



MIDWEST BIBLE CAMP
2008 CURRICULUM

Finding Your Place in His-Story

God's has a history of choosing people no one else would have chosen. This year at Midwest Bible Camp, we will explore some of the lesser known characters in God's history. Some of these characters are found in the Old Testament, some are found in the New Testament; some were women, some were men, some were children—some of whose names are not even given—but all were used by God to advance his story.

The following are the 16 lessons in chronological order:

- Abraham's Servant (Genesis 24)
- Leah (Genesis 29)
- Jethro: Priest of Midian (Exodus)
- Deborah / Barak (Judges 4)
- Nathan: The Prophet (2 Samuel 12)
- The Israeli Servant Girl (2 Kings 5)
- Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-32)
- Joseph: Father of Jesus (Luke 1-2; Matthew 1-2)
- Andrew: Brother of Peter (John 1, 6, 12)
- Man with Leprosy (Mark 1)
- The Blind Beggar (John 9)
- Thomas (John 11, 14, 20)
- Barnabas: Son of Encouragement (Acts 4, 9-15)
- The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8)
- Timothy (Acts 16)
- Aquila & Priscilla (Acts 18)

You may choose to omit some of the lessons, or use the extras for chapel talks or devotionals. But it is our prayer that as you study how God uses a wide variety of people, the campers will come to see how their stories can become part of God's story.

We are God's workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- Ephesians 2:10

Terry Seufferlein, for the Curriculum Committee

ABRAHAM'S SERVANT

Scripture Reference: Genesis 24

Suggested Themes:

- Service
- Loyalty
- Life's Struggles
- Selflessness

Lead-In:

Who's Story? A slave was told to travel a great distance. He was being sent because his master was adamant that he himself was not going to go. He was going in search of a beautiful woman. But the woman was not for himself, he was to get her and bring her back for his master's son.

Discussion:

Try to get them to put themselves in the Bible character's place. Is that fair? How would you have felt?

Have you ever been made to do something you didn't want to do with no reward? (chores, clean room, homework)

THE STORY

Read Genesis 24:1-26.

We are not told the name of the servant in Genesis 24, but it might have been Eliezer of Damascus (see Gen. 15:2). 24:2 tells us he is the chief servant (oldest), 15:2-3 says a servant was going to receive Abraham's inheritance. Could have been same servant in chapter 24. It would make sense that the chief or oldest and most trusted servant would be the one in line for inheritance. [If that was the case, he was being sent to get a wife for the person who had spoiled any anticipation he had of receiving riches and freedom]

Genesis 24, Abraham calls him in because he has a job for him to do. Obviously very important in mind of Abraham because he sends his most trusted servant and makes him swear oath. Abraham thinking about Isaac carrying on for him after he dies. Adamantly does not want Isaac to go back to land where they came from and forget promise of God, but he still wants him to marry in the family, so he sends the servant to go get wife for Isaac. The servant is unsure about if he can be successful, so Abraham tells him that if no one will come back with him, he is absolved from fulfilling the oath.

Servant could have made trip grumbling the whole way, "Why didn't he go himself?" He could have only pretended to go, or gone and not talked to anyone or looked for an eligible woman. Then he could have come back and said he tried when in fact he didn't. He could have taken off with all the animals and expensive jewelry and never came back, he was a long ways away with a good deal of wealth after all.

Instead, he got there, got down on his knees and prayed for God to give him success. He wanted to be a good servant of his master. When he found Rebecca & her family, they invited him to eat, but he would not eat before he addressed his errand. (24:32-33) After that, Rebecca's family invited him to stay a while - he could have had a mini vacation away from all

of his duties back with Abraham. Instead, he said no because he wanted to finish the task, fulfill his oath and get back home to his master. (24:54-56)

He is perfect example of loyalty. Because of him, Isaac found a wife that would be the mother of Jacob who is the father of the entire nation of Israel through which Jesus, the son of God came to this world.

Ephesians 6:5, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."

Note on Slavery:

You might want to have a discussion on slavery or it might be brought up by the kids in your class. One way you can tie it back into the theme is that God uses imperfect people to do his will and those people are in imperfect societies. Our society might not have slavery any more, but we do have poverty, hunger, abortion, all kinds of injustice and all kinds of immorality. We live in this society, but we are called to live according to God's principles of righteousness, love and mercy in dealing with things like these. We treat the poor with respect and try to help in what ways we can. We take a firm stance against abortion, but by no means do we twist the truth to scare people or use violence and blow up buildings. We address the problem in society with our Christian principles. In the days of slavery, the Bible taught that you were to treat slaves with respect and to be kind and fair to them (Ephesians 6:9). Big names in abolition are William Wilberforce, Frederick Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. They did great things to make our society fairer. But there were also many smaller people, who while being imperfect in imperfect societies, did their part to treat slaves well and have an impact for Christ. When we do things God's way, even while living in imperfect situations, we take part in his kingdom having an impact in the world. That impact is there even if it is being done in small ways - like Abraham's servant serving well.

