

Middle School

Teacher's Guide

Winter 2019—2020

God's Plan | Who Jesus Is | What Jesus Said



WESLEY

Contents

Unit 16: God's Plan

Unit Value: Awareness

Lesson 1	Ready or Not, Here He Comes	8
Dec. 1	<i>Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Luke 1:5, 11-17, 57, 76, 80; Matthew 3:1-3; 11:7-10</i>	
Lesson 2	Expect the Unexpected	15
Dec. 8	<i>Isaiah 7:14; 9:1b, 6-7; Luke 1:26-27; Matthew 1:18-23</i>	
Lesson 3	From Rags to Riches	22
Dec. 15	<i>Micah 5:2-5a; 2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 2:1-7</i>	
Lesson 4	Bringing Jesus to the World	29
Dec. 22	<i>Isaiah 49:6-7; 60:3; Matthew 2:1-11</i>	

Unit 17: Who Jesus Is

Unit Value: Compassion

Lesson 5	Who Is Jesus, Anyway?	36
Dec. 29	<i>John 1:29-34</i>	
Lesson 6	Never Left Out	43
Jan. 5	<i>Luke 7:37-50</i>	
Lesson 7	Beyond Our Wildest Dreams	50
Jan. 12	<i>John 8:21-29, 48-59</i>	
Lesson 8	Choosing to Help	57
Jan. 19	<i>Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:40-45; 6:30-34</i>	
Lesson 9	Becoming the Greatest	64
Jan. 26	<i>Mark 10:35-45</i>	

Unit 18: What Jesus Said

Unit Value: Love

Lesson 10	The Greener Grass Syndrome	71
Feb. 2	<i>Matthew 20:1-16</i>	
Lesson 11	You're Invited	78
Feb. 9	<i>Luke 14:15-24</i>	
Lesson 12	Making the Most of God's Gifts	85
Feb. 16	<i>Matthew 25:14-30</i>	
Lesson 13	Just Do It for Jesus	92
Feb. 23	<i>Matthew 25:31-40</i>	
Teaching Materials		4
Bring the Bible to Life		5
Supply Lists/Prayer Notes		6-7
Understanding Salvation		99

Middle School Teacher's Guide
for grades 6-8. Can also be used for
grades 7 & 8 or grades 7-9.

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Janelle Vernon
Editor
Frieda Nossaman
Designer
Stephanie Hopkins

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Please Note:
Building Teachers can now be found online at
wphresources.org/bt

WESLEY

Connecting with Families



**JUST
FOR
YOU**

Family means something different in every household! One family might eat home-cooked meals, play games, and read books together, seldom watching television. Another family might eat together only at fast-food restaurants, rarely play board games or read books, but regularly watch selections from a streaming service. So what are some practical ways you can best connect with and support the many diverse kinds of families represented by the students in your class?

AWARENESS

Family configurations change from family to family. A family unit may be one parent (or caregiver) and three children; two grandparents and a grandchild; or two parents and one child. Get to know the families of your students. The challenges faced by families create many opportunities for you to minister to them. Pray for each student and his or her family. Ask God to make you aware of ways to connect with those families and become an agent of His grace to them.

EMPATHY

Difficult situations, such as divorce or separation and illness, are part of some family situations. Children and youth are often under stresses that they themselves don't recognize. Your extra patience, kindness, and nonjudgmental words are crucial for these students! If it's possible, record all parents' (or caregivers') names and contact information. Know how to contact a family to help a student stay connected when he or she misses class. Be sure to pray for families as they go through hard times.

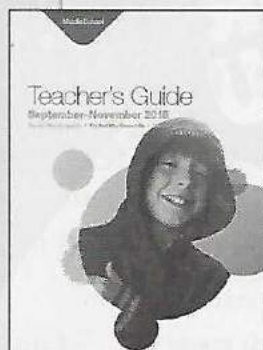
SENSITIVITY

As you talk about families, avoid assumptions about family life. Include references—without sounding negative—to those families whose members are composed of non-traditional members. Be sensitive to children and youth who live in a blended family, shared-custody, or foster situation. Help each student feel valued and loved regardless of his or her home circumstances. As you show acceptance, children and youth will see a picture of the way God loves them!

SUPPORT

Your impact doesn't end when students leave your classroom. As a teacher, you have unique opportunities to help families. Your support can begin with something as simple as a friendly conversation at the end of class, a text message, or a phone call. Letting families know you care—along with creating a safe place for adults as well as their children—is one more way you can support and love both the students you teach and their families.

Materials for Your Middle School Class



Middle School Teacher Guide

Each of the 13 lessons contains step-by-step instructions to help you prepare and teach, with Bible background, tips for teaching middle schoolers, and a variety of activities to help your students learn and apply the Bible lesson. Need one per class.



Middle School Creative Teaching Aids

This packet contains a variety of posters, games, 3D models, puzzles, and more. Need one per class.



The Rock

This student book contains eight pages for each lesson including Bible studies, stories, and articles. As a bonus, each book contains a six-day devotional schedule for your students. Need one per student.



Free! Downloadable Options for Steps 1 and 4

- The latest in pop culture.
- News that just happened.
- Relevant subjects from today's world that are rarely talked about in Sunday school!


resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded





Online Teacher Training! Visit www.wphstore.com for more helpful resources.


Bring the Bible to Life for Teens

Use our proven, effective 4-step lesson plan.
Here's how it works:

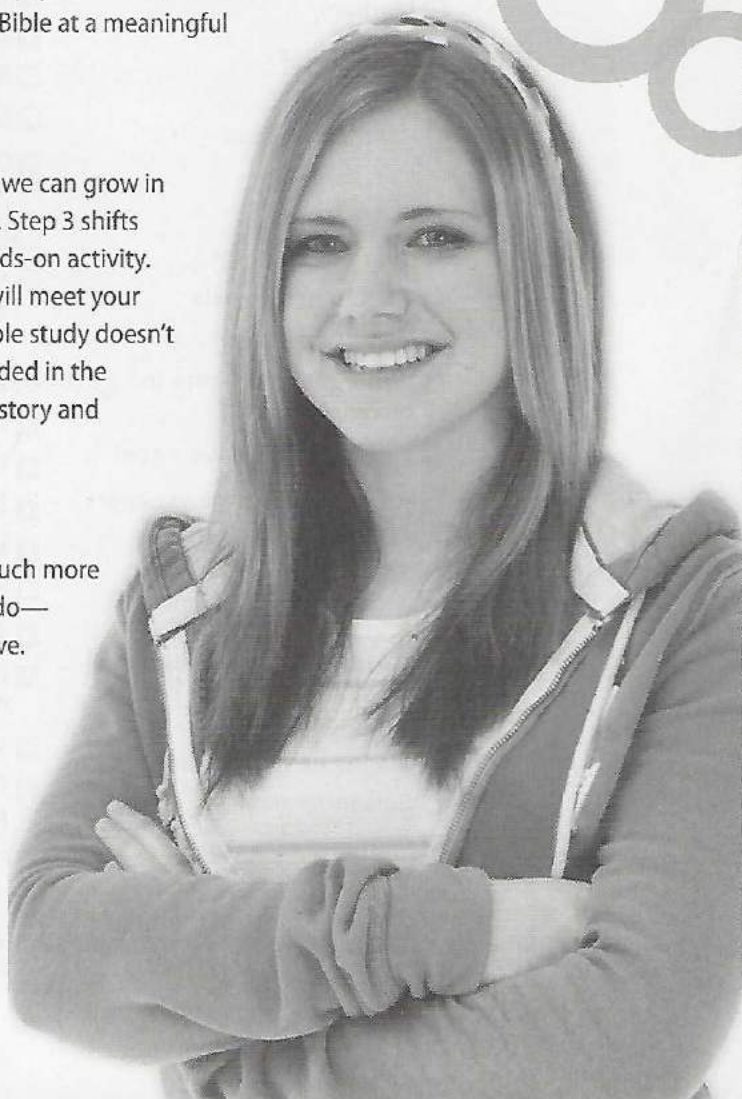
STEP 1  Scripture makes it clear that God puts priority on relationships. We grow the most spiritually when we are in relationship with others. Or, as the youth ministry adage goes: You have to open the kid before you open the Book. Step 1 gives you and your students a chance to share about yourselves and your lives and encourages them to be active participants in your discussion. You'll make real-life connections between their lives and what the Bible says. These conversations will flow naturally into Step 2, your Bible lesson.

STEP 2  God reveals His nature to us through His written Word. In Step 2, you'll study God's story. You'll dive into a portion of God's Word and then review it together. You'll lead the lesson by asking relevant questions so your students will not only understand what they've just read, but also realize how it connects to their lives. Through this step, you'll be able to make sure your students engage in a fruitful discussion about the Bible at a meaningful level.

STEP 3  God asks us to internalize His Word so we can grow in relationship with Him (Ps. 1:2; 119:97). Step 3 shifts your lesson from a discussion to a hands-on activity. Different activity options allow you to choose the one that will meet your students at their levels—and their interests—so that the Bible study doesn't just go in one ear and out the other. By doing activities founded in the Bible lesson, your teens will actively work through the Bible story and interact with the text.

STEP 4  The Bible makes it clear that faith is much more than a list of beliefs. It's also what we do—how we live out what we say we believe.

Step 4 is a way for you to encourage life application by your students. Together you'll recap what you've learned and help your teens carry the Sunday school lesson into the rest of their week. You'll be able to provide them with practical suggestions for ways to live out their faith in real life so they will be doers of the Word, not just hearers.



Supply List

Needed for Every Lesson

- ☐ Middle School Creative Teaching Aids
- ☐ The Rock
- ☐ Bibles

Classroom Supplies

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Whiteboard
- ☐ Whiteboard markers and eraser

Lesson 1

- ☐ Markers
- ☒ Old clothes
- ☒ Mural paper
- ☒ Postage stamps

Lesson 2

- ☒ Two tables
- ☒ Sheets and towels
- ☒ Variety of balls
- ☒ White elephant gifts in boxes
- ☒ Gift wrap or tissue paper
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers

Lesson 3

- ☒ Basket, box or bag
- ☒ Beads and thread, or small stones, marbles or buttons and small bags
- ☒ Magazines or newspapers
- ☐ Scissors, glue
- ☐ Markers

Lesson 4

- ☐ Prepared concentration cards

Lesson 5

- ☐ Scissors and glue
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers

Lesson 6

- ☒ Two bags of small, multi-colored candy
- ☒ Cups
- ☒ Pretty jar or bottle
- ☒ Two bowls
- ☒ Journal paper

Lesson 7

- ☒ Concordances
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Scissors and glue
- ☐ Markers
- ☒ Construction paper

Lesson 8

- ☐ No additional materials

Lesson 9

- ☒ Four certificates
- ☒ Beanbag
- ☒ Ball of string
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Scissors and glue
- ☒ A coin
- ☒ Permanent or fabric markers
- ☒ White athletic socks
- ☒ Christian music CD and CD player
- ☒ Cardboard

Lesson 10

- ☒ Three pretend \$20 bills
- ☒ Plastic straws cut to various lengths in a paper bag
- ☒ Small snacks or prizes
- ☒ Photocopies of Bible quiz
- ☒ Two envelopes
- ☒ 20 pennies

Lesson 11

- ☒ Water-based paints or markers
- ☒ Construction paper
- ☐ Scissors and glue

Lesson 12

- ☒ Masking tape
- ☒ Ball of yarn
- ☐ Scissors, glue, and tape
- ☒ Craft supplies
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers

Lesson 13

- ☒ Large target
- ☒ Beanbags or hacky sacks

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

lesson 1

Bible Basis:

Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Luke 1:5, 11-17, 57, 76, 80; Matthew 3:1-3; 11:7-10

Focus:

Get ready for the Savior.

Ready or Not, Here He Comes

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Preparing Ahead: Students will brainstorm ways to prepare for various events.

- ☐ Paper, markers, pencils or pens

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Malachi 3; Isaiah 40; Luke 1; Matthew 3; 11: Students will study various passages to see what the Bible says about getting ready for the Savior.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Preparing the Way: Students will choose from activities that explore how to prepare for Jesus' arrival.

- ☒ Old clothes
- ☐ Paper, pencils or pens, markers, Bibles or *The Rock*
- ☒ Mural paper

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Preparing Others for the Savior: Students will plan ways to get themselves and others ready for the Savior.

- ☒ Postage stamps
- ☐ Poster board, markers, pencils or pens
- ☐ "Postcards" from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Memory Verse

The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.

—1 Corinthians 3:8

Understanding the Bible

Good news! Jesus was born and came into the world to deliver people from sin. It's not easy for people to accept that they need to repent and turn to God for forgiveness.

Knowing the condition of humankind, God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the LORD as it says in Isaiah 40:3. The Gospel writers linked a "voice" in Isaiah 40:3 with John the Baptist in Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, and John 1:23. In John 1:23, John the Baptist made the connection himself. Jesus also stated that John was the messenger sent to prepare the way (Matt. 11:10; 17:12-13).

John the Baptist had a deep and long-lasting influence on Israel. It had been a long time since the nation had had a prophet, and people came out in droves to hear this unusual messenger (Mark 1:5).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus barely alluded to Jesus, but he described at length John's influence. Groups of John's followers continued to meet for many years after his death. Even today a sect called the Mandaeans claims to perpetuate the movement begun by John the Baptist.

John never tried to be Christ's rival; he knew his mission was to point the way to Jesus. The New Testament tells us that many of Jesus' followers, such as Andrew (John 1:35-42) and Apollos (Acts 18:24-25), were

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

first John's followers. John performed his mission well.

One of the Old Testament passages most commonly associated with John the Baptist is Isaiah 40:3-5. The expression "prepare the way for the LORD" alludes to a custom in ancient times of sending representatives to prepare the way for a visiting monarch. In a spiritual sense, this was John's role. By preaching repentance and pointing to Christ, John the Baptist prepared people to welcome the Messiah.

Classroom Tips

When you divide your class members into groups, you can avoid students' forming cliques by dividing them according to any number of arbitrary guidelines. Try some of these: alphabetically by a random letter of their name, for example, the third letter of their first name; according to birthdays—January through June in one group and July through December in another, or the 1st through 15th in one group, the 16th through 31st in another group; according to what colors they are wearing; etc. Use your imagination to keep your students guessing!

Teacher Devo

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him." Luke 1:76

John knew he was called to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. What a huge responsibility! What an honor!

Think about your life and the people you cross paths with each day. Are they Christians or non-Christians? What do they need most in their lives? Christians may need you to share a word of encouragement or to hold them accountable in a specific area. Non-Christians may need to see that looking out for others' interests is many times better than looking out for "number one." They may need to see a relevant difference Christ makes in your life.

What example do you model before these people?

Do you help prepare them for the coming of Jesus?

Ask God to use you today to prepare your youth for Christ's coming.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Many middle-school students are hesitant about sharing their faith in Christ because they fear rejection and ridicule from peers. Few have the self-confidence and maturity to be as bold as John the Baptist.

But there are many ways early adolescents can prepare others to receive the good news of Christ. Help middle-school students see that everything they do or say can be a witness for

Christ. They may not always directly share about their faith in Jesus with others. However, other middle schoolers may learn about Christ through the examples set by their Christian friends.

Encourage youth to know what they believe and why. Just as John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus, so middle schoolers have the responsibility to share with others about Jesus.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Get ready for the Savior.

Before Class Option

Have early-arrivers brainstorm a list of the things they need to do to prepare for a ski or snowboarding trip. They must list the things they need to do in advance and items they need to pack.

Through team brainstorming and group discussion, students will think about how they prepare for different things.

Materials:

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Pencils or pens

Divide your youth into two groups. Ask each group to brainstorm and write examples on their papers of ways we prepare others or ourselves for various events. Write the following questions on the board or another place where both groups can see them.

- ➊ What do you do to prepare your parents for your report card?
- ➋ How does your family prepare for a visit from relatives?
- ➌ How do you prepare yourself for a test, class elections, or tryouts of some kind?
- ➍ How do you prepare for a big game, recital, or other performance?

After your students have had a few minutes to discuss these questions, call the class back together and have each small group report their ideas. After you discuss answers for each question, ask students:

- ➎ What would happen if you didn't prepare for this event? Consider the consequences. *(Encourage students to share their responses.)*

After students have shared ideas about all of these events, ask:

- ➏ Why is proper preparation so important? *(Without proper preparation, other people might be caught off guard and respond in a way we don't want them to. Preparation is important if we want something to turn out a certain way or if we want to perform at our very best.)*
- ➐ What are some other things it's important to prepare for? *(Encourage students to share.)*

Today we're going to learn about someone who was born especially to prepare others for something very special. And we'll learn how we can help others prepare too.



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3;
Luke 1:5, 11-17, 57, 76, 80;
Matthew 3:1-3; 11:7-10



Alternate Method

Assign parts to students and read Today's Scripture dramatically.

Students will study Malachi, Isaiah, Luke, and Matthew to see what God's Word has to say about preparing for the Savior.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Distribute pencils or pens and copies of *The Rock*, and ask your students to open to Today's Scripture on page 5. Have volunteers take turns reading aloud the various passages while other students follow along. You might want to ask for volunteers to read the various passages directly from their Bibles. Ask these questions to be sure students understand what they have heard and read.

- ▶ **Who were the parents of John the Baptist?** (Zechariah and Elizabeth.)
- ▶ **For what or whom was the messenger to prepare the people?** (The coming of Jesus.)
- ▶ **How?** (By bringing many people back to the Lord, turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.)
- ▶ **Where did John live until he appeared publicly?** (In the desert.)
- ▶ **What message did John preach to the people?** (Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.)

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Bible Study

Malachi 3:1

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.

Isaiah 40:3

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Luke 1:5

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

Luke 1:11-17

"Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.'"

"He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:57

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

Luke 1:76

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

Luke 1:80

And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Matthew 3:1-3

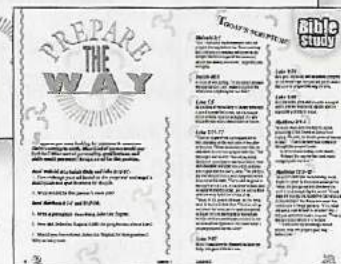
"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

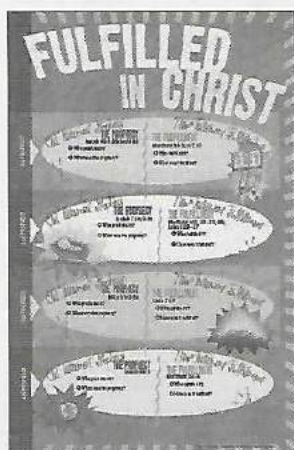
"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Matthew 11:7-10

"As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"





Display the "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from the creative teaching aids. You will be using this chart for several weeks, so be sure to save it for future use. Have a volunteer fill in the "Who predicted it?" (Isaiah and Malachi) and "Who fulfilled it?" (John the Baptist) sections for the first prophecy. Also, as a class, come up with a summary for the prophecy and its fulfillment, and have your volunteer write those on the chart as well. For example:

Prophecy: "A messenger to prepare the people for Jesus' coming."

Fulfillment: "John called people to repentance."

Discuss these questions:

- ❶ Why do you think a messenger was needed to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus? (Accept all reasonable answers. Possible answers may include: to fulfill prophecy; so the Jewish people would know Jesus was the Messiah; to bring the people back to God; so the people would repent of their sins.)
- ❷ What kind of person do you think John had to be to act as the messenger for God? What qualities did he probably possess? (Accept all reasonable answers. These may include: strong personality; willing to be different; able to stand up for the truth and what is right; close to God; not afraid to confront others; committed to the Lord; willing to go the distance in spite of any hardships.)

PREPARE THE WAY

Suppose you were looking for someone to announce Christ's coming to earth. What kind of person would you look for? What sort of personality, qualifications, and skills would you want? Design an ad for this position.

Read Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; and Luke 1:11-17.

1. Now redesign your ad based on the prophets' and angel's description and qualifications for the job.

2. What would be this person's main job?

Read Matthew 3:1-3 and 11:7-10.

3. Write a paragraph describing John the Baptist.

4. How did John the Baptist fulfill the prophecies about him?

5. Would you have hired John the Baptist for this position? Why or why not?



Direct your students to page 4 of *The Rock*. Make sure all students have a pencil or pen. Question 5 is used later in the lesson so you may or may not want to cover it here. Depending on your plan have students complete the third and fourth questions and possibly question five:

❸ 3. Write a paragraph describing John the Baptist. (Invite volunteers to share their paragraphs with the class. They will probably include some of the information discussed above.)

❹ 4. How did John the Baptist fulfill the prophecies about him? (John was a messenger who prepared people for Jesus' coming. Jesus came shortly after John. He lived in the desert. Many people repented because of his preaching.)

Now that we've studied about how John the Baptist helped people get ready for the promised Savior, let's do some activities that explore what it means for us to get ready for the return of Jesus.

STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

Students will choose from activities that explore getting ready for the Savior.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "John the Baptist" your students will dress and preach like a modern-day John the Baptist; in "Special Visitor" students will brainstorm how they would prepare for a visit by Jesus; and in "Classified Ads" students will complete an activity from *The Rock* that explores John's qualifications for his messenger job.

