

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

Bible Basis: Genesis 1:1–3:24

Key Verse: So God created man in his own likeness. He created him in the likeness of God. He created them as male and female. —Genesis 1:27, NIV

Bible Point: God made everything there is. He made me to know him.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 1: “The Beginning of Life as We Know It”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Get children’s attention by pacing around the room clapping your hands slowly. With each clap name an item that you see in the classroom. This can be anything as big as a whiteboard or as small as a paper clip. Children will try to figure out what you’re going to look for next. As children watch you, invite them to join in. Ask individual children to name something they see as you all clap together. Then ask:

- If we were going to name everything there is, how long would the list be?
- How many things do you think there are that we don’t even know about?

Say, In our Bible story today, we’re going to hear about some of the amazing things God made—including you and you and you! Point to children as you say this.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 1*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 1. You can also have children find Genesis 1 and mark it in their Bible. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Follow the directions to present the Bible story. Then gather to debrief.

In THE BEGINNING

As you begin Bible story time, have children spread out so they have plenty of space to move. If possible, dim the lights. (Some young children may be frightened by complete darkness.) Begin the story in dim light, and turn on the lights when indicated. Explain that they should watch what you do and follow your example. Ask children to crouch with you as you begin the story.

In the beginning, everything was dark. But God’s Spirit was there. God said, “Let there be light.” Jump up and have someone flip on the lights. **God called the light “day.”** He called the darkness “night.”

Spread your arms wide and lift them up. Next, God created a huge space that he called "sky" with water underneath. Stomp in place. Then, God made the dry ground that holds us up.

Punch your arms upward repeatedly and twinkle your fingers. And then came the stars and the sun and the moon in the sky. Pretend to swim. Then God filled the water with living things—fish and whales and starfish and everything else that lives in the water. Pretend to fly as you turn in a circle. And God made birds that fly through the sky—eagles and robins and swallows and every other kind of bird. Gallop in place. Then God made all kinds of animals—wild animals and livestock, big animals and small ones, friendly ones and scary ones.

Have everyone be still. All of this took six days of work for God. In six days, he made the whole world except for one thing. What do you think was missing? Pause for responses. People! So God did one more thing on the sixth day. He made people! Grin and point to your cheeks. But the people were not like the animals. God said, "Let us make man in our image." He wanted people to know him and be like him. He called the first people "Adam" and "Eve."

Read Genesis 1:31a; 2:1–2. Our amazing world was finished and ready for us to live in. God was ready for people to know him and enjoying being with him.

Early elementary children will enjoy retelling the story themselves with some prompting. You might tell the story again and ask children to suggest new motions for each creation event. Or you might demonstrate the same actions and encourage children to tell you the part of the story each action represents.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 1*. Ask children to describe the picture on the card and tell what part of the story the picture shows. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Of all the things God created, why do you think people are the best? (Because we can know God and be like him.)
- Tell me some things you know about God.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WHAT GOD MADE

Have children stand along one wall, facing you. Explain to children that you will name an object. If they think God created that object, they should take one step forward. If they think God did not create the object, they should stay still. Play until a child reaches where you are standing. Children might enjoy being the leader and naming objects God created.

OPTION 2: THIS I Know

Stuff You Need: beanbag or other small item to pass, open floor space

Invite kids to join you in a circle on the floor. Say, **God made us in his image so we can know him and be like him. I'm going to toss the beanbag to someone. If it's you, tell me something you know about God and toss the beanbag back to me.** After everyone has had a chance to tell something they know about God, play again. This time, ask children to tell you one way they can be like God (loving, kind, creative, generous, and so on). If you have time, you can play again and this time let one of the children take the role of choosing whom to toss the bag to. After the game, have a brief discussion on these questions.

- Of all the things we've named, what do you think is the coolest thing about God?
- Tell me one way you'd like to be more like God this week.

Say, **Our great God, who made everything in the universe, wants us to know him and be like him! Totally cool!**

OPTION 3: God Is So Good

Stuff You Need: God is So Good Activity Sheet, markers or crayons

Optional: tissue paper, glitter glue, fabric scraps, foam shapes, watercolor paint and brushes

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the special things that God provided in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. Say, **What do you think Adam and Eve liked the best? What part of God's creation do you like the best?** Instruct children to color the picture. Consider offering the optional supplies so children can give texture and dimension to the coloring page.

OPTION 4: Creation Mobile

Stuff you need: plastic disposable plates, ribbon or string, hole punch, construction paper, crayons, markers, glitter, etc.

1. Ahead of time, cut the plastic plates in half. Each student will need one half, so two students can share a plate.
2. Punch eight holes along the bottom (straight) edge of the plate. Some holes may be higher than others. Punch one hole at the top in the middle to help hang the mobile.
3. Have students draw and color a small picture to represent each day of creation.
4. Punch a hole at the top of each of the creation pictures.
5. Cut eight pieces of ribbon of varying lengths.
6. When they are done decorating help students thread ribbon through the pictures and the holes in the plate. Tie securely in place.
7. Thread a ribbon through the top hole and tie in a loop. This will allow you to hang the mobiles around the room.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

At the end of the lesson, pray together praising God for his creation and asking God to help you know him better. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 1*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

GOD BUILDS A NATION

Bible Basis: Genesis 12:1–15:21

Key Verse: [God said,] “I will give you all of the land that you see. I will give it to you and your children after you forever. I will make your children like the dust of the earth.” —Genesis 13:15–16, NIrV

Bible Point: Abraham trusted God and obeyed. I can trust God, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 2: “God Builds a Nation”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: generous supply of a common classroom item such as paper clips, toothpicks, cotton swabs, sheets of paper, markers. Optional: spoonful of sand

You can display your items in a jar, a clear glass, or simply on a plate, but be sure all the children will be able to see. As the class gathers, ask them to speculate on how many of the featured item you have. If you have a large group, you might want to have children file past to look and make a mental guess. They are not allowed to touch. Then ask the whole group to call out their guesses. Children this age may have wild ideas about numbers. You may or may not know the correct answer to the question; it doesn’t really matter. Then ask:

- Tell me about the biggest pile of something you’ve ever seen.
- Why do we usually like to have more of something good?

Optional: Draw a square inch shape on paper. Dribble in enough sand to fill the square, but only one layer deep. Ask how many grains of sand they think can fit in the square. The answer is about 10,000! Wow!

Say, **In our Bible story today, God promises Abraham he’s going to have a lot of something that he doesn’t have any of! Let’s find out about that.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 2*

Optional: brown paper grocery sack

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 2. You can also have children find Genesis 12 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

If you'd like, you can cut a large brown paper grocery sack to look like an old map and glue the Bible story page to it.

ABRAHAM obeys God

In today's Bible story, children will wander with you to retrace Abraham's journey. If your group is small enough, you can lead the whole group around the room. For a large group, have them march in small circles in place while you move to a different spot in the room. Start the story by standing in front of the room. If you're using the optional brown grocery bag map, pretend to consult it for directions.

Abram was an old man who believed in God. He trusted God for everything. One day, God told Abram, "Leave your country and go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation." Abram trusted God, so he packed up all his tents and everything he owned and left Haran, even though he didn't know where he was going.

Move to another wall of the room. Have the children follow you or turn in circles to face you again. Continue the story.

Abram moved to Canaan. God said to Abram, "Look north and south and east and west." (Pause and point in all four directions and have kids turn and look.) God said, "I will give you all the land that you see. I will give you so many children you won't be able to count them. Walk through the whole land and see what I am giving you." Abram trusted God, so he packed his tents again and kept moving.

Move to another wall of the room. Have the children follow or turn to face you.

In Hebron, Abram built an altar to the Lord. Read Genesis 15:5. Abram trusted God, so he worshiped God. He went wherever God told him to go.

Move to another location or back to the front wall. Have the group follow or turn to face you.

When Abram was 99 years old, God came to him and said, Read Genesis 17:5–7. Abraham was very old and didn't have any children, but he trusted God to keep his promise. And one day it all came true! Abraham had a son, who had two sons, and they had sons, and those sons formed new nations. Abraham trusted God and obeyed. We can trust God to keep his promises, too!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 2*. Ask children to look at the picture and try to count the stars. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What did God promise to give to Abraham? (children, land, a nation)**
- **How did Abraham show that he trusted God's promise? (He obeyed God.)**

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: KIDS AND KIDS AND KIDS

Stuff You Need: paper, scissors, markers, tape, tacks. Optional: Kids and Kids and Kids template for children to trace to make folding doll people

You may use the template provided. Or, if you'd like, prepare a template for children to trace. Fold a piece of paper ahead of time according to the instructions below and sketch a shape of a person; make sure the arms fill the sections from edge to edge.

Say, **God promised Abraham that he would have kids and kids and kids—a whole nation would come from Abraham. Let's make a pile of people of our own.**

Show how to fold a piece of paper in half, lengthwise. Then fold it in half along the width. Now fold back the open ends toward the fold. You should have four equal sections with two layers. Have children trace a template or draw their own figures on the top of the stack. Show how to cut around the shape, but be careful not to cut through the folds at the sides. However, do cut through the fold at the top of the head. Unfold the sections, and each child will have two rows of four people. Allow time to decorate as they wish. Then have the children add their strips to a common wall or bulletin board to build a "nation" together.

- **What did Abraham think of God's promise to make a nation out of his family?**
- **What would you like to trust God to do for you?**

Close by saying, **Abraham trusted God and obeyed him. You can trust God's promises, too.**

OPTION 2: STARRY NIGHT CARDS

Stuff You Need: black or dark blue construction paper, star stickers or white paint and paintbrushes, newspaper, water jars to rinse brushes, art smocks

Say, **God shows his promise to Abraham in a starry night. Let's make a reminder that we can trust God's promises, too.**

Have children fold a sheet of construction paper in half two times to make a card. On the front of the card, let them decorate with as many star stickers as they would like. Or if you paint, spread out the newspapers and place water jars on the table. Then let the kids dot on stars with paint and brushes. Help them write on the inside, "I can trust God." When everyone is finished, discuss these questions:

- **What promise did God make to Abraham?**
- **Tell me a promise God makes to you.**

Close by saying, **God always keeps his promises, so we can trust him.**

OPTION 3: ABRAHAM BELIEVES

Stuff You Need: Abraham Believes Activity Sheet, variety of green crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about how God always keeps promises and how Abraham knew that. Talk about how we can know that, too. Have the children color the picture of Abraham admiring the gift of land from God.

OPTION 4: GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Family tree: God told Abraham he would be the father of many nations. You can build your own family tree.

Stuff you need: God's Promise to Abraham Activity Sheet, tree template, leaf template, construction paper, safety scissors, markers, glue

1. Give an activity sheet to each child.
2. Have children cut out the tree template and trace it to make their own tree.
3. Have children cut out the leaf template. Using the leaf template, cut out many leaves from construction paper.
4. Students can use the markers to decorate the tree and leaves.
5. When students are done coloring, instruct them to write the names of their family members on the leaves.
6. Glue leaves to the tree.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

At the end of the lesson, pray together, listing specific ways children want to trust and obey God this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 2*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

JOSEPH: FROM SLAVE TO DEPUTY PHARAOH

Bible Basis: Genesis 37:1–36; 39:1–23; 41:1–45:7

Key Verse: Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. ... You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good.” —Genesis 50:19–20, NIV

Bible Point: God worked things out for Joseph’s good. God knows what’s good for me.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 3: “Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Greet the children and announce that you’re going to make some statements. If they agree a statement is “true,” they should stamp a foot three times. If they think the statement is “false,” they should turn around in a circle. Make a series of statements, such as “Ice cream is a healthy breakfast” or “There should be no such thing as bedtime.” Do as many as you have time for and allow kids to vote. Then ask:

- How do you know if something is good for you or not?
- Does something good ever come out of something bad? Explain.

Say, **Not everything we choose to do is good for us, and sometimes we can’t help the bad things that happen to us. In today’s Bible story, we’ll find out that God knows what’s best for us.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 3*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 3, pausing throughout to show the emotions mentioned. You can also have children find Genesis 37 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

From Pit to Palace

When you come to a word appearing in bold, pause and ask children to show what that feeling looks like.

Read Genesis 37:3–4. Joseph’s ten older brothers were **jealous**. (Pause and ask kids to show what “jealous” looks like.) One day the brothers had a chance to make Joseph **worried** (pause). Some of them wanted to kill him, but they threw him in a dry well instead. Imagine Joseph’s **surprise** (pause). Then, the brothers decided to sell Joseph to a group of traders who were passing. The brothers were **glad** (pause) to be rid of Joseph, and that’s how Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave.

Even though he was a slave, Joseph had a pretty good job in Egypt with a lot of responsibility. People depended on him, and he always did a good job. Then one day, someone told some lies about him, and that's how Joseph ended up in prison. I'm sure Joseph was **shocked** (pause) and **confused** (pause). But once again, Joseph did a good job and ended up with a lot of responsibility even in prison. He never gave up on being **hopeful** (pause).

After a few years, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, started having bad dreams about fat cows and skinny cows. He didn't understand what these crazy dreams meant, and was **puzzled** (pause) and **exhausted** (pause) from not sleeping. So Pharaoh asked Joseph to help him. Joseph explained that the seven fat cows meant Egypt would have seven good years with plenty of food. But the seven skinny cows meant there would be seven bad years without enough food for everyone. Joseph told Pharaoh to save food during the good years to feed everyone during the bad years. Pharaoh was **pleased** (pause). Because of that great idea, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of saving food. Read *Genesis 41:39–40*. Joseph could have been **proud** (pause), but he wasn't.

Years later, people from all around came to Egypt looking for food. Joseph's ten older brothers were part of that crowd. They had no idea what had happened to Joseph, and they didn't recognize him. Joseph could have been **angry** (pause), but he wasn't. Joseph had to turn away **crying** (pause). But Joseph didn't tell his brothers who he was. Finally, though, Joseph couldn't take it any longer. He wanted to show his **love** (pause). Read *Genesis 45:3* (pause), 4–5. That's how Joseph ended up saving his whole family.

When Joseph's brothers put him in a dry well and then sold him as a slave, they wanted bad things to happen to him. Instead, God worked out everything so that good things happened for the brothers and lots of other people. God always has amazing ideas that we never think of!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 3*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about the emotion shown in the picture. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **Name the bad things that happened to Joseph.**
- **Tell me how God made something good come out of the bad things.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: FAT COWS, SKINNY COWS

Stuff You Need: black, brown, tan, and white construction paper, cotton balls, glue, 4" and 6" circle templates, safety scissors, markers

Cut circle templates ahead of time. Say, **Joseph told Pharaoh what his dream about fat cows and skinny cows meant. Let's make a reminder that God works things out for our good.** Show how to

make cows out of the circles. The large circle is the body; the small circle is the head. Draw on legs and a tail or cut shapes from paper. Each child should make a skinny cow and fat cow of any color they choose. For a skinny cow, glue the shapes flat on the paper. For a fat cow, place a cotton ball under the large circle, then glue the edges down. As children work, engage them in discussion.

- **What did the skinny cows and fat cows mean in our Bible story?**
- **How did God work things out for Joseph's good?**

Optional: While children work on the cows, ask if they know how many stomachs a cow has. The answer is four, and each one serves a different purpose. A cow can digest things that humans cannot. Wow!

Close by saying, **Joseph's story is a good reminder that we can trust God to know what's best for us.**

OPTION 2: Pass the Sack

Stuff You Need: construction paper, safety scissors, CD player, and music

Optional: paper lunch sacks

Ahead of time, cut eleven sack shapes out of construction paper. Make ten the same color, and the last one a different color or, use paper lunch sacks and color one different from the rest. Have the group sit in a circle.

Say, **Joseph had a lot of trouble because of what his ten brothers did. But God worked things for good and Joseph gave his brothers sacks of food. Explain that you will play music while the children pass the sacks around the room. When the music stops, whoever is holding the sack of a different color will tell the beginning of the story.** Keep playing until children have recounted the whole story. If necessary, remind children of the sequence.

OPTION 3: The Brothers Meet Again

Stuff You Need: The Brothers Meet Again Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the group about the famine and about when Joseph and his brothers meet in Egypt. Color the scene and have them share the story of Joseph with their families.

Close by saying, **Even when we can't see what's going to happen, God knows. He can work things out for the best.**

OPTION 4: Joseph and His COLORFUL Coat

Stuff you need: Joseph and His Colorful Coat Activity Sheet, coffee filters, colored markers, spray water bottle (or paint brush to use to flick water), Joseph template, a coat template

1. Give an activity sheet to each child.
2. Give each child a coffee filter to color as he/she chooses. This will be the coat.

3. Wet the coffee filter.
4. Hang to dry for roughly half an hour or blow dry with a hairdryer set on low.
5. While the coat dries, students will have time to color Joseph.
6. When coffee filters are dry, have students use the template to cut the filters into the shape of the coat.
7. Glue coat to Joseph.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

At the end of the lesson, pray in small groups about situations the children would like to see God work for good. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 3*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

OUT OF EGYPT

Bible Basis: Exodus 1:1–2:10; 3:9; 12:31; 13:21–22

Key Verse: Moses answered the people. He said, “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm. You will see how the Lord will save you today.” —Exodus 14:13, NIV

Bible Point: God watched over Moses and his people. God watches over me, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 4: “Out of Egypt”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: beanbag

Start by calling out, “Watch out!” and tossing a beanbag at one of the children. See how the group will go to alert mode at the sound of a warning and whether the child you aimed at catches the bag. Ask the child to toss the bag back to you. You could do this several times, tossing the bag in different directions. Then ask the following questions:

- **What was your first thought when you heard me say, “Watch out”?**
- **What do you do when you “watch out”?**

Say, **Watching out means being careful because danger might be near. Our story today tells us how God watched out for his people in dangerous times.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 4*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 4. You can also have children find Exodus 2 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

WATCH OUT HIKE

In today’s Bible story, children will pretend they’re on a hike and have to watch out for danger ahead. Warm up by having them use thumbs and forefingers to make rings around their eyes and look around the room. As you tell the story, they should quietly hike in place. Whenever they hear you say, “Uh-oh, watch out!” they should stop and look around the room through their finger glasses.

God’s people lived in Egypt—but it wasn’t always a great life. They were slaves and had to work hard to serve the Egyptians. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, thought there were too

many Israelites, so he gave an order to throw all the Israelite baby boys in the river. Uh-oh, watch out!

A baby boy was born to a family who trusted God. God was watching over this baby. His mother kept him safe for three months. Read Exodus 2:3–4. Here comes somebody! Uh-oh, watch out!

Read Exodus 2:5–9. God was really watching over him. The baby's name was Moses.

When Moses grew up, God spoke to him. "I have seen the way the Egyptians are beating down my people," God said. Read Exodus 3:9–10. Uh-oh, watch out!

Moses was nervous about this big job from God! Pharaoh was a powerful king, and God's people were a big group. How was Moses going to get everyone out of Egypt? What would happen when Pharaoh got angry? Uh-oh, watch out!

Moses talked to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh didn't want to let the Israelites go. Who would do all the work if the slaves left? But God had a plan. He made a lot of scary, nasty things happen in Egypt. The river turned to blood. Icky bugs and frogs popped up everywhere. The animals all got sick. Hail pounded the whole country. It was dark even in the daytime. Pharaoh was stubborn through everything and wouldn't let God's people go. Finally, God decided to take away the oldest son from every Egyptian family. He told the Israelites to paint a special stripe over their doors so this awful plague wouldn't happen to them. That did it for Pharaoh. He decided to let the Israelites go. Uh-oh, watch out!

Read Exodus 12:31–33. So that night, all God's people left Egypt. While they traveled, God was always with them. During the day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud. At night, he guided them with a pillar of fire. God never left his people.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 4*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you what happened both before and after the scene in the picture. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What does it mean to "stand firm"?
- How did the people in the story "stand firm" in scary times?

Say, **God watched over Moses and his people, and he watches over you, too.** Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home at the end of the lesson.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose one or more of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WATCH OVER BASKET

Stuff You Need: Watch Over Basket Activity Sheet, safety scissors, markers, glue

Optional: green and tan construction paper

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Moses' mother put him in a basket made of grass, and God helped his sister watch over him. Let's make a basket to remind us that God watches over us, too.** Cut out the shapes on the activity sheet on the solid lines. To make the basket, fold up from the bottom corners toward the center on the dashed line. Glue the overlap in place, leaving a little space at the top without glue. Press the ends to make the basket open then fold the top flap down. Tuck the front corner into the main part of the basket. Cut the slits indicated on the add-on pieces to make them look grass-like. Tuck them into the basket. Color the outside to look like grass. Optional: cut construction paper into thin strips and glue on strips to cover the outside of the basket in a basket-weave pattern. As children work, talk about:

- How did God watch over Moses and his people in this story?
- Tell me some ways God watches over you.

Say, **God is always there to watch over us and guide us, just like he was with Moses and his people.**

OPTION 2: STAND FIRM GAME

Stuff You Need: variety of items that make loud noises, such as pots and spoons, wooden blocks, party noisemakers, bells; blindfolds

Say, **Our Bible verse today reminds us to stand firm in scary times, because God is there with us. Let's play a game to see how well we can stand firm.** Remind children of the verse you read from the card. Practice saying it together. Then have children take turns wearing a blindfold and turning their backs to the group. Someone else in the group can choose an item that makes a sudden noise, creep up on the blindfolded player, and make a loud noise. See if the blindfolded player can "stand firm" and not be startled by the noise. The others should watch for any movement. Play as many rounds as you have time for. Let the children be creative about using other items from around the classroom as long as no one will get hurt. After everyone has had a turn to be blindfolded, debrief.

- Tell me about something that might happen to you that would make it hard to "stand firm."
- Tell about a way that God saves you when you're scared.

Say, **Moses was nervous sometimes. We all get scared. But God is always there ready to help.**

OPTION 3: Moses Talks to Pharaoh

Stuff You Need: Moses Talks to Pharaoh Activity Sheet, colored pencils

Give each child an activity sheet. Talk to the class about how they handle being nervous or scared about something. Talk about why they think Moses was nervous about meeting with the Pharaoh when he did know him. Have them color the picture and write a thank-you prayer to God for courage.

OPTION 4: Moses Parts the Red Sea

Water/Oil Activity

Stuff you need: disposable bottle with cap (empty pop bottles or water bottles), water, vegetable oil, food coloring, funnel

1. Fill the water bottle about halfway full with water.
2. Add two drops of food coloring.
3. Put the cap on tight. Shake. The water will turn the color of the food coloring.
4. Unscrew the bottle and add enough oil to form a thick layer on top.
5. Screw the lid back on tightly.
6. Shake the bottle.
7. Let sit for a minute. The water and oil should separate, just like Moses separated the Red Sea.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Divide your class into groups of two or three. Have them pray together about scary times they may face this week, asking God to remind them that he is with them all the time, even in scary situations. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 4*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NEW RULES

Bible Basis: Exodus 19:1–8; 20:1–17

Key Verse: [God's people] answered with one voice. They said, "We will do everything the LORD has told us to do." —Exodus 19:8, NIV

Bible Point: God gave us rules so we can know him. I can know God by learning his laws.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 5: "New Rules"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: whiteboard or large paper, marker

Say, I know you have a lot of favorite things and favorite foods. We could spend all day talking about them. But today I want to hear about your favorite rules. Invite kids to tell you about rules they like. Be ready to write down anything they say. Some may mention something, but likely the general reaction will be that they don't like having rules. Encourage discussion by asking:

- Why don't we like rules very much?
- If we don't like rules, why do we have them?

Say, Today's story is about rules that came straight from God.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, copies of the Ten Commandments Activity Sheet, pencils, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 5*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 5. You can also have children find Exodus 19 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

RULES FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

As you begin the story, tell children that you will be holding up fingers. When you hold up fingers, they will shout out the number. For instance, when you put up one finger, they say, "Number one!" and so on. After you say the rule, have children echo it back to you.

After 400 years of living in Egypt, God's people left that land. God wanted to take them to their own land and chose Moses to lead them. But first, while the Israelites were in the desert, God gave Moses some rules the Israelites needed to follow if they wanted to stay God's special people. While Moses was on Mount Sinai listening to God, God gave him

10 rules—or commandments—for the people to follow. God had written them out on two big stone tablets. Moses took them to the people. God said, “I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of Egypt. That is the land where you were slaves.”

Put up one finger. Children call out, “Number one.” **The first rule was, “Do not put any other gods in place of me.”** Repeat.

Put up two fingers. Children call out, “Number two.” **The second rule was, “Do not make statues of gods that look like anything in the sky (Repeat) or on the Earth (Repeat) or in the waters (Repeat). Do not bow to them or worship them.”** Repeat.

Put up three fingers. Children call out, “Number three.” **The third rule was, “Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God.”** Repeat.

Put up four fingers. Children call out, “Number four.” **The fourth rule was, “Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy (Repeat). Do not do any work on that day.”** Repeat.

