

28. King



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Psalm 47:7-8

This session also recaps some basic facts about the Bible and an overview of the story of the Bible so far



AIMS

This session is designed to be an introductory session to the second year of One Big Story. More time has been allowed for icebreaker games, and much of the Bible content is recapping the story so far. It also introduces the choice we have about whether to acknowledge God as King.

God created the world, but people rejected his rule, and this led to many problems throughout the Old Testament and continuing for us now. From the very beginning, God had a plan to provide a solution by sending Jesus.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What has the story of the Old Testament so far shown about the difficulties that can arise when God is not honoured as King?
- What does it mean to honour God as King in our lives today? Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Name Game

You will need: chairs for the group to sit on, scarf

Have the group sitting on chairs in a circle, and one person standing in the middle of the circle. The person in the middle holds a folded scarf (or something else they can tap others with without hurting them).

If the group don't already know each other's names, go round the circle and get them to introduce themselves.

Choose one person who is sitting in the circle to start the game. They have to say their own name and then the name of someone else in the circle: e.g. David to Kirsty.

The person whose name they have said then does the same: e.g. Kirsty to Laura.

Meanwhile the person in the middle of the circle is trying to use the scarf to tap the leg of the person whose turn it is to speak before they finish saying the two names. If they manage to do this, they swap places and take a seat in the circle, while the person who was tapped takes the scarf and stands in the middle.

▶ Cone/ Cup/ Card Flip Game

You will need: either disc cones, cups or cards (any kind of cards will work as long as it is obvious which side is the

(continued overleaf)

back and which is the front), timer

If your group meets in a large space like a gym hall and you have access to a set of disc cones, you could use these. Otherwise you could use cups or cards and play on the floor or on a table.

Lay out the cones, cups or cards with half the right way up and half upside down. Divide the children into two teams. Tell one team that their task is to turn all the items upside down, and tell the other team that their task is to turn all the items the right way up.

Set a timer for a minute and let the children attempt to complete their tasks. Once the time is up, count to see if more items are upside down or the right way up. The team that was aiming to turn them that way wins.

If you want to play another round, make sure you even up the number of items that are turned each way before you begin.

▶ “Would You Rather...” Questions

You will need: printout of questions (from additional document: Would You Rather...)

Help the group get to know one another better by answering “Would you rather...” questions.

You could cut the sheet into slips with the individual questions on and let each person in turn pick one to answer, or you could simply ask the children questions from the sheet. With a larger group, you could split the children into smaller groups to do this activity.

▶ King/ Queen For A Day

You will need: large sheets of paper, pens

Divide the children into groups of three or four, and give each group a large sheet of paper and a pen. Get them to imagine they were king or queen for a day and they could make any new law they wanted to.

What laws would they come up with that they think would make the world a better place?

Get them to write down some ideas and share them together.

Point out that two things are needed for this to work well: the king or queen needs to make good laws that are going to help the people, and the people need to follow them.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Introduction

Explain that in your group this year you are following a programme to look at how the Bible fits together as One Big Story. Tell the children that it is a two-year programme and some of them will already have completed year one. Today’s session is a reminder of the story so far for those who were at the group last year and a chance to catch up for those who are new.

▶ Bible Facts

You will need: Bible, cards (from additional document: Bible facts)

Print out the cards from additional document: Bible facts and hide them around the room before the children arrive.

Show the children a Bible, and tell them that they are going to hunt for some cards to find out some key facts about the Bible. Once the children have found them, go through each card in turn. (You could give the children the option to read the card themselves or to

let a leader read it.)

- 1. The Bible is made up of the Old Testament and the New Testament.**
- 2. The Old Testament talks about the time before Jesus was born as a baby and the New Testament talks about Jesus’ birth and the time after that.**
- 3. The Bible contains 66 individual books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.**
- 4. The Bible contains lots of different kinds of writing: history, poetry, letters, laws, and lots more.**
- 5. The Bible was written over a period of about 1500 years by around 40 authors who were inspired by God.**
- 6. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, but it has been translated into English as well as over 670 other languages.**
- 7. Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God.**
- 8. The Bible is one big story, telling how God created the world, how people messed it up, and how God had a plan to put things right.**

You could also use the Bible bookcase from One Big Story Session 1 (additional document: Bible bookcase) as a visual aid.

▶ The Story So Far...

You will need cards from One Big Story Session 27 (additional document: One Big Story Recap)

Use the cards to briefly recap the story so far.

If you have several children who were part of the group last year, you could ask them to put the cards in order and get them to tell you what they remember about each one.

If most of the children are new

to the group, you could use the script below to fill them in.

Card 1: The story of the Bible starts right back at the very beginning. It talks about how God made the world and everything in it, and he said it was very good. Because God made the world, he was in charge of it. He was King.

Card 2: Unfortunately, it didn't stay very good for long because people disobeyed God and chose not to follow his rules. They didn't want him to be King. Ever since then there have been things that are wrong with the world.

Card 3: God could have given up on people, but he didn't. From the very beginning, he had a plan to sort out the mess of the world, and it began with a promise to a man called Abraham.

Card 4: Joseph was one of the people who came later in Abraham's family. He was taken to Egypt as a slave but later he became a ruler in Egypt and all his family moved there.

Card 5: Hundreds of years later, the Israelites were slaves. (The Israelites was the name for the people from Abraham's family.) By now, Abraham and Joseph had died, but the Israelites were a great nation just like God had promised. God called Moses to rescue the Israelites and help them to escape from the Egyptians.

Card 6: Later, a man called Joshua led the Israelites into the land which God had promised to give to Abraham's family.

Card 7: That sounds like it should be the happy ending, but it wasn't because the people kept disobeying God. God still cared for them and he provided people called judges to lead them.

Card 8: The people decided that they wanted a king, so God gave them kings. So far in One Big Story we've heard about three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. They did some good things, but none of these kings was perfect. The people were waiting for a perfect King to lead them.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Who will be King?

You will need: a Bible

Christians believe that God is the perfect king.

Read Psalm 47:7-8 from a Bible.

Right back at the beginning of the Bible, we read that God is the one who made the world. That means that he knew the best way for people to live, but people didn't obey him. They didn't want him to be their king and that caused a lot of problems.

We can see this today when we look at the world around us or even at our own lives.

God had a solution though, and that was sending Jesus. We'll hear more as we go through this term about why Jesus was the solution to the problem, and the choice for us to think about as we do is:

Would you rather let God be king or you be king?

(Don't ask the children to answer this. Just leave it for them to think about. Bear in mind that some children may be new to the SU Group and just beginning to explore who God is. The aim here is not to encourage the children to respond at this point, but simply to raise the question as something to think about as

they discover more of what the Bible says in the coming weeks.)

"Who Will Be King?" by Matthias Media provides a child-friendly presentation of the Gospel with some helpful illustrations. It can be purchased as a booklet, and it is also available online here: <https://www.matthiasmedia.com/who-will-be-king>

The first two illustrations may be useful for this session.

▶ Prayer

If you have new children, briefly explain that prayer is talking to God, and lead them in a short prayer thanking God for the group and asking for his help in learning more about what the Bible says together.

29. Separation



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

1 Kings 11:1-13, Jeremiah 25:1-11, Jeremiah 52:12-30, Lamentations 3:21-23

After Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel splits in two, and the people are sent into exile



AIMS

To help the children see the seriousness of the consequences of sin – both for the Israelites and for us today – but to understand that God gives hope of restoration.

Disobeying God caused separation for the people as the kingdom split and they were exiled from their land. It also causes separation for us in our relationships with others and with God, but God provides hope of a way for things to be restored.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What are the consequences of sin for the Israelites?
- What situations do you see today where there is brokenness or separation because of sin?
- How does God give us hope in the midst of this?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Empires

You will need: slips of paper, pens or pencils

This game works best with around 8-12 children. Get everyone to sit in a circle and give each person a slip of paper and a pen or pencil. Ask them to choose a well-known person or character and to write it on their slip without telling anyone else or letting them see. Collect in the slips of paper, mix them up and then read out the names on

the slips to everyone.

The children have to guess who wrote each name, and if they guess correctly, that person is captured and has to join their empire.

Choose one person to start. They can choose any person in the circle and say, "Are you..." and guess any of the names on the slips. If their guess is wrong, the person next to them in the circle has a turn.

If they guess correctly, the person whose name they guessed has to move to sit beside them and they are now part of their empire. They can have another go, and from now on their empire can work together to guess the identity of the other players.

The aim of the game is to capture as many people as

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possible in the circle and to end up with the biggest empire.

▶ Going on a Journey

Get everyone to sit in a circle. Tell the children that in the story today we are going to think about some people going on a journey.

Choose someone to start: they say, "I'm going on a journey and I'm going to take..." Then they add an item they are going to take on their journey. (This can be serious or silly.) The next child in the circle then repeats the same sentence, saying the first child's item and then adding one of their own.

Continue round the circle with a new item being added to the list by each person. See how far you can get with the person still remembering all the items on the list. If you have a small group this may mean going round the circle a few times.

▶ Separate the Sweets

You will need: sweets with lots of different colours (e.g. Smarties, Skittles, M&Ms), bowls, cups, timer

You can either have two children competing against one another to see who can complete the challenge first, or you can have one child attempting to complete it in a minute.

Give each participant a bowl of sweets and enough cups so that they have one for each colour of sweet. Their challenge is to separate the sweets by colour and put them into the cups. However, they may only use one hand, and they may only pick up one sweet at a time.

You can find a one minute countdown video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebvtJCu33vM> or you can

simply use a timer on a watch or a phone.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Introduction/ Recap

You will need: map of Israel (from additional document: 12 tribes map), Saul, David and Solomon crowns (from additional document: Crowns and Prophets' Words), Blu tack

Show the children the map of Israel.

We learned before about how God made a promise to Abraham that he would lead his family to a land that would be theirs. It took a long time, but the people finally got there. It didn't end happily though because the people decided they didn't want God to be king and they didn't want to follow his rules. They wanted to be the same as the other countries around them and to have a man as a king.

Those of you who were here last term heard about the first three kings of Israel – Saul, David and Solomon.

(Use Blu tack to stick the three crowns with their names along the top of the map.)

▶ Story: The Split Kingdom and the Exile

You will need: map of Israel (from additional document: 12 tribes map), Rehoboam and Jeroboam crowns and speech bubbles with prophets' words (from additional document: Crowns and Prophets' Words), Blu tack, scissors

Solomon started off doing a good job as king, because he asked God for wisdom and he listened to God and obeyed him. He also had a Temple built, a special place where the people could come to worship

God.

He started well but, when he got older, Solomon's heart turned away from God and he started doing what he wanted. He got involved in worshipping other gods and began leading the people in the wrong direction, and God was angry.

The result was that when Solomon died the kingdom split in two. His son was called Rehoboam and he was meant to take over as king, but the land was made up of twelve tribes, and only two of them would accept Rehoboam as their king - the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

The other ten tribes decided that they wanted another man called Jeroboam to be their king instead, so the nation split into two separate countries.

*(Cut the map to separate Judah and Benjamin from the other tribes.)**

The part with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became known as Judah, and its king was Rehoboam, (stick the crown with Rehoboam's name onto Judah) and the rest of the land continued to be called Israel, and it was ruled by Jeroboam. (Stick the crown with Jeroboam's name onto Israel.)

