

2018

*Junior Youth Week of Prayer
Leadership and Character*

At the Banqueting Table



DAILY SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS INCLUDED
Produced by the General Conference Youth Ministries Department

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8 LESSONS ON CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

2018
Junior Youth
WEEK OF PRAYER READINGS

At the Banqueting Table
PASSING ON VALUES TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Daily Small Group Discussion Questions and Activity suggestions included.

WRITER: *Debbonnaire Kovacs*

2018 JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER SERMONS

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Help them understand
complex truths in simple ways

JUNIOR YOUTH

WEEK OF PRAYER SERMONS

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Official date for the Week of Prayer is

March 17-24, 2018

Global Youth Day: March 17, 2018

Homecoming Sabbath: March 24, 2018

Try the 15-Minute Rule

For every 15 minutes of preaching/teaching, include an energy-burning activity or game.

Maybe the activity illustrates a point, or it could be completely random. A strategically placed activity might break your flow, but it greatly enhances a junior youth's ability to stay mentality engaged.

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ABOUT THE WRITER



Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she was a small child and sold her first story to Guide magazine (known in those days as Junior Guide) when she was eleven years old. When she was fourteen, she was “tricked” (when she missed Sabbath School because she was sick) into doing a mini sermon for a large youth convention, and thought she would die! But she didn’t, so she wrote a sermon herself for a youth Week of Prayer at Mount Vernon Academy when she was seventeen. She lived through that, too!

Today she is a full-time author and speaker who has published 19 books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and over 500 stories and articles, including lots of stories for Primary Treasure. She speaks at camp meetings, women’s retreats, and other events, and is hardly ever afraid anymore.

Praise God!

Mrs. Kovacs strongly encourages young people to follow their dreams, and not wait until they are grown up to do something God is calling them to do. Her greatest prayer is that everyone who reads her words will deepen their own walk with Jesus. Her website is www.debbonnaire.com.

She lives on a mini farm in Berea, KY, with milk goats, chickens, gardens, and orchards, and is also a fiber artisan who does spinning, weaving, lacemaking, and many other textile arts. Gaela’s Gardens, which has a theme of forgiveness and reconciliation, is her first novel. It is available at CreateSpace.com, amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. Also available for Kindle, Nook, or Kobo.

INTRODUCTION

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

Just imagine!

Do you ever try to imagine what heaven will be like? It's impossible, but it's also good for us, especially any time we have problems here. It's easier to cope with the things life here on this earth throws at us if we remember where we're going. This year, we're going to exercise our imaginations a lot during the Week of Prayer. I pray you will be greatly blessed!

Long ago, a young girl, just 17-years-old, was given an incredible vision by God. That girl was Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White, after she married James White) and her vision showed her a glorious view of heaven. In her vision, one of the things she saw was the table for what Revelation 19:9 calls "the marriage supper of the Lamb." Here is what young Ellen wrote about the table:

After we beheld the glory of the temple, we went out, and Jesus left us and went to the city. Soon we heard His lovely voice again, saying, "Come, My people, you have come out of great tribulation, and done My will; suffered for Me; come in to supper, for I will gird Myself, and serve you." We shouted, "Alleluia! glory!" and entered into the city. And I saw a table of pure silver; it was many miles in length, yet our eyes could extend over it. I saw the fruit of the tree of life, the manna, almonds, figs, pomegranates, grapes, and many other kinds of fruit. I asked Jesus to let

me eat of the fruit. He said, "Not now. Those who eat of the fruit of this land go back to earth no more. But in a little while, if faithful, you shall both eat of the fruit of the tree of life and drink of the water of the fountain." And He said, "You must go back to the earth again and relate to others what I have revealed to you." Then an angel bore me gently down to this dark world (*Early Writings*, 19).

See what I mean? Impossible to imagine! How can we sit at a table miles long and see from one end to the other? Yet that is just one of the tremendous joys God has in store for those who choose to live with Him in His love and unselfishness *now*.

Now try to imagine the people sitting around that table. Of course Jesus will be there, and if we do choose to live with God in His love day-by-day, we will be there. He promised. We pray that our families and friends will be there. But just think of all the other people! Adam and Eve, Joseph and Mary, Queen Esther, and King David, and the apostles...the mind just can't take it in! Who do *you* want to talk to when you get to heaven?

This year, our Youth Ministries theme is Leadership. We're going to find all kinds of new ways to think about and understand what godly leadership is. We'll be able to follow our leaders more faithfully (especially God!) and we'll get to try being leaders ourselves, too. Did you know you are already a leader, just because you're a child of God? People look up to you. Sometimes there's something you can do at school that someone else can't do, and you can help them. Or two friends are starting to argue, and you use gentle words and turn away the anger.

During the eight days of the Week of Prayer, we will learn something about eight leaders from the Bible. And here's how we're going to do it: we're going to imagine that Jesus has come, and sin and horribleness is all done and over with, and we live in the light of God forever. Oh, just imagine! That's enough to make us feel better already! Then we'll imagine that we're sitting at that beautiful silver table, miles and miles long, surrounded by all the faithful of all time. And I know what I would want to do—I'd want to listen to them telling stories. Just think what it will be like when we can hear Adam describe the first minute he woke up and saw Eve, or listen to Mary telling about the angel's visit to tell her she would have Jesus as a little baby. And...there will be the angel Gabriel himself, smiling and remembering, too!

In our Week of Prayer stories, we can only use our imaginations. It won't be like really listening to Moses and Joseph and Deborah and the rest. It's also *very* important to understand that *only God* knows who will be there. We don't know if all these characters and their family members that we might imagine continued to choose to accept God's grace so that He could take them to live in heaven with Him forever. But we hope so! And we can learn a lot, just the same. Put on your Imagination Caps, and come along. Find a place at the silver table—there's room enough for everyone. And remember, all you have to do to *really* sit in your place at that table someday is keep on saying Yes to Jesus—every day of your life!



