



Session 1
Winter 2015–16
Middler

The path to God's promise

JEREMIAH 33:14–16; PSALM 25

prepare

PRAYER

God of hope, remind me of your promises. Truthfully, I do not want to wait for them to be fulfilled. Increase my confidence in your ultimate, infinite love. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To hear the people's hopes for a righteous leader

STORY SUMMARY

Today's texts accompany the first Sunday of Advent. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises to bring a righteous "branch" from the line of David. The prophet spoke of God's promise to provide a leader for Jerusalem. This leader would set things right and save the land. Psalm 25 speaks of trust and waiting for God. The people sang that they trusted in God, followed God's paths, and waited for God's forgiveness, teaching, friendship, relief, and deliverance.



teaching tips for middler

Welcome to the winter quarter of Shine! In this quarter, middlers will journey with Jesus from before his birth until the events leading up to his death, encountering many significant moments along the way. Make copies of the Letter to families from page 104 in this guide to send one home with each child. This letter gives an overview of the quarter as well as where to find the Bible stories in *Shine On: A Story Bible*.

In today's story, the people long for a leader who is good and just. Middlers are beginning to understand and critique the influence that parents, teachers, and peers have on them. Yet they may have rarely considered what makes someone worthy of being followed and why we need good leaders. Your group can explore the desire for a good leader throughout this Advent season as you prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus, our ultimate leader.

Practice the Bible memory song on page 90 of this guide so that you can teach it to the group. Decide which Explore activities you will do. For Discover, you will need lids from plastic containers. Check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

The faithfulness of God

Jeremiah 33 is set during the time when the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem (598–597 BCE). In this chapter, Jeremiah predicts that God will restore God's people to the land, restore their prosperity, and restore a king to the throne of David. Jeremiah is told that a descendant of David will once again rule God's people with justice and righteousness.

Verse 3 is crucial for understanding the thread of this chapter. The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah, saying, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." What Jeremiah does not know is that, despite the present crisis and later exile, God will eventually restore the fortunes of God's people. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God will prove to be faithful.

God's overarching commitment contrasts dramatically with the chaos that Jeremiah and Jerusalem were experiencing. Earlier, Jeremiah used the phrase "the Lord is our righteousness" in reference to a coming king (23:6). In this week's text the phrase is applied to the city of Jerusalem. This underscores the connection between the coming king and his people. Despite present circumstances, God assures the people that in the days to come they will dwell secure and safe in the land: "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety" (33:16a).

The Branch is a title that is used in other places in the Bible to refer to a messiah.¹ *Branch* means "a royal successor"; it is a poetic term for the heir of a dynastic line. Neighboring nations used this same term for an heir to the throne who rules justly. In Jeremiah's time, the dynasty of David appeared to have come to an end. On the face of it, God's promise had failed. But here God boldly reaffirms this pledge. A Christian understanding of this promise has been that Jesus is the Messiah who will inherit David's throne and establish God's kingdom through faithfulness and righteousness.²



The structure of Psalm 25

Psalm 25 is a remarkable blend of wisdom and lament, asking for wise guidance and for deliverance. It is an alphabetical poem, with each new line starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is structured according to an inverted parallelism: it introduces all its themes and then returns to them in reverse order. For example, in both verses 1 and 22, the psalmist calls upon God. Verses 2–3 and 19–21 plead for salvation from enemies and from shame. Verses 4–5 and 16–18 speak of following God's path and waiting for God's salvation. Verses 6–7 and 11–15 speak of God's covenant love. The central

verses (8–10) of this psalm emphasize the steadfast love that guides one on a just path:

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Singing of God's love

The entire psalm speaks of God's loving and faithful character. As in the promise to Jeremiah, the psalmist says that God no longer remembers people's sins. Despite the psalmist's sense of guilt and fear, God's love and faithfulness will win the day.

In the Gospels we hear Jesus announcing the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. With the advent of Jesus, God's long anticipated reign of justice and righteousness shall be realized. God will not leave people without a leader; the son of David has come to inherit the throne. That which the prophet foresaw and the psalmist longed for shall come to pass in unexpected and wondrous ways.