John the Baptist

- ☐ Old clothes
- ☐ Mural paper
- ☐ Markers

In this activity you'll think about what a modern-day John the Baptist would look like and sound like. Using the clothes provided, dress someone in your group as you think a modern-day John the Baptist might dress. If there are no volunteers to dress up, you may draw a modern-day John the Baptist on mural paper. Either way, write possible things a modern-day John the Baptist might say to prepare others for the Lord.

Special Visitor

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

In this activity you will think about and write down how you would prepare for a special visit by Jesus.

- If you knew Jesus was to return during your Sunday school class next week, what would you do to get ready?
- How would you prepare the room?
- How would you prepare yourself?
- Would you personally do anything differently this week?

Write down your ideas.

Classified Ads

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Markers, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

In this activity you will create a "Want Ad" based on page 4 of *The Rock*, considering John the Baptist's qualifications for his messenger job. Suppose you were looking for someone to announce Jesus' coming to earth.

- What kind of person would you look for?
- What sort of personality, qualifications, and skills would you want?

Design an ad for print or radio production. Keep in mind the prophets' and angel's description

and qualifications for the job.

- Would you have hired John the Baptist for this position? Why or why not?



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Get ready for the Savior.

Students will plan ways to get themselves and others ready for the Savior.

Materials:

- ☒ Postage stamps
- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ "Postcards" from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Now that your students have seen how John the Baptist helped the Jewish people prepare for Jesus' coming, help them put their knowledge into action. Your students also know people who need to prepare for Jesus' coming in their lives—help your students prepare their own hearts and other people for Jesus' coming into their lives and His return to earth.

- **What things about John's lifestyle and character made him a believable messenger to prepare the people for Jesus?** (*Accept all reasonable answers. He was full of the Spirit; he did not drink strong drink; he lived a simple life in the desert.*)
- **What things about a person's lifestyle and character today would make that person a believable messenger to prepare people for Jesus?** (*Some answers might be the same: full of the Holy Spirit; living a just and upright life; avoiding evil activities; treating others with compassion; consistent character; staying close to God; etc.*)

Today we are living, modern-day messengers responsible for telling and showing others the way to Jesus. But in order to help others prepare for Jesus' return and entrance into their lives, we also need to prepare our own hearts. Think about what you might need to change or do differently in order to be an effective messenger, someone who can prepare others for Jesus. Allow a moment for your youth to examine their hearts and repent in silent prayer. This week, let's see if we can help someone else prepare for the Savior's return or entrance into their life.

Take the postcards from your teaching aids packet and have each person choose at least one. On the postcards they should write a short note to a friend or relative, preferably a non-Christian or someone else who needs help getting ready for the Savior in his or her life. Urge students to mail or hand deliver the postcards this week. If possible, bring sufficient postage to class.

Seal It!

Close in a prayer for those who will receive the postcards. Pray that their hearts and minds will be open to the message of Jesus Christ. Encourage any students who would like to offer sentence prayers of their own to do so. Open and close the prayer time yourself. Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.

Seeing God throughout the Week Your students will prepare their hearts and get ready for the Savior. Encourage students to interact this week in prayer for each other.

LES. 1



lesson 2

Bible Basis:

Isaiah 7:14; 9:1b, 6-7; Luke 1:26-27; Matthew 1:18-23

Focus:

Expect the unexpected from God.

Expect the Unexpected

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Unsuspecting Volunteers: Students will be surprised.

- ☒ Two tables, sheets or blankets and towels
- ☒ Variety of balls

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Isaiah 7; 9; Luke 1; Matthew 1:
Students study what God's Word says about expecting the unexpected.

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Surprising Events: Students will explore activities.

- ☒ White elephant gifts in boxes
- ☒ Gift wrap or tissue paper
- ☐ Scissors, tape, paper, pencils or pens
- ☒ Magazines or newspapers
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Planning for the Unexpected: Students will contemplate the unexpected ways of God.

- ☐ Whiteboard and markers
- ☐ "Expect the Unexpected" poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Memory Verse

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

—Isaiah 7:14b

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Understanding the Bible

In first-century B.C. Palestine, marriage customs differed in many respects from our own. There was no engagement period as we have today. Instead, there was a more binding premarriage arrangement, usually called a betrothal, which often lasted six months. This arrangement was begun with a public betrothal ceremony. After the betrothal, the couple were considered to have an official agreement to be married. The betrothed couple were often called husband and wife. In the rare instances when a betrothal was broken, this action might be called a "divorce" (Matt. 1:19). But by tradition, the betrothed couple did not live together and did not have sexual relations until marriage.

A couple named Mary and Joseph, both from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, were "pledged" (Matt. 1:18)—that is, betrothed—when they were informed that they would raise God's Son. First, the angel Gabriel told Mary that she, though a virgin, would have a child by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26, 35). Later, an angel (perhaps Gabriel again) instructed Joseph to go ahead and marry the pregnant Mary. Before Joseph received his angelic visitor, he had somehow found out that Mary was pregnant. He naturally assumed that she had been unfaithful to him, since the child could not have been his. When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy, custom

—continued on next page

Understanding the Bible —cont'd

presented him with two options. He could have charged Mary with adultery and forced her to go through a public trial, or Joseph could have spared Mary and others involved much humiliation by speaking with the necessary parties and quietly dissolving his bond with Mary. Joseph had chosen the second option but had not yet put it into action when the angel came to him. Once he heard from the angel, Joseph, like Mary, submitted to God's will.

In this way, Mary and Joseph were prepared for Jesus' birth. This would be the unique virgin birth predicted about 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah.

Classroom Tips

This week's lesson requires a bit of setup before class. Make sure you give yourself enough time to set up the tables as required, and enlist a volunteer before class to be the "surprise." Make sure your volunteer understands what to do. You could ask either one of your own class members or another adult from your church. Proper preparations will make this activity one your students will not soon forget!

Teacher Devo

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory. Ephesians 3:20-21a

An encouraging note in the mail. A phone call telling you that you are loved. A kind word said in passing. The unexpected blessings that we so often take for granted. God does more for us than we ever know! He can do more than we ask or even imagine.

Your middle-school students need to see someone who recognizes and believes in a great and awesome God. They need to know that God will take them through whatever experiences they might deal with in life. Although we might face the unexpected, God always knows what we will face. And His plan is for us to have the best, more than all we ask or imagine.

Pray that you will be open to the unexpected things that come your way. Pray that you will be an example to youth of a confident and living faith in a great God. Pray that you and your youth will be open to the unexpected ways of God.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Sometimes the Bible confronts us with issues that may be a little tricky to handle in discussion. Today's theme of the virgin birth of Jesus is one of those issues, especially when discussing it with middle-school students.

Sex is an important topic to middle schoolers. Their minds and bodies are awakening to changes in ways that are both marvelous and confusing. In discussion they are likely to react with embarrassment, laughter, and clowning

around. That can make anyone feel embarrassed and frustrated.

Try to be calm and matter-of-fact in your discussions. Most likely middle schoolers will feel grateful for the example you set and, after calming down, will handle the discussion in a matter-of-fact way themselves.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Expect the unexpected from God.

Before Class Option

Have students create their biggest smile possible. Use a tape measure to find out whose smile is widest.

Students will play a game and discuss their surprise.

Materials:

- ▣ Two tables, sheets or blankets and towels
- ▣ Variety of balls

Before class, set up two tables end to end, and cover them with sheets or blankets. Leave a small space between the two tables, large enough for someone to kneel on the floor and place his or her head to look as if it were on the table. Place the balls on the tables and cover them and the person's head with the towels. It is best to use balls that are approximately the same size as someone's head, for example, soccer ball, volleyball, or basketball. Ask for three volunteers, and send two of them out of the room. Explain to the remaining volunteer that he or she will come to the table, lift a towel, call out the type of ball, then move to the next towel on the table. Each student will be timed and should try to go as fast as possible.

Instruct the first volunteer to begin when ready. He or she will lift the towels and identify the balls. When the towel is lifted with the person's head underneath, the hidden volunteer should yell or scream, surprising the player. This will bring a big laugh from the audience, as well as various reactions of surprise from the player.

Allow your students to compose themselves, then bring in the next volunteer player. Continue until all three volunteers have completed the game and have been shocked by the hidden player.

After lots of laughter, ask your middle schoolers, both the players and the audience, to discuss these questions.

- ▶ What did it feel like to be surprised?
- ▶ Were you expecting anything unusual to happen? Why or why not?
- ▶ For the audience, how did it feel to watch each new volunteer play the game?
- ▶ Tell about another time when you were surprised.

Today we are going to read about some people in the Bible who were surprised by the unexpected.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Isaiah 7:14; 9:1b, 6-7;
Luke 1:26-27; Matthew
1:18-23



Students will study Isaiah, Luke, and Matthew to see what God's Word has to say about expecting the unexpected.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Distribute *The Rock* and pencils or pens, and have a volunteer read aloud the introduction in boldface type under "Supernatural Surprise" on page 4. Then ask your youth to read Today's Scripture on page 5 silently as two volunteers read aloud. One may read the Isaiah passages and the other the New Testament passages. After the reading, work through the questions on pages 4 and 5 together with your students. Possible answers are given here.

1. The following should be circled: Immanuel; child; son; Wonderful Counselor; Mighty God; Everlasting Father; Prince of Peace; of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end; he will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever; Lord Almighty.
2. Immanuel would rule with peace, justice, and righteousness; He would be a good, fair, powerful, compassionate King, the ruler many people would look forward to.
3. The following should be circled. angel Gabriel; virgin; through the Holy Spirit; angel

of the Lord; from the Holy Spirit; save his people from their sins; fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; Immanuel.

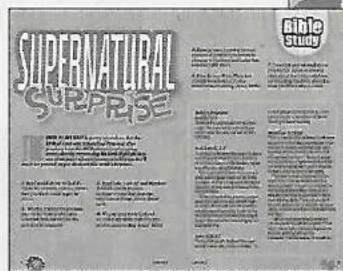
4. Maybe God wanted to be sure that Jesus' birth was obviously the fulfillment of many prophecies, and obviously a miracle from Him. Perhaps He didn't want anyone to mistake another person's birth for that of Immanuel.

5. Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled in Luke 1:27 and Matthew 1:18, 23. Isaiah 9:1 mentions Galilee, as does Luke 1:26.

6. The miracles surrounding Jesus' birth

Alternate Method

Assign parts to students and read Today's Scripture dramatically.



BIRTH OF ANY BABY is pretty miraculous. But the birth of Jesus was astounding! Prophecy after prophecy from the Old Testament and amazing events directly surrounding His birth highlight it as one of the most miraculous events in history. You'll see it for yourself as you check out this week's Scripture.

1. Read Isaiah 7:14; 9:1b, 6-7.

Circle the phrases in those verses that you think could apply to Jesus.

2. What is it about the phrases you circled that might make someone look forward to the arrival of Immanuel?

3. Read Luke 1:26-27 and Matthew 1:18-23.

Circle phrases in those verses that describe miraculous things about Jesus' birth.

4. Why do you think God put so many apparent miracles into motion surrounding Jesus' birth?

probably helped Mary and Joseph remember through a difficult time that what was happening to them was a miracle from God. This might have helped them feel special and encouraged them to follow God's plan for them. The angel visitors were probably especially encouraging.

7. Answers will vary but should reflect some grasp of Jesus' supernatural nature and the fact that He came as God in the flesh.

Display the Unit Chart "Fulfilled in Christ" from your teaching aids packet. Have a volunteer fill in the second oval on the chart.

Prophecy:

Isaiah—Immanuel would be born of a virgin.

Fulfillment:

Jesus—He was born of Mary, a virgin.

Read this week's memory verse together with your students from their Bibles or page 8 of *The Rock*. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" Isaiah 7:14.

① **Mary and Joseph were probably young when this happened. How do you think they must have felt when they learned that Mary was pregnant?** (Encourage students to share, and accept all reasonable answers. These could include: surprised; confused; scared; worried about what other people would think; excited about bringing the promised Savior into the world.)

Now that we've studied how God surprised Mary and Joseph with the unexpected, let's do some activities that explore what it means for people to expect the unexpected from God.

Bible Study

5. Draw arrows from the circled phrases of prophecy in Isaiah to phrases in Matthew and Luke that seem to fulfill them.

6. How do you think Mary and Joseph were helped by the miracles surrounding Jesus' birth?

7. Now that you've read some prophecies about Jesus and read about the circumstances surrounding His birth, describe what you think about Jesus.

Today's Scripture Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:1b, 6-7

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Luke 1:26-27

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 'to

a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Matthew 1:18-23

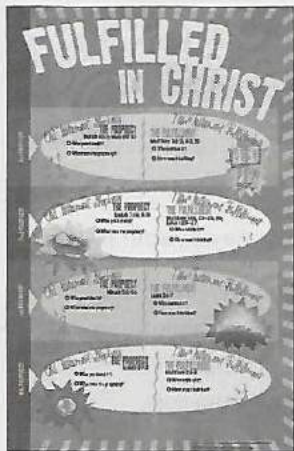
"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. "Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

"But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Lesson 2

5



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

Students will choose from activities that explore how to expect the unexpected from God.

tip For "Surprise Gifts," bring in a white elephant gift for each student. Use old junk from around home or small items like rubber bands, paper clips, rocks, uncooked noodles, etc. Put the items in boxes and tape them shut.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Have them work individually or in groups. If your class is small, prepare just one or two activities. In "Surprise Gifts" students will exchange gifts and discuss their expectations; in "Journals" students will write about how Mary or Joseph might have felt about the news of Jesus' impending birth; and in "Unexpected News Show" students will present a short news program highlighting unexpected ways that God has worked in the lives of young people.

Surprise Gifts

- ☒ White elephant gifts in boxes
- ☒ Gift wrap or tissue paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Tape

In this activity you will wrap and exchange gifts and talk about expectations. Choose one of the gift boxes, and without looking inside, wrap it to give to somebody. When everybody has wrapped one gift, exchange them with each other and open them. Then discuss:

- ▶ If this gift were under your tree at home, what would you expect to be inside?
- ▶ How do your expectations affect your feelings?

Journals

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will write what Mary or Joseph might have written in a personal journal. Read again the Scriptures on page 5 of *The Rock*. Think about how Joseph and Mary might have felt and the things that may have been running through their minds. For example, you may write about their visits from angels, how their friends and families responded, or how they felt about becoming parents.



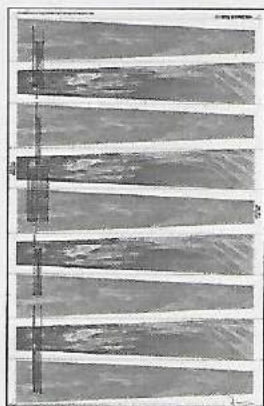
Unexpected News Show

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☒ Magazines or newspapers

In this activity you will present a short news program highlighting unexpected events that have occurred recently in the lives of young people. You may use examples from people that you know, or look through recent newspapers and magazines to find more stories. Speculate about how God might use these events, or report on how He already has. You might want to write down some notes before you present your news report.

STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson
Focus:Expect the unexpected
from God.**Students will plan ways to be open to the unexpected ways of God.****Materials:**

- ☐ Whiteboard and markers
- ☐ "Expect the Unexpected" poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Today your students have been learning about the unexpected ways in which God works. In this step you will help them plan ways in which they can expect and welcome the unexpected from God in their own lives.

Display the poster "Expect the Unexpected" from your teaching aids packet where everyone can see it. Have students stare at the poster. Ask students what they see.

► **What happens when you take a closer look at the design of this poster?** (Encourage students to say what they see in the images and explain their perception of the pictures displayed. Upon closer inspection of the pictures, students should see a manger scene and a crucifixion scene.)

Explain that, just as the volunteers in the opening activity were surprised by a head instead of a ball, many people in Bible times were surprised by the birth of Jesus. Even with the Old Testament prophecies foretelling Jesus' birth, many people still did not expect God to send the Messiah in such a radical way.

► **What are some ways that you see God working in the world today?**

Encourage students to think of ways God works that may or may not be obvious to everyone. Write their answers on the board. Explain that, in order to see God working, we must be open to the unexpected ways of God. Ask: **How can you be more open to God's unexpected ways in your own life?** (Do not insist that students share if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Answers will vary, and might include: not insisting on my own way; being more flexible; listening to other people's ideas; looking for God's plan and listening to His direction.)

(Optional) Separate the creative teaching aid poster into strips, and give each student a strip to take home.

► **Seal It!**

Just as a puzzle fits together to form a picture, so God is working to make our lives complete. Although we may not understand how certain pieces fit together, God has a great plan for our lives. Close in prayer, asking God to help each individual in the group be open to God's unexpected ways. Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



► **Seeing God throughout the Week** Remind students that God works in unexpected ways. Encourage students to be willing to be surprised by God and what He might do in their lives this week.

lesson 3

Bible Basis:

Micah 5:2-5a; 2 Samuel 7:16;
Luke 2:1-7

Focus:

Jesus became poor so we could become rich.

From Rags to Riches

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Exploring Riches: Students will discuss what it means to be rich.

- ☐ Paper, pencils or pens
- ☐ Whiteboard and markers

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Micah, 2 Samuel, and Luke: Students will study Micah, 2 Samuel and Luke about how Jesus became poor so we could be rich.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Leaving His Wealth: Students will choose from activities that explore Jesus' riches and our own.

- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Paper, pencils or pens, poster board, markers, scissors, glue, index cards
- ☒ Basket, box or bag
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Accepting His Gifts: Students will plan ways to experience the riches available to them through Christ.

- ☒ Beads and thread or small stones, marbles or buttons, and small bags
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

Memory Verse

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. —2 Corinthians 8:9

Under- standing the Bible

Luke's purpose for writing his Gospel is stated in the beginning verses: "to write an orderly account for you" after a careful investigation of the facts concerning Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). Luke carefully detailed the events recorded in his book.

Concerning the birth of Jesus, Luke recorded that the event occurred during the reign of Caesar Augustus. This Roman emperor ruled between 27 B.C. and A.D. 14.

Jesus' birth occurred in Bethlehem, as foretold by Micah, while Quirinius was governing in Syria. With interruptions, Quirinius was military governor or commander-in-chief in Syria at times from 12 B.C. to A.D. 16.

Luke said Jesus' birthplace came about as result of Caesar's decree for an empire-wide census. This census, the first of many censuses taken every 14 years for tax purposes, was decreed in 8 B.C. (In Palestine the census must have been delayed for two to four years. By comparing other chronological clues in the New Testament, most scholars think Jesus was born sometime between 6-4 B.C.)

Mary and Joseph were both descended from the line of David, fulfilling yet another biblical mandate for the Messiah. So they were both registered for the census at David's hometown, Bethlehem, even though they lived in Nazareth, about 90 miles away. Family records were probably kept in Bethlehem.

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Jesus' birth was a historical event, a reality set in the midst of real human events. Today's Scripture emphasizes both the prophecy and the historical fulfillment of prophecy by the birth of Jesus.

Classroom Tips

In today's lesson you may need to be especially sensitive to the economic situations of your students' families, especially if they display a wide spectrum. Do not let your "wealthy" students look down on those who do not have as much material wealth, and likewise, do not let your less wealthy students put down any who have more money than they do. If the discussion gets too personal, direct it back to more general terms, embracing such themes as celebrity lifestyles. By the end of this lesson, your students should understand that any material riches we might possess are worth nothing compared to the riches we enjoy in Christ.

Teacher Devo

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (See also John 1:1-18)

John tells us that the Word existed in the beginning, was with God, and was God. Yet when the Word became flesh and was born of a woman, Jesus accepted the limitations and the poverty that being mortal involved. He surrendered the glory, riches, and power of heaven so that humanity can experience those same riches.

As we celebrate the newborn Jesus, we should also remember the salvation we obtain through Jesus' death and resurrection. What are some creative ways to incorporate the risen Christ into the celebration of Christ's birth?

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Younger youth are beginning to grasp abstract concepts beyond the concrete facts of familiar Bible stories. The birth of Jesus is a good example of a Bible story that younger youth need to revisit at a different level of understanding. Encourage your middle schoolers to think and understand in three important ways:

1. Talk at their level of understanding, encouraging questions and discussion.

2. Allow unconventional ideas and thinking. Support and/or correct their ideas without embarrassing or criticizing students.

3. Challenge your middle schoolers with new ideas and thoughts that encourage further study and discussion.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus became poor so we could become rich.

Before class Option

Poll students about gifts they desire and the costs of those items.

Students will discuss what it means to be rich.

Materials:

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Whiteboard and markers

Have your youth form groups of three or four students for this activity. Write the following questions on the board or where everyone can see them, and have youth brainstorm their answers. Distribute paper, pencils or pens and be sure each group has at least one person to record the group's answers. Possible answers are given here beneath each question.

▶ What things do you associate with the word "rich"? the word "poor"?

(Rich: Lots of money, big houses, fancy cars, lots of high-tech electronic equipment, exotic vacations, private jets, fancy clothes, etc.) (Poor: Old clothes, old car, dumpy house, etc.)

After a few minutes, call the class back together and have a representative from each group share some of their ideas. Allow time for students to discuss their opinions. Then continue your discussion with these questions:

▶ Do you think that the people with the riches we're talking about are happy? Why or why not? (Answers will vary. Most students will agree that actually having these things does not necessarily make a person happy, although it doesn't necessarily make a person unhappy either.)

