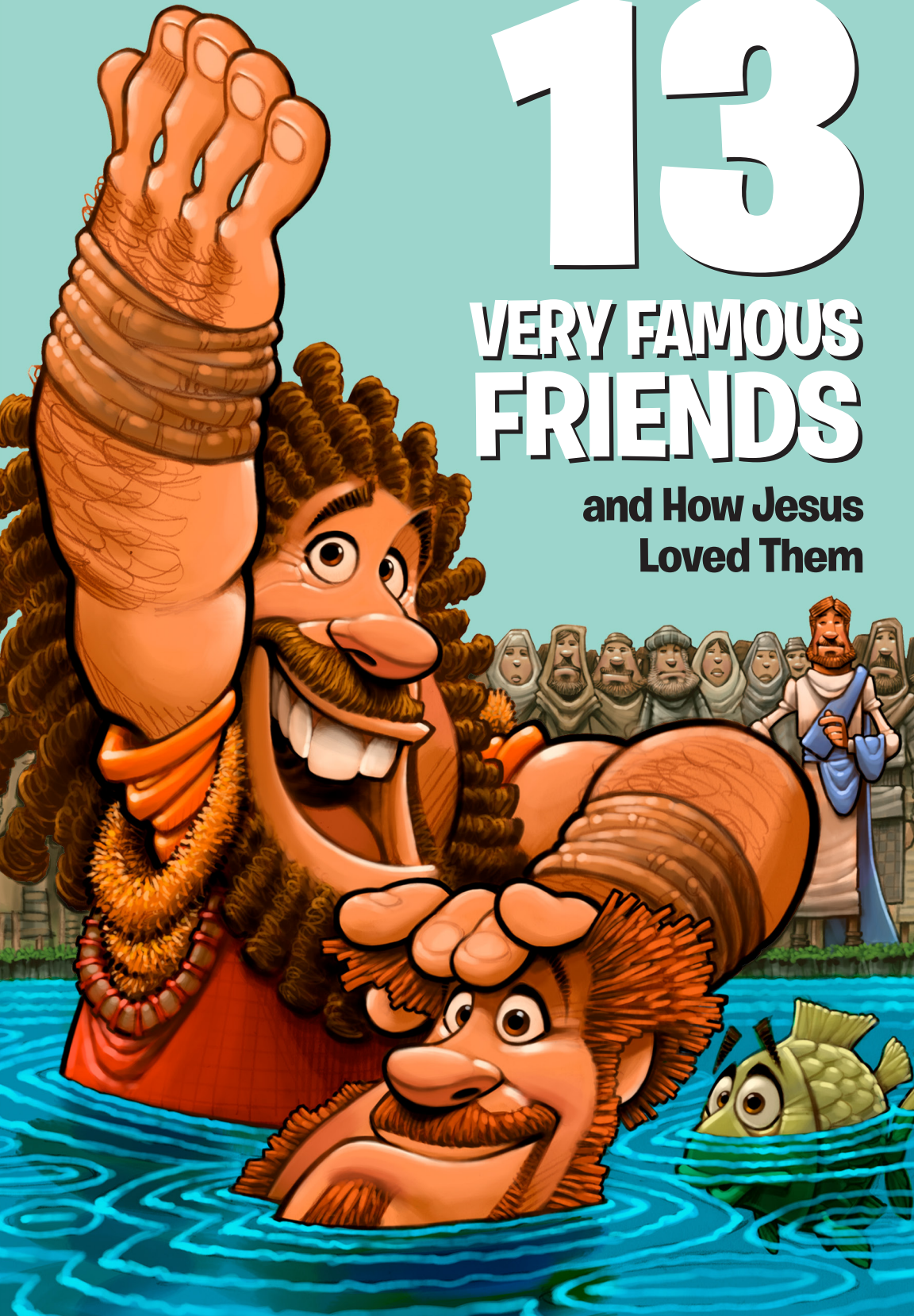


13

VERY FAMOUS FRIENDS

and How Jesus
Loved Them



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Loved Them

13 VERY FAMOUS FRIENDS AND HOW JESUS LOVED THEM

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**I no longer call you slaves,
because a master doesn't confide
in his slaves. Now you are my
friends, since I have told you
everything the Father told me.**

John 15:15

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How to Use These Sessions

About These Sessions

First, thanks! Thanks for caring about children and for helping them discover that if they're a friend of Jesus, his love changes ... everything.

That was true for Jesus's famous friends (they're in the Bible and that makes them famous!), and it's true for the rest of us too.

Through these 13 sessions you'll help your kids see Jesus in a fresh, new light. Yes, he's their Savior. And their Lord. And the King of Kings.

But he's also their friend. And he's a *good* friend—as the people around him in Bible times discovered. As you explore those accounts with your kids, you'll help them see that nothing has changed.

Jesus is *still* a good friend—one worth knowing.

So get ready to help your kids make that discovery!

Welcome to Easy

These sessions for elementary kids are carefully designed to make your life easy. They're light on supplies, quick to prepare, and long on fun. You'll find most supplies in the church's supply closet or kitchen or at home in your garage, pantry, or junk drawer—no need to spend time scrambling to come up with materials.

Because these sessions are created so beginning teachers or mature teenagers can lead them, you won't need highly trained teachers. And the variety of options in each session will snag—and hold—the attention of first-grade through sixth-grade children, including the boys!

Best of all, you'll see kids grow in their faith as they open their hearts to Jesus through these 13 sessions.

Welcome to Simple Learning

Preparation is easy too. In each session you'll focus on one key Bible truth, which children will explore and apply. You'll drive that point home through Bible exploration, fun discussions, giggle-worthy games, and "Oh, wow!" activities that engage kids in multiple ways.

Welcome to Deep Bible Discovery

In each session, your children actually *experience* a Bible truth. They'll discover it, ponder it, talk about it, pray about it, and apply what they learn. If that's what you're looking for—for your children to *do* God's Word instead of just hear it—you're in exactly the right place. And here's a tip: supersize the learning by using a kid-friendly version of the Bible to make sure the stories are understood by children.

Welcome to Flexibility

We get it: sometimes you have to punt. A sermon goes long ... or short. Kids are quick to dive into a lesson ... or need some time to warm up to being together. Older kids might zip through an activity while their younger friends take a little longer.

Relax. We've got you covered.

You can use these sessions in practically any setting: in Sunday school, children's church, evening programs, or while kids' parents are attending an adult class or small group. There's maximum flexibility because each session is written to last 45 minutes and then provides enough extras to fill a full hour. These sessions stretch to fit exactly what you need, when you need it. They're ...

- **multi-aged**—suitable for mixed ages of elementary children;
- **easily adapted**—sessions work for just a couple kids or a packed classroom;
- **relational**—children grow close to Jesus *and* one another;
- **flexible**—brimming with options to fit varying time frames; and
- **fun**—even easily distracted kids will engage, learn, and grow.

So are you ready for some fun? Let's dive in!

How Jesus Loved Shepherds

The Point: Jesus gives us joy.

Scripture Connect: Luke 2:1–20

Supplies for all session 1 activities and options: Bible, small cookies, smartphone (optional), paper plates, scissors, paper clips, tape, timer, trash can, bottle of bubble solution with wand, bowl of water, paper towels, paper, marker

The Basics for Leaders

Other than singing Christmas songs, your kids seldom use the word *joy*.

But they're big fans of *happiness* and know exactly what makes them happy.

Today you'll help your kids discover that on the far side of happiness, way beyond what causes them to light up as they unwrap a gift or as a friend walks through the door, waits something else.

Something that lasts. Something that doesn't rust, won't move away, and isn't built to fall apart.

It's *joy*—and the place to find joy is in Jesus.

Happiness comes and goes. But joy?

Joy can be forever.

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

COOKIE SCRUNCH

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: small cookies, smartphone (optional), Bible

Note: Have a gluten-free cookie option available.

What gives happiness? Cookies, that's what! And your kids will get some—if they work for them.

Have kids lie on their backs. Place a cookie on each child's forehead. Explain that kids are to scrunch their faces to advance the cookie toward their mouths. Should the cookie fall off, the three-second rule is in full force and the cookie can again be placed on the child's forehead.

For extra fun, shoot pictures of kids' faces as they go through facial gyrations, and show the photos to your kids once the activity is over. (But *don't* post photos on social media!)

After several minutes, have kids sit up and eat their cookies. Provide replacement cookies for any cookies that spent more time on the floor than on foreheads.

As kids eat, discuss as a group:

- Some say cookies are baked happiness. What food cheers you up when you eat it—cookies or something else?
- If you have a “happy place,” where is it? Why that place?
- How much of each day are you happy? 50 percent? 20 percent? 100 percent? What influences whether you’re happy?

After this activity, place any remaining cookies out of sight so they’re not a distraction.

Read aloud Galatians 5:22–23. **The Bible says that when we know, love, and follow Jesus, joy grows in our lives. We’ll meet some people who got a sudden jolt of joy. But first, let’s play a game!**

Gung-Ho Game

TO MARS AND BEYOND

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper plates (1 per child), scissors, paper clips, tape, timer, trash can

Place supplies on an easily accessible table. Tell kids they’re spacecraft designers who will each build a prototype that can achieve both distance (Mars is a long way away) and accuracy (miss it and your next stop is ... nowhere).

Give kids each a plate and five minutes to make a spacecraft using the materials provided. Encourage kids as they build, and announce that there’s a minute left when you’re 60 seconds out from test-flight time.

When time is up, position kids about 15 feet from the trash can. One at a time, let them launch their spacecrafts with the goal of landing in the can. Before each launch, ask for a quick explanation about the design. A future aeronautics engineer may be in your room!

After the launches, place all crafts in the trash can, and set the can aside to avoid distractions. Any child who wants to take home his or her craft can claim it later.

As a whole group discuss:

- How did you feel while *designing* your craft?
- How did you feel as you *launched* your craft?
- How did you feel when your craft landed safely—or crashed?

Say: It's easy for circumstances to determine how we feel. Mad, glad, sad, scared ... feelings come and go.

But you can feel something deeper than all those—and it *never* goes away. Even when life's hard, it's there for you.

We're talking today about how Jesus gives us joy. Let's meet a few people who discovered that firsthand!

Famous Friends Bible Story

JOYFUL SHEPHERDS

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Ask a willing child to read Luke 2:1–6.

Point out that Luke doesn't describe how people felt. He just gives facts, and not many of them. But then ... then comes the terror and joy.

Tell kids to silently act out the role of shepherds, including facial expressions and movements.

Read aloud Luke 2:7–20, pausing often to allow time for kids to show emotion and act out what Luke describes. When you've finished, applaud your actors. Then as a group talk about this:

- **Why do you think the shepherds were terrified?**

After kids respond, have them pair up and discuss:

- **Tell about a time you were terrified—scared to your bones. What was the situation, and how did it turn out?**

Say: Luke also describes the shepherds as joyful, glorifying and praising God for all they'd seen and heard.

TIP

The best way to recruit a willing reader is to do it *before* it's time to read. Ask older kids as they come in the door whether they're willing to read. Or after the session, ask if they'd be willing to read during different sessions. And don't ignore younger children as potential readers—they might surprise you!

- Why do you think the birth of this one baby prompted such joy in the shepherds? Let's talk about that as a whole group.

Say: These shepherds knew the prophecies about a coming Messiah who'd be born in Bethlehem. (If you want, read from Micah 5:2.) They'd heard that the Messiah would set Israel free and draw God's people back to God.

And here they are with front row seats when the Messiah shows up! They couldn't help but rejoice and share the good news!

I've had times when I've gotten good news I wanted to share too. One time was ...

Briefly tell about good news you once received and then joyfully shared with others. Model the sort of story you'd like kids to share with their partners.

Say: **That's my story. Now it's your turn. Talk with your partner about this:**

- What's some good news you've gotten that you couldn't wait to share?

Say: **The good news about Jesus is that he came to save everyone from sin and to draw all of us back to God! When we say yes to Jesus's offer of friendship, we can feel the same joy the shepherds felt.**

The good news is for us too!

CLOSING PRAYER

BLESSINGS BUBBLES

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: bottle of bubble solution with wand, bowl of water, paper towels

Stand where kids can easily catch bubbles you'll blow. Tell kids that when they manage to catch a bubble and are holding it, they should shout out, "Happy!" (It won't happen often.)

Then have each kid dip one hand in water. Blow bubbles again, with kids letting bubbles land on their wet hands. (Bubbles landing on wet surfaces are less likely to break.) This time, as they're holding a bubble, have kids call out, "Joy!"

You'll hear some joyful shouts!

Say: Happiness depends on what's happening around us, and it sometimes doesn't last long. But joy is something that happens *in* us, and we can have it in our lives no matter what's happening around us.

Like those shepherds, let's thank God for Jesus.

Pray: God, thank you for the blessings you send our way. We appreciate them! But we appreciate most the best blessing you ever sent: Jesus. Help us be joyful in Jesus! Amen.

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: The shepherds were joyful about Jesus because they knew who he was. And who wouldn't be excited that someone you expected to set you and your country free had shown up?

Let's pretend I know nothing about Jesus. Tell me who he is and what he's done—or will do—for you. Fill me in.

Gently probe responses, asking follow-up questions. You'll gain insight into how your kids view Jesus.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

BELLY JELLY JOY

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: sheet of paper, marker

Have one child lie on his or her back, and then have the next child rest his or her head on the first child's belly. Keep going until all the kids are lying with their heads resting on someone's belly.

Pick a child to start the game by asking that child to call out "Belly Jelly Joy" in as funny a voice as possible. Someone will laugh, which will get others laughing, and soon heads will be bouncing up and down.

When laughter dies down—it'll take a while—have kids sit up and talk about this:

- What gets in the way of your experiencing joy in Jesus?

TIP

This activity is best limited to kids grade 2 and younger!

- **What can we do to have more joy in our lives?** (Help kids consider deeper things beyond just “being happy.”)

Use a marker and sheet of paper to make a list of suggestions from kids about increasing joy; then review it aloud. Ask children each to choose the suggestion they're going to try and to plan when and where they'll do it. Get specific. And when you meet next, ask who followed through!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: none

Explain that you'll share a scenario, and kids will add a string of situations that alternate between fortunate and unfortunate consequences.

For instance: “Fortunately, Jack jumped out of a plane. Unfortunately, his parachute didn't open. Fortunately, he was falling toward a swimming pool. Unfortunately, it was a child's wading pool. Fortunately, Jack ...” You get the idea.

Have kids sit in a circle, and go around the circle. If someone can't think how to add a situation within 10 seconds, skip to the next person.

