

Stories of God's People



To be used with Gather 'Round curriculum

by Kathy Weaver Wenger

This series of lessons begins with one of my favorite stories from childhood – Balaam and his donkey. I think a man beating his donkey caught my attention as much as the donkey talking. What has stayed with me is that the donkey knew what was going on before the man!

Some in your congregation will have similar experiences – hearing old stories, remembering, hearing them again through the filter of current life experiences. Others will be introduced to these characters for the first time. It is an opportunity to hear how God has been at work in ordinary people for a long time. This same God lives in and through us today.

In these biblical stories we see how God was present to the people in their joys, challenges and sorrow which we in turn can see how God is present to us in our daily lives. The biblical stories tell us who we are and where we belong. The stories help us know where we have come from and where we are going. We are part of the long history of stories about God's people.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This worship guide connects summer worship themes with Gather 'Round curriculum sessions. If you have Sunday worship first, Christian education classes may explore worship themes in greater depths through *Connect* and *Response* activities. If you have Christian education first, invite children and youth to share their gifts of music, reading, and drama in worship. They may lead prayers and litanies or present contemporary skits to go along with the biblical texts. If you do not have summer Christian education, this guide will bring Gather 'Round themes into your worship.

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIPPERS

Refer regularly to the following Gather 'Round materials: *Together* (the multiage student book) and the *Multiage Teacher's Guide*, *Connect* (the parent/caregiver guide book, and *Youth* (supplemental materials). There are great creative and inspirational ideas that you will not want to miss. Make sure these are available to each worship leader and person preaching.

Other materials needed:

- Pictures from the resources packet or on-line art prints for the Hall of Faith
- Gather 'Round music CD
- *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (HWB) – Mennonite Publishing Network (MPN)
- *Sing the Journey* (SJ) – MPN
- *Sing the Story* (SS) – MPN
- Books for children's time *Are You Joking, Jeremiah?* by Norman C. Habel, Concordia Publishing House, 1970. (Optional for session 9)
- "Fun Bible Skits" in the resources packet
- *VIA: Exploring the Way of Christ* curriculum (MPN) Story from DVD for session 10 (optional)
- *Words for Worship 2*, Herald Press

Other resources are referred to in the Gather 'Round materials.

Note: If your congregation uses this curriculum during the Sunday school hour, consult with the teachers about the best ways to use the content. If your congregation does not have summer Sunday school, consider using some of the stories and activities with the children during the children's time. For example, the story from the Oasis of Peace community about the Palestinian Arab and Israeli Jewish boys who become friends (*Together* p.16) is a good option for Session 3.

VISUALS

Don't overlook this aspect of worship. For those who grasp things better visually this is a key part of worship.

Drape a table with a green cloth. Throughout the summer use a symbol of faithfulness like a rainbow or a cross plus additional items suggested weekly. Or, use only what is suggested with each session.

If the Hall of Faith is not being done during the education time, begin one by posting pictures, one at a

time, of biblical characters in a banner format or clip to a line. See the resources packet materials.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome – Connect worship and the theme to the lives of your people.

Call to worship – Acknowledge God’s presence and why we gather. Worship may have started with the prelude or gathering song, but with these words we corporately verbalize our desire/intent to worship God.

Offering – Some churches consider this part of a praising section while others choose to make it a response. Either way, be creative and active with this part of worship.

Children’s time – Included in each service. Check ahead for possible additional items needed.

Scripture – Include memory work, readers theater, and other creative readings from *Together*, plus selections from the “Fun Bible Skits” books.

Confessions and affirmations of faith – One of these is in most services. Also include times of silence.

Sermon – Be sure to read the “Bible Insight” in the Gather ’Round materials. It is the same in all levels. Additional excellent ideas and background are found in the multiage, youth, and adult Gather ’Round resources.

Prayers of the people – As Anabaptists we believe that worship has both vertical and horizontal elements. This time could include persons responding to what they heard and how they have experienced God during worship.

Benediction – Conclude with a blessing and brief challenge to the people as they look toward their daily routine.

Don’t be limited by the materials written. Use them as a springboard and feel free to adapt. You know your people and what works best for helping them connect to and experience God. Summer is a great time to try new things. Creatively make the stories of these biblical characters come alive and be relevant for today.

PREPARATION

- Prayerfully read through the worship guide to get an overall sense of the flow of the summer worship resources. Open yourself to what God’s Spirit wants to teach you about the biblical stories of God’s people.
- Study the biblical background material in the weekly “Bible Insight” by Christina Bucher, “Connect to the Story,” and helpful comments in the sidebars (see *Multiage Teacher’s Guide*).
- Use the daily devotionals in *Connect* in your personal devotional time.
- Gather visuals for the worship table.
- Gather objects for children’s time.
- Invite people of all ages to share in worship leading.
- Prayerfully prepare for the worship service

REMINDER

The worship resources coordinate with the summer quarter which begins on May 30 and ends on August 29.



