



SPROUTING
IN GOD'S LOVE

CHRISTIANCORE
TO THE

kids



CHRISTIAN
TO THE CORE kids



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE



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SPROUTING IN GOD'S LOVE

Life for an oak tree

begins
as
an
acorn.



But with time
and the right conditions...

the acorn becomes a
majestic oak tree.

A God-shaped life is illustrated in the Bible as a flourishing tree planted by God through the work of his hands. Those who trust in God and make him their confidence can be like a tree planted by a stream of water, whose leaves are always green and that always bears fruit. When Jesus announced his ministry to a brokenhearted and enslaved world by reading from the scroll of Isaiah, he said he would not just heal people but that he could transform them into "oaks of righteousness."¹

When you become a follower of Christ, the seed of discipleship is planted in your life. God's desire is that you develop deep roots, grow strong, and experience his full power and presence. The first steps to developing this type of deeper life begin at a young age. Investing in the lives of children will greatly impact the rest of their lives.

Christian to the Core is a twelve-session journey to help children know and understand God's love and purpose for their lives through a study of Eight Core Values. Just as a tree grows from the core, you also have the ability to help children grow and focus on the core of who they are and what they can become in Christ. This journey can start the development of their lives, relationships, and legacies.

Until all worship,

Wes and Joy Griffin
International Directors

instructions for the leader

Christian to the Core Kids is based on the globally recognized leadership and discipleship curriculum used in more than 80 nations by the International Leadership Institute. This guide is intended assist the teacher in leading the children through the same ILI Eight Core Values as presented in *Christian to the Core* for adults.



Register Today

Register yourself as a leader or group member at ChristiantotheCore.org/Register. You will receive specific updates to encourage you on the Christian to the Core journey.

Using the Curriculum

Children's groups meet 12 times with each session lasting one hour. Depending on your context, you may choose to include fellowship, worship, and refreshments. It is important to cover the entire resource; each Core Value is essential.

For best results, read through and study each lesson in your notebook before coming to that particular session. *Christian to the Core Kids* relies heavily on your personal application and experience. In the teaching sessions, there will be times when the large group is broken into smaller groups for more intentional discussion. Each lesson contains a section at the end for discussion groups to connect the large group experience to each age-specific group. Good discussions enhance learning and personal transformation. A general outline for each session includes:

1. **Opening Prayer:** Open each session with a time of prayer.
2. **Core Value Description:** This will make the Core Value easier for a child to understand.
3. **Leader Background:** This will give background information for the leader in preparation for the lesson.
4. **Biblical Foundation:** This section highlights the Scripture focus for the Core Value being taught. There are interactive activities and questions throughout this part of the large group lesson.
5. **Closing:** Each lesson leads to a real-life, practical application for the children. The lesson is summarized and leads into the group discussion. Close this time with a prayer.
6. **Discussion Groups:** Small groups based on ages gather to respond to the lesson with an activity and answer questions from the lesson. This will link to the Home Connect for the week.
7. **Home Connect:** This usually consists of an activity for parents or guardians to do with the children at home throughout the week to reinforce the lesson taught and prepare the children for the next session. This helps reinforce the Core Value at home through another practical application.

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To learn more about the International Leadership Institute (ILI), visit ILITeam.org. To explore ILI’s global initiative for young leaders, visit History-Makers.org.



CHRISTIAN TO THE CORE

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SESSION ONE

Just What Are the Core Values Anyway?



Core Values Defined

Bring a snack to start your time with the children this first session. In particular, bring a snack that has a large seed/pit or core, such as a mango, peach, cherries, or other items available in your local region.



As you share the snack, show a whole piece of fruit and point out that there is something very special inside. Ask the children what they think is in the middle of this fruit. Follow up by asking them if they think this is important. Regardless of how they answer, you get to point out the importance of the core of the fruit. The Core holds the fruit together, gives it shape and form, and especially important, it allows the to reproduce. Point out that often, what cannot be seen is really the most important part of all. This part impacts what others do, see, and enjoy.

For the Leader

Similar to the adult curriculum, Christian to the Core Kids is grounded in expectations for the future. While children may not be able to articulate this clearly, they certainly think and dream about the future. They love life today as it is filled with play and wonder, *and* they know there is something more. Spend any amount of time with children you see, and their play is often their interpretation of what is to come. They build, play family, dig in the dirt, play school, dance, and sing as natural expressions of how they interpret the world.

Christian to the Core Kids is intended to accompany the adult Christian to the Core (download a free PDF of the adult version at ChristiantotheCore.org/Resources). This book follows the lessons and patterns of the adult curriculum, only in a language that is child-friendly. Here in this first session, the correlating adult session will be noted to offer a clear connection. One exception is made from the adult curriculum to the children's in the order of the lessons, the reversal of Core Values four and five. Core Value four for children is "Following Jesus" and Core Value five is "Sharing Jesus." Children need to know what it means to follow Jesus before they can share Jesus. Developmentally, they are just learning what a life as a Christian is. Consequently, we chose to teach this order rather than asking a small child to evangelize then disciple another.

While the actual lesson today is about introducing the concept of a "core" to young children, the following are adaptations to the Eight Core Values with short descriptions that will be discussed over the next several weeks.

knowing god

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls to know Him and spend time with Him. As children grow and mature in their faith, their relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit will show up in their daily lives.

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vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity



loving others

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who show love through their words and actions. As children learn to look for people to love, they will share out of the overflow of their own relationship with God. This includes being kind and including those who may be overlooked or picked on.

Being god's child

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who live with the understanding that they have been created as His beloved child. As children, they get to walk in humble confidence knowing that they have nothing to prove, while at the same time, knowing they have much to offer. This occurs as they are encouraged to reach their full potential in Christ.

following Jesus

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who want to follow Jesus. Children will learn what it means to follow Jesus in their daily lives as they seek to imitate Christ as loved children. Following Jesus begins as imitation and transitions into a daily choice.

Sharing Jesus

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who share the Good News of Jesus Christ as they understand it. Children will share authentically out of who they are and what they know about God in ways that are developmentally appropriate. This may include singing, drawing, dancing, or words of encouragement.

celebrating family

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who love their families. God offered the family as a gift, and He provides guidelines for developing healthy, strong families. Families are the place where children get to practice and live out God's love.

caring and sharing

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who take care of what they have and are willing to share with others. Children will learn all they have comes from God and may be used in service to God's Kingdom.

living my best

Core Value: God looks for boys and girls who make choices that please God even when those choices are difficult. God desires that all children live in a way that reflects their understanding of the love He pours out for them. This reflection should both serve to glorify God and encourage children to continue growing in their relationship with God.

Referring to core as more than one may be a difficult concept for the smallest children. Consider a culturally relevant way to explain this. You may consider an everyday object being viewed from multiple angles or different elements being highlighted such as the color, size, texture, etc. Feel free to be creative!

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*The first Core Value is "Knowing God."
It serves as the foundation for every
other aspect of our lives.*

Biblical Foundation—Knowing Who You Are on the Inside

In 1 Samuel 17 (the story of David and Goliath), David was a young, small boy, especially compared to the soldiers all around him. He visited his older brothers regularly to bring them food and report back to his father how they were doing.

ask the class:

Who here has ever felt small? Name a time when you felt smaller than all the people around you. (Be sure to give each child an opportunity to talk.)

Even though David was younger than his brothers, he still had an important role to play. He made certain they did not go hungry, and he helped his father with the flocks. This alone would have been enough, but David had even more to offer!

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 17:1-19.

ask the class:

Who was David? What did he do? Who was Goliath? What did he do?

Have you ever known someone who is unkind to you or others? Someone like this is often called a “bully.” He or she may try to scare or hurt others.

What do you think is going on inside the mind and heart of a “bully”?

Let’s see what happens next.

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 17:20-33.

David believes in God so much that it seems unthinkable for someone not to step up to stop Goliath. He asks why no one does just that, and it gets him in a little trouble. King Saul hears of this and calls for David. The King says to David that he cannot go against Goliath because he is too young.

ask the class:


What does David want to do? Do you think David was scared?

Have you ever been told that you are too young to do something? What made you try anyway?

What do you look forward to being able to do one day as you grow bigger?

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 17:34-51.

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King Saul finally agreed to let David go and face Goliath, and he tried to send him with armor fit for a king. Instead, David decided to go with a weapon he knew how to use, his simple slingshot. This seemed like a dangerous decision, but David believed in himself, and he knew he had on the inside what it would take to use this slingshot well.

When he faced Goliath, the giant made fun of David. Goliath thought it was a joke to send someone so young and small. David knew a secret, though; he knew he had God at the core of his being and that God would help him do the right thing.

By all measures, Goliath should have defeated David. But he did not! David looked too small and too young on the outside, but it was what was on the inside that mattered most. David faced Goliath and saved his people from the giant.

Activity

Choose something that looks yucky on the outside but is beautiful or yummy on the inside. This can be a geode or other rock that looks plain on the outside but beautiful inside or something like a coconut that looks rough but tastes wonderful on the inside. Ask children to describe what they see at first. If they know the object well, ask them to say only what they can see and save what they know it to be for the second question. After revealing the inside, ask children what is so surprising about what they find inside.

Go around the circle and name as many things as you can that are good on the inside but look yucky or weird on the outside. Examples include watermelon, yams, potatoes, coconuts, kiwi, etc.

The Daily Challenge

Read the following verse and offer it as a memory verse for the children. This is a great verse to use throughout the entire curriculum that reminds children that we are talking about what happens on the inside! For the youngest children, invite them to memorize only the second half.

A great memory aide is to make motions to go with the verse! If you have supplies available, ask each child to write out the verse on paper and draw a picture to accompany the verse.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." —1 Samuel 16:7

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

As you close, ask each child what they hope God sees when He looks at their heart. If they cannot think of anything, you may want to prompt them with a few ideas. Close in prayer, asking for these things to be present and growing in their lives.

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discussion guide - younger

Remember at the beginning of our time together today we talked about what was inside the fruit? Do you remember what it was called? During this whole series of lessons we are going to be learning about our "core." What is at the core of being a Christian?

What is at our core? What does God look at?

Refer to 1 Samuel 16:7 if prompting is needed.

God looks at our heart, not what we look like "on the outside." He wants our heart to help us make good choices and do things that please Him.

What things do you think you have in your heart right now? Kindness? Anger? Frustration? Love?

Review today's lesson – 1 Samuel 17.

ask the class:

How can we help make sure our hearts hold only good things? What are some things that encourage us to make bad choices and think bad thoughts?

One way that we can encourage our hearts to help us make good choices is by memorizing Scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (NASB). We have begun to treasure God's Word in our hearts with 1 Samuel 16:7. Think about other verses you might have memorized. Share them with others.

If you had motions to go with the verse in the large group time, practice the words and motions with your group for the verse below. If motions were not created, take time in this smaller group to create motions that make sense for this verse.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." — 1 Samuel 16:7

As you go home this week, share this verse with your parents. As we learn more about what is at your core, keep in mind that God looks at your heart!

Pray for your group. As you listen to the responses given, pray specifically for those needs and that God would be pleased with what He sees in our hearts.



discussion guide - older

Remember at the beginning of our time together today we talked about what was inside the fruit? Do you remember what it was called? During this whole series of lessons we are going to be learning about our "core" and what is at the core of being a Christian.

ask the class:

**What is at our core? What does God look at?
(Refer to 1 Samuel 16:7 if prompting is needed).**

What do other people look at? How do your friends or family decide if something is good? What is helpful about this? What can be hurtful?

God looks at our heart—not what we look like. He wants our heart to help us make good choices and do things that please Him.

ask the class:

What things do you think you have in your heart right now? Kindness? Anger? Frustration? Love?

Review today's lesson – 1 Samuel 17.

ask the class:

How can we help make sure our hearts hold only good things?

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One way we can encourage our hearts to help us make good choices is by memorizing Scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (NASB). We have begun to treasure God's Word in our hearts with 1 Samuel 16:7. Think about other verses you have memorized. Share them with others around you.

If you had motions to go with the verse in the large group time, practice the words and motions with your group. If motions were not created, take time in this smaller group to create motions that make sense for this verse. Invite children to memorize Scripture as a practice so their heart is indeed pleasing to God.

Pray for your group. As you listen to the responses, pray specifically for those needs and that God would be pleased with what He sees in our hearts.

home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the introduction and overview adult session, "The Core."

take action:

This week as you talk with your child, look for things that have "middles" or "cores" (like a mango with a large seed or a baseball that only throws correctly with the core being formed completely). What things did you find?

What we value is deep inside us, at the core of who we are. The next few weeks we will be learning how these core values affect our lives.

knowing god

God looks for boys and girls to know Him and spend time with Him. As children grow and mature in their faith, their relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit will show up in their daily lives.

loving others

God looks for boys and girls who show love through their words and actions. As children learn to look for people to love, they will share out of the overflow of their own relationship with God. This includes being kind and including those who may be overlooked or picked on.

being god's child

God looks for boys and girls who live with the understanding that they have been created as God's beloved child. As children, they get to walk in humble confidence knowing that they have nothing to prove, while at the same time knowing they have much to offer. This occurs as they are encouraged to reach their full potential in Christ.

following jesus

God looks for boys and girls who want to follow Jesus. Children will learn what it means to follow Jesus in their daily lives as they seek to imitate Christ as beloved children. Following Jesus begins as imitation and transitions into a daily choice.

sharing jesus

God looks for boys and girls who share the Good News of Jesus Christ as they understand it. Children will share authentically out of who they are and what they know about God in ways that are developmentally appropriate. This may include singing, drawing, dancing, or words of encouragement.

celebrating family

God looks for boys and girls who love their families. God offered the family as a gift and provides guidelines for developing healthy, strong families. Families are the place where children get to practice and live out God's love.