Put up five fingers. Children call out, “Number five.” **The fifth rule was, “Honor your father and mother.”** Repeat.

Put up six fingers. Children call out, “Number six.” **The sixth rule was, “Do not commit murder.”** Repeat.

Put up seven fingers. Children call out, “Number seven.” **The seventh rule was, “Do not commit adultery.”** Repeat.

Put up eight fingers. Children call out, “Number eight.” **The eighth rule was, “Do not steal.”** Repeat.

Put up nine fingers. Children call out, “Number nine.” **The ninth rule was, “Do not give false witness against your neighbor.”** Repeat.

Put up ten fingers. Children call out, “Number ten.” **The tenth rule was, “Do not long for anything that belongs to your neighbor.”** Repeat.

Moses went and told the people all of the LORD’s words and laws. They answered with one voice. They said, “We will do everything the LORD has told us to do.”

After you have told the Bible story, show the children Exodus 20 where the Ten Commandments are written. Then give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 5*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about the Ten Commandments. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Why did God give his people these rules?
- What did the people say about God’s rules?

Collect the cards for now. You’ll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: New Rules Pop-up

Stuff You Need: copies of New Rules Activity Sheet

Optional: craft sticks, glue

Ahead of time, cut apart the rules from the activity sheet. Assign children to groups of five to ten. Give each child one or two rules. Make sure each child knows which rules he or she has. Starting with number 1 read them together. Take this time to explain any concepts that may be difficult for young children. For instance, "adultery" means breaking promises you make when you get married. Giving "false witness" means telling a lie. Misusing God's name means saying it in a way that does not give him honor. Then play a game. Call out the numbers 1 to 10 in random order. The child with the number you call lifts the card and recites the commandment. (If you have some non-readers, play by recognizing the numbers and holding up cards.) If you'd like, you can glue cards to craft sticks for children to hold. After the game, talk about:

- **What sometimes makes rules hard to follow?**
- **How are God's rules good for us?**

Optional: Ask kids to guess how old the Ten Commandments are. The answer is around 3,500 years, yet people still read and follow them all over the world. Wow!

Say, **God gave his people these rules so we can know him better and live our lives in ways that make him happy.**

OPTION 2: Ten Commandments Memory

Stuff You Need: multiple copies of New Rules Activity Sheet copied on cardstock or sturdy paper, safety scissors

Optional: small zip-top plastic bags

Have children form pairs or trios. Give each group two copies of the activity sheet and have them cut apart the cards. (For younger children, you may want to cut them ahead of time.) Groups can scramble the cards, then lay out 20 cards in a grid, words down, and play a game of "memory." Each player turns over two cards. If they match, the player keeps them. If they don't match, turn the words down again and someone else takes a turn. If you'd like, you can give every child a set of 20 cards in a plastic bag to take home to play with family. Talk about:

- **Why did God give rules to his people?**
- **How can we learn about God by keeping his rules?**

Say, **We don't always know what's good for us, but God does. His rules help us stay safe from things that hurt us while we learn to follow God's way.**

OPTION 3: The Ten Commandments

Stuff You Need: The Ten Commandments Activity Sheet, highlighters

Give each child an activity sheet. Pair the group up in twos and have them complete the word search puzzle together or send home and have the children work on it with their family.

OPTION 4: Ten Commandments

Stuff you need: cold coffee or tea (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup per student), cups, baking sheets or something to catch liquid when students pour it over their papers, white paper, markers, hairdryer or someplace to hang paper to dry

1. Give each child a piece of paper and a cup of cold coffee or tea.
2. Have them crumple their paper into a ball.
3. Let them unfold paper and spread it onto the cookie sheets or whatever you're using.
4. Help children pour coffee/tea over the whole sheet.
5. Pour excess liquid in the sink.
6. Either blow dry (will take about five minutes) or hang to dry (will take roughly a half hour).
7. When paper is dry, have students write one (or all) of the Ten Commandments on their sheet of paper.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together as a class, asking God to help you follow his rules this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 5*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

WANDERING

Bible Basis: Numbers 13:1–3, 17–33; 14:1–11, 22, 34–38

Key Verse: [Joshua and Caleb] said, “If the Lord is pleased with us, he’ll lead us into that land. ... He’ll give it to us.” —Numbers 14:8 NIV

Bible Point: Joshua and Caleb were confident in God’s promise. I can be confident no matter what.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 6: “Wandering”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: two plastic containers with lids, treat, trash

Fill one container with an appealing treat. Fill the other with some trash or something equally unappealing. As you begin class, invite a couple of children up to inspect the two containers. Show the contents of one container to one child and the other to a second child. Then ask each child to give a report to the large group on what he or she saw. Make a rule that they can’t say the name of what they saw; they must only describe the contents for the others. Have the large group vote which container they think is better without seeing the contents for themselves. Then reveal the contents.

- I asked our volunteers to give a report. Tell me about a time when you gave a report.
- As you listened to the two reports, did you start to think you liked the report about the treat better than the report about the trash? Why?

Say, **What we say to other people can influence what they think. In our Bible story today, we’ll find out how a report actually made people want to disobey God.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 6*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 6. You can also have children find Numbers 13 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

SPYING OUT THE LAND

Say, **During the story, we’re going to be spies in the Promised Land. Good spies learn their code words.** Assign children to four separate groups and explain that each group will have a code word. Group 1: Crouching. Group 2: Slouching. Group 3: Creeping. Group 4: Peeking. Have each group practice saying its word when you point. **When you hear me say, “The spies went ...” I’ll point to you and you say your code words.** Practice this sequence, then begin the story.

Hundreds of years before, God promised to make Abraham into a father of nations and give him the land of Canaan. By now, Abraham had too many relatives to count, and they were about to move into a new land—the land God promised. God spoke to Moses, the leader of the Israelites. He said, “Send some men to check out the land of Canaan. I am giving it to the people of Israel.” So Moses sent 12 spies to check out the land of Canaan. And **the spies went** ... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking.

Moses had a lot of questions: *Read Numbers 13:18–20b.* In order to find out the answers to these questions, **the spies went** ... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking.

They came to a valley with grapes growing so big that a single bunch took up a whole branch. Two men carried it on a pole. They also found pomegranates and figs. But they still had a lot of questions to answer, so **the spies went** ... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking.

They went into the hill country to see what the land was like and found milk and honey. And **the spies went** ... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking. But they also found the cities, and they saw that the cities had high walls around them, and the people who lived there were powerful. They also found big people living along the Jordan River. For 40 days **the spies went** ... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking. Finally, it was time to go home and give a report.

Ten spies gave one report. They said it was very good land, but the people who lived there were big and scary. But two spies gave a different report. Caleb stood up and said, “We should go up and take the land. We can do it!” And the ten spies said, “We can’t attack those people! They are stronger than we are.”

The Israelites didn’t know what to think! *Read Numbers 14:1.* But Caleb and his friend Joshua were not going to give up. They said, “If the Lord is pleased with us, he’ll lead us into that land. It’s a land that has plenty of milk and honey. He’ll give it to us. Don’t be afraid. The Lord is with us!”

But the people believed the ten spies. All the Israelites did was complain! God decided to punish them for doubting he could defeat the large people of Canaan. *Read Numbers 14:30.* So for 40 years, the Israelites complained and wandered in the desert, until all the grown-ups had died. Their children grew up and were ready to go into the new land God had promised with Caleb and Joshua. We can always be confident in God’s promise **as we go**... (point to groups in sequence) crouching and slouching and creeping and peeking through the adventures of our lives.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 6.* Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about why we remember Joshua and Caleb in this story. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What kind of report did the ten men give?**
- **Why did Caleb and Joshua give a different report?**

Say, **Caleb and Joshua were confident in God’s promise, even when the others were not. We can be confident in God no matter what.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: I SPY

Stuff You Need: *The Story for Children* and a supply of other storybooks

Let children play a quiet game of I Spy. Most children will know how to play. If they don't, let another child explain. One child chooses an object and then describes it, saying, "I spy something round" (or other appropriate descriptor). The other children guess the object the first child is describing. They can use classroom objects for their game or use the pictures in *The Story for Children* or other storybooks. For a more active game with classroom objects, let children walk to the object they think the first child is describing.

OPTION 2: PROMISED LAND HIDEAWAY

Stuff You Need: 2 copies of Promised Land Hideaway Activity Sheet, markers

Print out the activity sheets before this lesson. If possible, print on brightly colored paper. Cut apart the cards on one copy of the handout and hide them around the classroom. (If you can't do this ahead of time, have class put their heads down while you do it.) Say, **I've hidden around the room some words that remind us what the spies found in the Promised Land. Now it's your turn to spy out the land. When you see one of the words, don't pick it up. Don't tell anyone what you saw. Instead, come to me and sign your name next to that word on this page.** Show the second copy of the handout. Allow plenty of time for everyone to find the hidden cards and sign their names next to each word on your copy of the handout. Then talk about:

- Why were Caleb and Joshua confident the Israelites could conquer the land?
- What did the reports of the other spies make all the people think?

Say, **Caleb and Joshua didn't listen to the bad reports. Instead, they put their confidence in what God said.**

OPTION 3: A GREAT LAND

Stuff You Need: A Great Land Activity Sheet, crayons or watercolor paints and brushes

Give an activity sheet to each child. Instruct the children to look for gifts that God would give his people in the new land. Color or paint the land brand new!

OPTION 4: JOSHUA AND CALEB, THE SPIES' TELESCOPE

Stuff you need: cardboard tubes (from paper towel, toilet paper, wrapping paper, etc.), tape, markers, crayons, or paint

1. Give each student a long cardboard tube if you're making a telescope, or two small tubes if you're making binoculars.
2. Let students decorate their tubes as they wish.
3. If you're making binoculars help students tape the two tubes together, side-by-side.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Divide your class into groups of two or three. Have them pray together about trusting God no matter what. They may want to pray that they will have courage like Caleb and Joshua to trust God even when it's not the popular choice. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 6*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

Bible Basis: Joshua 1:1–11, 2:1–24

Key Verse: Be strong and very brave. Make sure you obey the whole law. ... Then you will have success everywhere you go. —Joshua 1:7, NIV

Bible Point: God sent help for his people. God sends me to help, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 7: “The Battle Begins”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: masking tape

As you begin class, get out the roll of masking tape and begin pulling off a long strip. Aim for eight to ten feet. As you pull tape, talk about what you are trying to do. **I need a really long piece of tape, but I'm not sure what the best way to do this is.** Struggle with the task. Invite suggestions. If someone volunteers to help, accept it. If not, ask for help. One child can hold the roll while you pull the tape and walk ten feet away. Or you might want to enlist several students. When you have a long strip, attach it to the floor. (Depending on your set-up, you might be able to use it for the Bible verse game below.) Talk about:

- Why was that a hard thing for me to do by myself?
- Tell me something that is hard for you to do by yourself.

Say, **We all have hard things to do. Sometimes we can do them alone, but sometimes it's okay to ask for help. In our Bible story today, God used someone to help his people.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 7*, signs labeled A, B, and C

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 7. You can also have children find Joshua 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Rahab the Helper

Post the “A,” “B,” and “C” signs around the room. When you come to a multiple-choice question in the story, pause for children to move to the sign they think is the right answer.

Read Joshua 1:1–2. But they were going to have to fight some battles first. The first city to conquer was Jericho. Joshua sent two men to spy on Jericho and make sure it was safe for God's people to attack.

When the spies got to Jericho, they saw that it had high, thick walls around the whole city. The walls were as high and thick as a house with two floors! How would they ever get in? Do you think they: A) gave up and went home; B) sat down to think about the problem; C) figured out a way to get into the city? Pause for children to move to signs.

The spies got into the city of Jericho. There they met a woman named Rahab, who lived in a house attached to the city wall. Do you think they: A) tied her up because she was the enemy; B) decided to stay at her house; C) ran away as fast as they could? Pause for children to move.

The men decided to stay at Rahab's house. It turned out Rahab knew about God and his plan, and she wanted to keep the spies safe. But then the king of Jericho heard the spies had come! He sent a message to Rahab. It said, "Bring out the men who came to your house." Do you think Rahab: A) hid the men under a pile of stuff on the roof; B) pretended she didn't get the message; C) invited the messengers in for lunch? Pause for children to move.

Rahab had heard the king's messengers coming and hid the Israelite spies on her roof under a pile of flax plants. She told the messengers, "It's true the men were here. Go after them quickly. You might catch up with them." The king's men left to hunt down the spies. Rahab went up to the roof to talk to the spies. Do you think she told them: A) "You have to get out of here now"; B) "I know the Lord has given this land to you"; C) "I'm sorry I ever let you in"? Pause for children to move.

Rahab knew it was God's plan to give the land to the Israelites. Read Joshua 2:12–13. Do you think the men said: A) "We can't make any promises"; B) "Sorry, you're the enemy"; C) "We'll give up our lives to save yours"? Pause for children to move.

The men promised to keep Rahab and her family safe when the Israelites attacked Jericho. Rahab's house was attached to the big thick wall around the city. She let the spies down with a rope through the window. The spies went and hid in the hills for three days until they were sure it was safe to come out. Then they went back to Joshua and told him everything that had happened to them.

Do you think Joshua thought: A) the spies had been chickens; B) God would take care of his people in the battle; C) conquering Jericho was too hard? Pause for children to move.

Joshua liked the spies' report. He knew it meant God would take care of them once they started fighting in Canaan, the land God was giving them. Joshua had all the Israelites pray and get ready to attack Jericho.

God knew the spies would need some help, and he made sure Rahab was there to help them. He knows when you need help, too. And, he even knows when you might be able to be the one who helps.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 7*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about how the Israelites fought the battle of Jericho. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Why did the two men in the Bible story need help?
- How did Rahab help them?

Say, **God sent help for his people. God might send us to help someone, too.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BIBLE VERSE CRUMBLE

Stuff You Need: paper, marker, bins or baskets, whiteboard or newsprint

Ahead of time, write these segments from the Bible verse on separate, full sheets of paper: Be strong / and very brave. / Make sure you / obey the whole law. / Then you will have success / everywhere you go. Make a set of verse sheets for every four or five children you expect. Also write the verse on the board. During class, help the children to read the verse together. Then show a set of papers. (Younger children may not be fluent readers, but they can practice recognizing the verse segments and compare to what is on the board.) Have the children tightly crumple up the sheets and put them in a basket. Set the baskets about ten feet away from the starting area. Children will take turns running to the basket, smoothing paper to find the next verse segment, and bringing it back to the group. If they open a sheet that is the wrong segment, they should crumple it again and keep looking. Play until the whole verse is assembled. After the game, talk about:

- How were the people in our story strong and brave?
- Tell me about a time God helped you be strong and brave.

Say, **Sometimes the people God sends to help us show us how to be strong and brave, the way Rahab helped the spies. Don't forget to look for ways you can help, too.**

OPTION 2: SHH! Be STILL!

Stuff You Need: small, lightweight objects, hard surface to drop them on

Gather a variety of small, lightweight objects such as a pin, thumbtack, paper clip, rubber band, pencil eraser, length of string, gum wrapper, scrap of paper. Say, **Rahab helped the men in our story by hiding them, but they had to keep very still and quiet. I wonder how long we can all be perfectly still and quiet. Let's see if we can be quiet enough to hear a pin drop.** Pause and give everyone a chance to hold still. Have children close their eyes or put their heads down. Then quietly let them know you're going to drop some items, and if they hear the sound, they should raise their

hands. Start with the heavier objects that will make a louder sound and progress to the ones that are more difficult to hear. Wrap up with these questions.

- **What do you suppose the men in the story heard when they were being quiet?**
- **How can being quiet sometimes help us to hear what God wants to tell us?**

Say, **God sent Rahab to help the two men. If we're quiet enough to listen to his voice, God might ask us to help someone, too.**

OPTION 3: Rahab Helps

Stuff You Need: Rahab Helps Activity Sheet, crayons or markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Review the story of Rahab with the class. Ask whether they think she was a hero to help the Israelites. Instruct the class to color the picture of Rahab hiding the spies ... being a hero! On the other side of the paper, have the children draw and color a picture of another hero that helped someone.

OPTION 4: Musical Instruments

Stuff You Need: musical instruments

Say, **The priests blew their trumpets in the battle of Jericho. We are going to walk around our room seven times using our musical instruments like the people of Israel did.** Give each child a musical instrument. If you don't have enough instruments for every child, have some children clap their hands and trade with someone who has an instrument each time around the room. You can make your own musical instrument by filling an empty, clean soda bottle no more than three-quarters full with beads or uncooked rice or beans. Make sure the cap is tightly screwed on before shaking the bottle.

After you are done marching around the room, sing some of the children's favorite songs accompanied by the musical instruments.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together that you will have faith and believe in God's promises. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 7*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

A FEW GOOD MEN ... AND WOMEN

Bible Basis: Judges 16:1–31

Key Verse: [Samson] said, “Lord and King, show me that you still have concern for me. God, please make me strong just one more time.” —Judges 16:28 NIV

Bible Point: God helps those who turn to him. I can depend on God.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 8: “A Few Good Men ... and Women”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: table, two chairs

As you begin, say, **Who's feeling strong today? Let's see if you really are.** Invite children to arm wrestle. (Don't force anyone who doesn't want to.) If your group is large, you might have a couple of volunteers wrestle where everyone can see. With a small group, pairs can wrestle at a table. Make sure kids understand the rules. They can only use one arm, they must remain seated, and elbows must stay on the table. Talk about:

- Tell me some other ways to know if someone is strong.
- How do people become strong?

Say, **In our Bible story today, we'll meet someone who was very strong, but what made him strong was his secret.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 8*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 8. You can also have children find Judges 16 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Samson's Strength

Pause as indicated to have children repeat after you.

Even after God's people moved into the land he had promised them, they had enemies. But they also had some heroes of their own. When Samson was born, God made him really strong. He was so strong he even ripped up lions for fun. No one could beat Samson, especially the Philistines—the enemies. The Philistines wanted to know Samson's weakness. They got their chance when Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah.

Read Judges 16: 5–9.

Uh-oh. Hold up one finger. Repeat after me: That's once! (Repeat.)

Read Judges 16:10–12. **Uh-oh.** Hold up two fingers. Repeat after me: That's twice. (Repeat.)

Read Judges 16:13a–b. A loom was a big contraption for weaving cloth and rugs. So while Samson was sleeping, Delilah took hold of the seven braids of his hair. She wove them into the cloth on a loom. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines are attacking you!" But when Samson woke up, he pulled up the loom without any trouble. **Uh-oh.** Hold up three fingers. Repeat after me: That's three times! (Repeat.)

Now Delilah was fuming mad. She said, "How can you say you love me when you won't share your secret with me?" Day after day, she nagged him about his secret. Repeat after me: Nag, nag, nag. (Repeat.) Pester, pester, pester. (Repeat.) Read Judges 16:17. I have a feeling Samson should not have done that. Repeat after me: Uh-oh. (Repeat.)

Delilah had one more chance to get that money! She sent a message to the Philistine leaders and they came with all the money they promised her. Delilah got Samson to fall asleep on her lap. She called for a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines are attacking you!" Samson woke from his sleep and thought he could just shake himself free like the other times. He didn't know the Lord had left him. Repeat after me: Uh-oh. (Repeat.)

The Philistines grabbed Samson and poked his eyes out. They put bronze chains around him and made him grind grain in the prison day after day. Samson had a lot of time to think about what he had done and what God could do. He had a lot of time to be sorry. And Samson's hair began to grow back. Repeat after me: I can depend on God. (Repeat.)

One day the Philistines were having a huge party in the temple of their god. Some party guests called for Samson to put on a show for them. Samson knew this was his chance. He had made a huge mistake when he got involved with Delilah, but now he wanted to do the right thing. He wanted to show these enemies the power of the one true God. So he said to the servant who was guiding him, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that hold this temple up."

Read Judges 16:28. Then Samson reached for the two pillars and leaned hard against them. God had given him his strength back, and he pushed the pillars over. The whole building collapsed!

Though he lost his strength when they cut his hair, Samson knew God would still hear him pray. He knew he could depend on the Lord. God gave Samson the strength to do one more heroic feat. Repeat after me: We can depend on God! (Repeat.)

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 8*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you what happened to Samson's strength. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What mistakes did Samson make in today's story?
- How did God show that he doesn't leave his children?

Say, Even though Samson made some huge mistakes, he turned back to God. When Samson needed him most, God was there.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: How Strong

Stuff You Need: two paperback books with more than 100 pages each and about the same size

Ask, **Do you think you can separate these two books from each other?** Children will most likely say they can do it easily. As they watch, lace the pages of the book together like you would shuffle a deck of cards. Pages should overlap about halfway. Pick two children to try to pull the books apart from the spine. They shouldn't be able to pull it apart. Let other children try as well. When children are finished trying, talk about the source of Samson's strength.

OPTION 2: Balloon Strength

Stuff You Need: balloons, plastic trash bag, oversized sweatpants and sweatshirt

Optional: newspapers

Gather a set of sweat clothes for every six to eight children you expect. Ahead of time, inflate five or six balloons for each group, tie them closed, and store in the plastic bag. Say, **Samson was famous for his strength. Choose one person from your group to wear the sweat clothes then use the balloons as muscles to make the person look strong.** Children can also use newspaper to supplement the balloons. Allow a few minutes to work, then have the models show off their muscles. Talk about:

- Where did Samson's strength really come from?
- How can what we learn from Samson help us in our lives?

Say, **Samson made some big mistakes, but when he turned to God, God was there. No matter what we do, God stays with us.**

OPTION 3: Be Strong!

Stuff You Need: Be Strong! Activity Sheet, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the group about the many ways that we can be strong ... physically, academically, faith-filled. Where does that strength come from? Instruct the children to

write *God is where strength comes from* on the bar of the barbell. In the weights have them either write words or draw pictures that show two kinds of strength they have received from God.

OPTION 4: Samson

Hairy Samson (NOTE: Must allow two weeks for preparation.)

Stuff you need: paper cups, markers, fast germinating grass seeds, dirt, rubber bands, plastic wrap

1. Pass out a paper cup to each student.
2. Have students draw a face on the front of the cup. Put their name on the back.
3. Fill the cup with dirt.
4. Sprinkle grass seeds in cup and water it.
5. Cover with plastic wrap and secure with a rubber band.
6. Watch Samson's hair grow.
7. On the day of the activity, tell the story of Samson and Delilah. Then allow students to cut Samson's hair.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together that you will turn to God and depend on him. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 8*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

Bible Basis: Ruth 1:1–2:23

Bible Point: Boaz and Ruth are kind to others. I please God when I am kind.

Key Verse: May the Lord reward you for what you have done. May the God of Israel bless you richly.
—Ruth 2:12 NIV

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 9: “The Faith of a Foreign Woman”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: small rewards such as pencils, stickers, and erasers

Challenge a few volunteers to some simple tasks and offer a reward if they succeed. For instance, ask them to rub their heads in circles in one direction and their tummies in the other direction at the same time. Or ask them to do a backward crab walk across the room—or anything else you think of. Pass out rewards. Say, **You did something I asked you to do, so I’m rewarding you.** Ask:

- **Would you have done what I asked if I hadn’t offered a reward? Explain.**
- **Tell me about a reward you got for doing something right.**

Say, **In today’s Bible story, we’ll meet some people who did the right thing without hoping for a reward.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 9*, Word Bank PowerPoint slide and projection equipment or whiteboard and marker

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 9. You can also have children find Ruth 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story. When you come to a blank in the story, have children fill in the word from the Word Bank slide or from the list you have provided.

Use the PowerPoint slide or write these words where kids can see them: *grain, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, field*. Review the words with children to make sure they recognize them.

RUTH IS KIND

In this story, you’ll find blanks. Pause at each blank and ask children to supply the correct word by choosing a word from the Word Bank: *grain, Ruth, Boaz, Naomi, field*. If you’d like, you can give some kind of visual cue about which word to choose, such as using a pointer.

After some good years, things got tough in Israel. A woman named Naomi and her family moved to the country of Moab, where there was food. Her sons grew up and married women from Moab. But then sadness came to _____ (Naomi). Her husband died. And then her sons died. So _____ (Naomi) decided to go back home to Israel. She had heard Israel had food now. The wife of one of her sons decided to go with her. This young woman's name was _____ (Ruth).

Now Ruth had never lived in Israel before. She would be a foreigner there. But she loved _____ (Naomi) and wanted to stay with her. So they traveled together to a town called Bethlehem.

Read Ruth 2:2. So _____ (Ruth) went out to pick up _____ (grain). It turned out that she was working in a _____ (field) that belonged to a man named _____ (Boaz).

Boaz saw the young woman and spoke to the man who was in charge of his workers. He asked, "Who is that young woman?"

The man replied, "She is from the country of Moab. She came back from there with _____ (Naomi). She said, 'Please let me pick up the _____ (grain) that is left in the _____ (field).' She has been working there from morning until now."

