

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

Bible Basis: Genesis 1:1–3:24

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: Optional: PowerPoint slide entitled Space View, computer and projection equipment

Say, **Let me ask you some challenging questions and see what you know.** Display the Space View slide and invite kids to tell you what they see. Then ask these questions. (If you’re not using the slide, go straight to the questions.)

- **What is the speed of light?** (186,286 miles per second)
- **Which planets can you see without a telescope?** (Depending on the time of year—Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.)
- **What is the largest object in the universe?** (Abell 3266, a comet-like ball of gas that is a thousand million times bigger than the sun.)
- **How many stars do scientists think there are?** (70 sextillion; for added effect, write the number on the board—70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.)

After the questions, wrap up with a brief discussion:

- **How do you feel when you think about how huge and amazing the universe is?**
- **What’s the most amazing fact about the universe that you know?**

Say, **We are such a small part of the universe God created, but we are the part he cares about the most. He created us to know him and be like him.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

In the Beginning

The Bible story has three parts, each with a different interaction from the children. Begin the Bible story by explaining that the children will do an “anti-echo.” You will whisper a word, and they will shout it back to you. Practice with any word you choose, then begin the story.

God made the world in six days. He made the *(whisper)* light and darkness. *(Pause for kids to echo.)* He made the *(whisper)* seas and the sky. *(Echo.)* He made the *(whisper)* dry ground and plants. *(Echo.)* He made the *(whisper)* stars and sun and moon. *(Echo.)* He filled the water and the sky with *(whisper)* living things. *(Echo.)* God made every kind of creature on the Earth. But he had one more thing to create.

In the second part of the story, children will mirror your actions.

Stand facing the children. If you move your right arm, they will move their left. If you turn to your right, they will turn to their left. Choose any actions you like for kids to reflect. Have a child read *Genesis 1:26–27*.

He created Adam and Eve and gave them the Garden of Eden to live in. God wanted people—us—to reflect his glory. We can have many of the same qualities God has—like love, kindness, creativity, and generosity. Let’s practice being mirrors to remember that we are made in God’s image and reflect God’s glory.

In the final story section, the children will respond to cue words by saying, “Oh no!”

The time came when Adam and Eve had to make some choices. When I say, “Was that a good choice?” You answer, “Oh no!”

God told Adam and Eve they could eat from anything in the garden except one tree. But the serpent hated God and wanted Adam and Eve to think God lied. He told Eve she could eat from that tree and she did. Was that a good choice? *(Oh no!)* Then Eve offered Adam some fruit. Was that a good choice? *(Oh no!)* Then Adam ate the fruit. Was that a good choice? *(Oh no!)* Then Adam and Eve tried to hide from God because they knew they had disobeyed. Was that a good choice? *(Oh no!)*

God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden after that. But he never stopped loving them, and he never wanted them to stop reflecting his glory. Even now, we still reflect God’s glory, and every day we can choose to be more like him.

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

- **How did God feel about Adam and Eve?**
- **What does it mean that God made us in his own image?** *(We reflect his glory; we have the ability to be like God in our characteristics.)*

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: RIGHT AND WRONG

Stuff You Need: index cards

Before class, write one true or false sentence about today's lesson on each card, or you can have children write their own true or false sentences in class.

In class, have the children stand in the middle of the room. Explain to the children that you will read one card at a time. If they think the statement is true, they should move to the right. If they think the statement is false, they should go to the left. If children get the answer incorrect, take time to look up the answer in the Bible. For more of a challenge, add sentences about the Bible passages covered in *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 1.

OPTION 2: GARDEN OF EDEN

Stuff You Need: construction paper in a variety of colors, paper plates, glue, tape, scissors.

Optional: toothpicks, paper clips, other small tactile items

Say, **God created the Garden of Eden as the perfect place for Adam and Eve to live. Let's make our own 3-D versions of the Garden of Eden.** Give each child a paper plate. Challenge them to cut shapes from paper to represent items in the Garden of Eden and stand them up in a three-dimensional picture on the plate. One method is to fold paper and cut the shape out of two layers at once, leaving the fold uncut at the top of the shape. Bend the bottoms into short tabs that can be taped to the plate to make the figure stand sort of like a pyramid. As the group works, engage them in discussion.

- How do you think the world might have been different if Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God?
- What will you remember most about today's Bible story?

As you wrap up, say, **Our God created an exciting world for us to live in. He made us to be like him in many ways. No matter how many stars are in the universe, they can't know God the way we can.**

OPTION 3: MY GARDEN OF EDEN

Stuff You Need: My Garden of Eden Activity Sheet, crayons

Optional: poster board, art supplies, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the idea of a perfect world. Brainstorm the types of things that might be in a perfect world. Have the children draw a version of their perfect world, created by God, not man! Send home to share with their family.

OPTION 4: CARING FOR CREATION

Stuff You Need: poster board, art supplies

God gave the world and all creation to us to use and care for the best we can. What are some parts of creation that you use daily, that you feel you cannot live without?

How do you care for that creation?

How do you show God your appreciation?

Can one or two people make a difference?

Break the group into smaller groups of three or four students. Have each group choose one part of God's creation that needs more of humanity's care and concern. Challenge each group to write up a plan to present to God—showing him how they would protect creation.

Direct the group to describe the creation, name how and why it might need our attention, and three to four ways they plan to carry out their plan.

Use poster board, markers, or other art supplies if needed to help illustrate their project. Present the projects to the larger group.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

GOD BUILDS A NATION

Bible Basis: Genesis 12:1–15:21

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: Optional: spoonful of sand

Say, **Everybody count to ten!** Pause and count as a group. **Good, you’re great counters. Now I’ll say some numbers, and you tell me what comes next.** Give a string of long, complicated numbers and see if anyone can remember them well enough to tell you the next number correctly. For instance, use 1,438,659; 719,534,172; 23,629,743. Congratulate anyone who is right. Then ask:

- **Tell me something you wish you could have as much of as you want.**
- **Besides money, what are some good things to have a lot of?**

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: Bible, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 2*

Optional: crepe paper rolls

Divide your class into four groups. Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 2. As you tell the story, each group will move around your room to form a continuous border. If you have a small class, have the children pass a roll of crepe paper down the row, unrolling it as it goes, and hold that in place for a border. You can also have the children find Genesis 12 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Read Genesis 12:1–2. Abram trusted God, so he packed up all his tents and everything he owned and left Haran, even though he didn’t know where he was going.

Send one-fourth of your class to stand along one edge of your space.

What do you need to build a great nation? Land and people—and Abram didn't have either one, but he trusted God.

Move another group to a second edge of your space. Pace around within the borders being created.

Abram moved to Canaan. Read Genesis 13:14–15. Abram trusted God, so he packed his tents again and kept moving.

Move another group to a third edge.

In Hebron, Abram built an altar to the Lord. Read Genesis 14:5–6 Abram trusted God, so he worshiped God. He went wherever God told him to go.

Move the last group to the fourth edge.

When Abram was 99 years old, God came to him and said, "You will be the father of many nations. Your name will now be Abraham. Nations and kings will come from you. I will be their God." Abraham was very old and didn't have any children, but he trusted God. And one day it all came true! Abraham had a son, who had two sons, and they had sons, and those sons formed new nations full of land and people. Abraham trusted God and obeyed. We can trust God to keep his promises, too!

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

- **What did Abraham trust God for in this story?**
- **How does Abraham's story affect how you feel about trusting God?**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY

Stuff You Need: Abraham's Journey Activity Sheet, string or yarn, markers, glue

Optional: PowerPoint slide entitled Abraham's Journey, projection equipment, and star stickers

Say, **Abraham didn't always know where he was going, but he trusted God to lead him safely. Let's make a reminder of Abraham's trust.** Give an activity sheet to each child. Have the children label key spots along Abraham's journey (Haran, Canaan, Hebron). Encourage the children to add

small reminders of the promises God made. Then use string or yarn and glue it down along the path Abraham took. If desired, the children can add a starry background to the map.

- **How did Abraham show that he was trusting God?**
- **How can you show that you are trusting God?**

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

OPTION 2: TOO MANY TO COUNT

Stuff You Need: scrap paper, pencils, four sets of items to count, watch with second hand

Play this game in groups of six to eight. The items to count can be simple things, such as pennies, buttons, paper clips, construction paper squares, or sticky notes in a stack. Set out one item at each of four stations around the room. Make sure there's a different number of each item and enough to be challenging to count accurately and quickly. Give each player paper and a pencil.

Say, **On Abraham's journey, God kept giving him things to count, and it wasn't easy!** Explain that the children will go on a journey to four stations. At each station they'll find something to count. They should count the items and record their answers. When everyone has played, compare answers and see if anyone counted the same. If you have an odd number, someone can be the timekeeper. Say, "Go," and let the first player start. When that player moves to the second station, the next player begins. Keep time to see how long it takes the whole group from start to finish. If you have time, scramble up the number of items at each station and play again to try to beat the group time. Then discuss these questions:

- **How are God's promises like something we can't count?**
- **Tell me something you'd like to trust God for.**

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

OPTION 3: I TRUST

Stuff You Need: paper and pencils

Optional: video recording device

Encourage children to think about trusting God. Talk about the following questions:

How did Abraham trust God in today's Bible story?

Do you know other Bible characters who trusted God?

How can you trust God this week?

Have the children use what they have thought of in the previous questions to write a song about trusting God. Some children may find it easier to write new words to a familiar tune instead of making their own. If you have a video recording device, record the final song.

OPTION 4: God's Promises

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, concordance

Let the group know you are going to talk about promises. Have volunteers define the word "promise" and give examples of promises that were made to them. Ask:

How important are promises?

Do people take promises seriously?

Have the children make a list of promises that God has made. They can start with promises they know and then use Bibles and a concordance to find more promises God has made. When time is ending or children are becoming restless, ask:

Which of God's promises means the most to you? Why?

How seriously does God take his promises?

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

JOSEPH: FROM SLAVE TO DEPUTY PHARAOH

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Get the children’s attention by mooing loudly. Get everyone to moo with you. Then give a signal for everyone to stop. Say, **Let’s see what you know about cows.** Ask the following questions and let the group guess the answers:

- **How many hours a day does a cow spend eating?** (Six)
- **How many gallons of milk does the average cow produce each day?** (Ten)
- **How long does a cow live?** (Up to 25 years)
- **How much does a cow weigh?** (1,400 pounds)
- **How much water does a cow drink in a day?** (As much as a bathtub full)
- **How many glasses of milk does a cow produce in her lifetime?** (200,000)

Then ask:

- **How are cows good for humans?**
- **If cows get too skinny, how does that affect humans?**

Say, **Cows are an important part of our Bible story today. Let’s find out what Joseph had to say about them.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, From Pit to Palace Emotions Activity Sheet, pencils, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 3*

Give an Activity Sheet and pencil to each child. Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 3, pausing throughout the story for children to draw the emotions mentioned on their papers. Explain that they will use these circles to draw the emotions of Joseph and the other characters in the story. You can also have children find Genesis 37 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

From Pit to Palace

When you come to a word appearing in bold, pause and give the kids a quick moment to sketch the emotion in one of the circles on their paper.

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

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

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

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

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

When the story is finished, ask:

- How did God turn things around for good for Joseph?
- How would you like God to turn things around for good in your life?

Say, **Time after time, Joseph had to trust that God knew best. We can learn a good lesson from him!**

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

- Tell me how God made something good come out of the bad things for Joseph.
- Why are the feelings in this Bible story important to understanding what God did?

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: STORY PICTURES

Stuff You Need: pictures or items representing parts of the story, paper bag

Before class, gather at least five pictures or items that represent different parts of the story. You might choose a colorful piece of cloth, an empty water glass, a pyramid, toy handcuffs, a stuffed animal cow, and a family picture. Place all these items in a paper bag. Let each child draw an item from the paper bag and explain what part of the story it represents. If you have more children than items, pair children up.

When each item has been explained, discuss how Joseph trusted God throughout the story. Then discuss how children could trust in God this week.

OPTION 2: FAT COW FOOD

Stuff You Need: paper lunch bags, colored duct tape, decorating supplies

Say, **God used the circumstances of Joseph's life to provide food for untold numbers of people. Joseph saved grain in warehouses then distributed it when the famine struck. Today we are going to make reusable lunch bags that will remind you of when Joseph gave his brothers sacks of food.** Give each child a paper lunch bag and ask them to cover the bag with duct tape and decorate it. On one side of the bag, have each child write, "God knows what's good for me." As they work, ask:

- What things are happening in your life that you'd like God to turn into something good?
- How can God use what happens in your life to help others?

Say, **God knows what's best and can use anything for good.**

Option 3: God Knows Best Drama

Stuff You Need: Optional: Bible-time clothes

Have the children participate in a drama about today's Bible story. Let the children use their Bibles and *The Story for Kids* to help them, but encourage children to do the drama using their own words. When children use their own words, you can not only check their understanding of the Bible story, but the story and the lessons learned will stay with the children longer.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

OUT OF EGYPT

Bible Basis: Exodus 1:1–2:10; 3:9–10; 12:31–33; 13:21–22

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Gather the children together and ask if any of them have babysat or watched younger brothers and sisters. Allow the children to tell stories about watching over younger children. After a few stories, ask:

- What does it mean that you’re watching over someone or something?
- Tell me about a time when someone was watching over you.
- How does it feel to watch over someone or something?

Say, In our Bible story today, we’ll see how God was watching over his people and running interference for them.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

Optional: drum

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

Watch Out Hike

In today’s Bible story, the children will pretend they’re on a hike and have to watch out for danger ahead. Warm up by having the group use thumbs and forefingers to make rings around their eyes and look around the room. Ask a student volunteer to lead the hike by calling out, “Hut, two, three, four; hut, two, three, four” while the group marches in place in rhythm. You may want to give another volunteer a drum to beat the rhythm. On your cue the marching stops. Continue with the next story segment. Whenever children hear you say, “Uh-oh, watch out!” they should look around the room through their finger glasses. Then resume marching until you give the signal again to stop.

God's people lived in Egypt—but it wasn't always a great life. They were slaves and had to work hard to serve the Egyptians. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, thought there were too many Israelites, so he gave an order to throw all the Israelite baby boys in the river. Uh-oh, watch out!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Say, **God watched over Moses and his people, and he watches over you, too.**
Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: JUMPIN' FROGS

Stuff You Need: Green index cards

Say, **One of the plagues that God sent to Pharaoh was the plague of frogs. There were frogs everywhere. Frogs in bed; frogs in bread; frogs on head! Today we are going to make a jumpin' frog to remind us that God watches over his people.**

Give each child a green index card. One at a time, fold both top corners to the opposite edge of the paper, then unfold. Fold the paper in half where the diagonal creases meet in the middle and then open. Fold the paper in at the sides, using the diagonal creases, making a triangle on the top of the card. Fold the uppermost triangles up to the top point. Fold the sides in to meet at the centerline. Accordion-fold the bottom in thirds. Rub your finger down the back of the frog to make it jump.

OPTION 2: STAND FIRM GAME

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

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

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

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

OPTION 3: EXODUS WORD SEARCH

Stuff You Need: Exodus Word Search Activity Sheet, highlighters

Give an activity sheet to each child. Briefly review the story of Moses and Pharaoh with the class. Talk about key words. Have them solve the puzzle.

Option 4: Miracles

Stuff You Need: construction paper, markers, decorating supplies

We hear so many stories about how people have been protected and survived accidents, bad storms, robberies, illness, or other disasters. People call these miracles.

Talk about some recent events such as the ones above.

- Why do you think that some people are kept safe while others are not?
- Tell me all the ways God watched over his people in this Bible story.
- Tell me some ways God watches over you.

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

On construction paper have each student write a thank-you prayer to God for watching over us. Decorate with art supplies and display.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Thank God for watching over you. Encourage the children to thank God for a specific way he has watched over them. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 4*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NEW RULES

Bible Basis: Exodus 19:1–8; 20:1–17

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: whiteboard or large paper, markers

Say, **Wash your hands before you eat. Red means stop, green means go. Do your homework before playing video games. We have rules all around us, in every part of our lives. But what makes a good rule?** Invite answers and be ready to write down everything the children say about the requirements of a good rule.

- Tell me some examples of good rules.
- If you had to make up a good rule right now, what would it be?

Say, **Good rules have a purpose. They're not just for bossing people around, but for keeping them safe and learning good habits. Our Bible story today is about the rules God gave his people.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 5. You can also have the children find Exodus 20 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

RULES FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

For today's Bible story learning, the children will use the Ten Commandments Activity Sheet to identify God's new rules for his people. Set up for this activity with the following explanation:

After hundreds of years of living in Egypt, God's people left that land. God wanted to take them to their own land and chose Moses to lead them. But first, while the Israelites were in the desert, God gave Moses some rules the Israelites needed to follow if they wanted to

stay God's special people. While Moses was on Mount Sinai listening to God, God gave him ten rules—or commandments—for the people to follow. God wrote them out on two big stone tablets and took them to the people. God said, "I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of Egypt. That is the land where you were slaves."

Give an activity sheet and a pencil to each child. Explain that the words are the Ten Commandments but without punctuation or capitalization at the beginning of a sentence. The task is to identify the ten separate commandments. Warn them that the words "Do not" don't always signify the beginning of a new commandment. Allow children to work in pairs or small groups. Write the number of each commandment over the first word that it begins with. Overachievers may like to add punctuation and capitalizations. Provide ample time to work on this, then come back together to go over answers. Check students' answers by reading *Exodus 20:1–17*. Use this time to explain any concepts that may be confusing. For instance, misusing the name of God is using it in a way that does not give God honor. Adultery is breaking promises you make when you get married. Giving false witness is lying.

Here is the correct division of commandments:

1. Do not put any other gods in place of me.
2. Do not make statues of gods that look like anything in the sky or on the Earth or in the waters. Do not bow to them or worship them.
3. Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will find guilty anyone who misuses his name.
4. Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. The seventh day is a Sabbath in honor of the LORD your God. Do not do any work on that day.
5. Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
6. Do not commit murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not give false witness against your neighbor.
10. Do not long for anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Wrap up the Bible study time by saying, **Moses went and told the people all of the LORD's words and laws. They answered with one voice. They said, "We will do everything the LORD has told us to do."**

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

- **Why did God give his people these rules?**
- **How did the people respond to God's rules? How do you respond?**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Do EVERYTHING Game

Stuff You Need: copies of Do Everything Activity Sheet, pencils, paper, Bibles

Bookmark Exodus 19:8 in one or more Bibles and leave them where children will find them. Give an activity sheet and pencil to each child. Explain, **This is a “Do Everything” game. Your paper tells you what you have to do. When you’ve done each task, mark it off. You can do them in any order you want, but you must do them all.** Read through the list and make sure everyone understands the tasks. If you’d like, you can say the challenge is to see how long it takes for everyone to do all the things on the list, then keep time while children move around the room. When everyone is finished, gather for a discussion.

- **What did the Bible verse that you read say?**
- **I gave you ten things to do, and they were pretty easy. How do you feel about what God asks you to do in his rules?**

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

Say, **This was just a game, but God’s rules have a purpose. God gave us the rules so we can know him better. When we learn and follow God’s laws, we get closer to God himself.**

OPTION 2: Memory Times Three

Stuff You Need: copies of New Rules Activity Sheets printed on card stock or sturdy paper, scissors

Optional: small resealable plastic bags

This is a familiar memory game format with the added challenge of finding three matching cards rather than two. Have children form groups of three or four. Give each group copies of the activity sheets and have them cut apart the cards. Groups can scramble the cards, then lay out 30 cards in a grid, words down, and play a game of “memory.” Each player turns over three cards. To make a match, the number, commandment, and Bible verse must be about the same commandment. If all three match, the player keeps them. If they don’t match, turn them word-side down again and someone else takes a turn. If you’d like, you can give every child a set of 30 cards in a plastic bag to take home to play with their family. Ask:

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

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

Option 3: No Rules

Start playing a familiar game with your class. Change the rules, but don't tell them. They will most likely tell you that you are not playing according to the rules. Play for a while, giving the children the opportunity to figure out the new rules.

After most children have figured out the new rules, wrap up the game and discuss:

- **Was it hard to play the game when you didn't know the rules?**
- **How do we learn God's rules?**
- **Why are rules good for us?** (Children generally see many rules as unfair and this may become an energetic discussion. Encourage discussion and help them to see the reasoning behind some rules.)

Option 4: Follow God's Rules

Stuff You Need: white board or butcher paper, tape, markers

Talk more about rules and how the students follow the ancient Ten Commandments today.

Are there rules or commandments in everyday life? Brainstorm ten of these types of rules.

Have each student write rules or commandments they follow in everyday life on the board. These can be rules from home, school, friendships, clubs.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

WANDERING

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

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

Bible Point: Joshua and Caleb trusted God. I can trust God no matter what.