Caring and Sharing

God looks for boys and girls who take care of what they have and are willing to share with others. Children will learn that all they have comes from God and may be used in service to God's Kingdom.

Living my Best

God looks for boys and girls who make choices that please God even when these choices are difficult. God desires that all children live in a way that reflects their understanding of the love He pours out for them. This reflection should both serve to glorify God and encourage children to continue growing in their relationship with God.

In their classes, your children also learned 1 Samuel 16:7 as a memory verse. As you are able, discuss, say, and memorize this verse with your child. How does this verse help us to focus on the core values listed above?

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." —1 Samuel 16:7

SESSION TWO

Knowing God

Being with God Every Day



core value

God looks for boys and girls to know Him and spend time with Him.

Think of all the songs children know about God: “Jesus love me,” “The B-I-B-L-E,” “Hosanna.” Each song teaches about God long before some of our youngest friends can even read! Music is a natural way for children to learn. Open your time with a song or two that your children know. Point out what you can know about God from singing these words.

For the Leader

Children love games! Games are much more than play in the life of a child. It is how they learn. For younger children, games are often “playing” what they have seen around them. They play house, cook, and play ball but all without rules conveyed. As they mature, they learn what works and what does not. With a little more time, rules are established.

Go to any field or playground in the world and chances are you will see a wide age span playing soccer. At first it seems like a simple game of children chasing and trying to kick a ball. For the youngest players, it may not even matter in what direction. They are imitating the most basic elements of what they have seen. As they grow, older players teach them rules and techniques. As they play, they learn those rules both by listening and experiencing. Over time, if asked, many adolescent players could not tell you when they learned the rules.

In this session, “Knowing God” will be considered. For our youngest friends, they may be able to talk about knowing God without giving much detail. This is wonderful and age appropriate! They are experiencing God’s presence and are often intensely curious, filled with questions. They may ask God’s favorite fruit or what games Jesus played as a child. This is their way of connecting. They will sing, pray, take in Bible stories, and imitate the world of faith that has been modeled all around them.

As children grow and mature, they get to know God in more detail. They are able to take in patterns of faith and specific lessons from Scripture. They too will sing, pray, study the Bible, and imitate the world of faith around them, just at a deeper level. Both are the building blocks of a lifetime relationship. It is the doing before they understand, and as they grow in understanding their actions follow. For some, they have been living out a relationship with God long before they had words to describe that lifestyle. This is a great time to clarify and let them know of God almighty, Jesus Christ who created and loves them!

Children hear many stories about God. God can be referred to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we walk through the biblical foundation of knowing God, we will explore and clarify that each term is God.



The first Core Value is “Knowing God.” It serves as the foundation for every other aspect of our lives.

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Biblical Foundation—Knowing God

As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses...The LORD would speak to MOSES face to face, as a man speaks with his friend... —Exodus 33:9,11 (God the Father)

God came to Moses and spoke with him! Moses could ask questions, tell stories, listen, and be with God just like being with a regular friend.

ask the class:

**What do you like to talk about when you are with your friends?
Do you sing or tell stories?**

Getting to know God is a lot like getting to know your friends! You get to ask questions or just chat as well as hear stories from the Bible and sing songs that help you know God better.

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. — John 5:19-23 (God the Son, Jesus)

Long ago, God wanted to know us better, so He stepped out of heaven and came to Earth in the flesh. This is who Jesus is! Jesus helps us to know God even better. He grew up in a family, had siblings, had friends and people who didn't like him, went to parties, and got hungry and tired. In many ways, Jesus was a lot like you! There are, however, important ways in which Jesus was very different. He gives to all of us the example of how to be a good friend and treat others.

ask the class:

In what ways are you like your parents or family who is raising you? How did this happen?

Did you know Jesus is just like His father? Just like you, He is so close to His Father that He is able to show us what God is like.

What do you know about Jesus from other stories in the Bible?

Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to be imitators of Jesus. What does it mean to imitate?

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activity

Ask younger children to imitate an animal or two. Ask older children to choose someone in the room to imitate. Remind them to be kind about it! This can be a really funny time with children imitating their leaders.

ask the class:

How did you know what to do to imitate that animal or person?

As we learn how to be like Jesus and actually act like Him, we get to know Jesus better. It means we must spend time learning about Him and being with Him. Sometimes it's hard to be kind when others are not nice to us. Sometimes it's fun to help our friends. Either way, the more we try to be like Jesus, the better we know Him and people around us can tell we are spending time with Him.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." — Acts 1:3-5 (God the Holy Spirit)

The Holy Spirit is how God gets to be with all of us, every day, all over the world! Jesus knew He couldn't be here forever and that people all over the world would know about Him. He wanted to be able to be with each and every one. In God's wisdom, the Holy Spirit was sent so that each of us, you and me, could spend time with God every day!

ask the class:

Who are you close to?
How do you get to know them?

The Holy Spirit loves time with us, and this is God's way of helping us to know Him.

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The Daily Challenge

Between chores, school, and distractions, it can be difficult for anyone to know God. Just like with our friends, we must choose and make time to be together. God knew this would happen. That is why God offered a few ways to help us get to know Him better and spend time with Him.

These ways are called “spiritual disciplines.” Spiritual disciplines are really just practices that help us get to know God and strengthen our faith! In your small group time you will get a chance to talk more about spiritual disciplines and to learn that you have already been doing a few in our time together.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

There are many ways to talk with God. Singing is one that is natural to most children. Choose a song for closing and offer this as a prayer.

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discussion guide - younger

ask the class:

Who are your closest friends? What is one thing you know about them? What do they know about you?

Did you know that you can know God? Just like your friends, the more you spend time with God, the more you will know Him!

Review today's lesson – God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

How can we get to know God better? What gets in the way of knowing God more?

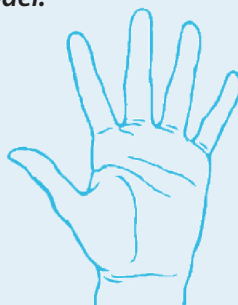
Some ways that we can know God are called "spiritual disciplines" or "practices." Do you remember talking about those? Today we've already participated in three just since we've been together. Does anyone know what they might be?

One is **worship**. We participated in worship together as we sang a song together. What is your favorite song about God?

Another is **Bible study**. We looked at Bible stories that told us about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What was one new thing you learned?

A spiritual practice that you can take part in at any time and anywhere is **prayer**. Prayer is talking and listening to God. Today we are going to pray in our group using our hands. You can take this anywhere and pray at any time! Hold up your hand. **Pray together as a group using this model.**

Thumb – I love you God
Pointer – I'm sorry God
Middle – Thank you God
Ring – For others
Pinky – For myself



Helping others is another spiritual discipline. You can help others by doing something they need done or by doing something that is kind. What are some things you could do to help others at home? At school? In your neighborhood?

What spiritual practice do you want to try so you can know God better? Write this on a piece of paper as a reminder to take home.



discussion guide - older

Review today's lesson – God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we focused on knowing God. Think about your best friend. What do you know about him or her? What does he or she know about you? How do you get to know one another better? Just like your best friend, we can get to know God better.

ask the class:

How can we get to know God better?

What gets in the way of knowing God more?

We can overcome things that get in the way by using "spiritual disciplines or "practices." Today we participated in three of these practices. Does anyone know what they might be?

One is **worship**. We participated in worship as we sang a song together.

Another is **Bible study**. What are the Scriptures that we studied? Why did we study them? What did you learn from Exodus, John, or Acts today that was new to you?

The third is **prayer**. You can pray at any time and in any place. Prayer is not only talking to God but also listening. What are some ways that you pray? ("Now I lay me," The Lord's Prayer, prayer before meals, etc.) Today we are going to pray in our group using our hands. You can take this anywhere and pray at any time! Hold up your hand. **Pray together as a group, each taking turns following this model.**

Thumb – I love you God

Pointer – I'm sorry God

Middle – Thank you God

Ring – For others

Pinky – For myself



What I'd like you to do this week is find a way to **serve**. Serving others is another spiritual discipline. You can help others by doing something they need done or by doing something that is kind.

What are some things you could do to serve others? What will you commit to doing this week? Who will you serve?

home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Intimacy with God."

take action:

As we talk about getting to know God better, we learned that spiritual disciplines help us grow in our relationship with God. We talked with your children about singing, Bible stories, prayer and helping others. These might be more familiar to you in the adult terms of worship, Bible study, prayer, and service. There are so many options! This week, as a family, choose one or more spiritual disciplines to practice together as you seek to know God better and grow in your intimacy with Him!

Journaling: Begin a journal time one day this week. Give each family member a journal or a sheet of paper collected into a three-ring binder to become your family book. Use blank pages for younger children and lined pages for older children. **Ask:** "Where did you see God today?" Have each family member share what they have written or drawn.

Memorizing Scripture: Do you have a family verse? If you do, memorize it together! If you do not, present your family with the idea of choosing one. For younger children, paraphrase the Scripture. If you have a ball, you can take turns rolling it to one another (or throwing for older children), each saying a word in the verse in order. As you repeat it, the verse becomes memorized.

Physical Exercise: Take a family walk. Talk about how each of our bodies are the temple of God and that He wants us to take care of our bodies. As you walk, make a conscious effort to worship God through what you see, how you feel, or what you think. As you breathe in, talk about how God is filling you up and as you exhale, how that could represent getting rid of the things that are holding us back from God.

Fasting: Choose to fast from something as a family (TV, sweets, cell phones, or time with friends). Instead, participate in something that builds your faith or serves others.

Silence: After dinner, enjoy a time of silence. With all electronics off and put away, ask everyone to focus on a name of God or a Scripture (Alpha and Omega, I AM, Jehovah, Yahweh, Jesus, Savior, Father, Master, Lord). After a set time, talk about what the experience was like. How did you feel? What did you hear? Did you feel God's presence? If so, what was it like?

Tithing: Discuss together what a tithe is. As you prepare to tithe, include your children in the process. Show them how you tithe to the church, and ask them to participate. If children earn an allowance, investigate how much a tithe would be. Participate together in giving this offering.

Service: Find a way to help a neighbor or friend this week as a family. It might be something like taking a small gift or a plate of food to them, or helping them clean part of the yard, or organizing a project in their house. Be certain to point out how serving others is serving God!

SESSION three

Loving Others

Sharing the Love You Have Been Given



core value

God looks for boys and girls who show love through their words and actions. As children learn to look for people to love, they will share out of the overflow of their own relationship with God. This includes being kind and including those who may be overlooked or picked on.

For the Leader

What are some things that you really love? At the top of your list might be your spouse, children, or other family members. Some might resonate with things like coffee, chocolate, or other foods. You might automatically think of a dear friend or leader who has impacted your life like no one else has before. As you think through these top people whom you love, think about what you would do for them to help them or what you might do for them just because you love them. How does this expand outside of your community? How do you love others?

In this session, children will learn what it means to love others. God calls us to love others. Children love through what they do and say. Children have things that they love dearly. In the youngest of ages, it is most evident by the “things” they enjoy—a favorite toy, book, blanket, etc. Even with the youngest children, there is still evidence of the love for important people in their world—parents, siblings, teachers, friends. The challenge will be to continue reinforcing the concept of “loving others” versus “loving things.”

Ask children to picture something they love. Gather responses. Ask them to think about people whom they love. Gather responses. Dramatically share the people and things that made the top of your list of what and who you love.

Tell a story about a time where you lost something and went to great lengths to find it. Ask children if they have ever been in a similar situation. Tell them to think about how they looked for that lost item. When people are involved, we should have even stronger feelings! People matter more than things. God asks us to love all people—even those who might be mean or hard to love. Those are the ones God asks us to love so they might see Him in us.



*The second Core Value
is “Loving Others.”*

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity



Biblical Foundation—Loving Others

Luke 5:17-26 is a story of Jesus forgiving and healing a paralyzed man.

ask the class:

What do you know about Jesus? *(Be sure to allow time for each child to respond.)*
What kind of man is he? What is important to him?

Do you find those same things are important to you?

Jesus loved others everywhere he went. Be thinking of this today: How do you love others?
Tell the story. Read or summarize Luke 5:17-26.

ask the class:

Have you ever tried to help a friend? What happened?

Did you catch what happens? Jesus is teaching. It sounds like he has a crowd of people around him. All of a sudden, someone is being lowered through the roof! Imagine if, right now, someone lying on a mat was lowered through this roof. I do not know about you, but I would be shocked!

ask the class:

Who brought this man here? Who lowered him down through the roof?

Yes, his friends. They tried one way and could not get to Jesus, tried another and still could not. I wonder how long they tried to get their friend to Jesus to be healed. They keep trying until they find a way. They believe Jesus can heal him so much that they were willing to do anything to help their friend. They are rewarded for their faith as well—all their sins are forgiven.

ask the class:

When have you tried to help a friend?
To what lengths have you had to go to get help?

When have you loved someone this much? Just like these friends, who knew they loved their friend so much they would do anything to help him, God wants us to love our friends, family, and everyone so much that we will do anything to help them know Jesus.

Is it easy to love everyone? I can think of some people who are hard to love—the boy or girl at school who seems to be mean all the time, the person who poked you or pulled your hair, or the kid who does not seem to want to talk to you. God wants us to love them, too!

intimacy
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Activity

Before class, prepare a list of actions and words that are loving and not loving. Examples may include: listening to your parents, being kind to friends, cleaning up your toys, helping make dinner, folding clothes or blankets, saying “hi” to someone who looks sad (loving); making a mean face at a friend, pinching your sibling, throwing your toys on the ground, screaming or crying when you do not get your way (not loving).

