on one side of the room (eight per team).

Divide children into teams and line them up. On "Go" the first person from each team runs to get a can, returns to his or her team, and places the can on the ground. The next player runs down and brings back a second can, placing it on

top of the previous one and forming a tower. If at any time the tower falls, all the cans must be returned to the other side and recollected one at a time. The first team to successfully stack eight cans wins. Remind children that Jesus taught people to build their life on the solid rock of his word so their life wouldn't fall apart when trouble comes.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Treasures and Thieves

Supply List: four plastic toy hoops, bean bags

Before Class: Gather supplies. Set a large number of bean bags in the center of the room and one plastic toy hoop in each corner.

Divide children into four teams and assign each team a corner. On “Go” the first player from each team runs to the middle, grabs a “treasure,” drops it into his or her team’s hoop, and tags the next person to go. Play continues until all bean bags are gone from the middle. The leader then calls out, “Thieves break in!” The children have 1 minute to steal bean bags from other teams’ hoops and drop them in their team’s hoop. Children can only carry one treasure at a time. After 1 minute, everyone freezes. The team with the most bean bags in their hula hoop wins. Remind children of Jesus’s teaching that we should not store up treasures on earth because they do not have lasting value.

Option 2: Love Your Neighbor

Supply List: chairs

Before Class: Set chairs in a circle (one less chair than number of children).

Have children sit in chairs. The child without a chair is “It.” “It” walks up to someone and asks, “Who do you love?” If she replies, “I love my neighbor,” then everyone gets up and moves to a new seat. If she replies, “I love people who . . .” (are wearing blue, are wearing jewelry, etc.), then only the children who meet that description switch seats. When the children are moving, “It” also tries to get a seat. The person who does not get a seat is the new “It.” Continue play as time allows. Remind children that Jesus tells us to love all people—even our enemies.



Story

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Matthew

5–7

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Fingerprint “Bee-attitudes”

Supply List: paper, yellow paint, paper plates, black markers, baby wipes

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print the Beatitudes on paper (Matthew 5:3–12; one per child). Place yellow paint on paper plates. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a “Bee-attitudes” paper. Place black markers and paint plates on tables. Have children dip one finger in the yellow paint and make a fingerprint on the “Bee-attitudes” paper. Continue to make fingerprints in various places on the paper. Clean children’s fingers with wipes. Allow paint to dry a little, then use markers to add strips and antennae to each print to make them look like bees.

Option 2: Tissue Paper Flower

Supply List: cardstock, small squares of colored tissue paper, paper plates, liquid glue, pencils

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print Matthew 6:33 alongside a simple outline of a flower (one per child). Make a sample craft. Put glue on paper plates.

Give each child a pencil and flower paper. Place tissue paper and glue on tables. Have children wrap a single square of tissue paper around the end of a pencil, dip it in glue, and stick it on their flower, continuing until the flower is completely filled in. Remind children Jesus taught that just as God takes care of flowers and clothes them in splendor, God will take care of us too.



Option 1: “Blessed Are” Craft

Supply List: colored paper, paper plates, scissors, string, tape, colored pencils

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut string into 8-inch pieces (ten per child). With space between, print on colored paper the different groups who are blessed (“the poor in spirit,” “those who mourn,” “the meek,” etc.). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a paper plate, scissors, printed colored paper, and string. Set colored pencils and tape on tables. Have the children write “Blessed are” in the center of their plate, then cut out the nine blessed groups in various shapes (stars, circles, etc.). Have them tape the shape to one end of the string, then tape the other end of the string to the plate (so the shape hangs down). Continue with other shapes. Decorate. Take final string, loop, and tape to the top of the plate for hanging.

Option 2: Tissue Paper Flower

Supply List: cardstock, small squares of colored tissue paper, paper plates, liquid glue, pencils

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print Matthew 6:33 alongside a simple outline of a flower (one per child). Make a sample craft. Put glue on paper plates.

