



Stories on the Way: Lesson Plans for Small Sunday Schools

The Parable of the Sheep (and the Goats) Matthew 25:31-40

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Written by Rhonda Waters

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A Note

I cut the parable before the chastisement of the goats in order to keep the story short and the focus on the call to good works rather than reward/punishment. In doing so, my biases are revealed (not for the first time) but I hope it is not just my biases that make me think a lesson on how to live well is more suitable for children than one on the eternal punishment awaiting those who fail to do so. If you feel strongly that the story's integrity is damaged by cutting it short, it would be easy enough to add the second half without changing the activity. You're on your own for fielding kids' questions, though!

The Parable of the Sheep (and the Goats)

Jesus told his disciples a story:

When the Son of Man comes in glory with all the angels, he will sit on the throne and be the king of the whole world. All the people in the world will be gathered in front of him, and he will sort the people into two groups just like a shepherd sorts the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the king will say to the people at his right hand,

“You are blessed by my Father. Come into the wonderful kingdom that God has prepared for you because when I was hungry, you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.”

Then these good and happy people will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”

The king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, whenever you did it to anyone, even unimportant people, you did it to me because they are all members of my family.”

(Matthew 25:31-40)

With Actions

(Sheep and Goats Lesson 1)

This lesson is intended to help students commit the list of blessed deeds to memory by providing muscle memories to go with the brain ones.

Things to know about this lesson:

- It is super easy. You need no supplies, no open space, no prep beyond a quick read-through. Enjoy!

Open with prayer.

Introduce the Story

Who can tell me what holiday we just celebrated? (Easter)

What happens at Easter? (Jesus dies and is raised again)

That's right. Jesus is alive! Death and sadness was not strong enough to beat life and joy and love. As Christians, we try to remember that even when it is hard to remember because of our problems or the problems in the world. We also try to share that good news with other people by telling them about it and by working hard to be on the side of life and joy and love. We try to live in the way Jesus lived – the way God wants us to live. But it's not always easy.

Jesus told the people who followed him many stories to help them understand God and how God wanted them to live. Some of these stories are in the Bible and, even though they are very, very old, they are still helpful to us. We are going to read one of those stories today.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

Who do you think the king was in the story? (Jesus)

And who was the king's Father? (God)

What were the things that the good people did?

Help the students name all six good works. If necessary, you can identify the needs and get the students to name the remedies.

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that doing these things to people in need was the same as doing them to him?

Introduce the Activity

It is very important to remember what Jesus told us to do for other people so I want us to memorize the list. A good way to memorize something is to make up actions so that our bodies can help our brains remember. What would be a good action for being hungry? (e.g. hold stomach as if suffering from hunger pains)

Help the students come up with an action for each need. Let them get a little silly, if they want.

Play the Game

Drill the group in the actions by calling out a need at random. Get faster as they get better at it and mix them up so as to make transitioning between actions difficult. Do things like establish a pattern and then change it suddenly to try and catch them off guard.

After a little while, tell them you are going to reread the story and they should put in the actions. Reread the story (**see page 1**).

Regrouping

Challenge the students to name the needs and remedies, with the actions, by themselves.

Well done! But remember that Jesus did not tell us just to memorize his story. He told us to do these things for anyone who needed them. And, when we do, we are taking care of Jesus himself.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for Jesus' stories in the Bible and for the help they give us in learning how we should live. Help us to do more than just read the stories – help us to do the things they tell us to do. Amen.

When I was Hungry (Sheep and Goats Lesson 2)

The ability to read from multiple perspectives is also a valuable tool for reading the Bible and one I have tried to encourage in a number of Stories on the Way lessons.

The second lesson on the parable of the sheep and goats, invites students to think of themselves as those in need rather than as those who help. I think this is an important perspective for three reasons. First, kids in general are often in a position of receiving help. Second, some of the kids in our churches are in families who need the kinds of help Jesus calls upon us to give. Third, playing with perspective helps build compassion for those in need and, hopefully, helps prevent complacent, self-satisfied charity.

Things to know about this lesson:

- You need to be sensitive to the real needs of your students. The lesson would play out quite differently for kids whose only experience of hunger is needing an after school snack from their family's well-stocked fridge than for kids whose families receive support from the food pantry. Similar ranges of need could exist with regards to every point in the story. Do not allow need to become a competition. Do not put kids on the spot. If something bigger than you are equipped to handle arises, talk to your priest/pastor.