Here are some starters, but feel free to add your own!

- Fortunately, Sheila woke up one morning to find she was lighter than air.
- Unfortunately, Devin was driving a car when the steering wheel fell off.
- Unfortunately, Adrienne fell asleep in class.

After kids string out a few situations as long as they can, as a group talk about this:

- **Tell about a day in your life that started out well and then fell apart. What happened?**
- **How could knowing Jesus as a friend have helped you have joy and helped that day go better?**

How Jesus Loved

John the Baptist

The Point: Jesus tells us the right thing to do.

Scripture Connect: Matthew 3:3–4, 13–15

Supplies for all session 2 activities and options: Bible, straws, balloon, broom, hat, paper, markers, mirror, empty 2-liter soda bottle, water, electric drill, mop

The Basics for Leaders

As John was baptizing people to signal their repentance and ready them to encounter Jesus, up pops Jesus himself asking to be baptized.

When John hesitates, Jesus lays a reassuring hand on John's arm and tells him it's the right thing to do. So John did it.

Your kids will get to know *that* Jesus today, the Jesus who knows the right thing to do and points the way. Not in a finger-wagging, scolding way—but as a wise, compassionate, encouraging friend.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

STEADY STRAWS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: straws

Group kids into trios and give each trio about 20 straws. Have the kid in each trio who's wearing the most blue hold the straws upright, with one end of the batch resting on a hard surface. Then those kids can let their straws drop.

Explain that kids in each trio will take turns attempting to remove a straw from the pile without moving any other straws. Steady hands help!

After trios play several rounds, as a whole group discuss:

- How did you choose which straw to remove? How did you decide which straws *not* to remove?

Say: There are lots of times throughout the day when you have to decide what to do and what not to do.

- A bully says something nasty to you. Do you talk back or not?
- Your parent asks you to do a chore. Do you do it at once or later?
- How do you decide what's the right thing to do when you're not really sure?

Say: **Let's meet someone who heard the right thing to do from someone who'd know: Jesus. But first, a game of Hatballoonbatball!**

Gung-Ho Game

HATBALLOONBATBALL

Time: about 15 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: balloon, broom, hat

Put your kids into pairs and have pairs sit far enough apart that they can't hear each other talk.

Place an inflated balloon, a hat, and a broom in the center of the room. Explain that pairs will have three minutes to create rules for a game that uses all three items. Stress that pairs shouldn't let any other pair hear their rules. (Extra points if pairs come up with a cool game name.)

After giving pairs about three minutes to plan their games, ask pairs to all *silently* play their games, according to *their* rules, as other pairs attempt to use the same three items to play their own games. Spoiler alert: It won't go well.

After letting kids be silently frustrated for a bit, have one pair explain their game. Play that game for a minute; then let several other pairs take the lead with their games.

Have kids sit and, as a whole group, discuss:

- **At first, why didn't your games go so well? What made things better?**

Thank kids for sharing.

Say: **When everyone plays by their own rules, doing what they think is right, games are chaos. You have no idea how to play!**

Sometimes there's a right way to do things and a wrong way, a right answer and a wrong answer.

Let's meet someone who thought he knew the right thing to do, but then someone told him otherwise.

His name is John.

Famous Friends Bible Story

FREEZE FRAME

Time: about 17 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Ask kids to pair up. Let them decide who in each pair will be John and who will be Jesus.

Say: Those of you playing the role of John—you and your partner will act this out, by the way—here’s what we know about you:

Read aloud Matthew 3:4.

So, you wear camel hair clothes—itchy! If you’re playing the role of John, start scratching. You eat locusts and wild honey—yum! Lick your lips! You probably don’t cut your hair or beard. You tell people to turn away from sin and toward God and the Messiah who’s coming.

Jesus, here’s what we know about you: You’re the Son of God, the Messiah. You’ve never sinned. You don’t need to turn toward God because you *are* God. And you’re here visiting your cousin John while he’s baptizing people in the Jordan River.

Remind pairs to do actions from this point.

Look! John’s standing out in the water, talking to people on shore. See him waving his arms and pointing to people? (pause)

Now he sees Jesus coming and wades out of the water toward Jesus. (pause)

John and Jesus hug because they haven’t seen one another since the last family reunion! Big pats on the back. (pause)

Now here’s what happens next. Listen to this. Read aloud Matthew 3:13–15.

A question for all you people playing John: Why is John confused here?

Allow several responses. Ask partners to give each other a high five and then to sit down, but staying in their pairs.

Say: Jesus’s request didn’t make sense to John, but Jesus told him it was the right thing to do—and that was enough for John. He trusted that Jesus knew the right thing to do.

TIP

When you ask kids to share their thoughts and stories, thank them for sharing.

No matter how old they are, kids love knowing that adults are listening and appreciating their ideas!

- **What person in your life do you trust to tell you the right thing to do? Why that person? Answer only to your partner.**

Ask if anyone is willing to share with the whole group who they talked about in their pair and why they chose that person.

Thank kids who share.

- **What's something Jesus says is the right thing to do—like love God, love others ... it's a long list—that you struggle to do?**

Say: **When Jesus tells us to do something, he walks along with us as we do it. He's a friend who doesn't just *tell* us what to do, but stays with us all the way. He reassured his first followers of that truth when he said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).**

- **Tell your partner about a time you think Jesus helped you do what's right.**

After kids talk, move into the prayer time.

CLOSING PRAYER

TRUE NORTH

Time: about 3 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Ask your kids which way is north. (Be sure you know before asking!)

Tell kids to stand and face north. Explain that navigators need a point of reference when setting a course, and knowing where north is gives them one.

Say: **You want to make right decisions, but what's your "north" that guides your decisions? Is it the opinion of friends, how things feel in the moment, or what the Bible tells you is the right thing to do?**

Ask one child to stand and close her eyes while the rest of the kids stay silent. With your hands on that child's shoulders, rapidly turn her in a circle at least seven times to disorient her. Rotate your position as you spin her. Keep steadying the child as you ask her to point toward north. Then ask her to open her eyes and try again.

Say: **Knowing what's in the Bible helps us know true north when we're making decisions. It helps us know how to please God!**

Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy and said something about God's Word. Read aloud 2 Timothy 3:16.

Pray: **God, help us discover what John the Baptist knew: you're true north. It's always best when we do what you've asked us to do. Help us show you our friendship in that way. Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 2 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: **Jesus doesn't want just our obedience. He wants our hearts too. He wants to be our friend.**

Unlike your other friends, he *is* the Lord of the Universe, so he can tell you what to do. And he does, but he lets you decide whether to obey. He gives you respect and freedom.

Friends do that: they give one another freedom. You can use yours to either choose to walk closer to Jesus or choose to wander further away.

Take the next minute to silently pray and the two of you talk about that: **Are you moving toward Jesus, or away?**

Pause for prayer. After one minute say: **Thanks for loving us, Jesus. Amen.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

RORRIM, RORRIM, ON THE WALL

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: markers, paper, mirror

Give each child a marker and sheet of paper. Explain that you're going to dictate a few sentences and you'd like to have kids write them down ... backwards. The goal is to hold up what they write in front of a mirror and be able to read it.

Here are a couple of sentence options or make up your own:

"Help! I'm trapped in this mirror!"

"Saltwater Sally sells shells."

Let kids check their backwards abilities in the mirror, and then continue.

Say: **Sometimes our thinking is backwards about the right thing to do.**

We need to check in with Jesus to know what's really best for us.

As a group discuss:

- **What are some ways you can know what God wants you to do?**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

LEFTY LOOSEY, RIGHTY TIGHTY

Time: about 10 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: empty 2-liter soda bottle, water, electric drill, mop

Before kids arrive, use an electric drill to put a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch or smaller hole about 2 inches up the side of an empty 2-liter soda bottle. Cover the hole with a finger and fill the bottle with water.

When the bottle lid is tight, pressure keeps the water from leaking. Loosen the lid to let air into the bottle, and it'll spring a leak. Do this several times and let kids try it too. Do this demonstration someplace where leaking water will be easy to mop up!

Ask kids if they can think of a way to make the water leak without touching the bottle. Take suggestions—even *try* suggestions—but there's only one right way to make this work, and that's to touch the bottle while loosening the cap.

Say: **Sometimes there's just one way to make something work. It's handy when you know what that right way is!**

- **When you try to do something and it isn't working, where do you turn for advice?**
- **What about when you're not sure what *is* the right thing to do? Where do you turn for advice then?**
- **Tell about a time you think Jesus used you to help someone know the right thing to do. How did it feel to be used by Jesus for that?**

How Jesus Loved

Andrew

The Point: Jesus does much with our little.

Scripture Connect: John 6:1–11

Supplies for all session 3 activities and options: Bible, bowl of M&M'S® candies, whiteboard with marker and eraser, box of small stuff from your house or garage, index cards, pens, cross, tape, sealable mason jar, water, dish soap, vinegar, teaspoon, glitter, postcards, postage stamps

The Basics for Leaders

Feed 5,000 people, Jesus said. They're hungry, he said. Figure it out, he said.

And everyone just sort of ... gave up.

Well, *almost* everyone. Andrew found a young boy with a few dried fish and barley loaves and brought them to Jesus.

It was enough.

In this session you and your kids will consider how, when you bring what you have to Jesus, it's somehow *always* enough.

He's just that sort of friend.

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

WHO ARE YOU AGAIN?

Time: about 10 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: bowl of M&M'S® candies, whiteboard with marker and eraser

Before kids arrive, copy the color code onto the whiteboard.

Pass a bowl of M&M'S candies from kid to kid, along with these instructions:

Take three candies but don't eat them.

When kids have candies, put kids into trios. Explain that in their trios they'll take turns sharing about themselves. The color of their candies will determine what they tell, based on the color code.

Allow time for each child to share before trios advance to the next person in the trio. Ask follow-up questions as kids share; here's a chance to discover new stuff about your kids!

Announce that once kids are done sharing, it's officially time to eat their candies.

Say: Hard to believe a few little candies decided what you'd talk about. But something small can accomplish a lot *if it's* in the right hands! We'll dive into that idea further today!

COLOR CODE

Yellow: A place you love to go

Red: A food you don't enjoy

Brown: Something that scares you

Green: A favorite animal

Blue: Something you want to do

Orange: A type of music you don't like

Gung-Ho Game

BIG STUFF!

Time: about 10 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: box of small stuff (hammer, ice cream scoop, kitchen utensils, clothespins, whatever is lying around the house!)

In this game kids will take small objects and figure out how to use them to accomplish big things. Huge things. *Amazing* things!

Have kids pair up, and have enough objects for each pair to select one.

Say: **I'll dump stuff on the floor. As a pair, your job is to select an item and then figure how to use it to do something huge.**

For instance, use an ice cream scoop to dig for and find buried treasure or tunnel out of jail after being captured by ninjas. Each pair will act out how you've decided to use your object, and the rest of us will guess what you're doing.

Come up with something amazing and make it tough for us to guess!

After pairs brainstorm, have them act out how they supersized the awesomeness of their objects. Allow up to 45 seconds for guessing before revealing answers.

Performers can signal if a guess is close to the answer so guessers can zero in on a right answer.

When you're ready to move on, if not every pair has performed, ask them to hold up their objects and tell how they planned to use them. Applaud creativity!

Say: **I love how you did amazing things with ordinary stuff!**

A friend of Jesus got to watch a similar thing happen, but it wasn't a game. It happened in real life, and Andrew was there to see it.

Famous Friends Bible Story

THINK BIG

Time: about 20 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: Bible, index cards, pens, cross

Before kids arrive, place in your room a cross that can have index cards taped to it. (No cross available? Create one with paper and tape it to the wall.) The cross will be used in the prayer time below.

Ask a willing reader to read aloud John 6:1–11.

Interrupt the reader after verse 8 and say: **Let's say you're Andrew. Jesus gives you an impossible task: feed 5,000-plus people. You've found a boy with five barley loaves and two dried fish.**

- **How are you feeling right about now—and why?**

Allow several kids to respond, and then signal your reader to keep reading.

After verse 11 say: **Andrew, Jesus has just taken what amounted to the couple of fish sandwiches you found and fed thousands of people.**

- **How are you feeling right about *now*—and why?**

After several kids respond, continue.

Say: **Jesus took a little bit of food that was given to him and used it in a big way. He does the same thing with what we give him too.**

Jesus can take our skills, interests, dreams, and plans and use them in big ways—far beyond anything we thought possible. But we've got to offer him what we've got.

Which is fair, actually, because all those skills and gifts that you have, all the dreams you have about changing the world for the better—they're from God.

Read aloud James 1:17.

Give each child an index card and pen. Tell kids that you'd like them to consider what they have that they could bring to Jesus.

First, have kids write on their cards a skill they have, something they're naturally good at doing. Be clear that they'll be telling others what they write on their cards.

Then ask kids to write on their cards an interest, a dream they hold for their future, and something they plan to do soon. Complete a card yourself.

When they've finished writing, have kids pair up and talk about what they've written. Ask:

- **How might Jesus use what's on your cards? What might that look like?**

Once kids talk, ask them to give their partners a high five and then hold their cards in their hands. Go directly into the prayer time.

CLOSING PRAYER

CROSS WALK

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: cross that was put in place before the Bible story time plus students' index cards, tape

Walk over to the cross.

Say: **There were 5,000 men in the crowd, plus moms and kids. Some of those moms surely packed food for their families. But Andrew found a young man who was willing to give what he had to Jesus, and Jesus multiplied it.**

I want Jesus to multiply what I bring to him too, to bless others and glorify God. If that's something you'd also like to do, you can bring your card to the cross.

But it's up to you. Maybe you're not ready to trust Jesus with who you are yet. Some people do feel that way, and it's your call.

Pause as kids come to the cross and attach their cards. (It's okay if some kids don't come.) Pray: **Jesus, thank you for using in big ways the little that Andrew brought to you. Use the little we bring you too. Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: **You can bet Andrew told people what he saw Jesus do. And that helped build Andrew's faith and the faith of those who heard him talk.**

Ask kids to tell stories about what they've seen Jesus do in their lives.

TIP

Not sure how to share your faith story in an age-appropriate, clear, quick way? Try this: **Before I knew Jesus, I was** (afraid/sad/quick to get angry ...). **An example is _____.** **But Jesus is helping me change. Now I'm** (less afraid/happier/quicker to listen ...). **Knowing Jesus has changed my life!**

You'll help them practice telling their faith stories and remind them that their friend Jesus is with them.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

JARNADO

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: sealable mason jar, water, dish soap, vinegar, teaspoon, glitter, Bible

Place your supplies on a table.