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

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

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

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

SPYING OUT THE LAND

This Bible story presentation is a drama a group of students can perform. If you’d like, make some simple Bible-time costumes and props available. If you have a small group, double up on narrator and spy lines.

Narrator 1: Hundreds of years ago, God promised to make Abraham into a father of nations and give him the land of Canaan. By the time of our story, Abraham had too many relatives to count, and they were about to move into a new land—the land God promised.

Narrator 2: God spoke to Moses, the leader of the Israelites. He said, “Send some men to check out the land of Canaan. I am giving it to the people of Israel.” So Moses sent 12 spies to check out the land of Canaan.

Narrator 1: Moses had a lot of questions:

Moses: Are the people who live there strong or weak? Is the land good or bad? Do the towns have high walls? Are there trees or not? Is it rich land or poor land? Inquiring minds want to know. (*Numbers 13:18–20b*)

Spy 1: We spied our way through the desert and finally came to a valley.

Spy 2: And what a valley! We spied grapes growing so big that a single bunch took up a whole branch. Two of us carried it on a pole.

Spy 3: Don’t forget the figs and pomegranates.

Spy 1: We spied into the hill country and down by the Jordan River. It was like the land flowed with milk and honey. This was good land!

Spy 2: But we also spied the cities, and the cities had high walls around them.

Spy 3: And we spied the people who lived behind the high walls. They were powerful!

Narrator 1: For 40 days, the 12 spies walked through the land God had promised to give the Israelites.

Narrator 2: Finally, it was time to go home and give a report.

Moses: What have you got to say for yourselves?

Narrator 1: Ten spies gave one report.

Spy 1: It’s a very good land, but the people who live there are big and scary.

Spy 2: Yeah, big and scary.

Spy 3: Yeah, *really* big and scary.

Narrator 2: But two spies gave a different report. Caleb stood up to talk.

Caleb: We should go up and take the land. We can do it!

Spy 1: We can’t attack those people! They are stronger than we are.

Spy 2: Yeah, big and scary!

Spy 3: Yeah, *really* big and scary!

Spy 1: Next to them, we are grasshoppers!

Narrator 1: The Israelites didn't know what to think! They sobbed out loud during the night. But Caleb and his friend Joshua were not going to give up. (*Exodus 14:1*)

Caleb: If the Lord is pleased with us, he'll lead us into that land. It's a land that has plenty of milk and honey. He'll give it to us. Don't be afraid. The Lord is with us!

Narrator 2: But the people believed the ten spies. All the Israelites did was complain! God decided to punish them for doubting he could defeat the large people of Canaan.

Narrator 1: God said only Caleb and Joshua could live in the Promised Land, because they believed God and not the bad reports of the other spies. (*Exodus 14:30*)

Narrator 2: So for 40 years, the Israelites complained and wandered in the desert, until all the grown-ups had died. Their children grew up and were ready to go into the new land God had promised with Caleb and Joshua.

Narrator 1: We can always be confident in God's promise as we spy our way through the adventures of our lives.

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

- What effect did the bad report of the ten spies have on the Israelites?
- What happens when we listen to what people say instead of what God says?

Say, **Caleb and Joshua trusted God, even when the others didn't. We can trust God no matter what.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

Option 1: Exploring the Land

Stuff You Need: books or pictures of the Holy Land

Let the children be spies for the Israelites to explore the land of Canaan. Provide books and photos of the area for children to look through and learn about. Let them prepare their own report of the

land. To make the children feel more like spies who are searching for information, hide the books around your room or church and have an exploration. After the “spies” have returned and given their report, ask:

- What happened when the people doubted what God could do?
- Why were Caleb and Joshua not influenced by the report of the ten spies?

Say, **God promised to give his people a new land. Caleb and Joshua were confident that God would keep his promise, and they didn’t let other people change what they thought.**

OPTION 2: LISTEN TO WHOM?

Stuff You Need: Listen to Whom? Activity Sheet.

Optional: assorted simple skit props

Print out a copy of the activity sheet. Cut apart the three scenarios. Have children work in groups to prepare a skit that illustrates the scenarios. (If you have a large group, you can duplicate scenarios and see how different groups handle the same situation.) Allow about 10 minutes planning and practice time, then have each group present. Applaud all performances, then talk about:

- When you hear two different opinions about a situation, how do you decide who to listen to?
- How can today’s Bible story help you in situations like these?

Say, **Caleb and Joshua were confident because they knew they were obeying God. Let God set the standard for your decisions, not other people.**

OPTION 3: TRUST IS THE ISSUE

Stuff You Need: Trust is the Issue Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the trust that Caleb and Joshua must have had for God’s power and love. Talk about the fact that God knew he could count on Caleb and Joshua as well. **Who can you trust? What makes a person trustworthy?** Split the group into small groups and have them list on their papers the characteristics of a trustworthy person in their lives. Have the groups circle the top five characteristics.

OPTION 4: TRUST GOD

Stuff You Need: Bibles, paper, pencils

Sometimes it is difficult to know who to trust. But we can always know that God keeps his promises and can be trusted, no matter what.

Brainstorm with the large group what it means to be trustworthy. Name some people whom the group feels are trustworthy all the time.

Split the group into smaller groups and provide each group with a Bible, paper, and pencil. As a group, find three times, other than the story of Caleb and Joshua, when God's people put their trust in him, no matter what. Record them.

Have the groups choose one of the Bible stories (do not duplicate) and write a skit about God's people and their trust in his love and promises. Share the skits.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

THE BATTLE BEGINS

Bible Basis: Joshua 1:1–11; 2:1–24

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: masking tape

As you begin class, ask a volunteer to pull off ten feet of masking tape without tangling the tape. This will be difficult, but let the volunteer struggle for a moment. Then invite suggestions. For instance, one child can hold the roll while another pulls the tape and walks ten feet. When they have a long strip, attach it to the floor. (Depending on your set-up, you might be able to use it for the Bible verse game below.) Ask:

- Why was that a difficult thing for one person to do alone?
- Tell me something that is hard for you to do by yourself.

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 7*, signs with one of the following words on each: law, spies, Rahab, roof, rope, and three days

Optional: funky, colorful hat

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

Who Needs Help Now?

Gather the prepared signs that say: law, spies, Rahab, roof, rope, three days. Recruit from one to six helpers to carry the signs out and walk in front of you as indicated in the script. You may want to have an adult assistant following the script to prompt the helpers. Helpers should walk right past you, holding the sign for the audience to see. Optional: give children funky hats to wear.

Read Joshua 1:1–2. "Be strong and very brave. Make sure you ... I know there's something I'm supposed to remember here. I think I need some help. Signal for the first helper to carry out the "law" sign. Pretend to stretch your neck to try to read it. Oh yes, "Make sure you obey the whole law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn away from it to the right or to the left. Then you will have success everywhere you go." It helps to do just what God says.

Forty years earlier, Joshua had helped spy out the land. He remembered that the people in Canaan were very strong, so he decided to ... what was it? I need some help here. *Signal for the helper with the "spies" sign. Oh yes, Joshua decided to send two spies into Jericho, the first city the Israelites would attack. The spies could make sure everything was safe for God's people to attack.*

The spies got into Jericho, and there they met a woman named ... named ... what was her name? I'm having a bad day! *Signal for the helper with the "Rahab" sign to come out. That's right, Rahab! Rahab lived in a house attached to the city's huge wall. It turned out Rahab knew about God and his plan, and she wanted to help keep the spies safe. It's always good to have someone helping you out in a tough situation.*

But then the king of Jericho heard the spies had come! He must have had some spies of his own. He sent a message to Rahab. It said, "Bring out the men who came to your house. They've come to check out the whole land."

Rahab had heard the king's spies coming and hid the Israelite spies ... I know she hid them somewhere ... in the closet ... the crawl space ... no, that's not right. Where is that help when I need it? *Signal for a helper with the "roof" sign to come out. She hid them on her roof! That's right, under a pile of flax plants. She told the messengers, "It's true the men were here. Go after them quickly. You might catch up with them." The king's men left to hunt down the Israelite spies.*

Rahab went up to the roof to talk to the spies. She knew it was God's plan to give the land to the Israelites. *Read Joshua 2:12–14.*

So Rahab let the spies down by ... let's see, the front door wouldn't work, and there was no back door. Help! *Signal for the helper with the "rope" sign to come. Rahab used a rope! She let them down with a rope through the window. She had said to them, "Go up into the hills. The men who are chasing you won't be able to find you. Hide yourselves there for three days until they return. Then you can go on your way."*

When the spies left, they went up into the hills. They stayed there for ... let's see, how long was that ... a week? No, that's too long ... *Signal for the helper with the "three days" sign to come. Three days! They stayed three days. By that time the men who were chasing them had searched all along the road. They couldn't find them.*

Read Joshua 2:23–24. Joshua liked the spies' report. He knew it meant God would take care of them once they started fighting in Canaan. Joshua had all the Israelites pray and then get ready to attack Jericho.

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

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

- Why did the two men in the Bible story need help?
- How did God provide the help they needed?

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BIBLE VERSE CRUMPLE

Stuff You Need: paper, markers, bins or baskets, whiteboard or newsprint, blindfolds

Have the children form groups of four to six and give each group paper and markers. Ask them to write these segments from the verse on full sheets of paper: Be strong / and very brave / Make sure you / obey the whole law. / Then you will have success / everywhere you go. Also write the verse on the board. During class, read the verse together. Have the children tightly crumple up the sheets and put them in a basket. For extra fun, add some crumpled blank sheets as well. Set the baskets about ten feet away from the starting area. Children will take turns running to the baskets in pairs. One person in the pair will be blindfolded. The person who can see is not allowed to touch the papers. The blindfolded player follows the seeing player's instructions to uncrumple paper to find the next verse segment. If they open a sheet that is the wrong segment, they should crumple it again and keep looking. The next pair finds the next part of the verse. Play until the whole verse is assembled. After the game, ask:

- How does this verse apply to the people in our story?
- How does this verse apply to you?

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

OPTION 2: JERICHO'S WALLS

Stuff You Need: construction paper, markers, scissors, glue, poster board

Say, **Jericho had a high, thick wall all the way around the city. Rahab's house was actually part of the wall, and she used a window to help the spies escape to safety.** Invite children to work

together to build as much as possible of a city wall out of construction paper. Fold a sheet of paper in half, then in half again in the same direction. Tape the open edges together to form a hollow square or rectangle, or overlap the end segments to form a hollow triangle. Glue pieces to the poster board and each other. Use various widths of paper for different size elements. Draw windows or other features with markers. Build as much of the wall as you have time for. As children work, talk about:

- What parts of this story encourage us to accept help from other people?
- What parts of this story encourage us to give help to other people?

Say, **Sometimes God's help comes in the form of other people. I hope you'll be willing to let God use you to help others, too.**

Option 3: Joshua Gets Help

Stuff You Need: Joshua Gets Help Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Pair the children up and have them try to solve the puzzle. It says "Rahab helped Joshua. We should be ready to help people too."

Option 4: We ALL Need Help Sometimes

Stuff You Need: craft paper, markers or crayons

Everyone needs help now and then. Sometimes that help can come from an unlikely source, like a little brother or a stranger.

Have volunteers tell about times they received help from someone they never would have expected.

Why didn't they expect help from this person?

Did you remember to show your appreciation to this person?

Have you ever helped anyone and surprised them with your assistance?

Think of a time that God has helped you. With craft paper and markers or crayons design a thank-you card for someone who has helped you—this can be God!

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

A FEW GOOD MEN ... AND WOMEN

Bible Basis: Judges 16:1–31

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: table, two chairs

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

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

Samson’s Strength

Ask three fluent readers to be narrators for this story. Ask others to play the non-speaking roles of Samson, Delilah, and a group of Philistine leaders. These children will act out what they hear the narrators saying. For instance, when the narrator says, “Delilah tied up Samson”, the actors will mime this action. If you’d like, you can have some simple props on hand, such as belts for lengths of leather, clotheslines for rope, and simple furniture for a set. Remind the narrators that they may need to pause for actors to catch up with the action.

Narrator 1: Even after God's people moved into the land he had promised them, they had enemies. But they also had some heroes. When Samson was born, God made him really strong. He was so strong, he even ripped up lions for fun.

Narrator 2: No one could beat Samson, especially the Philistines—the enemies. The Philistines wanted to know Samson's weakness. They got their chance when Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah.

Judges 16:5–6

Judges 16:7–9

Judges 16:10–12

Judges 16:13a–b

Narrator 1: A loom was a big contraption for weaving cloth and rugs. So while Samson was sleeping, Delilah took hold of the seven braids of his hair. She wove them into the cloth on a loom and called for the Philistine leaders to come again. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines are attacking you!" But when Samson woke up, he pulled up the loom without any trouble.

Narrator 2: Now Delilah was fuming mad. She said, "How can you say you love me when you won't share your secret with me?" Day after day, she nagged him about his secret. Nag, nag, nag. Pester, pester, pester.

Judges 16:17

Narrator 1: Delilah had one more chance to get that money! She sent one more message to the Philistine leaders and they came with all the money they promised her. Delilah got Samson to fall asleep on her lap. Then she called for a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair.

Narrator 2: Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines are attacking you!" Samson woke from his sleep and thought he could just shake himself free like the other times. He didn't know the Lord had left him.

Narrator 3: The Philistines grabbed Samson and poked his eyes out. They put bronze chains around him and made him grind grain in the prison day after day. Samson had a lot of time to think about what he had done and what God could do. He had a lot of time to worry. And Samson's hair began to grow back.

Narrator 1: One day the Philistines were having a huge party in the temple of their god. Some party guests called for Samson to put on a show for them.

Narrator 2: Samson knew this was his chance. He had made a huge mistake when he got involved with Delilah, but now he wanted to do the right thing. He wanted to show these enemies the power of the one true God. So he said to the servant who was guiding him, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that hold this temple up."

Narrator 3: Read *Judges 16:28*. Then Samson reached for the two pillars and leaned hard against them. God had given him his strength back, and he pushed the pillars over. The whole building collapsed!

Narrator 1: Though he lost his strength when he cut his hair, Samson knew God would still hear him pray. He knew he could depend on the Lord. God gave Samson the strength to do one more superhero feat. We can depend on God!

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BRAID OF STRENGTH

Stuff You Need: three lengths of clothesline about five feet long each, duct tape

Say, **Samson was famous all through the land for his strength. Even the last thing he ever did showed that his strength came from God. God set him apart from birth, and he never cut his hair. Despite his mistakes, Samson learned he could depend on God. The Bible says he had seven braids of hair.** Explain that you're going to work together to make a group braid. (If you have a large class, make several braids.) Use duct tape to secure one end of the three lengths of clothesline to a table top, close together. Demonstrate how to braid by moving one of the side lengths to the middle, then moving the other side length to the new middle. Have children take turns braiding and completing this sentence: "I depend on God when I _____. " Keep taking turns and braiding until you finish the length of clothesline. Use duct tape to secure both ends so the rope doesn't unravel. You can display the braid in your classroom for a future reminder of this lesson. Ask:

- Why did Samson want God to make him strong one last time?
- What can we learn from God's response to Samson's last request?

Say, **Samson's story teaches us that when we turn to God, he's there to help. We can depend on God.**

OPTION 2: BALLOON STRENGTH

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

Optional: newspapers

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

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

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

OPTION 3: CHOICES

Stuff You Need: Choices Activity Sheet, markers

Give an activity sheet and marker to each child. Talk with the group about the fact that Samson did get his strength from God and that there were some responsibilities attached to that gift. **When Samson chose to tell Delilah his secret, he made a bad choice when it came to this special gift. Is it easy or hard to make right choices?** On the Activity Sheet, there are six scenarios with two choices each. Have the children shade in the side of the barbell with the choice they would make. Some of the scenarios do not have one wrong and one right answer. Use the children's answers to promote discussion in class. Make sure to send this Activity Sheet home so the discussion can continue at home.

OPTION 4: STRENGTH COMES FROM GOD

All of our strength comes from God.

- When we keep our bodies healthy, exercise, and respect our bodies, he helps us stay physically strong.
- When we work hard in school and use the intelligence God has given us, we become strong in mind.
- When we show respect and love for the people God has put in our lives, we become strong at heart.

Talk to the group about the strengths that we each have. What made them strong in these areas? It is important for us to recognize that everyone has many strengths so we can use the gifts we have from God to glorify him. It is also important to realize that if we feel weak we should ask God for guidance and help in developing strengths that we have or need.

Do the following activity:

Have the entire group stand and go the left side of the room. Stand in a line if possible. Let the children know that as you give them directions they must be honest and they must respect others in the group. Give the following directions, making sure you are giving the group enough time to follow the directions.

- **Step forward three steps if you are physically strong.**
- **Walk to the door if you are smart in math.**
- **Go to the center of the room if you are a good friend.**
- **Go back to your original spot if you are a good athlete.**
- **Sit down if you have been kind to someone today.**

Continue as long as you like with this to illustrate the many strengths that your class has. Say a prayer as a group, thanking God for the strengths you all have and promising him that you will use your strength for good.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

Bible Basis: Ruth 1:1–2:23

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

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

Resource: *The Story For Kids*, Chapter 9: “The Faith of a Foreign Woman”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: Optional: trophies or award ribbons

Open with a discussion about the difference between awards and rewards. If you brought in trophies or award ribbons, show them now and talk about what they were for. Ask the children to talk about the difference between *award* and *reward*. An award is something you earn by hard work and accomplishment. A reward is something you might get for doing a good deed or doing something that someone else wants you to do. “Re” is a clue that the word means you get something back.

- Tell me about a time when you got an award or a reward.
- How does the possibility of a reward motivate you to do the right thing?

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 9. As you come to words in the word bank throughout the Scripture passages, allow children to add the words from the bank. You can also have children find Ruth 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

RUTH IS KIND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The woman named _____ (Ruth) bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked, "Why are you being so kind to me? I'm from _____ (Moab)."

Boaz replied, "I've heard about everything you have done for your _____ (mother-in-law) since the death of your husband. I know you came to live with people you didn't know."

Read Ruth 2:12

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

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

Read Ruth 2:19b–20a.

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

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 9*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about the character qualities found in Ruth and Boaz. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: GRAIN AND STRAW

Stuff You Need: packing peanuts, coffee filters, tubs or boxes

Set out tubs of packing peanuts at the start line. Set out empty tubs or boxes at the finish line. Use one set of tubs for each team. Explain, **What Ruth did in Boaz's field is called gleaning. That means she was picking up what was left over after the harvesters had been through the field and tied up bundles of grain. In this game, we're going to pick up leftovers.** Have the children form groups of four. (If your class is small, use groups of two.) Two players on each team will reach into a tub of packing peanuts and try to carry what they grab to the other side of the room and put it in a tub there. The other two players from each team will carry coffee filters to use as baskets. They will pick up what the first two players drop along the way. See which group ends up with the most in the tub at the finish line.

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

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

OPTION 2: KINDNESS CHARADES

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

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

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

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

OPTION 3: THANK YOU!

Stuff You Need: copies of Thank You! Activity Sheet, card-making supplies

Give an activity sheet to each child. Brainstorm as a group about the many people from the church congregation who have shown them kindnesses—either personally or as a group. Be sure to add the pastor, pastor's wife, and other church personnel if they are not mentioned by the children. Have the children design a thank-you card for someone on the list. Encourage them to be specific in their message to the person they are thanking. Decorate these and deliver during the next week. Let students make more than one card if they want.

OPTION 4: ACTS OF KINDNESS

Stuff You Need: Bibles, paper, pens

For quite a while there was a movement for people to do random acts of kindness. Brainstorm with the group a list of kind acts the students do or have done in the past. Talk about whether it is easy to be kind to some people and not to others and why they think that is so.

Talk about some people whom the class thinks are kind. What makes a person kind?

Break the group into small groups and give each group a Bible, paper, and pen. Have each group find three instances of kindness in the Bible and record the location and a brief summary of the story.

Share the findings of the groups.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

MESSAGES FROM GOD

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: simple items that make familiar sounds

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

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card* 10, copies of pages 67–71 of *The Story for Kids*

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

Samuel: An Answer to Prayer

Today your children will get a taste of what it's like to teach a Bible story. Work in groups of three to five. (Smaller groups will work if your class is small; if you have more than thirty students, consider dividing into two or more "large" groups before dividing further into small groups.)

Assign each group a portion of the Bible story. You might want to mark up the copies of the pages from *The Story for Kids* in advance so each group knows what to work on. Below are some suggested story divisions, but you can adjust these segments to match the number of groups you expect to have.

Explain that each group's task is to present their portion of the story to the larger group. They'll have about ten minutes to prepare a presentation using any items available in your classroom (furniture, art supplies, Bibles, and so on). Encourage creativity! Give a two-minute warning when the work time is almost over. Then begin with the first group and enjoy the presentations.