Materials

- plain drawing paper
- crayons/markers/pencil crayons
- scissors
- glue
- copies of a picture of Jesus (see page 7)

Open with prayer.

Introduce the Story

Have you ever been hungry or thirsty?

Did someone help you? Who? What did they do?

Have you ever been sick and had to stay in bed or even go to the hospital?

How did it make you feel? Lonely? Bored? Sad?

Did anyone visit you? Who?

Have you ever been the new kid? Maybe at a new school or in a new club? How did that feel?

Did anyone make you feel welcome? Who?

Today, we are going to read a story that Jesus told his disciples. Jesus used stories to teach people about how they should live – this story talks about helping people who need things like you did. Let's see what Jesus says.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

Who do you think the king was in the story? (Jesus)

And who was the king's Father? (God)

What were the things that the good people did?

Help the students name all six good works. If necessary, you can identify the needs and get the students to name the remedies. If enough of the students were present for *With Actions*, invite them to do the actions.

We usually read this story and think about ourselves as the people helping. That's a good way to read it – we are often able to help. But we could also read this story and think about ourselves as the people who need help – because sometimes we do need help. Before we read the story, we talked about times when we had been hungry or thirsty or sick or new in town. Maybe there have also been times when you or someone you know needed clothes or was in prison.

(Depending on your circumstances, I would suggest allowing a brief pause in case someone wants to share a story but not asking directly.)

In Jesus' story, the king said that the people had helped him. What did he say when they asked when they had seen him in need? (helping others is helping him)

So when your mom or dad gives you food, they are also helping Jesus. When you keep your brother or sister company while they are sick, you are also helping Jesus.

Use a few examples from the discussion, either in addition to the one's above or instead of them.

Introduce the Activity

We are going to make pictures of stories from our own lives. Think of a time when someone helped you or someone you love with one of the problems from the story. Tell me what the problems are again...

Draw a picture of that story and we'll do something special to your picture when you're all done.

Self-Portraits with a Twist

Distribute plain paper and colouring supplies.

When their pictures are done, distribute , glue, and the pictures of Jesus. Direct the students to cut out Jesus and glue him on the person being helped in their picture. They may prefer to just use his head.

Regrouping

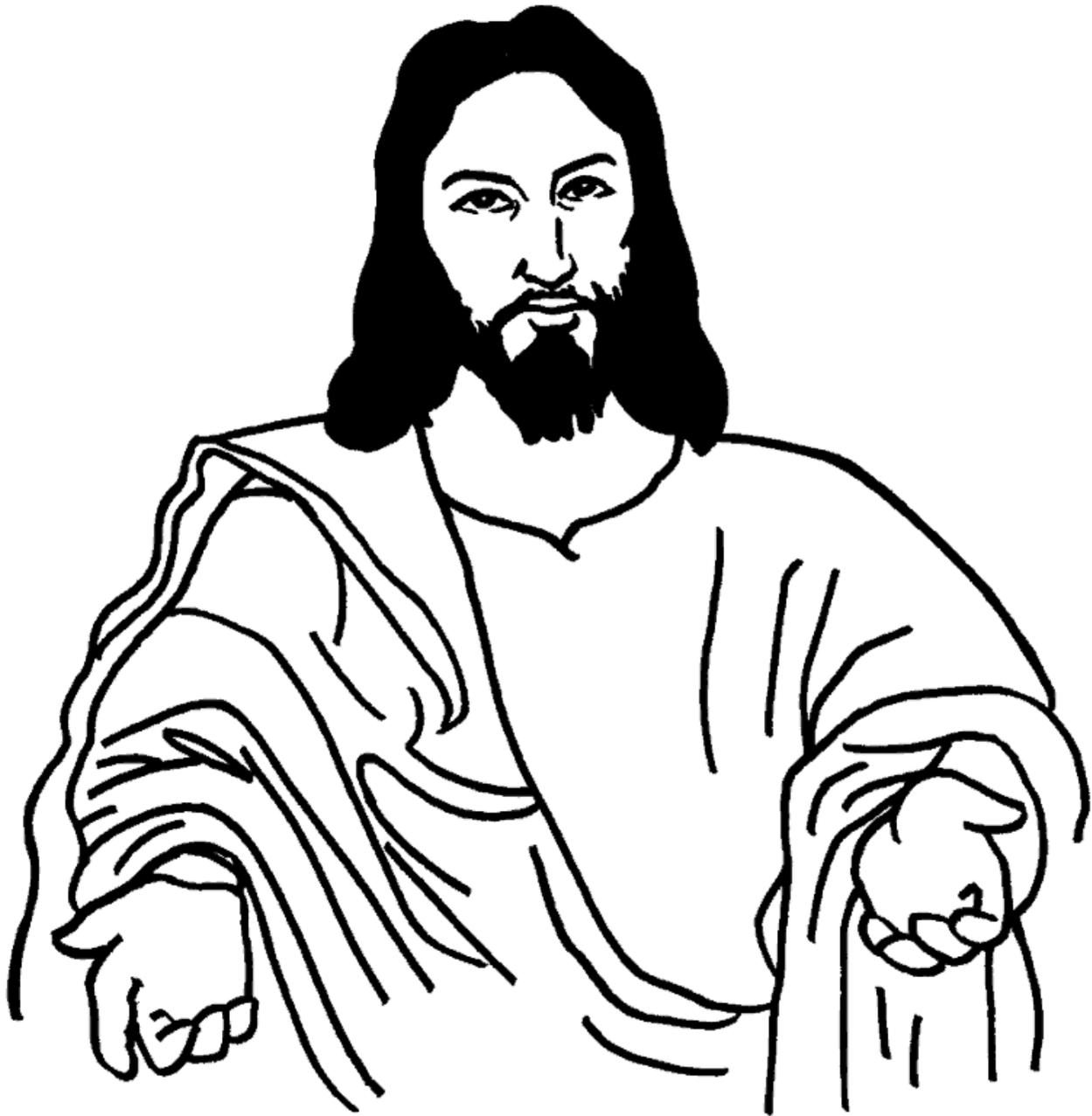
How would it feel to know you were helping Jesus?

