



Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

This section provides Christian education resources for children of all ages. (A lesson plan for a session with adults will be posted separately at www.childrensdefense.org.) There is a lesson plan for young children ages three to five, a lesson plan for elementary age children with suggested modifications for younger and older children in that age range, a lesson plan for middle school students, and a lesson plan for high school students.

The lessons may be used the week before the Children's Sabbath, on the Children's Sabbath, or at another time suitable for your congregation. A half-day retreat, a lock-in, or a youth group meeting are other possibilities. The lessons may be used as written, adapted to suit your setting, or portions of the lessons may be incorporated into your existing curriculum. Do what is right for your place of worship.

Children's Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan for Preschool Children (ages 3-5)

Theme/Title

Growing Like Jesus

Scriptural Passage

The child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:40

Focus

Jesus grew and learned. Children today can learn and grow too.

Lesson Objectives

The students will:

- Learn that Jesus was a boy who grew and learned.
- Think about some of the things Jesus learned and the people who helped him learn.
- Recognize that they, like Jesus, grow and learn.
- Identify things that they are learning and people who help them learn.

Materials

Photocopies of the handout, "People Who Help Me Learn," one per child; crayons and markers; large cardboard box, decorated with wrapping paper or markers, if desired; cup, toothbrush, shirt with buttons, sneaker, pencil and sheet of paper, construction paper shapes of triangle, square, and circle, bar of soap, fork, coloring book; mural paper.

Preparation

- Review the lesson.
- Gather the materials.
- Create the "learning box."
- Hang mural paper on wall, write heading, "People Who Helped Jesus Learn," and draw large outlines of figures on page 5.

Overview

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message

Learning Box: Things We Have Learned (10 minutes).

People Who Help Us Learn Discussion (5 minutes).

Coloring Activity (10 minutes).

Game: Guessing and Pretending (10 minutes).

Things Jesus Learned (5 minutes).

People Who Helped Jesus Learn (10 minutes).

Movement Game (10 minutes).

Closing Prayer.

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message

Say to the children, "Today we are going to talk about when Jesus was a boy, and how he had people who helped him learn things, just like all of you are learning new things and have people who help you learn."

Learning Box: Things We Have Learned (10 minutes)

Have the children sit in a circle. Tell them that you have a "Learning Box." Show them the box. Tell them that the things inside the box remind us of things they have learned to do. Reach inside and pull out an item. If it is the fork, for example, ask them what they have learned to do with it—(eat). Invite a child to reach in and pull out the next item. Ask the children what it is. Then ask them what they have learned to do with it. If it is the shirt with buttons, for example, they might say that they have learned how to put on a shirt, or how to get dressed by themselves, or how to do buttons. Have the children continue pulling out items and identifying them and what they have learned to do with them until every child has had a turn. Affirm that the children have learned many things and that they will continue to learn as they grow.

Have a Bible at the bottom of the box (or kept by you off to the side). Pull it out of the box last. Say, "Inside this special book, called a Bible, are lots of stories that teach us about God and about how God loves us. You are already learning about God when you come to church and come to Sunday School, like you did today. You will keep learning about God as you grow bigger."

People Who Help Us Learn (5 minutes)

Next, ask the children to name some of the people who help them learn. Use examples of things they just named, such as tying shoes or coloring inside the lines, and ask who helped them learn these things. Hold up each item and ask, "Who helped you learn how to do buttons?" or "Who showed you how to color inside the lines?" Answers may include their mother or father, an older sister or brother, child care provider or preschool teacher, church school teacher, relative, or neighbor. Try to give each child a chance to respond, even if he or she repeats a previous answer.

Hold up the Bible and say, "There are lots of people who will tell you the stories in this Bible and teach you about God. Your parents will, and other grown-ups here in the church. I will, and other Sunday school teachers will."

Coloring Activity (10 minutes)

After the children have come up with responses to who helps them learn, distribute the photocopied page with the heading, "The People Who Help Me Learn," and crayons or markers. Ask each child to color in the pictures of the people who help her or him learn new things. As the children finish coloring, ask them to name the figures in their pictures, and help to label them.

While the children are coloring, put the items back in the learning box.

Game: Guessing and Pretending (10 minutes)

In turn, have each child reach into the learning box and touch an item without looking at it. Have them try to guess what they are touching. After they have made their guess, have them pull out the item and see if they were right. Then have them pretend (without using any words) to do something they have learned with the item, such as brushing their teeth. Have the other children guess what they are doing. Then have the remaining children take their turns.

Things Jesus Learned (5 minutes)

Now, ask the children what kinds of things they think Jesus learned when he was a boy. Remind them that Jesus was born as a baby at Christmas, and before he was the grown-up who taught people about God, he had to grow bigger and learn things.

To start with, name some of the things the children listed earlier as their own learning. For instance, ask, "Do you think Jesus learned how to get dressed by himself?" Let the children respond. (If you want, you can add simple clarifications, such as, "He would have learned how to put on a sort of robe that went over his head and tie it with a belt, instead of putting on pants with zippers and shirts with buttons like you do.") Ask additional questions, such as "Do you think Jesus learned how to recognize his colors?"