For the next 400 years there were lots of different kings of Israel and Judah. A few were good, but most of them were really bad and led the people in the wrong direction, away from what God wanted.

Again and again, God sent warnings to the people, telling them to change the way they were living. There were people called prophets, who gave messages from God to the people. (Stick speech bubbles with the prophets' words around the map - "Turn back to God!" and "Stop doing evil!") But the people ignored the

prophets' messages.

Eventually, God allowed the northern part of the kingdom – Israel – to be captured by the Assyrians and many of them were captured and taken away to Assyria.

God told the people of Judah that something similar was going to happen if they continued in doing wrong: “This whole country will become dry and empty. And these nations will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.” (Jeremiah 25:11 NirV) *(Stick this speech bubble onto the map.)*

Finally, God decided he had had enough, and he was going to send the people into exile. That meant they were invaded by the Babylonian army and they were taken there to be slaves. The Temple which Solomon had built for the people to worship God in was burned down and the walls around Jerusalem (the main city) were knocked down.

Many of the people ended up in Babylon, which was about 900 miles from home.

If you have a large group, as an alternative to using the map, you could get the children to stand in groups representing the different tribes, and you could give them larger versions of the crowns and prophets' words to hold up as you go through the story. (See additional document: Crowns and prophets' words - large)

*Additional background information: the question may arise over what happened to the people of the tribe of Simeon, whose land was within the land of Judah. There is no clear-cut answer to this, but it is likely that many of the people moved to live in the northern kingdom of Israel, while some stayed in Judah. 2 Chronicles 15:9 refers to some members of

the tribe of Simeon who had settled among the people of Judah, and in Genesis 49:7, as Jacob prophesies over his sons, he talks about Simeon's descendants being scattered throughout the nation of Israel.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

This is not a very nice part of the story, but the Bible teaches that disobeying God leads to separation:

The people were separated from each other when the kingdom split in two.

They were separated from their land when they were taken away to foreign countries.

They were separated from God because they didn't want to follow him or obey him.

It's the same today. Because there is sin and selfishness in the world and people want to do their own thing, we see separation. We see friendships break up, we see families break up, we see people fighting and arguing, we see countries at war with one another, and it all makes God very sad. And, most of all, the wrong things we do separate us from God.

BUT there is a way back. God promised the people of Judah that one day they would be able to return to their own land, though it would take 70 years. And even when we have messed up there is a way back.

This means saying sorry for what we have done wrong, and asking God to help us change our ways to put God first. It also means being

willing to forgive other people if they have hurt us. It doesn't always happen quickly and it's not always easy to do these things, but the Bible is clear about one thing - God will always forgive us and welcome us back if we are sorry for the wrong things we have done and we ask him to help us.

▶ Prayer Activity

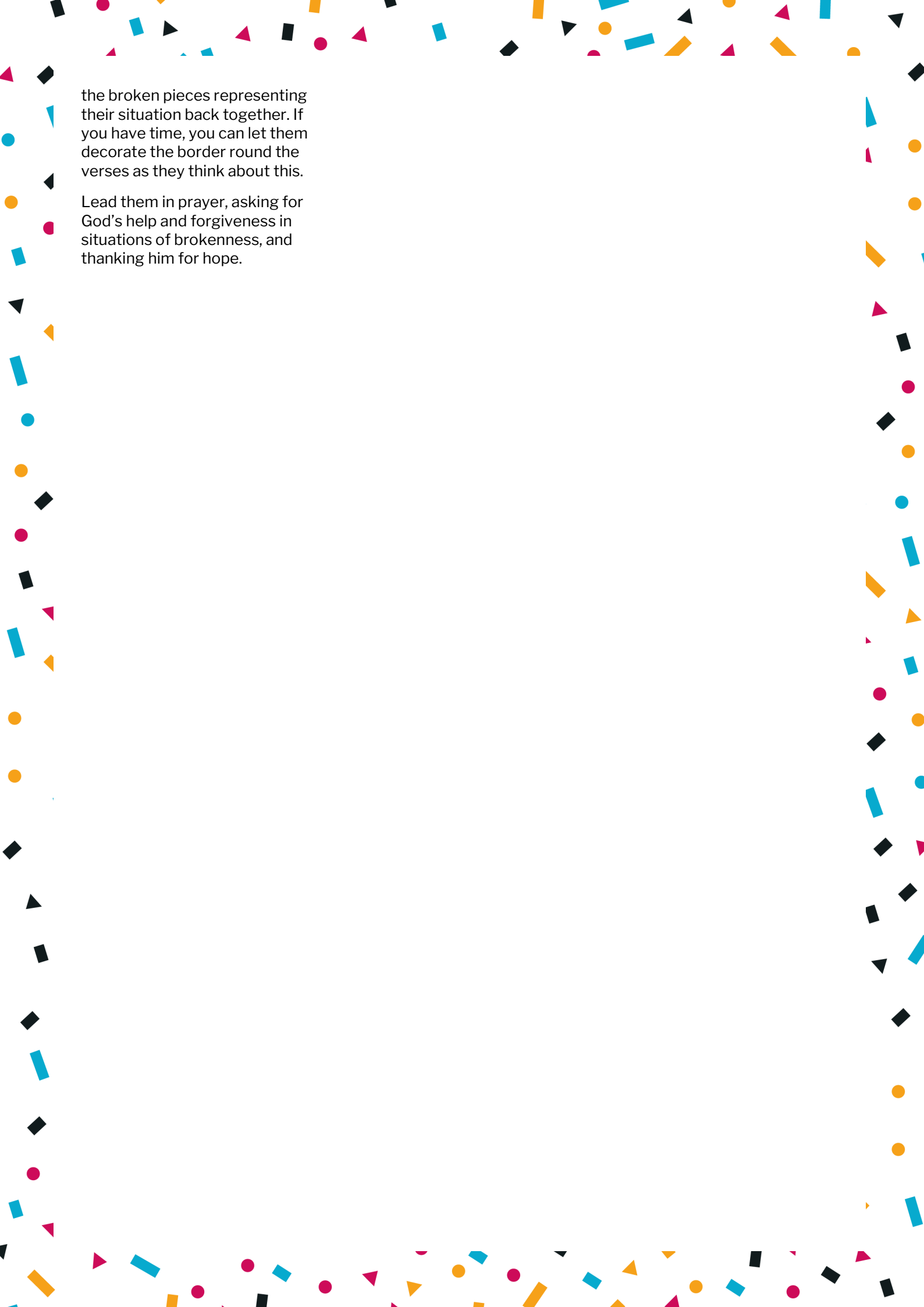
You will need: A5 size piece of card or paper for each child, printouts of Lamentations 3:21-23 (from additional document: Lamentations 3), glue sticks, coloured pens or pencils

Get the children to think of a situation where there is fighting or separation. It could be personal, such as a broken friendship or separation in their family, or it could be something more general such as countries at war, or refugees who have had to leave their country.

Give the children a piece of card or paper. Let them have a few moments to write or draw something that represents the situation they are thinking about, and then get them to tear their piece of paper in half. (Let them know in advance that they will be asked to tear the paper in half.)

Give them printouts of Lamentations 3:21-23 (from additional document: Lamentations 3). Tell them that these are words that one of the prophets, Jeremiah, wrote after the people were exiled. Talk about how he had hope, even in a difficult situation, because of God's faithfulness, and we can find hope in that too. Even though we might not see our situation fixed right away, or at all, we can trust that God is faithful.

Give the children glue sticks to put glue on the back of the Lamentations printout, and then get them to use it to stick



the broken pieces representing their situation back together. If you have time, you can let them decorate the border round the verses as they think about this.

Lead them in prayer, asking for God's help and forgiveness in situations of brokenness, and thanking him for hope.

30. Faithful



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

**Daniel 1:1-21,
Lamentations 3:22-23,
Hebrews 13:8**

Daniel and his friends are exiled to Babylon and put to work for the king



AIMS

To help the children reflect on God's faithfulness, and to understand that no matter what else may change in their lives, God is always the same and he can help them through difficult times of change.

Daniel and his friends were taken far from home to a place where everything was different, except one thing. God is always the same, and knowing his faithfulness to them helped them to be faithful too.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- How did Daniel and his friends' faith in God help them through the changes they faced as they arrived in Babylon?
- How has knowing God's faithfulness helped you in times of change?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Drawing Game

You will need: paper, pens or pencils, blindfolds, cards (printed from additional document: Drawing Game Cards)

You can either let all the children play this game if you have a small group, or you can choose a few people to take part while the others watch.

Get the children to pair up. One member of the pair (Person A) stands or kneels in front of a table and puts their arms behind their back so they

cannot use them. Blindfold the other member of the pair (Person B) and then get them to stand behind their partner and put their arms under their partner's arms so that they are sticking out over the table.

Give each pair some paper and a pen or pencil, and show Person A one of the cards (from additional document: Drawing Game Cards). They have to describe the item on the card to Person B, and Person B has to draw it.

Give them a few minutes to do this, then let the children remove their blindfolds. See who has managed to draw the most accurate picture.

You could comment on the fact that, under normal circumstances, the children would have found it much easier to draw the items on the cards, but in this game the rules were different, and it

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made it much more difficult.

If you have time, you could reverse the roles and play again.

▶ Codebreaker

You will need: code sheets (printed from additional document: Code Sheets), pens or pencils

Tell the children that today they will be hearing about some of the people of Judah moving to a place where the language was different. Get the children to solve the codes to see if they can work out the messages.

The answers are:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (from Hebrews 13:8)

The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace. (from Psalm 29:11)

▶ Fruit and Vegetable Game

You will need: printouts of fruit and vegetable pictures (from additional document: Fruit and Vegetables) printed on card and cut out individually

Divide the children into four teams with one team at each corner of the room. Place the fruit and vegetable pictures in a pile on the floor in the middle of the room.

Each team sends one child at a time to go and pick up one of the pictures and take it back to their base. At first the children take the pictures from the pile in the middle, but once there are none left, they can take them from another team's base instead.

The first team to get six fruit and vegetable pictures at their base wins.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Introduction

Last time we talked about how the Israelites kept on ignoring God, and, because of this, the kingdom split in two. Then later, they were sent away as slaves to a foreign land and told that they would have to stay there for 70 years. The people of Judah were taken away to Babylon which was about 900 miles away from home.

Imagine what that would be like. It's roughly the same distance as going from Scotland to Spain or Austria or Poland. Of course it's nice to go on holiday to those places, but imagine what it would be like if you didn't have a choice – if you were separated from your family and taken to one of those places with no idea when you would be back, or if you would ever get back home.

What kind of things would be different there? (e.g. the language, the food, the way people lived)

Another thing that was different for the people who were taken to Babylon was that the people there had different gods. Today we're going to hear about what happened to some of the people of Judah who were taken to Babylon.

▶ Daniel's Story

You will need: crown and robe (optional) for King Nebuchadnezzar, name cards (printed double-sided from additional document: Name Cards)

You can buy cardboard crowns to decorate from Baker Ross: <https://www.bakerross.co.uk/card-crowns> or you can make your

own.

