



More Than Storytelling

TRAINING MANUAL

What Makes *Walk With Me* and *Kid Connection* Reformed?



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Time

1 hour and 15 minutes

Audience

Walk With Me and *Kid Connection* training for church school teachers.

Focus

By applying basic Reformed principles of interpretation, teachers will better understand, tell, explain, and apply the Bible stories that form the core of each *Walk With Me* and *Kid Connection* session. This will allow teachers to help kids discover how all the Bible stories interconnect to tell the *one* story of Jesus and his love.

Room Setup

In preparation for your class you'll need the following:

- Computer for PowerPoint presentation and screen (If you don't have access to this equipment, you could also do the presentation with an overhead projector and transparencies.)
- Nametags
- Agenda (reproducible page 11)
- Bibles (you could ask participants ahead of time to bring their own)
- This workshop guide
- Photocopies of the reproducible pages for the steps or options you're using, one per person

Room setup will be easy. If space allows, place chairs in a semicircle. That allows participants to interact with each other and with you, while also permitting everyone to see the PowerPoint presentation (if you're using that step). You'll also need to be able to rearrange the furniture quickly so that small groups of two or three can meet from time to time and then reassemble.

We recommend that you distribute reproducible pages as they're needed during the session rather than handing them out all at once. That will allow for some "breathing space" between steps.

Preparation

As session leader, be sure to do your homework! Read this guide over carefully. Run through the PowerPoint presentation (if you plan to use it) so that you feel comfortable reading the notes that go along with each slide. You and your class may find the content of this session somewhat challenging (unless you've had training in exegesis and Scripture interpretation). If that's the case, we suggest doing the following:

- Consult your friendly pastor beforehand, and ask for whatever help or explanations you may require.
- Remind yourself and your class that you don't need to be the expert—you're all in this together.
- Don't expect too much from yourself! Your goal for this session is to introduce the topic of Scripture interpretation and to give participants a taste of the issues involved. The curriculum itself will provide lots of help where and when it's needed, so you don't need to turn participants into exegetical wizards.
- Don't fret if participants raise questions you can't answer. Throw the question to the group. If no one can answer it, promise you'll find out the answer, write it down, and get back to the person later on.

Session Planner

Hello Set a fun tone for this session by using a story to demonstrate the difficulty of accurate interpretation. Then tell the biblical story of the Ethiopian official to emphasize our calling to interpret God's Word for those who don't "get" it.

- Welcome and Devotions 15 minutes
- Option: What Do You See? 15 minutes

Know Warn teachers away from some common misinterpretations of Bible stories and use a PowerPoint presentation to equip them with some useful "rules of thumb."

- How NOT to Read the Bible 25 minutes
- Option: Good Advice from Uncle John 15-20 minutes

Grow Help teachers sense the value of using Reformed principles of interpretation.

- Take Y'r Pick 20 minutes

Show Use an interpretation checklist to help teachers prepare for leading a *Walk With Me* session.

- Checklist 15 minutes



HELLO-What's Up?

Welcome and Devotions

Time

15 minutes

Goal

Set a fun tone for this session by using a story to demonstrate the difficulty of accurate interpretation. Then tell the biblical story of the Ethiopian official to emphasize our calling to interpret God's Word for those who don't "get" it.

Materials

- Agendas (reproducible page 11)
- Nametags, pens
- Bible

As participants arrive, greet them warmly, hand them a copy of the agenda, and ask them to put on a nametag. When you're ready to begin the session, briefly review the agenda and invite participants to introduce themselves. Then tell the story of the pope and the rabbi as found below. If possible, use your own words and "ham" it up, using appropriate gestures and accents.

Double Meanings

Way back in the Middle Ages, there was a pope who ran into a particularly delicate political situation. His advisors alerted him to a small community of Jews who had set up a squatters' village right under the walls of the Vatican, the headquarters of Mother Church itself. That would *never* do. So the advisors urged the pope to go and evict them.

Zealous to do his duty, the pope marched off only to return again a few minutes later shaking his head. "I can't evict them," he said. "They're good Christians."

"HUH!" said his advisors, unable to believe their ears.

"It's true," said the pope. "They're good Christians."

"Did you question them?" one cardinal asked.

"I did, but I had to rely on sign language since I speak Latin and they don't. So here's what I did. I went up to their leader and, with both hands, traced a big arc over my head and shoulders—like this. I showed him that God is over all.

"He nodded to show he understood, then repeatedly pointed to the ground with his finger, telling me that that's true, but also that each one of us stands before God.

"So then I raised three fingers to indicate the persons of the Trinity. Again he nodded in agreement, but raised just one finger in response: God is three, but God is also One. So far so good, I thought. That's solid Christian doctrine.

"Next I showed him the wafer and the chalice to symbolize our communion with the Lord. He shook his head, reached into his pocket, and produced an apple, reminding me that even now sin remains in the world.

"So, you see, that's all good doctrine. I had to let them stay."

Now the rabbi went back to his community shaking his head. They asked him, "So, Rabbi, do we have to pack up our stuff and leave?"

"No," he said, "but I don't get it. This fella in a long, white dress comes up to me and waves his arms in the air, telling me we have to get lost. So I point to the ground, telling him we're not moving from this spot. So he raises three fingers to tell me we have three minutes to clear out. I raise one finger telling him we're not taking a single step. Then he smiles at me and we both pull out our lunch and go home."

Following the story, conclude that communication can be difficult and misinterpretation happens. Ask the group for another example or two of obvious miscommunication.

Then read or tell the story of the Ethiopian's Spirit-led encounter with Philip (Acts 8:26-39).

What Do You See?

Time

15 minutes

Goal

Do an interpretive exercise using modern art before telling the story of the Ethiopian.

Materials

- "Wazzis???" (reproducible page 13)
- Bible

If you'd prefer not to use the story, hand out "Wazzis???" (reproducible page 13), a modern art illustration. Ask participants to write on the back of the page what they imagine the illustration is trying to represent. Compare notes and see how wildly different their interpretations might be. Call for a round of applause for the most creative suggestion—and maybe offer a sugary, carb- and calorie-laden prize.