So the man named _____ (Boaz) said to the young woman named _____ (Ruth), "Stay in my _____ (field). Don't pick up _____ (grain) in any other _____ (field.) When you are thirsty, go and get a drink."

Ruth bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked, "Why are you being so kind to me? I'm from another country."

Boaz replied, "I've heard about everything you have done for _____ (Naomi). I know you came to live with people you didn't know."

Read Ruth 2:12.

When it was time to eat, the man named _____ (Boaz) said to _____ (Ruth), "Have some bread." She ate all she wanted. She even had some left over.

Ruth got up to pick up more _____ (grain). She worked in the _____ (field) until evening. Then she separated the barley from the straw and carried it back to town. At home, _____ (Naomi) saw how much Ruth had gathered. She asked, "Where did you pick up _____ (grain) today?"

Read Ruth 2:19b–20a.

Ruth was kind to _____ (Naomi.) Boaz was kind to _____ (Ruth). They were not kind because they wanted something back. They were kind because it was the right thing to do. We aren't kind to others to get a reward from people, but God blesses us when we are kind.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 9*.

Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Ruth and Boaz. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Tell me some examples of kindness from this Bible story.
- Why do you think Boaz and Ruth were so kind to others? Did they get a reward?

Say, **Boaz and Ruth pleased God with their kindness to others. You can think of ways to please God with kindness, too.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: GRAIN AND STRAW

Stuff You Need: generous amounts of two kinds of items to separate, such as two shapes of pasta, or two colors of paper cut into small pieces; bowls or small tubs, baskets

Mix up the two different pasta shapes or two colors of paper pieces in one tub. Say, **In the Bible story, Ruth separated the grain from the straw. We'll play a separating game today.** For a non-competitive game version, have children work in pairs. One child searches for one shape or color, and the other searches for the second shape or color. Transfer what they find to baskets. For a competitive version, assign children to teams and prepare a tub and basket for each team. Tell each team which shape to find. Each player runs to the tub, finds five pieces, and brings them back to the team's basket. Play for a specified amount of time then see which team has filled their basket the fullest.

- In the Bible story, how did Ruth show kindness to Naomi? How did Boaz show kindness to Ruth?
- Tell me some ways you can show kindness to other people.

Say, **Boaz and Ruth are good examples of being kind to others. We please God when we are kind.**

OPTION 2: KINDNESS CHARADES

Stuff You Need: index cards or scrap paper, markers, basket

Say, **Our Bible story was about people who showed kindness to others. Let's think of some ways to show kindness and see if we can guess them.** Have children think of ways to show kindness and write them on index cards. If your children are too young to write easily, have them whisper their ideas in your ear and you write them down. Fold the cards at least in half and put them in a basket. Have children take turns drawing a card from the basket and miming the action on the card for others to guess. If you'd like, you can assign children to teams and have one team act while the other guesses. Then talk about:

- Which of these kindness ideas do you think you could do for someone?
- When do you think you can show kindness to others?

Say, Boaz and Ruth showed kindness on regular days in their regular lives. That's what God wants us to do. We please him when we are kind.

OPTION 3: Kindness Counts

Stuff You Need: Kindness Counts Activity Sheet, colored pencils

Give an activity sheet and colored pencils to each child. Instruct the children to draw a cartoon of themselves helping someone in their life. Perhaps draw an example on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, showing the children how to divide the act of kindness into three to six different scenes.

OPTION 4: Naomi and Ruth

A Handprint Bouquet for Mothers

Stuff you need: washable paint (the color of flowers), paper plates, white paper, green construction paper, safety scissors, glue

1. Squirt a generous portion of paint on the paper plates.
2. Cover palms of hands in paint.
3. Make several handprints on the white paper.
4. Wash hands and allow paint to dry.
5. Cut out a stem and leaves using the green construction paper.
6. When handprints are dry, cut them out.
7. Arrange handprints so fingertips are pointing up. Hands may overlap. Glue together.
8. Glue the stem to the bottom of the handprint bouquet.
9. Add leaves to the stem.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together, asking God to help you to be kind to someone this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 9*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

MESSAGES FROM GOD

Bible Basis: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:2, 21; 3:1–10

Key Verse: The Lord has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong. —1 Samuel 2:1 NIV

Bible Point: God answered Hannah's prayer. God hears me pray, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 10: "Messages from God"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: simple items that make familiar sounds

Gather several simple items that make identifiable sounds, such as book pages to flip, cards to shuffle, paper clips to jingle, pencil to tap, water to pour from one cup to another, a small ball to bounce, a spoon to clink against a glass. Keep these items out of sight as children arrive. Say, **How well can you listen? Let's see if you can tell me what sounds I'm making.** Have the group close their eyes. **No peeking!** Make sounds one at a time and pause for children to identify them. Have them open their eyes. Ask:

- **Do you think you would have heard all those sounds if we weren't listening quietly?**
- **Why is it sometimes hard to listen quietly?**

Say, **In today's Bible story, we'll meet a mother and son who learned how to listen to messages from God.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 10*, chenille wires, one per child

Optional: Story Wire PowerPoint and projection equipment

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 10. You can also have children find 1 Samuel 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Samuel: An Answer to Prayer

Give each child a chenille wire. As you tell the story, you will demonstrate for them how to twist the wire into a shape representing something from the story. You may use the optional Story Wire PowerPoint if your group is large and children will have a hard time seeing what you're doing.



Our story begins with a woman named Hannah. Pause and twist the wire into the "Hannah" shape. Hannah was always very sad, because she didn't have a baby. Hannah decided to ask God to give her a baby. She sobbed and sobbed as she prayed to the Lord. She said, "Don't forget about me! Please give me a son! If you do, I'll give him back to you. Then he will serve you all the days of his life."



Read 1 Samuel 1:20. Pause and twist the wire into the "baby Samuel" shape. She was very, very happy. She loved him as much as a mom can love a child. She prayed again and said, "The LORD has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong." God had answered her prayer. Hannah took care of little Samuel at her house until he wasn't a baby anymore. After all, she had promised he would serve God. So one day Hannah took Samuel to the temple so he could live with Eli there. Eli was the priest who took care of God's temple, the Lord's house. He would teach Samuel how to become a great servant for God.



In those days, God didn't give many messages to his people, so what happened to Samuel was really amazing. Read 1 Samuel 3:2-3. Samuel was in his bed when amazing things started to happen. Pause and twist the wire into a "bed" shape.

During the night, Samuel heard a voice call, "Samuel!" He thought it was Eli, so he popped out of bed and scampered over to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called out to me."

But Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back and lie down." So Samuel went back to bed. But it happened again. He heard a voice call, "Samuel!" So he popped out of bed again and scampered over to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called out to me."

But Eli said, "My son, I didn't call you. Go back and lie down." So Samuel went back to bed. Samuel didn't know it was the Lord calling him. God had never given him a message before. So when he heard someone say his name for the third time, he popped out of bed for the third time. He scampered over to Eli for the third time. He said to Eli, "Here I am. You called out to me."

Read 1 Samuel 3:8b-9.



The Lord came and stood there, right where Samuel was sleeping! He called Samuel's name, just like he had before. This time though, Samuel didn't pop out of bed. He didn't scamper over to Eli. Instead, he said, "Speak. I'm listening." Pause and twist the wire into the "ear" shape. (Bend it in half first.)

God gave Samuel a message for Eli, and Samuel told Eli what God said. As Samuel grew up, he and God talked all the time. Samuel would tell the Israelites what God said, and the people would listen.

God heard Hannah's prayer and answered her. Then he talked to Samuel in the middle of the night. God wants to have a conversation with us! He hears us when we pray.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 10*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you several things about Samuel's life. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What did Hannah pray for? How did God answer her prayer?
- How did Samuel learn to listen for God's message?

Say, When Hannah prayed for God to give her a son, she promised to give the son back to God. That little boy was Samuel, who grew up to be one of the greatest leaders God's people ever had.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: NIGHTTIME CHALK PICTURE

Stuff You Need: black construction paper, colored chalk

Say, God spoke to Samuel in the middle of the night. Use the chalk to draw a picture on black paper of Samuel listening to God. If necessary, remind children of some of the elements of the scene, such as Samuel in his bed, Eli nearby, they were in the temple. As children work, lead a simple discussion.

- How did God answer Hannah's prayer?
- What did God say to Samuel during the night?

Say, God heard Hannah's prayer, and he talked to Samuel in the night. God wants us to talk to him and listen to him. That's praying!

OPTION 2: BIBLE VERSE TARGET

Stuff You Need: Target PowerPoint slide and projection equipment or large piece of butcher paper and marker; beanbags

Project the Target slide on a blank wall where it is safe to throw beanbags. (Or draw a target and hang it on the wall. Write the words of the Bible verse in the circles of the target. At the bull's-eye, write, "God hears me pray.") Say, When God answered Hannah's prayer, her response was to say, "The Lord has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong." (1 Samuel 2:1) Hannah knew the joy that came from knowing that God listened to her prayer. Explain that children will take turns tossing beanbags at the Bible verse target. Read the words written in the target. Whenever anyone



hits the bull's-eye, everyone will say together, "God hears me pray." After the game, gather for a discussion.

- Why was Hannah's heart filled with joy?
- Tell me about some prayers that God has answered for you.

OPTION 3: GOD HEARS ME PRAY

Stuff You Need: God Hears Me Pray Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Instruct the children to get into pairs and work together on this prayer. Have the pairs write a prayer to God asking for strength and thanking him for that strength. They can be very specific. The prayer can be decorated and hung or shared with the group.

OPTION 4: HANNAH'S PROMISE TO GOD

Promise Necklace—write a promise on a necklace so students can read it and remember their promise to God.

Stuff you need: string (thick fishing wire or yarn can work well), uncooked pasta, colored noodles work well (noodles must have a hole in them), safety scissors, hole punch, construction paper, markers, stencils (optional)

1. Cut a circle large enough to write a few words or a sentence on. (You can utilize stencils to help cut large shapes.)
2. Have students write down a promise to God, just like Hannah promised God.
3. While students are writing, you can use this time to cut a section of string for each student. They should be long enough that, when tied, the necklace will fit easily over their heads.
4. Use a hole punch to put a hole in the top of the circle.
5. Have students push the string through the hole, so their medallion ends up in the middle of their piece of string.
6. The remaining string can be decorated with the noodles. You might need to help students thread the string through the holes.
7. Tie the necklaces.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God for hearing your prayers. Encourage children to pray each day this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 10*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

FROM SHEPHERD TO KING

Bible Basis: 1 Samuel 17:1–50

Key Verse: I am coming against you in the name of the Lord who rules over all. —1 Samuel 17:45 NIV

Bible Point: David fought in God's strength. God gives me courage when I am afraid.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 11: "From Shepherd to King"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As you begin, see how many of the children have dogs. Give them a minute to tell you about their dogs. Talk about big dogs and little dogs. Then ask them to bark like dogs and discuss who has the scariest sounding bark. Be sensitive to children who may be afraid of dogs. **Dogs can be scary, especially big ones!**

- Tell me some other things that might scare you.
- What do you usually do when you're afraid?

Say, **In today's Bible story, we'll hear about somebody who was like a big scary dog, and we'll find out why a young boy was not afraid of him.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 11*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 11. You can also have children find 1 Samuel 17 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

DAVID BEATS GOLIATH

Before beginning the Bible story, assign your children to two groups. One group should be most of the children, regardless of the size of your class. This is the Goliath group. The other group should be small, perhaps only one or two children. This is the David group.

Teach the Goliath group this response rhyme.

You ask, "**How big was Goliath?**" Children say, "Nine feet tall."

You ask, "**Did that scare David?**" Children say, "Not at all."

Teach the David group to finish these sentences when cued.

You say, "David had neither ..." Children say, "... spear nor sword."

You say, "David fought in ..." Children say, "... the strength of the Lord."

When you're sure the groups know their responses, begin the Bible story.

Israel's enemy, the Philistines, gathered for war. King Saul and the Israelite army camped on one hill. Across the valley, the Philistines camped on another hill. The Philistines had a secret weapon—a giant named Goliath. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme with the Goliath group.

Read 1 Samuel 17:4–7. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme with the Goliath group.

Goliath stood and shouted to the soldiers of Israel. Every day he did this. He shouted at them across the valley and dared them to send someone to fight him. But no one wanted to go. Goliath was too big and scary. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme with the Goliath group.

One day, a shepherd boy showed up in the Israelite camp. He was the little brother of some of the soldiers, and his father had sent him to see how his big brothers were doing and take them some food. His name was David. Pause and do the David rhyme with the David group.

David found out what was happening with the giant Philistine. He found out that Goliath came out every day and dared the Israelites to fight him, and no one wanted to do it. For forty days Goliath made this dare, and no one took the dare. Have all the kids squat down. When I point to you, pop up then squat down again. Count from one to forty, pointing at a different child each time. Forty days! Forty dares! And every day the Israelite army ran in fear because Goliath was so scary. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme with the Goliath group.

But on this day, David was there. David heard the dare. Pause and do the David rhyme with the David group. David said, "Who does that bully think he is? We have God on our side!" King Saul heard that David was saying things like that and called for David to come see him. David said to Saul, "I'll go out and fight him."

Read 1 Samuel 17:33–37. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

Read 1 Samuel 17:40. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

Read 1 Samuel 17:42–45. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

Read 1 Samuel 17:48–50. Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

David fought in the strength of the Lord who rules over all!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 11*.

Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about a time when David had courage. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

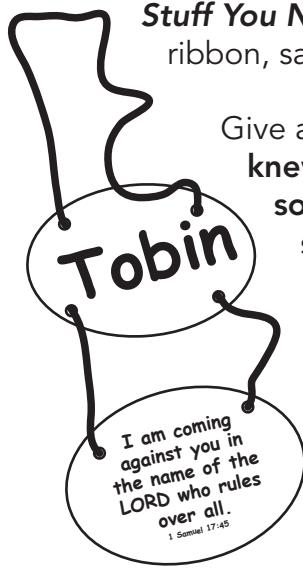
- Why were the Israelite soldiers afraid of Goliath?
- Why was David not afraid of Goliath?

Say, **David knew Goliath was big and scary, but David also knew that he was fighting in the strength of the Lord. That's where his courage came from.** Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Name Tags



Stuff You Need: copies of Name Tags Activity Sheet, sturdy paper or cardstock, yarn or ribbon, safety scissors, glue, hole punch, markers, glitter

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **David fought in the name of the Lord. He knew that God was more powerful than Goliath—or anything else. Let's make something to remind us of the power of God's name when we're in scary situations.** Cut out the shapes on the activity sheet. Have children write their names in the blank shape and decorate with art supplies. Decorate the letters in the bottom shape. Use the shapes as patterns and cut two more from sturdy paper, cardstock, poster board, or craft foam. Glue the decorated shapes onto the backing. Punch holes as indicated. Tie one end of the yarn through one hole of the Bible verse shape. Thread the yarn through the bottom of the name shape, up the back, and out through the hole at the top. Then go down through the other top hole, down the back, out the bottom hole, and tie to the Bible verse shape. Leave enough yarn loose at the top to use as a hanger. As children work, ask:

- Tell me about some times when you'd like to remember this verse.
- Can anyone say the verse without looking at the words?

Say, **David knew God's name was powerful because God is powerful. If we remember that, we can have courage when we're afraid.**

OPTION 2: When I'm Afraid

Stuff You Need: classroom chairs

To start, make a circle using classroom chairs with one less chair than children. The chairs should be facing inward. Have children sit in the chairs with one child standing in the middle. The child in the middle should tell about a time when they have been afraid. If any of the other children have been

afraid of that, they should get up and find a new seat, at least two seats over, while the child in the middle tries to find a seat. The new child standing in the middle will say something he or she has been afraid of. Play continues as long as you have time. At the end of the game, remind children that God can give them courage when they are afraid.

OPTION 3: DAVID MEETS GOLIATH

Stuff You Need: David Meets Goliath Activity Sheet

Give an activity sheet to each child. Read the verse at the bottom out loud several times. Have the children try to memorize the verse. Now have the class color the picture of David meeting powerful Goliath. Who will win?

OPTION 4: SHEEP'S FACE

Stuff You Need: paper plates, glue, white cotton balls, black chenille stems, large plastic eyes, pink and white felt

1. Give each student a paper plate.
2. Cover the plate completely with glue.
3. Attach cotton balls. The whole plate will be the sheep's face.
4. Glue on the eyes.
5. Cut chenille stems into 2–3 inch sections. Have students bend the edges up to create a "U" for the sheep's smile.
6. Using the pink and white felt, have children cut out a triangle of the pink for the nose and cut large oblong shapes for the ears.
7. Attach the pieces.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups about things children are afraid of and that with God they will have courage to face their fears. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 11*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

A KING MAKES BAD CHOICES

Bible Basis: Psalm 32:10–11; 51:1–12; 1 Chronicles 29:1–20

Key Verse: Wash away all of the evil things I've done. Make me pure from my sin. —Psalm 51:2 NIV

Bible Point: God forgave David's sins. God forgives me when I'm sorry for doing wrong things.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 12: "A King Makes Bad Choices"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: masking tape

Optional: large appliance box, paint or markers

Use masking tape to mark off a square on the floor to represent a time machine. If you're using the optional appliance box, decorate it to look like a futuristic time machine. Cut away a portion of one side so someone can get inside the box.

Welcome children and point out the time machine. Say, **Have you ever wished you could go back in time and change something you did? Let's think about the last two days. Can you think of something you'd like to change?** Dramatically step inside the time machine. Younger children may need some examples, so go first and suggest something you would change, such as getting impatient in line or losing your temper with your children or thinking something unkind about a neighbor. Invite children to make machinery noises and on your signal, everyone should call out something they would change from the last two days. Ask:

- Why do you want to change your actions?
- What does it feel like to be sorry for something you did?

Say, **We all do things we know are wrong. That's called sin. Our story today is about a great king of God's people who shows us what it feels like to be sorry for our sin.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 12*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 12. You can also have children find Psalm 51 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

DAVID IS SORRY

Have the class spread out and stand facing you. Then ask everyone to turn one-quarter turn to the left. During the story, children will be making half-turns, but if they start out in this position, they will never have their backs to you.

Tell children, **The key sound today is “ent.” Say that back to me.** Pause for children to repeat “ent.” **Whenever you hear me say a word that ends in “ent,” I want you to turn around and face the other direction and say, “I relent, I repent. God forgives—what a present!”** With the next cue, they’ll make another half-turn. Practice the cue and response several times, then begin the story. Pause at the bolded words for children to respond.

King David always tried to do what God wanted him to do, but once he really, really messed up. He saw a woman named Bathsheba. She was married, and David wanted her to be his wife. So he sent her husband into battle, where he died. Then David married Bathsheba. That was quite an **event!** (Pause for children to respond.)

God told David that what he’d done was very wrong and David would be punished for his sin. David wrote a song to help him accept God’s punishment and ask forgiveness for what he had done. He said what he **meant.** (Pause for children to respond.)

David said, *Read Psalm 51:1–4.* David knew he’d done wrong. He was not giving God any **argument.** (Pause for children to respond.)

David kept on praying, *Read Psalm 51:5–7.* David meant what he said one hundred **percent!** (Pause for children to respond.)

David said, “Let me hear you say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ That will bring me joy and gladness. Take away all of my sins. Wipe away all of the evil things I’ve done. God, create a pure heart in me. Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you.” David was sorry wherever he **went.** (Pause for children to respond.)

Read Psalm 51:10–12. David was thankful for all the love God **sent.** (Pause for children to respond.)

God forgave David, and David again obeyed God. And soon, Bathsheba had a baby that they named Solomon. That was a happy time in David’s palace. “Our God, we give you thanks. We praise your glorious name!” That was David’s **comment.** (Pause for children to respond.)

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 12.* Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about a time when King David sinned and a time when King David followed God. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **How did King David show he was sorry for what he’d done?**
- **What happens when we’re sorry for the wrong things we do?**

Say, **God forgave David. We can’t do anything to make God stop loving us.** Collect the cards for now. You’ll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: CHASE THE SPOT

Stuff You Need: string, tape, construction paper or manila folder

Cut a four-inch circle out of construction paper or manila folder and tape it securely to one end of a long string. You'll be dragging the spot around in the middle of the children. Have children stand in the play area. **David asked God to wipe away the evil things he'd done. I'm going to see if I can sneak up on you with this spot of sin. You don't want it to touch you. If it comes close, jump away and say, "Wash away all of the evil things I've done."** Practice the words together then begin to play. Pull on the string to make the spot move among the children. Students are not allowed to move unless the spot is coming close. After the game, ask:

- When we do something wrong, who do we hurt?
- How does God respond when we say we're sorry?

Say, Even a great king, like David, makes mistakes, but it's great to know that God always forgives.

OPTION 2: SPOT SCRUBBERS

Stuff You Need: washable or dry-erase markers, tub of water, soap, disinfectant wipes, toothbrush, toothpaste, clean-up supplies

Say, **Sometimes when we sin, we try to get rid of the problem ourselves. But what we really need is God to make us clean.** Have the group use markers to write or draw on their palms. They can write something that represents a sin, or they can just make a spot. If you'd like, have children write on each other's palms. (Emphasize they may not write anywhere else.) Then have them try three different methods of cleaning the spot and see which one works best: soap and water, disinfectant wipe, or scrubbing with toothpaste and brush (the abrasive in the toothpaste helps clean). Gather for a discussion.

- Tell me about a time you were sorry. What happened?
- Why do you think God wants us to be sorry when we do something wrong?

Say, **No matter how sorry we are, we're going to mess up again. But every time we mess up, God is ready to forgive us again.**

OPTION 3: SHOW YOU ARE SORRY

Stuff You Need: Show You Are Sorry Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet and pencil to each child. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group fill in the boxes with examples of ways that they can show they are sorry for things they have done. Have each group share one of their examples.

OPTION 4: DAVID'S HARP

Stuff You Need: empty tissue box, large rubber bands

1. Wrap the rubber bands around the box so the rubber bands go across the opening of the box.
2. Pluck strings.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking God's forgiveness for things the children have done wrong. You may wish to have children pray silently, and then close the class in prayer. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 12*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

This lesson may bring up questions about salvation. Be available to answer any questions children may want to ask you individually. Be sure to let parents or guardians know about their child's questions.

THE KING WHO HAD IT ALL

Bible Basis: 1 Kings 3:1–15; 4:29–34; 2 Chronicles 9:1–9

Key Verse: Don't be wise in your own eyes. Have respect for the Lord. —Proverbs 3:7 NIV

Bible Point: God made Solomon a wise leader. God can make me wise, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 13: "The King Who Had It All"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: advertisements, such as store flyers that come in the Sunday paper or catalogs

Open up some ads and begin commenting on items you see. Talk about something you'd really like to have. Get excited about one item after another. If your group is small enough, let children look through ads and say what they'd like to have.

- **If you could have anything you see in these advertisements, what would it be?**
- **If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?**

Say, *In our Bible story today, we'll find out what one king said when God asked him this question.*

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 11*, "yes" and "no" signs

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 13. You can also have children find 1 Kings 3 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Wise in God's Eyes

Recruit two volunteers from the class to help you with the story presentation. One will hold the "yes" sign and the other will hold the "no" sign. Whenever you pause to ask a question about Solomon, the sign holders should parade with the signs and encourage the rest of the children to call out answers.

Saul was the first king of Israel. Then came David, a famous king who ruled for 40 years. Then came King Solomon, one of David's sons. From the start, Solomon was a very different king than David. No battles and bloodshed for him. Solomon wanted to make his kingdom great by using his brain.

Read 1 Kings 3:5. Now that's an incredible question, isn't it? Solomon could really have anything he wanted! Do you think Solomon made a careful choice? Pause for sign holders to wave signs.

Solomon thought long and hard about this question. He definitely wanted to make a good choice. He could have asked to live a long life. He could have asked to be wealthy. He could have asked for God to kill his enemies. But he didn't ask for any of that. Instead, he asked for God to give him a wise heart to know the difference between right and wrong. Read 1 Kings 3:10–12. Now Solomon had reason to boast about how smart he was and how wise he was. Do you think Solomon bragged to his friends? Pause for sign holders to wave signs.

Solomon didn't get all proud and boastful. Instead, he was grateful for what God had done for him. He made the wise choice to go to Jerusalem and stand in front of the ark of the covenant. That was where God met with his people. Solomon made sacrifices to God because he knew his wisdom came from God.

Solomon became very famous for his wisdom. He knew about all kinds of things, from what rock badgers do in their free time to how to be truly happy in life. He solved arguments and figured out the best time to plant crops. Solomon could have kept his wisdom to himself. He could have made sure no one else ever learned how to be wise. But did he? Pause for sign holders to wave signs.

Solomon didn't keep his wisdom to himself. He was constantly thinking of wise things that people needed to know, and he wrote a lot of those things down in a book called Proverbs. Proverbs teach you wisdom. They help you understand wise sayings. Solomon's advice was, "Don't be wise in your own eyes. Have respect for the Lord."

