

TRAINING
TO WIN GOD'S WAY!

GOD'S ALL-STAR Champions



**Adult
Guide**
for VeBS[®]
2004

God's All-Star Champions™

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power!"
—Ephesians 6:10

A Bible Study for Adults
to be used in conjunction with *God's All-Star Champions™* VeBS®.

Written by Diana Stucky

Excerpts taken from Cook's curriculum for adults.

God's All-Star Champions™: Training to Win God's Way

Very exciting Bible School® Curriculum

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God's All-Star Champions™ Adult Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching *God's All-Star Champions*[™]: *Training to Win God's Way*

Designed to correlate and run concurrently with *God's All-Star Champions*[™]: *Training to Win God's Way* VeBS[®], this Bible study will give your adults an opportunity to learn along with the children of your church or community, as they study several stories from the Bible.

The sessions follow three simple steps: Getting Started, Digging In, and Taking It Home. Getting Started will create interest and focus your group's attention on the session topic. Digging In dynamically involves your group so that they can discover God's truth and its implications for their lives. Taking It Home helps group members apply God's truth to their lives.

In addition, remember you will also find important notes concerning Bible commentary, the lesson focus, a list of supplies needed, the preparation you will need to do, and an assignment for the next session. You'll also find tips on how you can connect with the children in *God's All-Star Champions*[™] VeBS[®]. In addition, some of the Bible commentary information given in each lesson is taken from Cook's Adult Bible-in-Life Curriculum.

As you lead this study, begin each session with prayer, depending on the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds to give understanding so that the truth will be applied. Try to involve everyone in your group; group involvement is a key to learning. Arrange your chairs in a circle or semicircle. This promotes eye contact among members and encourages more dynamic discussion. As the leader, address people by name to help others get acquainted. And remember—have a good time!

SESSION ONE

Site

Training Camp 1:
Soccer—Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Bible Story

Acts 8:26-39 Philip and the Ethiopian Man

Theme

Sharing Good News

Key Verse

Romans 10:15

Theme

Sharing Good News

Supplies

Bibles, Pens or Pencils, Response Sheet 1

Preparation

Read story in Acts 8:26-39, and Key Verse, Romans 10:15. Make copies of the Response Sheet 1.

Getting Started

To help your group start to know each other better as they study these sessions together, ask a few “ice breaker” questions such as these:

- If you could make your present job the “ideal job,” what would it be like?
- What is the best news you’ve heard in the last week? the worst news?
- Finish this sentence: “The person I share things with most often is _____ because _____.”
(For example, “my wife” and “I talk to her the most during the day.”)

Explain to your group that you are beginning a study of five sessions on

Who Was the Ethiopian Man?

The Ethiopian man was not from the African country we call Ethiopia today. Rather, he was from a region along the Nile River that today would run from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, the capital of the Sudan.

Greek and Latin writers mention a line of Ethiopian queens known by the title or family name of Candace (*Acts 8:27*). A queen would have had a eunuch serve her because he would have been considered “safe” as her attendant. The one in this story obviously held great power since he was over the queen’s treasury and rode in a royal chariot. This would not have been a war chariot equipped with fast horses, but more of a large cart.

Since the Ethiopian was coming from worshipping in Jerusalem and was reading the Hebrew Scriptures, he was either a convert to the Jewish religion or a Gentile “God-fearer” like the Roman centurion Cornelius (*10:1-2*).

how to wear and use the “full armor of God” (*Eph. 6:10-18*). All Christians should “put on” this spiritual armor to be able to stand against the devil’s schemes. The children will be studying the same Bible story each day with a sports connection, so encourage your adults to ask their kids what they are learning in each session.

Soccer—Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

SESSION ONE

The theme of this first session is “Sharing Good News.” The first part of a Christian’s armor that we’ll discuss is the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace. Ask them to think of what kind of shoes they would like to wear if they were entered in a foot race (*tennis shoes, track shoes, or at least some kind of running shoes would probably be best*). Ask what kind of race they would run if they had to wear ski boots (*if they are familiar with them*) or the lead boots that go with an underwater diving suit. How would they feel if they tried to run in those?

Sometimes we may feel like we have the wrong equipment on when we have the opportunity to share the Gospel. Possibly the number one reason people do not share what Christ means to them is because they don’t feel prepared for the task. Ask your class what things would keep them from sharing the Gospel with someone they know (*they may think they need to know the Bible better, that they will embarrass themselves when they speak, or that the other person will ask questions they can’t answer*).

Hopefully, this lesson will point out that we are really more prepared to share the Good News of Jesus than we think for at least two reasons:

- All Christians have a unique life story that God has given them to share about what He has done for them.

Philip the Evangelist

Philip the evangelist (*not Philip the apostle*) was one of the men traditionally identified as the first seven deacons (*Acts 6:1-6*). He preached and healed in Samaria after the stoning of Stephen (*8:9-13*). Even though Philip was having a successful ministry there, the Spirit told him to go down the road to Gaza, south of Jerusalem, to witness to the Ethiopian. Afterward, Philip took up residence at Caesarea, where he had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses (*21:9*). After Philip hosted Paul on Paul’s last journey to Jerusalem (*21:8-15*), tradition says Philip took the Gospel to Hierapolis in Asia Minor, where he was martyred.

- We are not alone when we share: the Holy Spirit opens doors for us and is there to help us as we tell our story.

These two points will become clearer as we read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian man.

Soccer—Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

SESSION ONE

Digging In

Hand out Resource Sheet #1 and ask a volunteer to read Acts 8:26-39. Encourage your students to follow along in their own Bibles as the story is read. Also encourage everyone to listen carefully to the story all the way through before they start answering any of the questions on the Response Sheet.