▶ What other "riches" can make people happy? (Close family relationships, good friends, good health, an attitude of enjoyment of life, a relationship with Jesus, etc.)

▶ What are some things that can make even rich people poor? (Bad family relationships, no friends, poor health, addictions, selfishness, etc.)

▶ So what does the word "rich" really mean? (Answers will vary. Some students might say that being rich means having everything you need to be happy and enjoy life.)

Now that we've talked a little about what it means to be rich or poor, let's explore what the Bible has to say about Jesus' becoming poor so we could become rich.



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Micah 5:2-5a; 2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 2:1-7



Alternate Method

Instead of addressing the discussion questions as a large group, divide your class into several smaller groups for discussion, then come back together to share students' findings.



Students will study Micah, 2 Samuel, and Luke to see what God's Word says about Jesus' becoming poor so that we could be rich.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Distribute *The Rock* and have students turn to Today's Scripture on page 5. Have a volunteer read aloud the introduction in bold under "Stable Situation" on page 4. Then have two other volunteers read aloud (the first volunteer reading the two passages of prophecy, and the second volunteer reading the Luke passage) while the rest of the class follows along. Work through the questions together with your students.

1. The following should have a star at the beginning of the phrases: Ruler over Israel; whose origins are from of old; He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth; he will be their peace.

2. Bethlehem was small among the clans of Judah. It was not an important city.

3. This person could rule forever if this person was God and also lived forever.

4. The following phrases should be circled: To Bethlehem, the town of David; he belonged to the house and line of David; she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

5. Being from humble circumstances might help the ruler to understand the poor people and the struggles that they face each day just

Table

The Son of the Almighty God was about to be born as a human baby on earth. What sort of surroundings would seem to fit such a birth? Lots of publicity? Rich linens? A cradle in a palace? Hardly. The Prince of Peace was born poor—for a reason.

1. Check out Micah 5:2-5a. Put a star at the beginning of phrases that describe the one who would come out of Bethlehem.

2. What do you think was unusual about the prediction that "the ruler" would come from Bethlehem?

3. Read 2 Samuel 7:16. It's part of a promise God made to David about one of David's descendants. How do you think this person could rule forever?

4. Read Luke 2:1-7. Circle phrases that you think are related to the above Old Testament passages.

to live. This could help him be fair and compassionate.

6. God might have had His Son enter the world in such a humble way so that He could better understand us. Also so that we could know that He understands us and that we can approach Him. So we would not be afraid to get to know Him.

7. Answers will vary but should reflect God's desire for us to be in a relationship with Him. He gave up so much for us.

Display the "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from your Middle School Creative Teaching Aids, and have a volunteer fill in the third oval.

Prophecy: Micah and Samuel—Messiah would come from Bethlehem, from David's line.

Fulfillment: Jesus—He was born in Bethlehem, from a descendant of David.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-5. What was Jesus' life like in heaven before He came to earth? What did He give up to become human? (Jesus reigned with His Father in heaven. Seraphs [angels] praised Him. He was all-powerful.)
2. What was Jesus' birth on earth like? Was it a birth befitting a king? (Jesus' parents weren't even truly married yet. They were out of town when Jesus was born and had no place to stay. He was apparently born in a stable and had a manger for a crib. Jesus became poor so we could become rich!)
3. What kinds of riches can we gain because of what Jesus did for us? (We will one day live forever with God. Jesus made our salvation from sin possible. He also sent His Spirit to help and comfort us now. We can have a better life and better relationships on earth because of Him.)

Now that we've studied how Jesus became poor so that we could become rich, let's do some activities that explore what that means for us.

Bible Study

5. How might being born in humble circumstances be of help to the ruler described in Micah 5:2-5a?

6. Why do you think God had His Son enter the world in such a humble way?

7. What does Jesus' act of giving up the privileges of heaven to come to earth say to you about God's desire to communicate with us?

Today's Scripture

Micah 5:2-5a

²But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." ³Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. ⁵And he will be our peace.

2 Samuel 7:16

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

Luke 2:1-7

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

Students will choose from activities that explore what it means that Jesus became poor so that we could be rich.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work in groups or individually. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Poems" your students will make up their own literary pieces based on today's Scripture lesson; in "Collage" they will make creative pieces that express today's lesson focus; and in "Christ's Riches Game" they will consider the riches that Christ has already given them.

Poems

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will create a poem that expresses the story of Jesus' birth from a different perspective. Use the Scripture on page 5 of *The Rock* to guide you. Write a poem about the riches Jesus gave up in heaven and His poverty on earth. You may want to try writing a limerick, haiku, or another favorite style of poetry.



Collage

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will make a collage with the title, "Jesus became poor so we could become rich."

- ▶ What riches did Jesus give up?
- ▶ What was His poverty on earth like?
- ▶ How does knowing Jesus make you rich?

Use your Bible or *The Rock* to find answers that you reflect in your collage. Use any of the materials supplied.



Christ's Riches Game

- ☒ Basket, box or bag
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pencils or pens

In this activity you will consider the riches that Jesus has already given you. Each of you should write on an index card a blessing you have received this year, preferably a blessing that is not a possession. Put these cards in the basket, box or bag provided. Sit in a circle with a basket, box or bag in the middle of the circle. Take turns randomly pulling a card and sharing one blessing received this year, for example, "Last year I spent time with my grandparents." Go around the circle until all of the cards have been read. If you want to share which one was yours you may, but you don't have to.

STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus became poor so we could become rich.

Students will plan ways to experience the riches that are available to them through Christ.

Materials:

- ☒ Beads and thread or small stones, marbles or buttons and small bags
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this step you will help your students see how they can experience Christ's riches in their lives this week.

Read this week's memory verse with your students from your Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" 2 Corinthians 8:9.

- 1 **Some of the things Jesus gives us we won't fully experience until heaven. But what are some ways that we can experience Christ's riches right now?**

Help your middle schoolers brainstorm some of the riches they already have because of Jesus. For example, forgiveness, new life in Him, Christian friends, the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Just get them started, then distribute several beads and some thread to each youth. Have them make bracelets, identifying one "richness in Christ" for each bead. They can wear their bracelets throughout the week to remind them of the riches they have in Christ. Be sure to take a few minutes to allow students to share what their beads represent.

As an alternative, instead of making bracelets, you could bring in a variety of small rocks, marbles, buttons, or easy-to-find items. Give each student several to identify as symbols of riches in Christ that they collect in bags. Again, give them time to share what each piece represents. Encourage your youth to carry their objects throughout the week.

Have your middle schoolers pair up to tie each other's bracelets on. Then close by reciting the memory verse together in unison. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Seal It!

Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



Seeing God throughout the Week Have students contemplate this week how Jesus' coming poor makes them rich. Encourage generosity this week as students think on this fact.

lesson 4

Bible Basis:

Isaiah 49:6-7; 60:3; Matthew 2:1-11

Focus:

All people are called to worship Jesus.

Bringing Jesus to the World

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Seeing the Need: Students will answer questions about missionaries.

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Isaiah 49, 60; Matthew 2: Students will discover what God's Word says about who is called to worship Jesus.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Worshipping the Christ: Students will choose from activities that explore God's call to worship Jesus.

- ☒ Prepared concentration cards
- ☐ Paper, markers, pencils or pens, poster board, Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Taking the Message: Students will commit to spread God's call to worship Jesus.

- ☒ Isaiah 49:6b written on the board

Memory Verse

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

—Isaiah 49:6b

Understanding the Bible

Isaiah 49:6 has sometimes been referred to as the "Great Commission" of the Old Testament. God's plan was clearly to extend His grace to all nations, not just the Jews. This prophecy was in part fulfilled as recorded in Matthew 2:1-11.

God evidently wished to demonstrate that His Son deserved worship, not only by Jews, but also by all people. So He used a star to attract a group of Gentile "Magi from the east" (Matt. 2:1). The Magi [MAY-jey] were a religious group in Persia who also had great political power, so much that they could even choose kings. They likely studied the stars in search of cataclysmic events. They believed that the birth of a new king was significant enough for nature to record it in the stars. Being from the Persian area, they may well have known the Jewish expectation of the Messiah from the time the Jews had spent in captivity there. The search for the new king of the Jews led the Magi to Jerusalem and to Herod. Herod heard about their investigations and grew anxious. Knowing Herod's history of ruthlessly destroying all rivals, the people of Jerusalem became anxious too.

Herod (not a Jew himself) evidently convened the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council, as well as other teachers of the law, to find out where the Messiah would be born. The group quoted Micah 5:2 to the effect that Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Herod next held a private meeting with the Magi. By asking them when they had first seen the star, he found out the approximate age of the Christ child. Then Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem, hypocritically saying he, too, would worship the new king. Actually, He was plotting murder (Matt. 2:16-18).

The Magi now knew where to go. But they were pleased to have their route confirmed as the star led them the five miles southward to Bethlehem.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had left the stable and were staying in a home in Bethlehem. By now, Jesus may have been anywhere from a few weeks to two years old. The Magi found Him and bowed down in humble adoration. Their gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh were fit for a king. Gentiles were already being drawn to Jesus, exactly as the Old Testament had predicted.

classroom tips

Help your students see that sharing about Christ is an opportunity to tell their friends what God has done in their lives. People will notice when they thank God for the good things that happen and trust Him through difficult times. Encourage them to talk about God in their own way, using ordinary language.

Teacher Devo

He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. 2 Corinthians 5:19b-20a (See also vss. 16-21)

Are you acting as Christ's messenger to your middle-school class? Every Christian has been given the message and the ministry of drawing people to Christ. That's the ministry of reconciliation of which Paul wrote.

However, before you can fulfill that ministry, you must experience reconciliation with God yourself. Have you ever really trusted God's forgiveness for yourself? Do you have unconfessed sin?

Start the new year off with a fresh slate of forgiveness. Spend time before God in confession so you can truly be Christ's ambassador in good standing. Write a prayer of response to His offer of reconciliation.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

"What can I do to tell the world about Jesus Christ? I'm too young!" Middle schoolers feel overwhelmed by the enormous task of sharing Jesus Christ with the world. They see only their inability, unavailability, lack of talent, and lack of wealth as deterrents to answering Jesus Christ's call to evangelism. Emphasize during this lesson that, while God certainly calls Christians to go to other parts of the world as full-time missionaries,

He also calls His people to work where they are in the ministry of reconciliation. Help your youth focus on what they can do where they are. Help them plan and carry out a short-term mission project in your community that allows youth to do true ministry. Emphasize the importance of prayer and mission offerings as ways that younger youth can help spread the message of Jesus Christ.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

All people are called to worship Jesus.

Before Class Option

Have early-arriving youth work together to draw on the board a freehand map of the world. Tell them not to worry about the details but to concentrate on giving a general representation of the continents.

Students will quiz themselves on their knowledge of missionaries.

Open class by asking students some questions about missionaries.

- ▶ **What are the children of missionaries often called?** (*M.K.'s which stands for Missionary Kids.*)
- ▶ **What kind of shock do missionaries sometimes experience?** (*Culture shock.*)
- ▶ **What is culture shock?** (*It is the adjustment that occurs when people adapt to another culture or way of life.*)
- ▶ **What does T.C.K. stand for?** (*Third Cultured Kid.*)
- ▶ **What might T.C.K. mean?** (*It doesn't mean a person lives in a third-world country; instead it means that children who live overseas or in a different culture combine some of the culture from their original, home country with their new country's culture. They become people with a blend of cultures, or a third, distinct culture.*)
- ▶ **Can people be missionaries without leaving their home country? Explain your answer.** (*Yes, God calls us to be missionaries where we are.*)

There is a great deal you can learn about missionaries. With the Internet and social media, it is easier than it has ever to learn about mission work being done in various lands.

God calls all people to worship Jesus. With billions of people in hundreds of countries speaking thousands of languages, how will all these people be reached to hear God's call to worship Jesus? In today's lesson we'll get some ideas.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Isaiah 49:6-7; 60:3;
Matthew 2:1-11



Students will study Isaiah and Matthew to see what God's Word says about His calling all people to worship Jesus.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Distribute *The Rock*. Have your students form groups of three to five to read Today's Scripture on page 5. When they've finished reading, instruct them to work together in their groups to answer the questions on page 4 of *The Rock*. After sufficient time, gather the class back together and review their answers.

1. Students should circle: My servant; a light for the Gentiles; him who was despised and abhorred by the nation; the servant of rulers; light; brightness of your dawn; the one who has been born king of the Jews; Messiah; a ruler; shepherd (of) my people Israel; the child. These names tell about Jesus' saving power, His humility, and His love.

Alternate Method

Assign parts to students and read Today's Scripture dramatically.



Bible Study

THE STAR the Magi followed on their special journey was a leading light. But that bright beacon brought them to an even brighter light, the one who was later called the Light of the World.

LEADING LIGHT

1. Circle all the names for Jesus found in today's Scriptures, both in Isaiah and in Matthew. What do they tell about Jesus and His work on earth?

2. Read Isaiah 49:6-7 and Isaiah 60:3. These words were written about 700 years before the Magi searched for Jesus. Which verses in Matthew 2 tell of the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecies? How were they fulfilled?

3. Most manger scenes show the Magi worshiping Jesus in the stable with the shepherds on the night He was born. Find two or more proofs in Matthew 2:1-11 that disprove this.

4. Why do you think the Magi went to Jerusalem looking for Jesus? What did they call Jesus when they spoke to Herod?

5. Read Matthew 2:3-4, 7-8, 13-16. What can you learn about Herod from these verses?

6. God wanted to be sure the Magi found Jesus and worshiped Him. List the ways God made this happen.

7. Why was it so important that the Magi worship Jesus? Read Isaiah 49:6b for a clue.



2. Matthew 2:1-2 and 11 tell that the Magi followed the star to find Jesus; they bowed down and worshiped Him. You may wish to share with your students some information from Understanding the Bible about the Magi. The Magi came after Jesus was born (vs. 1); Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were now living in a house (vs. 11).

3. Verse 1—The Magi came after Jesus was born. Verse 11—The Magi came to a "house," and Jesus is referred to as a "child."

4. Perhaps they thought the new king would be found in the capital city, Jerusalem. Or at least somebody in Jerusalem might

be able to give them some information about Him. They called Jesus "the king of the Jews."

5. Herod was insecure about the possibility of overthrow from another king. He was sneaky and secretive. He was a liar—he didn't really want to worship Jesus but to kill Him. He was cruel and evil, a remorseless baby killer.

6. God sent a star to lead them; He gave prophecies centuries earlier about where Jesus would be born and made sure that someone in Herod's court knew those prophecies.

7. They fulfilled prophecy because they lived far away and traveled a long distance to find Jesus. They were not Jews but Gentiles. They could spread the good news of Jesus' birth to people in their own country. God calls all people to worship Jesus.

Display the "Fulfilled in Christ" Unit Chart from your teaching aids packet, and have a volunteer fill in the final prophecy and fulfillment.

Prophecy: Isaiah—all nations would worship Jesus.

Fulfillment: The wise men—they came from far away to worship Jesus.

Then discuss the following questions:

- ▶ **What does Isaiah say about who will be offered God's salvation?** (*The Gentiles and people to the ends of the earth—everyone, everywhere.*)
- ▶ **Who will come to the light?** (*Nations and kings—everyone, no matter how rich or poor.*)
- ▶ **Who does the light represent?** (*Jesus. He is the Light of the world.*)
- ▶ **How did Herod know where to send the Magi?** (*The chief priests and teachers of the law told him. They knew the prophecy that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.*)

Now that we've studied about some of the people God called to worship Jesus, let's do some activities that explore what it means that all people are called to worship Jesus.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 49:6-7

"He says: 'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.' This is what the Lord says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: 'Kings will see you and stand up; princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'"

Isaiah 60:3

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

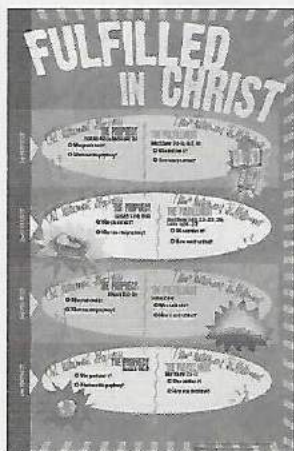
Matthew 2:1-11

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'"

"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."'

"Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'"

"After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen ahead of them went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip Be sure to call the group back together in time to complete the Lesson Path with Step 4. Allow students a few minutes to share their experiences with classmates.

Students will choose from activities that explore God's call to worship Jesus.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work in groups or individually. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Missions Concentration" they will play a game that teaches key words for missions; In "Missionary Letters" students will write letters or postcards to missionaries; and in "Puzzle" students will complete a word puzzle in *The Rock* that reviews today's Scripture.

Missions Concentration

▣ Prepared concentration cards*

In this activity you will play a game that teaches key words for missions. Use the cards your teacher supplied, turn them facedown and mix them up, then set them up like a concentration game. Take turns flipping over two cards at a time until a match is made with a word and its definition. Each player to make a match collects the pair of cards. The player with the most matches wins.

* Before class, prepare index cards with the information below. Each word in boldface should be written on one card, and each definition on another card. If your class is large, make several copies of each card.

Missionaries: Christians sent out beyond their local church to tell others about Christ and help them grow in Him.

People group: Those who share things in common like language, culture, religion, race, etc.

Great Commission: Christ's last recorded command to His followers (Matt. 28:18-20), to "go and make disciples of all nations."

Translators: Missionaries who learn other languages and cultures so that they can put the Bible in a written language that other people can read.

Missionary Letters

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers

Write a letter or design a postcard to send to a missionary your church supports. You may want to choose a family with students your age or missionaries in a particular country you're interested in. If you have email at home, you could email them.

Puzzle

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*

In this activity you will complete the word puzzle on pages 6-7 of *The Rock*, which reviews today's Scripture. When you're finished, answer this question: How does knowing the prophecies and events surrounding Jesus' birth help you tell the world about Him?



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

All people are called to worship Jesus.

Students will commit to spread God's call to worship Jesus.

Materials:

☐ Isaiah 49:6 written on the board

In today's lesson your students have discovered that God calls all people to worship Jesus. You will help your students make plans and commit to helping spread that call.

God may call some people in this group into full-time missions, possibly in other countries. But even now there are things that we can all do to spread God's call to worship Jesus.

▶ What can we in this class do to spread God's call to worship Jesus?

Help your class brainstorm ways that they can support missions. Write their ideas on the board or somewhere everyone can see. Students might suggest that they could do the following: pray for missionaries and foreign countries; become more aware of how different people around the world live; give money and other support to missionaries; participate on a short-term missions trip; and share the message of Jesus right here in their own town.

Encourage your youth to each choose one of the ideas mentioned or one of their own and commit to practicing it all week. One way to remember their commitment is by visual association. For example, every time they see a label of something made in a certain country, they will pray for that country. Or every time they see a lamp, they will think of Jesus, the Light of the world, and pray for a certain missionary. Encourage your youth to each choose one object to remind them of their commitment next week.

▶ Seal It!

Recite this week's memory verse, Isaiah 49:6, in unison: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." (You may want to write this verse on the board while students are working on Step 3.)

Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



Seeing God throughout the Week Ask students, "Who can come to Christ?" Next, encourage students to reach out to someone new this week with God's Word.

lesson 5

Bible Basis:

John 1:29-34

Focus:

We can know who Jesus is.

Who is Jesus, Anyway?

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Exploring Who Jesus Is: Students will talk about the importance of personal identity.

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from John 1: Students will study John 1 to see what God's Word says about who Jesus is.

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Deepening Our Understanding of Jesus: Students will choose from activities that explore who Jesus is.

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Deciding Who Jesus Is to Me: Students will make symbols to represent who Jesus is to them.

Memory Verse

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
and not only for ours but also for the
sins of the whole world.

—1 John 2:2

Under- standing the Bible

The entire Book of John is about proving conclusively who Jesus is—the Son of God whose sacrifice offers us eternal life. Through an eyewitness

account of the life of Christ, John gives us a unique perspective on the deity of Jesus.

John the Baptist's preaching had created a stir, so the Jews in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to find out who this popular preacher was. When asked who he was, John the Baptist freely admitted that he wasn't the Messiah but rather the Messiah's forerunner (John 1:19-28). The next day the priests and Levites may still have been there, by the Jordan River, when John identified Jesus as the one about whom he had been speaking—the Lamb of God, God's Son (John 1:29-34). God marked Jesus as the Messiah with a sign—the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove coming down on Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-22).

The two titles John used for Jesus are interesting. The first is "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). This specific expression is found in the Bible only here and in verse 36, though Revelation refers to "the Lamb" about 30 times. John may have been thinking of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Exod. 12), the lambs sacrificed in the daily offerings (Num. 28:3-8), or the lamb mentioned in Isaiah 53:7. The NIV text note on John 1:29 remarks that this expression was probably a general reference to sacrifice, not the name

—continued on next page

☒ Indicates items you will need to prepare before class

for a particular offering. In any case, John declared Jesus as the sacrifice that would take away the sin of the world.

The second title that John used for Jesus is "Son of God" (John 1:34). Jesus is uniquely God's Son (see the phrase "the one and only Son" in John 1:14, 18). John's testimony to Jesus as the Son of God was affirmed by the words of God the Father: "This is my Son, whom I love" (Matt. 3:17; compare Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

Classroom Tips Many middle schoolers are progressing in their ability to process biblical information independently. They are ready to understand who Jesus is in more depth. This ability also equips them for determining for themselves the most meaningful personal response to the information they have. Help your students own their faith by challenging them to think on their own. Don't settle for pat answers. And don't avoid students' tough questions. Let the class discuss and debate, and help your youth discover the truth themselves.