FOOD & WATER DRIVE

17TH | MARCH | 2018

YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER

Theme: *Leadership*

17 - 24 March 2018

HOME COMING

24 March 2018

Seek | Love | Keep

**BE THE
SERMON**

#GYD18



JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY ONE

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

I'm so excited I can hardly sit still! Here we are at the great, long, silver table in the New Jerusalem. Jesus has invited us to celebrate His wedding with His bride, the New Jerusalem. All down the center of the great table are platters and bowls of the most gorgeous fruit, and nuts, and salads of vegetables I don't even recognize. There are containers of manna, and plates of flatbread, and piles of dates and...there's the fruit the Tree of Life is giving this month! Doesn't it look luscious?

Not to mention the beautiful, gleaming pitchers of water from the Tree of Life. And look—grape juice! Jesus will drink it with us now, for the first time in 2,000 years!

Hey, I wonder who those two men across the table are. They look like they belong together, don't they? Listen! One of them is going to tell a story!

Caleb and Joshua

Biblical References: Numbers 13 and 14; Joshua 15; Joshua 24, Judges 1

One of the men, the one with the brown beard, leans toward the other. "It seems like just yesterday, doesn't it, Joshua?"

Joshua laughs. "It does! I was so scared, and so excited at the same time. Remember walking along behind those merchants with their carts and bundles, trying so hard to look like we fit in?"

Caleb nods. "You and I were together, and the other ten went in different directions, all two-by-two, to spy out the land God had promised us." He sighs and shakes his head. "Two years we'd been wandering in the wilderness since we left Egypt, and that was long enough for me! Finally, we were going to enter the Promised Land!"

"I can remember the stories my father and grandfather told me when I was a little boy, how God told Abraham his descendants would settle the land, but then when they went to Egypt during the famine, we'd all stayed there. Four hundred years!"

Joshua is shaking his head, too. "Four hundred years," he repeats, then grins suddenly. "That seemed like such a long time then, but now that we're *here*," he stops to look around the glorious city of New Jerusalem, "I can see that 400 years will soon seem like a snap of our fingers!"

Caleb smiles, too, but goes on, "But it was a long time in those days. Generations. The Pharaohs who knew our ancestor Joseph died, and cruel ones rose in his place. Our people were enslaved, and it got worse and worse. My grandfather told me that for a while, after Moses was adopted by the princess, he thought it would get better, but then Moses disappeared. The years passed, and Grandfather got old, and his son grew up and had me, and...we thought that was that."

The two old friends smile at each other. "Then Moses came back!" Caleb exclaims.

"Did he ever!" Joshua laughs. "I became his servant soon after that. I admired him so much! God used Moses, not to mention his brother, Aaron, in a powerful way and got us all out of there."

Caleb's smile fades, remembering. "Not easily and not quickly." He shakes himself a little and smiles again. "Those old, sad memories are fading. I'm glad it's all over. Anyway, two years later, there we were in the wilderness of Paran, near Kadesh Barnea. Moses picked out twelve of us to spread out into the Negev secretly, spy out the land, and see what we were up against."

Joshua's face lights up. "I remember! Altogether, the twelve of us got as far as Rehob, Lebo-hamath, and Hebron, where the Anak descendants were. Talk about scary!"

Caleb laughs. "They were pretty big! Their family still had some of the characteristics of our first fathers and mothers." He looks toward the head of the long silver table, where Adam and Eve are sitting near Jesus, and for a moment we all look that direction, feeling the awe of seeing those tall ancients. We have been told we'll grow up to match them eventually (Mal. 4:2), but for now, people are a lot of different heights, depending on where in earth's history we are from.

"Eshcol was my favorite," Joshua says. "That's where we got that bunch of grapes that was so big we had to put it on a pole and carry the pole on our shoulders. Remember that?"

Caleb laughs again, and picks up an enormous, luscious-looking grape from a golden plate on the table. "Like this?"

We all laugh. That's the way all the grapes are now. But once upon a time, big fruit in the fertile valley of the Promised Land was a very big deal.

Chewing on his grape, Caleb grows thoughtful, and Joshua does, too. "Then we made our reports. And nobody would listen!"

Caleb swallows, then shakes his head. “We kept saying, ‘God gave us this land, and promised to save those of the inhabitants who would follow His ways. He promised us everything we’d need to conquer in His name!’”

If it’s possible to look sad in heaven, the two men look sad. “All the others could think of was how big the people were, and how thick the city walls were,” said Caleb. “And in the end, no matter what you or I or Moses could say, they persisted in rebelling. God said we had to wander 40 more years, until all that generation died.”

“All except you and me.” Joshua puts a hand on Caleb’s shoulder. “Don’t forget that. And I have seen some of that generation here. There were some who repented before they died, and even though they didn’t get to see the earthly Promised Land, they’re here in the only one that really counts!”

Caleb’s smile is back. “That’s true, old friend. And then you, lucky thing, got to be the leader of all those difficult people after Moses died!”

Joshua rolls his eyes. “Don’t remind me! If I thought I’d ever been frightened before, it was nothing to that night when I knew the whole crowd was now on my shoulders the way they’d always been on Moses’! I was praying so hard. I’ll be honest—I felt like running away. But I had been following God, trying to do it as I’d always seen Moses doing it, even staying behind in the tabernacle to be close to God, for years by that time. All of a sudden...” Joshua’s voice fades and his face glows as he looks to the head of the table again, to where Jesus is sitting. “I thought it was an angel that appeared to me,” Joshua murmurs, but our new ears can hear him clearly. “It was *Him*. The angel of the Lord. Jesus. We didn’t know that name then, of course, but I’ve learned it now. Everyone has been talking about Him coming to earth and living as a

human, and it's astonishing and I want to learn all about it. But I know He'd already walked on earth with us, at least sometimes. He stood beside me and said, 'Don't be afraid, I'm with you.'" Joshua looks around at us and the rest of his listeners.