People Who Helped Jesus Learn (10 minutes)

Ask the children, "Did Jesus have a mommy who helped him learn?" "Does anybody remember her name?" (If the children can't come up with her name, tell them it was Mary.) "Did Jesus have a daddy who helped him learn? Does anybody remember his name?" "Do you think that Jesus had teachers who helped him learn?" "Do you think who the leaders of the place where Jesus went to pray helped him learn?" "How about neighbors; do you think that the grown-ups who lived near Jesus helped him learn sometimes?"

Have a large piece of mural paper hung on the wall. Ahead of time, print across the top of the paper "People Who Helped Jesus Learn and People Who Help Us Learn." Spaced along the paper (at intervals of two feet or so) have labeled outlines of the figures named above. (Examples are provided on page 5.) Point out and name the people. Invite the children to color in the figures with crayons. Then, invite them to stick their drawings of people who help them learn onto the mural paper. Arrange to hang the mural in the church building where others can see it.

Movement Game (10 minutes)

Have the children stand on one side of the room. Say, "If you have learned how to brush your teeth, skip to the other side of the room. If you are going to learn how to do that, hop to the other side of the room." Once the children have all skipped or hopped to the other side of the room, offer the next learned skill and mode of movement (skip, hop, walk, run, walk backwards, walk with little steps, walk with big steps, and so on).

Alternative Game

Have the children form a circle. Using a large, easy-to-catch ball, either throw or roll it to the children, depending on their age and ability. When the ball comes to them, they should name something that they have learned to do. Make sure that each child gets at least one turn. It is okay if children repeat each others' answers. What is important is for the individual child to reflect on things she or he has learned. Answers may include: tie my shoes, count to (a certain number), recognize letters (A, B, X...), write my name, or get dressed by myself.

Closing

Ask the children to repeat each line of the prayer after you.

Dear God, (children repeat "Dear God")

Thank you (repeat) for helping us to learn (repeat)

lots of things (repeat) just like Jesus (repeat).

Thank you (repeat) for giving us (repeat)

people to help us learn (repeat) just like Jesus (repeat).

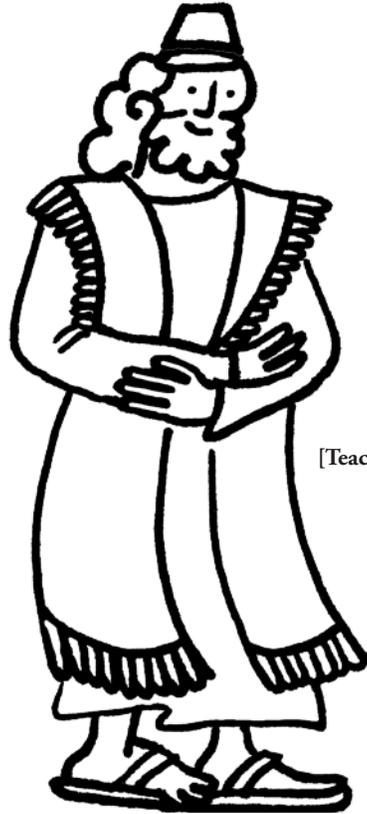
Amen.

People Who Help Jesus Learn

[Mary]



[Teacher]



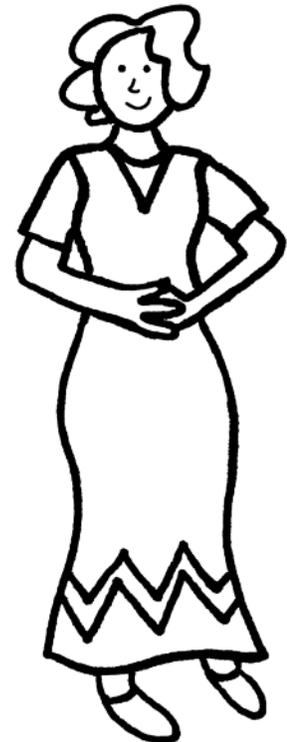
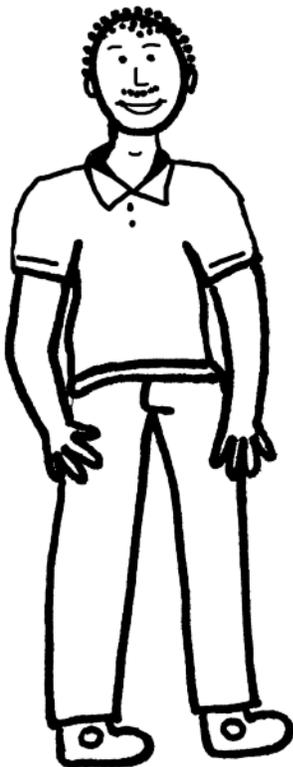
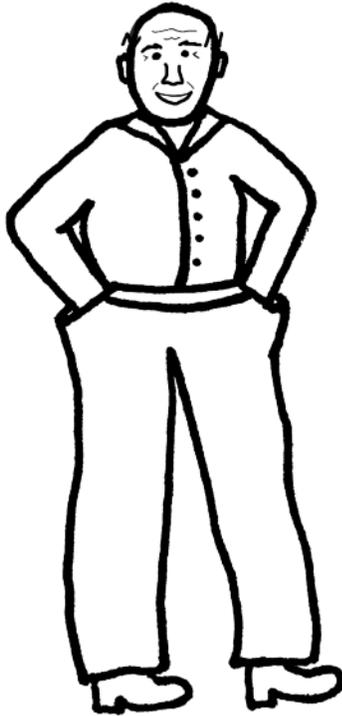
[Joseph]



[Neighbor]



People Who Help Me Learn



Lesson Plan for Elementary Grades

Theme/Title

Jesus Grew in Mind, Body, and Spirit and So Can We!