Teacher Devo

"There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12b

What's in a name? Jesus is known by a myriad of names in the Bible, each of them describing some facet of His character. Take time to write down as many of the names of Christ as you can recall. Some of them probably will jump right into your thoughts, while others may take concentration to bring out.

What names of Christ are the most significant for you? Teacher? the Door? Bread of Life? Meditate on who Jesus is to you. Then spend a few moments asking God to reveal Jesus to you in a new manner this week. As you look ahead to teaching this lesson, let God introduce you anew to His Son, the Savior of the world.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Middle schoolers question everything and everyone. This independent thinking can be a positive trait as students work out what they believe. Use this characteristic to help your students think through their relationship with God. You can help them make their faith deeper and more meaningful by letting them clarify questions and pursue the truth about their salvation.

One caution: Don't assume that those in your class know everything they need to know about Christ's sacrifice for their sins. Be clear about the basics and explain who Jesus is as if they had never heard it before. Be ready to present the facts about salvation through faith in Christ so you are comfortable answering questions.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

We can know who Jesus is.

Before Class Option

Make two columns on the board, labeled "Same" and "Different." Challenge students to list as many ways as they can in which Jesus is the same as we are and how He is different from us.

LES. 5



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

Students will discuss the importance of each person's individual identity.

Begin this lesson by dividing students into small groups of three or four. Appoint someone as discussion leader for each group. Ask them to find out one thing of value that each person owns.

When all groups have completed the task, call everyone together. Have each leader report their findings for his or her group. Then discuss:

- ▶ What was it like trying to choose one thing that you value most?
- ▶ How would you feel if that treasured possession were stolen?
- ▶ What would you be willing to do to get it back?
- ▶ What if you could not get it back?

Tell students about the young couple, Jocelyn and Edward, who were arrested for stealing stuff—lots of stuff! Explain that these two took "little things" like keys from their neighbors that opened apartment doors and mailboxes. They used the keys to steal cash and credit card information, which they used to buy very expensive things, like computers and printers and a machine to make fake I.D. cards.

Police found photos that the two had taken of themselves eating in expensive restaurants and enjoying stays at ritzy resorts in faraway places like Paris, France.

They had used the credit cards and fake I.D.s for shopping sprees. And Jocelyn even spent \$1,700 at a posh beauty salon for hair extensions.

For several years, they used other people's money to live very wealthy lifestyles.

But they took something of even greater value from their victims—their identities.

- ▶ How would you describe your identity?
- ▶ What could happen if someone stole your identity, like your school I.D. card and somehow put their picture on it?
- ▶ What do you think would happen to that person when they got caught?
- ▶ How can you know for sure if others are telling the truth about themselves?
- ▶ What can you do to protect your reputation and identity?
- ▶ If someone questioned you about your identity, would it help to have your best friend alongside you to verify that you were telling the truth?
- ▶ If someone asked you, "Who is Jesus?" how would you answer their question?

In today's Bible study, we're going to explore who Jesus is. We'll hear from two men named John about an event that proved Jesus' true identity. The first John was Jesus' disciple, and he wrote the Book of John in the Bible. The second man was Jesus' cousin, and people called him John the Baptist. The event was Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

John 1:29-34



Students will study John 1 to see what God's Word says about who Jesus is.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

Hand out *The Rock* and read aloud for your class the introduction in bold on page 4. Then have your youth silently read Today's Scripture on page 5. Ask for a volunteer to dramatize John's testimony of who Jesus is, as written in the passage. A narrator can read the two brief sections that are not in quotes (vss. 29 and 32). Encourage "John" to be as dramatic and eloquent as possible while reading from the Scripture text.

Have students work in pairs to complete the questions on pages 4 and 5 of *The Rock*. After sufficient time, call them back together and review their answers.

1. John introduced Jesus by saying that He was the Lamb of God; the Son of God.
2. Students will describe what their reaction might have been when John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Encourage students to share. They might say confused, skeptical, happy.

Alternate Method

Have youth pair up to read Today's Scripture before the dramatization.



There are introductions and there are introductions. The "Lisa-this-is-Sara, Sara-Lisa" doesn't say as much as "Lisa, this is Sara. We're lab partners in science class. Only she actually understands what we're doing." Catch the difference? Good introductions can be a starting point for a friendship. John the Baptist knew how to give a good introduction. Read John 1:29-34 to see how he introduced Jesus to a waiting world.

1. Look at John 1:29, 34. How did John introduce Jesus?
2. Imagine you're in the crowd, listening to John the Baptist. Describe your reaction when John introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Son of God.
3. According to verse 29, why did God send Jesus to earth?

3. God sent Jesus to earth to take away the sin of the world.

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Bible Study

4. Take a closer look at verse

30. If you remember, John the Baptist was born before Jesus. What do you think John meant when he said Jesus was before him?

5. Look at John 1:32-33.

How did John know that Jesus was the Lamb of God?

6. Look over John 1:29-34

and list the things John said about Jesus (for example, the Lamb of God).

Today's Scripture

John 1:29-34

^aThe next day John saw

Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

"This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

"Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. "And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

Lesson 5



5

4. Students should answer what they thought John meant when he said Jesus was before him. John was referring to Jesus' eternal life. The Son of God existed in heaven before John was born.

5. John knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God when He saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him, which was the sign God told John to look for.

6. John said these things about Jesus. He said that Jesus was the Lamb of God; that He takes away the sin of the world; that Jesus came after John but was greater than John because He existed before him; and that John saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus; that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus is the Son of God.

Discuss this question:

➊ **How has Jesus acted in your own life to prove that John's statements are true?** (Encourage students to share. Students might share about the first time they realized who Jesus was. Other students might talk about how they can trust Jesus to guide them in their lives because He was before all things and knows all things, etc.)

Have your students read aloud together 1 John 2:2, this week's



memory verse, from their Bibles or page 8 of *The Rock*:

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" 1 John 2:2.

➋ **In what way is this verse like John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus in John 1:29?** (Jesus, the Lamb of God, died once for all for humankind to take away the sins of the world. Only Jesus could be the atoning sacrifice for a righteous God.)

Now that we've studied John's introduction of Jesus, let's do some activities that explore what it means to us that we can know who Jesus is.

STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

Students will choose from activities that explore who Jesus is.

Allow your students to choose from the following activities. They may work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Bumper Stickers" they will create catchy slogans that make a statement about who Jesus is; in "Talk Show" students will interview each other about who Jesus is; and in "Mural" students will create art describing who Jesus is.

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

LES. 5

Bumper Stickers

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors

In this activity you will create a bumper sticker that makes a statement about who Jesus is. Think of your own original saying and design, and start creating.

If possible, cut out your bumper sticker and take it home and use tape to adhere it to a notebook, mirror, door, etc.

Talk Show

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

Interview each other about who Jesus is. Produce a mock talk show, with one person acting as host and the others as guests. The topic is: "Who is Jesus, and what do you know about Him?"

Use your own experiences and thoughts in discussing the topic. One student may want to play the part of John the Baptist, using the Scripture text as the basis for his answers.

Mural

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*

In this activity you will create a wall mural that depicts who Jesus is. Look up today's Scripture in your Bibles or on page 5 of *The Rock* and use it, and/or your own experience of who Jesus is in your life. Using the materials supplied, cut out, tear, or create your own words, diagrams, pictures, collages, or whatever you choose. Somewhere on your mural include the title, "Jesus Is..."



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

We can know who Jesus is.

LES. 5

Students will practice how they would describe Jesus to someone who asked.

Gather middle schoolers and have them open their Bibles to John 1:32.

Ask a student to read the verse. "Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.'"

Remember that when we read this verse we're actually hearing from two men named John. The first man is John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, and this is his testimony.

▶ **What is a testimony?**

▶ **Why is John the Baptist's testimony important?**

Ask for a volunteer to read John 1:34.

Jesus' cousin John saw what happened, and he testified that Jesus "is God's chosen one." The other man named John is the one who wrote down John the Baptist's testimony. This John was a disciple of Jesus who wrote the Book of John. I want you to see what John the disciple wrote at the end of his book, so let's turn to chapter 21.

Help students find John 21:24 in their Bibles. Say, John the disciple wrote: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."

▶ **What does John the disciple say about his testimony?** (*His testimony is true.*)

John was talking about himself, saying, "My testimony is true!" In the same way, John the Baptist was saying, "I'm telling the truth. I know that Jesus is the Son of God!"

▶ **What things make up John the disciple's testimony?** (*All the things that he wrote about in his book, the Book of John in the Bible, including Jesus' baptism.*)

John's book is full of amazing things that Jesus did, like healing the sick and making blind eyes see again. He brought dead people back to life. And after He was killed, His body was sealed in a tomb for three days, and then His Father in heaven raised Him back to life. Lots of people saw Jesus after He was raised from the dead, and they believed that He is the Son of God.

Divide your students into small groups. What if someone came up to you at school or at a mall or even here at church today and asked, "Who is Jesus, anyway?" Think about all that we've studied together in this lesson and come up with some things you could say back to help that person understand who Jesus really is. Talk in your groups to come up with a reply that is brief but still gets the message across.

Call everyone together and hear the reply from each group. Compare each reply to John's response given in a letter he wrote—1 John 2:2: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins [pause] and not only for ours [pause] but also for the sins of the whole world."

Seal It!

Close class time in prayer, thanking Jesus for who He is and what He means to us. Encourage students to also pray aloud. Remind your class members to use the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* as they pursue knowing Jesus.



Seeing God throughout the Week Invite students to come up with three ways that they can know who Jesus is this week. Invite students to discuss this with their families.

lesson 6

Bible Basis:

Luke 7:37-50

Focus:

Jesus loves us; we can love others.

Never Left Out

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Considering Feelings: Students will consider feelings of rejection, acceptance, and love.

- ☒ Two bags of small, multicolored candy
- ☒ Cups
- ☒ Two bowls

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Luke 7: Students will study Luke 7 to discover what God's Word has to say about loving others.

- ☒ Pretty jar or bottle
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ Pencils or pens

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Practicing to Love Others: Students will explore ways that they can love others.

- ☐ Paper, pencils or pens, poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☒ Journal paper
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Working at Loving Others: Students will commit to be more loving of others in their lives.

- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Pens or markers

Memory Verse

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

—Romans 15:7

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Understanding the Bible

Since the teachers of the law and religious leaders were appalled that Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 5:30), they were probably now pleased that Jesus was finally dining in good company—with a Pharisee named Simon.

When Jesus arrived for dinner, however, Simon wasn't a gracious host. Ancient Palestinian hospitality included three customs. First, the host put his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. Second, cool water was poured over the guest's feet to cleanse and soothe them (because people wore sandals and the roads were dusty). And third, oil was placed on the head of the guest. Simon the Pharisee did not offer any of these signs of respect to Jesus when He came to dine with him. In fact, Simon's motive for inviting Jesus may have been to entrap Jesus rather than to learn from Him (see the NIV text note on Luke 7:36).

The meal was underway when a woman interrupted Simon and Jesus. It wasn't considered rude to enter someone's open courtyard—especially to hear a rabbi. This meal was probably held in one of these courtyards.

Simon was not pleased with the interruption, because this woman had a reputation around town as a sinner (see Luke 7:37). More than likely she was a prostitute who had heard Jesus preach, then repented

—continued on next page

and wanted to live a new life.

In wealthier homes of that time, guests reclined on low couches, resting on their left elbows, with their feet stretched out behind them. This position would have made it easy for the woman to pour the perfume on Jesus' feet and wipe them with her hair. Mary of Bethany performed a similar act the week before Jesus' crucifixion (John 12:3). In Simon's eyes, no respectable Jew would let himself become ceremonially unclean through contact with a sinner. Jesus, however, loved the woman and forgave her.

Classroom Tips

Activity centers provide multiple strategies for students to reinforce, review, practice, express, or expand on their learning. They offer an opportunity for all students to learn using their most effective learning style or to safely explore learning in a different style.

You may not always be able to use all three activity centers, depending on your time, resources, or class size. But varying the types of activities you offer and giving students choices will help honor all of your students.

Teacher Devo

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2

Loving others just as they are, the way Christ loves them, is one of the toughest commands we are handed through Scripture. Some of us find it difficult enough to love ourselves! So how can we learn to love others and thus bring praise to God? One way is with "breath prayers," short phrases spoken aloud or to one's self in a whisper when faced with someone who is hard to love.

Breath prayers take little to invoke, but are a good way to invite God into our thinking and feeling toward those we find unacceptable. Ponder what breath prayer you can use when needed, and jot it down or memorize it now. Use a few words from Scripture or of your own creation, or bring to mind words to a song that prods you to be loving. As you use a breath prayer to practice loving others, you are honoring God.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Self-absorption is commonplace among middle-school students. Often it results in self-rejection as young people compare themselves with people the world puts on a pedestal. How do you spot students who consider themselves unacceptable? They may be unable to sustain eye contact, may use put-down words or statements about themselves, and may be reluctant to take part in class activities or discussions. Sometimes self-rejection shows itself in silly behavior or defensiveness.

You can be a counteracting influence on these young teens. Look for opportunities to genuinely compliment them, and be warm and accepting of their classroom participation. Take time to talk to them and learn about them. As your relationship with these students grows, share your own difficulties in self-acceptance, and tell how God loves you and them wholeheartedly and is willing to bring about positive change.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus loves us; we can love others.

Before class Option

Draw a big stick figure on the board. Early students can add clothes and characteristics that they think would make the person acceptable in their school or neighborhood.

Students will participate in a game and discussion on our feelings about being accepted, rejected, and loved.

Materials:

- ▣ Two bags of small multicolored candy
- ▣ Cups
- ▣ Two bowls

Before your students arrive, set out your candy, cups, and bowls. You'll need a cup for each student.

When everyone has arrived, split your class into even teams and give one cup to each person. If you have an odd number of people, join the team with fewer people. Instruct the teams to line up shoulder to shoulder with cups in hand. Place a bag of candy at one end of each line and the bowls at the other end. The object of this game is to pass candies one at a time from the bag, cup to cup, passing each candy into the bowl. Play two rounds. In Round One, each team must choose one of the colors to pass. Let's say Team A chooses red and Team B chooses yellow. Once all of your specifically colored candies are out of the bag and into the bowl, your task for Round One is complete. First team done wins.

In Round Two, each team will have a different objective. The losing team from Round One will now have to choose two of the remaining colors and transport all of those specific colors to their bowl two at a time! The winning team from Round One will have to transport all their remaining candies to their bowl. That team will not be choosing a specific color for Round Two. They will transport all their remaining candies. Give the first team time to choose their two colors, instruct both teams that they may transport two candies at a time this round, and then say "Go!" When Round Two is over, confirm the winner, just as you did for Round One. If the score is tied, tell the students that if there is time at the end, you will have a tiebreaker.

- ① **The game involved choices of colors. How did your team make these choices?** (They may have chosen based on which flavor they liked the best or which color was their favorite.)
- ① **Have you ever been left out, not accepted, rejected? How did it make you feel?**
- ① **Had you done anything to "earn" that type of treatment?**
- ① **Does anyone ever deserve to be rejected? Why or why not?**

Today, we're going to look at the story of a young woman who was rejected by just about everyone around her except Jesus.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Luke 7:37-50



Students will study Luke 7 to discover what God's Word has to say about acceptance.

Materials:

- ☒ Pretty jar or bottle
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *The Rock*

Distribute *The Rock* and direct students to Today's Scripture on page 5. Introduce the text by reading aloud the introduction on page 4. Then ask students to read the Scripture passage silently. Ask for volunteers to take the parts of Simon, Jesus, and the woman, and dramatize the story. Remaining students can be the dinner guests. Provide a pretty jar or bottle as a prop. After the dramatized reading, break into small groups and have students answer the questions on page 4 of *The Rock*. After sufficient time, gather your class back together and review their answers.

1. The woman had lived a sinful life; she was a prostitute. She was very sorry for her sins and wanted Jesus to accept and forgive her.

① **Why do you think the woman came to Jesus?** (Maybe she had heard of Jesus' actions and teachings. She saw Jesus as a forgiving person. Perhaps she knew that she needed forgiveness and wanted to change her lifestyle.)

2. Simon was judgmental; selfish; inconsiderate; not a welcoming host. You might want to share some of the information from Understanding the Bible with your students.

① **What amazing thing did Jesus say to the woman?** ("Your sins are forgiven.")

Alternate Method

Remain as a large group to answer the first set of questions; then have students pair up to tackle the deeper discussion questions.



GOD accepts people just the way they are—nasty, thoughtless, dirty-minded, sneaky. And He changes those people who allow Him to work miracles in their lives.

Read Luke 7:37-50. Keep in mind as you read that this woman was a sinner and prostitute.

1. How would you describe the woman?

2. How would you describe Simon?

3. Use the symbols from the next column and fill in the chart to discover people's attitudes toward each other in this passage.

In each box, write the name of the person and the attitude you think this person had toward the other person involved. (Include the second person's name too.) For example, verse 37 would look like this:

WOMAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD JESUS



THE SYMBOLS

ACCEPT

ACCEPT WITH DIFFICULTY

ACCEPT, THEN DROP

REJECT

4. How do you think the woman felt as she left Jesus?

5. If Jesus accepted the prostitute, how do you think He accepts people you know?

REJECT

VERSE 38	VERSE 39	VERSE 40
VERSES 41-43	VERSE 44	VERSES 47, 48

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 7:37-50

"A woman in that town who had lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."

"When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.'"

"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.'"

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 'Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?'"

"Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.'"

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

"Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 'You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 'You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 'Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'"

"Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'"

"The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'"

"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

Lesson 6

5

3. You might want to reproduce the chart from page 5 of *The Rock* on the board and have students come up and draw their answers for question 3. Possible answers are below.

Verse 38:

Woman accepted Jesus

Verse 40:

Jesus accepted Simon

Verse 44:

Simon accepted Jesus but then dropped Him

4. ^{Accept} all reasonable answers. The woman probably felt accepted and loved by Jesus. Since Jesus had forgiven her sins, she likely felt cleansed and new. She was probably happy and grateful for Jesus' love of her.

► **What can you learn about Jesus from the way He treated Simon the Pharisee?** (*Jesus never rejected Simon; He is willing to love and forgive anyone. Jesus knew that Simon needed forgiveness as much as anyone.*)

► **Why did Jesus oppose Simon's attitude toward the woman?** (*Simon thought he was better than the sinful woman and that he was doing the right thing by*

rejecting her. Jesus made it clear that all people need forgiveness from God.)

5. Discourage use of names, but encourage deep thinking. Jesus loves everyone, no matter what they have done. Ask a volunteer to read aloud this week's memory verse from his or her Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7.

► **What kinds of things might limit someone else's love for you but hasn't affected Jesus' love for you?** (*Probe beyond physical characteristics; encourage students to think of wrongs or personality faults that are harder to accept.*)

► **What does this tell you about the attitude we should have toward others?** (*We should be loving of others, no matter what, as God is loving of them.*)

Now that we've studied how Jesus loved others, let's do some activities that explore what it means that Jesus loves us and we can love others.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip You can limit your explanation time by making a photocopy of each activity. Place the copies with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

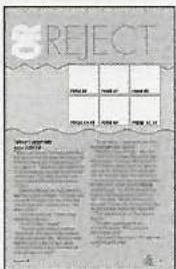
Students will explore ways that they can love others.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Modern-Day Scripture" students will compose their equivalent of today's Scripture, bringing its truth into their own world; in "Journaling" they will write their thoughts about how Jesus loves them and they can love others; and in "Cartoon" students will create a comic illustrating a variety of ways that they can put this week's memory verse into practice.

Modern-Day Scripture

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will bring the truth of today's Scripture (on page 5 of *The Rock*) into a situation that could happen in your own life. Create a modern-day version of the Bible story of Jesus, Simon, and the sinful woman. How might this story look if it included several middle-school youth? You might want to write some notes, and then act out your drama.



Journaling

- ☒ Journal paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

What does today's lesson mean to you? How might it affect your life? Write a journal entry on your thoughts and concerns about love, both how Jesus loves you and how you can love others.

Cartoon

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will illustrate a variety of ways that you could put this week's memory verse into practice as you are more loving of others. Read Romans 15:7 from your Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*, and brainstorm several ways middle schoolers could put this verse into practice. Create a large cartoon illustrating your ideas.



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus loves us; we can love others.

Students will commit to be more loving of others in their lives.

Materials:

- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Pens or markers

Your students have had a great illustration today of how Jesus is willing to love anyone and how your students can in turn love others. In this Step you will help them commit to making love a part of their lives, putting into practice this week what they have learned. Read this week's memory verse, Romans 15:7, aloud in unison with your class: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" Romans 15:7.

Give each student one or two index cards. Knowing how Jesus loves us, we can work at loving others in order to glorify God. These index cards can be crafted into Love Cards. Your Love Cards can serve as a reminder to you that Jesus loves each of us, and we need to love others. You may want to use your card to apologize to someone you have rejected or as a personal reminder of why you can now love that person or group.