Ask the children to stand. Tell them to move to the right side of the room when they hear something “loving.” When they hear something unloving, they should move to the left side of the room.

Read the lists together in random order, switching between “loving” and “unloving” options so the children move quite a bit. This is great kinesthetic learning and should be a lot of fun! Make the statements dramatic, and feel free to add more of your own to suit your context.

The Daily Challenge

There are many ways to show love! Two of the most common ways are through words and actions. As a group, create one list of words that express love and a list of actions that express love. Words might be “Thank you,” “I love you,” “You make me smile,” etc. Actions might be to help clean up at the end of the day, help set the table for dinner, play with a younger brother or sister, etc. Invite each child to choose one word and one action to do this week.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Our verse for this session is:

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” —1 Samuel 16:7

If you have made motions, do those as a group. If you prefer, just say the verse together.

Ask each child to think about God looking at his or her heart. Does God see a heart that loves others? Have them share with the group.

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity

discussion guide - younger

We were just given a question to think about: When God looks at your heart, does He see a heart that loves others?

As you think about this question, you might be remembering the time you pulled your sister's hair or yelled at your mom and dad. Don't only think about those times. See if you can also find the times where you have shown love.

What do you do to show your friends and family that you love them? What is your favorite way to show someone that you care about and love them?

This might lend itself to a short discussion about love languages—words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts, and physical touch. All of us tend to show our love in different ways and also like to receive love in different ways.

Review today's lesson—Luke 5:17-26, Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson? How did his friends show love to the man who needed healing?

How did Jesus show his love for this man?

What gets in the way of loving friends and family?

Why do we choose to not show love to other people?

What can you do this week that will show others you love them?

What word and action did you decide you want to try this week to show someone you love them?

If you have paper and pencils or crayons, write or draw a picture of the words and actions down to remind children of one way to love others this week.

Pray together as a group. Pray specifically for their ability to love the people in their lives well. Use the contributions from the group to help make the prayer specific.

discussion guide - older

We were just given a question to think about: When God looks at your heart, does He see a heart that loves others?

As you think about this question, you might be remembering the time you pulled your sister's hair or yelled at your mom and dad. But see if you can also remember the times when you have shown love.

What do you do to show your friends and family that you love them? What is your favorite way to show someone that you care about and love them?

This might lend itself to a short discussion about love languages—words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts, and physical touch. All of us tend to show our love in different ways, and we also like to receive love in different ways.

Review today's lesson—Luke 5:17-26, Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson? How did his friends show love to the man who needed healing?

How do you show love to your friends? To family?

What gets in the way of loving friends and family?

How can people show you that you are loved?

Why do we choose to not show love to other people?

Choose a word or action that you want to try this week to show someone you love them.

If you have paper and pencils or crayons, write or draw a picture of the words and actions to remind children of one way to love others this week.

Pray together as a group. Pray specifically for the children's ability to love the people in their lives well. Pray also that we can show love to all, even people who are unkind, mean, or difficult to love. Use specifics mentioned in the group time to guide the prayer.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Passion for the Harvest."

For many adults, we forget that children around us learn not only by what we say and intend to teach but also by our everyday actions, how we spend our time, and our life choices. Think through a typical week. What would your child say you love?

Take a guess, and then actually ask your children! Is what you are modeling worth your time, attention, and heart's affection?

Some people experience love through words, others through actions or touch. Talk about love as a family this week. What was learned in your lesson? How has your idea of love changed?

The Bible says in 1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us" (NASB).

Have each family member share what it means to him or her to be loved by God. You may want to set this up by reminding everyone that this is God, creator of the universe, almighty and holy, and this same God knows your name and loves you!

take action:

Having already talked about different ways love is expressed (actions, words, touch, etc.), tie this together with being able to love because you are loved. Invite the family to participate in a love experiment this week. Have each family member choose the name of one other family member to be his or her focus for the week. Ask what ways he or she best understands love. Make it your practice for the week to love that person in the way he or she best receives and understand love.

Examples: Small children may understand love by being read to and spending time with a parent, a parent may want help with daily chores, someone else may desire a hug every day. Regardless of the choice, ask family members to participate by showing love in a concrete way as a result of knowing they are loved!

How does choosing to practice a week of love remind you of the lesson where we learned that God looks at the heart more than the outside? (1 Samuel 16:7)

SESSION FOUR

Being God's Child

Reflecting the Image of Your Creator



core value

God looks for boys and girls who live with the understanding that they have been created as God's beloved child. As children, they get to walk in humble confidence knowing that they have nothing to prove, while at the same time knowing they have much to offer. This occurs as they are encouraged to reach their full potential in Christ.

For the Leader

In this session, your class will learn that they are all created as beloved children of God. Each child is loved, and each child has special things to do! Children can have a healthy self-image. The needed shift is to help each child see these gifts or things that they are good at as gifts from God and that He is the one who created each of those special gifts for us glorify Him with.

Think about artists, doctors, runners, preachers, moms, dads, florists, writers, etc. Each person has special gifts that only he or she can do. Think about the different people in your community. Use these people or professions as examples in this lesson.

Learning at a young age that we have been created in God's image is a foundational element to our faith. This can be a difficult concept to grasp as a child begins to understand what sin is and personalize that he or she sins; the direct connection between being made in God's image seems contradictory. Laying a clear foundation early in a child's life helps solidify that truth so it can be accepted. Grace can be accepted as Jesus' sacrifice becomes reality and understandable.

activity

Tell the children to turn to the person next to them and compliment them on something. Give a couple of examples that range from a characteristic or an ability that you know of in one or two children in the group. Repeat a couple of times. Each time emphasize that God created each one of us with different gifts.

Today we are talking about how to be who God created you to be. God made you. God loves you. He has a special plan for you and your life.



*The third Core Value is
"Being God's Child."*

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity



Biblical Foundation—Being God’s Child

Psalm 139 was written by King David — the shepherd boy with the slingshot who killed Goliath, who made a huge mistake but was forgiven, who was referred to as a man after God’s own heart. David is just like you and me. God created you! He made you. He put you together as you grew in your mom’s tummy.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. — Psalm 139:13-14

WOW (with much expression)! Give thanks. Let’s shout, “Thank you God” together. 1, 2, 3...



Do you know how amazing it is that God made you? There is nothing more amazing than a human being! God said when He created everything that Adam and Eve were **very** good. Not just good—**very** good. There are so many details that make up our bodies: organs, bones, and trillions of cells. We are a wonderful creation of God. It does not get much better than that!

ask the class:

When you hear how much God put into creating you, how does it make you feel? What does your face do when you hear this?

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. — Psalm 139:15-16

Do you know this very well? Do you know that you were made by God and cannot be hidden from him, no matter what? Think back to the things that your friends said at the beginning about you. Let’s try this activity again.

activity

Ask the group to turn to the person next to them and compliment them on something. Remind them of a few examples from before, but ask them to change their compliment into a statement such as, “I am so glad God made you. I can see He gave you _____.” Repeat this a few times. Each time, emphasize that God created each one of us with different gifts.

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity



Activity

Prior to the session, write each child's name on a card or small piece of paper. Give each child a random card. Tell them not to look at it! (An option is to tape the card to their forehead with the name facing outward.) Have the group walk around and ask questions about the person's name on their card (the others are able to see the name on the card). The objective is to guess whose name they have. Examples: Is my person a boy or girl? Does my person like to read? Does my person have brown hair?

Throughout the game, remind the group that the person's name they hold is a created, loved child of God, and He has great things for him or her to do. He or she is special!

The Daily Challenge—Sometimes it is Hard to Know God!

Sometimes it is hard to believe God created us with a plan and a special purpose for our lives. Sometimes we do not like how we are made or something that happened to us. Let's look at a person from the Bible who was created for something special just like you and me but who had some struggles.

Read or summarize Luke 19:1-10. If your group knows the song, "Zacchaeus was a 'wee' little man," encourage a quick time of singing with the motions.

Ask the Class:

What do we know about Zacchaeus?

Try to include as many responses from as many different children as possible. As they give responses, if available, draw a picture of what they are describing. Begin with a figure that will represent Zacchaeus.

How many of you know someone just like Zacchaeus? He was created special, and there is no one exactly like him. Zacchaeus was short. He could not see over the crowd, but he did not let that get him down. He was not discouraged. He just climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. Imagine if he had not. He would not have seen Jesus, Jesus would not have seen him, and Jesus would not have gone to his house! God had a plan for Zacchaeus. His life was changed for good!

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Close with a time of worship using Psalm 139:14 as a great praise to help remember God has a special plan for each of us. Let's say it together:

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

intimacy
 passion
 vision
 evangelism
 multiplication
 family
 stewardship
 integrity

discussion guide - younger

You are fearfully and wonderfully made! God created you to be special, and He loves you!

ask the class:

How would you describe to a friend what “fearfully and wonderfully made” means?

It is a great mystery how God creates each of us and how we are made different from everyone else. It is so much to try to imagine!

What were some of the things that your friends complimented you on, those things that they said you were good at?

God gave you each of those abilities. He wants you to use those gifts so others know Him better. One thing we have to remind ourselves of is that God loves us! He loves us so much that He made each of us special.

Review today's lesson: Psalm 139:13-16.

ask the class:

What was one thing that was new with today's lesson? Could you relate to Zacchaeus? In what way?

How can we be who God created us to be? What gets in the way?

Sometimes we get discouraged. Sometimes it is difficult to remember that God loves us and He made us, that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made. When that happens, we can remember that when God created man and woman, he said it was not just good, it was very good! When God created you, He said it was very good. We can also remember that Zacchaeus is an example of someone who kept his eyes focused on God and who Jesus reminded he was made for good things!

One way we can remind ourselves of these truths is to study and memorize God's Word. This is a spiritual practice we learned when we talked about knowing God. Try it together as a group. Take turns passing a ball (or another object) back and forth in no particular order, each taking a turn to say a word. The first person says the first word from the verse below, “I.” The second, “will.” Continue until all of the verse has been said. Repeat a few times.

*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.
—Psalm 139:14 (NASB)*

Ask the group to pray for one another.



discussion guide - older

You are fearfully and wonderfully made! God created you to be special, and He loves you!

ask the class:

How would you describe to a friend what “fearfully and wonderfully made” means?

It is a great mystery how God creates each of us and how we are made different from everyone else. It is so much to try to imagine!

Review today’s lesson: Psalm 139:13-16.

ask the class:

What was one thing that was new with today’s lesson?

Zacchaeus is known for being a small man. It would not be surprising if he was teased or made fun of. And yet, he did not let that get in the way of seeking Jesus and trying to be the best person he could be. Are there things you get teased about? How could you view that as something good instead of bad or negative?

Sometimes we get discouraged, and it can be difficult to remember that God loves us and He made us (“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”). We can remind ourselves that when God created man and woman, he said it was not just good, it was very good! When God created you, He said it was very good! We can also remember that Zacchaeus moved his focus from negative thoughts of himself when Jesus reminded him that he was made for good things!

One way we can remind ourselves of these truths is to study and memorize God’s Word. This is a spiritual practice we learned when we talked about knowing God. Try it together as a group. Take turns passing a ball (or another object) back and forth in no particular order, each taking a turn to say a word. The first person says the first word from the verse below, “I.” The second, “will.” Continue until all of the verse has been recited. Repeat a few times.

*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.
—Psalm 139:14 (NASB)*

ask the class:

Name one thing about yourself that you like and appreciate. What is one way you know that you were wonderfully made?

This is not meant to be arrogant. It is a reminder that you are good and that all goodness comes from God!

Ask the group to pray for one another.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "A Visionary Life: The Power of Vision."

This week your children learned about being who God created them to be. Parents, grandparents, extended family, and friends all play a vital role in modeling what it means to grow and be a follower of Jesus.

One of the great things about being family is that you really get to know one another! You know things about your children that even they don't know, like how they slept as a baby, what foods they liked when they were small, and what their first words were. You also know specific things about them now just from being with them. Guess what? They know about you, too! Knowing these things is a part of being intimate and really knowing that person.

take action:

Spend some time on each family member, and make a list of at least five items that you know to be true about them. Be sure to stay positive. Examples might include: your smile lights up a room, your attention to detail is amazing, your favorite color is blue, you peel a banana upside down to make the stem a handle, etc. After you share this list, celebrate that you know one another and that each of you has been fearfully and wonderfully made.

Ask each person to think of one thing the rest of the family may not know about them. It may be a favorite song or verse or a new skill that has developed. Share these, and add them to the list of what makes each of you who God made you to be.

As you close your family time, read Psalm 139:14 together. This verse reminds us not only that we are fearfully and wonderfully made but also that all of God's works are wonderful!

Children are especially vulnerable to others' words and actions. Some may feel ugly or not smart or lonely. As family, you have the blessing of being a voice and constant reminder for children that they are wonderful. God desires they know this and live as if they have value and worth!

Close with a family prayer, thanking God for the different ways each of you have been made.

I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. — Psalm 139:14

SESSION five

Being God's Child

Overcoming Obstacles



core value

God looks for boys and girls who live with the understanding that they have been created as God's beloved child. As children, they get to walk in humble confidence knowing that they have nothing to prove, while at the same time knowing they have much to offer. This occurs as they are encouraged to reach their full potential in Christ.

Create a mini obstacle course for the children in your group. Be sure to think through what is available, possible, and inclusive of all children (even ones with physical limitations). Obstacles may include climbing over a chair, under a table, running around a pole, and swinging from a tree branch. You are limited only by your imagination and rules of safety. At least six elements, but no more than twelve, are needed in your course to make it feel like a challenge. Some elements may require children to work together.

ask the class:

What did you enjoy most about the obstacle course? What did you enjoy least?