Give each child a pencil and flower paper. Place tissue paper and glue on tables. Have children wrap a single square of tissue paper around the end of a pencil, dip it in glue, and stick it on their flower, continuing until the flower is completely filled in. Remind children Jesus taught that just as God takes care of flowers and clothes them in splendor, God will take care of us too.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Mr. Clean

MARK 1

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Mark 1.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

In Leviticus (that's the third book in the Bible) we find a list of laws that tell God's people what is clean and unclean. Just like sinful people couldn't perfectly reflect a holy God, neither could unclean people. So, this very important list of rules included what is clean or unclean, who might be clean or unclean, and how to get clean if you are unclean. For example, Israel could eat lamb. That animal was clean. But not pigs. That animal was unclean. Other animals like bats and rats, lizards and vultures, wasps and hornets were also considered unclean. (Don't eat hornets, especially when they are still alive!) To touch a dead body made someone unclean. A woman was unclean after she gave birth. And if someone was unclean, they had to wash themselves. In the days of Jesus (and the days of Leviticus too) the most unclean person was a leper. A leper was

not someone who looked like a leopard (the spotted cat), but someone who had an itchy, scratchy, sore, ugly skin disease that wouldn't go away. To keep other people from getting the terrible disease, lepers were to shout "Unclean, unclean" if they were coming close to people. Today's story is about how an unclean leper gets clean.

TELL THE STORY

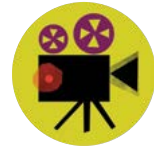
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Our sins make us
dirty; Christ can
make us clean.

Imagine how awful it would be to be a leper. It's *not* like having a big mosquito bite that itches but doesn't bother you for too long. It is like having a bad case of poison ivy, because if people touch the plant's oil on your skin, they can get the poison ivy too. But it's *not* like that, because poison ivy doesn't usually kill people. With leprosy you lose feeling throughout your body, so you can't feel if you cut yourself or something bit you. You also scratch off parts of your body because you can't feel. This made lepers look ugly. They had sores on their skin, and they had parts of their limbs and faces missing. And people wouldn't get close to them. They had no friends, other than other lepers. And they couldn't go to worship in the temple or at synagogue.

One day, a very courageous leper believed that Jesus could turn his sad and scary life around. He was desperate. He came to Jesus, bowed before him, and begged him, "If you will, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40). Notice he didn't say, "If you can, will you make me clean?" He believed that Jesus had the power to do the impossible—to clean the incurable unclean! Mark's Gospel tells us about what Jesus felt: he was "moved with pity." Then it tells us what Jesus did: he "stretched out his hand and touched him." Then it tells us what Jesus said:



Story

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Mark 1

“I will; be clean” (1:41). And do you know what happened? A miracle! “Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (1:42). A leopard may not be able to change its spots, but this leper was spot clean!

Next, Jesus commanded him to do what Leviticus said to do: “Go to the priest and show him you are now clean” (see 1:44). This way he could return to society—get a job, be with family and old friends, and worship. He also commanded him not to tell anyone else what had happened. But do you know what he did? He disobeyed! It was good news he was sharing, but it is not what Jesus asked him to do. In fact, it created a big problem for Jesus. Now he couldn’t go anywhere without people mobbing him. Jesus now had to act like an outcast and secretly enter towns! To heal this leper cost Jesus something, but that’s why he came—to give his life for others.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

Why did Jesus touch the leper when he healed him? Did Jesus need to do that? No. Sometimes he healed people just by saying a word. (The centurion’s servant was healed miles away when Jesus just gave a command.) Plus, the moment Jesus touched the leper, according to the laws in the Old Testament, he should have become unclean. Ah, but that’s just it. Here’s the bigger miracle! Because Jesus is perfectly holy, he didn’t become unclean the moment he touched the man. Rather, the man became perfectly clean. Jesus took away the man’s uncleanness and gave him his cleanness. In that way, it’s like a little picture of what Jesus would do on the cross—the very biggest miracle of all! Jesus, “who knew no sin,” took on our sin so that everyone who bows before Jesus and believes in him (like the leper did!) becomes clean—we become “the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). So, you see, as the Snake Crusher is crushing Satan, he is also cleansing us of all our ugly sins.