Challenge students to think of a person or group they have had trouble loving and plan how they can start loving them as Jesus does. Give your youth a few minutes to reflect and create a reminder to themselves of Jesus' love and their own commitment to love others. For example, they could write the name of a person they have had a difficult time loving and use their card as a reminder to pray for God's help in loving that person as He does. Or they could use the card to invite somebody they have difficulty loving to join them in some activity this week. If students are having difficulty thinking of ways to use their cards, begin with a brainstorming time and suggest these ideas.

Seal It!

Encourage students to use their cards this week, as reminders to themselves to be loving, or to give to someone else in a gesture of love, if that is what they have planned. Remind students to use the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* this week to help them practice loving others as Christ loves us.



Seeing God throughout the Week Encourage students to go out of their way to accept others this week. What might that look like?

Lesson 7

Bible Basis:

John 8:21-29, 48-59

Focus:

Jesus is greater than our expectations.

Beyond Our Wildest Dreams

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Reaching Beyond: Students will brainstorm and discuss things that are beyond their understanding.

- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from John 8: Students will discover what God's Word says about Jesus' greatness.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Pursuing Understanding: Students will choose from activities that explore a deeper understanding of Jesus.

- ☒ Concordances
- ☐ Bibles, poster board, scissors, glue, markers, paper
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Accepting the Unknown: Students will accept things they find hard to understand about Jesus.

- ☒ Construction paper
- ☐ Scissors, pencils, pens or markers
- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Memory Verse

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

—Colossians 1:17

Understanding the Bible

In John 8, Jesus revealed that He is the eternal God. For the religious and social leaders of Jesus' day, this fact was impossible to accept without a fight.

In John 8 we read part of the running discussion between Jesus and one group who kept misunderstanding Him, condemning Him as evil, and opposing Him (John 8:12-59).

In this discussion Jesus made many claims, including the following: Those who do not believe in Him will die in their sin (John 8:21, 24).

Jesus spoke and acted for the Father (vss. 26, 28-29). He sought glory for the Father (vss. 49-50). Those who keep His Word have eternal life (vs. 51). The Father glorifies the Son (vs. 54). Jesus knows the Father and keeps the Father's word (vs. 55). Abraham saw Christ's day (vs. 56). Jesus existed before Abraham (vs. 58).

The last two of these claims may not seem clear on a first reading. Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). By saying this, Jesus was appropriating for Himself the divine name revealed to Moses: "I am" (Exod. 3:14). This name, in the present tense, indicates that God lives in the eternal present: He exists; at no time has He ever not existed nor will He ever not exist. Jesus was calling Himself eternal God. This meant He was alive before Abraham was on the earth.

Jesus also identified Himself not only as

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Understanding the Bible —cont'd

God but also as the Son of Man (John 8:28). This was His most common title for Himself. With it He identified Himself as the one spoken of in Daniel 7:13-14 before whom all worship.

Jesus' listeners finally understood some of what He meant, but they chose not to believe Him. They interpreted His claims as nothing other than blasphemy, for which stoning was the punishment.

Classroom Tips

In today's lesson you will refer frequently to the Colossians 1:17 memory verse poster from your creative teaching aids packet. Rather than pulling out the poster and putting it away repeatedly, simply hang the poster in a place where students can easily see it. This might be a bulletin board, wall, easel, etc. If you put a piece of tape directly on the back of the poster, and then a loop of tape on top of the first piece, you will be able to easily remove the loop of tape at the end of the lesson without tearing the back of the poster. You might want to leave the poster on display for the next several weeks to remind students of today's lesson.

Teacher Devo

"Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom." Psalm 145:3

The mystery that is God will never be comprehended by our finite human brains. He's too great, too awesome, too far beyond humans to be known fully. And that's reason for delight. After all, how glorious would be a god who could be understood on human terms, and then, perhaps, manipulated or duped?

One of the wondrous things about our God is that He is mysterious, holy, way out of our league. Rather than be perplexed or aggravated by God's unfathomable nature, take pleasure in the knowledge that, despite our lack of understanding Him, He is full of understanding and care for us.

Write a short prayer to God, thanking Him for His wonderful attributes and for sending Jesus, who is greater than our human expectations.

LES. 7

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Students today are assaulted with all kinds of influences—media, friends, teachers, other religions—that can cloud our understanding of who Jesus is. Many of these influences make the effort not to deny the existence of God but to twist the truth about Him. One of the primary truths that gets twisted is the divinity of Jesus Christ. He is often held up as a worthwhile hero and example, but His divine nature is denied.

Few middle schoolers have the knowledge or ability to counteract such untrue influences.

Knowing the truth about Christ's deity is one of the primary tools they can use to sort out all the information that bombards their minds.

For both those youth who know little about who Jesus is and those who think they've heard all there is to know, you can offer some help. Explain that it is vital to understand who Christ is. Then students won't feel as bombarded and bewildered by the random philosophies and ideas that will challenge their beliefs today and in the future.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus is greater than our expectations.

Before Class Option

Have early-arriving youth brainstorm what they expect heaven will be like.



Students will brainstorm and discuss things that are beyond their understanding.

Materials:

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" memory verse poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

To get your students starting to think about concepts that are too difficult to understand, begin class today with this activity. It will lead naturally into the discussion. Divide students into groups of three to five to play a game of "Can You Top That?" Each group will brainstorm a list of concepts that are difficult for their human minds to understand. Examples: what makes two people fall in love; why bad things happen to good people; how an airplane that weighs several tons stays in the air. Display the memory verse poster from your creative teaching aids packet to spark more ideas.

After a few minutes, call the class back together and have each small group share their findings. Write students' ideas on the board. If the brainstorming list doesn't include the eternal nature of Jesus and the fact that He is both God and man, add those to the list. Then discuss:

- ▶ **What do you do when you can't understand something?** (Encourage students to share honestly. Their answers might include: I get frustrated; I ask a teacher, parent, or other adult; I study it to try to find an answer; I ask one of my friends; I accept that I don't understand it, but it still must be true; etc.)
- ▶ **How do you feel about being faced with mysteries and ideas that are beyond your understanding?** (Again, encourage honest answers. These might include frustrated, intrigued, awed, etc.)
- ▶ **How do you feel when there are things about God or the Bible that you can't understand?** (Answers might include confused, frustrated, etc.)

The Bible gives lots of information about who Jesus is, but there are some things that are still tough to understand. Some people who even knew Jesus in person refused to believe Him. Now we're going to investigate this Jesus, who is beyond our expectations.



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

John 8:21-29, 48-59



Alternate Method

Ask one student to portray Jesus while several others read the part of Jesus' opponents. Have these youth read the Bible story in a dramatic fashion while the rest of the class looks on.



Students will study John 8 to discover what God's Word has to say about how Jesus is greater than our expectations.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" memory verse poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Distribute *The Rock* and ask students to open to pages 4-5. Divide your class into two groups. Designate one group to read aloud the parts spoken by Jesus; the other group will read the part of the Jewish opponents. You read the narration. Each group will read its part in unison; encourage students to use appropriate emphasis. Have the two groups stand and face each other as may have been the scene when this event took place. After the reading, have your students remain in the two groups to complete the questions in *The Rock*. After sufficient time, call students back together and review their answers.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Bible Study

²¹Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

²²This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

²³But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins."

²⁵"Who are you?" they asked.

"Just what I have been telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied.

²⁶"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

²⁷They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

⁴⁸The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

⁴⁹"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."

⁵²At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

⁵⁴Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word."

⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

⁵⁷"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

⁵⁸"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.



PHARISEE CHALLENGE

Draw a picture of the event in His life that Jesus was referring to in **John 8:28**.

In **verse 25**, Jesus responds that He is the one He claimed to be all along. Who has He claimed to be?

Why do you think it was so hard for the Pharisees to believe Jesus?

Why did the Jews react so violently to what Jesus said (**vss. 58-59**)? You might want to check **Exodus 3:14**.

Jesus used the phrase "I am" many times in His ministry. Remember "I am the light of the world" (**John 8:12**)? How many other "I am" statements can you recall?

1. Students' pictures should represent Jesus' crucifixion.

❶ In verse 21 Jesus told the crowd that He was going where they could not follow. The people didn't understand what He was talking about. What did the Jews think Jesus meant when He said He was going away? See verse 22. (They thought that Jesus was going to kill Himself.)

2. Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man and the Son of God (vs. 28). You may wish to share some information from Understanding the Bible with your students to further explain these statements.

3. Jesus didn't fit the Pharisees' expectations of the Messiah. He challenged their authority among the people, so they didn't like Jesus or try to understand Him. Some were stubborn or proud, and some were protecting their own position in society. Most were simply blinded by sin, and did not want to have their eyes opened by the Spirit.

❷ Do any of those reasons relate to why people don't believe in Jesus today? (Accept all reasonable answers. Most students will see some connections.)

4. Jesus was claiming to have always existed. He was claiming to be God. If Jesus was not telling the truth, this was blasphemy, punishable by stoning to death according to Old Testament law.

5. Jesus also said, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1), "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), "the gate" (John 10:7), "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

❸ What does the promise that Jesus made in verse 51 mean? (Those who trust in Jesus as their own Savior from sin will not experience spiritual death; this is a promise of heaven and eternal life.)

Have a volunteer read aloud Colossians 1:17, this week's memory verse, from his or her Bible, page 8 of *The Rock*, or the memory verse poster from your teaching aids packet. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" Colossians 1:17.

❹ What does this verse tell you about who Jesus is? (Jesus existed before everything and created and controls all; therefore, He must be God.)

Now that we've studied how Jesus exceeded the Pharisees' expectations, let's do some activities that explore what it means to us that Jesus is greater than our expectations.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

Students will choose from activities that explore a deeper understanding of Jesus.

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Have them work in groups or individually. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Debate" your students will think through one or more of the paradoxes presented in *The Rock*; in "Collage" students will create a piece of art illustrating Jesus' "I am" statements; and in "Letter Writing" they will express their feelings about today's Scripture as if they had been in the crowd.

Debate

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

In this activity you will consider some of the paradoxes of Christianity in an attempt to deepen your understanding of Jesus. Read the article about paradoxes on pages 2-3 of *The Rock*. Then choose sides and debate the truth of each side of one paradox you've selected. Use today's Scripture text and other passages in your Bible for reference. If you have time, debate more than one paradox.



Collage

- ☒ Concordances
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Poster board
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Markers

In this activity you will explore more sayings of Jesus in order to pursue a greater understanding of Him. Search out the "I am" statements Jesus made about Himself throughout Scripture. You might want to use a concordance. Most of these statements can be found in the Book of John. Use your findings to create a collage portraying all the things Jesus is. You may cut out words and pictures as well as creating your own. Title your collage.

Letter Writing

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be in one of the crowds Jesus spoke to? Write a letter to a friend as if you were a young Jewish teen in the crowd the day of the Pharisees's discussion with Jesus. Feel free to ask questions and express your feelings about things you can't understand or tell your friend about the Pharisees and their problem.

STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus is greater than our expectations.

Students will commit to accept some aspect of Jesus that exceeds their expectations.

Materials:

- ☒ Construction paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Pencils, pens or markers
- ☐ "Colossians 1:17" memory verse poster from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

There are many things that you and your students will never completely understand about Jesus until you are together with Him in heaven. Help your students see that this is not a reason for despair, but rather an opportunity to practice their faith.



Refer once again to the memory verse poster, and have a volunteer read the verse aloud for the class. **"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"** Colossians 1:17.

It's clear that there are things about Jesus that will always be beyond our human expectations. However, that doesn't have to be a stumbling point for us. Because we know God is good, we can trust Him despite the unknowns and the mysteries. After all, He is the one who existed before everything else, and holds everything together. What is there about God that you don't understand but are willing to trust anyway?

Encourage students to reflect and offer honest answers. Accept their doubts and questions without feeling obligated to answer them. The whole point of today's lesson is that there are some things about Jesus that we simply cannot understand, but we don't limit Jesus by those misunderstandings. That's what the Pharisees did!

Hand out colored sheets of paper and ask students to cut or tear them into the shape of a large question mark. Then they should write one or more things about God that they find hard to understand but are willing to trust.

Ask your students if they are ready and willing to accept that Jesus goes beyond our expectations, that there are some things about Him we just cannot understand. For those students that are ready to accept this, have them take their question marks and lay them on a table or other designated spot, symbolizing an offering of their impossible questions to God, accepting and trusting in Him despite their questions.

Seal It!



Close class today with prayer, thanking God for being bigger than what our brains can comprehend, for being bigger than all our questions, and bigger than even the answers. Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" in *The Rock* to explore more aspects of the "out-of-this-world" qualities of Jesus.



Seeing God throughout the Week Ask students, "What expectations are you holding on to?" Remind students that Jesus is greater than our expectations.

lesson 8

Bible Basis:

Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:40-45;
6:30-34

Focus:

Take time to be compassionate.

Choosing to Help

STEP 1 ▶ Connecting with God's Word

Picking and Choosing: Students will take part in a demonstration to spur discussion about compassion.

STEP 2 ▶ Studying God's Word

Reading from Matthew 14 and Mark 1 and 6: Students will study Matthew and Mark to discover what God's Word says about being compassionate.

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 ▶ Interacting with God's Word

Responding with Compassion: Students will choose from activities that explore taking time to be compassionate.

- ☐ Poster board, markers, pencils or pens
- ☐ "Compassion Reaction" worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 4 ▶ Applying God's Word

Showing Compassion: Students will commit to take time to be compassionate in the following week.

Memory Verse

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

—1 Peter 3:8

Understanding the Bible

The Greek word for leprosy in Mark 1:40 was used for various skin diseases, including what we call leprosy. Whatever disease the man had, he believed that Jesus could heal him. Under the law, diseases such as leprosy and blindness made a person ceremonially unclean. Once deemed unclean, a leper wasn't allowed on the temple grounds, and under the law, touching someone who was unclean brought defilement.

Jesus' compassion went beyond the law and brought healing. He touched the man to cleanse him of his leprosy. Even so, Jesus showed a respect for the law when He asked the man to show himself to the priest and offer sacrifices. Because the Jews believed that only God could cure leprosy, the healing testified to Jesus' divine power.

We don't know if the man obeyed Jesus' instructions to go show himself to the priest, but he probably did. We do know the man didn't keep quiet about his healing. As a result of the man's enthusiasm, Jesus couldn't enter a town openly because crowds would come from everywhere to see Him. As His popularity with the people grew, so did His unpopularity among His opposition.

Later Jesus decided to take His disciples away from the crowd, and they set sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Luke recorded in his Gospel that they went to Bethsaida.

—continued on next page

☐ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Understanding the Bible —cont'd

Some people in the crowd noticed that they were leaving, so they ran around the lake and through the towns, actually getting there ahead of the boat.

When Jesus saw the eager crowd, He was moved with compassion and filled with concern for the people's spiritual needs. They were like sheep without a shepherd (compare Num. 27:17; Ezek. 34:5). Jesus "welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing" (Luke 9:11). And since they had rushed to Him without bringing provisions, He fed them miraculously.

classroom tips

Your middle-school students will probably want to be more compassionate as a result of today's lesson, but might not know how. Help them to think about realistic ways that they can show compassion every day. There are people all around them who are in need of kindness and love. Help them recognize who these people are and what they can do to help.

The "Compassion Reaction" worksheet from your creative teaching aids packet is a good place to start. It presents various situations from the world your students live in everyday. It's situations like these that can help your students develop a sense of compassion for others.

Teacher Devo

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Romans 9:15 (Also read Psalm 103:6-14.)

God clearly shows us that compassion is not simply an emotion. It is a choice. Sometimes a feeling accompanies our choice, but these emotions should not be the driving force behind how we react to those who need our help. Instead, we need to look to God and follow His model of compassion. Jesus healed a man even when He knew the man's disobedience would hinder His ministry. Jesus was tired, yet He healed and spoke to the masses. He wanted to be alone, yet He remained with those who needed His words. His compassion did not come only when His physical needs were met and He "felt" like helping others. Because God has compassion on your needs, take the time to be compassionate to others—because they are in need, not because it's convenient for you.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Middle schoolers are beginning to become aware that others may have problems, and are beginning to be able to show compassion and kindness. The more experiences they have and the more situations they learn about, the better they will understand people and their needs, and the responsibility that comes with that awareness.

Help your students explore their reactions to situations. Help them face answers realistically so they will learn how to help others practically, even when the result does not have any direct personal benefit.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Take time to be compassionate.

Before Class Option

Write the word *compassion* on the board and have early-arriving students write their own definitions of the word.

Students will take part in a demonstration to spur discussion about compassion.

Choose four volunteers to read the following stories aloud to the class. Ask your class members to think about who they feel sorry for as the stories are read.

1. Jeff has been cheating off your tests the whole year, even after you told him to stop it. The teacher caught him cheating off your unit test and flunked him. The teacher wonders if you willingly helped him cheat and is considering flunking you.

2. Alex studies even when there isn't a test. He has a learning disability that doesn't allow him to easily retain information. He quit the basketball team to study for the unit test. He flunked it.

3. Sarah has been working after school to help her family make ends meet. She used to be a straight-A student and on the honor roll. Lately, she's been falling asleep during her study time. She flunked the unit test.

4. Charlotte enjoys partying more than studying. She flunked the unit test.

Assign the four walls of your meeting room as the four names from these stories. Ask students to stand at the wall named for the person they feel the most sorry for. Then ask them to switch and stand under the name that they feel least sorry for. Discuss any or all of these questions:

- ▶ How do circumstances affect your feelings?
- ▶ Should we be compassionate toward people who deserve punishment? Explain your answer.
- ▶ If we do nice things for people only because someone makes us, are we still being compassionate? If not, what must change?
- ▶ What is the difference between acting on feelings and acting on choices?

Jesus showed compassion even to people that we might think didn't deserve it. In today's lesson we'll see how Jesus chose to have compassion on sinners—even when He was tired or they were contagious.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Matthew 14:14;
Mark 1:40-45; 6:30-34



Students will study Matthew and Mark to discover what God's Word says about being compassionate.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

Distribute *The Rock* and pencils or pens, and have your students open to Today's Scripture on page 5. Read the introduction in bold on page 4 aloud for the class. Then ask three volunteers to read each Scripture passage aloud while the rest of the class follows along. When students are done reading, ask these questions to be sure they understand the stories:

- **What was Jesus' response to the large crowd?** (He had compassion on them and healed their sick.)

Alternate Method

Assign parts to students and read Today's Scripture dramatically.



Your mom asks you to help her get breakfast ready. Your brother asks you to read over his book report. A new kid at school asks you to help him find a class. Someone from church calls and asks you to baby-sit. If one more person asks you to do something, you're going to scream.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus felt, with people constantly asking Him for help? Take a look at some incidents in Jesus' life that show you how Jesus felt and acted. Read Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:40-45; and 6:30-34.

1. Skim these three passages and underline the phrase that describes Jesus' feelings toward the crowds and the man with leprosy.

2. Real, genuine compassion motivates people to act. Describe Jesus' actions in detail in each case.

a. The crowd and their sick (Matthew 14:14)

b. The man with leprosy (Mark 1:40-45)

c. The crowd who followed Jesus (Mark 6:30-34)

- **What made Jesus touch the leper to cleanse him?** (Jesus was filled with compassion.)

- **What did Jesus tell the man to do after he was healed?** (Don't tell anyone. Go to the priest and offer the appropriate sacrifices.)

- **When the leper disobeyed, what was the result?** (Jesus could no longer enter a town openly [because of the crowds] but stayed outside in lonely places. Even then the people came from everywhere to see Him.)

Bible Study

3.

Retell the story you just read about Jesus' healing the leper from the leper's point of view. (Be sure to use the pronouns "I" and "me.")

Today's Scripture

Matthew 14:14

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

⁴¹Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:

⁴⁴"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."
⁴⁵Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 6:30-34

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

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► Why did Jesus ask the disciples to go with Him to a quiet place? (Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. They needed some rest.)

► How did Jesus express His compassion to the crowd? (He began teaching them many things.)

Work through the questions in *The Rock* together with your class.

1. Underline: Filled with compassion; he had compassion on them.

2. a. He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

b. Jesus healed the man.

c. Jesus taught the crowd many things.

3. Volunteers should retell the story from the leper's point of view. Their stories should be told using the pronouns "I" and "me." You may give them a chance to write their stories first if they prefer.

Discuss these questions:

► Do we need to be compassionate even to people who are selfish and rude? (Yes, it was selfish and rude for people to come after Jesus when He and His disciples needed rest. He still had compassion on them and sacrificed His personal time.)

► Are acts of compassion rewarded? (Here on earth, sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't. The reward doesn't always reflect on whether the compassionate

action was right.)

► Although it's easy to show compassion to those we think deserve it, it can be hard to have compassion on those who don't seem to deserve it. So what's the use of showing compassion in these situations? (We do it because God teaches us to be compassionate.)

Now that we've studied how Jesus took time to be compassionate, let's do some activities that explore what it means for us to take time to be compassionate.

STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip Be sure to call the group back together in time to complete Step 4. Allow students a few minutes to share their experiences with classmates.

Students will choose from activities that explore taking time to be compassionate.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Statues of Compassion" students will strike poses that represent compassion in action; in "Crowd of Needs" students will brainstorm people who need help and ways that they can show compassion; and in "Compassion Reaction" students will use a worksheet from the teaching aids packet to consider their level of compassion.

