



BIBLE LESSONS FOR KIDS | Volume 6



THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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BIBLE FUN FACTORY

BIBLE LESSONS FOR KIDS

JUDGES

Welcome to this series of Bible lessons for students age pre-school to sixth grade. You'll find these Bible lessons introduce children to characters of the Old Testament, making their lives very personal by putting their problems in a modern-day context. The characters introduce principles students can use every day in school, at home, and in the neighborhood, while growing in Christ.

In this series of five lessons, starts a series of lessons on the theme of friendship. **What's wrong with Israel's memory** starts this series on friendship, with Israel forgetting that God is their best friend in the whole universe. **Deborah** was severely underestimated because she was a woman: she sparks the theme, **don't judge a book by its cover**; we should pick our friends based on their insides, not their outsides. Reinforcing that are two tales of **Gideon**, who is small and young, and who has a very small army. And finally, **Delilah tempts Samson** shows that peer pressure and two-faced people were certainly around in Bible times! Samson fell for it; maybe thanks to his experiences, we won't!

Covering the Books of the Judges, these lessons will provide children with a solid understanding of how important it is to choose friends carefully and to not find friends based on the world's standards.

Lessons Included:

1. What's Wrong with Israel's Memory (Judges 1-3)
2. Deborah is Underestimated (Judges 4)
3. Gideon: God Uses the Smallest Again (Judges 6)
4. Gideon's Army is Small Like Gideon (Judges 7)
5. Delilah Betrays Samson (Judges 16)

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH ISRAEL'S MEMORY

The Book of Judges 1-3 shows four times when the Israelites forgot about God and worshiped the idols of neighboring people—beginning only one century after leaving Egypt. These chapters are great examples of how easily we can forget God in our own lives and how important it is to stay on track. **God's love is a Father's love. He wants to enjoy our plans and our company. When we forget, not only does He get hurt, but things don't go very well for us.**

MATERIALS LIST

Lesson

Five pieces of construction paper, on which you should write the following signs:

- GOD DOESN'T WANT US JUST TO LOOK COOL.
- HE WANTS US TO ACTUALLY BE COOL.
- THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING NICE AND BEING GOOD
- NICE
- GOOD

Index cards, on which you should write, or cut and tape, the following lines, one on each card:

- Makes friends laugh
- Keeps promises, like not telling secrets
- Invites lots of people to their parties
- Invites people to their parties that won't get everyone in trouble
- Tells all sorts of funny stories
- Tells funny stories that don't hurt anyone's feelings

- Has a closet full of clothes and shares with friends so they'll like her
- Has a closet full of clothes, and gives to thrift stores for poor kids she might never meet
- Hears a funny lie about someone and laughs
- Hears a funny lie about someone and sticks up for that person
- Sees a homeless person asleep on a city sidewalk and shudders, grateful it's not her
- Sees a homeless person and feels sick about moving on until Mom leaves him a dollar

Intro Activity for Younger Children

- Card stock, on which you cut out five-pointed stars, perhaps 4 inches square; one star for each child
- Aluminum foil, cut in the same shape and size as the stars, two foil pieces for each child
- Glue sticks
- Marker pens
- Twine cut in one-foot sections, one for each child
- Hole puncher

Intro Activity, Older Children

- Plain lined paper
- Chalkboard or larger piece of paper for teacher to write on

Activity, Younger Children

- Stars from Intro Activity

Activity, Older Children

- Plain or lined paper

Game, Younger Children

- No materials needed

Game, Older Children

- No materials needed

BIBLE READING/STORY: JUDGES 2

Israel turns away from God after Joshua dies

⁶After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites [from all the takeovers of bad kingdoms], they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. ⁷ The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and others.

¹⁴ In his anger against Israel, the LORD handed them over to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer strong enough to fight. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but served other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived. The LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

²⁰ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did." ²³ The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

LESSON (TEACHER WORDS IN BOLD):

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ISRAEL'S MEMORY?

If you stuck your ear to the sky and listened closely, you could hear the echo coming from lots of kids, young and old, all across America:

I...JUST...WANT...TO...LOOK...COOL.

Kids want to wear what the cool kids are wearing. They want what's in the windows in the hottest stores in the mall. They want clothes with names on them: Hollister. Abercrombe. Deliah's. Pac Sun.

Is there a party? They want an invitation.

Is there a talent show? They want first prize.

Things in that sense have not changed one little bit since the first days of Israel. Moses led Israel as slaves into the desert. They walked around there, growing stronger and stronger, for 40 years. Then Joshua led them in battle for another 40 years while they got bigger and bigger. After that?

For all those nations that had been around for hundreds of years, **THEY...JUST...WANTED...TO...LOOK...COOL.**

Does God want us NOT to look cool? No.

Does God want us to be dorky? No.

Some of us are, and God loves us just the way we are. But...

Bring two students to the front of the room. Give one the first construction paper sign and have him read it aloud before holding it up in front of others:

GOD DOESN'T WANT US JUST TO LOOK COOL.

Give one the second sign and have him read it aloud also:

HE WANTS US TO ACTUALLY BE COOL.

The Israelites got in trouble because they started admiring guys who were *not actually cool*. They just *looked cool*. We don't want to make the same mistakes. Hence,

today we're going to learn another good saying that will help us remember the difference between *looking cool* and *actually being cool*.

Bring a third student up. Put him in the middle of the other two with a sign that says this:

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING NICE AND BEING GOOD.

Read it aloud. **Have any of you ever heard this saying before?** Most will not.

There's a difference between being nice and being good. If you are nice but you're not good, that is *not cool*. That's not what God wants for you.

Let's look at the difference between the words NICE and GOOD, because they are NOT the same.

Have the first two students cover their signs with new signs. One should say NICE on it, and the other should say GOOD.

I'm going to hold up a trait. Somebody tell me whether it describes "nice" or it describes "good."

Start with the index cards on which you have written traits. Put a piece of Scotch tape on it, so it will stick to the sign that says NICE or the sign that says GOOD.

The first card should say, MAKES FRIENDS LAUGH.

Ask students whether that describes NICE or GOOD. Explain:

Remember, you can make your friends laugh by telling a funny joke, or you can make them laugh at somebody else's expense, such as by putting someone down or gossiping behind someone's back.

The answer is NICE. Have a student tape the card to the bottom of the NICE sign.

The second card should read, KEEPS PROMISES LIKE NOT TELLING A SECRET.

Ask students whether that describes NICE or GOOD.

Keeping a secret means you can trust that person. Trust is a good quality.

The answer is GOOD. Have a student tape the card to the bottom of the GOOD sign.

The reason we are telling you this is that if you aren't already, very soon you will be under peer pressure very similar to what the Israelites went through when they were a young nation. They were sort of like teenagers in nation years. You will soon find a lot of pressure to *look cool*, but you really want to *be cool*.

NICE means that people are drawn to you for any number of reasons.

GOOD means that people are drawn to you for the right reasons.

Proceed with the index cards, asking the class to pin them on the right sign. Hold up two at once from here on in and ask which card shows NICE, and which one shows GOOD.

Invites lots of people to their parties

Invites people to their parties that won't get everyone in trouble

(first is NICE, second is GOOD)

Tells all sorts of funny stories

Tells funny stories that don't hurt anyone's feelings

(first is NICE, second is GOOD)

Has a closet full of clothes and shares with friends so they'll like her (NICE)

Has a closet full of clothes, and gives to thrift stores for poor kids she might never meet (GOOD)

Hears a funny lie about someone and laughs (NICE)

Hears a funny lie about someone and sticks up for that person (GOOD)

Sees a homeless person asleep on a city sidewalk and shudders, grateful it's not her (NICE)

Sees a homeless person and feels sick about moving on until Mom leaves him a dollar (GOOD)

Do you see how sometimes the difference between a NICE person and a GOOD person is slightly hard to tell? If you want to be a GOOD person and pick GOOD friends, you have to think about this sometimes.

Has a great personality (NICE)

Has a great conscience (GOOD)

Likes having designer clothes because they make her look cool (NICE)

Likes having designer clothes because God is good and makes sure beauty is provided (GOOD)

Feels comfortable with everyone (NICE)

Feels uncomfortable with people who are doing bad things (GOOD)

Wants to *look* cool (nice)

Wants to *be* cool (good)

We're telling you this, because it's normal for kids to hear parents warn and warn about picking good friends. You come home from school and think, "What on earth are my parents acting so nervous about? These people are perfectly NICE."

BE CAUTIONED: Nice and good are two different things. You want your best friends to be GOOD. Or like the Israelites, you won't see the subtle differences. And you'll be led astray too.

Good is still fun, as you've seen. Good is cool. If a friend tells you that so-and-so ought to be your friend because "she's so NICE," remember to think to yourself quickly: "Yeah, but is she GOOD?"

INTRO ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: STARS FOR BEING GOOD

Give each child the cardboard star and the pieces of aluminum foil for the front and the back. Have them put them all together with a glue stick.

Today, we're going to talk about the differences between being nice and being good. Everyone should be "nice," but as Christians, we want you to be "good."