Possible Story Segments

Segment 1: Start on page 67 and go through "But she wasn't making a sound" at the top of page 68.

Segment 2: Start on page 68 with the summary that begins, "The person who took care of the temple ..." and continue through "Her face wasn't sad anymore."

Segment 3: Start on page 68 with, "After some time, Hannah became pregnant" and continue through "There isn't any Rock like our God" on page 69.

Segment 4: Start on page 69 with, "The boy Samuel served the Lord ..." and go through "So Samuel went and lay down in his place" on page 70.

Segment 5: Start on page 70 with, "The Lord came and stood there" and go through the summary on page 71 that ends with "When Samuel got very old, he decided to make his sons the new leaders of the Israelites."

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

- What did Hannah pray for? How did God answer her prayer?
- What do we learn from this story about prayer?

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

Option 1: Prayer Journals

Stuff You Need: Prayer Journal Pages Activity Sheet, supplies to make a journal cover, art supplies. Journal cover supplies can be as simple as construction paper and a stapler, or you might provide brightly colored, three-ring binders, wallpaper samples, or card stock.

Say, **Hannah prayed to God, and God heard her prayer. Then she celebrated God's answer to her prayer by saying, "The Lord has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong." (1 Samuel 2:1)** Let's make prayer journals to help us see how God answers our prayers. Provide multiple copies of the activity sheet for each child to put between two cover pieces. As the children work, ask:

- What is the hard part and the easy part about praying?
- What is the first prayer you would like to write in your journal?

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



Option 2: Bible Verse Target

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

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

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

OPTION 3: BIBLE PRAYERS

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, concordance

Divide the group into pairs and give each pair a Bible. Direct each pair to find three instances of prayer in the Old Testament and three examples in the New Testament. Have each group share one of the prayers. Ask: **Who was praying? For what? How did God answer?**

OPTION 4: PRAYER TIME

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, paper, markers

Optional: floor pillows

Give the children time to spend in prayer. Give them options to pray quietly, write their prayers out, or pray using prayers in the Bible. If children would like, let them pray together as long as they stay focused. After a time of prayer, continue in a discussion about prayer. Ask:

- **Do we know that God answers every one of our prayers? How?**
- **Do we always like or agree with the answers we get from God? Is there anything we can do about that?**
- **Have you ever prayed for something that you thought was very important and felt that you did not get an answer? What did you do? How did you feel?**

Become prayer warriors. As a group dedicate your prayer for the next three Sundays to one cause or person that needs your prayers. Let that person know that you care and are praying for him/her.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

FROM SHEPHERD TO KING

Bible Basis: 1 Samuel 17:1–50

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: covered bowl of cold spaghetti (make sure the bowl is not see-through), cottage cheese or gelatin cubes, blindfold

Say, **I have a dare for you today.** Show the bowl. **Who is willing to wear a blindfold and stick your hand in this bowl without knowing what's in here?** Choose a volunteer and blindfold him or her. (If more than one child wants to take the dare, send others out of the room with a helper so they can't see what's in the bowl.) After the dare, talk about:

- Why did some of you not want to take the dare?
- What kinds of things make you feel afraid?

Say, **In our Bible story today, we'll hear about someone who had good reason to be afraid, but he also had good reason to take the dare.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

DAVID BEATS GOLIATH

Before beginning the Bible story, assign your children to two groups. One group should include most of the children, regardless of the size of your class. This is the "Goliath" group. The other group should be small, perhaps only one or two children. This is the "David" group. You might even want to have the two groups stand on opposite sides of the room while you stand in the "valley" in between. Encourage volume in responses!

Teach the Goliath group this response rhyme:

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

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

Teach the David group to finish these sentences when cued:

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

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

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

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

1 Samuel 17:4–7

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

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

David found out what was happening with the giant Philistine. He found out that Goliath came out every day and dared the Israelites to fight him, and no one wanted to do it. For forty days Goliath made this dare, and no one took the dare. Forty days! Forty dares! And every day the Israelite army ran in fear because Goliath was so scary. *Pause and do the Goliath rhyme with the Goliath group.*

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

1 Samuel 7:33–37: Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

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

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

David said to Goliath, "You are coming to fight against me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin. But I'm coming against you in the name of the Lord who rules over all. He is the one

you dared to fight against." Pause and do the Goliath rhyme, followed immediately by the David rhyme.

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

David fought in the strength of the God who rules over everything there is!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 11*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about a time when David had courage. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What made the difference between David and the rest of the Israelites?**
- **What lesson does the David story have for you?**

Say, **David knew Goliath was big and scary, but he also knew he was fighting in the strength of the Lord. That's where his courage came from.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: NINE FEET WHO?

Stuff You Need: measuring tapes, paper, pencils

Say, **The tallest man in the world right now is eight feet, three inches tall.** (This is according to the *2012 Guinness Book of World Records*.) **The tallest man on record was eight feet, eleven inches. But our Bible story tells us that Goliath was over nine feet tall. Let's do some measuring and see exactly how tall that is.** Provide measuring tapes and have children measure each other's heights. Challenge them to add heights together and try to figure out which two children come the closest to being over nine feet tall combined. If your ceilings are high enough, let someone mark nine feet on a wall. Talk about:

- **How would you feel if you had to go up against someone who was nine feet tall?**
- **Why wasn't David afraid to go up against Goliath?**

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

OPTION 2: GOD'S STRENGTH NECKLACES

Stuff You Need: small rocks, leather cording, jewelry wire, scissors, pencil, needle-nose pliers

Before class, gather small rocks, one for each child. Cut wire into 15-inch pieces.

In class, say, **David fought Goliath using five small stones. We are going to make a necklace to remind us that with God we can have courage to face what is hard.** Let each child pick a rock and then give each child a length of wire. Children will place the rock at the center of the wire and wrap the wire around the rock a few times to secure it. Twist together the ends and wrap the twist around a pencil to form a loop. Use pliers to close the loop, and then cut off any excess wire. To finish, thread a necklace-length piece of cord through the loop and knot the ends.

- **Why wasn't David afraid when everyone else was?**
- **What can we learn about God from this story about David?**

Say, **David fought in God's strength. God can give you courage when you're afraid, too.**

Option 3: In Six Scenes

Stuff You Need: copies of In Six Scenes Activity Sheet, pencils or colored pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the story of David and Goliath again. Have six children tell one part of the story and have them do it in sequential order. Talk briefly about cartoons in the newspaper or a comic book and how the author and artist work together to get the story in a short form. Have each child retell the story of David and Goliath as a cartoon on the activity sheet.

Option 4: SUPERHERO COURAGE!

Stuff You Need: paper, colored pencils or markers

It is difficult for some people to talk about their fears. Children do not want to appear less than fearless in front of friends. The Israelite army had no problem admitting their fear of the Philistine Goliath, and were shocked at the courage of the young boy, David.

Talk about what it means to have courage. Who has courage?

Individually or in small groups of no more than three, create a superhero with strength and courage from God. Name him or her. Draw a picture and write a short story together detailing a feat of great courage and how his or her work has given glory to God.

Share the superheroes with the rest of the class.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

A KING MAKES BAD CHOICES

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: masking tape

Optional: large appliance box, paint or markers

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

Welcome the children and point out the time machine. Say, **Have you ever wished you could go back in time and change something you did? Let's think about the time that has passed since your last birthday. Can you think of something you'd like to change?** Dramatically step into the time machine. Go first and suggest something you would change, such as getting impatient in line or losing your temper with your children or thinking something unkind about a neighbor. Invite the children to make machinery noises and on your signal, everyone should call out something they would change since their last birthday.

- **Why do you want to change what you did in that situation?**
- **What does it feel like to be sorry for something you did?**

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, Repent and Forgive Activity Sheet, pencils, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 12*

Optional: Repent and Forgive PowerPoint slides

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

DAVID IS SORRY

Say, **David always tried to do what God wanted him to do, but once he really, really messed up. He saw a woman named Bathsheba. She was married, but David wanted her to be his wife. So he sent her husband into battle where he died. Then David married Bathsheba.**

God told David that what he'd done was very wrong and David would be punished for his sin. David wrote a song to help him accept God's punishment and ask forgiveness for what he had done. We can read it in *Psalms 51*.

Give an activity sheet to each child, and make sure everyone has access to a Bible. The Activity Sheet asks children to read *Psalms 51:1–12* and categorize the statements in two columns. Is the statement one of repentance, where David admits his sin and expresses he is sorry? Or, is it a sign of God's forgiveness and how David is asking God to respond? You can read each verse and decide together, or you can have the class work in groups and compare their lists with the large group later. They do not have to copy whole verses onto the list, but rather jot down key words. If you are working as one group, you might prefer to use the optional PowerPoint slides of the verses to keep children focused on one section at a time.

A sample list:

What Is David Sorry For?	What Does David Ask God For?
• lawless acts • evil things • not being clean • sinning against God • sinner ever since birth, before birth	• show favor, faithful love • make pure • truth in my heart • teach wisdom • create a pure heart • give joy • spirit that obeys • whiter than snow

After groups finish working, gather to review lists. Then say, **God forgave David, and David again obeyed God. Soon Bathsheba had a baby that they named Solomon. That was a happy time in David's palace.**

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

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

Say, **God forgave David. We can't do anything to make God stop loving us; he'll always forgive us.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Clean as a Penny

Stuff You Need: dirty pennies, small container, spoon, vinegar, salt, strainer, large bowl

Do this simple science experiment with your class to talk about God washing away our sins. Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vinegar with a tablespoon of salt in a small container. Stir until the salt is dissolved. Give each child a penny. Have them place the penny in the vinegar solution. As they put the penny in the solution, encourage them to think about something they did wrong. After all the pennies are in the vinegar solution, wait five minutes. Then pour the solution through a strainer into a large bowl. Let each child keep their clean penny to remember the lesson. Talk about how God's forgiveness makes our hearts clean.

OPTION 2: SPOT SCRUBBERS

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

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

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

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

OPTION 3: I Am Really Sorry

Stuff You Need: I Am Really Sorry Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the group about David's songs that he wrote to God, asking for forgiveness. Prayer and song are great ways to express your feelings and many people use those methods. Perhaps take time to look through the Bible pointing out other instances when people sang to God or prayed for forgiveness or for guidance in making the right choices. Group the

children into small groups and have them write a song or prayer asking for forgiveness. Encourage them to be general in their request or if they want to use examples, use ones that are generic, like lying or fighting. Have the groups write their prayers/songs on the Activity Sheet and share them with the class. Have them take the prayers home to share. If this is especially successful, collect the prayers, photocopy, and give each child a collection of prayers to take home.

Option 4: Apologies

Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four. Direct them to write a skit in which an individual or group does something to another and needs to apologize. Have the group write two endings—one with a sincere apology and one with an insincere apology.

Have the groups perform their skits, and as a large group discuss the different apologies:

- **What makes one sincere and true and the other not?**
- **Does God know when we are truly sorry for our wrong-doing? How?**
- **How did he know that David was sorry?**
- **Can we apologize to God over and over? What happens if we continue to do the same things wrong?**

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

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

THE KING WHO HAD IT ALL

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

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

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

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card* 13, "yes" and "no" signs

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

Wise in God's Eyes

Ahead of time, make two signs; one that says "yes" and one that says "no." You'll need two strong readers to be narrators, and two volunteers to be sign holders—one will hold the "yes" sign and the other will hold the "no" sign. Whenever the narrators pause to ask a question about Solomon, the sign holders should parade with the signs and encourage the rest of the children to call out answers.

Narrator 1: Saul was the first king of Israel. Then came David, a famous king who ruled for 40 years. Then came King Solomon, one of David's sons.

Narrator 2: From the start, Solomon was a very different king than David. No battles and bloodshed for him. Solomon wanted to make his kingdom great by using his brain.

Narrator 1: *Read 1 Kings 3:5.* Now, that's an incredible question, isn't it? Solomon could really have anything he wanted!

Narrator 2: Do you think Solomon made a careful choice? *Pause for sign holders to wave signs.*

Narrator 1: Solomon thought long and hard about this question. He definitely wanted to make a good choice.

Narrator 2: He could have asked to live a long life. He could have asked to be wealthy. He could have asked for God to kill his enemies.

Narrator 1: But he didn't ask for any of that. Instead, he asked God to give him a wise heart, to know the difference between right and wrong. *Read 1 Kings 3:10–12.* Now Solomon had reason to boast about how smart he was and how wise he was.

Narrator 2: Do you think Solomon bragged to his friends? *Pause for sign holders to wave signs.*

Narrator 1: Solomon didn't get all proud and boastful. Instead, he was grateful for what God had done for him. He made the wise choice to go to Jerusalem and stand in front of the Ark of the Covenant. That was where God met with his people. Solomon made sacrifices to God, because he knew his wisdom came from God.

Narrator 2: Solomon became very famous for his wisdom. He knew about all kinds of things, from what rock badgers do in their free time to how to be truly happy in life. He solved arguments and figured out the best time to plant crops.

Narrator 1: Solomon could have kept his wisdom to himself. He could have made sure no one else ever learned how to be wise. But did he? *Pause for sign holders to wave signs.*

Narrator 2: Solomon didn't keep his wisdom to himself. He was constantly thinking of wise things that people needed to know, and he wrote a lot of those things down in a book called Proverbs.

Narrator 1: Proverbs teach you wisdom and train you. They help you understand wise sayings. Solomon's advice was, "Don't be wise in your own eyes. Have respect for the LORD."

Narrator 2: The queen of Sheba heard about how famous and wise Solomon was. She also heard about how he served and worshiped the Lord. So she traveled from far away to test Solomon with hard questions.

Narrator 1: Solomon didn't have to answer her questions. After all, he was the one who was smart, not her. Do you think he answered her questions? *Pause for sign holders.*

Narrator 2: The queen of Sheba asked Solomon about everything she wanted to know, and Solomon answered all of her questions. There wasn't anything that was too hard for the king to explain to her.

Narrator 1: So the queen of Sheba saw how very wise Solomon was. She said, “Back in my country I heard a report about you. I heard how wise you are. But I didn’t believe those things. So I came to see for myself. You are twice as wise as people say you are.”

Narrator 2: God made Solomon a wise leader who could rule the people with choices that were fair and right. God wants to help us be wise, too. All we have to do is ask.

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: PROVERBS FOR TODAY

Stuff You Need: copies of Proverbs for Today Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. **The Bible tells us that Solomon wrote over 3,000 proverbs.** Find out if the children know what a proverb is (a wise saying that many people use). **The book of Proverbs in the Bible records many of these.** Read the proverbs aloud together. Then have children work in pairs or trios to rewrite the proverbs in contemporary terms. Share the results with the whole group. Then talk about:

- **Which of these proverbs do you think is the wisest?**
- **How does having respect for the Lord help us to be wiser?**

Say, **We can learn from Solomon. When you face a tough decision, remember how much Solomon wanted to make wise decisions that pleased God.**

OPTION 2: Wise or Unwise?

Stuff You Need: prepared index cards

Before class, write wise and unwise choices on index cards, such as reading your Bible, obeying your parents, eating ice cream before dinner, or cheating on a test. In class, gather the children in

the middle of the room. Explain that when you read a card, they must decide if it is a wise or unwise thing to do. If it is wise, they should go to the right side of your room. If it is unwise, they should move to the left side. For a less active option, have children stand for a wise option and sit down for an unwise option.

Option 3: Solomon's Temple

Stuff You Need: pictures and descriptions of Solomon's temple (you can find pictures online or in books at your local library)

Optional: construction paper, scissors, pencils, ruler

In Chapter 13 of *The Story for Kids*, Solomon builds a temple for God. Let the children learn about this temple by looking at its description in the Bible (2 Chronicles 3–4) and looking at pictures of what people think it might have looked like. Children may like to construct a class model of Solomon's Temple.

Option 4: Choose Wisdom

Talk to the large group about Solomon. Why did he choose wisdom over anything else in the world? Brainstorm what types of things the group would ask for if they had the opportunity and knew that whatever they wanted would be granted.

- Is there a difference between being wise and being smart?
- Which would be better to be in today's world?
- Why would you go to a wise person? A smart person?

Break the large group into smaller groups. Have these groups write a list of proverbs (wise sayings) that are appropriate for today. Allow them to use the Bible and Solomon's advice as no more than two of the five they should have. Design a poster of the sayings and share them with the rest of the class. Talk about the sources of the wise sayings. How did those people get their wisdom?

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

A KINGDOM TORN IN TWO

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

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

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

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 14: “A Kingdom Torn in Two”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: rod pretzels (one for each pair of children) or a loaf of French bread

If you’re using a loaf of French bread, ask two volunteers to help you. If you have rod pretzels, have children partner up and give one pretzel to each pair. As you get started, tell the class you’re going to play tug-of-war with the bread or pretzels. The goal is to pull on the item until a piece breaks off and see who ends up with the biggest piece. The bread makes a good large group visual, but the pretzels allow everyone to participate. Choose what works best for your setting. Talk about:

- Can we put these pieces back together and make them whole again?
- Tell me about something that got destroyed and you couldn’t put it back together.

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

Optional: something to make a breaking sound

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

The Kingdom Divides

Give an activity sheet to each child. As you tell the story, pause as indicated and have children cut their Divided Kingdom Map into pieces. If your group is too large to have everyone cutting, you can simply cut one map as you tell the story. As you do this, hand the pieces to a few of the children. At the end of the story, these children can see if they can put the kingdom back together.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read 1 Kings 15:11. Asa knew that God had been trying to teach his people something, and he wanted to pay attention! He got rid of all the statues of false gods the kings before him had made. He even took his grandmother out of her job as queen mother because she made a pole to worship the goddess Asherah. Asa cut down the pole and burned it up.

Everything he did focused on learning from mistakes and trying to turn Judah around to be a country that worshiped God again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- What lessons did King Asa want the people to learn?
- What lessons can we learn when bad things happen to us?

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: MY MISTAKE

Stuff You Need: My Mistake Activity Sheet

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Sometimes bad things happen just because they happen, not because God caused it. But even then we can look back and learn from our mistakes.**

Have a volunteer read one My Mistake scenario at a time from the Activity Sheet. Ask children to identify 1) the mistake someone made in the story and 2) lessons to be learned from the mistake. Let children role play their answers. Then guide a closing discussion:

- **Why is it hard to think about learning from mistakes?**
- **How can bad experiences make our lives better?**

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

OPTION 2: CAN YOU COUNT?

Ask your class if they think they can count to 100 without making a mistake. They should all tell you they can do that easily. Challenge them to show you. Have your class stand in a circle to count, each child counting the next number in turn. When they are ready to start, tell your class that they must count to 100, but for any number that is a multiple of seven, they have to say “king” instead of the number. If someone makes a mistake, they must start over from the beginning, starting with the next person in line. See how long it takes them to count to 100 without any mistakes. Then discuss:

- **Was it as easy to count to 100 as you thought?**
- **How did you feel when a mistake was made?**
- **Did you learn anything from the mistakes you made?**
- **What can we learn from the mistakes that we made that applies to today's Bible story?**

OPTION 3: BIBLE SEARCH

Stuff You Need: Bible Search Activity Sheet, pencils, Bibles

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the idea that everyone does make mistakes, even people that seem to be really great all the time. Give some examples of people in today's spotlight that have made some mistakes and learned from them. Talk about the Bible and how many people, not just the Israelites, made mistakes and learned that God will still love them. Divide the class into small groups, give one or two Bibles to each group, and have them search for three people from Bible times that made mistakes but were still loved by God. Have the class write the Bible location and a brief summary of each to share.

Option 4: Learning From Mistakes

Share with your class a mistake you made and what you learned from it. Then, let children share what they have learned from mistakes. Don't force anyone to share who doesn't want to.

Talk about some current events that have impacted people positively and negatively and what kinds of lessons can be learned. Children of any age love to debate. Ask them what they think about the question of why bad things happen to good people.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

GOD'S MESSENGERS

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: 100 or more paper cups, table

Before you get started, arrange about fifty paper cups in several groupings. For instance, you might build a pyramid using stacks of cups. Make a second identical arrangement. Invite a couple of volunteers to come forward. Explain that the task is to transfer the entire arrangement to another spot, which you designate, by moving one cup at a time. Then give a time limit that will be tough to meet, such as ninety seconds. The point is to create frustration and discouragement. Talk about:

- When you started out, did you think you could do the job? Explain.
- How did you feel when you realized you probably weren’t going to make it?

Say, We all have experiences when things don’t go the way we want them to. We get discouraged. We may even feel like hiding in a cave! Today’s Bible story is about someone who wished his troubles would go away if he went in a cave.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

Optional: noisemakers, pompoms

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

God’s Encouragement

On a poster board, write this cheer:

God says, “Go, go, Elijah.