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

- 1. QUESTION:** Since God was perfectly holy, what were his people to be? What did they have to do to remain holy?

TAKEAWAY: Because God is perfectly holy, he wants his people to be holy.

3

Engage

Memory Verse

I will . . .
cleanse them;
and they shall
be my people,
and I will be
their God.

EZEKIEL 37:23

2. **QUESTION:** Who was the most unclean person in our story? What was it like to be a leper? Was there any way that lepers could be made clean? What did the leper believe only Jesus could do for him?

TAKEAWAY: The unclean can be made clean by Jesus.

3. **QUESTION:** When Jesus healed the leper, what did he tell him to do? What did he tell him not to do? What did the leper do? When someone does something amazing for you, what do you want to do?

TAKEAWAY: When God makes us clean, we want to tell others!

4. **QUESTION:** Why didn't people touch lepers? Why did Jesus touch the leper to heal him? How can Jesus make us, not just the leper, clean and righteous?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus took our uncleanness to make us clean.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from TheBiggestStory.com, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Leprosy Tag

Supply List: none

Have children line up on one side of the room. Assign one child to have leprosy and to stand in the middle of the room. When the leper calls out “Unclean,” the other children try to run to the other side without being tagged. If a child is tagged, he becomes a leper and helps tag others. Play continues until one child remains. Remind children that Jesus had compassion on the man with leprosy and healed him.

Option 2: Helping Relay

Supply List: adhesive bandages, table

Before Class: Gather supplies. Spread out adhesive bandages on a table on one side of the room.



Divide children into teams and line them up across from the adhesive bandages. On “Go” the first two children from each team link their arms together and walk to the table with adhesive bandages on it. Each child opens one and places it on the hand of his or her partner. They then walk back arm-in-arm to tag the next two children on their team. The race continues until every player has raced. The first team to have their whole team bandaged and back to the starting point wins. Remind children that Jesus healed the leper. We should follow his example and care for others when they are sick too.

3rd–5th

Option 1: No Touch Race

Supply List: balloons

Before Class: Gather supplies. Blow up balloons (one for every two children, plus a few extra).

Divide children into pairs and give each pair a balloon. Have pairs line up along one side of the room and place the balloon between their shoulders (the balloon should prevent the two children from touching one another). On “Go” each pair tries to walk to the opposite side of the room without touching each other and without letting the balloon fall. If it falls, the pair must stop and reposition the balloon before continuing. The first pair to reach the other side wins. Continue to race as time allows. Remind children that lepers were unclean and unable to touch others, but Jesus had compassion on a leper and touched him.

Option 2: Do Not Touch Musical Game

Supply List: string, music

Before Class: Gather supplies. Place a long string on the floor to form a circle big enough for all children to walk around in it.

Tell children that when the music is playing, they should move around inside the circle, being careful not to touch anyone. If a child touches someone, he or she is out and must leave the circle. When the music stops, all remaining children freeze. The leader then pulls the string to make the circle smaller. Play continues in the same manner, with the circle getting smaller each time the music stops. The last two children remaining win. Remind children that people with leprosy couldn’t touch others but had to stay at a distance and yell, “Unclean!”

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Adhesive Bandage Cross

Supply List: construction paper, adhesive bandages, crayons, heart stickers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of construction paper and three adhesive bandages. Set crayons and stickers on tables. Have children write “Jesus is our healer” on the paper. Have them open their three adhesive bandages and use them to form a cross on their paper. Have them add heart stickers to remember Jesus’s great love and compassion for us.

Option 2: Stick Puppets

Supply List: cardstock, paper, scissors, crayons, glue sticks, craft sticks, white dot stickers

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, make an outline of a sad face and a happy face (one per child). Print the words Unclean and Clean and cut out. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a sad face / happy face paper, *unclean* and *clean* words, and scissors. Place crayons, glue sticks, craft sticks, and white dot stickers on tables. Have children color and cut out the two faces. Glue the sad face and *unclean* to one side of a craft stick, and the happy face and *clean* to the other side. Have them place white dot stickers on the sad face to show they have leprosy. Remind children that people with leprosy had sad, lonely lives, but Jesus healed the leper and made him clean.