When they are finished, punch a hole through one of the points using a hole puncher. Run a piece of ribbon or twine through it, so it can be a necklace later in the lesson. Put aside when finished for now.

INTRO ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: NICE OR GOOD?

Today we'll be taking about the difference between nice and good. It's a very important distinction:

When somebody is "nice," they make lots of people feel good—even bad people about bad things.

When somebody is "good," they don't get involved with bad people doing bad things. They can even make those people feel uncomfortable sometimes.

Have students peruse the lists of traits that kids have in the list below on your screen.

Then direct students to number a separate piece of paper 1-23, then

- Put a “g” beside those traits that describe someone who is “good,”
- Put an “n” before those that describe someone who is merely “nice,”
- Put a “c” before those traits where you “can’t tell;” it could be nice, good, both, or neither.

List of Traits:

1. Funny
2. Cute
3. Jokes around a lot and makes people laugh
4. Gives thoughtful, handmade birthday presents
5. Offers money to any classmate who forgot theirs
6. Ignores it when they see somebody cheating
7. Offers too-small clothes to friends
8. Pets all dogs that pass by on street
9. Screams at scary movies
10. Is not at all shy
11. Refuses to gossip about own friends
12. Gives expensive birthday presents
13. Keeps secrets of best friends
14. Is a great athlete
15. Gives old clothes to charity
16. Has an expensive bike
17. Keeps secrets of anyone
18. Helps find a lost dog’s home
19. Enjoys going to church at Christmas
20. Talks to the Lord every day
21. Refuses to gossip about anyone
22. Gives money to friends who forgot theirs
23. Turns in cheaters to teacher secretly after class

Children may have various reasons for marking some of these “nice“ or “good,” and tell them you’ll discuss these later. Your point: **You’ll be exposed to plenty of people who are nice. Even total bad guys think their own friends are nice. As a Christian, you want to make sure your best friends are good, and sometimes it’s hard to see the difference.**

ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: PRACTICE BEING GOOD

Have the children sit in front of you and volunteer to come up before the group and do the following suggestions. If their role playing turns out to be “nice” or “neutral” instead of good, guide them with praise and applause into “good” behavior. Ask them questions or help them embellish the stories in the right way. Once they have exercised “good” behavior, let them wear their stars from the Intro Activity on their clothes.

1. Make a “once upon a time” story about a kid who had to choose between giving old toys to poor people or keeping them.
2. Pretend you have a bowl full of candy. Your classmates don’t have any. Show us how you divide your candy.
3. Pretend you’re playing in your yard and a doggie comes over to you wagging his tail. He doesn’t have a collar on and you don’t know who he belongs to. What do you do?
4. A big kid yells in your face outside your house. You’re trying to be good. Make up what you say back to him.
5. A littler kid snatches a toy from you. You’re trying to be good. Make up what you say back to him.
6. You’re outside playing with two friends. One just hits the other. The one who gets hit starts to cry. What do you say and do? Pretend for us...
7. Make up a “once upon a time” story about a little boy who has a whole slew of Matchbox cars. Here comes his friend who doesn’t have any. What happens between the two of them?
8. You’re playing dress-up with a friend. She wants the purple necklace for her outfit. But it’s your favorite, and it really matches your outfit. Pretend you are trying to get it in a nice way.

ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: NICE OR GOOD (CONTINUED)

Return to the Intro Activity List for some important further discussion.

Sometimes we find we like kids for reasons that aren't really great. We like them for shallow reasons. Let's try to be aware of that first, so we don't do it as much. Pick out all the traits on the screen that are kind of shallow.

They should probably pick out nice looking, gives big birthday presents, is a great athlete, and has an expensive bike.

Do any of those traits really tell you *anything* about whether a person will make a good friend or not? How can we remind ourselves not to get close to people for these reasons?

Let them set some standards for themselves.

It's easier to see which of these are merely "nice" and which are "good" by putting the similar ones next to each other. Like this:

Read the following, which are actually pairs. One is nice, while the other is good. Stop to discuss after each one and make sure they can see which is which:

1. Gives big birthday presents / Gives thoughtful, handmade birthday presents
2. Gives old clothes to friends/ Offers old clothes to charity
3. Pets all dogs that pass by on street/ Helps find a lost dog's home
4. Refuses to gossip about friends / Refuses to gossip about anyone
5. Keeps secrets of best friends/ Keeps secrets of anyone
6. Enjoys going to church at Christmas / Talks to the Lord every day
7. Gives money to friends who forgot theirs/ Offers money to any classmate who forgot theirs
8. Ignores it when they see somebody cheating/ Turns in cheaters to teacher secretly after class

Discuss with them why "nice" doesn't always cut it, even though it can be attractive to more people. It can include that "nice" is noncommittal against things that are wrong, when a person being good would mean taking a stand.

GAME, YOUNGER CHILDREN: NICE WALL, GOOD WALL

Have students stand in two lines, facing each other. Explain to the students in one line that every time they hear the word “Nice,” they move a step to the left (as they might not know left from right, point to the wall in which they take the step sideways.) When they hear the word “Good,” they step in the other direction.

The students in the line facing them should do the same, (right or left), but because they are facing the other students, they will be going in the opposite direction. Point out the correct walls to them.

Stand in front of them with your eyes shut. Say “Nice!” a couple of times, then “Good!” a couple of times. Then say “Nice!” very quickly three times. Say “Good!” very quickly twice. Mix it all up until you’re not sure how many times you’ve said “Nice!” and “Good!” The assistant can help them get to the right wall. When both teams have reached the wall, the game is over.

Did you get confused about which way to go? Life is confusing sometimes, especially when you are watching others who are going the opposite way.

If your friends went the wrong way accidentally, did that get you going the wrong way, too? In life, you have to be careful to listen to your conscience and your inner soul about which way to go. Looking at others can make you make wrong choices like the Israelites.

When your friends banged into you, did that get you going the wrong way? That’s like when friends put pressure on you if they’re doing the wrong thing. You want to keep your mind fixed on “good!” It takes practice!

Want to try it again??

GAME, OLDER CHILDREN: PEER PRESSURE GAME

Have one child get in the center of a circle. Have her classmates facing outward. They should keep their hands at their sides. As their backs are to her, they should not be able to see her.

When you say, “Go!” she can wait to fake people or she can try to make a break for it. The game is for her to get outside the circle before the two people she pushes through can tag her. The rule is that she has to have at least one foot on the floor outside of them before they tag her. If they tag her, she returns to the center. If she’s free, another person goes to the center.

Sometimes when you’re in a crowd of kids, like in school or in someone’s house, you can feel like you’re surrounded by people facing a different direction in life than you are. But you can “get through” their pressure and still be yourself. But it’s not easy, is it?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving us Israel. The lessons they learned serve as great lessons for us today.

Amen.

DEBORAH IS UNDER ESTIMATED

The modern-day story told in this lesson is about seventh graders. It goes with the Bible reading of Deborah and Jael. Although our Sunday school kids are younger, they need to brace up as early as possible to face peer pressure, and they need to begin picking their friends wisely at the earliest age possible. The story of Deborah and Jael causing the defeat of Sisera provides great fodder for such a lesson. **We all make mistakes, as Israel did once again. It's never too late to fix mistakes. And when you need help, God provides people to help you—and sometimes it's through the least likely person you would expect. THINGS ARE NEVER AS THEY APPEAR, SO DON'T JUDGE BY APPEARANCES.**

MATERIALS LIST

Lesson

- No materials needed

Intro Activity, Younger Children

- Big box
- Small box
- Old blanket and some clanking things to put in the big box
- Wrapping paper
- Bows
- Scotch tape
- Bag of candy, enough for everyone to have some

Intro Activity, Older Children

- 12-15 catalog cutouts or online downloads of faces of varying kids, about the same age as kids in your class

Activity, Younger Children

- Chalkboard or larger sheet of paper

Activity, Older Children

- Plain or lined paper

BIBLE READING/STORY: JUDGES 4

Deborah

¹ The Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD. ² So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king. The commander of his army was Sisera. Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. So they cried to the LORD for help.

⁴ Deborah, a prophetess, was leading Israel at that time. She sent for Barak, a military commander, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men and lead the way to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lure Sisera with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.' "

⁸ Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

⁹ "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because you are going about this with faith instead of fear, the honor will not be yours. The LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. Ten thousand men followed, and Deborah also went with him.

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.

¹² When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera gathered together his nine hundred iron chariots and all the men with him.

¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men. ¹⁵ At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶ But Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim. All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left.

¹⁷ Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.

¹⁸ Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my Lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him.

¹⁹ "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

²⁰ "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say 'No.' "

²¹ But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

²² Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple-dead.

LESSON (TEACHER WORDS IN BOLD) DON'T UNDERESTIMATE PEOPLE

Who killed Sisera? Jael, Haber's wife.

How was she able to do this? He was exhausted and asked her for a place to sleep. She killed him while he was sleeping.