"So then I wasn't afraid anymore, and I took up my burden of leadership. It was hard! You'd think, after seeing what happened to all our fathers and mothers when they refused to trust God, *our* generation would have decided to make a different choice! But no, they were just as stubborn, just as rebellious..."

"Just as likely to follow all kinds of idols," Caleb takes up the tale again. He shudders. "I'm glad I can't really remember the details of all that. But I do remember when you gave them the "Big Choice". It was after we'd been in the land for a while, and had subdued most of it. God had given us peace, and we were eating the fruits of vines and crops we hadn't planted."

"I was getting old. "Joshua grins. "It seemed old then, anyway. I was 110. I knew I wouldn't be around much longer, and I wanted so badly to shore up the people's *own* faith, so they would follow God without me trying to make them do it!"

"You might have been old by earth standards, but your voice was still powerful," says Caleb. "This is a memory I won't forget! You were standing up there, with your hair and your white beard streaming in the wind. I thought you looked a little like Moses."

"You did?" Joshua interrupts, looking surprised and pleased.

"Of course I did! You did a good job of filling his shoes. First, you told us all the whole story over again, how God had called Terah, called Abraham, led them into Egypt, led us, their descendants, out of Egypt, patiently stayed with us through all our rebellion and trouble-causing, and brought us here to a new start in an old land. Then

you shouted out with a strong voice, ‘Choose today! Whom are you going to serve? Are you going to follow the idols your parents served back in Egypt? Are you going to serve the idols of these pagan nations around us?’ The people kept yelling, ‘No!’ I was caught up in it, myself. I yelled as loud as I could, ‘*No!*’ Then you said, and I’ll never forget the light in your eyes, ‘*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*’ And I knew, right down to my bones, that you meant it with all your heart. You’d served God since you were a boy, served His servant, Moses, since you were a young man, and served this annoying, beloved nation of God’s children with patience and determination until now you were an old man. I remembered all those years as I listened to you. And I know you couldn’t hear me, but I echoed you: ‘As for me and my house, we will, too, my brother Joshua! We will, too!’ You died not long after that, and my heart was sore, but I did what I swore that day I would do. I followed God, and I led my family to do the same. We took the hills you’d promised us, and my nephew, Othniel, helped us capture Kiriath-sepher and married my daughter. We lived in the land, and they lived after me, and...we served the Lord.”

The two friends turn once again and look toward the head of the table. Jesus looks up, and we can see the three pairs of eyes meet and a glow pass between them that is just indescribable. We know that it’s the glow of a friendship that was forged in the fiery furnaces of old earth and its troubles. These two men, Caleb and Joshua, learned to follow Jesus when they didn’t even know His name. They knew Him only as God—which is the only name that matters, really. They lived long, difficult, and faithful lives...and now they are here, in the New Jerusalem, where they get to start again. They are only at the very beginning of a friendship that will last through the ages. They

didn't even know the story of Jesus and His birth, life, and death on earth when they got here, and they have a lot to learn about the ages of Christianity, and all the obstacles it has overcome, and even about the Second Coming.

But they made their choice. ***We will serve the Lord.***

Whom will you serve?

Community Service

**It is our responsibility to
instill in young people the
value of giving back to
their community.**

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Thought/Discussion Questions

Share with your friends what your imagination has been doing with this heavenly scene. Whose stories would you like to hear in heaven?

Can you imagine a miles-long, silver table, with fruit so beautiful that Ellen Harmon said it looked like it was made of precious metals and jewels?

What did Joshua and Caleb do to get there? Do you think they will be in heaven because of their good actions? If so, look up these two texts and think again: Romans 4:3; Ephesians 2:8-10.

What can you do to go to heaven? Have you made that choice?

Having made their choice, and being saved by the grace of God and the blood of a Savior who hadn't even come to their world yet, then what actions did Caleb and Joshua do that shared the love of God and helped them and those around them remain faithful?

What actions do you do every day to help show God's love for everyone around you and keep yourself faithful?

What are you learning about godly leadership from these two men?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

By yourself or with friends, you could create a painting or collage of the table in heaven. You could draw or paint all the beautiful foods you can think of, and lots and lots of people around the table, or you could cut pictures from magazines. Maybe you could even glue aluminum foil on the table to represent silver.

Or make a poster, as beautiful as you can, that challenges: “Choose this day whom you will serve,” and post it where lots of people can see it and perhaps it will plant some seeds in some hearts.

To do:

Act out part of the story of Joshua and Caleb. You can choose any part of their stories, but a good one would be the “Big Choice”. Choose two people to be Joshua and Caleb and have them stand in front of the rest of the group. Use Joshua 24 as a script and read the parts aloud. Then make your choice. If you want to serve God, join “Joshua” and “Caleb” up front. End with a prayer asking God for strength and faithfulness to keep the choice you have made.

Or role play telling *your* story of God’s grace around the table in heaven. You could have one or two share a story each day this week.

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY TWO

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

Look over there, on the other side of the table. See that lady gazing joyfully at the man beside her? She keeps reaching out to touch his hand, or passing him some particularly delicious food. It's as if she can't believe he's here...well, I guess that makes sense, doesn't it? We've seen a lot of people here who can hardly believe their eyes when they see someone they had lost to death. They are so happy!

I am, too, aren't you? We have back those of our families and friends that went to sleep in Jesus. Some of them suffered greatly on earth. Some of them died suddenly, even as young people or children. Still, it seems that the lady I'm looking at is feeling something even deeper than that. Let's listen to her story.

Hannah and Samuel

Bible References: 1 Samuel 1, 2, and 3

"Samuel, Samuel, my son, oh, how I've missed you!" the lady says with happy tears in her eyes. "I had to give you up *so young!*" Then she hesitates, and smiles. "I shouldn't say 'had to.' It was my choice, and I made it joyfully and never regretted it—not really, in my heart. But it was hard!"

On the lady's other side, another woman we don't know leans forward and asks gently, "Who are you? Which time are you from? Do you mind sharing your story?"

"Not at all! We are from the time of the judges in Israel. I understand there were kings later, but I don't know about that."