State that even Scripture itself requires careful interpretation to be properly understood. Then read aloud Acts 8:26-39, or, better yet, tell the story in your own words.

Reiterate that appropriately interpreting Scripture to the kids we teach is essential. To do so, we need the help of God's Spirit. Lead in a prayer for illumination, asking God's Spirit to fill your session with meaning, and to help all present to be obedient and devoted interpreters of Scripture.

2 KNOW-Guess What?

How NOT to Read the Bible

Time

25 minutes

Goal

Warn teachers away from some common misinterpretations of Bible stories and use a PowerPoint presentation (or overhead projector with transparencies) to equip them with some useful "rules of thumb."

Materials

- Bibles
- Pencils
- "How NOT to Read the Bible" (reproducible pages 15-16)
- "Some Rules of Thumb" (PowerPoint or transparency presentation)
- "Good Advice from Uncle John" (reproducible page 17)

Begin by pointing out that a Reformed understanding of Scripture warns us away from a number of traditional ways of interpreting the Bible that are not recommended by Scripture itself. **Hand out copies of "How NOT to Read the Bible" (reproducible pages 15-16).** Briefly review this "rogues gallery" of bad methods by asking a volunteer or two to read them out loud to the group or by having each participant carefully read the description for themselves.

Divide everyone into groups of two or three persons. Assign each group one of the ways NOT to interpret the Bible. If you have lots of participants, it's fine to assign the same method of interpretation to more than one group. If you have only a few, you could assign more than one method to each group. Have each small group pick one of their favorite Bible stories and brainstorm how they might present it by using the



Don't worry if your groups have trouble telling one (wrong) approach from another. The goal is more than adequately reached if participants see that different approaches lead to very different understandings of what these Bible stories are supposed to be telling us.

assigned interpretation. (The examples listed on the sheet should give some good clues.) Invite each group to choose a reporter who will share their interpretation of the story with the "committee of the whole" when it reconvenes. Keep participants in the dark about which interpretation each of the small groups were assigned. See if the rest of the group can guess the interpretation method from the reporters' presentations.



If you're worried about keeping within the timeframe, it would be fine to break into just two groups and choose only two of the interpretations listed on "How NOT to Read the Bible." Or you can just hand out "How NOT to Read the Bible," ask participants to briefly review it, then skip the small group exercise altogether.

Summarize what you've learned together: the meaning of a Bible story can be badly distorted by misinterpreting it. How can you do better?

Observe that Reformed Bible scholars offer some very important suggestions for how to interpret Scripture in ways that Scripture itself recommends. Use the PowerPoint presentation "Some Rules of Thumb: Reading the Bible Through Reformed Glasses" (or use your overhead projector) at this time to review them with your group.

Some Rules of Thumb: Reading the Bible Through Reformed Glasses

As you show each slide, slowly and clearly read the notes for each before moving on to the next.



Bible interpretation is like a set of glasses that help us to see clearly what the Bible reveals.



John Calvin and the other Reformers wanted to restore the whole church, including us, back to obedience to the authentic teachings of the Bible.



An important part of that Reformation was to return us to interpreting the Bible as the Bible itself required.



The Bible provides us with its own "set of glasses" to help us understand it correctly. The Reformers believed that the church in their day was using self-made glasses. Those glasses distorted the message of the Bible.

What follows are some rules for interpreting Scripture that come from Scripture itself.



We need to treat the Bible as God’s holy Word—because it is.

Because it is God’s Word, we must make it our only rule for what we believe and what we do.

We must not add to or take away from what it means to tell us.



We need to serve the Bible, not force the Bible to serve our pet views.

Calvin taught a straightforward grammatical-historical approach to interpreting the Bible.



Like Philip, your job is to explain what God is saying and apply it to the lives of your kids in language they understand.



Only God’s Spirit can make us truly understand and believe the Bible.



Not even a perfect interpretation will help if God’s Spirit doesn’t prepare our hearts to receive the Word.

In preparing the lesson and as you begin your class, pray for the Spirit to reveal the meaning of the story to you.



Reformers like Calvin taught that Word and Spirit always, always work together.



The Bible is first of all about God, not about biblical heroes, morals, or us.

The Bible is God’s self-revelation to us.

We need to interpret every story in a way that places God front and center.



All the Bible’s stories are first about God and only secondly about the biblical characters.

From how God deals with people we see who God is, what God wants, and what God does for us.



The Bible is God's love letter to each one of us.
 It shows us how much God loves us, even giving us his only Son.
 It shows us how we can respond by reflecting that love back to God and to each other.



The Bible speaks in everyday terms to everyday people in everyday language.
 It's written in simple layman's Hebrew and Greek.
 Complexities arise from our unfamiliarity with the original languages and the original historical settings in which Scripture was written.



Be sure you understand the words.
 Consult sources that can explain the original language and historical setting.
 Determine whether the passage intends to be literal or symbolic.



Read carefully the WordSearch that's provided at the start of each *Walk With Me* lesson, or the Get Connected at the beginning of *Kid Connection* sessions.
 Use a study Bible and, where required, consult a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, a commentary, or a Bible encyclopedia.



The purpose of God's Word is to bring us into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
 The Bible isn't interested in satisfying our curiosity about less important things.



The Bible is not a science book, a theological treatise, or a technical journal.
 The Bible does not provide us with technical scientific data such as the age of the earth.



To find out who created the universe and why, read your Bible.
 To find out when and how, break out your geology tools.



The Bible presents many different kinds of literature: poems, parables, factual accounts, letters, proverbs, psalms, and prophecies.

Each type of writing needs to be interpreted in a way that is appropriate to that way of speaking.



How would you like it if your loved one took you literally when in your valentine you promised to give them your heart?



No, Victoria, Jesus' parables are *not* true stories. Only the points they make are true.