Scriptural Passage

The child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)

Focus

Learning was important when Jesus was a boy, and it is important now. Growing in our minds, bodies, and relationship with God is vital. Every child should be able to grow in these ways. Families, schools, churches, and communities can all help to see that children grow in mind, body, and spirit.

Lesson Objectives

The students will:

- Learn about when Jesus was a student, and how he grew in mind, body, and spirit.
- Reflect on ways that children now grow in mind, body, and spirit.
- Participate in an active response to help other school children.

Materials

Butcher paper and markers; Bible times snack foods: figs, dates, nuts, pita, grape juice, water, dried fish; square of cardboard, clay, and sturdy twig for making clay tablets; strip of cloth (measuring 2 inches by 2 feet) for each child; brown paper bag and two foot-long dowels for making a scroll; school supplies such as notebooks, pads, pencils, sharpeners, and erasers. (Alternatively, the week before the lesson, ask each child to bring in some of these supplies, bags or boxes to hold school supplies, and materials to decorate them such as stickers, paint, and ribbon.)

Preparation

- Review lesson plan.
- Gather materials.
- Make a clay tablet by pressing clay onto a square of cardboard. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap to keep clay moist. Find several strong twigs for the children to use to write on the clay tablets.
- Make a scroll by cutting a brown paper bag into a rectangle and stapling the short sides onto two dowels. If you will be teaching older children (grades 3-5), write out Psalm 117 on the paper bag from right to left (word order reversed.) If you will be teaching younger children (grades K-2), draw simple pictures, from right to left, of the creation story (first frame, make half black and other half white; second frame, draw an ocean with waves below a sky; third frame, show brown land with plants; fourth frame, draw a moon and stars; fifth frame, draw a few animals; sixth frame; draw figure of man and woman; seventh frame, use your imagination!)

If you will have at least two assistants, you may want to conduct the lesson in the style of “learning centers,” where the class divides into thirds. Each group starts at a different “learning center” and then moves on to the other two. Otherwise, conduct the three parts of the lesson in sequence.

Overview

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (1 minute).

Explore the Message.

“Jesus grew and became strong:” Brainstorming, snack, discussion (20 minutes).

Jesus was “filled with wisdom:” Experience a synagogue school, read from a scroll, write on a tablet, discussion (20 minutes).

“And the Spirit was upon him:” Discussion, learning by doing (15 minutes).

Closing (5 minutes).

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (1 minute)

Tell the children, “In the Bible it says that the child Jesus grew and became strong, and he learned many things. God loved him and he loved God.” Say, “Learning is important; it was important when Jesus was a boy and it is important now. Growing in our minds, bodies, and relationship with God is important. Every child should be able to grow in these ways. Families, schools, churches, and neighborhoods can all help to see that children can grow.”

Explore the Message

Jesus grew and became strong: (20 minutes)

Brainstorming: Ask, “What things helped Jesus and help us become strong?” Have the children brainstorm until they come up with these, and perhaps other, categories: healthy food (milk, fruit, and vegetables), health care when we are sick or hurt, plenty of sleep, exercise, homes that are safe and warm, clothes that protect us from the weather.

For younger children (K-2), as each category is named, draw simple symbols or pictures on butcher paper. For older children (Grades 3-5), write words.

Snack from Jesus' Time: Talk about the healthy foods Jesus would have eaten, and let the children sample some. Have on hand the following: figs, dates, walnuts (be sure to know about any students' food allergies), pita bread, water or grape juice. If you can find some dried fish, let the adventurous children try some! Then have children brainstorm a list of healthy foods to eat today. (Fig Newton cookies may be a more popular snack once the children have sampled the more authentic foods.)

Discussion about Healthy Eating: Ask, “How do parents help children eat healthy foods to make them grow strong?” (*Responses may include: serve healthy food for breakfast and dinner, pack healthy lunches, limit sugary snacks or junk food.*)

Tell the children, “Schools help children eat healthy foods by offering school lunches that include important food groups like milk, vegetables, and fruit. When parents don't have enough money to pay for school lunches, their children can buy them for less money or even get them for free. That's another way that schools help children eat healthy foods.”

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Finally, ask, "How do churches and neighborhoods help children eat healthy foods to make them grow strong?" (*Responses may include food pantries, soup kitchens, gift baskets of food on Thanksgiving and other holidays, and other ministries. If the children don't know about these, introduce them to them. You may also say, "There is a special program called WIC that gives coupons that are like money to help mothers with babies and very young children buy healthy food." Be sensitive to the possibility that this may apply to children in your class.*)

Discussion about Health Care: Ask the following questions to stimulate discussion. If younger children have a hard time coming up with responses for some of the questions, you may introduce and talk about some of the suggested responses.

