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Bible 2: From Bondage to Freedom



CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION

A RESOURCE FOR LEADERS

creative  confirmation

Bible 2: From Bondage to Freedom

by Allan F. Debelak
Y. Franklin Ishida
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Scott Tunseth

Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis

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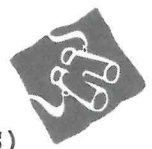
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Creative Confirmation Series
Bible 2: From Bondage to Freedom

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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 2 ♦ Bible 2: From Bondage to Freedom is one of the resources for Creative Confirmation. Freedom (independence) is a common concern among young people. It is important to belong, but it is also important to follow individual callings. The passages in *Bible 2* explore biblical themes of bondage and freedom. 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 the entire class time, matching the symbol included in each session will guide you in selecting activities from the other resource books. (See key on contents/credits page.) If an activity does not have a symbol, it can be used in any session.

Freedom

(independence)

is a common

concern among

young people.

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Bible basics

How does the church view the Bible?

FOCUS The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America views the Bible as follows: "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life." (p. 19, ELCA constitution)

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, copies of your congregation's constitution (especially the section on scripture), copies of Reproducible Page 1, and copies of Reproducible Page 2.

BACKGROUND The Bible is the sacred book of the Christian church, and has been described through the centuries as "holy scriptures," "sacred books," "divine scriptures," or "holy book." These words seem to state what the Bible says about itself: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV). Key words here are inspiration and authority. The church believes that the Bible is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, which means the authors of the books of the Bible were speaking the message of God. They were not merely human authors writing a book. Though they retained their humanity and wrote in different styles, what they wrote was inspired by God.

Likewise, the Bible is an authoritative book. That means the Bible has ultimate authority for Christians and the church in all matters of faith and life. That does not mean that the Bible answers all of our questions about specific issues or problems. But it does mean that we ask and seek guidance from the Bible in all matters of faith and life. We also remember that although the church holds a high view of the Bible, the central core of Christianity is not a book, but a person, Jesus Christ, the center of the Bible.

WARM-UP On the chalkboard or paper, write the following continuum:
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Disagree

As you read the following statements and ask each participant to mark her or his response on the continuum. Remind them that they are to respond as they honestly feel, not as they think they should respond.

- 1) I believe the Bible is the Word of God.
- 2) I have experienced God speaking to me in the Bible.
- 3) The Bible is old fashioned and out of date.
- 4) The Bible answers all of my questions about life.

Encourage discussion and reactions to the responses.

ACTIVITY Distribute copies of your congregation's constitution (especially the section on scripture). Distribute copies of the statements on scripture from the ELCA constitution and Martin Luther's comments on scripture (Reproducible Pages 1 and 2). Discuss differences and similarities. Note that the church, your congregation and Martin Luther have a very high view of the place of the Bible.

RESPONSE Have everyone open their Bibles and read together 2 Timothy 3:16. Ask what new meanings they now have after this exercise.

Bible basics

Which books belong in the Bible?

FOCUS The process of determining which books belong in the Bible happened over a long period of time as certain writings were seen as authoritative and speaking God's word.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, and a Bible with *The Apocrypha*.

BACKGROUND *Canon* means "standard," "measure," or "norm," and refers to the books that are now in our Bible. Canon refers to books that came to have special authority for believers, who considered them holy and inspired by God. Books of the canon are called the Bible, which means "the books." The process by which certain books came to be seen as canonical or scripture, was long and complicated.

The Old Testament canon was settled in three stages: 1) the Law by 400 B.C.; 2) the Prophets by 200 B.C.; 3) the Writings by about 100 A.D. The books of our New Testament came to be seen as canonical over many years; the first canonical list of the New Testament did not appear until about 150 A.D. The biblical canon as a whole did not appear until 367 A.D.

Although decisions about which books were canonical were made by various councils, the real decisions about canon were made by the faithful people of God who through use in worship and study, found certain books to be authoritative and helpful for faith. Certain books now in our Bible were seen as problematic, such as Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Esther, James, and Revelation.

Canonicity was never a clean, precise process, but part of many decisions by the church. There was never unanimous agreement about canon. The Apocrypha is a collection of books written between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. The word means "hidden" or "outside." The Roman Catholic Church views the apocryphal books as part of the canon. In the Protestant tradition, they are placed either between the testaments or at the end of the Bible. Martin Luther stated that the apocryphal books were not to be held equal

with sacred scripture, but nevertheless were valuable for edification and historical knowledge of that time.

WARM-UP Divide the participants into four groups. Assign each group to read one of the following passages: John 2:22, Acts 8:32, Romans 1:2, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Note that in each passage, "scripture" is used. Point out that "scripture" for the people of Jesus' time was what we refer to as the Old Testament. Today when we refer to scripture we include both the Old and New Testament. Share other information from the background section including the definition of canon and an explanation of the Apocrypha.

ACTIVITY Have the group work together in this matching exercise. Of the books listed, 5 are from the Old Testament, 5 from the New Testament, and 5 from the Apocrypha. Write the following list on the chalkboard or chart paper; on one side, write Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocrypha. On the other side write the books of the Bible listed below. Have participant use their Bibles to match the books with the appropriate section of the Bible.

Ephesians	Sirach
1 Maccabees	Hebrews
Jeremiah	Bel and the Dragon
Joshua	Ruth
Judith	Isaiah
Jonah	Luke
Susanna	2 Corinthians
Acts	

RESPONSE Read the story of Bel (Bel and the Dragon 1:3-22), to introduce the group to the Apocrypha.

Bible basics

How do I find my way around the Bible?

FOCUS Regular use of the Bible will enable one to become more comfortable with the Bible.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND The Bible can be an intimidating book to many people, youth and adults alike. There are several reasons for this. One is the size of the Bible with its many books. Another reason is the nature of the Bible. The books of the Bible do not read like a novel. One cannot just begin with Genesis and move on through the Bible chapter by chapter. One will often bog down and become discouraged or confused. One other reason is the mere fact of unfamiliarity; the unknown seems difficult to master. Regular use of the Bible enables one to become more familiar with and less threatened by the Bible. Some useful helps include looking at the table of contents for both Old and New Testaments; look at the names of the books of the Bible. It can also be helpful to memorize the order of the books. Christians are encouraged to use the Bible often and regularly. The more the Bible is read and studied, the more comfortable one becomes with it, and the more meaningful the Bible becomes.

WARM-UP Have the participants turn to the table of contents in the front of their Bibles. The names of the Old Testament books will be listed first. New Testament books may be listed either in the front of the Bible or between the Old and New Testaments. Move through the contents slowly, noting the names of the different books. Note how they vary in length. Some books are only a few chapters; others are many chapters. Ask if anyone has any ideas why the books are named the way they are. The purpose here is to have the participants become more comfortable with looking through the Bible.

ACTIVITY Divide the group into pairs. Have each pair work together to find a book in the Bible from each of the following categories:

Old Testament
Pentateuch (the Law)
Prophets
Writings

New Testament
Gospel
Epistle (Letter)
Apocalypse

Have each team report to the group with the book they found for each category and the page on which that book begins. You may need to help them as they work together. However, let the participants work out their own answers as much as possible. This exercise will help them become more comfortable working with the Bible.

RESPONSE To again encourage them to use their Bibles, have the group work together to answer the following questions:

- ◆ The first book of the Old Testament is . . .
(*Genesis*)
- ◆ The last book of the Old Testament is . . .
(*Malachi*)
- ◆ The first book of the New Testament is . . .
(*Matthew*)
- ◆ The last book of the New Testament is . . .
(*Revelation*)
- ◆ The longest book of the Bible is . . .
(*Psalms*)

Encourage them to use their Bibles to complete these statements.

Bible basics

How should I interpret the Bible?

FOCUS The meaning of a Bible verse or passage is not always obvious at first reading, but must be interpreted to hear its intended message.

PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, a Bible dictionary, a concordance, and a Bible commentary.

BACKGROUND The Bible is not always easy to understand. The books of the Bible were written many centuries ago in cultures that are very different from our own. To simply read the Bible and take a passage at its immediate, face value will not always yield the intended message. Trying to discover the writer's intended audience, the situation addressed, the meanings of certain words, or the nature or purpose of the particular book will help the reader understand the biblical passage. Every biblical writing originated in a particular time and place, or developed over a period of time. It was meant for a certain audience. Often the authors are unknown. The book's date or audience are not always stated clearly. Two helpful ways of looking at any biblical passage are:

1) Ask these questions of the passage or book:

- ◆ WHO is the author?
- ◆ TO WHOM is this passage directed?
- ◆ WHAT is the passage about? What issue or event occasioned this passage?
- ◆ WHEN was it written?
- ◆ WHERE was it written?
- ◆ WHY was this passage written?

2) Answer these questions in this order:

- ◆ What does this passage SAY?
- ◆ What does this passage MEAN?
- ◆ What does this passage MEAN TO ME?

These all help enable us to better understand any biblical passage.

WARM-UP Have each person ask one question that she or he would expect to find an answer for in the Bible. List the questions on the chalkboard or chart paper. Have the participants work together to try to answer some of the questions. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

Some questions may be impossible to answer. That is all right. If possible, have access to a Bible dictionary or one volume Bible commentary, which could be helpful in looking for answers to questions.

ACTIVITY Divide the participants into four groups or, if you have a small number of participants, work together as one group. Assign each group one of the following passages:

- ◆ Isaiah 2:1-5
- ◆ Psalm 91:14-15
- ◆ John 8:31-32
- ◆ Revelation 2:8-11

List the questions raised in the paragraph. Have each group answer: What does the passage SAY? What does the passage MEAN? What does the passage MEAN TO ME? Have each of the four small groups share with the whole larger group. This will help each person see how one can discover the meaning in biblical texts.

RESPONSE Have each participant turn to Romans 3:23-24. Read those verses together. Have each participant state what those verses mean to them. Help them to see what the message of God's grace meant for all people.

Session 1

Exodus 2:1-16 ♦ The birth of Moses

FOCUS God moves people with passion to set the stage for liberation.



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

BACKGROUND The power of the Pharaoh could have changed the course of history. When Pharaoh said, "Throw the Hebrew boys into the Nile," it was done. To go against such power was foolishness. However, the power of Pharaoh did not stop a woman from her compassionate attempt to rescue her baby from death.

In a land of people who thought that Pharaoh was the incarnation of a god, Moses, son of a Hebrew woman, was rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household and eventually sat in a position of power in Pharaoh's domain.

Moses fled to Midian after he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. But God's plan for the Hebrew people was not to be stopped. God eventually called Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrew people from bondage to freedom.

WARM-UP Have a participant look up the word *compassion*. Then ask the participants to write down on small slips of paper issues or concerns that generate a feeling of compassion in them (an abandoned baby, for example). Collect the slips.

Ask the group to imagine a line that runs from one side of the room to the other. Designate one end of the line as "no feeling of compassion" and the other end as "strong feeling of compassion." As you read the issues or concerns one by one, have each participant stand on a spot on the line that best represents his or her feeling of compassion.

Allow time for the participants to share what it is that "stirs them up" in each of the examples and what they would like to do about the situation.

ACTIVITY Divide the participants into two groups. Have each group give examples of women and men who have had the courage to stand up against a power, a group, a nation, or

another person because they could not tolerate the cruel and unjust situation. They may personally know these people or know about them from stories. Share your examples and stories.

As you read Exodus 2:1-16 ask the participants to notice the people who act out of compassion. What did they do? (*The Pharaoh's daughter took the baby into her home. Moses struck a blow against an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew worker.*) Ask the group to evaluate the actions of the daughter of Pharaoh. Then ask the group if killing the Egyptian was the only thing Moses could have done. Have them take into consideration how Moses himself was compassionately rescued.

In many ways, after Moses killed the Egyptian, he was totally "out of control." Pharaoh was out to kill him and Moses could not count on the Power of Egypt to save him.

Ask the group: When you find yourself in a position in which you are "out of control" what do you want to do? What is your impression of Moses when you hear that he "took off" to Midian? Would you have taken off? (*Answers will vary.*)

RESPONSE The end of the story has Moses living with a Midian priest and his seven daughters. From what we see at this point, do you think that this Moses has the ability and nerve to become the Moses who will lead the people out of Egypt? (*Answers may vary. It's hard to see at this time. Striking out in an act of violence doesn't make for a great leader.*) What is needed to make the transformation? (*This may bring about a variety of insights and off-the-wall answers. How about something only God would be able to give him?*)

Have you ever run away from something for fear of what might happen to you if you stay? (*Answers will vary.*) Where does your courage come from? What stirs your heart to make you want to act in the face of pain, violence toward others, injustice, mistreatment of a friend or an unknown person? (*The key here is what "stirs your heart." Then we can talk about what we do or don't do when our hearts are stirred up.*)

Session 2

Exodus 3:1-17 ♦ The call of Moses

FOCUS Even you and I are called to set people free.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, and chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers.

BACKGROUND As we read the story of Moses' call, many of us probably decided that it would be nice to have a burning bush or a heavenly voice to speak up and tell us what we are to do. Moses wasn't looking for a sign or a voice. He was tending his flock beyond the wilderness. He was not looking to go back to Egypt and risk his life. In fact, he was quite settled with his father-in-law, Jethro, and his wife, Zipporah.

The text also shows that Moses didn't appear to be too sure that he was the right one for the job. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11 NRSV). God assured Moses that God would be with him. Moses still was not sure that the people in bondage would listen to him.

WARM-UP How are people in bondage today?

Spend some time coming up with lists of people or groups of people who are living in some sort of bondage today. Have one group of participants give examples of people in bondage in places far away. Another group of participants can list people in some sort of bondage in your own country. The groups together might try to list people within your own school, city, town, state, or province. (*Answers will vary.*) List them all on a chalkboard or on chart paper. What is our part in the process of liberation? How do we know when God wants to grab our attention and use us to be a part of the work to set brothers and sister free? (*When we hear connections being made between our societies' conditions and our call to be God's agents of justice and peacemaking in our churches.*)

ACTIVITY Since the chance is quite slim that any of us have a "mountain of God" near us where a burning bush might just grab our attention, how is it that God grabs us today? How is it that God grabs us to be about the

task of setting people free? Remember that Moses already knew of the bondage in Egypt. He fled from there because he was wanted for murder. What is our part in God's ongoing concern for God's people to be "set free?"