**Option 1: Handprint Picture**

Supply List: red copy paper, colored construction paper, pencils, scissors, glue sticks

Before Class: Gather supplies. Make copies of a 2-inch heart on red paper (one per child).

Make a sample craft.

Give each child two pieces of construction paper (different colors) and a red heart paper. Set remaining supplies on tables. Have children trace their hand on construction paper and cut it out. Next, have them cut out the red heart. Have the children glue their handprint to the second piece of construction paper and glue the heart to the middle of their handprint. Remind children that Jesus had compassion on the leper and touched him when no one else would.

Option 2: “Create in Me a Clean Heart” Puffy Paint

Supply List: shaving cream, glue, bowls, paint brushes, cardstock, string, stapler, glitter (optional)

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut string into 18-inch lengths. Stir together equal parts white liquid glue and white foam shaving cream to make a “paint” mixture (add glitter if desired). Put mixture in bowls and set on tables. On colored cardstock, print the words “Create in me a clean heart” in bubble letters and put a large heart under it (one copy per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a heart paper and string. Place glue mixture and paint brushes on tables. Have children fold the top of their paper down over the string for hanging and staple to hold in place. Have children paint the bubble letters and heart with the glue mixture. Remind children that our sins make us dirty, but Jesus can make us clean!



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.



Get Up!

MARK 2

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Read Mark 2.
- Pray for God's help. Ask for the Spirit's help in understanding the passage and for the Lord to open the children's eyes to see who he is what he has done, and how they should respond to him.
- Study the lesson plan below. Use these sections as suggestions. Think of ways to teach it in your own voice.

1

Read

THE BIG PICTURE

Help children see how this story connects with the other lessons. Build anticipation by introducing the setting and the significance of what is about to happen in this week's story. {5 minutes}

2

Teach

How does God forgive sins? In the Old Testament, God gave his people certain things they had to do. First, he asked his people to build him a tabernacle (later called the temple). In the temple was a holy place where our holy God would meet with his unholy people and they could seek forgiveness. Second, only certain people could go into this place on behalf of the rest of God's people. Do you remember Moses's brother Aaron? Only people from Aaron's family (from the tribe of Levi) could go into the holy place. Third, God instructed these men (called priests) to offer sacrifices for the sins of God's people in that holy place—that was how God forgave sins. Outside the holy place, there weren't signs that said "Restricted Access" or "Authorized Personnel Only," but everyone knew only priests could enter. So, in today's lesson when Jesus—who was outside the holy

place and not a priest from Levi's line—announced to someone, “Your sins are forgiven,” it makes sense that the religious leaders said, “Why does this man speak like that?” (Mark 2:7). They knew God alone—through his priests, in the temple—could forgive sins. So what is Jesus talking about, and who does he think he is? Let's find out.

TELL THE STORY

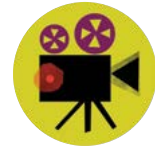
Share the story in one of these three ways. {5–10 minutes}



Read the
Bible passage
together



Read from
The Biggest Story
Bible Storybook



Play *The*
Biggest Story
video

TEACH THE STORY

Retell the story with an emphasis on what it says about God and about us. {10 minutes}

Big Truth
Jesus has
the power to
forgive sins.

Famous people are hard to get close to because they usually have crowds around them. Jesus had become famous, and crowds surrounded him all the time. He was not famous for being a great singer, actor, or politician. He was famous because of what he said and what he did. People came from all over to hear him teach and be healed by him.

Today's story starts with a packed house. Mark tells us that there were so many people in the house “that there was no more room, not even at the door” (Mark 2:2). The living room was packed. The bedrooms. Even the front hallway. As Jesus was teaching in that packed house, four men arrived carrying their friend on a stretcher. Their friend was paralyzed (he couldn't move from his back to his toes), so they carried him. They carried him to Jesus because they believed Jesus had the power to heal. They couldn't enter by the front door, but that didn't stop them! At the back of the house was a stairway that led to the roof, which was flat and made of straw, twigs, and dried mud. They carried him up, dug a hole through the roof, and lowered him down.