Application:

Being a slave wasn't glamorous. He didn't receive riches or fame or prestige. Not even mentioned by name (Don't know if Eliezer from 15:2). But because he was willing to serve with right kind of attitude, he had a role in God's work through the Patriarchs. If Isaac not married Rebecca and stayed in land God promised, Isaac could have gone back home and there would never have been Jacob or the entire Israelite nation.

Sometimes we're asked to do things that aren't glamorous. Sometimes we might not even be told "thank you." But if we are doing God's work by serving the people around us, we are participating in God's great plan for his kingdom, not just living our own small self-serving life. We will have honor and glory when we share in the honor and glory God has in heaven. Our loyalty lies with God, but it is displayed by how we serve and help each other. If we do it with the right attitude, our story becomes part of God's story.

Activity/Further Application:

As a class, you could volunteer to do something extra like another KP or Toilets & Showers, taking the place of another group. Talk about how small acts like KP actually keeps camp running, which in turn allows for great activities that change lives, convert souls to Christ, and strengthen our faith. If no one did KP, camp would not be possible. Also pray with them like the servant prayed and emphasize that even though it might seem trivial, you are going to do it to the best of your ability - serving others like we were serving God himself.

LEAH

Scripture Reference: Genesis 29; 1 Peter 3:3-4; Proverbs 31:30

Suggested Themes:

- Life's Struggles
- God Choosing the Lowly
- Beauty and Self-Perception

Lead In:

Who's Story?

Her sister was always more popular. She always saw her sister get the attention from the boys while she was mostly overlooked. She had a small physical deformity, but it was enough that people noticed. Her dad didn't help matters either. He set her up with her sister's boyfriend. In the end, she was married, but her husband always loved her sister more.

Discussion:

Have you ever had a sibling outdo you?

Is there something you would like to change about your appearance to get more attention from the boys/girls?

What kind of marriage do you hope to have?

How would you feel if your husband loved someone else more?

THE STORY

Read Genesis 29:14-28.

Leah had a hard life. She had bad/weak eyes. Don't know how much of a physical impairment it was, but it seems that it was something having to do with appearance because it's set in contrast to Rachel who was beautiful. Rachel caught Jacob's eye. It was only by trickery that Leah became married to Jacob. Imagine Jacob's shock. Imagine Leah's disappointment. The first thing she heard from her husband was something like, "Oh, its you! Your not supposed to be here!"

It was only by concession that she was able to spend the first seven days with him before Rachel came on the scene. What she desired was her husband's love, she thought that by bearing him children, she would get it (29:32), but Jacob always loved Rachel more. What she desired was Jacob's love. What she got - without realizing it - was the blessing of being the mother of the strongest tribe in Israel - Judah, who would have the promise of the blessing passed down to him and would eventually become the ancestor of David, then later Jesus.

She lived a hard life and never found her happily-ever-after. We don't know how much consolation it would have been to her to know her place in history, but God used her in her less than perfect situation to be a part of his plan of eternal salvation for all the world.

1 Peter 3:3-4, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."

Discussion:

When you watch a movie, or even the Disney cartoons, who gets all the attention? The beautiful princess. Sleeping Beauty was of course beautiful. Snow White was the fairest of them all. Cinderella was the beautiful step sister. Ariel was the most beautiful daughter among a group of sisters. The beautiful get the attention and end up living happily-ever-after. What happens to the rest?

Not everyone is movie star material, but we all have what it takes to take part in God's plan for the world. We can either have our story of personal gain, success, achievement and happiness, or we can take part in His story of victory, meaningfulness and eternal joy. One is based on our ability, talents and looks. The other is based on his. We aren't told a great deal about Leah. Don't know that much about her devotion to God, but she took more of a part in God's plan for the salvation of all humankind than Rachel did.

Activity/Application:

Have guys make list of truly great women in life they look up to and girls vice-versa. (Mom, Dad, Grandmas & Grandpas, teachers) Do you put them on that list because of their looks? Talk about amazing people like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, MLK, Rosa Parks, Helen Keller. History very seldom remembers or honors beauty. Supermodels don't usually go down in the history books. In fact, they usually aren't remembered ten years down the road. What God honors is something completely different. Would you want to marry someone like your grandma, grandpa - their kindness, spirit, strengths ...even if they weren't supermodels?

Read through 1 Corinthians 13. Love is... Wouldn't you want your future spouse to have those qualities? Where is gorgeous in that list?

Note on Polygamy:

(See note on slavery, in class material on Abraham's Servant). Polygamy was an imperfect part of their society. Still, God worked through it because his plans were too big and great to be stopped by man's imperfections. Jacob's trickiness and favoritism were not Godly traits, but God still used him because God's promises are effective even in the midst of our failures.