Ask the participants what excuses they might list for why any one of us should not become active in seeing to the well-being of others?

Notice that God gave Moses two responses to give to the people in bondage in Egypt so that they would know who it was who sent Moses. One appeared to be more confusing than the other: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14 NRSV). The other made a connection to the God that would be known to the Israelites: "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:15 NRSV).

RESPONSE It is important to know who it is who leads us. It is important to know that the same God who freed the Hebrew people from bondage through the leadership of Moses is also the God who calls us to work in this world for freedom. We can count on God. Ask the group what they would need to hear to make them trust what was being asked of you. (*How is it connected to my life story? Will what I'm saying make sense to those around me, or will I look dumb?*)

The bottom line becomes the issue of the future. No one can tell you what will come. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, did not know what would come around the next bend in the road, but he turned the corner and continued on the way. Moses stepped back into Egypt with the God who was present and also shaped the future by setting the people free.

Ask the group: Knowing that the future is not under our control, what does it mean to you that God says, "I AM WHO I AM" or as it is sometimes translated, "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE"? Is that enough for you to hear? (*Comments will vary.*)

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 16.

Session 3

Exodus 7:8—11:10 ♦ The plagues in Egypt

FOCUS God will use all of creation to deliver us from our hard hearts.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, copies of Reproducible Page 3, and chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers.

BACKGROUND The Pharaoh can be painted in quite a bad light. You need only read Exodus 8:1-15 and you will see a pattern created that runs through chapter 14 when Israel is finally let go. This pattern of "hard heartedness," though, is also the pattern that became a part of the life of the people of Israel when they were free from Pharaoh and in the wilderness. Maybe it is also the pattern of our own lives when God is trying to set us free! Maybe we shouldn't jump on Pharaoh's case so quickly.

It is important as we look to these plagues in Egypt to see that we are given a picture of the God who sent Moses to free God's people. The magicians of Egypt can do some amazing things, but they cannot match the power of God. The God of Israel is not a magician. "The Book of Exodus tells of a God who acts not against nature, but through it, because he is LORD of nature." (From *The Message of Exodus*, by Lester Meyer, copyright © 1983 Augsburg Publishing House.)

WARM-UP Have the participants work in pairs and write down what they think of when they hear the word plagues.

ACTIVITY The story of the plagues makes for a great demonstration of the power of God over nature, the earthly rules, and ultimately over life and death. Throughout the history of Israel, this story was told over again and again.


Assign the following eight passages to individuals or groups of individuals. If you have fewer than eight individuals or groups, assign more than one passage per group. As the passages are read, ask the participants to record on Reproducible Page 3: God's instructions, the plague or plagues, the reaction of Pharaoh and his magicians. Inform the participants that they will report to the whole group.

1. Exodus 7:14-24, Nile to blood; 2. Exodus 7:25—8:15, frogs; 3. Exodus 8:16-32, gnats and flies; 4. Exodus 9:1-12, death of livestock and boils; 5. Exodus 9:13-35, hail, thunder and fire; 6. Exodus 10:1-20, locusts; 7. Exodus 10:21-29, darkness; and 8. Exodus 11:1-10, announcement of the death of the first born.

As the groups or individuals report, keep track of the plagues and of Pharaoh's response on a chalkboard or on chart paper. Invite the participants to complete the chart on Reproducible Page 3. Notice how Pharaoh gradually comes to realize that neither his magicians nor the power of the Pharaoh are any match for the God of Israel (*Exodus 8:8, Pharaoh momentarily recognizes God. Exodus 8:18-19, the magicians fail and recognize God. Exodus 9:27, Pharaoh is beaten but still refuses to make concessions. Exodus 10:7-11, Pharaoh attempts to negotiate against the advice of his officials.*)

The bottom line is that the one who holds the mastery of the entire universe and all its powers and creatures is the God who promises to set free God's beloved whenever they are being beaten down and held in bondage. And nothing can stop or outshine this God of liberation. (For further reflection, invite the participants to read "Day of the Locusts" on page 77 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV.*)

RESPONSE Hard hearts resist God's call to freedom again and again. Sometimes it takes quite a bit of persuasion to set us free from our hard hearts so that we can recognize the power of our Lord. Put two columns on chart paper. On one side write responses to this question: What could be an issue or situation around which you or someone else might have a hard heart? Then, in the next column work together to answer the following question for each issue that was mentioned in column one. Ask: What will it take to soften your heart and let the God of grace work some amazing feats of liberation?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 17.

Session 4

Exodus 12 (12:21-32) ♦ Passover

FOCUS Special meals, stories, and rituals help us remember God's acts of liberation.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles and pencils.

BACKGROUND The Passover story is the beginning of a journey for the people of Israel. It is a memorable story. In fact, for our Jewish brothers and sisters, it is an event they reenact, relive, and remember. The blood on the two doorposts is a sign for them (Exodus 12:13). It reminds them that the Lord passed over the houses with the blood on the doorposts. It reminds them that God set them free.

When this story of liberation is retold, the ancestors of those Israelites who were in bondage in Egypt will be reminded of how their God is a deliverer and one who keeps promises for all time. The story becomes for the people of God something that helps shape the people in every new generation to come.

WARM-UP We all have family activities and stories that remind us of "who we are." Have the group share examples of stories they have within their families that are retold again and again, or stories they think remind them of their family. Discuss what rituals their families have to remind them that they are children of God (*special events around holidays, special prayers at meals, special clothes for baptisms*). Then, spend some time talking as a family of the church. How do you gather and remind yourselves of whose you are? Who is the one who gives you life? (*Let examples be given without critique, for each may be very different and not seem important to some.*)

ACTIVITY Ask the participants to open their Bibles and follow along as you read Exodus

12:21-32. Have the participants mark the verses that tell the story (12:21-23 and 12:28-32) and the verses that provide instruction for future observance of the event of the Passover (12:24-27). How does the group react to the Passover story? Ask what they see as being important in the whole story and what appears to be a bit odd about it.

Remind the group that Passover is celebrated each spring in the Jewish community. The exodus from Egypt is remembered in the food that is eaten and the stories that are told. (For further reflection, invite the participants to read "Independence Day" on page 81 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV.*)

RESPONSE Explore the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper by having the participants work in three groups. Assign each group one of the following: Matthew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-23. Ask the group to identify similarities and differences. What do we remember when we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Why is it important to have stories or rituals that attempt to keep us connected to our faith? How does the story of Passover have implications for us in regard to the power of God to set people free? We pass stories of our faith down from generation to generation. Why? (*Comments will vary. Stories encourage our present lives to be shaped by God who has always shaped and liberated God's people. We remember our salvation through Jesus when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.*)

Session 5

Exodus 14:10-29 ♦ Deliverance at the sea

FOCUS Deliverance and being set free may mean facing the possibility of the end of everything.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a map that shows the route of the exodus, and a copy of *Lutheran Book of Worship* or *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism: Study Edition*.

BACKGROUND In the first few verses of this text, it is easy to become a bit tired of all the complaining and whining of the people of Israel! They had just been taken out of the hands of Pharaoh by some amazing events, the plagues and the Passover, and yet they could only offer criticism of Moses and this God who had brought them out into the wilderness.

WARM-UP Ask for volunteers to read Exodus 14:10-12 in their best whining voice. Ask the participants, "If you were the Lord God at this point of the story and heard all the whining, what would you be tempted to do?" It is quite natural for us to say we'd "give it to the Israelites" for their lack of faith and appreciation. On the other hand, here is where we must point out the difference between our God and the people. Read the rest of the account (Exodus 14:13-29). Have the group come up with reasons why God delivers them despite their complaining. (*God follows through with promises. God is not manipulated by our actions. In spite of our unfaithfulness, God remains faithful in order to make a people of faith.*)


ACTIVITY This is a good time to pull out a map of Egypt and the area of land that would show possible routes out into the wilderness. We don't know the exact route. We don't know the precise pieces of the story since history as we know it today is not the way things were recorded back in the days of the deliverance at the sea. Spend time asking the participants what they consider to be parts of the story that grab their interest. (*Comments will vary and you will also hear what is a part of their own history of interpretation of scripture.*) Are the details of the sea crossing what makes the story

important, or is it the fact that God is given the glory of the rescue of the people?

Now, take note that the movement through the water in this text is more than movement through water. Have the participants come up with reasons why water plays an important part in the life of the people of Israel. (*Comments will vary. It could be a cleansing, a preparation, a test, an initiation, a dying and a rising.*) Then, let's talk about water as it plays into our life as Christians. Read together Luther's flood prayer in the baptismal service of *Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 122 or in *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism: Study Edition*, page 66. How might the water in our baptism be like that story of the deliverance at the sea? We are not delivered from Pharaoh. From what are we delivered in Baptism and for what purpose are we lead through the water? (*Again, let them piece the answer together. God acts to deliver.*)

RESPONSE It must have been a frightening experience to know that Pharaoh's army was in hot pursuit. With their backs up against the sea there was likely a great feeling of helplessness among the people.

When everything we hope for appears to fall short of its goal, we can be devastated. Ask the group to share situations in their own lives that appeared to be hopeless, or that scared them half-to-death, or that left them feeling as though everything was lost. God plucked the Israelites out of Pharaoh's grasp and rescued them. In the everyday lives of the participants, there is probably no great "parting of the sea" like in this Exodus story. But then, how are the seas parted in our lives? How are we set free and from what are we set free? Is this deliverance at the sea a fairy tale that really doesn't make any sense to us, or can we use this demonstration of God's power to see us though what might be the worst of our days?

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 18.

Session 6

Joshua 2:1-21 ♦ Rahab and the spies

FOCUS God puts together a full spectrum of people to serve as agents of deliverance.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND In the story of the Passover, blood was painted on the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites. It was a sign of the houses upon which death will not come. In the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies, her household was saved from the destruction of Jericho because of a "crimson cord in the window" (Joshua 2:18,21). It was a sign to the Israelites to protect Rahab during the complete and utter annihilation of the city of Jericho. The destruction passed over her family.

Rahab was a prostitute. And yet, she was to be known for much more. In fact, "according to Matthew genealogy of Jesus, she was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, and thus the ancestor of David." (*The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.)

WARM-UP Ask the group why they think spies sent on behalf of the people of God would go to Rahab the prostitute to get information about Jericho? The reality of the situation is that she knew quite a bit about what was happening among the people of Jericho in regard to their thoughts about the Israelite army and its movements. Some men of power and influence do frequent the business places of prostitutes. Just look at all the men who sweat it out when a modern day "madam" lets word out as to what men have come to her for her services.

ACTIVITY There is nothing that says the spies went to Rahab because they knew she was "worth saving" or righteous or that God picked the house and said, "That's the woman."

Instead, her only claim to fame was that she was a prostitute. It is strange that such a person would be used by God—or is it? Who do we tend to push away from the church today and say they do not belong because of how they live? Ask the participants to work in pairs and record their responses. (*Responses will vary.*)

Have the group, or several small groups, talk about a reenactment of the story today. But don't use the Rahab of our text. Use someone with whom most church folks today would rather never be seen. Decide who will be the Rahab-type character and what it is that makes her or him someone who might not be welcome in the church. (*Have the group(s) discuss the fact that there are people labeled "outcasts" either by profession or lifestyle or color.*) Discuss what it is like to have "this kind of person" become a foundational piece in the "sacred history" of the people. Who then, can be excluded as God delivers and sets free the people of God? (*Neither Jew nor Greek, male or female.*) Who says we are okay and a part of God's family? If there are some people you think are to be excluded, why? And then, why are we included over and against "them"?

RESPONSE In many ways, you could say that Rahab was, in time, "delivered" from her life as a prostitute. At the same time, we could say that Rahab "delivered" the spies from the hands of the king's men in Jericho and even "delivered" Jericho to Israel. Just from our discussions today as we dealt with Rahab's life, is there any light shed onto that from which we need to be delivered as God is making us into a holy people? (*Answers may vary, but may include: our prejudice, our hatred, our indifference to the hurts of the world.*)

Session 7

Joshua 6:1-21 ♦ The fall of Jericho

FOCUS One's perspective can shape the retelling of our stories of bondage and freedom.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND The taking of the promised land in the book of Joshua is quite a dramatic story. The fall of the city of Jericho is one example of what appears to be a sweeping conquest of the land.

It is important to note the total destruction of the city and every living thing in the city. "Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys" (Joshua 6:21 NRSV). This is characteristic of how the land was won according to the book of Joshua. Objects of value, gold and silver and bronze and iron, were salvaged and placed into the treasury of the house of the Lord. The Lord God handed over the land to the army of Joshua. They received the land but were not to keep the spoils of their conquest for themselves. God was the victor—the conqueror.

WARM-UP It is important to talk about perspective with the participants. As the group is gathering, place several participants in unusual places (under a table, behind a chair, outside the door, looking out a window) for the reading of the text and some initial remarks about it. Then move them around to a new position. Talk about how the different placements changed their perspective on the room in which you meet.

Mention to the group that as the people of Israel move into the promised land, different people have different perspectives of the events. In the book of Judges, we are not given a picture of a complete and dramatic victory in the land of Canaan as we are in the book of Joshua. Instead, Judges has the flavor of a slow invasion made up of numerous raids and the people of Israel living side-by-side with the people of Canaan. A very important part of listening to stories is to listen to the ones telling the stories. In Joshua the very swift, orderly, and complete conquest of the land of Canaan gives

a message to anyone who reads the book of Joshua. Wow! This God of our ancestors is an awesome God!