1. Jeremiah 23:5–6; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1–5; Zechariah 3:8; and 6:12.

2. Luke 1:32–33 (see also 2 Samuel 7:12–16).

gather

supplies

- Bible
- *Glow* magazines
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Blank paper
- Markers/colored pencils/crayons
- Advent candles (real or electric)
- Matches or lighter (if needed)

poster pack

- Bible memory poster (Luke 1)

to do

- Display the Bible memory poster with the Luke 1 side visible.
- Practice singing the Bible memory passage (music on page 90).
- Set up a Christmas tree and an Advent candle display (instructions on page 90).

media connections

- Internet image search for "Tree of Jesse stained glass, Chartres Cathedral"
- *Circles of Hope* by Karen Lynn Williams
- *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan
- YouTube video "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)" by hillsongunitedTV

BUILD COMMUNITY

Welcome the children into your meeting space as they arrive. If needed, have a time of introductions. Children need to feel comfortable in the room in order to truly share with each other and form a community of faithfulness.

Have everyone draw a picture of a great leader. They can also write words that describe that leader. Encourage everyone to share their pictures with the group. Say that today's story is about people hoping for a great leader.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Gather near your Advent candles. Explain that the first Advent candle is for prophecy/hope. Say that a prophet shares a message from God, often using word pictures or poems. The prophet's message is called a prophecy. Today's Bible story includes a prophecy.

Light the first Advent candle. Together say the Week 1 Advent prayer from page 1 of *Glow*. Spend a moment of silence thinking about Jesus, the light of the world. Sing verse 1 of "Hope Is a Light," track 9 on the Shine CD and page 16 of the *Year Two Songbook*. Lyrics are also at the back of *Glow*.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Spiritual practices invite the children to connect with God in a variety of ways. Use each session's practice wherever it fits best in the session.

Introduce children to the idea of "praying the psalms." This means using a verse from the book of Psalms as your own prayer to God. Have someone read Psalm 25:1 from a Bible. Repeat this verse together. Say that the word for *soul* in this verse can also mean "breath" or "living being." Your *soul* is your breathing, living, loving self. Invite everyone to breathe in and out deeply. Then invite the children to repeat several times: "To you, O Lord, I lift up my whole self."

Bible memory

Introduce the Bible memory song based on "Frère Jacques." Lyrics and music are on page 90 of this guide. (Go to www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras for a recording of the song.) Point out the words on the Bible memory poster and sing the song several times as a group.

**By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break
upon us, to give light to those who
sit in darkness and in the shadow
of death, to guide our feet into the
way of peace.**

—Luke 1:78–79

teaching tip

Media connections can add creativity and relevance to your session. They can enlarge your understanding of the Bible text and prepare you to offer additional experiences to children.

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Show where Psalm 25 and Jeremiah 33 are in a Bible. Invite the group to travel back in time with you. You live in Jerusalem, and an army from Babylon is attacking your city. Huddle together on the floor. Say:

You are hungry. All day you wait for one tiny mouthful of food. Sometimes your parents don't eat anything so the littlest ones can have an extra bite. Everyone is tired and afraid. Your mother says that enemies built a wall around the city and that's why no food can get to you. This horrible war has gone on and on. You feel like it will never end. Then you hear a man saying he has a message from God.

Show the illustration on page 144 of *Shine On*, and then read the first part of the story. Pause before the psalm and say:

Sometimes your family sings this song about God's promises.

Read the psalm. Finish with a short silence.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect together on the story. Let children know that it is fine to think without speaking.

- I wonder what it's like to live in a war . . . and to hear a promise of safety.
- I wonder if anyone has ever insulted you or laughed at you. I wonder if you thought to ask God for help when they did.
- I wonder what a "path of love" is like.
- I wonder what helps us wait for God.

PEACE NOTES

Tell the children that Israelite people were eventually defeated by Babylon. Many had to leave their homes and go live in a strange place. There are people in today's world who also have to leave their homes because of war. Look at pages 2–3 of *Glow* to learn about children who are refugees. Ask the group what the refugees might hope for. Children can each write one answer on colored paper, then draw a shape around the words and cut them out to create ornaments. Pray for each hope as the children hang their ornaments on your Christmas tree or around the room.