Choose one of the children to be King Nebuchadnezzar. You could give him a robe and a crown to wear and let him sit on a chair, representing his throne.

Choose someone else to be the chief of King Nebuchadnezzar's staff, and get them to stand beside the king. Tell the rest of the children that they can be some of the people of Judah who were taken to Babylon.

The king of Babylon was called Nebuchadnezzar. He asked for some of the people of Judah to be brought to his palace. He wanted young men who were strong, healthy, good-looking and intelligent. He wanted them to be trained and taught all about how things were done in Babylon. This had to happen for three years and then, when their training was finished, they would be ready to work in the king's palace. The king also said that each day they were to get special food and wine from his own kitchen.

Four of the men from Judah were called Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah and they were chosen to be trained up to work for the king.

(You could let the child playing the king choose four people to be Daniel and his friends, or a leader could choose. Give the four children name cards, and get them to hold them with their original names on show.)

Explain that something else was about to change for these four men. King Nebuchadnezzar decided to change their names so that they had Babylonian names.

Get the children to turn their name cards round to reveal their new names.

Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Hananiah was called Shadrach.

Mishael was called Meshach.

Azariah was called
Abednego.

These four men were determined to follow God and, even in a new country where everything was so different, they wanted to stay true to God. They went along with the training, but they didn't want to eat the king's food because some of it had been offered as a sacrifice to other gods and they didn't think it was right to eat it.

(Encourage the children to act out the rest of the story as you tell it.)

Daniel went to the chief of staff and asked if he and his three friends could have permission not to eat the king's food but to eat vegetables and drink water instead.

The chief of staff liked Daniel and was pleased with him, but he was scared to agree. He said, "The king has asked that you eat his food. If I let you eat something else instead and you don't look as strong and healthy as the other young men, I'm worried that the king will have me killed."

Daniel asked if they could try it out for ten days. He suggested that he and his friends could eat vegetables and drink water for ten days and then they could see how healthy they were compared to the other men. Then the chief of staff could decide whether they were allowed to continue to have vegetables and water.

At the end of the ten days Daniel and his friends looked much better than all the other men. They were much stronger and healthier, and so they were allowed to continue to eat vegetables and drink water every day instead of having the

king's food.

They continued to be faithful to God and God blessed them. He gave them wisdom and helped them do well at all the things they were learning. When the training was complete, all the men were brought to the king and no-one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He found that they knew more and worked better than anyone else in his kingdom and so they were given good jobs in his palace.

▶ Testament – The Bible In Animation Video

You will need: equipment to play video

As an alternative way of telling the story, you could show the video found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9mwQkl6hnM&t=70s>

The relevant part for today's story is from 2.14-6.53.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection and Prayer

You will need: large sheet of paper, pens, Bible or cards with verses (from additional document: Bible Verses)

Daniel and his friends faced lots of changes. They were in a new land with different food, a different language, different names, and a whole new way of life, and it must have been hard for them.

We may not face so many changes all at once, but all of us have things changing in our lives at times. There are times when we can feel like Daniel.

Using a large sheet of paper, get the children to make a list of changes we may

face, e.g moving house, moving school, a family member dying, a parent getting a new job...

Some changes may be good, and some may be very difficult and painful. Using a different colour, get them to add to the sheet of paper some of the feelings we might have about the changes, both good and bad.

No matter what else changes, the Bible says that one thing that always stays the same is God, that he never changes.

You could look up the verses Lamentations 3:22-23 and Hebrews 13:8 or show them cards with the verses on (from additional document: Bible verses).

Daniel and his friends knew this. They had learned to trust God in Judah and they knew they could still trust him in Babylon, and God was with them and helped them. God was faithful to them, and because they trusted in that, they were able to be faithful to him.

Christians believe that God is still the same today, that we can trust him no matter what else is changing in our lives and no matter what difficult decisions we might have to make.

Lead the children in prayer thanking God that he is always the same and asking for his help in difficult changes we might face.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ **Song: Through It All-
Lifetree Kids**

*You will need: equipment to
play video*

This song fits well with the
theme. You can find it
at: [https://
www.youtube.com/watch?
v=IPdDB2jiMic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPdDB2jiMic)

31. Protection



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel is thrown into the lions' den for disobeying the king's law and continuing to pray, but God protects him



AIMS

To help the children think about situations we might face where we have the choice to follow God or do our own thing, and to reflect on how God's promises can help us in these situations.

Daniel had a difficult choice: to obey the king, or to stay true to God and risk being thrown into the lions' den. He chose to obey God, and experienced God's power and protection.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What do you think enabled Daniel to make the choice to obey God rather than the king?
- What does Daniel's story teach us about God?
- What difficult choices might we face as Christians today, and how can God help us in these?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Sleeping Lions

All the children are lions apart from two who are hunters. The lions lie on the floor and their aim is to stay still and quiet. Meanwhile, the hunters can move around, trying to get the lions to move or make a noise. They are not allowed to touch the lions, but they can move around, talk to them, make noises etc. Any lion who moves or makes a noise joins the hunters. The winner is the last child to remain a lion.

▶ Lions' Den Game

Get all the children to line up against the wall at one side of the room. Choose one child to be a lion and get them to stand in the middle of the room. When the leader tells them to go, the children have to run across the room to the opposite wall, trying not to be caught by the lion. Anyone who is caught has to stop and stand still in the place where they were caught.

When the leader tells them, the children who were not caught have to run back to the other wall again. This time as well as being caught by the lion, they can also be caught by the children who are standing still, having been caught by the lion in the previous round. However, these children can only catch others by reaching out with their hands; the lion is the only

(continued overleaf)

one who is allowed to run or move their feet.

Continue the game in this manner with the children running from one wall to the other until everyone has been caught apart from one child who is the winner.

▶ **Protect The President**

You will need: a soft ball

Get all the children to stand in a circle, and choose two children to stand in the middle of the circle: one as the President and the other as the Bodyguard.

The children forming the circle have to throw the ball, attempting to hit the President, while the Bodyguard tries to defend the President.

If the ball touches the President, they are no longer the President and they have to join the circle. Meanwhile the child who was Bodyguard becomes the new President, and the child who threw the ball when it hit the President becomes the new Bodyguard.



▶ **Recap/ Introduction**

You will need: print-out of the word "faithful" (from additional document: Faithful) - optional

Last time we heard about how the people of Judah were taken away as slaves to Babylon because they kept on disobeying God.

You could display the word "faithful" to remind the children of the key point from last week's session.

We heard about a man called Daniel and his three friends and how they wanted to stay faithful to God even though they were in a strange land.

They chose not to eat the king's food but to eat vegetables and drink water. God was faithful to them too, and he helped them become strong and healthy and good at their work. When their training was complete, they were given good jobs by the king.

▶ **Daniel in the Lions' Den Story**

You will need: robe (optional) and crown for King Darius, words for Daniel and King Darius (from additional document: Daniel words), lion masks, scroll containing new law - this can simply be a rolled-up piece of paper or card

You can buy cardboard crowns to decorate from Baker Ross: <https://www.bakerross.co.uk/card-crowns> or you can make your own.

You can find a template to make lion masks here: <https://www.firstpalette.com/printable/lion-mask.html>

A document containing the words for the scroll can be found in additional document: New law

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a young man, but the most famous story about him is something that happened many years later after a new king had taken over in Babylon.

Get some volunteers to act out the story as you tell it - choose people to be Darius, Daniel, two or three other workers and two lions.

Give Darius a crown and robe to wear and let him sit on a chair to represent his throne. Give words to Daniel and King Darius. Give masks to the lions.

Get the lions to stand on the opposite side of the room from King Darius' throne in an area representing the lions' den. You

could ask them to make a roaring sound every time the words "lions" or "lions' den" are mentioned.

The King at this time was called Darius. Because of Daniel's good work the king had promoted him to a high position in the land. But some of the other workers got jealous of Daniel and decided to look for a way to get him into trouble.

They couldn't find a way because Daniel worked hard, he was reliable and responsible, and they couldn't see anything that he was doing wrong. They knew that although Daniel had been in Babylon for a long time, he still put God first, so they decided to use that against him.

One day the men went to Darius and bowed before him. Then they showed him a new law that they thought should be put into place in the land.

(Give them the scroll and get someone to open it and read the law.)

"For the next 30 days, no-one is to pray to any god or any person apart from the King. Anyone who does will be thrown into the lions' den."

The king liked this idea, so he signed the law and it was announced to the people.

When Daniel heard about the law, he had a choice to make. Would he follow the king's law, or would he keep praying to God?

He decided to go home and do what he did every day. He knelt down in front of his window and he prayed to God. Of course, the men saw him, and they went to tell King Darius.

The King was upset. He didn't want to throw Daniel into the

lions' den because he liked Daniel and he was his best worker, but he'd made the law and there was no way that it could be changed. He ordered for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions.

(Get other workers to throw Daniel into lions' den.)

That night the king couldn't sleep because he was so upset and worried about Daniel. Early the next morning he went to the den and called out, "Daniel, was your God able to save you?"

To his surprise, Daniel walked out and he said, "Yes, I'm fine. God sent his angel to close the lions' mouths so that they wouldn't hurt me."

The king was pleased, and he gave orders that everyone in the land should follow Daniel's God because of his great power. Then he ordered for the men who had tried to trick him to be thrown into the lions' den, and the lions pounced on them straight away and tore them apart. Darius announced to all the people that everyone should worship God because of his amazing power.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

Talk together:

Why do you think Daniel chose to keep praying even though he knew he risked being thrown to the lions?

Do you think he knew that God would keep him safe from the lions?

I think he knew God could, but I'm not sure he knew that God definitely would. But I think, for Daniel, it was more

important to keep praying and to keep doing what he believed was right even if it meant that he died.

Daniel was in a powerful position in the kingdom, and we live in a world where we often see people being dishonest or using their power for their own gain, but Daniel wanted to put God first and stay true to him.

All of us have to make difficult choices sometimes. We probably don't face being killed, but sometimes we have to make a decision about whether we're going to follow God or whether we're going to do our own thing.

Maybe there is someone in your class that people make fun of and you know you shouldn't join in but it's quite hard to stand out and be different. Maybe your friends are doing something you know is wrong and they want you to join in with them.

God can help us in those times, just like he helped Daniel.

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: lion pictures (from additional document: Lions, large sheet of paper (optional), Blu tack, pens or pencils, Bible, printout of Daniel 6:26-27 (from additional document: Daniel 6)

Get the children to think about things that they might worry about when they feel under pressure or face a difficult choice, e.g. being left out, people making fun of them, making the wrong decision. They can also write emotions they might feel such as fear, anxiety, confusion...

Get someone to write each idea they come up with on one of the lion pictures (from additional document: Lions). You could stick them on the **wall or on a large sheet of paper.**

Point out that it can feel scary when we are in a situation like that, but that we can remember how God showed his power in Daniel's story.

Read out the words that King Darius spoke at the end of the story from Daniel 6:26-27.

God was with Daniel, and God showed that his power was greater than anything else.

All through the Bible, God makes promises to be with his people and to help them.

Take the printout of Daniel 6:26-27 and stick it in the middle of the lions that were stuck on the wall or the sheet of paper.