ACTIVITY Divide the participants into two groups. Have one group put together a news broadcast from the perspective of the people of Jericho about the fall of the city. Have the other group do the same from the perspective of the people of God. Encourage the participants to use interviews and commentary as they report on the events of the day. Have each group respond to questions about the God of Israel.

In the journey from bondage to freedom, there is always the perspective of how we view the events that made up our past. Ask the group: Did the Israelites brutally slaughter all the people the book of Joshua mentions? And, whether they did or not, more important is the message of the story that goes with the total and swift conquest of the land. What is the primary message that comes from a story like the one of the fall of Jericho? (*The people's complete obedience to God was essential to the taking of the land.*)

RESPONSE It is important for the group to consider the benefits and responsibilities of being a part of a larger community of faith. Individual actions must follow the framework of life for the whole community. For one person to pick up a few pieces of gold and stash them away for themselves was forbidden. Also, remember that the whole army of Israel marched around Jericho. God is with the people, the tribe, the community. Ask the group: Why would the community be so important to these Israelites at this time in their history? (*God is making a "people."*) How would being a community change our perspective—our story? What are some ways that being a part of a group may cause us to see events and tell stories of those events very differently from others? Can you still be faithful to the values of a group and see differently?

Session 8

Judges 4:1-22 ♦ Deborah

FOCUS In bringing God's people to freedom, God defeats some mighty forces. But how do we deal with the violence and brutality of those victories?



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, newspapers, and news magazines.

BACKGROUND As you consider this text with the young people don't let all the names of places and people get in the way of the story. Also, the tent peg through Sisera's head may occupy most of the reaction to the story. It's an awful act and we need to say that and then go on to see why it is a part of the story.

For twenty years, the Israelites were under the harsh rule of King Jabin of Canaan. E. John Hamlin writes about the oppression, economic strangulation, plunder, and rape that was characteristic during these years. (*Judges At Risk in the Promised Land*, pages 81-82, E. John Hamlin, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.)

This story is very important for the history of Israel. Into a hopeless and desperate situation came a prophetess named Deborah. Into her hands, the Lord delivered the army of Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's army. Under the leadership of Deborah, the one who brutalized Israel was annihilated. The story makes great note of Sisera's nine hundred chariots of iron but they were no match for the God of Israel. Victory was the Lord's!


WARM-UP Distribute recent newspapers or news magazines to the participants. Ask them to find articles and pictures about people who are victimized by those in power. Examples will vary—countries at war, stories of child abuse, rape, and other abuses of power may be mentioned. Discuss how these situations make them feel. What would they like to be able to do to resolve these situations? Would they consider violence?

ACTIVITY As you read Judges 4:1-22 have the participants follow along and note: how the Israelites got into this situation (*the Lord sold them to King Jabin*); for whom Deborah spoke (*the Lord*); what Deborah promised in the name of the Lord (*victory over Sisera and the death of Sisera by the hand of a woman*); who sent Sisera's army into panic (*the Lord*).

This story emphasizes: 1) that God is in control of the events; 2) that God is willing to punish the Israelites; 3) Deborah's faithfulness; and 4) Jael's execution of Sisera. Ask the group: What questions does this story raise for your group about God's use of punishment and violence? About Deborah?

RESPONSE Now what do we do with the tent peg and Jael's execution of Sisera in the tent as he slept? Can you understand why she did it? (*Comments will vary. You may need to highlight the brutality of King Jabin's army again.*) Without judging right or wrong, how do you think Jael felt? Can you justify her actions? In the presence of intense violence and hardships and abuse, "real people" tend not to just sit back and take it. We all sometimes react with brutality. Ask the participants to share examples from their experience.

God is continually calling God's people into a new life where all people are held up as blessed and holy. When we are confronted with brutal forces that pay no attention to the blessedness of others, what do we finally do? What way of life do we finally follow? (*Comments will vary. To be truly free, we are told to lift up our cross and follow our Lord in service and love others—even if it means death on the cross.*)

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 19.

Session 9

Judges 7:1-23 ♦ Gideon

FOCUS God uses ordinary people to bring about extraordinary acts of courage and liberation.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, and paper clips.

BACKGROUND We need the story of Gideon. He didn't believe in himself and he even had a tough time trusting the power of God. The Midianites prevailed over Israel and Gideon was the last person to think he could do anything about it. When the angel of the Lord appeared to him in Judges 6:12 and addressed him as "you mighty warrior" Gideon didn't see himself with such eyes, and didn't really buy the idea of his potential for being a leader of the people.

But God uses ordinary people to accomplish extra-ordinary things. It is, after all, God who graciously delivers us from bondage.

WARM-UP Ask the participants to work in pairs to make a list of 'titles' we use to describe people who have power, status, or authority. After a few minutes have each group share their list. Write the responses on a chalkboard or on chart paper. (*Expect a variety of answers—president, super star, boss, first chair, leader, teacher, principal, king, and so on.*) Ask: How do people earn these titles? Do some people get these titles without deserving them? Does having one of these titles help you fulfill the expectations of that position?

ACTIVITY Prepare to read the text by telling the group that the people of the tribe of Manasseh (one of the tribes of Israel) were being oppressed by the Midianites. As often happens in the Old Testament, God calls an unlikely (and hesitant) hero. When God's angel addresses Gideon as a "mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12) Gideon is surprised and sarcastic. He asks, "If the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:13 NRSV). He really is not a great warrior. And yet, God makes him one. Gideon gathers a large army, but the all-powerful God has other plans. Read Judges 7:1-23. With three hundred men who lap water like dogs, God de-

feats Midianites. Ask the participants what the message is in such a strange story. (*Answers will vary.*)

RESPONSE Distribute a paper clip to each member of the group. Tell them that this was an important weapon to a group of people during World War II.

To trust in God we often find ourselves in situations where the task seems impossible. We have strange and seemingly inferior weapons. Gideon had 300 men, empty earthen jars, torches placed inside the jars, and trumpets. Ask the group what the reason could be for the use of these "weapons" against such a great enemy? There is a message contained in the small number of Gideon's forces, but there is also a message for us in the "weapons" used. Any ideas? (*Comments will vary.*) Before you share the following idea of the possible interpretation of the weapons, have the participants come up with a consensus interpretation of their own. One author wrote that the empty jars were symbolic. They were worthless like the kings of the earth. The torches were symbols of salvation in the sight of the nations. The trumpets were like the warning on the mountains to the inhabitants of the world. (*Judges At Risk in the Promised Land*, pages 96-97, E. John Hamlin, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) The weapons did the job but they also carried a message.

When faithful people are in bondage or oppressed, it is critical that we have a message that can confound the oppressors. Young people in Norway wore paper clips on their clothes as a sign of resistance to the occupying Nazi forces. The Norwegian young people had a message for the Nazis. "You have no power over us."

Have people spend some time coming up with symbols used in our day that are meant to encourage and support and keep us focused on an issue. (*Red looped ribbons are quickly associated with solidarity with those with AIDS. Pink ribbons are the same for breast cancer.*) What symbol can your group use to demonstrate your faith in God?

Session 10

Judges 16:4-31 ♦ Samson

FOCUS God will provide us with the strength to be bold witnesses to our God despite our foolishness.



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

BACKGROUND All of Samson's adventures in the book of Judges are worth reading. In our text alone, we are presented with love, bribes, lies, trickery, violence, and an amazing show of God's strength. Sounds like a soap opera!

As it turns out, Samson is beaten, mutilated, humiliated, and set out as an example to the world as to what the gods of the Philistines can do to their enemies. Can anything come from such a position of total defeat? We find out that Samson eventually has one final exhibition of strength that kills "more than those he had killed during his life" (Judges 16:30 NRSV).

WARM-UP As you read Judges 16:4-31 ask the participants to notice what part of the story sticks with them or grabs them, and why. What do they have to say about Samson? Why didn't Samson know right away that Delilah was working for the Philistines? Ask why they think Samson stayed with Delilah after the first failed attempt to capture him? What purpose does it serve? (*Comments will vary.*)

ACTIVITY Invite the participants to do some detective work in groups of two. Ask them to search the text to discover the source of Samson's strength, why he lost it, and why he was able to destroy the house. They will need to be able to site verses to support their conclusions. After a few minutes invite everyone to gather and to share their findings. (*Samson's strength was not in his hair but in the presence of the Lord. The Philistines captured him because "the LORD had left him" (Judges 16:20 NRSV). His strength returned not with his hair (16:22) but when he turned back to the Lord (16:28) and asked God to strengthen him one last time.*)

It is interesting to notice where this last God-given bit of strength takes place—a gathering to offer great sacrifice to the Philistine god, Dagon, who they thought had given Samson to

them. It was not only the Philistines who mutilated Samson, it was believed that the god of the Philistines was the reason for this victory over Samson. In pairs or small groups ask the participants to consider what or who they think really delivered Samson to the Philistines? (*Delilah, Samson's stupidity, Samson's love for Delilah, the Philistine soldiers, the Philistine god, Dagon, the God of Israel.*) Have pairs or small groups make up arguments to present as to why they picked the one(s) they did.

A very important part of the story comes at the height of Samson's humiliation as he stood between the two pillars "performing" for the Philistines. Ask the participants if they can see what were some important actions done by Samson in this scene. (*First, he called upon his God for help. Second, he was willing to die in a final show of the strength of his God.*) Even though his hair had started to grow back (Judges 16:22), the God of Israel was his source of strength, not his hair. Though he was bound up in chains before the Philistines, God finally set him free. That is a message for the people of God to hear again and again especially when we feel as though we are being oppressed beyond our limits.

RESPONSE Samson's final physical act of strength is called a "witness" to his God who does not abandon God's people. What if you are no Samson and you are, as we all are, called to be a witness to the God who gives us life in every situation. How does a someone who is not strong make a power-filled witness? How does a soft spoken or shy person make a power-filled witness? (*We can tumble pillars of oppressive powers with words and simple acts of defiance and resistance. The truth will do the same.*) Any witness to God's grace, power, and love that is made in the face of those who would put us in bondage is an act of great strength. And any of us can be a witness to the freedom and life promised to us by our God.

1 Samuel 17:1-49 ♦

David and Goliath

FOCUS God provides those who are faithful with the strength to overcome the largest obstacles.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, paper, pencils or pens, copies of Reproducible Page 5, and copies of Reproducible Page 6.

BACKGROUND This story is so familiar that it is easy to overlook the most important message of the story. That message is most clearly stated in David's challenge to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:45-47 NRSV. David claims to come against Goliath "in the name of . . . the God of the armies of Israel. . . . This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand . . . so that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel." God strengthens and protects those who are faithful. But why is the fight with Goliath left to a young shepherd boy who can't even walk when he puts on King Saul's armor (17:38-39)? The answer is simple: no one else, including King Saul, dared face Goliath (see 17:11, 24). The fear of Saul and his whole army betrays their lack of faith in the covenant promises of God (see Exodus 23:22; Deuteronomy 3:22). The situation is also a sad commentary on Israel's decision to place its trust in an earthly king when they begged Samuel, the last judge in Israel, to "appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). God allowed Samuel to appoint a king (Saul), but the king was never intended to replace God as the object of the people's trust. Israel was to remain faithful to the covenant and trust in God's strength in times of peril. It took a young shepherd boy to act on this promise, and in so doing he bore witness to the power of Israel's God for all generations. (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Have each person write down at least one problem they are facing or have faced in recent memory. Remind them that they will not show this to you or anyone else in the room. Have everyone put away their "problems" for the time being.

ACTIVITY Hand out "David and Goliath Battle Area" (Reproducible Page 5), which shows a map of the battle area described in the story. Take a moment to point out the land of the Philistines, which lies along the Mediterranean Coast directly to the east of southern Israel. Then hand out "Tale of the Tape" (Reproducible Page 6) and introduce the main characters in the story, who are pictured on this page. Note things such as the size contrast between Goliath and David, the size of Goliath's spear, and the supposed size of the stones David used in his sling.

Then read through the entire story, assigning speaking parts to the various characters. For the sake of speed and for pronouncing difficult terms, you may want to be the narrator.

RESPONSE When you have read the story, ask the following questions:

1. According to Goliath, what would happen to the loser of the fight between himself and one of the Israelites? (See 17:9.)
2. How did Saul and the rest of Israel respond to Goliath's challenge? (See 17:11, 24.)
3. Why were Saul and the others surprised when David volunteered to fight Goliath? (*He was a boy, not an adult with battle experience.*)
4. If you could ask David today how he defeated Goliath, what would he say? (*His victory was accomplished through God's strength.*)
5. What does this story say to you about faith in God and dealing with problems or obstacles? (*Answers will vary, but encourage responses that focus on the willingness and power of God to help them face problems.*)
6. Ask the participants to look at the "problem" they identified in the Warm-up activity. If you have time, have the participants create a prayer that asks for God's help in facing this problem and add it to the page on which the problem is written. This can also be done as an at-home assignment for the week ahead.

See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 20.

Psalm 23 ♦

The good shepherd

FOCUS Like a good shepherd, God guides, protects, provides, and invites us to dwell in the Lord's house (worship) throughout our whole life.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, pieces of white paper, and colored pencils or markers.

BACKGROUND The writer of this familiar psalm (identified as David in the heading) is someone who has lived a full life, filled with both hardship and joy. Through it all, God has been an ever-present force. God is compared to a shepherd, an image that was often used to describe the God of Israel in the Old Testament (see Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-16). Israel and many of its Near Eastern neighbors also used this image to describe the ideal king (see Psalm 78:71-72; 2 Samuel 5:2), one who provided protection and whose policies enabled all to live in comfort and security. The rod (an instrument of authority) and staff (a tool of support) further bring the king and shepherd metaphors together (Psalm 23:4). Verse 5 seems to describe the kind of banquet that one king might have provided for a subject after the two had completed a covenant agreement. Anointing the head with oil was a sign of hospitality in ancient Israel. The reference in the final verse to dwelling in the house of the Lord probably refers to worship in the temple (see also Psalm 27:4). In worship God was present with the people in a most special way. For the writer, the experience of God's presence in worship and the fact that God had guided him in right paths are the greatest things a person could hope for in this lifetime. For Christians the meaning of this psalm has been transformed into a hope for an eternal future with the one who called himself the good shepherd (John 10:11-16). (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP A recent advertising slogan uses the phrase *No Fear*. It is printed on T-shirts and caps. Ask the participants if they have seen this slogan and ask what they assume it means.