JETHRO: PRIEST OF MIDIAN AND FATHER-IN-LAW OF MOSES

Scripture References:

- Ex. 2:15-23 Gives his daughter's hand to marry Moses
- Ex. 3:1 States he is the priest of Midian
- Ex. 4:18 & 24-26 Jethro allows Moses to take his daughter and grandchildren to Egypt. Also Jacob's daughter saves Moses' life.
- Ex. 18:13- Jethro's advice

Suggested Themes:

- Mentor
- Patience
- Sacrifice / Trust
- Wisdom
- Diplomacy
- Father-leader

Background:

- Jethro is a shepherd. God sure likes that occupation. You notice he never picks tax collectors...Oh wait... He likes them too.
- Jethro is a Priest of Midian. This is before God sets up the Levitical priest system and before Moses gets the law so he had to have an intimate relationship or knowledge of God apart from the Law.

Lead-In:

Discuss the wisdom of our nation's judicial branch of the government. What would happen if every single traffic ticket and minor offence went before the Supreme Court? They'd be so swamped they could never get around to the really big issues. So our courts are set up with district courts, appellate court, state supreme courts, and finally the federal Supreme Court at the top. Wow, that's pretty smart. See if they know where we get this concept from. Point out that above the door when you exit the Supreme Court in Washington D.C. is a carving of Moses. Ask why he's up there. Because our founding fathers got the idea from him. Well, actually from Jethro.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

I. Patience: Ex. 3:16 SEVEN daughters. Enough said.

II. Sacrifice/Trust: Jethro lets Moses take his daughter and grandkids back to Egypt when Moses goes back to talk to Pharaoh. He could have convinced Moses to leave them at home where it was safe. "If you want to take yourself into enemy territory and risk your life fine, but don't take my daughter and grandchildren with you." Jethro saw God's hand at work and was willing to go along with it.

III. Wisdom: "I will give you some advice, AND MAY GOD be with You." Ex. 18:19

Jethro gives advice but points out God is the catalyst. He points out to first "teach them God's laws." In other words, help them prevent problems rather than try to solve problems (prevention rather than cure).

Then sets up a judicial system of 1000, 100, 50, 10 and finally the toughest cases go to Moses so he doesn't get burnt out. (The same system our founding fathers used to create our nation's judicial branch.)

IV. Diplomacy: Ex. 18:27 "... and Jethro returned to his OWN country."

He gives advice then stood back and let God work. He was not a busy-body.

V. Priestly Leader Father: Ex. 4:24 Jethro taught his daughter (Moses' wife) how to properly honor God even if Moses (who had actually spoken to God) didn't know God was about to kill him. If he hadn't taught his daughter she wouldn't have acted on Moses' behalf. No Moses, no exodus, no nation, no Jesus, no salvation. A father's leadership went a long way.

Application:

God's wisdom can make even situations in everyday life smoother than they otherwise might be. A wise mentor is important to take away a good chunk of the "DRAMA" in our lives.

God is the active ingredient, not just brains. So as we strive to mentor others we don't give God's advice we'd be better to keep our mouths shut.

Have diplomacy. Give advice then get out of God's way so He can work.

DEBORAH / BARAK

Scripture Reference: Judges 4

Suggested Theme: The Power of Mentoring.

Background:

The story of Deborah is not exactly rife with detail. In fact, everything we know about Deborah is given to us in only two chapters in Judges. One of those chapters is devoted entirely to a song. Her story, however short, still tells us some important things about God's nature and His sovereign design.

The attitude that Deborah portrays as she deals with the children of Israel, even the commander of the army, is just what ought to typify the children of God. Peter tells us that anyone speaking on God's behalf should do so as "one speaking the very words of God." That can be a difficult proposition, but Deborah, called on to do that as judge of the entire nation, is an example that we can all follow. Deborah not only stands face to face with the man that God chose to lead 10,000 men against the enemy, she pronounces embarrassment for him in light of his not having the faith to follow without her at his side. A prophetess certainly, but who does God call to prophesy but those with the courage to do so.

Lead-In: What is a mentor?

Discussion: Do you know what a mentor is? [See what the class knows about mentors]

In the book of Judges there is a man by the name of Barak who is called to be the commander of Israel's army. Barak isn't afraid, exactly, to lead the soldiers into battle, but he's not ready to do it all by himself. Barak needs a mentor, someone who understands God's plan better than he does, to encourage him to do what needs to be done, so God sends him to a mentor—the judge Deborah.

THE STORY

I Deborah (Judges 4:4-5)

We know very little about the judge named Deborah. [You might discuss that judges in the book of Judges were typically great warriors or generals; Deborah is the exception to that description] The book of Judges introduces us to her by telling us that she was well-known by the Israelites because she was a prophet. The people would go to her to have their disputes settled, much as people do with judges today.

Deborah was so important to the people of Israel that she had a certain spot, the Palm of Deborah, so that she could be easily found. She spent her days listening to the people and passing on to them God's wisdom. [Who are the people that your class goes to for direction? Why do they feel that these people can offer them godly wisdom?]

There came a time, however, when it was necessary for Deborah to call someone to give him the command of God.