Why do you think Sisera trusted Jael, wife of a Kenite, who happened to live on the outskirts of Israelite territory? Because she was a woman. Because she trapped him with what sounded like kindness.

Did he "underestimate" her? Did he think she was weaker than she was? Yes.

Now let me tell you a modern-day story. There was a bully in a nearby school named Earl. In seventh grade, he used to come up to a girl named Tina and ask her for the answers to her math homework. At first, Tina gave him the answers because he was in a cool crowd, and she thought he might be nice to her and help get her in that crowd, too. But she noticed he never said anything to her at all, except when demanding her homework answers.

One day in the cafeteria a bunch of boys picked on Tina, calling her "fish face," because she hated cafeteria food and always brought a tuna sandwich from home. Earl joined right in. But instead of call her "fish face," he called her "fish breath" and started this awful rumor that Tina never brushed her teeth. It was totally untrue and Tina was stunned. It was like this whole homework thing had never happened.

She learned her lesson and decided not to give him any more answers. But the problem was...how to stop, now that she'd started, without creating an even bigger backlash from these kids.

Her mom told her to tell the teacher. Tina didn't want to tell the teacher, because this particular teacher would simply call Earl out on it, and it would create public embarrassment. She tried bringing it up to a couple of the "nicer" girls that Earl hung out with.

"Earl is just Earl," they told her nicely. "Just do what he tells you and it's the best way to stay out of trouble."

But Tina felt betrayed by him, and angry at herself for falling for his bullying, and really wanted to find a way out.

Her own friends were too scared of him and that crowd to do anything. Tina realized the girl she sat next to in history never had much to say. She simply vented to Honna, thinking the girl would say nothing, but she could at least get a load off her chest. Honna always had her homework done by the end of free period. She brought out the math homework and looked at it. This time, it was a multiple choice take-home assignment with all the letters of the alphabet lined up with various possible answers.

Earl sat only three seats away from them, so Honna spoke softly with a smirk. "Did you finish yours yet?"

"No," Tina answered.

There were eight problems. All had to be assigned one of the lettered answers at the top.

"Gimme your paper," Honna said.

Tina handed over the blank sheet, and Honna filled in some answers quickly and handed it back. Tina realized Honna had simply filled in letters, but she couldn't see any rhyme or reason to what she had picked.

"Look with your eyes," Honna insisted. When Tina looked again, she saw the pattern: "I M CHEAT R" ran down the side of the page. What she had picked were so far from the correct answers that Tina figured the teacher might even notice the pattern.

She laughed, almost aloud, though Honna was very cool. "Do the work at home, write down the answers on something else, and after Earl takes your homework, erase these and put down the right answers."

And so she did.

Two days later, the teacher had Earl in front of the desk, questioning him for more than fifteen minutes. She had him doing problems in front of her desk, and it turned out that he was clueless about the work they had done for the past two weeks. He received a failing grade for cheating.

He came into history class, and Tina had figured there would be some anger on his part, but she wasn't prepared for the full measure of it.

"You're dead!" he said, his face still red. "Not only you, but I'll torture your little sister for months."

Tina's whole body turned to sludge as she thought of trying to make it home with Earl and his friends on her heels.

Honna wasn't tiny, but she wasn't huge either. She was just a girl you wouldn't notice until she opened her mouth that day.

"What," she demanded of Earl in a laughing voice. "What are you going to do? I gave her the idea. Are you going to pick on me too?"

Whoa, Tina thought. Wish I had that much nerve.

Earl was just watching the girl, obviously trying to size her up, but there wasn't a lot to know. Honna didn't hang out much with anyone. She had a tiny house that had a lot of old cars in the yard, and the kids always assumed she was embarrassed. Also embarrassing was the fact that her mom walked their huge rottweiler every day around 2:30, and Honna walked home with them instead of with friends.

"You're the one with the yard that looks like a trash heap," Earl jeered.

"Yeah," Honna laughed. "And my dad works on all the old cars back there. He loves to fling his wrenches into the noggins of big-mouth kids. He's kind of crazy. You want to try him out? Come on over. Honest. If he doesn't get you, my dog will."

Honna had been slouching in her chair. She hadn't moved. She hadn't risen up to try and look bigger. Tina decided it was Honna's inner confidence. Where it came from, Tina had no idea.

But she wanted to find out. After school, she walked home on a route where she could walk most of the way with Honna, her mom, and the dog. Earl and his friends went the other way without even a thought.

“Does this dog really bite?” Tina asked.

“No, he’s a love. Just looks fierce,” Honna said, patting the dog’s side.

“And does your dad really throw car wrenches?”

“No way,” she said but looked sad. “He’s unemployed right now. He’s depressed, and working on the cars makes him feel better. Maybe he’ll sell one.”

“How’d you get the nerve to tell off Earl?” she asked curiously. Honna’s mom had known who Tina was right away, so Tina figured she knew the whole story.

“My dad got fired because he got accused of something he didn’t do. He couldn’t find the words to defend himself,” she said.

Tina didn’t feel right asking more questions. They all said nothing as they walked along. But Tina felt grateful. And wiser. And she marveled, thinking, “You never know who’s going to be strong or why.” *THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY APPEAR.*

Questions for the class.

- 1. In the first story we heard, Deborah and Jael put their strength together and killed a violent man. *Things are not always as they appear.* Why is it surprising that two women would get the better of a huge military leader?** Because they were women. Because Jael seemed sweet and helpless, offering him food.
- 2. In the second story, why is it surprising that two girls could teach a bully a lesson?** Because Tina had gotten in a bad habit of giving away homework answers. Because Honna was quiet and you wouldn’t suspect her of inner strength.
- 3. What would have been the best thing that Tina could have done from the beginning?** Refused to give any homework answers to Earl from the start. It only put her in deeper later.
- 4. Honna told Tina, “My dad got fired because he got accused of something he didn’t do. He couldn’t find the words to defend himself.” How does this sad event relate to Honna standing up for herself and Tina?** It inspired her because she didn’t want to also become frustrated and depressed.
- 5. Can God bring good even out of very bad situations? How did He do so in this case?** The father’s failure made Honna stronger. Honna’s strength made Tina stronger and wiser.

6. **How are things not as they appear in this story?** Strength didn't come from the coolest kids or the most popular kids. The girl nobody would notice was strongest.
7. **Jesus said in John 7:24, "stop judging by appearances." In other words, don't be shallow. What does this teach you about how to pick your friends?** Don't judge by appearances. You'll find the best friends in strange places. You have to look beneath the skin to find people who are good.

INTRO ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: DON'T JUDGE BY APPEARANCES

Tell the children there are two presents hidden around the room. See if they can find them, but *don't open them!* They should bring them back to the table.

One should be very large and the other very small. Both should be gift wrapped to look pretty.

Look at both gifts. You can shake them, but don't hurt them. Take a guess about what is inside.

Give the children time to guess to each other what each box contains. Ask them which they'd rather open—the big one or the small one. In the big one, you will have put a crusty old bed blanket and some knives, forks and odd, boring things that will clatter. Fill the smaller box with small wrapped candies.

Have the children unwrap both before the lesson begins.

Today we'll be talking about how things are not always as they appear. We often think big things will be great things because they're big. Sometimes the best things come in small packages. Tell them they can eat some candy after the lesson.

INTRO ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: WHO LOOKS LIKE A FRIEND?

Bring in a yearbook (that isn't too old!) or a popular teen magazine with lot of kids' faces in it. Have kids leaf through it, giving their opinions who on looks like a good friend.

At the end of the session tell them:

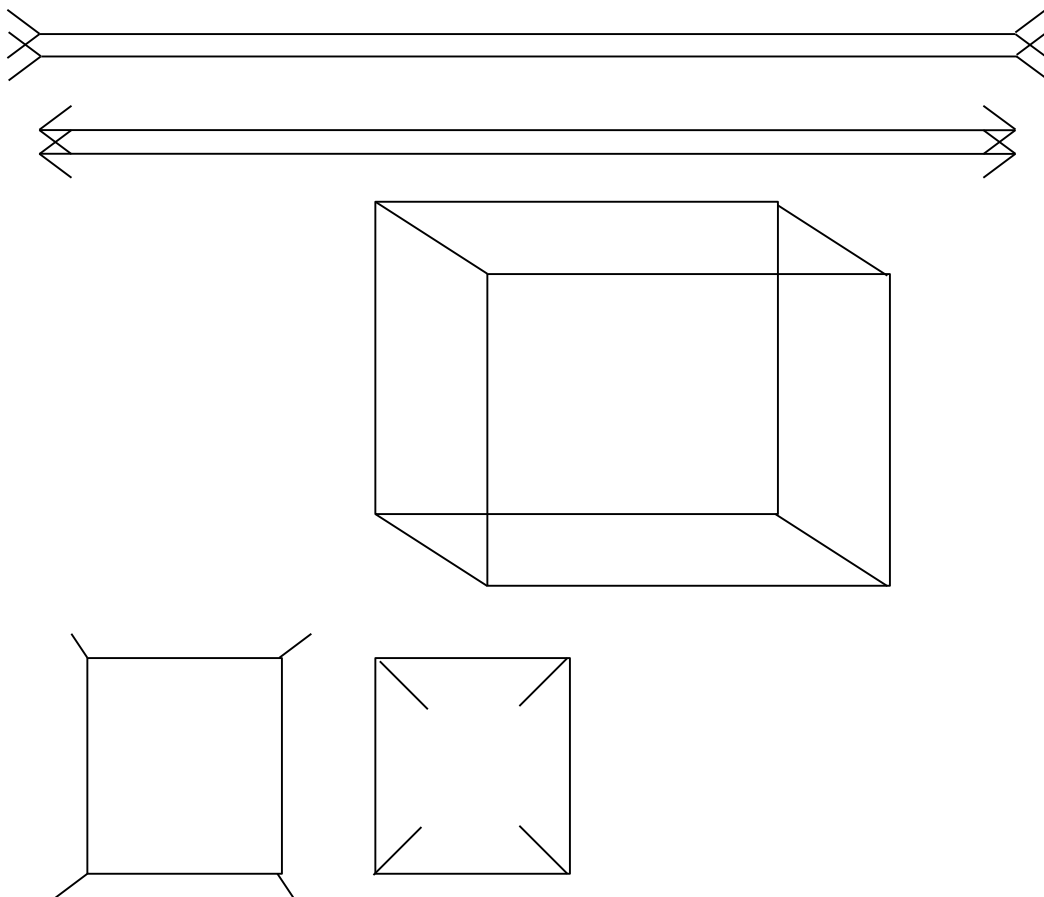
The truth is, you can't tell which of these kids would be your friend. You can't judge a book by its cover, because things are always different than they appear. That's what we'll be talking about today.

ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: THINGS AREN'T AS THEY APPEAR

On the board or a piece of paper, draw the three sets of images shown below. Be careful to keep the images the same size as they appear on the paper in proportion to other images. Of the first and last sets, ask students, **Which object is biggest?** Actually, both items in each set are the same size, and the cube can be seen either way. In the cube, ask them which square is closest. It will depend on how they are seeing it.

These are simple optical illusions. Point out:

Things are not always as they appear, are they? Don't judge people by what they look like either!



Teach them how to draw a cube like the one in the middle by making two squares, one slightly higher and to the left of the other, and attach them with four straight lines going from corner to corresponding corner.

ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: WHO ARE YOU SURVEY

Pass out a sheet of paper. Have students number #1-20 and encourage students to ask honestly.

Split the children up so they are writing on the floor and in corners and nobody else can see their handwriting. Ask the questions below:

- 1. Are you more outgoing or are you more shy?**
- 2. Do you have a loud laugh or a soft laugh?**
- 3. Are you extra-smart in school? yes/no**
- 4. What sports have you played?**
- 5. Whose house of the others in the room have you been over to?**
- 6. Is there someone in here whose house you go to a lot?**
- 7. What is your favorite board game?**
- 8. Which do you like more: science fiction movies or funny movies?**
- 9. Do you live close enough to the church that you could walk to it?**
- 10. Do you have a dog?**
- 11. Do you have a cat?**
- 12. Do you have a lizard, snake, or a hamster?**
- 13. Are you known for being good at art?**
- 14. Do you have any food allergies that you know of?**
- 15. What is your favorite color?**
- 16. Are you the oldest in your family?**
- 17. Are you the youngest in your family?**
- 18. Do you go to the public school?**
- 19. What is your favorite movie?**
- 20. Do we know at least one of your parents well?**

Collect all the papers and shuffle them up. You will use them for the GAME.

GAME, YOUNGER CHILDREN: FUSSY FREDDY FREAK OUT

Have one child come to the front of the class. Blindfold him. Have other children come up and say the following into his face.

Hello there. My name is Fussy Freddy. I can freak you out.

The blindfolded child has to guess which classmate is speaking. The speaking children may disguise their voices with groveling, whispers, or high-pitched soprano. They can speak into their hands or into a tube (no screaming in ears!). They can surround their voice with extraneous noises like tongue clicking or barking. They can speak on the inhale.

Ask the blindfolded child to guess who is speaking. If they guess, ask them how they knew. If they can't guess, the child who disguised his voice well enough wins.

Often in real life, we don't see all of a person, and we can't hear them clearly. Sometimes they are shy. Sometimes they are nervous and that makes them make too much noise. We don't want to judge by these things.

GAME, OLDER CHILDREN: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Having shuffled the papers from the activity, put them all on the table. The handwriting may make the writer recognizable, so they should be encouraged to pick a paper of someone whose writing they don't recognize. **THEY SHOULD NOT IDENTIFY THEIR OWN PAPER OUT LOUD.** Take someone else's paper.

Have the children take turns reading off the questions and one person's answers. See if they can guess whose paper is being read from. Take a vote at the end. See how many get it right. For those who do get it right, ask "How did you know?"

Have the subject person of the paper share one thing about him or herself that perhaps the class wouldn't know. It can be something funny, a personal taste in something, or anything they want.

Go on to the next paper.

Bet today we learned something about one person in here, at least, that we didn't know before. It's funny how you can spend time around people and not know very much about them, isn't it?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for Deborah and Jael, for showing us how things are not always as they appear. We want to make our friends based on knowing them from the inside out. Help us to have wisdom and to pursue friendships so that we can have "good" friends, not just "nice" friends.

Amen.

GIDEON: GOD USES THE SMALLEST AGAIN

The story of Gideon seems almost like a remake of either the tale of Joseph or the tale of Moses. Joseph was the smallest and youngest of many brothers, and Moses had been living almost anonymously in Midian when God called him to lead the Exodus. In both cases, neither had a lot of confidence—or a lot of reason to have confidence. As children often feel they are in the midst of conflict over who has nicer clothes, better appearances and more friends, these tales bolster confidence that living by God’s standards and not by the world’s standards. **God enjoys choosing those whom others would not choose. And they always wind up the biggest heroes.**

MATERIALS LIST

Lesson

- Two small bouncy balls (to be given away at end of session)

Intro Activity, Younger Children

- Three gift bags, different sizes
- Lots of tissue paper
- Scotch tape
- Clothespins or something that rattles curiously in a package
- Bag of candy, enough for each child to have a piece
- A pretty bow or multi-colored curling ribbons

Intro Activity, Older Children

- Seven index cards with one letter of Gideon’s name written on it

Activity, Younger Children

- Black construction paper, one sheet for each child
- White paper, one sheet for each child.
- Yellow construction paper; draw moons on and either cut them out or have children cut them out; draw suns by using a glass to draw a circle
- Green construction paper, cut in strips, 8 ½ by three inches; one strip for each child.
- Blue hole-punch circles to be used as drops of water, a dozen for each child.
- Discarded sweater or baby blanket, cut into 2-inch squares to make Gideon's fleece; one square for each child.
- Gold sticky stars, a dozen for each child
- Marker pens
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Chalk: White, blue, yellow, and pink or flesh. If the children are too young, write on the black paper yourself in white or yellow: "Gideon asked God to make the fleece dry in the morning."
- Hairspray (keeps chalk from smudging)

Activity, Older Children

- Drawing paper; one sheet for each child
- Markers and crayons

Game, Younger Children

- No materials needed

Game, Older Children

- No materials needed

BIBLE READING/STORY: JUDGES 6

Gideon

¹ Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.

⁷ When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

¹¹ The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah, where Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

¹³ "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

¹⁷ Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

¹⁹ Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

²⁰ The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. ²¹ With the tip of the staff that was in his

hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

²³ But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."

²⁴ So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah.

²⁵ That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."

²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

²⁸ In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

²⁹ They asked each other, "Who did this?" When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

³⁰ The men of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." ³² So that day they called Gideon "Jerub-Baal," saying, "Let Baal contend with him," because he broke down Baal's altar.

³³ Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

³⁶ Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised- ³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground

is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

LESSON (TEACHER WORDS IN BOLD): GOD'S CHOOSES THE SMALLEST AGAIN

We're going to play a game with the ball. Let's pick sports teams. Who are the two best athletes in the class? Let them decide (if amicably) and have those two students come up to the front. **Each of you take turns picking one student at a time to be on your team.**

After the teams have been picked, take a note of the last students to get picked.

Ask the first team captain, **Why did you pick (student's name) first?** The answer ought to be something like "He's my friend" or "He's a good athlete."

Ask the second team captain, **Why did you pick (student's name) first?** The answers ought to be similar to captain one. Go down the rows until you come to the two who were picked last.

You guys—you were picked last. How special is that? Don't you feel special?

They ought to say no, and why should they feel special about being last?

Being last is absolutely special, but we'll get to that part later.

Have the two teams form lines in the order they were picked. The team captains should be first, their first choice should stand immediately behind them, and on down to the end. Have the team captains turn around and face their line of teammates. Have them take four paces back. This will be them approximately six feet away from the next player.

Give them each a ball.

Have them each speak to the student facing them, which should have been the first ones they picked. Have them say, "(Student's Name!) I need you! Catch this!" As they bounce the ball, the other student should catch it.

