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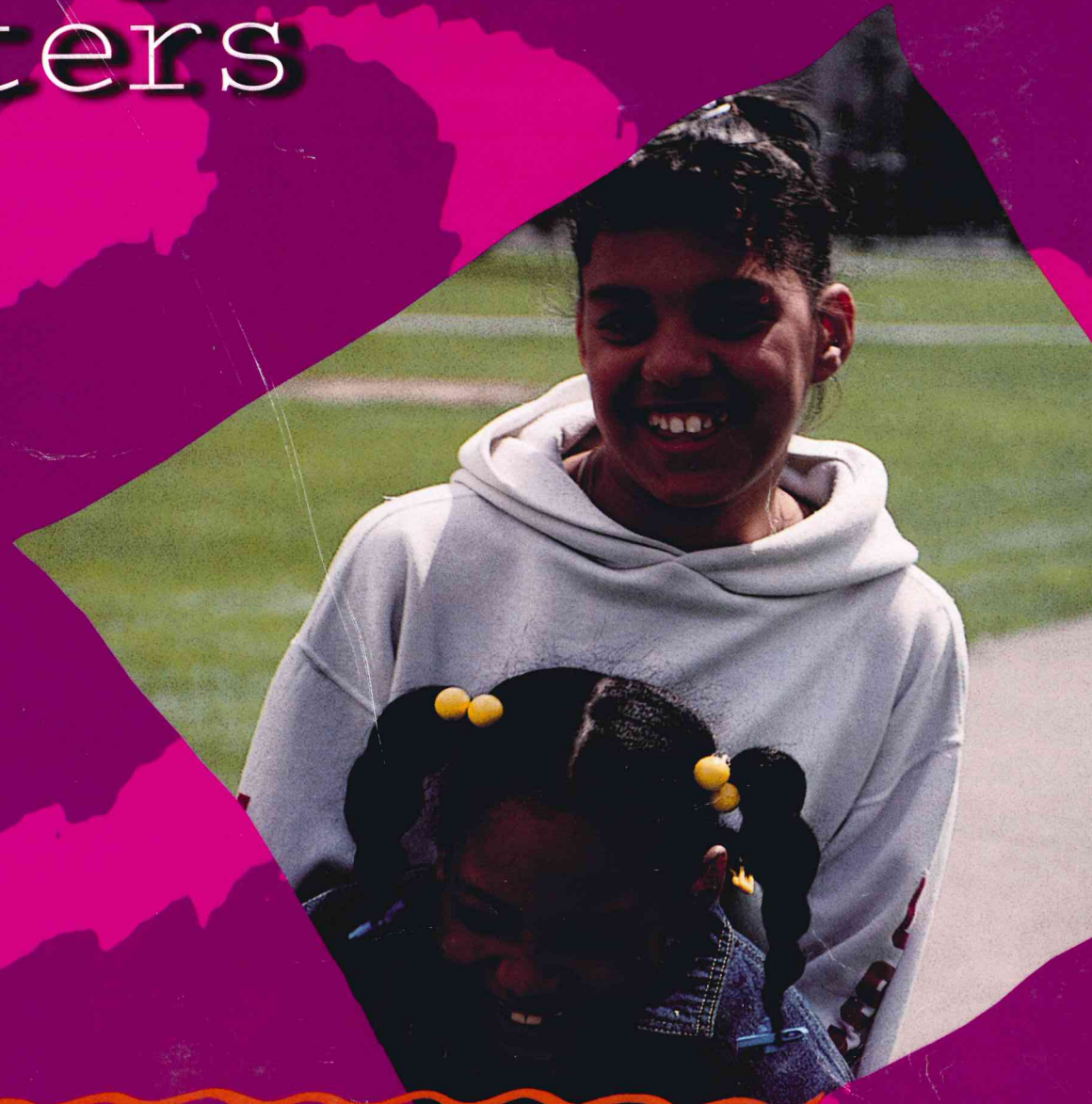
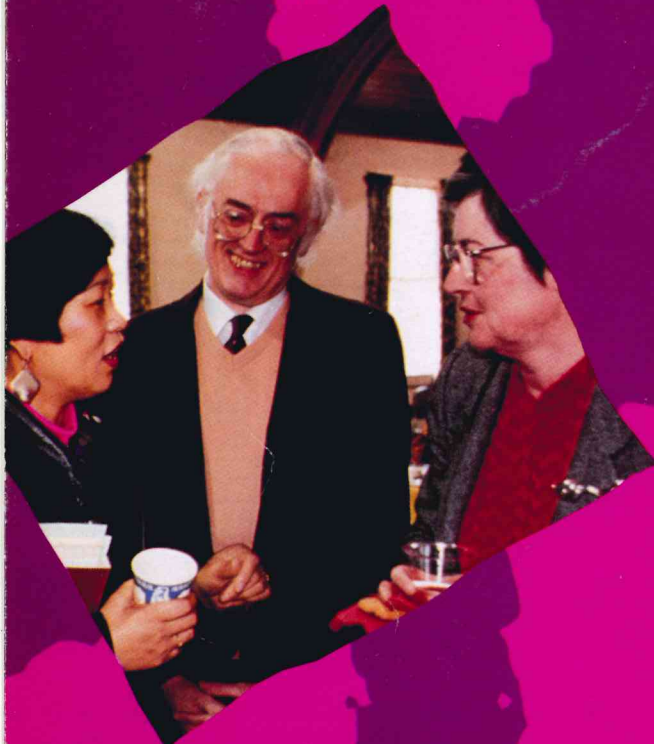
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**Other resources in the
Creative Confirmation
Series include:**

- ◆ Creative Confirmation Planning Guide
- ◆ Bible 2: From Bondage to Freedom
- ◆ Bible 3: Into the World
- ◆ Small Catechism
- ◆ Worship
- ◆ Community-Building Activities and Games
- ◆ Sharing the Language of Faith
- ◆ Mission/Service Projects
- ◆ Parent Conversations
- ◆ Family Book
- ◆ Youth Journal
- ◆ Study Bible: The New Student Bible
(New Revised Standard Version)
- ◆ A Contemporary Translation of Luther's
Small Catechism: Study Edition

Bible 1: Family Matters



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CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION

A RESOURCE FOR LEADERS

creative  confirmation

Bible 1: Family Matters

by Kathryn M. Haueisen
Alan E. Loose
Stanley N. Olson
Peter A. Sethre

Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis



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activities key



remembering (R)



seeking (S)



wandering (W)



hoping (H)

Creative Confirmation Series
Bible 1: Family Matters

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Introduction


CREATIVE CONFIRMATION

Welcome to the Creative Confirmation Series. This series invites you to customize a confirmation program that meets the needs of your youth and your congregation. These flexible confirmation resources work together through active and experiential learning activities to emphasize basic Bible literacy, the Small Catechism, worship, and daily life in the Christian community.

LEADER RESOURCES

Nine resource books are provided for pastors and leaders. *Bible 1*, *Bible 2*, *Bible 3*, and *Small Catechism* serve as the core of the program. The other five leader resources—*Worship*, *Community-Building Activities and Games*, *Sharing the Language of Faith*, *Mission/Service Projects*, and *Parent Conversations* will help you build a comprehensive confirmation program by providing related activities that nurture faith development in a community setting. The sessions are designed for a group of up to 12 middle school students.

LEARNER RESOURCES

Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV (Augsburg Fortress code 30-10-999) and *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism* (Augsburg Fortress code 15-5305) are the primary student resources for Creative Confirmation sessions. In some sessions a reproducible page from the leader resource is used. The *Youth Journal* guides learner reflection on many of the sessions in *Bible 1*, *Bible 2*, *Bible 3*, *Small Catechism*, *Worship*, and *Sharing the Language of Faith*. In session plans, look for the  symbol and page number that point to a *Youth Journal* activity.

About *Bible 1* ♦ *Bible 1: Family Matters* is one of the leader resources for Creative Confirmation. Young people struggle with questions about the roles and relationships they have with their families of origin, the community of faith, and the whole human family. These passages help explore the joys and struggles of family matters. This resource will help youth and their leaders:

- ♦ experience the message of God's Word through an active interaction with the biblical texts;
- ♦ gain a basic understanding of the salvation story in the Bible;
- ♦ relate the biblical texts to life experience in the community of faith and in the whole human community.

USING THIS RESOURCE

Each of the 34 sessions in this book is designed to last about 20 minutes. Within a single learning period, churches can group more than one Bible session or combine a single Bible session with activities from the other resource books.

If you are responsible for leading only the Bible study part of the class time, *Bible 1: Family Matters* is the only resource book you need. Other leaders are responsible for the remainder of the class time.

If you are responsible for the entire class time, matching the symbol included in each session will guide you in selecting activities from the other resource books. The activities are assigned to one of four groups (see activities key on preceding page). If an activity does not have a symbol, it can be used in any session. See the *Creative Confirmation Planning Guide* for more detailed information on planning your sessions.

These
passages
help explore
the joys and
struggles of
family
matters.



Bible basics

Why read the Bible?

FOCUS We read the Bible because it is God's word to the world and to us, and it tells of God's desire and action to establish peace and salvation in our world.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, paper, and pencils.

BACKGROUND When encouraged to read the Bible, some may respond, "What's in it for me?" or "What is the Bible good for?" These are important questions. People might come up with a variety of answers. In this session, you are encouraged to stress two main points:

1. The Bible is God's message of life for us and the world. It is more than a collection of interesting stories—it is more than a rulebook for morality with a list of do's and don'ts. Through the story of the people of Israel and of Jesus, the Bible tells how God worked and acted to establish and continue the divine mission to bring life and wholeness to the world. Therefore, a helpful question one might ask in reading a biblical passage is, "What is God doing here?"

2. Try to instill a sense of eagerness and expectation as you study the Bible stories together. The Bible is interesting and exciting as it helps us make sense of our own lives and of the world around us. Point out to the participants that as they read the stories of the people in the Bible, they will also discover themselves in those stories. The Bible passages will speak a meaningful message to them in this time and place.

WARM-UP Have the participants page through their Bibles, looking at the contents of both the Old and New Testaments. Have them note the names of the books, some of which

might seem strange at first. Ask for reactions or first impressions. Have each person share one thing they already know about the Bible. List these responses on the board. If someone cannot list an item, encourage them to share a question they have about the Bible. Point out how the group already possesses some insights about the Bible.

ACTIVITY Divide the participants into groups of three, or, if the group is small, divide into pairs or work as one group. Have the groups work together to complete three responses to the following phrase: "We read the Bible because . . ." Give them five minutes to write their responses on their papers. Bring them together and have each group share its responses. List all responses on the board. Encourage the participants to share their feelings and responses. Elaborate on the responses as they are shared. Point out how they will discover new reasons to read the Bible as the class progresses.

RESPONSE Have the participants open their Bibles to John 20:31. Point out that in one way, this verse summarizes all of the reasons why we read the Bible, to help us believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that we will have life in Jesus' name. If you are reading from the same translation, read the verse together. Otherwise, ask for a volunteer to read the verse.



Bible basics

What is the Old Testament?

FOCUS The Old Testament was written by many authors over a period of 1500 years. It tells of God's creation of the world and of God's call to Israel to bring justice, righteousness, and peace (shalom) to the world.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, paper, pencils or pens, and copies of Reproducible Page 1.

BACKGROUND The Old Testament consists of 39 books written by many authors over 1500 years. It begins with the stories of creation, moves to the call of Abraham and Sarah to be the beginning of a new nation, and then tells of the formation of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan after the Exodus from Egypt. Other Old Testament books deal with God's call and actions in their history, both in times of prosperity and in times of disobedience and defeat.

Through the stories of the Old Testament, God's purposes are revealed, above all God's desire to bring life and peace to the world through Israel. In the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament books are usually divided into three groups: 1. The Law, or Pentateuch—Genesis through Deuteronomy; 2. The Prophets—Joshua through Kings, plus the prophetic books; 3. The Writings—the remainder of the Old Testament books. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew.

WARM-UP Have the participants work in pairs to list as many Old Testament stories and people as they can in three minutes. List the responses on the chalkboard or on newsprint.

ACTIVITY Ask the participants to open their Bibles to the Old Testament while you present the information from "Background." Hand out the list of Old Testament books (Reproducible Page 1) as you introduce the three groupings of books. Have the participants find in the Bible the stories or people they identified in "Warm-up." Be prepared to help them by suggesting that they use headings in the text, logic (Daniel in the Lion's Den is found in the book of Daniel), concordances, study helps, or other resources. Do they know stories and people from all three groupings?

RESPONSE Using the Old Testament Word Find (Reproducible Page 1) have the participants work together to find the 28 words that occur in the Old Testament. The responses include names of people, books of the Old Testament, and places. Tell the participants that they will hear more about most of these words in future sessions.



Bible basics

What is the New Testament?

FOCUS The New Testament tells the story of Jesus as God's Messiah who fulfilled the promises of God in the Old Testament, and whose life, death, and resurrection brings us new life and forgiveness.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, markers or crayons, tape, a chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, and copies of Reproducible Page 2.