II. A Bit of History (Judges 4:6)

For 20 years King Jabin, an enemy of the Israelites, had been making life miserable for the Hebrew people in the northern part of the land. When the previous judges, Ehud and Shamgar, were no longer there to fight for them, the people began to do things that were opposed to God's will. As had happened before, God allowed the enemies of Israel to harass the Hebrews. The effect was to remind them of who it was that took care of them and who they needed to put their trust in so that he could keep them safe. So, after 20 years the Israelites turned back to God and asked for relief from Jabin and his army. [There's a point to be made here about how we tend to lose our focus on God when we feel that we're able to take care of ourselves. One thing that a wiser person- a mentor- can do for us is to remind us of our need for God. That wisdom typically comes from the mentor's mistakes...]

Jabin's general was a man named Sisera. Sisera had 900 chariots at his disposal, making his army pretty well invincible. The people of Israel couldn't fight back against Sisera and his men by themselves, and, once again, God revealed his love and power to his people by sending another judge to fight for them.

III. Barak (Judges 4:6-7)

As with Deborah, we know very little of Barak. We know nothing more than where he lived which was a considerable distance from Deborah. At her call, Barak went nearly half-way across the country to hear God's message for him.

When Barak arrived at the Palm of Deborah, he heard what must have been an exciting, maybe frightening, command from God. Deborah spoke God's command, that Barak was to lead 10,000 soldiers against Sisera and his 900 chariots (plus the rest of the army) because God was going to destroy them. Now, the people of Naphtali and Zebulun had 10,000 soldiers to send to war. The reason that they hadn't was that they knew they'd be defeated if they fought against Sisera. With God's support Barak was willing to give it a try. There was, however, one small hitch in the plan.

IV. The Power of Mentoring (Judges 4:8-10)

Barak wasn't opposed to going to fight against Sisera and his overwhelming army. He wasn't, though, ready to go on his own. "I'll go," he tells Deborah, "but only if you go with me." One of the advantages of having a mentor is that you never have to go it alone. [Do your students feel as though they have people in their lives who will share in their struggles?] Barak's courage was increased at the thought of having a wise advisor at his side. We can berate Barak for a lack of faith, but we should also be able to relate to his desire to remain close to the one who had spoken the very words of God. There are times when we need to step out on faith one-on-one with God, but there are times when God supplies the encouragement we need through the presence of those more prepared than we are—that is what makes mentors useful to us.

Deborah's agreement must have given Barak at least a little security, but it was touched with disapproval. As commander of the Israelite army, Barak stood to gain fame and notoriety for being the means by which God would deliver his people, but because of his unwillingness to follow without Deborah as a visible means of support, Deborah tells him, he would not receive the honor. Mentors are honest, even when honesty is hard. [In some class settings it might be useful to discuss situations in which honesty can be discouraging to the receiver, e.g., "Does this dress make me look fat?"] Sometimes a mentor will be the means

through which God expresses his displeasure. Two important facets of mentoring arise from this fact.

First, if we're going to be serious about being mentored, we need to be serious about taking the bad with the good. When we look to someone as mentor we need to trust that person just as much when he has to correct us as we do when we ask for direction. The person who looks for nothing but agreement isn't looking for a mentor he's looking for a flatterer. Barak could have decided to avoid his responsibility, but even in light of the discipline that Deborah tells him about, he goes off to do God's will. Certainly he must have been disappointed, but when his trusted mentor spoke, Barak listened.

The other side of the coin is important for those who desire to be mentors. No one is fit to serve as a mentor if he's not willing to make the difficult decision to be honest even when it could hurt feelings. It's easy to give when the recipient is grateful, but a mentor must be willing to give even when the result isn't encouraging to him. Deborah must have known that God's withholding of the glory from Barak might have been enough to discourage him from taking on a tremendous responsibility, but she didn't hesitate to tell him the truth. For Deborah, in her role as mentor, doing what was right was the first priority.

V. The Rest is His-Story (and Her-Story) (Judges 4:12-24)

As one might expect, with God in control of the battle Barak's army routed Sisera and his seemingly invincible army. Just as Deborah had prophesied, God delivered Sisera's men into Barak's hands, "Not a single one was left alive." Barak, encouraged and rebuked by Deborah went on to do great things. Such is the God-given power of mentoring: with a faithful, godly mentor by his side anyone can do great things.

Finding a mentor might seem intimidating at first blush, but if we focus on those qualities that are of the most importance we'll quite likely find that we've been being mentored all along. In Deborah, Barak found someone worth listening to, someone who knew God very well, and someone who was willing to pass on that knowledge without fear. People who exhibit that sort of attitude are the very ones that we find attractive anyway. If we think about it, most of us can probably identify people in our lives who have those qualities and likely are fulfilling the role of mentor for us already.

Being a mentor probably seems even more daunting. Indeed, it probably takes a firm commitment to be the kind of person who can be accepted in that role. Making that commitment and conscientiously applying yourself to it is a worthy goal. In the time of Deborah and Barak God's plan for his people was accomplished only because of the willingness to be a mentor.