Lead the children in prayer, asking for courage in situations where they are under pressure or face difficult choices about whether to obey God.

32. Rebuilding



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

**Nehemiah 1:1-2:20,
Nehemiah 4:3-9,
Nehemiah 6:15-16**

Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and leads the people in rebuilding the walls



AIMS

To help the children understand that God wants us to take action where we see things that are not as he intends them to be, but that we should also pray, asking for his help, as he is the one who ultimately brings restoration.

Nehemiah was upset that Jerusalem lay in ruins and he wanted to change that. His first response was to pray, but he also worked hard, and, despite some challenges, God helped him to succeed.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What does Nehemiah's story teach us about how to respond to situations that are not right?
- What does it teach us about God? Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Teamwork Challenge

You will need: a ball

Get the children to stand in a circle. Choose two children - their challenge is to carry a ball round the circle together, but they can only touch it with the body part you name, e.g. head, arms, elbows, knees... Once the first two children have completed it, choose two others and repeat until everyone has had a go. Some body parts will be harder than others!

You could link this into the story by talking about teamwork and determination,

as well as the difference it makes if those who are watching encourage rather than mock.

▶ Wall War

You will need: building blocks/ Jenga bricks/empty plastic bottles, balloons

Divide the children into groups of three or four. Have them sitting fairly close to one another, but with a clearly-defined area for each group. Give each team a supply of building blocks/Jenga bricks, and a few balloons.

Their challenge is for each team to build the highest wall they can from their bricks, but they are also allowed to blow up their balloons and use them to try to knock down the other teams' walls. They must stay within their own building area to do this.

Give a time limit (e.g. two minutes) and then see which

team has managed to build the highest wall.

If you don't have building blocks to use, an alternative is to provide the children with plastic bottles and get them to line them up in a row. At the end of the time the winning team is the one with the longest wall.

▶ Wall Building Challenge

You will need: timer, Lego bricks, building plans (create these in advance based on the Lego bricks you have. Keep it fairly simple as the aim is for the children to complete their building within 52 seconds.)

You can either choose two children to take part in this challenge upfront, or if you have multiple sets of bricks and plans, you can let the children all take part, working in pairs.

Give each pair a set of Lego bricks and a building plan. Explain that the wall has been broken down and their task is to rebuild it so that it matches the plan. The challenge is to do it in 52 seconds. They'll find out why that is the time limit when they hear the story later on.

▶ Emoji Game

You will need: pictures of emojis (from additional document: Emojis)

Lay out the pictures of the emojis and let the children take it in turns to make the face of one of the emojis while the others guess which one they are doing.

Then go round getting them to answer the question: Which emoji are you now?

If you have time you could give them the option of briefly explaining why.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Introduction

Remind the children that they have been learning about the people of Judah and how they were taken away to a foreign country to work as slaves.

The last two weeks we were thinking about Daniel - how he stayed faithful to God, and how God protected him when he was thrown into the lions' den.

The people had been away from Jerusalem for a long time but God had promised that they would be able to go back home one day.

Does anyone remember how long it would be before they were allowed to go back to their own land? 70 years.

It happened just as God said, and after 70 years were up the people gradually began to go back home. They were allowed to take back the items that had been taken from the Temple and they were able to rebuild the things that had been destroyed.

▶ Nehemiah's Story

You can use images from freebibleimages.org either by displaying on PowerPoint or by printing out copies. The images suggested below come from two separate sets on Free Bible Images, and some slides have been omitted for brevity.

The first nine slides below (labelled 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15) refer to the corresponding slides at this link: <http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/nehemiah-1/>

The four slides that follow (labelled 1, 5, 8, 21) refer to the corresponding slides at this link: <http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/nehemiah-2/>

1. Today we're going to think about one of the people of Judah who was called Nehemiah. Nehemiah hadn't gone back home yet. He was living in Persia, and he had a good job working for the king.

3. But one day his brother came to visit and brought news of the people who had gone back to Jerusalem. He said it wasn't going well.

4. The walls around the city had been torn down, and the gates had been destroyed by fire. The city was in ruins.

6. (If you used the Emoji Game intro activity, you could refer back to it here. Which emoji do you think Nehemiah was when he heard the news?) Nehemiah was very sad when he heard this news. He cried, and he didn't eat for several days. Then he prayed. He talked to God and told him about what was happening and how he felt about it. He also said sorry for the things that he and the people of Israel and Judah had done which had made God sad. Then he asked God to help him.

7. God didn't answer Nehemiah's prayer at once. But eventually, four months later, when Nehemiah was working, serving wine to the king, God answered his prayer. The king asked Nehemiah why he was looking so sad and what he could do to help. Very quickly and quietly, Nehemiah prayed again, and then he told the king what he wanted.

Read from the Bible Nehemiah 2:1-6

8. The king also agreed to give Nehemiah letters to the people whose land he was travelling through so that he would be kept safe, and letters to the manager of the king's forest, asking him to give Nehemiah wood to use to rebuild the

city.

11. When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem he checked out the walls by riding around them on a donkey.

13. Then he told the city leaders his plan and the people got to work.

15. Some people weren't so impressed though. This is what they said:

Read Nehemiah 2:19,20

1. Nehemiah and the Jewish people started work on the walls and Sanballat, Tobiah and their friends gave them a hard time – a very hard time indeed.

5. Read Nehemiah 4:3-9 to the children.
Each time things were tough, what did Nehemiah do? (Take some answers from the children.)

8. Nehemiah prayed, but he kept working as well, and made sure everyone else did too! He told the people to remember that God was with them and that he would help them. They divided into two groups – those who kept guard and those who kept working. They didn't stop working and they didn't stop praying!

Ask the children what they think happened. Finish by reading Nehemiah 6:15,16 to them.

21. It took them 52 days but they completed their task! (If you used the Wall Building Challenge intro activity, you can tell the children that they didn't have as long as that so, instead of 52 days, the challenge was to do it in 52 seconds.)



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection/ Discussion

When Nehemiah saw something that wasn't right, he wanted to do something about it. He prayed a lot, and then he got people together to try to fix it.

Why was it wrong that Jerusalem had been destroyed? It was the place where the people had lived, in the land God had given to them, and the place where they worshipped God. The state of the wall around the city was like the state of the people's friendship with God. Both of them had been broken because of the people's sin, and Nehemiah knew that wasn't how God wanted it to be.

Is there anything that you can see around you that is not right, that makes you sad? It could be seeing someone in your class being bullied by others, or it could be seeing children around the world who have no money for food and the things they need.

Why do these things make us sad?

One reason could be that this is not how God designed them to be.

A good first step is to do what Nehemiah did: pray about it and ask God to help. Maybe there's also something you could do to help, such as standing up for the person who is being bullied or raising some money to help a charity.

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: building blocks and sticky labels, or rectangles of paper and Blu tack, pens or

pencils

You could get the children to build up a wall with their prayers. If you have building blocks available, the children could write their prayers and the actions they think they could take on sticky labels and stick them to the blocks. You could let them work in twos or threes to do this. Then they could build them up into a wall as you lead them in prayer.

If you don't have access to building blocks, you could cut paper into rectangles to represent bricks, get them to write their prayers on these, and build them up by sticking them to the wall with Blu tack.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ God's Story Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This short video tells the story of Nehemiah and also points ahead to Jesus coming to restore the brokenness of the world. You can find it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdDvqWtVkro>

33. Waiting



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

**Nehemiah 13:6-31,
Daniel 2:44, Micah 5:2,
Isaiah 7:14**

The people are back in Jerusalem but that hasn't fixed the problem of sin. They are waiting for God's promised rescuer to come.



AIMS

To help the children understand that sin is a problem only God can fix, and to reflect on the fact that sometimes we have to wait to see God's promises fulfilled, but that he is always faithful

Although the Israelites had returned to their land and rebuilt the walls, it hadn't fixed the problem of sin. This was something they couldn't fix themselves; it was something only God could fix. The people had to wait a long time, but they had promises and prophecies to encourage them.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- Why do you think it all went so wrong for the people of Judah once they were back in the land?
- What do you think it would have been like to wait hundreds of years for the promised Messiah?
- How would these prophecies give the people hope?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ **Count To Ten Game**

Get the children to stand or sit in a circle, and ask them all to close their eyes. Their task is to count to ten as a group. Each person may only say one number at a time, and they are not allowed to plan out an order in advance or go in sequence round the circle. If two people say a number at the same time, the group must start again from the beginning. This is harder than it sounds!

▶ **Pass The Squeeze Game**

You will need: scarf, coin

Divide the children into two teams and get each team to stand in a long line. The two teams should be facing each other with a small gap between them.

Place an object, such as a scarf a short distance away, making sure it is an equal distance from the person at the end of each team's line.

When you begin the game, the children should join hands in their team, and everyone should close their eyes except for the person at the start of each team's line. Stand beside the children who have their eyes open and toss a coin. If it is tails, they should do nothing,

(continued overleaf)

and you should toss it again. If it is heads, they should squeeze the hand of the team member beside them. That person should then squeeze the hand of the person next in line and it should continue to be passed along the line. When the person at the end of the team feels their hand being squeezed, they should open their eyes and run to pick up the scarf. The person who manages to get it wins a point for their team. Get the people who were at the end of their team to move to the start and begin again. If possible, continue until everyone has had a turn and then see which team has got the higher score.

As an alternative, you could repeat a game from a previous session that the children particularly enjoyed.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Introduction

You will need: treat for the children (optional)

Take a treat for the children. Depending on your school's policy on healthy eating, it could be some sweets, or it could be something healthy such as grapes. If you are not allowed to use food at all, it could be a small gift like a sticker or a pencil. Tell the children that they will get to have the treat later but that they'll have to wait.

Remind them of what they have been hearing about over the last few weeks: about the people of Judah and how they were taken away to a foreign country to work as slaves, and about Daniel and how he stayed faithful to God even in a strange country and how God protected him when he was thrown into the lions' den.

Last time we talked about how the people of Judah finally got

to go back to their land after 70 years. They were able to rebuild things and make a fresh start.

▶ Nehemiah's Story, continued

Now the people were settled in the land. They had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and they had restored the Temple. It looked like things were getting sorted out, but there was still one big problem.

We heard last time about Nehemiah and the people building the walls. When the wall was finished, all the people gathered together and they prayed to God. They said sorry for the things they had done wrong, and they said that, from that time on, they were going to follow God and obey him. It looked like things were going to be better.

But the book of Nehemiah doesn't have a happy ending. Nehemiah went back to Persia to work for the king again, but when he came back to Jerusalem later, he found that the people were doing all kinds of things that were wrong.

They were not looking after the Temple or the people who worked there. They were working and selling goods on the Sabbath, which was meant to be a day of rest. (You could remind the children that this was one of the Ten Commandments God gave to the people.) **Some of them had married people from other tribes who worshipped other gods.**

It was all still a bit of a mess.

▶ Old Testament Summary and Prophecies

You will need: images (from additional document: Story Images) - cut out the red crosses from the last three sheets in advance, sin image (from Session 13 additional

document: Sin) - optional, printouts of prophecies (from additional document: Prophecies)

This is the story of the Old Testament of the Bible. God created the world and it was good.

(Show the children the first picture.)

People disobeyed and messed it up.