Ask the participants if it's possible to go through life with "no fear." Then ask them to think of at least one thing in their lives that makes them afraid. Remind them that they will

not have to tell anyone what their fears are, unless they want to. After a brief time ask only for volunteers to share their fears.

ACTIVITY Pass out blank sheets of white paper and colored pencils or markers. Have the participants turn to Psalm 23 in their Bibles. Ask for a volunteer or two to read it aloud. Then assign individuals or pairs one verse to illustrate. Try to cover each verse. Ask the participants to draw the image they see in their minds based on their assigned verses. After five minutes, have everyone share their drawings and tell what their verses mean to them.

RESPONSE Use the following questions as time allows:

1. What do you think it means to be led in right paths? (*This probably referred to following God's law. Participants may focus on making the right moral choices. Remind them that it is God's Spirit who wishes to lead them in these paths.*)
2. Why do you think this psalm is often read at funerals? (*Focus on verse 4. "Darkest valley" [NRSV] has also been translated as "the valley of the shadow of death." This psalm provides comfort and hope for those who have lost a friend or relative.*)
3. Have the participants finish the sentence: "This psalm helps me. . . ." (*Answers will vary.*)
4. Have everyone think about the fear they identified in the Warm-up activity. Encourage them to pray this week for courage and guidance. Remind them that Jesus, the good shepherd, wants to be part of their lives to lead them in the right direction, to comfort them when they are down, to help them face life's fears with courage and hope. Finally, remind them that it is in worship that we hear most clearly God's words of hope and grace. That's why attendance in worship is so important to building a strong faith.

See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 21.

1 Kings 17:1-24 ♦ Elijah and the widow

FOCUS God calls and empowers prophets to do great things.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles and copies of the Reproducible Page 7.

BACKGROUND This story records the beginning of Elijah's ministry as a prophet in the Northern Kingdom, Israel. His ministry roughly coincided with the reign of King Ahab (874 to 853 B.C.), son of Omri. Both Omri and Ahab are known for their flagrant disregard for the chief commandment: "You shall have no other gods." 1 Kings 17:1-24 is a story sandwiched between chapters 16 and 18, which focus on how Ahab was promoting worship of the Canaanite god Baal. As a result of this apostasy (renunciation of the faith), God sent Elijah to announce the drought God would initiate as punishment for Ahab and Israel's sin. Elijah's name in Hebrew literally means "the Lord is my God." His message and his actions were a living confession of his name. After announcing the coming drought to Israel's king, Ahab (17:1), Elijah was directed to go to Zarephath, a Phoenician town on the Mediterranean Sea. The widow he encountered there was not a believer in Elijah's God, but through the miraculous events of the story (the never-failing bread and the resurrection of the widow's son) she came to believe in Elijah's God. The placement of this story of a believing foreigner between chapters highlighting Israel's lack of faith in the Lord, provides a clue to the author's intentions and reminds us of encounters like the one Jesus had with a Canaanite woman who displayed great faith (Matthew 15:21-28). (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Pass out copies of "Elijah and Elisha Map" (Reproducible Page 7), which shows a map of the places mentioned in the stories of Elijah and Elisha (Sessions 13-15). Point out that Elijah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Review, if necessary, the fact that after King Solomon's reign, the people of Israel split into two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Isra-

el in the north. Point out the key places in the story—Israel, Gilead, (the location of Tishbe, Elijah's hometown, is unknown), wadi (brook) Cherith, Sidon, and Zarephath.

ACTIVITY This is another good story to read aloud. Assign volunteers to read the speaking parts and the part of the narrator. Before reading, relate enough Bible background to help the participants understand why Elijah announces to Israel's King Ahab a drought in 17:1. After reading the story, turn to the following questions.

RESPONSE 1. Name the miracles in the story. (17:6—ravens feed Elijah; 17:11-16—the unfailing jar oil and grain; 17:20-23—the revival of the widow's dead son; 17:24—Some would say that the widow's belief in God [in response to Elijah's miracle-working] was a miracle.)

2. Do you find these miracles easy or difficult to believe? Why? (Answers will vary. While it is easy to focus on the miracles in this story, it is important to remind the participants that not very many people get to see miracles like those Elijah or Jesus performed. Remind them that Jesus also said: "Blessed are those who have not seen [the miracle of my resurrection] and yet have come to believe" [John 20:29 NRSV].)

3. What do you think is the main point of this story? (Answers will vary. The story introduces us to the life and work of the prophet Elijah, but more importantly it demonstrates the power of the God of Israel and what can happen when people believe in and act on this power.)

4. Name some "everyday miracles" you could do. (Answers will vary. Focus on the fact that all can do acts of justice and mercy and kindness—being a friend, defending another's honor, being truthful, or reaching out to those in need or who are down and out are miracles in today's world of violence and self-centeredness.)

5. Encourage everyone to pray this week that they might be God's hands and feet in the world.

1 Kings 18:17-40 ♦ Elijah and the prophets of Baal

FOCUS Worship only the God of Israel, whose power is greater than all earthly gods.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles and copies of the Reproducible Page 7.

BACKGROUND The great confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal occurred about three years after Elijah first announced the coming drought in Israel (see 1 Kings 17:1). In 1 Kings 18:1 Elijah was directed to return to Israel and meet again with Ahab. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was ordering the execution of the Lord's prophets (see 18:2-16), so Elijah's encounter with Ahab and the prophets of Baal was a brave move in hostile territory. In 18:18 NRSV Elijah identified Israel's main problem: it's king (Ahab) had "forsaken the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals." Therefore, Elijah set up a contest to take place on Mount Carmel between himself and the prophets of Baal that would "eat at Jezebel's table" (18:19 NRSV). What a spectacle that was to be. It was like the "super bowl" of prophets or a heavyweight title match. Ahab ordered everyone in Israel to come and watch the contest (18:20). When all were gathered, Elijah went on the offensive first, challenging the people: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (18:21 NRSV). This, of course, is the key question in the text: What God will Israel [or anyone] serve? The people did not have the nerve to answer (18:22) until after the contest was over and Elijah's God, the Lord of Israel, had soundly defeated Baal and his prophets. Then they cried out: "The LORD indeed is God" (18:39 NRSV). (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Ask the participants to think of the most exciting contest or athletic event they have ever participated in or watched. If they can't think of something concrete, ask them to imagine an exciting contest or event. Have volunteers briefly share their stories. Ask: What made the contest or event exciting? What was

at stake, or what was on the line for the winner or loser? After a brief time of sharing, tell the participants that the Bible text for this session is about a big contest.

ACTIVITY Begin by looking at "Elijah and Elisha Map" (Reproducible Page 7), which shows a map of the key places in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. Point out Tyre (where Jezebel was from), Israel, and Mount Carmel. Then read the story, assigning volunteers to read the parts of Ahab, Elijah, the prophets of Baal, the people, and the narrator. This story lends itself to movement as well. You or a volunteer could read the story as others pantomime the action. Use the following questions to review and respond to the story.

RESPONSE 1. Why did Elijah challenge Ahab and the prophets of Baal to this contest? (They had been forsaking their faith in the Lord and following false gods, something that the First Commandment strictly forbade.)

2. Were you surprised by the outcome of the contest? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)

3. What other "gods" sometimes try to take the place of God in your life? (Answers will vary. Remind the group of Luther's definition: a god is anything or anyone to whom we give our devotion. We always have to examine what it is that we are spending our time and energy serving. Another way to get at this idea is to ask the participants what the most important things in life are to them. Are these things more important than God?)

4. Elijah called himself the servant of the Lord (18:36). How can you serve God? (Answers will vary. Encourage everyone to consider this question seriously. Perhaps they could reflect on it during the week ahead and pray that they might find ways to be God's servants.)

(For further reflection, invite the participants to read "The Contest" on page 339 of *Study Bible: The New Student Bible NRSV*.)

Session 15

2 Kings 5:1-19 ♦ Elisha and Naaman

FOCUS God's grace and power can provide healing and new life.



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

BACKGROUND The prophet Elisha was Elijah's successor in Israel (see 2 Kings 2:1-14). His ministry spanned the years from about 848 to 797 B.C. Second Kings 5 relates the story of the healing of Naaman, a commander of the army of Aram, one of Israel's enemies. Naaman had what the text calls leprosy, which could have been one of a number of skin diseases. Naaman found out about Elisha from an Israelite girl whom the Arameans had kidnapped. Being a dutiful soldier, he reported the girl's message to his king, who allowed Naaman to go to the king of Israel to find Elisha. As a sign of good faith, Naaman took money (about 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold) and clothing for the king of Israel. The king of Israel was distraught, thinking Naaman's request for Elisha's healing was a trap (5:6-7). This was evidence of his lack of faith in God. Elisha caught wind of the request and saw it as an opportunity to witness to God's power (5:8). When Naaman refused to do what Elisha told him to do, it is Naaman's servants who showed faith and convinced Naaman to follow Elisha's orders. When he obeyed, his skin became like that of a young boy. Naaman, a Gentile, received God's grace and became a sign to disobedient Israel that God's blessings come through faithfulness. And Naaman offered the confession: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" (5:15 NRSV). Naaman's request of two muleloads of soil (5:17) had to do with the common belief in the ancient world that a god could only be worshiped on the soil to which it was bound. Naaman wanted to worship Israel's God back in Damascus. Notice that Elisha didn't quibble when Naaman said that he may have to kneel down in the house of Rimmon, the Aramean equivalent of the god Baal, when he reported back to his king at home (5:18-19). (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Put the word healing on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Under it write three more words—body, mind, spirit—each in a column. Ask the participants to think about what a person needs to remain healthy in each of these categories. After a brief time of sharing, introduce the Bible text by saying that it has to do with people who needed different kinds of healing.

ACTIVITY Pass out copies of "Elijah and Elisha Map" (Reproducible Page 7), which shows a map of the area described this session. Point out Aram, Israel, and the Jordan River. Note that the Arameans were Israel's enemies and did not believe in Israel's God. Read the story aloud, or, as a change of pace, tell the story of Naaman and Elisha in your own words. Interject information from the Bible background that will help shed light on the story.

RESPONSE 1. Which characters in the story showed faith in Israel's God? (*The young Israelite girl, Naaman [eventually], Elisha, Naaman's servants.*) Which didn't? (*The king of Israel, Naaman [at first], probably Naaman's own king.*)

2. Complete this sentence: "I think Naaman was healed because . . ." (*Answers will vary. Focus on the fact that God chose to heal Naaman, and that Naaman believed and obeyed Elisha's request.*)

3. Who else needed healing in this story? (*The participants may not readily realize that Israel's king and many of its people needed spiritual healing. Many of them had lost their faith and turned from God.*)

4. Talk about the concept of sin. We are all sinful and in need of forgiveness (spiritual healing). Ask the participants to consider how they can be healthier—physically, mentally, and spiritually. This can be an at-home assignment for the week. Try to follow up on this important assignment.

See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 22.

Session 16

Isaiah 11:1-10 ♦ Promise of deliverance

FOCUS A descendant of Jesse would be a messiah and usher in an age of peace, prosperity, and justice.



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

BACKGROUND Isaiah proclaimed God's Word to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and its capitol Jerusalem from 742 to 687 B.C. During this period of time, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was defeated and annexed to Assyria (722 B.C.). Judah thus became a territory surrounded by hostile neighbors. Isaiah attempted to keep the kings and the people of Judah focused on faith in God and the way to face their ongoing problems. It was in response to one of those dark times that Isaiah was called to deliver a message of warning and hope to King Ahaz (see Isaiah 7:1-9). Isaiah 11:1-10 focuses on the hope of a messianic deliverer who can bring a new age of justice, righteousness, and peace to Judah. This deliverer (probably assumed by the original hearers to be an earthly king) was to come from the "stump of Jesse" (11:1). The spirit of the Lord would rest on this deliverer, who would display all the traits of the ideal king: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of (respect for) the Lord (11:2-3). This messianic king would deal justly with the poor, slay the wicked, and live a righteous life (11:4-5). The messianic age ushered in by this deliverer would be an age so peaceful that little children could play with dangerous wild animals and not be injured. In fact, nature as it exists would be changed; no one or no thing would hurt another in "my holy mountain," a reference to Mount Zion in Jerusalem (11:9). But the messianic rule would not be limited to Jerusalem: all the nations would seek this deliverer (11:10). Centuries later, Israel was still looking for this messiah to come. Christians, based on New Testament writings like Matthew 1-2, have seen the coming of Jesus as a fulfillment of this prophecy. (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Have each person name something that he or she really looks forward to doing, having, being, or happening. List volunteers' responses on the chalkboard or chart paper. Briefly follow up by asking why it is important that we have hope for the future. What if there was nothing in life to look forward to?

ACTIVITY Provide a brief summary of who Isaiah was and the situation in which he prophesied to the people of Judah (see Background). Have the participants read through the text alone or with a partner. Ask them to underline, circle, or write down words or phrases they don't understand. Talk about these briefly and then move on to the following questions.