The queen of Sheba heard about how famous and wise Solomon was. She also heard about how he served and worshiped the Lord. So she traveled from far away to test Solomon with hard questions. Solomon didn't have to answer her questions. After all, he was the one who was smart, not her. Do you think he answered her questions? Pause for sign holders.

The queen of Sheba asked Solomon about everything she wanted to know, and Solomon answered all of her questions. There wasn't anything that was too hard for the king to explain to her. So the queen of Sheba saw how very wise Solomon was. She said, "Back in my country I heard a report about you. I heard how wise you are. But I didn't believe those things. So I came to see for myself. You are twice as wise as people say you are."

God made Solomon a wise leader who could rule the people with choices that were fair and right. God wants to help us be wise, too. All we have to do is ask.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 13*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Solomon's wisdom. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What have you learned about wisdom from the story of Solomon?
- Tell me about some times when you would like to have God's wisdom to know what to do.

Say, God made Solomon into a wise leader, and thousands of years later he's still famous for being wise. But God has enough wisdom for us, too, and will share it with us if we ask.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Wise Eyes

Stuff You Need: copy of Wise Eyes Activity Sheets, coins, checkerboard, small items for playing pieces

Optional: paper and markers

If possible, copy the game cards on cardstock ahead of time. Cut apart the game cards. As many as eight children can play this game on one checkerboard. (If you have a large class, you might prefer to have each player draw a column of eight squares on a sheet of paper.) Each player will move a button or other small item through the squares of one column on the board, beginning on the first square. Players will draw a Wise Eyes card and read the situation. Be prepared to help younger children read. Then have them flip a coin to see if they make the wise choice. Heads means yes, a wise answer; move ahead one square. Tails means no, not a wise answer; stay on the same square. Recycle the cards as necessary to keep playing. After the game, talk about:

- Tell me about something that happened in your life when you had to make a wise choice.
- How does having respect for the Lord help us to be more wise?

Say, Solomon is an example we can learn from. When you face a tough decision, remember how much Solomon wanted to make decisions that pleased God.

OPTION 2: Solomon's Temple

Stuff You Need: pictures and descriptions of Solomon's temple

Optional: construction paper, safety scissors, pencils, ruler

Before class, find drawings online or in books of what Solomon's temple might have looked like. In Chapter 13 of *The Story for Children*, Solomon builds a temple for God. Let children look at pictures of what people think it might have looked like. Children may like to construct a class model of Solomon's temple.

OPTION 3: A Man of Wisdom

Stuff You Need: A Man of Wisdom Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Ask **Who is this man?** (Solomon) **Why is he so special to us and our faith heritage?** Color the picture of Solomon.

OPTION 4: Wise Solomon's Crown

Stuff You Need: construction paper, tape, markers, glitter, sequins, stones, etc., crown template

1. Print out a simple crown templates on construction paper.
2. Using safety scissors, have children cut out their crowns.
3. Hand out markers, glitter, etc., and let students decorate their crowns as they wish.
4. When children are done decorating, have them tape the two ends together to make a circle the size of their head.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking for God's wisdom. Encourage children to pray for a specific situation in which they need wisdom. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 13*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

A KINGDOM TORN IN TWO

Bible Basis: 1 Kings 11:4–6; 12:1–33; 14:22–23, 26–28; 15:11–14, 16–24

Key Verse: Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. —1 Kings 15:11 NIV

Bible Point: God uses bad things to teach his people. I can learn from mistakes.

Resource: *The Story for Children*: Chapter 14: "A Kingdom Torn in Two"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: item and tools to safely smash the item (see below)

Bring in something that you can safely smash and a "smasher." Some ideas include crackers and a rolling pin, or sugar cubes and a meat mallet. Set up the crackers or cubes in some sort of structure, then make a production of smashing them down. You might like to have a volunteer do the smashing. For easy clean up, do this activity outside or over a plastic tablecloth.

Talk about:

- Can we put those back together?
- Tell me about something that got destroyed and you couldn't put it back together.

Say, Our Bible story today is about something that got torn apart and God's people didn't know if it could ever be put back together.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 14*, copies of Divided Kingdom Activity Sheet, safety scissors

Optional: something to make a breaking sound

Give each child an activity sheet. Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 14. You can also have children find 1 Kings 14 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

The Kingdom Divides

As you tell the story, you'll pause as indicated and children will cut their maps into pieces. If your group is too large to have everyone cutting, you can simply cut one map as you tell the story. As you do this, hand the pieces to a few of the children. At the end of the story, these children can see if they can put the kingdom back together.

Optional: have an assistant use something to make a breaking sound as a signal for children to cut. This may be as simple as snapping a pretzel rod in half or playing a downloaded sound of glass breaking.

The first king of Israel was Saul. He was tall and handsome and popular, but he turned out not to be a very good leader. Next came David. David was a great king! Sure, he made some mistakes, but he was sorry for them and wanted to show his love for God more and more. Then came David's son Solomon. Solomon started out as a great king who followed God's ways. But as the years went by, he started making a lot of mistakes. By the end, he had really messed up and he wasn't really sorry. He had stopped worshiping God and no longer led the people in following God. When Solomon died, the kingdom where God's people lived starting breaking apart.

When Solomon's son Rehoboam became king, the first thing he did was make the people mad at him. Obviously, he didn't get his dad's wisdom. So most of the people decided to start a new country, and God let them make a man named Jeroboam their king. Jeroboam wasn't very smart either. He let the people in the new country worship idols—things that were not the one true God. That was a mistake! Pause to make the first cut in your map. You can cut the page roughly in half between Israel and Judah.

The country Rehoboam ruled was called Judah, and the kingdom Jeroboam ruled was called Israel. Show the two parts of the cut map. Set the Judah portion aside for a moment. For the most part, the kings and people of Israel and Judah were very sinful. They worshiped all the wrong things, like sacred stones and Asherah poles. These idols were not the one true God! Read 1 Kings 14:22–23. The people made mistake after mistake. God would have to show them he was more powerful than their idols. He used bad things to teach his people that they should be following him. Kings from other countries attacked God's people and carried away their treasures. Pause and cut some more. Make deep slices into the Israel portion of the map.

But still the people didn't learn their lessons. Everything in Judah and Israel was falling apart. In addition to fighting the kings around them, Jeroboam and Rehoboam were fighting each other, too. And when they died, their evil sons took the thrones and kept up the fighting. That was a mistake!

For the most part, Israel was a big pit of sin. No matter who was king, the people there kept sinning and putting up more idols, which only made God angrier and angrier. But the people refused to learn the lessons God wanted to teach. They kept on doing all the wrong things. Pause and cut. Finish off some of the slices made earlier so that parts of Israel start falling away.

But there was still some hope for Judah. Hold up the Judah portion. Occasionally there was a king there who loved God and who tried to be a good king like David. The first one of these good kings was Asa. He was ready to learn from the bad things that kept happening.

Read 1 Kings 10:11. Asa knew that God had been trying to teach his people something, and he wanted to pay attention! He got rid of all the statues of false gods the kings before him had made. He even took his grandmother out of her job as queen mother because she made a pole to worship the goddess Asherah. Asa cut down the pole and burned it up. Everything he did focused on learning from mistakes and trying to turn Judah around to be a country that worshiped God again.

King Asa didn't get rid of every single place where false worship happened, but he committed his whole life completely to the Lord. He brought silver and gold and other valuable things to the Lord's temple to honor God.

As usual, the evil king in Israel wanted to fight a war against Judah. Asa had a feeling that King Baasha wanted to take all of God's treasures out of the temple. Asa definitely did not want Baasha to use these holy things to worship idols. That would be another mistake! He got the king of another country, Aram, to fight with him against Israel. The two parts of God's people went to war against each other again. Pause and slice into the Judah portion.

Then Asa invaded Israel and his soldiers carried away all the stones and wood Baasha had been using there. Asa used this stuff to build up the cities of Judah.

Asa knew the kings before him had made a lot of mistakes, but he thought the people could learn from their mistakes. It wasn't too late to change! It wasn't too late to serve God. It wasn't too late to worship the one true God. Asa was one of the best kings Judah had seen in a long time. But God's kingdom had been destroyed despite everything Asa did to save it. Israel and Judah had broken apart and would never come back together to be the strong kingdom they had been under David. Pause and finish slicing up Judah.

Take a moment to clean up paper scraps, particularly if you have had children cutting along with you. For a moment of extra fun, you could allow children a few minutes to see if they can put the map back together.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 14*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about how King Asa followed God. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did God's people make him unhappy in this story?
- How does God teach us through our mistakes?

Say, God's people went through some tough times, but God uses even the hard times to teach his people how to live his way.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Knock 'Em Down

Stuff You Need: beanbags, small items to stack (such as blocks), empty boxes, small classroom items

Say, God's people built idols. Even though the idols had no power, the people paid more attention to the idols than they did to God. King Asa knew the idols were wrong and knocked

them down. Engage children in constructing towers from the items you've provided. Then take turns tossing beanbags at the towers to see how hard it is to knock them down. Gather for a discussion.

- Name some things that people today pay more attention to than they do to God.
- Why is it a mistake to pay more attention to these things than to God?

Say, God's people made a lot of mistakes—and still do. But God doesn't give up, and he helps us learn from our mistakes so that we pay better attention to him.

OPTION 2: MISTAKE CHARADES

Have the children think about mistakes they have made and what they have learned from those mistakes. Have children, one at a time, act out their mistake and let other children guess what the mistake was. Then the child should say what he or she learned from the mistake. Let everyone have a chance to act. Children may feel more comfortable acting out a mistake they know about rather than one they made.

OPTION 3: A BROKEN KINGDOM

Stuff You Need: A Broken Kingdom Activity Sheet, envelopes, safety scissors, crayons

Give an activity sheet and an envelope to each child. Remind the group that God's saving power will always bring his believers back together. Have the children cut apart the puzzle on the heavy dark lines. Then have them reassemble the puzzle. When they have done this, have them put the puzzle into the envelope and take it home to share.

OPTION 4: THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

Putting a divided kingdom back together

Stuff You Need: paper (you may want to use a heavier paper like poster board or card stock), crayons, markers or colored pencils, safety scissors

1. Give each child a piece of paper and coloring utensils.
2. Ask the children to picture a kingdom, and then draw what they imagine. You might need to give them starter ideas like castles, moats, kings, etc.
3. When the children are done drawing their picture, ask them to cut it into as many pieces as they want. Encourage them to make as many cuts as possible.
4. When they're done, have them try to put their picture back together.
5. Talk about how difficult it is to put their kingdom back together, but how easy it for God to unite us.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together asking God to help you learn from your mistakes. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 14*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

GOD'S MESSENGERS

Bible Basis: 1 Kings 17:1–6; 18:1–2, 17–18

Key Verse: [Elijah said,] “I serve the Lord. He is the God of Israel.” —1 Kings 17:1 NIV

Bible Point: God encouraged Elijah in hard times. God encourages me.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 15: “God’s Messengers”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As you get started, ask the children to settle down, stand quietly, and close their eyes. Say, **Imagine you’re running from something that makes you feel scared.** Have the children start running in place. **You’re running past a wall of rock. Suddenly you see a small opening in the rock. It’s a cave! Crouch down if you would go in the cave to get away from being scared.** Pause to see if children will crouch. Then tell them they can open their eyes. Talk about:

- Does a cave make a good hiding place? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time you felt like hiding in a cave.

Say, **We all get scared sometimes. We all wish we could just make our troubles go away. Our story today is about someone in the Bible who wished his troubles would go away if he went in a cave.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 15*, poster board

Optional: noisemakers, pompoms

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 15. You can also have children find 1 Kings 17 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

God’s Encouragement

On a poster board, write this cheer:

God says, “Go, go, Elijah.

I’m with you, you betcha!”

If you're using optional noisemakers and pompoms, distribute them to a group of children who will act as cheerleaders for the large group. (If your group is small, everyone can have props.)

You'll need five children to help you. One will carry the cheer poster across the front of the room to lead all the children in a cheer. Four others will participate in presenting the story. You will pause as indicated during the story to ask a game-style question, and the four contestants will compete to answer first. Have the four contestants stand a distance away from you. When you ask a question, they should run to be first to slap a table or the back of a chair, then answer the question.

God's people divided into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. Israel had a series of evil kings. One of the worst was Ahab, whose wife Jezebel was even more evil than he was! At the same time, though, there was a man living in Israel who loved God and did God's work. His name was Elijah, and God chose him to speak to King Ahab.

Elijah went to Ahab and gave him a message from God. The message said there would be no rain in all of Israel until Elijah said it would rain. Of course, Ahab was not pleased with this message. Read 1 Kings 17:2–6.

*Pause for the helper with the poster to walk across the room and lead the cheer. Then ask a game-style question: **How did God encourage Elijah during the years without rain?** Wait for the players to answer.*

Read 1 Kings 18:1–2. Elijah challenged Ahab and his false gods. On a mountain in front of all the people of Israel, Elijah proved that God was the only true God, and the gods Ahab worshiped had no power at all. God showed his power by starting a fire, while Ahab's false gods could do nothing. This made Ahab and Jezebel angry! They were ready to kill God's messenger!

Elijah was afraid, so he ran for his life. He ran and ran and ran. Finally he fell down under a tree and said, "Lord, just let me die!" Then he fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." Elijah woke up. Read 1 Kings 19:6–7.

*Pause for the helper with the poster to walk across the room and lead the cheer. Then ask a game-style question: **How did God encourage Elijah when he ran for his life?** Wait for the players to answer.*

Elijah walked and walked for forty days and forty nights. He kept going until he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. He felt all alone and afraid that Ahab would hunt him down and kill him. When he found a cave, he went into the cave to spend the night.

The Lord said to Elijah, "What are you doing here?" Elijah answered, "The people of Israel have turned their backs on you. I'm the only one left who is doing your work, and they're trying to kill me."

Read 1 Kings 19:11–13b. God said, "Go back the way you came. I still have work for you to do."

Pause for the helper with the poster to walk across the room and lead the cheer. Then ask a game-style question: **How did God encourage Elijah when he was hiding in the cave?** Wait for the players to answer.

Elijah obeyed God once again. He went out of the cave and walked down off the mountain to keep doing the work God gave him to do. He met Elisha, a young man God had chosen to be a new prophet. Elijah's job now was to teach Elisha about giving the people God's message. Finally, Elijah was getting really old, and God decided it was time for Elisha to be the main prophet. So Elisha and Elijah traveled together. They kept walking and talking together. Suddenly a chariot and horses appeared. Fire was all around them! The chariot and horses came between Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah went to heaven in a strong wind. Elijah's long life of serving God was over—and he got to go to heaven without dying first!

Pause for the helper with the poster to walk across the room and lead the cheer. Then ask a game-style question: **How did God encourage Elijah when his life was over?** Wait for the players to answer.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 15*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about some of the things that Elijah did and how Elijah went to heaven. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What made Elijah so discouraged?**
- **How did God encourage Elijah?**

Say, **Elijah's story reminds us that God knows what we feel and he wants to encourage us.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: You Can Do It

Stuff You Need: You Can Do It Activity Sheet, basket

Ahead of time, cut apart the cards on the handout, fold them and put them in the basket. Say, **God encourages us when we're discouraged. One way it does this is through other people—you and me! Let's get some practice cheering each other on.** Have children take turns drawing one of the slips from the basket and following the instructions. The other children will cheer on the performer. If necessary, suggest specific things children can say to encourage each other. Then talk about:

- **Tell me about a time when someone encouraged you.**
- **Tell me some ways that God encourages you.**

Say, **If we open our eyes wide, we'll find ways every single day that we can encourage another person.**

OPTION 2: ENCOURAGEMENT CARDS

Stuff You Need: Encouragement Card Activity Sheet, Encouragement Verses Activity Sheet, safety scissors, glue, other card-making supplies

If possible, duplicate the Encouragement Card activity sheet on colorful card stock. Say, **Giving someone a card can be a great encouragement. Today we are going to make cards with some verses from the Bible to encourage someone who may be going through a difficult time. Think about someone you'd like to encourage with a card.** Give each child a copy of the activity sheets. Have the children cut the interlocking card shape on the heavy black lines of the Encouragement Card Activity Sheet. Fold on the dashed lines. Lock the two pieces of the front together by cutting slits as marked. Then choose one of the verses from the Encouragement Verses Activity Sheet and glue it on the inside of the card. Use any available supplies to decorate the card further. Say:

- Tell me about the person who needs your card.
- Tell me about a time when someone encouraged you.

Say, **God knows when we feel discouraged. Let's open our hearts to the ways he sends encouragement into our lives.**

OPTION 3: OFF TO HEAVEN

Stuff You Need: Off to Heaven Activity Sheet, markers, glue, red, orange, and yellow tissue paper

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the way that God rewarded Elijah for his faithful service. Say, **What a wonderful sight it must have been to see the chariot take Elijah to heaven. Color this picture of Elijah and share with your family.** Have children color the activity sheet and glue tissue paper on the flames.

OPTION 4: GIANT ENCOURAGEMENT CARD

Stuff You Need: poster board, markers, stickers, and other decorating supplies

Fold the poster board in half. Let children decorate and write encouraging messages for your church's staff on the giant card.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking God to show you ways to encourage others this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 15*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Bible Basis: Isaiah 3:1–13; 14:1–5; 48:8–9; 53:1–2

Key Verse: When it is time to save you, I will help you. I will keep you safe. —Isaiah 49:8 NIV

Bible Point: God doesn't give up on his people. God won't give up on me.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 16: "The Beginning of the End"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: stack of heavy books, more than a child can lift

Invite children to take turns lifting a stack of books. You may use another heavy item if that is convenient. As each child takes a turn, add another book to the stack. At any point, children may decide to give up and skip a turn and are "out." Children who continue must be able to lift the stack of books and hold it up for three seconds; if they can't, they're "out." If you have a large group, you can do this with a few volunteers. With a small class, include everyone. Play until everyone gives up or is unsuccessful at lifting the stack. Talk about:

- **What did it feel like when you had to give up?**
- **Tell me about something that happened to you when you had to give up.**

Say, **Our Bible story today is about a time when God's people probably felt like giving up, but they discovered that God does not give up on them.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 16*, basket or bowl, packing peanuts or uncooked macaroni, poster board, glue

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 16. You can also have children find Isaiah 53 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

God Takes and Gives

Use the marker to write, "God never gives up" on the poster board. Use outline style letters. Put the packing peanuts or uncooked macaroni in a bowl or basket. At various points in the story, you will toss handfuls out to the children, representing the things Isaiah said God would take away. Later, children will collect the items and return them to you. At that time, you or the children will glue items into the outlined letters on the poster board.

God's people wanted a king, so he gave them a king. But as the years passed, the kings fell away from following God. The Lord sent prophets to warn the people, but the people ignored God's messengers. They didn't follow God's rules. They didn't listen to God's messages. So God let the punishment come. The kingdom split into Israel and Judah. Kings from other nations came in and took away all the money in Israel and destroyed houses and cities. In fact, the people of Israel were captured and led away to live in other countries.

Things were not much better in Judah, the other group of God's people. A few good kings tried to turn things around, but most of the people paid no attention. God sent another messenger, a prophet named Isaiah, to tell the people to change their ways. If Judah shaped up and started obeying God like they were supposed to, God would forgive them and protect them from the kings from other countries. Isaiah tried really hard to get the people to listen. He told the people all the things God would take away from them if they didn't change.

Throw out generous handfuls of the item you've selected as you name the things God would take away:

- | | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|----------------------|
| • supplies | • heroes | • prophets | • government leaders |
| • food | • soldiers | • elders | • advisers |
| • water | • judges | • captains | • skilled workers |

All these good things would go away because the people were not following God. The people would fight with each other, and everyone would suffer. Pause and show your empty basket; the good things are gone.

Isaiah said, "Your leaders have taken you down the wrong path. They have turned you from the right path." But the people paid no attention. Isaiah said that the cities would fall apart and the people of Judah would be marched off to another country in chains!

But Isaiah's message was not all doom and gloom. He knew that God still loved his people and was not going to give up on them. So his message was also about the good things that would happen after the horrible stuff was over. God was going to bring good things back.

Pause and ask the children to collect the items you threw out earlier and bring them back to you as you name the things that God promised to do for his people:

- God would show his tender love toward his people.
- God would settle the people back in their own land.
- Israel's suffering would end.
- Other nations would help God's people.
- God would break the power of evil rulers.
- God would answer prayers.
- God would save his people.

God said to his people, "When it is time to save you, I will help you. I will keep you safe." Isaiah's message got even better. God let him see things that would happen in the future—way in the future. Isaiah had visions of the Messiah, the person who would save all of Judah and the whole world. Isaiah knew about Jesus hundreds of years before Jesus was born. God wanted to give his people hope for the future. No matter how many bad choices God's people made, he wasn't going to give up on them.

Pause and invite children to glue the collected items in the outlined letters on the poster. If you have a large group, have an assistant put down dabs of glue so children can simply file by and stick an item on. With a smaller group, you can allow children to fill in the letters. As they do so, continue telling about what God had planned for the future of his people.

Isaiah told the people that God's servant would grow up like a tender young plant. He said, "He suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the Lord has placed on his servant the sins of all of us. He gave his life for those who had done what is wrong."

If you have a large group and need more time for children to glue items in, you can read all of Isaiah 53:1–12 from a Bible or from *The Story for Children*. If you have strong readers in your group, you can ask for volunteers to read. Then finish the story time by saying:

Isaiah was talking about Jesus long before Jesus was ever born. That's because God had a plan not just for the people of Israel and Judah, but for all people. He doesn't give up on any of us. He sent Jesus so that all of us can have the same close relationship with God that the Israelites had in the Old Testament. God doesn't give up on his people, and he doesn't give up on us.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 16*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Isaiah's job. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Why did God take so many things away from his people?
- What did God have planned for his people in the future?

Say, **We feel like giving up plenty of times. It's good to know that God doesn't give up on us.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Take and Give Collage

Stuff You Need: fresh poster board or the poster from the Bible story time, markers.

Optional: old magazines, safety scissors, glue

Briefly review with the children the things Isaiah said God would take away from his people: supplies, food, water, heroes, soldiers, judges, prophets, elders, captains, government leaders, advisers, skilled workers. Then review the things God promised for the future: tender love, settle them in the land, an end to suffering, answered prayer, keeping his people safe, a Savior. Divide the poster board with a diagonal line. On one half, write "Take" and on the other half "Give." Invite children to draw pictures or write words in each category. If you wish, provide old magazines to cut pictures or letters and glue them to the poster. Encourage them to fill in every open space for a true collage effect. Ask:

- How did God show that he does not give up on his people in this story?
- How do you know that God does not give up on you?

Say, **No matter what his people did in Bible times, God didn't give up on them, and he doesn't give up on you either!**

OPTION 2: BIBLE VERSE CAKE WALK

Stuff You Need: sturdy paper, marker, masking tape, CD player, music

Use the marker to write words or phrases of the Bible verse on sheets of paper. On an extra sheet, draw a big star. Tape the sheets to the floor in a circle with a step or two in between. Aim to have a circle of about twelve sheets for eight to ten children. Enlarge the circle with blank sheets for a large group. Begin your activity time by reviewing the words of the Bible verse: "When it is time to save you, I will help you. I will keep you safe" (Isaiah 49:8). Play this Bible verse game like a cake walk. Have children walk around the circle while music plays. Randomly stop the music. The child standing on the starred sheet chooses any word from the Bible verse. The player behind this child must begin with that word and say the rest of the Bible verse. If a player chooses the last word, the next player says the Bible verse from the beginning. Start the music again. After the game, talk about:

- Tell me about some times when you need God's help.
- Describe some ways that God helps you.

Say, **This verse doesn't mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us, but it does mean that God is close to us all the time. He's always there to help and plans good things for us.**

OPTION 3: God's Help

Stuff You Need: God's Help Word Search Activity Sheet, highlighters, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Have them work in pairs if they choose, to find all the words in the word bank. Arrange the words on the blanks below the puzzle to show Isaiah 49:8.

OPTION 4: Isaiah—God Won't Give Up on You

Stuff You Need: unsweetened powdered drink mixes, water, paintbrushes, bowls, paper

This watercolor paint will be scented and uses multiple senses for children to remember that God won't give up on them. Make paint by mixing 1 tablespoon of drink mix with 1 tablespoon of warm water.

Give each child a piece of paper and a paint brush. Mix bowls of watercolor for children to share. Have children paint a picture that illustrates a situation in which God didn't give up on them or on someone they know.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God for never giving up on you. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 16*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE KINGDOM'S FALL

Bible Basis: Jeremiah 1:4–10; 2:21–28; 5:1–2; 16:17–19; 2 Chronicles 36:1–16

Key Verse: I say to myself, “The Lord is everything I will ever need. So I will put my hope in him.”
—Lamentations 3:24 NIV

Bible Point: God’s people suffer because of their sin, but God still loves them. His love for me will never end.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 17: “The Kingdom’s Fall”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: “What Happens?” Activity Sheet

Give each child an activity sheet. Ask a series of “what happens” questions that establish cause and effect. The questions begin with simple facts and progress to matters of choice. Every choice has a consequence. After going through the list talk about:

- What happens if you sometimes make the wrong choice?
- What is the purpose of punishment?