Ask, "What do parents do when children are sick or hurt? What do they do when they are healthy to help them stay that way?" (*Responses may include: take them to the doctor, give them medicine, take them for check-ups.*)

Ask, "How do schools help keep kids healthy?" (*Responses may include: school nurse, practicing fire drills, and checking our eyes and ears.*) Tell the children about ways that your church and community help children stay healthy. You may want to mention "giving shots to keep you from getting bad sicknesses," doctors' offices, and hospitals.

Ask, "Why is being healthy important for learning? How can not being healthy affect your learning?" (*Responses may include: if you are sick, you may miss school and have hard time catching up; if you have a problem with your eyes or ears, you can't hear the lesson or see the chalk board; if you don't feel well and are in class, you can't concentrate on lesson. Younger children may have a hard time brainstorming these kinds of answers. In that case, talk about the answers rather than having the children come up with them.*)

Jesus was "filled with wisdom" (20 minutes)

Experience a Synagogue School: Place a chair at the front of the room, and have a clear spot in front of it for the children to sit. Have the children sit on the floor, while you sit in the chair. Tie a strip of cloth around each child's head as a headdress.

Tell the children that Jesus would have gone to school in the synagogue, starting when he was about five years old, and he might have worn a headdress just like they are. Tell them that the teacher sat in a chair, while the students sat on the ground at the teacher's feet.

Read from a Scroll: Tell the children, "Jesus learned from one part of our Bible, this part (hold up a Bible and show the children the Old Testament section), which we call the Old Testament."

Ask, "Does anyone know what we call the rest of our Bible?" Supply the answer if necessary.

Continue, "The Old Testament would have been like Jesus' schoolbook, and he would have learned to read and write by studying it."

Hold up the scroll you have prepared and tell them, "This is called a scroll. Scrolls like this were used instead of books." Continue, "The words we read today are English, but the words Jesus read were a language called Hebrew. Hebrew is written from right to left, the opposite of how we read English."

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Tell the creation story to younger children as you point to each picture in turn. Have the older children take turns reading from the scroll. Remind them that it reads from right to left. Older children may enjoy deciphering the writing which is going in the “wrong” direction.

Write on a tablet: Tell the children that Jesus would have written on a clay tablet instead of paper as they do. Have the children take turns making marks with a strong twig on the clay tablet you have prepared. (Have extra twigs in case it breaks, or use an unsharpened pencil.)

Discussion: Invite the children to compare schools in Jesus' time and schools today. Ask, “How were schools in Jesus' time the same as our schools?” (*Responses may include: there was a teacher, there were students, they learned how to read, they started at about the same age.*)

Ask, “How were they different?” (*They wrote on tablets, not paper; they read from scrolls, not books; the children sat on the floor, not in chairs; there weren't any student desks.*)

Ask, “What makes a school a good place to learn?” (*Responses may include: teachers who are nice to everybody, treat all students fairly, and expect that every child can learn; students who like to learn; when everybody tries to do what is right; when school feels like a safe place, and there are enough books and other things for learning.*)

Ask, “How does it feel or how do you think it feels to go to a school that is a good place to learn?” (*Responses may include: the children are excited about learning, are ready to go on to the next grade, will be ready for college or jobs.*)

Ask, “How does it feel or how do you think it feels to go to a school that is not a good place to learn?”

Ask the following, allowing time for responses to each: “What could anybody do to help schools be good places to learn? Is there something you can do? How about moms and dads and grandmothers and grandfathers? Can the church help make schools a good place to learn?” (*Since children are likely to “compartmentalize” the church and school, and not understand ways the church might help schools, you may need to offer suggestions, such as, “The church could pray for the students and teachers, or we could send grown-ups to be helpers in the classroom.”*)

And the spirit of God was upon him (15 minutes)

Discussion: Growing in our relationship with God.

Ask, “How can we learn more about God? What can we do to feel closer to God?” (*Responses may include: Pray, go to church to worship, go to Sunday School, think about God, ask questions about God.*)

Learning by Doing: Tell the children, “One way of learning more about God is to think about the things you do and the experiences you have. For example, say you saw a kid at school being pushed around and scared by some bigger kids, and you decided to start a Peace Club to help kids work out their disagreements and get along together. When the Peace Club helped the kids become better friends, you might think about how God wants people to be friendly, not to fight. You might even think that Jesus started his own kind of Peace Club when he taught his friends about how God wants us to love each other. In that way, you would have learned more about God from what you did or experienced.”

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Tell the children that they are going to do something now that will help them learn more about God. Have the group make school kits—including items such as note pads, pens, pencils, sharpeners, and erasers—to donate to students who need them. You may even want to include gift certificates to a local bookstore. Have the children decorate bags or boxes to put them in. Have them talk about what it might be like to go to school and not to have the things you needed for your school work. How do they think a kid might feel when she or he receives a present like this? How will they feel knowing that they have made such a thoughtful gift? How do they think God feels about this?

Next, ask the children if they can think of things they can give to other students that don't cost any money. If they need some examples to get started, you could mention some of the following: a smile, a hug, being a friend if someone is lonely, and making sure other children are included in a game being played.