The other woman smiles. “Yes. And thousands of years later, we had something called Prime Ministers. I am from Israel, too. But I’d love to hear what it was really like in the early days of our country.”

“Well, I can share our small part of it, anyway,” says the first lady. “My name is Hannah, and this is my son, Samuel. He was a miracle gift from God! You see, I wasn’t able to have children. In fact, my husband Elkanah, even though he did love me, took another wife. I don’t blame him, you understand. It was the custom in our time and in our place, but...”

“But it led to much sorrow,” says the other woman.

“Yes,” agrees Hannah. “I tried, I really did. But Peninnah and I just couldn’t get along, and on top of that, she had several children, and I had none. It was a source of great sorrow to me, and shame too. Peninnah made fun of me, and took every chance she could to try to turn Elkanah against me.” She smiles. “That didn’t work. My husband loved me with or without children, which a lot of men in our day wouldn’t have done. He did his best to keep me from grieving, even asking if he wasn’t as much to me as ten sons.” She laughs. “Of course I would tell him yes, but you know, a husband, beloved as he may be, is just not the same as sons!”

“Anyway, one year when we went up to worship and sacrifice at Shiloh, I didn’t even want to go. But Elkanah begged me, so I went. To show me how much he loved me, he even gave me a double portion of the meat that was our share after we sacrificed and had it blessed. But I was so unhappy I didn’t even want to eat.

I went to the doorway of the house of God, and there I fell down on my knees, weeping and praying. I have to admit, I had lost all sense of my surroundings, or

whether anyone would see and hear me. It didn't even occur to me to realize what people might think if they saw me. All I wanted was to cry out to God."

Like Caleb and Joshua, Hannah looks toward the head of the table, to Jesus. "He's not like I imagined. I thought God was distant, and angry—or at least, ready to get angry at the least provocation. I thought He was displeased with me for something I had done, or not done...I thought maybe I had to somehow pay Him, or bargain with Him, to grant my prayer. I promised that if He would just let me bear a son, I would give him to God for his whole life."

Hannah turns to smile at the tall son beside her. "I said it before, and I'll say it again—I don't regret it. I know that God used you in astonishing ways, Samuel. But over time, I did learn that you weren't anything like a *payment* to God. I learned that God isn't like that."

"Anyway, what happened next is a little funny now, remembering. The high priest, Eli, who was getting so old that his two sons did most of the work, was sitting nearby. I hadn't even noticed him, and he startled me when he came over and began scolding me. I looked up through my tears, and what he was saying finally became clear to me. He thought I was drunk! He rebuked me for appearing at God's house in such a state."

"Well, I should think so!" says the other woman.

"Absolutely!" Hannah agrees. "If I had been drunk, it would certainly have been his duty to set me straight. But he should have asked questions first. Anyway, I told him I wasn't drunk, but just begging God to give me a son. And then he changed his tune, telling me to go in peace. And he said, 'May God grant your request.' It wasn't a

promise, but somehow I felt assured, as if God had said ‘yes’ to me. I went home, and for the first time in years, I was content.”

She turns to her son again, a radiant smile on her face. “And I got pregnant right away! By the time we went to Shiloh again, I had a little baby boy! Elkanah let me name him, and I called him Samuel, the “asked-for boy.” Oh, how happy I was! I loved that little baby! For the next few years, I stayed home from Shiloh, because the next time I went, I wanted to take my little boy to live and work at the temple, as I had promised. In the meantime, I taught him everything I could about God and His love.”

Samuel speaks up for the first time. “I still remember that day. I couldn’t decide if I was more scared or more excited. I knew I was going to an apprenticeship of sorts. Other boys I knew were becoming apprentices, too, but I was much younger than they were. That made me more frightened—I hated leaving you, Mother!—but it also made me excited and proud. I was determined to do my best and make you and Father proud.”

“We were proud of you already. You were so cute, in the little linen tunic I’d spun and woven for you out of the finest flax I could get my hands on.” She smiles in remembrance, and the smile widens as she adds, “High priest Eli could hardly believe his eyes! I asked him if he remembered the woman he’d thought was drunk, and after a minute of searching my face, his eyes lit up. ‘Oh, yes!’ he said. ‘I remember you! You were praying for a son!’ ‘Yes,’ I told him, ‘and here he is!’ And I pushed Samuel forward.”

Samuel laughs. “You had to push because I was trying to hide behind your skirt! Now that the moment had come, the fear overcame the excitement. But only for a

minute. I remember Eli looking down at me, and his whole face lighting up. ‘So,’ he said to me, ‘you are a miracle child, are you?’ Of course, my mother had always said that, but you know, mothers have to be like that. If God’s high priest said it, then it *had* to be true! I stepped forward and bowed and determined in my heart to be the best little servant I could be.”

Hannah laughs, too. “I’ll never forget! Suddenly, you let go of my hand, and you gave that little bow, and said, ‘Here I am, sir!’ It was so cute!”

Samuel’s face changes. “I thought I would simply be a temple boy—lighting lamps and carrying wood, and running errands. I really didn’t know, at that age, that I wasn’t just saying ‘here I am’ to the priest or the temple. I was saying it to God. And I *certainly* had no idea God planned that I would be a leader of my people!” He grins. “I think I would have stayed behind your skirts!”

“No, you wouldn’t. You had your choice to say ‘no’ to God, not much later. Tell us that story. I can never hear it enough,” Hannah begs.

“I will, if you promise to sing that song you burst out with that day.” Says Samuel.

Hannah looks around. “Well, if people want me to...”

“We do!” says the other woman. You and I, and everybody else listening, agree.

“We do, we do!”

Hannah blushes. “All right. But first, Samuel’s story.”

Samuel nods and begins. “Well, I was sleeping one night, and I heard a voice calling. I wasn’t surprised; I’d been at the temple for a while now, and I had learned to fetch and carry for Eli. He was getting older and older, and he was pretty blind. He needed lots of help, and I was happy to give it. He was always kind to me.”