The “you” in that sentence is in the plural.

It's only *together* that we will fully understand all that God has told us in the Word.

We should test our own understanding of Scripture with that of others.

Through the books they left us, we can even learn from saints of old—people like good old Uncle John Calvin.



None of us may pretend we know the whole truth.

We're in this together because we *share* God's Spirit.

A good way to check your understanding is to read carefully the WordSearch that opens each lesson.

But don't take it as gospel truth . . . it too is only one person's opinion.



The Spirit can even use our disagreements to prod us into new discoveries.



Bible writers always had this as their central reason for writing what they wrote.

The original Bible books were not split up into chapters and verses. They were written as coherent works.

Their purpose is always redemptive, revealing God's salvation to us in Christ.



Read the verses before and after the selected passage/story.

Identify the setting (place, time, circumstances) in which the passage/story took place.

Remind yourself of the purpose for the whole book and how this text advances that purpose.

Interpret the passage in a way that honors where it was in the history of God's redemption and where we are today (now after Jesus' ascension, after the outpouring of the Spirit, still awaiting Christ's return).



Using a curriculum like *Walk With Me* or *Kid Connection* together with a good study Bible can go a long way in helping you "get the picture" without having to "over-study."



Both Old and New Testament teach us the one story of Jesus and his love.

"The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed."

The Old Testament shows us our need for redemption and restoration and God's promises for doing so in Christ.

The New Testament shows how God fulfills for us the Old Testament promises.



God's revelation to us is consistent and coherent.

Be sure to interpret the passage in the light of the other texts dealing with the same subject.

Interpret each text in light of the other relevant texts.



There's no better way of learning to interpret any passage of the Bible than to read the whole Bible through on a regular basis. It will harvest eternal rewards not only for yourself but also for the kids you teach.



Looking over these rules might make telling, interpreting, and applying a story to kids seem daunting if not impossible.

It really isn't. There's so much help along the way.

There's the Spirit and the insights the Spirit gives you.

There are the many written sources.

There's the Christian community of which you're a part.

Your pastor is just a phone call away and will be eager to help you.

In spite of our failures to interpret correctly, God's Word still shines through.

Doing your best is good enough for God.

Following the presentation, hand out copies of "Good Advice from Uncle John" (reproducible page 17). Ask participants to review it briefly and check for any questions they may have.



Remember that it's perfectly okay if you don't know how to answer participants' questions. Throw the question back to the group. If nobody has a satisfying answer, say: "I don't know, but I'll find out." Then follow up with the questioner after the session.

Good Advice from Uncle John

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

- "Good Advice from Uncle John" (reproducible page 17)

Instead of going through the PowerPoint (or transparency) presentation, distribute copies of "Good Advice from Uncle John" and invite your pastor to lead your group through it. Be sure to make the invitation early enough so that your pastor can prepare adequately for the presentation. You'll want to emphasize the specific timeframe for this step—after all, you don't want a repeat of what happened to poor Eutychus who fell out of the window because the apostle Paul "kept on talking" (Acts 20:7).



GROW-So What?

Take Y'r Pick

Time

20 minutes

Goal

Help teachers sense the value of using Reformed principles of interpretation.

Materials

- "Good Advice from Uncle John" (reproducible page 17)
- "Take Y'r Pick" (reproducible pp. 19-20)
- Bibles

If you have not already done so, distribute "Good Advice from Uncle John." Then distribute copies of "Take Y'r Pick" and invite participants to break into the same groups they worked with before. Ask participants to read the story of the two spies (Joshua 2) and then choose an interpretation of the Bible passage from "Take Y'r Pick"—one they believe would really put a gleam in Uncle John Calvin's eye. Have them back up their claim by showing how Reformed principles apply. Then reconvene the groups and spend some time comparing notes. If groups choose different interpretations, discuss which one best reflects all the rules of thumb. If they all choose the same one, ask one group to review which principles apply, and how. Invite other groups to share only those principles they used that were not yet mentioned.

In our humble opinion, interpretation 2 is the one that would make Uncle John happiest and that best follows the rules of thumb we discussed in the previous step. If others are suggested you, as leader, may need to pounce. Here's some ammunition for you—principles listed in "Good Advice from Uncle John" that are broken by those other interpretations respectively:

- Interpretation 1 breaks rules 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 (this is an example of "This Stands for That Approach" usually called "spiritualizing").
- Interpretation 3 breaks rules 1, 3, 5 (this is an example of the "And-the-Moral-Is . . ." approach usually called "moralizing").

- Interpretation 4 breaks all the rules. Okay, so it's just for fun. But you'd be surprised how close many tel-evangelists get to this kind of harebrained way of applying Scripture. Now where's that clicker . . .?

4 SHOW-Do What?

Checklist

Time

20 minutes

Goal

Use an interpretation checklist to help teachers prepare for leading a *Walk With Me* or *Kid Connection* session.

Materials

- Checklist (reproducible page 21)
- Bibles
- Handout 7A (*Walk With Me*) or Handout 7B (*Kid Connection*)

Hand out the checklist and briefly review its contents with the group. Next hand out the sample lesson in handout 7A or 7B depending on which curriculum you are using. Ask participants to imagine that they were to teach the lesson next Sunday. Invite them to use the checklist as part of their lesson preparation. It's designed to prompt them to apply some of the Reformed principles to their own teaching of *Walk With Me* or *Kid Connection*. Point out that this is just the first part of the lesson that provides the WordSearch or Get Connected, and a way to present the story. The rest of the lesson that helps kids experience and respond to the story is not included because here we're only focussing on the interpretation of the story as presented.

Their own interpretation of the story may differ from the curriculum. In that case they will need to remember that curriculum must always be their servant, not their master. They'll need to interpret and present the story according to their own insights and modify the lesson accordingly. After all, they're the ones called to teach this class—not some curriculum writer a thousand miles away.

