



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 14

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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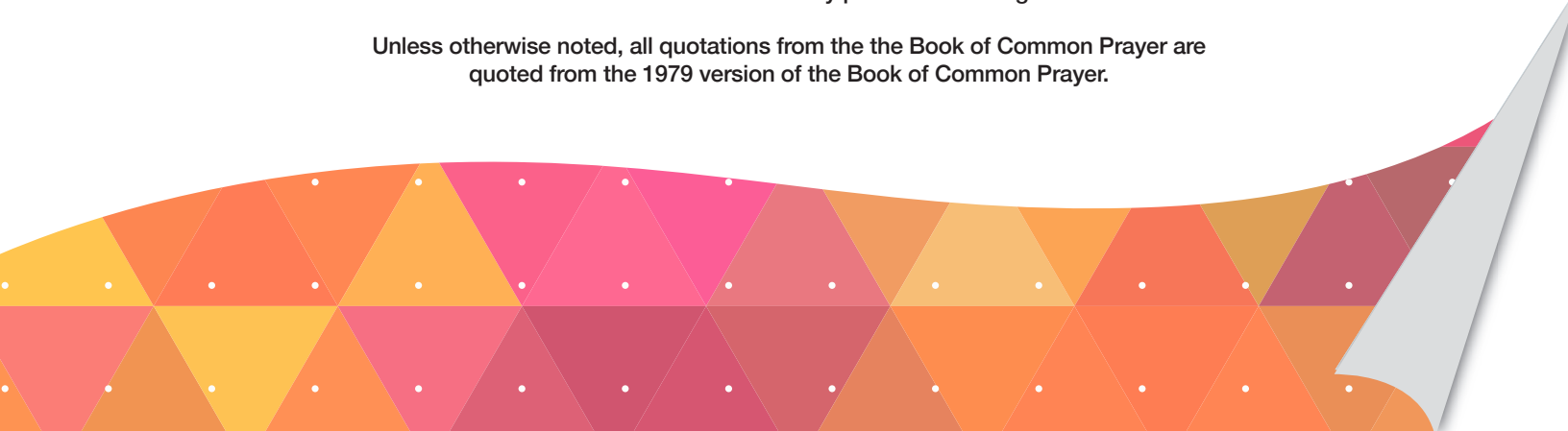
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Isaiah Announces Liberty

Texts: Isaiah 11

Big Idea: God promises us liberty from our trials.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Formulate an understanding of liberty by completing a group challenge.
2. Understand that God brings us liberty by engaging in a re-telling of the Isaiah text.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of God's liberty by engaging in a prayer ritual experience.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Human Knot

The Story (15 minutes)
Isaiah Announces Liberty

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Our Liberty

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
The Jesse Tree

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

• Nothing

• Objects to create an obstacle course
• Blindfolds

• Copy of Lesson Sheet 14.1

• Soft, instrumental music (optional)
• Method for playing music (optional)
• Large cross
• Pens and Post-it notes
• Bible

• Cardstock • Scissors
• Markers, crayons, or other drawing supplies
• Bibles • Ribbon or string
• Single-hole punch
• Smartphones, tablets, or other devices
that can connect to the Internet

• Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today's story is found in Isaiah 11. This passage is recognized by many people as it is traditionally read during the Advent season. In this passage, Isaiah brings words of hope to God's people by announcing liberty from their trials and by announcing the coming of one who will delight in the Lord and bring judgment to people. Isaiah also announces the coming of peace between all peoples.

Like some of the other texts used in this curriculum, the announcement by Isaiah comes at a time when God's people are in exile and waiting for freedom. They await the day when they will be able to live in the peace and harmony brought by the one who Isaiah says is coming.

Many people associate this passage with the prophecy of Jesus' coming. The "Jesse" in this passage refers to Jesse, the father of King David and the first name in the genealogy of Jesus.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the idea that *God promises us liberty from our trials*. Isaiah's words bring hope and comfort to God's people because the prophet's words remind them that God is coming and that one day peace will reign. There are many things in our lives that keep us chained and away from God: our sinful words and actions, fear, worry, difficult circumstances, and many other things divide us and keep us away from God. However, God promises us peace and liberty from these things that chain us. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are given the opportunity for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.



What's the Symbol?

Our liberty comes from the death and resurrection of Christ. Find a large cross to place on your altar. A large altar cross works perfectly for this lesson. If you are able, find a large chain to wrap around the cross. Even a paper chain can help reinforce the image of the liberty that we have been given by God.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about the things in their lives that have bound them and kept them separated from God. Participants will then write these things on post-it notes. As a symbol of God's love and reconciliation, the group will then tear these post-it notes and stick them to the cross. This activity will reinforce the image of liberty that is evident in Isaiah's prophecy.



Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a table and cover it with fabric or linen. On the table, place a few candles and a large cross. If you are using a chain, wrap it around the cross. Have supplies for the ritual and the Dig Deeper activity nearby.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week? Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Human Knot

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Instruct the group to stand in a circle.
- Invite each person to reach into the circle with their right hand and grab the hand of a person across the circle from them. You cannot grab the hand of the person standing next to you.
- Then, invite each person to reach into the circle with their left hand and grab the hand of a different person. Again, you cannot grab the hand of the person standing next to you.
- Instruct the group to untangle themselves without breaking hands. The group should work together to create a circle without breaking hands.
Note: For some groups, this task will be easy; for others, it will be hard. It might be frustrating and take longer than 15 minutes. Encourage the group and invite them to think through how to untangle the knot. If you are able, take as much time as needed to complete this activity.