When Jesus “saw their faith,” he said something strange: “Son, your sins are forgiven” (2:5). The man wasn't there to have his sins forgiven but his body



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healed. The man and his friends were probably confused. The religious leaders, we know, were steaming mad! “Only God can forgive sins,” they thought to themselves. “What on earth! Does Jesus think he is like God in heaven? This man needs to have a priest offer a sacrifice in the holy place so his sins can be forgiven—not have an ordinary man say the words, ‘Your sins are forgiven!’” (see 2:6–7).

Well, they were right that only God can forgive sins. But they were wrong, because they didn’t know that Jesus is the God-man—so he can do what only God can do. To prove he had authority to forgive sins, he performed a miracle. He told the man, “Get up, take your bed, and go home” (see 2:11). Suddenly, his feet, legs, arms, and back were as strong as he and his friends’ faith. He did exactly what Jesus told him to do. He walked home. Maybe he skipped. Maybe he jumped up and down, then skipped! And the crowd responded, like we would, praising God and saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (2:12).

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Show how the story points to Jesus and his rescue mission as the Snake Crusher.
{5 minutes}

When Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven” (2:5), we don’t know what sins the man committed. But in the very next story, we are told about the sins of a man named Levi. He had a priest’s name, but he was a tax collector! What’s wrong with that? No one likes to pay taxes (money for the government), and Levi was the one who collected them. But he did more than that. He overcharged people. He squeezed his own people (the Jews) for money, gave some to the Romans, and kept the rest for himself. Because of this, the Jews hated tax collectors like Levi more than anyone.

But Jesus didn’t! He called Levi to leave behind his sinful life and follow him. And—miracle of miracles—he accepted Jesus’s invitation. More than that, he invited all his sinful friends to meet Jesus so they too could be loved and forgiven. When the Pharisees heard about this, they didn’t understand why Jesus would get together with such terrible people. They forgot what Jesus taught when he healed the paralyzed man. That he “came to call not those who think they are good but those who know they need a Savior” (see 2:17). Jesus came to forgive *sinners*—that’s the point. To experience the good news that Jesus has the power to forgive all sins, we must first recognize how much sinners like us need him.

3

Engage

DISCUSS THE STORY

Discuss the story in smaller groups. {10 minutes}

1. **QUESTION:** Why were so many people trying to get to Jesus? Why were the friends of the paralyzed man trying to get to Jesus? Did Jesus say he came to call those who are good or those who know they need a Savior? Why did Jesus heal the paralyzed man?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus came to heal those who know they need a Savior.

2. **QUESTION:** According to the Old Testament, how would people find forgiveness for their sin? Who is the only one that could forgive sins? Why did it make the religious leaders angry when Jesus told the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven”? What did they get right? What did they get wrong?

TAKEAWAY: Jesus has authority to forgive sins.

Memory Verse

The Son
of Man has
authority
on earth to
forgive sins.

MARK 2:10

3. **QUESTION:** If you break something of your parents, ask their forgiveness, and are forgiven by them, how do you feel? What about if you’re feeling really sick and a doctor gives you medicine that makes you feel better? How do you think the paralyzed man felt when Jesus healed and forgave his sins? How did the crowd respond?

TAKEAWAY: When Jesus heals and forgives, the people of God celebrate.

4. **QUESTION:** According to Jewish law, who should the paralyzed man have gone to for forgiveness of his sins? Who are we to go to for forgiveness of our sins? Why don’t we need to go to a temple anymore?

TAKEAWAY: Because of Jesus, we no longer need a temple priest to ask forgiveness for our sins; we can ask Jesus directly.

ACTIVITIES

Download coloring pages and activity pages from *TheBiggestStory.com*, or choose from the following activity suggestions. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Pass the Man Race

Supply List: ping-pong balls, small pillows

Before Class: Gather supplies.