After they have worked through the checklist, allow for a few minutes to debrief together. Thank the group for their presence and their involvement in the workshop and close the session with prayer.

Agenda

1. Hello: Welcome, Introduction, and Devotions
2. Know: We'll look at the don'ts and do's of Bible interpretation.
3. Grow: We'll explore the value of using a Reformed interpretation.
4. Show: We'll use an interpretation checklist to prepare for an actual *Walk With Me* or *Kid Connection* lesson.

WAZZIS???

Here is a challenge for you. Take your best guess at what this piece of modern art represents. Top honors go to the most creative interpretation.



How NOT to Read the Bible

Reformed Christians believe that the Bible speaks with enough clarity to allow well-intended believers to catch enough of its message to be saved. Trained theologians are not indispensable. However, Reformed Christians also believe that interpreting the Bible as it wants to be interpreted offers tremendous reward, while sloppy Scripture interpretation hides much of its God-breathed message.

Even before the ink dried on its pages, the Bible was subjected to wildly different and even bizarre methods of interpretation. Here are a number we should avoid.

1. The “This Stands-for-That” Approach

Description: Spiritualizing takes an earthly story and gives it, point for point, a heavenly meaning. It tries to dream up spiritual truths for every detail or twist in the Bible story. It turns historical facts into a mush of symbols that supposedly point to supernatural realities that themselves may have nothing directly to do with the story.

Caution: Interpreting Bible stories as elaborate webs of spiritual teachings makes them say things that the Bible writers didn’t intend and treats the actual historical reality told in the story as insignificant.

Examples: The story of the Exodus is all too often interpreted as a roadmap for our own spiritual journey through the wilderness of sin or as a model for the struggle of other enslaved peoples towards freedom.

2. The “Dr. Littlefaith” Approach

Description: This approach assumes that miracles are scientifically impossible, and, therefore, we need to extract from the story some other psychological or life-related truth.

Caution: Like the first approach, this one fails to take seriously the historical importance of the story itself. But unlike that approach, this one flat-out *rejects* that these stories really happened as historical events even though the Bible writers clearly insist that they did.

Example: The Easter story is considered to be only a myth, since science and reason tell us that resurrections cannot happen. So we reinterpret Christ’s resurrection as (merely) a heartwarming, pious dream on the part of the disciples that shows us that hope springs eternal.

3. The “Read-It-Like-It-Says” Approach

Description: Many believers think they should always just take the Bible literally, to “read it like it says.” This approach imagines that we can take the text at face value without interpreting it at all.

Caution: Human language doesn’t work that way, not even in Scripture. By taking the text literally, we may not be taking it seriously. For example, if I tell you

that I laughed my head off yesterday, you would not be taking me seriously if you took me literally. Reading the Bible too literally causes unresolvable problems because we fail to realize that Bible writers often used images and poetry and expected us to understand that. By reading the Bible only “as it says,” we would have to conclude that God is made of rock (Ps. 18:2) and that bread and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Christ (Matt. 26:26).

Example: The “read-it-like-it-says” crowd runs into trouble because they insist that some Old Testament laws, like tithing, must be taken literally, while others must not, like those that demand the death penalty for speaking back to one’s parents or working on Saturdays (the Sabbath).

4. The Proof-Text Quilt Approach

Description: Proof-texting assumes that we can tear small texts out of their intended context and apply them to situations that are far removed from their original purpose. Often such texts are strung together with other texts also torn out of context, and the collected scriptural snippets are patched together into a quilt that teaches something way beyond the scope of the biblical writers’ intent.

Caution: By taking Scripture out of its God-intended context, we can make it say anything we want. For example, we certainly would not want to quote Eccles. 10:19, “money is the answer for everything” without enlarging on the context of that statement just a bit!

Example: Many end-times preachers use this approach to piece together an endless variety of elaborate, fanciful, and contradictory schemes for what is yet to come. Makes your head hurt!

5. The “And-the-Moral-Is . . .” Approach

Description: This is arguably the Sunday school teacher’s favorite (wrong) way of interpreting Scripture. Moralizing treats every Bible story like an Aesop’s fable. Rather than focusing on God, it pulls from the story a moral lesson for kids—a lesson about right and wrong behavior.

Caution: Moralizing often imposes on the text a meaning that it never intended or a teaching that stops short of the real message of the biblical writer. In fact, the Bible is filled with stories that don’t teach us how to be good boys and girls at all! There’s Jacob deceiving his father; Rahab lying to her own people about the Israelite spies; David helping himself to forbidden consecrated bread—and God rewards all of them! For good morality tales, stick with Aesop!

Example: The story of Noah is often presented this way—Noah was good, he obeyed God, therefore God saved Noah from the flood. We too should obey God. If we do, God will save us too. This moralistic approach not only misses the entire purpose of the passage—to reveal God’s grace-filled promise to the whole earth and humankind—it also directly contradicts Scripture’s central message that salvation is by grace, not by works.

Good Advice from Uncle John

The great church Reformer John Calvin was a gifted and careful student of the Bible. He insisted on reading the Bible in a way that humbly and gratefully received and read it as God's holy, reliable, and authoritative Word. Here are some of the principles that he and other Reformers have used ever since to help us understand and apply the Word of God.

Rule 1: Teach what the passage *intends* to say, not what you *want* it to say.

Rule 2: Pray for the Spirit's illumination.

Rule 3: Show how God is at the center of every passage/story.

Rule 4: Take the language of the text at face value within its historical setting.

Rule 5: Don't try to make the Bible answer questions that it doesn't intend to address.

Rule 6: Identify the kind of literature the passage presents and interpret it accordingly.

Rule 7: Check your understanding of the text with that of others.

Rule 8: Always read and interpret the text within its context.

Rule 9: Always interpret Scripture with Scripture.

Take Y'r Pick

The Scripture passage below is a well-known and much-loved Bible story. On this page you'll find some sketches of how it might be interpreted. (Don't laugh, most of these can be readily found in any number of commentaries and curriculums.) Your job is to read the story from Scripture, review the interpretations, and then pick the one you think best fits the principles listed on "Good Advice from Uncle John." Then compare notes with the main group.