Tell them that they have just learned more about God by thinking about an action they took, and other things they could do, to help someone. Tell them that this is something that they can do any time they are involved in an action or experience, and they will learn more about God. Tell them that unhappy experiences can also be opportunities for learning by doing: if they are in a group that leaves out a classmate, they can think about how God feels about our doing things like that.

Closing (5 minutes)

Gather all of the children back in the “synagogue school” area. They can put headdresses back on if they wish. Lead them in a closing prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for helping us to grow strong in our bodies, our minds, and our relationships with you. Thank you for all of the people who help us learn. We pray for all children, that they will be able to learn and grow. We pray that parents, teachers, churches, and neighborhoods will work together to help all children learn. We pray in the name of your Son who taught us about you. Amen.

Lesson Plan for Middle School (Grades 6, 7, & 8)

Theme/Title

Learning Like Jesus

Scriptural Passage

Luke 2:41-52

Focus

Jesus was a boy who was excited about learning. He grew in mind, body, and spirit. All children should be helped to be excited about learning and to grow in mind, body, and spirit. Families, schools, churches, and communities can help see that children learn and grow.

Lesson Objectives

The students will:

- Learn about Jesus when he was a boy their age, and about how he grew in mind, body, and spirit.
- Reflect on ways that children now grow in mind, body, and spirit.
- Participate in an active response to help other school children.

Materials

Copies of “Lost in Love of Learning”; butcher paper and marker; supplies for “Responding to the Message” activity, if appropriate; two dowels and a brown paper bag for scroll, and ribbon or strip of cloth.

Preparation

- Review the lesson.
- Assemble the materials.
- Make a copy of handout “Lost in Love of Learning” for each student.
- Make signs saying “Nazareth,” “Jerusalem,” and “Temple.” Post Nazareth and Jerusalem signs on opposite sides of classroom for dramatic enactment. Post the Temple sign a few feet away from the Jerusalem sign.
- Make a scroll by cutting a long rectangle from the paper bag and stapling the short ends to the dowels. Roll both sides of the scroll in toward the middle, and tie with ribbon or strip of cloth.
- Contact a local school to learn of any needs it has that your class might fill.

Overview

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (10 minutes).

Explore the Message (20 minutes).

Respond to the Message (20 minutes).

Closing (5 minutes).

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (10 minutes)

Remind the students that today is Children's Sabbath. This year, there is a special focus on learning, and what children, parents, schools, churches, and communities can do to help all children grow, learn, and succeed.

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Tell the class that we usually think of Jesus as a teacher, someone who helped us learn about God. Ask if anyone remembers anything about Jesus as a learner or student. Tell them that there is one story in the Bible that tells about Jesus as a boy who loved to learn.

Get volunteers to take different roles for an enactment of Luke 2:41-52 using the script "Lost in Love of Learning." In addition to the parts of Jesus and his parents, assign a narrator, group of travelers, teachers at the temple, and people at the temple. If the students are not comfortable acting out the drama, have them remain seated and simply do a reading of the script.

After the play has been enacted or read, invite the children to respond to it. Ask if they have ever felt like Jesus—getting so caught up in what they were learning that they lost track of everything else. Let the students know that the learning they talk about does not have to be related to school. It could be learning to in-line skate or play an instrument or master a computer game. Ask them what they think Jesus was so excited about. Why do they think his parents didn't understand? Has there ever been a time when they were excited about learning something important, and their parents or other people didn't understand or realize how important it was? What gets them excited about learning? Note that when we are very young, parents are our first and most important teachers, but as we grow older, other people help us learn. Ask them to name some of the people who teach them things and help them learn.

Explore the Message (20 minutes)

For the following discussion, possible responses the students may offer are indicated in parentheses and italics. If you find that the students have a difficult time responding to the open-ended questions, you may want to list the things mentioned as possible responses, and then ask the students to talk about one of them as it has affected them or someone they know.

Say, "At the end of the story, it says that Jesus 'increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.'" Ask, "What does that mean in your own words?"

Ask, "What are the things that will help you 'increase in wisdom'?" (*Responses may include: try hard in school, respect the teachers, behave appropriately, and try to get help if they are having trouble.*)

Ask, "What are things that get in the way of children 'increasing in wisdom'?" (*Responses may include: peer pressure not to "act smart"; schools that don't feel safe or are violent; schools that don't have good materials or too many students in each class; schools where the teachers don't expect all students to learn or teachers that are burned out; when children don't get enough to eat and are hungry in class; when children don't get health care and miss class or can't see the board or hear the teacher.*)

Ask, "What are the things that will help you 'increase in years'?" (*That's not as silly a question as it sounds. Besides the natural aging process, urge them to think of ways to protect their health and safety. Responses may include health check-ups and care when they are sick, not smoking or taking illegal drugs, avoiding alcohol, only riding in cars with safe drivers, and being aware of the danger of guns.*)

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Ask, "How can you increase 'in divine favor'? What can you do to improve your relationship with God?" Point out that in one sense, we can't "increase in divine favor" by anything we say or do; God loves us unconditionally and graciously. However, there are things we can do so that we feel closer to God.