After reading, ask the class the questions from the sheet. The questions and some possible answers are given below.

Why had the Ethiopian man been to Jerusalem?

He had been to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, probably because he was a convert or a God-fearer. He was now studying the Book of Isaiah (*likely on a scroll*) to learn more about God.

Why did Philip run up to the chariot?

The Holy Spirit had directed Philip to leave Samaria and come to this road. He heard the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant, and Philip ran up to the chariot to ask if the man needed help to understand what the Scripture was truly saying.

What was the Ethiopian man reading? Why was he confused?

The Ethiopian was reading about the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, but he did not know who the person described in the passage was, Isaiah himself or someone else.

What was important about the Scripture the Ethiopian was reading?

Since this Scripture was a prophecy about Jesus, and the Ethiopian needed it explained to him, it was a God-given opportunity for Philip to share the Good News.

What was the role of the Spirit in this encounter?

The Spirit first led Philip to the Gaza Road, then to the Ethiopian's chariot. At the end the Spirit led Philip away to another assignment (*Acts 8:40*).

What principles does this story show us that could help us when we share the Gospel?

- (1) The Spirit led the encounter; He picked the time and place and knew the Ethiopian was ready to hear the Gospel.
- (2) Philip did not force his way into the chariot, but rather offered to help the man understand what he was reading. This was a God-given opportunity where the Spirit used Philip.
- (3) God always has more in mind than we imagine if we will let Him lead us. Philip not only helped one Ethiopian man find salvation in Christ, but perhaps his whole country of Ethiopia, since he was an influential person there.

What things could you do that would help you be better "armed" to share the Gospel?

Being "armed" with the Gospel means knowing Scripture and being able to share it, but it also means being able to

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SESSION ONE

just tell the good news of Jesus, as Philip did. Paul often told his life story to anyone who would listen (*Acts 22:1-21, for example*). We also need to listen to the Spirit as He directs us to particular times and places where windows of opportunity come open, perhaps in questions like the Ethiopian had.

Taking It Home

The Bible story and the discussion of it should have led your class to think about ways they can share the Good News without feeling inadequate and unprepared. The Spirit is always there to guide and direct us, so we should not feel alone in any situation where questions of faith and belief come up.

Before your adults leave, encourage them to pray for “open windows” of opportunity where they can share the Good News. Conversations and questions do not have to start out of Scripture. Someone saying, “I’m not sure there is a God who loves me after all that has happened in my life” could lead to sharing discussion that brings a new commitment or recommitment to Him.

Assignment

Before next session, ask your class to read Luke 19:1-10. Tell them to think about the last big decision they made, such as buying another car or changing jobs. Also ask them how they found the “wisdom” to finally make that decision. (*For instance, did they check out information about particular makes and models of cars before they bought one?*).

Kids’ Connection

Your kids studied the same story that you did today. Discuss what they learned about sharing the Good News, and ask if they had fun with the soccer activities they participated in. You might ask them if special shoes are needed for soccer and see if they can give you some reasons why. Then relate that to the fact that all of us need to wear the Shoes of armor the Lord has given us—the shoes of the Gospel of Peace—so we can take the Good News wherever we go. Answer any questions they might have about what the Good News really is—this may be a “window of opportunity” for you to share with them.

Soccer—Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

RESPONSE SHEET 1

Read Acts 8:26-39, then answer these questions:

1. Why had the Ethiopian man been to Jerusalem?

2. Why did Philip run up to the chariot?

3. What was the Ethiopian man reading? Why was he confused?

4. What was important about the Scripture the Ethiopian was reading?

5. What was the role of the Spirit in this encounter?

6. What principles does this story show us that could help us when we share the Gospel?

7. What things could you do that would help you be better "armed" to share the Gospel?

Soccer—Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

SESSION TWO

Site

Training Camp 2:
Bicycling—Helmet of Salvation

Bible Story

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus

Theme

Making Wise Decisions

Key Verse

Joshua 24:15

Supplies

Bibles, Pens or Pencils, Response Sheet 2

Preparation

Read the story in Luke 19:1-10, and the Key Verse—Joshua 24:15. Make copies of Resource Sheet 2.

Getting Started

Thank your students for coming to this second session, then ask them if they have any stories to share about the last big decision they made, such as buying another car or changing jobs. Also ask them how they found the “wisdom” to finally make that decision. (*For instance, did they check out information about particular makes and models of cars before they bought one?*) Some of their important decisions might also be whether or not to buy a house, get married, have children, retire early, or do something at church (*such as teach a Sunday school class*).

As your adults may have guessed, the theme for this session is “Making Wise Decisions.” We can all think of times we made wise decisions and unwise decisions. If we were lucky, we had the opportunity to reverse or change some of our unwise

The ‘Chief Tax Collector’

Zacchaeus is described by Luke as being “a chief tax collector” (*Luke 19:2*). While we are not completely certain what that phrase means, it’s likely that Zacchaeus was in charge of the tax district of Jericho and had several other tax collectors working for him. He may not have collected the taxes personally, but had others do that for him. Zacchaeus would then take a certain percentage of the money for himself.

The Romans collected personal and property taxes themselves through their own officials, called censors, but the censors “franchised out” the collection of other taxes to the highest bidder for those services, Jew or Gentile. Such taxes were often customs on produced goods. In other words, all food and other merchandise that passed through Jericho was taxed at a certain rate. Tax collectors could set the rate, as long as the Romans received their required share of the money. While the Romans might want 8%, the tax collector could charge 12% and pocket the difference. In a place such as Jericho, which was highly agricultural and on the main road from Jerusalem to the East (*the road for spices and silks, for instance*), a tax collector could make a fortune, which Luke said Zacchaeus did (*vs. 2*).