(Lay down the second picture and place a red cross on the top. Repeat this with the other images as you go through those parts of the story.)

Since then, nothing had been enough to sort it out for good. God sent the flood, but people still did wrong. He rescued them from slavery and led them to the Promised Land, but they still did wrong. He gave them judges and kings to lead them and prophets to speak to them, but they still did wrong. And even back in the land with the walls and the Temple rebuilt, they were still doing wrong.

The problem of sin was so big that the people couldn't sort it out.

You could refer back to the definition of sin given in One Big Story session 13 (Shove off, God! I'm in charge! No to your rules!) and use the image from that session (additional document: Sin) to remind the children.

There was nothing the people could do to sort it out. They needed God to sort it out. And the good news is, he had a plan to do that.

He sent some more messages through some of the prophets, telling the people what he was going to do.

Get three of the children to read out messages from the prophets (from additional

document: Prophecies):

Daniel 2:44 - During the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up another kingdom that will never be destroyed or given to another group of people. This kingdom will crush all the other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will continue forever.

Micah 5:2 - You, O Bethlehem, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.

Isaiah 7:14 - The Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

So God promised to send a king, someone who would rule forever, someone who was going to be born in Bethlehem, someone who would be sent from God, who would be "God with us."

The people of Judah were looking forward to this person coming. They talked about him as the Messiah or the Saviour, the one that God had chosen to be king and who was going to come and save the people.

Does anyone know who this person was that they were waiting for? Jesus.

The bad news for the people was that they had to wait - they had to wait a long time. We read about these messages from prophets throughout the Old Testament. After the prophets had all brought their messages it was 400 years before anything happened.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

How do you feel when you have to wait for something? Maybe it's something you're excited about like your birthday or Christmas or going on a special holiday. It can be really hard when you know you have a long time to wait.

▶ Minute's Silence Game

You will need: a timer

Get the children to close their eyes and tell them that you want them to wait for one minute. When they think the minute is up, they should not say anything but they should raise their hand. Time the minute and tell them who was the closest to estimating the time.

Ask them how they found that? Was it hard? Did the minute seem longer than they expected?

Imagine how hard it would be to wait 400 years. Imagine you knew you were waiting for something good but you didn't know when that thing was going to happen. You didn't even know if it was going to be in your lifetime, and there was nothing you could do to speed it up.

That was what it was like for the people of Judah, but they trusted God that one day it was going to happen, because God had made these promises and they knew that he was faithful.

Next week we'll start looking at the New Testament and we'll find out what happened when their waiting was over.

Give them the treat you promised them at the start of the session and then pray together, thanking God that he always keeps his promises and asking for his help in any situations where it is difficult to wait.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ God's Story: the Prophets Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This video goes into more detail about the prophets and the messages they gave:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sumaXbjP2Kg>

34. Messiah



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 1:26-45, Luke 2:1-35, Matthew 2:1-12

Jesus is born



AIMS

To help the children understand the significance of Jesus' coming, for the Israelites then, and for us now. (Since this session will probably take place well before Christmas, it is a good chance to focus on the story of Jesus' birth and its significance without the other distractions of that time of year.)

Jesus was born, but he was no ordinary baby. He was the promised Messiah. The people's wait was finally over.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth marked it out as special?
- What do these passages teach us about God?
- Why is Jesus' birth so significant for us today?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

be a Christmas decoration or simply a star shape cut out of cardboard)

Ask for a volunteer to hunt the star. Get that child to stand outside the room for a moment while the other children hide the star somewhere in the room.

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Stuck In The Mud

For this game, you will need a large space for the children to run about. Depending on the size of your group, choose one or two children to be the chasers – they will try to catch the other children. If a child is caught, they have to stand with their arms out, and they are unable to move until one of the other children runs around them in a circle, going under both arms, to set them free.

Get the child to come back in and hunt for the star. To help them, get the rest of the children to repeat the word "star" over and over, very quietly when the person hunting is far away from the star, and getting gradually louder as they get closer.

Once the star has been found, choose another child to be the hunter, and repeat.

▶ Hunt The Star

You will need: a star (this could

▶ Musical Tableaux

You will need: equipment to play music

This game is an adapted

version of Musical Statues. Divide the children into groups of about three. While the music is playing, they should dance or move around the room. When the music stops, they have to work in their groups to make a tableau of a part of the Christmas Story.

Tell them before starting the music each time which part of the story you want them to make when the music stops.

Some suggestions are:

The angel appearing to Mary

The journey to Bethlehem

Jesus is born

The angels and the shepherds

The wise men following the star

The wise men worshipping Jesus



▶ Recap/Intro

Last time we heard that the people of Judah were settled back into their own land but that things still weren't right. God had promised the Messiah, a special king who was going to come and save the people, but after the last time we hear of God speaking in the Old Testament they had a long time to wait. Does anyone remember how long? 400 years.

You could refer back to last week's session and see if the children remember any of the specific prophecies that were given about Jesus.

Finally, at the start of the New Testament, the wait is over, and this is the event that Christians remember at Christmas.

It's probably a familiar story to

many of you, but we are going to think today about why it is so important.

▶ God's Story Video

You will need: equipment to play video, three wrapped gifts representing the wise men's gifts (you could use chocolate coins as gold, spices as frankincense, and perfume as myrrh)

Watch this short video (around 4 minutes) from Crossroads Kids' Club to tell the story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk58bHnJLD4>

It's always good news when a baby is born, but there were lots of things there that pointed to the fact that Jesus' birth was extra special. Can you remember some of the things from the video?

Angels visiting people, a special star, Elizabeth's baby jumping in her womb, Simeon recognising Jesus as the Messiah...

We heard a bit in the video about some wise men who travelled a long way to visit Jesus after he was born. They brought three special gifts that also pointed to the fact that Jesus was someone special. Normally if you go to see a baby you might take them a toy or a book or something to wear, but the wise men's gifts were different.

Get three of the children to open the gifts, and discuss their significance:

Gold – Gold is a gift fit for a king. The wise men were recognising Jesus as someone who would be a ruler, and as the special king God promised through the prophets.

Frankincense – This is something that was used in worship to God. It is sap that is taken from trees, which is

dried, and which was burned in the Temple as part of the people's worship to God, so it pointed to the fact that Jesus was someone people would worship.

Myrrh – This was a really strange gift. It is a spice that was used to embalm a dead body. Why would you give that to a baby? I don't know how much the wise men really understood, but it seems to point to the fact that Jesus' death was going to be especially important. That was what was going to sort out the problem of sin and make a way for people to be friends with God.

▶ Christmas Pairs

You will need: pictures printed out (from additional document: Pairs Game) - print two or three copies of each picture depending on which option you use, items for each part of the story (optional): baby doll, angel ornament or decoration, walking stick, star ornament or decoration, crown, chocolate coins, spices, perfume)

As an alternative to using the video, you could talk about the story using a pairs game.

Ask the children to tell you what they already know about the Christmas Story. Hopefully they will come up with the basic facts such as Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, Jesus being laid in a manger, and the shepherds and wise men coming to visit.

While the birth of a new baby is always something to celebrate, the birth of Jesus was extra-special and there were lots of signs that pointed to this. We are going to play a game to look at some of them.

Lay two copies of each of the picture cards (from additional document: Pairs Game) out in a grid, face-down. Divide the

children into teams (probably two, three or four teams depending on your numbers). Let each team in turn choose two cards to turn over. If the cards match, they take them from the grid, and they have another go. If the cards don't match, they turn them face-down again and the next team takes their turn. Once all the pairs have been matched up, the team with the most cards wins.

You can then use the cards to point to the different signs that showed Jesus' birth was something extra-special.

If you want to get the children moving around a bit more, you could have an extra copy of the cards from the game stuck around the room beforehand with an item representing that part of the story beside them. You could move around the room with the children going to each item in turn and talking about that part of the story. Suggested items are listed at the end of each section in the script below.

Pregnant lady - Mary's pregnancy was something very special. She hadn't even married Joseph yet when an angel came and told her she was pregnant! Shortly after that, she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who was also pregnant, and when they met, Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy inside her. (Suggested item: baby doll)

Angel - Angels appear a lot in the story - giving a message to Mary, reassuring Joseph that the baby was from God, announcing to the shepherds on the hillside that Jesus had been born. (Suggested item: angel ornament or Christmas tree decoration)

Old man - A man called Simeon had been waiting for years for the Saviour God had promised to send. God had promised

Simeon that he would get to see the Saviour before he died. After Jesus was born, his parents took him to the Temple and Simeon was there. He recognised Jesus as the one God had sent. (Suggested item: walking stick)

Star- A special star appeared in the sky over Bethlehem - a sign that a new king had been born. (Suggested item: star ornament or Christmas tree decoration)

Crown - Wise men saw the star and travelled on a long journey to find the king. They arrived in Jerusalem at King Herod's palace. When Herod found out that a baby king had been born, he was angry and jealous, and he made plans to kill Jesus. Fortunately, God helped Jesus and his family to escape. (Suggested item: crown (this could be cut from cardboard))

The final three cards represent the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus. They were not the normal kind of gifts you might give to a baby, but each of them had a special meaning.

Gold - a gift fit for a king. The wise men were recognising Jesus as someone who would be a ruler, and as the special king God promised through the prophets. (Suggested item: chocolate coins covered in gold foil)

Frankincense - This is something that was used in worship to God. It is sap that is taken from trees, which is dried, and which was burned in the Temple as part of the people's worship to God, so it pointed to the fact that Jesus was someone people would worship. (Suggested item: jar of spices)

Myrrh - This was a really strange gift. It is a spice that was used to embalm a dead body. Why would you give that to a baby? I don't know how

much the wise men really understood, but it seems to point to the fact that Jesus' death was going to be really important. That was what was going to sort out the problem of sin and make a way for people to be friends with God. (Suggested item: perfume)



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Christmas Card

You will need: coloured card, selection of art materials

Give the children card and art materials such as pens, glitter, glue, sequins or other things to stick on. Get them to design a Christmas card that tells something about why Jesus' birth is so important to Christians.

(If you are following One Big Story as it is released, this session should take place around the start of November. You may want to keep the Christmas cards for the children for a few weeks and give them out for them to pass on to a family member or friend closer to Christmas.)

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: slips of paper, pens, box, gift wrap, scissors, tape

At Christmas, we can often be distracted from thinking about Jesus' birth by all the parties and presents. Christians believe that God sending Jesus was the greatest gift of all.

Give the children slips of paper to write or draw prayers thanking God for sending Jesus. You could put the slips in a box and gift-wrap it. Then keep it until your last session before Christmas when you can get the children to open it again and remember what you reflected on in this session.

35. Baptism



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 3:1-22, John 1:29-34, Romans 6:4

Jesus is baptised by John



AIMS

To help the children understand that following Jesus means turning away from sin and receiving new life from him.

To think about the sins in their lives that they want to ask Jesus to deal with.

People were baptised as a response to God – to say that they were putting their old, sinful way of life to death and being raised to new life following God. Jesus was also baptised and he was marked out as the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Jesus is the one who can deal with our sin and give us new life.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- How did Jesus' baptism mark him out as someone special?
- What is the significance of him being the Lamb of God and the Son of God?
- How have you known Jesus giving you new life?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Relay Race

You will need: printouts of God's words from Matthew 3:17 (from additional document: Bible verse) Cut out each word individually and mix them up. You will need one complete set for each team.