Incidentally, we ought not forget God's pronouncement against Barak, that a woman would get the glory for defeating Sisera. Thanks to Barak's hesitation, God's leading, and the faith of a woman named Jael, mighty commander Sisera, captain of the King Jabin's invincible army, was ignobly killed by a woman. Indeed, destruction of Sisera's chariot-led army and his execution were the beginning of the end of King Jabin. [Some of the younger boys might need to be reminded that girls can be pretty tough, too]

Activity/Application

Have the students write a thank-you letter to a Godly mentor in their lives and deliver them when they return from camp.

NATHAN: THE PROPHET

Scripture Reference: 2 Samuel 12

Suggested Themes:

- Courage
- Wisdom
- Concern for Souls
- Spiritual Encouragement

Lead-In:

Who's Story?

Tell the story in general terms and see if they can think who it might be. Everyone knows about David standing up to Goliath. At one point of David's life, David was very powerful and did something very wrong. Then a man came and stood up to him. Just like David and Goliath, he was taking a big risk because he could have faced horrible punishment or death, but God told him to go.

Discussion:

David was the most popular king in the history of Israel. Would you have confronted him?

Would you go before Abraham Lincoln and tell him of things he did wrong? Kings back then could kill people that made them mad and often did.

Do you fail to confront your friends because of fear of being ridiculed or shunned?

THE STORY:

Nathan was a trusted prophet who served King David. In 2 Samuel 7:1-17, David tells Nathan of his desire to build a temple for God. Nathan tells him Ok, then after God speaks to him, Nathan goes back and tells David that he won't build the temple, but his son will because God will establish David's throne forever.

At the end of David's life, Nathan worked with Bathsheba in order to get David to promote Solomon as his successor rather than Adonijah who was trying to set himself up as king (1 Kings 1:5-14). He then took part in the anointing of Solomon as king over Israel. (1 Kings 1:32-35).

A crucial point of his life was when he confronted David. David had an affair with Bathsheba who was the wife of Uriah, one of David's fighting men, one of the captains in his army. When Bathsheba became pregnant and Uriah's integrity and loyalty kept David from covering it up, David had Uriah killed by having the rest of the army pull back in the heat of battle to leave Uriah unprotected. David then marries Bathsheba. But God knew, so he sent Nathan to confront him. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-14.

Very bravely, he came before David and with great wisdom, he was able to show David the extent of his sin. As a result, David repented. He could have gone down in the Bible as a liar and a murderer who was wicked. Instead, because he turned back to God, he is still remembered as the greatest king Israel ever had and his penitence and sincerity has been an example and inspiration for many Christians today who sin but eagerly long for forgiveness.

1 Corinthians 16:14, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."

Discussion:

It takes true bravery to step in and intervene when someone needs confrontation. When we truly care about each others souls, we will step in to tell people when they are doing wrong. When they are going against God's will. We will be most effective when we do it carefully and wisely like Nathan did.

Imagine how grateful David was to Nathan, maybe for the rest of his life. How grateful would you be? Maybe someone has cared enough about you to confront you. Do you appreciate it? What about when it is your parents? It is a big show of love to confront what needs to be confronted. Are you willing to show how much you care for your friends when you confront them? When we do, with wisdom and love, we are being Godly and pleasing him. (James 5:20)

Activity/Application:

Play "You're Bluffing" with cards.

Use Nathan's tactics on common things kids do.

Think of a bully who was the biggest, strongest one in the class. Everyone knew it, but he continually proved it. He picked on everyone. He picked on the nerds, he picked on the cool kids. There wasn't a single person he didn't pick on. He even picked on one of the handicapped kids. He took their wheelchairs, their food, the medical equipment and beat them up. What should happen to that kid?

You make fun of kids all the time. Who do you make fun of? Isn't it the ones who are the worst off? Even if they aren't physically handicapped, they might be mentally challenged, or have a history of a tough life - for them the insults do more damage than beating them up would. What should happen to you?

THE ISRAELI SERVANT GIRL

Scripture References: 2 Kings 5:1-18; Luke 4: 27

Suggested Themes:

- Compassion
- Courage
- Faith

Background: (What was going on around this girl at the time this took place?)

- 1) When Solomon was king of Israel, he brought in the "gods" of the nations. God was angry and promised to tear the kingdom apart. I Kings 11:9 -
- 2) God raised up enemies against Solomon and Israel to make the ripping apart take place. I Kings 11: 14ff. (Hadad, Rezon and Jeroboam were three of the enemies listed here.)
- 3) God promised Jeroboam that he would have 10 of the tribes of the nation of Israel because Solomon had brought in the "gods" of other nations and had not obeyed him. Some of the things against Israel are "events" that were from God. I Kings 11:31; 12:15.
- 4) God had His prophet Elisha anoint Hazael king over Aram (Syria). Remember that Syria was the nation that God raised up to help break up Israel. I Kings 19:15
- 5) When Ahab the evil King of Israel, didn't obey God and kill Ben-hadad, king of Syria, when he had the opportunity, God told him that he would give "your life for his life; your people for his people." I Kings 20:42
- 6) As king of Israel's ten tribes in the north, Jeroboam had two golden calves made to worship. One was for the north and would be in Dan, the other in the southern part at Bethel. He also appointed his own priests and did other things against God. I Kings 12:28ff (God made good his promises. God told Jeroboam that he would "destroy his family from the face of the earth" and "remove Israel from my sight" II Kings 17:19-23. In II Kings 12:24 it is the King of Assyria that did it and began to carry in people from other places to repopulate those taken out.)
- 7) Marauding bands from Syria had taken the prized possessions of Israel even as far back as the last days of Solomon's reign. I Kings 11:14ff
- 8) This Israeli servant girl working for Naaman, chief of the Syrian Army that had taken the people and things away from Israel, was a victim of one of those marauding bands from Syria. She was there to serve Naaman's wife.