BACKGROUND The New Testament is a collection of 27 books written between about A.D. 50-125. Some authors are anonymous, while some can be identified. The early church grouped the New Testament books as follows: 1. Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); 2. The Acts and General Letters (the seven letters that bear the names of James, Peter, John, and Jude); 3. The Pauline letters; 4. The Apocalypse (Revelation).

The New Testament centers around the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—God's Messiah who fulfills the promises God made to Israel. The Gospels are not only biographies of Jesus, but tell of the meaning of his ministry, death, and resurrection. The Epistles are letters sent to churches established in the Mediterranean area and Asia Minor and deal with issues or situations that arose in those early churches. The Apocalypse is the final book of the Bible and tells of the great victory Christ has won over evil and death, a victory that is also ours.

WARM-UP Hand each participant a piece of paper. Have a variety of markers or crayons available. Ask each person to draw a picture of a hat (or some other common object that is not too hard to draw). Give no more instruction. Ask the participants to tape their completed drawings to the wall or other surface. Point out the variety of hats and how many different interpretations of "hat" are represented.

ACTIVITY Introduce the New Testament by having everyone open their Bibles. Explain that the New Testament is made up of 27 books written by a variety of people between A.D. 50 and 125. Each writer has a different interpretation or perspective on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As a whole these books announce the good news that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and has restored us to right relationship with God.

To illustrate the different perspectives of Jesus presented in the New Testament, have the participants form three groups. Assign each group one of the gospel narratives of Jesus' birth: Matthew 1:18—2:12, Luke 2:1-20, and John 1:1-18. Ask each group to report on the details of their account and notice who is mentioned in their account (Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Angels, Herod, Shepherds). Which account is most difficult to understand? What surprises them? Why does each writer tell the story differently?

Point out that reading the New Testament is interesting and challenging because of the variety of understandings of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the struggle of the early church to live as followers of Jesus.

RESPONSE Using the New Testament Word Find (Reproducible Page 2), have the participants work together to find the 18 words that occur in the New Testament. The responses include names of people, books of the New Testament, and places. Tell the participants they will hear more about most of these words in future sessions.



Bible basics

Why so many translations?

FOCUS There are many translations of the Bible because language changes over time and because of the difficulty in communicating meanings from one language to another.

PREPARATION You will need a Bible for each participant. Have the group use the same translation—the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), if possible. In addition, collect as many other translations as possible. Some translations to consider include: NRSV, Revised Standard Version, Today's English Version (Good News Bible), King James Version, Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, and New International Version.

BACKGROUND Many people ask why there are so many translations of the Bible. Others ask which translation is the best one. It is important to remember that no translation is perfect because of the nature of language and the difficulty of communicating meanings from one language to another. The purpose of any translation is to communicate the meaning to a different language with clarity and precision. William Tyndale (1484-1536), called the father of the English Bible, wanted to make the Scriptures available to all people, the purpose of any translation. Our own time has seen a proliferation of Bible translations, which can make it confusing for people. New translations appear because language changes and meanings of words change over years.

It can be helpful to compare translations of a particular passage. No one translation is perfect. In group settings, it is usually best to use the same translation. Some versions of the Bible are actually not translations, but paraphrases. A paraphrase is a looser interpretation of a passage, does not always seek to be precise in stat-

ing a meaning, and may be less accurate than a translation.

WARM-UP Show the group the various Bible translations. Ask them why they think there are so many. List responses on the board. State that to translate means to communicate meaning from one language to another.

Distribute copies of "Hebrew and Greek Manuscripts" (Reproducible Page 3). Point out that most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. State that people who prepare to become pastors must learn Greek as part of their preparation. Many also learn Hebrew.

ACTIVITY Divide the participants into up to four groups or have them work in groups of two or three. Assign each group one of the Bible texts below. Have them compare at least two translations and note the differences. Have each group share its discoveries with the other participants.

1. Mark 1:9-11—note especially Mark 1:10;
2. Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 1:8;
3. Luke 1:4 (RSV has "informed"; NRSV has "instructed.")
4. Genesis 1:26 (compare *man* and *human-kind*. (NRSV is more accurate; *adam* means humanity.)

RESPONSE Read Mark 1:9-11 from three different translations. Ask students to state what this verse means to them.



Session 1

Genesis 2:18-25 ♦ Adam and Eve

FOCUS A relationship of mutual love and companionship between husbands and wives (men and women) is the basis of God's plan for families.



PREPARATION Cut pieces of paper according to the "Warm-Up" instructions. Write "I believe families . . ." in large letters at the top of a piece of poster board for the "Response" activity.

BACKGROUND The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, the first "wedding" in the Bible, gives important insight into God's plan for male/female relationships. Considered with the corresponding story in Genesis 1:26-28, the picture is one of mutuality ("his partner" in 2:20) and interdependence ("they become one flesh" in 2:24). The fact that the woman is formed from the rib of the man (2:22) correlates with their uniting as one flesh in marriage (2:24). It does not imply (nor prescribe!) subordination of woman to man. Such inequality can only be legitimately traced to the *fall* in Genesis 3 (see 3:16) where it is not extolled, only regretted.

WARM-UP Before the session, cut squares of paper into two pieces in a variety of geometric shapes. For example, you might cut one square into two triangles, another into two different sized rectangles, another into a small square and a larger "L"-shaped piece. As participants arrive, randomly distribute the shapes you have cut and ask them to write their name on their shape. Instruct the participants to find their "match" by comparing their shapes until they find someone with the shape that makes a perfect square when combined with their own.


After all have found their "match," point out that each of the individual shapes had an identity and attractiveness all its own, an identity that was not lost when combined with another."

ACTIVITY Using whatever groupings the size of the group allows, have participants develop a fictional account of the day after Eve and Adam were "married." Encourage creativity. What would their activities have been? (*Admiring new plants and animals they may not have seen yet, admiring one another, making love, finishing some of the naming, walking, preparing food to eat.*) What might they have said to one another? (*Answers will vary. They may include conversation about their physical differences, recollections about life before Eve, discussion about God's plan for the two of them, conversation about who will do what in the garden.*)

Have pairs or groups read their stories aloud. Discuss the attitudes that are expressed about male/female relationships and marriage. Emphasize marriage and sexual relationships in marriage as *gifts* from God to be used with love for one another, with joy, and with great care.

RESPONSE With so many marriages and families struggling, it is important for participants not to lose sight of the goal that families be loving, nurturing places for children as well as husbands and wives. As a group, develop a "Family Creed."

Write "I believe families . . ." in large letters at the top of a piece of poster board. Use the rest of the poster to complete that sentence with a list of things participants feel about family or believe are important for establishing and maintaining strong families and marriages.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 4.



Session 2

Genesis 3 ♦ Disobedience in the garden

FOCUS The universal desire to be our own god so alienates us from God, self, family, and the rest of creation that only the grace of God can restore us to wholeness.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, copies of Reproducible Page 4, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND "Disobedience in the garden" is not simply the story of how the first man and the first woman fell into sin. It is the story of all humanity. Even the names of the characters emphasize this point: *Adam* is Hebrew for "humankind"; *Eve* means "mother of all living."

At the heart of the story is the temptation (given voice by the serpent, but born in the hearts of the man and woman) to "be like God" (3:5). When Adam and Eve give in to the temptation, four consequences follow: 1) separation from God; 2) disharmony in human relationships as evidenced by pain in childbearing and subordination of wives to husbands; 3) work as a burden; and 4) death as a haunting fate instead of just a natural result of our dusty origins (see 2:7). Only God's grace (3:21-22) gives us hope.

WARM-UP Begin the session with the following instructions: "Pretend you have been appointed God for one day. You have the power to make one decision in your new role. Then you must return to your normal human status, and live with that decision along with everyone else it would affect. What decision would you make?"

Allow a couple of minutes for thinking, then invite the participants to share the decisions they would make. Divide a large group into smaller groups so everyone has a chance to contribute. Discuss the good and the bad effects each decision would have. (Who would be affected and how? What might be some unintended consequences?)

ACTIVITY Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree. Like a pebble dropped in a calm pool of water, that act of disobedience sends ripples through the entire creation. Every relationship is threatened or broken. The same thing happens every time we disobey God and try to take over God's role in our lives.

Use "Pebbles in the Pool" (Reproducible Page 4) to guide participants through the story in Genesis 3. Instruct participants to place all the possible relationships affected by the disobedience in the concentric circles along with the verse where that relationship is mentioned. In order, starting from the center, it might appear like this: God (v. 5, 8, 10), self (v. 7), spouse (v. 12, 16), family (v. 16), and earth (v. 17).

RESPONSE The story of Adam and Eve and their disobedience in the garden is our story. Reconstruct the garden scene as though it were an event in the lives of the participants. Tell the participants: "Think of a time when you were tempted and ended up disobeying." Share responses. Discuss how that act of disobedience affected their relationships. You might want to use "Pebbles in the Pool" (Reproducible Page 4) to consider the various possibilities.

Conclude by reminding one another of God's unconditional love and forgiveness, for Adam and Eve and for us. Invite participants to share experiences when their mistakes/disobedience were forgiven, when love from God or another person healed a broken relationship.



Session 3

Genesis 4:1-16 ♦ Cain and Abel

FOCUS Caring for one another, especially in families, is our response to God who gives life, and to whom every life is precious.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND There is much speculation surrounding this well-known story. Why is it in the Bible? To explain the tension that exists between farmers and nomads? To tell how the firstborn came to be rejected from the line of promise? Or is it to be understood simply as a morality tale about jealousy and anger? Beyond those questions, debate centers on the reason Cain's offering was rejected while Abel's was accepted. Was it something about the quality of the offering? Was it the condition of Cain's heart? For this session, the aftermath of the murder is the focus. Responsibility before God means taking responsibility for one's brother/neighbor (4:9-10). God considers every life precious—even that of the murderer, Cain (4:10,13-15).

WARM-UP Being part of a family is a great gift from God. It is also a challenge. Nowhere do we experience more extremes in our emotions. Hot anger, intense loyalty, deep empathy, raw fear, complete security—we can feel them all, often in the same family and within moments of each other.

Begin this session by inviting participants to share their answers to the open-ended sentence, "Sometimes I could just . . . !" Have them think about both positive and negative experiences they have had in their families that have been highly emotional for them. Encourage sharing of feelings, and affirm all feelings. Help participants to understand the distinction between what we *feel* and how we *act* on those feelings.

ACTIVITY What was going on inside Cain? What happened to his relationship with Abel that caused him to murder his brother? Was it more than an offering to God that was not as well received as was his brother's? Could there have been parental favoritism at work? Was there something in the way Abel related to Cain that finally got Cain so angry?

In small groups or pairs have the participants reconstruct the "story behind the story" in three parts: Part I—events and reactions in the Adam/Eve, Cain/Abel family on the day before the murder; Part II—Cain's thoughts and feelings on the day of the bloodshed; Part III—the scene the next day as Cain told his parents what had happened.

RESPONSE God was horrified at what Cain had done (4:9-11). Justice would seem to demand Cain's life as payment (4:10). But God's response tells us something about the value of life to God. As deeply as God felt the loss of Abel, that did not lead God to take yet another life. Cain's life was spared (4:15).

Go back to the stories the participants rewrote, above. Choose the one the group likes best. Go back over the events and discuss how things would have been different if every member of the family had acted out of love for one another in all their interactions. Ask the same question for the anecdotes shared in response to the open-ended question in "Warm-up."



Session 4

Genesis 18:1-16 ♦ The promise of a son

FOCUS As God used the birth of Isaac to the family of Abraham and Sarah to fulfill a promise, God can use our families as a place of promise as well.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper for birth announcements, markers, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND The climax to this story of the promise of the birth of Isaac is God's response to Sarah's laughter at the thought of a 90-year-old woman giving birth to a child with a 100-year-old man: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" The answer, of course, is "No!" And therein lies the heart of the Old Testament covenant (Genesis 12; 15; 17). God will accomplish all God has planned, namely the salvation of the entire creation. And it will be accomplished through the most unlikely means imaginable—a child born to an old couple well beyond child-bearing years whose offspring will be Jesus, God's own Son, the Savior.

WARM-UP Ask, "How are births announced and celebrated in your family or community?" (*Answers will vary.*) Explain that in some families birth announcements are sent in the mail. Provide participants with pieces of paper that can be folded and designed into a birth announcement. The task is for the participants to design an announcement of their own birth. It should give the "vital statistics." But in addition, it should include a sentence or two that tells why the birth of this child is so important. Instruct the participants to write from the perspective of a proud parent, grandparent, or other relative—whoever is most likely to brag about this terrific child. Have the participants read aloud their announcements.

ACTIVITY A childless couple, both over 90 years old, would be ancestors of a great nation (familiarize yourself with God's covenant with

Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12; 15; 17)? Sarah did not believe it from the start. It was laughable! She was old enough to know that if it sounds too good to be true, either it's not too good or it's not too true. In small groups, create together a conversation that might have taken place between Abraham and Sarah after the visitors left. Then assign the roles of Abraham and Sarah and have them "act out" the dialogue.