RESPONSE 1. From whose family was the new messianic king or deliverer to come? (*Jesse's.*) Why is that important? (*Because Jesse's son, David, had been the greatest king in Israel up until this time. The next great king and deliverer would be David's descendant.*)

2. Matthew 1 says that Jesus comes from the family of Jesse and David. How does this affect how we, as Christians, read Isaiah 11:1-10? (*Christians have come to see Jesus as the Messiah, who brings the messianic age.*)

3. Isaiah 11:2-5 describes an ideal leader. What do think the perfect leader would be like? (*Answers will vary.*)

4. Concerning the messianic age of peace described in Isaiah 11:6-10, do you think it: (a) has already come and gone; (b) is here now; (c) is still to come? (*Answers will vary. Even Christian theologians disagree about this. We believe that the age of the messiah is now and not yet. While Jesus has come to bring forgiveness and new life through the Holy Spirit, we also look forward to a future time when Christ will come again and bring an age of perfect peace.*)

5. Have the participants pray this week for the world's leaders and for hope for people who are facing dark times.

Daniel 3:1-30 ♦

Three young men in a fiery furnace

FOCUS God gives us courage to remain faithful and protects us when our faith comes under fire.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND The book of Daniel is a blend of stories and apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature uses symbols and imagery and is usually focused on the future when God will intervene in our world to defeat evil and create a new kingdom. This kind of literature, a later development in Israel, and the fact that some of Daniel is written in Aramaic have led some scholars to believe that the book of Daniel may have been written during a time of intense persecution of Jews under the Persian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes around 167-164 B.C.

Antiochus tried to get Jews in Palestine to honor him as a god and put to death many who didn't. The action in Daniel 3 seems to describe such an environment of persecution. According to the story, the action took place during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the country that defeated Judah in 587 B.C., and which took many of its people into exile. Some bright young Jewish men like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given places of power in the Babylonian government (see also Daniel 1:1-7). However, Daniel 3 reports that these faithful young Jews refused to worship the statue Nebuchadnezzar set up on the plains of Dura. This led to a brief trial at which they expressed confidence in God to save them from punishment in the fiery furnace that was so hot it torched the men who threw them in. God's angel intervened and saved their lives, which prompted Nebuchadnezzar to praise Israel's God and promote Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Ask the participants to think about the times they have gotten into "hot water." What got them there—their own actions, the actions of others? How did they get out?

Have volunteers share stories. Do not make everyone talk, since some information may be rather sensitive.

ACTIVITY Briefly review the actual historical situation in which the story takes place and if time allows, share other information from the Background you think may shed light on the story. Emphasize that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are bright young men who have been taken from their homeland (Judah) to serve a foreign king in a foreign land. Have the participants imagine how they might have felt under such circumstances. Then read the text aloud, assigning volunteers to read the parts of the king, the herald, king's advisers, the young Jewish men, and the narrator.


RESPONSE 1. How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego get in trouble with the king? (*Some Chaldeans, probably jealous of the young Jews, reported to the king that they refused to fall down and worship the king's idol.*)

2. When faced with being thrown in the fiery furnace for disobeying the king, what did they do and say? (*See 3:16-18.*)

3. What do you think you would do if you faced a similar situation? (*Answers will vary. Remind the participants that through the years, and still today, people have faced death or persecution because of their faith.*)

4. Name some situations in which your faith might be challenged or tested? (*Answers will vary. Record the responses and talk about the importance of being faithful when it is not "cool," or when faced with making a tough choice. Remind the participants that they don't have to make such choices on their own. God's Spirit is present to help. They also need to rely on friends and family or others who will provide positive advice.*)

5. Encourage everyone to pray this week for faith under fire.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 23.

Daniel 6:1-28 ♦

Daniel and the lions

FOCUS God protects those who remain faithful.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND Daniel was deported to Babylon when the Babylonians defeated Judah in 587 B.C. For more background on the book of Daniel and its authorship, see the Bible Background for Session 17. The first five chapters of Daniel tell how Daniel had been a faithful servant of the Babylonian kings. He was especially known for his accurate prediction of dreams. At the end of chapter five we find out that Darius, the Mede, has just received the kingdom from the Chaldean king Belshazzar, whom Daniel had correctly predicted would lose his kingdom and die. Darius upheld Belshazzar's final decree that Daniel should rank third in the kingdom (5:29; 6:1-2).

Daniel was such an excellent leader that the satraps who served under Daniel were jealous of him. They convinced Darius to sign a document forbidding prayer to anyone or any god but Darius, knowing that Daniel would not comply. They spied on Daniel, caught him praying to the Lord, and reported him to Darius. Even though Darius didn't want to punish Daniel, he had no choice. Honor would not allow him to rescind his signed decree. Daniel was thrown in the lion's den, but God protected him. When Darius rushed to the den in the morning, he found Daniel safe. Daniel's faith was a powerful witness, and an enemy and nonbeliever was moved to confess faith in Israel's God. Darius even made a decree that all people in the land should recognize Daniel's God. (6:25-27). (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Ask the participants if someone has ever spread rumors or told lies about them. Without relating specific incidents, ask how this made them feel. Once rumors are spread, why is it hard to defend ourselves? Then ask if the participants have ever spread rumors or told lies about others. Again, don't ask for specific infor-

mation, but talk briefly about the damage this can do to someone.

ACTIVITY Provide background about Daniel and his situation prior to the story in chapter 6 (See Background for Sessions 17 and 18). Then ask volunteers to read the parts of the various characters—Daniel, Darius, satraps, and narrator.

RESPONSE 1. Why did Daniel get in trouble with King Darius? (*Some jealous satraps told Darius that Daniel was praying to his own God, which violated Darius's decree.*)

2. Review the First and Eighth Commandments. Then ask how this story relates to them. (*Daniel remained faithful to the First Commandment and continued to pray to the one and only God of Israel. While the satraps did tell the truth about Daniel, they plotted to smear his reputation and have him eliminated, which violated the Eighth Commandment (bearing false witness) and perhaps the Fifth ["You shall not kill"] as well.*)

3. Have the participants respond to the following statements with AGREE, DISAGREE, or NOT SURE:

- It's easy to trust in and serve God.
- Showing my faith can affect whether or not another person believes in God.
- I believe God can and will protect me in times of danger.

Discuss responses as time allows. Another way to do this activity is to use a human continuum. Have participants line up along a line, one end of which is AGREE, the other end being DISAGREE, and NOT SURE in the middle. Encourage participants to talk about the positions they have chosen along the continuum. (*Focus on how it can be difficult to trust in and serve God, but that this is what God expects and promises to help us in the midst of trials. Talk about those times that test their faithfulness. Showing our faith can help others believe. This is called witnessing.*)

Jeremiah 1:1-19 ♦

The call of a prophet

FOCUS God calls young people to faithfulness and service.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND Jeremiah 1:1-3 provides some important background about the prophet Jeremiah and the time of his ministry. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a descendant of the priest Abiathar, who was banished to Anathoth by King Solomon many years before Jeremiah was born. Jeremiah's ministry took place roughly between 627 and 586 B.C. That means his prophecies were directed to the people of the Southern Kingdom (Judah), since the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had already fallen to the Assyrians.

Jeremiah often was called to speak words of judgment against those in Judah who followed other gods or who compromised their trust in the Lord. Jeremiah 1:4-10 includes a report of his calling while he was still a youth. Jeremiah 1:5 echoes the belief of the writer of Psalm 139 (see 139:13-16). Jeremiah protested that he was too young to do the job, but God didn't let Jeremiah off the hook (Jeremiah 1:6-8).

Jeremiah 1:11-19 is an oracle reporting God's judgment on Judah at the hands of enemies from the north (the "boiling pot" in 1:13). Even though the Assyrians held the land directly to the north of Judah, they were losing power. This northern force probably referred to the Babylonians, whom God would use to bring judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah no doubt knew that this message would be very unpopular, so God assured him in 1:17-19 that God would protect him and deliver him from those who did not like these visions. (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Ask the participants to name some responsibilities they have at home or school. Then ask them to name the most important responsibility they have ever been given. Were they excited about this responsibility or not? Why? Mention that the Bible text for today has to do with a young person—probably

around their own age—being given a huge responsibility by God.

ACTIVITY Read Jeremiah 1:1-4 aloud together and then give some background on Jeremiah and the historical situation in which he served God. Then read 1:5-10. Stop and check their understanding of this section, which details Jeremiah's calling. Ask what Jeremiah's task is (*to serve as a prophet and preach to Judah and the nations concerning God's judgment*). Get some responses to how the participants would like to have been in Jeremiah's shoes, or how they might react to being "called" by God today to do some big task. Finally, read through 1:11-19 together. Help the participants understand Jeremiah's vision and what it meant for Judah, as well as the promise of protection God gives Jeremiah in 1:17-19.

RESPONSE 1. Have the participants compare Jeremiah's calling to what Paul says to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:11-16). What is the common theme? (*God can use young people to speak about and do God's will. They can be examples of faithfulness and righteousness to people their own age or to people who are older.*)

2. Ask the participants to give themselves a "God's servant rating" based on the following scale: 5—AWESOME; 4—GOOD; 3—FAIR; 2—SOMETIMES SUNDAYS; 1—SAY WHAT? (*Answers will vary. The idea is not to make the participants feel unworthy. This activity gives them an opportunity to truthfully evaluate how they devote their time and energy to serving God. Remind them that a person doesn't have to be world-famous prophet to serve God. They can serve in everything they do and in every situation.*)

3. Imagine the greatest way you could serve God. What would it be? (*Answers will vary. Encourage some dreaming. Accept all answers.*)

4. Encourage everyone to pray this week for the courage to serve God in all situations.

Jeremiah 31:27-34 ♦

A new covenant

FOCUS God promises hope and a new relationship with people through the covenant of forgiveness and grace.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND Jeremiah 31:27-34 is part of a section (30:1—33:26), called Jeremiah's "book of consolation," because it offers hope for the restoration of both Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom). This prophecy was delivered around 587 B.C., just before Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and its people exiled to Babylon. See the Background in Session 19 for more information about Jeremiah and historic period in which he preached.

Israel had been defeated and annexed by Assyria around 722 B.C. As Jeremiah delivered the oracle in 31:27-34, Judah was on the verge of collapse as well. So the words provided hope for the future: the houses of Judah and Israel would be sown (repopulated) again after a time of exile (31:27-28). But Jeremiah's message provided more than hope for restoration. It spoke of a new covenant with the people.

In the past it was believed and taught that the children inherited the punishment of evil generations before them (31:29), but in the time of restoration to come each person would be responsible for his or her own sins (31:30). The new covenant would not be written on stone like the old covenant containing the Law: the new covenant would be written on people's hearts. The people would know God intimately and God would forgive their sins. This text is read each year on Reformation Sunday when the emphasis is on the freeing love of God whose covenant with people is based on grace through faith, not obedience to the Law. (Reproducible Page 4 provides helpful background information for this session.)

WARM-UP Write the word covenant on the board or on chart paper. Tell the group that this word refers to an agreement between two parties, in which both sides offer something to each other. Ask the participants to give examples of such agreements (*home mortgage, con-*

tract to buy a bicycle in installments, team rules, etc.). Have the participants ever signed or entered into verbal covenants with anyone? Encourage volunteers to share some examples. Then mention that the Bible text is about a new covenant God made with people.

ACTIVITY Share information about the historical situation in which this part of Jeremiah's prophecy is given (see Background for Sessions 19-20). Have the participants pretend they are residents in Jerusalem in the time just before it is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. The people are afraid about the future and know that they could be killed or taken from their homes to live far away in Babylon. Have them keep these things in mind as they listen to you or a volunteer read 31:27-34 aloud. After reading ask the following questions.

RESPONSE 1. How do you feel after hearing the words of Jeremiah? (*Answers will vary. They might feel hopeful about the promise restoration, but nervous about the fact that there will be a time of exile. They also may be wondering about this "new" kind of covenant.*)

2. How is the new covenant Jeremiah describes different from the old one? (*The old covenant was based on the written Law of Moses and held children responsible for their parents' sins. The new covenant is written on people's hearts and makes everyone responsible for his or her own sins. It also emphasizes forgiveness.*)

3. Do you have more or less hope for the future now that you have heard Jeremiah's prophecy? (*Answers will vary. This new covenant supports the covenant of God's love and grace that comes through Jesus.*)

4. Based on this prophecy, what word best describes God for you: (a) Judge; (b) Savior; (c) Builder; (d) Comforter; (e) Conscience; (f) Other? (*Answers will vary. God is all these things and more. This text especially emphasizes God's forgiving and restoring nature.*)

Mark 5:1-20 ♦

The Gerasene demoniac

FOCUS Christ has the power to free us from those evils that possess and control us.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, index cards, chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, and banner or bulletin board prepared for the Response.

BACKGROUND Though this story is basically one more exorcism performed by Jesus, it seems to present a particular challenge since the man had been possessed for a long time and could neither be subdued nor restrained. But, similar to the calming of the howling sea in the preceding story in Mark (4:35-41), the howling demon is subject to the Son of God. The power of Jesus Christ to overcome those evils that bind us is without question. Furthermore, the setting is in Gentile territory, demonstrating Jesus' mission beyond the borders of Jewish lands. The gift of freedom from bondage to evil is given to all.

WARM-UP Print on separate index cards one of those things to which we can become addicted, such as alcohol, drugs, money, television, dieting, and exercise. Pass these cards out at random to the participants. Ask them to act out or talk about the effects of too much of whatever they find on their card. For example, a person who has had too much alcohol would stagger around.

ACTIVITY On a chalkboard or chart paper, list those things in life on which we can become hooked. Answers should include those that were a part of the Warm-up exercise. Add as many others as the participants can think of. Ask: What is it about these things that get us hooked? (*They satisfy a need; we become obsessed; they are addictive; they become an escape from all our troubles.*) As we get hooked on these things, what are the results? (*Responses may include: we forget our priorities in life; we neglect God; we alienate ourselves from others; we destroy our bodies and minds.*) At what point do we go from "addicted" to be-


ing "possessed?" (*When we no longer are in control.*) Could we say that being possessed by these things is evil? Participants may think this is a strong term, but encourage them to consider the seriousness of being possessed by a power that controls us.

As you read Mark 5:1-20, focus on the possessed man and how the evil spirits were doing him much harm. Then, note the peace that embodies him after being ridded of the evil spirits (verses 18-20). How does he respond to Jesus? (*He wants to remain with Jesus.*) But what does Jesus tell him to do? (*Remember what God has done; proclaim the mercy of God.*)

RESPONSE As we examine those "evils" that control us, we can look to Jesus who comes to free us. Jesus is the alternative to all those powers that possess us, for only Jesus Christ offers what we need the most—freedom to live fully as human beings.