Scripture Passage

Joshua 2

Interpretation 1

In this story the two spies are immediately beset by serious difficulties. The Canaanites try to hunt them down. What can they do against such overwhelming odds?

We often face a similar situation on our way to the New Jerusalem. We strive to take possession of it, but in our attempts we find ourselves powerless and helpless against the hosts of sin and the powers of darkness. Yet we have no way of reaching our destination without venturing bravely into that dark domain.

But notice that in our struggle we can find protection in the most unexpected places. Rahab, herself a godless Canaanite, hides the spies on the roof under the drying flax and keeps them safe from their powerful enemies. That shows that in our most desperate spiritual struggles we can find shelter in the humble pursuit of simple, everyday tasks.

Just before she helps the men escape, Rahab extracts from the spies the promise that they will spare her life when the Israelites take the city. The scarlet cord she used to let them down from the wall will be the sign by which she and her family will be saved.

Our spiritual lives also hang by a mere thread. We must remember how precarious our fate remains and how far we must still go before we gain eternal rest. The scarlet cord reminds us that our spiritual battle has only just begun.

Interpretation 2

The Israelites must take possession of the land God has promised to them, but without Moses (Josh. 1:1). They face formidable forces and are led by a greenhorn commander, Joshua. Do they have a prayer?

They do. God has promised it: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). To confirm that promise, God allows the two spies to gain vital intelligence from a Canaanite woman who turns against her own people in order to save the spies, herself and her whole family. She's a woman of faith (Heb. 11:31) who explains to the spies how the fear of God has already taken hold of her people (Josh. 2:8f.). God's reputation has gone before. It's the Canaanites who shake in their boots.

Rahab knows that God is a promise keeper. She demands from the spies the oath that she and her family will be spared when God delivers the city into Joshua's hand. The same red cord by which she spared their lives will bear witness to the truth of her claim and the faithfulness of God.

At this crucial time God's people needed encouragement to act bravely on God's promises. Without it they would have "chickened out" as they did before (Deut. 1). That's why God raised up Rahab to give them the strength of faith they needed.

Did God keep his promise to Rahab? He sure did (Josh. 6:23). And he didn't stop there. He even allowed her to become a great-great-great-great grandma of Jesus Christ himself (Matt. 1:4)! That's the kind of

God we serve. As promised, in the fullness of time, God gave us his only Son. Through Jesus' death and resurrection for us, we too can live in the same faith that Rahab showed. Like Joshua, we too can "be strong and courageous . . . for the Lord [our] God will be with [us] wherever [we] go." Through Jesus, God has promised us the victory of eternal life even though life's struggles may sometimes overwhelm us.

Interpretation 3

The spies are in serious trouble. If the authorities of Jericho capture them they will be killed. Fortunately for them, Rahab promises to shelter them. She hides them under the flax on her roof. There the enemy soldiers won't find them. When they arrive, she sends them on a wild goose chase away from her home so the spies can escape. When the coast is clear, Rahab lets them down over the city gate with a rope. The men return to report to Joshua all the good Rahab did for them.

Because Rahab kept her promise to the spies, they now keep their promise to her. They promised that when God delivered the city into Israel's hand that she and her family would be saved. The scarlet cord would be a reminder of their promise. Notice how the men also kept *their* promise to Rahab (6:23). As a result her life and the lives of her family were spared.

There are many, many times that we need to remember to keep our promises. That's never easy. We often forget. Or later we regret having made the promise and we change our minds. This story shows us how important it is for us to keep our promises. Someday our lives may depend on it, just as Rahab's did.

Are *you* a promise-keeper?

Interpretation 4

Joshua had no parents because he was the "son of Nun." So here's a mystery that deepens when we realize that Joshua sent the spies *secretly* (Josh. 2:1). If it was so secret then how did *we* get to find about it? Was it the CIA running that leaky security operation or was it the Royal Canadian Mounted Police? This poses a real modern-day crisis.

Now *Rahab* and *spies* both are words that have five letters. This is significant. It signals that those who share this trait share a common condition. We too are drawn into this community of need when we realize that we are all *human*, which also is a five-letter word. What do Rahab, spies, and humans have in common? According to verse 1 we all occupy space on this planet, for it says that the spies went to "look over the land." Why would they risk their lives to look if the Israelites didn't need to occupy that land? Would we assume for even a moment that the Israelites all floated somewhere in the air—say a thousand feet up? Can you imagine what that would look like—women, men, children, camels and donkeys all just drifting up there in the sky? How would they move around without any traction on those sandals? No wonder Scripture reports that those sandals never wore out! How could they? They never got to touch the ground. If they did wear out, now *that* would have been miracle!

So the critical question is to determine *which* space we occupy. We see from this story that the king occupies quality space in his palace. Then there are all those Israelites still occupying mediocre space out there in the desert and all. That sand gets into everything—yuck! Not great space!

Rahab has a fairly decent space but her house is in on the city wall. Not cool. Imagine waking up in the morning and being a bit groggy. You'd open your front door and forget that you're living on a city wall. And there you go! That first step would be a *doozy*, wouldn't it?

The spies had the worst space. How would you like to be stuck on somebody's roof, buried under a bale of flax and not be allowed to sneeze for fear of being found out? That could ruin your whole day, couldn't it?

So what are we to make of all of this? It's clear that humans occupy space and that words occupy space too—on a page. Some of those words, like this interpretation, aren't worth the space they're given. Let that *never* be true of us. Amen?

Checklist

What follows is a compact checklist you might use in preparing to tell and interpret the story in a way that will have integrity and will connect with your kids. For this exercise today, you may assume that you've already worked through the first item—remember our opening prayer?