THE STORY

An Israeli girl, servant, prisoner and probably ripped from her family and friends, recognized the need of her master. Naaman had leprosy - a terrible, crippling, disfiguring and incurable disease. She knew the prophet of God would cure him, even though she might have never seen it done in Israel (Luke 4:27). Naaman's wife, the person she served, told him about the girl's faith in the prophet of God back in Israel. The girl thought that he could heal Naaman! On that information he went to his king and asked for permission to go to the king of Israel to see if he could heal him. By the way, Naaman, Chief of the army of Syria, was responsible for having fighting men ready and trained to fight and take Israel's precious and prized things! Later he went to the prophet and after some extra persuasion by other servants of Naaman (Israelites too?), was healed when he decided to obey God.

Discussion Points:

1) God uses all kinds of people to spread His message. This victimized and abused child had every reason to say "Yes that's what he deserves!" Instead, she sought after his needs.

2) The girl seemed to have compassion. Perhaps she knew that Naaman mattered to God. If she knew that and responded to it, it would have been even more remarkable since just living in his home was unlawful for her! (Acts 10:28)

3) Naaman wouldn't have gone to his king if he had not had faith in the girl's words! In other words, he trusted her! So did his wife or she wouldn't have mentioned it.

4) What if? What if Naaman had went and nothing happened except he wasted his time!? She must have had real faith in the God of Israel!

5) The risk must have been great for her, but she had boldness enough to take advantage of the opportunity that she had.

6) Others can come to believe in God by our small efforts. Just a word or good deed can change someone's life eternally!

Activity:

Play "Vantage Point".

A recent movie with that name illustrates a plot to kill the US President by replaying the scenario from eight perspectives—from the president, to the killer, to an agent, to a family man in the crowd. Each perspective broadened the understanding of the viewer explaining the events that had taken place when played by the news media.

Similarly this event could be viewed with these eight distinctly different perspectives by using your choice of skits, discussions, essays read aloud, etc. to present the different views.

1. The servant girl
2. Naaman's wife
3. Naaman
4. The King of Syria
5. The King of Israel
6. The prophet of God
7. The other servant's, perhaps Israeli's too
8. The Lord God

Application:

Be brave, have faith, rise up - even in tough times, live so others can trust your words and actions, and don't over-look your opportunities! God be with you always as with this girl.

HEZEKIAH

Scripture References: 2 Chronicles 28-32

Suggested Themes:

- Listening to God
- Commitment

Lead-In:

Do you ever wonder if God is paying attention to us? We sing, we pray—but does God hear us?

[Turn your back to the campers, and continue talking to them.]

How would you like it if I spoke to you like this? [Allow for responses].

You might put up with it for awhile, but you would soon give up, wouldn't you?

Why? [It doesn't show respect for the person you are talking to].

Maybe the question of whether or not God listens to us depends to a large degree on whether or not we listen to God.

King Hezekiah wanted God to hear him, and so he made sure he was listening to God.

THE STORY

I. The Setting

Hezekiah became King of Judah during a time of moral and spiritual sickness. His father was Ahaz. Ahaz was a horrible king. 28:1-4. The valley of Ben-Hinnom became the town trash dump. Jesus called it Gehenna.

Because of his wickedness, they were invaded by the Arameans, the Edomites, the Philistines, and the Assyrians. God was trying to get their attention. 28:19. Tens of thousands of Israelites were taken captive to other lands during the reign of Ahaz.

28:24-25. Ahaz officially broke off relations with Yahweh. "God does not have a place in this kingdom anymore."

That's the kingdom Hezekiah inherited. The nation was devastated militarily and economically. But when he came to the throne at the age of 25, Hezekiah made his first order of business the fact that the nation was bankrupt spiritually. He realized the reason Judah had so many problems was because the blessing of God had been taken away from the place. So the first thing he did was try to lead the people back to God.

29:6-10. Hezekiah knew that Judah needed help. It was help that education or legislation could fix. The nation had turned their backs on God—now they needed to turn back to God. So what are some characteristics of people who turn to God?

II. Worship

The first item on Hezekiah's agenda was to restore the temple as a house of worship. 29:3-6. [Notice 29:6, they had turned their backs on God.]

Hezekiah grasped the importance of worship.