I’m with you, you betcha!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: ENCOURAGEMENT BIBLE VERSE HUNT

Stuff You Need: copies of Encouragement Bible Verse Hunt Activity Sheet, Bibles, chairs or small tables, pencils

Ahead of time, set Bibles on chairs or tables around the room. Say, **We all face discouragement. The good news is God's Word is one way that God encourages us. Let's look at some verses and find out how.** Give an activity sheet to each child. Explain that each chair or table has a Bible. Children should visit each station individually or in small groups, look up one of the verses on the activity sheet, read it, and fill out the corresponding area of the activity sheet. Gather to review results. Then talk about:

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

Say, **If we open our eyes wide, we'll find ways every single day that we can encourage another person. Perhaps you'll be able to share one of these Bible verses with someone.**

Option 2: Encouragement Cards

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

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

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

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

Option 3: Never Feel Discouraged!

Stuff You Need: Never Feel Discouraged Activity Sheet, pens or pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Remind your class that God never wants us to fail or feel like we cannot do something that needs to get done. He is our constant encouragement and will never fail us. Look for words of encouragement in the Never Feel Discouraged! puzzle. Use five of the words in encouraging sentences you might say to a friend that needs your help!

Option 4: Encourage One Another

Stuff You Need: poster board or card stock, markers, art supplies

Talk to your class about encouragement:

- Have you ever had to do something difficult and felt that no one was being supportive? What did you do? How did the situation turn out?
- Have you ever had to do something difficult and had someone cheering for you and supporting you the entire way?
- How did that situation turn out? Was it a more positive experience?
- Name some of the comments that were made that were encouraging.

Have several options of people or groups within the church community that need encouragement. It may be someone who is ill, a family who is adopting a child, a group going on a mission trip or to camp, adults going on a retreat.

Assign small groups to make posters or cards that encourage the people or person who has a challenge or something to do. Include Bible verses or other encouraging words. Follow through and make sure the posters get delivered or post them in the church sanctuary or hall for all to see and add their encouragement.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in groups of two or three about discouraging situations children may know of and ask for opportunities to encourage others this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 15*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Bible Basis: Isaiah 3:1–13; 14:1–5; 48:8–9; 53:1–6

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: Tongue Twisters Activity Sheet

Optional: Tongue Twister PowerPoint slide, projection equipment

Give an activity sheet to each child. Have some fun with the children by exploring tongue twisters on the activity sheet. Start with simpler ones and say them slowly as children learn them. Then try to speed up. Move on to longer, more complicated ones. When you get to the hardest one, have the class stand up and try to say it accurately and quickly. (You might need to practice ahead of time!) Ask the children to sit down when they know they've made a mistake or when they can no longer keep up the speed. Talk about:

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 16*

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

God Takes and Gives

Ask three fluent readers to present the Bible story to the large group. Two are narrators. One is the "Echo Leader." Explain to the large group that everyone should repeat everything the Echo Leader says (as indicated in bold).

Narrator 1: God's people wanted a king, so he gave them a king.

Echo Leader: God gave them a king.

Group: God gave them a king.

Narrator 2: But as the years passed, the kings fell away from following God. The Lord sent prophets to warn the people, but the people ignored God's messengers. They didn't follow God's rules. They didn't listen to God's messages.

Echo Leader: They didn't listen!

Group: They didn't listen!

Narrator 1: So God let the punishment come. The kingdom split into Israel and Judah. Kings from other nations came in and took away all the money in Israel and destroyed houses and cities. In fact, the people of Israel were captured and led away to live in other countries.

Narrator 2: Things were not much better in Judah, where the other group of God's people lived. A few good kings tried to turn things around, but most of the people paid no attention. God sent another messenger, a prophet named Isaiah, to tell the people to change their ways.

Narrator 1: If Judah shaped up and started obeying God like they were supposed to, God would forgive them and protect them from the kings of other countries. Isaiah tried really hard to get the people to listen. He told the people all the things God would take away from them if they didn't change.

Echo Leader: Supplies.

Group: Supplies.

Echo Leader: Food and water.

Group: Food and water.

Echo Leader: Heroes and soldiers.

Group: Heroes and soldiers.

Echo Leader: Judges and prophets.

Group: Judges and prophets.

Echo Leader: Elders and captains.

Group: Elders and captains.

Echo Leader: Government leaders.

Group: Government leaders.

Echo Leader: Advisers.

Group: Advisers.

Echo Leader: Skilled workers.

Group: Skilled workers.

Narrator 2: All these good things would go away because the people were not following God. The people would fight with each other, and everyone would suffer.

Echo Leader: Everyone would suffer.

Group: Everyone would suffer.

Narrator 1: Isaiah said, “Your leaders have taken you down the wrong path. They have turned you from the right path.” But the people paid no attention. Isaiah said that the cities would fall apart and the people of Judah would be marched off to another country in chains!

Narrator 2: But Isaiah’s message was not all doom and gloom. He knew that God still loved his people and was not going to give up on them. So his message was also about the good things that would happen after the horrible stuff was over. God was going to bring good things back.

Echo Leader: God would show his tender love toward his people.

Group: God would show his tender love toward his people.

Echo Leader: God would settle the people back in their own land.

Group: God would settle the people back in their own land.

Echo Leader: Israel’s suffering would end.

Group: Israel’s suffering would end.

Echo Leader: Other nations would help God’s people.

Group: Other nations would help God’s people.

Echo Leader: God would break the power of evil rulers.

Group: God would break the power of evil rulers.

Echo Leader: God would answer prayers.

Group: God would answer prayers.

Echo Leader: God would save his people.

Group: God would save his people.

Narrator 1: God said to his people, “When it is time to save you, I will help you. I will keep you safe.”

Narrator 2: Isaiah’s message got even better. God let him see things that would happen in the future—way in the future. Isaiah had visions of the Messiah, the person who would save all of Judah and the whole world.

Narrator 1: Isaiah knew about Jesus hundreds of years before Jesus was born. God wanted to give his people hope for the future. No matter how many bad choices God’s people made, he wasn’t going to give up on them.

Narrator 2: Isaiah told the people that God’s servant would grow up like a tender young plant. He said, *Read Isaiah 53:4a, 5.*

Read Isaiah 53:6.

Narrator 2: Isaiah was talking about Jesus long before Jesus was ever born. That's because God had a plan, not just for the people of Israel and Judah, but for all people. He doesn't give up on any of us.

Narrator 1: He sent Jesus so that all of us can have the same close relationship with God that the Israelites had in the Old Testament. God doesn't give up on his people, and he doesn't give up on us.

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: NEVER GIVE UP

Stuff You Need: classroom chairs

To start, make a circle using classroom chairs with one less chair than children. The chairs should face inward. Have the children sit in the chairs with one child standing in the middle. The child in the middle should say a time when they wanted to give up. If any of the other children have wanted to give up over the same thing, they should get up and find a new seat, at least two seats over, while the child in the middle tries to find a seat. The new child standing in the middle will say something they wanted to give up on. Play continues as long as you have time. At the end of the game, remind children that God never gives up on them.

OPTION 2: BIBLE VERSE CAKE WALK

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

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

begin with that word and say the rest of the Bible verse. If a player chooses the Bible reference, the next player says the Bible verse from the beginning. Start the music again. After the game, talk about:

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

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

Option 3: I Will Help You

Stuff You Need: I Will Help You Activity Sheet, colored pencils,

Give an activity sheet to each child. **God made the promise to help people in Bible times. He makes that same promise to us.** Have the children think about times in their lives that show clearly that God was helping and keeping someone (or themselves) safe. Draw and describe four of these events on the activity sheet. Share the drawing and the verse with families at home.

Option 4: Unconditional Love

As a large group talk about what it feels like to know that someone really cares about you and loves you ... parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, friends.

- What does it mean to say "unconditional love"?
- Does anyone in your life have unconditional love for you? How do you know?
- Does God have unconditional love for us? How do you know?
- Give some examples of times when it is obvious that someone loves you no matter what you say or do.

Ahead of time, write the following words on index cards. Add words so that each student will have a card. Fold the cards in half and pass one to each of the students in the group. Take turns opening the cards. Have each student read their card and talk about whether it would be easy to love someone that does the thing on the card. Think about how God loves us no matter what we do.

lie	yell	cheat	mock	help with homework
steal	hug	break things	hit	encourage

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together, asking God's help to never give up. Encourage children to pray about a specific area where they feel like giving up. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 16*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE KINGDOMS FALL

Bible Basis: Jeremiah 1:4–10; 2:21–28; 5:1–2; 16:17–19; 2 Chronicles 36:11–16

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

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

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 17: “The Kingdoms Fall”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: What Happens? Activity Sheet

Ask a series of “what happens” questions that establish cause and effect. Use the What Happens? Activity Sheet as a guide. The questions begin with simple facts and progress to matters of choice. Every choice has a consequence. After going through the list talk about:

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

God’s Love Never Ends

This Bible story is a trial setting. Kids will use the script to conduct a trial and see if God’s people deserved the consequences they suffered for their sin. You’ll need players to be judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, bailiff, and Jeremiah. You can arrange a simple set to look like a courtroom if you like.

Bailiff: Court is in session.

Judge: Bailiff, what is our case?

- Bailiff:** The people of Judah.
- Judge:** What is the charge?
- Bailiff:** God's people are charged with going their own way instead of following God.
- Judge:** Let's begin. The prosecution may make its opening statement.
- Prosecutor:** Thank you, Your Honor. Today, we will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the people of Judah knew they were following false gods.
- Judge:** Is that it?
- Prosecutor:** We will also prove that the people of Judah freely chose to ignore the warnings of prophets.
- Judge:** Anything else?
- Prosecutor:** Finally, we will prove that the people of Judah deserved the punishment the prophets warned about.
- Judge:** You seem well-prepared. How about the defense?
- Defense:** Your Honor, we will show that the people were led astray.
- Judge:** Mmm. I will try to keep an open mind, but that seems doubtful.
- Defense:** Your Honor, the kings of Judah were under extreme stress.
- Judge:** Bailiff, do you think the defense has a case?
- Bailiff:** No, your honor.
- Defense:** Objection! It's not up to the bailiff to decide.
- Judge:** Then let's ask the jury.
- Defense:** Objection! We haven't presented our case yet.
- Judge:** Okay. We'll listen to both sides, but I'm pretty sure I know how this is going to turn out.
- Prosecutor:** The prosecution calls Jeremiah to the stand.
- Bailiff:** Do you promise to tell the truth?
- Jeremiah:** I do.
- Bailiff:** He's all yours.
- Prosecutor:** Jeremiah, tell us what you do for a living.
- Jeremiah:** I am a prophet of God.
- Prosecutor:** What does that mean?
- Jeremiah:** I tell the people a message God wants them to hear.
- Prosecutor:** Is your message the same as other prophets' messages? Is it the same as Isaiah? Or Amos? Or Hosea?
- Defense:** Objection! The witness cannot speak for other prophets.
- Judge:** Sustained.
- Prosecutor:** It doesn't matter. The people know what all the prophets said. Jeremiah, what is your message to the people of Judah?
- Jeremiah:** God told me to warn them to stop following false gods.

- Prosecutor:** And if they didn't?
- Jeremiah:** They would face punishment, of course.
- Prosecutor:** What kind of punishment?
- Jeremiah:** They would be carried off as slaves to a foreign land.
- Prosecutor:** And you warned the people about this?
- Jeremiah:** Yes, I did.
- Prosecutor:** Did you tell the king?
- Jeremiah:** Yes, I did.
- Prosecutor:** Did the people change?
- Jeremiah:** No, they did not.
- Prosecutor:** And did this really happen?
- Jeremiah:** Yes. The people became prisoners of Babylon.
- Judge:** Perhaps we should hear from the defense.
- Defense:** Jeremiah, how can you tell what people really think in their hearts?
- Jeremiah:** They show what's in their hearts by what they do.
- Defense:** What do you mean?
- Jeremiah:** If they believe in false gods, they worship false gods. If they believe in the true God, they worship the true God.
- Defense:** Isn't it possible the people didn't really mean what they did?
- Jeremiah:** I don't believe so.
- Defense:** Isn't it true that we all make mistakes?
- Jeremiah:** Yes, that's true.
- Defense:** Jeremiah, what do you believe about the love of God?
- Prosecutor:** Objection! What does that have to do with anything?
- Defense:** We believe God loves his people, no matter what.
- Prosecutor:** That is true. But the people still sinned.
- Defense:** That's your opinion. They were just confused.
- Judge:** I think Jeremiah's testimony proved the people sinned. But I also agree that God loves his people. Prosecution, you may call your next witness.
- Prosecutor:** Your Honor, Jeremiah was our only witness.
- Judge:** Does defense have anything to say?
- Defense:** No, your Honor.
- Judge:** Then the case goes to the jury now. Thank you, everyone.

Have the large group play the "jury" in the case and decide if the people of Judah were guilty of the charge of following their own ways instead of God's. Encourage the large group to use their Bibles to decide.

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

- **Do you think the people of Judah deserved what happened to them? Explain.**
- **How could God show love for his people even in punishment?**

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Seems Like a Puzzle

Stuff You Need: Seems Like a Puzzle Activity Sheet, pencils, Bibles

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **In the Bible story, God's people refused to be sorry and kept on sinning. If I asked you for a list of all the ways you mess up, it would probably be pretty long, too. But God's love is always longer than our list of sins. It is something to really think about, the fact that no matter how many times we mess up, God is always there loving us. Look at the scrambled verses on the activity sheet and rearrange them to make sense.**

- **What do these verses tell you about God?**
- **What do these verses tell you about yourself?**

Say, **Sometimes it's good to talk to ourselves! It's good to remind ourselves of how much God loves us, no matter what.**

OPTION 2: Say to Myself Balloon Rub

Stuff You Need: balloons, permanent markers

Briefly talk about what a speech balloon is. Most will recognize the device of words in a shape over someone's head, such as in newspaper comics or comic books. Say, **We're going to try to make another kind of speech balloon today to show our thoughts.** Review the words of the Bible verse: "I say to myself, 'The Lord is everything I will ever need. So I will put my hope in him.'" (Lamentations 3:24) Then have kids inflate the balloons and tie them closed. Children can use markers to write the words of the Bible verse on an inflated balloon. Then have them rub the balloons on their hair and try to get them to stick to their heads. How much of the Bible verse can kids recite before the balloons come loose? Keep playing and see who can say all of the verse. Then talk about:

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

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

OPTION 3: GOD IS EVERYTHING WE NEED

Stuff You Need: God Is Everything We Need Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Everything comes from God. Because of his great and never-ending love we have what we need. God has always made sure his people are OK.** As a group, begin listing things that the class are thankful to have from God. Have the children choose their top two and write a thank-you letter to God for his love and his gifts.

OPTION 4: GOD LOVES ME, EVEN WHEN I SIN

Stuff You Need: Bibles

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

Talk to your group about sin.

- What exactly is a sin? Do not give examples, but a definition of the word "sin."
- How does sin affect our relationships with our family and friends?
- How does that sin affect our relationship with God? How do you think God feels when we sin?
- What if we do the same sin over and over and over? Then how do you think God feels? Can you compare that to how your parents or friends would feel if you committed the same sin against them over and over?

Split the group into smaller groups of 3–4. Have a Bible for each group. Direct each group to find an instance in the Bible when one of God's people sinned and God did not forget him. How did he show his continued love? How has God shown that he continues to love you even when you mess up a little?

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together, thanking God that his love will never end. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 17*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

GOD WATCHES OVER DANIEL

Bible Basis: Daniel 6:1–13, 16–23

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As children gather, challenge them to a concentration game. Ask them to count by fours. Get the group started together. As they count, call out other random numbers. Use some that are close to what the children ought to be saying as they count, and others that are just wild distractions. See how many children can stay on track and keep counting till they get to 100. Talk about:

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

Daniel Stays Loyal

Choose actors to be King Darius, Daniel, and a narrator. Two actors can be the officials. The rest of the large group are the rulers. Whenever they hear, “Get rid of Daniel,” they respond with, “Yeah, what they said!”

Narrator: God’s people were carried off as prisoners to another country, called Babylon. They lived in Babylon for a long time. After many years, another kingdom took over Babylon. Darius was the king of Persia.

Darius: Here's how I will organize my kingdom. We will have 120 rulers. Three officials will be in charge of the rulers.

Narrator: Daniel was one of the three main officials. It turned out that Daniel was also the best of the top three officials or any of the 120 rulers. He did the best job at his work out of anyone in the entire kingdom.

Darius: I think I will put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom of Persia.

Official 1: I don't like that idea.

Official 2: Me neither. We have to get rid of Daniel.

Rulers: Yeah, what they said.

Read Daniel 6:4.

Official 1: He never does anything wrong!

Official 2: His work is always perfect!

Official 1: He always does what he is supposed to do.

Official 2: We have to get rid of Daniel.

Rulers: Yeah, what they said!

Narrator: *Read Daniel 6:5.* The officials came up with a plan to trick the king into giving them what they wanted.

Official 1: We've agreed you should give an order. For 30 days, don't let anyone pray to anyone except you.

Official 2: If they do, throw them into the lions' den!

Darius: I like this idea! Everyone can worship me or else!

Narrator: The king liked Daniel a lot. But in that moment, he didn't think about Daniel, even one little bit.

Daniel: This new law is not going to change anything. I pray three times a day, and I'm going to keep on praying three times a day.

Official 1: Daniel always prays in front of an open window.

Official 2: We'll see when he prays. The king signed the law. Even Daniel has to follow the law.

Official 1: This is how we'll get rid of Daniel!

Rulers: Yeah, what they said!

Narrator: So Daniel went to his room and got on his knees, just like he always did. He prayed and thanked God.

Official 2: Our plan is working perfectly.

Official 1: He's right there in the window, just like he always is.

Official 2: Time to go see the king.

Darius: What do you want?

Official 1: We have to give you a report about Daniel.

Darius: Ah, Daniel! My favorite official!

Official 2: I'm afraid your favorite official has been breaking the law.

Darius: That's impossible! Daniel never does anything wrong.

Official 1: He has this time. He's praying to his own God.

Darius: He always does that.

Official 2: Yes, but you made a new law that says everyone must pray to you.

Darius: Oh no! Do you mean I have to throw my friend Daniel into the lions' den?

Official 1: That is the law.

Official 2: We'll have to get rid of Daniel.

Rulers: Yeah, what they said!

Read Daniel 6:16–7.

Darius: I can't sleep! I can't eat! I can't do anything fun! I'm so worried about Daniel.

Narrator: Finally morning came. As soon as the sun peeked out of the sky, the king hurried to the lions' den.

Darius: Daniel! You serve the living God. Has he been able to save you from the lions?

Daniel: My God sent his angel, and his angel shut the mouths of the lions. They haven't hurt me at all.

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BALL AND BOX ROLL

Stuff You Need: Bible Story Strips Activity Sheet, three boxes, several rubber balls, tape, scissors, paper, bowl or basket

Ahead of time, make three signs that say: 1) Scene 1: Officers Plot; 2) Scene 2: Daniel Prays; 3) Scene 3: Lions' Den. Set three boxes against a wall on their sides with the opening facing the play area. Hang the signs above the boxes. Cut apart the story strips on the activity sheet and mix them up in a bowl or basket. Explain that the task is to organize the story strips into the correct scenes where they belong. Children will pull a random strip, wrap it around a ball, tape it in place, and try to roll it into the appropriate box representing the scene where that strip belongs. It may take some experimenting to roll the ball into the box and not have it bounce back out. For a competitive version, set up a double set of supplies and have teams. Race to see which team completes the story first. For a cooperative version, simply take turns rolling the balls. You or a volunteer can be stationed near the boxes to remove the strips and roll the balls back to the players. After the game, talk about:

- Summarize what happened in each of these three scenes from the Bible story.
- How could the lesson you learn from Daniel affect your real life?

Say, **Daniel was ready to be loyal to God no matter what was going to happen. His relationship with God was the most important thing in his life.**

OPTION 2: PRAY LIKE DANIEL

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, paper, and markers

Optional: floor pillows

Give children time to spend in prayer like Daniel did. Give them options to pray quietly, write their prayers out, or pray using prayers in the Bible. Floor pillows can make a comfortable place to pray or journal quietly. If children would like, let them pray together as long as they stay focused.

- Why did Daniel end up in the lions' den?
- How did God protect Daniel in the lions' den?

Say, **Daniel was loyal to God even when he knew it could be dangerous. He trusted that no matter what happened, God was in control.**

OPTION 3: SCENE BY SCENE

Stuff You Need: Scene by Scene Activity Sheet, colored pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the story of Daniel and how he became a leader in the country. Include why other leaders were jealous of him and why they wanted him to be in trouble with Darius. Have the children choose six events in the story and draw them in the comic grid. Be sure the children add words in the scenes, showing how important Daniel felt loyalty to God was.

