

Jacob's Ladder

Program 5: The Invitation

Teaching Plan For Youth

Summary: Young Samuel lives with constant torment from his half-brothers and sisters. His desire to follow God is clouded by feelings of anger and resentment. When he learns of the promise his mother made to God before he was even born, Samuel begins to understand his own purpose. His very life is the result of answered prayer and now he must choose whether to follow the path set before him.

Scripture: I Samuel 1-2:11

Teaching Themes: God gives each person unique gifts and a unique calling in life. Our decision on whether to follow God's calling is one of the most important in our life.

Take a Pulse (gauge the students' understanding of some key words and get them thinking about the topic):

- 1. Designed for a Purpose Activity:** Give one student a wire whisk and a container of ice cream. Give another student an ice cream scooper and an egg broken into a dish. Instruct the first student to scoop the ice cream with the whisk, while the second student tries to beat the egg with the scooper.
Alternate Idea: Give one student a piece of wood with a nail and have him try to hammer in the nail with a screw driver. A second student will try to screw in a screw with a hammer. **Discuss:** *Why are these jobs so hard to accomplish?*
- 2. Before You Were Born Activity:** Prepare slips of paper with various careers or other life choices on them. For example: "marry my neighbor," "be a garbage man," "always wear purple," "never wash my hair," "live in a church and become a pastor," etc. Have students choose slips of paper at random. They will use their slip to read the following and fill in the blank: "Before I was born, a solemn vow was made that I would <substitute words from the slip of paper>, but I don't want to because _____." **Discuss:** *Why do you want to make your own life choices?*
- 3. Look up the word "Consecrated" as a class.** *Do you know of anything that has been consecrated? Is there anything or anyone in your church that has been consecrated? If your situation permits, walk through your church building to try to find things that have been set apart as sacred or holy.*

View the 30-minute video. Discuss initial reactions and any points of confusion.

Explore the Story:

1. *Samuel knows that his mother has promised God that he will live at the temple, attend the temple school, and eventually become a priest. How does Samuel feel about this? How would you feel if you were Samuel?*
2. *Describe Samuel's relationship with his half-brothers and sisters. How does this strained relationship affect his decision to follow his calling? What sin does Samuel need to work through?*
3. *What evidence do you see of Samuel being gifted to be a priest?*
4. *Samuel is chosen, he is promised, and he is gifted. But that is not enough. Why is it important for Samuel to choose for himself to submit to his calling wholeheartedly?*
5. *How did Samuel's conflicts with his half-brothers and sisters help to prepare him for what he would face at the temple school?*
6. *Eli is acting as a father, a teacher and a priest. Which job is he doing well? Do you think he is fulfilling his purpose?*
7. *What are some of the first things Eli shows Samuel?*
8. *What is in the Ark of the Covenant? What does the ark represent to the Hebrews? See Deuteronomy 10:1-5.*

Live the Lesson

1. Give the students handfuls of clay or play dough and ask them to craft something useful. As they work, say: *"Imagine yourself as clay in God's hands. He has a plan and a purpose for you, just like He did for Samuel. He is shaping you and preparing you for your special purpose. Do any of you know what God's purpose for you is? How can you find out?"*
2. *When you consider the idea that God has a purpose for you, does that make you feel more restrained or less restrained? Why?*
3. *If someone is following God's purpose for their life, does that guarantee that things will go well and be easy for them? Use Samuel's life as an example.*
4. *Have you made a promise or covenant with God? How have you kept that promise?*

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Program 6: Samuel's Destiny, Part 1

Teaching Plan For Youth

Summary: Eli the priest has commissioned young Samuel to serve as a priest. Samuel is working hard to learn all he can and to help the aging Eli in his responsibilities. Meanwhile, Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas are going deeper and deeper into a sinful lifestyle. They are mocking God and their priestly duties, while Eli looks on and does nothing to correct them.

Scripture: I Samuel 2:12-2:36

Teaching Themes: Feeding the sinful nature leads to greater distance from God, while feeding the spirit leads to a closer walk with God. Developing our gifts to follow God's calling takes hard work and effort.

Take a Pulse (gauge the students' understanding of some key words and get them thinking about the topic):

- 1. Be a Truth Teller:** Before class prepare a batch of homemade brownies, but leave out the sugar and add in 2 Tablespoons of vinegar. When students arrive, begin to rave about your brownies. Say that your family had some last night and they loved them. Offer your students some brownies. See if they flatter you or tell you the truth about your "special brownies." *Have you ever covered up the truth or ignored something that's obviously wrong?* Point out that we sometimes do this because it's too difficult or painful to deal with the truth. Provide some good brownies as you discuss.
- 2. Developing Our Talents:** Bring in some items to represent talents your class may have experience with. Some examples are: sports balls, sewing supplies, writing paper, school books, cooking utensils, building supplies, art supplies and musical instruments. Place the items around the room and have a piece of paper next to each item. Allow students time to go around the room and write their name on papers representing a skill or talent they have. Alternate Idea: Announce a week ahead of time that you will have a "talent show" in class. Invite students to share a talent with the others. Give plenty of ideas and remind students mid-week if possible. *What are things we do to develop our talents? Have you ever thought of your talent as a gift?*
- 3. What is the difference between a *promise* and a *covenant*? Can you give examples of each?**

View the 30-minute video. Discuss initial reactions and any points of confusion.