Ask: How can we call on Jesus to help us or others around us to be freed of possession? (*Prayer.*) We need to keep in mind that Christ's power works in many and different ways. Sometimes Christ gives us the power to effect change. For example, we might be empowered to seek help for an alcoholic parent. Or we might make a drug-addicted friend realize his or her helplessness and help him or her seek assistance and healing.

Make a large banner or use a bulletin board with the words, "Jesus frees us from . . ." at the top. Draw pictures or cut out pictures from magazines of those things that are addictive or destructive to our bodies and minds, or otherwise harmful to our well-being as children of God. At the bottom write the words: "O Lord, give us strength and free us from those powers that possess us in life."

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 24.

Mark 5:21-43 ♦

The bleeding woman and Jairus' daughter

FOCUS Christ's healing power frees us from bondage to illness and even the fear of death.



PREPARATION You will need: Bibles, copies of Reproducible Page 8.

BACKGROUND Both stories tell of restoration by touch and are great miracles in themselves. The overriding theme, however, is faith. The faith of the woman and Jairus' faith to call upon Jesus both lead to Jesus' reaching out with compassion. Jesus' power to draw out the faith of those around him and to make that faith a healing power is dramatized in the two healings.

WARM-UP Gather everyone in a circle. Have everyone face one direction and give the person in front a back rub. After a few moments, face the other direction and repeat the back rub. Ask everyone how it felt to get a back rub. (*Felt good, embarrassing, tickled, relaxing.*)

ACTIVITY Discuss with the participants what they understand or perceive to be the healing of God. Have any seen on television or elsewhere a ministry of healing where people seem to be miraculously healed of all ailments? Can we believe these healings? While mindful that there have been hoaxes in such healing ministries and that some may be suspect, we do need to be open to God's miraculous power. Furthermore, we Lutherans look at God's healing to be more than a healing of our bodies—there is a deep sense of spiritual healing and wholeness and emotional well-being that comes from Christ.

Distribute "Laying on of Hands and Anointing the Sick" (Reproducible Page 8) adapted from the *Occasional Services, a Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship*. Invite your pastor to per-

form the anointing with oil since anointing normally is done by a pastor.

Discuss the use of touch (laying on of hands) as a transmitter of the power of God's healing. If anointing was used, ask how it felt to have the cross traced with oil on one's forehead. (*Responses may include: It felt strange, greasy, comforting, like Christ was really there.*)

RESPONSE Healing has been an important part of Christian ministry. Throughout the ages churches have established hospitals and other places of healing. God's power, working through those trained in the medical field, has been seen as an avenue for the healing of our bodies and minds. The church also has always prayed for the sick and needy. Read James 5:14-16a. It is touch, whether through prayer or human hands, that helps us feel God's Spirit working. And what a better way to sense God's healing power than to be touched by God.

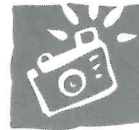
How does God touch us with a healing hand? (*Answers may include: there is sudden healing; God strengthens people, such as doctors and nurses, to bring care and healing; our minds are comforted.*) Healing does not always come about in ways we expect. But we trust God to bring healing and wholeness into our lives, our bodies, and our spirits.

If you do not already have one, suggest to the pastor or worship committee to have a Service of the Word for Healing. This simple service is found in *Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship*. Make plans with the pastor or worship committee to implement this service. Take part in this service as a choir, readers, or any other worship leader position needed.

Matthew 15:21-28 ♦

A woman with faith

FOCUS The freeing power of Christ's healing is aimed at all people.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles.

BACKGROUND Jesus consistently claimed his ministry was mainly aimed at calling back the Jews to God. So Jesus' initial reaction (or lack thereof) to the pleading Canaanite woman is not surprising, although it may be disturbing to our inclusive sensibilities. The clear result of this encounter and healing story is that we find Jesus' mission defined as something beyond our expectations and focused on bringing God's healing to all people.

WARM-UP As the participants arrive, give one or two an arm band that they are to wear throughout the session. Tell the group that those participants wearing arm bands are different from the rest and therefore are to be treated in less than a friendly manner—ignored, ordered to do this or that, frowned at, sneered at.

ACTIVITY Discuss how it feels to be ignored, treated harshly or impolitely, or even discriminated against (all while continuing to treat unkindly and ignoring the peoples with arm bands). (*Answers may vary: lonely, disturbing, frightening, unjust, uncomfortable, not nice.*) After some time, allow those with arm bands into the conversation. Ask how they felt when being ignored or mistreated. Perhaps others can share their personal experiences of alienation and discrimination.

Have a volunteer read Matthew 15:21-28. Ask: Why did Jesus initially ignore the woman? (*She was a Canaanite, a foreigner, and a woman.*) How do you think the woman felt? (*Hurt, still desperate for healing for her daughter, used to being ignored by Jews.*) What can we learn from Jesus' final response, commending

her faith and granting healing? (*Answers may vary. Some may include: we need to listen to those who seek help; faith transcends differences between cultures and races; and Christ comes to all people.*) Discuss how the participants will translate their lesson of Jesus' inclusivity into daily life. Who have they ignored? Should that behavior pattern change?

RESPONSE The woman's response to Jesus about dogs eating the crumbs from the table is indication that even those outside the community can and do have faith. It is so easy for individuals or groups to believe they have a corner on the truth. Yet Christ opens up the blessings of God to all people. Hearing the cries of the people indeed is a way to realize the breadth of the faith among God's people. Is the freeing message of the gospel proclaimed to all people in your community? To those in need? To those who come seeking?

Look around your church and see if it is a welcoming place. Are there clear signs that help people find the worship space, the washrooms, the pastor's office? Are the facilities handicapped-accessible? Are there indications that people of various ethnic, cultural, social, or economic background would be welcome (for example, the kinds of hymns sung, the style of dress in worship, topics of Bible study, etc.). Produce a report with recommendations to the appropriate committee, or offer to make improvements as a group.

John 9:1-41 ♦

The man born blind

FOCUS The light of life, Christ, opens our eyes from the bondage to darkness to see the glory of God.



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

BACKGROUND In biblical times human suffering—in this case blindness—was attributed to sin, either of the parents or the person—even prenatally. But Jesus denies this and instead focuses on purpose; this is an opportunity for God's power to be manifested. The story is one of Jesus acting out the triumph of light over darkness, giving sight to a blind person.

WARM-UP Cover each person's eyes with a bandana. Leave them covered until the end of the Bible study. If there are persons with visual impairments, cover their eyes as well to give them a sense of a "barrier" to everyday functions. Also, some people with visual impairments can see a little light so covering their eyes will further hinder some activity.

ACTIVITY Have the participants walk around or perform some other everyday task like filling a cup with water. Make sure the activity is safe. After several minutes, gather the group together, their eyes still covered.

Discuss what it is like to function without sight. (*Difficult, scary, hurts when you bump into things, have to rely on touch and sound.*) If you have persons with visual impairments, ask them how they manage in a world that generally requires sight for many activities. Ask what kinds of obstacles exist for those who live without sight every day.

Have the group listen carefully as you read John 9. Ask: Did the blind man merely receive sight or was there more to his newfound vision? (*His faith was opened up to seeing Jesus as Lord [9:35-41].*) What did Jesus have to say

about his critics? (*They could see visually, but were blind spiritually.*) How would spiritual blindness affect us? (*Answers will vary: we would feel emptiness, there would be lack of vision, lack of hope, discomfort.*) How can we nurture our spiritual sight? (*Attend worship, study the Bible, regular devotions, prayer.*)

RESPONSE Jesus gave sight to a blind person. It was a tremendous experience for this man to be able to see after being blind all his life—to see people, buildings, flowers, the sky, the sun. But more than this, Jesus opened his heart, and ours, too, to see something beyond what we normally see. We are freed from the darkness of our lives—whether just the dread of each day or some of the ills in our society—to understand and perceive a God who indeed gives us something to live for, the promise of wholeness and eternal life.

Ask the participants to list those things in life they see differently as Christians. (*Responses may include: the goodness of heart in even the enemy, the wonderful creation that surrounds us, caring people, the family of the church, forgiveness.*) Write an article for your newsletter based on these comments to give a positive outlook to the world as seen through eyes that have been opened by Christ. You can begin the article with something like: "The confirmation group has been examining what it means to receive sight again through Jesus Christ. In our sin we are often blinded to the goodness of God and God's world around us. But as Christ gave sight to the blind, we, too, receive sight. The participants now realize that through Christ we can see . . ."

John 11:1-53 ♦

Jesus raises Lazarus

FOCUS We are freed from the bondage to death through the life-giving gift of Christ.



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

BACKGROUND This miracle has been described as the crowning sign by Jesus, revealing Jesus as the giver of life. The symbolic importance is that Lazarus's sickness is for God's glory, for we find that the sickness will not end in death because Jesus will give life. Physical life, therefore, can be seen as a sign of eternal life, and Jesus is not only the agent of final resurrection, but gives eternal life now.

WARM-UP On a chalkboard or chart paper, create two columns. At the top of one column write, "... gives life" and the other "... takes away life." Have the participants finish the sentences and write down their words. (Possible words for the "gives life" column could include water, sunshine, God, parents; for the "takes away life" column, hatred, illness, war.)


ACTIVITY Assign different parts for a dramatic reading of John 11:1-53: Jesus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, several disciples (including Thomas), onlookers, and a narrator. If you have a small group, assign each person more than one part. Read the story in parts. Ask participants to read slowly, carefully, and expressively. This is important in order to focus on the contrasts of words, emotions, and actions portrayed in this story. When you finish, go back and read verses 25 and 26 again. Ask: What did Jesus mean by saying he is the resurrection and the life? (Answers may vary. But the central point is that God, through Christ, is our ultimate source of life.) Is there a reason for the order of words, resurrection and then life? Tie this question in with Jesus' words, "Those who

believe in me, even though they die, will live." (Answers will vary. Help the group focus on the human predicament that we die to sin but are raised again in our baptism to new life. In faith we die first, are then given new life in Christ.)

Examine again the chart of those things that give life and take away life. What is the source of those things that take away life? (Answers may include hatred, evil, sin, just the way it is.) The reality is that we are not only surrounded by this death, we even are part of this death. What breaks into the death cycle as the source of life? (Answers may vary, but God or Jesus Christ should be at the top of the list.)

RESPONSE The waters of Baptism are a powerful symbol of our sinfulness and our death (water drowns) from which we emerge with new life in Christ (water cleanses, refreshes and gives life). Even though Christians, who have the promise of life in Christ, still face death, we live in the assurance that death is not the final chapter in life, that a wonderful gift waits beyond. Although Lazarus was raised from the dead, he eventually died again. But the raising of Lazarus should be for us a sign, a reflection of the ultimate gift of life we have through Jesus Christ.

Gather around the baptismal font in your church. Touch and splash that water there. Remind the participants that it is this water that "drowns" us, gives new life, and washes us to be children of God. Mention that Martin Luther said that as we wake up each morning, we should make the sign of the cross to remember the waters of Baptism that have made us new people again, made alive to live a great life.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 25.

Mark 15:1-41 ♦

Jesus' death

FOCUS Jesus is bound up to death so that we may go free and live.



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

BACKGROUND This is the climax of Jesus' life, the culminating event to which our Christian faith points. The helplessness of Jesus in the face of death is an apparent focal point and readers are left with the question of why the Son of God could not save himself. The narrative is pointed and powerful in recounting the events of Jesus' final hours.

WARM-UP Ask the participants to list things that symbolize power and write them on a chalkboard or chart paper. (Some items may include bombs, guns, money, position, government buildings, locomotives, volcanoes.) At the top of the list draw a cross.


ACTIVITY Have the participants look at the whole list of power symbols. Discuss how each item on the list may be more powerful than others. How does each item manifest its power? (Kills, destroys, pulls, buys, etc.) Is there power in the cross? Discuss whether the cross is stronger or weaker than the other items listed. As you read through the story of Jesus' death from Mark 15:1-41, stop at different points and ask the participants to identify the kinds of power expressed (ropes to bind Jesus, the law of the land, prison, murder, the crowd, etc.) When you get to verse 39, discuss the meaning and power of the centurion's words, "Truly this man was God's Son!" How did he know? (Answers may vary. He saw the power of God in the power-

lessness of the cross; he saw the innocent death of Jesus only as a sign of God's power working through Jesus.)

RESPONSE The cross was an instrument of capital punishment. In this sense the cross is a symbol of death. The mystery for us is that the cross is where God, through the sacrifice of his only Son, took on death for us. The cross is the refusal to use power, the willingness to choose weakness rather than to seek revenge or to destroy. The power of the cross, therefore, lies precisely in its lack of power. For Christians, to make the cross a symbol of the faith is to say we stand for love rather than hatred, forgiveness rather than revenge, God's power rather than our own. This is a difficult task in a complicated world. But as we look at the cross each day of our lives, we are given the assurance that God is with us in our struggles to live a Christ-like life.

Ask if anyone has a renewed sense of the meaning of the cross. What thoughts do they have as they wear a cross or see one displayed? (Answers will vary. Some responses may include: the source of life, a crazy symbol that also gives hope, a symbol of forgiveness and salvation.)

Make signs that say: "What does this mean to you?" Post these signs on each cross you may find in your church. (Find safe ways to attach these so as not to damage each cross.) Write an article for your newsletter or bulletin, or make an announcement in church challenging members to think again what the cross means for us.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 26.

Matthew 28:1-10 ♦

The empty tomb

FOCUS By bursting from the tomb, Christ has broken forever the chains of death that entomb us.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles and materials for the project in Response.

BACKGROUND “Do not be afraid . . . He is not here; for he has been raised” (Matthew 28:5-6 NRSV). These words by the angel announcing Jesus’ resurrection were totally unexpected. But the announcement opens a new reality for the world—death no longer held Jesus. And as that good news was proclaimed to the women, they became the first witnesses to that reality. While this resurrection story is familiar as the focal point of Christian faith, there always is a freshness and newness to the story because it is about life itself overcoming death.