Here's the checklist:

- ___ • *Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your reading, study, reflection, and presentation of the passage or story.*
- ___ • *Read the story carefully for yourself. Repeat.*
- ___ • *Read around the story. What was its immediate context? Do the verses coming before and after it help you determine why the story was included? What was the writer's purpose for writing the book in which it's found? How does this story advance that purpose?*
- ___ • *Read in community. Consult a study Bible, a commentary, and/or the lesson WordSearch to allow other believers to reflect on the passage with you.*
- ___ • *Answer these questions:*
 1. What's the point of the story?
 2. What's the message of that story for me and my kids?
 3. How will I tell it and interpret it so that that message comes through loud and clear?
- ___ • *Compare my work with what the lesson recommends. Will the presentation of the story "track" well with my interpretation? Will I need to modify or build on the lesson? If so, how will I do that?*

4

Sin Spoils God's World

Scripture

Genesis 3

Memory Fun

Genesis 1:1, 31a

Focus

God's perfect creation was spoiled when Adam and Eve disobeyed.

WORDSearch

Think About It

In today's story everything that was good and glorious turns bad and miserable. But don't be tempted

to skip this dismal story—your children need to know where sin and suffering come from. Besides, it's not all gloom and doom. You'll be leaving your kids with the good news that sin cannot separate us from God's love. There's lots of light in this present darkness.

Pray About It

The more we become aware of our sinfulness, the more we become aware of God's forgiving grace. That's because the same Spirit who moves us to seek a Savior helps us to find him as well. Speak honestly to your Savior about the burden of sin and guilt you carry. Be as honest and specific as you can. Experience God's forgiveness. Then forgive yourself as well.

Through a series of questions, God helps Adam and Eve realize the seriousness of their crime. They try to excuse themselves by blaming someone else. The kids in your group will understand that ploy—they're masters at it! Tell them how disappointed God was with Adam and Eve and how frustrating it must have been to witness their cowardly attempt to duck responsibility.

Next God punishes them. Their lives will become difficult and painful. They are banished from the garden and are no longer able to enjoy fellowship with God. That's the worst of it. Their relationship with God is shattered. As a result their difficult lives end in death.

At this point, you'll want to encourage your students to take heart. This story isn't over.

Session Planner

Hello *Tell about a way we take care of God's creation.*

- How Did You Do? 10 minutes
- Option: Two Questions 10 minutes

Know *Tell how sin entered the world.*

- A Dramatic Reading 15 minutes
- Option: Sign Your Feelings 15 minutes

Grow *Realize how sin has changed our lives.*

- Find the Differences 10 minutes

Show *Ask God to forgive our sins and celebrate our forgiveness in Christ.*

- Forgiveness and Prayer 10 minutes

Overtime

- Worship: Praise Instruments 15 minutes
- Creation Parade Game 15 minutes

We don't need the Bible to convince us that something is fundamentally wrong with our world. We experience it in our own lives. We see it splashed all over the nightly news. Your children know it too. They see it when they watch their parents fight or break up. They feel it when their friends are mean. They experience it when a relative dies. Emphasize that these things are not God's fault.

The serpent convinces the man and woman to eat forbidden fruit. And sure enough, their eyes are opened as the serpent said. But the serpent had tricked them. What they see is their own nakedness and shame. They have gained new knowledge, but it's a bitter disappointment. Too late they realize that living outside of God's will is no good at all.

Tell About It

Don't leave your students with the impression that our world is broken like shattered glass—with all the pieces so dangerous that they are completely unusable. It's more like a broken backpack—still usable, sort of. We wouldn't want to throw it out. Although it's spoiled, we can still enjoy God's world even as we look forward to the wonderful day when God will make it perfect again.

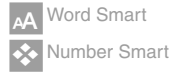
Here's the good part! God promises that a descendant of the woman will crush the tempter's power (Gen. 3:15). God will send someone into the world to take away our sins and make us right with God again. That's how much God loves us, in spite of all the wrong we do.

Because God's own Son came to this world, we don't have to do what Adam and Eve did when we disobey. We don't need to run and hide from God. We can confidently go to God and confess our sins. We can trust that God will forgive us and help us do better next time—for Jesus' sake.



KNOW

A Dramatic Reading



Word Smart



Body Smart



Number Smart



Self Smart

Goal

Tell how sin entered the world.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- Story Satchel
- Bible (child-friendly version like NIV)
- Genesis 3:1-13 (reproducible page 56, optional)
- Question cards from session 3 (reproducible page 55)

Today's story is powerfully and dramatically written in Scripture. Therefore, you will be reading the first part of it (Gen. 3:1-13) straight from a child-friendly version of the Bible. (If you do not have a child-friendly version at home, you will find the NIV version printed on page 56.)

Invite the children join you in a circle on the floor so they are able to get up and move around. Tell them they'll have a chance to show how they feel about the story as you tell it. Sometimes they might be upset if they don't like what's happening, or sad when something bad happens, or embarrassed and ashamed for the people in the story.

Open your Bible and show the children that today's story is from chapter 3 of the book of Genesis.

Slowly read verses 1-13, inviting the children to get up and move around to show and express their feelings after key verses. Not all children will feel the same way about this story, so be sure to accept and affirm their varied expressions.

Then ask the children to show how they think God felt about everything that happened to this point. Reinforce their perceptions that God was brokenhearted. Adam and Eve were God's spe-



Remember that an effective dramatic reading involves intentional body language and eye contact with listeners. Pause often between verses to look at your group, and use your eyes and face to express feelings. Also, be sure to vary your voice both in tone and volume to suit the intent of the words. Use your eyes and voice to denote deceit as you read the serpent's lies. Use your finger to point from Adam to Eve and from Eve to the serpent to highlight how the blame is passed from one to the next.



Encouraging children to show feelings through movement may be a new experience for everyone. You might want to spend a few moments practicing how they could express feelings using their whole bodies to move, stretch, curl up, slump, cower. As a warm-up, you might say, "Your favorite uncle just showed up at your house with a brand-new bike for you. Show me how you feel." Do the same with negative feelings: "Your mom sent you to bed early because you disobeyed her. Show me how you feel." Once the children feel comfortable with this activity, move into today's story.

cial friends; God walked and talked with them daily in the beautiful garden. But then they disobeyed God.