Divide the children into teams. Position the teams along one end of the hall and have a pile of the words from the Bible verse for each team opposite them at the other end of the

hall.

When you tell them to go, the first child in each team runs to their pile of words, picks one up and brings it back to their team. Then the next child has a turn, and they continue like this until they have collected all of the words of the verse.

The second part of the challenge is to organise the words into the right order to find out what God said about Jesus as he was baptised: "This is my beloved Son who brings me great joy."

▶ **Water Game** (this game was also included in Session 27 of One Big Story)

You will need: spray bottle filled with water

Get the group to stand in a

(continued overleaf)

circle and have a leader in the middle of the circle holding the water spray.

The leader chooses a category, e.g. fruits, sports, chocolate bars... and tells the children. The leader should also choose one item from that category to be the taboo word, but they should not tell anyone what the taboo word is.

Go round the circle with each person in turn saying an item that fits with the category. If they say something that doesn't fit with the category, if they say the taboo word, if they repeat something that has already been said, or if they hesitate for more than a few seconds, the leader sprays some water in their face.

Choose a new leader to go into the middle of the circle (this can be one of the children) and get them to pick a new category to start the game again.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Intro

Last week we heard about how after the people had been waiting for years for the Messiah God had promised, Jesus was born, and Christians believe that he was the one the people had been waiting for.

After we read about Jesus being born, the Bible doesn't say much about his life as he was growing up. Joseph was a carpenter so Jesus probably helped him in his work but there's only one story in the Bible about Jesus as a child. It takes place when he is 12 years old and he goes to the Temple in Jerusalem and amazes the people there with his questions and with how much he knows about God.

After that, the Bible jumps ahead to when Jesus is about

30 years old and that was when people began to notice that he was someone special.

▶ Jesus' Baptism

You will need: blue cloth or towel, dove (from additional document: Dove)

There was a man called John who was a follower of God. He was Jesus' cousin and he was just a few months older than Jesus. We heard last time about how John jumped for joy as a baby in his mother's womb when Jesus' mother Mary came to visit.

John was about 30 years old at this time, and God spoke to him and told him that he had to go round the different towns and villages along the banks of the Jordan River and tell the people that they had to get ready because the Messiah was coming. John told them to turn away from their sin - from the things they were doing wrong - and to turn to God to ask him to forgive them. As a sign that they were going to do that and that they were making the decision to follow God, they would be baptised in the river.

Get two children to hold up a blue cloth or towel to represent the river, choose someone to be John and let a few other children pretend to be baptised by John - they can just duck down behind the cloth and come up again. Choose a child to be Jesus later on in the story.

For the people, baptism was a sign of them saying they were leaving behind their old lives and the things they had done wrong in the past, and that they were making a fresh start following God. John told them only to be baptised if they really meant it and they really planned to change the way they lived. Lots and lots of people came and were

baptised by John.

One day as people were being baptised down by the river, someone familiar approached John. It was Jesus! As John saw Jesus he recognised him as the Messiah. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." He realised that Jesus had been sent from God and that he was the one who was going to sort out the problem of people's sin.

Jesus came to John and asked to be baptised. At first John didn't think Jesus needed to be baptised. People were baptised to say that they wanted to stop sinning and start following God, but the Bible tells us that Jesus had never done anything wrong, so why would he need to be baptised?

But Jesus managed to persuade John that it had to be done because it was what God wanted, so John agreed to baptise Jesus.

Let the children act this out.

As Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, came down on him and rested on him in the form of a dove. (Use the cut-out dove to act this out - have it flying down and resting on Jesus.)

God's voice spoke from heaven and he said, "This is my beloved Son who brings me great joy."

So Jesus was pointed out as God's Son to all the people who were there and the Holy Spirit came to give him power and to help him live as God wanted. Jesus would really need the Holy Spirit's help for what would happen next, but we'll hear about that next time.



REFLECT & RESPOND

► Discussion

See if the children can identify the two special things that this story tells us about who Jesus was. If they need some clues, you can get them to think of what John said about Jesus as he came down to the river, and about what God said about Jesus after he was baptised.

John said he was “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”.

(If you have several children who were in the group last year, you could refer back to Session 19 of One Big Story and make the link with Passover - the lamb was killed and its blood was put around the doorframe of the Israelites’ houses, and that was what protected them and saved them. Christians believe that when Jesus died on the cross he was a sacrifice just like the lamb, and he did that to deal with the sin of the world so that it is possible for us to know God.)

God’s voice said, “This is my beloved Son.”

All the people there would have heard that and would have known that Jesus was someone special. They had the choice about whether they would believe in that and follow him. Baptism was a sign that they wanted to do that, and it’s something people still do today.

► Baptism today

(It may be helpful to briefly explain to the children how baptism is done today. Bear in mind that churches have a variety of beliefs and practices in this area and try to explain this in a neutral way.)

In some churches, parents have their children baptised when they are babies as they want them to be brought up learning about Jesus in the family of the church. On the basis of what they learn about God’s promised love, they have to make the decision at some point in their lives about whether they are going to follow Jesus for themselves. In other churches people are baptised when they are older and they have made the decision to follow Jesus for themselves.

Christians believe that whenever we make that choice the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside us too and helps us to know God more and to follow him.

► New Life Prayer Activity

You will need: cress seeds, pots and soil

Read Romans 6:4 to the children.

In the story, when people were baptised they went down under the water for a second or two and then came back up. It was like a sign that they were putting an end to their old life of doing wrong and living for themselves, and that they were being raised to a new life trusting in Jesus and following God. Jesus died on the cross and rose to life again so he can give us new life too if we trust in him.

Give the children some pots to fill with soil and then plant cress seeds in. As they bury the seeds in the soil, give them a moment to think about any places where they see their sinfulness and any things they want to put an end to in their life e.g. unkindness, selfishness, greed, disobedience...

Remind them that if we trust in Jesus, he promises to give us new life. The difference might not be obvious right away, but

he works inside us to help us change and grow, just like the seed grows under the soil at first, and then gradually we see the new life sprouting.

Pray, thanking God that he offers new life, and asking God to help them with the things they want to change.

Encourage them to take the plants home as a reminder to keep praying about these things.

36. Temptation



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Matthew 4:1-11, 1
Corinthians 10:13,
Hebrews 4:15-16

Jesus is tempted by the devil



AIMS

To help the children understand how using God's Word, the Bible, can help us resist temptation, and to encourage them that they can pray to God for help when they are tempted.

The devil tempted Jesus to do wrong, but he resisted by referring to the Scriptures. We all face temptation too, but knowing what the Bible says can help us too, and we can also pray and ask for God's help.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- How did Jesus use Scripture to fight against the devil's temptation?
- How does Scripture help us resist temptation?
- When have you known God helping you in this?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ A Sad and Solemn Occasion

This game will work best with a medium-large group. Get everyone to stand in a circle. Choose one person to start. They have to say the words, "This is a sad and solemn occasion, is it not..." and then add the name of someone in the circle, referring to them as Brother or Sister, e.g. "This is a sad and solemn occasion, is it not Brother Jamie?" The person chosen then replies, for example, "It is indeed a

very sad and solemn occasion, Brother Ross." Then everyone in the circle has to put their hands together and bow, making a humming noise.

The person who was chosen to give the response (in this example, Jamie) then begins the dialogue again, choosing someone else.

The main point of the game is to avoid the temptation to laugh. Anyone who laughs at any point is out and must sit down in the circle. People can use silly voices and facial expressions to try to encourage others to laugh, but they must be careful not to laugh themselves. The last one who is left standing is the winner.

▶ Staring Contest

Get the children to divide into

(continued overleaf)

pairs to compete in a staring contest. They have to maintain eye contact for as long as they can and the first one to blink, laugh, or look away loses. You could then get the winners from each pair to find a new partner and play again, and continue in this way until you have an overall winner.

▶ Marshmallow Test Clip

You will need: equipment to play video

You could show this clip to introduce the theme of temptation: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ

Several children are given a marshmallow and left alone in a room. They are told that they can either eat the marshmallow there and then, or they can wait until the adult returns and they will be given a second marshmallow. The children show different reactions to the temptation to eat the marshmallow they have.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Introduction

Over the last two weeks we have been thinking about the start of the New Testament of the Bible. We heard about some of the events surrounding Jesus' birth, then last time we heard one of the first stories the Bible includes about Jesus when he was grown up - when he was baptised by John.

Do you remember what happened as Jesus was coming up out of the water after he was baptised? God's voice was heard from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son who brings me great joy." Then the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus in the form of a dove. We talked about how the Holy

Spirit gave Jesus strength and power and how he needed it for what was going to happen next.

▶ Story of Jesus' Temptation

You will need: images printed out, or on PowerPoint, from Free Bible Images, as detailed below

Tell the story using illustrations from Free Bible Images: <http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-014-jesus-temptation/> (The numbers in the script below correspond to the slides in the presentation.)

1. **After Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit led him out into the wilderness.**
2. **He ate nothing for 40 days and he was very hungry. The devil came to him and tried to tempt him to do what was wrong.**
3. **First the devil said to him, "If you really are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." He was trying to get Jesus to doubt that he really was God's Son, and he was trying to get him to prove his power. Jesus said, "No! The Scriptures say, "People do not live by bread alone."" He was quoting a bit from the Bible, from the Old Testament.**
4. **Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the very highest point of the Temple, and he said, "If you really are the Son of God, jump off!" The devil tried to use words from the Bible to persuade Jesus. He said, "The Scriptures say, "He will order his angels to guard and protect you. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even strike your foot on a stone.""**
5. **But Jesus saw through the devil's scheme, and he said, "No! The Scriptures also say, "Do not test the Lord your God.""**

6. **Then the devil showed him all the kingdoms in the world, and he said, "I have power over all these kingdoms and I will give it all to you if you will bow down and worship me."**

7. **Again Jesus used words from the Old Testament and he said, "No! The Scriptures say, "You must worship no-one else but God.""**

8. **Finally the devil left Jesus and angels came to care for him. Jesus returned from the wilderness and went back home.**

So, three times the devil tried to get Jesus to do things that were wrong, and three times Jesus was able to resist the temptation. How did Jesus do it?

He knew what the Bible said, and he knew what God wanted, and that helped him to see through the devil's plans and not to do things that were wrong. It was also because the Holy Spirit gave him power.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

You will need: a Bible

Do you ever have times when you feel tempted to do something that you know is wrong?

Give some examples... e.g. your mum has said she doesn't want you to have a biscuit before dinner but she's gone upstairs to do something and you're sure she'd never notice if you took one, maybe a friend in school is messing around in class and trying to get you to join in, maybe someone has said something nasty to you and you're tempted to hurt them back.

I think all of us face times like that. Even when you grow up it's not always easy to do the right thing.

What could help you be able to do the right thing?

It could be having good friends or family that keep you on track, making a decision about it and being determined to do the right thing, thinking about the consequences.

If you used the marshmallow test video earlier, you could refer back to it here. The children had to decide whether it was better to do what they wanted now (to eat the marshmallow) or to wait and get two marshmallows. Some decided to eat the marshmallow straight away but that meant they missed out on getting a second one.