But this promise was not too good to be true. *God* made the promise and, sure enough, it was true. Isaac was born (Genesis 21:1-7). Sarah and Abraham's first child was the first in a long line of offspring that would eventually bring Jesus into the world.

RESPONSE God used this family to accomplish a world-changing event. God can just as easily use our families! We may not see ourselves as "world-changers," but every family can be a place where God's promises are realized—promises such as unconditional love, forgiveness, security, and hope.

Ask, "How can families be places where children and parents experience God's love?" (*Answers might include: Parents love you no matter what. You can always go home, even if you have gotten into trouble. Parents can't "divorce" you. Families encourage individual members to achieve their potential.*) Discuss what participants can do in their families to improve their families' potential as a place of promise and love.



Session 5

Genesis 22:1-19 ♦ The binding of Isaac

FOCUS Families experience God's care and presence most dramatically when they put God at the center of their life together.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, and bandanas.

BACKGROUND The Old Testament account of the binding of Isaac probably horrifies most readers. What loving parent could ever think of sacrificing the life of their child, much less go as far as Abraham did—tying up Isaac, laying him on the altar and raising the knife over him, poised for the slaughter? How could he do it? The key is found in Genesis 22:1—"God tested Abraham," with the emphasis upon *God*. God is the protagonist in this story. God was testing—one might suggest *proving*—the faith of the one with whom God made an everlasting, world-altering covenant. For such a one, supreme faith is crucial. Only a supreme faith in God enabled Abraham to risk the past promise, the present life of Isaac, and the future hope for a great nation that Isaac represented.

WARM-UP As the participants arrive ask, "What's the biggest risk you have ever taken?" After several participants have shared their stories, discuss what makes certain actions risky. Point out that the greater the consequences of our actions, and the more the consequences of our actions fall upon us, the riskier the action becomes. On the other hand, an action may have grave consequences but little risk for us if someone else is willing to accept the consequences. Give some examples. (*Investing a large sum of money in a risky investment but having a friend promise to reimburse you if you lose anything. Not studying for a test knowing if you do not do well, the teacher will let you try again.*)

End by inviting the participants to go on a trust walk. Travel in pairs, one person's eyes covered with a bandana, to a specific location. The sighted member acts as the eyes for the other. Instruct the sighted members that they are responsible for the safety of the other and to be aware of obstacles and hazards. Emphasize the trustworthiness of those who lead. Discuss reactions and feelings. (*Frightened but confident. "OK" after I saw someone else do it successfully.*)

ACTIVITY Read Genesis 22:1-2 where God directs Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Pretend you are at the table with Abraham and Sarah as Abraham reports the encounter with God to Sarah. Have half of the group develop an explanation that Abraham will offer to Sarah. What has he heard from God? Why does he believe he has to go through with the command? How will he explain the "outing" to Isaac? Assign the other half the task of imagining Sarah's response. What will be her initial response? What questions will she ask? What finally convinces her to let Abraham carry out the plan? For both exercises, encourage the participants to find data and support for their responses from the rest of the story.

RESPONSE These days, families are not commanded to demonstrate their faith in God by sacrificing their children. But they certainly are faced with challenges that call for a strong faith in God. Invite participants to list the top four or five challenges they believe families face today. As a group, discuss how trusting God can help families face difficult challenges.



Session 6

Genesis 25:19-34 ♦ Jacob and Esau

FOCUS Families and children, gifts from God, need God's unconditional love and our constant attention to preserve them in the inevitable times of conflict.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, copies of Reproducible Page 5, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND If ever a biblical narrative demonstrated the complexity and challenge of being a family and the need for divine patience and unconditional love, the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau to Isaac and Rebekah is it. Isaac prayed to God for a child, and the answer to that prayer was the birth of twins.

But from the start, indeed, in the womb, there was conflict. The two struggled inside Rebekah (25:22). The struggle continued in the family with father and mother each picking a favorite child (25:28). Not surprisingly, Jacob and Esau acted out the conflict in their relationship. These twins could not have been more different (25:26-27). The treachery and double-dealing that followed (25:29-34) typify and foreshadow a much deeper and wider struggle within the human family. And God was in the midst of it (25:23).

WARM-UP As the participants arrive, distribute the handout for this session entitled "Picture Your Family" (Reproducible Page 5). For this activity direct the participants to Part I: Strengths and Growth Areas. Have them list under "Strengths" the three best things about their family, then have them list under "Growth Areas" the three things about their family that they find most troubling or difficult. When all have completed this exercise, invite them to form groups of three or four and compare their lists. Ask them to consider making some trades—"This negative in my family for that negative in yours," or "This strength we have

for a different strength you have." Would any youth want to trade families completely—maybe for a day or a week? Provide opportunity to share reactions together from the small groups.

ACTIVITY Rebekah, Isaac, Jacob, and Esau had a problem in their family. Actually, they seem to have had many problems. Read through the story together. As you come to places where there are problems or potential problems, have the group assume the role of family counselor. What is the problem or potential problem? Why is there a problem? Who is responsible for the problem? How could the problem have been or still be avoided? How could things get worse if the problem is not handled well? Where are the resources for solving the problem? How can God's love change the situation?

RESPONSE Go back to the handout. Part II: Family Snapshot is designed to help participants take a step back and see what their families look like. Instruct the participants to diagram their families, drawing a picture of each member of the family using as many of the "Identification Symbols" included on the page as apply. As the participants place each member of their family on the diagram, have them select the appropriate "Relationship Symbols" to describe the relationships among all the members of their family. Consulting their responses in Part I should be helpful. How do the dynamics present in Isaac and Rebekah's family (both problems and solutions) apply to the families of the participants?

Session 7

Genesis 27:1-29 ♦ Jacob gets the blessing

FOCUS The only real heroes of the faith, from the beginning to the present, are heroes not because of their own worthiness or righteousness, but because God has selected and used them in the divine plan of salvation.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND Jacob, whom God later named *Israel*, is the one through whom God chose to forward the divine plan for salvation. That, at least as far as the book of Genesis tells us, is the *only* credential Jacob had to recommend him for such a privileged role. The monstrous deception he played out with his mother, on Isaac and Esau, by all merits should have excluded him from consideration. But fortunately for Jacob (and for us), God's choice of servants to accomplish our ultimate salvation depends not on the righteousness of the servant but solely on the wisdom and grace of God. That makes room, apparently, for a lying deceiver like Jacob (who did, however, pay a price for his dishonesty) and also for ordinary, imperfect people like us in God's remarkable plan.

WARM-UP The criteria we use to select our heroes says a lot about our beliefs and values. Invite the participants to name a personal hero or some individual they believe is heroic. As they share names, encourage them to tell *why* they consider that person a hero. (Discuss the risks of hero worship.)

ACTIVITY Act out this story using the biblical narrative as the script. Three characters are needed, plus a narrator. Encourage a dramatic presentation. After the story has been performed, take a poll among the participants. Have them vote which character in the story is

most guilty of the injustice that took place and then discuss why. Are there any actions of the characters that could be considered noble?

RESPONSE The story in Genesis 27 of Jacob receiving his father's blessing (regarded in Old Testament times as extremely important and powerful in determining one's destiny and character) is the story of the breakdown of a family. Yet it plays a central role in determining the line of descendants who would carry on God's covenant with Abraham and eventually produce the Savior, Jesus. How could this happen? How could God choose such a dysfunctional family for such an important role? Why would God want to? Doesn't this story teach the lesson that cheaters win?

An alternative to this conclusion is that God wins, even when our actions are sinful. Knowing and believing this can strengthen our trust in God.

Explore with the participants experiences in their families where God has accomplished something positive even while something negative might have happened. Ask the participants to recall a conflict in their family. (*A disagreement with a parent over responsibilities around the house, an argument about weekend activities, parents' objections to youth "attitude."*) Have them write down three positive things that happened in the family as a result of the conflict. If none come to mind, ask how God's unconditional love, forgiveness and the opportunity God gives for a second chance might have brought about a positive result.

For further reflection, invite participants to read "Con Man in God's Family?" on page 48 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV*.

Session 8

Genesis 29:1-30 ♦ How Jacob got his wives

FOCUS Deceit and double-dealing can cause us great unhappiness and misfortune even though they cannot derail God's plans.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a container filled with pennies and quarters, and pop or candy.

BACKGROUND The story of how Jacob was tricked by his uncle, Laban, as he got his wives closely parallels the story of how he got his father's blessing (Genesis 27:1-29). Both are the result of deceit. The younger son, Jacob, took the blessing rightfully belonging to the elder son, Esau. Then it was payback time: Jacob, who desired Rachel, the younger daughter, instead got Leah, the elder daughter—after seven years of labor. Rachel would cost *another* seven years (though Jacob got her along with Leah after the first seven).

From outside the narrative, however, the reader observes that through it all, God's plan advanced. With his two wives, Jacob was blessed with 12 sons. Ten of Jacob's sons (Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Judah, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, and Zebulun) and two of his grandsons (Ephraim and Manasseh) became the 12 tribes of Israel that took over the promised land and represented the beginnings of the great nation promised to Abraham.

WARM-UP Bring a container filled with enough quarters and pennies for each participant to take one of whichever one they choose. As the participants arrive, invite them, without explanation, to take a coin. If they ask which kind, tell them it makes no difference. Otherwise, do not provide any guidance about which would be a good or bad choice. Chances are most will take the larger coins.

When all have arrived and have a coin, tell the participants that now they are to trade their coins for the corresponding "merchandise." For this purpose, have a supply of soft drinks, candy, or some other items that will be appealing to the participants. Trade these items to all participants who have taken a penny. Those who have taken quarters receive a penny in exchange. Give the participants an opportunity to share how they felt.

ACTIVITY Use the reactions of participants to the "Tricked" activity to introduce the story of how Jacob got his wives. Read Genesis 29:1-30. Remind the participants that this trick played on Jacob was not the first time Jacob was involved in trickery. Review the details of Genesis 27:1-29.

Ask, "How did God's plans for Jacob proceed either in spite of or as a result of the deception that took place?" (*The promise to Sarah and Abraham of many descendants was fulfilled through Jacob's marriage to both Leah and Rachel and not from Esau's marriages.*)

RESPONSE Ask the participants to share their opinions about what is fair and unfair in the story. Then invite them to share situations from their own experiences where they believe they or someone else was treated unfairly. Ask how other people might see the events differently. Conclude by having each youth focus on one relationship or aspect of life in his or her family where he or she may be treating others unfairly. Ask how they can be vehicles of God's love by changing their way of acting.

Session 9

Genesis 30:25-43 ♦ How Jacob became rich

FOCUS In the pursuit of wealth, which brings out both the best and the worst in us, we must always remember: 1) that everything belongs to God, and; 2) that wealth often comes at someone else's expense.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, examples from various media of offers "too good to be true," chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, copies of Reproducible Page 6, and pencils.

BACKGROUND This story from the Jacob cycle concludes the saga of maneuvering, manipulation and intrigue between Jacob and Laban. Theologically, it advances the cause of God's chosen people by adding material wealth to the increase in offspring accomplished through Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel. Historically, it offers insight into the beliefs of the ancients about animal husbandry that female animals, at the time of conception, were influenced by visual impressions that could determine the coloration of the offspring. Ethically, it challenges the reader to evaluate the subtle nature of how wealth is accumulated and at what cost to whom.

WARM-UP Before this session, search magazines, newspapers, or television (a short video of a portion of an infomercial or real estate scheme would work well) for examples of "get rich quick" schemes, investments, or businesses that promise more than they can deliver or have hidden "costs" (like needing substantial money to get started, outrageous time commitments in order to succeed, or high cost of the "method" that is rarely recovered). Examine some of these schemes with the participants. Try to find out where they are "too good to be true."

ACTIVITY Both Laban and Jacob were scheming to get the upper hand from the beginning to the end of this story. Read the story

together and keep a running score of the contest. A participant could use a chalkboard or newsprint with one column for Jacob and another for Laban. As the story goes on, have participants stop the reader each time one of the characters tries to manipulate events in his favor. Add up the scores at the end to determine the winner.

Jacob's success in the contest did not come without costs. What might be some of the costs of Jacob's wealth? (*His relationship with Laban. The well-being of Laban's household. Possibly conflict with Laban's daughters—now Jacob's wives [see Genesis 31].*) Ask, "How did dealing with Laban bring out the best in Jacob?" (*He used his cleverness and intelligence, and dealt honestly with Laban.*) Ask, "How did it bring out the worst?" (*Motivations included besting another person and greed.*)

RESPONSE Distribute copies of "The Cost of Wealth" (Reproducible Page 6). Instruct the participants to complete the exercise. When all have completed the activity, discuss examples they know of where the pursuit of "things" has led to problems—in their family, among their friends, or in their community, nation, or world. How does acknowledging that *everything* belongs to God help us avoid the dangers of materialism and greed? What are some positive things that we can accomplish with riches? (*Create jobs. Care for the less fortunate. Support charitable causes. Preserve health and achieve independence.*)

Session 10

Genesis 32:9-32 ♦ Jacob wrestles with God

FOCUS Struggling in our relationships, both with God and with one another, is inevitable and often necessary to bring about positive change and reconciliation.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND Jacob's wrestling match with God and the anxiety-laden preparations for his meeting with Esau, whom he had reason to believe could still have been out to kill him, are united in this story. Together they give the reader insight into the evolution of Jacob's character. He had to struggle with his own history of being a cheat and manipulator (his name, Jacob, can be translated "he supplants"). He had to struggle with the unresolved conflict with Esau caused by his deception and his sense of vulnerability in the face of what he believes was a furious Esau. Finally he had to struggle with God, whose covenant with Abraham was extended also to grandson Jacob but who demanded faithfulness and holiness.