OPTION 4: STRONG FAITH

Say, **The story of Daniel in the Lions' Den is a well-known one for most young church-goers. Daniel's great faith in God and his insistence that he will never stop praying and praising God is legendary.**

Talk with the group about others in our faith that have not given in to what others say must happen and refused to turn away from God. Ask:

- What does it take to have that kind of belief?
- Do you think your faith is that strong?
- How can we help our faith to grow and become that strong and never-ending?

STEP 4: GOING HOME

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

THE RETURN HOME

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

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: wall

Ask the children to stand sideways against a wall and put one shoulder and one foot against the wall. Challenge them to try to lift the other foot off the floor. This is more difficult than it looks! After a few tries, explain that this action requires shifting your body's balancing point, but the wall keeps you from doing that. Talk about:

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, classroom props

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

The New Temple

Assign the children to four groups. Each group will read a passage together and decide how to dramatize it for the large group. Let them use whatever props they can find around the classroom. Allow about ten minutes for groups to plan their presentations. If you have a small class, groups can do more than one scene, or the class can dramatize all the scenes together.

Read the narration that follows, pausing as indicated for groups to present.

Scene 1: *Ezra 1:1–7*

Scene 2: *Ezra 3:10–11*

Scene 3: *Ezra 3:12–13*

Scene 4: *Ezra 6:16–18*

God's people were excited! After long years of living in a foreign country far away, they were going home!

Pause for the first group to present Scene 1, then continue the narration.

Forty-two thousand people made the long trip back to Jerusalem, ready to rebuild their land.

Pause for the second group to present Scene 2, then continue.

But there were some people making loud noises not because they were glad, but because they were sad!

Pause for the third group to present Scene 3, then continue.

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

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

Then the people got back to work on the temple.

Pause for the fourth group to present Scene 4, then wrap up.

Now the people would be able to worship the way God wanted them to. Now they would have a place to come and praise God together. Now they could let everyone around them know they wanted to follow God. Going back to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple was their way of saying they were ready to follow God now.

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

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

Say, **We all make mistakes, but God welcomes us to get right back on the path of following him.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BIBLE VERSE QUESTIONS

Stuff You Need: Bible Verse Questions Activity Sheet, four buckets or baskets, small ball or beanbag

To set up the game, set the four buckets in a straight line with about a foot between each bucket. Cut apart the Bible Verse Questions from the activity sheet and put one in each bucket. Have players stand two or three feet back from the first bucket and toss the beanbag into the first bucket. If a player misses, another player takes a turn. If a player hits the first bucket, have a helper pull the Bible Verse Question out of the bucket and the player that did the tossing answers it. Then that player moves on to the next bucket. The goal is to be able to hit all four buckets in a row without missing. Whenever a player misses, someone else gets a turn. After the game, talk about:

- What does this verse tell us about what following God's ways will be like?
- Can anyone say the whole verse without missing?

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

OPTION 2: TEMPLE BUILDERS

Stuff You Need: sheets, blankets, classroom items

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

OPTION 3: I Am a Temple of God

Stuff You Need: I Am a Temple of God Activity Sheet

Give an activity sheet to each child. Look at the brick wall on the Activity Sheet. Say, **Brick walls are strong and solid. Our relationship with God should be as strong and solid. It is built with God's promises to us and his people and with our promises to him.** Talk with the class about the

promises that have been made throughout the Bible and about some of the promises that we make to God. Have the children fill the bricks in with some of those promises, choosing the ones that are most important to them. Have some of the children share with the class.

OPTION 4: WHY DO WE BELIEVE?

Stuff You Need: poster board, paper, markers, decorating supplies, scissors, glue

Talk to your group about why we believe in something.

- **What influences us to be believers in a theory, a person, a faith, a cause?**
- **Are there particular things that influence, cause, or help people to believe in something? What are some of those things?**
- **Is influencing people to believe in something fair or should it be a natural occurrence?**
- **God wants us to believe in him. There is no question about it.**
- **How do we know? Does he do anything that helps us or guides us to that belief?**
- **When we have faith, when we believe, we should not hide it. It is our mission to be evangelistic and spread the news that Jesus is our Lord.**
- **How does God want us to do that? Brainstorm ideas and ways that you have already experienced.**

In small groups of 2-3 design a church. Using art supplies such as markers, crayons, poster board, construction paper, or whatever is available, have the children make their church an open place to pray. Label areas if appropriate, such as day care area, senior center, and sanctuary. Name the church. This project may take two sessions.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups that the children would follow God this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 19*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY AND COURAGE

Bible Basis: Esther 1–9

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: newspaper, tape

If you have a large class, recruit enough volunteers to have three groups of three or four per group. These children will help you up in front. If your class is smaller, assign everyone to a group. Give each group some newspaper and a roll of tape. Say, **Choose one person in your group to be your model. The rest of you have three minutes to create a costume for your model out of newspaper and tape. Ready! Go!** After three minutes, gather to see the results. Have the large group vote on which costume is the best.

- What was the hardest part about this challenge?
- Tell about something you've had to do that was really hard.

Say, **The Bible story today is about a beautiful queen who had to decide if she was going to do something hard. Let's find out how she got ready.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 20*, four poster boards, markers

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

ESTHER'S HEART

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After you have told the Bible story, divide your class into four groups and assign each group one of the following characters: Esther, Xerxes, Mordecai, Haman. Give each group a poster board and markers. Based on what they learned in the story, have the children create a visual representation of the story character they have been assigned. After allowing the children to work, have each group present their representation.

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: PRAYER CARDS

Stuff You Need: Prayer Card Insert Activity Sheet; sturdy, colorful paper; markers; glue; scissors; hole punch; string; ribbon or yarn

Cut sturdy paper into half sheets. Say, **Esther got ready for her challenge by making sure her heart was close to God. She fasted and prayed for three days.** Briefly explain the concept of fasting—giving up food or something else important to you so you can devote your energy to hearing from God. Give each child a half-sheet of paper. Ask them to fold it in half again. Give an activity sheet to each child and have the children cut out the inserts on the bold lines. Glue the insert inside the card. Hole punch both parts of the card. Thread string, ribbon, or yarn through the holes so the card ties shut. Children can use markers to decorate the prayer card as they like. When the projects are finished, look at the insides together and allow a few minutes to consider how they would fill out the first half.

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

Say, **Follow Esther's example when you face something tough. Get your heart ready by getting close to God.**

OPTION 2: COURAGE CLUTCH

Stuff You Need: deflated balloons, flour, funnels, scoops or large spoons

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

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

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

Option 3: Heroes Need Help Too

Stuff You Need: Heroes Need Help Too Activity Sheet, pencils, Bibles

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk to the class about heroes in general and start with Bible-time heroes. **Where does the bravery and determination come from? How do they ask for God's help? Is asking God always automatic?** Then talk about heroes of today, concentrating on questions such as where their bravery comes from and does the class think these people also rely on God's love. On the activity sheet, have the children list questions that they would ask Esther about her actions and feelings as she approached the king and how she may have felt afterward. If time permits, pair the children up and have them role play, one child being Esther and the other a reporter.

Option 4: Facing Difficulty

Have a talk with your group about the fact that no matter who you are, you will face difficult situations; most of the time, people need some type of help or guidance in hard times.

- What kinds of difficult situations do kids this age face?
- Name some that your parents or other adults face?
- What helps people get through tough situations?
- Do you think the same things work for everyone? Why or why not?
- How could a person's faith in the Lord help in a difficult situation?

Have volunteers tell about a time they were faced with a difficult situation. Guide them to talk about their faith and how knowing God helped them through the tough time. Were there specific Scripture verses or prayers that were inspirational? Share them as well.

Have individuals write prayers to share that ask God for his help in tough times. Post them around the room or collect, photocopy the prayers, and bind with a staple to make prayer books for the students.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking for God's help in hard situations. Encourage the children to pray for a specific situation in which they need God's help. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 20*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

REBUILDING THE WALLS

Bible Basis: Ezra 7:1, 7, 10–11; Nehemiah 1:26; 4:4–6, 13–23; 8:1–12

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

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

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

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: list of things you can be sure of

Before class, gather a list of statements that we can typically be sure of, such as the sun will rise in the east tomorrow, the Earth is round, I will get in trouble if I hit my sister, etc.

In class, read each statement, one at a time and discuss how the children know the statement is true. After you have talked about your entire list, ask the children to share with you other things they are sure of, as well as things they are not sure of. Then ask:

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

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

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

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

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

Nehemiah Is Sure

As you tell the story, you'll pause as indicated and ask, "Do you think ...?" Children stomp once for yes, and twice for no. Then ask, "Are you sure?" Children should stomp three times if they're sure.

Nehemiah had a job that not many people had. He was the drink-tester for the king of Persia. That meant he tasted anything the king was going to drink, so if someone was trying to poison the king, they'd get Nehemiah instead. But no one tried to poison the

king, so it was a good job, and the king liked Nehemiah. But Nehemiah's heart was far away from Persia. He wanted to go to Jerusalem and help rebuild the city. First he had to ask the king's permission to go.

Do you think the king will give permission? *Tell children to stomp once for yes, and twice for no.*

Are you sure? *Children stomp three times if they're sure.*

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

Do you think Nehemiah will get everybody to work?

Are you sure?

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

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

Are you sure?

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

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

Are you sure?

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

Do you think the people were encouraged by this?

Are you sure?

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

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

Are you sure?

Nehemiah was sure. At long last, the wall was finished, and it was time for celebration. Jerusalem, God's holy city, finally had a wall to protect it. And to celebrate, the people

gathered to worship. Ezra, the priest, stood before all the people and read from the law of God from sunrise until lunch time. Everyone listened carefully, and when he was finished, they bowed down and worshiped the Lord.

Do you think Nehemiah was happy about this?

Are you sure?

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

Do you think Nehemiah got the job done?

Are you sure?

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

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

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

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

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: BUILDING CHALLENGE

Stuff You Need: small paper cups, toothpicks, straws, tape

Explain that just like the people in the Bible story were building and experienced opposition, children will face the challenge of building with opposition. Form groups of four to six children who will work together. Give each group a set of supplies. You may substitute other items for the suggested list if you prefer. The task is to build the biggest wall they can with these items. However, the opposition is allowed to come over three times and remove any one piece from the construction—even a foundational piece. If you have a lot of groups, you may want to designate which groups will be opposition for each other. Set a time limit, such as ten minutes, and at the end of ten minutes see who has the biggest wall. Then talk about:

- What did it feel like when the opposition came to cause trouble?

- What does it mean to you that God is on your side?

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

Option 2: Yes, I'm Sure Song

Stuff You Need: Optional: video recording device

Say, **Nehemiah was sure of God's power. We can also be sure of God's power and that he is always on our side. Write a song about today's Bible Point or Bible story.** Allow children to work together or separately to write a song incorporating what they learned from today's lesson. Some children may find it easier to write a song to the tune of one they already know. If you have time, have children make a music video for the song they wrote and record it.

Option 3: God Is On Their Side

Stuff You Need: God Is On Their Side Activity Sheet, Bibles, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Divide the class into small groups and make sure each group has a Bible and pencils. Talk about the many ways that the people of God relied on him. Talk about how today we also rely on God for everything.

Have the groups look in the Bible for the stories of the people on the activity sheet. Have the small groups read the stories together and summarize them. Tell them to comment on how God helped each person be confident.

Option 4: God Is With Me

Have the children close their eyes and imagine themselves all alone. Imagine there is not one person around, and they cannot hear anyone talking, laughing ... not even breathing. Now imagine that you have to pick up the huge 100-pound boulder that is near you and carry it 100 miles to the next town. Ask the children to think about whether they feel overwhelmed. Is this impossible to do? If you needed help, where or how would you find it? Have volunteers try to describe how they are feeling.

Now have the group think about a time they had to make a big choice. Not something like what to have on their pizza but a choice between right and wrong, such as whether to take a brother's \$20 off the dresser or whether to do the dishes or go outside to play.

Remind the students that God is always on their side, when decisions they have to make are difficult or easy! Pray together, thanking God for his support. Have individuals talk about specific times that they have felt his presence and support.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God that he is always on our side. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 21*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE BIRTH OF THE KING

Bible Basis: John 1:1–18; Luke 1:26–2:20

Key Verse: Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.
—Luke 2:11, NIV

Bible Point: God sent a Savior for the world. I can believe Jesus is my Savior.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 22: “The Birth of the King”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: lyrics to familiar Christmas carols, scraps of paper, whiteboard or easel pad, markers, bowl

Ahead of time, prepare slips of paper for children to play a Pictionary-type game with lyrics from Christmas carols. Write one short phrase on each slip of paper such as “Silent night, holy night,” “on Mary’s lap is sleeping,” or “Angels we have heard on high.” Put several folded slips in a bowl and have volunteers take a slip and draw its meaning for the large group to guess. Play several rounds with different volunteers. After the game, talk about:

- What’s your favorite Christmas carol and why?
- How do Christmas songs help us remember the Christmas story?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’re going to hear the details of the Christmas story. Let’s see how well we know them.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 22. Have the children find Luke 2 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

A Savior Comes

In this story, you will deliberately make mistakes. The children will let you know when they think you’ve made a mistake and provide the right information.

Say, **Listen carefully to the story, because I might get confused. I might need you to help me get the facts straight. If you think I’m saying something that’s not quite right, stomp your feet until I stop. Then you can tell me what I said wrong and help me get it right.** Begin the story, pausing

as indicated for children to stomp and correct you. If children don't stop you, then stomp your own feet and correct yourself.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in the Old West. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Nazareth is not in the Old West. It's in Galilee. The angel went to a young woman named Matilda. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Oh that's right; her name was Mary, and she was engaged to a man named Charles. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Thanks for straightening me out. His name was Joseph. Mary and Joseph. I've got it now. The angel Gabriel greeted Mary and said, "The Lord has given you special favor."

Gabriel told Mary she was going to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God and give birth to a baby girl. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Not a girl? Then it must have been a boy. A baby boy. Mary was pretty happy about this, and she took a nice long nap. *Pause, stomp and correct.* What Mary actually did was praise God!

Someone else needed to hear this news. Mary was engaged to Charles, *Pause, stomp, and correct.* I mean Joseph. When he found out Mary was going to have a baby, he wasn't sure he wanted to marry her. Then an angel of the Lord came to him in the bathtub. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* No, not the bathtub. It was a dream. The angel came to him in a dream and said, "Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your maid." *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Joseph wasn't going to hire a maid. Mary was going to be his wife. That makes more sense. The angel said, "She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Mike." *Pause, stomp, and correct.* I knew that didn't sound right. The baby's name would be Jesus. That's right, Jesus. When Joseph woke up from the dream, he did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. He took Mary home as his wife.

In those days, President Lincoln made a law. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* That doesn't sound right, does it? It can't be Lincoln. Kennedy? Bush? Obama? Maybe it wasn't a president. How about Caesar Augustus? Yes, that sounds better. Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, wanted a list of everyone in the whole Roman world. All the people had to go to their hometowns to put their names on the official list.

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. But that's not the town Joseph came from. His family came from New York City. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Okay, it wasn't New York; it was Bethlehem. He came from Bethlehem. So Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem, the town of Casey at the Bat. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* No, I think Casey was from Mudville, but Bethlehem was the town of David. While they were there, the time came for Mary's baby to be born, so they headed for the hospital. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* No hospital in Bethlehem! They couldn't even find a decent room to stay in. But Mary gave birth to her first baby anyway. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth and placed him in a shopping cart. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* No hospital, and no shopping cart. Mary put the baby in a manger.

Out in the fields nearby, there were carpenters. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Carpenters don't work in a field. It must have been shepherds. They were taking care of their puppies. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* I guess shepherds don't take care of puppies. They take care of sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone all around

them. They were ready to party! *Pause, stomp, and correct.* I guess it was kind of scary. Those shepherds were terrified. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Read Luke 2:10–12.

And then a whole rock band appeared in the sky. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* Okay, not a rock band. A large group of angels. They praised God, saying, “May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!”

Then the angels left and the shepherds looked at each other. They said, “Let’s go out to dinner.” *Pause, stomp and correct.* No time for dinner! Those shepherds said, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened.” So off they went to Bethlehem. When they got there, they couldn’t find Mary and Joseph anywhere. *Pause, stomp, and correct.* That’s not right. The truth is, they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger, just like the angel had said. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone about what had happened. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

Read Luke 2:19.

The light of God had come into the world. That light was Jesus. Not everyone believed in him. Some people did accept him. They believed in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God. Jesus came from the Father, and he was full of grace and truth.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you something special about the baby in the picture. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What is your favorite part of the Christmas story?
- What difference does it make if you think Jesus is the Savior of the world?

Say, Christmas is a favorite time of year for many people. Remembering that Jesus is the Savior makes it even more special.

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: GREETING CARD ORNAMENT

Stuff You Need: old Christmas cards, scissors, hole punch, narrow ribbon in three-foot lengths

Gather enough old Christmas cards so that each child can have three. Try to have a wide assortment of images of the Christmas story. You may want to cut the backs off ahead of time so children only

handle the pictures. Say, **Find three pictures that show different parts of the Christmas story.** Children can string together three cards, or if they'd like they may cut specific images out of the card. Hole punch the bottom and the top of each picture. String the images together by running a ribbon through the holes, making sure to keep the ribbon behind the pictures. Go in through the top and out from the bottom of each picture. Tie a knot at the bottom of the ribbon and a hanging loop at the top. Talk about:

- **How can you use this project to tell someone the story of a Savior being born?**
- **Invite the children to say the Bible verse together: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).**

You might want to invite any children who want to know more about believing in the Savior to speak to you privately.

Option 2: Marble Manger Relay

Stuff You Need: marbles, construction paper, masking tape

Use the masking tape to mark start and finish lines across the room from each other. Assign players to teams of four or five. If you have a small class, use at least three people to a team, or play as one group. Give each player a sheet of construction paper. Show how to fold the paper in half lengthwise two times to create a crevice that looks like a manger.

Remind children, **In our Bible story, the angels brought good news to the shepherds, the shepherds ran off to Bethlehem to see the good news—Jesus in the manger—and then the shepherds told everyone they could find about the good news of a Savior. Your job is to pass the good news (the marble) across the room by rolling it from one manger to another.** Players stand next to each other, feet touching, and pass the marble. Once a player passes the marble from his manger to the next person's manger, he or she can run to the head of the line and be ready to receive it, then pass it again. If the team loses control of the marble and it falls to the floor, the entire team goes back to the start line.

Option 3: Jesus Is the Savior

Stuff You Need: Jesus Is the Savior Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about the story of the first Christmas, highlighting main ideas. Have the children solve the puzzle, using the codes.

Solution 1: Jesus was born in a manger on Christmas morning.

Solution 2: Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

Option 4: What I Believe

Talk to your group about the many things that they believe. These can be very general and do not have to be about their faith. Allow several minutes and quite a few ideas to be brainstormed. Write these on chart paper or whiteboard so you can refer back to them.

Ask:

- Which of these beliefs are very important to you?
- Are there any beliefs in this list that really help to determine how you live your life and make decisions?

Now talk about faith with the group.

- What are some key beliefs that the group has about their faith?
- Does everyone in the group agree with these beliefs?

Break the large group into smaller groups of no more than four. Have each group write a persuasive speech or a skit that tries to influence people to believe in Jesus as the Savior. Present the skit to the rest of the groups and have them respond as to whether each helped guide them in their belief.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together thanking God for sending a Savior. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 22*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

Bible Basis: Matthew 3:1–17; 4:1–11, 24–25; Mark 1:31–2:12; 3:9–15; Luke 8:1–3

Key Verse: People brought to him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses ... Jesus healed all of them. —Matthew 4:24, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus shows people the power of God. I can look for God's power in my life.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 23: "Jesus' Ministry Begins"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: paper, markers in bold colors

Ahead of time, prepare signs that contain several color words, but use a different color to write the letters. For instance, write the word "purple" using an orange marker. Write "green" using a brown marker, and so on. For maximum impact, use a thick line of color. Say, **How strong is your will power?**

Let's see who can resist temptation. Hold up signs and ask children to tell you what the signs say. Most likely, at least some of the children will say the color of the letters they see, rather than the word the letters spell. Others will catch themselves and think a moment before reading the words. The natural inclination of most people is to say the color they see, rather than read the word. Talk about:

- **Why is it hard to resist saying the color of the letters rather than the words?**
- **Tell me about some times when it's easy to get off track from what you're supposed to do.**

Say, **In the Bible story today, the devil tried to get Jesus off track so he wouldn't do God's work. He tempted Jesus with great things. Let's find out what Jesus did and how it helped him get ready to do God's work.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*, paper, Flight Strips Activity Sheet, scissors, glue

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 23. You can also divide your class into two groups and have one group find Matthew 3 and mark it in their Bibles; the other group should look up Mark 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Shows God's Power

Ahead of time, cut apart the Flight Strips. Give every child a sheet of paper to fold into an airplane of any design they choose. You might want to have some helpers on hand if you have a lot of children. Be prepared to demonstrate a simple method, such as folding in half lengthwise, folding two corners to the folded center, then fold the wing flaps to the folded center. Many will have more sophisticated methods they'll be eager to show off. Make enough copies of Flight Strips so that each child can have a label to glue on an airplane, or simply write a number from 1 to 9 on the wings of their planes.

