

Life's Biggest Choice

BIBLE STORY

Joshua's Farewell
Joshua 23:1—24:27

BIBLE TRUTH

God wants us to choose to serve Him.

This lesson will help middle elementary children . . .

- Begin to understand what it means to "serve the Lord"
- Identify ways they can serve the Lord
- Determine to serve the Lord

VERSE-A-MONTH CLUB

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9

Reflect on the Word

Superheroes are part of today's culture and your kids know all about them. While superheroes are usually "bigger than life," they can encourage children to aim high, think big, and never use the word impossible. Unfortunately, most superheroes today are fictional. But in the Bible, your children have the opportunity to learn about some real-life superheroes, and one of those is Joshua.

Joshua began his life as a slave in Egypt. He followed Moses out of bondage, escaping Pharaoh's army through the parted Red Sea. He experienced God at Mount Sinai, and with the rest of God's people received the Ten Commandments. He was one of the spies sent to scout out the Promised Land and returned with a positive report and trust in God's promises. He, along with Caleb and Moses, were the only adults who survived the 40 years of wilderness wandering. After Moses' death, he led the Israelites across the Jordan River, defeating the incredibly strong city of Jericho. He directed the Israelites to take over Canaan against a determined enemy and eventually to live peacefully in the land God had given them. Joshua certainly qualifies as a superhero, but only because he chose to serve God.

In this week's passage, Joshua, who was nearing the end of his life, gathered the leaders of Israel together one last time. In his farewell speech, he reminded the Israelites of their history and how God brought them from Egypt to the Promised Land. He reassured them that all God's promises had come to pass. Now, he challenged them to be faithful to the one true God, even though they would be tempted to follow the gods of their pagan neighbors. He warned them that destruction would come upon them if they failed to live by God's commandments.

The Israelites now had a decision to make. Joshua longed for them to completely trust in God alone. He asked them, "What God will you serve? Who will you respect ('fear') with your total mind, heart, and soul? Choose today!" Then Joshua, in true hero fashion, took the first step and announced his own decision in strong words: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (24:15).

The people, following Joshua's example, also committed to serve the Lord. But Joshua did not want them to take that commitment lightly. He had them get serious by making a covenant, which is essentially a promise. To remind the people of this new covenant they were making with God, Joshua had a huge stone set up. With that very visible reminder of their promise, surely they could not easily forget their choice to serve God alone.

—Shannon Rankin

**"As for me and my household,
we will serve the LORD"**

This week . . .

- Reflect on what it means to trust God completely and serve Him.
- Examine your life to see whether you are fully committed to Him.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal these important truths to the children in ways they can understand.

You are
here

Attention Getters

Use these activities to help focus the children's attention and prepare them to learn today's Bible Truth.



Do your students dislike writing? Then skip this part of the activity and go directly to discussing the questions. The activity is just as effective that way.



Faith Words

GOD: The Creator of everything, and the Ruler of the universe. He has always lived and always will live. He is not limited in any way. One way we know **God** is as our Heavenly Father.

Picture Poster Memory Verse

Before class, Prepare Item 2 as directed. Display the poster in the classroom.

In class, Let the students work together to identify the words the symbols represent. Then lead them in saying the verse together two or three times. Encourage the students to try to memorize this verse within the next three weeks. Say, **This verse is important for us to remember when we face difficult situations in our lives. We can know God is with us in everything we do.**

You'll need

- Resources, Item 2, Verse-a-Month Club Poster
- Laminator or clear Con-Tact paper
- Scissors



Consider obtaining a treasure chest and filling it with various prizes of candy, small toy items, and other fun kid things. You will be able to use these for any occasion in your teaching that would be enhanced by a reward. You might consider giving a prize for each verse a student memorizes, providing some additional motivation for your students.

TRANSITION: Say, **Today in our Bible story we will hear from a man who was strong and courageous. Let's see where he found his strength.**

What's Most Important?

Invite the students to turn to *Connections*, page 1. Say, **Today we are going to read about choices other kids your age have to make. As we will see in our *Connections* page, we can often tell what is important to us by how we make our choices.**

You'll need

- *Connections*, p. 1
- Pens or pencils

Ask volunteers to read the two stories, allowing time to write responses to the questions and discuss them. Then, read question 3, allowing time for writing and discussing responses.

TRANSITION: Say, **We can tell from our *Connections* page what is important to Sandy and Jared. In our Bible story today, we will see what was most important to one man based on a choice he made. Let's see what that was!**

Servants and Masters

Say, **We are going to explore the difference between a good servant and a bad one.** Ask for three volunteers to role-play this activity. One will be the "kind master," one will be the "good servant," and one will be the "bad servant." Let the other students choose at least three reasonable jobs the master can ask of both servants. Possible ideas: answer the door, clean the floor, and bring the master a meal. Explain that both servants will perform each job. Have the master ask the servants to do a job. Then each servant performs the job, according to whether he or she is a good servant or a bad one. Continue until all jobs have been performed. If time allows, repeat this activity using new volunteers.