What was difficult about getting through the obstacle course?

Do you think you could do it more quickly if you tried again?

Today we are talking about being who God created you to be and how the world often makes it difficult to be that person. Obstacles get in the way, and we have to work to stay true to who we are.



*The third Core Value is
"Being God's Child."*

For the Leader

Think back to some of the mistakes you made when you were younger. Some are unavoidable, but we learn valuable lessons because of them. Other mistakes could have been avoided if we knew what to look for and how to overcome obstacles that were placed in our path.

intimacy
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vision
evangelism
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family
stewardship
integrity

Children need to be listened to, encouraged, and offered wisdom on how to cope in healthy ways with obstacles that they encounter.

One of the gifts adults can pass on to children is the wisdom that comes with their years of experience. This often comes in the form of healthy coping skills and a reframing of circumstances. When we make healthy choices and understand that circumstances are not the end of the story, our choices honor God and reveal who we were created to be. Even young children understand there are things in life to be overcome. Some must overcome a physical trait and others an environmental trait. Learning ways to overcome obstacles early in life allows children to develop healthy coping skills in the face of a variety of potentially detrimental circumstances.

In this session, children will hear the story of Ruth, who faced loss, loneliness, and a low status in life. She did not allow this to define her, though, and she chose to focus on what she instead could control. Ruth also focused on the relationships she had rather than the ones that were lost. In doing so, she was able to survive and ultimately thrive.

Children often feel things deeply. It is easy as adults to see a child upset over a broken toy or friend who said something unkind and think it is no big deal. Many things in life break, and friends come and go. As adults, we know this. As children, they are learning these things for the first time. Gently letting a child know that these seemingly bad things are not the end of the world is one step in learning to overcome larger obstacles in life. This allows a child to know that difficulties and obstacles do not define them. Rather, that they may be free to be who God created them to be!



Biblical Foundation—Being God’s Child

Scripture reference: The book of Ruth

Ruth is a woman from a land known as Moab. She marries and lives close to her husband’s family. Sadly, her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband all die. Her mother-in-law plans to go back to Bethlehem and encourage her daughters-in-law to stay in their own home country. One daughter chooses to do so, but Ruth decides to stay with her mother-in-law and move to Bethlehem.

ask the class:

Has anyone or anything you loved die? How did you feel?

Sometimes when someone dies, we are so sad that we do not know what to do. Ruth was very sad and tried to figure out what to do next.

Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, went to Bethlehem. They were very poor. One of the rules during this time was that poor people could pick food from the edges of a field in order to take care of their basic needs. Ruth went from being married and surrounded by her family and community to being poor and far from home. Still, she did not complain and worked hard to take care of herself and Naomi.

When things go wrong for you, how do you respond? What happens when you don’t get your way? Do you think you could keep trying without complaining even when things don’t go well? Offer a few suggestions of reactions that might be realistic and culturally appropriate for the children in your class to consider.

intimacy
passion
vision
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family
stewardship
integrity



At the advice of Naomi, Ruth picks food from a field owned by a wealthy man named Boaz. He notices what a hard worker Ruth is. Boaz asks about who she is, and then he has his servants look after her. In time, they meet and get married. Ruth must have thought that the happy times in her life were over, but she chooses to overcome every obstacle thrown her way! In the end, she knows who she is at her core. She acts in faith, even when it is difficult, and God blesses her!

ask the class:

Name one time you overcame an obstacle and remembered who you were.

This could be a time when someone teased or made fun of you and you chose not to feel bad because you are made in the image of God. Or this could be a time when you were sick and God healed you. We have to overcome obstacles every day to live as the people God created us to be!

activity

Role play different scenes with the children where they have to overcome something. Options may include a friend at school being unkind to them, a sibling taking a toy, a teacher blaming them for something at school, or friends pressuring them to be mean to someone else. In each of these situations the child must overcome the urge to be mean, rude, judgmental, etc. They must overcome obstacles and choose to be who God created them to be.

Choose role playing scenarios that fit your children, based on culture and circumstances. Some overcome poverty, some lack parental involvement, some have inadequate food or housing. These are realities of their world. Do not avoid difficult situations. A great gift to children is to name their reality and offer positive options.

As we remember who God created us to be, we find strength to overcome the most difficult obstacles!

The Daily Challenge

One of the greatest struggles is not only overcoming obstacles but not allowing those obstacles to make us angry or bitter. For some children, they face unspeakable difficulties every day before they even make it to school. For others, they are simply growing up in a difficult world.

God wants for us to remember that we are *in* this world and not *of* it. Even when obstacles come, He provides a way of escape. He also understands how difficult it can be. Jesus died on the cross and overcame that obstacle through the resurrection! God understands what pain is, and He is with us every step of the way.

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity

Last week you looked at Psalm 139:13-16. In this same psalm, we hear a very different concern:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way. — Psalm 139:23-24 (NASB)

ask the class:

Read this verse aloud, and invite children to talk about what each part means.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart.”

Is there anything in your heart that is mean, unkind, or not who you want to be?

“Know my anxious thoughts.”

What are you worried about? Can you ask God to help with that worry?

“See if there is any hurtful way in me.”

Have you been mean to a friend? A family member? Is there something or someone you do not like and you have hurt?

“Lead me in the everlasting way.”

Remember that we all have ugly or mean thoughts at some point in time. We constantly need to return to God and ask for help in living as the person He created us to be.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Close your time by going around the group and naming one great thing about each child. As you dismiss, ask them to remember who they belong to and who they are created to be.

intimacy
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stewardship
integrity

discussion guide - younger

As you gather your group together, begin by bringing up the great thing that was mentioned about each child. Relate this experience to when you were their age. Did you have a similar experience? If so, share. If not, share how you believe this experience will help them remember who they belong to and who they are created to be.

ask the class:

Who do you belong to? Who created you?

You belong to God. He created you to do great things. He will never leave you. These are great things to remember as you grow up. Think about the obstacle course we had at the beginning of class. You overcame obstacles to reach the end of the course. Every time you encounter something difficult in life, God will give you the tools to make it through!

Review today's lesson—Ruth.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Tell us about a time when you had something difficult happen to you. How did you respond?

As we remember who God created us to be, we find strength to overcome the most difficult obstacles. We talked about Psalm 139:23-24 today:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (NASB).

Remind children of the four parts that this verse was broken into during the lesson. Direct them to think through each part. Pray for each child as they share their hearts.

God gives us a passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 called "The Armor of God." Read through this passage together. Discuss how these are tools that help us overcome difficult times. Point out different types of armor and the significance of each. Families will use this passage as the focal Scripture for their home connection this week.



discussion guide - older

Begin by bringing up the great thing that was mentioned about each child. Relate this experience to when you were their age. If so, share. If not, share how you believe this experience will help them remember who they belong to and who they are created to be. Ask: Did you have a similar experience? Does God make good or bad things?

ask the class:

Who created you? If God makes good things and God made you, what does that say about you?

What makes it difficult to remember this at times?

Think of the obstacle course we had at the beginning. Every time you encounter something that throws you off track, God will give you the tools to make it through!

Review today's lesson—Ruth.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Tell us about a time that you had something difficult happen to you. How did you respond?

As we remember who God created us to be, we find strength to overcome the most difficult obstacles! We talked about Psalm 139:23-24 today:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (NASB).

"Anxious" is a pretty big word: it means things that make me worry. There is another part of this verse: "See if there be any hurtful way in me." We can all be unkind or mean to others. How do we move toward being kind and able to handle difficult things well and away from responding in unkind or mean ways?

God gives us a passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 called "The Armor of God." Read through this passage together. Discuss how these are tools that help us overcome difficult times. Point out different types of armor and the significance of each. Families will use this passage as the focal Scripture for their home connection this week.

home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Overcoming Obstacles."

Today we learned about Ruth and how she encountered difficulties in her life. Her husband passed away, and she moved away from her friends and family. She was unsure of what was going to happen, but she remained faithful. As we strive to be who God created us to be, difficulties will come our way. If we ask for God's direction, He will always help us through those difficult times.

take action:

Spend time affirming each of your family members with ways that God has created each of you uniquely. Remind your children that God created each characteristic and ability.

Discuss the difficulties that each family member has faced in the last week.

God always equips us with the tools we need to face difficult circumstances. Think about how you guard yourself with the armor of God on a daily basis. Grab some of these items (or items that will work to illustrate), and talk through how these things might help in situations that your family encounters. It might be being made fun of, being accused of cheating, or a friend moving away. How can the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with readiness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit help in these difficult situations?

Keep these items out as a reminder this week of the gifts God gives us. Refer back to each piece of armor as opportunities arise.

The Armor of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. —Ephesians 6:10-18

SESSION SIX

Following Jesus

Imitating What You Know



core value

God looks for boys and girls who want to follow Jesus. Children will learn what it means to follow Jesus in their daily lives as they seek to imitate Christ as beloved children. Following Jesus begins as imitation and transitions into a daily choice.

****It is important to note that this core teaching for children is out of sequence with the adult materials. The concept of discipleship is a distinctly mature believer concept. As children are in the early stages of development and learning who God is, the choice was made to focus on following Jesus and sharing Jesus in lieu of Evangelism and Multiplication.***

Leadership is needed in every area and culture. There are leaders in homes, in communities and villages, in schools, in businesses, and certainly in churches. Leaders are those individuals who are willing to be responsible for decisions and to seek do what is right.

There is one specific item that every leader must have: followers. The crazy part is that some of the best leaders have very few followers. They may be asking people to do things that are too difficult or that place other people's needs ahead of their own. The number of followers is not what determines a good leader. All throughout Scripture, there were leaders trying to honor God and leaders trying to build their own kingdoms. By the world's standard, those who were rich or powerful looked like good leaders and those seeking to honor God looked like they were lacking.

In reality, we are called to an upside down kingdom. Being a leader who honors God often means serving others. Many of the greatest leaders in ministries throughout the world are not known as scary, powerful, arrogant people but rather as chief servants. They are the people who are modeling Christ's example from Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." This is the model we get to share and teach children.

For the Leader

"Follow the Leader" is a popular children's game all over the world. It is so simple, and in many cultures, it is what takes place naturally when children gather. No supplies are needed, and the instructions are quite simple. One person is the, "leader" and whatever he or she does, the others attempt to mimic. This can be anything from reaching for the sky, climbing a tree, or singing a song while jumping on one foot. In many ways, it is pure silliness. On another level, it is the visible foundation of what those willing to submit to another may look like.

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They are in control of their own actions, but they choose to follow one they recognize as the leader. In this game, children take turns being the leader. As they grow and mature in their faith, they learn that Jesus is the leader for them as children and into adulthood.

You may want to begin your time together with a round or two of "Follow the Leader" to set up the lesson!



*The Core Value for this lesson is
"Following Jesus."*



Biblical Foundation—Following Jesus

What does being a servant mean to you? Being a servant has many negative images that go with it. How might we reframe this in light of Matthew 20:28?

Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus never tried to do ministry in isolation. In fact, almost from the day he began public ministry, he was turning around and training others to do the same. He did this by teaching but also by sharing life with the disciples.

What have you learned to do just by being a part of your family or friends' lives? Share one thing to help children get the idea, then ask each child to share one thing they have learned by sharing life. Cooking, certain songs, games, and skills are often the earliest things passed on. (You may also be reminded of words or phrases used by adults around you. Children are an incredible mirror of how we speak or our tone of voice. This can be for good or ill depending on how we watch the words that come out of our mouths!)

ask the class:

What specifically did Jesus ask of Peter, Andrew, James, and John? "Follow me." Did he give any other specific instructions? (No, but they did leave what they were doing immediately.)

Do you wonder what they thought they might be getting into?

This is the beginning of Jesus gathering his closest disciples. He does not offer a clue that we know about as to what they might be doing. He simply says "Come, follow me."

ask the class:

What do you think that Jesus might be asking of you when He says, "Come, follow me"?

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integrity



Activity

Earlier you may have played “Follow the Leader.”

If not, this is an excellent time to play! Another game that offers a similar lesson is “Simon Says”. In “Simon Says,” one person is the leader or “Simon.” That person calls out commands like, “Simon says touch your toes,” “Simon says march in place,” “Simon says bend your knees,” “Wave your arms.” Notice the final command does not include the phrase “Simon says.” If children still waves their arms after this command, they are out and must sit down for the rest of the game. The goal of the game is to be the last person standing!

Just like in real life, Simon might not be asking you to do anything bad, but if it is not what Simon says, then we do not want to follow. Jesus asks us to follow him in every word and action. We may not think something is bad, but if it is not what Jesus is asking, we do not need to waste our time. Always listen for what “Jesus says” to do in every situation.

The Daily Challenge

One of the ways we can learn about following Jesus is to listen to and imitate what He teaches. Ephesians 5:1 reminds us to be like children. Indeed, children are excellent at this.

One great place to learn about the concrete teachings of Jesus is when He teaches his followers how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. Read through this prayer, asking what each section means to the children. They will also be doing this exercise with their families later this week.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Close by saying the Lord’s Prayer together. Point out that this may be found in the Bible. As we wonder what it means to follow Jesus, He offers examples and clues all throughout Scripture to help us do just that.

discussion guide - younger

Think back to playing “Follow the Leader” or “Simon Says.”

ask the class:

What did you like? Dislike? Why?

Do you think you are more of a leader or follower throughout your day?

Review today’s lesson – Matthew 4:18-22 and Ephesians 5:1.

What one thing was new about today’s lesson?

How can we follow Jesus? What gets in the way of following Jesus?