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SESSION TWO

decisions (such as deciding to go back and finish school if we decided to quit at some point). However, sometimes we have to live with the consequences of unwise decisions for the rest of our lives (for example, not being able to undo the damage we created with harsh words we shouldn't have said to someone).

The Book of James says there are two kinds of wisdom: earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom (*James 3:13-18*). James described "earthly" wisdom as the selfish kind that the devil uses to create disorder and strife in the world. Heavenly wisdom, however, is considerate, sincere, and impartial. James says that God will give us that kind of wisdom if we will only ask for it (*1:5*). Too often God is not the first person we turn to when we need to make an important decision, perhaps because we don't want to hear Him tell us "No" if it's something we really want to do—or vice versa.

In the Old Testament, Joshua, who led the Israelites in their conquest of the promised land, later warned them to always follow the Lord and not turn to false gods, such as their ancestors had done. Joshua said he did not know what decision other people would make, "but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (*Josh. 24:15*).

This session's Scripture lesson is about someone in the New Testament who made a life-changing decision, the most important one a person can make.

Digging In

Hand out Response Sheet #2 and ask a volunteer to read *Luke 19:1-10*. Encourage them to follow along in their own Bibles as

Who Likes a Tax Collector?

Paying taxes is likely no one's favorite activity, and the person who collects taxes has never been a popular person. In Jesus' day, however, Jewish tax collectors were shunned and hated because they collaborated with the Romans who were occupying the country. They had sold their souls and their country to the enemy. Therefore, no one associated with tax collectors: they were barred from the synagogue since they frequently associated with Gentiles, and most people would not even talk to them unless forced to do so for business purposes.

The utter contempt the people had for tax collectors can be heard in the remark the religious leaders often made about Jesus: "He associates with tax collectors and sinners" (see, for instance, *Matt. 9:11*). The tax collectors were their own, particularly despicable group of "sinners" who had forfeited any hope of being part of the kingdom of God. John the Baptist, however, baptized repentant tax collectors, telling them to take no more money than was legally owed (*Luke 3:12-13*). Perhaps Zacchaeus had heard that Jesus ate with tax collectors and other "sinners" and so was excited to see such an unusual man.

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the story is read. Also encourage everyone to listen carefully to the story all the way through before they start answering any of the questions on the Response Sheet.

After reading, ask the class the questions from the sheet. The questions and some possible answers are given below.

Why did the people of Jericho hate Zacchaeus?

He collaborated with the Romans by collecting taxes for them, and his wealth probably came from overcharging everyone, rich and poor alike.

Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus?

Probably he had heard that Jesus associated with “tax collectors and sinners,” something no other Jews would do. Such a person was someone Zacchaeus would want to see for himself. Good Jews shunned tax collectors since they were “unclean” through their sin and their association with Gentiles.

What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus that caused an uproar in the crowd?

Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down out of the sycamore-fig tree he had climbed because Jesus wanted to eat and stay at Zacchaeus’s house. That meant Jesus would become unclean Himself by going to the house of a known sinner and eating with him. That was something a religious, law-observing Jew would not do.

What was Zacchaeus’s reaction to Jesus?

Zacchaeus climbed down joyfully from the tree, ecstatic that Jesus had first

talked to him and called him by name, then had said He would come to Zacchaeus’s house and eat with him.

What change came to Zacchaeus from Jesus’ visit?

Zacchaeus said he would give half of what he had to the poor and repay anyone he had overcharged in taxes four times what he had overcharged, almost the amount of repayment required under the Jewish law for someone who had stolen something (see *Exod. 22:1*). That was more than the law required for someone who had wrongly taken the property of someone and willingly decided to give it back—that requirement was return of the property plus one-fifth of its value as compensation (*Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:7*).

Why did Jesus say that “salvation” had come to Zacchaeus’s house?

In one sense, salvation had come to Zacchaeus’s house because the Savior, Jesus Himself, was there, but more than that, Zacchaeus had repented of his sins and decided to make amends to the people he had wronged. Zacchaeus was a changed person. Even though he had always been a “son of Abraham” (*Luke 19: 9*) by birth and descent, Zacchaeus was now a spiritual “son of Abraham,” one who was justified by faith (*as Paul explained in Romans 4*).

Zacchaeus’s decision was obviously a wise one. What principles does Scripture give us for making wise decisions?

The greatest principle is to walk with God and obey Him. Those who listen to His

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voice through prayer, Scripture reading, the Holy Spirit, and the advice of other Christians (see *Prov. 15:22*) are more likely to make God-honoring decisions. He will also give us wisdom if we ask Him for it (*Jas. 1:5*).

Taking It Home

The Bible story and the discussion of it should have led your class to think about decisions they have made and if they were God-honoring. The first and most important one, of course, is the one that Zacchaeus made—he turned his life around to be a follower of Jesus. Be sensitive to anyone in your class who has not made that decision as yet. You may want to encourage anyone who has not made that decision to stay for a few moments after this session so that you can talk to that person and explain how a person trusts in Jesus for salvation. It can be as easy as ABC: **A**dmit that you are a sinner who is going the wrong way trying to run your own life; **B**elieve that Jesus can save you from your sins and the consequences of being a sinner (*Rom. 6:23*); **C**onfess your sins to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness and help in becoming a new person who follows Him from now on. No matter who they are or what they have done, like Zacchaeus they are loved and accepted by Jesus.