Say: **When Jesus got his hands on a few fish and loaves, he did something big with them. He's still doing a lot with a little! Even small things become powerful when Jesus gets involved.**

Jesus said something about tiny amounts of faith. Read aloud Matthew 17:20.

Fill the mason jar with water, leaving about an inch of space at the top. Add 1 teaspoon of dish soap, 1 teaspoon of vinegar, and a few pinches of glitter. Put the lid back on, swirl the jar for about 10 seconds, and then set it down to observe the tornado.

As a group discuss:

- **When you think of Jesus doing a lot with a little, what comes to mind?**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

THANK YOU

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: postcards, pens, postage stamps

Give kids each a pen, postcard, and these instructions: **Think of someone who's had a big impact on your life—someone who has been real important to you—but who may not know it. It may be a favorite teacher, a caring adult, or maybe a long-time friend.**

Ask kids to write a note thanking their person. Encourage them to make sure to get the card to the person they chose. If a child intends to mail a postcard, add a stamp to the card; at home, parents can track down the address.

When kids have finished writing, as a group talk about this:

- **Who did you choose and why?**
- **What do the people you chose have in common? How is Jesus a friend like that?**

How Jesus Loved a Rich Man

The Point: Jesus tells us the truth.

Scripture Connect: Mark 10:17–22

Supplies for all session 4 activities and options: Bible; stuff for kids to balance (yardstick, pen, broom, spatula, etc.); candy bar; dollar bill; small stones; paper lunch bags; small objects from your kitchen, garage, or junk drawer; sidewalk chalk

The Basics for Leaders

A rich man approaches Jesus and asks a direct question. And Jesus responds with a direct answer, telling the rich man a truth he didn't want to hear.

Friends do that: they tell each other the truth. Because sometimes the most loving thing a friend can do is share truth that won't *feel* great but will *do* great good.

Today you and your kids will explore how Jesus is telling you truth too. Truth that may challenge, may confront ... but is always shared in love.

OPENING ACTIVITY–OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

BALANCE BEAMS

Time: about 10 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: stuff for kids to balance (yardstick, pen, broom, spatula, etc.), Bible

Place the items you brought on a table and challenge kids to balance an object on one finger. Extra points if they can balance the object on a fingertip!

Once they've mastered that, challenge them to walk across the room without dropping the objects.

Make it more interesting by suggesting that kids cross the room several times, moving in different ways: walk backwards, hop, crawl, dance, shuffle like zombies, or walk on their knees.

Say: Today we're talking about a conversation Jesus had with a rich man. Jesus told the man something he didn't want to hear, but it was the truth.

Jesus's words might have sounded harsh, but Jesus was "balancing" what we have to balance too: telling the truth in love.

The apostle Paul wrote to believers in the city of Ephesus to warn them not to fall for clever words that sounded like the truth but weren't.

Read aloud Ephesians 4:25.

Truth and love: sometimes they're even harder to balance than those objects you had in hand!

Gung-Ho Game

THE TRUTH: IT'S UP TO YOU

Time: about 15 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

Ask kids to pair up and link elbows. Explain that pairs will cross the room with a certain number of points of contact with the floor.

For instance, if you call out "four," a pair can walk across the room. Two feet x two partners = four points of contact.

Say: **To win this game you need to tackle every challenge, but your pair can stop at any time. You can do as I tell you, or not. It's up to you.**

As you call out points of contact, say: **To win this game, the truth is that you need to cross the room with _____ point(s) of contact.** Call out numbers in this order: four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, three, two.

After the game, discuss as a group:

- **How much did you like or dislike me as you played this game? Why?**
- **You had to do some hard things! Tell your partner about a time someone told you a hard thing to do. What was it? And did you do it?**

Allow time for partners to talk. Then call for volunteers to share with the larger group what was shared with a partner.

Say: **You did hard things to win a game. But sometimes people ask us to do hard things because those things will be good for us.**

One hard thing that turned out to be good for me was ...

Give a brief example from your own life, such as running laps or practicing an instrument to help you grow as an athlete or musician.

Say: **Your turn now.**

- **What's something hard you were asked to do, and it turned out to be good for you?**

After a few responses, say: **Thanks for sharing those stories.**

Jesus often asked people to do hard things, things that would be good for them. Jesus wasn't being mean; he did it because he loved those people. Sometimes we need to do a hard thing or hear a hard truth so we can grow closer to Jesus.

Let's meet a guy whom Jesus loved enough to tell a hard truth. And Jesus asked him to do a hard thing.

Famous Friends Bible Story

FIRE DRILL

Time: about 15 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: Bible, candy bar, dollar bill

Say: Let's say you're at home and a fire breaks out. All people and pets will get out okay, but you have time to grab just one possession on your way out the door. What would you rescue—and why?

Put kids into pairs and have partners discuss the question. After kids talk, ask volunteers to share with the whole group what was shared with a partner.

Say: Now think about what you rescued. I'm going to offer you a trade. With a show of hands: Who'd trade that treasure for a candy bar? (pause for response as you hold up a candy bar) **A dollar?** (pause for response as you hold up a dollar)

How about eternal life, eternal good health, and you get to be with the best friend ever? Wait! Don't answer yet! But keep your answer in mind as you listen to this.

Read aloud Mark 10:17–22.

Say: Jesus loved this rich man. Jesus loved him enough to tell him a hard truth: "Your stuff is in the way of a friendship with me, so get rid of it and come join me."

The man thought it over and, at least at that time, decided on his stuff.

A question for us to answer in our whole group:

- **Where do you see love in the hard thing Jesus asked the rich man to do? And where do you see truth in the hard thing?**

CLOSING PRAYER

JESUS'S TRUTH FOR ME

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: Bible

Have kids fan out around the room and close their eyes.

Say: The rich man we met today in our Bible story isn't the only one who's heard some hard truths from Jesus. I'm going to read aloud some hard-but-true things Jesus said to others ... including us.

As you listen, let these true things sink into your hearts and minds. I'll close by praying for us.

Read aloud these passages: Matthew 5:44–45; 6:14–15, 19–21; 7:1–2, 13–14.

Pray: Jesus, thank you for always loving us and for telling us the truth, but balancing that truth with love. We love you for that, Jesus. And thank you for being the narrow gate through which we can come to new life in you. Amen.

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: small stones

Say: Friends talk with and listen to one another. That's true of you and your buddies, and it's true of you and Jesus.

Give each child a small stone to tuck into a pocket.

Say: When you get home and empty your pockets, this will be a reminder to tell Jesus something true about your life and how you're feeling. He loves hearing from you when you pray!

And he loves it when we tell him what's really going on and ask for his help!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

TRUTH BAGS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: 10 paper lunch bags; 10 small objects from your kitchen, garage, or junk drawer

Before kids arrive, place 10 small objects in 10 paper lunch bags. Fold the bags closed. Then give a bag to a child who will then open it, look inside, and describe to the group what's in there. The catch: the child can tell the truth or lie.

Other children can ask up to five questions about the object and then must decide: Are they hearing the truth or a lie?

After playing this quick game, as a whole group discuss:

- **What helps you know whether you're hearing the truth or a lie?**

Say: **I'm glad we know someone who never lies, who loves us enough to always tell us the truth: Jesus!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

HEAVENLY HOPSCOTCH

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: sidewalk chalk

Ahead of time, scout out the best sidewalk for this activity.

Arm kids with sidewalk chalk and, together, head outside to the determined sidewalk. Have each kid write on the sidewalk (and arranged as for a hopscotch game) something true about Jesus, such as "Jesus loves you!" or "Jesus is powerful!"

Remind kids that what they write will be read, so it has to be both true and loving. That's the way Jesus shares truth with us, and how we need to share it with others.

Do your best to not be spotted by anyone!

How Jesus Loved

James the Less

The Point: Jesus gives us a mission.

Scripture Connect: Luke 6:12–16

Supplies for all session 5 activities and options: Bible, index cards, markers, inflated balloons (2 colors), paper, timer

The Basics for Leaders

James the Less: What do we really know about him?

Next to nothing, that's what. We know his dad's name was Alphaeus and that he's listed among Jesus's first disciples.

And that for some reason, he got tagged with that name: James *the* Less.

"The Less" appears in only a few translations of the Bible. Sometimes James is referred to as "the younger," and sometimes he's just listed. But in every translation of the Gospels, we don't see much of him other than his name.

He's just ... there. Sort of like he was on the disciples' junior varsity team. But don't be mistaken.

He was a friend of Jesus. He was chosen by Jesus. Jesus had a mission for him. And there's nothing "the Less" about being on a mission for Jesus.

As you and your kids consider James the Less, you'll consider what makes him—or anyone else—*more*: and that's a friendship with Jesus.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

BEST TICKET EVER

Time: about 10 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: index cards, markers

Give kids each a card and marker and ask them to create tickets to an event they wish they could attend—past, present, or future. Abraham Lincoln's inauguration? Season ticket for their favorite sports team? Snag a seat on the Mars mission? They can make a ticket to whatever they'd like.

After kids create tickets, have them show their tickets and tell why they chose what they did. Ask questions; you're learning about your kids!

Say: **You had it easy. Some people make it a personal mission to get tickets to events. They stand in line or hover over a keyboard for hours. Today we'll meet a friend of Jesus whose mission was to change the world, but we know almost nothing about him.**

First, though, a quick game of Mission: Airborne!

Gung-Ho Game

MISSION: AIRBORNE

Time: about 15 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: several inflated balloons (2 colors)

Ask kids to count off by twos, 1-2-1-2 style. Have kids stand and spread out, 1s and 2s interspersed in the center of the room. Assign one balloon color to the 1s and the other color to 2s.

Explain that the goal of the game is to keep your team's balloons in the air by batting them up and to let the balloons of the other team hit the floor. The rules:

- No smacking the other team's balloons to the floor.
- Kids can't move their feet; they must stay stationary.
- Once a balloon hits the floor, that's where it stays unless you as the leader reintroduce it into play.

Say: **Your mission is to keep your team's balloons airborne. Ready?**

Start with a few balloons but quickly introduce more to keep the pace of the game galloping along quickly!

After a few minutes, have kids sit down. Remove balloons to avoid distractions. Better: have teams sit on their team's balloons and pop them!

Discuss this as a group:

- **You worked hard to fulfill your balloon mission. Turn to a partner and tell that person about another mission you took on in life and whether you fulfilled it.**

For instance ...

Briefly tell about a mission you had, maybe to make a team or pass a class or get into an event.

Say: **That's me, but how about you? What's a personal mission you've had? And were you able to fulfill it or not?**

After kids talk together, ask if anyone's willing to share with the whole group what was shared with a partner.

After a few responses, say: **Keeping balloons in the air isn't a very impressive mission to be handed. But changing the world? That's a biggie—and we'll meet someone whom Jesus loved so much that Jesus handed that mission to him.**

Ladies and gentlemen, meet James the Less.

Famous Friends Bible Story

JAMES THE WHO?

Time: about 20 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: Bible

Ask kids to stand and line up, shoulder to shoulder, across one side of the room.

Say: **Without speaking, please line up by age.**

When kids are in line, have them check to see if they got it right. Then have kids *silently* line up alphabetically by the first letter of their middle names, then by where their birthdays fall in the year, and then by how important they are.

Hopefully, the process will fall apart at this point. Ask kids to pair up and to be seated.

Say: **The stuff we just found out about each other? We know none of that about James the Less.**

Read aloud Luke 6:12–16.

He's mentioned as one of Jesus's first disciples, we find out his dad's name is Alphaeus, and that's about it. He's not always called James the Less, and we aren't even sure why he got tagged as "the Less."

But we do know this: He was a friend of Jesus. And we know Jesus trusted him with a mission, and that makes James the Less important. It's worth seeing what that mission was because it's the same one Jesus gives us.

Have a willing reader read aloud Matthew 22:37–39.

TIPS

When there's a passage with unfamiliar Bible names or places, consider reading those passages yourself so no tentative reader is embarrassed.

Have passages marked in a Bible when you ask a reader to read. Otherwise you'll lose the lesson flow and possibly embarrass a child who has to fumble to find a passage in the Bible.

Say: **If that's your mission too, how might it look if you do it this week? What might you do or say if you love God with your whole heart?**

As for me ...

Briefly share how you can love God with your whole heart in the coming week.

Say: **Your turn. With your partner, talk about this:**

- **How might it look this week if you love God with your whole heart?**

After kids have a chance to talk, ask:

- **How might it look this week if you love your neighbor as yourself?**

After kids talk, have the whole group form a circle. Ask a willing reader to read aloud Matthew 28:18–20. Remind kids this was part of James the Less's mission and it's part of our mission too. We're to make disciples, or followers, of Jesus and to help launch those disciples in a life of faith.

As a group, discuss this:

- **How can we tackle that part of our mission? What might it look like?**

Thank kids for sharing their thoughts and then say: **James the Less was a friend of Jesus, so there was nothing "less" about him. Jesus made him "more" as Jesus worked in and through him. Jesus trusted him with a life-changing mission, and it's the same one he's asking us to take on.**

CLOSING PRAYER

MISSION ACCEPTED?

Time: about 3 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: **Jesus loved James the Less enough to trust him with a mission that gave James's life a focus, a purpose, and adventure.**

And it's the same mission he gives each of us.

The question is this: Will we choose to accept the mission as James chose to accept it? Like James, are we all in ... or are we out?

The mission is clear: love God, love others, and share the good news about Jesus.

Ask kids to close their eyes and keep them closed. Tell them you'll do the same—nobody will be watching them.

Say: I'll close with a prayer, but first I'll leave about 30 seconds of silence. With your eyes closed—and I'm serious about all of us doing that—give a silent thumbs-up if you're up for accepting the mission Jesus gives you.

Others may not be watching, but Jesus is. He'll know you're in.

After 30 seconds of silence, pray: **Jesus, thank you for loving James the Less so much that you gave him a life mission. Thanks for loving us enough to give that same mission to us. Walk with us as we do our best to live it out. Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: You know your general mission, but maybe you're wondering if there's something specific Jesus has for you to do. Great question. But rather than just wonder about it, let's talk about how we can each make use of our strengths. God wired each of you to be able to do some things well. And those things probably can be used to serve others and honor God.

Put kids into pairs. Have partners take turns sharing something they're good at doing. Then have pairs brainstorm a way those abilities could serve others and honor God.