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Permission to photocopy

Subscribers to *Leader* are welcome to photocopy worship materials in this section.

Balaam, the donkey, and the angel



Text: Numbers 22-24

Focus statement: Pay attention to God's voice.

Visuals: Old-fashioned hearing aid, bell, shofar, cell phone, and other items that get our attention

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Psalm 29:1-9

Prayer: HWB 672 or:

It is in you, O God, that we live and move and have our being. As we meet you in worship this morning, make us sensitive to your presence and your voice. Open us to your guidance and give us the courage to follow. You are worthy of our trust and we worship you, God.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SS 5 *Open my ears, open my eyes*

HWB 569 *Day by day, dear Lord*

HWB 163 *Obey my voice*

SJ 5 *Come and be light for our eyes*

Praise song: "In the Secret" by Andy Park, Vineyard Music

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Confession:

Sometimes we wish that God were clearer when trying to get our attention. We confess that because we are focused on our own agenda and very busy, we often miss God's voice. Read 1 Kings 19:11-13 a. Follow with silence.

Song: HWB 594 *Lord, you sometimes speak*

Children's time:

Ahead of time record about 5 sounds that children will be able to identify (dog barking, car horn, baby crying, thunder storm, someone whispering). Ask the children to name the sounds they hear. How do they identify the sounds? We have to listen carefully and pay attention. In the same way, we need to listen carefully for God's voice. We can hear God's voice in the gentle words of people, in the sounds of nature and when we are all by ourselves. Invite response from the children on other ways to pay attention to God. Invite them to listen to the Bible story to learn of a very surprising way that God spoke to a man named Balaam.

Scripture reading: Numbers 22:18-35

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for further inspiration.)

In the time and culture of Balaam, donkeys were valued and an indicator of wealth. They carried heavy loads but were treated well. Perhaps Balaam's treatment of his donkey indicated not only his frustration with the animal but also his struggle with God. Did he want to hear what God was saying? Did the sound of recognition, wealth, and power drown out God? What blocks us from hearing God's voice? How do we respond if what we hear isn't what we expect or what is pleasant? Nothing is more important than obeying God. Who has helped you hear God's voice?

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SS 65 *Abre mis ojos (Open my eyes)*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SJ 42 *Listen, God is calling*

Benediction:

Go now and be aware of God
Go now and hear God speak.
Go now and be surprised by God,
For God may come to you anytime and anywhere.
Go anticipating to meet God.
Listen and be blessed.

Session Two

Deborah the prophet



Text: Judges 4 & 5

Focus statement: God provides leaders.

Visuals:

Balance scales, symbols of leadership – mallet, award or plaque; pictures of past and present congregational and denominational leaders

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship:

Leader: Rise to your feet and say,
People: “What a great thing God has done!”
Leader: Make music to God, to the God of Israel.
People: To God, yes to God, I’ll sing.
Leader: Lift your hearts high with abandon!
People: Bless the Lord!

—adapted from Judges 5:3, 9, *The Message*

Prayer:

Amazing God, we gather in awe as we remember how you led your people and empowered ordinary women and men to guide others. We say with Miriam and Moses, “Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? In your steadfast love you led the people who you redeemed” (Ex. 15: 11&13). Guide us today as we open our hearts to worship you.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SJ 19	<i>I will call upon the Lord</i>	HWB 545	<i>Be thou my vision</i>
HWB 17	<i>We gather together</i>	GR CD	<i>Rejoice in the Lord always (text, Together p. 2)</i>
SJ 12	<i>Contai ao Senhor (O sing to the Lord)</i>		

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Affirmation of faith: SS 199

Children’s time:

Play a simplified version of “Follow the Leader.” Do a simple activity such as clapping your hands until everyone joins in, then touch your ears, etc. After a few rounds ask, “Who wants to be the leaders?” Take time for a few people to be leaders. (Be sure that one of the children who leads is a girl). Ask, why did some children like to be leaders and some don’t want to lead? Not everyone can be leaders and not everyone can be followers. The Bible is full of stories of leaders and followers. Today we will learn about a good leader named Deborah. Deborah was a judge—she listened to two sides of the problem and then had to make a decision on what to do. Deborah knew that God would help her be a good leader. Offer a prayer asking God to help the children become good leaders.

Song: HWB 304 *There are many gifts*

Scripture reading:

Judges 4:1-10 (or see *Connect* p. 22 for a comparative reading between Judges 4 (story) and Judges 5 (song)).