When Jesus approached Simon, Peter, James, and John, he asked them to follow him—to leave what they were doing and follow him forever. You can follow Jesus, too! Following Jesus means we can be like Simon, Peter, James, and John and leave what we are doing to be where Jesus calls us.

ask the class:

How do you think Peter, James, and John felt? How would you have felt if you were one of them?

**Who do you follow? How is following Jesus the same as following this person?
How is following Jesus different?**

Take a few minutes to participate in a “Sherpa Walk.” A Sherpa is a guide typically on a mountain trail. You will be the leader, and your group will be the followers. Blindfold all the children, and have them all hold onto a rope. Take them on a walk (simple obstacles are on this walk), and describe to them what they need to do. For example, if they are going to need to step over a rock, the Sherpa will need to describe that to them as they are doing it.

ask the class:

Was it easy to follow directions from the Sherpa? How did you feel?

Was it easy to trust the Sherpa? Did you lean on him or her at any point?

Following Jesus is a lot like the walk we just did. When we follow Jesus, He is our leader, and we want to do what He says. We also lean on our leader (show by example).

Pray for your group. Ask each child to say a one-sentence prayer.



discussion guide - older

Think back to playing “Follow the Leader” or “Simon Says.”

ask the class:

What did you like? Dislike? Why?

Do you think you are more of a leader or follower throughout your day?

Review today’s lesson – Matthew 4:18-22 and Ephesians 5:1.

What one thing was new about today’s lesson?

How can we follow Jesus? What gets in the way of following Jesus?

When Jesus approached Simon, Peter, James, and John, he asked them to follow him—to leave what they were doing and follow him forever. You can follow Jesus, too! Following Jesus means we can be like Simon, Peter, James, and John and leave what we are doing to be where Jesus calls us.

What would be one thing you would need to leave behind or change in order to be a better follower of Jesus? Sometimes it’s a bad attitude, the use of ungodly language, or being a bully—there are many possibilities. Encourage children to consider one thing they might need to change in order to better follow Jesus.

Take a few minutes to participate in a “Sherpa Walk.” A Sherpa is a guide, typically on a mountain trail. You will be the leader, and your group will be the followers. Blindfold all the children, and have them hold onto a rope. Take them on a walk (simple obstacles are on this walk), and describe to them what they need to do. For example, if they are going to need to step over a rock, the Sherpa will describe that to them as they are doing it. Ask children to be quiet as they are on this walk in order to hear the Sherpa.

ask the class:

Was it easy to follow directions from the Sherpa? How did you feel?

Was it easy to trust the Sherpa? Did you lean on him or her at any point?

Was it harder for those farthest away from the Sherpa to hear and understand?

Following Jesus is a lot like the walk we just did. When we follow Jesus, He is our leader, and we want to do what He says. We also must trust even when we cannot see clearly or know for certain ourselves.

Pray for your group. Ask each child to say a one-sentence prayer.



home connection

Parents: *If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Multiplication of Disciples." Sessions six and seven are reversed in the children's curriculum. In order for children to share Jesus and encourage others to become disciples, they must know what it means to follow Jesus.*

Share as a family what it means to follow Jesus. Share with your children a brief description of the moment when you chose to follow Jesus. Jesus teaches his followers how to pray in Matthew 6 with The Lord's Prayer.

take action:

The Lord's Prayer is a familiar prayer and maybe even one that is spoken without thinking about the meaning. This week, as you talk with your child about what it means to follow Jesus, incorporate a special prayer time together as a family where The Lord's Prayer is used as a basis for your time together. Each day, focus on a different part for discussion as you talk about what this means for your family. Memorize it together.

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

—Matthew 6:8-14 (NKJV)

Monday: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name."

What things can you praise God for today? Remembering who He is, take some time to share as a family the qualities you praise Him for.

Tuesday: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

We all want God's will to be done in our lives. Discuss where you see God at work and His will being done.

Wednesday: "Give us this day our daily bread."

God meets our needs and gives us what we need, when we need it. Share with one another when you have witnessed God's provision in your life.

Thursday: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

When have you asked for forgiveness? When have you forgiven someone else? Discuss as a family when this has happened (or maybe still needs to happen) in your home.

Friday: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

When do you feel tempted? What have you done to stop the temptation? What could you do differently?

Saturday: "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

What does God own? What might you be holding back? Where can your family help experience the Kingdom here and now?

SESSION SEVEN

Sharing Jesus

The Best News Ever



core value

God looks for boys and girls who share the Good News of Jesus Christ as they understand it. Children will share authentically out of who they are and what they know about God in ways that are developmentally appropriate. This may include singing, drawing, dancing, or words of encouragement.

For the Leader

Sharing often comes naturally for children. They either automatically want to share if someone has something they want, or for many children, they look to others when they have something worth sharing. Cookies, fruit, and snacks of all kinds are often broken into pieces and distributed among friends. Perhaps even more than possessions or food, children love sharing stories. They let you know when they have new shoes, when they have visited a grandparent, their favorite color, and when a birthday is around the corner.

In today's session children will learn about sharing their faith with others. God invites all believers to join in the sharing of the Gospel. This is not just any invitation; it is a mandate for the youngest to the oldest believer. Talking with young Christians about sharing their faith can be tricky. As you work through this lesson, be sure to talk not only about sharing what we have (God calls us to be good stewards), but also to do so in the name of Jesus.

There are times when the thought of sharing can drive a child to tears. Asking them to share a favorite stuffed animal, a beloved toy, or even a friend when they are developmentally establishing the concept of "mine" and "yours" will be a work in progress. Be patient, and know that the lesson today on sharing will be one of many over the course of childhood. No one is more or less important. If this concept is repeated and modeled, children will develop into who Christ wants them to be for a lifetime.

Before the children arrive, have a plate of something that is relatively easy to share in plain view or reach of your group. This can be a pack of candy, a yummy bread, or some other treat to eat. As children arrive, greet them as usual, and then draw their attention to the plate. Ask them not to touch it. Let them know that it is your plate and you would prefer they not have any of the treat at this time.

Once your group is gathered, ask each person to listen to a list of items you prepared ahead of time. If you name something they like to share, ask them to raise their hand. If it is something they do not like to share, ask them to keep their hand down. Your list might include candy, a game of catch, chores, birthdays, shoes, toothbrushes, etc.

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ask the class:

Does your attitude change depending on the person with whom you share?

Is it easier or harder to share with someone you know? Who would you like to share with?

For many children, they will choose to share with someone they know. In fact, as children across the world move from kindergarten to the early grade school years, they begin to cluster in groups. They may be very sharing with other children they know and like. Keep this in mind as you ask the children to share. Keep the tone encouraging, not harsh or judgmental.



Biblical Foundation—Sharing Jesus

Read the passage from Matthew 28:16-20 together. Ask your group what they heard in this passage. For the first round of discussion, there is no wrong answer. Just encourage them to listen and interact. For those old enough, encourage them to read the passage on their own or have them read it out loud for the group. This is an extremely well known passage within Christian communities.

This verse is important for who we are as a people. For children, this is a dense passage, and help with vocabulary may be needed.

authority: Person or organization who has the right to be in charge

disciple: Follower of Jesus

nation: A group of people gathered in an area or country

Baptize: To be covered with water in obedience to God

If we were going to say this passage in one sentence it could be:



“Jesus gives us all we need to share Him with everyone in the world.”

This means that we are supposed to share Jesus not only with the people we know and like but with all people!

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The fifth Core Value is
"Sharing Jesus."



Read Matthew 28:1-8.

This passage tells of the morning it was discovered that Jesus had risen from the dead. Two women, each named Mary, went to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. What they found was a complete surprise: He was no longer there! An angel (a messenger of God) met them and told them what had taken place. Overjoyed, they went quickly to the other disciples to share the news that Jesus rose from the grave.

These two women are often known as the first evangelists. This is a fancy way of saying "a person who shares the Good News of Jesus."

ask the class:

What do you understand to be Good News about Jesus? How could you share this with your friends and family?

Matthew 28:16-20 reminds us that we get to join these women in sharing Jesus with everyone. This passage is known as the Great Commission and sets the course for a lifetime of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

activity

Draw attention back to the plate where you placed candy, fruit, snacks, etc. Remind the children that you told them not to touch the plate at the beginning of the session. How did that make them feel? How would they feel right now if you decided to share? Give a piece of the treat to each child, but as you do, ask them not to eat it but to give it to someone else in the group. Be sure that each child ends up with a treat. Just like sharing treats with others, God gives you more and more of his love, but we are meant to share it with others. We get to give it away!

The Daily Challenge—Sharing What You Have

There are many ways to share Jesus with others. For children, singing is a natural way to share truths. Choose a song that is well known in your culture or community to pass on to the children. "This Little Light of Mine" is one great option. It lends itself to actions and tells about God's story and that we have a place in that great story. Sing this song several times, and invite the children to sing it throughout their week.

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Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Everything we talked about today has centered on sharing the Gospel. The Gospel means “Good News.” The Good News is that Jesus loved us all so much he made a way for each and every one of us, children included, to be in a relationship with God. This is the greatest gift ever. Perhaps even more amazing, this is a gift that is big enough for every person in the entire world to enjoy if we share it with them.

ask the class:

As you go to small groups, think about the biggest thing you know and how that might be shared with lots of people. Is that easy or difficult?

intimacy
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discussion guide - younger

ask the class:

What is your favorite story? Maybe it is a story a teacher has read to you, a story your parents have told you, or a bedtime story. What about family stories of grandparents or a family trip or how you came to live where you are?

Stories are all around us! Many of you like to make up your own stories.

Can you think of a time when something so good happened that you could not wait to share it with others? Maybe you received a fun gift, brought a baby brother or sister home, earned a good grade, or got really good news. When you shared it, you were sharing a story of something good that happened. God has the best story of all, and you are part of it!

Review today's lesson – Matthew 28.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

At some point someone shared Jesus with you. Do you remember the first time you heard about Jesus?

For some of you, stories of Jesus have been such a part of your life that you do not even remember the first time you heard about Him. Matthew 28 commands that followers of Jesus share Jesus with others! This means we get to share our lives, who we are and what we have with others, and most importantly, who Jesus is and what he has done in our lives. It is great to be included in the wonderful story of Jesus.

ask the class:

How can we share Jesus? (Be prepared to help children consider concrete ways as this is a developmentally difficult concept.)

What gets in the way of sharing Jesus? (Examples: being teased, not knowing what to say, etc.)

Remind the children of the song you learned today. Sing it together, and add motions to help them remember it. Invite students to sing this song in the coming week as a way to share the love and joy of Jesus.

Pray for your group and for each child to know that he or she is an important part of God's story.



discussion guide - older

ask the class:

What is your favorite story? Maybe it is a story a teacher has read to you, a story your parents have told you, or a bedtime story. What about family stories of grandparents or a family trip or how you came to live where you are?

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Remind the children of the song you learned today. Sing it together, and add motions to help them remember it. Invite students to sing this song in the coming week as a way to share the love and joy of Jesus.

Pray for your group and for each child to know that he or she is an important part of God's story.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Relevant Evangelism." Sessions six and seven are reversed in the children's curriculum. In order for children to share Jesus and encourage others to become disciples, they must know what it means to follow Jesus.

Last week we talked about what it means to follow Jesus. Often, it is more natural for children to want to share Jesus than it is for adults. You may remember stories of when your child was three or four years old and would tell anyone at the grocery store that Jesus died for him or her. There is much less inhibition at younger ages.

Think about ways you have shared Jesus with your children as they have grown up. It might be a simple correlation to nature as you talk about creation. It might be discussing how doing something wrong affects other people, but the wrongful act does not keep your child separated from God because of Jesus' sacrifice.

take action:

This week, write a letter to your children that depicts some of your journey with Christ. Be as detailed as you feel appropriate for your children's ages. Share the letter with your children this week, and then save it for them to have later in life. Ask your children to share their story up until this point with you.

Note: It is helpful to guide your children as they describe what God has done in their lives, but be cautious not to put words in their mouth. Allow this to be their story.

Here are some questions to consider: What are your first memories of God? What is your first God experience? How did God work in your life? When? Where and when did you become a follower of Jesus? How is God at work in your life now? When has God grown your faith? How has God used the Bible, the church, or the community to help you grow in your faith?

Read Matthew 28:18-20 together. Read Acts 4:20. Matthew 28 is a command: go and tell. Acts 4:20 has a different twist. The disciples say, "We cannot help but share what we have seen and heard. Jesus is amazing!"

Discuss how your family is sharing Jesus with others. Maybe you are sharing with a neighbor or a friend at school or another family member. Discuss who else may need to hear the Good News through your story.

Pray together, and ask God to help identify those who need to hear your story. Write down the names of these people, and place them somewhere for the family to see. As the week continues, ask each family member to share his or her own story to aid in the comfort level of sharing with others.

Session Eight

Celebrating Family

Loving the Ones You Are With



core value

God looks for boys and girls who love their families. God offered the family as a gift and provides guidelines for developing healthy, strong families. Families are the place where children get to practice and live out God's love.

For the Leader

Who is in your family? Think about your immediate and extended family. Think about how families may look different from yours. How do you think other people define family?

Family can be defined in many ways, but ultimately children see family as those around them who love and care for them. This includes parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, half siblings, step-siblings, step-parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends.

As we prepare for this lesson, reflect on what you know about the families who are represented in your group of children. Of what dynamics might you need to be aware? Where might things look different from your family?



The sixth Core Value is "Family Priority." The family unit is the foundation for all cultures. It constitutes the core of every nation.

Children experience family as they see it on a daily basis. Be aware that this may not look like your family or as one might desire family to look. As we look at the story of the prodigal son as our key passage for family, note the many different roles in a family with which one could connect. We will explore this together.