Samuel's face shows some sorrow. "I think he must have been much more fatherly to me than he was to his sons when they were young. I got the impression that he'd pretty much let them have their own way in everything—do whatever they wanted. Now that they were grown, they were terrible people, which is bad enough in anyone, but in a priest, dedicated to God!" Samuel shakes his head. "The worst of the memories are fading, but I do remember even I, as just a little lad, was ashamed of their actions. Anyway, I thought Eli was calling me, and I got up and ran to see what he wanted. This happened a couple more times, until he figured out something more was going on than just me having a dream. He said if I heard the voice again, I should say, 'Speak, Lord, I'm listening.'"

Samuel laughs a little. "Now *that* was scary! *God*, calling *me*?! I didn't even lie back down. I sat there on my mat, shivering and waiting. I couldn't decide if I hoped the voice would or wouldn't come again. But it did. I managed to get out, 'Speak, I'm listening!'" Samuel shakes his head, all smiles gone. "Of all the messages God gave me over the rest of my life, that first one might have been the hardest. Here I was, just a little boy, the lowliest of the temple servants, and I had to go tell Eli that his sons were such a disgrace to God that his family would end, and no longer be His priests. I'll never forget Eli's face. He knew it was just. He seemed like he aged another ten years right there, but all he said was, 'It is God; let it be as He wishes.' And that was just the beginning, for me."

Samuel falls silent, and after a moment, Hannah says, "But we can't look back on the bad things now. It's all over. Sin and sinners are no more, and here we only rejoice forever. I, for one, am rejoicing that I can see my boy every day! Back then it was only

once a year. I did have more children, and I loved them dearly and worked hard for them, but every day I spent a little time on my present for you. I would prepare the inner fibers of flax plants and get the fibers arranged on my distaff just so. Then I would spin them into the finest thread I could, on my best spindle. That took months. Next I would double ply them, and then set up my frame loom in the shade of the fig tree outside and begin weaving. That only took a few weeks. When I had the cloth, I would wash it and full it and soften it until I was satisfied, then sew the seams and it would be a fine tunic for my prayed-for temple boy.”

Samuel gives his mother a glowing smile. “How I would look forward to that day every year! You would bring me my new tunic, plus some offerings for the priests, but what I most enjoyed was hugs from you and Father. I would admire the latest baby, and listen to stories from the children as they grew older.”

“And I would listen to stories of *you* as you grew older,” adds Hannah. “In the early years, even though I was secure in the knowledge that I’d fulfilled my promise to God, the sorrow of not having you with me was often greater than the joy of knowing you were God’s child more than mine—as are all children everywhere. But later, when you were confirmed as a prophet of God and everyone knew it—when your name was spoken from one end of the country to the other... Well, at first, it was just pride—‘my son, the prophet!’ But as time passed, I began to see that you were serving God in ways I never could have imagined. I knew that God’s giving you to me, and my giving you back to Him was meant to be, that you were a huge gift, not just to me, but to our whole nation. Then, instead of pride, I felt awe and humility. I remembered the song that came

to me from the Spirit of God when I first brought you to the temple, and it took on new meaning to me.” Hannah looks around the table. “That’s why I wanted to sing it last.”

And she begins to sing, her face glowing with joy. Around us, conversations stop, and people turn to listen. Jesus smiles from His place at the head, and the angels draw near.

I’m bursting with GOD-news!

I’m walking on air.

I’m laughing at my rivals.

I’m dancing my salvation.

Nothing and no one is holy like GOD,

no rock mountain like our God.

Don’t dare talk pretentiously—

not a word of boasting, ever!

For GOD knows what’s going on.

He takes the measure of everything that happens.

The weapons of the strong are smashed to pieces,

while the weak are infused with fresh strength.

The well-fed are out begging in the streets for crusts,

while the hungry are getting second helpings.

The barren woman has a houseful of children,

while the mother of many is bereft.

GOD brings death and GOD brings life,
brings down to the grave and raises up.
GOD brings poverty and GOD brings wealth;
he lowers, he also lifts up.
He puts poor people on their feet again;
he rekindles burned-out lives with fresh hope,
Restoring dignity and respect to their lives—
a place in the sun!

For the very structures of earth are GOD's;
he has laid out his operations on a firm foundation.
He protectively cares for his faithful friends, step by step,
but leaves the wicked to stumble in the dark.
No one makes it in this life by sheer muscle!
GOD's enemies will be blasted out of the sky,
crashed in a heap and burned.
GOD will set things right all over the earth,
he'll give strength to his king,
he'll set his anointed on top of the world!

1 Samuel 2:1-10, *The Message*

When she stops singing, Hannah stands and turns to face the head of the table.
Looking at Jesus, she says, "God *has* set things right all over the earth, and made it

new. We didn't even have a king when I first sang those words, and I always wondered what they meant. Now I see that God's king, and God's anointed—those are You, my Lord, my God, and my Salvation. You are the only True Leader; all the rest of us, even those we humans consider famous, like my beloved son, Samuel, are only Your humble servants.

And a wave of praise and joy and hosanna sweeps the huge room. You and I jump to our feet, clapping, singing, shouting praises, weeping for joy. What a day that will be!

Thought/Discussion Questions

With whom do you identify most in this story—Hannah, or Samuel?

Did Hannah have leadership qualities? If so, what were they?

Who do you think had a harder time of it, the mother or the son? Or were they the same?

What do you think it would be like to be given to the church to work for God from the time you are just a few years old?

If our parents have dedicated us to God as babies, or even if they didn't, but we have given ourselves to Him when we grew old enough to understand, *are* we, in fact, given over to His work? In what ways?

How is your society different from or similar to Samuel's?

In what way was Samuel a godly leader?

What would you do if you knew for sure that God wanted you to give a message to your elders? How could you know for sure?

What can you learn about godly leadership from this story?