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

What are the qualities of a good leader? Why do we need leaders? “A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go but ought to be.” —Rosalynn Carter

The Mennonite Church advocates a priesthood of all believers rather than having one person who makes all of the decisions. How do we balance that with respecting those who are called and designated as leaders?

Do you believe that God provides leaders at given times to guide the congregation? Interview one of the leaders in your congregation.

What women have given you wise counsel? Was Deborah the only female who filled this high calling of a judge. How do you affirm and use the gifts of women in your congregation?

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SS 31 *Jesus, be the center*

Prayers of the people (Include prayers for congregational, local, and national leaders.)

SENDING

Song: HWB 418 *Move in our midst*

Benediction: *Words for Worship 2*, 165

Session Three

Ruth and Naomi



Text: Ruth

Focus statement: Outsiders can teach us about God's love.

Visuals: Stalks of grain, basket, passport, knapsack, items we use from various cultures

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: SS 190 or litany "God's Love" in *Together* p. 6.

Prayer: SJ 139

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SJ 3 *Jesus calls us here to meet him*

SJ 44 *The Love of God*

HWB 306 *In Christ there is no East or West*

HWB 362 *Help us to help each other*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Time of confession: *Words for Worship 2*, 58 or:

Eternal God, God of all people and places, we confess that our ears are closed to voices of pain and wisdom when they speak in accents other than our own. Our sensibilities are jarred by the way those we call “foreign” express their faith in Christ. We cling to the pride of nation and denomination as if we have a special claim on truth and your love.

Gracious God, forgive us and renew a right spirit within us, a spirit of compassion, understanding, and humility. Enable us to incarnate God’s love and to see God’s love in new ways.

Children’s time:

There are many children’s books that feature this theme of who’s in and who is out. Examples: *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting (Clarion Books) about a young immigrant who gains self-confidence when the green apple she picks perfectly complements the other students red apples; *You are Special* by Max Lucado (Crossway Books) is a touching story about God’s love for us regardless of our abilities or looks. Remind the children that God loves everyone the same, and we can experience God’s love from people who are the same and different from us.

Song: SS 117 *How can I say*

Scripture reading: Ruth 1:22-2:13 or “Fun Bible Skits 2,” Ruth.

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

Ruth was a foreigner and a widow. We are challenged in the scriptures to give special attention to persons in those categories. Instead, we more readily feel superior, looking down on those who wear dirty clothes, speak differently than us, or don’t fit in socially. Who are the outsiders in your community, your congregation? How do we respond to immigrants? Consider the hospitality level of your congregation. Do we, like Boaz, give more than what is required, particularly to those we consider different? God uses unexpected people to fulfill God’s purposes. Conclude with HWB 683.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SS 52 *Whatever you do*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*

Benediction: *Words for Worship 2*, 156, or Colossians 3:12-17

Elijah



Text: I Kings 17

Focus statement: God provides for our needs.

Visuals: Bottle of oil, flour, circle of people candle, widow's cake (*Youth* p. 11)

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Psalm 46:1-3, 7

Prayer:

We come before your loving and awesome presence, O Lord, to worship you. Quiet our busy minds and fearful hearts. Even when the foundations of our existence are shaken and we cannot see beyond the present moment, we know that you are here. You are our refuge and for that we praise you. Amen

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SS 72	<i>We are often tossed and driven</i>	SJ 54	<i>Longing for light</i>
HWB 37	<i>Praise to the Lord, the Almighty</i>	SS 99	<i>The Lord's my shepherd</i>
SJ 1	<i>We sing to you, O God</i>		

Praise song: "Gratitude" by Nichole Nordeman (Woven and Spun)

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Affirming our faith: *Words for Worship* 2, 132

Children's time:

Ahead of time, cut out pictures of things that could be needs or wants (i.e. house, food, water, clothing vs. toys, candy/junk food, DVD, Nintendo game). Put a small piece of magnetic tape on each. Label two large cookie sheets; one with Needs and the other Wants. Talk about the difference between what we need and what we want. Have the children attach the pictures on the correct sheet. Are there items they would add to the sheet? If the children are older, talk about situations where even the basic needs are not provided, i.e., in the case of refugees, homeless, hungry families. How can we work with God in providing food?

Books that could be used are: *The Goat Lady* by Jane Bregoli (Tilbury House) tells the story of an elderly woman who raised goats to provide milk for needy people; *Faith the Cow* by Susan Bame Hoover and Maggie Sykora tells the story of the Heifer Project (The Heifer Project).