Say something like this: **God’s beautiful plan for the world was spoiled. I wonder what God should do?** Invite the children to share their ideas of how God should respond to this disaster. Then spend a few moments telling what really happened as a result of this disobedience:

- **God cursed the serpent. From now on the serpent would crawl on its belly all the days of its life and would eat dust.**
- **God told Eve that when she had children it would be painful.**
- **God told Adam that he would have to work really hard. Thorns and hard ground would make growing food difficult.**
- **Instead of living forever, someday Adam and Eve would die and be buried in the ground.**
- **Adam and Eve could no longer live in the beautiful garden of Eden. To make sure that they could not come back, God put an angel guard at the gate and a flaming sword that swung back and forth in front of the gate.**

Tell the children that disobeying God was so terrible that God had to punish Adam and Eve. Even worse, the beautiful feeling between God and Adam and Eve was broken. Adam and Eve had sinned. They had disobeyed, and that broke their relationship with God. Invite the children to express how they feel about this story so far.

Then tell the children that God didn’t want the serpent to have the last word. God did not want people to stay sad. So God said to the snake, “Someday, a child will come into this world to crush you.” Invite the children to think about what child brought joy back into the whole world. That’s the good news! Someday Jesus would be born!

tip Sometimes people use color to describe sin. They might say: “Sin is black. It changes our hearts from pure white to black and dirty.” Make a conscious effort to avoid that pitfall. That way you’ll avoid the possibility of introducing or reinforcing negative stereotypes to your children.

End the story by asking the children to show you how they feel at the very end of the story.

**Option to
step 2**

option option option option option option

Sign Your Feelings AA Word Smart 👤 Body Smart 😊 Self Smart

Time
15 minutes
Materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign language cards (reproducible pages 57-58)

If you don’t think the movement approach will work well with your group, you might tell the story as above, but have the children use sign language to express their feelings. Ahead of time, cut out the cards and post them on your wall. Introduce the following basic signs for these feelings by referring to the cards on the wall and showing children how to sign the words *scared, disappointed, proud, sad, embarrassed, ashamed, and hope*.

Practice these signs with the children until they feel comfortable with them. Tell them you will stop from time to time in the story so they can express themselves with these signs. If they’ve forgotten exactly how to sign these words, they can just act them out. Then proceed to tell the story in the same way as scripted above.

SESSION 4

Spoiled Rotten**Scripture**

Genesis 3

Focus

God didn't give up on his spoiled world.

Memory Connection

Psalm 100:1-3 (K-3)

Psalm 100:1-5 (4-6)

Get Connected**Hear It**

In today's story everything that was good and glorious turns bad and miserable. But don't skip this dismal story. Your class needs to know where sin and suffering come from. Besides, it's not all gloom and doom. You can leave your students with the good news that sin cannot separate us from God's love. There's lots of light in this present darkness.

We don't need the Bible to convince us that something's fundamentally wrong with our world. We experience it in our own lives. We see it splashed all over the nightly news. Your students know it too. They see it when they watch their parents argue or break up. They feel it when their friends are mean. They experience it when a relative dies. Emphasize that it's not God's fault.

The serpent convinces the woman to eat forbidden fruit. Once she and Adam do, their eyes are opened, as the serpent said. But the serpent tricked them. What they see is their own nakedness and shame. They have gained new knowledge. But it's a bitter disappointment. Too late they realize that living outside of God's will is no good at all.

Through a series of questions God helps Adam and Eve realize the seriousness of their crime. They try to excuse themselves by blaming someone else. Your students understand that ploy—they're masters at it! Tell them how disappointed God was with Adam and Eve and how frustrating it must have been to witness their cowardly attempt to duck responsibility.

Next God punishes the man and the woman. Their lives will become difficult and painful. They are banished from the garden and are no longer able to enjoy fellowship with God. That's the worst of it. Their relationship with God is shattered. As a result of their sin, their lives will end in death.

At this point be sure to encourage your students to take heart. This story isn't over. Here's the good part! God promises that a descendant of the woman would crush the tempter's power (3:15). God will send someone into the world to take away our sins and make us right with God again. That's how much God loves us in spite of all the wrong we do.

Because God's own Son came to this world, we don't have to do what Adam and Eve did when we disobey. We don't need to run and hide from God. We know we can confidently go to God and confess our sins. We trust that God will forgive us and help us do better next time—for Jesus' sake.

Pray About It

The more we become aware of our sinfulness, the more we also become aware of God's forgiving grace. That's because the same Spirit who moves us to seek a Savior helps us to find him as well. Speak honestly to your Savior about the burden of sin and guilt you carry.

Be as honest and specific as you can. Experience God's forgiveness. Then forgive yourself as well.

Tell About It

Don't leave your students with the impression that our present world is broken like shattered glass—with all the pieces so dangerous that they are completely unusable. It's more like a beautiful heirloom vase with a big crack in it. It's still usable—sort of. We wouldn't want to throw it out. Although God's world is spoiled, we can still enjoy it, even as we look forward to the wonderful day when God will make it perfect again.

Large Group

1 What's Up?

Simon Says

Goal

Introduce today's Bible story and engage the kids with a fun listening lesson.

Time

10 minutes

Supplies




CD player

Song: "Creation Song" (audio track 1; *Sing With Me*, p. 55) and "In the Beginning" (audio track 2)

Before Class Begins

Cue CD player to "Creation Song."

Intelligences

-  Body Smart
-  Word Smart
-  Music Smart

Say, **Hello everyone, and welcome! I am so glad each of you could be here today!**

If you see any newcomers, be sure to welcome them too:

If you are here for the first time today, a special welcome to you! We want you to relax and enjoy yourself because we are going to have a great time together as we learn about God! Right now, let's all jump up and get ready to praise the Lord!