If you really could talk to Hannah and Samuel, what do you think they would say if you told them two whole books of the Bible are written about, and named after, Samuel?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

If there is a spinner or weaver in your area, see if she or he will help you to spin some yarn or weave something small. Or you could make a small tunic out of a piece of cloth that is already made. It would be nice to make it out of cloth that is characteristic of your local community, if that's possible

Try setting Hannah's song to music. You can change the words around a little to make them fit, as long as they still have the same meaning.

Write a song or poem of praise of your own.

To do:

Give everyone a piece of paper and let each one write down something they are praying earnestly for. Collect the papers in a box or basket and pray over them. Let each person decide whether to keep their prayer requests secret or share them.

Offer to your local church leaders to do some volunteer work of their choice, to help the church.

Have one or two more share the story they would like to tell when they reach heaven.

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY THREE

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

I see a lively-looking woman further down the table on our own side. She and the man beside her are discussing something with excitement. The others around them are leaning toward them; let's listen in, too.

Barak and Deborah

Bible References: Judges 4 and 5; also see BC2 45; 330-336 (esp. 330, 331: #8, 9, 15)

"Barak and Deborah, you lived during the time of the judges, didn't you?" I hear someone asking. "What was it like then?"

The man speaks. "It was a terrible time. Everyone just did whatever they wanted or thought they could get away with. We had different judges here and there. Some were in charge over the whole country; others were in charge only in a certain area. Sometimes there was more than one judge in different areas at the same time. If a godly judge arose, then many people would behave in a wiser manner, following God and the laws and regulations He gave us through Moses. For a while, we would worship at our own tabernacle, not to mention in our own homes, and we would have peace. Then the people would fall away from God and start worshiping one idol or another, and the countries of those idols would gain power over us and oppress us. I don't like to think about it."

Next to him, Deborah smiles. “The truth is, we can hardly remember it now. Heaven is worth all the troubles that seemed so bad at the time!”

For a few minutes, the table is awash in praise and joy as everyone agrees and shouts praises to God.

When it is quieter, another person says, “Tell us the story of the battle against Sisera.”

Deborah shakes her head. “I don’t want to talk about battles here. There was so much death and bloodshed.”

Barak nods. “I agree. There are only a few things I like to remember. One is Deborah’s faithfulness and leadership.”

Deborah blushes and shakes her head. “It wasn’t me, it was God!”

“Well, then tell us how you came to be both a prophet and a judge.”

She smiles. “You would have to ask God. It was His call in my heart, certainly nothing I did or deserved. I do remember, from my earliest childhood, longing to serve God with all my heart. Sometimes, as I grew older, ideas would come to me—ideas of ways to make peace. It began with small things—arguments among my brothers and sisters. My parents named me ‘Bee,’ (that’s what Deborah means), and they said I was as busy as a bee, trying to keep the peace. I would find something all sides could agree on. Later, adults began coming to me for advice, too.”

“I remember how she used to sit under her favorite palm tree,” Barak adds. “She was the only judge Israel had that was also a prophet.”

“Maybe it’s because whenever anyone asked me what to do, I didn’t just search in my own heart and experience,” Deborah explains. “I would pray in my heart, silently

asking God to show me His will. Answers came, and when I shared them, they always settled the matter—if the people listened, that is! Those who truly wanted a solution could find one; those who only wanted to fight and get their own way went away as angry as they came.”

“However it was,” Barak says, “soon Deborah became known both as a judge and a prophet. As a judge, we could trust her to impartially listen and help disagreeing people to come together around a solution. As a prophet, she spoke for God to us. Over time, more and more people came and lined up to wait for their chance to stand before her judgment seat.” He shakes his head ruefully. “I wasn’t that pleased when she sent for me and informed me that God was calling me to go up and free our people from King Jabin and his general, Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots and had been treating all Israel like the dirt under his chariot wheels for twenty years!”

“But you listened and obeyed,” Deborah puts in.

Barak smiles at her. “Yes, but only because you agreed to go with me. I knew there was no way I could keep the Israelites’ morale up on what seemed like an impossible quest. Not only that, I knew this whole idea came from God, and I wanted everyone to know that. I didn’t want anybody to think it was *my* idea to go up against those iron chariots! I wanted your face, the face of Deborah the Prophet-Judge to be foremost, because I knew the people trusted you, and because of you, they trusted God. And you didn’t even hesitate. Many women would have been frightened—well, many *men* would have been frightened.” Barak stops and laughs. “Let me be clear—we were all frightened! But as long as we knew God was leading us, we could do it.”

Deborah's answering laugh fades. "Not everyone saw it that way. Several of our tribes stayed where they were, discussing it to death—'shall we go? Shall we stay? How many should we send? Is it the right thing to do? *We* have peace here, why should we go help them just because they're being oppressed down there?' They were still discussing it when they got the news that God had won the battle and demolished the enemy."

Barak nods forcefully. "And it was *God* who won the battle! He sent a big rainstorm, and the clay earth around the place where Sisera and his army camped turned into a mud slick. Those heavy iron chariots couldn't get anywhere, and all we had to do was chase them down. And it was another woman, Jael, who made the final strike. But—" Deborah and Barak finish in unison, "—let's not talk about that here!"

Deborah raises her hands. "Let us instead praise the God of our fathers and mothers for the peace we had for forty years—the rest of my life on earth. And let us praise Him even more for the total, unending peace and joy we have now—forever and ever!"

And once again, the rafters ring as we, the redeemed, and all the angels, sing together of the glory of God while Jesus smiles on us with tears in His eyes for the joy of finally having all His children home with Him.

Some Added Notes

Deborah, too, wrote a song, or she and Barak wrote it together. You can read it all in Judges 5. Some of it, especially at the end, is very sad. Sisera and his armies could have followed God. Not only has God always been present everywhere there are

people, but at this time, the Israelites had been in Canaan for many years, and there was no excuse for them not to know that there is **one** Creator. They need not have died. Their wives and mothers need not have waited in vain for them to come home. As women themselves, Deborah and Jael must have been very sorrowful over the thought of all those lives needlessly lost.