Point out that Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus, “I’ll go to your house today if you change your sinful ways and follow Me.” Instead, Jesus accepted Zacchaeus as he was, and that act in itself initiated a radical change in Zacchaeus and his thinking. Love and acceptance are more

powerful tools for change than condemnation and shame.

If your students are already Christians, they need to be reminded that the decisions in their lives should honor God. Ask them to think about a decision they are struggling with right now and their answer to Question 8 on Response Sheet 2. Ask them to pray about it right now, turning that decision over to God and committing to do what He tells them to do.

Assignment

Before next session, ask your class to read 2 Kings 6:8-23 and ask them to think about what people and things they do and do not trust in. For example, they may have complete trust in their spouse and the Bible, but have little or no trust in car salespeople and the government.

Kids’ Connection

Your children studied the same story that you did today. Discuss what they learned about Zacchaeus. Point out that he was much more than just a “wee little man” who climbed up in a sycamore tree. Zacchaeus found out that he needed more than to just physically see Jesus; he needed the salvation that Jesus offered. Just as your child needs to wear a bicycle helmet when bicycling, your child needs salvation from Jesus. This is the only way to lay the foundation for wise decisions for the future. Perhaps your discussion will lead to your talking about decisions your children have made or are making and if they are making those decisions wisely, with God’s help, or if they are only taking their own wants and desires into account.

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RESPONSE SHEET 2

Read Luke 19:1-10, then answer these questions:

1. Why did the people of Jericho hate Zacchaeus?

2. Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus?

3. What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus that caused an uproar in the crowd?

4. What was Zacchaeus's reaction to Jesus?

5. What change came to Zacchaeus from Jesus' visit?

6. Why did Jesus say that "salvation" had come to Zacchaeus's house?

7. Zacchaeus's decision was obviously a wise one. What principles does Scripture give us for making wise decisions?

8. What decision or decisions are you dealing with right now in your life? What have you done so far to seek God's will in this decision? What do you need to commit to do in the near future to make sure that what you decide to do is wise and God-honoring?

Bicycling—Helmet of Salvation

SESSION THREE

Site

Training Camp 3:
Softball—Breastplate of Righteousness

Bible Story

2 Kings 6:8-23 God protects Elisha from the enemy

Key Verse

Joshua 1:9

Theme

Trusting God's Protection

Supplies

Bibles, Pens or Pencils, Response Sheet 3

Preparation

Read story in 2 Kings 6:8-23, and the Key Verse, Joshua 1:9. Make copies of Response Sheet 3.

Getting Started

To begin this session, ask your adults if they have been thinking about what people and things they do and do not trust in, and how they came to their conclusions about who and what to trust. In other words, is trusting something they do easily, or do people have to "prove" themselves first? Do they trust in their spouses, for example, because they have seen their spouses acting trustworthy over the years? Do they trust in Jesus because He has answered prayers they have prayed, or is their trust built on more than that? And does their trust in Him diminish or even go away when their prayers are not answered as they hoped they would be?

Who Are the Arameans?

This Bible passage talks about the king of Aram and the Arameans who are at war with Israel (*2 Kings 6:8*). The Arameans lived in the area that we call Syria today. During the time of David and Solomon, this area to the north and east of Galilee was under Israelite control, but the Arameans around Damascus formed their own kingdom when the country split after Solomon's death. The Arameans were then regularly at war with the Northern Kingdom, Israel, over the border areas between the two countries. In the time of the prophet Elijah, King Ahab of Israel defeated the Arameans and signed a treaty with them (*1 Kings 20:29-34*). Later, however, the peace broke down, and in a battle for the border town of Ramoth Gilead, Ahab was killed (*22:29-37*).

By the time of Elisha, the two kingdoms were not really at war with each other, but raiding parties from Aram frequently crossed the border into Israel (*2 Kings 5:2; 6:23*). Such a large raiding party was likely the group that came after Elisha in this story.

Both Israel and Aram were conquered by Assyria and disappeared from history. However, Aramaic, the easily spoken and written language of the Arameans, eventually became the dominant language of the Middle East for the next several centuries and was the language that Jesus probably spoke.

Softball—Breastplate of Righteousness

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A lack of trust in someone or something can come from having people lie to you—for example, telling you a car they were selling was in “good shape” and “a great deal” when actually the opposite was closer to the truth. Or perhaps you depended on someone to do something for you, and that person did not come through for you. It is much harder the next time to put trust in such a person.

Be sure to steer your students away from blanket accusations against any particular organization or group of people. Overgeneralizations such as “Car salespeople can’t be trusted” are just as incorrect as saying “All Christians are trustworthy.” We live in a world of fallible people, and we are fallible ourselves, very capable of doing things that would cause people to lose trust in us.

That is why the Bible consistently says to put your trust in God, not in things or people. For instance, Psalm 20:7 says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” In other words, if we trust the things of this world to protect or save us, ultimately they cannot. However, we can “trust in him at all times” (Ps. 62:8), no matter what.

Of course, we can always fall into the trap of putting our trust in things we can see rather than in God, who we can’t see. But what we see with our physical eyes is not everything that exists. We will discover in this session’s Scripture lesson from the Old Testament that sometimes what we think we see and what is really there are two completely different things.

Digging In

Hand out Response Sheet #3 and ask a volunteer to read 2 Kings 6:8-23. Encourage them to follow along in their own Bibles as the story is read. Also encourage everyone to listen carefully to the story all the way through before they start answering any of the questions on the Response Sheet.

The Prophet Elisha

Elisha became the main prophet in Israel after Elijah was taken up into heaven and Elisha took the prophet’s cloak (*2 Kings 2:1-14*). God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor, much as God had picked Joshua to succeed Moses (*1 Kings 19:19-21*; *Elisha’s name means “God saves,” while Joshua means “the LORD saves”*).