As you tell the story, pause as indicated to take a flight and find out what Jesus is doing next. When you call out a flight number, children with that number on their Flight Strip should throw their airplanes. (If you think this has potential to cause chaos, give clear instructions about what children should do when they catch an airplane, such as put them under a chair or sit on them.)

When Jesus was alive on Earth, he walked everywhere. Or he may have ridden a donkey once in awhile. If he were on Earth now, maybe he would use an airplane. Let's imagine that we're flying around with Jesus. When I call your flight number, you'll throw your airplane for someone to catch. If you catch one, read aloud what it says. So fasten your seatbelts and let's get ready for our first flight.

The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about Jesus between the time he was twelve years old and when he was thirty. One of his friends might have been his cousin John. John was not only Jesus' cousin, but he was also a special person to God. He preached in the desert, saying, "Turn away from your sins." One day Jesus found John preaching near the Jordan River. We're ready for Flight 1. *Pause to throw Airplane 1: Jesus is baptized. (Have all the children with that strip throw their airplanes. Then have one child read the strip aloud. If you're not using the strips, read the statement yourself.)*

Read Matthew 3:13–17. Then the Holy Spirit led Jesus on the next part of journey. We're ready for Flight 2. *Pause to throw Airplane 2: Jesus is tempted.*

Read Matthew 4:1–2. The devil told Jesus to turn stones into bread so he could eat. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. The devil wanted Jesus to jump off a high building so the angels could save him. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. The devil promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would bow to the devil. But Jesus resisted the temptation. He stuck to God's way. Then the devil left, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Getting baptized by John and being tempted in the wilderness were two events that got Jesus ready for the work God wanted him to do. Now it was time to start doing that work. We're ready for Flight 3. *Pause to throw Airplane 3: Jesus begins showing the power of God.*

Jesus was ready to start his ministry and tell the people that God had sent him to save them from their sins forever. He preached everywhere he went, and people began to follow him. Now boarding for Flight 4. *Pause to throw Airplane 4: Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law.*

Jesus had a few special friends, called his disciples. One of his disciples was Peter, also called Simon. *Read Mark 1:30–31 People saw the power of God and started bringing other sick*

people to Jesus. We're ready for Flight 5. *Pause to throw Airplane 5: Jesus heals a man with a skin disease.*

Read Mark 1:40–42. Passengers holding tickets for Flight 6 may now board. Pause to throw Airplane 6: Jesus heals a man who can't move.

One day Jesus was preaching in a crowded house. Four friends wanted to bring their friend to Jesus. He couldn't walk, so they had to carry him. But the house was too crowded, and they couldn't get in. So they made a hole in the roof and lowered the man through the hole right in front of Jesus. Jesus told the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Then he said, "Get up. Take your mat and go home." And the man got up! He walked away while everyone watched. All the people were amazed at the way Jesus was showing the power of God. Have your tickets ready for Flight 7. *Pause to throw Airplane 7: Jesus heals people in great pain.*

News about Jesus spread all over. People brought to him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses. Some were suffering with great pain, and Jesus showed God's power and healed them. Just in time for Flight 8. *Pause to throw Airplane 8: Jesus heals people shaking wildly.*

Some of the people who came to Jesus were shaking wildly. They couldn't control their own bodies. Jesus showed God's power and healed them. Flight 9 is our final flight of the day. *Pause to throw Airplane 9: Large crowds follow Jesus.*

Large crowds followed Jesus everywhere he went. People came from close by and far away. Everyone heard about the amazing things that Jesus did when he showed God's power and wanted to see for themselves. Jesus traveled from one town to another. He announced the good news of God's kingdom and showed the power of God's kingdom by everything he did and everything he said.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about Jesus' baptism. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How did Jesus' temptation get him ready to do God's work?
- How did Jesus show the power of God?

Say, **We might not be able to watch Jesus do miracles like the people in the Bible, but we can be sure that God's power is still at work.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

Option 1: Weak Moments

Stuff You Need: coins, wall

Say, **In our Bible story, we heard about a lot of sick people. They probably felt weak and helpless, and that's why they came to Jesus. Let's get an idea of how they felt.** Have the class line up against a wall with their backs and heels against the wall. Set a coin a few inches in front of each child. See if they can pick up the coins without moving their feet. This is almost impossible to do because bending over requires shifting the body's center of gravity, which you can't do if you are standing up against the wall. Talk about:

- How did you feel when you couldn't do something as simple as bend over and pick up a coin?
- How do you think the people who came to Jesus felt?
- How does God show you his power when you feel helpless?

Say, **God doesn't wave a magic wand to fix everything that goes wrong, but he does let us know that he is powerful and wants to help us.**

Option 2: Bringing Everything to Jesus

Stuff You Need: open floor space, small items to pass (see below), basket or box

Ahead of time, collect an assortment of items in various shapes and sizes. For instance, have something round, flat, heavy, light, tiny, slippery. Optional: tape labels to the items that describe illnesses in the Bible story. Say, **Our Bible verse reminds us that people came to Jesus with all kinds of illnesses, and Jesus healed them. Some of those people went to a lot of effort, like the four friends of the paralyzed man. Let's think about bringing everything to Jesus while we bring a few items around the circle.** Have the children sit in a circle with their shoes off and legs extended to the center. Put a basket in front of one person. Start the items around the circle with the person next to the basket. Children will pass the items around using only their feet—no hands allowed! The last person puts the item in the basket. If an item drops, start it again at the beginning of the circle.

- Tell me what it felt like when we were successful getting something around the circle and into the basket without dropping it.
- How does bringing people or situations to Jesus help us see God's power?

Say, **Jesus still shows God's power today. When we bring him everything that bothers us—whether we're sick or worried or scared—we can look for how he's going to help in that situation.**

OPTION 3: Volcano Power

Stuff You Need: Red or brown modeling clay, 15x15-inch piece of cardboard, aluminum foil, plastic soda bottle (20-ounce or larger), baking soda, dishwashing liquid, water, red food coloring, medium-size plastic bowl, funnel, white vinegar, measuring spoons and measuring cups

Cover one side of the cardboard piece with aluminum foil. Place the plastic bottle, open side up, in the middle of the cardboard, then form a volcano around it with the modeling clay. In a plastic bowl combine two tablespoons of baking soda, one cup of water, five drops of dishwashing liquid, and three drops of red food coloring. Using a funnel, pour the mixture into the plastic bottle. Ask, **What do you think will happen if we leave this bottle alone? What if we pour in some vinegar?** Next, pour one cup of white vinegar into the bottle. Then stand back and watch the volcano explode!

Then ask:

- How is God's power stronger than nature's power?
- When have you experienced God's power in your life?

OPTION 4: God Is in My Life

Stuff You Need: paper, art supplies

God is in all of our lives. We can see his influence in our friendships and families, in our work and play. Some people are more aware of him in their lives and others are still looking and learning of ways that God is there. Jesus is the best way for us to know that God is here with us.

Have the group give some specific examples of how Jesus helps them and other Christians to believe. Brainstorm about miracles, events, prayers, and other ways that he has influenced your belief in God.

Have individuals choose one event in the Bible and summarize it on paper. Then supply the class with art supplies and have them create a comic strip-type layout on which they can illustrate the event they have talked about in their essay. Post the comics so that everyone can share.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking God for his power. Encourage the children to pray about a specific situation in which they need God's power. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 23*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NO ORDINARY MAN

Bible Basis: Matthew 5:2–12; 6:5–15; 14:22–32; Mark 4:30–41; 6:30–44; Luke 10:25–37; 15:1–7; John 6:66–71

Key Verse: We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. —John 6:69, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus teaches his friends and the crowds. I can learn from Jesus.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 24: “No Ordinary Man”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As children gather, ask volunteers to tell you the hardest thing they ever had to learn in school. Then ask about the hardest thing they ever had to learn outside of school (sports skills, music, chores, etc.). Then see what the goofiest thing is the children ever had to learn. If someone has a skill to demonstrate and you have time and space, encourage the demonstration. Talk about:

- If you want to learn something new, what do you do?
- What’s your favorite way to learn something new?

Say, **Our Bible story today is all about learning. Let’s see what we can learn about learning.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*, cell phone, Call-in Questions Activity Sheet

Optional: additional cell phones

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 24. Have the children find Matthew 6 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passage listed in the story.

STORIES FROM JESUS

As you tell the story, children will make the sound of a phone ringing. Practice the sound ahead of time, and make sure children know which signal means to start making the sound and which signal means to stop. Hand out the Call-in Questions Activity Sheet to volunteers ahead of time, and after each ringing episode, have someone ask the next question. If you have cell phones, you could have children actually call the phone you’re using. As you begin telling the story, fidget with your phone.

I hope this phone has a lot of battery power left in it because I’m sure getting a lot of calls. Everyone seems to have a question about this Jesus fellow and the stories he’s telling. As soon as I put the phone down, it rings again. Give the signal for kids to make ringing sound.

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 1: What is a parable? Yes, I can help you with that. A parable is a story that teaches an important truth. Jesus used parables to teach people truths about the kingdom of God. Parables were often about everyday things that the people knew well, like sheep or mustard seeds. For instance, if a shepherd has 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, the shepherd goes to look for it and celebrates when he finds it. God celebrates when a lost sinner comes home like lost sheep. Jesus' friends and the crowds learned from these kinds of stories. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring again.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 2: Did Jesus have discussions with smart people? One time a young lawyer tried to trick Jesus. He asked, "What must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus wasn't about to be tricked. He said, "What does the law say?" He made the lawyer answer his own question. The man said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as you love yourself." But the lawyer caught on that Jesus was trying to trick him back and said, "But who is my neighbor?" Jesus told another story, and the whole crowd listened in. He told about a man who was robbed and beaten up along the road. Two religious leaders saw him and walked by on the other side of the road so they wouldn't have to help him. But a man from another country saw the man and took care of him. Then Jesus asked that smart lawyer, "Who was the neighbor?" The one who took care of the wounded man was the neighbor. Neighbors who need love are not hard to find. The people learned from hearing these discussions. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring again.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 3: I've heard Jesus preached long sermons. Is that true? Oh, yes, they were quite long, but the people didn't mind. Crowds would gather and spread out over the mountainside to listen to Jesus preach. He could preach as long as he wanted, and the people stayed and listened. I'd have to say the Sermon on the Mount was the most famous one. Jesus talked about his favorite topic, the kingdom of God. He let the people know what the kingdom of God would be like and how they could live in this great kingdom. The people who need God the most are the ones who live in his kingdom. The people learned from sermons. Thank you for your call. Put down the phone. Give the signal for the phone to ring.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 4: Did Jesus answer questions about prayer? Yes, Jesus had a lot to say about prayer. He told the people not to brag when they prayed, but to be humble and pray in private. Prayer is not a way to show off that you know a bunch of fancy words. Prayer is about what's going on in your heart. When his disciples said, "Teach us to pray," he taught them Read Matthew 6:9–13. Jesus' prayer is called the Lord's Prayer and Christians all over the world pray this prayer. The people learned when Jesus answered questions. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 5: Did Jesus teach both large groups and small groups? It's true that Jesus often taught to very large groups of people. Crowds followed him everywhere. But he also took time to be alone with his special group of disciples and teach them privately. Jesus' friends learned when he spent time with them. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 6: Did Jesus use active learning techniques? Ah, that's a very interesting question. Yes, he did. One time he took a boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish and used it to feed more than five thousand people. Everyone participated in active learning that day! Another time, Jesus' disciples saw him walking on the water—yes, walking on the water! Peter decided to try. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, Peter walked on water, too. But when Peter got scared, he sank. Jesus saved him, of course. But I'd have to say that was an active lesson for Peter. The people learned from seeing what Jesus did. Thank you for your call. Put the phone down. Give the signal for the phone to ring.*

Jesus Tells It Call Center; how may I help you? *Pause for Question 7: What did the crowds think of Jesus' teaching? Great question! Jesus was no ordinary man. The people who listened to him teach were amazed at what he had to say, and they said, "We believe and know that you are the Holy One from God." Thank you for your call. Put the phone down and look at your watch or a clock.*

Well, I see my shift is over. The questions just never seem to stop. I guess that's because people never get tired of learning from Jesus, even two thousand years later.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about what Jesus is doing in the picture. Then ask them to tell you other things that Jesus did. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **Name some of the ways that people learned from Jesus.**
- **Name some ways that you can learn from Jesus.**

Say, **We learn all kinds of stuff every day. Let's not forget to learn from Jesus, too.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help the children explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: PARABLE PARTY

Stuff You Need: paper, pencils

Say, **One of the most common ways that Jesus taught the people was to tell a kind of story called a parable.** Review to see if the children understand what a parable is: a story that teaches a truth God wants us to learn. You could remind children of some of the more familiar parables in the gospels that they may recognize. Then encourage them to write their own parables. They can work in pairs or small groups. Assign each group an item and a topic from the lists below in any combination. Their task is to write a story about the item that teaches a truth about the topic. Ideally the item would represent something related to the topic.

Items: iPod, DVD, stones, plastic bottles, rainbow, vacuum cleaner, mailbox

Topics: friendship, obedience, honesty, kindness, responsibility, courage, prayer

Hear the finished parables, then talk about:

- **How do stories help people learn important ideas?**
- **Tell me about something you would like to learn from Jesus.**

Say, **The people in the Bible story learned from Jesus, and we can learn from Jesus, too.**

OPTION 2: LEARNING LISTS

Stuff You Need: butcher paper or large newsprint pad, markers

Label one sheet of paper “Everything we believe about Jesus,” and label a second sheet “What I’d like to learn from Jesus.” Put both sheets up on the wall where children can get at them easily. If you have a large group, put up two sheets for each topic. Say, **Our Bible verse says, “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” John 6:69.** Take a minute to have children repeat the verse with you. **Let’s make a list of everything we believe about God. Then we’ll make a list of things we’d like to learn from Jesus.** Hand out markers and encourage the class to each write at least one thing on each list. Review the results together. Leave both lists on the classroom wall where you can look at them again over the next few weeks as you study more stories about Jesus. Talk about:

- **We can’t sit on the hillside and listen to Jesus talk, so how do we learn from Jesus today?**
- **If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?**

Say, **Jesus has as much to teach us as he did the people two thousand years ago. The question is, are we willing to learn?**

Encourage the children to make a plan to learn the answers to their questions.

OPTION 3: FIND IT!

Stuff You Need: index cards, Bible

Before class, write the books of the Bible on index cards, one book for each card. If you have a large class, you may want to make more than one set. Say, **One way we learn from Jesus is to study the Bible. We are going to play a game to help us remember the books of the Bible.** Explain that you will mix up the cards on a table and they will have to put the books back in order. To make the game active, have the children take cards, one at a time, to another area of your room to place in order. Allow children to use the table of contents in a Bible if they are having difficulty. If your class already knows the order of the books of the Bible well, have them group the books in topics such as Law, Prophecy, and History.

Option 4: Jesus, The Master Teacher

Stuff You Need: paper, scissors, pens

Jesus has been called by many names and one of them is Teacher. He is the Master Teacher and the best source of information there is on God.

- How did Jesus teach his disciples and the other people around him?
- How does he teach us more than 2,000 years later? Give some specific examples of each. (his actions, his teaching, his miracles, the parables)
- Do you think that the things Jesus did while on Earth are still effective teaching tools today?

Ahead of time, write the names of several parables and miracles on small strips of paper. Divide the class into small groups and have one person from each group choose a slip of paper. Allow time for the groups to write a skit dramatizing the parable or miracle they have chosen. Use things around the classroom as props. Be sure each group uses all of its members in the production.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking God that we can learn from Jesus. Encourage children to choose a specific way they can learn from Jesus this week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 24*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

Bible Basis: Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17

Key Verse: Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t keep them away. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like them.” —Matthew 19:14, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus, the Son of God, told the children to come to him. I am important to Jesus.

Reference: *The Story for Children*, Chapter 25: “Jesus, the Son of God”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Start your class with a discussion about blessing. Talking about blessing will help the children take what they already know about blessings and apply it to the Bible story. Gather your class around you. Pretend to sneeze. See if a child says, “God bless you.” If not, ask questions about what you say after someone sneezes. Ask,

- **Why do we say “Bless you” or “God bless you” after someone sneezes?** (The origin of this custom is not known, so let your class have fun thinking of reasons why.)
- **What does it mean to bless someone?** (Let children share their ideas here. You will spend the rest of the lesson talking about what this means.)
- **Do you think blessings are important? Why?**

Say, **We’ve talking about blessings. In today’s Bible story, we are going to learn about some parents who wanted Jesus to bless their children.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: Copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 25*

Optional: Bible-time outfits

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 25. You can also have children find Mark 10 and mark it in their Bibles. The children can follow along when Thaddeus reads the Scripture passage listed in the story.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Today’s story is a drama with Thaddeus and Bartholomew, two of Jesus’ disciples. If available, let the actors dress up in Bible-time clothes. You will need two volunteers for this drama. Consider asking children ahead of time and letting them read through the script before class starts.

Thaddeus: Hi! My name is Thaddeus. I'm one of Jesus' 12 disciples. And this is Bartholomew. He's also one of Jesus' disciples.

Bartholomew: We thought we knew Jesus pretty well. After all, we had been traveling with him for awhile and listening to him teach. He'd done some amazing things.

Thaddeus: Remember when he fed five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fish from a little boy's lunch? We thought we were going to look really silly trying to feed that many people with so little food.

Bartholomew: And when Jesus walked on water and calmed a furious storm. He'd healed so many people, too.

Thaddeus: What about that time with Lazarus?

Bartholomew: I wouldn't have ever believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Jesus had a good friend named Lazarus. One day Jesus heard that Lazarus was really sick, but by the time we got to Lazarus' house, he had been dead for four days. We all knew that Jesus could heal sick people, and we didn't understand why Jesus hadn't helped Lazarus.

Thaddeus: We walked to Lazarus' tomb and Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away. So, some people rolled the stone away.

Bartholomew: (Holding his nose and making a face.) Ugh! When they rolled away the stone, it smelled awful!

Thaddeus: But Jesus didn't seem to care. He prayed and then shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" We all watched in amazement as Lazarus walked out of that tomb alive and well, as if he'd never been sick.

Bartholomew: Jesus is always surprising us with the things he does, but we still thought we knew Jesus pretty well.

Thaddeus: One day, Jesus had been teaching the people. When Jesus teaches, everyone tries to get close to Jesus. They know he's pretty special. This time, parents were trying to get their children close to Jesus. They wanted Jesus to bless their children.

Bartholomew: See, blessings were really important. A blessing is more than fancy words.

Thaddeus: We had this one covered. Teaching crowds is hard work. We thought Jesus should have a break from teaching and rest for a while. So, we sent the parents and the children away. "Not now," we said. "Jesus has more important things to do." After all, if Jesus is the Son of God, he should be spending time with important people like our leaders. So, we kept sending them away. We didn't want the children to take up Jesus' time.

Bartholomew: Then, Jesus got angry. We didn't know why he was so angry. We were only trying to help him. If we hadn't sent them away, every child from miles around would have come to be blessed by Jesus. He could have been there all night blessing the children.

Thaddeus: What did we do this time? We were always getting into trouble for things. But, every time, Jesus would forgive us.

Bartholomew: What Jesus said was so important that our friends Matthew and Mark wrote about it in their books about Jesus' life. Luke even wrote about it, too.

Thaddeus: (Read Mark 10:14b–15.) Jesus told the children to come. When he said that, some of the children wiggled out of their parents' hands and ran to Jesus. Others were shy and tried to hide behind their parents. Jesus took some of the children in his arms and gave them hugs. He put his hands on some of their heads. He blessed all of them. By the time Jesus was done, even the shy children were trying to get close to Jesus.

Bartholomew: We were right about one thing. Children came from everywhere to be blessed by Jesus. He said that to receive the kingdom of God you have to have faith like a little child and just believe. I guess we still have a lot to learn from Jesus, but we know that children are important to Jesus. We don't make that mistake again!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of The Story Elementary Trading Card 25. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you what the picture tells them about Jesus. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What did Jesus do in the story?
- What does this story show about Jesus and children?