Sing "Creation Song" and "In the Beginning."

Wow! Isn't it great to praise God together? Now I want everyone to take a deep breath so that you'll have enough energy to stay standing and play a game with me. Everybody—inhale—and exhale! One more time—inhale—and exhale! Great! I see some good listening happening here. That's important because the game you're about to play requires great listening skills. Get ready to play "Simon Says!"

Many kids are familiar with this classic game, but you'll want to give a quick review of the directions to them:

- The leader stands facing the group.
- When everyone is ready, the leader directs the group to touch their heads, put their finger on their noses, touch their shoulders, hop up and down, put their hands on

Tip

You've probably been singing these songs for the past three weeks, so many of the kids should know them quite well. Invite a child up front to be the leader as you chant "Creation Song" or ask two kids to come up and help you lead "In the Beginning."

Tip

It might be fun to insert your name in the place of Simon. For example, if your name is Steve, you could say, "Super Steve Says"; if your name is Juanita, call yourself "Wonderful Juanita."

their waist, and so on. The leader also does any action he or she has ordered.

- Here's the catch: any instruction that begins with the words "Simon Says" must be obeyed, but no one is supposed to do an action that didn't begin with those words. Traditionally, a child is "out" if he or she does an action that doesn't have "Simon Says" in front of it, and the game ends when the last child left standing is eliminated. If you have a really small group, you could play this way, running through it several times so that everyone can play a few rounds. Another great alternative is to allow kids to keep playing even after they mess up, encouraging them to see how long they can go with a perfect listening record.

Here's an example of what the leader might say:

Simon Says touch your head.
Simon Says touch your shoulders.
Simon Says bend down and touch your toes.
Stand up.
Simon Says stand up.
Simon Says blink one eye.
 And so on . . .

When you're finished with the game, say:

Great job, everyone! Have a seat. In order to be great at Simon Says, you have to be a good listener, follow directions, and be on the lookout for tricks that might make you mess up. Kind of reminds me of what happened to Adam and Eve in today's Bible story. If they had done all the things God told them to do, the world might be a very different place!

Involving Preteens

A preteen who loves to lead may enjoy being "Simon" for the round of "Simon Says."

Tip

The game is trickier when the leader gives instructions quickly and rhythmically, making it harder for contestants to notice when "Simon Says" was omitted. Another tricky technique is to say the same instruction several times in a row, then skip the "Simon Says."

Guess What!

Sin Comes In

Goal

Tell what God did when Adam and Eve spoiled his world.



Time

10 minutes

Supplies

Bible
Guess What! magazine

Intelligences

 Word Smart
 Self Smart

For the first three weeks of this unit your storytelling has been energetic and full of fun—after all, you've been talking about God's amazing creation! In today's story sin enters God's perfect world, and the storytelling technique is a bit more subdued. But although the fall of humans is not a rosy tale, it does have a powerful ending—God doesn't give up on people, ever! Read through the story a few times before you present it to the kids. It's a riveting story, and you'll keep your group engaged with eye contact and lots of expression. We've included some tips to help you express the story physically—try them out or add your own dramatic flair! Finally, be sure to convey God's continuing love for the world, in spite of our continuing sins. That's good news for all of us!

Today's Bible story is found in the part of the Bible called Genesis, chapter 3.

Show kids your Bible and where the story is found.

For the past few weeks we've been learning about God's creation. God made an amazing world filled with light and colors, skies and seas, every kind of animal, and all kinds of food to eat. God made a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, to take

care of creation. God provided them with everything they could possibly want or need. God gave them one special instruction—they could help themselves to fruit from every tree in the garden except one. If they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. Everything was perfect—until sin—dressed up as a snake—entered the garden. And that's where our story begins today.

A snake appeared one day to Eve. The snake was really the devil in disguise, and he was there to trick Eve. He began his lies with a question.

Look sneaky. Lift your shoulders and squint your eyes.

"Did God really tell you that you can't eat the fruit from any of the trees that are in the garden?"

Stand tall again.

Now Eve knew that wasn't true, and she told the snake there was only one tree that God said they weren't allowed to eat from or they would die.

Look sneaky again and take one step closer to the audience.

Moving forward with his sneaky plans, the snake said to Eve, "You won't die. God knows that if you eat the fruit, you'll know new things. You'll even know the difference between good and evil. You'll be like God!"

Stand tall again. As Eve considers the tree and its fruit, you may want to tilt your head slightly from side to side as though you are considering what the snake has said.

Eve liked the sound of what the snake was saying, and so she took another look at that tree. She decided its fruit was looking very tasty. She decided the fruit from that tree looked like it could make people smart. So, Eve decided to disobey God and eat the fruit. Then she gave some to Adam, and he decided to disobey God and eat the fruit too.

Get ready to yell as though someone has just seen you naked!

AHHHHH! After eating the fruit Adam and Eve knew some different things alright! Only they weren't great things like the snake had suggested. Adam and Eve realized they were naked, and they weren't OK with that anymore! Suddenly they knew how it felt to be ashamed and guilty and afraid. Adam and Eve, who had been living in God's perfect world, had disobeyed God. So they ran off and hid when they heard God coming. They had become sneaky, just like the snake.

Step out of the story for a moment—it's helpful to physically step out of the story by taking one step forward or sideways as you stop and talk to the group.

Imagine how Adam and Eve must have been feeling. Think about a time you decided to do something you knew you weren't supposed to do.

Pause.

Now think about how you felt after you did the bad thing.

Pause.

You might have felt afraid or ashamed, and your insides might have felt kind of heavy—like you'd just swallowed a really big rock! Maybe Adam and Eve were feeling some of those things as they tried to hide from God among the trees in the garden.

Now step back into the story.

Involving Preteens

It might be fun to let your preteens know beforehand that at one point during today's story you'll be yelling AHHHHH! And invite them to echo your yell so that it sounds like the reactions of both Adam and Eve.