(Possibilities include: praying, reading the Bible, attending church school and youth group, attending worship, listening to the sermon, asking questions they have about God, and trusting God. Other possibilities include doing things God wants us to, such as showing compassion and working for justice.)

Ask, "How can you increase in human favor?" *(Possible responses include: being a good friend, always trying to do their best, showing compassion, respecting their parents and teachers.)*

Respond to the Message (20 minutes)

Tell the students that now they will work on a project that will help other children learn. In doing this project, they will also grow closer to God and show compassion—all things that are part of increasing in wisdom, and divine and human favor.

Have the students brainstorm a list of ways that they could help students or a school in need. (If possible, identify in advance a school and get a sense of what is needed. Describe the school to your class and broad areas of problems or need.)

Ideas for projects might include hosting a fund-raising activity to buy books for a school, volunteering as reading buddies for younger children, or arranging to help paint or otherwise fix up a school classroom or playground.

Have them rank the ideas, determining which one is most feasible. After selecting one idea to pursue, make a list of steps necessary. Plan to follow-through on the project over the coming months.

NOTE: If this open-ended process to select and pursue a project does not feel do-able for your class, in advance decide to substitute a more defined activity during this period, such as assembling school supply kits to donate to a school with children in need. The week before conducting this lesson, ask your students to bring in school supplies (such as notepaper, pencils, erasers, notebooks, etc.) for this lesson. Alternatively, you could have each child write a letter thanking someone who has helped them learn.

Closing (5 minutes)

Invite the students to assemble for reflection and a closing prayer. Ask them if they have any thoughts about today's class that they would like to share. Then ask each student to name something that he or she has been excited to learn in the past year. This does not have to be restricted to traditional classroom subjects. For example, it could be learning to in-line skate or dive.

Dear God, Thank you for the things we learned today and the things we have learned over time. Thank you for giving us bodies that grow strong, minds that love learning, and hearts that seek you. Help us to be good friends, to those we know and even those we don't, and help us to see that everyone has a chance to grow in mind, body, and spirit. These things we ask in the name of your Son, who was both student and teacher. Amen.

“LOST IN LOVE OF LEARNING”

BASED ON LUKE 2:41-52

Narrator: Now every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when Jesus was 12 years old, they went up as usual for the festival. *[Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, standing by “Nazareth” sign, cross room to join crowd of Passover celebrants by “Jerusalem” sign.]*

Narrator: When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. *[Mary and Joseph start back across the room toward “Nazareth” where they started, along with some of the crowd of Passover celebrants. Jesus sits at feet of several teachers sitting on chairs by the “Temple” sign. Have other students join Jesus on the floor.]*

Narrator: Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, Mary and Joseph went a day's journey. *[Mary, Joseph, and fellow travelers continue toward starting point.]*

Mary: Joseph, we've been traveling for a day now. Isn't it strange that we haven't seen our son Jesus in all this time? Perhaps we should look for him, to make sure that everything is alright.

Narrator: Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.

Mary and Joseph: *[mingling in crowd of fellow travelers]* Have you seen Jesus? We haven't seen him since we left Jerusalem. Was Jesus traveling with you during any of the journey yesterday? Would you let us know if you see Jesus? We are starting to get worried.

Narrator: When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

Joseph: Mary, I don't think he is anywhere in our group. I think it is best that we go back to Jerusalem and see if by any chance he is still there...although I can't imagine why he would have stayed behind. *[Mary and Joseph leave group and return to Jerusalem location]*

Narrator: After three days they found him, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Teacher: *[Unrolls scroll and pantomimes reading it aloud.]*

Jesus: *[Pantomimes asking a question and making a point. Teacher and other students should show appropriate expressions of amazement, nudging each other and nodding approvingly.]*

Narrator: When his parents saw him, they were astonished.

Mary: *[fairly worked up and upset]* Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.

Jesus: *[calmly and reassuringly]* Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

Narrator: But Jesus' parents did not understand what he said to them. *[Mary and Joseph look puzzled and shake their heads, or make other appropriate gestures.]*

Narrator: Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. *[Mary, Joseph, and Jesus walk back across classroom toward Nazareth location. Mary or Joseph's hand might rest on Jesus' head or shoulder in suggestion of parental authority.]* His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Lesson Plan for Senior High (Grades 9–12)

Theme/Title

Savage Inequalities

Focus

The Beatitudes give us a stark understanding of God's concern for and presence with those who are most disadvantaged. Today many students experience vast disadvantages while others experience rich advantages. God calls us into faithful concern and presence with disadvantaged students, so that all might learn and grow and flourish as God intends.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Deepen their understanding of the Beatitudes in Luke.
- Learn about inequalities in schools and learning opportunities.
- Reflect on the meaning of the Beatitudes for current situations.
- Engage in an active response to school inequalities that mirrors God's concern for those who are most disadvantaged.

Materials

A Bible or a copy of Luke 6:20-26 for every student; copies of the handout, "Savage Inequalities;" butcher paper and markers; and copies of the handout, "Students with Smart Solutions."

Preparation

Review the lesson and gather the materials, making the number of copies needed.

Overview

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (introduction, antiphonal reading of scripture, dramatic reading from *Savage Inequalities*) 10 minutes.

Explore the Message (large group discussion and small group brainstorming) 20 minutes.