WARM-UP Begin this session by having the participants pair up and sit on the floor back to back. Their task is for both to rise to their feet without using their hands. Try some different combinations, especially if you can pair a very small person with a much larger partner. Be sensitive to participants with disabilities or who are self-conscious about their bodies.

Note how pushing against each other with a balanced amount of force is the key to success in this activity. Use the experience to discuss how differences get resolved. Both parties must participate equally, without trying to overpower one another. When that happens, compromise or some other resolution is possible.

ACTIVITY In the story, Jacob was forced to examine three relationships—with himself, with Esau and with God. As you read the story, do that examination with Jacob. For each relationship ask first how Jacob viewed the relationship. Then ask how God might have viewed the relationship. Where are these two perspectives the same? Where are they different? (*With himself: Jacob did not seem to believe he had much to be sorry for, only that he had been very fortunate. God would challenge Jacob to remember his past and look into his heart and examine his actions and motives. With Esau: Jacob wanted a reconciliation. The obstacle to that in his mind was Esau's anger, not his own deception. He was willing to offer a "peace offering." God would surely have wanted a reconciliation and restitution. God would have further demanded an acknowledgment of sin on Jacob's part. With God: Jacob wanted God to remember the covenant God made with him, and so demanded a blessing. God insisted upon being in charge and gave Jacob the name Israel—"God rules."*)

RESPONSE Invite the participants to evaluate one of their own close relationships (family or friend) in which they have experienced a conflict or fight.

Encourage them to discuss in pairs the following: What was the fight *really* about? (*Often we appear to fight about one thing but are really battling over something completely different.*) What part did each of you play in the fight? Did you both participate equally? Did the conflict get resolved? What was the resolution?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 5.

Genesis 37:1-28 ♦

Joseph and his brothers

FOCUS Getting along with our families includes both pleasure and pain.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND The stories about Abraham and Sarah reveal God at work behind the scenes, moving people to accomplish God's purposes for them. Abraham and Sarah were blessed to be a blessing to God's people and all nations through the promise made to Abraham that he would have more descendants than the stars of the heavens.

The Joseph stories also reveal very personal joys and sorrows about life within a family. Joseph, first son born to Rachel, was Jacob's favorite. God worked with Joseph through a series of dramatic events to keep the promise made to his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah.

WARM-UP Give the participants paper and have them write down the names of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, as far back as they can go. Suggest that they write things such as where their ancestors were born, what kind of occupations they had, and what size family they were from. Be sensitive to those who either do not know the details of their family or are being raised by adoptive families. Encourage them to make notes about their personal roots.

ACTIVITY Have the participants turn over their papers and make five columns with these headings: "Joseph," "Joseph's brothers," "Reuben—first born," "Jacob—Dad," and "God." Ask the group to listen carefully as you read the story. Read slowly, pausing several times so they can jot down notes about how each person might have felt. If they prefer, they can use circle faces to indicate different feelings.


Then ask participants to talk about what feelings they came up with. They will probably express a wide range of feelings. (*Fear, resentment, annoyance, jealousy, terror, panic, grief, relief, confusion, and maybe others.*) Point out that Joseph's family experienced the same range of feelings we have about our families. God created families to nurture and help one another. But we often let our feelings of disappointment and disillusionment get in the way. We begin to hurt each other. Some families have years of unresolved hurts that cause great pain to everyone involved. This is not God's plan for us.

It may be difficult to come up with feelings God might have about the story. Talk about what parents or guardians want for their children. (*To get along, to help one another, to stick together, not to fight.*)

RESPONSE Divide the group into three teams. If you have fewer than six participants, let the whole group work together to defend the actions of Joseph, the brothers, and Reuben. Team 1 will defend the actions of Joseph. Team 2 will defend the actions of Joseph's brothers. Team 3 will defend the actions of Reuben.

You will play the role of a family judge who listens to the grievances of the various family members. Allow about five minutes for the groups to review the story and prepare their defense. Call each team forward and listen to their story. When all three groups have had a turn, discuss any new insights they got from the role playing.

For further reflection, invite participants to read "Family Battles" on page 58 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV*.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 6.

Genesis 39 ♦

Potiphar's wife

FOCUS God brings victory out of defeat.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, paper, copies of Reproducible Page 7, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND The people of Joseph's time were ruled over by kings and pharaohs. The political system was highly structured to determine who had power and how they could use that power. Those closest to the top had the most power. Kings and pharaohs had the most power of all. Some groups of people were considered property, to be bought and sold for the convenience of others. Families sometimes sold children into slavery when they thought a child would be better off away from the family.

Joseph became a slave when his brothers sold him to a caravan of traders headed to Egypt (37:25-28). As a slave, Joseph belonged to Potiphar, a high-ranking officer in the Pharaoh's court. Joseph's survival depended on pleasing Potiphar in all matters, both personal and professional. The sexual advances of Potiphar's wife could have ended in the death penalty for Joseph. But God was at work behind the scenes throughout Joseph's adventures in Egypt. God moved Joseph into position to be used to fulfill the promise to Joseph's great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah (See Genealogy Chart, Reproducible Page 7).


WARM-UP In small groups have the participants pick one soap opera or evening sitcom to discuss. After a few minutes have each group tell what its soap opera is about. When all groups have reported, ask what common themes they found. (*Infidelity, competition, deceit, power, ambition, betrayal, compassion, hope, and help.*) List their words on a chalkboard or on newsprint.

ACTIVITY Tell the participants that you are going to read a story from the Bible that may sound like a soap opera. Pause as you read to let the youth jot down words either in their Bibles or on a sheet of paper. Tell them to use the list you've made about modern soap operas to help describe the action in Joseph's story.

After you've read the story, ask for enough volunteers to act out each character in the story. Give the other participants signs that read, "Go Joseph!" and "Boo! Hiss!" Read the story again, stopping each time there's a speaking part to let that character repeat their words after you. Have the characters act out their actions as you slowly read them. The rest of the participants hold up cards and yell either to cheer Joseph on or to "Boo! Hiss!" at the actions against Joseph.

RESPONSE Divide into three groups: Joseph, Potiphar's wife, and Potiphar. Have each group select one member who will be a guest on a talk show. You serve as the talk show host or hostess. The topic of the talk show is "How Some People Overcome Defeat." Those who are not playing the parts of Joseph, Potiphar, or his wife have two roles. One is to coach their team member on how to respond to questions during the show. The other role is to be the talk show audience and ask each guest questions.

Ask your "guests" questions and allow time for them to defend their particular actions in the story. After 5 to 10 minutes stop the show and let the participants talk about what they've seen and heard. Ask them to discuss how God was involved in all of this.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 7.

Genesis 41:1-45 ♦ Pharaoh's dreams

FOCUS God works through human events to fulfill God's promises.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles and copies of Reproducible Page 8.

BACKGROUND God promised Abraham and his wife, Sarah, that they would be blessed to be a blessing to countless others. From the beginning, the promise was threatened by the events involving the chosen family. The promise seemed to go astray once again when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery to a caravan of traders headed to Egypt. They, in turn, sold Joseph to one of the Pharaoh's top officials. Joseph ended up in prison after being falsely accused of sexually harassing the official's wife.

But God's promise had yet to be thwarted. Joseph had the ability to interpret dreams. Ancient people believed dreams contained important messages for mortals. Anyone who could interpret dreams was in great demand, even a Hebrew slave. Joseph's position of power in Egypt eventually became important for the survival of his family.

WARM-UP We all dream. Some of our dreams come to us as strange images while we're asleep. Other dreams are our ideas or hope for the future. Divide your group into pairs to talk to each other about their dreams—either while sleeping or their dreams for the future. Ask them to focus on the feelings they have about their dreams.

ACTIVITY Review the Joseph story by passing out the "Story Cards" (Reproducible Page 8). Have the participants line up in the order of events on their cards. If you have more participants than cards, have them work in twos or threes. If you have more cards than partici-

pants, pass out two or more cards to each participant and have them move around to the right place in the time line as they read each card. Read Genesis 41:1-45.

RESPONSE Have the participants form an opinion line. One end of the line represents the belief that God lets us work things out for ourselves—whatever happens is a combination of luck, coincidence, and our personal efforts. The other end of the line represents the belief that God controls all situations and circumstances, even though we don't always know it. Invite the participants to stand in a place on the line that represents their personal opinion. After the participants have lined up, ask them to explain their decision to stand where they are.

Then play the "What If" game. Distribute the "What If Cards" (Reproducible Page 8) to the participants or groups that have the corresponding "Story Card." Have the participant or group present the "What If" question and then explain the consequence this would have on the whole story, for example: What if Joseph had not aggravated his brothers? They would not have thrown him into the pit.

Close this portion of the session by asking, "Does God create events to get us to do what God wants? Or does God use events that happen to make things come out God's way?" (*Emphasize that God manages to work with events in human history to accomplish God's will, even when humans seem to work against God.*)



See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 8.

Genesis 45:1-15 ♦ Joseph and his brothers (reconciliation)

FOCUS What Joseph's brothers did out of revenge, God used to help the family.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers

BACKGROUND Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery to a wandering caravan of strangers. They in turn sold him into the household of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Because he had the gift of interpreting dreams, Joseph rose to the second highest position of power in the country next to the Pharaoh. He rightly interpreted the Pharaoh's dream to mean there would be seven years of great prosperity followed by seven years of extreme drought and famine. When the famine came, Joseph's relatives were among the throngs of foreigners who came to Egypt seeking emergency relief.

Today's story focuses on the stunned reaction of Joseph's brothers when they realized their appeals for help were directed to Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery years earlier. Even more shocking, they discovered Joseph only wanted to help them and be reconciled with his family. This amazing turn of events reflects God's work behind the scenes to restore what has been destroyed and to bring good out of evil.

WARM-UP Write the names of group members on newsprint or on a chalkboard. Ask them about their birth order and indicate "oldest," "youngest," "middle," or "no siblings" next to their names. Have the participants share what they like or don't like about their birth order. What are the advantages? Disadvantages?

ACTIVITY Do a dramatic reading of Genesis 45:1-15, dividing up the group as follows: 1) Two Josephs. One will read the appropriate dia-

logue. The other will act out what the script says; 2) Three brothers—Benjamin and two others; 3) One narrator.

Encourage the rest of the group to exaggerate whatever the text describes. For example, in 45:1 Joseph says, "Send everyone away from me." The rest of the group should back up as far as possible from Joseph. When "he wept so loudly . . ." is read, have the participants make loud weeping sounds.

RESPONSE Form groups of three to discuss: 1) A time you were mean to a member of your family or a very close friend. What made you behave that way? 2) A time you were afraid a family member was really angry with you, but treated you kindly instead.

After each group has had 8-10 minutes to discuss these issues, invite the entire group to talk about the text from God's point of view. What was God trying to accomplish? (*To reunite Joseph and his brothers; to let Joseph's brothers know something good came out of their evil behavior, but let Joseph use his position and power to help his own people.*) How was God present in this story? (*All behind the scenes, bringing Joseph's family to Egypt for help during the famine; promoting Joseph because of his ability to interpret dreams; in Joseph's desire to be reunited with family.*)

What might be some ways God is at work behind the scenes in today's headline situations?

How could Joseph be so glad to see people who had done such awful things to him?



See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 9.



Session 15

Genesis 45:16—46:7 ♦ Israel in Egypt

FOCUS God's spirit works through current events to unfold God's plan of reconciliation for all people.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, copies of Reproducible Page 7, and markers or crayons.

BACKGROUND God promised Abraham and Sarah that through them there would arise a family so large that its members could not be counted. Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, became a grown man and still the promise had not been fulfilled. Through a series of disasters, Joseph rose to a position of great power and influence in Egypt. He and his brothers had an emotional reconciliation, and Joseph sent his brothers home to bring their father and the rest of the family back to Egypt.

Joseph's father, Jacob, was also called Israel. In biblical times people often had a name change after some life-altering experience. After Jacob wrestled with God, his name was changed to Israel, meaning, "The one who strives with God." Joseph was Jacob's (Israel's) favorite son. The idea of seeing Joseph again before he died (46:4) was enough for Jacob to pack for the journey to Egypt.

Then all four generations of Abraham and Sarah's family were in Egypt. There they would grow into the large family God had promised. God would eventually lead them from slavery back to the promised land through the great Old Testament event of the exodus.