WARM-UP Talk about encountering something that is totally opposite of what was expected, such as a surprise birthday party two days before the real day. What are some normal reactions? (*Surprise, shock, fear, apprehension, speechlessness.*) Ask the participants about their experiences with surprises.

ACTIVITY Have the participants act out the resurrection account from Matthew 28:1-10. Assign parts for the two Marys, angel, soldiers, and Jesus. As you or a volunteer reads the story slowly, the actors should be as dramatic as possible, considering especially the sudden appearance of an angel, the fear of both the soldiers and the women, the shocking news that Jesus was no longer dead but alive, and the actual appearance of the resurrected Jesus.


This Easter story is so familiar that it is often difficult to realize again the radical nature of the resurrection. So why were the women both fearful and joyful? (*They didn’t know what was happening, but glad that Jesus was alive; they still were in shock and couldn’t really absorb the full impact of the news, which did sound good.*) How would the participants react to news of life where there was death? (*Shock, unbelief, surprise.*)

RESPONSE Christians are a resurrection people. We find our identity, our peace, our comfort, our direction only through the risen Christ. It is in the resurrection that we find ourselves no longer standing in fear of death and punishment, but truly alive and free to live as God wants us to. How can we do this? How can we witness to this great news?

The butterfly is often used as a symbol of the resurrection. The butterfly emerges from its cocoon as a beautiful surprise as compared to the simple caterpillar it once was. It is as if new life emerged.

Create a poster or decorate a bulletin board with butterflies on it. In large print, write, “We are a resurrection people. We are free. What are we going to do about it . . . ?”

Or, cut out butterflies from contact paper or labels and write on them, “I am a resurrection person.” Pass these out to each person attending worship to wear as a reminder of who we are as Christians living the resurrection.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 27.

Romans 3:19-30 ♦

Justified by faith

FOCUS We are made right with God and given new life to live in Christ, all as a free gift of God’s grace.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a candy bar or fast food gift certificate, and ideas for involvement in a local service project.

BACKGROUND Big words such as law, justified, righteousness, redemption, and atonement seem to be packed into this passage. Perhaps one way of clarifying Paul’s message is to say that words, big words, do not make us right with God. Nothing we can do, even following rules and being obedient, brings us to a right relationship with God. It all is very simple ultimately—God loves us and it is the free gift of that love that brings forgiveness. Forgiveness is the power that restores our relationship with God. And that is our faith.

WARM-UP Out of the blue, give one of the participants a candy bar or fast food gift certificate. Note the reaction for yourself and ask that person how he or she felt about this gift. (*Unexpected, great, why do I deserve this?*)

ACTIVITY Ask the participants how they would react to a free, valuable gift out of the blue. How do we usually get rewards? (*Responses may include: work for it, follow the rules, do something good.*)

Have a volunteer read Romans 3:19-30. You may wish to read from another version of the Bible, such as Today’s English Version to help the participants understand the meaning of the text.

Ask: How is a free, unexpected gift of great value similar to God’s gift of love? (*It’s undeserved, we don’t work for it, it’s a welcome surprise.*) How can we respond to a free gift? (*Say thank you, accept it as something meaningful, trust the gift to be real.*) How do we respond to God’s gift of a relationship made right again? (*We can live knowing that God loves us, we can live without being burdened by thoughts of sin.*) How can we share this free gift of love and forgiveness with the rest of the world? (*Answers will vary but may include: Do something meaningful for others without pay, show unconditional forgiveness toward others, smile.*)

RESPONSE Despite our sinfulness before God and before the world, God comes to us with the gift of love and forgiveness. We are justified—made right again with God—as a free gift. And through God’s righteousness, God’s justice comes into our lives. We can stand before God, confident and trusting only in that unconditional gift of God’s love for us. That is faith. Living that faith each day gives us a new freedom—the freedom to confidently move ahead with the knowledge of Christ’s presence.

Plan an event where you can give to the community a free gift of service.

Session 29

Romans 5:1-11 ♦ Peace with God

FOCUS Knowing we have peace with God gives us freedom to live.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, a variety of felt-tipped pens, chart paper, origami paper or square pieces of paper six to eight inches square, and copies of Reproducible Page 9.

BACKGROUND God comes to those who have rebelled against God. Through Jesus Christ, and by his grace, we are restored to a right relationship with God. And when we open ourselves and trust totally in that gift of God's grace rather than in ourselves, we have peace. As Paul explains, this happens as a result of Christ's death. We cannot attain that reconciliation with God by our own power. Therefore God showed his love through his only Son. We have peace of mind as we live in the knowledge of this wonderful gift. This peace, in turn, frees us to truly live and love.

WARM-UP Prepare a variety of colors of felt-tipped pens. Prior to meeting with the group, write in big letters on chart paper or a large sheet of paper, "What makes for peace." Have the participants draw, directly under the words, pictures of those things they believe make for peace. (*These could include lots of food, hearts, smiles, a cross etc.*) Where pictures cannot describe the thoughts, have them write words. (*These could include happiness, forgiveness, God, friendship, health, etc.*)

ACTIVITY Discuss together what really makes for peace. Focus on the fact that biblical peace is more than the lack of conflict. Peace is where there is wholeness—health, happiness, plenty, justice, meaningful life. Ask: Do we have this kind of peace? (*Some may say yes, but en-*

courage participants to see we are not quite there because there must be peace all around, not just in our communities.)

Have a volunteer read Romans 5:1-11. How does a gift of forgiveness and love give us peace? (*Answers may vary. We can live without worry of those sins that burden us, love is the opposite of hate and conflict, there is reassurance to live life fully.*)

Acquire some origami paper or prepare square pieces of paper approximately 6 to 8 inches square. Using "Paper Cranes" (Reproducible Page 9), fold the paper into paper cranes. Explain that in Japan, the crane is a symbol of hope, health, and peace. The tradition is that if you fold one thousand paper cranes, your wish of health, wholeness, and peace will come true.

RESPONSE Peace is a freeing thing. When we no longer have worry of conflict, illness, or other problems, we can live more freely. God wishes this for us and through Jesus Christ has given us the knowledge and the reality of a life of forgiveness and love.

With the participants, decorate the poster "What makes for peace" with the folded paper cranes. Display this poster in a prominent place in your church. Encourage the worship leaders to use the word peace often, with reference to peace of mind, wholeness for our bodies, elimination of conflict and war, and the gift of God's love.

Session 30

Romans 8 ♦ Free at last

FOCUS The Spirit of God that dwells in us makes us realize our identity as children of God and heirs of God's eternal kingdom.



PREPARATION You will need Bibles, chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers, and copies of Reproducible Page 10.

BACKGROUND The Christians to whom Paul addresses this letter (and other letters in the New Testament) lived difficult and dangerous lives. They were not popular in their non-Christian world and everything they stood for in Christian living was suspect and reason for persecution. In this context, Paul assures those Christians in Rome of the life-giving Spirit that is present in those who are in Christ. And even if the Christian life involves suffering, our confidence in God leads us to live freely as children of God who rejoice in the sure hope of glory.


WARM-UP Write on a chalkboard or chart paper the words, "Freedom is . . ." Copy down the words as you have the participants respond and finish the sentence. (*Answers may include: staying out late, saying what you want, having no responsibilities, flying like an eagle, worshipping God.*)

ACTIVITY Romans 8 is a long chapter, but read it out loud in the following three segments. Verses 1-17 (life in the Spirit). Ask: What gives us life? (*The Spirit.*) Why does it give life? (*It gives the power to live and see beyond human ways, it gives us guidance for life, it gives us peace.*) Continue with verses 18-30 (future glory). Ask: What will life involve? (*Suffering.*) How does the Spirit help us in life? (*It gives us the power to pray.*) How will all things turn out

in the end? (*Good.*) Conclude by reading verses 31-39 (God's love in Christ Jesus). Ask: In whom should we put our confidence? (*God.*) Why should we put our trust in God? (*Because God didn't even hesitate to give his only Son to die for us.*) What can separate us from the love of God? (*Nothing.*)

RESPONSE The key part of the chapter includes verses 31-39. Here we learn that God's love is so strong we will never be separated from God. What is the good news here? We are given the power to live. And that means to live freely, not bound up to rules and evils that may control our lives. What does freedom really mean? Examine again the list of "Freedom is . . ." from the Warm-up. Discuss each possibility and consider if it is really freedom as a gift from God, or a perceived freedom we think we have. Discuss the implications of our freedom from God. (*Answers may vary. Focus on the responsibility we have as children of God to live our faith. This means sometimes freely constraining ourselves for the sake of love of neighbor.*)

Distribute "I Have a Dream" (Reproducible Page 10). This excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech is truly a testament of the Christian faith. Our faith leads us from dream to vision to confidence in the freedom that comes from God. Have a volunteer read the speech. Encourage participants to post the speech in their rooms at home, inside school lockers, or otherwise make it a visible part of their lives.

 See corresponding activity in the *Youth Journal*, page 28.



Reproducible Page 1: ELCA Constitution Bible Basics: How Does the Church View the Bible?



Excerpts from
*Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing
Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America*

Chapter 2

Section 2.02

b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel in the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

Section 2.07

c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

Section C2.03

This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

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Reproducible Page 2: Luther on Scripture Bible Basics: How Does the Church View the Bible?



Excerpts from
*What Luther Says:
A Practical In-Home Anthology
for the Active Christian*
Compiled by Ewald M. Plass

Section 174

Bible in a Class by Itself After all, no book, teaching, or word is able to comfort in troubles, fear, misery, death, yea, in the midst of devils and in hell, except this book, which teaches us God's Word and in which God Himself speaks with us as a man speaks with his friend.

Section 204

Christ's Redemption the Theme of the Bible

What purpose other than this proclamation does Scripture have from beginning to end? Messiah, God's Son, was to come and through His sacrifice, as an innocent Lamb of God, bear and remove the sins of the world and thus redeem men from eternal death for eternal salvation. For the sake of Messiah and God's Son Holy Scripture was written, and for his sake everything that happened took place.



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Reproducible Page 3: The 10 Plagues
Session 3
Exodus 7:8—11:10



Verse	The Lord's Instructions	The Plague or Plagues	Reactions of Pharaoh, His Magicians, and His Officials
Exodus 7:14-21			
Exodus 7:25—8:15			
Exodus 8:16-32			
Exodus 9:1-12			
Exodus 9:13-35			
Exodus 10:1-20			
Exodus 10:21-29			
Exodus 11:1-10			



Reproducible Page 4: Old Testament Time Line
Sessions 11-20



The Monarchy and Prophets
1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles

UNITED KINGDOM

Saul 1030 B.C.—1010 B.C. From tribe of Benjamin. Anointed by Samuel. Had initial success over Ammonites and Philistines, but was defeated at Gilboa.
David 1010 B.C.—970 B.C. From the tribe of Judah. Great king of Israel. Captured Jerusalem in 1000 B.C. Victories over much of Middle East.
Solomon 970 B.C.—922 B.C. David's son. Married Pharaoh's daughter. Built temple. Introduced idolatry. Israel's greatest expansion.

DIVIDED KINGDOM

Approx. Date	Kings of Israel (Northern 10 tribes)	Northern Prophets
922 B.C.	Jeroboam—Built worship centers at Dan and Bethel. Civil war with Judah.	
910 B.C.	Nadab	
909 B.C.	Baasha—Massacred House of Jeroboam.	
886 B.C.	Elah	
885 B.C.	Zimri reigned seven days	
885 B.C.	Omri—Founded Samaria as capital. Subdued Moab.	
874 B.C.	Ahab—Married foreigner, Jezebel. Erected temple to Baal. Concerted effort to destroy worship of Yahweh.	Elijah (1 Kings 17–19)
853 B.C.	Ahaziah—Fought wars against Syria.	
852 B.C.	Joram—Ahaziah's brother. Campaigned with Judah against Mesha. Put to death with his family by Jehu.	
841 B.C.	Jehu—Yahwist reaction.	Elisha (2 Kings 2–13)
841 B.C.	Jehoahaz	
798 B.C.	Joash—Death of Elisha. Defeated Amaziah of Judah.	
783 B.C.	Jeroboam II—Restored Israel's boundaries.	Amos Hosea
743 B.C.	Zechariah	
743 B.C.	Shallum	
743 B.C.	Menahem	
738 B.C.	Pekahiah—Killed by Pekah.	
737 B.C.	Pekah—Lost Galilee and Giliad to Assyrians.	
732 B.C.	Hoshea—Alliance with Egypt.	
722 B.C.	CONQUEST OF ISRAEL by Assyria. Samaria destroyed. Deportation of population. The Kingdom of Israel comes to a complete end.	





DIVIDED KINGDOM		
Approx. Date	Kings of Judah (Southern two tribes)	Southern Prophets
922 B.C.	Rehoboam—Continue idolatry of Solomon. Grandson of David. Civil war with Israel.	
913 B.C. 911 B.C.	Abijah Asa—Struggled against idolatry. Allied with king of Damascus against Baasha of Israel.	
870 B.C. 848 B.C.	Jehoshaphat—Struggled against idolatry. Subdued Edom. Jehoram—Married Athalia, daughter of Ahab. Baal worship introduced. Edom revolted successfully.	
841 B.C. 841 B.C.	Ahaziah—Killed on Jehu's orders. Athaliah—(Queen) daughter of Ahab, wife of Jehoram, massacred king's sons except for Joash.	
835 B.C.	Joash—Grandson of Ahaziah. Repaired temple. Restored worship of the Lord.	
796 B.C.	Amaziah—Victory over Edom. Defeated by Joash of Israel. Killed at Lachish.	
781 B.C. 740 B.C. 736 B.C.	Uzziah—Commercial and agriculture expansion. Jotham Ahaz—Offered son as human sacrifice. King of Damascus and king of Israel (Pekah) besieged Jerusalem but were defeated after Ahaz appealed to king of Assyria for help.	Isaiah (Isaiah 1–23, 28–39) Micah
716 B.C.	Hezekiah—Reformer. Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah but failed to take Jerusalem.	
687 B.C.	Manasseh—Pagan cults in temple. Human sacrifice and temple.	
642 B.C. 640 B.C.	Amon Josiah—Discovery of "Book of Law." Religious reform. First edition of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Killed in battle with Egypt.	Zephaniah Nahum Habakkuk Jeremiah
609 B.C. 609 B.C. 598 B.C.	Jehoahaz Jehoiakim—Rebelled against Babylon. Jehoiachin—siege of Jerusalem by king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. Taken captive to Babylon.	Ezekial
597 B.C. 586 B.C.	Zedekiah—son of Josiah. Revolted against Babylon. DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM. People exiled into Babylon. Temple destroyed.	Jeremiah taken to Egypt. Isaiah II (Isaiah 40–56)
550 B.C. 520 B.C.		Haggai Zechariah I (Zechariah 1–8) Isaiah III (Isaiah 56–66) Obadiah
500 B.C.		Joel Malachi Zechariah II (Zechariah 9–14)
450 B.C. 400 B.C. 350 B.C.		