Divide children into teams and have them stand in single file lines. Give each team a ping-pong ball (representing the paralyzed man) and a small pillow. Set the ball in the center of the pillow. On “Go” the first child in each line must pass the pillow between his legs to the person behind him. The children continue to pass the pillow in this way until it reaches the end of the line. It is then returned to the front by passing over the children’s heads to the person in front of them. If the ball drops, the team must start over. The first team to get the “man” back to the front wins. Remind children that the paralyzed man’s friends carried him to Jesus to be healed.

Option 2: Friendship Tag

Supply List: none

Have children link arms with a partner. Choose one pair to disconnect. One of the “disconnected” kids is “It” and tries to tag the other child. To avoid being tagged, the runner can link onto one of the connected pairs. When he links onto a pair, the child on the opposite side of the link is now the runner. If a child is tagged, she becomes “It.” If the leader calls “Find a new friend,” all pairs must break apart and make new pairs. Anytime the children are not connected, they can be tagged and become “It.” Remind children that the paralyzed man had friends who brought him to Jesus. Continue play as time allows.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Pass the Man Race

See above.



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Option 2: Shoebox Relay

Supply List: adult-sized shoeboxes (two per team), scissors, packing tape

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut openings on top of the shoeboxes so children can slip their feet into them. Tape the tops of the shoeboxes to the bottoms.

Divide children into teams of six or less and give each team two shoeboxes. On “Go” the first person on each team slips his feet into the boxes, walks to the other side of the room, then returns to his team to give the boxes to the next person. The first team to race all their members wins. Remind children that the ability to walk is a gift and that the paralyzed man struggled to get around.

CRAFTS

Choose from the following craft suggestions depending on time, age ranges, and group size. {10–15 minutes}

K–2nd

Option 1: Dress the Paralytic

Supply List: cardstock, scissors, glue, scrapbook/construction paper, pom-poms, buttons, sequins, felt, googly eyes, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. On cardstock, print a simple outline of an 8-inch person. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a person paper, scissors, and glue. Set remaining supplies on tables. Have children cut out the person and write “Jesus forgives sin” on the back. Have the children use the supplies to make clothes and decorate their person. Remind children that the paralyzed man had to have people help him do everything, including getting dressed, but that his greatest need was forgiveness.

Option 2: Paper Weaving Bookmark

Supply List: white cardstock, construction paper, scissors, tape, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut construction paper into ½" x 5" strips. Cut white cardstock into 3" x 9" pieces. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of white cardstock and scissors. Set construction paper strips, tape, and markers on tables. Have children fold the cardstock in half to



form a 3" x 4.5" rectangle. Have children make five evenly-spaced cuts that start at the folded edge and end an inch from the open edge. Unfold the paper. Have children weave in the paper strips by alternating over and under the lines they cut. Trim the strips as needed and use tape to secure. Have children write the Big Truth on the bookmark.

3rd–5th

Option 1: Paper Patchwork Quilt

Supply List: paper, scrapbook paper, scissors, glue

Before Class: Gather supplies. Print sample patchwork quilt templates. Print the Memory Verse (one per child). Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of paper, Memory Verse, and scissors. Set quilt templates and remaining supplies on tables. Have children use the quilt templates as inspiration to design their own quilts by gluing scrapbook paper pieces onto their paper. After their quilt design is complete, glue on the Memory Verse. Remind children that before Jesus healed the paralyzed man, he had to lie around and depend on others for help.

Option 2: Paper Weaving Bookmark

Supply List: white cardstock, construction paper, scissors, tape, markers

Before Class: Gather supplies. Cut construction paper into $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5" strips. Cut white cardstock into 3" x 9" pieces. Make a sample craft.

Give each child a piece of white cardstock and scissors. Set construction paper strips, tape, and markers on tables. Have children fold the cardstock in half to form a 3" x 4.5" rectangle. Have children make five evenly-spaced cuts that start at the folded edge and end an inch from the open edge. Unfold the paper. Have children weave in the paper strips by alternating over and under the lines they cut. Trim the strips as needed and use tape to secure. Have children write the Big Truth on the bookmark.



Visit TheBiggestStory.com for downloadable coloring pages, activity pages, and craft templates for this lesson.