Say, **Jesus told the children to come to him. Spending time with someone can show they are important to you.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

Option 1: Come to Me Game

Play this active game with your class to help them remember that Jesus told the children to come to him. Have one volunteer play Jesus. If you are uncomfortable with a child playing Jesus or you have a small class, you can stand in the center. Divide the class into two groups. One group will be the disciples and will stand around Jesus. The other group will be children trying to get to Jesus. The disciples try to keep the children from getting to Jesus. If the child in the middle says, "Come to me," the disciples must let the children come. Switch roles so children get to participate in a variety of roles.

Option 2: Magic Scratch Poster

Stuff You Need: sheets of magic scratch paper, scratch tools such as a pencil or a bamboo skewer
Let your class make colorful poster reminders that they are important to Jesus. Give a sheet of magic scratch paper and a scratch tool to each child. Explain to the children that they should use their tool

to scrape off the black surface to reveal beautiful colors. Have the children scratch out the words, “I am important to Jesus” on their poster and add any designs that they want. Encourage children to hang the poster in their bedrooms, a school locker, or anywhere they will be reminded that they are important to God. You can find magic scratch paper at many craft supply stores, online, or you can make your own by filling a sheet of paper with color from crayons and then painting over it with black paint.

Option 3: Blessing Search

Stuff You Need: Blessing Search Activity Sheet, Bibles, concordance, pencils

Optional: Bible dictionary

Jesus blessed the children. Let your class go on a search in their Bibles for other blessings in the Bible. Give an activity sheet to each child. If you have a large class, divide into small groups to work together. Show your class how to use a concordance and a Bible dictionary to find passages about blessings. They can write down the passage and what they learn about blessings on the activity sheet. If you divided your class into small groups, have each group share what they learned before ending the activity.

Option 4: Write a Blessing

Stuff You Need: paper, pens, Bibles, whiteboard, and marker

Optional: dictionary definition of the words *bless* and *blessing*

Blessing was an important concept in today’s lesson. In this activity your class will further discuss blessings and then write a blessing for someone they know. Ask:

- **After our lesson, what do you think a blessing is? Did your definitions of blessing change?**
- **What does it mean to bless someone?** (After these two questions, share the definitions of *bless* and *blessing*.)
- **What are important words or parts of a blessing?** (Write these on a whiteboard. If children have completed Option 3 previous to this activity, they should have examples of different blessings in the Bible.)

Say, **Now that we’ve talked about blessings some more, you are going to write a blessing for someone you know. It might be a parent or grandparent, a sibling, a friend, or another person you know. Use the important words and parts of a blessing to help you write your blessing.** Allow children to work on their blessings. Ask for volunteers to share their blessings, but don’t force anyone to share. Encourage children to share the blessing with the person they wrote it for this week.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Spend time praying and blessing each child by name. If you feel comfortable, put your hand on the child’s head or shoulder as you bless them in Jesus’ name. Consider asking parents to come to class five minutes before the end of class to participate in this blessing with you. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 25*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents’ Page.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

Bible Basis: Matthew 26:26–28, 33–35; 27:46–49; Luke 22:51–62; 23:32–49; John 13:21–30; 14:1–15; 18:4–10; 19:30

Key Verse: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me also. —John 14:1, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. I can accept his love.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 26: “The Hour of Darkness”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As the children gather, ask if they ever think a punishment is unfair. Choose six volunteers and pair them off. One person in the pair names something that children do that gets them in trouble, and the other tells what the punishment should be. The large group votes whether they think the punishment is fair. Talk about:

- How do you decide if a punishment is fair?
- Tell about a time you did not get what you deserved?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll hear about how Jesus faced a punishment he didn’t deserve so that we wouldn’t get what we did deserve.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*, Bible Explore Activity Sheet

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 26. You can also have the children look up several Bible verses throughout the story, starting with John 14. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

God’s Love Plan

In this story, you’ll narrate sections then ask the children to work together to answer the questions on the Activity Sheet by reading portions in the Bible. Before you begin, assign the children to groups of three or four and make sure everyone has a Bible, an activity sheet, and a pencil.

Our story begins at a busy time in Jerusalem. It was the Passover feast! Everyone in Jerusalem was getting ready to celebrate the way God saved his people from slavery in Egypt many years before. The Passover celebration included a special meal, and Jesus and his closest friends gathered for this big meal.

Jesus was thinking about what was going to happen. He knew the time was close when he would have to go away. It was time for him to finish the work God had given him to do. In fact, this would be the last meal Jesus would share with his friends.

Jesus knew his friends would get scared. He said they would run away and they would tell people that they didn't even know Jesus. One friend, Peter, refused to believe this. He said he would rather die than say he didn't know Jesus!

Pause and have the children read John 14:1–3 and complete that portion of the Activity Sheet.

After the meal, Jesus and some of his friends went to a garden. Jesus went off by himself to pray. Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him. And even though he was the Son of God, he knew it was going to be hard to do what God wanted him to do. Jesus prayed hard to God for help. His friends kept falling asleep while they waited for him to finish praying. Finally, he woke them up, because he knew the big moment had come.

Jewish leaders stormed into the quiet garden with soldiers. One of Jesus' friends, Judas, was with them.

Pause and have the children read John 18:4–9 and complete that portion of the Activity Sheet.

The Jewish leaders had paid money to Judas to turn in his friend. But Jesus knew all this was supposed to happen just the way God planned it. Soldiers arrested Jesus, and all his friends ran away—just like Jesus had said they would. The soldiers took Jesus to leaders who wanted him to die. Peter secretly followed the soldiers. He wanted to know what was happening to Jesus, but he was also really scared.

Pause and have the children read Luke 22:55–62 and complete that portion of the Activity Sheet.

During the night, the religious leaders had a fast trial. People lied about Jesus to make it sound like he'd done something wrong. In the morning, Jesus was led out to be killed. In those days, criminals were killed by being nailed to a cross. Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, but he was being punished with two other criminals. Soldiers made fun of him, like it was all a big joke.

For long painful hours, Jesus hung on the cross. It was getting hard to breathe, and his whole body was hurting.

Pause and have the children read Matthew 27:45–52 and complete that portion of the Activity Sheet.

All this showed that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God's plan. It was no accident.

Our sins get in the way of knowing God—all our bad thoughts and bad attitudes and bad actions and bad choices. When Jesus died, he took the punishment that we deserve and cleared the way for us to know God and live forever in heaven. Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to do what God asked him to do—to take our punishment for us. We don't

get what we deserve; instead, we get to be with Jesus. Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. The best choice we could ever make is to accept his love.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about why Jesus was crucified. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **Who deserved the punishment that Jesus had?**
- **Why did God send Jesus to take our punishment?**

Say, **Jesus died for our sins. He wants us to accept the gift of God's love.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: Bean Mosaic

Stuff You Need: several varieties of dried beans in different colors and sizes, cardboard, white glue, markers, scissors

Optional: paper plates

Say, **The cross reminds us of what Jesus did for us—that he died for our sins so we can be with him forever.** Have the class cut cross shapes out of cardboard. Then use the beans to create a mosaic effect by arranging them in pleasing artistic patterns. As the children work, talk about:

- **Why would someone volunteer to take another person's punishment?**
- **What does the cross mean to you?**

Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to accept the love God gives us.** You may want to invite the children to speak with you privately if they want to know more about accepting God's love and living with him forever. Transport crosses on paper plates.

OPTION 2: CROSS TOSS

Stuff You Need: 3 or 4 small rectangular boxes, tossing items (coins, hard candies, pebbles, buttons, beans)

Have the children stand in a circle. In the middle of the circle arrange the rectangular boxes in the shape of a cross. Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to trust in him and not have troubled hearts. In this game, we're going to toss our sins and troubles into the cross and let Jesus take care of them.** Give each player a supply of items to toss. If you think your children are mature enough to name specific sins or troubles, ask them to do so as they toss.

Variation: Set up more than one cross and have only four players at each cross. Give each player a different item to toss so that at the end of the game players can compare how many items they got in the box. Talk about:

- If you could wipe out every wrong thing you've ever done, how do you think you'd feel?
- When you see a cross, what does it remind you of?

Say, **Because of what Jesus did when he died for us, we can live with him forever. God wipes out every wrong thing we ever do and helps us do the right things.**

OPTION 3: Yes, Jesus Loves Me Too

Stuff You Need: Yes, Jesus Loves Me Too Activity Sheet, highlighters

Give an activity sheet to each child. Solve the wordsearch puzzle. Use the word bank if necessary. Talk about key words.

OPTION 4: I Am WORTH IT

Say, **God had planned that Jesus would come to Earth a long, long time ago. He knew that as humans we would mess things up and he would have to fix things for us. By sending his son to Earth, to teach us and love us so completely, he teaches us that we are worth it.**

- How can we live our lives to show God that we know how important the gift of his Son is?
- How do we show Jesus that we are worth the gift of his life?

Ahead of time, write on slips of paper actions that are signs of our love and affection. Put the slips of paper in a basket and have volunteers choose one slip each. In a charade-like format have children act out the signs for the rest of the group to guess and then briefly discuss.

Some examples are:

- Attending church services
- Praying or meditating alone or in a group
- Participating in a Bible study
- Join a youth group
- Being kind to others
- Singing in a choir

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking Jesus for dying for our sins. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

THE RESURRECTION

Bible Basis: Matthew 28:2–8, 16–20; Luke 24:36–49; John 20:1–6

Key Verse: He is not here! He is risen, just as he said he would. —Matthew 28:6, NIV

Bible Point: God raised Jesus from the dead. God gives me new life, too.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 27: “The Resurrection”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: paper, black marker

You can do this activity with a few volunteers or have all the children do it, depending on your setting. Make a black dot, about a quarter inch in diameter at one end of the paper. Then write the numbers 1 through 7 across the page about an inch apart. Cover your right eye and hold the paper at arm’s length in front of you with your left hand. Look at the dot. Then look at each of the numbers, keeping the dot in your side vision. The dot will “disappear” around number 5. Talk about:

- **What happened to the dot? Is it still there? Explain.**
- **Have you ever seen something that seemed to disappear?**

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll find out about something that disappeared—and it was a happy surprise.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 27. You can also have the children find Luke 23, Matthew 28, or John 20 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Rose from the Dead

Choose four readers for the parts in the script. If you wish, you can dress them in Bible-time clothing. Then teach these actions for the rest of the children to do in response to the cue words in bold print.

Jesus—touch the tip of the right middle finger to the left palm, then touch the left middle finger to the right palm

Disciples—put arms around each others’ shoulders

Tomb—scrunch down as if in a cave

Angel—use hands to make halos above their heads

Reader 1: It was a sad, sad day when **Jesus** died. The religious leaders didn't like the things he said and did, and they made up lies about him.

Reader 2: Soldiers nailed him to a cross, and he died. His friends, the **disciples**, didn't know what to think.

Reader 3: How could this happen to **Jesus**? What was going to happen to the **disciples**?

Reader 4: *Read Luke 23:52–53.* A big stone blocked the opening to the cave.

Reader 4: **Jesus** had promised to come back to life in three days. The religious leaders remembered he said that, and they wanted to make sure no one could think it had really happened.

Reader 1: They put soldiers in front of the **tomb** to make sure no one tried to steal **Jesus'** body and pretend he was alive.

Reader 2: No one really thought Jesus would come back to life. But after three days, the soldiers were in for a disappearing act.

Reader 3: *Read Luke 24:1.*

Reader 4: But what about the big stone?

Reader 1: How were the women going to get to **Jesus'** body?

Reader 2: There was a powerful earthquake!

Reader 3: An **angel** of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled the huge stone away from the **tomb**.

Reader 4: The **angel** sat on the stone. His body shone like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow.

Reader 1: The guards were so afraid of the **angel** that they shook and became like dead men.

Reader 2: *Read Matthew 28:5–6.*

Reader 3: Had **Jesus** disappeared?

Reader 4: No, not disappeared.

Reader 1: Risen! The angel said:

Read Matthew 28:7.

Reader 3: So the women hurried away from the **tomb**. They were afraid but full of joy at the same time. They ran to tell the **disciples** about the **angel** and the empty **tomb**.

Read John 20:30-37.

Reader 1: The **disciples** didn't know what to think. Had **Jesus** disappeared?

Reader 2: No, not disappeared.

Reader 3: Risen!

Reader 4: The only things they found were the strips of cloth the body had been wrapped in.

Reader 1: When they got back home, they talked with the other **disciples** about what they had seen at the **tomb**.

Reader 2: The **disciples** were still talking about the **angel** and the empty **tomb** when **Jesus** himself suddenly stood among them.

Reader 3: He didn't come in through a door or a window.

Reader 4: He was just there! They thought they were seeing a ghost!

Read Luke 24:38-39.

Reader 2: *Read Luke 24:40-42.*

Reader 3: It took a while for the **disciples** to understand that **Jesus** was really back.

Reader 4: After all, people don't come back from the dead every day.

Reader 1: So for the next few weeks, **Jesus** showed up sometimes to remind the **disciples** of his teachings.

Reader 2: It was important for them to know why he died and came back to life, because it would be up to them to tell everyone else what they saw and heard.

Reader 3: Finally, **Jesus** told his **disciples** to go to a mountain, and he came to them there.

Read Matthew 28:19.

Read Matthew 28:20.

Reader 2: God raised **Jesus** from the dead. God gives us new life, too.

Reader 3: When we believe in **Jesus**, we can live with him forever.

Reader 4: And that's great news for everyone!

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about Jesus' resurrection. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What surprising news did the angel have?
- Why was Jesus rising from the dead so important?

Say, **God raised Jesus from the dead! God has the power to give us new life, too. He wants us to be with him forever.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: GROUP SCULPTURE

Stuff You Need: clay or play dough, cardboard, toothpicks, plastic knives, other decoration supplies

If you want to make homemade play dough, mix 2 cups of flour, 1 cup of salt, and 1 cup of water.

Say, **The Bible story today had an unexpected twist. People were expecting Jesus to stay dead, but he didn't. Let's make a picture of this unexpected event.** Talk briefly about what elements the resurrection scene should contain, such as tomb, stone, angel, women. Press the dough out flat onto the cardboard. If it doesn't seem to be sticking, add a little water. Use the dough like a canvas. With toothpicks and plastic knives, draw the elements of the resurrection scene. If you have extra dough, kids can sculpt 3-D pieces to add to the picture. As the children work, talk about:

- What do you think is the most amazing part of that first Easter morning?
- Tell me in your own words why God raised Jesus from the dead.

Say, **God raised Jesus from the dead! God has the power to give us new life, too. He wants us to be with him forever.** Set the project aside to dry and enjoy it together in coming weeks.

OPTION 2: RESURRECTION DRAMA

Stuff You Need: Bible

Optional: Bible-time clothes, props, video recording device

Have the children use the Bible passages from today's story to put on a drama about Jesus' resurrection using their own words. Encourage them to use Bible-time clothes and other props. If you have access to a video recording device, record the final performance.

OPTION 3: WERE YOU THERE?

Stuff You Need: Were You There? Activity Sheet, Bibles, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Jesus rising from the dead is a miracle. There were witnesses to that great and unforgettable event.** Have the children think about what it might have been like to witness Jesus rising. On the activity sheet, have each child write a narrative, describing what it was like for them to witness Jesus' rising from the dead. Have them write it from the perspective of one of the women, a soldier/guard, or someone else in the garden. Share the stories with the class and encourage them to take them home to share with their families.

OPTION 4: NEW LIFE

Stuff You Need: art supplies, paper, markers or crayons

What does it mean to say that God gives us new life?

Have individuals tell their ideas of what this means.

Explain how it happens. Do we really die and come to life again? Or does it mean that God changes the life that we have to something better or more fun?

What does Jesus have to do with this new life?

Using art supplies like paper, paint, markers, glue, and crayons, create a before and after picture. We all have read the story of Jesus' death and resurrection and the new life he offers us, but this is a before and after picture of you. Fold the paper in half the long way. Draw yourself as you are now and then yourself in your new life with Jesus. Be creative and use materials to create 3-D features. Share with the group what you have drawn and what the difference is in your life.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups, thanking God for the new life he gives us through Jesus. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 27*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Bible Basis: Acts 1:2–11; 2:1–6, 23–24, 32–33, 42–47; 8:4–8; 9:1–9, 17–19

Key Verse: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in languages they had not known. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this. —Acts 2:4, NIV

Bible Point: God gives his people the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can live inside me.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 28: “New Beginnings”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As the children gather, have them stand in a large circle. If you have more than twenty in class, break into groups of no more than twenty. You may want to separate boys and girls into different groups. Have the group hold hands. Then ask the children to knot themselves up. They can twist under arms, step over hands, cross to the other side of the circle—but they may not let go of each other’s hands. Let them tangle themselves up for a few minutes, then stay in that position for the discussion.

- Tell me something great about being connected to other people.
- If I said you had to wait like this for a long time, how would you feel?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll hear about a group of people that weren’t sure what they were tangled up with. Jesus told them to go to Jerusalem and wait. Let’s find out what happened there.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*; Bibles; *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*; poster board; marker; tape; Cloud, Fire, Light Activity Sheet, paper, pencils

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 28. You can also have the children find Acts 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Then, use the Cloud, Fire, Light Activity sheet present the story.

A New Community

Ahead of time, prepare three posters. Put one of these words on each poster: Cloud, Fire, Light. If you’re artistic, add drawings. Set up three stations around the room. Put a poster at each station, along with a Bible. Cut apart the story segments on the Activity Sheet and leave the appropriate portion at each station. If you have a large group, you might want to provide more than one set of supplies at each station.

Have the class form pairs or trios. Give each group a sheet of paper and a pencil. Say, **Today's Bible story has three scenes, a Cloud scene, a Fire scene, and a Light scene.** Point out the stations you've set up. **Go to each station and read the paper you find there. It will tell you what part of the Bible to read. After you read everything, write down anything you find that is "new."** Remember, you might not see the word "new," but something new could still be happening.

Get children started at the Cloud Station, then let each small group work at its own pace to go through the three stations. When everyone is finished, gather as a large group to recap the story. Ask the children to tell you what they discovered at each station. Summarize the story and discuss the "new" items found. (For instance, new Spirit, new part of life for Jesus' disciples, new good news for everyone, new life for Saul, new community of believers.)

Close by saying, **After Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, he was taken up in a cloud. Then the Holy Spirit came to his friends in tongues of fire. And finally, Saul's life was changed by a bright light and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. God gave his people the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can live inside us, too, when we believe in Jesus the way the people in the story did.**

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about what the tongues of fire are. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- What gift did God give his people?
- What happened to Saul on the way to Damascus?

Say, **The Holy Spirit was not just for Bible times. The Holy Spirit lives in us, too, when we believe in Jesus.**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: LIVING PICTURES

Stuff You Need: Bibles

Optional: Bible-time clothes, props

Divide the class into three groups and give each group one part of the story—Jesus going to heaven, the Holy Spirit coming, and Saul meeting Jesus. The groups don't have to be the same size. The groups should talk about their part of the story and decide on three parts to picture. When it's their turn, they should freeze in poses to show the scenes. When everyone has shown their scenes, talk about why they chose those parts of the story to show. If you have a large class, each picture can be done by different children.

OPTION 2: TANGRAM STORIES

Stuff You Need: Tangram Stories Activity Sheet

If possible, duplicate the activity sheet on colorful cardstock or sturdy paper. Have the children cut apart the shapes. Briefly review the main events in the Bible story: Jesus went to heaven, the Holy Spirit came, and Saul met Jesus on the way to Damascus. Encourage children to arrange the tangram shapes in ways that illustrate characters or elements from the Bible story. Children may want to work together to create an entire scene.

- Which part of the story was the best part for you?
- What would it mean to have the Holy Spirit in your life?

Say, **God's gift of the Holy Spirit is for all his people. That includes you!**

OPTION 3: THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Stuff You Need: The Gift of the Spirit Activity Sheet, markers, pens

Say, **When God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples after Jesus rose, it was to give courage and strength to the believers so that they could go out and spread the Good News! What does the Holy Spirit do for us today?** Give an activity sheet to each child. Have the children write words on the flame that describe how the Holy Spirit has influenced their life. Have them color the flames a bright color to match the spirit that is in them. Share some of the words/gifts.

OPTION 4: GOD GIVES GIFTS

Stuff You Need: poster board, markers

God has given us so many gifts. Everything we have and everything we are is a result of his great love for us. The Holy Spirit is another one of those great gifts. Just like when the Spirit came upon the disciples, the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. He gives us strength and wisdom to accept and believe in God and in Jesus as our Savior.

Divide the class into small groups. Assign each of the groups a person of the Trinity, making sure that at least one group has each of the persons. Instruct the groups to brainstorm together a list of gifts that we receive as believers in the Trinity, in particular the part of the Trinity they were assigned.