Say, **The Bible story today is about a time when God’s people were making lots of wrong choices. Let’s find out what happened to them.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 17*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 17. You can also have children find 2 Chronicles 36 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

God’s Love Never Ends

Before you begin the Bible story, teach the children this cue and response. When you say, “Oops!” they respond by putting their hands on their cheeks, shaking their heads, and saying, “Uh-oh, not again.” Practice the cue and response a few times then begin the story.

How long does it take you to learn a lesson? What does it take to finally get through to you? God might have been asking those questions about his people. Although he was kind and good to them, for years and years and years, they did just as they wanted. They followed

other gods who weren't true gods at all, but just statues and carvings. King after king thought only about himself, and not about God. Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

God sent messengers to his people to warn them what was going to happen. Isaiah, for instance, tried to tell the people that they were going to be carried off as prisoners to another country, to serve another king, if they didn't straighten out. But the people didn't listen. God called another messenger named Jeremiah to warn all the people again about what was going to happen to them. But did they listen? No! Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Jeremiah was a little scared by what God wanted him to do, because he knew the kings of Judah were hard-headed and wouldn't like his message at all. And did they? No! Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

God told Jeremiah to say, "You say to a piece of wood, 'You are my father.' You say to a stone, 'You are my mother.' You have turned your backs to me. You refuse to look at me. Let these gods you have made save you when you're in trouble!" Did the people listen? Did they change their ways? No!Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Jeremiah told the people over and over about the horrible things that would happen if they didn't repent, but no one listened. And then everything started to happen just the way he said. The king of Babylon attacked God's people! Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. Zedekiah was the king of Judah. Zedekiah did what was evil in the sight of God. He didn't pay any attention to the message the Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah. Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem, where Zedekiah lived. All his armies went with him. He surrounded the city so no one could get in or out. That meant no food and supplies could get in or out, either. Zedekiah was scared, and the people were getting desperate. Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Then the Babylonians broke through the city wall. Judah's whole army ran away. The Babylonians chased Zedekiah until they captured him. They took him prisoner! Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah in bronze chains and carried him off to Babylon. Zedekiah had lots of chances to be sorry and change his ways, but he never did. Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Read 2 Chronicles 36:18–20. They should have listened! Oops! Kids respond, "Uh-oh, not again."

Jeremiah, on the other hand, had trusted God and had done whatever God wanted, so God promised to protect Jeremiah so he wouldn't have to live in Babylon as a slave. Instead of putting Jeremiah in chains, the Babylonians let him go and even promised to take care of him.

Jeremiah knew the story wasn't over, though. He knew God had not forgotten about his people forever. Being slaves in Babylon was punishment for their sins. Isaiah, who had come before Jeremiah, knew that one day God would bring his people back. Jeremiah knew this, too. He knew that God's love for his people never ends.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 17*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about what part Jeremiah had in the kingdoms' fall. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What message did God give Jeremiah to tell the people?**
- **What happened when the people didn't listen to Jeremiah's message?**

Say, **When we mess up, we have to face the consequences of our actions. But that doesn't mean God ever stops loving us.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: CARRIED OFF

Stuff You Need: assortment of small ordinary items, masking tape

Bring in an assortment of ordinary household items: mugs, toys, plastic containers, books, office supplies, boxes, kitchen utensils, or use things from around the classroom. Vary the weight and shape of the items. Try to have at least one item for each child. Say, **In today's story, God's people refused to be sorry for all the things they were doing wrong. They had to face the consequence of their choice. God allowed them to be carried off in chains as prisoners to live in another country with another king.** Explain that the game is about carrying things off. Children should work together to use the tape to "chain" the items together. However, they may only make one loop of tape around each item, so they must plan carefully how they will connect the items with adequate support. When everything is connected, see how few children are required to transport the entire chain across the room. Can just two carry the ends of the tape, or must other children support sections of the chain as well? Children may only touch tape, not the items, as they transport the collection. (If you have a very small group, use multiple items per child to increase the challenge.) Ask:

- **Why were God's people carried off in chains?**
- **Can punishment be a way of showing love? Explain.**

Say, **God's people suffered the consequences of their sin, but God never stopped loving them. And his love for us never ends either.**

OPTION 2: I SAY TO MYSELF BALLOON RUB

Stuff You Need: balloons, permanent markers

Briefly talk about what a "speech balloon" is. Most will recognize the device of words in a shape over someone's head, such as in newspaper comics or comic books. Say, **We're going to try to make**

another kind of speech balloon today to show our thoughts. Review the words of the Bible verse: "I say to myself, 'The Lord is everything I will ever need. So I will put my hope in him'" (Lamentations 3:24). Then have kids inflate the balloons and tie them closed. The children can use markers to write the words of the Bible verse on an inflated balloon. Then have them rub the balloons on their hair and try to get them to stick to their heads. How much of the Bible verse can they recite before the balloons come loose? Keep playing and see who can say the entire verse. Then ask:

- Why is it good to remind ourselves—to say to ourselves—that the Lord is everything we need?
- What does it mean to put your hope in the Lord?

Say, Even when we mess up big time, like God's people in the Bible story, his love for us never ends.

OPTION 3: PUT HOPE IN GOD

Stuff You Need: Put Hope in God Activity Sheet, watercolor paints and brushes

Give an activity sheet to each child. Have the students trace over the letters of the verse several times as they recite the verse to learn it. Paint the pot. Have the children take the sheet home and tell their family about Jeremiah.

OPTION 4: FLOUR DRAWING

Stuff You Need: flour or sand, large baking sheets (If you don't have baking sheets, allow children to draw on the tables, but cleanup will be much more difficult.)

1. Let the children scoop out a few handfuls of flour onto their baking sheet (or onto the table in front of them).
2. Have them spread the flour out on the baking sheet so that a thin layer covers the entire surface.
3. Read the Bible story aloud.
4. As you read, ask the children to draw scenes from the story in the flour with their fingers. It might help to tell children that this is a similar concept to drawing in the sand at the beach.
5. Continue reading the story, pausing occasionally to allow children to draw the scene you describe.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God that he still loves us even when we sin. You may want to give the children some quiet time to confess sins to God. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 17*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

GOD WATCHES OVER DANIEL

Bible Basis: Daniel 6:1–23

Key Verse: [Daniel] went to his room three times a day to pray. He got down on his knees and gave thanks to his God. —Daniel 6:10

Bible Point: Daniel is loyal to God and God protects him. I can be loyal to God.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 18: “God Watches Over Daniel”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As children gather, challenge them to a concentration game. Begin by asking them to balance on their left foot and swirl the right foot in a circular motion. After everyone is in rhythm, ask them to move their left arms in an up and down motion—not circular. See if they can concentrate enough to keep arms and legs moving in two distinct motions. Ask:

- Why was that a little bit hard to do (or very hard for some)?
- Tell me about something else you have to concentrate on to do right.

Say, Our Bible story today is about a man who concentrated hard on one thing—staying loyal to God.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 18*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 18. You can also have children find Daniel 6 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

DANIEL STAYS LOYAL

Cut apart the cards on the Bible Story Word Cards Activity Sheets. Be careful to keep the cards in sets as labeled. Pause when indicated during the story and take out the corresponding set of cards. Hold them in your hand or put them on a table, face down. Ask a volunteer to come up and choose a card. Children should not see the words before they choose. Depending on the word chosen, continue the story with the story chunk that uses that word. These chunks appear in boxes below. Use only one story chunk for each set of cards.

God's people were carried off as prisoners to another country called Babylon. They lived in Babylon for a long time. After many years, another kingdom took over Babylon. Darius was the king of Persia. He appointed 120 rulers over his kingdom, then he put three people in

charge of all the rulers. Daniel was one of the top three officials. It turned out that Daniel was also the best of the top three officials or any of the 120 rulers. He did the best of anyone in the entire kingdom. So the king planned to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom of Persia. The other rulers were not happy about this.

Pause to take out cards labeled Set 1. Have a volunteer choose a card. Continue with the story chunk below that corresponds with the word selected.

JEALOUS

The other officials were **jealous** of Daniel. They didn't want him to have the top job. They thought one of them should be in charge of the whole kingdom.

ANGRY

The other officials were **angry** with the king's decision to put Daniel in charge of everything. They thought one of them should get the top job, not Daniel.

FEARFUL

The other officials were **fearful** of what might happen if Daniel was in charge. Maybe they thought he would get rid of them because they didn't do their jobs well.

Read Daniel 6:4–5.

Pause to take out cards labeled Set 2. Have a volunteer choose a card. Continue with the story chunk below that corresponds with the word selected.

CHEAT

The officials hatched a plan to **cheat**. If they couldn't get rid of Daniel the fair way, they would cheat.

TRICK

The officials came up with a plan to **trick** the king into giving them what they wanted.

FOOL

The officials figured out a way to **fool** the king. It would look like getting rid of Daniel was his idea.

All the rulers except Daniel went to talk to the king. They said, "We've agreed you should give an order. For 30 days, don't let anyone pray to anyone except you. If they do, throw them into the lions' den!" The king liked the idea of everyone praying to him, so he went along with the new law. He liked Daniel a lot, but in that moment, he didn't think about Daniel at all.

Daniel paid no attention to the new law. He was in the habit of going to his room three times a day to pray. He did it in front of an open window. He didn't care who saw him. This is what the other officials were counting on. When the king made the new law, Daniel did just what he always did.

Pause to take out cards labeled Set 3. Have a volunteer choose a card. Continue with the story chunk below that corresponds with the word selected.

PRAY

What Daniel did three times a day was **pray**, so that's what he did on this day. He got down on his knees to pray.

KNEEL

Daniel liked to **kneel** when he prayed. So just like always, he got down on his knees to pray.

GIVE THANKS

Give thanks is what Daniel liked to do when he prayed. So he got on his knees to give thanks, just like always.

Some of the royal officials went to where Daniel lived. They saw him praying, just as they expected, and they went running to the king to tattle on him. The law the king had made couldn't be changed. As much as the king liked Daniel, he had to follow the law. So Darius gave the order for Daniel to go into the lions' den. He sealed the opening to the lions' den himself. Then he went back to his palace.

Pause to take out cards labeled Set 4. Have a volunteer choose a card. Continue with the story chunk below that corresponds with the word selected.

SLEEPLESS

The king was **sleepless**. He couldn't sleep a wink all night because he was so worried about Daniel.

RESTLESS

The king was **restless**. All night long, he couldn't eat or sleep because he was so worried about Daniel.

SAD

The king was **sad** about the new law. He worried about Daniel all night long.

Read Daniel 6:19–22.

King Darius had never been happier in his life! He ordered his servants to get Daniel out of the lions' den, and it was all true. He didn't have a scratch on him. Daniel had stayed loyal to God, and God protected him.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 18*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about how Daniel was loyal to God. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did Daniel show he was loyal to God?
- What does this story about Daniel teach us?

Say, **For Daniel, being loyal to God was the most important thing. What a great example for us to follow.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: KNEELING DANIEL

Stuff You Need: Kneeling Daniel Activity Sheet, safety scissors, markers

If possible, duplicate the handout on sturdy paper or card stock ahead of time.

Say, **Let's make a reminder that Daniel was loyal to God by praying even when it was dangerous. He got down on his knees and gave thanks to God.** Give an activity sheet to each child and have

children cut on the heavy lines. Caution them not to cut off the hands or feet. Then fold the figure in half so the edge of the head is lined up with the edge of the toes and with the writing on the inside of the fold. Fold the head back in the opposite direction. Then fold the toes back in the opposite direction, creating knees. Children can use markers to give Daniel a face and decorate his clothing. Read the verse on the figure together. Ask them to hold the figures in a standing position. Ask a series of questions that cause the children to make the figures kneel in response.

- What did Daniel do three times a day?
- What did Daniel do when he gave thanks to God?
- What did the other officials catch Daniel doing?
- Why did the king have to put Daniel in the lions' den?

Say, **Daniel got down on his knees and prayed because he was loyal to God. God showed his power by saving Daniel.**

OPTION 2: DANIEL DRAMA

Stuff You Need: Bible-time clothes, props

Let children reenact today's Bible story. You will need actors for Daniel, King Darius, and the other officials. Children will enjoy using Bible-time clothes and other props throughout the drama. Allow children to perform the drama on their own, only stepping in to prompt the next part of the story. If you have time, do the drama multiple times, changing roles each time.

OPTION 3: DANIEL IS LOYAL AND BRAVE

Stuff You Need: Daniel is Loyal and Brave Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Look at the coloring page. What is on it? (a lion) Daniel must have known that being taken to the lions' den would be dangerous. What made him brave? Color the lion. Then write some things that might scare you.**

OPTION 4: DANIEL AND THE LIONS

Stuff You Need: tan and brown construction paper, glue

For this age group you can precut the circles to make the craft easier. For each child, you will need:

- Eight (8) large brown circles (with the circumference roughly the size of a soda can)
- One (1) large tan circle (with the circumference roughly the size of a soda can)
- Four (4) medium tan circles (with the circumference roughly the size of a fifty-cent piece)
- One (1) medium black circle (with the circumference roughly the size of a fifty-cent piece)
- One (1) medium white circle (with the circumference roughly the size of a fifty-cent piece)
- Two (2) small black circles (with the circumference roughly the size of a dime)

1. Find and count eight large brown circles. Glue them together so they form a slightly rectangular circle. There should be a hole in the middle. This will be the lion's mane.
2. Find the large tan circle. Glue it in on top of the brown circles, though a little above center. This will be the lion's face.
3. Find the medium black circle. This will be the nose. Glue it to the bottom of the face.
4. Find the two small black circles. These will be the eyes. Glue them onto the face above the nose.
5. Find the four medium tan circles. Use two to make ears. Glue to the top of the face.
6. Use the other two to create a muzzle. Glue them side-by-side about halfway down the nose.
7. Ask students what circle they have left. They should have one medium white one.
8. Take the remaining white circle and glue it under the muzzle to form a mouth.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together that God will help you be loyal to him. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 18*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE RETURN HOME

Bible Basis: Ezra 1:1–7; 3:10–13; Haggai 1:2–11; Zechariah 8:2–22

Key Verse: They will be my people. I will be their faithful God, I will keep my promises to them.
—Zechariah 8:8 NIV

Bible Point: God's people promise to follow his ways. God wants me to follow him.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 19: "The Return Home"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: wall

If you have a small class, all the children can participate. With a larger group, ask for several volunteers. Ask children to stand sideways against a wall and put one shoulder and one foot against the wall. Challenge them to try to lift the other foot off the floor. This is more difficult than it looks! After a few tries, explain that this action requires shifting your body's balancing point, but the wall keeps you from doing that. Talk about:

- Tell me about something you've done that looked easy but turned out to be hard.
- Do you like to try new things, or do you like to stay with the old way? Explain.

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll see that God's people reached a point where they had to shift their balancing point. They had to make some changes to do what God asked them to do.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, scarf or length of fabric, noisemaker, pot lids or cymbals, music book, box of tissues

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 19. You can also have children find Ezra 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

The New Temple

Gather a scarf or length of fabric, noisemaker, pan lids or real cymbals, music book, and box of tissues. Ask five volunteers to stand with you as you tell the story. When you point to them, they should use the items you give them.

God's people were excited! After long years of living in a foreign country far away, they were going home! Cyrus, the new king of Persia, sent a message all through the kingdom

telling God's people they could go back to Jerusalem, to their own city, and build a new temple for the Lord. The old temple had been destroyed when old king Nebuchadnezzar carried God's people off to the foreign country. Cyrus was a much nicer king. Now thousands of people got ready to travel. They packed up their stuff and rounded up their animals. Read Ezra 1:6-7b. Forty-two thousand people made the long trip back to Jerusalem, ready to rebuild their land.

The builders in the group got right down to business. They laid the foundation for the new temple right over the place where the old temple had been. And then it was time to party! The priests arrived with their special clothes. Pause and dramatically drape a scarf or fabric around one child, fussing to get it just right. Have the child take a bow.

They brought their trumpets with them. Pause and give one child a noisemaker. Allow a moment for the child to make noise. Point at the priest to bow.

The Levites came, too. They assisted the priests when the people worshiped. They brought their cymbals with them. Pause and give pot lids or cymbals to one child and allow a moment to bang them together. Point at the trumpeter to blow the noisemaker. Point at the priest to bow.

The priests and Levites took their places ready to praise the Lord. They did everything just the way the great King David had done it. They sang to the Lord. Pause and give music to one child. Encourage the child to sing, "La, la, la." Point at the Levite to clang cymbals. Point at the trumpeter to blow the noisemaker. Point at the priest to bow.

All the people thanked the Lord, they praised the Lord. Here's what they said. Repeat after me.

The Lord is good.

Echo: The Lord is good.

His faithful love to Israel

Echo: His faithful love to Israel

continues forever.

Echo: continues forever.

All the people gave a loud shout. Let's hear you give a loud shout of "Praise the Lord" on the count of three. Our musicians can play and sing with us. One, two, three! Pause for a loud shout. The trumpeter should use the noisemaker, the Levite should clang the symbols, and the singer should sing, "La, la, la."

The people were glad because the foundation of the Lord's temple had been laid. Now they would be able to worship the way God wanted them to. Now they would have a place to come and praise God together. Now they could let everyone around them know that they wanted to follow God. Going back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple was their way of saying they were ready to follow God now.

Read Ezra 3:12. Pause and hand the box of tissues to one child. Encourage the child to wail loudly.

Read Ezra 3:13. Let's hear another shout. You can shout, "Praise the Lord" or you can sob loudly. One, two, three! Pause to shout. The musicians can make their noises.

Not everyone in Jerusalem was excited about the new temple. The people who had been living in Jerusalem during all the years while God's people were gone didn't want a new temple. They didn't even want all these strange people there. They tried to cause all kinds of trouble to get rid of God's people and stop the building project, but King Cyrus had given the order for God's people to go back to Jerusalem, so the grumblers couldn't really do anything about it.

The people had to build houses, too. Some of them got distracted with building their own houses and forgot about working on the temple. So God sent messengers named Haggai and Zechariah to remind the people what they were supposed to be doing. Haggai and Zechariah reminded the people that God loved them and wanted them to worship him in the temple. Zechariah told the people that God said, "I will save my people. I will gather them from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people. I will be their faithful God. I will keep my promises to them."

Then the people got back to work on the temple. When it was finished, it was time to party again! Let's shout one more time. One, two, three. *Pause to shout.* Now the people had a place to worship God. God had kept his promise to bring them back to Jerusalem, and now they could keep their promises to follow his ways.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did the people show they were going to follow God?
- Name some ways you can follow God.

Say, **We all make mistakes, but God welcomes us to get right back on the path of following him.** Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: FESTIVAL OF NOISE

Stuff You Need: plastic straws, safety scissors, pot lids or cymbals

Say, **When the people gathered to celebrate at the new temple and to promise to follow God's ways, they brought their instruments—trumpets and cymbals. The Bible says they made a lot of noise!** We're going to make straw horns and make some noise of our own. Show children how to chew on one end of a straw until it's flat, about one inch in length. Then help children cut a "V" shape out of the flattened area to make it look like the point of a pencil. Blow through the flattened end. This mouthpiece must be as flat as possible to create the vibrations that make a sound. Let children make several of these "horns" and cut the straws to different lengths to create different

pitches. If you'd like, let some children toot along while others sing a favorite song, or they can try to play a song with their various pitches. Don't forget to bang cymbals during your festival of noise.

- Why did the people want to make so much noise?
- How do you celebrate that you want to follow God?

Say, **Following God is something to celebrate! Let the world know that's what you want to do!**

OPTION 2: TEMPLE BUILDERS

Stuff You Need: sheets, blankets, classroom items

Say, **In today's Bible story, we learned about how the people of Israel rebuilt the temple. Use the materials to build a temple of your own. It should be big enough for our entire class.** If you have a large class, divide children into small groups of four to eight and give each group supplies to build a temple. Allow children to work together to build a temple. When they are finished, crawl inside as a class and spend some time worshiping God by singing some of your class's favorite worship songs.

OPTION 3: WHERE I WORSHIP GOD

Stuff You Need: Where I Worship God Activity Sheet, crayons or colored pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Explain that the children should draw and color their church, adding as much detail as they can. Have them write a sentence, or words, that describe what makes their place of worship special.

OPTION 4: JOURNEY HOME

Stuff You Need: 9" x 12" pieces of felt, ribbon or yarn, Velcro strips, hole punch, markers, glitter glue, etc.

1. Fold up the bottom third of a piece of felt.
2. Keeping the folded part as the bottom, punch holes along both sides.
3. Use the ribbon or yarn to lace up the sides. Tie a knot at the top of each side to secure.
4. To close the bag, stick a small piece of Velcro on the inside of the top flap and another on the front of the pouch near the top.
5. Decorate using markers, glitter glue, etc.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together asking God to help you follow him this week. Encourage children to think of specific ways they can follow God this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY AND COURAGE

Bible Basis: Esther 1–9

Key Verse: What if you don't say anything at this time? Then help for the Jews will come from another place. But you and your family will die. Who knows? It's possible that you became queen for a time just like this. —Esther 4:14 NIV

Bible Point: Esther gets her heart ready for a hard job. God helps me when it's hard.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 20: "The Queen of Beauty and Courage"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: Are You Brave? Activity Sheet

As children gather, introduce the subject of being brave. Use the Are You Brave? questions to get the children talking. Have them stand up tall if they would answer a question "yes" and squat down if they would answer the question "no." Ask:

- What's the hardest thing about being brave?
- How do you decide whether to be brave or not?

Say, **The Bible story today is about someone who had to decide whether to be brave or not.** Let's find out how she got herself ready for the challenge.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 20*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 20. You can also have children find Esther 3 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

ESTHER'S HEART

Assign children to four groups: Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and Xerxes. Teach these responses to the groups.

- When you hear the name **Esther**, say, "Ooooh, pretty!"
- When you hear the name **Mordecai**, say, "Wise fellow."
- When you hear the name **Haman**, say, "Harrumph!"
- When you hear the name **Xerxes**, say, "Your Majesty."

Only the group assigned to a keyword responds, so children have to be on their toes.

The king of Persia needed a queen. His name was **Xerxes**. You might think a king could just call up a woman and go on a date, but that was not the plan for **Xerxes**. Instead, this king held a beauty contest. Women from all over his kingdom entered the contest. He would choose the one he liked best.

The king chose **Esther**. He put a royal crown on her head and made her queen. He even gave a big dinner party to celebrate getting married to **Esther**. He invited all the nobles and officials, including a man named **Haman**.

Now **Haman** was a proud man. He thought he was better than anyone else. He gave an order that everyone should get down on their knees and honor him when he walked down the street. Lots of people did. One man didn't. This man was **Mordecai**, who was the cousin of Queen **Esther**, wife of King **Xerxes**. Read *Esther 3:5–6*.

So **Haman** cooked up a plan and went to King **Xerxes**. Read *Esther 3:8*. The king said, "Do what you want to with those people." So just because **Mordecai** wouldn't bow down, **Haman** was going to kill all of God's people living in Persia.

Mordecai found out about this plan and came up with a plan of his own. He talked to his cousin, Queen **Esther**, wife of King **Xerxes**. He told the queen everything that was going to happen. His plan was for **Esther** to go to the king and tell him. No one knew that **Esther** was one of God's people, not even **Xerxes**.

Now **Esther** was scared. Even the queen was not supposed to talk to the king unless he called for her to come. And **Xerxes** had not called for **Esther** for a long time. If she went to see him without permission, he might kill her! And people weren't supposed to tell the king what to do. She didn't want to do it! It was just too scary.

But **Mordecai** said to **Esther** that maybe God had made her the wife of **Xerxes** just so she could do something about this huge problem. He knew that **Haman** was no problem for God.

Esther decided she would do it, but she would get ready first. Read *Esther 4:15–16*.

So **Esther** spent three days getting her heart ready for this big huge job. She wanted to know that God was close to her and that this was the right thing to do. She prayed and prayed and didn't think about anything else. **Mordecai** and all God's people in Persia were praying with her. Finally, it was time to see **Xerxes**. Read *Esther 5:1–3*.

Esther didn't want to just blurt out the problem. Instead, she invited **Xerxes** and **Haman** to a dinner party. And then she invited them to another dinner party the next day. **Xerxes** asked again, "What do you want? I'll give you anything."

The moment had come. **Esther** had to speak up. It was time to tell the truth about **Haman**. Read *Esther 6:3–6*. **Xerxes** punished **Haman**, and all God's people were spared. When **Xerxes** found out that **Mordecai** was **Esther's** cousin, he gave him **Haman's** old job. The people were safe, and they would never have to bow in the street again.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 20*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about what Esther did that took courage. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Why do you think Esther made the choice she made?
- How did Esther get herself ready for the challenge of being brave?