Statues of Compassion

In this activity you will act out ways that you can show compassion to others. With the rest of your group, make a living statue that reflects compassion. To do this, you may have one person begging on their knees and another extending money to that person. Perhaps another is holding an umbrella over that person's head, etc. Have each person extend a compassionate act to another. When you are each representing a compassionate act, have everyone freeze into a living statue.

Crowd of Needs

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers

Get a small group to brainstorm who you can help with acts of compassion and how. Make a graffiti-style list of people who need help; these could be people you know from school, church, or your neighborhood, or people around the country and the world. As you think of these people who need help, think also of ways that you can show compassion to them, individually or as a class. Be creative!

Compassion Reaction

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ "Compassion Reaction" worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

In this activity you will use a worksheet to help you consider your own acts of compassion. Fill out the "Compassion Reaction" worksheet by yourself or with a partner. Remember to consider your initial reaction, what you would want done if you were in the situation, and what might happen as a result of your response.



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Take time to be compassionate.

Students will reflect on how they can be compassionate.

Jesus Christ lived out the perfect example of compassion. He lived His life among sinners, though they did not understand Him. His own family called Him crazy at one point. Ultimately, he showed that He loved people, in spite of their sins. He lived, died, and rose again for us, even though we do not deserve it. His compassion for our situation was so great that He chose to die in our place. He chose to heal us not only of our physical illnesses (like in the passages we read today), but also of our sins: a far deeper problem. True compassion does not depend on the person receiving it, but on the person giving it.

- **What are specific areas of your life where God has shown you compassion that you didn't deserve?**

It is easy for us to feel bad for someone we see hurting. It is much harder to have mercy or compassion for those who hurt us. This is exactly what Jesus Christ did, however, as He accomplished the Father's will here on earth. It is also what we are called to do in our daily lives—to show active compassion in our families, schools, communities, and ultimately, the world!

- **Do you regularly extend mercy to people who have hurt you? How do you help the people you don't like as well as the ones you do?**
- **Can you think of people or situations where you need to practice mercy? Write down their names on a piece of paper and commit to pray for them this week.**

God said He requires us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him (Mic. 6:8). All of these are closely tied together. We must practice mercy even as we judge, and we should judge well in situations that require mercy. All of this is made possible by walking humbly with God. You can't have the necessary discernment to mix judgment and mercy rightly if you are not wholeheartedly pursuing God first.

- **What are some ways you think that spending time with God might help you be merciful?**
- **How can you pursue your relationship with God more directly this week? Write down some specific points in a plan you can stick to.**

There are many problems in our world that may seem too large or far away for you to directly change, but there are many ways you can make a difference in your school, community, and even around the world by being compassionate. With the Holy Spirit's power, your simple acts of compassion can reveal Jesus to this broken world.

Seal It!

As a class, spend time planning a way you can make a difference as a class by showing mercy. If your students need ideas, you might suggest serving in a local soup kitchen, helping the elderly or disabled in our church, or sponsoring a child.

Close with a prayer for God's guidance and discernment for each person to know how to show compassion and to reach out to others each day, being a light for the Lord.

Seeing God throughout the Week Help your students to think of ways to show compassion this week. Remind them of the many ways they have been blessed and encourage them to share that blessing with others.

lesson 9

Bible Basis:

Mark 10:35-45

Focus:

Jesus defined "greatness" as serving others.

Becoming the Greatest

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Training to Be the Greatest: Students will discover how they can reflect Jesus' greatness by serving others.

- ☐ Four "certificates"—these can be handmade or a printout from your computer.

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Mark 10: Students will discover what God's Word says about being the greatest.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Becoming Great: Students will choose from activities that explore becoming great by serving others.

- ☐ Beanbag, ball of string, or other similar object
- ☐ Bible, markers, poster board, scissors, glue, music player or radio, Christian music (optional)
- ☐ Magazines and newspapers, a coin
- ☐ "Being a Servant" game from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Being a Servant: Students will decorate socks in service.

- ☐ Permanent or fabric markers
- ☐ White athletic socks—one sock for each student
- ☐ Cardboard or newspaper to line the inside of the socks

Memory Verse

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

—Mark 10:45

Understanding the Bible

In today's lesson, James and John, the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), asked Jesus to let them sit at His left and right in glory. In Matthew 20:20-28, the parallel passage, James and John's mother made the request.

In ancient times the most honored guest took a right-hand seat (see 1 Kings 2:19; Ps. 110:1), and the next in rank, the seat to the immediate left. James and John may have figured they deserved these positions of honor in Jesus' kingdom since they were with Him at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8) and at the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37).

James and John didn't understand that to share in Christ's glory also meant to share in His sufferings. The phrase "drink the cup" found in Mark 10:38 was a Jewish expression that meant to share someone's fate. In the Old Testament a cup of wine is a common symbol of God's wrath on sinners (for an example, see Ps. 75:8). Jesus drank that cup of wrath when He bore the punishment for our sins on the cross.

Jesus knew that James and John would one day suffer for the sake of Christ, but He also told them that, even though they would suffer for His sake, it is the Father's prerogative to assign honor. He would not usurp that authority. Instead, Jesus supplied the new definition of greatness that His disciples needed: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43b).

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☐ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Mark 10:45 is a key verse in the Gospel. Jesus came as the Suffering Servant (see Isa. 52:13—53:12) who would suffer and die for humankind's redemption.

Classroom Tips

Talk to other Sunday school teachers and others involved at your church and ask about service projects your students could do for them. For example, your middle schoolers could help clean toys in the nursery, read aloud to your church's elderly members, or offer free baby-sitting to young families—the possibilities are endless! Focus on opportunities that are realistic for your group to do, as well as something that will indeed fill a need. Later, present several possibilities and let your students decide which to pursue.

Teacher Devo

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10 (See also vss. 3-21.)

Serving others is sometimes a thankless act. Likewise, honor and promotion to the top positions do not always follow immediately. In addition, serving is not always easy. It takes time, resources, and energy away from us for the benefit of others. Serving is really very contrary to the secular norm, but it is exactly the route to achieving greatness in the kingdom of God.

Let go of the control that makes you want to become great in your own power. God knows who you are and what will make you happiest. If you can trust Him even when you're doing another's chores or making someone else look good, you will learn what it truly means to be great.

Take a minute to define here what greatness might look like through Jesus' eyes. Include a way that you will show Christ's greatness to others this week.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Middle school is a time when students typically come to the realization that some people are less fortunate than they are. Middle school is also when a student is old enough to do something to change someone's world. Not only are young people confronted daily with embarrassment and insecurity, but they also become aware of those who are hurting. At an age when it is easy to add to the pain of others, serving is a needed outlet. As young people learn to focus

on others, they help make people's lives better and in turn make their own lives more fulfilled. As youth learn more about Jesus, they see that He was the greatest servant of all. Jesus defined "greatness" as serving others (Mark 10:43-44). In an environment where it is often hard to be deemed great, servanthood is a tangible way for middle schoolers to gain personal satisfaction and affirmation.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus defined "greatness" as serving others.

Before Class Option

Bring in a common household object that has many uses, such as a spray bottle. Have youth think of as many uses for this object as they can.

LES. 9



Free! Downloadable Options for Steps 1 and 4.
resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded

Students will discover how they can reflect Jesus' greatness by serving others.

Materials:

- Four "certificates"—these can be handmade or a printout from your computer

Prepare for the opening activity ahead of time by writing each of the following titles on a separate piece of paper. Feel free to add flair to the "elections" by creating the papers to look like official certificates.

1. By Far the Best-Looking Human Specimens in the Universe
2. Undoubtedly Superior in Intelligence and Wit
3. Always Victorious in Any Feat of Strength or Agility
4. The Funniest, Most Interesting People Who Have Ever Lived

Since the United States is a democratic-republic, we tend to use elections for making all sorts of decisions. We elect presidents, senators, schoolboard members—even broadcast talent show finalists. Most of you have an elected student council at your school.

- ▶ What kinds of things have you heard candidates say to win an election?
- ▶ If you could choose anything, what position would you most like to be elected to? Why?
- ▶ What would you do to get voted to that position?

Announce that you're going to hold your own election. Form four equal-sized groups.

I have four amazing titles here, and each of your groups will be elected to be one of them. I'm going to tell you what they are, then you'll vote on which group will be elected to each title. Read each one aloud with great flourish.

Now, you have the great responsibility of electing each of your fellow groups to one of these amazing honors. Here's how we'll do this: I'll point to each group, and everyone will hold up the amount of fingers indicating their choice.

Now go around the groups, encouraging every student to vote. Make quick tallies and "elect" each group to its title by dramatically bestowing the paper. Throughout this activity, keep in mind that teenagers can be self-conscious and vulnerable to peer review. Therefore, maintain a lively, joking attitude that doesn't allow students to take the actual titles too seriously. Since the choices are so over-the-top, they should have fun with this fake election. Congratulate each group on its victory, then have students discuss the following questions in their group.

- ▶ How do you feel about the title you were elected to? Which if any of the others would you rather be, and why?
- ▶ What is it like to be considered the best or greatest at something?
- ▶ Have you ever been the greatest at anything? Share.
- ▶ How do others treat someone who's the greatest? How does someone who is the greatest treat others?
- ▶ How do you think Jesus would define greatness? Why is this important?

It's very important how Jesus defines greatness—and the answer might surprise you. Let's explore it now.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Mark 10:35-45



Students will study Mark 10 to discover what God's Word says about being the greatest.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

Distribute pencils or pens and *The Rock*, and have your students open to Today's Scripture on page 4. Read aloud for them the introduction in bold; then have volunteers read the parts of a narrator, Jesus, James, and John. Have the rest of the class act as the other disciples as your students read this passage of Scripture aloud.

When students are done reading, have them work with partners to come up with questions for the answers on page 5 of *The Rock*. After sufficient time, call your class back together and review what students came up with. You might want to play in a game-show style and have students race to give the first correct answer, in the form of a question.

- ❶ What did James and John want from Jesus?
- ❷ What did Jesus ask them in return? Or: How did Jesus answer them?
- ❸ Why were the other 10 disciples angry with James and John?
- ❹ What did Jesus say it takes to be great? Or: How can someone become great in God's eyes? Why did Jesus come to earth?



Alternate Method

Have one student read Today's Scripture aloud instead of having a dramatic reading.

James and John definitely belonged to the in-crowd. They were some of the very first disciples of Jesus. They became part of the Big Three: Peter, James, and John. But they wanted more. James and John wanted positions of power and honor in heaven.

"So, you want to be great?" Jesus essentially asked the two brothers.

"We wanna be, we wanna be!" James and John sang out, but Jesus' answer took them totally off guard.

Read what Jesus said in Mark 10:35-45.

We've come up with the answers, and left it up to you to think of questions that fit these answers.

WHAT IS . . .

THE ANSWER IS . . .

TO BE GREAT IN HEAVEN.

YOU'LL HAVE TO FACE THE SAME SUFFERING I FACE.

BECAUSE THE OTHER 10 DISCIPLES WERE WANNA-BE'S TOO; THEY WANTED TO BE BIG SHOTS IN HEAVEN.

BE EVERYONE'S SLAVE.

TO SERVE OTHERS AND TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE FOR THEM.

Then discuss these questions:

- ▶ **What was wrong with James and John's request?** (*James and John were trying to get ahead of the other disciples and were looking out only for themselves. They were trying to use the world's standards to become great in God's kingdom.*)
- ▶ **Take another look at Jesus' definition of greatness in Mark 10:43-44.** How do you think a professional athlete would react to Jesus' definition of greatness? A politician? A celebrity? (*Accept all reasonable answers.*)

Read this week's memory verse, Mark 10:45, with your students from your Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" Mark 10:45.

- ▶ **In what ways was Jesus like a servant?** (*Jesus often did the things nobody else wanted to do, such as touch lepers, visit the sick, and talk to outcasts. He worked long hours and sometimes missed meals. He was treated like a criminal when He was beaten, mocked, spat on, and killed—all to serve us.*)
- ▶ **When we think of being like Christ, we don't often think about all the little things He did for people when He was tired or wanted to be doing something else. What would need to change in your life for you to be able to say that you are here to serve others?** (*Allow some time for reflection and accept all reasonable answers.*)

Now that we've studied how Jesus told His disciples to become great, let's do some activities that explore what it means that Jesus defined "greatness" as serving others.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

Students will choose from activities that explore becoming great by serving others.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In “Hot Potato” your students will play a game and practice serving each other; in “Categories of Greatness” students will compare the world’s idea of greatness with God’s definition of greatness; and in “Being a Servant” they will play a game from your teaching aids packet about being a servant.

tip As students play the game "Being a Servant," make sure they do not defeat the purpose of the game by having unsportsmanlike attitudes.

Hot Potato

- ☐ Beanbag, ball of string, or another similar object
- ☐ Music player or radio
- ☐ Christian music (optional)

In this activity you will play a game that gives you practice being a servant. Sit in a circle and have a volunteer play Christian music or find a Christian radio station. Pass the beanbag around and across; when the music stops, whoever has the beanbag is the Greatest. That person must serve someone else in the group (e.g., tidy up their papers, get them a drink of water, pray for a need, etc.).

Categories of Greatness

- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers

In this activity you will compare the world's idea of greatness with God's definition of greatness. Divide your group into two teams. Each team should divide a piece of poster board into two columns. Above the first column, write, "Great in the World"; above the second column, write, "Great in God's Kingdom." See which team can fill up their poster board first by gluing magazine pictures that show how people become great in the world or in God's kingdom.

Being a Servant

- ☒ A coin
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ "Being a Servant" game from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

In this activity you will play a game about being a servant. Set up the “Being a Servant” board game and punch out the cards and playing pieces. To play, move your marker around the board by flipping a coin—heads, move one space; tails, move two. Pick a card for each square you land on, look up the verse on the card, read it aloud, and answer the question. The first person or team to finish wins.



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Jesus defined "greatness" as serving others.

LES. 9

Students will decorate socks as a reminder of "greatness through serving."

Materials:

- ☐ Permanent markers or fabric markers
- ☐ White athletic socks—one sock for every student
- ☐ Cardboard or newspaper to line the inside of the socks

- ▶ **What surprised you about what we discovered today about greatness? How might this change your life?**
- ▶ **Why does it make sense that Jesus wants us to be great by serving others? What might some of His purposes be—for us, the people we're serving, and the world in general?**
- ▶ **How might we fight the temptation of serving others just to look good, or get praise? What can we do to keep our motivation pure?**

Give each student one sock and at least one marker.

You'll notice that I gave you a sock. And don't worry, it's clean. Now, your first reaction may be to laugh. But what we've learned today is an unexpected truth.

Jesus turns ordinary things great. In fact, we reflect Jesus' greatness by doing a humble, seemingly lowly thing: serving others. This totally flips the world's ideas of greatness upside down, doesn't it?

Look at the sock you hold in your hand. With these ideas of service and humbleness in mind, think about how you might serve others in real, practical ways. Maybe you can use the sock as inspiration: For instance, it provides warmth, support, protection. I want you to take some time now to talk to God about greatness—and how He wants to use you to serve others. As you do, decorate your sock to symbolize your thoughts, prayers, and ideas about greatness through serving. You can write on it, draw on it . . . whatever you want.

Have students spread out around the room so that they aren't distracted by others. Give students a few minutes.

- ▶ **What was it like to express your thoughts about greatness through serving on something so ordinary as a sock?**
- ▶ **What are two ordinary things you can do this week to protect, comfort, support, or encourage someone?**
- ▶ **How do you think God wants to use you in the lives of those around you? Why do you think He does?**
- ▶ **In what ways will our new idea of greatness surprise others? How might it even make others angry? How will you handle this?**

Seal It!

End by praying that each of you will live out Jesus' definition of greatness through everyday service.

Seeing God throughout the Week Mention that Jesus served others. Help students think of ways they can serve others this week and encourage them to take action.

lesson 10

Bible Basis:

Matthew 20:1-16

Focus:

Comparison can lead to discontent.

The Greener Grass Syndrome

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Comparing Wages: Students will perform a roleplay and discuss the dangers of comparisons.

- ☒ Three pretend \$20 bills

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Matthew 20: Students will study Matthew 20 to discover what God's Word says about comparisons.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Tipping the Scales: Students will choose from activities that give them practice not comparing themselves with others.

- ☒ Plastic straws cut to various lengths in a paper bag
- ☒ Small snacks or prizes
- ☒ Photocopies of Bible quiz
- ☒ Two instruction envelopes (see Step 3)
- ☒ 20 pennies, hidden throughout the room
- ☒ Blindfolds
- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Seeing Ourselves: Students will connect the lesson to their situations.

Memory Verse

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:19

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Under- standing the Bible

The parable of the workers in the vineyard was Jesus' way of illustrating what He meant by this saying: "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Matt. 19:30; 20:16). In other words, the final judgment will hold many surprises. On that day we'll see that many who enjoyed material prosperity and who lived lives of merely outward righteousness will be condemned. Also, many who had little in this life and who nobody noticed will one day be acknowledged by the King Himself!

It was typical in Jesus' day for those seeking employment to gather in the marketplace and hope for someone to hire them as day laborers. At that time the usual daily wage for a manual laborer was one denarius, a silver Roman coin. Soldiers made the same wage.

In at least three ways, the landowner of Jesus' parable acted unusually. First, he hired workers not only in the morning (the third hour, or 9:00 a.m.), but also at noon (the sixth hour), in the middle of the afternoon (the ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m.), and even an hour before quitting time (the eleventh hour, or 5:00 p.m.). Second, he paid the last first. Third, he paid the ones who did a partial day's work as much as he paid those who did a full day's work.

The unusual behavior of the landowner is the key to Jesus' meaning. The parable shows that God, represented by the

—continued on next page

landowner, is fair, giving to the workers of all shifts the amount agreed to. Since He is the employer and the owner of the vineyard, He is free to do whatever He wants! Sometimes it pleases Him to bless people in ways that other people think they don't deserve. The quality we learn about God is that He is generous and merciful.

Classroom Tips

This week you will introduce your students to Jesus' parables, as well as explain what a parable is. You will be using the worksheet "Tell a Parable" from your *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids* packet. Each of the four lessons in this unit teaches one of Jesus' parables, and each uses the "Tell a Parable" worksheet in the Before-Class Option. For this reason, you will want to collect these sheets from your students each week and save them for future use.

Teacher Devo

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5

In a society where rich people often live in huge houses, drive multiple fancy cars, and are the first to own the latest gadgets and gizmos, it's difficult, even as Christians, to resist falling into a comparison trap. This week's lesson is about just that: Being content with what we have been given.

Contentment equals freedom for the Christian. It's only when our possessions and finances are kept in proper relationship to our "riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19) that we are free to love others without the tyranny of comparisons.

Are you free? Is your identity tied to your material value? Do you envy someone else's blessings? Before continuing with your lesson preparations, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal to your mind any envy based on comparison with others. Ask the Lord to set you free from the grip this could have on your heart.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . .

This parable strikes at the heart of your middle schoolers' world. There is nothing that breaks a student's spirit more than feeling inferior to others. Our culture fans the flames of comparison by bombarding our young people (through the media) with a false standard of beauty and athleticism.

Our youth struggle to believe that their worth is based on God's love and valuing of them.

Be sensitive to the students in your group who may be feeling self-conscious about their looks, their coordination, or their clothes, especially in comparison to their peers. You have an awesome opportunity to lead them to freedom from this world's standards by describing the unlimited riches available to them in Christ Jesus.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Comparison can lead to discontent.

Before Class Option

Have students read the first two sections of the "Tell a Parable" worksheet from Creative Teaching Aids as an introduction to today's lesson. See how many parables from the Bible they can name.

Collect the worksheets before beginning Step 1.



Students will perform a roleplay and discuss the dangers of comparisons.

Materials:

- ☐ Three pretend \$20 bills

Use the following roleplay to demonstrate a point to your students about comparisons. The roleplay will lead naturally into the discussion. Choose three volunteers to step out of the room. Call each student back in one at a time and make an agreement with each one to pay them for baby-sitting as follows:

The first student gets \$20 for eight hours. The second student gets \$20 for four hours. The third student gets \$20 for one hour. After each student has agreed to the wages, he or she should step back out of the room so the next student can repeat this process. Instruct them not to discuss with the other volunteers what happened in class. After all three have agreed to the wages, invite them all back into the room. Starting with the first student (the eight-hour worker), ask these questions:

- ① **For how many hours did you agree to baby-sit? For how much money? Is that a fair price?** (They should all say yes since this is the wage they agreed to be paid.)

As each student answers that the price is fair, give him or her \$20 in play money. After all three students have been paid, ask the first and second volunteers:

- ② **Do you still think your wages are fair, knowing that the third volunteer made the same amount of money for only one hour's work?** (They will probably answer no.)

Then discuss the following questions. Accept all reasonable answers.

- ③ **Why did students 1 and 2 change their mind about the fairness of their \$20 wages? What happens when we compare ourselves to others?** (Because they learned that someone else was getting paid the same amount for much less work. They were comparing their wages to the third person's wages.)

It's hard to be content with what we have, how we look, or who we are when we compare ourselves to others. Jesus told a story about a vineyard to illustrate that comparisons can lead to discontent.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Matthew 20:1-16



LES. 10

Alternate Method

Have the students work on the questions in *The Rock* individually and then have them share their answers as a group.