God validated Elisha’s ministry with miracles, such as parting the Jordan River, making an ax head float, and restoring a woman’s son to life. Elisha also traveled to Aram (*Damascus*) itself to prophesy that the king in this story, Ben-Hadad II, would be murdered and his successor would invade Israel (*2 Kings 8:7-15*).

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SESSION THREE

After reading, ask the class the questions from the sheet. The questions and some possible answers are given below.

Why are the Arameans unable to find and capture the king of Israel in one of their raids?

The king of Israel is warned ahead of time by Elisha, the prophet, who always seems to know every move the Arameans are about to make.

Why did the king of Aram send a raiding party to capture Elisha?

The king reasoned that if he captured Elisha, the king of Israel would no longer know ahead of time what the Arameans were going to do and their raids into Israel would be successful.

What was Elisha's servant concerned about?

The Arameans did send a war party to Dothan, a town in Israel where Elisha was staying, to capture the prophet and take him back to Aram. When the servant got up one morning to look outside, he saw the Arameans surrounding the city. Presumably, there was no way out and they would be captured.

Why was Elisha not concerned?

Elisha trusted in God and told his servant that "those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (*2 Kings 6:16b*). He asked the Lord to open the eyes of his servant, and the servant saw the fiery army that encircled the prophet and his servant, protecting them from the enemy.

What happened to the army that was supposed to capture Elisha?

God first struck the Arameans blind, and then Elisha led the Arameans the 10 miles from Dothan to Samaria, the capital city of Israel, where Elisha presented his prisoners to the king of Israel. The entire episode was turned upside down, so that the man the army was supposed to capture wound up capturing the army instead and humiliating them.

Why did Elisha tell the king of Israel not to kill the prisoners?

Elisha knew it would be much more effective to send the prisoners back to the king of Aram, humiliated, to show them what came of trying to capture the Lord's prophet. Consequently, the raids against Israel stopped when the Arameans realized the power of the Lord.

Taking It Home

The Bible story and the discussion of it should have led your class to think more closely about who and what they trust in and why. Challenge them in this last part of the session to finish these sentences.

I remember a time when I didn't trust in God when I should have, and here's what happened:

I have felt like the servant in the Bible passage today, hemmed in on all sides with no way out, when:

I remember one time when I knew God was protecting me, even though I didn't see Him:

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When they have finished their answers, encourage them to share their answers with at least one other person. Sharing how God is working in our lives is a wonderful way to encourage each other. They may even want to share their answers with the rest of the class. They may have stories about feeling God protecting them in a storm, or being beside them during the time when a parent died, or trusting in Him when they were between jobs or stepping out on faith to start something new.

Assignment

Before next session, ask your class to read 2 Chronicles 34–35 and ask them to think about the first Bible they ever owned and if it was special to them in some way.

Kids' Connection

Your children studied the same story that you did today. Discuss with them the importance of wearing the chest protector when playing the catcher's position in softball. Ask them if they know the importance of wearing the Breastplate of Righteousness in their daily lives. Are your children the kind of people others trust? Do you trust them? Why is being trustworthy important to them both now and in the future? Does imagining putting on this breastplate help them to trust God to protect them? You might also tell them how much you trust in God and give them some examples of times when it was hard for you to trust in Him and His protection.

Softball–Breastplate of Righteousness

RESPONSE SHEET 3

Read 2 Kings 6:8-23, then answer these questions:

- 1. Why are the Arameans unable to find and capture the king of Israel in one of their raids?***
- 2. Why did the king of Aram send a raiding party to capture Elisha?***
- 3. What was Elisha's servant concerned about?***
- 4. Why was Elisha not concerned?***
- 5. What happened to the army that was supposed to capture Elisha?***
- 6. Why did Elisha tell the king of Israel not to kill the prisoners?***
- 7. Read the following situation and answer the questions after it:***

After a long, fruitful life, Homer, a true man of God passed away after a short bout with cancer. His funeral was scheduled on a hot summer's day in a small Kansas town. Many came to pay their respects and join with the family during their time of loss. In fact, so many came that the fellowship hall in the basement of the church was also being used to seat the overflow crowd, with the service being heard over the P.A. system.

The celebration service was underway, with many sharing stories of Homer's trust and faith in the Lord, when tornado sirens interrupted the service. The minister stated that a tornado had been spotted about 5 miles west of town moving east. He gave the group in the sanctuary the opportunity to move to the basement, stating that he would continue the service from the sanctuary. He felt that the Lord would protect them all as they celebrated the life of such a faithful servant, but he didn't want anyone to feel "trapped" on the main floor. Only a couple of people moved to the basement as the service continued.

In the end, not only did the tornado miss the town, but the storm was downgraded to just a summer thunderstorm shortly thereafter.

- 1. How do you feel about the way the minister handled the bad weather situation?***
- 2. What would have been your thoughts if you had been one of those trying to decide if you should move to the basement or not?***
- 3. Do you have a story to share with the group about a time in your life when you trusted in the Lord's protection? Was it a hard or easy decision? Why?***

Softball—Breastplate of Righteousness

SESSION FOUR

Site

Training Camp 4:
Field Hockey—Sword of the Spirit

Bible Story

2 Chronicles 34–35 King Josiah reads the law to the people

Key Verse

2 Timothy 3:16

Theme

Using God's Word

Supplies

Bibles, Pens or Pencils, Response Sheet 4

Preparation

Read the story in 2 Chronicles 34–35, and the Key Verse, 2 Timothy 3:16. Make copies of Response Sheet 4.