Song: SJ 69 *Cuando el pobre (When the poor ones)*

Scripture reading: 1 Kings 17 (Do the reading in *Together*, p. 21 or the skit in “Fun Bible Skits” 1, #7).

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

When did God provide for you, physically or spiritually? There is a balance between waiting upon God and being proactive. God always provides, even if it isn't in the time or way we wish or expect. Trust God in difficult times.

This is an opportunity to assure people of God's love and care. It is also a time to encourage sensitivity and action for those in need. Proverbs 15:17 in *The Message* says, “Better a bread crust shared in love than a slab of prime rib served in hate.”

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SJ 103 *Why should I feel discouraged*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SJ 29 *You are all we have*

Benediction:

God is generous and gracious. Go into a world of need trusting God to bless you and then empower you to bless others.

Session Five

Elisha and the Shunammite Woman



Text: 2 Kings 4:8-37

Focus statement: God hears our cries in times of troubles.

Visuals: Bottle of oil, cross, prayer, candles – lit just before or during anointing

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: *Words for Worship* 2, #11 or Psalm 18:1-3, 6, 16-19, 46

Prayer: (alternate singing and scripture reading)

HWB 25, verse 1 *Jesus, stand among us*

Psalm 13:1-3a

HWB 25, verse 2

Psalm 13:5-6

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

HWB 377 *Healer of our every ill*

HWB 26 *Holy Spirit, come with power*

HWB 110 *Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing*

Praise song: “I waited for the Lord on high,” Bill Batstone (Maranatha Praise)

Praise song: “Blessed Be,” Matt and Beth Redman (Sixsteprecords)

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Children’s time:

Bring a prayer shawl, special blanket or a comforter from home and some soft toys.

Invite the children to tell about a time when they felt sad (or tell of a time you felt sad as a child and what you did). What do we do when we are sad? Invite responses (sit on a parent’s lap, curl up in a blanket, lay in bed, hold on to a special toy). These are some ways we can comfort ourselves.

Tell how some churches (maybe your own) have a special toy like a soft lamb that they give to children when they are sick or feeling sad because someone they loved died. Some families have a prayer shawl or special blanket they use to remind them that God is with them in their sad times.

If possible, curl up with or under the blanket. Remind the children that God is with us just like being wrapped in a blanket or hugging a soft toy. Give a prayer of thanks to God for being with us when we are sad.

Song: HWB 11 *Sweet hour of prayer*

Scripture reading: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (For a dramatic reading of this story, see the *Multiage Leader*, p. 36.)

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

Elisha means “God is deliverance.” Even when bad things happen to good people, God is there and feels the pain. We can’t take away the problems, but we can trust that God hears our cries of despair, guides us to the light and will deliver. If there has been the death of a child or young person in the congregation, acknowledge that journey.

Mennonite Women USA has offered Sister Care events as a way for women to walk with and encourage each other. What are you doing to respond to grief and despair? Lead into the anointing service, inviting those who are crying out, to be anointed as a symbol of God’s power filling and healing them.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Anointing service:

HWB 348 *O Lord, hear my prayer*

SS 50 *Waza nomthwalo wakho (Come, bring your burdens to God)*

HWB 558 *When the storms of life are raging*

HWB 559 *O thou, in whose presence*

SS 45 *Calm me, Lord*

Prayers of the people:

(If you choose not to do an anointing service, use SJ 146, otherwise have a brief prayer at the conclusion of the anointing.)

SENDING

Song: HWB 596 *And I will raise you up*

Benediction: Isaiah 40:28-31

Session Six

Naaman and Elisha



Text: 2 Kings 5:1-19

Focus statement: We humbly accept God's way of caring.

Visuals: Clear container of dirty water, praying hands, remedies for ailments

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Psalm 103: 1-5, 10-13

Prayer:

Tender God, thank you that you have compassion for your children. Help us to have child-like faith in you believing that you know us intimately and will heal us in whatever way that is needed. Caring and powerful God, receive our worship as we gather in your presence.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SS 1 *Praise the one who breaks the darkness*

HWB 546 *Guide my feet*

HWB 143 *Amazing Grace*

HWB 627 *There is a balm in Gilead*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Confession: HWB 818 (verses from Psalm 51)

Sing *Create in me a clean heart* (SS 62) after segments 1 & 3 found in the HWB confession. Read the last segment in unison.

Children's time:

Talk about skin rashes like poison ivy or even mosquito bites or scrapes. Show examples of creams or other remedies that are used to make them better. Some rashes don't go away easily and are very noticeable. People may not want to come near for fear that they will get a rash too. God can give people courage to care for people who have diseases.

For older children, read the story, “You are God’s Hands” from *Don’t Be Afraid: Christians in Times of Trouble* (Faith and Life Resources).