The path to God's promise

Jeremiah 33:14–16;
Psalm 25

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- *Glow* magazines
- Colored paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Tape or ribbons (for hanging ornaments)

to do

- Become familiar with today's story in *Shine On*.
- Gather supplies for making ornaments.

teaching tip

There are various ways to use *Shine On*. Have a child hold *Shine On* for the group to see as you tell the story and move the props. Or, show the *Shine On* illustration, then lay the book beside you so that you can glance at the words as you tell the story. Make sure you read through the story ahead of time so that you are comfortable reading or telling it to the group.

explore

DISCOVER

The Hebrew word for “lift up” in Psalm 25:1 is also used to describe Noah’s ark rising on the water. Have children write their names inside plastic lids and place them in a pan. Pour water into the pan, carefully avoiding the lids. As children watch the lids rising up, they can imagine themselves floating or rising up on God’s love. Repeat Psalm 25:1 together and talk about what it means to lift up our souls to God. Children can take the lids home to remind them of this image.

supplies

- Plastic lids (such as from sour cream containers)
- Permanent marker
- Pitcher of water
- Large pan



Voice of America, public domain

MOVE

Play “Follow the leader” with a twist. First, write adjectives on slips of paper, such as *silly*, *lazy*, *extra quick*, and *confused*. Pass out a different slip to each child. Children can take turns leading the group, moving through your space in the manner of their adjective.

Sit down and ask the children to name leaders at church, school, home, and among their friends. How do they know if someone is a good leader to follow? What kind of leader were the people in today’s story hoping for?

For smaller groups: Each leader can take turns with several different adjectives.

supplies

- Slips of paper
- Pencil

RETELL

Tell the group that psalms were originally sung. Set up a gentle background rhythm using simple percussion or plucked open guitar strings, or have everyone pat their legs in time. Pass around *Shine On*; each person will sing or chant a line of the story. (They should pass the book at the end of each sentence.) If you have nonreaders, chant the line to the person whose turn it is and invite the child to chant or sing it back.

supplies

- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Simple percussion instruments or guitar (optional)

GLOW

On page 1 of *Glow*, children can learn how to write words from today’s psalm in Hebrew characters and create messages of hope for each other to decipher. If desired, create ornaments with the Hebrew words on the page.

supplies

- *Glow* magazines
- Pencils/pens
- Ornament supplies (optional)

other ideas

- Make candle prayers for Advent. Go to www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras for instructions.
- Create acrostic poems about hope, starting each line with a different letter of the alphabet.
- Listen to blues, spirituals, or other music people have created during hard times.

bless

PRAY

Show “Jesus’ family vine” poster. Explain that it shows Jesus’ grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. Have the children find David’s name. Explain that David is associated with many psalms, including the one in today’s story. David lived about one thousand years before Jesus. People were waiting and hoping for a long time for a leader like Jesus.

Play “Dios de la esperanza” (May the God of Hope) from the Shine CD, track 5, and have the group listen or sing along on page 10 of the *Year Two Songbook*. Lyrics are also at the back of *Glow*.



SEND

Remind the children that they have prayed a psalm and prayed for people who are refugees today. Encourage them to try praying in different ways and for different people throughout the week.

Read this sending blessing from Psalm 25:10:

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love.

Walk in God’s paths of love this week, wherever you go.

Send home with each child a copy of the Letter to families copied from page 104.

supplies

- *Glow* magazines
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Copies of Letter to families (from Additional resources)

poster pack

- “Jesus’ family vine” poster

Don’t get discouraged if you don’t see quick results from your teaching. “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvesttime, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Piano lessons that my mother thought were a waste of money have resulted in music being one of the greatest joys of my life.

—June Fischer
Powell, Ohio

leader’s closing prayer

Expectations can be high during the holiday season. You may feel that you “should” have a loving, picture-perfect family or house or celebration. You—or others—may fail to live up to your exacting standards. By contrast, the hope we celebrate during Advent is based not on what we can do, but on God.

God of love, let me focus on who you are instead of what I’m not. Amen.