Say, **Life is full of hard times. It's great to know that we can face them with God's help.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: STORY PUZZLES

Stuff You Need: Story Puzzle Pieces 1 and 2 Activity Sheets, envelopes, markers, safety scissors

Duplicate the activity sheet on card stock or sturdy paper ahead of time. You could also glue the pages to manila folders for extra support. Give an activity sheet to each child. Have children color the lettering of the words that appear on the handouts. Cut the puzzle pieces apart on the heavy lines. Scramble the pieces from both puzzles together. See how long it takes to separate the pieces and put the two puzzles together. Read the words together to review the story. Ask:

- What did Esther do that took courage?
- Tell me something you have to do that takes courage.

Say, **Esther got ready for her challenge by making sure her heart was close to God. That's good advice for all of us!**

OPTION 2: COURAGE CLUTCH

Stuff You Need: un-inflated balloons, flour, funnels, scoops or large spoons

Sometimes when we have to be brave, we're also nervous. We're going to make a Courage Clutch to have something to squeeze when we're nervous. Have children work in pairs to help each other insert a funnel in the neck of the balloon, then scoop flour into the funnel. Fill the balloon till it's the size of a fist. Tie it closed. As children work, talk about how they might use the Courage Clutch to help them pray when they have to do something hard. Ask:

- What kinds of situations make you nervous?
- What can you learn from Esther about how to handle those situations?

Say, **Esther is a great example of being brave enough to do something hard. She knew she could help a lot of other people, and she asked God to help her be brave.**

OPTION 3: A Hero Like Esther

Stuff You Need: A Hero Like Esther Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the children about what makes a person a hero and how Esther fits that description. Have the children color the picture of Esther and then draw a picture of another person they feel is heroic. It may be a biblical character or anyone else.

OPTION 4: ESTHER's SPECIAL PLACEMAT

Stuff You Need: construction paper, glue stick

1. To prep for this activity:

- Cut a piece of construction paper lengthwise into one-inch strips, making sure to leave a one-inch border along one side so all the strips stay connected. This will be the base of the placemat. Each student will need one.
 - Cut other pieces of construction paper width-wise into one-inch sections. You should have several colored strips when you're done.
2. Have children thread strips of construction paper through their mats. They should go under the first row, then over the next. Repeat until the strip is completely threaded through the placemat.
 3. Repeat with another strip. Then another.
 4. Make sure to push the strips together so the placemat will not have holes in it.
 5. When the last strip is threaded through the placemat, glue down the edges. This will make sure the strips won't fall out of the placemat.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups for courage to do what's right. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 20*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

REBUILDING THE WALLS

Bible Basis: Ezra 7:1, 7, 10–11; Nehemiah 1:2–6, 11; 4:4–6, 13–23; 8:1–12

Key Verse: Don't be afraid of your enemies. Remember the Lord. He is great and powerful.
—Nehemiah 4:14 NIV

Bible Point: Nehemiah was sure of God's power. God is on my side.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 21: "Rebuilding the Walls"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: whiteboard or easel pad and markers, Optical Illusion Activity Sheet

Optional: Optical Illusion PowerPoint slide and projection equipment

If you're not using the Optical Illusion PowerPoint slide, draw lines like those on the "Optical Illusion" page where everyone can see them. While the arrow lines vary, the main lines should be the same length. (With a small class, you can just display the printed page.) As children gather, ask which line they think is the longest one. Then ask, "Are you sure?" or "How sure are you about that?" Reveal that the lines are all the same length. The direction of the arrow lines make us think the main lines are different lengths. Talk about:

- Tell me some things you are sure of. Then tell me some things you're not sure of.
- What makes you sure of some things and not sure about other things?

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll meet Nehemiah and we'll find out what he was sure of.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 21*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 21. You can also have children find Nehemiah 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Nehemiah Is Sure

As you tell the story, you'll pause as indicated and ask the same pair of questions each time: "Do you think ...?" "Are you sure?"

Nehemiah had a job that not many people had. He was the drink-tester for the king of Persia. But Nehemiah's heart was far away in Jerusalem. He wanted to go to Jerusalem and help rebuild the city. First he had to ask the king's permission to go.

Do you think the king will give permission? Pause for responses.

Are you sure? Pause for responses.

Nehemiah was sure that going to Jerusalem was the right thing to do, and the king agreed. When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, he found everything was a big mess! The people were having a hard time. The wall around the city was still broken down, and the gates had been burned. Other people who lived in the area were making fun of God's people. No one seemed to be in charge. Not much was getting done.

Do you think Nehemiah is going to give up and go home to Persia?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure he could help! He was going to get busy doing something about these problems. But first, he stopped to pray. Read Nehemiah 1:5–6a.

Do you think Nehemiah can get everybody to work?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure they could get the job done if everyone worked together. Nehemiah got everybody organized to get to work. Everybody had a job to do, and they followed Nehemiah's leadership. The people worked with all their hearts and built up the wall until it was half as high as they wanted it to be. But the problems were still there. Other people living in that area still wanted God's people to stop building the wall. They still did everything they could to cause problems and get in the way.

Do you think Nehemiah has a plan to solve this problem?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure God wanted them to build that wall. He assigned the families to work on the wall, but he told them to keep their swords and spears close to them. Read Nehemiah 4:14.

Do you think the people were encouraged by this?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure. Read Nehemiah 4:16–17.

Do you think the wall will get built all the way up?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure. At long last, the wall was finished, and it was time for celebration. Jerusalem, God's holy city, finally had a wall to protect it. And to celebrate, the people gathered to worship. Ezra, the priest, stood before all the people and read from the law of God from sunrise until lunch time. Everyone listened carefully, and when he was finished, they bowed down and worshiped the Lord.

Do you think Nehemiah is happy about this?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure that this was the right thing to do. He said to the people, "This day is set apart to honor the Lord your God. Don't be sad. The joy of the Lord makes you strong." Then all the people went off to eat and drink and celebrate.

Do you think Nehemiah got the job done?

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure of God's power. He knew no matter what the enemies tried to do, God was still more powerful. God was on the side of his people, and he's on your side, too!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 21*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about how Nehemiah was sure of God's power. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Why do you think Nehemiah was so sure of God's power?
- How did Nehemiah handle the things that happened that could have made him not so sure?

Say, **The next time you feel alone, remember that God is on your side.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Shape Art

Stuff You Need: Shape Templates Activity Sheet, safety scissors, glue, markers, construction paper
Optional: poster board

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Our story was about God's people building a new wall around the city of Jerusalem. Let's make a picture of what happened in the story by using only certain shapes.** You can have children work individually on construction paper or cooperatively on a

poster board. Cut out the template shapes and have children use these as guides to make as many shapes as they want. Then arrange the shapes to make a picture of people building the wall. As children work, ask:

- How does Nehemiah's example help you in your life?
- Why can you be sure that God is on your side?

Say, **Nehemiah was sure of God's power and knew God was on the side of his people. God is on your side, too!**

OPTION 2: Yes, I'm SURE Song

Say, **Nehemiah was sure of God's power. We can also be sure of God's power and that he is always on our side. Write a song about how God is on our side.** Allow children to work together to write a song about God being on our side. Children may find it easier to write a verse to the tune of one they already know.

OPTION 3: God is on His Side

Stuff You Need: God is on His Side Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the group about how it feels to know that there is someone always supporting you. Say, **Do you think that Nehemiah felt this same way? Color this picture of Nehemiah.**

OPTION 4: Nehemiah Building Walls

Stuff You Need: small boxes (depending on how big you want your bricks, milk cartons and shoe boxes work well), glue, paintbrushes, yellow, gray, or beige washable paint, sand

Optional: tarp

1. Cover box with glue. You can use a paintbrush or let kids use their hands to help spread glue over the entire surface.
2. Coat heavily with sand.
3. Gently shake off the excess.
4. Let dry.
5. When dry, paint over the sand.
6. Let dry.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God for always being on our side. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 21*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE BIRTH OF THE KING

Bible Basis: John 1:1–18; Luke 1:26–2:20

Key Verse: Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.
—Luke 2:11 NIV

Bible Point: God sent a Savior for the world. I can believe Jesus is my Savior.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 22: “The Birth of the King”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: lyrics to familiar Christmas carols

As you open your time together, quiz the class to see how well they know familiar Christmas songs. Explain that you'll say a phrase, and see if they can tell you what comes next in the song. For instance, if you say, “Silent night,” children respond, “holy night.” If children seem to know the easy ones, make the song lines a little harder or longer. Ask:

- What's your favorite Christmas carol and why?
- How do Christmas songs help us remember the Christmas story?

Say, In the Bible story today, we're going to hear the details of the Christmas story. Let's see how well we know them.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 22. You can also have children find Luke 2 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

A Savior Comes

In this story, you will deliberately make mistakes. The children will let you know when they think you've made a mistake and provide the right information.

Say, Listen carefully to the story, because I might get confused. I might need you to help me get the facts straight. If you think I'm saying something that's not quite right, stomp your feet until I stop. Then you can tell me what I said wrong and help me get it right. Begin the story, pausing as indicated for children to stomp and correct you. If children don't stop you, then stomp your own feet and correct yourself.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. The angel went to a young woman named Matilda. Pause, stomp, and correct. Oh that's right; her name was Mary, and she was engaged to a man named Charles. Pause, stomp, and correct. Thanks for straightening me out. His name was Joseph. Mary and Joseph—I've got it now. The angel Gabriel greeted Mary and said, "The Lord has given you special favor."

Gabriel told Mary she was going to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God and give birth to a baby girl. Pause, stomp, and correct. Not a girl? Then it must have been a boy—a baby boy. Mary was pretty happy about this, and she praised God.

Someone else needed to hear this news. Mary was engaged to Charles. Pause, stomp, and correct. I mean Joseph. When he found out Mary was going to have a baby, he wasn't sure he wanted to marry her. Then an angel of the Lord came to him in the bathtub. Pause, stomp, and correct. No, not the bathtub—it was a dream. The angel came to him in a dream and said, "Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Mike." Pause, stomp, and correct. I knew that didn't sound right. The baby's name would be Jesus. That's right, Jesus. When Joseph woke up from the dream, he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. He took Mary home as his wife.

In those days, President Lincoln made a law. Pause, stomp, and correct. That doesn't sound right, does it? It can't be Lincoln. How about Caesar Augustus? Yes, that sounds better. Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, wanted a list of everyone in the whole Roman world. All the people had to go to their hometowns to put their names on the official list.

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. But that's not the town Joseph came from. His family came from New York City. Pause, stomp, and correct. Okay, it wasn't New York; it was Bethlehem. He came from Bethlehem. So Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem, the town of David. Read Luke 2:6–7.

Out in the fields nearby, there were carpenters. Pause, stomp, and correct. Carpenters don't work in a field. It must have been shepherds. They were taking care of their puppies. Pause, stomp, and correct. I guess shepherds don't take care of puppies. They take care of sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone all around them. They were ready to party! Pause, stomp, and correct. I guess it was kind of scary. Those shepherds were terrified. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Read Luke 2:10–12.

And then a whole rock band appeared in the sky. Pause, stomp, and correct. Okay, not a rock band—a large group of angels. They praised God, saying, "May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!"

Then the angels left and the shepherds looked at each other. They said, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened." So off they went to Bethlehem. When they got there, they couldn't find Mary and Joseph anywhere. Pause, stomp, and correct. That's not right. The truth is they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger, just like the angel had said. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone about what had happened. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

Read Luke 2:19.

The light of God had come into the world. That light was Jesus. Not everyone believed in him. Some people did accept him. They believed in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God. Jesus came from the Father, and he was full of grace and truth.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you something special about the baby in the picture. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What is your favorite part of the Christmas story?**
- **What difference does it make if you think Jesus is the Savior of the world?**

Say, **Christmas is a favorite time of year for many people. Remembering that Jesus is the Savior makes it even more special.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WHO AM I?

Stuff You Need: Bibles, index cards, pencils

Say, **Our story today had a lot of different people and places in it. Let's play a guessing game that will help us remember them.** Have children make up their own clues. Assign each child or pair of children one of the characters or places and allow time for them to write three clues using their Bibles. Give one clue at a time, and see how many clues children need before the group correctly names the character or place. Ask:

- **Who were the first people to know God sent a Savior?**
- **What does it mean to you that you can believe Jesus is your Savior?**

Say, **Christmas comes every year, and it seems like everyone is celebrating. But it's important to remember that each person must believe for himself or herself that Jesus is the Savior.** You may want to offer to talk privately with any children who seem ready to express personal faith.

OPTION 2: GREETING CARD ORNAMENT

Stuff You Need: old Christmas cards, safety scissors, hole punch, narrow ribbon in three-foot lengths

Gather enough old Christmas cards so that each child can have three. Try to have a wide assortment of images of the Christmas story. You may want to cut the backs off ahead of time so children only handle the pictures. Say, **Find three pictures that show different parts of the Christmas story.**

Children can string together three cards, or if they'd like they may cut specific images out of the cards. Hole punch the bottom and the top of each picture. String the images together by running a ribbon through the holes, making sure to keep the ribbon behind the pictures. Go in through the top and out from the bottom of each picture. Tie a knot at the bottom of the ribbon and a hanging loop at the top. Ask:

- **How can you use this project to tell someone the story of a Savior being born?**
- **Invite children to say the Bible verse together: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).**

You might want to invite any children who want to know more about believing in the Savior to speak to you privately.

OPTION 3: The Nativity

Stuff You Need: The Nativity Activity Sheet, star stickers, cotton balls, crayons, glue, glitter, other decorating supplies

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the class about the Nativity and review who was there and what was seen. Direct the class to add the details to the picture and decorate.

OPTION 4: Christmas Tree Ornaments

Stuff You Need: clear glass ornaments (or plastic if you can find some that have removable tops), bottles or tubes of acrylic paint (CAUTION: have students wear old clothes and smocks as this paint will stain)

1. Carefully remove the top of the ornament. Pull the top off a little. Then pinch the two wires together to pull the top the rest of the way off.
2. Let students pick out their paint colors. Two or three usually work best.
3. Let student squeeze paint in the ornament. You can add all of the colors at once because the paint won't mix.
4. Have children turn the ornaments being careful not to turn them completely upside down so the paint can spill out. Keep turning until paint covers the entire inside of the ornaments.
5. Let the paint dry for an hour or so before putting the top back on the ornaments for your students.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God for sending a Savior. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

Bible Basis: Matthew 3:1–17; 4:1–11, 24–25; Mark 1:31–2:12; 3:9–15; Luke 8:1–3

Key Verse: People brought to him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses ... Jesus healed all of them. —Matthew 4:24 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus shows people the power of God. I can look for God's power in my life.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 23: "Jesus' Ministry Begins"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: goggles or sunglasses, cotton balls

Say, **How strong is your willpower? Let's see who can resist temptation.** Have one volunteer sit in a chair wearing the goggles. (If you're using sunglasses, make sure they are lightly tinted so the child can see clearly.) A second volunteer stands close to the chair to watch the eyes of the seated child. A third volunteer stands a few feet away and tosses cotton balls at the seated child. Does he or she blink? Depending on your time, you may want to play several rounds with different sets of children to see if anyone can successfully resist the impulse to blink. Ask:

- Why is it hard to resist blinking?
- Tell me some other things that are hard to resist.

Say, **In the Bible story today, the devil tried to make Jesus blink. He tempted Jesus with great things. Let's find out what Jesus did and how it helped him get ready to do God's work.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*, paper, Flight Strips Activity Sheet, scissors, glue

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 23. Divide your class into two groups. Have one group find Matthew 3 and mark it in their Bibles; the other group should look up Mark 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Shows God's Power

Ahead of time, cut apart the flight strips. Fold nine sheets of paper into paper airplanes. Glue one flight strip on each airplane. As you tell the story, you'll pause as indicated to take a flight and find out what Jesus is doing next.

When Jesus lived on Earth, he walked everywhere. Or he may have ridden a donkey once in awhile. If he were on Earth now, maybe he would use an airplane. Let's imagine that we're flying around with Jesus. I'm going to throw some paper airplanes. If you catch one, read aloud what it says. So fasten your seatbelts and let's get ready for our first flight.

The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about Jesus between the time he was twelve years old and when he was thirty. One of his friends might have been his cousin John. John was not only Jesus' cousin, but he was also a special person to God. He preached in the desert, saying, "Turn away from your sins." One day Jesus found John preaching near the Jordan River. Pause to throw Airplane 1: Jesus is baptized.

Read Matthew 3:13–17. Then the Holy Spirit led Jesus on the next part of journey. Pause to throw Airplane 2: Jesus is tempted.

Read Matthew 4:1–2. The devil told Jesus to turn stones into bread so he could eat. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. The devil wanted Jesus to jump off a high building so the angels could save him. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. The devil promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would bow to the devil. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. Then the devil left, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Getting baptized by John and being tempted in the wilderness were two events that got Jesus ready for the work God wanted him to do. Now it was time to start doing that work. Pause to throw Airplane 3: Jesus begins showing the power of God.

Jesus was ready to start his ministry and tell the people that God had sent him to save them from their sins forever. He preached everywhere he went, and people began to follow him. Pause to throw Airplane 4: Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus had a few special friends, called his disciples. One of his disciples was Peter, also called Simon. Read Mark 1:30–31. People saw the power of God and started bringing other sick people to Jesus. Pause to throw Airplane 5: Jesus heals a man with a skin disease.

Read Mark 1:40–42. Pause to throw Airplane 6: Jesus heals a man who can't move.

One day Jesus was preaching in a crowded house. Four friends wanted to bring their friend to Jesus. He couldn't walk, so they had to carry him. But the house was too crowded, and they couldn't get in. So they made a hole in the roof and lowered the man through the hole, right in front of Jesus. Jesus told the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Then he said, "Get up. Take your mat and go home." And the man got up! He walked away while everyone watched. All the people were amazed at the way Jesus was showing the power of God. Pause to throw Airplane 7: Jesus heals people in great pain.

News about Jesus spread all over. People brought to him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses. Some were suffering with great pain, and Jesus showed God's power and healed them. Pause to throw Airplane 8: Jesus heals people shaking wildly.

Some of the people who came to Jesus were shaking wildly. They couldn't control their own bodies. Jesus showed God's power and healed them. Pause to throw Airplane 9: Large crowds follow Jesus.

Large crowds followed Jesus everywhere he went. People came from close by and far away. Everyone heard about the amazing things that Jesus did when he showed God's power and wanted to see for themselves. Jesus traveled from one town to another. He announced the good news of God's kingdom and showed the power of God's kingdom by everything he did and everything he said.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Jesus' baptism. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did Jesus' temptation get him ready to do God's work?
- How did Jesus show the power of God?

Say, We might not be able to watch Jesus do miracles like the people in the Bible, but we can be sure that God's power is still at work. Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: HEALING ART

Stuff You Need: self-adhesive bandages in various shapes and sizes, cotton swabs, cotton balls, first aid tape, gauze pads, markers, construction paper

Say, In our story today, we heard how Jesus healed the sick people. Our Bible verse says, "People brought to him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses ... Jesus healed all of them" Matthew 4:24. Explain that children can use the first aid supplies to make a picture of Jesus healing someone. You may want to review some of the incidents in the Bible story. Ask:

- How did healing the people show God's power?
- How does God show his power in your life?

Say, When Jesus was on Earth, he showed the power of God to the people. God hasn't changed. He still has power and wants to show it in our lives.

OPTION 2: BRINGING EVERYTHING TO Jesus

Stuff You Need: open floor space, small items to pass (see below), basket or box

Ahead of time, collect an assortment of items in various shapes and sizes. For instance, have something round, something flat, something heavy, something light, something tiny, something slippery. Optional: tape labels to the items that describe illnesses in the Bible story. Say, **Our Bible verse reminds us that people with all kinds of illnesses were brought to Jesus, and Jesus healed them. Some of those people went to a lot of effort, like the four friends of the paralyzed man.** Let's think about bringing everything to Jesus while we bring a few items around the circle. Have children sit in a circle on the floor with their shoes off and legs extended to the center. Put a basket in front of one person. Start the items around the circle with the person next to the basket. Children will pass the items around using only their feet—no hands allowed! The last person puts the item in the basket. If an item drops, start it again at the beginning of the circle.

- Tell me what it felt like when we were successful in getting something around the circle and into the basket without dropping it.
- How does bringing people or situations to Jesus help us see God's power?

Say, **Jesus still shows God's power today. When we bring him everything that bothers us—whether we're sick or worried or scared—we can look for how he's going to help in that situation.**

OPTION 3: It's A Miracle!

Stuff You Need: It's a Miracle Activity Sheet, crayons, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about what makes something that happens a miracle. Review the miracles of healing that you just read about. Then talk a little about things they have heard other people say are miraculous today such as someone lost who is found or someone who survives an accident. Remind the class that God is in control and knows what happens to us all. Have the class color the picture of Jesus with the people. Have them write a short thank-you prayer on the back of the sheet, thanking God for his miracles here on Earth.

OPTION 4: Jesus is Baptized

Paper Bag Dove

Stuff You Need: a paper lunch bag (preferably white), safety scissors, white and orange construction paper, plastic eyes, glue, pencils

Instructions:

1. Put the bag flat on the table with the flap-side up. This will be the front of the puppet, with everything above the fold acting as the dove's head. The rest of the bag will be the body. Be sure to keep the opening at the bottom of the bag facing toward you.
2. Cut wings out of the white construction paper. For this age group you can either provide a template for children to use or you can have the shapes precut for them.

3. Cut a beak and two feet out of the orange construction paper. Again, you can create a template or cut the pieces ahead of time for your students.
4. Glue the wings to the back of the body close enough to the outer edge so that you can see them from the front.
5. Glue the beak under the eyes, being careful only to attach it to the head so the mouth will open.
6. Glue the eyes in the middle of the head.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking God for his power. Encourage children to pray about a specific situation in which they need God's power. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NO ORDINARY MAN

Bible Basis: Matthew 5:2–12; 6:5–15; 14:22–32; Mark 4:30–41; 6:30–44; Luke 10:25–37; 15:1–7; John 6:66–71

Key Verse: We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. —John 6:69 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus teaches his friends and the crowds. I can learn from Jesus.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 24: “No Ordinary Man”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: pictures of recognizable logos

Ahead of time, collect several examples of recognizable logos with international meaning. (A simple Internet search for images will yield results.) Some ideas are: the recycle logo, the “no” image (circle with line across it), handicapped access, school crossing sign, hospital, library, airport, food signs (McDonalds, Pizza Hut, KFC, etc.), a cross. As you gather, ask what the symbols mean. Then ask the class to tell you how they learned the meaning of the images. Some children may have specific memories of particular symbols. Many may say they “just know” or “everybody knows.” Ask:

- If you want to learn something new, what do you do?
- What's your favorite way to learn something new?

Say, Our Bible story today is all about learning. Let's see what we can learn about learning.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*, cell phone

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 24. You can also have children find Matthew 6 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passage listed in the story.

STORIES FROM JESUS

As you tell the story, children will make the sound of a phone ringing. Practice the sound ahead of time, and make sure the children know which signal means to start making the sound and which signal means to stop. As you begin telling the story, fidget with your phone.

I hope this phone has a lot of battery power left in it because I'm sure getting a lot of calls. Everyone seems to have a question about this Jesus fellow and the stories he's telling. As soon as I put the phone down, it rings again. Give the signal for kids to make ringing sound.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... Could you repeat your question, please? ... Your question is, "What is a parable?" Yes, I can help you with that. A parable is a story that teaches an important truth. Jesus used parables to teach people truths about the kingdom of God. ... Yes, parables were often about everyday things that the people knew well, like sheep, or mustard seeds. For instance, if a shepherd has 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, the shepherd goes to look for it and celebrates when he finds it. God celebrates when a lost sinner comes home like lost sheep. Jesus' friends and the crowds learned from these kinds of stories. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring again.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... I see. You want to know about the discussions Jesus had with some of the smartest people around. ... One time a young lawyer tried to trick Jesus. He asked, "What must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus wasn't about to be tricked. He said, "What does the law say?" He made the lawyer answer his own question. The man said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as you love yourself." But the lawyer caught on that Jesus was trying to trick him back and said, "But who is my neighbor?" Jesus told another story, and the whole crowd listened in. He told about a man who was robbed and beaten up along the road. Two religious leaders saw him and walked by on the other side of the road so they wouldn't have to help him. But a man from another country saw the man and took care of him. Then Jesus asked that smart lawyer, "Who was the neighbor?" ... Yes, that's right! The one who took care of the wounded man was the neighbor. Neighbors who need love are not hard to find. The people learned from hearing these discussions. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring again.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... That's right, Jesus didn't always tell stories. Sometimes he preached sermons. ... Oh, yes, they were quite long, but the people didn't mind. Crowds would gather and spread out over the mountainside to listen to Jesus preach. ... No, he didn't have to be finished by a certain time. He could preach as long as he wanted, and the people stayed and listened. ... What's that? What's his most famous sermon? ... I guess I'd have to say the Sermon on the Mount was the most famous one. Jesus talked about his favorite topic, the kingdom of God. He let the people know what the kingdom of God would be like and how they could live in this great kingdom. The people who need God the most are the ones who live in his kingdom. The people learned from sermons. Thank you for your call. Put down the phone. Give the signal for the phone to ring.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... Your question is about prayer? Yes, Jesus had a lot to say about prayer. He told the people not to brag when they prayed, but to be humble and pray in private. Prayer is not a way to show off that you know a bunch of fancy words. Prayer is about what's going on in your heart. ... Did Jesus say to pray a certain way? Well, when his disciples said, "Teach us to pray," he taught them to say, Read Matthew 6:9–13 ... Yes, that's right. Jesus' prayer is called the Lord's Prayer, and Christians all over the world pray this prayer. The people learned when Jesus answered questions. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... Your question is about large groups and small groups? Yes, it's true that Jesus often taught to very large groups of people. Crowds followed him everywhere. But he also took time to be alone with his special group of disciples and teach them privately. Jesus' friends learned when he spent time with them. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... Ah, that's a very interesting question. Did Jesus ever use active learning techniques? Yes, he did. One time he took a boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish and used it to feed more than five thousand people. Everyone participated in active learning that day! Another time, Jesus' disciples saw him walking on the water—yes, walking on the water! Peter decided to try. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, Peter walked on water, too. But when Peter got scared, he sank. Jesus saved him, of course. But I'd have to say that was an active lesson for Peter. The people learned from seeing what Jesus did. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.