Getting Started

If you still have the first Bible you ever owned or were given, you should bring it to this session. Ask your students to share about their first Bible as well—was it a gift from their church or their family? Was it special to them because they had never had their own Bible before? Was it easy or hard for them to understand? You may also talk about your students' favorite Bibles, the ones that are so used the pages may be falling out or that are marked up with special notes in the margins or that have many special verses underlined.

Of course, the most important thing about a Bible is not when you get it or how many verses you underline in it, but how often you read it and listen to God speak to you through its words. Ask your class if they remember the first Bible verse or verses that they learned and if that verse or

Good King Josiah

For almost 60 years (*about 697–640 B.C.*) the kingdom of Judah followed evil kings and ignored the commandments of God. Idol worship was even practiced in the temple. Finally, Josiah, the great-grandson of the last good king, took the throne at age eight and began turning the country back to God. At age 12 he started a campaign to rid the country of its idols and idol worship and to repair and restore the temple. During this process the "Book of the Law of the LORD" (*2 Chron. 34:14*) was found, and Josiah read its commandments to all the people, who pledged to follow the Lord's decrees. After that, this godly king returned the ark of the covenant to the temple and reinstated the Passover feast for the whole land.

Sadly, Josiah took time from his reforms to fight the Egyptian pharaoh Neco, who was crossing Judah with his army on his way north to join a fight against the Babylonians. During a battle near Megiddo with the Egyptians, Josiah was badly wounded and died. A distraught nation, including the prophet Jeremiah, mourned the passing of this great king.

Field Hockey—Sword of the Spirit

SESSION FOUR

verses had an impact on their lives in some way. For example, they may have learned John 3:16 and realized as they did so that God really did send His Son Jesus to the world to die for them so that they might receive eternal life.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

When we read and then share God's Word, we are actively participating in the growth of His kingdom as well as listening to His Holy Spirit telling us how well we measure up to His standards. The power of Scripture should never be underestimated, for it has changed more lives than any other book in history. Our theme today is using God's Word, and one of its most important functions is helping us examine our lives to see if we are living the way Christ wants us to live.

Today, with Bibles available everywhere, it can be hard to imagine what life would be like without the Bible.

However, Bibles were not always so readily available; in fact, during the Middle Ages,

The Bible Scrolls

We are not sure exactly what was in the "Book of the Law of the LORD" (2 Chron. 34:14) that was found in the temple. It could have included all of the first five books of the Bible, or perhaps just Deuteronomy, which "sums up" most of God's law given to Moses.

Whatever was found, we can be sure it was written on papyrus scrolls, not in "books" as we think of them, since those had not yet been invented. The scroll or scrolls may have been found in the cornerstone of the temple during the remodeling. In ancient times, it was common for important documents to be placed in the cornerstone of a building, so the original temple cornerstone may have cracked, allowing the documents to be found.

Huldah

When the law was found, they took it first to the prophetess Huldah for her decision if what they had found was authoritative, the true Word of God (2 Chron. 34:22). This event is significant because they took the Scriptures to a prophetess (*mentioned only six times in the Old Testament*) and because two other major male prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, were active at this time (35:25; Jer. 22:15-16; Zeph. 1:1). She confirmed the authority of the scrolls that had been found and so gave more importance to Josiah's God-honoring reforms.

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when Bibles were hand copied, some libraries chained them to their walls so they would not be stolen. And several times during Israel's history, the Scriptures were actually lost, as they were during the time of King Josiah.

Digging In

Hand out Response Sheet 4 and ask a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 34:14-33. This is the section of Josiah's story we want to focus on in this session. Since it is a long passage, you may want to have several volunteers read. If your students have not had time to read all of 2 Chronicles 34–35 before this class session, you might want to first read them "Good King Josiah," the summary of Josiah's reign you will find on page 21. Encourage them to follow along in their own Bibles as the story is read.

After reading, ask the class the questions from the sheet. The questions and some possible answers are given below.

Why was the finding of the book so important?

The Scriptures had been ignored and basically lost for years due to the evil of previous kings. Now the king and his officials could read the actual commands God had given and show that they were right in turning the country back to worshiping God.

Why did the king tear his clothes?

Tearing your clothes was a sign of great emotion—the king was deeply affected by hearing how far the people had strayed from God's commands.

Why did the king send the book to the prophetess Huldah?

The king wanted to find out if what was written in the book was truly the Word of God, so he sent his officials with the book to someone who they believed knew God's Word—Huldah the prophetess. She was obviously considered someone who knew God's truth, even in a time when it had been long ignored.

What was in the book that caused Huldah to prophesy to the king?

Huldah read the curses in the book that come on a nation that does not follow God's commands (see *Deut. 28 for the curses she is probably talking about*). Therefore she prophesied disaster for the country because of their many years of idol worship—but not until after good King Josiah had died. He would not see the destruction that the Babylonians would bring to his country in the next 50 years.

What did the king do with the book? How did the people respond?

Josiah gathered the people together and read to them from God's law book. He renewed the country's covenant with the Lord to follow His commands at all times, heart and soul. The people agreed to live by God's commands and did so as long as Josiah was king.

Your Response to God's Word

(individual answers on the Response Sheet)

Field Hockey—Sword of the Spirit

SESSION FOUR

Taking It Home

The Bible story and the discussion of it should have led your class to think about what God's Word has to say to them both individually and as a community of believers. Focus for a moment on the section "Your Response to God's Word" at the end of Response Sheet 4. Anything that was said there in the Scriptures applies both to them and to their church. For example, they may feel the need to be more forgiving, and their church may need to be reminded to be more that way as well. If you need more Scriptures to discuss for that section, you could have them read more of Matthew 5–7, Romans 12, and Ephesians 5. All of those passages are very pointed in reminding us how we should live our Christian lives.