WARM-UP Pass out paper and markers or crayons. Work in groups of three or four. Ask each participant to draw a picture that shows their personal "My World of Tomorrow." Have them include things about where they want to live, what they expect to do, and what they will do for fun and recreation. Give them time to share these with one another.


ACTIVITY Review the genealogy of the family of Abraham and Sarah (Reproducible Page 7) and the promise God made to make a mighty nation from their family (Genesis 15:1-21).

On the backs of their "My World of Tomorrow" drawings, have the participants write "Joseph in Egypt" along the lower left hand corner. Then have them write "Jacob in Israel" in the top right corner. Ask them to draw illustrations as you read the story of how Joseph and his father Jacob (Israel) were reunited. Have them use stick figures and initials for the main characters: Joseph, Pharaoh, Joseph's brothers, Benjamin, Jacob/Israel, and God. Have them use circles to represent unnamed characters in the story.

After you've read the story, note the movement from the land of Israel into Egypt and back again. God is a God on the move.

RESPONSE Ask the participants to prepare a time line of their own lives in two-year increments. For each section have them include: 1) where they were living; 2) who lived with them; 3) what they did most of the day, and; 4) one or two special people in their lives.

Some participants will have time lines that reflect many changes. Others may not have many changes at all, but may have had other people moving in and out of their lives. Ask them to look for things that were the same in each time period as well as things that were different. Are there connections with the family of Joseph as it moved from Israel into Egypt?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 10.



Session 16

1 Samuel 1:1-20 ♦ Hannah's child

FOCUS God calls us to turn to God alone to find meaning and purpose in life.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND After years of slavery in Egypt, the Hebrew people were led out of Egypt through the incredible events of the exodus. After years of wandering through the wilderness, they returned to the promised land, what we now call Palestine. Their system of government was based on leadership from prophets and judges. Prophets reminded people what God wanted them to do. Judges ruled over the people and settled disputes. The system proved inadequate in skirmishes with neighboring countries.

God used Samuel to make the transition into a form of government based on kings, like the neighboring countries. Samuel's birth was a special one, and his mother's story set the stage for what was to come. Hannah was desperate to have a child. Her credibility as a wife depended on providing children for her husband. The dramatic way in which Hannah learned she would finally have a child told her this would be a special child. For this reason she dedicated the child before he was even born.

WARM-UP Divide your group into teams of two or three. Have each participant describe something he or she wants more than anything else. Suggest that they describe situations rather than things. Suggest ideas such as what they'll do as an adult, where they'll live, and what they want their adult lives to be like.

Ask how they feel when they really want something but can't have it.


ACTIVITY Explain that you're going to read a story about a woman who wanted something very badly. Ask for volunteers to act out what you read about the following characters: Elkanah, Hannah, Peninnah, and Eli the priest.

Slowly read Hannah's story. Ask the participants what they hear in the story and what questions they might have. (*Why did Elkanah have two wives? Polygamy was the solution to childlessness in ancient times. Why couldn't Hannah have children? We don't know, but not bearing children presented serious problems to a married woman. Did Hannah get what she wanted by bargaining with God? It might seem that way. More likely she resigned herself to accepting whatever God wanted to happen for her.*)

RESPONSE Tell the participants you're going to read a series of statements. If they agree with the statement they will gather on one side of the room. If they disagree they gather on the other side. They can try to persuade others to join them. Read these statements one at a time:

- ♦ God knew before you were born what you would be like and what you would do when you grow up.
- ♦ God decides every time a baby should be born.
- ♦ God decides about some babies and leaves others to chance.
- ♦ God plans the details of our lives.
- ♦ God observes our lives and tries to influence us.
- ♦ God really doesn't care what we do as long as we don't hurt each other.
- ♦ You can do whatever you want and still please God.
- ♦ You have to give up what you want most out of life to please God.

Have everyone sit down. Ask, "How does God guide our lives?"

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 11.



Session 17

1 Samuel 3:1-18 ♦ Samuel's call

FOCUS We sometimes need help knowing God's will for our lives.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, "Help Wanted" advertisements, paper, pencils or pens, and materials the group needs to retell the story.

BACKGROUND After the people returned to Israel from Egypt and settled down, they developed a community life that offered great stability and direction. Some served as priests in the temple. Some were called to be prophets, reminding the people what God expected of them. Others were judges who ruled over the daily affairs of the people.

As in our own age, some public leaders did a better job than others. One priest, named Eli, had two children who showed no respect for the rituals of the faith. They were a constant source of irritation and annoyance to their father. Yet God used Eli to tell Hannah that she would one day have a son. Hannah named the baby Samuel and dedicated him to live with Eli, who taught Samuel how to serve God as a priest. Hannah later had several other children to compensate for dedicating Samuel to the temple. God used Samuel to do the ministry Eli's own sons were unwilling to do. God also used Samuel to make important changes in the system of government for the people.

WARM-UP Collect enough "Help Wanted" ads to provide two or three for each member of the group. Pass these out and ask participants to respond to the positions they think they might be good at doing. Tell them not to worry about experiences they don't have yet, such as word processing, ability to drive, or degrees. Rather, have them think about what they think the position would be like and if they think they would be good at it.


Ask each participant to list five or six things he or she is good at and that would be useful in some paid position.

Explain that God gives each individual a unique combination of talents and gifts, suitable for a variety of tasks. Part of growing up is exploring these talents and gifts and learning how best to use them. This is our vocation or calling in life.

ACTIVITY Explain that ancient people also had callings. Ask two participants to play the parts of Eli and Samuel. Invite the rest to get as comfortable as possible and watch the drama of how Samuel began to learn about his calling. When you get to speaking parts for Eli and Samuel, have the actors repeat the lines after you. Have the participants work in small groups to retell the story in a modern setting in your community. Consider using cartoons, mime, songs, or rap.

Ask what this story has to say about God, vocations, and callings.

RESPONSE Tell the participants you're going to talk about the *pillar* and *balcony* people in their lives. A pillar person is someone who guides you and keeps you going the direction you should go. This person is a strong influence in your life and is someone you know you can lean on when you begin to feel weak or confused. Balcony people are people who inspire you to look up from the present to the future. They motivate you to try things you never thought you could do. They give you a vision of something you could do or someone you could become. Talk about these people in groups of two or three. How was Eli a Pillar; a Balcony to Samuel?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 12.



Session 18

2 Samuel 11:2-21 ♦ David and Bathsheba

FOCUS Our rebellion against God's will leads to ruin for ourselves and others.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND The people of Israel developed a system of judges and prophets to guide them. But they wanted kings like the neighboring countries. When David became king, God promised an heir to the house of David forever. King David was one of the great kings in ancient times, ruling over Israel about 1000 B.C.

Yet King David was human. When he saw a beautiful woman he sent for her, using his royal authority to have his own way. When Bathsheba became pregnant, King David called her husband home from battle to get him to accept responsibility for fathering the baby. But Uriah wouldn't break his vows to abstain from the pleasures of home during wartime. Rather than accept responsibility for committing adultery, King David ordered Uriah to the front lines, where he was killed in battle.

As soon as Bathsheba's official short mourning period ended, King David claimed her as his wife. It was a dark day for the house of David and the people of God who were called to be different from their pagan neighbors.

WARM-UP Middle school youth readily see themselves as victims in the unfairness of life. Have the participants talk in groups of three or four about times they have been victims. Suggest: times someone took something of theirs without asking; times when a friend cheated off them in school; times when someone cut in front of them in a line; or times when a friend betrayed a confidence.

ACTIVITY Divide the group into four teams of equal numbers. If your group is small, have everyone work together. Assign each team one main part in the story of David and Bathsheba:


David, Bathsheba, Uriah, and Joab (King David's administrative assistant). Ask each team to write down the feelings and thoughts they think their character might have had as the story unfolds. Ask someone to volunteer to read aloud the story or read it yourself. It should be read with great dramatic emphasis.

Give the groups a few minutes to write down all the thoughts and feelings they think their characters would have had. Then ask each team to recast its character into a modern version of the story. Let them think of their own characters. If they get stuck, suggest that David could be a governor, president, or mayor of a town. Bathsheba could be a popular singer or movie star. Uriah could be a police officer in a drug enforcement unit or a soldier assigned to a dangerous overseas unit. Joab could be a high-ranking public official.

Have each group retell the story from the point of view of their modern-day character.

RESPONSE Most of us are far better at assigning blame to others than accepting it ourselves. Yet every day we have countless opportunities to take actions that might prevent problems for ourselves and others around us. Ask each team to find ways in which its character could have done something to change the outcome of this story.

Ask the participants to think back to the list they made of times they've been betrayed. Have them talk in their groups about what they could have done to make things come out differently.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 13.



Session 19

2 Samuel 12:1-15 ♦ Nathan the prophet and punishment of the king

FOCUS There are times when confession and repentance are the best course of action.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, white paper, markers, and items to distribute for the "What's Fair" game.

BACKGROUND As a prophet, it fell to Nathan to confront David about his affair with Bathsheba and plotting to kill her husband when she got pregnant. In spite of David's deplorable behavior, God was able to use King David because he confessed his sins and repented of them. These events took place during what was considered the Golden Age of Israel in about 1000 B.C.

David's wrongdoing was a threefold failure: he disobeyed God's commandments; he was irresponsible in his duties as king; and he hurt many members of the community. David's own suffering was also severe. The child conceived by the affair died. Yet God worked through King David to bring into power another great king—Solomon, David's second son. God forgave and blessed David, but David's behavior hurt many.

For further reflection, invite participants to read "Adultery and Murder" on page 294 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV*.

WARM-UP Hand each participant a clean unfolded sheet of white paper. Pass out markers and encourage everyone to make their papers as ugly as possible with marks and by wadding it up. Do a sheet yourself. Instruct everyone to unfold and smooth out their sheets. Explain that the sheets you passed out were clean and spotless, without blemish, but now they are all beat up and worthless for writing. Our lives become like marked-up sheets of paper when we willfully neglect God's will and do whatever we want. God can smooth us out and give us a clean start. We call this forgiveness. But the consequences of our acts can-

not be undone. The marks of our sins will always show.


ACTIVITY Have participants gather in groups of two to four to read the story. Read through 2 Samuel 12:6 and stop. Ask students to make up modern examples of this parable. Have each group share its modern parable.

Have the participants read through the rest of the section to 12:15. Ask them to play the part of the prophet Nathan in the parable they wrote. What are the consequences of the action? Discuss what would happen if the offender repented. Discuss the consequences if the offender did not repent.

RESPONSE To help the participants understand the impact of our actions, set up a game called "What's Fair?" Divide the group into teams of unequal numbers—ranging from two to seven or more per group. If you have a small class, have each participant imagine that he or she is the leader of a group or family. Each leader is assigned an imaginary group of two to seven dependents.

Have each group stand together about six feet away from the other groups. As the ruler, you have total control over the resources. They can't get anything without coming to you. You have all the food. You've decided to divide it up evenly among the groups in your community. Give each group the same number of any small item—dried beans, buttons, pennies, peanuts. Keep half of what you have for yourself.

The participants will quickly tell you this isn't fair. If they don't, ask them, "Is this fair?" Let them discuss what they think is fair.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 14.



Session 20

1 Kings 3:3-14 ♦ Solomon's prayer

FOCUS God's priorities are different from the world's priorities.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, index cards, pencils or pens, tape, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, and materials for posters.

BACKGROUND God promised there would always be an heir to the house of David to rule over Israel with justice and righteousness. At King David's death his son, Solomon, became king. Solomon followed in his father's footsteps, leading the people to worship God and follow the laws of their religion. Part of God's plan for Israel was that the Israelite people be different from other people. This fulfilled the ancient promise given Abraham and Sarah that their family would become a mighty nation.

The promise was fulfilled many decades later. Solomon reported he was responsible for more people than he could count. The nation of Israel was experiencing a time of prosperity and well-being. Early in Solomon's reign as king, he dreamed that God asked him what one thing he wanted to help him rule these people. Solomon asked for great wisdom. He was granted his request, and as a bonus also received great wealth and power.

WARM-UP Give one 3 x 5 index card to each participant. Ask them to write down the name of one truly great man or woman from history or current times. These should be people who are well known. Ask each participant to tape his or her card on someone else's back. As the participants mingle, they should attempt to guess which famous person they are by asking only "yes" or "no" questions of each other. List


these people on a chalkboard or sheet of paper. Ask what qualities make these people so great? List the qualities the participants name.

ACTIVITY Explain the background to the session's scripture story. King David had died and Solomon had assumed his responsibilities as king over a great nation of people. He had been king only a short while, but already knew the weight of kingly responsibility. He felt overwhelmed by the task before him. Then he had a dream. Read 1 Kings 3:3-5. Ask the participants what they would ask for if God made this offer to them. List the responses. Read 3:6-14.

Ask them to list reasons why Solomon might have responded the way he did.