Repeat, having the second student turn and take six steps back and be facing the next student picked. Have him repeat the chant and bounce the ball to that student.

After as many rounds as you have, there should be remaining the last students picked. As they come forward, there will be no teammates for them to throw to.

Oops, here we are again! I'm with the last people to get picked on teams. There's nobody left for them to throw to! How special is that?

At this point, the two “lasts” should be slightly exasperated. Having no one to throw to adds insult to injury.

You don’t have anyone to throw to, because you were picked last. What do you mean, you don’t feel special???

Often in life, the biggest kids and the best athletes will rely on each other. As well, groups of very closely knit friends will rely on each other.

God loves us all. But when God chooses the team captains, he often chooses the smallest and the quietest—like Joseph from Genesis and Moses from Exodus. Why might that be? They didn’t seem very athletic to everyone around them. They didn’t stand out. At times it appeared...like they didn’t have anybody to throw to! But in a very important sense, they were very, very special.

Often the people God chose didn’t have a lot of big and powerful friends to rely on. So, who did those people learn to rely on? With whom did they get very, very friendly?

God. (Point to the ceiling if they don’t get it.)

Gideon described himself as “My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” Yet God picked him to be team captain to get Israel out of another jam with the bullies. That’s probably because Gideon had relied on God a lot when he wasn’t first pick. Gideon had to make a friend of God. He had to make a friend of someone a whole lot bigger.

Go to the place on the floor where the teams had been catching the balls. Tell the last remaining team members, **“You get to throw to me.”**

After they throw the balls, bounce each back to them.

“And in keeping with Bible stories of the last people picked ending up as the winners....you two get to keep the balls.”

INTRO ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: WHICH BAG HAS THE CANDY?

You probably already know that we shouldn't make friends based on how people look. Today we'll be talking a little more about that. And, we'll be trying not to judge a present by its size. There are three treasures on the table. Without opening them, try to guess what each one contains.

On the table, have three different-sized gift bags. Staple or tape them shut. In the biggest one, put clothespins in a zip lock bag wrapped in tissue paper (to thwart the peekers) with a lot of gift wrap on top. In the middle one, put the candy (wrapped in tissue paper). In the smallest one, put just tissue paper, though decorate this bag with a very colorful bow or multi-colored curling ribbon.

As you open them this time say, **some people are attracted to big things. They like big muscles, big houses, and in presents, they like big bags. But in the story we hear today, big muscles are not the most important issue.**

Let them see that there were clothespins in the bags.

Some people are attracted to splashy, colorful things. They like loud voices, well-dressed people, and in presents, they may not care about size, but they like what jumps out at the eyes and ears.

Let them see that there's nothing in the tissue paper.

But sometimes the best present comes in the bag you might not notice. This bag is right in the middle, and it's neither large nor colorfully decorated. Take the candy out.

God says don't judge by outside appearances. Let's all have a piece of candy...

INTRO ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: WHERE'S GIDEON?

Take seven index cards and, using all capital letters, put one letter from Gideon's name on each index card. Then hide the index cards around the room. As this is an Intro Activity, you want it to go on for long enough that all can participate. Find good hiding places! Use camouflage! Stuff one in your pants pocket, so that only the corner shows.

This week, we're going to be talking more about not judging by appearances, and we're going to talk about a hero in the Bible who could have been described as "least likely to be noticed."

In fact, he's in this room, but you probably don't notice him right now. His name is spelled out, one letter on each of seven index cards. Find all seven cards, put them together, and tell me what his name is!

ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: GIDEON IS LIKE US

Gideon's adventures often go untaught because they are very similar to tales of his more famous compatriots--Moses, Joseph, and later on, King David. However, Gideon's humility, coupled with his anxiety about doing anything important, make him very relatable to most of us.

Gideon was not very sure of himself. Nobody had ever paid him special attention before God asked him to lead the army to set Israel free again. He was *really nervous*. He kept asking God to give him signs that He was really there and talking *to him*. Gideon asked God to make the fleece be wet in the morning, while all the ground around it was dry. Then, he asked God to make the fleece be dry, when all the ground was wet. This week and next, we'll be working on a "memorial poster" of Gideon's adventures.

- Give students the sheet of black paper.
- Use gold sticky stars to make a starry sky.
- Make a moon out of yellow construction paper
- Write in white or yellow chalk: Gideon asked God to make the fleece dry in the morning.
- Have them draw in chalk Gideon praying. Next, give students a sheet of white paper.
- Use yellow construction paper to make a sun. Children can make rays orange, red, and yellow markers.
- The strip of green construction paper should be cut in tiny strips to make grass blades. Cut only an inch into the strip and have them make the cuts on 1/8-inch in thickness. Then ruffle the tops to look like grass.
- Students should lay the grass down with stick glue

- Make the fleece out of the pieces of cut cloth or the old discarded sweater.
- Students should glue it into the grass.
- Use blue hole-punch circles as drops. Students should paste lots of blue dots coming out of the fleece to show that it is wet.
- Spray the black picture with hairspray (to keep the chalk from smudging)

If you are doing both of our available lessons on Gideon, then collect the two pictures when students are finished instead of letting them take them home. That way, you can tape all four pictures together to make the poster after next week.

ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: SIGNS FROM HEAVEN: DISCUSSION

Some people in the Bible asked God for “signs,” such as Gideon asking God to make the fleece turn out wet, and then asking for it to turn out dry. God was very quick to respond to Gideon’s requests for signs.

However, in the New Testament, the Scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for “signs” to show that he was the Messiah and was capable of miracles. The Scribes and Pharisees were two groups of devout Jewish men who didn’t like Jesus. They were always trying to trick him. Jesus said, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Matthew 16:4

Why do you think some people like Gideon got lots of signs from God and the people who were not nice to Jesus didn’t get any? A sign is for helping people to find God’s will. If you’re not looking to do God’s will, then you can’t expect to see any signs

Let’s look at this list of times we might be tempted to ask God for a sign. Based on God providing “signs” to help find His will, decide which of the following circumstances might be ones that you’d see a sign from God:

- 1. “Dear God: I want my sports team to win tomorrow. Please give me a sign to let me know whether we will win.”** (no sign will be given).
- 2. “Dear God: I feel sorry about the handicapped new girl in our class because the other kids seem nervous of her wheelchair and don’t want to go up to her. Give me a sign to let me know what to say to her.”** (sign granted)

3. **“Dear God: I want to have the best outfit at the birthday party. Give me a sign as to which store I should shop in.”** (no sign given)
4. **“Dear God: I really want a puppy, and my parents keep saying ‘maybe,’ but they’re not sure I’m responsible enough. Give me a sign as to whether they’ll say yes this week.”** (no sign given: the better alternative would be to pursue more conversation with parents about how you can prove responsibility.)
5. **“Dear God: These kids at school keep teasing me. Give me a sign that they will stop.”** (no sign given: a better alternative would be to learn Godly confrontation, or to practice standing up for yourself and/or turning the other cheek.)
6. **“Dear God: The kids at school keep teasing me and I get lonely sometimes. Please let me know that you love me.”** (sign granted)

Have the children make up their own situation of when they might like a “sign.” Draw a picture of the circumstances and pray for God’s guidance.

GAME, YOUNGER CHILDREN: FOUR LEGGED RACES

Gideon was very nervous to lead the army into battle. But then, God filled him with the Holy Spirit. It’s sort of like this.

Have one student, small like Gideon, lie flat on the floor.

This is about how much Gideon wanted to go into battle. He’d have rather lied down, gone to sleep, and forgotten about the whole thing.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is about getting extra power from “spiritual friends,” sort of like getting an extra set of muscles—or two extra sets!

Have two children volunteer. They should stand on either side of the child lying down. At the count of three, they should pull him up by the arms. Have them lace their arms under his so that he can stand but can also pick up his legs, all his weight on the two outer children.

Bring six children forward if you have that many. Divide them into two teams of three.

Have two children on each team serve as the “spiritual strength,” holding up the other student who stands between them. He should have his arms around their shoulders with his feet off the ground.

Have both teams relay across the room and back without the middle student touching down. The team that wins must race against the next group of three. The group that wins is the group that challenges each round, until all children have had a turn being the spiritual strength and being the middle man.

The two outside teammates sort of represent God and the Holy Spirit, and the person in the middle is like us. We all need power from On High sometimes when the going gets rough. It's easier to do things, once you are empowered by God, isn't it? And it doesn't matter how big or how strong you are—it matters how big and how strong the power is that's helping you! And we all know that God is very, very strong!

GAME, OLDER CHILDREN: SIGN / NO SIGN

We have to work hard to know the will of God, when to ask for signs and when to ask for wisdom, extra love, extra courage, extra faith. Sometimes it feels like we're in a whirlwind. But if we practice long enough, we grow spiritually discerning. It's like this game...

Bring one child to the center of a circle. Have him shut his eyes. The children in the circle will take turns, going around clockwise, shouting out the word "Sign!" or "No sign!" They can choose which ever word they wish.