When we get to heaven, we will all praise God for the victories, but we will let the bloodshed and sorrow be buried in the past, never to rise again.

Thought/Discussion Questions

During some eras, and still in some places today, men refuse to follow the leadership of women. You will notice Barak was not like that. What is it like in your region? Do all people recognize that God is the only leader, and gives the gifts of leadership under Him to whomever He chooses? Or do they try to limit God's call? What do you, personally, think about it?

Read all of Judges 4 and 5. Do you find anywhere in this story any indication that the men who came to Deborah thought less of her judging because she was a woman? Discuss this.

As Christians, we may or may not be under physical oppression from earthly foes, but we are always under oppression from Satan and his forces. What are some things that are oppressing you lately? How can you find help against this inner foe?

Are there ways that we can be "prophets" (speaking God's words to each other) or "judges" (listening and advising impartially) for each other?

How do you think these things might show themselves in young people, hinting at a possible call from God?

What kinds of jobs in today's world, especially where you live, might a person with these gifts work and serve God? Does it have to be a specifically religious job, like in a church?

What can you learn about leadership from the story of Deborah and Barak?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

Try setting Deborah and Barak's song (Judges 5), or part of it, to music. Or try writing a song of praise, either by yourself, with another friend, or as a whole group, with a scribe to keep track of ideas.

Draw a picture or make a clay sculpture illustrating one scene in this story.

To do:

We still have tribes. People are very tribal by nature. Perhaps you live in an area where there are actual tribes by name; even if not, you may have differing ethnic groups. Or perhaps there is gang activity where you live, or conflict between people who speak one language and people who speak another. Even in our churches we can have conflict between older people and younger people, or between women and men, or people who want to do things the way they are used to doing them and people who want to try new things. If every young person your age would do the very best they can to get along with their families, their friends, *and* the families and friends of others, it would change the world. Can you find one person who is different from you, with whom to create a friendship? If everyone in your class did that, what do you think would happen?

Set up a court and try to find just solutions to some simple disagreements people in your group bring up. Try it with and without praying first, and see what you think. Does it matter? How and why?

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY FOUR

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

A group of men have been listening to Deborah and Barak with great interest. Look at that one in the middle. I think he must have been a man in authority—don't you think so? It's something about the way he carries himself, with strength and a kind of calmness. Now one of the men with him leans forward to say something to Deborah. Maybe there will be another story. I wonder if it will be from a different time in history. I think that's one of the most fascinating things—speaking to people from the time of the patriarchs until our own day. Best of all is seeing their faces when they learn that their stories were collected, written down, and put into a book we call the Bible!

Jehoshaphat, Micaiah, and Jehu

Bible References: 2 Chron. 17-20

The man says to Deborah and Barak, "I was listening when you spoke of the time of the judges, when everyone did whatever they wanted. I am from the time of the kings, and believe me, it wasn't much better. Just as in your time, so much depended on the character of the leader. The difference was, a king had a much wider influence over more of the people than a judge in his or her district.

“My name is Micaiah, and I was called to be a prophet of the Lord after our people had split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, and the smaller kingdom of Judah in the south. So there would be two kings, and sometimes they even made war on each other. During my time, there was a good, long-reigning king, named Asa, in the southern kingdom and half a dozen terrible ones in the north.”

The man who looks like a great leader joins in the conversation with a smile. “Asa was my father. I’ve always been grateful for his teaching and example, but he made a big mistake at the end of his reign, when he turned to a pagan kingdom for help in danger, instead of to God.” He shakes his head sadly. “And then I did the same thing!”

Micaiah puts a hand on his arm. “Jehoshaphat, you were a good king. You fortified the cities of Judah, you followed the ways of God, and you even sent officials, priests, and Levites to teach God’s law in all the towns. It’s true that you allied with Ahab, but even then, remember, when Ahab’s prophets gave him false encouragement, you insisted on sending for me and demanding the truth.”

The man on Jehoshaphat’s other side speaks up. “I am Jehu, another prophet,” he introduces himself to the rest of us. “I remember all that happened, and I did rebuke you afterwards, remember, sir?”

Jehoshaphat nods.

“Do you remember what else I said?”

“You told me there was good in me because I had destroyed the high places.”

“That was a turning point for you,” Micaiah declares. “I know God forgave you (otherwise you wouldn’t be here!) and I remember what you did during the rest of your

years as king. You drew the people back to God, continued to keep the pagan shrines out of Judah, and continued to send teachers of God's word to the people."

Jehu adds, "You also set up judges in the towns. I was really moved by what you told them: 'Don't judge for humans, judge for God. Be faithful, be careful, never take bribes or be partial to some people. Remind people to be faithful to God, and follow the guidance of the priests and Levites. Act resolutely, and the Lord be with the upright'" (2 Chron. 19:6, 7, 9-11).

Micaiah continues, "It was that, and the remembrance of the mistakes your father had made and that you had made, which set you up for the greatest action of your life. Remember when Moab, Ammon, and some of the Meunites sent out a great army against us?"

Jehoshaphat laughs. "How could I forget! I was terrified. I'm ashamed of that now—why should we be afraid if God is with us? This time I did what I should have done the first time: I turned to God and proclaimed a fast through the whole land."

"I remember," says Jehu, his eyes lighting. "All my neighbors and I joined the crowds heading toward the temple in Jerusalem. Everyone who could get there was there: men, women, children, even babies. All but a few of the babies were quiet as could be, listening to you pray. I'll never forget. I believe I could recite every word, even now."

He begins, and Micaiah and Jehoshaphat join him. Our memories of God's word come to us, and we join in, too. All eyes, many with tears, turn toward Jesus at the head of the table, and as we speak, we think of our fading memories of all the bad things that threatened us in our own times, and how God brought us through them.

“O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens?

And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You. Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying ‘Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.’ Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), see how they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance. O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You” (2 Chron. 20:6-12).