Put the phone to your ear. Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? ... What did the crowds think of Jesus' teaching? Great question! Jesus was no ordinary man. The people who listened to him teach were amazed at what he had to say, and they said, "We believe and know that you are the Holy One from God." Thank you for your call. Put the phone down and look at your watch or a clock.

Well, I see my shift is over. The questions just never seem to stop. I guess that's because people never get tired of learning from Jesus, even two thousand years later.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about what Jesus is doing in the picture. Then ask them to tell you other things Jesus did. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Name some of the ways that people learned from Jesus.
- Name some ways that you can learn from Jesus.

Say, **We learn all kinds of stuff every day. Let's not forget to learn from Jesus, too.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: EGG PAINTS

Stuff You Need: bowls, egg yolks, powdered drink mix, heavy paper, paintbrushes, clean-up supplies

Caution: Remind children that the “paint” is not edible.

Stir one egg yolk and a little bit of powdered drink mix together for a fun finger paint. Make several colors and make sure children all have access to some variety. Say, **Jesus taught the people in lots of different ways. Let's see how many different ways we can come up with.** Encourage them to paint a picture of how we learn from Jesus. As they work, ask:

- **What was your favorite part of the Bible story?**
- **Tell me about something you would like to learn from Jesus.**

When the pictures are finished, have children tell about what they painted. Say, **The people in the Bible story learned from Jesus, and we can learn from Jesus, too.**

OPTION 2: LEARNING LISTS

Stuff You Need: butcher paper or large newsprint pad, markers

Label one sheet of paper “Everything we believe about Jesus,” and label a second sheet, “What I’d like to learn from Jesus.” Say, **Our Bible verse says, “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God”** (John 6:69). Take a minute to have children repeat the verse with you. **Let's make a list of everything we believe about God.** Act as a scribe and write down everything children say (unless it’s blatantly inappropriate). Then say, **Now, let's make a list of things we'd like to learn from Jesus.** Make a second list. Put up both lists on the classroom wall where you can look at them again over the next few weeks as you study more stories about Jesus. Ask:

- **We can't sit on the hillside and listen to Jesus talk, so how do we learn from Jesus today?**
- **If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?**

Say, **Jesus has as much to teach us as he did the people two thousand years ago. The question is: are we willing to learn?**

OPTION 3: JESUS IS MY TEACHER

Stuff You Need: Jesus Is My Teacher Activity Sheet, Bible, markers, decorating supplies

Give an activity sheet and a Bible to each child. Explain that we all learn things from Jesus just as the people long ago did. Direct the children to the New Testament and if you want, you can direct them to specific chapters and verses of Jesus teaching. Have the students read through the verses or read

them together and find a statement that Jesus says to the people. Write in neat handwriting and decorate as a wall hanging.

OPTION 4: Jesus Calming the Storm

Boat

Stuff You Need: construction paper, hole punch, straws, markers, clay, wide plastic lid (like from a tub of butter or a lid from a disposable cup), decorating supplies

Ahead of time, cut triangles out of the construction paper. Then punch three holes along one side of the triangle.

1. Give each child a sail to decorate using whatever available materials you have.
2. Weave a drinking straw through the three holes.
3. Put a small ball of clay on the lid.
4. Push the end of the straw into the clay so the sail stays standing up.

Optional: Bring in a large tub and fill it with water so children can watch their boats float. Let them create waves to see how afraid the apostles were of the storm.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking God that we can learn from Jesus. Encourage children to choose a specific way they can learn from Jesus this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

Bible Basis: Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17

Key Verse: [Jesus said,] “Let the little children come to me. Don’t keep them away. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like them.” Matthew 19:14 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus, the Son of God, told the children to come to him. I am important to Jesus.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 25: “Jesus, the Son of God”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Start your class with a discussion about important people. Talking about important people will help the children in your class focus on today’s Bible point. Gather your class around you. Have each child tell you about someone they think is important and why. Children may mention parents, teachers, your pastor, the president, or famous celebrities. After each child has named someone, talk about other people who are important. Ask:

- **What makes someone important?**
- **Who do you think is the most important person in the world?** (Let children answer honestly. Ensure that children do not make judgments about whether another child’s answer is right or wrong.)
- **How do you show someone that they are important to you?**

Say, **We’ve talked about a lot of important people. In today’s Bible story, we are going to learn about a group of people who were important to Jesus.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: Copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 25*

Optional: Bible-time outfit for an adult

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 25. You can also have children find Mark 10 and mark it in their Bibles. The children can follow along when Thaddeus reads the Scripture passage listed in the story.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Today’s story is a first person narrative from the perspective of Thaddeus, one of Jesus’ disciples. If you’d like, you can dress up in Bible-time clothes. For more fun, ask an adult who does not normally teach your class to come in and share the Bible story.

Hi! My name is Thaddeus. I'm one of Jesus' 12 disciples. We thought we knew Jesus pretty well. After all, we had been traveling with him for a while and listening to him teach. He'd been doing some amazing things. We'd even seen him feed five thousand men with two loaves of bread and five fish from a little boy's lunch. Have you ever tried to feed that many people with a lunch meant for one child? We thought we were going to look really silly trying to feed that many people with so little food.

Jesus walked on water and calmed a furious storm. He healed tons of people and then he did something none of us would have ever believed if we hadn't seen it with our own eyes. Jesus had a good friend named Lazarus. One day, Jesus heard that Lazarus was really sick, but by the time we got to Lazarus' house, he had been dead for four days. We all knew that Jesus could heal sick people, so no one understood why Jesus hadn't helped Lazarus. We walked to Lazarus' tomb and Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away. Now, I don't know if you know, but it doesn't smell that good inside a tomb. But some people rolled the stone away anyway. Jesus prayed and then shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" We all watched in amazement as Lazarus walked out of that tomb alive and well, as if he'd never been sick.

Jesus is always surprising us with the things he does, but we still thought we knew Jesus pretty well.

One day, Jesus had been teaching the people. When Jesus teaches, everyone tries to get close to him. They think he's pretty special. This time, parents were trying to get their children close to Jesus. They wanted Jesus to bless their children. You see, blessings were really important. A blessing is more than fancy words. A blessing from Jesus had God's power to bring about the words that were spoken. A blessing had power to bring what was said to happen.

The other disciples and I had this one covered. If you didn't know, teaching crowds is hard work. We thought Jesus should have a break from teaching and rest for a while. So, we sent the parents and children away. "Not now," we said. "Jesus has more important things to do." After all, Jesus is the Son of God. He should be spending time with important people like our leaders. So, we kept sending them away. We didn't want the children to take up Jesus' time.

Then, Jesus got angry. We didn't know why he was so angry. We were only trying to help him. Every child from miles around would have come to be blessed by Jesus. He could have been there all night blessing the children. What did we do this time? We were always getting into trouble for things. But every time Jesus would forgive us.

I'd tell you what Jesus said, but maybe you'd like to help me. What Jesus said was so important that three different people wrote about it in their books about Jesus' life. Can you read what Jesus said? (Have a child read Mark 10:14b–15.)

Jesus told the children to come to him. When he said that, some of the children wiggled out of their parents' hands and ran to Jesus. Others were shy and tried to hide behind their parents. Jesus took some of the children in his arms and gave them hugs. He put his hands on some of their heads. But, he blessed all of them. By the time Jesus was done, even the shy children were trying to get close to Jesus.

We were right about one thing. Children came from everywhere to be blessed by Jesus. He said that to receive the kingdom of God you have to have faith like a little child and just believe. I guess we still have a lot to learn from Jesus, but we know that children are important to Jesus. We won't make that mistake again!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 25*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you what the picture says about Jesus. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What did Jesus do in the story?**
- **What does this story show about Jesus and children?**

Say, **Jesus told the children to come to him. Spending time with someone can show they are important to you.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Come to Me Game

Play this active version of the game “Red Light, Green Light” to help children remember that Jesus told the children to come to him. Make sure you have a large area to run or play this game outside. Have children stand against one wall. Two children should stand at the other side of the playing area. One child will say Jesus’ words, “Come to me.” All the children should run or walk quickly toward the game leaders. The second leader should say, “Don’t come.” And then all the children should freeze and stop moving. Anyone who keeps moving must return to the start. The first two children to reach to leaders become the new leaders.

OPTION 2: Jesus Loves the Little Children

Stuff You Need: Jesus Loves the Little Children Activity Sheet

Optional: CD player, CD with “Jesus Loves the Little Children” song

Give an activity sheet to each child. Many of the children in your class will know the first verse to the song “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” inspired by today’s lesson. Teach your class all the verses using the activity sheet. Each verse tells one thing that Jesus did to show the children they were important to him. Sing the song several times together as a class. If you have a CD with the song on it, use it while you sing. Children may also enjoy making up additional verses or motions.

OPTION 3: IMPORTANCE AWARDS

Stuff You Need: Importance Awards Activity Sheet, craft foam, glue, decorating supplies, safety pins, safety scissors

Jesus showed everyone that children were important to him when he spent time with them and blessed them. Ahead of time, cut pieces of craft foam (two for each child slightly larger than the awards on the activity sheet). Let children make an award to wear, and one to give away that shows children are important to Jesus. Give an activity sheet to each child. Let the children cut out the

awards and glue them to craft foam. Then let each child decorate two awards — one for the child and one to give away. Use a safety pin to attach one of the awards to each child's shirt.

OPTION 4: ALL THE CHILDREN

Stuff You Need: Paper, pencils, safety scissors, markers, glue, decoration supplies such as fabric scraps, lace, and wallpaper samples

Optional: Paper doll template from Lesson 2

Lay the paper horizontally in front of you. Fold the paper accordion-style. The more folds you make, the more paper dolls you will have. Have children trace the shape of a person onto the paper with the arms and the legs extending to each side of the fold. Have children cut out the shape, leaving the folds at the arms and the legs. Unfold the paper doll cut-out to reveal a chain of people. Let the children color and decorate the people.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Spend time praying and blessing each child by name. If you feel comfortable, put your hand on the child's head or shoulder as you bless them in Jesus' name. Consider asking parents to come to class five minutes before the end of class to participate in this blessing with you. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 25*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

Bible Basis: Matthew 26:26–28, 33–35, 27:46–49; Luke 22:51–62, 23:32–41; John 13:21–30, 14:1–15, 18:4–10, 19:30

Key Verse: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me also. —John 14:1 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. I can accept his love.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 26: “The Hour of Darkness”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As children gather, ask if they ever think a punishment is unfair. Then give them a combination of a wrongdoing and consequence and ask if they think the punishment is fair for that offense. Talk about several different combinations, such as: talk back to your mother/lose TV privileges; leave a mess in the bathroom/have to do the laundry; hit your sister/have to go to your room; spill your milk/have to eat outside; lie to your dad/not go to a ballgame. Ask:

- How do you decide if a punishment is fair?
- Tell about a time when you did not get what you deserved.

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll hear about how Jesus faced a punishment he didn't deserve so that we wouldn't get what we do deserve.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 26. You can have children look up Mark 27 and John 14 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

God's Love Plan

In this story, children will hold a series of freeze poses while you tell part of the story. Let children know they should hold the pose as long as they can. If they get too tired, they should sit down and wait for the next pose.

Our story begins at a busy time in Jerusalem. It was the Passover feast! Everyone in Jerusalem was getting ready to celebrate the way God saved his people from slavery in Egypt many years before. The Passover celebration included a special meal, and Jesus and his closest friends gathered for this big meal. Pause and have children stand and freeze in a pose that shows them eating or drinking. Remind them that if they get tired they may sit down.

Jesus was thinking about what was going to happen. He knew the time was close when he would have to go away. It was time for him to finish the work God had given him to do. In fact, this would be the last meal Jesus would share with his friends.

Jesus said to his friends, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me also. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If this were not true, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and do that, I will come back. And I will take you to be with me. Then you will also be where I am."

Jesus knew his friends would get scared. He said they would run away and they would tell people that they didn't even know Jesus. One friend, Peter, refused to believe this. He said he would rather die than say he didn't know Jesus!

Read John 14:1–3.

After the meal, Jesus and some of his friends went to a garden. Jesus went off by himself to pray. Pause to have children pose kneeling and praying.

Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him. And even though he was the Son of God, he knew it was going to be hard to do what God wanted him to do. Jesus prayed hard to God for help. His friends kept falling asleep while they waited for him to finish praying. Finally, he woke them up because he knew the big moment had come.

Jewish leaders stormed into the quiet garden with soldiers. One of Jesus' friends, Judas, was with them. Read John 18:4–6.

Judas was standing there with them. Now he stepped up and kissed Jesus. That was the signal that they had found the right man. The Jewish leaders had paid money to Judas to turn in his friend. But Jesus knew all this was supposed to happen just the way God planned it.

Soldiers arrested Jesus, and all his friends ran away—just like Jesus had said they would. Pause to have children strike a pose as if they're running.

The soldiers took Jesus to leaders who wanted him to die. Peter secretly followed the soldiers. He wanted to know what was happening to Jesus, but he was also really scared. Some people started a fire in the courtyard near where Jesus was on trial. Peter sat down with them to get warm. Three people said to him, "You're a friend of Jesus, aren't you?" And what did Peter say? Three times, he said, "No, I'm not!" Peter did just exactly what Jesus had predicted he would do—he told people he didn't even know Jesus!

During the night, the religious leaders had a fast trial. People lied about Jesus to make it sound like he'd done something wrong. In the morning, Jesus was led out to be killed. In those days, criminals were killed by being nailed to a cross. Pause to have children stretch out their arms like a cross. Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, but he was being punished with two other criminals. Soldiers made fun of him, like it was all a big joke.

For long painful hours, Jesus hung on the cross. It was getting hard to breathe, and his whole body was hurting. Read Matthew 27:45–46, 50.

At the same moment, the earth shook so hard that rocks broke apart. A curtain in the holy temple, where God's people worshiped, ripped into two pieces. Dead people starting coming out of their tombs! All this showed that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God's plan. It was no accident.

Our sins get in the way of knowing God—all our bad thoughts and bad attitudes and bad actions and bad choices. When Jesus died, he took the punishment that we deserve and cleared the way for us to know God and live forever in heaven. Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to do what God asked him to do—to take our punishment for us. We don't get what we deserve; instead, we get to be with Jesus. Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. The best choice we could ever make is to accept his love.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about why Jesus was crucified. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Who deserved the punishment that Jesus had?
- Why did God send Jesus to take our punishment?

Say, **Jesus died for our sins. He wants us to accept the gift of God's love.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Envelope Bookmarks

Stuff You Need: Verse Tags Activity Sheet, envelopes, safety scissors, glue, markers

Ahead of time, duplicate and cut apart the activity sheet. Say, **Our Bible verse tells us that Jesus wants us to trust in him. He died for our sins. He took our punishment so that we can experience God's love. We're going to make a heart-shaped bookmark to remind us of God's love.** Depending on the age and ability of your class, you can prepare envelopes ahead of time or demonstrate and have children follow your actions. Cut the bottom corner out of an envelope so that each side is about three inches. Hold the corner in your hand and trim the open edge into the shape of a heart. When you slip the heart over the edge of a page, the heart-shaped edge will point down. Glue a verse tag from the handout onto the heart. Let children decorate with markers. Read the verse together and ask:

- Why would someone volunteer to take another person's punishment?
- What does it feel like when your heart is troubled?

Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to accept the love God gives us.** You may want to invite children to speak with you privately if they want to know more about accepting God's love and living with him forever.

OPTION 2: Cross Toss

Stuff You Need: 3 or 4 small rectangular boxes; tossing items (coins, pebbles, buttons, or beans)

Have children stand in a circle. In the middle of the circle arrange the rectangular boxes in the shape of a cross. Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to trust in him and not have troubled hearts. In this game, we're going to toss our sins and troubles into the cross and let Jesus take care of them there.** Give each player a supply of items to toss. If you think your children are mature enough to name specific sins or troubles, ask them to do so as they toss.

Variation: Set up more than one cross and have only four players at each cross. Give each player a different item to toss so that at the end of the game players can compare how many items they got in the box. Ask:

- **If you could wipe out every wrong thing you've ever done, how do you think you'd feel?**
- **When you see a cross, what does it remind you of?**

Say, **Because of what Jesus did when he died for us, we can live with him forever. God wipes out every wrong thing we ever do and helps us do the right things.**

OPTION 3: Yes, Lord!

Stuff You Need: Yes, Lord Activity Sheet, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about why the children would say "yes" to the Lord and when. Instruct the group to color the letters in joyful colors and hand back in for the teacher to hang in the hallway or classroom.

OPTION 4: CRUCIFIXION

Popsicle-stick cross

Stuff You Need: popsicle sticks, glue, yarn

1. Give each child two popsicle sticks and a length of yarn.
2. Add a dab of glue to one end of the popsicle stick.
3. Adhere one end of the yarn to the glue.
4. Start wrapping the yarn around the popsicle stick.
5. When you reach the end of the stick, cut the yarn and glue to the end.
6. Repeat for the second popsicle stick.
7. Glue the two popsicle sticks together to form a cross.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking Jesus for dying for our sins. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE RESURRECTION

Bible Basis: Matthew 28:2–8, 16–20; Luke 24:36–49; John 20:1–6

Key Verse: He is not here! He is risen, just as he said he would. —Matthew 28:6 NIV

Bible Point: God raised Jesus from the dead. God gives me new life, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 27: “The Resurrection”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: covered coffee mug

As the class gathers, make a fuss about the covered coffee mug, acting as if there's something in it (keep it empty). Talk about what a great drink it is and how you're so glad to have it. Eventually, ask if anyone would like to taste your great drink. Choose a volunteer—who will soon discover that the cup is empty. Ask:

- **Were you surprised when you found out the cup was empty? Explain.**
- **Tell me about a time when you had a happy surprise.**

Say, **In the Bible story today, we'll find out about something that was empty and it was a happy surprise!**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 27. You can have children find Luke 23, Matthew 28, or John 20 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Rose FROM THE Dead

Before beginning the story, teach these actions for children to do in response to the cue words in bold print. Every time you read a bolded word indicate they should do the appropriate action.

Jesus—touch the tip of the right middle finger to the left palm, then touch the left middle finger to the right palm

Disciples—put arms around each others' shoulders

Tomb—scrunch down as if in a cave

Angel—use hands to make halos above their heads

It was a sad, sad day when **Jesus** died. The religious leaders didn't like the things he said and did, and they made up lies about him. Soldiers nailed him to a cross, and he died. His friends, the **disciples**, didn't know what to think. How could this happen to **Jesus**? What was going to happen to the **disciples**? Read Luke 23:52–53. Back then, **tombs** were like big caves. A big stone blocked the opening to the cave.

Jesus had promised to come back to life in three days. The religious leaders remembered that he said that, and they wanted to make sure no one could think it had really happened. They put soldiers in front of the **tomb** to make sure no one tried to steal **Jesus'** body and pretend he was alive. No one really thought **Jesus** would come back to life. But after three days, the soldiers were in for a big surprise. Read Luke 24:1. But what about the big stone?

There was a powerful earthquake! An **angel** of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled the huge stone away from the **tomb**. The **angel** sat on the stone. His body shone like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards were so afraid of the **angel** that they shook and became like dead men.

Read Matthew 28:5–7.

So the women hurried away from the **tomb**. They were afraid but full of joy at the same time. They ran to tell the **disciples** about the **angel** and the empty **tomb**. Read John 20:3–7. The only thing they found was the strips of cloth the body had been wrapped in. When they got back home, they talked with the other **disciples** about what they had seen at the **tomb**.

The **disciples** were still talking about the **angel** and the **empty tomb** when **Jesus** himself suddenly stood among them. He didn't come in through a door or a window. He was just there! They thought they were seeing a ghost!

Read Luke 24:40–42. A ghost doesn't eat fish!

It took awhile for the **disciples** to understand that **Jesus** was really back. After all, people don't come back from the dead every day. So for the next few weeks, **Jesus** showed up sometimes to remind the **disciples** of his teachings. It was important for them to know why he died and came back to life, because it would be up to them to tell everyone else what they saw and heard.

Finally, **Jesus** told his **disciples** to go to a mountain, and he came to them there. Read Matthew 28:19–20.

God raised **Jesus** from the dead. God gives us new life, too. When we believe in **Jesus**, we can live with him forever, and that's great news for everyone!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Jesus' resurrection. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What surprising news did the angel have?
- Why was Jesus rising from the dead a happy surprise?

Say, God used his mighty power to raise Jesus from the dead. He uses the same mighty power to change our lives, too.

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: RESURRECTION TWIST

Stuff You Need: Resurrection Twist Activity Sheet, safety scissors, tape

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, The Bible story today had an unexpected twist. People were expecting Jesus to stay dead, but he didn't. Let's make an unexpected twist to remind us of the story. Have children cut out the two strips from the activity sheet. Tape the two strips together, end to end. It should be one long strip now. Pick up the long strip at the loose ends. Twist the strip, then tape the remaining ends together. The result is an "infinity" figure. The words on the strips will read continuously. Help children read them together. Ask:

- How does this Resurrection Twist remind you of what God did on the first Easter?
- Why did God send Jesus to die and rise again?

Say, God raised Jesus from the dead! God has the power to give us new life, too. He wants us to be with him forever.

OPTION 2: RESURRECTION DRAMA

Stuff You Need: Bible

Optional: Bible-time clothes, props, video recording device

Have the children use the Bible passages from today's story to put on a drama of their own about Jesus' resurrection. Encourage them to use Bible-time clothes and other props. If you have access to a video recording device, record the final drama performance.

OPTION 3: NEW LIFE

Stuff You Need: New Life Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the idea of an empty tomb. What did that mean to the people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God? Have the children add details to the tomb scene while coloring it. Have the children get in pairs and write a sentence or two on the back

of their activity sheet describing the new life that we have because of Jesus' rising. Then ask the children to share what they wrote.

OPTION 4: RESURRECTION EGGS

Stuff You Need: hardboiled eggs (a couple for each student), tissue paper, bowls for water, paper towel, several damp cloths

1. Tear up tissue paper into sections. Size and shape will not matter.
2. Dip paper towel into the water and wet the egg.
3. Place a piece of tissue paper on the egg.
4. Run a damp cloth over the tissue paper to smooth it down.
5. Repeat steps 2–4 until the entire egg is covered.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray thanking God for the new life we can have in Christ. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Bible Basis: Acts 1:2–11; 2:1–6, 23–24, 32–33, 42–47; 8:4–8; 9:1–9, 17–19

Key Verse: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in languages they had not known. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this. —Acts 2:4 NIV

Bible Point: God gives his people the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can live inside me.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 28: New Beginnings

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As the children gather, have them stand in a large circle. If you have more than twenty in class, break into groups of no more than twenty. Have the group hold hands. Then ask children to knot themselves up. They can twist under arms, step over hands, cross to the other side of the circle—but they may not let go of each other's hands. Let them tangle themselves up for a few minutes, then stay in that position for the discussion.

- Tell me something great about being connected to other people.
- If I said you had to wait like this for a long time, how would you feel?

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll hear about a group of people that weren't sure what they were tangled up with. Jesus told them to go to Jerusalem and wait. Let's find out what happened there.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*, poster board, marker, tape

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 28. You can have children find Acts 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

A New Community

Ahead of time prepare three posters. Write one of these words on each poster: *cloud, fire, light*. If you're artistic, add drawings. Hang the signs on three different walls or on chairs in three separate parts of your teaching space. Start out with the group facing the cloud poster.