If the child in the center hears "Sign!" He spins clockwise. If he hears "No sign!" He spins counter clockwise.

The teacher's job is to point to the next child in the circle to let him or her know when it's time for the next person to shout out. There should be about a three-second pause between each shout.

After every child has shouted, and the child in the center has spun hither and yon, he should try to stand on one foot. He can hop, but he can't put his other foot down. Have the children count slowly and see how long he can stay on one foot.

The winner is the one who stands the longest without putting his foot down.

Sometimes we can feel dizzy, trying to figure out God's will, and when to look for signs and when to look for other things. But the more we practice, the less dizzy we'll feel.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for Gideon, who showed us today that you have a heart for the small, the shy, the ones that don't stand out. Help us to remember that when picking our friends. And help us know when to ask for signs and when to ask for other guidance instead.

Amen.

GIDEON'S ARMY IS SMALL— LIKE GIDEON

Throughout the Bible we see how God often chooses the smallest, youngest, and/or least likely to be noticed to carry out His will. This lesson is similar in that it shows Gideon leading 300 men in battle to defeat an army so vast that its camels reached to the sea. **God likes His people to know that He is doing most of the work. Hence, he creates circumstances wherein there is little doubt.**

MATERIALS LIST

Lesson

- Pencil
- A regular sized screwdriver (heavier than the pencil)

Intro Activity, Younger Children

- Several dozen building blocks (preferably, the smaller size, not the daycare size)

Intro Activity, Older Children

- 36 candy kisses

Activity, Younger Children

- Black construction paper, one sheet for each child (write on each in chalk, if your children are too young to write): *God tells the Dog Lappers to go home!*
- White construction paper, one sheet for each child, (write on each, if your children are too young to write): *God Tells Most Army Men to Leave.*
- Yellow construction paper with moon shapes drawn on and a round circle sun shape; one moon shape and one sun shape for each child.

- Blue construction paper to make the water; one 8.5” x 3” strip for each child.
- Sticker stars, a dozen stars for each child.
- Pink/brown hole punches to be the faces of Gideon’s Army.
- Colored chalk to make picture on black paper:
- Glue sticks
- Marker pens

Activity, Older Children

- Construction Paper
- Black or dark markers
- Other colors in markers

Game, Younger Children

- Blanket or sheet
- Aluminum foil

Game, Older Children

- Index cards to match the number of students you will have that day.
- Mark half Army 1, half Army 2, and mark one card “Person Least Noticed”

SCRIPTURE READING/STORY

JUDGES 7

Gideon's Army

¹ Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ² The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, ³ announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.' "So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

⁴ But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." ⁶ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. ⁹ During that night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. ¹⁰ If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. ¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

¹³ Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."

¹⁴ His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."

¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands." ¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

¹⁷ "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸ When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.' "

¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" ²¹ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

²² When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled.

LESSON (TEACHER WORDS IN BOLD): GOD USES THE SMALLEST—YET AGAIN!

I'm going to show you a trick that illustrates how God often chooses the youngest and smallest to lead his army.

Bring out a pencil and sit it on the edge of the table. Have it situated so that almost half is hanging over the table. Have the children gather close to watch you.

Some people think this is magic. Tell me what you think. I'm going to stare at this pencil until it moves on its own.

Stoop down so you are eye level with the pencil. Stare at it for five to ten seconds while breathing out your nose. Without saying anything, allow your breathing to switch from your nose to your mouth. Your breathing should go right onto the pencil and cause it to move.

Ta da! How do you think I did that? See if anyone can guess. If they do, it's okay, but don't confess to anything yet.

Okay, now I'm going to do the same thing, only instead of using a pencil I'm going to use something much bigger and heavier: a screwdriver.

Put the screwdriver where the pencil was and allow the metal part to hang over the table.

Watch me carefully to tell me how I'm doing it. This time, make the breaths out of your nose a little louder so they can hear it. Suck in a deep breath before blowing from your mouth onto the screwdriver. Let there be a big enough breath so that the students know what you are doing.

So. Was that magic? No, you were moving it with your breath.

Why didn't you know with the pencil? Why did you know with the screwdriver? The screwdriver is bigger, and so it was more obvious what you were doing.

Sometimes, the miracles God chooses to perform are to show people that He is real. This was the case with Gideon's army. It was a little tiny army. God did that so people would have to doubt that He was really the one at work.

The breaths I was taking are a little like God. You can't see them; you can't see God. Hold up the pencil. If we're moving something little, you can barely even hear my breaths. If God were to have Gideon's three hundred men conquer a little tiny army, you might not

be certain at all that Gideon's men didn't have enough might to do it. You might have looked only with your eyes.

Bend down and repeat the trick with the pencil, so they can recall how the pencil moved without any noticeable breaths.

But God chose a big, vast army. Pick up the screwdriver. **If you were moving something big and heavy, you are more likely to see God in the action.** Bend down, reposition and screwdriver and blow on it with a more noticeable breath.

When God performs a huge miracle, it's easier to see him in the process. Is it not? Yes, it is.

Who wants to try the tricks? Let each child each try the pencil, then the screwdriver to reinforce the idea. As each one blows on the screwdriver, say **Your breath is like the Lord God. It's easier to detect him when the object of the game is bigger.**

For classes following the Younger Children Intro Activity only:

Now that we know how God works, let's pretend we're God. To knock a house over, God would have to do a pretty big miracle. To imitate him, we're going to have to take pretty big breaths. Let's see if we can blow down our house of blocks.

Have children go over to the tower erected in the intro lesson. Show them how to blow the top blocks off first, one by one, to level the thing to the ground again.

INTRO ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: ASKING GOD FOR MIRACLES

Before class, empty a container of building blocks on the table. If available, use the smaller-sized blocks rather than the industrial childcare size, as you will accomplish your lesson goal more easily.

This week, we're going to build a house that's really big and ask the Lord to blow it down. Use the blocks to create a very tall tower. Don't knock it over!

When they are finished: **Father, we ask you to reveal your miraculous power to us after the lesson is over today. Amen!**

Move on to the lesson.

INTRO ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: WHERE'S GIDEON'S ARMY?

Hide candy kisses around the room. Hide a lot of them.

Today, we'll be searching for Gideon's Army. It was a small army and all the men were understandably nervous. A lot went home along the way. Three hundred stayed, and that's a small enough group that they could hide out in the woods in clusters of ten without the bad guys from Midian noticing them.

See if you can find all 30 "clusters,"(30 candy kisses) then bring them back to the table.

After the lesson, enjoy the snack.

ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: GIDEON'S PRAYERS II

Gideon was not very sure of himself. Today we'll see how he was not very sure his army could fight—nobody was sure! God kept giving him signs that he really was in charge. First he had Gideon ask any army man who was afraid to leave. Two out of every three army men left!

Then, God told Gideon to watch the men who used bad manners while getting a drink in the river. He had Gideon tell every man to leave if he stuck his face to the water like a dog rather than cupping the water in their hands to drink.

That left only three hundred men to fight an army of thousands! Today, we're going to add to our Gideon Picture Books with these two requests from God, so everyone would know he was the one at work.

- Give students a sheet of black construction paper and a sheet of white drawing paper.
- On the white sheet, either write or have them write: *God tells the Dog Lappers to go home!*
- On the black sheet, either write or have them write in chalk: *God Tells Most Army Men to Leave.*
- Have students draw Gideon in chalk he is shouting at his army.

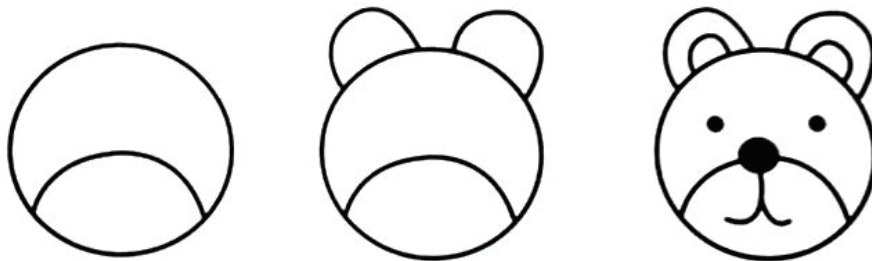
- Suggest they draw dialogue bubbles and put in phrases like, “Are you scared???? Go home, then!!!!” Have them paste the bubbles by Gideon’s head.
- Have them mark the ground by drawing brown stones in chalk. They can put a tree or two in the background using chalk.
- Pass out a dozen stars to each child to make the starry sky again.
- Pass out either a cutout moon or a sheet of paper for them to cut one out.
- Pass out the pink/brown hole punches. These are the heads of Gideon’s Army. Have the students take an area of the paper and rub glue stick all over it. Then dump on a lot of hole punches and pat down the area. They can let the rest of their hole punches drain off onto the table.
- Using sharp markers or pencils, have them draw little faces on two dozen or so of the dots.
- On the white paper, either have written at the top yourself or have them write: “Gideon Tells all Dog Lappers to go home!”
- Using the yellow construction paper, they can create their sun with markers for rays, like last week.
- Give them the strip of blue construction paper to make the water. They should cut a “water edge” into the top of the strip, but making loopy lines and cutting along the line.
- Make a sun of the yellow construction paper circles and yellow, orange and red markers to make the rays
- Draw Gideon on looking at the water.
- Create a dialogue bubble of Gideon saying, “God says if you drank like a dog, you should go home.”
- Pass out the remainder of the dots for the army faces.
- Have the children run glue stick near the top of the water.
- Drop the dots on, pat down and make the faces again with marker
- Create dialogue bubbles for the army clusters, saying, “Whew” or “I’m staying!” and glue them on.