Something that tempts us might look good at the time and it might be what we want to do but thinking about what the end result might be can help us make the right choice. For example, thinking about how much trouble we could be in if our mum or our teacher catches us doing something wrong, or how we might hurt someone and ruin a friendship.

It must have been hard for Jesus to resist the devil's temptation. It must have been tempting to turn a stone into bread when he was really hungry, and it must have been tempting to show his power, but to him the most important thing was doing what God wanted, and the Holy Spirit gave him the strength to do what was right.

Christians believe that God helps his people when they are tempted to do what is wrong.

This is what it says later on in the Bible - read from 1 Corinthians 10:13. "The temptations in your life are no

different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure."

We can pray to God and ask him to help us like he helped Jesus.

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: cards printed double-sided from additional document: Bible Verse Cards, a Bible

Jesus fought against temptation by using verses from the Bible, which is God's Word. We have God's Word in the Bible today too and that can help us when we feel tempted.

Lay out the cards with the sides that say "Tempted to..." face up. You may want to have multiple copies of the cards. Let the children take a moment to think about which temptation is the one they find the hardest.

Let them pick up the card with that temptation on it, and turn it over to read the Bible verse.

Read out Hebrews 4:15-16.

Because Jesus understands what it is like to be tempted, and because he is the only one who never gave in to temptation, we can pray and ask him for help.

Lead the children in prayer, and encourage them to take the card they chose home and keep it somewhere to remind them.

37. Follow



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 5:1-11, 27-32

Jesus calls his disciples to follow him



AIMS

To help the children see that the disciples were just ordinary people who were called by Jesus. To help them consider what it means to follow Jesus today and think about how they might want to respond to that call.

Jesus called people to follow him and be his disciples. They were ordinary, imperfect people, but he called them to spend time with him, learn from him, and take part in his work. He still calls people to follow him today.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- What was surprising about the kinds of people Jesus asked to follow him?
- What can we learn from their response to his call?
- What difference has it made to your life to follow Jesus today? Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ **Follow The Leader Game** (this game is also included in Session 12 of One Big Story)

Have the children sitting in a circle and send one child out of the room. Nominate one child in the circle to be the leader. They perform an action, e.g. tapping their knees, pretending to play the piano etc. and the rest of the children must copy them. From time to time the leader must switch to a different action and everyone else must

also switch to the new action as quickly as they can. Get the child who is outside to come back in and stand in the middle of the circle. See how quickly they can identify the leader.

▶ **Team Relay**

This will work with a medium-large group of children. Divide the children into teams of about five or six, and have all the teams standing at one end of the room. Choose one child to be the leader of each team. When you tell them to go, they have to run to the opposite end of the room, then back to their team. They then choose another team member to join them and the two of them have to join hands or link arms, and run to the other side of the room and back again. Continue this, adding a new team member

(continued overleaf)

each time until the whole team is running. The team that completes the challenge the quickest, with every member participating, wins.

If you have extra time, you could repeat the game with the children jumping, hopping, or skipping etc. Instead of running.

▶ My Chair

You will need: a chair for each person

This game works well with at least ten players.

Have the children sitting on chairs in a circle, and choose one child to stand in the middle, leaving their empty chair in the circle.

When the game begins, the player who has the empty chair on their right, says, "My chair," and moves to sit in that chair. Then the player next to them (who now has the empty chair on their right) says, "My chair," and moves to sit in it. The next player, instead of claiming the chair for themselves calls the name of someone else in the circle, e.g. "Rebecca's chair." Rebecca would then move from wherever she is sitting to sit in the empty chair.

The sequence begins again with the person who has the empty chair on their right calling, "My chair", the person next to them calling "My chair", and the third person calling the name of another player, e.g. "Andrew's chair."

While all of this is happening, the player standing in the middle is trying to sit in the empty chair. Once a player claims the empty chair for another player though (Rebecca or Andrew in the examples above) only that player can sit in the chair. However, the player in the middle can sit in the empty chair which Rebecca or Andrew vacate to move places, unless

the person next to them is quick enough to notice and call, "My chair."

If a player makes a mistake (e.g. not noticing the empty chair next to them quickly enough, or calling "My chair" instead of someone else's name or vice versa) they take over as the person in the middle of the circle.

Once the group gets used to the rules of this game, it can move very quickly.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap/ Introduction

If you were looking for a leader to follow, what kind of person would it be? What kind of person would you like to look up to and learn from?

Get the children to list some qualities, and give some examples yourself, e.g. I'd want to follow somebody who knew what they were doing, somebody who was kind and patient, someone who was honest, someone who cared.

Over the last few weeks we've been hearing about Jesus. We heard about his birth and then looked at a couple of stories when he grew up - he was baptised by John and then he went out into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil.

▶ Calling Of The Disciples

You will need: words for Peter (from additional document: Peter's words), nets (optional - you could use real fishing nets if you have them or else use nets from fruit packaging), table and chair, coins

After Jesus came back from the wilderness, he began travelling around different places teaching the people about God. He called people to

follow him - to travel with him, to learn from him and to help in his work. There were 12 people he chose to be his special followers - we talk about them as his disciples. Today we're going to think a bit about how some of the disciples were called to follow Jesus.

Choose children to be Peter, James and John. Give words to Peter. You could give Peter, James and John nets to hold. Also choose someone to be Matthew, and have him sitting at a table with some money a short distance away.

Get the children to act out the story as you tell it, prompting Peter to say the words on his card at the appropriate times.

Peter, James and John were fishermen and they had just come in from a night out catching fish... Or, I should say, trying to catch fish. They had been out all night and they hadn't caught a single thing. They must have been feeling pretty tired and fed up after their long night as they sat there cleaning their nets.

Jesus was down by the shore teaching the people about God. There was a large crowd and they were all pushing in to get closer and closer to Jesus. He noticed the empty fishing boats and asked if he could get into one of them. Peter let him into his boat and pushed the boat a little bit out into the water so that Jesus could teach the crowds from there.

When he had finished speaking to the crowd, he said to Peter, "Now go out where it is deeper and let down your nets to catch some fish."

Peter said, "Master, we worked hard all night and didn't catch a thing, but if you say so I'll let down the nets again."

Peter sailed out into the deep water and let down his nets. (You could get Peter

either to sit and slide across the floor or simply to walk and mime rowing his boat as he moves out into the water.)

Immediately loads and loads of fish swarmed into the net. Peter didn't know what to do. The nets were so full of fish and so heavy that they were about to burst. He called to James and John on the shore, "James! John! Quickly! Come and help me!"

(Get James and John to mime rowing to help Peter and putting their nets out to catch the fish.)

They sailed out in their boat to help, and soon both boats were absolutely full of fish. They sailed back in to the shore. Peter was amazed at what had happened.

When he got out of the boat and went up to Jesus he fell on his knees before him and said, "Lord, please leave me. I'm too much of a sinner to be around you."

James and John were also amazed. Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people." So Peter, James and John left everything. They left their boats and their work and their families and went with Jesus.

A while later, Jesus was walking out of town when he saw a man called Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector - he collected the money people paid to the government. Tax collectors weren't very popular people and most of them were quite dishonest and often took more money than they needed to from the people.

As Jesus walked by Matthew he said to him, "Come, follow me," and like the others Matthew left everything behind and went with Jesus.

Later Matthew held a big party

in his house. Jesus was the special guest and all kinds of people were invited - Jesus' disciples, some of the important religious leaders and some of Matthew's tax collector friends who were known for having done bad things, cheating and being dishonest.

(You can invite the rest of the children to join the disciples as Matthew's other friends who attended the party.)

The religious leaders were annoyed when they saw Jesus talking to those people and even sitting down to eat with them. They said to Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat and drink with such scum?"

Jesus said to them, "It's not healthy people who need a doctor. It's sick people. I didn't come to help the people who already think they are good enough. I came to help the people who know they have done things wrong and need help to change."

(Let the children hand back their props and sit down.)



REFLECT & RESPOND

► Discussion

Discuss with the children:

- Did anything surprise you about the kind of people that Jesus asked to follow him?

Peter, James and John were just ordinary people. They weren't wealthy or important. Matthew was somebody who was probably quite unpopular and maybe not a very nice person, but Jesus was saying he didn't come for the people who think they're all sorted. He came for the people who are

struggling, who know they have done things wrong and know they need help with that.

- What did the disciples have to leave behind to follow Jesus?

They had to leave their work, their families, their whole way of life.

- What do you think Jesus meant when he said to the fishermen, "From now on you will be catching people"?

It didn't mean that he wanted them to go around with a net, trying to catch people. It meant that he wanted them to be part of the work of telling people about him so they could follow him too.

Christians believe that Jesus still wants people to follow him today - not to follow him like we might follow a football team or follow someone on social media, but to be his disciples, to learn from him and to help in his work. Obviously it's a bit different than when Jesus was here as a person. But the leaders here have decided to follow Jesus and that's why we come and run this group - we think it's important that people get to know about Jesus so that they can make the choice about whether to follow him for themselves.

- What do you think it means to follow Jesus today?

If you have time, a leader could share their story of deciding to follow Jesus.

► Reflection and Prayer

Jesus came to Peter, James, John, Matthew and the other disciples as they were going about their everyday lives and he called them to follow him. Christians believe that he wants us to follow him too.

Get the children to close their eyes and imagine themselves

going about their everyday lives at school or at home, then to imagine Jesus asking them to follow him.

Suggest some possible responses:

I already follow you.

Yes, I want to follow you.

I'm not sure.

I need to find out more.

No thanks.

Ask them to think about what they would say. It could be one of these answers, or it could be something else. Let them know that they don't have to share their answer with anyone else, but they can talk to one of the group leaders about it if they want to or if they have questions.

Pray for the children, asking for God's help in following him for those who have made that choice, and for his help in finding out more for those who are still thinking about it.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ Lumo Project Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This short video from the Lumo Project could be a useful way to reinforce the story of the calling of the disciples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIF3D-8Wz0g&list=PLcJVluhl8isJOKcvkIMhwi7Gv5769FqEJ&index=14&t=0s>

The section we are looking at today - Luke 5:1-11 - begins at 2.50 on the video.

38. Healer



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Mark 10:46-52, Luke
4:16-21, Revelation
21:3-4

Jesus heals people,
fulfilling the prophecy
from Isaiah about the
Messiah



AIMS

To help the children
reflect on Jesus' power to
heal – to understand that
this was fulfilling
prophecy, pointing to the
fact that he is God, and
that it also points ahead
to the future hope of
complete restoration.

To encourage them to
pray for people they know
who are sick or struggling.

One of the ways Jesus demonstrated God's love and power was by healing people. This also fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah about God's chosen rescuer. Jesus cares about sick and struggling people today and wants to help them and make them whole. We don't always see them healed, but we can find hope in God's promise of complete restoration for his people, and freedom from pain and sickness.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- How did Jesus' ministry fulfil the prophecy from Isaiah quoted in the passage from Luke?
- When have you seen or experienced God's healing?
- What difference does it make to know the end of the story and God's plan for complete restoration?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Hospital Tig

In this version of tig, all the children are trying to tig one another. When someone is tug, they have to hold the part of the body they were touched on as they continue playing. When they are tug a second time, they have to hold the part of the body they were

touched on that time with their other hand. If they are tug a third time, they must go to the "hospital" - a designated area at the edge of the room - and do ten star jumps. They are then healed, and they can re-join the game with both hands free.