If you do not have time to finish the "Response" section of the sheet, encourage your adults to read through the Scriptures at home and pray about the changes they may need to make. Even if you do finish that section in class, ask them to be sincere in recommitting themselves to doing what God's Word says they should do. Too often we have the idea that the Bible really doesn't speak to our lives today, but those Scriptures on the sheet should prove that His Word is very relevant to our everyday lives. To paraphrase Mark Twain's famous statement, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand." That could very well be a statement that all of us can agree with.

Assignment

Tell your class to read Matthew 26:69-75 and John 21:15-19 before the next session, and ask them to think about when they were growing up and especially about one time when they were caught telling a lie.

Kids' Connection

Your children studied the same story that you did today. Discuss what they learned about the Sword of the Spirit. Just as field hockey requires a special stick to be able to play in the game, a Christian needs to carry and use the Sword of the Spirit—God's Word—in order to be an effective witness. Ask them what the people's response was to King Josiah's reading of the law. Discuss as a family what you all can do in your everyday lives to better follow God's Word.

Field Hockey—Sword of the Spirit

RESPONSE SHEET 4

Read 2 Chronicles 34:14-33, and then answer these questions:

1. **Why was the finding of the book so important?**
2. **Why did the king tear his clothes?**
3. **Why did the king send the book to the prophetess Huldah?**
4. **What was in the book that caused Huldah to prophesy to the king?**
5. **What did the king do with the book? How did the people respond?**

Your Response to God's Word

Read through the following words of Scripture and decide how well you are doing with what they say. If you have a problem in a particular area, ask for God's forgiveness and help in doing better:

- A. **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**
Matthew 5:44
- B. **"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."**
Matthew 6:25
- C. **"Do not judge, or you too will be judged."** Matthew 7:1
- D. **"Honor one another above yourselves."** Romans 12:10
- E. **"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."**
Romans 12:13
- F. **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**
Romans 12:21
- G. **"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs."**
Ephesians 4:29
- H. **"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."**
Ephesians 4:32

Field Hockey—Sword of the Spirit

SESSION FIVE

Site

Training Camp 5:
Mountaineering—Belt of Truth

Bible Story

Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19
Peter denies Jesus; Jesus gives
Peter special jobs to do after His
resurrection

Key Verse

Zechariah 8:16

Theme

Telling the Truth

Supplies

Some Coins or Paper Money, Bibles,
Pens or Pencils, Response Sheet #5

Preparation

Read the story in Matthew 26:69-75
and John 21:15-19, and the Key
Verse, Zechariah 8:16. Make copies
of Response Sheet 5

Getting Started

Unless your students are all like
George Washington, who
supposedly could not tell a lie
(*that's a story made up by his early
biographers*), they probably
remember a time as they were
growing up when they were caught
not telling the truth to someone.
Ask a few volunteers to share some
of their stories. If people are slow
volunteering, you may want to start
the storytelling with one of your
own. Perhaps you accidentally broke
someone's window playing baseball,

Peter in the Courtyard

All four of the Gospels describe Peter's denial of Jesus, and each one gives a few unique details that help us picture what happened that night. Peter entered the "courtyard" (*Matt. 26:69*) of the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, to see Jesus on trial after His arrest in Gethsemane. The house evidently was several buildings arranged around an open, square courtyard where a fire was built to warm the servants and others on this cold, spring evening (*John 18:18*). The buildings likely had some rooms facing the courtyard (*much as a modern house might have rooms facing a patio*), and the room with Jesus' trial may have been on a second floor above the courtyard (*Mark 14:66*). Peter had worked his way into the courtyard with another disciple who knew the high priest (*John 18:15*), and he stood near the entrance to the courtyard (*Matt. 26:71*), possibly so he could leave quickly.

After Peter denied Jesus three times, Luke's Gospel says that Jesus "turned and looked straight at Peter" (*Luke 22:61*). This may mean that the room where Jesus' trial was occurring was close enough that Jesus could hear what Peter was saying in the courtyard. Another possibility is that the religious officials were escorting Jesus out of Caiaphas's house to His next trial, and Jesus looked at Peter as He passed the courtyard. Either way, Peter realized what he had done and wept bitter tears of regret.

Mountaineering—Belt of Truth

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lied about it, and then were caught later. Another possibility is that you lied about going to the library, when in reality you were really going on a date with someone your parents didn't want you to date.

After you have shared a few stories, ask "Why do people lie?" One general answer might be out of fear of the consequences of telling the truth (*remember the broken window—you might have to pay for it or be punished for breaking it*). Other reasons could be to protect ourselves from embarrassment or to make ourselves look better (*as in "enhancing" a job résumé*). Another reason could be that it appears easier to lie—it is easier to say "I didn't break the window" than to admit that you did it and suffer whatever consequences might come from lying. Telling the truth can be a costly activity.

The follow up question is, "Why is it better to tell the truth than to lie?" Often we think that it is easier to lie and do not think of what will happen when we are caught later; perhaps the punishment will be far worse. Another reason for "truth telling" could be the positive impression we make on people when we tell the truth and the "boost" truth telling gives to our character. Do we want others to know us as an untrustworthy liar or as an honest person?

Finally, ask the question, "Can you 'undo' a lie, and if so, how?" When we lie and are found out, we can ask forgiveness for lying, but we can't "undo" everything we've

Peter's Death

The writer of John's Gospel says that when Jesus told Peter that one day he would "stretch out [his] hands" (*John 21:18*) and be led where he did not want to go, Jesus was "indicat[ing] the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God" (*vs. 19*). Church tradition says that Peter was crucified around A.D. 64 in Rome during emperor Nero's persecution of Christians. He is said to have asked to be crucified hanging upside-down, since he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

done. For instance, we can't "take back" the impression of us that our lies have created.