Ask each individual to list traits they think are most important to be successful adults. After a few moments have the groups agree on the one most important trait needed to succeed. The trait they choose should come from their individual lists. Have each group share its choice. Then have the whole group agree on one trait they think is most important for success. How does this compare with what Solomon said when asked what he thought was most important? What are God's priorities?

RESPONSE Have the participants work in small groups to create posters that advertise God's priorities and the world's priorities. Let participants cut up magazines or draw pictures to show popular advertising messages on a poster labeled, "The World's Ways." Make another poster labeled "God's Ways."

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 15.

Session 21

Matthew 1:18-25 ♦ Joseph becomes a father

FOCUS Joseph is a model of how trust in God can help us accept a role or task that is pleasing to God but difficult or controversial.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND This story of Joseph points to the salvation God sends through Jesus and encourages a response of trusting obedience to God. Matthew emphasized the connection between Jesus and King David (see Matthew 1:1, 17, 20). Many Jews of that time expected God to send a descendant of David to save them from their troubles. They called that anticipated savior the "Messiah." When Joseph accepted the pregnant Mary as his wife, his Davidic ancestry became the ancestry of Jesus.

In a dream, Joseph learned that Mary's pregnancy was the will of God and that he also had a place in God's plan. God's intent is the point of the whole story. Two significant names make clear what God would accomplish through Jesus. In Hebrew, the common name *Jesus* means "God is salvation." Matthew's supporting verse from Isaiah uses the name *Immanuel*, which means, "God with us." Matthew understood that wherever God is, God's love brings salvation. The two names imply the same thing—God will save. Joseph trusted this revelation from God and gave Jesus an important symbolic link to the long history of God's saving love.

WARM-UP Have the participants introduce themselves by giving their names and then naming at least two adults who have gone out of their way to be a positive influence in their life. Ask them to explain why or how those people are "family" to them. (*Responses will vary and might include biological or adoptive parents, grandparents or other relatives, teachers, pastors, or youth group leaders.*) You begin,

giving your name and mentioning the people who influenced you when you were a teen.

ACTIVITY Explain that Matthew 1:18-25 is a story about one of Jesus' parents on earth, a man named Joseph, a descendant of Israel's greatest king, David. In Joseph's time, many people hoped and believed that God would send a descendant of David to save them from their troubles. Help everyone find the text in their Bibles. Say, "As the text is read, read along and think about Joseph's feelings before and after his dream." Have a volunteer read the text, then ask, "How do you think Joseph felt before his dream?" (*Accept all answers. He might have been angry, embarrassed, or worried about what people would think. He was in love.*) Ask, "What might he have felt after the dream?" (*He was relieved, more confident. He trusted God.*) Ask, "What changed Joseph's feelings?" (*He learned that the pregnancy and his marriage were God's will. He heard God's promise of salvation.*)

RESPONSE Check for understanding of the text by asking, "Why can we say that both God and Joseph were fathers to Jesus?"

Say, "Joseph's trust in God allowed him to marry a pregnant woman even though he was not the father. That was socially and religiously awkward. Share some situations today in which a parent or someone else might trust God enough to do something that would not be easy or might not seem right to everybody." Ask, "Have any of you ever tried to do anything like this?"

Session 22

Matthew 2:1-23 ♦ Visit of the Magi and flight to Egypt

FOCUS God's work may be recognized or resisted, but those who trust God find continued guidance.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND The baby Jesus and his parents encountered outsiders who saw what God was doing, but they also became refugees when the leaders of their own country felt threatened. Through it all, God provided guidance. Matthew told this story as a conflict and contrast between Herod, the cruel and hated ruling king, and Jesus, the passive, almost unrecognized king from God. God guided the wise men (astrologers) from their home in Persia to the house of Joseph.

The visitors' encounter with Herod sets up the tension in the story. Herod feared for his throne. The city feared a war. Joseph feared Herod. After the astrologers found the child, offered gifts fit for a king, and told their story, God again offered guidance. The wise men were sent home by another route and Joseph was sent to Egypt with his wife and son. The second part of Matthew 2 tells how the frightened Herod killed innocent boys and how God continued to guide Joseph as the family came back from Egypt to Nazareth. Frequent quotations (2:6, 13, 18, 23) show that all of these strange events were within the knowledge of God.

WARM-UP Ask, "Can any of you tell us about a time when you or your family had to run away or move away from someone or something?" If no one has personal examples, ask for examples from current events. (*Families displaced by unemployment or bankruptcy, refugees from war, persecution, or economic conditions.*)

ACTIVITY Say, "Matthew tells us that Jesus and his family were refugees, fleeing their own country. But as part of the same story, Matthew tells how people from another country saw Jesus as a king from God." As a volunteer reads, have everyone read along and write down or mark each verse that tells how God guided people and each verse that suggests God is in charge. *The star (2:2, 7, 9, 10); dreams (2:12, 13, 19-20, 22); Old Testament quotations—God foresaw what would happen (2:6, 15, 18, 23.)* After the group reports its findings, mention that God's guidance or knowledge is implied in 13 of the chapter's 23 verses. Ask, "Why do you think Matthew made such a point of that?" (*To show that Jesus is important and that God guides people both to see what is important and to escape danger.*)

If time permits, ask the group to recall the story of young Moses (Exodus 2) and ways it is like this story of Jesus. (*Special birth, danger as a child from an evil king, protected but had to leave home, slaughter of innocent children, exile and return.*)

RESPONSE Check for understanding by asking the group to summarize what it considers important in the chapter, or invite them to do an impromptu dramatization of the story. The characters include Herod, the wise men, and Joseph and Mary. Have the same person play the guiding star, be the voice of God in the dreams, and read the quotations.

Ask, "In this story, God guided people with a star, through the Bible, and by dreams. How does God guide you, your family, and people you know?"



Session 23

Luke 1:26-56 ♦ The announcement to Mary

FOCUS God's ways are amazing—an elderly woman and a virgin conceive; the proud and powerful trade roles with the poor and lowly.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, and copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*.

BACKGROUND The first chapter of Luke is carefully written to introduce both Jesus and John the Baptist as well as the theme of joy at God's transforming work. Our section is the center of the story, which tells how Mary learned of God's intent for her and foresaw God's impact through her son Jesus. The angel's words about Jesus (1:31-35) echo many Old Testament promises about the restoration of God's governance (Isaiah 9:6-7; 2 Samuel 7:12-14).

The amazing promise of a child for the virgin Mary was affirmed by the fact that aged Elizabeth was already pregnant. Both pregnancies pointed to the far greater miracle that God would transform society through Jesus. Mary's song, "The Magnificat" (1:46-55), reflects the history of God's people (compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10). God is great; Mary was insignificant, yet she was chosen and blessed. Such, she sang, has been people's consistent experience of the love and dependability of God, who lifts up the humble and humbles those whose hearts are proud.

WARM-UP Begin by asking each person in the group to tell about a gift or announcement that changed her or his life. Be ready with your own example. After each person has spoken, ask, "What gifts or words of God have changed your lives?" (*Baptism, parents, abilities, "You are forgiven," "Love as I have loved you."*)

ACTIVITY Introduce Luke 1:26-56 by saying it is a story of a woman who heard a life-changing announcement from God. Have the

group do a dramatic reading of the text. You will need a narrator, Gabriel, Mary, and Elizabeth. Be sure one of the best readers gets Mary's part. Have the readers stand to be more dramatic. Afterward, ask the readers, "What did you particularly notice in the story?" Ask the audience the same question.

Have the group look again at the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Invite them to look at the pronouns (*me* and *my*) in the first part of the song (1:46-49) and the pronouns (*he*) in the second part of the song (1:50-55). Ask, "What is the significant difference?" (*In the first part, Mary sings of her personal experience. In the second, she talks about what God has done on a larger scale.*) Ask, "What ties the two parts together?" (*God's consistency, favoring the humble, and challenging the proud.*)

RESPONSE What has God given you that you can use to make the world a better place? Ask each person to imagine they are 30 years old. Have them record the details of their lives—where they live, the kind of car they drive, their marital status, children, job, hobbies, and so on. Have the participants share with one other person how they are using their God-given abilities and interests to make a difference in the world.

Play a recording or sing one of the many musical versions of Mary's song. There are three in *LBW*: Gospel Canticle, pp. 147-148; "My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord," Canticle 6; and "My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord," Hymn 180.



Session 24

Luke 2:1-21 ♦ Mary becomes a mother

FOCUS God's great work is carried on through Mary's child, born as a Savior for all humanity and a challenge to all other claims to offer God's salvation.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, dictionaries, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers.

BACKGROUND Luke carefully told the story of Jesus' birth to emphasize that Jesus was born to be a ruler from God for all people. The birth story echoed the ancient biblical confidence that God would rule directly. It also challenged other claims. For example, the Roman emperor of the time was called "Augustus," a title that implied he had godly qualities and deserved worship.

Luke contrasted the emperor's false claim with Jesus' link to King David and to God. Jesus' birth is recounted in a way that stresses his significance for public matters like government and for all people. The shepherds were ordinary people who heard the news, saw the sign with their own eyes, believed it, and praised God. The dramatic cluster of titles at the center of the story—savior, lord, messiah (2:11)—announces Jesus' significance for the people of God and for the whole Hellenistic world. Mary's baby would make a wonderful difference.

WARM-UP Ask the participants, "Who might be interested in hearing the story of your birth?" Allow several or all to respond. Then ask, "Who else might someday be interested in the story if you become well known as a government leader, performer, athlete, or business person?"

ACTIVITY Say, "There are many reasons why someone might be interested in the story of a child's birth. As Luke 2 is read, notice any clues

Luke gives about people who were interested and people who should have been or should be interested in Jesus' birth." As an alternative, have the group read through the text silently, marking all such clues with a check in the margin. (*Earthly rulers like the emperor and governor. People waiting for God to send a new king like David. Angels. Anyone who expects, wants, or needs a savior, lord or messiah. Common people like the shepherds. "All the people."*)

Have a regular dictionary available (not a Bible dictionary) for each person or each group of two or three people. Have the participants look up the words *savior, lord, and messiah*. Ask them to ignore definitions that are specifically Christian and choose from those remaining the one that best fits Jesus. List the different definitions on a chalkboard or on newsprint.

RESPONSE Ask each person or to decide which of the three titles—savior, lord, or messiah—they think is the most important for people to understand today. Take a vote. Ask them to explain their reasons. Ask, "How do you think we should tell the story of Jesus' birth today so that modern people can better understand that he can be their savior (or lord, or messiah)?"

List three descriptive words you would like people to use several years from now as they look back over your life. If *Christian* is not mentioned by someone, ask, "What would it mean if *Christian* was one of the words people most often used to describe your life?"



Session 25

Luke 2:41-52 ♦ Jesus in the temple

FOCUS The story of Jesus' visit to the temple suggests that youth can balance independence and obedience by considering the most important parts of their identity.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, copies of Reproducible Page 9, and pencils, pens, or colored markers.

BACKGROUND Who is Jesus' father, really? That is the theological question behind this narrative. Jesus went to the Passover feast in Jerusalem with his parents. By example, Mary and Joseph were teaching Jesus the practices of his religion. Luke tells the story from their viewpoint. Who would not be frantic with a 12-year-old left behind in a great city?

The climax of the story is the reunion scene. The reader sees Jesus with the religious leaders gathered in the temple. Jesus was not a lost boy, he was actively joined in the temple debates about God's Torah (the law). In fact, his understanding was impressive even to those expert teachers. The conversation between mother and son reminds us why Jesus understood God's will so well. Jesus was more truly son of God than son of any human parent. The incident at the temple was the first evidence of the tension created by Jesus' identity as son of God, but it was not the last. There was a cross to come. The story in the temple ends with an assertion of Jesus' other identity—he was obedient to his parents.

WARM-UP Have the group create an impromptu skit about a disagreement between an imaginary classmate and his or her parent(s). Use a situation where the son or daughter is probably right. If the group is larger than five, divide into smaller groups for the skit. Allow three to five minutes for preparation. After

they have performed the skit(s), ask, "What are some typical situations where parents do not see that the child's opinion may be better than their own?"

ACTIVITY Have the story read aloud by three people: a narrator, Jesus, and Mary. Ask the rest of the group as they listen to imagine the emotions Joseph, Mary, and Jesus would have at various points in this episode. After the reading, have them talk about the emotions they imagined.

Ask, "How is this story a story of two fathers?" (Notice the references to Mary and Joseph as Jesus' parents, 2:41,48, and Jesus' own reference to God as his father, 2:49.) Follow up by asking whether Jesus' connection to God or to Joseph was more important.

RESPONSE Remind the participants that Jesus' identity could be explained both with reference to Joseph and with reference to God. Ask them to think about different ways of describing their own identity—for example, with reference to biological parents, adoptive parents, friends, school or job, religious faith, or Baptism. Hand out copies of "The Many Identities of _____" (Reproducible Page 9) and pencils or colored markers. Explain the instructions. After the pages are completed, ask the participants to use their work to introduce themselves to the group. If you have additional time, ask, "Which aspect of your identity causes most tensions or conflicts with parents or other adults?"