When kids have finished, thank them for sharing and say: **There's just one thing more to do: invite Jesus along as you try out using your ability to serve others and honor God!**

Pray: **Jesus, you heard us talking. Please give us an opportunity to do what we talked about doing. Like James the Less did, we want to be all in when it comes to serving you. Help us! Amen.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

EYE ON THE PRIZE

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: paper, Bible

Give each child a sheet of paper and ask them each to roll up their paper like they're making a telescope big enough to see through with one eye. Have kids hold their telescopes in one hand and place their other hands a few inches in front of their faces, blocking their vision.

Say: It's easy to drift off mission when life gets busy. But Jesus doesn't just want us to do stuff for him; he's after a friendship with us so when things get in the way, he's there with us to deal with the distractions. Stay focused on your friendship with him and you'll stay on mission. Plus you'll have the purpose you want and need in life.

Jesus said something about that. Read aloud Matthew 6:33.

Let's pretend that seeing me is the mission. Right now, you can't see me because something's in the way. But when you focus on Jesus, when you give God's kingdom first place in your life, that changes.

Have kids put their telescopes up to their right eyes and keep both eyes open as they look at you. Then have them place their left hands, fingers pointing up, against the left side of the tube and about halfway out.

With both eyes open, it will look as if there's a hole in their left hands, and they'll see you.

Say: That's what it's like when you focus on Jesus. No matter what the world throws at you, your friendship with Jesus lets you do what's he's asked you to do!

A quick question: What's in the way of your accomplishing your mission? Tell a partner about that.

After kids talk for a few minutes, pray: **Jesus, help us keep our eyes on our mission. But even more, help us keep our eyes on you, our friend. Amen.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

60-SECOND KINDNESS MINI-MISSION

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: timer

Put kids into pairs and have pairs decide which partner will go first. Do that before explaining that kids will send one another on 60-second mini-missions.

One partner will send the other on a mission of kindness that can be done in the room in 60 seconds or less. After completing the mission, the person who did it will return and send the partner on a different mission.

The mission can be to give someone a hug or high five, straighten up the room, or break into a song that will bless everyone in the room.

But warn kids to be kind since each partner will send the other on a mission.

If the mission just isn't possible for some reason, the person being sent can say "Mission Denied," and another mission must be substituted.

After each person has been sent on several missions, have kids sit and discuss:

- **What was your favorite mission? Least favorite mission? Why?**
- **Jesus sends us on a mission to spread the word about him. Why might that be difficult to do sometimes?**
- **Loving others is a part of our mission too. What questions do you have about that piece of our mission?**

Say: **The mission Jesus gave James the Less and now gives to us is challenging. But Jesus isn't tossing us into the mission and walking away. He'll help us when we count on and trust him.**

And good news: he's a friend who *can* be counted on and trusted!

How Jesus Loved Nathanael

The Point: Jesus knows and loves us.

Scripture Connect: John 1:45–50

Supplies for all session 6 activities and options: Bible; white and colored paper; crayons; textured objects (keys, coins, leaves, wicker baskets, sandpaper, Lego® pieces, rough bricks); timer; tape; smartphone; laptop and internet connection (optional); metal forks; soft pear (or peach); paper towels; scissors; index cards; pens

The Basics for Leaders

The first time Nathanael heard about Jesus, he wasn't impressed. *The guy is from where? Forget about him.*

But then Nathanael *met* Jesus, and everything changed. That's when Nathanael realized that Jesus knew him from top to bottom, inside and out.

That's the sort of friend you want to make ... and keep.

In this session your kids will discover that Jesus not only loves them; he *knows* them too!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

RUBBING ART

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: white paper, crayons, textured objects (keys, coins, leaves, wicker baskets, sandpaper, Lego® pieces, rough bricks), timer, tape

Before kids arrive, strip paper off the crayons.

Explain that creating a rubbing is as easy as laying paper over an object and pressing down with the side of a crayon as the crayon is rubbed over it.

Say: Consider this an art challenge. Combine colors and objects to create the most interesting rubbing art you can in the next five minutes. We'll display your creations in the gallery when you've finished.

After four minutes, announce that there's just a minute left. When time's up, tape up the artwork. Ask artists to share where their ideas came from, the meaning of their work, and anything else they want to explain. Have fun with this!

Say: Rubbings reveal hidden textures. Sometimes when we find something that's hidden, it's great—like discovering buried treasure. Other times it's not so much fun.

Today we'll meet Nathanael, a man who discovered there's someone you can't hide anything from. That someone is Jesus.

Gung-Ho Game

AND YOURS?

Time: about 15 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

Have kids sit in a circle. Explain that one person will step out of the room while the rest of the group decides on something they all have in their lives. (For example, pillows, teeth, or shoes.) Once the person who left returns, the group will talk about the object without naming it. That person will listen to the discussion and attempt to guess what the object is as hints creep into the conversation.

To begin, ask the child whose birthday is closest to Christmas to step out of the room. The rest of the kids will quietly decide on an object to discuss. Call back the Christmas child and give it a go!

After playing a few rounds, discuss:

- **If you were someone who left the room and came back, how did it feel that others knew something you didn't know?**
- **How would you feel if someone knew a lot about you but you didn't know much about that person?**

TIP

If all kids are giving pretty much the same answer, make it safe for dissenting opinions by asking, "Does anyone feel differently?" You'll invite a range of opinions and create a space where it's okay to be honest.

Thank kids for sharing, and then say: **With a show of hands, who's glad there are some things about you that others don't know?**

I'm raising my hand! But today we'll meet Nathanael, who discovered there was someone who knew way more about him than he realized.

That person was Jesus. And Jesus knows all about us too.

Turn to a partner and talk about this:

- **How do you feel knowing that Jesus is aware of all your secrets? Is that a scary thought? A happy one? Or do you feel something else?**

Tell your partner how it feels to think that Jesus knows you inside and out—and tell why you feel as you do.

After kids talk, ask for volunteers to share with the whole group what was shared with a partner. Thank kids and then continue.

Say: Let's meet our new friend, Nathanael!

Famous Friends Bible Story

ALL ABOUT NATE, THE MOVIE

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible, smartphone, laptop and internet connection (optional)

Say: **It's time to make a movie!**

Assign these roles: Narrator, Jesus, Nathanael, and Fig Tree. You be the Videographer. If you have enough kids, also have someone play the part of Philip.

Explain: Your Narrator will read an encounter that Nathanael had with Jesus. Your actors will portray what happened, and you'll shoot the action. When it's finished, you'll view it together and decide who'll make the Oscar acceptance speech.

Nobody sits this out, because additional kids can be the Fig Tree's shade where Nathanael sits. Jesus will be partway across the room with Philip.

When you call "Action," start recording and signal the Narrator to begin reading John 1:45–50 aloud, pausing often so actors can do their thing. At the conclusion of verse 50, shout "That's a wrap!" and gather the cast for a viewing.

Not many kids? Just play the video on your smartphone. Lots of kids? Export the file to a laptop (if you have an internet connection). Not a file transfer whiz? Ask your kids for help!

After watching the footage, as a whole group talk about this:

- **Why do you think Nathanael was so negative about Nazareth?**

After kids make suggestions, share this:

Say: **Nobody's sure. It could be because Nazareth was a small town of just a few hundred people. Or because Nathanael knew the Messiah would be connected with Bethlehem, not Nazareth. See, Nathanael wouldn't have known that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem.**

Whatever the reason, Nathanael wasn't impressed with Jesus until the two met. Then Nathanael realized Jesus knew his heart and even knew where he'd been sitting, something Jesus couldn't have seen.

Say: Jesus summed up who Nathanael was in just one sentence. Read aloud verse 47. If Jesus were to sum up who you are in one sentence, what might he say?

As for me, I think it would be something like ...

Briefly share how you think Jesus would sum up who you are.

What about you? If Jesus were to sum up who you are in one sentence, what might he say?

Allow time for kids to answer with a partner. Then ask:

- How would you *like* for Jesus to sum up who you are? Tell your partner.

Allow time for pairs to talk, and then continue.

Say: Nathanael wasn't perfect; nobody is. Jesus knew Nathanael through and through and still chose him as a friend. Jesus chooses you as a friend too, even though you're not perfect.

The question is this: Will you do what Nathanael did and choose Jesus?

CLOSING PRAYER

FORKY PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: metal forks, soft pear (or peach), paper towels (for cleanup)

Give each child a fork, and you take one too. Ask kids to hold their forks with the tines pointing away from themselves. Explain that you'll toss the fruit to someone who'll catch it on his or her fork. Then that person will say something, remove the fork, and toss the fruit to someone else.

If the fruit drops, have someone stab it with a fork and keep going until the fruit is tossed back to you.

Say: I ask you to do something brave. When the fruit reaches you, confess something about yourself that you're not proud of, but that Jesus knows. Don't tell too much about that though.

Stick your fork into the fruit, and then share something about yourself that you're not proud of. An example: **For instance, I can sometimes be selfish. Jesus knows the details. Maybe you sometimes lose your temper, or you say mean things.**

When you catch the fruit, before you toss it to someone else, confess something that Jesus already knows.

Begin and model a soft underhand toss. Every time a kid confesses something, quickly say the child's name and say, "Jesus knows that and loves you with all his heart anyway."

When the fruit makes its way back to you, catch it on your fork.

Collect all the forks. If necessary, mop up any splat spots. Lay everything aside. Then pray: **Jesus, I'm so grateful that your love is bigger than the parts of our lives where we're not yet honoring you. Forgive us, help us become more like you, and bless us from here on as we try. Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Say: Friends are honest with one another. They may not tell each other everything, but what they say is true. They don't lie to each other.

The Bible says something about lying. Read aloud Proverbs 12:22.

Say: Without honesty, a friendship with God doesn't grow. Neither do friendships with people. And they don't last long either.

When you get home today, do this: tell Jesus something you wish he didn't know. Maybe you took something that wasn't yours. Or you cheated on a test. Or you said something truly awful to someone.

Whatever it is, tell him *exactly* what happened and don't leave anything out. You won't shock or surprise him. He knows and loves you. He's already aware of what you've done.

Then thank him for listening. He's a good friend!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

NOT-SO-GREAT DISGUISE

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: colored paper, tape, scissors, smartphone (optional)

Say: **Quick! We're about to go into hiding, and you need a disguise! Create a disguise using paper, scissors, and tape. Maybe you'll make yourself a fake mustache. Or a hat. Or an eye patch. Whatever it is, you've got just minutes to make it happen. Get hopping!**

Allow just a few minutes for kids to create disguises. For extra fun, take photos of them wearing their creations, and show the photos to the kids. (Don't post to social media!)

As a group discuss:

- **How do people you know go about “disguising” their true selves? What do they say or do?**
- **How easy or hard is it for you to see through disguises? What tips you off to what people are really like?**

Say: **With Jesus we don't have to hide who we are. He already knows we're not perfect or always kind. He knows and he still loves us.**

He loves us enough to call us his friends and also enough to help us change for the better as we grow closer to him. What a great friend to have!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

TO KNOW ME IS TO LOVE ME

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: index cards, pens, tape

Tell kids they'll create name tags to wear as they leave. Give each child a pen and index card. Ask kids to write in the center of their card, “My name is _____” and “To know me is to love me.” Have them keep all four corners of the card empty.

When they've finished, give them these instructions:

- **In the top left corner, write whether you're a cat person or dog person.**
- **In the top right corner, your favorite pizza topping.**
- **In the lower left corner, a favorite hobby.**
- **In the lower right corner, a favorite superhero.**

Then have kids tape their name tags to their shirts. Say: **Jesus knows all those things about you and a lot more. And he loves you!**

Wear your name tag as you leave and wear it for the next hour. And let's see whether everyone else agrees that to know you is to love you.

The next time we're together, tell me how that went!

How Jesus Loved Zacchaeus and His Sinner Buddies

The Point: Jesus accepts us.

Scripture Connect: Luke 19:1–9

Supplies for all session 7 activities and options: Bible, index cards, pens, marshmallows (save them to use in session 8!), bag, mousetraps, glasses of water, cotton swabs, dish detergent, small packets of pepper (we asked a café and they gave us a handful), can of soup, dented can of soup, hand mirror, timer, sidewalk chalk

The Basics for Leaders

How could Jesus hang out with a notorious criminal and his cronies? Didn't Jesus worry about his reputation?

Actually, no!

Jesus was way more interested in changing lives than in what people thought of him. He engaged with Zacchaeus, and as a result, Zacchaeus was never again the same.

Today you and your kids will explore how to accept people without necessarily endorsing their behavior.

Sort of like what our friend Jesus did with us!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

CAFETERIA ROULETTE

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: index cards, pens, marshmallows, bag that you can't see through

Give each child a pen and three index cards. Ask kids to write a favorite food on one card, the yuckiest thing they've ever eaten on the second card, and something disgusting found in the bottom of a garbage can on the third card.

Collect cards and shuffle them as you explain what's coming: The school cafeteria has a special and you'll describe it. Kids will respond with "I accept" if what you describe sounds tasty or with "No thanks" if they'd pass.

The catch: You've brought something from the "cafeteria special" with you. Grimace with disgust as you handle the bagged marshmallows, muttering "I hope this doesn't leak" as you move it.

Read aloud three cards picked at random. Add flourishes such as "fried," "refried," "chopped," "grilled," or "sugared" at random when describing one or more of the items.

After running through several cards, give the bag to the kid who's proclaimed as most accepting. Let that winner reveal the bag's contents.

Say: **Some stuff we wouldn't eat; we'd rather go hungry. But what about accepting people? Do we have to accept everyone, or can we pass on some people by saying "No thanks" to people we don't like?**

We'll dig into the whole "accept people" thing in a few minutes, right after a game of Mousetraps and Marshmallows!

Gung-Ho Game

MOUSETRAPS AND MARSHMALLOWS

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: mousetraps, marshmallows

Have kids take off their shoes. Set a half dozen spring-loaded mousetraps in a cluster about 10 feet away. As you set traps, explain that if kids value their toes, they won't want armed and dangerous mousetraps lying around.

Give kids marshmallows and explain that kids can toss the marshmallows at the traps to trigger them, but not to get closer than the boundary you set.

If kids aren't scoring many hits, move the boundary up to about 5 feet from the marshmallows. You scoop up misses and put those marshmallows back in play.

After a few minutes call a halt to the barrage and trigger the mousetraps yourself with some marshmallows.

Have kids sit, pull on their shoes, and talk about this:

Say: **Those mousetraps weren't welcome or wanted here in a room where we weren't wearing shoes. Tell about a time you didn't feel welcome someplace, and why you didn't feel welcome.**

As for me ...