Song: HWB 307 *Will you let me be your servant*

Scripture reading: 2 Kings 5:1-19 “Fun Bible Skit” 1, #8, (or, See reading with props in *Connect* p. 54).

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

Refer to the Children’s time discussion about home remedies (i.e. rubbing a potato on a wart). God’s ways are different from ours. Perhaps that is the first thing we should acknowledge. God sees a bigger, perhaps deeper picture. We see through a glass darkly. Some people, even today, are miraculously healed – physically and/or emotionally. The key is, can we humbly accept God’s desired way and time of healing? Note how each of the characters in the story had to be humble. (See Psalm 25:9 and 2 Chronicles 7:14)

We need to first recognize our need to be healed. Sometimes, as it almost did for Naaman, anger and pride can block healing. There is some healing care that money and ideal conditions cannot provide.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: HWB 504 *Have thine own way*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SS 95 *Jesus has done so much for me*

Benediction:

Leader: God is good all the time.

People: **All the time, God is good.**

Leader: All the time, God is good.

People: **God is good all the time.**

Session Seven

Jonah: Part 1



Text: Jonah 1 and 2

Focus statement: God finds us.

Visuals: GPS, map, large flashlight, “Where’s Waldo” poster or 3D hidden picture

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Words for Worship 104

Prayer:

Loving God, we are so grateful that you find us wherever we are. Even when we try to hide from you, you seek us out. Thank you for your forgiveness when we have been self-centered and strayed from the fullness of life that you offer to us. We now want to be open to your Spirit wooing us this morning as we worship you with our thoughts and words.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

HWB 115 <i>Jesus, thou mighty Lord</i>	SJ 80	<i>Christ be near</i>
HWB 46 <i>I sing the mighty power of God</i>	SS 49	<i>I will come to you in the silence</i>

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Children's time:

Ask the children if they like to play "Hide and Seek"? Why do they like the game? Do they like to be the one who hides or the one who is? It's fun finding really good hiding spots. But we really like to be found, too. It would not be much fun if we were hiding and the person who is it forgot about us or gave up looking for us.

Read the classic children's story, *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown (HarperCollins, revised edition). Wonder together if God is like the mother rabbit. Encourage the children to listen to the story of how Jonah could not run away from God. Thank God for always watching over us.

Affirming our faith: Psalm 139 (Reading, "God finds us," *Together* p. 7)

Song: SJ 39 *Cuando el pobre (When the poor ones)*

Scripture reading: "Fun Bible Skits 1" #10 (or read Jonah 1 & 2 as a radio broadcast – with sound effects!)

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

How do we respond when children disobey? Jonah resisted his mission. Why? Do we run from God when God asks us to do something that makes us uncomfortable? God will use events and/or people to get us back on track. God doesn't need a GPS to find us. Even when God challenges us it is embedded in love.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: HWB 506 *I sought the Lord*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: HWB 430 *God be with you*

Benediction:

Go in the healing power of Christ, humbly open to God's touch upon you and ready to be used by God to bring healing to others.

Jonah: Part 2



Text: Jonah 3 and 4

Focus statement: God's mercy includes everyone.

Visuals:

Globe or mounted world map with pictures of persons from various cultures attached, candles of differing dimensions and colors. Place items on a coarse, heavy cloth.

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Come. Worship the God whose mercy extends to everyone.

Prayer: SJ 142

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

HWB 397 *God loves all his many people*

HWB 87 *Great is the Lord*

HWB 145 *There's a wideness in God's mercy*

SS 113 *I will stand in the congregation*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Children's time:

"It's not fair!" is a common refrain from children. Share a story from your childhood about not being treated fairly. How do we feel when things do not seem fair with our sisters or brothers?

Read or tell a story about unfair treatment, such as *Bully Bill* by Joy Birky (Herald Press); or for older children, "Peace Chief" in *Plant a Seed of Peace* by Rebecca Seiling (Herald Press). Remind the children that God's love is for everyone, even those who don't treat us kindly.

Song: HWB 72 *When all thy mercies*

Scripture reading: Jonah 3 & 4 (Use the Reader's Theater in *Connect*, p. 130-131).

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

Are we willing to give those who have done something wrong a second chance? NFL player Michael Vic was given a second chance by the Philadelphia Eagle's coach Andy Reid because of what Reid went through with his sons. (Or use a more current example.) Jonah knew the Assyrian's history of violent oppression and worshipping many gods. He did not think they deserved God's mercy. "Let's not get smug about the rotten old sinners in Nineveh. We all need to go through the repentance door if we want to be hugged by God," Adrian Plass (quoted in *Connect*, p. 71). Don't give up on wayward friends and children. Everyone needs God.