Session 26

Luke 15:11-32 ♦ The complaint of a responsible child

FOCUS Like the two sons in Jesus' parable, we have much to learn about accepting, appreciating, and living the great and undeserved love of God.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND A parable makes its impact as a whole story, but in this parable the three characters are symbolic. The father is God, astoundingly generous and forgiving in love. Luke 15:1-2 is the introduction to the whole chapter and tells us how to interpret the brothers. The older one represents the religious leaders who thought Jesus associated with the wrong kind of people. The younger brother represents those people, sinners who had discovered or rediscovered the wonderful love of God.

Amazing love gives the story its drama. The father was imprudently generous in giving half of his wealth to a son who was not ready to manage it well. The older son thought the father was also foolish in welcoming home the spendthrift brother. Jesus painted a picture of extravagant love to help people appreciate God and imitate God.

WARM-UP Invite participants to share an experience of amazing love—either their own, someone else's, or a story from a book, movie, play, or TV program.

ACTIVITY Participants who have regularly attended worship or Sunday school will have heard this story many times. Help the group make the parable fresh again by acting it out. Divide the participants into three groups and assign a role to each—father, younger son, and older son.

Each team of one or more people should silently read the whole parable to learn about

their character. Do not include a narrator in your drama, so the actors will need to put into words any necessary clarifications. For example, the younger son may need to say, "Well, I converted that all to cash. Now I'm taking off. Bye!" Later he might say, "What if my friends could see me now, feeding pigs? We Jews aren't even supposed to touch pigs, and I'm eating with them!" Encourage humor—Jesus used it in some of his parables.

One person should play each role. Any others on the team can coach and make suggestions. Allow several minutes for the teams or individuals to prepare. Details of the story are not important. Have them work for the total effect.

After the parable has been acted out, invite discussion by asking questions such as, "What did you notice in the story? What else might the actors have said or done? Who is the central character in this parable? (*The father.*) How do you know? (*He is in all parts of the story. His love carries the action.*) What do you think Jesus meant to tell people about God?"

RESPONSE When the story ends, the younger brother is at the party. The older one and the father are outside because the older brother refuses to come in. Invite the group to suggest what happens next for the father and each of the brothers. What will they do, say, and feel later that day, the next week, and in future years?

Most of us today do not have large fortunes or think that feeding pigs is sinful. Have the group brainstorm story ideas using modern images to get the same impact as Jesus' story. If you have time, act out some of the suggestions.



Session 27

Mark 10:1-31 ♦ Family ties

FOCUS The love of God shatters many of our comfortable assumptions about what is really important in life. Jesus moves us from worry about limits to a focus on God's possibilities.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers, magazines, newspapers, and copies of Reproducible Page 10.

BACKGROUND Mark 10 collects several sayings of Jesus that explore the implications of God's amazing love.

1. (10:2-12) Jesus rejected a self-centered approach to marriage and divorce. The law of Moses allowed divorce, but not the casual, cruel dismissal of a wife that was acceptable in some cultures familiar to ancient Israel. Jesus went farther than Moses, changing the question from when divorce is permissible to what God intends for marriage.

2. (10:13-16) The story of the disciples and the children reveals God's love in a related way—these powerless ones are certainly included in God's love.

3. (10:17-27) The rich man was reminded that possessions can be a serious obstacle to knowing a loving God. The rich have no advantage before God. All of us—rich, poor, or in the middle—rely on God, who does what is impossible for humans. God's love frees us from the possessions that may possess us.

4. (10:28-31) The saying to Peter makes a similar point. All those who put their trust in God will experience God's great love. Nothing else that is usually seen as important has the same value, not even family or possessions or freedom from persecution.

WARM-UP Group participants in pairs and give them copies of current newspapers and magazines. Ask each pair to find an example of

real love and an example of selfish love. You may want to remind them that love includes much more than romantic love between two people.

ACTIVITY On the chalkboard or a piece of newsprint, write out these references in a column: Mark 10:2-12; 10:13-16; 10:17-27; 10:28-31. Say, "Jesus often had to help people understand things in a new way. In this chapter there are several situations where he taught the people a better way to understand God's love. Look at verses _____ and find what some people thought and how Jesus suggested something different."

Consider as many of the texts as time allows. (10:2-12—*They thought men could divorce their wives when they wanted to. Jesus said God intends marriage to be lasting.* 10:13-16—*The disciples thought Jesus was too busy for kids. Jesus showed they were important.* 10:17-27—*The rich man thought he needed his wealth. Jesus said that love may mean letting go.* 10:28-31—*Peter was concentrating on sacrifices the disciples had made. Jesus pointed instead to the great gifts God gives.*)

RESPONSE Distribute copies of "Selfish Love/Real Love" (Reproducible Page 10). Have participants look at the drawings and brainstorm how each one could represent examples of selfish love and/or examples of generous love that pleases God. The two columns of lines at the bottom can be used if you want each participant to write down a few ideas before discussion.



Session 28

John 19:17-27 ♦ New family

FOCUS Jesus is king, ruler of all humanity, but he is also the creator of a welcoming, family-like community.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND John presents Jesus as a king (see John 18:33-37; 19:13-15). The first part of the crucifixion story concentrates on the title placed above Jesus, "the King of the Jews." Historically, the sign told passersby that Jesus was tried and convicted for being a threat to the government. Christians are more interested in the title's symbolic significance—he is the true king. Ironically, the king was rejected by those to whom he was sent (19:15), but John's main point is the positive one—Jesus is king for all people.

The three languages represent the universality of his kingship. Jesus reigns from the cross. The concluding scene with Jesus, his mother, and the disciple Jesus loved gives a warmer picture of this universal kingship. Mary and the disciple are the symbolic center of a new family, the church. John often used family language to talk about the work of Jesus and the nature of the church. For example, in this gospel, Jesus constantly refers to and addresses God as "Father." After his resurrection, Jesus explicitly included his followers as brothers and sisters, children of God.

WARM-UP Ask the group, or small groups, to brainstorm several ways in which a congregation is like what is good about a family.

ACTIVITY Say, "I am going to read you a familiar story, the crucifixion of Jesus as told by John. As I read 19:17-22, listen for details you may not have noticed before. Listen also for hints at John's idea of what the story means." Afterward, ask what they noticed and what

seems to have been important to John. (Accept all answers and then continue.) Explain that the sign on the cross was to tell people that Jesus had been tried as a revolutionary leader. Ask, "Why would the sign be in three languages?" (John mentions the languages to say that Jesus is a king for all people.) Ask, "What is unusual about this king?" (His own people rejected him. He becomes king by dying. He is the king on a cross.)

Ask someone to read 19:25-27. Explain that John often used family language to describe Jesus' followers—they were "brothers and sisters," children of God the Father. Ask why John might have used such language. (Jesus had used it. The image points to love as the unity of the church.)

RESPONSE Split your group into two smaller groups. Have one small group list ways in which Jesus is our king or ruler. (He tells us what is right. He watches out for our welfare. He is eternal, creator and judge.) Have the other small group list ways in which Jesus has created a new family that includes them. (Jesus helps us see God as a loving parent and love each other.)

Have the entire group suggest ways in which their congregation is already like a healthy family (caring, welcoming newcomers, forgiveness) and ways in which it is not like an ideal family (cliques, unfriendly to newcomers, conditions placed on belonging). Plan a project the participants could do to make the congregation more of a family. (Serve as Sunday greeters for a month.)



Session 29

1 Corinthians 7:1-17 ♦ Single and married

FOCUS "Single or married: Serve God!" was Paul's approach to issues surrounding marriage and divorce. The approach is still valid.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, copies of Reproducible Page 11, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND In each section of this chapter, Paul's goal is the same: to help the Corinthians live justified and faithful lives. Paul rejected the Corinthian sexual abstinence slogan quoted in 7:1. Such extreme demands, Paul knew, would have led to failure and guilt. Guilt separates people from God's love.

Though Paul implied that marriage should exhibit equality and mutuality (7:3-5), he did not seem enthusiastic about marriage in general. Paul was single and saw that as the ideal state for Christians. Perhaps he expected the second coming of Christ very soon and felt single Christians could more easily devote their full attention to God. Nevertheless, Paul knew that single people and married people could and should serve God. Verse 17 is a good summary of all the advice in this chapter: live as a Christian in whatever your circumstances.

WARM-UP Have the group brainstorm a list of the many voices telling young people how to handle their sexuality and what to expect in love and marriage. List the responses on a chalkboard or on newsprint. (Responses might include parents, friends, church, Bible, TV, movies, magazines.) Ask the group to share what each "voice" says about sexuality and what to expect in love and marriage. Are the messages similar? Different? Confusing? Which "voice" is most important to you?

ACTIVITY Explain that in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul was writing to help Corinthian Christians solve problems related to singleness, marriage, and divorce. In verse 1 Paul quoted an idea defended by some Corinthians—all Christians should avoid sexual relations. Ask the group to listen as the passage is read aloud and decide what Paul thought about the Corinthians' idea. (*He rejected it. Sexuality is powerful and such a demand would lead many to fail.*)

RESPONSE Handle this chapter with sensitivity. Your group likely includes some whose parents or siblings are divorced, single and/or remarried. Don't condemn. Instead, follow Paul's positive, hopeful example.

Distribute copies of "Single or Married: Serve God" (Reproducible Page 11). Explain the instructions on the page. Have students work individually to get at least two answers in each section and then work with others until everyone has several answers for each section. Share results and discuss them one at a time. Urge the group to be like Paul and look at the possibilities more than the problems. (*A. Context for sexuality. Care for children. Mutual support. More effective in service. B. May look to a larger circle of people with needs. Not committed to support of a family. More time for prayer and study. C. Many answers are possible. D. Get well acquainted. Premarital counseling. Take time to talk together and do things together. Keep sex as only one joy among many.*)

Ask, "How can a commitment to serve God help a marriage?" (*Answers will vary.*)



Session 30

Ephesians 5:21—6:9 ♦ The household

FOCUS As Ephesians does, we can work from a general Christian principle and give advice to help Christians live their various roles in a family and in the world.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, and pencils or pens.

BACKGROUND In the Greek-speaking world of Paul's day, some philosophers and teachers summarized their moral advice in a "conduct code" for various members of a household—parents, children, servants. Here in Ephesians we have a similar conduct code reflecting Christian ideas. Ephesians 5:21 states the general advice and the basis for it. Reverence for Christ will lead to mutual submission. That is, Christians should respect the needs and wishes of one another, following the example of Christ who gave his life for the good of others (see Philippians 2:3-8). Keep this general principle in mind as you read the rest of the list of duties.

Husbands were given authority over wives, as was normal in that time, but the broader principle is mutual submission. The mutuality is reinforced by the reference to Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 7:31—husband and wife become one. Children are guided by a reference to the Fourth Commandment and its accompanying promise. Fathers (parents) are reminded of their role as agents of God's truth. They are to offer the discipline and instruction of the Lord—this means guidance, not punishment.

WARM-UP Ask the participants, "Try to say in one sentence how Christians should treat one another." Give everyone time to formulate a statement, then have several participants share their sentences with the group. (*"Love each other" or something similar is a likely answer and a good one.*)

ACTIVITY Say something like this: "Before we look at the text, I want you to guess what it will say. The text is a list of behavior guidelines for people in a Christian household. This conduct code begins with a general principle such as I just had you create. Then it uses that general idea and gives specific advice. There is advice to husbands and wives for relating to each other, for children and fathers, and for slaves and masters. Let's talk about each, use the general Christian principle you created, and guess what might be said to each of the six groups."

Work with your group to develop a sentence or two of advice for each group. Have someone write down what you agree on. Then have participants open their Bibles. Have someone read the general principle you agreed on and then Ephesians 5:21. Proceed in the same alternating manner with the advice for each of the six groups. Ask, "After reading Ephesians, what, if anything, would you change or add to the general principle and the advice we wrote?" If changes are suggested, ask why that change seems good. If no changes are suggested, ask why they think the group's conduct code is good as it stands.

RESPONSE Let the group create other Christian conduct codes for situations in which youth may find themselves. (*Examples: Responsibilities for Christian teachers and students in public and private schools. Responsibilities for teammates and coaches; friends and siblings.*)

See also "A Chart of Some Biblical Passages for the Household," *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism: Study Edition*, page 56.