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Reproducible Page 5:
David and Goliath Battle Area
Session 11

SYRIA



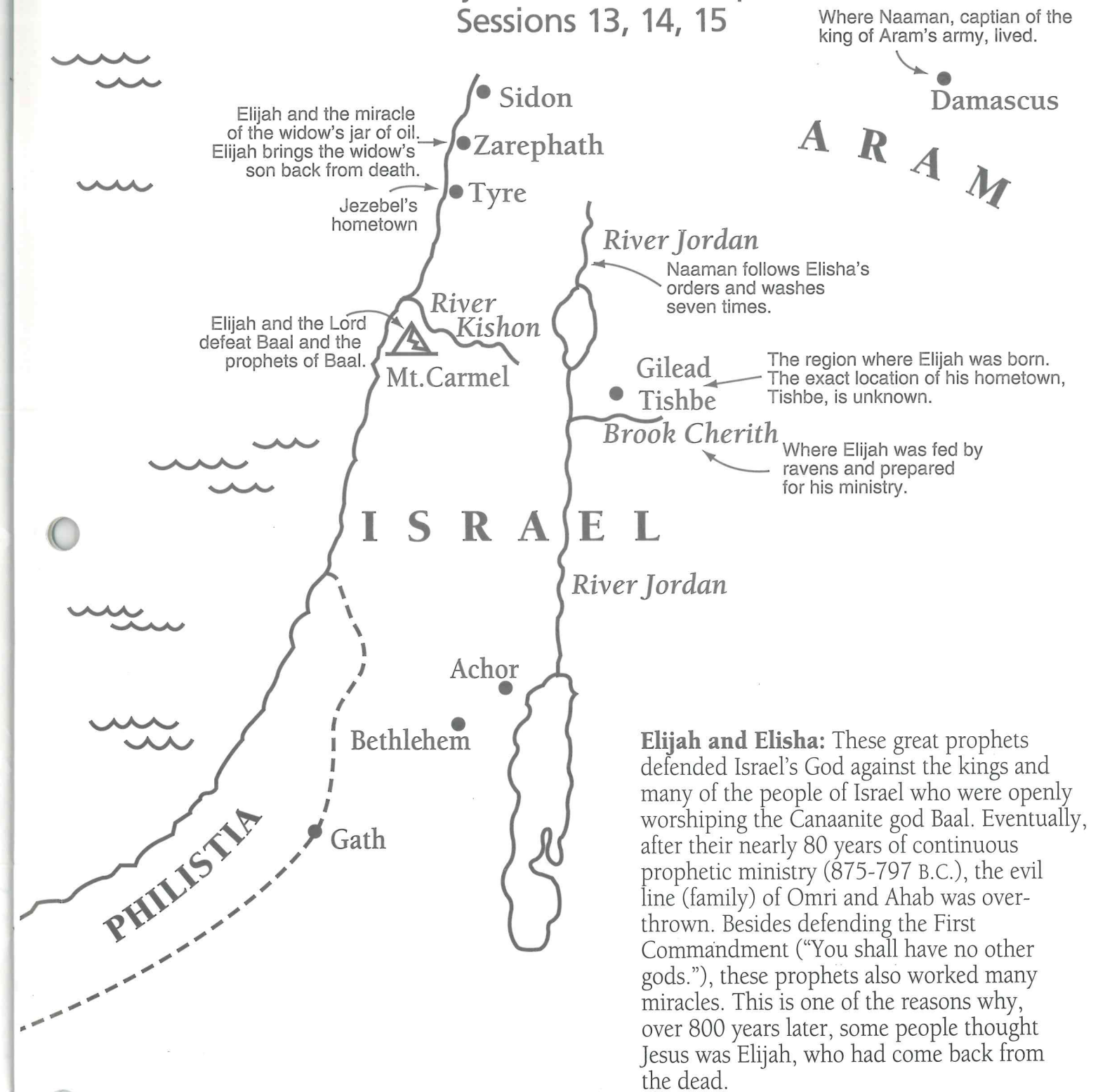
Reproducible Page 6: Tale of the Tape
Session 11



DAVID
Hometown: Bethlehem, Judea
Height: Unknown (probably about 5-1/2 feet)
Weight: Unknown (probably about 115 pounds)
Armor: None (tried Saul's but didn't fit)
Weapon: Sling and five baseball-sized stones
(and the power of the God of Israel!)

GOLIATH
Hometown: Gath, Philistia
Height: Six cubits and a span (about 9 feet)
Weight: Unknown (probably in excess of 400 pounds)
Armor: Bronze, weighing 5000 shekels (about 125 pounds)
Weapon: Iron spear, with point weighing 600 shekels
(about 15 pounds)

Reproducible Page 7:
Elijah and Elisha Map
Sessions 13, 14, 15



Elijah and Elisha: These great prophets defended Israel's God against the kings and many of the people of Israel who were openly worshipping the Canaanite god Baal. Eventually, after their nearly 80 years of continuous prophetic ministry (875-797 B.C.), the evil line (family) of Omri and Ahab was overthrown. Besides defending the First Commandment ("You shall have no other gods."), these prophets also worked many miracles. This is one of the reasons why, over 800 years later, some people thought Jesus was Elijah, who had come back from the dead.

Reproducible Page 8: Laying on of Hands
and Anointing the Sick
Session 22

1. This order is for use in a hospital or home with individuals who are unable to attend a corporate service of the Word for healing.
2. Confession and forgiveness; Psalms, Lessons, and Prayers; Laying on of Hands and Anointing the Sick; and Holy Communion are components of a ministry of healing.
3. Anointing normally is done by a pastor.
4. The minister says these or similar words:

P: Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.
R: Amen.

OR

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.
R: Amen.

5. An address may be said in these or similar words:

P: We are here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who restored the sick to health and who himself suffered for our sake. He is present among us still to heal and to make whole. We entrust our brother/sister, (name), to the grace and power of Jesus Christ, that the Lord may ease his/her suffering and grant him/her health and salvation.

6. Confession and forgiveness may follow.
7. One or more of the following lessons are read.

A reading from St. Luke: Luke 4:40

A reading from the gospels: Matthew 10:1,5,7-8a; Mark 6:12-13

A reading from James: James 5:14-16a

8. The minister lays both hands on the person's head and, following a brief silence, says:

P: I lay my hands upon you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, beseeching him to uphold you and fill you with grace, that you may know the healing power of his love.
R: Amen

9. If the person is to be anointed, the minister dips a thumb in the oil and makes the sign of the cross on the sick person's forehead, saying:

P: (name), I anoint you with oil in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
R: Amen

10. The prayer is said.

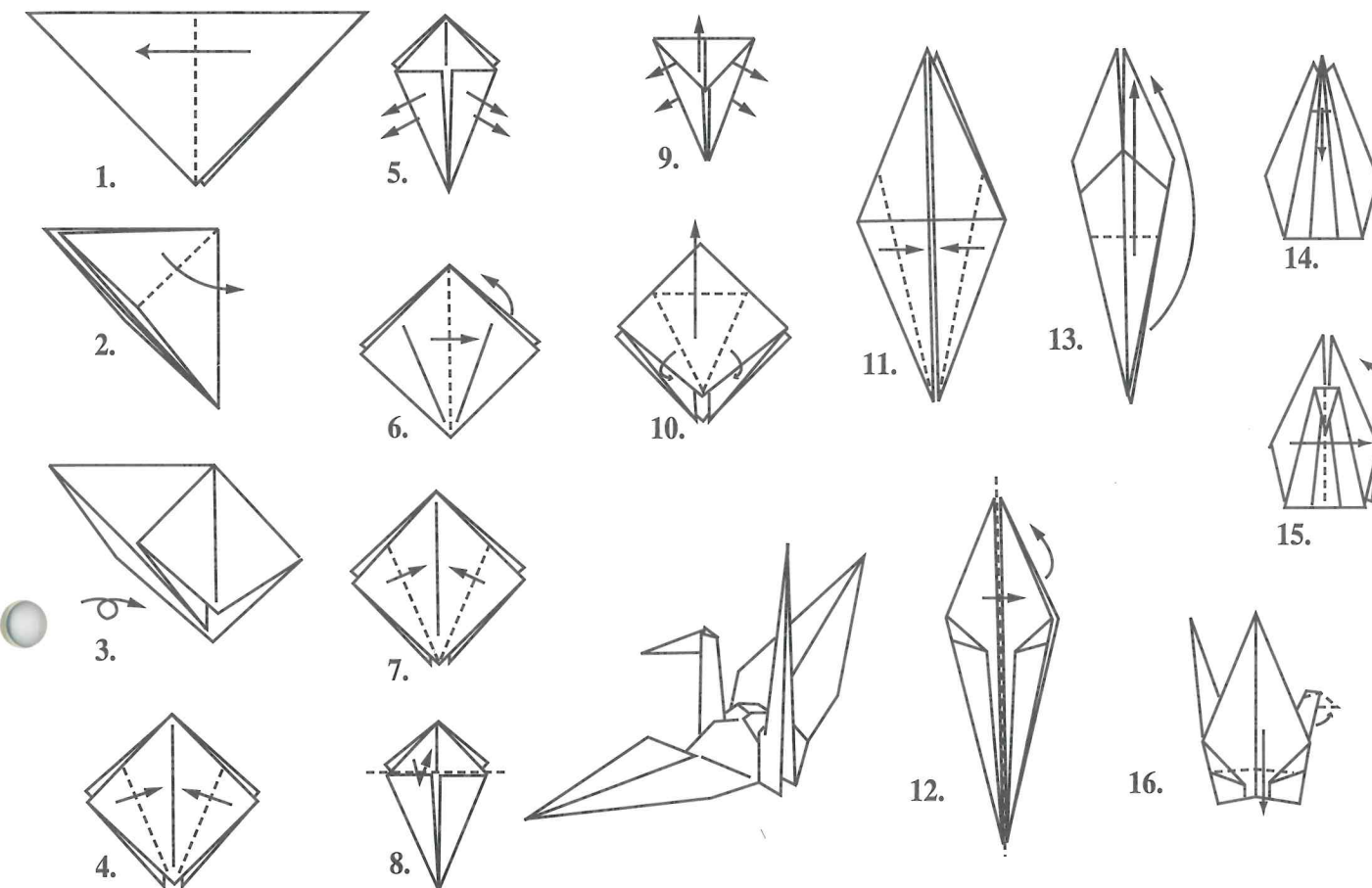
P: God of mercy, source of all healing, we give you thanks for your gifts of strength and life, and especially for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have health and salvation. Help us by your Holy Spirit to feel your power in our lives and to know your eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
R: Amen

11. The blessing concludes the service.

P: Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give you strength and bless you with peace, now and forever.
R: Amen

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Reproducible Page 9: Paper Cranes
Session 29



1. Begin with a square of paper folded diagonally in half. Fold in half again.
2. Put two fingers inside top triangle and push out O down to point P. A mountain fold (XR) will form and point X will move out to form a square.
3. Diagram shows completion of step 2. Turn model over. Fold both layers of triangle (PQR) to the left by way of valley fold PR. Repeat step 2, bringing point Q down to point P. Y will move over to X to complete second square.
4. Bring all points together at the bottom, crease well. The preliminary base has been completed. Valley fold lower raw edges of the top layer to center line. Turn model over. Repeat the same steps.
5. Unfold all four flaps, return to preliminary base.
6. Swing left side of upper layer to the right; on the back, swing right flap to the left.
7. Repeat step 4. This time make the valley folds on existing mountain creases.
8. Valley fold top point along top edge of flaps. Crease sharply. Unfold. Turn model over and repeat the same step.
9. Unfold all flaps, return to preliminary base.

10. Lift top layer at point O, fold back on existing valley crease, allow precreased mountain fold to form left and right, bringing both raw edges to center line. Turn model over, repeat same step.
11. The bird base has been completed. To narrow neck and tail, valley fold top layers as shown. Repeat on back. Note: Do not bring outside folded edges all the way to center line.
12. Do as in step six.
13. Fold lower point of top layer upward as far as it will go. Repeat on back.
14. Valley fold one tip down. This will form the head.
15. Do as in step 6 or 12. Neck and tail will be inside between wings.
16. Pull out neck and tail to desired angle. Neck could be pulled out further than the tail or both could be pulled out a little further than illustrated. Press flat. Hold neck and wing together and pull out head from inside neck. Press flat. Valley fold wings down. With thumbs on top of wings and bent forefingers pressed against each side of model under wings, gently pull wings sideways to fill out body of crane. Do not go too far. Blow into hole underneath to help fill out the body.



Reproducible Page 10: I Have a Dream

Session 30

Excerpts from

"I Have a Dream"

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

... I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

... I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith we will be able to hear out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning—"my country 'tis of thee; sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring"—and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that.

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, for every mountain-side, let freedom ring.

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

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