RESPONDING TO GOD

This is a good Sunday to extend an invitation for salvation.

Song of response: SJ 92 *Just as I am* (Or play “Change my heart O God” from the Gather ’Round CD.)

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SS 57 *Go, my friends, in grace*

Benediction:

Luke 1:50, followed by a simple phrase like, “God’s love be with you” in several languages.

Session Nine

Jeremiah’s call



Text: Jeremiah 1:1-10

Focus statement: God knows and blesses us.

Visuals: Bible (This is a good Sunday to involve a variety of ages in the worship service. You may also want to consider having a parent/child dedication or blessing of mentors and youth mentees.)

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship:

God has called us here, just as he has called each of us to follow him. God has called us with the loving promise to forgive, bless, and empower us to live faithfully. Praise the God who knows each of us intimately and meets us here in this time of worship.

Prayer: *Words for Worship* 2, 29

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SJ 38 *Beloved, God’s chosen*

SJ 34 *Loving Spirit*

SS 37 *Firstborn of Mary*

SS 39 *Will you come and follow me*

HWB 389 *Take my life*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Affirmation of faith

Children's time:

Give some examples of family rituals of blessing—notes in lunches, prayers or special words at the start of the day or at bedtime, or for birthdays. Refer to Jeremiah 29:11. Assure the children that they are special. Perhaps you could make simple bookmarks with Jeremiah's words for each child.

If possible, invite a parent or grandparent to come with the child. Ask them to tell one thing that is special about their child. Remind the group that God created us to be unique, different, and God loves us because we are all special in our own way.

Offer a blessing to each child, by touching them lightly on the shoulder or head, naming them, and telling that God knows them by name, loves them so much, and will be with them in a special way every day, all day long, even when they are as old as their parents and grandparents.

Song: SS 114 *God has chosen me*

Scripture reading:

Jeremiah 1:1-10 (See the Reader's Theater in *Together*, p. 38, or use an excerpt from *Are you Joking, Jeremiah?* by Norman C. Habel, Concordia Publishing House.)

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

God still calls young people. Do you believe that? Have someone tell their story of hearing God's call when they were young or you tell the story of someone your congregation knows. We are all called to use our gifts to honor God. Encourage your congregation to tap young people, giving them opportunity to use their gifts for God and the church. Being a prophet is not a popular vocation, but our calling can carry us through adversity.

When the task seems daunting, remember that God knows you intimately. "The leap of faith is not over a canyon or into a fire. It does not necessitate a mindless transference of my logic or my trust into the unknown. This leap of faith is into the strong arms of a loving God. There is no safer place."—Ellie Lofaro (quoted in *Connect* p. 79).

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: HWB 395 *Here I am, Lord*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SJ 57 *The Lord bless you and keep you*

Benediction:

"May God's ways fill your mind (*touch your head*), may your words be kind and true (*touch your lips*), may you see beauty in yourself and others (*touch your eyes*), and may you hear Jesus' voice and follow (*touch your ears*). Conclude with SS 145.

Four men in exile



Text: Daniel 1

Focus statement: Dare to be different.

Visuals: Fresh fruit and vegetables

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship:

Leader: Blessed are those who are steadfast in faith and show the mercy of God.

People: **God can do all things and the ways of God are greater than we can imagine.**

Leader: Therefore, sisters and brothers, be steadfast, immovable, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

People: **We wait for God and the strength and courage God offers.**

All: *We will stand firm and without fear, for God is worthy of our praise.*
—based on 1 Corinthians 15:58

Prayer:

Lord, we come before you this morning as humble servants, desiring to be faithful to what you have called us. Take our gifts and inadequacies and use them to bring glory to your name. Touch us with your love and power and give us courage to be true to you.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

SJ 45 *In the morning when I rise*

SJ 75 *Be still*

SJ 22 *By the waters of Babylon*

SJ 50 *Keep me safe. O God*

HWB 76 *Je louerai l'Éternel*
(Praise, I will praise you, Lord)

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Affirmation of faith: *Words for Worship* 2, 128 (Adapt last line)

Children's time:

Bring in a plate with a variety of snack finger foods: cut up vegetables and fruit, crackers, pita bread, cheese cubes, dried fruit, etc. (Include ethnic snacks and non-traditional food items.) Have each child take one snack item. Encourage them to explain why they chose the snack they did. Which one would they not eat? Why not? If there are children with food allergies, have them tell about the decisions they have to make about food. How can children be supportive of those who eat differently for whatever reason? Briefly tell the story of Daniel's decision not to eat the food that was given him for religious reasons. Talk about the difficult

decisions people hate to make sometimes because of their beliefs.