If you did both of our available lessons on Gideon, each child should have four pictures. Turn them over on the table with a black-and-white one on top (from the first Gideon lesson) and a black-and-white one on the bottom (this week’s Gideon lesson). Tape the backs together with four long lines or glue. Turn it over. All four pictures should stick together like a poster.

ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: GOD KNOWS THE WAY

God worked amazing miracles for Gideon, but Gideon had to do what God said. At each turn in his adventures, he had to go with the way God told him to. There were times he felt afraid and lost. Let's see how good you are at following voice commands to draw a picture.

Your students will be drawing a bear face. Use the images below to guide your voice. You will be explaining each drawing in steps but *will not* let the students see these images.



1. Draw a circle.
2. Draw a half circle in the bottom of the circle that looks like a giant frown, only both sides of the mouth should touch the circle.
3. Draw two half circles above the circle that look like ears.
4. Draw smaller half circles inside the half circles that look like ears
5. Draw two dots inside the circle that look like eyes.
6. Draw a bigger dot that looks like a nose. Have the dot be on the edge of the half circle that is inside the bigger circle.
7. Draw a line from that dot halfway down to the bottom of the circle.
8. Draw a short, upside-down V from the bottom of that line.
9. *What do you have??* A bear!

Creating this drawing is a little like hearing the voice of God. At first, when he speaks to us, it might not make much sense. In the case of Gideon, he did not know exactly where he was going or what he was going to do next. He could not see 'the big picture' God was designing in which Israel would win. But he followed every step. When we know God wants us to do good, we should keep going, even if things get confusing or even scary. After a while, we will see what God is up to, just as clearly as we can see the bear on my screen! Show them the bear illustration and let them color it in

GAME, YOUNGER CHILDREN: FOLLOW MY VOICE, GIDEON!

You will need a large playing area for this game. You will need a blanket and enough aluminum-foil “balls” (aluminum foil scrunched into the size of a baseball) to give one to each child. Have all students line up against one wall.

When we give our lives into God’s hands, we get protection from God. It’s like when Gideon agreed to attack the bad army, God protected Gideon. It was still kind of scary, because he couldn’t see what he was supposed to do from one minute to the next. But God told him.

Walking in God’s will is sort of like being under a blanket of His protection.

Bring one child to the other wall, close to the corner, and put a blanket over her.

That means you won’t get hurt by anything. But you have to go slowly and listen for the voice of the Lord so you don’t fall.

The child should follow closely that one wall to the voice of the teacher, which will be down at the other end of the room. Say to the student,

Follow my voice, Gideon, and you won’t get hurt!

As she proceeds forward, the other children should throw their foil balls at her one at a time and try to hit her on the blanket. If they hit the blanket, they get a point.

Let each child have a turn being under the blanket and following God’s voice without getting hurt by the “firepower.”

GAME, OLDER CHILDREN: PERSON LEAST NOTICED

We’ve talked a lot in our lessons about God often choosing the person least likely to be noticed. Now we’re going to play a game about it.

As with the game Spy, have students come forward and each take an index card from your hand. There should be enough cards for each student. Half should be marked Army I and half Marked Army II. An oddball card should read “Person Least Noticed.” Students read their card, leave the card with you, then proceed to predetermined positions.

The “armies” should go to opposite sides of the room. The “One Least Noticed” should go with Army 1. *She may not say she is the one least noticed, however! It is a secret for now.*

The first player in Army 1 should step forward into the center of the room. He should pick an opponent from Army II and they should “duel.”

By dueling, they should take hold of each other’s arms and stand on one foot. Without letting go of each other’s arms, they should try to lean each other one way or the other to the point where their opponent’s foot goes down. The player who is not first to either let go with his arms or put a foot down wins one point.

Precede to the next person in Army I, who should go to the center of the room and call out another opponent from Army II. They may *not* choose a person already chosen.

Eventually someone in Army II will be matched with the Person Least Noticed. When it happens, the Person Least Noticed should come to the center and say, “Congratulations! I’m the Person Least Noticed!” The member of Army II who called her out automatically wins a point and doesn’t have to duel.

Each time the Person Least Noticed is revealed, the round ends, and everyone returns to the teacher to pull cards again.

After two or three rounds, the person with the most points is the winner.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for Gideon’s army, which shows us again that we don’t have to be big, popular or impressive to be one of eternity’s heroes. Help us remember that You are the best friend we have and You will always show us the way to go.

Amen.

DELILAH BETRAYS SAMSON

Samson, a Judge of Israel, was given the gift of great strength. More than once he single-handedly protected Israel with his bare hands. However, one woman was able to get the better of him. It's a great story of how **God makes us strong, but picking the wrong friends can make us weak.**

MATERIALS LIST

Lesson

4 Index cards of one color with the following written on them, one line on each:

- NO TROUBLEMAKERS
- NO GOSSIPS
- NO HURTERS OF FEELINGS
- NO CHEATERS

4 index cards of another color with the following written on them, one line on each:

- GOOD FRIENDS ARE HONEST
- GOOD FRIENDS ARE TRUSTWORTHY
- GOOD FRIENDS ARE LOYAL
- GOOD FRIENDS ARE HUMBLE
- GOOD FRIENDS LOVE JESUS

Intro Activity, Younger Children

- Construction paper
- Marker pens, colors of the rainbow

Intro Activity, Older Children

- Paper and pens

Activity, Younger Children

- No materials needed

Activity, Older Children

- Four index cards. Glue or staple the scenarios for discussion onto them (see Activity)

Game, Younger Children

- Blindfold (optional)

Game, Older Children

- Masking tape

BIBLE READING/STORY

JUDGES 16

Samson & Delilah

(Background): Samson's gift from heaven was his great strength, which Israel needed to protect them from the Philistines, who were harsh and violent men. Once Samson killed a lion with his bare hands. Once, he killed a thousand Philistines just by swinging the jawbone of an animal and using it as a fighting weapon. He was a Judge of Israel for 20 years.

Judges 16

⁴ Samson fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

⁷ Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."

⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh thongs that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied."

¹¹ He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man."

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied."

He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. ¹⁹ Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"

He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. ²² But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

The Death of Samson

²³ Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands."

²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

"Our god has delivered our enemy
into our hands,
the one who laid waste our land
and multiplied our slain."

²⁵ While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, ²⁶ Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them."

²⁷ Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

³¹ Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him. He had led Israel twenty years.

LESSON (TEACHER WORDS IN BOLD): THE WRONG FRIEND GETS SAMSON INTO TROUBLE

Have your parents ever said to you, "Gee, we really don't want you going over to so-and-so's house to play?" So-and-so can be anyone who gets into trouble, or who could get you into trouble.

Your parents know how easily trouble spreads. Delilah was Samson's friend, and his parents had warned against friends like her. Samson, of course, was older, and so he wanted to make his friend Delilah his wife.

Samson was lured in because Delilah was fun, because she was beautiful, and because she was tricky enough to make him believe she would never betray him.

How do we pick friends?

Let the children respond with some qualities they look for in friends.

Here are some important qualities:

Are they the types who keep getting into trouble? If so, they will get you in trouble too. Hand one child an index card that says on it, NO TROUBLEMAKERS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Can they make people laugh, but their jokes often hurt other people? Someday a person like that could hurt your feelings, too. Hand another child an index card that says NO HURTERS OF FEELINGS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Do they often say bad things about other kids when those kids are not around? Someday they will gossip about you, too. Hand another child an index card that says NO GOSSIPS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

When you play games, do they often cheat? Cheating means a person cares more about winning than he does about his friend—you. Is that really a good friend? Hand out an index card that says NO CHEATERS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Do they often hit and punch? Sometimes children hit and punched because they've been hit and punched a lot by older, stronger siblings or even parents. Hence you have to show kindness. But if you hang around with a violent person, you could get hurt...or be inspired to hit and punch yourself! Hand out an index card that says NO HITTERS OR PUNCHERS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Wow, that kind of eliminates a lot of people, doesn't it? Doesn't almost everybody you know do a couple of these things once in a while?

Noticed I'm using the word "often" in most of my questions. Anybody can mess up "once in a while," but if people mess up often, you want to keep your strength, not give it up like Samson did. You don't want to make them your best friends.