He also understood the importance of his own example. 29:20, 27-30. Wouldn't you love to have see that? Notice some characteristics of their worship:

- (1) They worshipped with gladness (v. 30);
- (2) They worshipped with humility (they bowed, v. 28; they knelt, v. 29; they bowed their heads, v. 30).
- (3) They also worshipped corporately—they didn't go off by themselves, but gathered together to worship God.

[Note: OK, someone will doubtlessly point out that they worshipped with instruments. Since you probably don't want to take the class on that tangent, you might simply note that under the Old Testament worship at the temple was done with instruments—and with animal sacrifices.]

III. Purity

In these two chapters, the word "consecrate" is found 16 times. It means "to set aside for God's use." 29:15-19. Notice the level of their commitment—they were totally committed to a clean temple.

What is God's temple today?

[Have someone read 1 Cor. 3:16] The church!

[Have someone read 1 Cor. 6:19-20]. Our own bodies!

How important is purity? God cannot dwell in a place that is not pure.

Imagine you invite me to your house one weekend as a guest. You are frying chicken, and I say, "I don't like fried chicken. I want steak." You might make a change. You sit down to watch a ball game, and I change the channel. You might go along with it. The next morning, I'm painting the walls in the bedroom. Probably by that time you are going to say something to me like, "You act like you own this place. You don't own it. This is my home."

That is exactly what the Lord wants to say to you. This church, and your body, is his place. He purchased it. He only wants in his home what he likes. Everything else goes out.

The standard for purity is not set by the culture—it is defined by God.

How can we make sure our churches—and our bodies—are pure for God?

IV. Generosity

29:31. Why is giving so important? Does God really need anything from us?

The Bible says giving reveals something about our hearts [E.g., Mat. 6:21]. When people have a problem giving, the problem is one's love for God.

Again, Hezekiah knew the importance of his own example. 31:3-8. When people give their hearts to God, they don't ask how much they have to give—they give generously.

V. Unity

Hezekiah wanted to celebrate the Passover. It hadn't been celebrated in years. He did something nobody expected—he invited his enemies. 30:1. These people had invaded Judah during his father's reign, and taken Judah's people into captivity. He is inviting his enemies to come worship with him.

30:6-11. There will always be people who scorn and ridicule those who are serious about God. Revival will always have critics. People who are spiritually asleep may get angry if the status quo is disturbed. In fact, one sign of revival is opposition. But another sign is reconciliation.

30:12. Unity is a gift from God. If religion is true, you will see people reconciling with one another, and maintaining a godly unity.

VI. Sincerity

Back to the Passover. Hezekiah had a problem. The month for having Passover was past. It was the second month. He didn't want to wait a whole year for Passover, because he was afraid the passion of the people would cool.

So they decided to celebrate in the second month. The law of Moses allowed that in certain circumstances--yet it was clear that if anyone came to Passover unclean, they were to be put to death. But Hezekiah had sent letters all over. These people don't have time to get prepared.

30:18-20. Is he saying that you can decide when you want to obey God? Of course not. But God did not want is more concerned about hearts surrendered to him than a ritualistic keeping of rules.

Story about the Italian poet Dante. One time during a worship service, he did not kneel at the appropriate time. Immediately people went to the Bishop and said, "He needs to be punished for sacrilege." Dante defended himself by saying, "If my critics had been as focused in mind on the Lord as I was, they would not have noticed the events around them, and they certainly would not have noticed me."

End by reading 31:20-21. God blessed Hezekiah because Hezekiah made God first in his life.

Activity

Close with a time of worship. Consider songs like "Sanctuary."

JOSEPH: FATHER OF JESUS

Scripture References:

- Luke 1: 26-27, We are told he was engaged to marry Mary
- Luke 2:4, Joseph takes Mary to Bethlehem
- Matt. 1:18-24, Angel visits Joseph in a dream
- Matt. 2:13-15, Escape to Egypt

Suggested Themes:

- Meekness
- Faith
- Being used by God

Background:

- From the tribe of Judah. A descendent of David
- A carpenter. Probably rather poor.
- From Nazareth of Galilee. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Lead-In:

Have class share out their life-long ambitions. Are they going to go to college, become a famous athlete, travel the world, ect.?

After they are pretty pumped up and smug, throw a monkey wrench in their plans. God's has different plans than yours. You will never get to fulfill our own dreams, just His. Are you o.k. with that?

DISCUSSION POINTS:

I. Trust

Joseph was willing to marry Mary anyway. He had to come to a point where realized God's in charge. He's got it covered. "I know what's going on even if you don't, Joseph. Relax. I know what I'm doing."

He was ready to marry so he was probably well established with his career. He would likely have had regular customers, and a workshop set up. He'd probably worked hard to get where he was. He had it all worked out and now God was changing it all.

II. Submissive (obedient)

Joseph could have said "Hey, it's not my kid! Why should my whole career be put on hold to go to Egypt for someone else's problems?"

III. Gentleman (Sacrifice)

Joseph was silently going to put her away. Speculation still would have been that it was his child. Think of the ridicule he was going to receive. Either he lies and says the kid is his. Or if he admits it isn't his child then everyone will say Mary was unfaithful to him and he's such a loser that he takes her anyway. So he decided to break it off, but he's a gentleman. He is a compassionate guy so he isn't going to humiliate her.