Briefly share a story about a time you didn't feel welcome. Then invite kids to tell their stories too. If you have more than seven or eight kids, have them pair up to talk to each other. That way everyone gets the chance to talk.

After kids talk, continue.

Say: **We're going to meet someone who was most definitely not welcome where he was. We'll hear his story and find out why nobody wanted him around.**

Famous Friends Bible Story

THE ZACCH ATTACK

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible, glasses of water, cotton swabs, dish detergent, small packets of pepper

Group kids into trios and give each trio a glass of water, a packet of pepper, and a cotton swab whose tip you've saturated with dish detergent. Warn kids to keep the cotton swabs out of their ears!

Say: **Today we meet Zacchaeus and some of his friends. Let's say that Zacchaeus is like your water: clean, refreshing, a great guy. Except he's got a few issues. For each one I mention, take turns in your trio dropping a pinch of pepper into your glass.**

He was a cheater (pause briefly after naming each thing), **was a thief, could be mean, lied constantly, and treated people badly. In fact, he was so bad that you can just empty the rest of the pepper into your glass.**

But Zacchaeus ended up becoming a friend of Jesus. Here's how it happened. Read aloud Luke 19:1–7.

People knew Zacchaeus had gotten rich by overcharging them for taxes. People were mad at Jesus just for *talking* with Zacchaeus, let alone going to his home!

But when Zacchaeus spent time with Jesus, something happened. Read aloud Luke 19:8–9.

Dip your cotton swab into the middle of your water and see what happens.

The pepper will be repelled by the dishwasher soap and move to the outer edge of the glass. Let kids experiment for a few moments; then set aside the glasses and cotton swabs.

Being with Jesus changed Zacchaeus. Notice: Jesus didn't tell Zacchaeus to change first *before* Jesus spent time with him. Jesus didn't love the bad things Zacchaeus had done, but he *did* love Zacchaeus.

We're like Zacchaeus. We don't change to try to become good enough to come to Jesus. We just come to Jesus so the bad things we've done can be forgiven and so Jesus can change us.

In your trio, talk about this:

- What's a lesson you can learn from what happened with Zacchaeus?

After trios talk, ask if anyone will share with the whole group what was shared in trios.

Thank kids for sharing and then sum up: **Jesus accepts us like he accepted Zacchaeus and his buddies. He doesn't approve of everything we've done or will do in the future, but his love is big enough to forgive us when we ask for forgiveness. And his love is big enough to walk with us when we choose to follow him!**

CLOSING PRAYER

PASS-AROUND PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: can of soup, dented can of soup, hand mirror, Bible

Have kids sit in a circle. Hold up the can of soup.

Say: **Sometimes we look at other people and see what's good, but sometimes** (hold up the dented can of soup) **we look at ourselves and see only what's bad.**

When Jesus looks at us, he sees us as we really are—both outside and inside. Pass around the mirror and have kids look at themselves as you continue. **We might be a bit dented, a bit broken, but we're a lot loved. Just like Jesus accepted Zacchaeus, he accepts us. And like Zacchaeus, through Jesus we find the power to be the people he wants us to be. Listen to what God's Word says about you in the eyes of God.**

TIP

If you're reading several Bible passages, mark them in your Bible before kids arrive so you can easily flip from one passage to the next.

As time allows, read some of these passages, pausing between them to let the ideas sink in: 1 Samuel 16:7b; Psalm 139:14; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:9.

Ask kids to join you in prayer.

Pray: **Jesus, thank you. Your love is overwhelming. It sets us free. Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 2 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Say: **Zacchaeus discovered what you found out in our Bible story: Jesus accepts you as you are even if you're a big-time "pepper person" who's done bad things. He loves you, accepts you, and—if you choose—you can ask for forgiveness and Jesus will invite you into a forever friendship.**

So Jesus accepts you as you are. But do you accept him as *he* is?

He's not just some caring person. He's the *Savior*. The *Lord*. He's *God*.

Are you seeing Jesus clearly? If so, you know he's not like any of your other friends. They make mistakes, but Jesus doesn't. They may let you down, but he never will. They may break a promise, but Jesus always keeps his promises.

Let's see what the Bible says. Read aloud 2 Peter 3:9.

Let's thank him right now for being a friend—a friend like no other.

Pray: **Jesus, how wonderful that you want to be our friend! Help us see you for who you are. Help us honor you with the honor you deserve. Most of all, thank you for calling us into a friendship that will go on forever! Amen.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

EYE SEE YOU

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: timer

Ask kids to pair up and then sit so everyone is facing his or her partner.

Explain that partners will, at your signal, look into each other's eyes for a full 60 seconds without breaking eye contact. Blinking is okay, but no looking away.

Few pairs will be able to do it. At the end of 60 seconds, ask:

- **How did that feel? Why?**

Say: **We aren't used to people looking at us so long unless they're judging us in some way, maybe because they're mad at us or don't like us. Today we discovered that Jesus looks at us with acceptance, not judgment. He's calling us into a friendship with him that will change us; but before helping us grow, he accepts us.**

We don't have to ever turn away from our friend Jesus!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

FREE SIDEWALK ACTIVITY COURSE

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: sidewalk chalk

Before kids arrive, determine a stretch of sidewalk to turn into an activity course.

Arm each child with sidewalk chalk. Explain how you'll work together to turn a sidewalk into a free activity course by writing something on the concrete every 3 feet.

Before going outside, have kids choose what to write. Some options include: "Three jumping jacks," "Twirl in a circle," "Take a bow," "Walk like a zombie," "Howl like a wolf," "Sing a song," and "Smile!"

As the kids write, you write at the beginning of the course, "Free Activity Course—All Are Welcome to Play!"

After creating the course go back inside and, as a group, discuss:

- **We invited everyone to play, no charge. How's that like or unlike how Jesus invites people to follow him?**

How Jesus Loved Faithful Followers

The Point: Jesus gives us hope.

Scripture Connect: Matthew 7:1–3, 12, 15, 21–29

Supplies for all session 8 activities and options: Bible, paper lunch bags, markers, 2 paper plates, 8 empty soda cans (with pull tabs removed), glasses, water, vegetable oil, food coloring, effervescent antacid tablets, paper towels, stale marshmallows from session 7, trash can

The Basics for Leaders

Amazed, that's what they were.

Plenty of teachers picked up the Law and Prophets and then blathered on about what the words might mean. Such teachers twisted the message and inserted things the Lord never intended. The crowds were used to that.

But Jesus spoke with authority, almost as if he was the author of the message. The crowds hadn't heard *that* before.

Were these faithful followers always faithful? No, like us they sometimes wandered away. And friend that he is, Jesus invited them back.

Back to life. Back to freedom. Back to hope.

OPENING ACTIVITY–OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

MINI-ME HAND PUPPETS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper lunch bags, markers

Have kids lay their paper bags with the smooth side down and the flap that's usually the bottom of the bag facing up. The opening of their bags will be toward the kids.

Kids will each make a paper-bag puppet. They will draw an upper lip on the lower edge of the flap, and a lower lip on the body of the bag. Remind kids to scale the lips so the whole top of the bag is a face. After drawing a face, they can draw a body on the lower portion of the bag.

Make a puppet yourself so there's a model for kids to see.

Say: **Make your bag so it looks like you. Have fun!**

When kids have finished drawing, have them sit in a circle and pull on their puppets for a discussion. Have them use their puppets as they talk about this:

- **What's something you hope happens this week? Why that thing?**

After the puppet discussion, have kids carefully set their puppets aside. They'll need them again.

Say: **Today we'll talk about some people who needed hope—and found it when they met Jesus!**

Gung-Ho Game

CAN-DO RELAY

Time: about 20 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: paper plates (1 per team), empty soda cans (1 per kid, with pull tabs removed)

Separate kids into teams of four each. Explain that this relay will involve carrying the paper plate with one can on it to a far wall and back, where the next team member will stack an additional can on the first can and repeat the trip to the far wall and back. Cans will keep being added to the tower until there are four. If a can falls while someone's walking, it can be picked up and restacked, and the walker then continues.

Switch up whether kids carry plates in their left or right hands, whether they can walk or run, and whether they walk forward or backward. Play several rounds, switching up who's in each team.

When you're done playing, have kids sit and, as a whole group, discuss:

- **What gave you hope that you could complete this relay?**

Thank kids for sharing their responses. Then have kids find partners.

Say: **This was a game, but I know that life throws some real-world challenges at you too.**

- **Tell your partner something hard happening in your life now and what gives you hope that you can get through it.**

As for me ...

Briefly share a challenge you're facing and what gives you hope you'll come out the other side okay.

Say: **Your turn. Talk with your partners now.**

After pairs talk, say: **Thanks for sharing together. We're going to meet people who desperately needed the hope they found—in Jesus.**

Famous Friends Bible Story

PUPPET PEOPLE

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible, puppets made in the “Mini-Me Hand Puppets” activity

Have kids again pull on their hand puppets. Explain that they’re part of a Bible-times crowd, come to hear Jesus speak. Tell them to greet one another—speaking through their puppets, of course!

Then say: **Some of you have seen Jesus before. What are some amazing things you’ve seen Jesus do?**

Pause as kids respond. Then ask them to call out amazing things Jesus said.

Say: **Today you heard Jesus say things like ...** Read aloud Matthew 7:1–3, 12, 15, and 21–27.

The Bible says you’re amazed by what you hear. Read aloud verses 28–29. **Show me your best “amazed” puppet faces. You’re amazed because Jesus is teaching with *authority*, not just commenting on what’s already written. Some other teachers even twisted what God had written. But with Jesus it’s like Jesus is speaking for God himself. And that gives you hope. Look hopeful, puppet people!**

Ask kids to remove and set their puppets aside.

Say: **People who came to hear Jesus needed hope. They were often poor. Their country had been conquered by Rome. And God had promised them a Messiah hundreds of years earlier, but that Savior hadn’t shown up. Unless ... could it be? Might *Jesus* be the promised Savior?**

As people got to know him, they realized it was true: Jesus is the Messiah! Instant hope!

Turn to a partner and talk about this:

- **In what ways does Jesus give you hope? Or doesn’t that happen for you?**
- **What do you hope *for* because of Jesus? Why do you hope for that?**

Ask for volunteers to share with the whole group what they hope for in Jesus.

Say: **Jesus gives us hope. Let’s thank him for that!**

CLOSING PRAYER

HOPEFUL PRAYER

Time: about 2 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

Gather kids in a circle and ask them to cup their hands in front of them. Explain that they'll participate in a responsive prayer; you'll say something and then pause, and they'll respond, "Jesus, give us hope."

Pray: **Jesus, we live in a world that's sometimes hard to understand. When we hear about bad things happening, be with us.** (Jesus, give us hope.) **When we face disappointments, be with us.** (Jesus, give us hope.) **When we find ourselves scared or sad, be with us.** (Jesus, give us hope.) **When people we love are sick or hurt, be with them—and us.** (Jesus, give us hope.) **In all ways, on all days, be with us, Jesus.** (Jesus, give us hope.) **Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Say: **Friends trust one another. Jesus has said that if you love and follow him, you can trust him for eternal life.**

Listen to what he said. Read aloud John 10:28–30.

Say: **A question for you: What can your friend Jesus trust you for? In your friendship, what have you told Jesus he can expect from you? Remember to talk with Jesus about that.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOPE BUBBLE-UP LAVA LAMP

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: glasses, water, vegetable oil, food coloring, effervescent antacid tablets, paper towels

Do this activity on an easily cleaned tabletop or non-carpeted floor, just in case.

TIP

Practice making a lava lamp before you get together with your kids. You'll feel more confident and be better able to coach kids as they put together their lamps.

Group kids in trios and give each trio the supplies to make a Hope Bubble-Up Lava Lamp. Explain that they must carefully mix ingredients per your instructions; you don't want any unintentional volcanoes!

1. Have kids add food coloring to a glass that's half full of water.
2. Fill a second glass about three-quarters full of vegetable oil.
3. Add colored water until the glass containing oil is 1–2 inches from the top.
4. Break an effervescent antacid tablet into several pieces and drop them into the oil-and-water glass.

The carbon dioxide bubbles will attach to colored water and rise to the top of the glass, where bubbles will pop. The water will then drift back to the bottom of the glass.

After admiring their work, ask the whole group to discuss:

- **Tell about a time when hope “bubbled up” in you. What caused it?**
- **How would you like hope to bubble up in your life in the next week?**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

“I HOPE I CAN” H-O-R-S-E

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: stale marshmallows from session 7, trash can

Nothing complicated here. Just a good old-fashioned game of H-O-R-S-E with one twist: kids will forego basketballs and play with the marshmallows you saved from last week. No longer good for eating, they're *great* for tossing at a trash can!

Put kids into trios and let them compete. Encourage trick shots and add this rule: Every shot must be preceded with the shooter saying, “I hope I make this.” Any shot minus those words will count as a miss.

When trios have each crowned their Marshmallow H-O-R-S-E Maestro, as a whole group have kids discuss:

- What's the difference between making a wish and having hope?

After kids talk, say: **A wish is a desire without much confidence it'll come true. But hope in Jesus is real. He can and will deliver what he promises! You can hope for heaven with certainty because, if you're following him, he promises to see you there!**

How Jesus Loved a Roman Centurion

The Point: Jesus welcomes us.

Scripture Connect: Matthew 8:5–10, 13

Supplies for all session 9 activities and options: Bible, paper plates, scissors, markers, paper clips, pens, tape, drinking glasses, water, small paper cups, paper towels, colored card stock (or construction paper)

The Basics for Leaders

The *last* person most of Jesus's Jewish friends wanted to see walking toward them was a Roman soldier.

Especially an officer, a centurion.

But Jesus looked past the uniform to welcome the faith-filled man who'd come to ask for Jesus's help.

Jesus is like that—a friend who looks past exteriors to see us for who we are, to see us for who we can become in him, and to welcome us with a hug.

And today you and your kids will explore what it's like to be welcomed by Jesus and to welcome others that way.

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

EXTEND THE WELCOME

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper plates, scissors, markers, paper clips

Give each child a paper plate, scissors, and a marker.

Ask kids to write "Welcome" on their paper plates. Then explain they're going to extend their welcome by using the scissors to cut their paper plates in such a way that the paper will stretch as far as possible without breaking. Yes, there will be an inspection!

Kids can cut a spiral (that's the winning strategy) or back and forth to create strips, but don't give them any suggestions. See what they do in the allotted time.

When time is up, have pairs work together to mark distances from a wall as plates are stretched out (a paper clip on the floor is a good marker) and see who managed to "extend the welcome" the farthest.