Respond to the Message (activity) 20 minutes.

Closing 10 minutes.

Introduce the Theme and Bible Message (10 minutes)

Introduction: Remind the students that today is Children's Sabbath. Tell them that it is a time to look at what children need to learn and grow and succeed, and at what young people, parents, churches, and communities can do to make sure that every child gets a chance to learn and grow and succeed.

Antiphonal Reading: Have the class read the Beatitudes in Luke 6 antiphonally, with one side reading the blessings and one side reading the woes.

Dramatic Reading: Invite three students to read the handout, "Savage Inequalities." One student will read Luis' lines, another will read Jonathan Kozol's, and the third will read Jezebel's.

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Explore the Message (20 minutes)

Large Group Discussion: Ask the students to share their responses to the Beatitudes. What does it mean that the poor are blessed? Does it mean that God wants people who are poor to remain that way? What does it mean to say woe to the rich? Does it mean that God wants bad things to happen to those who have lots of money? Get the students' responses.

Make sure the discussion includes the ideas that God's special concern for and constant presence is with those who are in the most difficult circumstances. It doesn't mean that God wants people to be or remain in painful, difficult circumstances. The woes suggest the limited nature of those kinds of satisfactions, if one is only concerned about his or her own well-being. The woes don't mean that God is "out to get" those who are advantaged, but that we will find more woe than blessing if our priority is on selfish satisfactions that cannot provide a lasting experience of blessing. To share God's concern would be to side with those who are most disadvantaged.

Ask the students how they relate the reading from *Savage Inequalities* to the Beatitudes.

Small Group Brainstorming: Divide the group into two. Have one group brainstorm a list of the things that make it easier to learn (such as parents who expect the best from you, schools with caring teachers who expect every student to learn, friends who also value learning, and adequate books and equipment in the school). Have the second small group brainstorm a list of the things that make it more difficult to learn (such as a lack of books and other materials, peer pressure not to "act smart," and teachers who don't expect you to do well). Have each group record its ideas on butcher paper. After 10 minutes, have them come back together. Have one person from each small group share the ideas aloud.

Respond to the Message (20 minutes)

Ask the class, when they think about the Beatitudes, and about the *Savage Inequalities* description of advantaged schools and disadvantaged schools, what do they think is a faithful response that reflects God's concern?

Give the students copies of the handout, "Students with Smart Solutions." Invite several students to read the stories aloud.

Have the students list the things that they think were keys to success in each of the stories.

Have the class come up with a list of actions they could take to help all schools be good places for students to learn. Have them decide if there is one of these actions that they will commit to taking, and determine the steps necessary to get started.

Closing (10 minutes)

Lead the students in a collaborative project of writing a modern version of the Beatitudes based on the class today. Once it has been created and written out on butcher paper, have the class read it aloud together.

For example, lines might read:

"Blessed are the students who face the greatest learning challenges, for they will discover determination, persistence, and resourcefulness."

"Blessed are those who work to improve the quality of the poorest schools, for they will discover the rich satisfaction of fulfilling God's call to justice."

"Woe to those who hoard all of the resources for wealthy schools, for their grasping will leave them without the things that really matter: compassion, generosity, and fairness."

"Woe to those who view rich kids or white kids or able-bodied kids as the only ones who can learn at the highest levels, for they will miss seeing some of the brightest kids with great ideas."

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES

The following passage is from *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. It relates a conversation between the author, Jonathan Kozol, and a group of students from a public high school in Camden, New Jersey.

An 11th grader named Luis tells me that he went to a private school before he came to Woodrow Wilson High.

“If you ask me how it’s different, I begin to think of books, or air conditioners, or computers. But it isn’t one thing. It’s a lot of things: the whole effect. The teachers at that school, they had a comfortable lounge. You go in there, with their permission, if you want to sit and get to know your teacher. The students also have a lounge. It isn’t concentrated. It’s relaxed. You drive up a slope. The school is on a hill. You go up the driveway and it’s circular and like the entrance to a college campus or a nice hotel. The school is brick. A real nice-lookin’ school. There is a lacrosse field. When you go to lunch you go together, not in shifts, and it’s a pleasant place for lunch. My class had 15 students. And the teachers help you during class. They have the time, you know, to make sure that you understand.... “In this school [Woodrow Wilson High], they sometimes do not have the time. You know: They Xerox something, Here, do this. Just hand it out. This is your work. Just do it. Get it in before the end of class. You’ll get a grade. And, you know, it does take time for kids to understand. And some kids, when they don’t understand they feel embarrassed. You don’t want to be the only one to raise your hand and sayin’ you don’t understand. You sit there and say nothin’. If the teacher has the time to come around and talk to you, it’s different. You’re not scared to say to him, ‘I didn’t understand. I didn’t get it.’ And he helps you. And you’re willing to come early on the next day and be helped some more. And, in this way, you’re really learnin’.”

I ask them: “If you had the things here that you want: new books, more computers, air conditioning, all of that, it would take a lot of money. Money has to come from taxes. Where would that money and those taxes come from?”

“If there’s a surplus, say, in Cherry Hill [a nearby, wealthy town],” Luis replies, “well, you could divide that money.”