Then God steps in and says, "Joseph, I need you do take the difficult path instead of the easy one you were planning to do."

IV. Wrong Person in the Right Place

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" was asked about Jesus. It could be said of Joseph too. He was a nobody from nowhere, but he got to be used by God for His ultimate plan.

I would find it difficult to believe that Joseph really understood that he was about to be used as a key person for the climax of the salvation God had planned since the fall of man. I imagine he had a very limited view of what God was doing. But here we see God doing what he always does... the unlikely. God uses the imperfect, weak, ugly, poor, and flawed to show his perfection. We would imagine that the king of all the earth would come from a royal family living in a palace. All God wants is a person willing to "seek His kingdom first" and not his/her own. You don't have to be the right man for the job. Just the willing one.

Application:

Brainstorm examples of people they can think of that had their plans but God had other ideas. (Bible characters or from real life) Maybe even examples from their own life if they are an open group.

Ex. "I wasn't planning to be here this week. I wanted to... but then..."

Discuss how when we are thrown a monkey wrench we aren't expecting it can knock us off our feet spiritually. Based on all the people we discussed above, don't you think it will probably happen to you at some point too? But what if you are ready for it? What if you have already said, "Not my will but yours be done?" Will it be easier to accept His will then?

Meditation time: Send students off by themselves for an honest talk with God. Have them talk to Him about hanging on to their own dreams vs. realizing His.

ANDREW: BROTHER OF PETER

Scriptures References:

- John 1:35-42 - the calling of Andrew and Andrew calling Peter
- John 6: 1-14 - Feeding of the 5000
- John 12:20 - Gentiles seek to speak with Jesus

Suggested Themes:

- Meek (1st class 2nd fiddle);
- Initiator (action taker);
- Approachable

Background:

- Brother of Peter (fisherman)
- Only see him in action 3 times in the bible • One of the 2 First disciples to follow Jesus

Lead-In:

Ask class if they know what it means to be a "2nd fiddle." Discuss people they can think of that are always there in the background doing things that need to get done yet never getting to be the BIG name.

THE STORY

I Andrew was Meek/modest/unselfish/first class 2nd fiddle:

Andrew is never mentioned first in any list of the 12 apostles, yet he was the first to follow. He lived in the shadow of his brother Peter. He never jumped in to walk on water, or tried to chop off anyone's head to save Christ. He probably grew up hearing, "Why can't you be more like your brother Peter?" Yet when he met Jesus the first thing he did was tell his brother. Peter, the Pentecost preacher, who had the keys to the kingdom wouldn't have met the Messiah if Andrew hadn't pushed him to the forefront.

II. Andrew was an Initiator: He hooks people up w/ the One who can change things.

A. Peter. From the above statement is introduced to Christ as "Hey, Peter, we have found the Messiah." Not "I wonder if he could be a prophet," but for sure without a doubt this is the one we've been waiting for. Didn't he know that if he let his brother in on it he'd get overshadowed? This was his big chance to finally outshine his brother. Evidently Andrew realizes he isn't the up-front kind of guy—he's the gofer guy. "Hold on Jesus. I know just the guy who you could work through."

B. Boy with the sack lunch (feeding 5000). All the other disciples are complaining that there is no possible way to feed all these people. But one disciple sees a boy who needs to be hooked up with Jesus. Again we barely even notice him in the story. We all remember the faith of "the boy with the sack lunch," but Andrew is almost not mentioned. It reads "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up." Andrew again takes a back seat. But he puts into motion one of the most memorable miracles that we read in the bible. By seeing the right person in the right situation he identified opportunities he could make realities for God's kingdom.

C. Gentiles (John 12:20). Jesus had not yet reached out to the Gentiles. He had made comments like, "I have sheep not of this pasture." And he had spoken to Samaritans, but Samaritans are half Jew. Jesus had not openly reached out to the Gentiles, but they had heard of him. When some of them approach Phillip and ask to see Jesus, Philip is hesitant. He had to get a second opinion, so he went to the disciple who is good at connecting people with Christ. He says, "Andrew these guys want to see Jesus. Can they do that? I mean they're unclean! What should we do?" At another time some of the disciples wouldn't even let Jewish children approach. Phillip sure wasn't going to ask them if these fellows should be taken to Jesus.

III. Andrew was Approachable:

- The boy with the lunch picked Andrew to approach. Why not Matthew or John? They were the ones close to Jesus. He saw Andrew as the one who was easy to talk to.
- Peter - Here is Andrew's chance to shine without his brother overshadowing him, but all he can think is, "I've got to get Peter to this man!"
- Gentiles - They go to Philip first, but Philip takes them to Andrew. "Gosh, I don't know. You guys aren't Jews. Hey Andrew, what should we do?"

Application:

Students generate things they can do to enhance God's kingdom even if no one but God ever notices it. Encourage them to start adding to their prayers that God will help them to be ok with not getting the recognition.