Biblical Foundation—Celebrating Family

ask the class:


Close your eyes, and picture your family. How many people do you immediately think of when you hear the word "family?"

To whom in your family are you closest? Why?

Name something about your family that makes you smile. Share with the group.

God has chosen you to be part of your family. What a great gift for you! Think of something you enjoy doing with your family or a time when you celebrated with your family. Maybe it involves a certain event or something that happens every week that is special just for you and your family. Share that with the group. Sometimes we fail to see the positive aspects

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of family. Think of a time when something happened in your family that you did not think was fair. Today we are going to learn about a family situation from the Bible. The parable we are about to read is called “The Prodigal Son.” A parable is a story that give us an example to live by.

Read the story about the prodigal son, found in Luke 15: 11-32.

ask the class:

What are your first thoughts after reading this parable?

The father welcomes his son back into his house and gives him everything he needs, even though he made mistakes and lost all of his father’s money. What an amazing ending to the story, one that gives us hope and encouragement!

activity

Let’s interact with this story again, but this time, a few of you will act it out as we read. *Ask for three volunteers to help by acting out the story as you read it. Tell them that you will help guide them along.*

Read Luke 15:11-13.

This family had a father and two sons. One of the sons asked for his inheritance—the money and possessions he would normally get when his parents passed away. His father gave his son the inheritance, and his son packed up and left.

ask the class:

How do you think the father felt at that moment?

Ask the actors to show this scenario with the father acting angry. Then ask the actors to show this scenario with the father acting like he does not care. Finally, ask the actors to show this scenario with the father acting like he really cares.

This father loves his sons, both of them. The son who did not receive his inheritance right away is given what he needs to live, and he continues a good relationship with his father.

Read verses 14 to 17.

The son who left his father and brother, spent all of his money and begins to struggle. He even comes to the point of working with pigs and wishing he could eat their food! Pigs are dirty, smelly creatures. It is in the pigpen that the son realizes his father may give him a second chance.

Ask two actors to be like the pigs and one actor to be the son feeding the pigs.

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Read verses 18 to 19.

The son plans to ask his father to forgive him and let him come work with his father's servants. He is unsure if his father and brother will be happy to see him again.

ask the class:

What do you think the son is feeling in this moment? Sadness? Anger? Happiness? How does the Bible say he feels?

Read verses 20 to 24.

Family is celebrated here! The father's response is the same response God has for us when we come to Him asking for help or admitting we have done something wrong.

Ask the actors to show the father responding with anger, then with sadness, and finally with doubt. Then ask the actors to show the father responding with happiness.

ask the class:

What is the father's response? Is it a judgmental or loving response? Did he welcome his son back with open arms or tell his son to go away?

Read verses 25 to 31.

Ask the actors to show the brother's as loving and welcoming response. Then ask them to show his response as jealous, angry, and bitter.

ask the class:

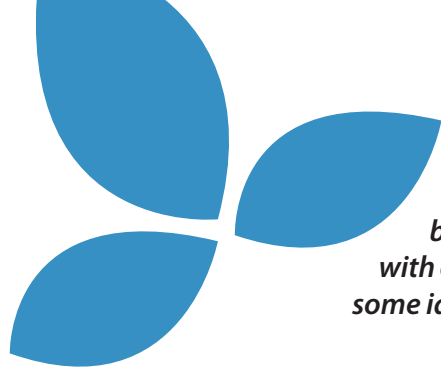
How does the Bible say the other brother reacted?
How many times do you react in this way when someone has done something wrong to you.?

The father responds by reminding him that he had never lost his relationship with him and he always had what he needed. It is important to stop and celebrate because his brother has come home. He was lost, but he now is found!

The Daily Challenge

Sometimes it can be hard to celebrate our family. A brother punches, a sister yells, a parent gets frustrated or asks us to do something we do not understand. Even in the midst of this, we are asked to celebrate our family—just like the prodigal son's father did. How can we do that? Life in a family is certainly not a party all the time. Celebrating family can also mean respecting them, sharing with them, or responding in love.

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Together, make a list of ways to celebrate your family this coming week. That list might include playing a game as a family, taking a walk together, baking or cooking together, giving a hug, responding with “I love you,” or helping with chores around the house. Complete this list together as a group to give everyone some ideas of how to celebrate family this week.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Philippians 2:3-4 says:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Let’s talk about these words (*ask children to help define*):

selfish: Wanting only what I want

vain conceit: Only think of myself

humility: Think of others first

Regard one another as more important than yourself, just like the father in our story today rejoiced when his son came home. He did not think about the pain he went through, but he thought of his son’s needs more than his own.

Take these three terms—selfish, vain conceit, and humility—as you move to small group. In your small group, look at the story again. This time, as you read the story together, find where selfishness, vain conceit, and humility are evident.

How can you think of the others in your family more than yourself? How can you serve your family this week? When we put others in our family before us, our family will have more moments of working together than frustration with one another.

discussion guide - younger

Living with family can be the best experience, but it can also be very difficult at times. When you live with people, the good, bad, and ugly all come out eventually because those people see you at your best and worst times.

Today as we talk about celebrating family, be sensitive to your group and aware that “family” may be a difficult situation for some of them.

ask the class:

Describe your family. What is your favorite part of your family? Who do you get along with the best? Who do you get along with the least? Why?

What ways have you celebrated your family in the past? What ways did you think of celebrating your family this week?

Today we talked about Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Review today’s lesson about the prodigal son—Mark 15: 11-32.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today’s lesson?

Who did you relate to most in the story? The father? The son who left and came back? The son who stayed and felt like he did not receive what his brother did?

What can get in the way of celebrating your family? How can you help get past that or through that?

activity

How can you put your family’s needs in front of your own? How can you celebrate family? Pray for your family. Tell your small group which family members you will be with this week. Think of something you would like them to be blessed with. Share with your group, or draw that blessing. As you draw/write/discuss, make it your prayer for those family members.



discussion guide - older

Living with family can be the best experience, but it can also be very difficult at times. When you live with people, the good, bad, and ugly all come out eventually because those people see you at your best and worst times.

Today as we talk about celebrating family, be sensitive to your group and aware that “family” may be a difficult situation for some of them.

ask the class:

Describe your family. What is your favorite part of your family? What is your least favorite part of your family?

In what ways can you celebrate family? What ways have you celebrated your family in the past? A special breakfast where you all eat together? A picnic? A game night? A family reunion?

Offer a few examples to children, then let them take over. Some of their ideas may seem silly to you as an adult, but allow them to use their imagination, as this encourages participation. Have each child choose one idea to suggest to their family this week as they celebrate being together.

Today we talked about Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Review today’s lesson about the prodigal son—Mark 15: 11-32.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today’s lesson? Did you know God wants to be in a relationship with you?

Some people call this coming home to Jesus. God is our heavenly Father, always looking for us. When we come to Him, it is like a party! Have you ever thought about God throwing a party for you?

activity

How can you put your family’s needs in front of your own? How can you celebrate family? Pray for your family. Tell your small group which family members you will be with this week. Think of something you would like them to be blessed with. Share with your group or draw that blessing. As you draw/write/discuss, make it your prayer for those family members.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Family Priority."

Family can be defined in many ways. There are brothers and sisters, grandparents, cousins, biological parents, and caretakers—these are often the same people, but not always. God has called us, as His children, to act as a family toward one another. This can be quite confusing for a child. For the sake of simplicity, we did not define exactly what a family looks like but rather the role a family plays and how family is a community to celebrate.

For some of you as parents, this means making a choice to not re-create the same patterns from a difficult childhood you endured. For others, this is an intentional choice to model what you had as a child. Regardless of your past, God invites you to be a powerful influence on your children in their world now.

Often, caregivers do not feel qualified to talk about faith with their children. Many families will leave this conversation to the leaders at church. While the role of the community and leaders at church is important, there is no substitute for family. Deuteronomy offers instructions for the conversations that should take place within a family.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. — Deuteronomy 6:5-7

In the adult lesson this week, you looked at six characteristics of strong families:

1. **Strong Commitment**
2. **Spending Time Together**
3. **Good Communication**
4. **Appreciation and Affection**
5. **Ability to Solve Problems**
6. **Shared Spiritual Life**

take action:

Spend time as a family talking about these six characteristics. What would each of these look like in your family? Consider creating a family covenant where you write out these characteristics and how they would play out in your life. Be certain this covenant is kept in a central location in the house. This is a great opportunity to create a family tradition focused on faith.

Ask each member to sign his or her name as you commit together to be a strong family.

SESSION nine

Caring and Sharing

Caring for Others

CORE VALUE

God looks for boys and girls who take care of what they have and are willing to share with others. Children will learn that all they have comes from God and may be used in service to God's Kingdom.

As children enter, give them a few clothespins, yarn bracelets, or something easily accessible to give all children. As the lesson continues, the children will listen for key words that you choose ("care" or "share" are good options), and when they hear that word, they need to give their item away. The goal is to give away as many items as possible throughout the lesson.



For the Leader

Think of how you consider yourself a good steward of what God has given you. How do you "meet" that description? What do you do? Give? Participate in? How do you care for what you have been given? How do you share what you have been given?

God gives us people in our lives to care for, and we share who He is because we care. God calls us to care for all people, no matter their background, status, race, or preferences. When we show we care, we are more apt to give what God has given us. In fact, everything belongs to Him, and we are to be good stewards of what He has entrusted to us.



*The seventh Core Value is
"Caring and Sharing."*

Children are normally generous. Sometimes adults can hold children back or influence their generosity.

Encouraging children to be faithful and generous with what they have been given can also prove quite a challenge. You know your group well. Modify as needed based on their dynamics.



Biblical Foundation—Caring and Sharing

Acts 10: 23-33 - Peter at Caesarea

Think back to our lesson, "Being God's Child," and reflect on the things you believe God has gifted you with—the things that are special and unique to you. Did God give you special talents or abilities that others do not have?

God has trusted us with a lot. Some may have more possessions than others, but God has given each of us gifts that He wants us to share. God wants us to remember that everything belongs to Him.

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ask the class:

What kinds of things have you been gifted with?

God also asks us to think outside of ourselves and give to all people. We should be willing to share with anyone, even if they look different than us or care about different things. If we are to be generous with what God has given to us, we should be obedient to give, no matter the circumstances.

Today our Bible passage is a little different. See if you can figure out the twist.

Read or summarize the story: Acts 10:23-33, Peter at Caesarea.

Peter welcomes travelers into his home, and he is hospitable to them. Normally, Peter and Cornelius would not associate with one another because of their cultures and backgrounds. Instead, Peter senses God telling him to be open and welcome these men into his home. Verse 28 tells us that Peter realizes he should never think of anyone as impure or unclean.

God changed Peter's heart and asked him to be generous not only with what he had but also with who he was created to be. God wants us to be willing to care for and share with all people around us, even if they dress differently, think differently, or act differently.

Is there someone you do not feel like being generous toward? Someone you do not like to share with? Think of that person, and say a prayer now that God would change your heart, just like He did for Peter.

ask the class:

How can you share who you are or the gift you have been given with someone this week?

Who is God asking you to care for that you have not cared for in the past?

Think about the activity we have participated in throughout the lesson. The goal was to give away as much as possible or as many times as possible.

ask the class:

Who has nothing left to give away?

Was it hard to give the items away? How many of you would have liked to keep the items for yourself?

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The Daily Challenge

Sometimes it is hard to care for others and remember that we have gifts so we can give them away. Our world continuously promotes the “one with the most toys wins” mentality, but that does not promote an understanding that God owns everything and asks us to care for those gifts in order to share with others.

Ask the class:

Think about the items you gave away today throughout the lesson. Were you able to give away more than you received? Were you able to be generous with what you were given?

As we learned today, continue giving as you care for others. Think about the times you gave your gift away today as a reminder to be generous.

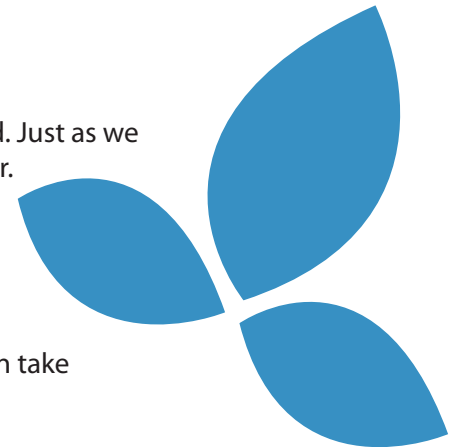
1 Peter 4:10 says,

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

This verse emphasizes the need to use what we have been given to glorify God. Just as we learned about Peter and Cornelius, background and preferences do not matter. God asks us to take care of all things and to share with all people.

Closing of Large Group time—Transition to Small Groups

Close the group today by asking the children to share what they think they can take care of and maybe share with others this week.



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discussion guide - younger

Review today's lesson – Peter and Cornelius.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we learned about taking care of what God has given us. We are to manage God's gifts; we are not the owners. Sometimes, that little change in words helps us remember that it is not "ours."

ask the class:

What things has God given you to take care of? How can we be happy giving more and getting less?

What gets in the way of giving?

This week, find a way to show you care about what you have been given. Caring for the things we have and for the people in our lives is one way we can remember that God owns everything.

ask the class:

What are some things you can do to help take care of others around you? What will you commit to doing this week? Who will you care for?

Have each child share and write down one goal for the week.

Let's recite the Prayer of Commitment to keep our focus on the fact that we are managers of God's resources:

*Lord, I recognize that you are the owner of all I have.
I am only the one who takes care of what you have given to me.
I commit to taking care of these things and ask your help to do so.
Teach me to do my best while I take care of your things here on Earth.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

If you are able to have a copy for the children to take home as a reminder of their commitment, please have them sign and take home.

discussion guide - older

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In Jesus' name, Amen.*

If you are able to have a copy for the children to take home as a reminder of their commitment, please have them sign and take home.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Faithful Stewardship."