Students will study Matthew 20 to discover what God's Word says about comparisons.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*


Jesus told great stories. Our Bible study today is the first in a series on some of Jesus' stories called parables. A parable is a story that uses common everyday experiences to teach an important spiritual lesson.

Distribute *The Rock* and have volunteers each read aloud two to four verses of Today's Scripture on page 5 as the class follows along. When they've finished reading, read aloud the introduction in bold on page 4 yourself, and then work together with students through the questions in *The Rock*.




THE PARABLE PYRAMID

Jesus told lots of parables. A parable is something like a pyramid—lots of stuff built up to a point.
Pretend you're an archaeologist studying the parable pyramid in Matthew 20:1-16.
Record your observations in your archaeologist's log.



Level 1: People (Matthew 20:1-7)


NICE



MEAN

What kind of person was the landowner?

NICE



MEAN

What kind of people were the hired men when the agreement for work was made?

Level 2: Plot (Matthew 20:8-16)
 How much did the landowner pay all the hired workers?
 Why did the first hired workers expect to get paid more than the last hired workers?

Level 1: People (Matt. 20:1-7)

The landowner was nice, generous, caring, etc. The workers were nice when they were hired, happy to have work.

Level 2: Plot (Matt. 20:8-16)

➤ How much did the landowner agree to pay the first workers he hired? (A denarius.)

➤ How much did the landowner pay all the workers? (A denarius.)

➤ Why did the first hired workers expect to get paid more than the last hired workers? (They did more work and worked through the hottest part of the day.)

How did they react to the landowner's action?

How did the landowner respond to the first hired workers' behavior?

Level 3: Parallel

Matthew 20:13-16

How is God like the landowner?

Whom do the hired workers stand for?

Write at least one statement that the landowner made to the first hired workers that is also true of the character of God and His relationship with us.

Level 4: Point

Matthew 20:4, 13-15

What is the point of the parable?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 20:1-16

¹"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

²"About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

³"He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

⁴"Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

⁵"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

⁶"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

⁷"The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

⁸"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

⁹"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Lesson 10



▶ Did they have a right to expect more than what they agreed on at the beginning of the workday? (No. The landowner fulfilled his agreement with them.) How did they react to the landowner's action? (They grumbled against him.)

▶ How did the landowner respond to the first hired workers' behavior? (He told them that he had fulfilled his agreement with them and, as the landowner, he could choose to do whatever he wanted with his money.)

Level 3: Parallel (Matt. 20:13-16)

▶ How is God like the landowner? (God is generous, caring, and the ruler of all. He is not unfair. God has a right to do as He pleases with His wealth.)

▶ Whom do the hired workers stand for? (The hired workers stand for us as God's children and servants on earth.)

Level 4: Point (Matt. 20:4, 13-15)

Discuss the following questions:

▶ If the first workers hired were paid the amount they agreed in the morning was fair, why did they think it was unfair at the end of the day? (They compared their pay with what the landowner paid everyone else. If they hadn't been comparing, they would not have felt cheated.)

▶ Was the landowner being unfair? (Help students understand that the landowner was fair to all hired. He was very generous to those hired later in the day, but he also paid the first hired a fair wage. It was only in comparing themselves to others that they felt cheated.)

Now that we've studied a parable that shows the discontentment that comes with comparison, let's do some activities that explore what it means to youth that comparison can lead to discontent.

STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip Use this tip for the Scavenger Hunt instruction envelopes. The instructions in Envelope 1 direct all students with birthdays between January and June to put on blindfolds. The instructions in Envelope 2 state that there are 20 pennies hidden throughout the room. The person who finds the most pennies wins a prize. Be sure to hide the pennies before class!

Students will choose from activities that give them practice not comparing themselves with others.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work in groups or individually. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "The Shortest Straw" students will complete an activity in which one is rewarded for an arbitrary reason; in "Bible Quiz" your students will compete to answer questions about the Bible with varying resources available; and in "Scavenger Hunt" they will compete with varying handicaps for the same prize.

The Shortest Straw

- ☐ Plastic straws cut to various length in paper bag
- ☐ Small prize or snack for everyone

This activity will give you practice not comparing yourself with someone else. This paper bag contains straws of various lengths. Without looking in the bag, reach in and take out the first straw you touch. After everyone has taken one, compare the lengths. Everyone gets a prize—whether he or she drew a short straw or a long one.

Bible Quiz

- ☐ Photocopies of Bible quiz
- ☐ Small prize or snack
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens

In this activity you will compete for a prize based on your Bible knowledge. Complete this Bible quiz. If your last name begins with A-M you may use your Bible; if not, sorry. After all the quizzes are scored, everyone gets an equal prize.

- ➊ Who was the oldest person in the Bible? (*Gen. 5:27*)
- ➋ What did Jesus say we must do to become great? (*Mark 10:43*)
- ➌ What did Jesus say to the woman who poured perfume on His feet? (*Luke 7:48*)
- ➍ What did John the Baptist call Jesus? (*John 1:29*)
- ➎ To what did Solomon compare a beautiful woman who shows no discretion? (*Prov. 11:22*)

Scavenger Hunt

- ☐ Two instruction envelopes
- ☐ Blindfolds
- ☐ Small prize or snack
- ☐ 20 pennies hidden throughout the room

This activity will give you practice not comparing yourself with others. Open the envelope marked 1 and read the instructions aloud. After you've done what it says, open Envelope 2 and read the instructions aloud. When you're finished, see your teacher for the prize.

STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Comparison can lead to discontent.

Students will apply today's lesson to their lives.

In today's Bible study (Matt. 20:1-16), Jesus tells a parable about day laborers who compare their situations with others. Even though they are all paid, they feel ripped off because some of them worked long hours while others barely worked at all, yet they are all paid the same wage. In life we, too, often compare our lives or situations with others.

It's easy to compare our lives with others rather than step back and see that any time we start comparing what we have to what others have, we come out unhappy.

When Jesus forgave the sinner on the cross and promised him heaven, that probably seemed unfair to many righteous people who had been going after God their entire lives. But grace is not fairness. It is grace, a gift, not fairness, that allows all sinners a chance at redemption if they believe in Jesus' work done on the cross.

Remember that the purpose of our parable today is to show that God is faithful to give us what we need. God is our provider. God provides what we need so comparison isn't necessary; it only leads to discontent.

Encourage students to think of one person they often compare themselves with. Help them to see that they don't need to compare themselves with others.

God gives us good things. Instead of looking around, encourage students to look up and offer thanksgiving to God for what they have been given.

Seal It!

This concept of grace—and understanding it—and letting go of the idea that things will or should be fair can help you go far in life if you allow it to change you. This week when things don't go your way, when you are envious of what others have or are just plain irked at the unfairness of a situation, remember Jesus. He died for sinners and that's what you are. By focusing on this concept this week, you'll be more content and better able to see those around you as Jesus sees them.

Close in prayer.

Seeing God throughout the Week Emphasize how comparing ourselves with others breeds discontent. Have students consider how choosing not to compare themselves with others will change their week.

lesson 11

Bible Basis:

Luke 14:15-24

Focus:

God invites all kinds of people to His party.

You're Invited

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Planning the Party: Students will brainstorm about their idea of the ultimate party.

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Markers

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Luke 14: Students will study Luke 14 to see what God's Word says about who will be included in His party.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Preparing for the Party: Students will choose from activities that prepare for including all kinds of people in a party.

- ☒ Water-based paints or large markers
- ☒ Construction paper
- ☐ Poster board, markers, scissors, glue

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Coming to the Table: Students will have an opportunity to respond to God's invitation to eternal life through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

- ☐ Pencils or pens, Bibles or *The Rock*
- ☐ "Invitations" from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Memory Verse

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

—Matthew 11:28

Understanding the Bible

Jesus originally told this parable of the great banquet at a tension-filled dinner party where He was a guest in the home of a Pharisee. First, the host and his fellow Pharisees had tested Jesus (Luke 14:1-6). Then Jesus had criticized the guests for scrambling to get the best seats (Luke 14:7-11) and had criticized the host for his exclusive guest list (vss. 12-14).

The Pharisees, who prided themselves on the way they kept the law so scrupulously, assumed that when Jesus was describing "the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:14), this included them! However, the righteousness of the Pharisees was based on keeping their own legal rules, not on believing in the Messiah, Jesus, in whose presence they dined. This parable illustrated that, by their rejection of Christ, these Jewish leaders were in essence refusing Jesus' banquet invitation.

When interpreting parables, one always runs the risk of pressing the details to mean too much. But consider the following interpretation of this parable:

The banquet giver = God. The banquet = the kingdom of God. The original banquet invitation = Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah. The servant = Jesus. The servant's follow-up invitations = the offer of salvation through Christ. The landowner, ox owner, and honeymooner = the Pharisees and others who rejected Christ. The urban outcasts = Jewish converts to Christ, largely from the

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

Understanding the Bible—cont'd

common working class, not considered respectable by the Pharisees. The last-minute rural guests = Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Christ.

Classroom tips

At the end of today's lesson, your students will have an opportunity to respond to God's invitation to eternal life through Jesus Christ. Some of your middle schoolers may have never made this decision. You should be ready to respond whenever the Holy Spirit leads a student to trust Jesus. Listen to your students' questions or objections and try to answer them simply and honestly. When a student is receptive, explain from the Bible the steps to trusting his or her life to Jesus. Become familiar with the information; memorize the verses; then share information naturally with youth, allowing them to interrupt at any time to ask questions.

Teacher Devo

Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17b

Our Lord invites those who thirst after His righteousness to come and drink their fill from His abundant springs of living water. Augustine put it another way when he said that our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. We are a spiritually famished people. But Jesus invites us to come to Him right up to the final verses of the New Testament (Rev. 22:17).

It is the heart of God to want a relationship with us. Your heart desires it also. If there is a void in your heart, a thirst that activities, possessions, or relationships cannot quench, perhaps it's an invitation to get back into fellowship with God. Bring your thirsty heart to Him today and drink deeply of His abundant love for you.

LES. 11

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

In his book *If Things Are So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?* author George Barna describes the growing discontent of Americans living in the material and technological prosperity of the postwar era. He observes that the greater the material comforts and convenience, the greater the discontent. Technology and "stuff," although bringing some comfort and momentary happiness to our lives, do nothing for the soul. Your middle schoolers are living with this tension. Their spiritual radars are on full

scan, searching for the key to unlocking peace within themselves and in their world. They are becoming increasingly aware that few things in life deliver the satisfaction promised. What a strategic time to lead them to the living waters of Christ! Be sensitive to the students who do not have a personal relationship with Christ. In this lesson they'll be given an opportunity to respond to Christ's invitation to be one of His banquet guests.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

God invites all kinds of people to His party.

Before Class Option

Have early-arriving students use the "To Tell A Parable" worksheet from Creative Teaching Aids to begin writing their own parables.

Collect the worksheets before beginning the lesson.



Students will brainstorm about their idea of the ultimate party.

Materials:

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Markers

In today's lesson your students will be learning about God's great banquet. Get them thinking about the ultimate party with this brainstorming activity and discussion.

Have your class members form groups of three to five students to brainstorm about the following questions. Write the questions on the board where everyone can see.

- ▶ What would be your absolute favorite kind of party to go to if you could be invited anywhere?
- ▶ Who would be there?
- ▶ What kind of food would there be?
- ▶ Music?
- ▶ Decorations?
- ▶ Dream big. What invitation could you not refuse?

Provide paper and markers for those who want to write down their ideas, and give your middle schoolers several minutes to brainstorm.

After sufficient time, call your class back together and allow the groups to share their ideas. Students may try to outdo one another with their party ideas—giving exotic themes or locations, extravagant food and decorations, live music, etc. This is exactly the point, so allow your youth to have fun with it.

After each group has had an opportunity to share their ideas, say:

Today's lesson is about a parable Jesus told about an incredible party. We'll see that God invites all kinds of people to His party. Let's take a look.



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Luke 14:15-24



Students will study Luke 14 to see what God's Word says about who will be included in His party.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

Distribute *The Rock* and have your students open to pages 4 and 5. Before reading the Scripture passage, read aloud the paragraph in bold on page 4 and have class members fill in their excuses. Then take a minute for students to share what they have written.

Now have students read Today's Scripture on page 5 in small groups. When they've finished reading, have them follow the instructions on the bottom of page 4, and continue with the Bible study on page 5 in their small groups. After sufficient time, call class members back together and review their answers. Begin with these questions that check for understanding:

❶ What were some of the excuses given by those who rejected the banquet invitation? (*I've just bought a field; I've just bought five oxen; I just got married.*)

❷ Do you think these were good excuses? Why or why not?

(Allow students to share. Refrain from passing judgment on their opinions.)

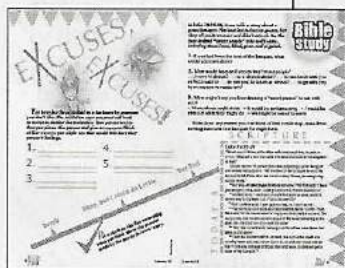
❸ Where did the banquet host tell his servants to look for other guests to invite to his banquet? (*In the streets and alleys of the town; the roads and country lanes.*)

❹ Who do the banquet host and servant in the parable represent? (*The host is God the Father and the servant is Jesus.*)

❺ Who was Jesus describing as the ones who made excuses and refused to attend the banquet? (*The Pharisees or anyone else who thought they could gain eternal life by doing enough good works or by keeping the law.*)

Alternate Method

Assign parts to students and read Today's Scripture dramatically.



EXCUSES! EXCUSES!

You have just been invited to a barbecue by someone you don't like. The invitation says you must call back to accept or decline the invitation. Your parent insists that you phone this person and give a response. Think of five excuses you might use that would NOT hurt that person's feelings.

1. _____ 4. _____

2. _____ 5. _____

3. _____

Okay, but I could do better

Dumb

Put a check on the line evaluating what you think about the excuses made by the guests in Jesus' story.

4

In Luke 14:15-24, Jesus tells a story about a great banquet. The host invited many guests, but they all made excuses and didn't attend. So, the host invited "street people" who could come, including those lame, blind, poor, and crippled.

Bible Study

1. If you had been the host of the banquet, what would you have done?

2. What would happen if you invited "street people" ... home to dinner? ... to a church dinner? ... to eat lunch with you at McDonald's? ... to join you for lunch at school? ... to go with you to an expensive restaurant?

3. What might keep you from inviting a "street person" to eat with you?
 • What others might think • It would be embarrassing • I would be afraid of what they might do • We might be asked to leave

Write down any reason you can think of that would stop Jesus from inviting someone to a banquet He might host.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:15-24

¹⁵When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

¹⁶Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. "At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁷"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁸"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²⁰The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

²¹"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room."

²²Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. "I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

TODAY'S

Lesson 11



If your students are interested in who the other characters in this parable represent, feel free to share with them the information from the Understanding the Bible background section of this lesson.

1. Accept all reasonable answers. These may include: I might have done the same thing; I might have canceled the banquet; I might have had the banquet anyway all by myself.

2. Some possible responses include: The street people might not want to come into my home. The church might want to give a street person food from the church pantry rather than have them join members for a church dinner. My parents might get upset or angry. My school doesn't allow people to come in for lunch. A fancy restaurant might not allow the street person in.

3. Allow students to share. Another possible answer is that class members might be afraid for their own safety. Some students might say that nothing would stop Jesus from inviting someone to a banquet He might host. Others might express different ideas. Either way, ask students to explain their answers.

► **What is the banquet Jesus invites us to?** (Jesus invites us to a banquet of eternal life forever with Him.)

Read this week's memory verse together with your students from your Bibles or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

► **What kind of people does God invite to His banquet?** (God invites all kinds of people to His party: poor and rich, ugly and beautiful, young and old, educated and uneducated.)

Now that we've studied a parable about God's party and who He invites, let's do some activities that explore what it means to you that God invites all kinds of people to His party.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

Students will choose from activities that prepare for including all kinds of people in a party.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work in groups or individually. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Party Banner" students will create a banner demonstrating that God invites all kinds of people to His party; in "Party Game" students will create a fun activity that includes every member of the group; and in "Party Invitation" they will create invitations for non-Christian friends to join them for a special event.

Party Banner

- ☒ Water-based paints or large markers
- ☐ Poster board

In this activity you will create a party banner that Jesus could hang across the entrance of His great banquet room to welcome His guests. You might want to decorate and color your banner with various pictures or paint cheerful images around the border of the banner. Remember that God invites all kinds of people to His party. Make your banner very welcoming to all kinds of people.

Party Game

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue

In this activity your group will create and test a party game that will include every member of the group. It may be a board game or an active game, but it should not exclude anyone. You may want to play a variation of a game you already know. Be creative, and remember to include every person in the group.

Party Invitation

- ☒ Construction paper
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue

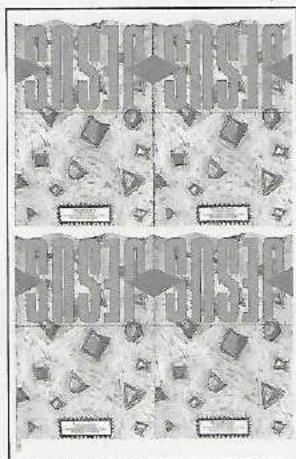
Think about some people God is inviting to His party who may not have responded yet. Create an invitation for a non-Christian friend to join you at Sunday school, youth group, church, or a social event. Think about what would appeal to that friend and how to invite this person so that he or she won't want to refuse.

STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

God invites all kinds of people to His party.



Students will have an opportunity to respond to God's invitation to eternal life through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Materials:

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*
- ☐ "Invitations" from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Today your students have learned that God invites all kinds of people to His party. They should realize that this also includes them, as well as their families and friends.

Distribute the invitations from your creative teaching aids packet, one to each student. Have students separate and fold the invitations. Make sure each student also has a pencil or pen.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 11:28, this week's memory verse, from his or her Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

Read the invitation aloud to your class, pausing when appropriate and allowing sufficient time for students to reflect and write down appropriate responses.

Challenge both Christians and non-Christians alike to be honest in their responses. Be prepared to answer questions students may have about becoming a Christian.

Have your class gather together in a prayer circle—around a table, if possible—and explain that they should use this prayer time to accept Jesus' invitation or to pray that others will accept it. Lead the prayer yourself, guiding students like this:

Lord Jesus, thank You for inviting all of us to Your banquet of eternal life.

If you want to accept Jesus' invitation, tell Him so now. (Pause.)

Now think for a moment of your family members and friends who need to accept Jesus' invitation. Pray that they will accept the invitation and join you at Jesus' banquet. (Pause.)

Jesus, we accept Your invitation by trusting in You. Amen.

Seal It!

Encourage students to pray throughout the week for those people who don't know Jesus and for understanding for their own questions about eternal life. Also encourage those who have accepted Jesus' invitation for the first time today to tell you or one of your helpers after class, and make yourselves available to answer questions they might have. Encourage your class to read and interact with the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



Seeing God throughout the Week God's party will be great! Encourage students to reflect on this when they feel left out of some of the world's parties because of what they believe.

lesson 12

Bible Basis:

Matthew 25:14-30

Focus:

Make the most of God's gifts.

Making the Most of God's Gifts

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Knowing Where I Stand: Students will assess abilities.

- ☒ Masking tape
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Matthew 25: Students will study Matthew 25 to discover what God's Word says about using our gifts.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Discovering My Gifts: Students will choose from activities that explore how they can make the most of God's gifts.

- ☐ Bible, pencils or pens, paper, poster board, markers, scissors, glue
- ☒ Ball of yarn
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Using My Talents: Students will plan ways to use the gifts God has given them.

- ☐ Craft supplies
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

Memory Verse

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

—1 Peter 4:10

Understanding the Bible

In the final week before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Jesus' first subject was His future return in glory (Matt. 24). But then He used three parables to describe what the kingdom of heaven will be like at His second coming.

In this parable, the property owner (representing God) gave his servants bags of gold. One bag of gold probably represented the total amount an average working man could earn in about 20 years. This means the property owner was wealthy and gave the servants important responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the property owner, upon his return, told the first two servants that they had been faithful "with a few things" (Matt. 25:21, 23). The bags of gold were small only in comparison with the greater responsibilities that the faithful servants would be given. This is an indication of the great rewards faithful believers will receive in heaven.

The third servant was not faithful. He buried his gold. Then he tried to excuse himself by accusing his master of being the kind of man who would harvest someone else's crop. In other words, the servant meant he was afraid that if he had invested the gold and lost it, the master would have demanded that he turn in a bag of gold anyway. In reality, the servant was not afraid;

—continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

he was just too lazy and wicked to find a way to profitably use his master's gold. The third servant's bag of gold went to a faithful servant.

Classroom Tips

Let students read together in pairs or small groups. Have some readers act out non-speaking roles in skits. Have classmates listen for specific things as student reads.

Read the passage aloud for the class yourself, especially if it involves difficult names.

Teacher Devo

Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:4

Sometimes God asks us to use the gifts He's given us in ways that are difficult or uncomfortable. For example, Paul was a gifted preacher, but his preaching got him in all sorts of trouble with those in power. Perhaps God has given you a home with an extra bedroom; allowing others to stay with you can be a way to use that gift, but it can also be difficult. It's at those times that we have to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.