Give a sheet of poster board to each of the groups and have them draw a large triangle in the center of the paper. Within the triangle have the groups write about or draw about the gifts that we have received. Share with the larger group.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together, thanking God that he sent the Holy Spirit. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 28*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

PAUL'S MISSION

Bible Basis: Acts 16:16–40; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–5; 3:9–13; 4:16–18; 5:16–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:12–18, 27; 13:1–7; 15:21; 16:23–24; Galatians 5:22–25; 6:18

Key Verse: He asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” —Acts 16:30–31, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus saves us if we believe in him. I can choose to believe.

Resource: *The Story for Kids* Chapter 29: “Paul’s Mission”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: 2 books, card, jar lid, pebbles

Ask, **Do you think it’s true that everything has a breaking point? Let’s do an experiment and find out.** Ask a couple volunteers to help you set the books a few inches apart, then lay the card on top of them to span the gap like a bridge. Set the jar lid on the card. Let volunteers set a few pebbles at a time on the lid. When the card falls, count the pebbles. Now roll the card into a cylinder. Put the side where the edges come together on the bottom and flatten slightly to set the curved shape on the book. Put the jar lid on top again, and again add pebbles. The children will discover that the curved card can support a heavier load than the flat card. Talk about:

- Were you surprised that the shape of the card made a difference?
- Can you think of anything that can’t break?

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll hear about something that broke when no one thought it ever could.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 29. You can also have the children find Acts 16 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Good News: Believe in Jesus

As you tell this story, children will mime the action to your narration. You’ll need people to play Paul, Silas, slave owners (one or two), judges (one or more), jailer, jailer’s family (several). If you have a large class, the rest of the class can be the crowd in Philippi. If you have a small class, you can

double up on roles or have those students read the Scripture verses. Encourage children to listen carefully for any hint of action, emotion, or attitude they can express by movement or expression. If they listen especially for verbs, that will be a good start. Read slowly and deliberately, pausing occasionally so children can keep up.

Paul didn't believe in Jesus at first. Then he saw Jesus in the middle of the road. When Jesus talked to him, Paul believed. Then he couldn't stop talking about Jesus everywhere he went. He traveled with his friend Silas.

Read Acts 16:16–18.

The spirit left the slave girl immediately. When her owners realized they couldn't make any more money, they got angry. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the judges. "These men are making trouble in our city," they said. "They are suggesting things that are against the law, and we can't do these things." The crowd joined the attack against Paul and Silas. Finally the judges ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and whipped without mercy.

Paul and Silas were thrown in prison. The jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. He put them deep inside the prison and fastened their feet with chains so they couldn't get away.

Read Acts 16:25–28.

The jailer called for lights, then rushed in shaking with fear. He fell down in front of Paul and Silas. He asked them, "What must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus. Then you and your family will be saved." They told the jailer all about Jesus. Paul and Silas told everyone in the jailer's house about Jesus. It was the middle of the night, but the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. Then he and his whole family were baptized because they believed in Jesus.

Early in the morning, the judges sent their officers to the jailer. They ordered him to let Paul and Silas go.

Paul and his helpers traveled to a lot of other places. Paul's teachings helped new Christians understand the things Jesus wanted them to do. Paul also wrote letters to churches. His words were full of encouragement and teaching to help the people be strong in their beliefs. We still have many of his letters today in the Bible, and we can read them for ourselves.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*. Ask children to look at the picture and tell you about Paul's mission. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **What broke in this story when no one thought it could?**
- **What good news did the jailer hear because the prison doors and chains broke?**

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

Say, **The jailer wanted to know how to be saved, so Paul told him. Jesus still saves us if we believe in him.**

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: LETTER BUNDLES

Stuff You Need: Paul's Letters Activity Sheet, envelopes, variety of wrapping paper, markers, scissors, glue, ribbon

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **After Paul got out of jail, he traveled to many places and he wrote many letters to churches. We'll make a bundle that reminds us of his letters.** Have children cut apart the letters from the activity sheet and put each one in an envelope. Decorate the outside of the envelope with markers or glue on wrapping paper. Bundle all the envelopes together and tie a ribbon around the bundle. As children work, take the opportunity to read the letters aloud. Then talk about:

- How did Paul share good news with the jailer in Philippi?
- How did Paul share good news with people in other cities?

Say, **The jailer chose to believe in Jesus, and he was saved. You can choose to believe, too.** If you sense a child may be ready to express faith, extend an invitation to talk privately.

OPTION 2: PERSECUTION PRAYER

Stuff You Need: information and prayer requests for the persecuted church, index cards, pencils

Before class, gather information about the persecuted church as well as prayer requests. Some organizations dedicated to helping the persecuted church have information specifically for kids.

In class, say, **Christians in some places in the world are not allowed to meet and worship God. They might be fired, beaten, thrown in prison, or even be killed for believing in Jesus. We are going to take time to pray for those people.** Allow children to take time to read the information and pray individually or in groups for the persecuted church. Encourage them to write some of the prayer requests on an index card and pray for them throughout the week.

OPTION 3: BREAK THE CHAINS

Stuff You Need: Break the Chains Activity Sheet, pencils, Bibles, one or more concordances

Say, **We are often chained down by things that we do or believe. These words or actions or thoughts keep us stuck and hold us back from believing in God's love and mercy.** Talk to the class about some of the words in the Bible that can help and encourage us to break out of the chains. Give an activity sheet, pencil, and a Bible to each child. Help them find words and passages in the concordance that help break the chains for them. Write them in the links of the chain and share.

Option 4: Faith Journey

Talk about faith with the large group.

What do you think influences or makes a person have faith in something or someone? What might influence a person to have faith in God?

If you are comfortable, share your faith journey with the group. Talk about the time you first realized what faith meant to you and how it has made a difference in your life. Did you grow up in a faith-filled family and so was influenced by their beliefs or did you learn about God on your own? Talk about things in the world and in your life that have strengthened your faith and brought you closer to God.

After you have shared, ask the group if anyone would like to share why they believe in God. Talk about people that may have taught them about faith and being a believer.

Share more stories from Acts and other New Testament stories about how the disciples spread the words of God throughout the world. Perhaps have small groups dramatize one of the stories for the rest of the class.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking God that Jesus saves us if we believe in him. Try to be available to any child who is curious about salvation. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 29*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.

PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

Bible Basis: Acts 20:22–28, 36–38; 22:22–29; 27:1, 9–41; 28:1–10

Key Verse: I only want to complete the work the Lord Jesus has given me. He wants me to give witness to others about the good news of God's grace. —Acts 20:24, NIV

Bible Point: Paul served God with his whole life. God wants me to serve him, too.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 30: "Paul's Final Days"

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Stuff You Need: box, large towel, small kitchen utensils or hand tools

Be sure to choose items that children won't hurt themselves with. Some suggestions: can opener, rubber spatula, small screwdriver, clamp, measuring spoon, measuring tape, whisk, wrench, paintbrush, bolt. Put at least five items in the box and lay a towel over the box. Ask volunteers to put one hand in the box, under the towel, and see what items they can identify by touch. Then reveal all the tools. Talk about:

- What kinds of jobs would you use these tools for?
- How important is it to like the job you're doing?

Say, In the Bible story today, we'll find out how Paul felt about doing the job God gave him to do.

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*, masking tape

Optional: spray bottles filled with water

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 30. You can also have the children find Acts 20 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

PAUL SERVES WITH HIS WHOLE LIFE

Ahead of time, use masking tape to make the outline of a ship that is large enough for all the children to sit within it. Designate one or more students (depending on the size of your group) to be guards and the rest of the children are prisoners. Several times during the story, you'll give a signal to get up and move to a different part of the ship. When it's time to move, the guards can tell prisoners where to go and prisoners must obey. If you like, you can also give guards spray bottles

filled with water to spray on prisoners while they move. Practice this question and response then use it at each stop.

Leader: What did Paul want to do?

Group: Complete the work.

After Paul met Jesus in the middle of the road to Damascus, he served God with his whole life. He traveled for many years starting new churches and visiting Christians until there were churches all over the place. Paul taught people to share the good news about Jesus with others. Many leaders in the Roman government wanted to stop the churches from growing because they thought Jesus had been a bad person. Since Paul was teaching about Jesus, these people kept trying to stop Paul from preaching.

Paul knew he might get caught soon, but he still kept on serving God. Jerusalem was a dangerous place for Christians, but when God wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem, that's exactly what Paul decided to do. So he got on a boat headed to Jerusalem. Along the way, he stopped at a few places to say goodbye to his friends as he sailed toward Jerusalem.

Pause and have the children get up and move to new spots. Make sure everyone moves. Use the question/response.

One of the places Paul stopped was Miletus. From there, he sent for his friends who lived in Ephesus, and they came to see him. He talked about what would happen in Jerusalem. Read Acts 20: 22–24. Then Paul hugged and kissed his friends and they said goodbye. He went on to Jerusalem.

Pause and have the children get up and move to new spots. Use the question/response.

Once he got to Jerusalem, some Roman soldiers found him, and Paul was taken to prison. A crowd shouted that Paul should die! So the commanding officer gave the order for Paul to be whipped.

Paul said, "Does the law allow you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" The officer didn't know Paul was a Roman citizen. Most Jews were not Roman citizens. The officer was shocked. He should not have put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. Since Paul was a citizen, he had special rights. Paul said that he wanted to have a trial in Rome with the emperor, Caesar.

Pause and have the children get up and move to new spots. Use the question/response.

Read Acts 27:9–11.

A gentle south wind began to blow, and the journey began. Before long, though, the gentle wind turned into a bad storm. The ship was in danger after all. Paul had been right all along. For two long weeks, the ship's sailors fought against the storm, but everything got worse and worse. The sailors got so worried that they even stopped eating. Paul got everyone to eat to keep their strength up and said no one was going to be hurt. Encouraged, the sailors threw everything overboard they didn't need. This made the ship

lighter. But even that didn't stop the danger. The ship got stuck on a sandbar and the pounding waves broke the ship to pieces. Everyone on board, 276 people, swam for shore.

Pause for the children to move to new spots. Use the question/response.

Everyone made it safely! Read Acts 28:1–3, 5, 9–10.

After three months on Malta, the weather was better, and another ship came to pick up the prisoners and sailors so they could continue their trip.

Pause for the children to move to new spots. Use the question/response.

Paul was once again sailing for Rome. Once he got there, he was allowed to live in a house, but a soldier always guarded him to make sure he didn't escape. He stayed there for two years. Paul used the time to write letters to churches and preach to people who came to see him at the house. Finally, Paul was put to death. He gave his whole life to serve God. All he ever wanted to do was finish the work God gave him to do and tell people about Jesus.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about how Paul served God. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- How do we know Paul liked the job God gave him to do?
- What was Paul willing to give up to serve God with his whole life?

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: SHIPWRECK WORD SEARCH

Stuff You Need: Shipwreck Word Search Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **In the story, Paul said he wanted only to complete the work that God gave him to do. Let's complete the work of a puzzle to review how Paul served God with his whole life.** Allow time to work on the word search puzzle. If children prefer, they may work in pairs. Go over the answers, then talk about:

- What do you think kept Paul going as he served God?
- How did Paul serve God with his whole life?

Say, **God called Paul to be a missionary and spread the good news of Jesus. As you grow older, I hope you'll want to find out what God is calling you to do so you can serve God, too.**

OPTION 2: SERVING CHARADES

Take a moment to let the children think about ways that they can serve God. If the children need help thinking of ideas, start them off with things like taking out the trash without being told, sharing with a younger sibling, taking cookies to and visiting with a lonely person. After children have had time to think, have each child in turn act out the way they thought about to serve God while the rest of the class guesses. You children will enjoy it if you take a turn acting as well.

OPTION 3: WHOLE LIFE POSTER

Stuff You Need: sturdy paper, colored pencils or markers, old family magazines, scissors, glue

Say, **Paul served God with his whole life. Make a poster to help you remember that you can serve God with your whole life, too.** Some children may want to draw on their poster, while others will want to make a collage of words and pictures cut from old magazines. Talk about ways they can serve God with their whole lives even while they are young.

OPTION 4: I Can Serve God

It is true. God does want us to serve him. And there are many ways we can do that. Some people serve God through good works toward other people. Others serve him by praying and living a good, simple life. This list could go on for a very long time.

Talk to your group about how children can serve God. Start by talking about all the ways Paul served—prayer, preaching, healing, suffering in God’s name, traveling and facing hardships for the sake of spreading the word of God.

Are these things that children can do? If they answer yes, then talk about how and have them be specific.

List these ways children can serve and talk very seriously with the group about how they would be willing to serve God in their community, whether the church community or the larger community around them. Choose one of the actions and start to formulate a plan with the whole group of how this could be done.

Have some volunteers ready to help as this could be a long-lasting project such as a food drive, a blanket collection, a penny drive, or weekly bake sales that benefit an organization or a family facing hardship.

As the plan is formed, talk about whether the group thinks Paul went through this type of planning or whether he just went as the Spirit moved him.

Bring the project to completion, taking as long as it needs.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups asking God for ways to serve him. Encourage the children to look for ways to serve God throughout the week. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 30*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents’ Page.

REVELATION

Bible Basis: Revelation 1:1–20; 4:1–11; 5:13–14; 19:11–15; 21:10–18, 21–27; 22:7–14; 16:21

Key Verse: Look! He is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him. —Revelation 1:7, NIV

Bible Point: Jesus is coming again. I can live in his kingdom forever.

Resource: *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 31: “Revelation”

STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

Say, **How far can you see? Let’s see how much you know about how far the human eye can see.** Ask the following questions, let children speculate, then give the answers:

- **How far can a person see on flat ground in daylight?** (8–10 miles)
- **How many planets are visible without a telescope?** (5—Mercury, 48 million miles away; Venus, 25 million miles; Mars, 35 million miles; Jupiter, 365 million miles; Saturn, 746 million miles)
- **When you look up at the night sky, how far can you see?** (The Andromeda Galaxy, visible to the naked eye, is 2.5 million light years away. One light year equals six trillion miles. Do the math!)

Talk about:

- **Tell me about something you’ve seen, but you weren’t sure what it was.**
- **What’s the most incredible thing you’ve ever seen?**

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll hear about something that’s going to happen that every eye on Earth will see.**

STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

Stuff You Need: copies of *The Story for Kids*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*, chenille stems (five per child)

Optional: props for the eye doctor

Tell the story from *The Story for Kids*, Chapter 31. You can also have the children find Revelation 1 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

Jesus Comes Again

You'll need four strong readers for the main parts of Eye Doctor, John, Patient 1, and Patient 2. John will read several Bible passages. Use props and costumes to the extent you wish to set up an eye doctor's office. Give children in the large group five chenille wires each. Allow a few minutes for them to fashion the wires into a set of glasses to wear during the story. Decide on a signal, and when you (or a volunteer) give the signal, children will say, "What a sight!" Practice the signal and response, then begin.

Doctor: I've been taking care of people's eyes for a very long time.

Patient 1: Like thousands of years?

Doctor: Seems like it. I remember one of my oldest patients. A man named John was one of Jesus' best friends. After Jesus went back to heaven, John became one of the leaders of the Christians.

Patient 2: I'm sure that got him into an eyeful of trouble.

Doctor: When John was an old man, he was captured and sent to an island called Patmos for the rest of his life. While he was on Patmos, he started seeing visions of heaven. I used to examine his eyes and wonder if he had special eyes.

John: My eyes have excellent vision. The visions were from God.

Doctor: John knew Jesus was coming again some day.

John: Jesus said he would. *Read Revelation 1:7.*

Patient 1: Every eye?

John: Every single eye.

Give the signal and response.

Doctor: One day, the Holy Spirit took control of John and he heard a loud voice.

Read Revelation 1:12–16.

Patient 2: That's mind-bending. Lamp stands ... gold ... fiery eyes ... stars in his hand.

Give the signal and response.

John: This blazing, sun-bright man touched me and said, "I am the Living One. I was dead. But look! I am alive for ever and ever!"

Patient 1: Was it Jesus?

Patient 2: It must have been Jesus!

John: Then I looked again, and there was a door standing open in heaven.

Patient 1: Really? Heaven?

Patient 2: Yes, heaven!

Give the signal and response.

John: I saw a throne, and the one who sat on the throne shone like jewels.

Doctor: The throne flashed and thundered. John saw four creatures. Listen carefully and see if your mind's eye can picture it. These four creatures were covered with eyes.

Patient 1: That boggles the mind.

Patient 2: Must have been a bazillion eyes.

Give the signal and response.

John: The first creature looked like a lion. The second one looked like an ox. The third had a man's face. The fourth looked like a flying eagle.

Doctor: They all had six wings with eyes all over them, and they never stopped saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God."

Give the signal and response.

Read Revelation 19:11–12.

Patient 1: What do you suppose he was the king of?

Patient 2: It must have had something to do with the kingdom of God!

Read Revelation 19:13–14.

Give the signal and response.

Doctor: Later the Spirit took John to a huge, high mountain and showed John the Holy City.

John: It came down out of heaven. The whole city shone with the glory of God. This city had twelve huge gates made out of pearls and each gate had an angel. This city was made out of gold, pure gold! Even the main street was pure gold.

Doctor: This incredible city of pure gold does not need the sun or the moon. God's glory is its light.

John: Jesus said, "Look! I am coming soon! I am the First and the Last. I am the Beginning and the End." The people who follow Jesus will get to live in this wonderful city someday.

Patient 1: We'll be allowed to go through the gates.

Patient 2: Anyone who wants to take this free gift can have it.

Give the signal and response.

Doctor: John saw some amazing stuff with his eyes! He wrote down everything so Christians in all the churches could know what was going to happen.

John: This is the very last part of the Bible called Revelation.

Patient 1: Jesus is coming again!

Patient 2: And we'll be able to live in his kingdom forever!

Give the signal and response.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about John's vision. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- **Name some of the things John had visions of.**
- **How does the story of Revelation show what God's kingdom is like?**

Say, **Jesus is coming again someday. We don't know when, but when it happens, everyone will know!**

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

STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose any or all of these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: JESUS IN A CLOUD FLIP BOOK

Stuff You Need: paper or small pads of sticky-notes, scissors, stapler, markers

Say, **Our Bible verse says, "Look! He is coming with the clouds. Every eye will see him" (Revelation 1:7). The Bible story helped us imagine what things might look like when Jesus comes again and we all live with Jesus in heaven.** Have the class make "flip books" to illustrate Jesus coming in a cloud. Children can cut a stack of paper into two-inch squares and staple them together, or you might prefer to give each child a stack of small sticky-notes. (Make sure children don't take the sticky-notes apart.) Either way, the stack should contain enough pages that you can flip pages quickly with a thumb. Starting either at the front or the back of the stack, draw what it might look like when Jesus comes on a cloud. Each page should advance the movement just slightly. Draw only in the bottom corner because this is what is visible when you ruffle the pages. When you flip through the drawings rapidly, they will look like a moving picture.

- Say, **Let's repeat the verse together.** Lead the class in saying the verse.
- **How do you think you will feel when Jesus comes again?**

Say, **God sent Jesus to Earth the first time as a baby and very few people knew. The second time, he will come in such a way that everyone will know that God is king!**

Option 2: Every Eye Mosaic

Stuff You Need: Eye Template Activity Sheet, colored paper, scissors, glue, poster board, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Say, **Our Bible verse says that every eye will see Jesus when he comes again. Let's use eye shapes to make a mosaic picture of what it might look like when Jesus comes again.** Have the children use the templates on the activity sheet and cut out eyes of various sizes and colors. Use markers to draw in eyeballs and eyelashes. Then arrange the eyes on the poster board so that the color groupings form a picture of Jesus coming on a cloud. Fill in all the space with colored eyes. As children work, talk about:

- What will happen when Jesus comes again?
- What kind of picture of heaven did John see in his vision?

Say, **Jesus is coming again, and we'll be able to live with him forever in his kingdom. He wants us to be there with him!**

Option 3: A Revelation

Stuff You Need: A Revelation Activity Sheet, pencils

Give an activity sheet to each child. Have the children solve the puzzles and read the verse together.

Solution: Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him.

Option 4: What Is Heaven Like?

Stuff You Need: butcher paper, art supplies

Talk to the groups about Jesus coming again.

What did John say would happen? How was the kingdom of God represented?

How does the group imagine heaven? Have volunteers describe what they believe it will be like. Divide the large group into smaller groups of 4–5. Give each group a large sheet of butcher paper and art supplies. Have them discuss and then illustrate heaven. Things can be labeled. This image can be based upon Revelation or it can be the group's individual interpretation of heaven.

Share with the larger group when complete. Have a spokesperson describe the work.

STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray together, thanking God that Jesus is coming again. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 31*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.