New things are often exciting and celebrated. New shoes, new books, and new babies get a lot of attention. While new is fun and exciting, what we do with those new things is what really matters. How we take care of what we have been given is called "stewardship." Simply put, what we have is a gift from God!

This powerful concept for adults can be a difficult one for children. Look at something as simple as shoes. As an adult, you may have the same pair for more than a few years, and you take care of them. For a child, his or her feet grow so quickly they may have the same pair of shoes for only a few months.

Spend some time gathering items in your home that you have had for ten years or more. As you gather these items, think about when you received them and under what circumstances (a wedding or birthday present, graduation, etc.).

Ask your children to guess why they think each item is important. After they have guessed, tell the real story. Let your children know how important the item is to you and the ways you cared for it to keep it in good condition. Have a family story time.

Ask your children if they have any items they think are very important. How do they care for them?

After your discussion of possessions, let your children know they, too, are under your stewardship. They are children of God, and for their time here on Earth, you have the privilege of caring for, teaching, and disciplining them. Let them know you care for them as a precious gift from God.

Read I Peter 4:10 together:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

take action:

List as many gifts as you can that your family has. Discuss how you can care for these gifts so you can share with others and glorify God.

SESSION TEN

Caring and Sharing

Sharing God's Blessing



core value

God looks for boys and girls who take care of what they have and are willing to share with others. Children will learn that all they have comes from God and may be used in service to God's Kingdom.

For the Leader

In the last session we looked at the concept of caring with your group. One major way of demonstrating caring for others is by sharing what you have. Do you remember the give away game from our last group time? That was all about showing the children how giving they can be.

For most children, the idea of sharing can be difficult to grasp. Siblings understand they are supposed to share some things and often succeed at sharing. On the other hand, some of the biggest fights between siblings come when one is not interested in sharing. This can involve a favorite toy, time with a parent, or physical space. Be patient as you introduce this important concept, remembering that it is part of the developmental journey for children.

Taking good care of their possessions is also a part of the developmental journey for many children. Often, children fail to recognize that what they have is actually a gift from God.

activity

Give each child a piece of paper, and have crayons or markers for them to use. Ask them to draw one thing that is important to them in this world. Do not worry about how realistic or neat the drawings are; rather, encourage each child to do his or her best. When the drawings are done, ask each child how to share what he or she has drawn.

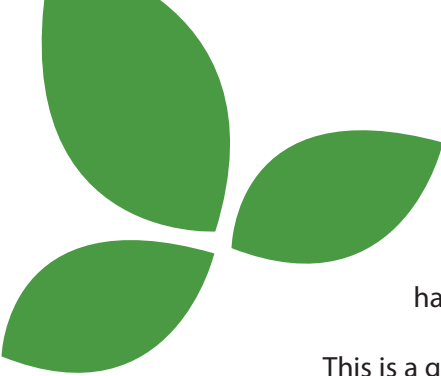
Read Psalm 24:1 out loud:

The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell within it.



The seventh Core Value is "Caring and Sharing."

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Go through each picture, and call out the child's name and object: "John's teddy bear belongs to the Lord" or "Anna's house belongs to the Lord." Tell the children in your group that everything in the world belongs to the Lord, but He loves us so much and wants such good things for us that God shares all He has with us. In turn, we should take the best care of it and share all that we have.

This is a great time to talk about how each child can share the object he or she drew with someone else.



Biblical Foundation—Sharing

Today we are going to look at famous siblings in the Bible. Who knows what a sibling is? Mary, Martha, and Lazarus all live together. In fact, it seems that Martha is the one who owns the home and allows her sister Mary and her brother Lazarus to live with her. These three people are very important to Jesus. Can you imagine being alive during the time of Jesus and having Him come to your house for dinner? Well, Jesus did that and more! He visited as often as He could and even stayed in this home while in Bethany.

Read or summarize the following three passages:

Luke 10:38-42 – Their home is a space for teaching, friendship, and food.

John 11:1-44 – A very important time in the life of their family. They shared a need instead of pretending they could do everything on their own.

John 12:2-3 – Their home, time with each other, food, and expensive perfume.

ask the class:

As you read, ask children to listen for one thing they think Mary, Martha, or Lazarus shared with Jesus. If they are unable to hear on their own what is being shared, prompt the students to listen for the items listed above and re-read the passages.

This may be best accomplished by reading and discussing the passages one at a time.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus certainly shared material possessions, food, and perfume. Equally important, they shared their lives with Jesus. They shared happy times and sad times. They shared freely and always with Jesus' best in mind.

Have you ever had a guest in your home? For many around the world, if a guest is in town, it is the children's room that becomes the guest room. Someone else sleeps in your bed, is in your space, and you may even be asked to give the best piece of fruit or dessert to your guest. This is not always easy to do but is what we should do. Remember Psalm 24:1? Everything in the world belongs to God, and He shares with us.



Activity

Play a game of “Red Light, Green Light” with your group. Have all the children line up shoulder to shoulder on one side of the room. Tell them to move quickly to a designated place on the other side of the room. (This may also be played on a field outside or any large area.) As you shout out “green light,” children move from their starting point to the ending point. As you shout out “red light,” children have to freeze. If they keep moving after you have shouted “red light,” they must go back to the starting point. The first child to make it to the finish line wins.

After you play, tell children that “Red Light, Green Light” is a reminder of how God wants us to share. God is always shouting “green light” or “Yes, share!” Too often we listen to our own voice and say “red light” or “No, do not share.”

The Daily Challenge

As you go throughout your week, look for red lights and green lights. Every time you see a green light, ask God to show you a new way to share what you have. Every time you see a red light, ask God for forgiveness for not sharing what you have. Remember, sharing does not always mean giving away your favorite toy. Sharing may also mean giving someone a smile, letting a friend play with your favorite toy, or giving up a seat for someone else. There are lots of ways to share!

Closing of Large Group Time— Transition to Small Groups

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are two sisters and a brother who are willing to share everything they have with Jesus and others. Each has his or her own special way of sharing. Mary likes to listen and offers an expensive gift of perfume. Martha is a willing servant, preparing food and being sure Jesus’ physical needs are covered, and Lazarus is a good friend who spends time with Jesus.

As you go to small group, think of your siblings you are most like.

Pray for the group as you close and send them to small groups. Thank God for all He shares with us and the privilege of getting to share with others.

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discussion guide - younger

ask the class:

How many of you have siblings?
Which one of your brothers or sisters are you most like? Why?

Review today's lesson – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we focused on sharing what God has given us. Sometimes that can be difficult. Psalm 24:1 reminds us that everything is the Lord's, and He asks us to share with others.

Ask the children to look at the pictures they drew earlier in this session. Add to them Psalm 24:1 by writing it on the pictures.

ask the class:

How might you be able to share the item that you drew with others this week?
What things did you share this past week? What gets in the way of sharing?

Think of a game that is easy to get materials for and that is a common game where you live. Maybe it is "Go Fish," kickball, or "Four Square." The game needs to be one where taking turns is prevalent throughout the entire game. As you present this game to your group, emphasize the need to take turns in order for the game to be fun for everyone. Continue to emphasize that skill as appropriate

Taking turns is one way to share with others.

ask the class:

What would the game look like without taking turns? How would you have felt?
When you think about taking turns in order to play the game with others, how does that make it better?

When we share with others, it can make something ordinary much more special and fun.

Pray for your group, for the willingness to share what we have been given, being thankful for all that each of us has been given and for the honor of sharing it with others.



discussion guide - older

ask the class:

How many of you have siblings? In what ways are you alike? Different?

What about your parents—do they have siblings? What family similarities or differences do you notice?

Review today's lesson – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we focused on sharing what God has given us. Sometimes that can be difficult. Psalm 24:1 reminds us that everything is the Lord's, and He asks us to share with others.

Ask the children to look at the pictures they drew earlier in this session. Add to them Psalm 24:1 by writing it on the pictures.

ask the class:

How might you be able to share the item that you drew with others this week?

What things did you share this past week? What gets in the way of sharing?

Sometimes the thing that gets in the way most of sharing is feeling like you do not have anything to share. This is far from the truth! God lets us know that each person is special and is given a gift from the Holy Spirit. You may not have many possessions, but you do have a lot to offer.

Help the older children create a list of things they could offer that do not cost any money or use material things, like helping a friend with chores, singing at church, smiling to someone who is sad, or befriending someone at school who does not have many friends. Next, create a list that might cost money or use material things, like sharing lunch, giving your allowance to someone else, allowing a friend to use your favorite dress for a special event, etc.

Pray for your group, for the willingness to share what we have been given, being thankful for all that each of us has been given and for the honor of sharing it with others.



home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit."

This week we focused on generously sharing all that God has given us. The Scripture focus was on the life of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

What does your family share well? Maybe you have someone over to eat often or you are able to share some of your resources to help another person. Discuss as a family one way you can share what God has given you. If this is a regular occurrence, help your children see that your family is already practicing being generous, and begin discussing another way to be generous with what you have.

Read Matthew 6:19-34 together. Discuss what this means.

take action:

Create a space (maybe a shoe box or a bowl) in a central location where you can do the following:

1. **Ask everyone to participate in decorating the space if possible.**
2. **Discuss what types of things each person in the family can share, maybe a talent or special gift, items that are currently in possession, or something that can be made and given away.**
3. **As you create as a family this list of items you want to share, decide *how* you want to share. Write your ideas on pieces of paper and put into the basket or box.**
4. **Each day in the week ahead, choose a sharing option that has been placed in the box or bowl and work to implement it.**

Matthew 6 teaches that the things we have—talents, gifts, possessions—should not be our focus or where we spend our time and energy. Rather, we should focus on Heaven and godly things. This includes being generous with who you are and what you have. It is easy to worry about not having enough, but let this be a reminder that God will take care of you. He will ensure that you have what you need.

Discuss your worries with one another about sharing these items with neighbors and friends. Spend time in prayer confessing these worries, and then ask God to take away any anxiety. Claim the promises found in Matthew 6 that God takes care of you.

SESSION ELEVEN

Living My Best

Making Each Choice Honor God



core value

God looks for boys and girls who make choices that please Him, even when those choices are difficult. God desires that all children live in a way that reflects their understanding of the love He has for them. This reflection should glorify God and encourage others to continue growing in their relationship with God.

Play a game of “Would You Rather” with your group. Give children two options so they practice making choices, direct them to one side of the room or the other based on their choice. Example: “Would you rather play in the rain or the snow?” Those who choose rain go to the left, and those who choose snow move to right. “Would you rather have a dog or a cat as a pet?” Those who choose a dog move to the left, and those who choose a cat move to the right. This is also a good opportunity to hear the reasons why they made those choices.

For the Leader

Living your best means making choices that please God. Making choices seems to come easily for children; however, many times children do not understand the choices they are making or that they have a choice.

When you were younger, what inspired you to live your best for God? What encouraged you to keep going? What discouraged you or got in your way? Maybe you were super quick to memorize Scripture, and that helped you grow in your relationship as you hid God’s Word in your heart. Maybe you struggled to go to church or surrounded yourself with non-believers, and that discouraged you in your choices. Whatever factors were in your life, some of the children likely encounter similar situations when it comes to living a life pleasing to the Lord.

As you reflect, choose something you feel comfortable sharing with the group.

Today we will focus on Daniel 3 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made the right choices despite difficult circumstances. They worshipped God even when it was hard, and it put them in the fiery furnace. We will use this story as an example of how we can remain steadfast even when it is really hard to make the right choice.

While it might seem that children make choices quickly, we want to help them make choices that will glorify the Lord. Taking time to think through choices and the rationale behind them is may be the most difficult part.



The eighth and final Core Value is “Living My Best.”

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity



Biblical Foundation-Living My Best

ask the class:

In what situations do you do your best and try the hardest?

Today we will learn about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who gave their best even in difficult circumstances.

Read or summarize Daniel 3.

When a specific sound was played, King Nebuchadnezzar demanded every person fall to their knees and worship the golden image he had set up. If anyone did not obey this rule, he or she would be thrown into a fiery furnace.

ask the class:

What would you do if you were told to bow to an image other than God?

The furnace is a hot place—like an oven with flames! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose not to follow the king's orders. They seemed to be the only ones who refused to bow down and worship. They were given a second chance to follow the rules and an opportunity to talk to the king.

ask the class:

Would you have followed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or would you have bowed down when you heard the special sound?

They respectfully told King Nebuchadnezzar they would not worship his idol. They wanted to be sure they worshipped only God. They knew the choice they were making could lead to horrible consequences, but their faith enabled them to stand firm. They chose to be steadfast in worshipping only God.

Sometimes, making the right choice is difficult. You know what you should do, but you feel a hesitation because of the consequences. When have you felt like this?

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thinking through their situation, they knew that God would save them. They trusted God with their lives because they knew He would never leave their side, which is why they simply could not worship anyone but God.

ask the class:

Have you ever felt this confident about a choice you made? When?

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Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace. What did King Nebuchadnezzar find when he looked into this furnace? Four people—not just the three! God protected them. He sent an angel to protect them in this furnace, and because of this, the king had a change of heart. He realized the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was real!

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood firm. They made a choice to live only for God even when the circumstances were difficult. They decided to worship God, no matter what the cost.

Have you ever been in a situation like this, where you know the choice that glorifies God, but that choice seems to have strong consequences? You know what choice glorifies God, but that choice seems to have strong consequences. Maybe those consequences mean your friends will laugh at you because they do not believe in God. Maybe it means one of your friends will leave you behind if you choose not to go against what your parents say.

ask the class:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego put God first. When do you put God first?