After Jesus died and came back to life, he appeared to his friends many times. Read Acts 1:4. The disciples wondered what Jesus was talking about. He said, "You will be my

witnesses from one end of the Earth to the other." Jesus was giving his friends a big job to do—to tell everyone about him! The Holy Spirit was going to help them do the job.

Then it was time for Jesus to leave. He didn't just disappear. He was taken up into heaven. His friends watched him rise off the ground until he was so high that a cloud hid him and they couldn't see him anymore. Repeat after me:

Cloud, cloud, the crowd was wowed. Pause for children to repeat.

The people there kept looking at the sky. Suddenly, two men dressed in white clothing stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven." Then the people came to their senses and went to Jerusalem to wait, just as Jesus had told them to do. Have the group turn and face the fire poster.

Read Acts 2:1–4.

Godly Jews from every country in the world were staying in Jerusalem. A crowd came together when they heard the sound of the believers speaking in all these languages. It was confusing, because everybody heard the words in their own language—all at the same time. The Holy Spirit was helping the believers tell the other people about Jesus. But some of the people thought the believers were just acting crazy. Peter, one of Jesus' friends, stood up to tell the crowd all about Jesus.

Peter explained that God had planned long ago for Jesus to die on the cross and then be raised from the dead. And God had promised the Holy Spirit, and now the Holy Spirit had come. Many people started believing in Jesus because of what happened that day. Repeat after me:

Cloud, cloud, the crowd was wowed. Pause for children to repeat.

Fire, fire, the Spirit inspires. Pause for children to repeat.

Things got pretty exciting after that. Believers worshiped and prayed together. They shared meals together in their homes. They shared everything they had. They were a brand new community. However, the religious leaders who hated Jesus didn't like his followers either. They tried to stop anyone else from believing in Jesus by scaring people or even killing them just for believing in Jesus. Have the group turn and face the light poster.

A man named Saul became very good at finding and hurting people who believed in Jesus. A lot of the believers went to other cities so they would be safe. But Saul looked for them everywhere. One day he was on his way to the city of Damascus to find Christians and cause trouble for them. He planned to take them prisoner and bring them back to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 9:3–6.

The men traveling with Saul stood there. They heard the sound, but they didn't see anyone. Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes—but he couldn't see! His friends had to lead him by the hand into Damascus because he was blind.

God spoke to another man in Damascus. His name was Ananias. God sent Ananias to see Saul and heal his blindness. Ananias said to Saul, "You will be filled with the Holy Spirit." Right away something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. He could see again! After that, Saul started telling people about Jesus, and he changed his name to Paul to show he was a different person. Repeat after me:

Cloud, cloud, the crowd was wowed. Pause for children to repeat.

Fire, fire, the Spirit inspires. Pause for children to repeat.

Light, light, it was strangely bright. Pause for children to repeat.

After Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, he was taken up in a cloud. Then the Holy Spirit came to his friends in tongues of fire. And finally, Saul's life was changed by a bright light and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. God gave his people the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can live inside us, too, when we believe in Jesus the way the people in the story did.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you what the tongues of fire are. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What gift did God give to his people?
- What happened to Saul on his way to Damascus?

Say, **The Holy Spirit was not just for Bible times. When we believe in Jesus the Holy Spirit lives in us, too.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: PYRAMID Toss

Stuff You Need: Pyramid Toss Activity Sheet, safety scissors, tape

Give an activity sheet to each child and have them assemble the pyramid. Say, **In our Bible story, we heard about a cloud, a dove, and a light. All these things showed that something new was happening—a new group of people was formed who believed in Jesus.** If necessary, review briefly the story connections of the three symbols: cloud—Jesus went to heaven; fire—the Holy Spirit came; light—Saul met Jesus on the way to Damascus. In small groups, have children take turns

tossing the pyramid. Have children pick it up and look at the bottom side it lands on, then tell one thing they remember about that portion of the Bible story. One side is “your choice” and children may choose any part of the story. Ask:

- Which part of the story would you like to have been part of?
- Tell about the new things that happened in this story.

Say, **God gave his people the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them do the new job of telling everyone about Jesus.**

OPTION 2: LIVING PICTURES

Stuff You Need: Bible

Optional: Bible-time clothes, props

Divide your class into three groups and give each group one part of the story—Jesus going to heaven, the Holy Spirit coming, and Saul meeting Jesus. The groups don’t have to be the same size. The groups should talk about their part of the story and decide on one part to picture. When it’s their turn, they should freeze in poses to show the scene. When everyone has shown their scene, talk about why they chose that part of the story to show. If you have a large class, each group can show multiple pictures.

OPTION 3: COME, HOLY SPIRIT

Stuff You Need: Come, Holy Spirit Activity Sheet, crayons

Give an activity sheet to each child. **The Holy Spirit is a gift from God. It is another way he shows he loves us. The Holy Spirit is with us. In the tongue of fire, write a way that the Holy Spirit shows he is with you.** Color and share.

OPTION 4: TONGUES OF FIRE HEADBAND

Stuff You Need: red, orange, and yellow tissue paper, construction paper, stapler

1. Preparation: Cut construction paper lengthwise into one-inch sections.
2. Staple ends together to form a circle. You might have to staple a few sections together to make the circle large enough to fit around the students’ heads.
3. Tear the tissue paper into pieces.
4. Glue to the middle of the headband so the pieces look like a flame.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Thank God for sending the Holy Spirit to live inside us. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents’ Page.

PAUL'S MISSION

Bible Basis: Acts 16:1–40; 1 Thessalonians 1:3–5; 3:9–13; 4:16–18; 5:16–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:12–18, 27; 13:1–7, 15:21; 16:23–24; Galatians 5:22–25; 6:18

Key Verse: He asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” —Acts 16:30–31 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus saves us if we believe in him. I can choose to believe.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 29: Paul’s Mission

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: 2 books, card, jar lid, pebbles

Ask, **Do you think it's true that everything has a breaking point? Let's do an experiment and find out.** Ask a couple of volunteers to help you set the books a few inches apart, then lay the card on top of them to span the gap like a bridge. Set the jar lid on the card. Let volunteers add a few pebbles at a time to the lid. When the card falls, count the pebbles. Now roll the card into a cylinder. Put the side where the edges come together on the bottom and flatten slightly to set the curved shape on the book. Put the jar lid on top again, and again add pebbles. Children will discover that the curved card can support a heavier load than the flat card. Ask:

- Were you surprised that the shape of the card made a difference?
- Can you think of anything that can't break?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we'll hear about something that broke when no one thought it ever could.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 29. You can have children find Acts 16 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Good News: Believe in Jesus

As you tell this story, you'll pause as indicated to give children three choices and allow them to choose the correct words.

Paul didn't believe in Jesus at first. Then he saw Jesus in the middle of the road. When Jesus talked to him, Paul believed. Then he couldn't stop talking about Jesus everywhere he went. He traveled with his friend Silas. One day they were going to a certain place. Do you think they went to A) the theater; B) a place of prayer; or C) the tennis courts?

Read Acts 16:16–18. Do you think the spirit A) left her; B) argued with Paul; or C) stayed put?

The spirit left her. When her owners realized they couldn't make any more money, they got angry. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the judges. "These men are making trouble in our city," they said. The crowd joined the attack against Paul and Silas. Finally the judges ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and whipped. After that, do you think they went to A) the hospital; B) the market; or C) prison?

Paul and Silas were put in prison. The jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. He put them deep inside the prison and fastened their feet with chains so they couldn't get away. In prison, do you think Paul and Silas A) tried to cut the chains off; B) worried about what would happen; or C) prayed and sang?

Read Acts 16:25–26b. What do you think happened to the prisoners' chains? A) They held strong; B) some came off, some stayed on; or C) they all came off?

Read Acts 16:27–28.

The jailer called for something. Do you think he called for A) soda and chips to celebrate; B) more guards; or C) lights?

The jailer called for lights, then rushed in shaking with fear. He fell down in front of Paul and Silas. He asked them, "What must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus. Then you and your family will be saved." They told the jailer all about Jesus. They also told some other people. Do you think they told A) the judges; B) the people at the jailer's house; or C) the other prisoners?

Paul and Silas told everyone in the jailer's house about Jesus. It was the middle of the night, but the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. Then he and his whole family were baptized because they believed in Jesus.

Early in the morning, the judges sent their officers to the jailer. They ordered him to let Paul and Silas go.

Paul and his helpers traveled to a lot of other places. Paul's teachings helped new Christians understand the things Jesus wanted them to do. Paul also wrote letters to churches. His words were full of encouragement and teaching to help the people be strong in their beliefs. Do you think Paul was A) thankful; B) joyful; or C) full of prayers?

Paul was all these things! We still have many of his letters today in the Bible, and we can read them for ourselves.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Paul's mission. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What broke in this story when no one thought it could?**
- **What good news did the jailer hear because the prison doors and chains broke?**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

Say, **The jailer wanted to know how to be saved, so Paul told him. Jesus still saves us if we believe in him.**

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: PRISON SONGS

Stuff You Need: chairs, CD, CD player

Set up a "prison" by arranging four chairs, two on each side with an aisle in between. Say, **When Paul and Silas were in prison, they sang songs of praise to God. If you get caught in our prison, it will be your turn to sing to get out.** Have kids line up on one side of the prison. As you play music, they will walk through the prison one at a time. Whoever is caught in the prison when you stop the music will sing a line or two from a favorite song. Then resume play. Try to catch each child in the prison at some point. Ask:

- **How did Paul and Silas respond to being in prison?**
- **Why did the jailer want to believe in Jesus?**

Say, **The jailer chose to believe in Jesus, and he was saved. You can choose to believe, too.** If you sense a child may be ready to express faith, extend an invitation to talk privately.

OPTION 2: PRAYER FOR MISSIONARIES

Stuff You Need: information about and prayer requests for your church's missionaries, index cards, pencils

Before class, gather information about some of your church's missionaries as well as prayer requests. Try to choose missionaries who have children the same age as the children in your class.

Say, **Paul and Silas were missionaries who spread the good news about Jesus to others. Let's also take time to pray for our missionaries.** Allow children to take time to read the information and pray individually or in groups for the missionaries. Encourage them to write some of the prayer requests on index cards and pray for them throughout the week.

OPTION 3: JAIL BREAK

Stuff You Need: Jail Break Activity Sheet, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. **Many things can hold us prisoner, like wrong or mistaken beliefs. Belief in Jesus breaks those chains and sets us free! Write some things that you believe about Jesus in the chain links.** Work with a partner if you would like. Share with your group and your family.

OPTION 4: PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON

Stuff You Need: empty toilet paper rolls, brown yarn (about 1 foot), hole punch, safety scissors, hole punch

1. Have children cut the toilet paper roll in half width-wise, so you're left with two circles.
2. Have children cut both of the circles open.
3. For each circle, help children punch a hole on one side of the opening.
4. Use the yarn to connect the two cuffs.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God that you can believe in him. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

Bible Basis: Acts 20:22–28, 36–38; 22:22–29; 27:1, 9–41; 28:1–10

Key Verse: I only want to complete the work the Lord Jesus has given me. He wants me to give witness to others about the good news of God's grace. —Acts 20:24 NIV

Bible Point: Paul served God with his whole life. God wants me to serve him, too.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 30: Paul's Final Days

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: box, large towel, small kitchen utensils or hand tools

Be sure to choose items that children can't hurt themselves with. Some suggestions: can opener, rubber spatula, small screwdriver, clamp, measuring spoon, measuring tape, whisk, wrench, paintbrush, bolt. Put at least five items in the box and lay a towel over the box. Ask volunteers to put one hand in the box, under the towel, and see what items they can identify by touch. Then reveal all the tools. Ask:

- What kinds of jobs would you use these tools for?
- How important is it to like the job you're doing?

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll find out how Paul felt about doing the job that God gave him to do.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*, masking tape

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 30. You can have children find Acts 20 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

PAUL SERVES WITH HIS WHOLE LIFE

Ahead of time, use masking tape to make the outline of a ship on the floor that is large enough for all the children to sit within. Several times during the story, you'll give a signal to get up and move to a different part of the ship.

After Paul met Jesus in the middle of the road to Damascus, he served God with his whole life. He traveled for many years starting new churches and visiting Christians until there

were churches all over the place. Paul taught people to share the good news about Jesus with others. Many leaders in the Roman government wanted to stop the churches from growing because they thought Jesus had been a bad person. Since Paul was teaching about Jesus, these people kept trying to stop Paul from preaching.

Paul knew he might get caught soon, but he still kept on serving God. Jerusalem was a dangerous place for Christians, but when God wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem, that's exactly what Paul decided to do. So he got on a boat headed to Jerusalem. Along the way, he stopped at a few places to say goodbye to his friends as he sailed toward Jerusalem.

Pause and have children get up and move to new spots. Make sure everyone moves.

One of the places Paul stopped was Miletus. From there, he sent for his friends who lived in Ephesus, and they came to see him. He talked about what would happen in Jerusalem. Read Acts 20:22–24. Then Paul hugged and kissed his friends and they said goodbye. He went on to Jerusalem.

Pause and have children get up and move to a new spot.

Once he got to Jerusalem, some Roman soldiers found him, and Paul was taken to prison. A crowd shouted that Paul should die! So the commanding officer gave the order for Paul to be whipped.

Paul said, "Does the law allow you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" The officer didn't know Paul was a Roman citizen. Most Jews were not Roman citizens. The officer was shocked. He should not have put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. Since Paul was a citizen, he had special rights. Paul said that he wanted to have a trial in Rome with the emperor, Caesar.

Pause and have children get up and move to a new spot.

Read Acts 27: 9–11.

A gentle south wind began to blow, and the journey began. Before long, though, the gentle wind turned into a bad storm. The ship was in danger after all. Paul had been right all along. For two long weeks, the ship's sailors fought against the storm, but everything got worse and worse. The sailors got so worried that they even stopped eating. Paul got everyone to eat to keep their strength up and said no one was going to be hurt. Encouraged, the sailors threw everything overboard they didn't need. This made the ship lighter. But even that didn't stop the danger. The ship got stuck on a sandbar and the pounding waves broke the ship to pieces. Everyone on board, 276 people, swam for shore.

Pause for children to move to new spots.

Everyone made it safely! Read Acts 28:1–3, 5, 9–10.

After three months on Malta, the weather was better, and another ship came to pick up the prisoners and sailors so they could continue their trip.

Pause for children to move to a new spot.

Paul was once again sailing for Rome. Once he got there, he was allowed to live in a house, but a soldier always guarded him to make sure he didn't escape. He stayed there for two years. Paul used the time to write letters to churches and preach to people who came to see him at the house. Finally, Paul was put to death. He gave his whole life to serve God. All he ever wanted to do was finish the work God gave him to do and tell people about Jesus.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about how Paul served God. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Do you know anyone who is as serious about their job as Paul was?
- What inspired him to love Jesus and want to dedicate his entire life to God? Are there people like that around today?

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WATER COLORS

Stuff You Need: butcher paper, watercolor paints, paintbrushes, clean-up supplies

Say, **In the story, Paul traveled on several boats. Let's work together to paint a scene.** Talk about the scenes covered in the Bible story and choose together which one to illustrate. Discuss what to include in the painting then make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute. If you have a large class, have children work in several groups. As everyone works, ask:

- What do you think kept Paul going as he served God?
- How did Paul serve God with his whole life?

Say, **God called Paul to be a missionary and spread the good news of Jesus. As you grow older, I hope you'll want to find out what God is calling you to do so you can serve God, too.**

OPTION 2: SHIPWRECKED!

Stuff You Need: shallow tub, water, small plastic boats or bath toys, large Legos or small blocks

Optional: plastic sheeting

Fill the tub with water and put the plastic boats in. Say, **When Paul was on the way to Rome, he was shipwrecked. But even that didn't keep him from serving. Let's think about things that might try to shipwreck us and keep us from serving God with our whole lives.** Explain that the plastic boats represent the things that might keep us from serving, so the task is to hit them or sink

them. Take turns throwing Legos or blocks at the boats. However, before throwing, each player must name something that keeps us from serving. Play for a while, then ask:

- How can we stop these things from getting us off track?
- Name some ways that you can serve God right now.

Say, Paul served God with his whole life. God wants us to serve him, too.

OPTION 3: OUR LIFE PRESERVER

Stuff You Need: Our Life Preserver Activity Sheet, crayons

Give each child an activity sheet. Say, Look at this drawing of a life preserver. This is something that can be used to help people survive if they are having trouble in the water. God is like a life preserver for us! He helps us when we are having trouble in life. He supports us and helps us stay alive. Read the verse in the center of the life preserver. Trace over it in your favorite colors and bring it home to hang up and share with your family.

OPTION 4: PAPER CHAIN SNAKE

Stuff You Need: construction paper cut into strips (between 1–1 ½ inches wide and 8 ½ inches long), plastic eyes or marker to draw eyes, glue (if needed to attach plastic eyes)

1. Give each child several strips of paper.
2. Using one strip of paper, have children bring the two ends together to form a ring. Tape them together.
3. Slide the next strip of paper through the ring. Tape the ends together to form a second ring.
4. Repeat the process until your snakes are as long as you want them.
5. On the first ring, either glue eyes on or draw them with a marker.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking God to show you ways to serve him. Encourage children to look for ways to serve God throughout the week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

REVELATION

Bible Basis: Revelation 1:1–20; 4:1–11; 5:13–14; 19:11–15; 21:10–18, 21–27; 22:7–14; 16:21

Key Verse: Look! He is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him. —Revelation 1:7 NIV

Bible Point: Jesus is coming again. I can live in his kingdom forever.

Resource: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 31: Revelation

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: pictures of items children will quickly recognize

Gather an assortment of pictures of items children can easily identify. These can be magazine pages, photos, or drawings. Try to have between fifteen and twenty. Say, **How good is your eyesight? I'm going to show you some pictures, and you call out what you see.** Then flash the pictures one after another, as quickly as you can. Children may or may not catch what some of them are. If you like, you may show them again more slowly. Talk about:

- Tell me about something you've seen, but you weren't sure what it was.
- What's the most incredible thing you've ever seen?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we'll hear about something that's going to happen that every eye on Earth will see.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*

Optional: props for the eye doctor

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 31. You can have children find Revelation 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Comes Again

You'll tell today's story as if you are an eye doctor. Ham up the part as much as you'd like. Before beginning the story, teach children to say, "John's eyes, John's eyes, what do you see?" They could also use their fingers to put rings around their eyes, like glasses. Decide what the signal will be for them to repeat this phrase, and practice a few times. Pause as indicated in the story to give the signal and allow time for the children to ask the question. Then continue with the story.

I've been taking care of people's eyes for a very long time—certainly longer than you young folks have been around. It seems like thousands of years. I remember one of my oldest patients. A man named John was one of Jesus' best friends. After Jesus went back to heaven, John became one of the leaders of the Christians, and this got him into an eyeful of trouble. When John was an old man, he was captured and sent to an island called Patmos for the rest of his life. While he was on Patmos, he started seeing visions of heaven. I used to examine his eyes and wonder if he had special eyes, but he said the visions were from God. Pause and give the signal for children to say, "John's eyes, John's eyes, what do you see?"

John knew Jesus was coming again some day, because Jesus used to say he would be back. Read Revelation 1:7. He knew that's what it would be like. John's eyes, your eyes, my eyes—every eye will see it. But John didn't know exactly what would happen.

John was minding his own business one day when the Holy Spirit took control of him and he heard a loud voice. Read Revelation 1:12–16. Can you even imagine? I had to have John describe it about six times before I started to get the picture. Lamp stands ... gold ... fiery eyes ... stars in his hand. Pause and give the signal.

John told me this blazing, sun-bright man touched him and said, "I am the Living One. I was dead. But look! I am alive forever and ever!" It was Jesus! Then John looked again, and there was a door standing open in heaven. Yes, heaven! John was getting a peek at heaven. He saw a throne, and the one who sat on the throne shone like jewels. Around the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald—that's an incredibly beautiful kind of precious jewel. Pause and give the signal.

The throne flashed and thundered, and John saw four creatures. The way John described them boggles the mind. I'm still trying to get my head around what he meant. Listen carefully and see if your mind's eye can picture it. These four creatures were covered with eyes. There must have been a bazillion eyes. The first creature looked like a lion. The second one looked like an ox. The third one had a man's face. The fourth one looked like a flying eagle. They all had six wings with eyes all over them, and they never stopped saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God who rules over all." Can you picture that? Pause and give the signal.

John's eyes looked perfectly normal to me, but what he saw was way beyond what I could imagine. Read Revelation 19:13–14. What do you suppose he was the king of? I'm thinking it had something to do with the kingdom of God! He had a name written on him that said, "The Word of God." This guy on the white horse must have been Jesus, and he was leading the armies of heaven! Everyone was riding on white horses, and everyone was dressed in clean white clothes. Pause and give the signal.

Later, the Spirit took John to a huge, high mountain and showed John the Holy City. It was coming down out of heaven. Can you picture that—a city coming down out of heaven? The whole city shone with the glory of God. This city had twelve huge gates made out of enormous pearls and each gate had an angel. This city was made out of gold—pure gold! Even the main street of the city was made out of pure gold. Have you got even one thing that's made out of pure gold? John saw a whole city! Pause and give the signal.

This incredible city made out of pure gold does not need the sun or the moon to shine. God's glory is its light. Jesus said to John, "Look! I am coming soon! I am the First and the Last. I am the Beginning and the End."

The people who follow Jesus will get to live in this wonderful city someday. They will be allowed to go through the gates and into the city. Anyone who wants to take this free gift can have it. Pause and give the signal.

John saw some amazing stuff with his eyes! He wrote down everything he saw and heard in the visions so Christians in all the churches could know what was going to happen. This is the very last part of the Bible, called Revelation. Jesus is coming to Earth again! And we'll be able to live in his kingdom forever!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about John's vision. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Name some of the things John had visions of.
- How does the story of Revelation show what God's kingdom is like?

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

Say, **Jesus is coming again someday. We don't know when, but when it happens, everyone will know!**

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: CLOUD VISIONS GAME

Stuff You Need: white bed sheet, large index cards (or half sheets of paper), marker

Ahead of time, write one word from the Bible verse on each card: "Look! He is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him." As you begin the activity, show the cards to the children and help them read or recognize the words. Then have everyone stand in a circle. Say, **Our game reminds us that Jesus is coming with the clouds.** Spread the sheet out in the middle of the children and have them all take hold of it. Practice flapping it together as high as possible. Then have one child choose a card and stand under the sheet. As the rest of the group flaps the sheet, the child under it flashes the card. See if anyone can see the word. Play until everyone has had a turn under the sheet or until all the words have been used.

- Say, **Let's repeat the verse together.** Lead the children in saying the verse.
- **How do you think you will feel when Jesus comes again?**

Say, **God sent Jesus to Earth the first time as a baby and very few people knew. The second time, he will come in a way so that everyone will know that God is king!**

OPTION 2: Every Eye Mosaic

Stuff You Need: Eye Template Activity Sheet, colored paper, safety scissors, glue, poster board, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Our Bible verse says that every eye will see Jesus when he comes again. Let's use eye shapes to make a mosaic picture of what it might look like when Jesus comes again.** Have the children use the templates and cut out eyes of various sizes and colors. Use markers to draw in eyeballs and eyelashes. Then arrange the eyes on the poster board so that the color groupings form a picture of Jesus coming on a cloud. Ask:

- **What will happen when Jesus comes again?**
- **What kind of picture of heaven did John see in his vision?**

Say, **Jesus is coming again, and we'll be able to live with him forever in his kingdom. He wants us to be there with him!**

OPTION 3: Revelation Word Search

Stuff You Need: Revelation Word Search Activity Sheet, highlighters

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say the lesson's Bible verse together again: "Look! He is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him."—Revelation 1:7 Then read the words in the word bank together. Either alone or in pairs, complete the word search puzzle. Then have the students arrange the words in correct order on the blanks below the puzzle to show the verse. There may be some extra words. Be careful!

OPTION 4: Revelation—Jesus is Coming

Clock

Stuff You Need: paper plates, paint, construction paper, CD or another large circular object for students to trace, brass fasteners, safety scissors, markers

1. Have children paint the paper plate. Let dry.
2. Trace the CD (or circle stencil) onto a piece of construction paper.
3. Cut out the circle to make the clock face.
4. Draw the numbers on the clock face. To make this easier, suggest drawing 12, 3, 6, and 9 first, and filling in the remaining numbers after.
5. Glue the clock face to the paper plate.
6. Using a scrap piece of construction paper, cut out the hands of the clock. Students can draw arrows and cut them out, or just use strips. Just make sure one hand is longer than the other.

7. To attach the hands to the clock, an adult should use a pencil to poke a hole through the center of each child's clock.
8. Then children can stick the brass fastener through the clock and clock hands.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God that Jesus is coming again. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.