(*Option:* Find a book or internet site that tells of the Jewish Passover meal. Bring some of the foods for the children to taste. Tell of the importance Jewish families still place on eating kosher foods. Connect with Daniel's story about eating foods that were healthy and not connected with the religion of the Babylonians.)

Song: "Dare to be a Daniel" by Philip Bliss (public domain)

Scripture reading: Daniel 1 (Read in sections)

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

How do you think persons who are forced to assimilate into another culture, like Native Americans, might feel? Going against cultural expectations is not easy. For a current story, view and/or show the Bonus clip in the VIA curriculum about a young soldier from a military family who was convicted to leave the military. Sometimes choices about how and what we eat are based on ethics.

At one time Mennonites were known as the different ones. Since it is no longer dress that sets us apart, what are our "marks" of non-conformity? Do others know they are based on our faith? This story calls for us to be sensitive to those who are different than us and to take the time to find out why they believe and do what they do. It also offers a challenge to contemporary Anabaptists to be willing once again to be set apart for Christ.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: HWB 545 *Be thou my vision* or HWB 374 *O young and fearless prophet*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: HWB 435 *May the Lord, mighty God*

Benediction: "Go with us, God" (*Together*, p. 7)

Session Eleven

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abenego



Text: Daniel 3

Focus statement: Stand firm in the faith.

Visuals: Modern day "idols" placed on the table

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: (Begin with the blowing of a shofar.)

Leader: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

People: We come here to receive Christ's assurance and the support of our brothers and sisters.

Leader: One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

People: We come for renewed strength to stand firm in our convictions.

All: Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!
—based on Psalm 27: 1, 4, 14

Prayer: *Words for Worship* 2, 125

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

HWB 567 *How firm a foundation*

SJ 50 *Keep me safe. O God*

HWB 447 *O Jesus I have promised*

HWB 343 *My hope is built on nothing less*

African American spiritual: *I shall not be moved*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Affirmation of faith: HWB 712 or SJ 135 Hispanic creed in Spanish and English

Children's time:

Read the story "A Familiar Tune" from *Plant a Seed of Peace* by Rebecca Seiling (Herald Press). Sometimes worshipping God and doing what we know is right takes courage. For some people it is dangerous. For us it could mean that people make fun of us. No one likes that to happen. But God can help us to be brave when we know that what we believe is right. It helps to have friends who believe the same way and can encourage us. The more we stand up for God and what God wants us to do, the more we feel the peace and strength of God inside us.

Scripture reading: Daniel 3

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

(Read the details about the statue, an obelisk, in *Youth*).

What are foundational beliefs for you, your congregation, and the Mennonite denomination? Are your Christian beliefs worth risking your popularity, even your life? (See 1 Peter 3:13-18a.) What are the idols that may tempt us to turn away from God? (See *Words for Worship* 2, 51.) Are your friends the types who encourage your faith and help you to be strong? Encourage regular spiritual practices which will strengthen our foundation, our relationship with God.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SJ 98 *All will be well*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: SJ 73 *The Lord lift you up*

Benediction:

Go with the assurance of God's strength as you stand firm on the foundation of Jesus Christ in all you experience this week.

Session Twelve

Daniel



Text: Daniel 6

Focus statement: Trust that God is with us.

Visuals: A lit lantern or candle almost hidden by rocks

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Psalm 56: 3-4, 9-11

Prayer:

This morning, Lord, as we worship you, we release our fears. We want to focus our eyes on you, not all the things that are pulling at us. Help us to experience you in a fresh and powerful way as we take another step in trusting you. We praise your name.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

Praise song: *Forever* by Chris Tomlin (www.frequencyworship.com)

HWB 59 *Sing praise to God who reigns*

SJ 97 *The Lord is my light*

HWB 576 *If you but trust in God*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Children's time:

Invite the children to tell you the story of Daniel in the lion's den, or read it from a children's Bible story book. Talk about Daniel's need to trust that God was with him when he was really afraid. Read the story,

“Embraced by God” in *Plant a Seed for Peace* by Rebecca Seiling (Herald Press) about the actions of Hedy Sawadsky, a member of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Song: Gather 'Round CD *Didn't my God deliver Daniel* or SJ 105 *Don't be afraid*

Scripture reading: Daniel 6 “Fun Bible Skits 1,” or the reader’s theater found in *Connect* p. 124

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

The setting has shifted since chapter 3 of Daniel. Daniel is now in the Persian court after the capture of Babylon. He remains faithful to God and trusts that God is with him. How do we know when God is with us? What are some everyday activities that require trust? Arrange with someone ahead of time to do a trust fall with you. (One of you falls and is caught by the other.) Refer to powerful images in Isaiah 43:1-3a.