This session's theme is "Telling the Truth." One person in the New Testament who said he would always tell the truth about being a follower of Jesus is Peter. While that is what he said, that is not what he did, as the Scripture for today clearly shows.

Digging In

Hand out Response Sheet 5 and ask a volunteer to read Matthew 26:69-75 and John 21:15-19. Encourage them to follow along in their own Bibles as the story is read.

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After reading, ask the class the questions from the sheet. The questions and some possible answers are given below.

Why was Peter at the house of the high priest?

Peter and another disciple (*probably John*) were trying to find out what was happening at Jesus' trial, so they worked their way into the courtyard of the house to listen in as much as they could.

How did the people in the courtyard know that Peter had been with Jesus?

The first two women said they had seen Peter with Jesus, then other people said that Peter's Galilean accent gave him away as one of Jesus' followers.

Why did Peter deny he had been with Jesus? Why three times?

Peter was probably afraid of being arrested if he admitted he was a follower of Jesus. The three denials became more emphatic each time, with Peter even cursing and swearing, so there was no doubt that Peter had denied Christ. At the beginning of Matthew, Jesus had successfully resisted the devil's temptations three times (see *Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 22:31*), so here is a vivid contrast.

Why were the disciples fishing in Galilee after Jesus' resurrection?

Jesus had told them to go to Galilee (*Matt. 26:32*), and likely they had returned to what they knew and were comfortable with—fishing. They may have thought their journey with Jesus was

over, not just beginning. They had not yet received the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:16-20*), and Peter was likely still upset over his denials of Christ.

Why did Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loved Him?

The three times corresponded to Peter's three denials. In a sense, Jesus forgave each of Peter's denials and so "reinstated" him as a forgiven disciple. He was now ready to live up to the name Jesus had given him before—Peter, the "rock."

What did Jesus mean when He asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these" and then told him to "Take care of my sheep"?

Jesus may have been asking if Peter loved Jesus more than what was there at the seashore—his former lifestyle of a fisherman—or if Peter loved Jesus more than just being with the other disciples. If so, Peter was to take care of, minister to, the Christians who were yet to come: the converts Peter would see at Pentecost and thereafter.

Your Response to God's Word *(individual answers on the Response Sheet)*

Taking It Home

The Bible story and the discussion of it should have led your class to think about if truth is a key characteristic of their Christian lives. Telling the truth does not mean that we hurt people by saying

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something like, “You certainly look ugly today.” Ephesians 4:15 tells us to “speak the truth in love,” as Jesus did to Peter on the lakeshore. Jesus reminded Peter of what he did, yet forgave him and led him on to do better things. No one is perfect, but we also do not use that as an excuse for our actions. God forgives us, but we need to continually recommit ourselves to being truthful disciples.

Truth is a way of life, admitting to ourselves who we are and what we do, not pretending that we are better than we are. The more highly we think of ourselves, the more we brag like Peter did (*that he would never deny Christ*), then “we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). But “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (vs. 9). If you are feeling condemned and guilty after you finish the “Your Response” section of the sheet, write FORGIVEN in large letters across what you wrote and make the commitment to be a more “truth-filled” disciple from now on.

Assignment

This is the last time you will be meeting together, so you may want to tell your students that you will call each of them in a few weeks so you can keep in touch and share insights and difficulties that come from living the Christian life. You might suggest also that each person find a prayer partner from someone else in

the class, especially if they do not have such a person already in their life. While these sessions have hopefully been a growing and learning time for everyone, there is more growing and learning to do every day, and we all need help doing that.

Kids’ Connection

Your children studied the same story that you did today. Discuss what they learned about mountaineering and having the Belt of Truth on in their lives. Just as we need the mountaineering gear to keep us from harm, if we “put on” the Belt of Truth before we deal with others, we will protect our character from harm. You could also talk about how they have felt when they have been caught in a lie. Was it worth the deception to feel that bad? Was it worth facing the consequences of being caught?

Mountaineering—Belt of Truth

RESPONSE SHEETS

Read Matthew 26:69-75 and John 21:15-19, then answer these questions:

- 1. Why was Peter at the house of the high priest?**
- 2. How did the people in the courtyard know that Peter had been with Jesus?**
- 3. Why did Peter deny he had been with Jesus? Why three times?**
- 4. Why were the disciples fishing in Galilee after Jesus' resurrection?**
- 5. Why did Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loved Him?**
- 6. What did Jesus mean when He asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these" and then told him to "Take care of my sheep"?**

Your Response to God's Word

We have all been in Peter's position at one time or another—we have let down, disappointed, or denied Jesus in many ways. Look at the following areas of your life and see which ones have suffered from a lack of "truth telling." Write Yes or No next to each situation, then think of other, similar situations you may need to "declare."

A. At Work

_____ I have "fudged" on my time sheet or expense account.

_____ I have not been fully truthful with customers or the people I work with.

I have not been totally truthful in this work situation either:

B. At Home

_____ I have not been honest with my spouse or children (*for example, I have told them I would spend time with them, while knowing I was not going to follow through*).

_____ I have said I will accomplish a specific task at home and not done it.

I have not been totally truthful in this home situation either:

C. In My Witness to Others

_____ I have not been faithful in my commitment to be Christ's disciple, even though I promised I would be.

_____ I have not been "truthful" in my witness to those around me, either verbally or in my actions.

I have not been totally truthful in this witness situation either:

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