Say: **Great job extending your welcomes as far as possible! Today we'll explore a time when someone received a warm welcome from none other than Jesus. And this was someone who wasn't all that used to being welcomed at all.**

More about that after a game of Cluster Muster!

Gung-Ho Game

CLUSTER MUSTER

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: paper clips

Give each child five paper clips and ask kids to hold those paper clips in their hands. Explain that you'll call out groups they're either part of or not part of.

An example: Ask kids to get in clusters of three. Anyone who's left out of that grouping will put a paper clip in a pocket (or clip to their shirt neckline). When kids find themselves excluded five times from groupings, they'll keep playing, but all their paper clips will be pocketed.

As you play rounds, ask now and then who still has paper clips. When just one or two kids still have them, declare them Cluster Muster champions with the honor of wearing paper clips on a pocket or neckline the rest of the hour.

Some possible groupings include: clusters of three (call out other numbers too as it makes for lots of fast-scramble action!), wearing laced shoes, born on an even-numbered day, wearing blue, pet cat (dog, hamster, etc.), can swim, first name starts with a vowel, last digit of phone number is an odd number, can/can't roll tongue, live more than 10 minutes away.

After you have your winners, as a group talk about this:

- **How did it feel being left out of a group?**

Ask kids to share with a partner—or in the whole group if you don't have many kids in attendance—about a time they found themselves excluded from a group.

You go first, sharing a brief story about a time you were in that situation.

Then say: **Now it's your turn. When have you found yourselves in that situation?**

After kids talk, thank them for sharing their stories. Then ask:

- **Now tell about a time when you were warmly welcomed by a group or a person. Who welcomed you and how did that feel?**

After kids talk, say: **Let's meet someone who found himself warmly welcomed when he may not have expected it.**

Famous Friends Bible Story

SKETCHY WELCOME

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible, paper plates, pens

Give each child a paper plate and pen. Tell kids they're all now sketch artists.

You'll describe someone, and their job is to each draw the head of the person you're describing on their Official Sketch Artist Plate. Share the following description, pausing to give kids a chance to sketch.

Say: **This person is a man back in the time of Jesus. He's a Roman and has dark, curly hair and dark eyes. Sort of a narrow, weathered face like he's been outside a lot. He's maybe ... oh, 30 years old.**

He's a centurion in the Roman army and wearing a helmet; maybe I should have told you that first. Anyway, it's metal and has metal plates that come down the side of the helmet to cover his cheeks and jaw.

On top of his helmet, there's what looks like a red horsehair broom bottom. It runs left to right on his helmet, sideways from ear to ear, sticking up.

This man commands 100 soldiers, so he yells a lot. And he's seen a lot of battles. He may have a few scars on his face; I can't remember.

Oh, and he has a mole on his chin.

Ask kids to finish up their sketches and then display their work to one another.

Say: **This Roman centurion—an officer in command of 100 men—was part of the Roman army occupying Israel. The soldiers kept an eye on everyone and sometimes beat, jailed, or killed people. The average person living in Israel couldn't *wait* until the Roman army left.**

As a whole group talk about this:

- **If you lived in Israel back in the day and the centurion you drew were to come walking up to you, how would you feel and why?**

After kids respond, thank them for sharing and say: **Let's see how Jesus responded.**

Ask a willing reader to read aloud Matthew 8:5–10, 13. As a whole group discuss:

- Jesus welcomed this enemy soldier. Why?

Thank kids for sharing and then say: **Jesus looked past the centurion's uniform to welcome a faith-filled man asking for his help.**

Jesus looks past our outsides and sees us for who we are, and he sees who we can become in him. He's a friend who always welcomes us, a friend who's always willing to listen to us. That's a friend I want to keep!

Let's explore how our friend Jesus listens, and ask him to do a bit of listening right now.

CLOSING PRAYER

I HEAR YOU PRAYER

Time: about 14 minutes

Supplies: paper plates, scissors, tape

Say: Before hearing aids, people with hearing loss held up large cones to their ears to amplify the sounds around them.

We'll make our own "ear trumpets" and see how they work as we listen to one another and you listen to me!

But two rules: Don't stick the small end of your ear trumpet into your ear canal, because that can cause damage. And do NOT "surprise" someone by suddenly shouting into a cone, because that can cause permanent hearing loss.

Have kids cut a straight line from the outside edge of a plate to the center. Then have them curl the plate so it creates a cone. A few pieces of tape will secure the cone shape. Then have kids snip off the pointed end of the cone.

Have kids place the cones up to an ear and turn their heads toward you as you talk. Your volume will appear to rise because cones collect and channel the sound waves of your voice. Go to the far side of the room and whisper. Let kids approach you until they can clearly hear what you're saying, and then have them remove their cones as you keep whispering.

After letting kids experiment with their ear trumpets in conversations, have kids sit. **Say: Friends welcome one another and listen to one another. As a whole group let's talk about this:**

- **How do we go about welcoming our friend Jesus and listening to him? How does that happen?**

Thank kids for sharing. Say: **When I read Jesus' words in the Bible, I welcome him into my life and listen to him. When I'm in nature and thank him for his creativity, I welcome him in and he hears me. When I pray, I welcome him and he hears me. Jesus is always listening!**

Ask kids to offer simple sentence prayers, thanking Jesus for welcoming them to be his friend and then welcoming him in return.

When they've finished, pray: **Thank you for always welcoming us, Jesus. We want to welcome you too. Walk with us, and thanks for listening! Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 1 minute

Supplies: ear trumpets made in "I Hear You Prayer," Bible

Ask kids to take their ear trumpets home as a reminder to pray.

Say: **Jesus welcomes us not just once, but every day. We can have a conversation with him every day. Every hour of every day, if we want!**

Let's see what the Bible says. Read aloud 1 John 5:14.

Put your ear trumpet where you'll see it tomorrow, and let it remind you: Jesus welcomes you!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

ROOM FOR ALL

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: drinking glasses, water, small paper cups, paper towels, paper clips

Group kids into trios and give each trio a paper cup and a glass full of water. Do this activity on an easily wiped surface like a tabletop or tile floor.

Explain that, pouring water from the glasses, trios are to carefully fill the paper cups up to the brim. Then distribute paper clips to the trios. (Or they may still have some if they did the Cluster Muster game earlier.) See how many paper clips they can carefully put in the "full" cups without water overflowing.

Better: Have each child in the trio guess, and then see who comes closest.

They'll be amazed how many clips will fit!

Have kids wipe up any spills and then move to a different area to sit and talk about this as a group. Say: **Our cups had room to hold more than we thought, didn't they? Jesus has room for *everyone* who wants to join him.**

- **Jesus invites everyone to come to him. Have you invited someone to get to know Jesus? If so, when and why?**
- **Who's someone you can pray will come to Jesus?**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

CLASSY WELCOME MAT

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: colored card stock (or construction paper), markers

Tell kids they've all been chosen as Welcome Mat Designers. They're each to design a welcome mat like those we see outside someone's door to offer a greeting to anyone who stops by. A welcome mat is useful for people wiping dirt off the bottom of their shoes, but it's fun if it says something about the people living behind the door.

Say: **For instance, if the people are dog lovers, their welcome mat might say, "A golden retriever and his people live here." Or maybe their mat will say something like, "Don't step on this mat—it's a trapdoor!"**

Write what you want, but here's the thing: this mat is for *your* front door. What can you write that says something about the people living at *your* address?

Allow time for kids to design and then to show and explain their mats.

Say: **Jesus welcomed our centurion friend, and he welcomes us. I'm glad you're welcoming people too! Put your welcome mat outside the door to the room where you sleep. See if anyone stops by!**

How Jesus Loved Lazarus and His Sisters

The Point: Jesus takes care of his friends.

Scripture Connect: John 11:1–8, 38–44

Supplies for all session 10 activities and options: Bible, balloons, cornstarch, funnels, paper cups, spoons, newspapers, fine-tip permanent markers, index cards, pencils with erasers, paper, paper plates, scissors, tissue paper, colorful contact paper

The Basics for Leaders

If you've ever had a friend show up to help you move a sofa or fix a faucet, you know you've got a good friend.

But what about a friend who shows up to raise you from the dead? How good a friend is *that*?

Lazarus and his sisters found out, and in today's session you and your kids will explore that encounter. Along the way you'll discover that Jesus is still giving life—eternal life!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

STRESS BALLOONS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: balloons, cornstarch, funnels, paper cups, spoons, newspapers

Have kids pair up, and give each pair a spread of newspaper to use as a tray for easy cleanup. Also give each pair two balloons, a funnel, ½ cup of cornstarch (in a paper cup), and a spoon.

Partners will take turns helping one another put cornstarch into their balloons by placing the funnel in the balloon and adding cornstarch to the funnel. They'll need to help the cornstarch along by pushing it through the funnel with the spoon. When they're done, ask them to tie off the balloons, leaving a bit of air in the balloons.

Explain that they've just created a “stress ball,” something to squeeze when they're worried and need to work out nervous energy.

Say: **Some people report that it's helpful to have a stress reliever when they're worried and wish they had some help with a problem. Rolling the stress ball around in their hands helps them focus and not be as anxious. Give it a try.**

Ask:

- How much help do you think your stress balloon will be the next time you're worried or anxious?
- If you've got a problem, which would you rather have: a stress balloon or a friend who'll jump in to help you?

Say: Today we'll meet a family that had a problem that no stress balloon could solve. But they had something better: a friend named Jesus.

First, though, how about a quick game of All-In Balloon Bop? We'll play as soon as you fold up your newspapers and we've cleaned up the area.

After cleanup, have kids set their stress balloons aside.

Gung-Ho Game

ALL-IN BALLOON BOP

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: balloons

Give each child an inflated, tied-off balloon and these instructions: All kids are on the same team. When you give the signal, kids will all bop their balloons into the air. Explain that they're working together to beat their enemy, Gravity.

The goal is to not let any balloon hit the ground; kids keep bopping them upward. If a balloon falls, it stays on the floor and that's a point for Gravity. When you call time, if there are more balloons in the air than on the ground, the kids win.

After you play for a few minutes, have kids hold their balloons and count how many did and didn't fall. Declare a winner.

Say: **Balloon Bop college scholarships for all of you! Great job!**

As a whole group discuss:

- If I'd asked you to play alone, trying to keep all these balloons in the air, do you think you would have won? Why or why not?

Thank kids for sharing. Ask them to partner up. (If you did the "Stress Balloon" activity, have kids keep the same partners.)

Say: **Tell your partner about a time you had a problem you couldn't fix on your own. What was it? Did you get the help you needed? How did it**

turn out? **As for me ...** Share a brief story from your life, modeling the sort of story you hope kids share with one another.

After kids share, ask whether anyone's willing to share with the whole group what was shared with a partner. If yes, thank kids for sharing.

Say: **Sometimes we need a friend to help us. Even if that friend can't fix the problem, it's helpful not to be alone.**

Two sisters had a problem they wanted their friend Jesus to fix. Their brother was sick and not getting better. They sent word to Jesus so he could come heal their brother. Except ... Jesus didn't come. At least, not in time.

Jesus told his disciples that what was happening to Lazarus would help them believe in him more and would show God's glory.

Let's find out how the rest of that story played out.

Famous Friends Bible Story

LAZARUS RAISED

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Explain to kids that they'll be providing the sound effects for this story. You'll read what happened and signal what they need to do and when. Open your Bible to John 11.

Say: **Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. They liked one another and were always laughing with one another.** (pause) **Really laughing.** (pause) **Belly laughing.** (pause)

But Lazarus got sick. First he started coughing (pause), **and then he just lay in bed moaning in pain.** (pause) **Mary and Martha were worried, pacing back and forth in their house, their footsteps smacking on the hard, dirt floor.** (pause) **They sent a friend running to where Jesus was so Jesus could come heal Lazarus.** (pause) **The friend ran faster than that.** (pause) **But Jesus didn't come, and Lazarus took one last breath,** (pause) **sighed one last sigh,** (pause) **and died.**

Lazarus had already been in a tomb four days when Jesus finally arrived. Mary was crying (pause), **as were friends who were gathered together.** (pause)

Jesus walked to Lazarus's tomb (pause) **and told some men to roll away the stone sealing the tomb. They grunted as they moved the heavy**

stone. (pause) The stone scraped the ground as it rolled. (pause) The men scrambled away from the tomb (pause), and Jesus said, “Lazarus, come out!”

Then there was a gasp from the crowd (pause) because Lazarus, wrapped in burial clothes, walked out of the tomb. (pause) The people shouted in amazement! (pause)

Applaud kids’ efforts and, as a group, talk about this:

- Jesus didn’t immediately go to Lazarus when he heard Lazarus was sick. How was Jesus taking care of Lazarus and his sisters by making that decision? How was Jesus taking care of his disciples?
- In what ways does Jesus take care of us by sometimes *not* giving us what we ask for or by *not* fixing our problems?

CLOSING PRAYER

STRESS BALLOON PRAYER

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: stress balloons made in “Stress Balloons” activity, fine-tip permanent markers

Ask kids to retrieve and hold their stress balloons. Give kids markers to share as they draw eyes and a flat-line mouth on their balloons, carefully letting the ink dry (it’s fast!) so there’s no smearing. Have kids experiment with squishing the balloon so the flat-line mouth becomes a smile or a frown.

Ask kids to find a partner, smush a smile on their balloons, and share with their partners one thing that’s making them happy right now. After kids share, have them smush a frown and share one thing that’s making them sad.

Say: **I’ll pray aloud, and you’re invited to silently pray during the silences. Smush the face of your balloon into a smile or a frown to match what you pray about.**

Pray: **Lord, please hear us as we silently tell you about a problem we have that needs your help. (pause 30 seconds) Thank you for being our friend and wanting to be with us in this problem. (pause 30 seconds) We trust you to help us in the way you feel is best and that will best help you make your purposes happen. (pause 30 seconds) Now hear our thoughts as we tell you why we love you. (pause 30 seconds) Amen.**

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: permanent markers, Bible

Remind kids that friends take care of one another. They've discovered today that Jesus takes care of *his* friends, but how do they take care of *their* friend Jesus? Ask:

- **How do we take care of Jesus? Or doesn't he need us to take care of him in any way? What do you think?**

After kids talk, ask kids to use a permanent marker to draw a dot on one of their thumbnails.

Say: Jesus tells us to love God with our whole hearts and to love others like we love ourselves. When we do this, we're taking care of our friend Jesus!

Listen to his words. Read aloud Mark 12:30–31.