Here are some good qualities to look for in friends:

If a kid tells the teacher when somebody copies in school, that person is honest. Honest people make great friends. Pass out another index card that says GOOD FRIENDS ARE HONEST. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

If you ask someone about sad news you heard of a third friend and he says, "Sorry, I do know about that but I promised not to tell," that friend can keep his word. Then, when you tell him a secret, you know he won't tell. Pass out another index card that says GOOD FRIENDS ARE TRUSTWORTHY. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

If kids in school ever tease you and one child stands up for you or pulls you away, that child is showing that he's loyal to you. Pass out another index card that says GOOD FRIENDS ARE LOYAL. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Let's say kids in school start gawking over clothes, noticing who wears designer labels, who has the best sneakers, jackets, etc. If one kid blurts out honestly, "My family just can't afford that stuff," that person is honest and humble. Pass out another index card that says GOOD FRIENDS ARE HUMBLE. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Here's the last one, and this is hard to find. If you go to someone's house and she has something important to her about Jesus hanging in her bedroom—something she made in Sunday School or a poster of a Bible story...ask her why it's there. Did she put it there herself? Without being forced by parents?

It is often hard for even the best kids to say to another kid that they love Jesus. Jesus is invisible. He's not the loud voice when we're involved in games. He doesn't show up visibly in school to solve all the problems. To many kids, he isn't real at all. If you can find a friend who is old enough in his heart to know already he loves Jesus, that is the best quality you can find in a friend. Pass out the last index card that says GOOD FRIENDS LOVE JESUS. Let the child read the card then hold it up.

Have all the kids holding all the index cards stand up in a circle so that all can see all index cards.

Let's make ourselves a promise, right here and now. We are going to think about these qualities this week. *Good friends are hard to find. It takes time and work.* But we don't want to be like Samson and pick people who sap all our own strength. So we will be mindful when we are looking for friends this week, and today's Activities will help us remember them well...

INTRO ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: GOD USES ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE

Show children how to draw a rainbow heart like the one below, starting with a small heart in the center, then drawing a larger one, then a large one, until six colors are involved. Have them put the word “I” on one side and “God” on the other.

We have heard in class, from the Bible, how God uses the smallest, youngest and least noticed to do His will. This week, we’ll see that He once used a very, very strong man. God uses people of all shapes and sizes. They just have to have the right qualities. The best quality is to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Color in this picture about that and put your name in the line.



INTRO ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN: WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIEND?

We’ve heard in class and in the Bible how God uses the smallest, youngest and least noticed to do His will. This week, He uses a biggest, strongest guy in Israel named Samson. But Samson loses his strength because he picked the wrong friends.

See if you can be the one to write down the most words that describe what a real friend is. Start with these: *Loyal and trustworthy.*

ACTIVITY, YOUNGER CHILDREN: “NEW KID” ROLE PLAYING

Now we’re going to pretend we’re making friends with a new kid. The new kid will do something and we’ll try to decide whether he would be a good friend or not.

Bring one child up to be the “new kid.” Whisper in her ear something to say in front of the class. Then move with her to the front of the class, and have this exchange:

Teacher, pretending to be a child: **“Hi! Did you just move here?”**

New Kid: Yes! (And then she should recite the line you whispered to her).

1. Yes, I’m new! And I already met one kid on this street. Wow, his house is really dumpy and I bet he doesn’t have any good toys. (gossip)
2. Yes, I’m new. And I heard that big kid say bad words at you when I was standing across the street. If you want to tell my mom, I’ll bring her over. (honest)
3. Yes, I’m new! And I know what. That neighbor left his car window open. Let’s go see if we can sit in the car and beep the horn. (troublemaker)
4. Yes, I’m new. I already met one kid. He told me a secret, so I can’t tell you what he said. (trustworthy)
5. Yes, I’m new. I saw your big sister pull your hair. I was watching from my house. I’ll stand up for you if she comes back. (loyalty)
6. Yes, I’m new! Let’s go to my house and play checkers. I can beat anybody. I never lose. (probably cheats)
7. Yes, I’m new. It’s kind of lonely so far. But Jesus keeps me company. (Loves Christ.)
8. Yes, I’m new. My house isn’t as nice as yours. You’re lucky. (Humble/humility)
9. Yes, I’m new. Watch this. Hi-yyyah!!! (he makes karate chops at you and your fence) (violent)
10. Yes, I’m new. Wow, you’re kind of fat. Do you eat constantly or something? (hurts feelings)

The others will decide if this is someone they want to play with or not. Help them along with these prompts:

Did he (she) show he was a troublemaker?

Did he (she) show he could hurt feelings?

Did he (she) act like he might cheat at games?

Did he (she) act violent?

Did he (she) gossip?

Was he (she) showing loyalty?

Was he/she showing honesty?

Was he/she showing trustworthiness?

Was he/she showing humility?

Is he/she happy to say he loves God?

ACTIVITY, OLDER CHILDREN

WHAT MAKES KIDS MISBEHAVE?

Getting kids to feel empathy for those less fortunate is often not easy, as empathy is considered an emotion that grows stronger with maturity. But it's never too soon to provide exercises to help them stretch in that direction. This is one.

When choosing what company we will keep as Christians, we don't want to visibly "reject" or hurt feelings. We want to build people up and not tear them down. So it's important, if we're deciding who's best for us to keep company with, to have compassion. Compassion means we feel bad for people who act up, because we understand why they do sometimes.

Some of the reasons kids act up are on my screen. Let's take turns reading scenarios and talking about them.

Have kids either come to your screen or pass it around so they can take turns reading a scenario. Tell them to think of experiences they may have had that would go with the card they're discussing. *Try not to use names.* The point is to discuss how they might view the person differently and how they might handle a situation that arises in the future:

Card #1: **Kids often reflect how they have been made to feel.** If they yell and say horrible things about others, it probably means that someone important—maybe someone at home—has done this often to them. Think of a time where somebody got loud and ugly with their words. Picture this person in his or her home and try to imagine what that is like.

Card #2: **Kids will behave badly if they are not stopped.** Kids will test situations with parents, occasionally yelling awful things just to see if there will be consequences. If nobody

does anything, they will subconsciously decide this behavior is okay. These kids often feel lost because they have no boundaries and don't know where to stop. They are often very anxious and nervous people. Think of a time when you've heard someone back-talking an authority. Try to decide if this is really an anxious and nervous person.

#3: Kids will sometimes lie or cheat because they don't feel good about themselves. They feel they have to be better than they actually are to feel "acceptable." If they are embarrassed by a situation at home—divorce or poverty—they can "make up" a better family and tell people that story instead. Try to put yourself in the shoes of someone who constantly feels ashamed. Discuss the circumstances.

#4 Kids can watch people in movies, TV shows or cartoons without the guidance of Mom or Dad. If parents are using TV as a babysitter, either because they're tired from work or are mentally involved in a problem of their own, kids often see things and think they should act that way, too. A good example is a kid who watches too many superhero cartoons and then thinks it's all right to hit and punch. Think of a time you've been with a hitting or punching person. Do you think that child watches too much TV?

Think of one person from the scenarios discussed today. While not picking up his or her habits, make a vow to pray for that person every day this week.

GAME, YOUNGER CHILDREN: WHO IS STANDING WITH ME?

Blindfold one child or have her put her head down on the desk. Bring another child up behind her. Ask the child standing behind questions. Have the child only nod "yes" or "no," and you repeat the answer out loud:

Do you have a dog?

Do you have a cat?

Do you play a sport?

Do you play more than one sport?

Do you have a brother?

Do you have a sister?

Do you have more than one brother?

Do you have more than one sister?

Do you go to the public school?

Do you live within walking distance of this church?

Do you have brown hair?

Do you have curly hair?

Do you have wavy hair?

See if the child covering her eyes can guess who it is.

If we're going to try to pick good friends, we should all try to get to know each other very well in this class. We all have one thing going for us in here, which is important in making friends, too: Our parents all want us to come to Church and know God better!

GAME, OLDER CHILDREN: GOOD APPLES / BAD APPLES

You may have heard of the expression “one bad apple spoils the whole bunch.” This is a truism having to do with how apple bruises spread from the bruised apple to a good apple when the bruise touches the good apple. Consequently, the bruises grow, and more apples get touched. With kids, it's come to mean that one bad kid in a crowd can turn everyone into people who misbehave. Today we're going to play Good Apple/Bad Apple.

Mark off an area with masking tape that is around six-feet by six-feet. Pick two children to be the “bad apples.” Have them shut their eyes and stand inside that area. Tell the rest of the kids to run through that area after you say, “One, two, three, go!” See how many kids the two bad apples can tag with their eyes shut. Everyone who gets tagged has to become a bad apple and, while keeping their eyes shut, tag kids on the next time through. The last kid to be tagged wins a Good Apple point.

Did you notice how it was easier not to get tagged if you were quiet? What does that say about attracting attention to yourself in real life? Sometimes the best way to get through life is quietly and humbly.

Did you notice how the more bad apples there are, the harder it is not to get caught up in the bruising yourselves? What does that tell you about your need for willpower while in a crowd? You need to be prepared and make conscious choices.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving us Samson and Delilah to show us how to pick our friends wisely. Help us to remember this week how we'll pick good friends and what traits to look for.

Amen.