▶ Jigsaw Relay

You will need: pictures of famous people cut into pieces, bowls and dice (one of each per team of two-six children)

In advance print out pictures of famous people so that you have enough for two different ones per team. Cut them each

(continued overleaf)

into five or six pieces and have a bowl ready for each team, containing the pieces for their two pictures mixed together.

Divide the children into teams (anything from two-six children per team). Position each team in a group at one end of the room and place the bowls containing their jigsaw pieces opposite them at the other end of the room.

Give each team a dice. The children take it in turns to roll the dice and if they roll a six, they have to run to their bowl and pick out one jigsaw piece. As they gather more and more jigsaw pieces, they have to sort them out and assemble them into the two separate images. The first team to complete this wins.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Recap

Last week we were thinking about Jesus and how he called his disciples to follow him. We heard about Peter, James and John, the fishermen that he called, and then about Matthew the tax collector. From that point on, Jesus went about teaching the people about God and doing special signs or miracles to show them what God was like.

There are lots of examples of this but we're going to think about one of them today.

▶ Bartimaeus' Story

Choose people to be Jesus and Bartimaeus and get the others to be the crowd, and get them to act out the story as you tell it. Give Jesus and Bartimaeus words to say (from additional document: Jesus' and Bartimaeus' Words)

Jesus and his disciples had just been visiting a town called

Jericho. As they were leaving town, a large crowd of people had gathered along the road to see Jesus. Among them was a man called Bartimaeus who was a blind beggar. He was sitting by the side of the road begging but when he heard that Jesus was passing by, he called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

The crowd were annoyed and they shouted at Bartimaeus- "Be quiet!" (You can get the children playing the part of the crowd to join in with this.)

But Bartimaeus only shouted louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Jesus stopped when he heard him, and he asked for Bartimaeus to be brought to him.

Some of the crowd helped lead Bartimaeus to Jesus and Jesus spoke to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus said, "I want to see."

Jesus said to him, "Go, for your faith has healed you." and immediately Bartimaeus was able to see and he followed Jesus down the road.

▶ Fulfilling the prophecy

The Bible is full of examples like that of Jesus' amazing power. Do you know any other examples of miracles that Jesus did? He healed people with skin diseases, he healed people who couldn't walk or couldn't hear, he did things like turning water into wine when the wine had run out at a wedding party or feeding 5000 people with just five small loaves and two fish. We'll hear more about some of those miracles next term.

But Jesus didn't just do these miracles to show how amazing his power was. It wasn't to show off; he did them to help

people who needed help because he cared for them, but that wasn't the whole reason either. We're going to read a bit from the Bible that will help us think about that.

Read Luke 4:16-21

Do you remember when we talked about prophets when we were looking at the Old Testament? They were people who heard God's voice and passed on messages to the people. Isaiah was one of the prophets, and we have the messages he received from God in the Old Testament of the Bible. He wrote about someone who would come with good news for the poor, who would bring people freedom, who would help blind people see and help people who suffer. Jesus was saying that he was the person Isaiah was writing about and this was what he had come to do. Healing the blind man Bartimaeus was one way of showing that and pointing out to the people that he was not just an ordinary man, but someone very special, sent from God.



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection

Jesus' miracles changed everything for Bartimaeus and the many other people he healed and helped, and Christians believe that Jesus can still change people's lives today.

Christians believe that Jesus cares about people who are sick or struggling today, just like he cared about Bartimaeus. Even when we ask God to help though, we don't always see people healed or see our prayers answered in the way that we want, and that

can be hard.

However, Jesus' miracles were like signs, pointing towards the end of the story and giving a little glimpse of what lies ahead. In the last book in the Bible, Revelation, it tells us how the story will end.

Read Revelation 21:3-4 from a Bible or show them on a sheet (from additional document: Revelation 21)

One day, God promises that everything will be restored. At the moment, we still live in a world with pain and sickness and death and sadness, but God promises that one day he will live among his people and all of those things will be gone.

▶ Prayer Activity

You will need: plasters, pens, printout of Revelation 21:3-4 (from additional document: Revelation 21)

Give the children a moment to think of someone they would like to pray for who is sick or struggling. Give them a plaster and a pen and get them to write the person's name on the plaster, then get them to stick it onto the sheet with the verses from Revelation on. Pray for these people.

39. Christmas



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 1:26-45, Matthew
1:18-25, Luke 2:1-20,
Matthew 2:1-12
(summary)

Jesus is born



AIMS

To celebrate the end of term and to help the children continue to reflect on Jesus' birth and its significance.

This session is slightly different from the others as it is an outline for an end of term party. There will be more time for games than usual, but there is an outline for a short talk helping the children to reflect on the significance of Christmas.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- Where have you seen God at work in your SU Group this term?
- What are your hopes for next term?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ Tear a Christmas Tree

You will need: green paper

Give each child a piece of green paper. Their challenge is to tear it into the shape of a Christmas tree while holding it behind their backs. Give them a couple of minutes to complete the challenge and then see who has managed to create the best Christmas tree shape.

▶ Pin the Nose on Rudolph

You will need: printout of reindeer picture (from additional document):

Rudolph), cutout of a red nose for each child (from additional document: Rudolph noses), Blu tack, blindfold or scarf, pens or pencils (optional)

Stick the reindeer picture to the wall. Give each child a red nose with a piece of Blu tack on the back. Let them take it in turns to be blindfolded and spun around, then led to the reindeer picture so that they can stick their red nose on. The winner is the child who gets it closest to the right place. If you have a large group, you may want to get the children to write their initials on the red noses before they start so that you can keep track of whose is whose!

▶ Snow Blower Game

You will need: cotton wool balls, straws

Give each child a straw and a

(continued overleaf)

cotton wool ball, and have them standing at one side of the hall. Their challenge is to place the cotton wool ball on the floor and blow it to the other side of the room using their straw. The child who completes the challenge the fastest is the winner.

If you have a large group or limited space, you could divide the children into teams and let them complete the challenge as a relay race.

There are further suggestions for Christmas-themed games in Session 11 of One Big Story. You could also use traditional party games such as Pass The Parcel and Musical Statues.



► Christmas Cracker

You will need: at least one Christmas cracker (ideally one for each child)

Over the last few weeks, we have been thinking about Jesus and some of the things he did when he was grown-up. Just now we're coming up to Christmas, the time when Christians celebrate Jesus' birth, so today we're going to think back to that story and think about why Christians celebrate.

What are some of the reasons why Christians celebrate Jesus' birth?

Allow the children to give some answers.

Something that can help to remind us is a Christmas cracker.

Give out crackers to the children, or ask for two volunteers to pull the cracker if you are only using one. Give them a couple of moments to enjoy looking at the contents of

the crackers and telling the jokes etc.

Let's take a closer look at the things we found inside the cracker and see what they can teach us about the Christmas Story. *(Depending on your group, you could see if the children are able to come up with a connection to the story for each item before you explain it to them.)*

First of all there's usually a bit of paper with a joke or sometimes a message on it. That can help us think of the first part of the story.

A very special message was brought to a lady called Mary. She was just going about her normal everyday business, when suddenly an angel appeared. Mary was confused and disturbed, but the angel told her not to be afraid. Then he went on to give her the special message: "You have found favour with God. You will give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be very great and he will be called the Son of the Most High."

Mary was very, very confused now. I imagine that at first the angel's message must have seemed like a bit of a joke. "How can that be?" she said. "How can I possibly have a baby?" The angel said, "The baby will be a special holy baby and he will be called the Son of God. Nothing is impossible with God." And so Mary agreed to go along with God's plan.

The angel brought a message to Joseph too, telling him not to be afraid but to take Mary as his wife. He reassured him that the baby was from God and that he was to call him Jesus as he would save people from their sins.

Next we have a crown - what does a crown make you think of? A king. That can remind us that the Bible tells us Jesus

was coming as a king. We heard earlier this term about how the people were waiting for a king to come. There were lots of prophecies and lots of promises about the one God was going to send. *(You could see if the children remember any of the prophecies from session 33.)* **The people had to wait for a long time for the prophecies to be fulfilled.**

Where would you expect to find a king?

Probably in a palace. But when it got close to the time for Mary to have her baby, she and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem. The emperor had called a census which meant they wanted to count the people and they were going to collect taxes from them, and so everyone had to return to their home town. When they finally arrived in Bethlehem they found that it was very busy. They struggled to find a place to stay and ended up not in a palace, not even in a nice house, but in a place where the animals were kept. That was where Jesus was born. Mary wrapped him up in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger which was an animals' feeding box. So he was a King, but not the kind of king the people expected.

The next thing we have in a cracker is a bit of a surprise. Sometimes it's a toy or a gift but we don't know until we open it what it is going to be. In the Christmas story we have lots of surprises. It was a surprise for Mary and for Joseph when the angel spoke to them. It was a surprise that the king was born in a place full of animals rather than in a palace. There were more surprises to come.

That night, out in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were watching over their sheep. Suddenly they got

a big surprise. An angel appeared in the sky and told them to go to Bethlehem because the Saviour had been born. They left everything and rushed to see for themselves.

As well as it being a big surprise for the shepherds, it was a surprise that they were the people the angel told. When a special baby, a royal baby, is born, you'd expect the family to be told first, then maybe important people or powerful people to hear about it. In those days shepherds were thought of as people with a low position. It wasn't a well paid job, they wouldn't be rich or well-educated, they wouldn't be people that were thought of as important at all - and yet they were the people that God sent the angel to tell.

The next set of visitors to come and see Jesus were a big surprise too—some wise men from a far away country who had found their way to Jesus by following a star. They had seen the star in the sky and travelled many miles, following it until they finally found the place where Jesus was. That must have been a big surprise for Mary and Joseph.

As well as thinking of the toy inside the cracker as a surprise, we can think of it as a gift. That can remind us that the wise men brought gifts to Jesus. They brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh and that's why we give gifts at Christmas - to remember the gifts the wise men brought.

(You could see if the children remember the significance of the different gifts from Session 34.)

The last thing we have inside the cracker is the snap. It makes a bang when we pull the cracker. If someone pulled a cracker without you knowing they were going to do it, the bang would make you turn

around and take notice. That can remind us that Jesus made a big impact on the world. As he grew up, he began teaching people about God, he began doing miracles and other amazing things. We've started to think about some of those and we'll continue next term.

Some people really liked Jesus and listened to his teaching and chose to follow him, some people hated him and tried to get rid of him but he made a big impact on everyone, so much so that even now, over 2000 years later, we still celebrate his birth.



REFLECT & RESPOND

► Prayer

Lead the children in a short prayer thanking God for sending Jesus at Christmas.

If you used the prayer activity in Session 34, unwrap the box with the children's prayers. Look through them together and pray, using some of the prayers the children wrote.

If you used the Christmas Card reflection activity in Session 34, make sure you return the cards to the children if you haven't already so that they can give them to a family member or friend.