“Let’s say that you have \$10,000,” Jezebel says. “Split that sum in half: \$5,000 for Cherry Hill, \$5,000 for Camden [their own city, with lower incomes.]”

Luis: “Make it equal. I don’t mean that you should make it worse for them. They have the right to education. But we need our education too. Make it equal. Even if you have to take funds from somewhere else....”

I ask him this: “If they raise more money from their taxes out in Cherry Hill, don’t they have the right to keep that money there and use it to buy things that they may want for their own school?”

“What could they possibly want,” says Jezebel, “that they don’t have?”

STUDENTS WITH SMART SOLUTIONS

Building Student Activism

Student Council President Trent Norris learned from his classmate Fran, a student representative to the school board, that there was a proposal to build a new gymnasium and library at the high school. This was to replace the cramped, aging, and inadequate ones the students currently had to use. The funding for the building project would be raised through bonds issued by the school district.

For all of this to go forward, a bond referendum would have to pass in the upcoming election. Because it was an "off year" in the election cycle (with no candidates running for major offices), a low voter turn-out was expected. The school board was worried that the bond referendum would be defeated.

So, Trent decided to get the students into action. First, he had to let the students know what was at stake. Of course, most students weren't reading notices about school board meetings or upcoming elections. Trent told the student council about the bond referendum to approve and fund the new gym and library, and the student council members spread the word from there.

Just letting the students know about the referendum wasn't enough. Trent knew that the students had to find a way to make their priorities known and to help pass the referendum. For starters, the students could educate their parents about the issue and urge them to vote for the referendum. But the student council took it one step further. They launched a campaign to get all of the high school students who would be eighteen years old on election day registered to vote. They even arranged to have real voting booths at the high school so the students could learn how to use them.

Election day came, and many more parents than usual turned out to vote. There was also a turnout of the town's newest voters: the high school seniors from Trent's school. At the end of the night, when the votes were counted, the referendum had passed. It would raise the largest amount of money in the school district's history.

Today, Trent is a lawyer living in California. But back in New Jersey at his former school, students are poring over books in a more spacious library while others are shooting hoops in a large, well-equipped gym. All because Trent Norris and the students at his school decided to get involved. And so can you!

The following article is from *The Boston Globe*, 9/17/98 by Beth Daley, *Globe* Staff

Students persuade T to change policy

Long before her after-school research at the Boston Public Library was complete, high school student Anita George last year had to scramble to catch the T [subway or metro] home before 6 p.m., the deadline for using her free MBTA (Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority) student pass. Fed up with having to cut research short to save the bus or train fare to get home, she and scores of other teens from the Boston Youth Organizing Project decided last spring to track down whoever decided on the 6 p.m. T-pass deadline and ask for an extension. After a summer of surveying other students, interviewing MBTA and school officials, typing agendas, and practicing their questions, the students went before MBTA General Manager Robert Prince last month and to their huge surprise won. Prince was so impressed with the students and

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath

their arguments, he extended student T pass times until 8 p.m. on the spot. About 19,000 Boston youths get free T passes each month, first subsidized by the MBTA and then paid for by the students' schools. The cost for the extra two hours, estimated at thousands of dollars annually, will be absorbed by the MBTA.

"We were expecting lots of answers and practiced for all of them except the answer—Yes," said David F. Walters, 18, of Dorchester, a senior at Another Course to College, an alternative Boston public school that George, 16, also attends.

"I know now that we have the ability to do anything. We don't have to rely on adults," said George of Dorchester.

Still, wading through Boston's arguably two most notorious bureaucracies took a summer of patience and dedication. The students got conflicting answers about who was in charge of the student pass regulations, and had to overcome adults who discouraged them from seeking the extension.

But the teens continued, sparked by their success last year in lobbying the city to use the Melnea Cass skating rink for in-line skating.

The Boston Youth Organizing Project, funded with roughly \$50,000 a year by the City Mission Society, the mission arm of the United Church of Christ, is run out of a rectory in Grove Hall by Liz Steinhauser. While she guides the teens at the outset, she tends to "sit in a corner and say nothing" during organizational meetings, Walters said.

For the T project, about six students began interviewing MBTA and school officials. Some were paid for their work, and others volunteered. For each interview, the students appointed a leader, wrote an agenda and questions, and met with each official for 30 minutes.

The students discovered that "the legislation that formed the MBTA in the 1960s said there should be reduced fare for students for school and school-related activities," said Jameela Philip, 15, a student at Boston Latin Academy.

The officials, especially Prince, were impressed.

"I was bowled over," he said. "The level of bureaucracy they went through to get to my desk was amazing. They were serious and conducted a perfectly held business meeting." Students felt the 6 p.m. deadline was unrealistic for those in sports or those who do after-school work. Today, the students will hold a press conference on their efforts. The walls of their headquarters are dotted with sheets of papers with questions people might ask, and things the group wants to say. The students are gearing up to meet yet again to decide on their next project.

"Once you want to reach your goal or change something, you can do it," said Renee Philip, a 10th-grader at West Roxbury High. "With different young people's help, you can get anything done."

[Note: In 2010, many of the individuals who were involved as students came together for a reunion of sorts. They discovered that several of them had made advocacy and working for justice their careers as adults.]