That means we take care of our friends! It also means we care for people who *aren't* our friends, people we don't know or even like.

Ask kids each to be aware of their dot over the next couple of days. And when they notice it, they should look around: Is there someone nearby they can care for with a smile or encouraging word? Is there someone they can pray for?

Say: Let's do as our friend Jesus does for us: let's care for others!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

FRIENDLY PORTRAITS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: index cards, pencils with erasers, paper

Have kids sit in a circle. Give each child (and yourself!) a pencil, an index card, and a sheet of paper. Ask kids to each write their name on the card; then collect and shuffle the cards. Explain that each child will get a card and that is the person who the child will sketch to the best of his or her ability. To be sure everyone knows the names of who's in the circle, have each child say aloud his or her name.

Distribute cards facedown and then give kids about five minutes to sketch. Have kids sign and then present their masterpieces.

Go around the circle, having kids hold up their portraits. See whether there are any budding Michelangelos among your kids!

Say: **All the people we sketched have something in common: we're all friends of Jesus. He wants a friendship with each of us, and one way he's taking care of us is by giving us one another. High fives all around!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

HEART ART

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper plates, scissors, tissue paper, colorful contact paper

Ask kids to each cut a shape out of the center of a paper plate, a shape that reminds them that Jesus takes care of his friends. It may be a heart, an open tomb (reminder of Lazarus), or whatever kids want.

Next, kids will lay their plates facedown and cover the holes with sticky contact paper so that when the plate is turned over, the sticky side is up. They'll then cut shapes from tissue paper and place them on the sticky contact paper to simulate stained glass.

Have kids take their plates home to hang up in a window as a reminder that Jesus takes care of his friends!

How Jesus Loved

Thomas

The Point: Jesus welcomes our honesty.

Scripture Connect: John 20:24–29

Supplies for all session 11 activities and options: Bible, modeling dough, paper plates, pennies, paper (or foam) coffee cups, fruit-flavored candy (variety), tissues, index cards, black pens, box

The Basics for Leaders

As an early disciple of Jesus, Thomas had watched Jesus turn water into wine, heal people suffering with leprosy, and raise the dead.

So why doubt that Jesus could rise from the dead himself?

Whatever the reason, Thomas doubted—and said so. And when Jesus appeared, one of the first things he did was turn to Thomas and invite Thomas to put his doubts to rest.

There was no yelling. No shaming. Just one friend helping the other to a deeper faith.

That's something you'll do with your young friends today.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: **If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.**

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

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OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

3-D DOUBTS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: modeling dough, paper plates

Give each child a small amount of modeling dough on a paper plate.

Say: **There's a lot of false information floating around. In the next few minutes, you'll make a sculpture representing something some people think is true but that you doubt.**

For example, some people believe alien spacecraft visit earth. If you doubt that, maybe you'll sculpt a flying saucer. Some people believe there are leprechauns guarding pots of gold. If you doubt that, maybe you'll make a gold coin. Or maybe you have another idea.

Give kids time to sculpt. Then let them show and explain to the group what they've made. Thank kids for their artistic endeavors and then say: **Today we'll meet someone who had doubts about something he'd been told too.**

Gung-Ho Game

I DOUBT IT

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: lots of pennies, paper (or foam) coffee cups

Have kids pair up, and give each pair a coffee cup. Give each child 20 pennies. Position kids in pairs at least 10 feet apart. Ask pairs to predict how many of the 20 pennies the pair's Catcher will nab when tossed, one at a time, by the pair's Pitcher.

Each team will declare a number. And if any other pair thinks the number won't be achieved, that pair can declare, "I doubt it!"

The prize for hitting a high number that was predicted: bragging rights.

Switch the roles in each pair. And after gathering up pennies, play the game several times, switching out partners. It's an addictive game!

After playing have the whole group discuss:

- **How did it feel to have other pairs doubt your abilities? How did it feel if they ended up being right?**

Have pairs discuss this:

- **What's a time when someone doubted you could do something? What was the situation, and was the person right or wrong?**
- **Tell about a time you doubted what someone told you. What was it, and why did you doubt what was said?**

Thank kids for having those conversations.

Say: **Doubt has gotten a bad reputation, but it's useful. It can keep you from making a decision too quickly or making a wrong decision.**

Famous Friends Bible Story

THE DOUBTING THOMAS TWO-STEP

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Have kids line up, single file, facing you. Explain that you'll read aloud 10 statements. If kids think a statement is true, they'll take two steps to the right. If they doubt that it's true, two steps to the left. After each answer is revealed, kids return to their single-file line. Ask kids to keep track of how often they step to the left.

The statements:

1. **Someone paid \$10,000 for an invisible piece of art. (T)**
2. **When startled, the Asian elephant can jump up to 12 inches in the air. (F—elephants can't jump)**
3. **A licking machine created by college students proves it takes an average of 364 licks to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Pop®. (T)**
4. **James Tufts, who was 3 years old in 2015, was elected then as mayor of Dorset, Minnesota. (T)**
5. **Because of arctic vision, if a polar bear charges you and you stand absolutely still, he won't be able to see you. (F—and a good way to get eaten by a polar bear!)**
6. **Just one person lives in the town of Monowi, Nebraska. (T)**
7. **If you eat enough carrots, your skin will yellow. (T)**
8. **An average car has 10,000 parts. (F—it's more like 30,000)**
9. **The pogo stick was invented by the Romans. (F—George Hansburg patented it in 1919)**
10. **A type of concrete was invented by the Romans thousands of years ago. (T)**

Ask kids to reveal who was the “doubtiest” and stepped left most often. Then have kids sit and, as a whole group, discuss:

- **What prompted you to decide to doubt something?**
- **If I hadn't told you the answers, how would you have discovered the truth?**

Tell kids that doubt isn't all bad. Doubt can keep them from trusting the wrong people or information. But it can also keep them from trusting the *right* people and information.

Say: **Let's hear about someone in the Bible who doubted what he'd heard about Jesus.**

Ask a willing reader to read aloud John 20:24–29. As a whole group discuss:

- **What prompted Thomas's doubt?**
- **How did Thomas go about discovering the truth?**

Say: Jesus wasn't angry that Thomas had honest doubts. Jesus helped Thomas trust wholeheartedly in him. Never in the Bible do we see Jesus turn someone away who brings honest doubts to him. Which means we can bring him our doubts too.

A man whose son was being tortured by an unclean spirit brought his boy to Jesus. The man hoped Jesus could help his son, but wasn't fully convinced. He had doubts, but he was desperate.

Here's how that encounter went. Read aloud Mark 9:22b–25.

Say: Jesus didn't scold the man for having honest doubts. Instead, Jesus did something that removed the man's doubts!

We can bring our honest doubts to Jesus too. If we doubt, we can talk to him. We can talk to friends of his, people who've been believers longer than we have. And we can look in the Bible for answers.

What *doesn't* help is to just stay silent.

CLOSING PRAYER

KNOW THYSELF (AND THY CANDY) PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: fruit-flavored candy (variety), tissues (for carrying candy)

Put kids into pairs. One partner in each pair will close her eyes, pinch her nostrils shut, and stick out her tongue. The other partner will come to you, get one piece of candy (using a tissue as a carrier), and pop it into the partner's mouth, where the candy will start to dissolve.

Kids with candy in their mouths will try to guess the flavor of the candy. No looking and no letting go of noses!

After making a guess, kids with candy in their mouths will open their eyes and let go of their noses. Ask them to pay attention to the taste of the candy.

After pairs reverse roles, as a whole group discuss:

- **In what ways did the candy's taste change throughout the experiment?**
- **What do you think accounts for the change?**

Explain: About 80 percent of what we think of as "taste" is actually due to our sense of smell. When kids let go of their noses and they could smell, the distinct taste of a flavor was far stronger.

Say: Truly tasting a flavor takes more than one sense. Truly dealing with our doubts takes more than just us. It takes God's help too.

When we doubt but don't do anything to take care of those doubts, it's like having our eyes closed and our nostrils pinched. We can't fully "taste," or experience, a friendship with Jesus. Those doubts sit there, blocking our ability to see him clearly and to see ourselves clearly.

Join me as I pray about trusting Jesus with our doubts.

Pray: Jesus, you didn't turn Thomas away for doubting. Thank you for loving that friend who had doubts. Thank you for loving us when we have doubts too. Help us be like Thomas and share our doubts with other believers and you. Amen.

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: index cards, pens, box

Remind kids that Jesus welcomes their honesty and so do you. Give each child a card and pen. Point to the box. Tell kids that if they have doubts about God, Jesus, or their faith, they can write them down and drop the card in the box. If they've signed the card, you'll pray that Jesus will help them through their doubts. If they've given you a phone number or email address, you'll pray and get in touch to talk more about those doubts.

Connect with your pastor or Christian education director to make sure you make contact in a safe way, and to seek help if you're not sure what to say.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

HONESTY EXPLORATION

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: none

Have a deeper conversation with your kids about how much honesty matters in their friendships. Circle up and discuss these questions:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that your friends be honest with you? Why?
- What's your best definition of an *honest friend*?

- In what ways does Jesus fit or not fit that definition?
- How many lies does a friend get to tell you before he's no longer a friend?
- What's the risk of being an honest friend yourself?

Say: **Jesus welcomes our honesty and our honest doubts. We can come to him with any concern, knowing he will still love and accept us. Be honest with your friend Jesus—just like he's honest with you!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

DOUBT DOT

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: index card, black pens

Give each child an index card. Ask kids to draw a dark dot on the far *left* side of the card and a cross on the far *right*. Then have kids hold their cards at eye level an arm's length in front of them, close their *right* eyes, and look directly at the cross with their *left* eyes.

Focusing on the cross, they'll still be aware of the dot as they move their cards closer to their faces. But at some point the dot will disappear, reappearing as the card draws closer still.

Say: **Thomas stayed focused on Jesus, and Jesus helped Thomas deal with doubt. He'll do the same for us when we keep our focus on him.**

How Jesus Loved **Peter**

The Point: Jesus forgives us.

Scripture Connect: John 21:15–19

Supplies for all session 12 activities and options: Bible, cookie sheet, 35 junk drawer and workbench objects, towel, paper, pens, balloons, painter's tape, straws, cotton swabs, bowl of ice cubes, paper towels, permanent marker, trash can

The Basics for Leaders

Jesus talks a *lot* about forgiveness.

And he didn't just talk about it; he showed us what forgiveness looks like when it shows up and salvages a friendship.

Peter had denied Jesus three times. And yet Jesus welcomed Peter back. And Peter wasn't on probation. He was welcomed back with open arms and an open heart.

You're going to help your kids explore the power of forgiveness and what it does for friendships.

Friendships with God ... and friendships with others.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

INSTANT RECALL

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: cookie sheet, 35 junk drawer and workbench objects, towel, paper, pens

Before kids arrive, place 5 of the objects (examples: bottle of aspirin, key, coin, pair of glasses, screwdriver) on a cookie sheet and cover it with a towel.

Give each child a pen and three sheets of paper. Explain that you'll uncover objects on a tray and kids will have 10 seconds to notice everything on the tray before you cover it again. They'll then write down what they saw. Play two rounds, the second with 10 objects on the tray. After each round, have kids compare notes to see if they recalled everything.

For the third round, include 20 objects, including kitchen utensils

TIP

Your kids might have things happening in their lives that are tough to forgive, such as abuse of a physical, emotional, or spiritual nature. If that's the case, you may pick up an inkling of what's happening. Get with your children's ministry leader before this session to know how to respond and who to tell of your suspicions. And reassure kids that they're not alone and that you can be trusted if they have something weighty to share.

and odd pieces of hardware the kids might not know the names of. But before they start writing, have them put down their pens and, as a group, discuss:

- **What makes this game easy or hard for you?**
- **If you could add an object to the tray that would be hard to remember, what would you add?**

Following the discussion, have kids list what they can remember and then compare notes. Ask:

- **Why was making a list harder this time than before?**

Thank kids for their thoughts and then say: **It takes work to remember things, including remembering why you're carrying a grudge against someone who wronged you. You have to remember what the person said or did, remember how you felt, and remember to keep those hurt feelings alive.**

But there's a way to save yourself that grief: you can choose to forgive. We're going to see a champion forgiver at work today, and that's Jesus. But first, let's play a game I call Missing the Mark!

Gung-Ho Game

MISSING THE MARK

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: balloons, painter's tape, straws, cotton swabs, Bible

Before kids arrive, make sure you have straws that are fat enough for cotton swabs to pass through. Create a shooting gallery by taping several inflated balloons to the wall, using painter's tape. (It usually doesn't affect wall covering or paint, but check before the activity!) Also create lines on the floor with tape: one line 3 feet from the balloons and another farther back.

Give kids straws and cotton swabs and challenge them to show their sharpshooting skills by hitting the balloons from behind the lines. Two rules:

TIP

Discover you accidentally got straws that are too thin? No worries! Just clip off one end of the swabs so the shafts fit into the end of the straws.

No shooting people, and don't accidentally inhale through the straw when launching cotton swab darts at balloons.

Organize a "best out of three" round and also allow experimentation to see what works best for launching cotton swab darts.

When you're ready to move on, encourage one last barrage and then move kids to a different part of the room to sit.

Say: **We're talking today about Jesus forgiving his friends, including us. Some people think, *There's nothing I've done that needs to be forgiven. I'm a good person.***

But what does the Bible say? Read aloud Romans 3:23–24.

We've all missed the mark, sort of like our sharpshooting. But it's not a game if we aren't forgiven by Jesus. We have to confess, meaning to tell or admit, our sin to Jesus. Unconfessed and unforgiven sin gets in the way of our friendship with Jesus.

Famous Friends Bible Story

FORGIVENESS ON THE BEACH

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Explain that you're joining Jesus on a beach where he's met some of his disciples. Jesus was recently arrested and crucified, and then rose from the dead. After his arrest, his disciples abandoned him. Three times Peter even denied that he'd ever met Jesus.

Now, after a meal of fish and bread, Jesus is talking with Peter.

Ask a willing reader to read aloud John 21:15–19. Interrupt the reader when he finishes verse 15.

Say: **Peter knew Jesus was aware that Peter had betrayed Jesus three times. Now Jesus is asking Peter if he loves him.**

- **If you were Peter, how would you be feeling right about now? Why?**

After kids talk, ask your reader to take it from the top. This time, interrupt after verse 16. Say: **Jesus asks the question a second time: "Do you love me?" Peter says yet again that he does.**

- If you were Peter, how would you feel being asked this a second time?

After kids talk, have your reader pick it up at verse 17 and read through verse 19.