When do you choose not to put Him first? How can you change that?

The Daily Challenge

Staying focused and making good choices that please God can be difficult. When we memorize God's Word, it can help us stay focused.

A key verse that will help us live our best is from Deuteronomy 6:5 which says,

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

activity

Create different actions for the words in this verse. One idea:

- "Love"—Cross arms in "x" shape over chest.
- "Lord your God"—Point to Heaven.
- "Heart"—Form a heart with your two hands.
- "Soul"—Point to the sole of your foot.
- "Strength"—Flex your arm muscles.

Have children stand up and say the words of the verse and do the actions at the same time.



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Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength is what will help you live your best and make choices that please God. This verse helps us focus on what God wants us to do.

ask the class:

How can you continue to make the right choice?

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

As you end your group, ask everyone to share one good choice they can make this week.



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discussion guide - younger

You make choices every day. You may choose what to eat for breakfast, which book to read, or what clothes to wear.

ask the class:

What are some things you like to choose during the day?

Make a list with younger children so they can see that they really can make many of their own choices.

Review today's lesson from Daniel 3—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we focused on how to make choices that make God happy. Putting God first in all we do helps us make good choices.

ask the class:

Think about the past few days. What choices have you made that pleased God? What choices have you made that were not pleasing to God?

How could you make a better choice next time? How can you put God first?

Putting God first will help you make choices that please God. *Read **Philippians 4:8** together as a group.*

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Work as a group to summarize this verse in words that make sense to the children. An example might be, "God wants us to think about things that are good and helpful."

When God is first, our choices please Him, just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made choices that pleased God. No matter what happens, no matter what is asked of us, and no matter what seems easy, we can make choices that please God.

Pray for each child in your group with this verse and their responses in mind.



discussion guide - older

You make choices every day. You may choose what to eat for breakfast, which book to read, or what clothes to wear.

ask the class:

What are the easiest choices for you to make? The hardest? Why?

Review today's lesson from Daniel 3—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

ask the class:

What one thing was new about today's lesson?

Today we focused on how to make choices that make God happy. Putting God first in all we do helps us make good choices.

ask the class:

Think about the past few days. What choices have you made that pleased God?

What choices have you made that were not pleasing to God? What can you do differently so you please Him?

What makes it difficult to make good choices? How can you put God first?

Putting God first will help you make choices that please God. ***Read Philippians 4:8 together as a group.***

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Reflect on the choices you made this week. Which of these choices follow this Scripture by being true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, or admirable?

When God is first, our choices please Him, just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made choices that pleased God. No matter what happens, no matter what is asked of us, and no matter what seems easy, we can make choices that please God.

Pray for each child in your group with this verse and their responses in mind.

home connection

Parents: If you are also using the adult Christian to the Core curriculum, this session corresponds with the adult session, "Integrity."

Have you ever heard your child complimenting or scolding his or her toys, and it sounded a bit too familiar? Have you ever had a response from your child that took you by surprise because it sounded like your voice coming out of their tiny mouths? Children are uncanny at absorbing all that is around them, including good and bad habits of the adults with whom they spend time.

In this session, the children focused on the story from Daniel 3 of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their unwillingness to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They declared God would deliver them from the furnace and even if He did not, they would still do what was right and pleasing to Him.

This is a great story and one that many young people learn in church all over the world. However, it can be very difficult to live out. It is all about integrity.

Ask your children what they thought of this story. What new thing did they learn?

In what ways has your family made similar choices that pleased and honored God? While the hope is that there is never a furnace from which you need to be saved, you may find yourselves making unpopular choices. You might give away your best possessions to help others or choose not to participate in something that dishonors God.

take action:

Spend time as a family talking through one concrete way each member can stand up for God, even if it costs him or her. Close your time together by praying that you remember to encourage one another to walk with integrity and do just as God asks.

SESSION twelve

Living My Best

Thriving from the Core



The last eleven sessions have covered the Eight Core Values of the most effective Christians. These Core Values have been used by men and women throughout the world. You have had the opportunity of introducing them to the youngest in our faith communities. Make no mistake, they have heard, learned, and been shaped by the biblical teaching you offered. With small children, it can be difficult to tell if they are following you. Children have a way of revealing what they have absorbed at the most unusual times. Take heart! Your effort will show up in their friendships, their families, and in their prayer lives.

For the Leader

This is the time to remind your group of the Eight Core Values you have covered. Think through the Core Values and how each has made an impact in your life over the course of this teaching. It is a very common practice for teachers to deepen their own understanding as lessons are prepared for others.

As you prepare, read each Core Value along with the description. Consider writing each in your own words to solidify the meaning in your mind.

knowing god

God looks for boys and girls to know Him and spend time with Him. As children grow and mature in their faith, their relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit will show up in their daily lives.

loving others

God looks for boys and girls who show love through their words and actions. As children learn to look for people to love, they will share out of the overflow of their own relationship with God. This includes being kind and including those who may be overlooked or picked on.

Being god's child

God looks for boys and girls who live with the understanding that they have been created as God's beloved child. As children, they get to walk in humble confidence knowing that they have nothing to prove, while at the same time knowing they have much to offer. This occurs as they are encouraged to reach their full potential in Christ.

following Jesus

God looks for boys and girls who want to follow Jesus. Children will learn what it means to follow Jesus in their daily lives as they seek to imitate Christ as beloved children. Following Jesus begins as imitation and transitions into a daily choice.

intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity

Sharing Jesus

God looks for boys and girls who share the Good News of Jesus Christ as they understand it. Children will share authentically out of who they are and what they know about God in ways that are developmentally appropriate. This may include singing, drawing, dancing, or words of encouragement.

Celebrating Family

God looks for boys and girls who love their families. God offered the family as a gift and provides guidelines for developing healthy, strong families. Families are the place where children get to practice and live out God's love.

Caring and Sharing

God wants boys and girls to take care of what they have and share it with others. Children will learn that all they have comes from God and may be used in service to God's Kingdom.

Living My Best

God looks for boys and girls who make choices that please Him even when these choices are difficult. God desires that all children live in a way that reflects their understanding of the love He pours out for them. This reflection should both serve to glorify God and encourage children to continue growing in their relationship with God.

As children arrive, have the same fruit that you served at the first meeting available for a snack. Remind children of what the "core" of something is as you cut it into pieces to eat.

Ask the Class:

What would happen to the fruit if there was not a core holding it together?

Just like the fruit, we all have a core. The core we have impacts everything: how we live, what we believe about ourselves and others, how we treat our friends and family, how we take care of what we own, what we share, and, most importantly, how we serve God. Let your group know that this is the last session, and while it is the last time together, they can remember every day the core truths that will guide their lives

Biblical Foundation—Thriving from the Core

A lot of ground has been covered over the past eleven sessions. As you prepare for this time, read Colossians 3:1-17. This is a great summary of the material. Knowing that this passage is too dense for children, simply keep it in mind as you present this final lesson.

intimacy
 passion
 vision
 evangelism
 multiplication
 family
 stewardship
 integrity

Tell children to listen for what they are to avoid or not do.

Read Colossians 3:8-10.

ask the class:

What are the things we are to avoid or not do?

Tell children to listen for what they are to do.

Read Colossians 3:12-15.

ask the class:

What are the things we are to do?

We have just read several things that we should not do and several that we should. These lists are helpful, but there is one verse that shares a way to think through all we say and do.

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
— Colossians 3:17*

This is good news! You do not have to memorize lists when you do everything as if you were serving God. This means we do our best, try our hardest, and keep God in mind for all choices.

Either have one large paper for all children to write on or provide each child with a small piece of paper that you will tape together. Ask each child to think of one thing they “do.” This may be play with friends, make their bed, sing, or homework. The task does not matter. Have children draw a picture of themselves doing the activity. Invite them to think of this activity as a way to offer thanks to God.

They may need help to make the connection. For example, if they chose singing, they may thank God for their voice. If they chose homework, they may thank God that they live in a country where they get to go to school.



The eighth and final Core Value is “Living My Best.”

*intimacy
passion
vision
evangelism
multiplication
family
stewardship
integrity*

Activity

This activity will require a little preparation before the children arrive. Write the names of the Core Values, each on a separate sheet of paper. There will be a total of eight sheets of paper. Find a small stone on which you can write "Jesus Christ." Take yarn or twine, and wrap it around the stone to create a ball that will easily unravel. (The entire rock will be covered.) Have the children sit in a circle. Hand out the eight sheets of paper, but not in order so that they are scattered throughout the circle. Hand the ball of yarn to the child holding the paper that states "Knowing God." Ask him to say how he may know God better. After he shares, he tosses it to another person, holding on to end of the yarn so it begins to unravel. It will create spider web look as it is tossed from child to child. The next person also says one way in which she may know God better. Depending on the size of your group, have at least two to three children offer their ideas to go with the first Core Value before moving to the second Core Value, "Loving Others." The topic then shifts to how they may love others. Proceed until every Core Value has been addressed. Your yarn should be almost to the end. You may need to toss it a few extra times at the end to get to the core of your ball. The same child may have the ball of yarn more than once.

Finish unraveling the ball of yarn. Ask the children what they thought was in the middle of the ball. Reveal that it is a stone, but not an ordinary stone. Rather, it is one with the words "Jesus Christ" written on it. Jesus is the core of all the values you have covered for the last twelve sessions together.

When we make Jesus the very center of who we are and what we do, the Eight Core Values become a way of life, and we are able to thrive.

The Daily Challenge—Remembering to Thrive

Rocks or stones are often readily available all over the world. Depending on your setting, either have a pile of rocks already assembled from which children may choose, or allow them to go outside to collect their own rocks. Write the name "Jesus Christ" on each rock. Encourage children to see the rock as a reminder that Jesus is at the core of their lives and that He wants them to thrive. Part of thriving is doing their very best for God as a way of worshipping and serving Him.

Closing of Large Group Time—Transition to Small Groups

Pray for the group as you close and send them to small groups. Thank God for each person who has been in the *Christian to the Core* training for adults, youth, and children. Pray for God to remind each person of all they have learned. Finally, invite children to hold their stones while they pray as a reminder that Jesus is to be the core of all they are do.

intimacy
 passion
 vision
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 family
 stewardship
 integrity

discussion guide - younger

Ask the children to hold the rock they just received and look at it for a moment.

ask the class:

What will this rock help us remember?

This is to help us remember that Jesus is at the core, and we can thrive by doing our best for God as a way to worship and serve Him.

Review today's lesson—Colossians 3:1-17, and focus on 3:17.

ask the class:

What kind of things are we not to do? What are the things we are to be or do?

Before small group time, cut a sheet of paper into nine strips for each child (one for each Core Value and one for the verse). These strips of paper will be used to create a chain at the end of the session. To create the chain after each Core Value, take a slip of paper and make into a circle. Secure it with tape, glue, or staple. Take the second and put it through the first and make a circle so the two are connected. Secure. Repeat with all nine strips.

Think about the Eight Core Values we discussed the past few weeks. Review with the group one by one, and use some of the descriptors the children shared during the activity in the lesson. As each Core Value is discussed, ask the children to draw a simple picture to help them remember what it is.

ask the class:

Which of these Core Values do you tend to think of as being easier than the others? Why? Is there one that is more difficult? What makes it so?

These Core Values, now made into a chain, help us remember how strong we are when Jesus is our focus. Colossians 3:17 says,

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
— Colossians 3:17*

All of these things come together as we keep our focus on God. Add this verse to the last strip of paper, and add it to your chain.

Pray Colossians 3:17 for your small group as children hold their stone in one hand and the chain in the other.



discussion guide - older

Ask the children to hold the rock they just received and look at it for a moment.

ask the class:

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This is to help us remember that Jesus is at the core, and we can thrive by doing our best for God as a way to worship and serve Him.

Review today's lesson—Colossians 3:1-17 and focus on 3:17.

ask the class:

What kind of things are we not to do? Why do these make the list?

What kind of things should we be or do? Why is this so?

Before small group time, cut a sheet of paper into nine strips for each child (one for each Core Value and one for the verse). These strips of paper will be used to create a chain at the end of the session. To create the chain after each Core Value, take a slip of paper and make into a circle. Secure it with tape, glue, or staple. Take the second and put it through the first and make a circle so the two are connected. Secure. Repeat with all nine strips.

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Pray Colossians 3:17 for your small group as children hold their stone in one hand and the chain in the other.



home connection

What a journey the past 12 weeks have been! We have learned who God is, how to love others, who we are in Christ, how to follow and share Jesus, how to celebrate family, share with others, and live our best for God alone.

As you think back over this study, what stands out as being most meaningful for you and your family? Where have you grown the most together as a family? Which of the Eight Core Values was most rewarding to experience together? Which was the most challenging? How can your family continue practicing these core values on a daily basis?

Today we learned what it means to live with Jesus as the foundation of our lives. Colossians 3:1-17 is our foundational Scripture that encompasses all we have learned about living out the Core Values.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. — Colossians 3:17

This is a great verse to use when talking with children who may have a difficult time memorizing Scripture but can understand the concept of doing everything for God. At home this week, review each Core Value and how you practiced them as a family throughout the study.

When we live Christian to the Core, much fruit is produced.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. — Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

take action:

Together, talk about what each “fruit” means. Share where you see an example in every family member’s life.

Write each fruit of the Spirit on a separate piece of paper and place in different spots around the house. As family members see the fruit in each other’s lives, encourage one another with that experience. When this happens, have that family member write his or her name on the paper along with the “fruit” exhibited. As the week concludes, encourage one another to continue focusing on Christ-like living so your family will continually bear fruit for God’s Kingdom.