After the role-play activity ask, **What was the difference between the good and the bad servant?** (*The good servant cared about what the master wanted. The bad servant did not.*) **If you decided to become someone's servant, what would you do to be good at it?** (*Try to please the master, work hard, have a good attitude*)

TRANSITION: Say, **In our story today, we will learn about someone who decided to become a good servant. I wonder who his master was. Let's find out.**

Bible Story

Have students look at *Connections*, pages 2 and 3. Say, **Our Bible story today is about Joshua. He led the Israelites for many years. What do you know about Joshua?** Let several students respond. Have a volunteer find the picture of Joshua on the time line (*first picture in the "Canaan and Judges" section*) and review this story. Say, **Today's story took place when Joshua was an old man. Let's listen to his final words to the Israelites.** Have the students read the words in *bold italics*, pretending to be the Israelites.

- You'll need**
- *Connections*, pp. 2-3
 - *Bible Trek Time Line*



Use these activities to help the children learn from the Bible story.

Joshua's Farewell

Joshua 23:1—24:27

One day, Joshua called together all the Israelites and their leaders. "I am old and well advanced in years," he said. "You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you."

We can trust a God like that!

"Remember that God has promised to push out the nations living here. You have been given this land to live on and pass down to your children and grandchildren."

We can trust a God like that!

"Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside from it. Do not serve the gods of other nations. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now. The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. So be very careful to love the LORD your God."

We can trust a God like that!

"If you make friends with the people of the other nations and serve their false gods, the Lord will no longer protect you from your enemies. Yet, you know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed."

We can trust a God like that!

"Long ago your ancestors worshiped other gods. But God called Abraham out of that land and took him to Canaan. God gave Abraham many children and grandchildren. He had Isaac, and Isaac had Jacob and Esau. Jacob and his sons went to Egypt. Finally, God sent Moses and Aaron and brought out Jacob's family, which were called the Israelites. You have heard how God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape the Egyptians who were chasing them. Then they lived in the desert for a long time."

"These Israelites are you! They are your family! Finally, you left the desert and headed back to Canaan, the Promised Land. Many countries fought against you, but God caused you to win. He even allowed the walls of Jericho to come down. God has given you this land. He has allowed you to take over and live in buildings and cities you did not build. You ate from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant."

We can trust a God like that!

"So if you can trust a God like that, serve Him! Throw out your other gods and serve the Lord! But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."



Have you ever looked back on the ways God has worked in your life? At the end of his life, Joshua was concerned about the Israelites and their future commitment to the Lord. How wise of Joshua to remind them of all the ways God provided and protected them. Take a few moments to think of the ways God has worked in your past. It can be much easier to trust Him for the future when you remember how He has helped you in the past. Perhaps this will help you say, *"I can trust a God like that!"*





REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Who helped the Israelites win their battles? (*God*)
2. Who gave the speech to the Israelites? (*Joshua*)
3. Was Joshua young or old? (*Old*)
4. What did Joshua say they should be careful to obey? (*The Book of the Law of Moses*)
5. What would the Lord do if the Israelites served the gods from other nations? (*He would no longer protect them.*)
6. What was Joshua's first reaction when the Israelites said they wanted to serve the Lord? (*He did not think they could do it.*)
7. What did Joshua tell the Israelites to throw away? (*Anything to do with false gods*)
8. What did Joshua set up as a reminder of the Israelites' covenant? (*A large stone*)



We will serve God!

"No, I don't think you can. He is holy. He is jealous. If you go to other gods again, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you. I don't think you can serve Him."

Yes! We will serve the Lord!

"Then you must remember your commitment. Throw away anything to do with other gods and give your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, between them and God. He wrote down the promises the people had made and took a large stone and set it up under an oak tree as a reminder of what they had said on that day.

Underlined words are from Joshua 23:2-14; 24:15-24.

After the story, Have the students form groups of two or three and answer the questions on *Connections*, page 2. Then review their responses as a group.

Bible Story Review

Before class: Print "Winner" on one sheet of paper and "Challenger" on the other two. Tape the sheets to three chairs.

In class: Set the three labeled chairs at a table and choose three volunteers to begin the game.

Read the first question from HELPING HAND. Any of the three players who knows the answer must slap the table with one hand. The other students in the class will decide who slapped first. The first "slapper" will get to answer the question. If the player answers correctly, he or she remains (or moves to) the "Winner" seat. The other two players retire and two new players take the "Challenger" seats. If the first player answers incorrectly, the others try to answer. The one who gives the correct answer moves to the winner's seat and the challengers' seats are filled with new players.

Continue the same pattern with the remaining questions until all have been answered correctly. Then ask, **In our Bible story, who would you call the "winners" and the "challengers?"** (*Those who chose to serve God were the winners; false idols and the people who worshiped them were the challengers.*) **Like the Israelites, you, too, can be winners when you choose to serve God.**

You'll need

- Table
- Three chairs
- Three pieces of paper
- Marker
- Tape

"God's Faithful Followers" Bulletin Board

Before class, Prepare Item 1 as directed on the item. Have the title, Joshua figure, and Joshua card ready to use.