Say: **There's no need to ask how Peter felt this time; we're told he felt hurt. Turn to a partner and tell about a time you said or did something that hurt someone. Maybe it was on purpose or maybe it was an accident, but someone was hurt and it was your fault.**

As for me ...

Briefly share about a time your actions or words hurt someone, and then invite kids to also share stories with their partners.

After kids talk, say: **We've all hurt people, accidentally or on purpose. But we haven't all asked for forgiveness.**

- **Why do you think some people don't like to ask for forgiveness?**

Thank kids for their responses and then ask:

- **Why do you think some people don't like to forgive others?**

Thank kids for sharing their ideas and then continue.

Say: **Jesus gave Peter three chances to say he loved Jesus—once for each time Peter had earlier denied being Jesus's friend. And each time, Jesus told Peter there was something he could do to fix things: take care of other friends of Jesus.**

Jesus was forgiving Peter in a powerful way!

Jesus didn't hang on to the hurt that being betrayed must have brought. Instead, he chose to forgive. And we can choose to forgive too.

CLOSING PRAYER

ICE-COLD PRAYER

Time: about 3 minutes

Supplies: bowl of ice cubes, paper towels, Bible

Pass around a roll of paper towels and have each child rip off a sheet and lay it aside. Then pass around a bowl of ice cubes and have each child take one to hold in his or her fist. The cubes will begin melting, and the cold will begin to cause pain.

Say: **When we hold on to hurt and refuse to forgive, we're holding on to something that will hurt us. It's hard to think of anything else—our hurt, anger, or disappointment gets in the way of feeling joy or thinking about other things.**

Plus, how you do or don't forgive others has an impact on how you're forgiven. Listen to what Jesus said. Read aloud Matthew 6:14–15.

Tell kids to “let go” of their ice cubes, wrapping them in their paper towels.

Join me as I ask Jesus to help us “let go” of unforgiveness.

Pray: **Jesus, you chose to forgive Peter. That set Peter free and restored your friendship with him. Help us choose forgiveness too. Help us come to you for forgiveness, and help us offer forgiveness to others. Thank you for showing us the way, Jesus, and for powering our ability to also forgive. Amen.**

Invite kids to dry their hands with paper towels. Then collect melting cubes and soggy towels in the bowl.

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: Bible

It's one thing to be forgiven—and another to accept that gift of forgiveness.

Ask kids to spread out around the room and to sit with their hands cupped in front of them. Ask them to listen carefully as you read aloud 1 John 1:8–9. Then say: **In the quietness of the next few minutes, silently tell Jesus what in your life needs to be forgiven. Be honest.** (pause)

Say: **I love that Jesus is a friend who forgives. Join me in thanking him!**

Pray: **Thank you that your love and friendship are bigger than our sins, Jesus. Thank you for hearing us. Thank you for forgiving us. Work in and through us to grow closer to you. Amen.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

BALLOON LAUNCH

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: balloons, permanent marker, trash can

Give each kid a balloon to inflate but not tie off. Have kids hold their inflated balloons while you write their names on their balloons.

Explain that you're asking them to be sharpshooters (as they were in the "Missing the Mark" activity). But instead of balloons being *targets*, the balloons they hold will be used to *hit* a target: a trash can about 15 feet from where kids stand.

When you give the signal, kids will release their balloons so those balloons soar into the trash can. It isn't likely to work well.

Have kids retrieve their own balloons, reinflate them, and try again.

Then have kids sit and, as a whole group, discuss:

- **There seems to be a flaw in my plan to fill the trash can with balloons. What is it?**
- **How is releasing the balloons like our releasing our anger when we're not willing to forgive someone?**

Say: **When we don't forgive, we hold on to our anger, disappointment, or feelings of betrayal. When we finally release those feelings, they can send us off in all kinds of crazy directions. We can end up hurting others and saying things we shouldn't say.**

Jesus modeled forgiveness when he forgave his friend Peter ... and us. It's not exploding; it's choosing to let go of our anger *without* exploding. Without Jesus's help, that's hard to do.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

FORGIVENESS SQUIRM

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: none

Have kids stand and form a tight circle by locking elbows. Explain that one child—you'll choose one—will be outside the circle and will have 20 seconds

to squirm his or her way into the circle. Meanwhile, the circle of kids will attempt to keep that child out by huddling as close as possible.

Try this several times with different kids attempting to break through the circle.

Then have kids sit. Say: **When we're trying to forgive someone, it's not easy. Things get in our way.**

- **What gets in your way when you know you should forgive someone?**
- **What might help you forgive others?**

Thank kids for sharing and say: **Forgiveness is hard. The good news is that we don't have to do it alone. Jesus forgives us and will help us forgive others!**

How Jesus Loves Us

The Point: Jesus gives us friendship.

Scripture Connect: John 15:13, 15–17

Supplies for all session 13 activities and options: Bible, paper, scissors, pens (or pencils), balloons, permanent markers, pennies, tape, rubber bands, whiteboard with marker and eraser, cross (or picture of a cross), construction paper (or card stock)

The Basics for Leaders

Holy One. King of Kings. Savior. Alpha and Omega. Almighty One. Lamb of God. Light of the World. Messiah.

Friend.

You and your kids may not be accustomed to also thinking of Jesus as a friend, but friendship is the relationship Jesus has invited you to, and he's waiting for you to click "accept."

He's still holy, still God. Yet the closeness he's looking for with you and your kids can best be described in one word:

Friend.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FRIENDLY FINGERS

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: none

After all kids arrive, say: **Let's find out how our friends have been since we've seen them last!**

Explain that they'll take turns describing the past week by giving it a number between 1 and 10 and holding up that number of fingers.

Say: If your week was a tough one and you're just glad you lived through it, give it a 1. A 10 means it was one of the best weeks of your life. Or maybe your week was a 6—mostly good, but nothing special.

Rate your past week any number you'd like between 1 and 10, except for a 5. That would be an average week, and nobody has an average week—there's always *something* that made it interesting.

After they rate their weeks, give kids 30 seconds each to explain why they rated their weeks as they did. You'll go first, sharing a story that models the sort of brief personal stories you hope kids will share too.

Children will express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this session to make it even more relevant to your kids' lives!

OPENING ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

DESIGNER FRIENDS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper, scissors, pens (or pencils)

Before kids arrive, cut a “person” shape out of a sheet of paper for each child. It needn't be elaborate; a gender-neutral block outline like one of those figures on restroom doors is fine.

Give each kid a paper person and pen. Ask kids to turn their paper people into ideal friends by doing this:

- **Over the heart, write a word that describes a heart quality that makes someone a good friend.** (For example: kind, fun)
- **On one of the hands, draw something that represents what you'd like an ideal friend to do with you.** (For instance, if it's to go fishing, perhaps draw a fish.)
- **On the other hand, draw something that represents how you'd like the help of an ideal friend.** (Need a math tutor? Draw a plus sign.)
- **Over the mouth, draw a word that a good friend should say.**
- **On the feet, draw footwear that represents where you'd like an ideal friend to go with you.** (For instance, if to the beach, draw flip-flops.)
- **Draw a belt with a big, championship belt buckle on it. What's a good friend a champion of?**

- Draw glasses over the eyes. What would you like an ideal friend to see in you?

Arrange kids into trios and ask kids to introduce their ideal friends to their partners, explaining what they drew and wrote. Got a small crowd? Kids can introduce their friends to everyone.

Say: **Maybe the day is coming when you can design an ideal friend, but for now we need to take people as they are, and they're hardly ever ideal. We take the good and bad together.**

We'll explore a friendship today that's got way more upside than downside. But first, let's play a game of Stand-Up Guy!

Gung-Ho Game

STAND-UP GUY

Time: about 20 minutes

Supplies: balloons, permanent markers, pennies, tape, rubber bands, Bible

Give each child a balloon to inflate and tie off. Have kids then tape a penny on the rounded end of the balloon that's opposite from the tied knot. Ask kids to use markers to quickly draw their own faces on their balloons, with the tied knot being the top of the head.

Position a table near one wall and then have kids line up their balloons on the tabletop, balloon faces all facing the center of the room. (The balloons will "stand" because of the pennies.)

Give each child about a dozen rubber bands and set up a shooting gallery by having kids line up about 6 feet from the table. Explain that the goal is to try to knock a balloon over, even off the table, by nailing it with direct hits from rubber bands.

After letting kids blast away, point out that all the balloons are still upright, not knocked over, even if they were knocked off the table.

As a whole group discuss:

TIP

You're about to arm your kids with rubber bands, so reinforce that the targets are *balloons*, not other *kids*. Expect a sneak attack or two, and cut those off quickly. No eye injuries!

TIP

Setting the table near a wall means you won't be chasing all over the room to retrieve rubber bands. You're welcome.

- How did it feel seeing people blasting away at your balloon?
- How about blasting away at others' balloons? What was that like?

Ask kids to get into trios and talk about this:

- Tell about a time you felt like a target. Lots of stuff was coming at you or you felt attacked. How did you get through that time? Did you feel like you were knocked over?

As for me ...

Briefly share about a time you felt attacked by circumstances or people. Then encourage kids to share similar stories in their trios.

Then ask trios to discuss:

- Tell about a friend who stuck with you during a hard time. Who was it, and in what ways was it helpful to have that person stick with you?

After kids share, ask volunteers to share with the whole group what was discussed in their trios.

Thank kids who share. Then say: **When things aren't going well, it's great to have a friend standing beside you, to help you keep standing.**

Maybe that's something you've had a lot when you were going through hard times, and maybe it isn't. But I can tell you this: you *can* have a friend who'll stick with you—and that's Jesus.

Let's see what Jesus said about this. Read aloud John 15:13.

Say: **And Jesus didn't just say that—he *did* it! That's sticking with us!**

Famous Friends Bible Story

FRIENDS FIRST

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible, whiteboard with marker and eraser

Position a whiteboard where it will be easy for you or a volunteer to jot down words.

Say: **We're joining Jesus and his followers at a key moment. Jesus has shared one last Passover meal with his disciples. In a few minutes they'll walk out into the Jerusalem night. Jesus will be arrested and taken away to be crucified. He's having one last talk with his disciples, and here's something Jesus says.**

Read aloud John 15:15–17.

Say: **Some Bibles say that Jesus is no longer calling his disciples “slaves.” Other Bibles translate the word as “servants.” Either way, that's not the relationship Jesus wants with his disciples, because he's now calling them his “friends.”**

Tell kids you doubt they have a lot of experience having servants, but ask them to call out words that describe what it is to be a servant. (For instance, if you're a servant, you have to show up and help out because it's your job.) You or a volunteer scribe can jot those words on one side of the whiteboard.

Then ask for words that describe a friend. (For instance, you show up to help because you want to.) You or a scribe can write those words on the other side of the whiteboard. Ask:

- **Would you rather have a friend or a servant? Why? What are the pros and cons of each?**

Thank kids for sharing. Then point to the “friend” side of the board.

Say: **Jesus is looking for that kind of relationship with us. Not to have us as slaves who he likes to order around. Not as servants he has to pay to show up. But as friends who love him like he loves us.**

He wants us to choose him like he's chosen us.

As a whole group discuss:

- **How does it feel to know Jesus has chosen you as a friend? Why?**
- **What would change if you *really* treated Jesus as a friend?**

CLOSING PRAYER

INVITATION PRAYER

Time: about 8 minutes

Supplies: cross (or picture of a cross), markers, construction paper (or card stock), Bible

Before kids arrive, place a cross in your room.

Give all kids a sheet of construction paper and make markers available.

Explain: **Friends spend time together and enjoy one another's company. Which means, if we choose Jesus as a friend—like he's chosen us as friends—then we'll be inviting him into our lives to do things with us.**

When we're together, he's with us. The Bible says so.

Read aloud Matthew 18:20.

Say: **So our friend Jesus is here with us right now! And he wants to be with us always.**

Ask kids to think of something they do that they've never thought about inviting Jesus to do with them, like go skating, hang out at school, or sit with them as they play a video game.

Distribute paper and ask them each to fold their paper to make a greeting card. They can write "You're invited" on the front of the card, decorate the front, and then describe on the inside what they're inviting Jesus to do.

When they're done, have them do as you'll do: take the card and lay it by the cross, then return to their seats to wait quietly.

When kids have finished taking their invitations to Jesus, close in prayer.

Pray: **Jesus, you're a friend who wants to be with us everywhere. All the time. In every situation. Thank you for loving us and choosing us as friends. Help us choose you as one too. Amen.**

Leave the invitations there for now.

BECOMING A BETTER FRIEND OF JESUS

Time: about 2 minutes

Supplies: invitations made in "Invitation Prayer"

Say: **You just invited Jesus to be a part of your life in a way he maybe hasn't been a part before. You gave him an invitation.**

Well, you can be sure he's accepted any invitation to be with you!

Ask kids to retrieve their invitations and return to their seats. Tell kids to take their invitations home with them.

Say: **When you next do the activity you described in your card, begin by praying. Thank Jesus for being with you!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 1

BECAUSE

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: penny

Have kids sit in a circle. Give one child a penny to hold.

Explain that as a group they'll affirm (praise, encourage) whoever is holding the penny by saying, "You're a good friend because ____." They'll each give a reason they appreciate the person.

Say: **Maybe you'll look at someone and say "You're a good friend because you're funny" or "You're a good friend because you listen well." Whatever it is, be positive and kind with your comments. This isn't a time to make a joke at someone's expense.**

Model the kind of comment you hope to hear by saying something to the person holding the penny. In all comments make sure that character strengths, not personal appearance, are being addressed.

After making a comment, invite anyone else who would like to share what they appreciate about the penny person. Then have the penny passed along to the next person in the circle.

Don't rush this—kids love being affirmed—and it doesn't happen nearly often enough!

When the penny reaches you, let kids make comments about you too.

Once the penny has made it around the circle, say: **Jesus chooses us as his friends, and I'm glad I get to choose you all as my friends too. You're special creations of God—all unique, all gifted—and God is eager to work in and through you all in amazing ways.**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY-OPTION 2

SPECIAL HANDSHAKES

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Have kids get into pairs.

Say: **Friends sometimes share secrets, and occasionally they share special greetings too. In the next two minutes, you and your partner will**

create the most elaborate secret handshake possible. You'll be doing a demonstration, so practice it a time or two!

After kids show off their handshakes, applaud all efforts and ask:

- **What's something special about your friendship with Jesus?**

Thank kids for sharing and say: **I love that Jesus chooses us to be his friends, and I'm grateful that we can choose him as a friend too!**



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