Books of the Old Testament



The Law (Pentateuch)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The Prophets

Joshua
Judges
1 and 2 Samuel
1 and 2 Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah

Ezekiel

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zachariah
Malachi

The Writings

Ruth
1 and 2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Lamentations
Daniel

Old Testament Word Find

T J B E T H L E H E M S M
 B E D E B O R A H A G A R
 H R R V S M S L C D B R F
 A U I E H I B G H A K A G
 N S S S E R U T H M J H D
 N A R V B I G O D A V I D
 A L A T R A E L I J A H E
 H E E R O M N A L E B C U
 J M L K N U E X O D U S T
 E L M O S E S M T G S R E
 M Y M J A R I O D J R E R
 P U S C M E S T H E R B O
 A R O A U D E N H R M E N
 H V L I E O R P I E J K O
 C Y O N L N F Q G M W A M
 M B M J O S E P H I Z H Y
 A M O S K I N G S A D E A
 D C N P A O R A C H E L G

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. Hannah | 8. Deborah | 15. Sarah | 22. Joseph |
| 2. Jerusalem | 9. Hagar | 16. Deuteronomy | 23. Rachel |
| 3. Israel | 10. Eve | 17. God | 24. Rebekah |
| 4. Solomon | 11. Cain | 18. David | 25. Ruth |
| 5. Amos | 12. Hebron | 19. Exodus | 26. Samuel |
| 6. Kings | 13. Miriam | 20. Moses | 27. Genesis |
| 7. Bethlehem | 14. Adam | 21. Esther | 28. Jeremiah |



New Testament Word Find



G F G A L A T I A N S
 R A J F U G M A R K V
 R H J K K C E M A R Y
 E J O S E P H A C C K
 V E H L L A F R T J P
 E S N M I U D T S M S
 L U K E Z L N H N O T
 A S B S A M J A M E S
 T A H S B L O R D W V
 I D C I E P I S T L E
 O E J A T P H I L I P
 N B Y H H G O S P E L

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Galatians | 10. Jesus |
| 2. Mark | 11. John |
| 3. Mary | 12. Messiah |
| 4. Joseph | 13. Elizabeth |
| 5. Luke | 14. Paul |
| 6. James | 15. Martha |
| 7. Epistle | 16. Acts |
| 8. Philip | 17. Lord |
| 9. Gospel | 18. Revelation |



Hebrew Manuscript

Psalm 23:1-3

מְנוּמָר לְדָוִד
 יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר: ^{a2}בְּנֵאֻת דָּשָׂא יְרֵבִיצָנִי^{a1}
 עַל־מֵי מִנְתּוֹה יִנְהַל, נִיבִי: ^{b3}נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב
 יִנְתְּנֵי בְמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׂמוֹ:

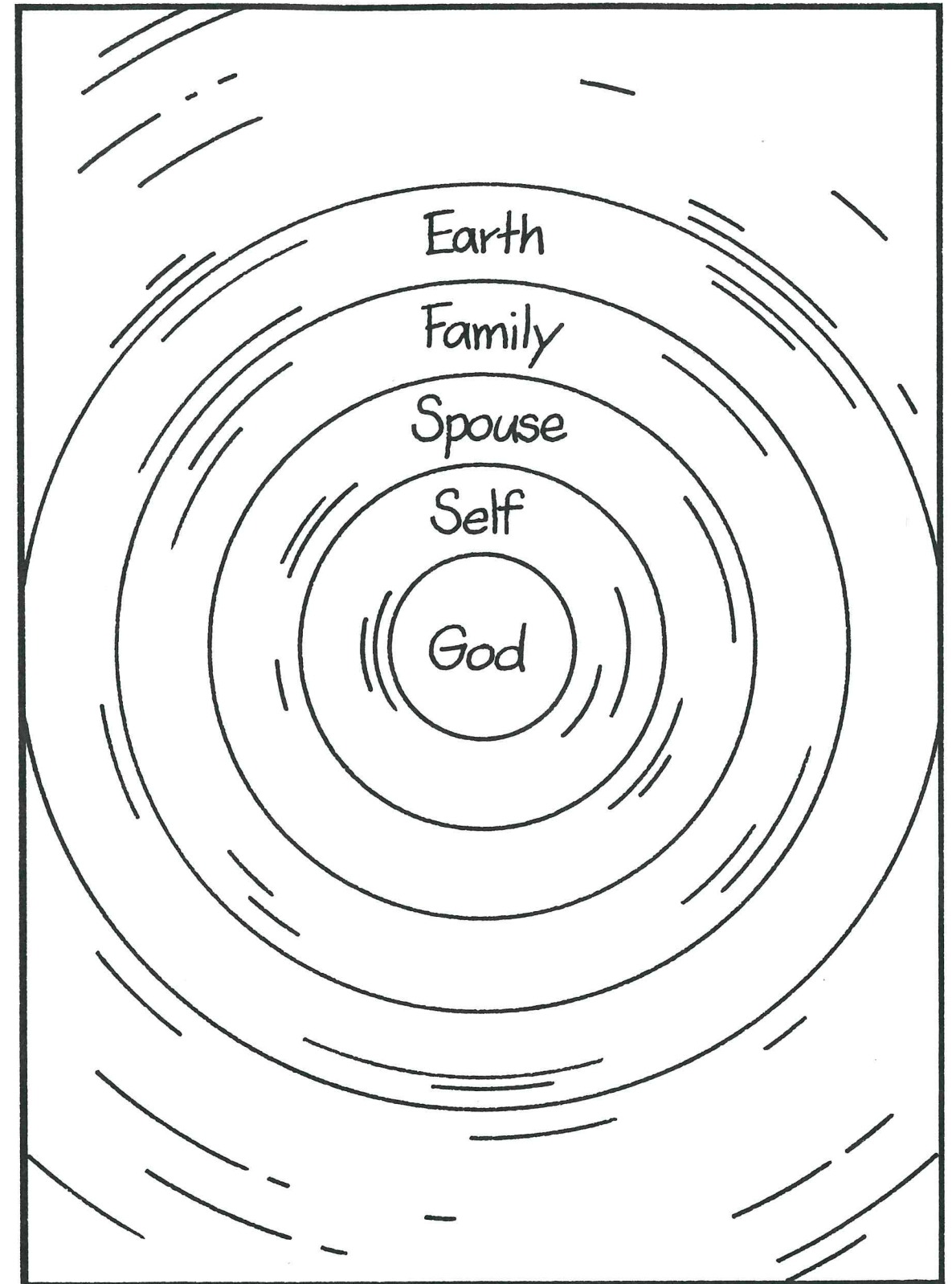
Greek Manuscript

Mark 1:1-3

- Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ^T.
 □ Καὶ ὡς γέγραπται ἐν <τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ>.
 ἰσοῦ Ἰάποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσ-
 ῶπου σου,
 ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου^T.
 φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.
 ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου,
 εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ;



Pebbles in the Pool



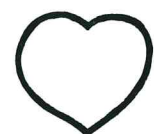
Picture Your Family

Part I—Strengths and Growth Areas

Strengths

Part II—Family Snapshot

Identification symbols



Caring



Strong faith in Christ



Confident



Pessimistic



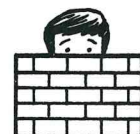
Intelligent



Peacemaker



Hot-tempered



Shy



Cheerful



Fun-loving



Humorous

Relationship symbols



Improving



Feeling good



Feeling very good



We don't understand each other



Close

100KM
Not close



We fight



We think alike

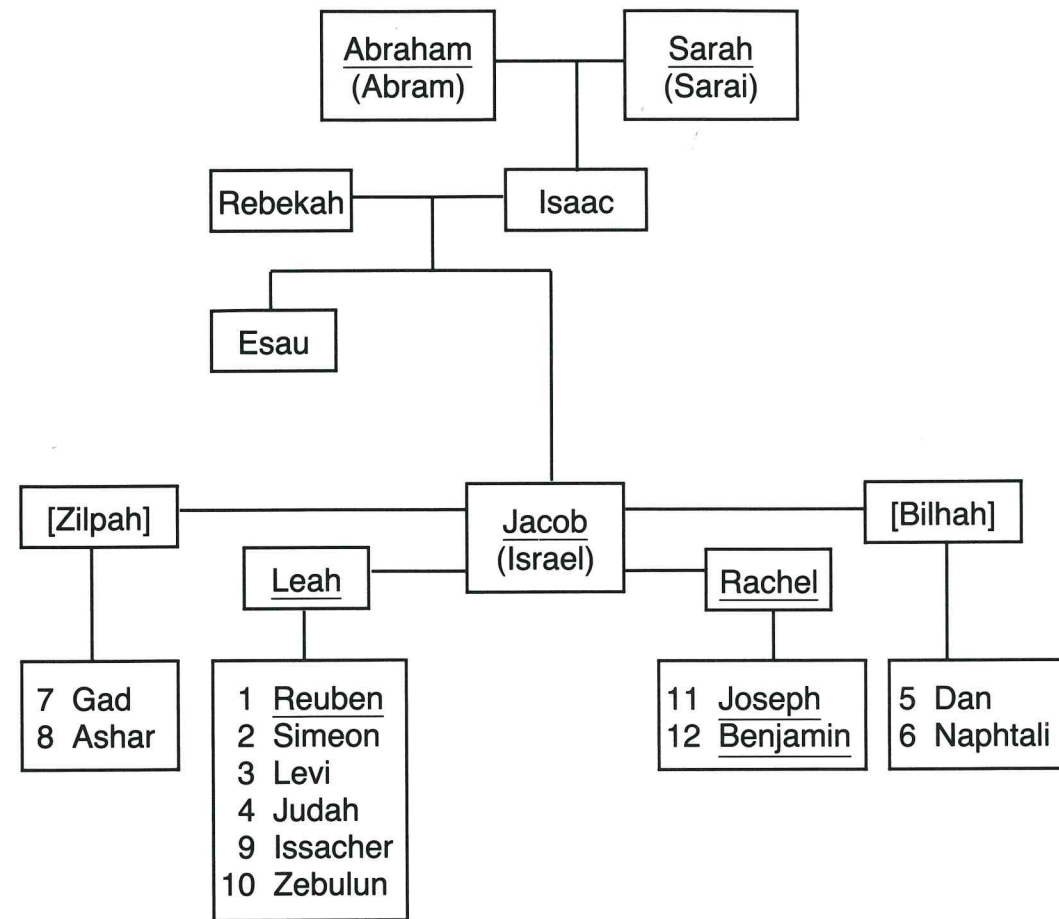
The Cost of Wealth

Place an "X" below each financial level to indicate what you would do for that amount of money.

LEVEL →	\$10	Weekly spending money	Twice as much spending money	\$250 per week	\$10,000 cash	\$100,000 yearly	\$1 million cash
Not willing to do anything—I'm entitled to it							
Do required chores around the house							
Work at a job in my free time							
Give up quality time with family and friends							
Turn my back on family and friends							
"Shade" the truth							
Harm another person							
Steal							
Give up my good health							
Sacrifice my happiness							
Give up my faith in God							
Take the life of another person							

Genealogy

The Family of Abraham and Sarah



- Underline indicates main characters in stories from these lessons.
- (Name) indicates name has been changed following encounter with God.
- [Name] indicates wife's handmaiden used by husband in order to bear sons.

Abraham and Sarah: First called Abram and Sarai. Abraham received a call from God to move from Ur to Canaan. He was promised that he and Sarah would bear a child in their old age, and through his family would come a mighty nation.

Isaac: Born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age.

Jacob: Born, with twin brother Esau, to Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Esau, born first, was entitled to rights of the firstborn. Jacob and his mother plotted to take these rights from Esau and succeeded.

Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, his love. His uncle made him marry her older sister, Leah, first. Jacob worked seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel. Between Leah, Rachel, and their handmaidens Zilpah and Bilhah, Jacob fathered 12 sons—the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's name was changed to Israel following an encounter with God. Joseph, firstborn to Rachel, was Jacob's favorite son. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, the youngest of the 12 sons and the only full brother to Joseph. Reuben, as firstborn of the 12 sons, had certain privileges and responsibilities above the others. Thus his great concern about the safety of Joseph at the hands of the other brothers.

Story Cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joseph aggravates his older brothers, who throw him into a pit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joseph's brothers sell Joseph to a caravan of nomads who are passing by. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The caravan of traders sell Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph and Joseph is imprisoned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joseph interprets the dreams of two fellow prisoners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joseph is called from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

What If Cards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if Joseph had not aggravated his older brothers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if a caravan of nomads had not come by when it did? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if the caravan of traders had not sold Joseph to Potiphar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if Potiphar's wife had not tried to seduce Joseph? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if Joseph had not interpreted the dreams of two fellow prisoners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What if Joseph had not been called from prison to interpret the Pharaoh's dream?



The Many Identities of _____

In the space below, use several circles to tell your group who you are. Write in each circle one important way of describing you. You might include circles that say "child of _____, member of _____, belongs to _____, good at _____, lives in _____, believes _____, friend of _____."

For the parts of your identity you feel are most important, make the circles larger and darker. For parts of your identity that sometimes pull you in opposite or conflicting directions, connect the two circles with a two-pointed arrow like this <----->



Selfish Love/Real Love

Some love is selfish. Some is generous—like God's love. Use these pictures to help you think of several examples of both kinds of love.



Real love

Selfish love



Single or Married: Serve God



The Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to aim to please God whatever their circumstances. He encouraged them to think about God's hopes and plans for them. Following Paul's advice, write your own responses to the questions in each of the sections below.

A. What are some positive reasons why a Christian would want to marry?

B. What are some positive reasons why a Christian might want to remain single?

C. What are some of the stresses and problems facing marriages and friendships today?

D. What can people do to build strong marriages before and after the wedding?