- After the group has untangled their knot, discuss the following questions:

How did you feel being tangled in the knot?

How did you feel after you gained freedom by untangling the knot?



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

Isaiah Announces Liberty

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 14.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 14.1.
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 14.1.
- **After the story, ask: What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God recognizes our need for deliverance and peace; God promises us a world of liberty and freedom.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We face trials that exile us from God; we seek God's deliverance when we are in trouble.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world is broken; the world is in need of the reconciliation, peace, and freedom that come from God.]*
- **God's people did not live in a perfect world. They waited for a Messiah to come and rescue them from their trials and tribulations. We don't live in a perfect world, either, and we also await the coming of the Messiah who brings us peace, love, and hope.**



THE RITUAL

(15 MINUTES)

Our Liberty

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Bible
- Large cross
- Post-it notes
- Pens

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **We all have things that break our relationships with God and with one another. We are bound by our sins: the things we have done, and the things we haven't done. Sometimes, too, our fears and worries keep us chained up and away from God.**
- Hand each participant two post-it notes and a pen.
- **In a moment, I am going to invite you to find a spot in the room. Think about two things in your life right now that have kept you chained up and away from God. Maybe it's something you have done or failed to do. Maybe it is a fear or worry. Maybe it's something that has broken your relationship with another person. Write these things down on your post-it notes.**
- Invite participants to find a space where they can feel comfortable. Give them time to think and reflect. Once everyone has finished writing, bring the large group back together and continue.
- Read Isaiah 11:1-2 and 11:10 from a Bible.
- **Isaiah spoke these words at a time when God's people were waiting for liberty from their own trials. We have been given liberty, too. Through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, we have been given the opportunity to set aside all of our fears and worries, and we are given God's love, grace, and forgiveness.**
- **In a moment, I am going to invite you forward to the cross at our altar. Bring your post-it notes with you. Take a moment to look at the cross and ask for God's love and forgiveness. Then, tear your post-it notes and stick them to a cross as a reminder of the liberty from our trials that God gives us.**
- Invite participants to the cross, one at a time. You may wish to start this part of the ritual by offering your post-it notes first. Once everyone has brought forward their post-its, sit in silent reflection for a moment.
- **Let's close this time together by praying together the words that Jesus taught us to pray:**
- Close by praying the Lord's prayer together.

DIG DEEPER

(10 MINUTES)

The Jesse Tree

Materials:

- Cardstock
- Single-hole punch
- Ribbon or string
- Markers, crayons, or other drawing supplies
- Bibles
- Scissors
- Smartphone, tablet, or other device that can connect to the Internet

Before the session:

- If you do not have an Internet connection, print off information about the Jesse Tree to share with your group. You can find a good explanation of the Jesse Tree at the following link:
<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=545>
- Make a sample ornament using one of the symbols of the Jesse Tree.

During the session:

- In the story from Isaiah, the prophet tells us that “a shoot will come out from the **stump of Jesse.**” **In some Christian traditions, a Jesse Tree is used to illustrate the story of Jesus’ coming. The Jesse Tree is named after Jesse, King David’s father and the first person mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. What are some of the symbols of the Jesse Tree? Let’s find out.**
- Invite the group to research the symbols and stories of the Jesse Tree. If you have paper information to share with the group, do so.
- After finding information on the Jesse Tree, invite participants to look up the stories of the Jesse Tree in a Bible. Invite them to pick a story and symbol of the tree that they like.
- Make available cardstock and coloring supplies. **The symbols of the Jesse Tree are normally made into ornaments and hung on trees during the Advent season. Pick one of the symbols of the Jesse Tree and use the supplies provided to make your own ornament of the symbol.**
- Invite participants to make their ornaments. Punch a hole in the cardstock at the top of the ornament and thread ribbon or string through it.
- If you have the ability to do so, hang the ornaments in your meeting space, or invite individuals to take the ornaments home with them.

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, your will is to restore all things through your Son, Jesus. Grant that all people who are bound by sin may be brought together through your love and grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 14.1

Isaiah Announces Liberty

God's Word, as told by the prophet Isaiah:

"From the stump of Jesse will come a shoot, a branch will come from his roots.

God's Spirit will come and rest on him:

A spirit of wisdom and understanding,

A spirit of counsel and strength,

A spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight will be obeying the Lord,

And he won't judge a person based on their appearance or what he hears.

He will bring justice to the needy and bring equity to those who suffer.

He will bring judgment to the violent and wicked, and will come wearing righteousness and faithfulness.

The wolf and the lamb will live together, and the leopard and the goat, too;

The young calf and young lion will also be together, and a little child will lead them.

There will be peace between all creatures on the earth, and there will be no pain or destruction,

because everyone will know the Lord.

"The root of Jesse will be a sign to all people. All nations will search for him, and he will live in the world in glory.

"The Lord will rescue those who are still left from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, and Ethiopia; from Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and all of the land by the coast.

He will give these nations a signal, and bring together all of the men and women living in exile in all

the corners of the earth.

There will be no jealousy or hatred between God's people, and they will take down their enemies

and those who wish them harm.

The Lord will be with them, and there will be a path for them, just as there was for the Israelites

when they left Egypt."