How does it feel to think of being Jesus when someone helps you?

Does anyone want to tell us about their picture?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the people who help us. May they know that they are helping Jesus. Amen.



You Gave Me Food (Sheep and Goats Lesson 3)

The third lesson on the parable of the sheep and the goats issues the call to action and teaches students about work the church is already doing. I used collecting food and money for a food bank but you should change it to whatever ongoing project with which your community is involved. Keep in mind that the project should tie in with the needs discussed in the story.

Things to know about this lesson:

- As with the previous lesson on this story, be aware of the possibility that some of your students may be clients as well as or instead of donors. Adjust as necessary to ensure a safe space for everyone.
- You need to have prearranged a place to prominently display your sign. It would also be wonderful to have it presented to the congregation during a service.

Materials

- mural paper
- crayons/markers/pencil crayons

Open with prayer.

Introduce the Story

Who can tell me what a food bank is?

Did you know that our church collects food and money to give to the food bank in our town?

Do you know where we collect the food? (e.g. in the box at the back of the church) Have you ever brought food to give?

Why do you think the church helps the food bank?

We are going to read a story that Jesus told his followers about how they should live and why they should do things like help food banks.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

Who do you think the king was in the story? (Jesus)

And who was the king's Father? (God)

What were the things that the good people did?

Help the students name all six good works. If necessary, you can identify the needs and get the students to name the remedies. If enough of the students were present for *With Actions*, invite them to do the actions.

In Jesus' story, the king said that the people had helped him. What did he say when they asked when they had seen him in need? (helping others is helping him)

Why do you think Jesus told his followers this story? (to get them to do these good things)

What do you think Jesus wants us to do? (the good things)

One way we can do those things is by working together with other organizations. Do you know any organizations that help people? (food bank, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, hospital volunteers, etc.)

One thing our church does to help is collecting food and money for the food bank.

Introduce the Activity

We are going to make a big sign to remind everyone in our church that we should do as much as we can to help feed hungry people, including bringing food and money for the food bank. We'll put it where everyone can see it.

What should be on our sign?

Food Bank Sign

Spread out the labelled mural paper and distribute colouring supplies.

Coordinate the project only as much as necessary.

Regrouping

Congratulate the group on a job well done and assure them that their sign will be prominently displayed. Encourage them to bring food or money to give to the food bank whenever they can.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, make us generous and compassionate so that we will always help people in need the way Jesus told us to. Help us remember that when we see people in need, we are also seeing Jesus. Amen.