Explore the Story:

1. *How is Samuel developing the gifts God has given him? What challenges does he face?*
2. *Hophni and Phinehas have grown up in the house of God. They know God's laws and they know the Covenant God has made with His people, yet they begin to dabble in sin. Before long, their sins are bigger and more involved. Describe some of the sins they are involved with. How have their sins increased over time? Who has been affected by their sin? Do you know anyone who has had a similar experience?*
3. *What is Eli's reaction when he is warned about his sons' behavior? What is Eli's highest priority?*
4. *Compare Eli's desire to hold on to his sons with Hannah's willingness to give up her son for the Lord.*
5. *What has led the Israelites to abandon their faith and their Covenant with God? What is the result of this?*

Live the Lesson

1. Bring in the sports section from a few newspapers. Let the students search for stories about well-known heroes. Alternate idea: Play a news clip from TV. Discuss sports heroes who have disappointed their fans by engaging in illegal or immoral behaviors. *How have these heroes broken a sort of "contract" with their fans? These heroes probably began their careers with lots of hope and promise. How do you think they ended up making such poor choices?*
2. Bring in a very large bag of potato chips. Give each student just one chip. *Why does just one bite of something that tastes good make you want to have more? How can a choice to dabble in a "small sin" lead you to bigger sins?*
3. *What is your responsibility if you see a friend making sinful choices? How can you find enough courage to tell the truth and help your friend avoid going down a bad path?*
4. Discuss the specific talents of your class. *Why is it important to work hard to develop our gifts? What do you do to increase your talent? What can distract you from working on your talent? How can each talent be used by God?*
5. As a group, make a covenant to develop your gifts and use them for God.

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Program 7: Samuel's Destiny, Part 2

Teaching Plan For Youth

Summary: Samuel's destiny takes shape as he becomes a prophet of the Lord. Samuel delivers God's messages to Eli and to the Israelites, reminding them of their Covenant with God. The Israelites ignore his warnings and take the ark of the Lord into battle, with disastrous results.

Scripture: I Samuel 3 - 7

Teaching Themes: God speaks to his people through many different ways. God is forgiving and generous and wants to renew His Covenant with us when we are repentant.

Take a Pulse (gauge the students' understanding of some key words and get them thinking about the topic):

- 1. So Many Distractions:** Turn on as much noise as you can in your classroom: a radio, a music CD, a television program, etc. Turn them up loud enough so that it's hard to concentrate on any one of them. Then give each student a piece of paper and a pencil. Tell them you will say a sentence and they are to write down what they hear. Say: *"It can be hard to get someone's attention when they are distracted by all kinds of noise and activity. It's much easier to communicate in a quiet environment."* See how well the class did at understanding what you said. Alternate Idea: Play "Whisper Down the Lane" with the same distractions. *Why was it hard for you to get my message?*
- 2. Tune In/Tune Out Activity:** Divide your class into two teams. Have one person from each team leave the room for a few minutes. While they are gone, hide two objects somewhere in the room. Invite the students back in and tell them that their job is to find the objects. Blindfold both volunteers. Each team will appoint one person as a direction giver – someone who is directing their blindfolded person to their hidden object. Everyone else on both teams will be shouting out bogus directions to the blindfolded person from the other team. The challenge is to listen for the good directions through the noise of bogus directions. *Why was it hard to tune in the correct directions and tune out the wrong directions?*
- 3. How is *repenting* different from *apologizing*?**

View the 30-minute video. Discuss initial reactions and any points of confusion.

Explore the Story:

1. *How does God speak to Samuel? Why does it take Samuel a while to figure out who is speaking?*
2. *Eli finally repents about not disciplining his sons. Even though he is forgiven, real damage has occurred. How are all the people going astray partly due to the sins of their leader?*
3. *The Hebrews are not living for God or listening to the prophet Samuel, yet they expect God to protect them in battle. How have they tried to force God to help win? What important symbol have they lost at the end of the battle?*
4. *The Hebrews seemed to think the Ark would save them. How is this an insult to God?*
5. *Why do you think God chose to show His power to the Philistines by toppling their “god?”*
6. *Finally, the Hebrews respond to Samuel’s pleas. How does God respond to them?*

Live the Lesson

1. Divide the class into groups of three. Give each group one or more symbols or photos of ways God might speak to someone. Examples include: a Bible, a prayer journal, a sermon tape, music, art, nature, and people. Ask each group to brainstorm ways God might speak to them through the various means. *Have any of you used any of these techniques to hear God? How would you know if it is God who is speaking to you as opposed to your own thoughts?*
2. *What are some of the distractions in our world that might keep us from paying attention when God speaks to us? Have you ever tried to be silent before God? Why is that a hard thing to do?*
3. Bring one or more symbols of Christianity to class (a cross necklace, a Christian bumper sticker, etc.). *Why do we use symbols like these? How could these symbols become idols instead of reminders of the God we serve?*
4. Commit to spending time this week connecting to God. Decide if you will use your Bible, prayer, silence, or some other way to communicate with God and listen for His voice. Close your time with a few moments of silent reflection, as a way of practicing this difficult discipline.

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