In class, Read or tell the Bible story from *Connections*, pages 2-3. Let volunteers hang the title and Joshua figure, leaving space for the other figures. Have a student read the questions on the Joshua card, allowing responses from the other students after each question. Have the reader write the responses in the space provided on the card. Allow the student to hang the card under the Joshua figure. Ask, **Why do you think Joshua chose to make this speech to the Israelites?** (*He wanted to encourage them to serve God.*) Say, **Just as this speech helped the Israelites decide to serve God; it can help us to decide to serve God too.**

You'll need

- *Connections*, pp. 2-3
- *Resources*, Item 1, "God's Faithful Followers" Bulletin Board
- Pens or pencils
- Bulletin board tacks

Me, Serve?

Before class, Cut construction paper shapes B-G, as shown in the HELPING HAND. Do not write on the shapes. Cut out shape A from poster board and write "SERVE" on it. Punch three holes as indicated.

In class, Give a Bible to each student. Allow the students to work in pairs or small groups. Give each group one of the verses from the HELPING HAND. For smaller classes, give each group two or more verses.

Say, **In our story today, Joshua and the Israelites decided to live for God and serve Him. Let's find out what the Bible says about how we can do this.** Give each group a shape and a gel pen. Once the group finds their verse, have them write a word or short phrase on their shape that tells what the verse says. Have them punch a hole in the top and bottom of their shape and tie a piece of yarn in the top hole.

After each group has completed their project, have someone from each group read their verse and show the completed shape. When all groups have shared, attach the shapes to form a mobile as shown. Hang the completed mobile from the ceiling or on the wall. Say, **Sometimes it's easy for people your age to think you are not old enough to live for God. But reading these six verses on our SERVE mobile helps us see that anyone can choose to become a Christian and then live for God!**

You'll need

- Bibles
- Gel pens
- Yarn
- Cardboard or poster board
- Construction paper
- Hole punch

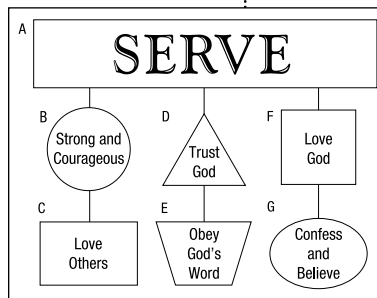
Connections To Life

Use these activities to help students connect the Bible Truth to life.



Scriptures for the SERVE Mobile

- Joshua 1:9
- Psalms 91:2
- Matthew 22:37-38
- Matthew 22:39-40
- Joshua 1:8
- Romans 10:9



Choosing to Serve

Have the students turn to *Connections*, page 4. Say, **Today we learned how Joshua and the Israelites chose to serve the Lord. We also know that we can serve the Lord. Now is your chance to consider how God is asking you to serve Him.** Read the instructions to the students and then hand out gel pens or colored pencils. Encourage them to use the pens or pencils to draw a picture of a way to serve the Lord, using ideas learned in this lesson or other ways God has placed in their minds and hearts.

Closing and Prayer

Say, **In our story today we learned that Joshua and the Israelites chose to serve God. God wants us to make a choice too. I'm glad we were able to learn about that choice today.**

Invite the students to sit in a circle where they can see the mobile. Say, **I will begin the prayer. As we go around the circle, I want each of you to pray that we could all serve God in a specific way. Use our mobile for ideas. You could say something like: Help us to be strong and courageous because You are with us. Then when it gets back to me, I will close the prayer.** Pray as described.

Hand out *Kid Zone* and *Parent Connections* for each child to take home.

I Will Serve the Lord

You'll need

- Foam door hangers
- Foam decorative shapes
- Craft glue
- Markers

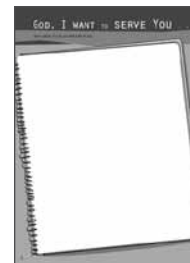
Give each student a foam door hanger shape. Say, **Today you may make a door hanger to take home and use. Write something on the hanger that will help you continue to think of ways to serve the Lord. You might write "Do something for Jesus today" or "Serve the Lord with gladness." Then decorate your hanger as you wish.** Allow the students to take the hangers home.

You'll need

- *Connections*, p. 4
- Gel pens or colored pencils

You'll need

- *Kid Zone* and unit 1 *Parent Connections* for each child
- Photocopier



Be alert to the mood of the children. There may be some who want to receive Jesus as Savior. If so, offer a salvation invitation. Talk and pray with children as described on page 2 of this *Teacher*. If anyone makes a decision, inform your children's pastor, children's director, or Sunday School superintendent so he or she can arrange for follow-up using *So . . . You Want to Follow Jesus?: A Five-Week Basic Bible Study for Young Believers*.



Option: If you cannot find foam door hangers, you can make them out of poster board or card stock. You can make a pattern or find one on the Internet. Do a search for "door hanger pattern."