We are to be good stewards of the gifts God has given us, using them as often as He asks, in whatever way He asks. What has God given you that He's asking you to use for Him? Is it difficult for you? How can looking to the needs of others motivate you to use your gifts?

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Everyone wonders what they're good at, and at different ages the answer may vary. Young children easily accept what they are told by their parents and significant adults. Early adolescents increasingly measure themselves by the opinions of their peers. Older teens value themselves in comparison with ideologies, groups, celebrities, and institutions. It's not until young adulthood, at the earliest, that most people are able to see themselves objectively. Since you are one of the

significant adults in your students' lives, your opinion carries more weight than you may realize. At your suggestion they may take on new tasks or responsibilities. Your encouragement may help students see themselves in a different light. And your ability to help them encourage their friends in their talents can carry your influence—and God's Word—further than you'll ever know.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Make the most of
God's gifts.

Before class

Have early-arriving students finish the parables they started last week.



Students will assess their own abilities and use of them.

Materials:

- ☒ Masking tape
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencil or pen

In this step, use the following activity to help your students think about the gifts God has given them and how they are using those gifts.

Place a line of tape on the floor in the center of the room, and ask students to stand side by side on the tape. Tell them that you are going to read a series of statements. If students agree, they should take one big step forward. If they disagree, they should take a small step backward. If they're unsure, they should stay where they are.

When students understand the directions, read the following statements:

- I believe God has given me certain gifts.
- I know what at least some of my abilities are.
- I know of some ways that I can use my abilities to honor God.
- I always use my abilities when it's appropriate, even if I'm embarrassed or afraid.
- I know people with similar abilities who are an example for me.
- I encourage others when I see them using their gifts.

Have students discuss the following questions with two other people near them. Write the questions on the board where everyone can see.

- ▶ What does your current position tell you about yourself?
- ▶ How does your position make you feel? Explain.
- ▶ What are some things you can do to better understand the abilities God has given you?

God made each of us special, with certain gifts and abilities. Today we're going to study a parable that Jesus told His followers about the importance of making the most of the gifts God has given us.

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Matthew 25:14-30

Alternate Method

Instead of having students work individually on the "Faithfulness Test," have them form groups of three and take the test together. Then come back together to check for correct answers.

Students will study Matthew 25 to discover what God's Word says about using our gifts.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

Distribute *The Rock* and have students take turns reading aloud one paragraph each of Today's Scripture on page 5. When they've finished reading, have students work individually to complete the "Faithfulness Test" on pages 4 and 5 of *The Rock*. Remind them to write the number(s) of the verse(s) where they found their answers in the blanks provided.

Bible Study

BASED ON MATTHEW 25:14-30

FAITHFULNESS

TEST

1. The money in this story is called a:

- ☐ a. Drachma
- ☒ 15 b. Bag of Gold
- ☐ c. Peso

2. Which one is right?

- ☐ a. The master gave four bags of money to one servant, two bags to another, and one bag to another.
- ☒ 15 b. The master gave five bags of money to one servant, two bags to another, and one bag to another.
- ☐ c. The master had a servant distribute the gold.

3. How did the master decide how much to give each servant?

- ☒ 15 a. By the servant's ability.
- ☐ b. By how much he liked the servant.
- ☐ c. By how well the servant told jokes.

4. What did the master want the servants to do with the money they were given?

- ☐ a. Go on a shopping spree.
- ☐ b. Keep it in a safe place.
- ☒ 27 c. Invest it to earn more.

5. Why did the one-talent servant hide his talent?

- ☐ a. He was smart.
- ☒ 25 b. He was afraid.
- ☐ c. He didn't hide it.

6. How did the master decide who got rewarded?

- ☐ a. By the servant who could bench-press the most weight.
- ☒ 21, 23 b. By the servant's faithfulness.
- ☐ c. By the hours the servant worked.

7. What reward did the faithful servants get?

- ☒ 21, 23 a. More opportunities to use their gifts.
- ☐ b. Retirement at full pay.
- ☐ c. A Rolex watch.

8. Why was the one-talent servant punished?

- ☐ a. For losing his gold.
- ☒ 26, 27 b. For not improving what he was given.
- ☐ c. For talking back to his master.

Choose the correct answer; then fill in the verse number where the answer is found.

After sufficient time, call class members back together and review their answers. The test is reproduced on the previous page, with the answers shown.

- **What do you think is the main point of this parable?** (Answers will vary, but most students will agree that we are to make the most of whatever God gives us. You might want to share with them some of the information from *Understanding the Bible*.)

Read 1 Peter 4:10, this week's memory verse, aloud together with your students from your Bibles or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" 1 Peter 4:10.

- **What are some abilities that God might give to middle-school students?** (Accept all reasonable answers. These might include singing, drawing, acting, playing sports, writing, smiling, helping, etc.)
- **Give an example of how you might use one of those abilities to serve others.** (Encourage creativity. Possible answers include: visiting people in hospitals; reading to people who are losing their eyesight; acting out stories from the Bible to teach others; helping people feel better by smiling and being nice to them, etc.)
- **How can you become more faithful in your use of the gifts God has given you?** (Reasonable answers might include: figure out what my gifts are and who could benefit from them; read the Bible; pray about how God wants me to use my gifts; find someone to keep me accountable.)

Ask students to share with the person on their left one ability they see in him or her.

Now that we've studied about some servants who used what they received faithfully or unfaithfully, let's do some activities that explore what it means to middle schoolers to make the most of God's gifts.



STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

tip Be sure to call the group back together in time to complete Step 4. Allow students a few minutes to share their experiences with classmates.

Students will choose from activities that explore how they can make the most of God's gifts.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Allow them to work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you may want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Hot Potato Talent Web" they will encourage each other in their gifts; in "Whatcha Gonna Do?" students will use an article from *The Rock* to consider how they might use their own gifts; and in "Memory Verse Poster" they will illustrate how to fulfill this week's memory verse, 1 Peter 4:10.

Hot Potato Talent Web

☒ Ball of yarn

In this activity you will encourage each other in the gifts you see. Sit in a circle with your group. The first person should hold one end of a ball of yarn. Toss the ball to someone else, naming one ability that you have seen in that person. Each person should hold on to the yarn and quickly toss the ball to someone else, naming one of that person's gifts. When everyone's had the ball, you should have a web of yarn.

Whatcha Gonna Do?

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ *The Rock*

The feature article in *The Rock* tells about a few young people who thought they were ordinary and useless, but then discovered their valuable gifts. Read "Whatcha Gonna Do with Whatcha Got?" from pages 2 and 3 of *The Rock*. Are you more like Jill, Robert, or Paul? Why? Make a list of your abilities and ask God to help you figure out how to use them.



Memory Verse Poster

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue
- ☒ Magazines and newspapers
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will illustrate ways that young people could fulfill 1 Peter 4:10. Make a poster of this week's memory verse, 1 Peter 4:10, copying the verse from your Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*. You may illustrate it any way you like, with designs, drawings, cutout pictures, examples of people using their gifts, etc.



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Make the most of God's gifts.

Students will plan ways to use the gifts God has given them.

Materials:

- ☐ Craft supplies
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this step you will help your students identify practical ways they can use their God-given gifts to help others. Encourage them to make a commitment and follow through on it this week.

Review this week's memory verse with your students once again, from your Bibles or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" 1 Peter 4:10.

Now that you've had a chance to think about some of the gifts God has given you, how will you make the most of those gifts? Choose one gift you will make the most of this week, and make a plan for how to use it to serve others.

Use the craft supplies to make a symbol of your gift or your plan, to remind you this week to follow through on making the most of God's gifts. For example, if you plan to use your gift of encouraging others to help a certain person, you might make a flower or a smile.

Encourage students to think of a practical way they can use one of their gifts this week, and give them several minutes to work on their craft symbols. If any of your students still feel uncomfortable identifying their gifts, help out by suggesting some things you have noticed that they are good at or seem to enjoy.

Seal It!

Share with your students one gift you commit to make the most of this week, and ask for volunteers to share some of their commitments. Close class in prayer, thanking God for the gifts He's given your group and asking for His help in making the most of those gifts to serve others this week.

Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



Seeing God throughout the Week Ask students, "How will you use your gifts?" Encourage students to put their gifts to use this week.

lesson 13

Bible Basis:

Matthew 25:31-40

Focus:

Whatever we do for others, we do for Christ.

Just Do It for Jesus

STEP 1 Connecting with God's Word

Doing for Others: Students will discuss what they do for others.

- ☒ Large target, bean bags or hacky sacks
- ☐ Markers

STEP 2 Studying God's Word

Reading from Matthew 25: Students will study Matthew 25 to discover what God's Word says about doing for others and for Christ.

- ☐ Bibles, pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 3 Interacting with God's Word

Doing unto Others: Students will choose from activities that explore doing for Christ as they do for others.

- ☐ Pencils or pens, Bibles, markers, poster board
- ☐ *The Rock*

STEP 4 Applying God's Word

Looking for Jesus in Others: Students will commit to treat others as they would treat Jesus.

- ☐ Index cards, pencils or pens, tape
- ☐ "Sheep vs. Goats" worksheets from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Memory Verse

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

—Matthew 25:40b

Understanding the Bible

In ancient Israel, shepherds were often in charge of both sheep and goats. However, the two kinds of animals don't graze together well, so shepherds would frequently separate their sheep and goats when they got to the grazing place.

This simple custom of separating sheep and goats was the foundation on which Jesus built the parable we study this week.

Jesus modeled the kind acts He encouraged others to practice. He fed the hungry on two occasions (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:32-39). He offered living water to meet a Samaritan's deeper thirst (John 4:10-15). We don't read where Jesus directly clothed anyone, but healing the demon-possessed Gadarene resulted in the man's being "dressed and in his right mind" (Luke 8:35). Jesus sent encouragement to John the Baptist in prison (Matt. 11:2-6), and rescued others from the prison house of death (Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44).

Jesus did these things not in search of any reward but because of who He is. The same is true of the sheep. They were servants of God and served Him faithfully without anticipating any reward. It's good to remember that Jesus was not saying that we are saved by our works, but rather that our works will flow from the kind of person we are.

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

When it comes to talking about things students should be doing to serve others, it's best to lead by example. What are some ways that you are serving others (besides, obviously, giving your time to these middle schoolers every Sunday morning)? Feel free to share your own service attempts and struggles so that students don't feel like you're simply lecturing them about service.

Teacher Devo

Serve one another humbly in love. Galatians 5:13b

Servanthood is a lifestyle. It's not just a few acts of service here and there, given to people you'll never see again or to groups of people you'll never meet. Of course, we must serve those people as well. But serving really gets tough when we try to serve those people with whom we live, work, and attend church.

Jesus had it no easier when He served His ragtag bunch of disciples. Yet He washed their dirty feet, and better yet, died in their (our) place—the ultimate act of servanthood.

Who are the people Jesus is asking you to serve? Those He loves and would like you to love in His name? Spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to pour His love through you to those people.

When Teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers . . .

Middle schoolers have a pretty clear ranking system of who's cool and who's not, who's a good friend and who's an acquaintance, who can be trusted and who can't. They are in transition between depending on their parents for their identity and having an independent self-concept. During this in-between period, they search for a safe environment to figure out just who they are—developing egos can't be exposed to just anyone!

This ranking is normal but can easily become stereotyping and prejudiced. You can help prevent their rankings from becoming rigid categories by encouraging students to treat others as they would treat Jesus.

STEP 1

Connecting with God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Whatever we do for others, we do for Christ.

Before Class Option

Have early arrivers share the parables they've been working on with each other.

LES. 13

Students will brainstorm different ways they can help those in need—those they see every day and the needy around the world.

Materials:

- ☒ A large target (with 4 or 5 concentric rings)
- ☐ A black marker that will write on the target
- ☒ Small beanbags or hacky sacks

Before your students arrive, lay the target on the floor in an open area of the classroom. Make the beanbags or hacky sacks available to students as they come in, and allow them to make up their own hit-the-target games while they wait for class to start.

When everyone has assembled, use the marker to write on each ring of the target. Put "Your everyday life" in the bulls-eye space and "Your city," "Your country" and "Your world," in the successive rings going out from the bulls-eye. (If your target has five rings instead of four, you can insert "Your state" in the ring between "Your city" and "Your world.")

Now, have your students circle up around the target and take turns tossing the beanbags onto the target. Based on what ring the beanbag lands in, students should come up with an example of how they can help someone in need.

Encourage them to think of options that they (not some hypothetical adult) can actually do. For example, if the beanbag lands on "Your world," a student might say that he or she could talk to Mom and Dad about sponsoring a child through a sponsorship organization. For a "Your city" hit, a student might suggest spending a Saturday volunteering to build a house or feed the homeless.

Give everyone a chance to toss and contribute at least once. If it takes a few rounds before all the categories have been covered, that's fine—keep tossing!

Then, settle everyone in for a discussion that introduces today's lesson.

- ➊ **How many of you have actually helped out in some of the ways you suggested?** If time allows, have students share some of their experiences.
- ➋ **Which category was the hardest to come up with examples for? Why?**
- ➌ **On a scale of one to ten, how good is our church at reaching out to those who don't have food, water, shelter, or clothing, or those who have lost their freedom?**
- ➍ **On a scale of one to ten, how important do you think it is to Jesus that we do these things?**

When many students have had a chance to chime in, say, Today, we're going to read what Jesus had to say specifically about this subject. Get ready: You may be surprised at just how serious He is about helping those in need!



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
[resources.wesleyan.org/
real-life-downloaded](http://resources.wesleyan.org/real-life-downloaded)

STEP 2

Studying God's Word

Bible Basis:

Matthew 25:31-40



Students will study Matthew 25 to discover what God's Word says about doing for others and for Christ.

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*


Distribute *The Rock* and have students open to page 5. This passage reads easily as a script with three speakers: a narrator, the King, and the sheep (the narrator reads everything not in quotations, and the King and sheep read the appropriate quotes). Ask for volunteers to read the parts of the narrator and the King. Everyone else should read the part of the sheep. Give volunteers a chance to quickly skim through the passage before reading it aloud.

After the dramatic reading, ask the following questions to be sure students understand what they've read:

- ❶ What reward did the sheep receive? (*The kingdom God prepared for them.*)

Alternate Method

Instead of reading the Scripture as a drama, have four volunteers each read one paragraph aloud for the class.



S.

GOATS

▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

Today's Scripture

Matthew 25:31-40


³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

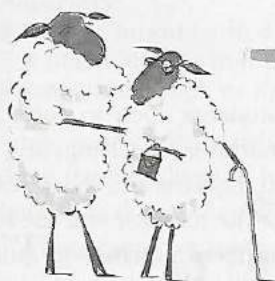
³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

⁴⁰The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Lesson 13



Bible Study



In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable about sheep and goats. Let's see what the parable is about.

SHEEP

▲ **Read Matthew 25:31-40.** What do these verses tell you about the people Jesus calls sheep?

GOATS

▲ **Read Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46.** What do these verses tell you about the people Jesus calls goats?

MORE ABOUT SHEEP

▲ Those sheep were really busy doing things for others. Give two other examples of the kind of good deeds the sheep might do?

In John 10, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. He also has some other things to say about sheep. **Read John 10:2-5, 14-15.** What do these verses tell you about the people Jesus calls sheep?

THINK ABOUT IT

In Matthew 25 Jesus isn't saying that people become sheep by doing good deeds. But what people do shows what they are.



Lesson 13

➤ **What kinds of things did the sheep do?** (Fed the hungry; gave water to the thirsty; welcomed strangers; clothed the poor; cared for the sick; visited prisoners.)

➤ **Why were the sheep confused?** (They did those things for other people, but never thought they did them for Jesus.)

➤ **What was the King's response to the sheep's confusion?** (Whatever you did for someone else, you did for me.)

Work through the questions on page 4 of The Rock together with your class.

1. The people Jesus called sheep were very helpful. They were always looking out for the needs of others and doing what they could to fill those needs.

2. The people Jesus called goats were not helpful. They never did anything to relieve somebody else's needs.

3. Answers will vary and might include such things as serving food at a soup kitchen, visiting sick people in the hospital, etc.

4. The sheep know Jesus' voice and follow only Him. Because they go where He leads, their actions will show that they are following Him.

Discuss these questions:

➤ **Did the sheep's good deeds earn them their reward?** (No. But if we love Jesus, our actions should show it.)

➤ **What does Today's Scripture tell you about our actions?** (Whatever we do for others we do for Christ. If we are truly His followers, our actions should show it.)

Now that we've studied a parable in which whatever the sheep and goats did for others they did for Jesus, let's do some activities that explore what it means that whatever we do for others we do for Christ.

STEP 3

Interacting with God's Word

Students will choose from activities that explore doing for Christ as they do for others.

tip To reduce your explanation time, you may photocopy the Step 3 page in each lesson. Simply cut out the activity instructions and place them with appropriate supplies at your activity centers.

Have your students choose from the following activities. Let them work individually or in groups. If your class is small, you might want to prepare just one or two activities. In "Footsteps on the Sidewalk" students will read and discuss a story from *The Rock*; in "Acting Out Our Faith" they will roleplay and discuss how middle schoolers treat each other; and in "Poster" they will illustrate this week's memory verse, showing how middle schoolers could serve others.

Footsteps on the Sidewalk

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ *The Rock*

The feature story in *The Rock* teaches a powerful lesson about seeing and treating others as Christ would. Read "Footsteps on the Sidewalk" from pages 2-3 and 6-7 of *The Rock*. Grab a partner who also completed this activity and discuss together the impact this story had on you. Now list some people you know who are like the people Martin helped.



Acting Out Our Faith

In this activity you will explore, act out, and discuss ways that middle schoolers treat other people. Create a roleplay based on how middle schoolers treat each other; for example, in the lunchroom, at a pep rally, during gym class, or at a sports game or other activity. After each roleplay discuss this question:

➤ What could these people change to make things better?

Then redo your roleplay, showing how the characters could treat others as they would treat Jesus.

Poster

- ☐ Poster board
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Bibles or *The Rock*

In this activity you will brainstorm ways that middle schoolers could treat others better. Write this week's memory verse, Matthew 25:40, on a piece of poster board. Fill the rest of the poster with examples of how middle schoolers could do for others what they would do for Christ; for example, help others with their homework or do the dishes without being asked.



STEP 4

Applying God's Word

Lesson Focus:

Whatever we do for others, we do for Christ.

Students will commit to treat others as they would treat Jesus.

Materials:

- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ "Sheep vs. Goats" worksheets from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

You will encourage your students to think of practical ways that they could treat others as they would treat Jesus.

Hand out the "Sheep vs. Goats" worksheets from your creative teaching aids packet. Give students a few minutes to read the example scenario, and then come up with their own answers to the 2nd and 3rd scenarios. Allow time for students to share some of their wacky "goat" answers, before you dive into the serious "sheep" answers.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 25:40, this week's memory verse, from his or her Bible or page 8 of *The Rock*.

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" Matthew 25:40.



Discuss this question:

- ▶ **Are there some people you find it difficult to treat as you'd treat Jesus? Why or why not?**

(Accept all reasonable answers. These might include: Yes, because I don't know how to treat Jesus; not everyone deserves to be treated well; some people aren't very lovable.)

Distribute index cards and pens and pencils. The Bible tells us that whatever we do for others, we do for Christ. Think of one person you have a hard time treating as you would treat Jesus, or whom you just ignore. What can you do for that person this week that you would like to do for Jesus?

Allow a moment for your youth to reflect and write their plans on their index cards.

Seal It!

Tell your students to keep the cards somewhere they look often so they remember who you are going to help.

Suggest the students donate clothing to a shelter, volunteer in a soup kitchen or even offer the mailman a cold lemonade or a hot chocolate (depending on the weather).

Close class in prayer, asking God to put people in their lives this week who are in need.

Remind your class to read the "Everyday Devos" on page 8 of *The Rock* throughout the coming week.



Seeing God throughout the Week Have students list on a piece of paper what they will do for Christ this week. Remind students that this involves doing things for others.

Leading Middle Schoolers To Christ

You should be ready to respond whenever the Holy Spirit leads a student to make a commitment to Christ. Listen to students' questions or objections and try to answer them simply and honestly. When a student is receptive, explain from the Bible the steps to becoming a Christian:

- God wants everyone to enjoy the best life possible. He wants all of us to lead full, rich lives and experience His love (John 10:10; Jer. 31:3).
- But everybody has rebelled against God and lived sinfully. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).
- This separates us forever from God. Furthermore, we deserve to pay a penalty because we sinned (Rom. 6:23).
- Only God could solve the problem. And He did! He loved us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to die the death that each of us deserves (John 3:16-17).
- But you are not forced to accept God's solution. To apply Jesus' payment for sin to your life, you must personally commit yourself in belief to Him.
- You can have forgiveness. If you declare openly that Jesus is who He claims to be and believe that God raised Him from the dead, God has promised you eternal life (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 John 5:11).
- As you study the Bible and talk with God through prayer, you will grow closer to Him and enjoy the full life He intended (John 10:10).

Coming Up This Spring

Final Days of Jesus

Your students will study lessons from Matthew, John and 1 Corinthians. VALUE: Discipleship

Jesus Conquers Death

During this unit, your students will study the New Testament about Jesus' resurrection life. VALUE: Thankfulness

How Believers Live

In this unit middle schoolers will learn about the early church from Acts. VALUE: Joy