Daniel knew from previous experiences that God was with him in scary times. What are the “lions” that may devour us and therefore challenge us to trust God? Lions represented power and authority. Has the desire for power and money ever overtaken us? When we lack power and money, can we still trust God?

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SJ 103 *Why should I feel discouraged*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: HWB 585 *In your sickness*

Benediction: *Words for Worship*, 285 or Isaiah 26:3-4

Session Thirteen

Queen Esther



Text: Esther 2-7, 9:24-32

Focus statement: Speak up for others.

Visuals: Balance scales, tiara

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: *Words for Worship* 2, 31

Prayer: SJ 123

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

Praise song: “*Meant for this moment*” by Helen Baylor & Carman on *Yo Kidz! 2* (Word)

HWB 185 *Hail to the Lord’s anointed*

SS 26 *Helpless and hungry*

SJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*

SS 124 *My soul cries out*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Confession and response: *Words for Worship* 2, 61

Children’s time:

The victory over oppression that Esther played a key role in is celebrated even today by Jews with the Feast of Purim. It is the most festive of Jewish holidays. They fast for one day and then feast for one or two days. They send gifts of food to friends and family and help those in need. (See Esther 9:24-32.) Read the book *Martin’s Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport (Hyperion Books for Children), a story of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., ending with the assurance that “his big words are alive for us today.”

Song: SS 64 *There is a well*

Scripture reading: “Fun Bible Skit 3” *Esther* or summary sections in *Connect* p. 110

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

Who needs a voice in your community? Are there those with power who speak for justice (for example, music groups like Black-Eyed Peas and Bono)? Hear testimonies from someone in your congregation, or highlight ways your congregation corporately has been there “for such a time as this.”

The adult issue that this story addresses is genocide. Sarejevo, Rwanda, Serbia’s attempt to wipe out Croatian and Muslim populations, apartheid in South Africa, the atrocities in Darfur, Sudan, and the Holocaust are a few examples of modern genocide. Consider the following statement by Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize: “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides... Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.” (See *Connect* p.111 for the complete quote.)

Don’t miss this opportunity to challenge your congregation to speak up for those who have no voice. This passage is a wonderful example of how God works through humans to bring about justice.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: SS 115 *Beauty for brokenness*

Prayers of the people: Incorporate SJ 32 with SJ 145 or play it from SJ 2 CD

SENDING

Song: HWB 367 *For the healing of the nations*, or SS 38 *When Jesus worked*

Benediction: SS 144

Zechariah's vision



Text: Zechariah 8:1-13

Focus statement: We celebrate a dream of peace for all people.

Visuals:

People of many colors poster by Mennonite Central Committee, the international peace sign, and the word “peace” in different languages, a peace plant and dove

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to worship: Litany from Isaiah 52:7, 9-10

Prayer:

Glorious God, invade our hearts and hurting world with your glory and power. We long for peace. May your Spirit stir us so that when we depart from here today we will know how we can be your instruments of peace. May your kingdom come and your will be done.

PRAISING

Song suggestions:

HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*

SJ 27 *God of the Bible*

SJ 31 *He came down*

SJ 71 *Alleluia, the great storm is over*

OFFERING

LISTENING TO GOD

Confession and response: SJ 66 and HWB 733

Children's time:

There are many good books to help children understand the way of peace and how they can participate in it. Read *Praying with Our Feet* by Lisa D. Weaver (Herald Press). If you have mainly younger children, read *Walk in Peace* by Ingrid Hess (Herald Press). Give out crayons and paper and invite children to draw a picture of their dream for peace.

Song: SS 71 *Gentle God when we are driven*

Scripture reading: Zechariah 8:1-13 (Use the reader's theater in *Multiage guide*, p. 90.)

Sermon seeds: (See *Connect* and *Youth* for additional inspiration.)

This passage is full of wonderful word pictures. Capitalize on that. Peace is a very deep and wide concept. It is understood best with the word “shalom,” the total well-being of a people. Peace can feel so broad and big that it is easy to keep it abstract. Martin Luther King, Jr. is well known for his “I have a Dream” speech. What is your dream of peace for your congregation? Make it practical. Do you need to focus within your body or

outside? Acts of peace spring from the deep well of Jesus Christ. Conclude with a time of silent reflection while instrumental music is played.

RESPONDING TO GOD

Song of response: HWB 371 *Let there be light, Lord God*

Prayers of the people

SENDING

Song: HWB 346 *Dona nobis pacem* or “Shalom to you” on the *Gather’Round* CD

Benediction:

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is still at work through us today. Read Zechariah 8: 12-13 or use the closing litany in *Connect*, p. 121.