Jesus’ face is glowing back at us, and once again the table falls into praise, glorifying God. Heaven is worth everything we ever faced!

When quiet is restored, Jehoshaphat says, “No matter what I forget here (and I’m delighted to forget all the bad!) I can never, never forget what happened next! A man called out from the crowd in the courtyard—”

Another voice interrupts, and a man who has not spoken yet says, “That was me. My name is Jahaziel, and I am one of the sons of Asaph, privileged to sing in the temple. I was suddenly completely overcome with the power and presence of God—I’d

never experienced such a thing before! I ran forward and cried out, ‘Don’t be afraid! The battle is not yours, but God’s.’ I told the king exactly where to go, and what to do.”

Jahaziel blushes. “I mean, it was God, but He spoke through me. I said, ‘You won’t even have to fight—just stand and—’”

Once again, all voices join him and we shout, “Stand and see the salvation of the Lord!”

Jahaziel blushes again. “I repeated, because the power was so strong upon me, ‘Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the Lord is with you.’”

Jehoshaphat takes up the story. “It was you, your faith, excitement, and the clear power God had over you, Jahaziel, that inspired me to do what I did the next day. I put all the musicians and singers, dressed in their most holy finery, at the front, with the army and the rest of the people behind. You led us in singing praises and thanksgiving to God as we marched out to see what God would do.” Jehoshaphat has a big smile. “I wasn’t afraid anymore—not at all! We marched out, singing our hearts out, and the armies who had come against us turned on each other instead! We stood there with our mouths open as they finished the whole thing with no help from us.” He turns to the head of the table again, and bows his head to Jesus, who smiles back.

As his gaze comes back to us, he says quietly, “I never really realized until now...God still lost a lot of His children that day.”

All of us nod solemnly, and Jehu adds, “He wanted so much for *all* to come to Him and be saved.”

But I know some of them did. I know that we will meet, in heaven, many people who were pagans here but turned to the Creator even if they didn't know God's name. Perhaps, who knows, Jehoshaphat and the others will meet people from Canaan who followed their example, after all.

Thought/Discussion Questions

This is a wonderful story! What can you learn about leadership, about mistakes, even about forgiveness from this story?

Why do you think Jehoshaphat was a good king?

Can you imagine some things that would have tempted him to turn to earthly resources for help instead of to God? Have you ever been tempted to do that? Were you restored, as Jehoshaphat was?

Discuss the varying roles of prophets and other helpers in this story.

How did Jehoshaphat's faith develop and grow?

What was his response when he heard of the armies coming against him?

How did the people respond?

When did they thank God—before or after His rescue?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

Create a flow chart or poster that shows the steps Jehoshaphat and the people took, in the order in which they took them, once they learned of the threat. Read 2 Chron. 2 carefully, and be careful not to leave any steps out. Put in what you think his emotions were at every step, and how they may have changed. Now use this method when you have threats, physical or emotional, in your life.

Make a shield of cardboard, perhaps covered with foil or metallic paint, and write on it, “The battle is not mine, but God’s,” or “Stand still and see,” or whatever phrase from this story inspires you the most.

To do:

Think of a threat to your group or community. Perhaps it is contention and argument, or laziness, or even something scary, like drugs or poverty. Create some strategies to fight against this threat, and be sure your singers and praisers are put at the head of your “army of youth.”

Share stories of times in your lives when God has delivered you and you have praised Him.

Let's face It!

The idea of doing something without monetary compensation may be foreign to many youth, especially if they are not from a family or part of a church or group that makes giving back to the community a part of their lifestyle.

FOR GLOBAL YOUTH DAY IDEAS VISIT

YOUTH.ADVENTIST.ORG

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY FIVE

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

I see another woman who wants to tell a story. See how she clings to that man? I'll bet one of them died, and they're back together now. They have two young men with them who seem to be their sons, and the woman's eyes keep going to two older men who—we are beginning to recognize the signs—have the look of prophets about them. As the people around us settle after Jehoshaphat's story, she speaks up.

Elijah, Elisha, and the Former Widow

Bible References: 1 Kings 19:15ff; 2 Kings 2; 2 Kings 4

"Your story and this joyful praise reminds me of a time when God blessed my life powerfully, too!" she tells us all. "*Our* lives," she amends, putting her arms around the shoulders of the two young men. "These are my sons, and I almost lost them. God saved them through a miracle, and He did it by the hand of a prophet, just as He did for you, King Jehoshaphat."

"Oh, don't call me 'king' anymore, ma'am," says Jehoshaphat. "There is only one King here!"

Everyone looks to Jesus (we never get tired of doing that) and then the woman continues, "The prophet's name was Elisha." She indicates one of the two older men—though I really don't know how I know they're older. Here in heaven, there is no age and

certainly no infirmity or weakness, but there is something about people's attitudes and bearing that seems to indicate greater age and perhaps greater wisdom.

The man turns his head to look at her, and smiles. "I remember. But of course, the miracle in my life began long before that." He laughs. "There I was, son of a rich farmer, plowing, minding my own business..."

The other older man beside him begins to chuckle to himself, listening.

"It was new ground," Elisha continues, "and pretty hard and rocky. I had harnessed *twelve* pairs of oxen to my plow, and I was guiding the last pair. I was watching my feet, trying to keep a straight furrow, watching out for bigger rocks...suddenly I jumped, because something fell onto my shoulders. I think I might have let out a little yell."

The other man is still laughing. "I think you might have."

Elisha grins. "Well, I didn't expect you! I turned, and you were walking away as if you had nothing to do with anything. You had no mantle, and I discovered that was what I had hanging off one shoulder." He shakes his head in wonder. "I just stood there in shock. I recognized you, of course, and I couldn't believe *you*, the man of God, the prophet of Israel, had just thrown *your* mantle across *my* shoulders! That meant you wanted me for your apprentice and assistant! Me! To tell you the truth, I still don't quite believe it. Why did you choose me?"

Elijah's smile fades as his eyes seem to look far back in time. "The simple answer is, God told me to. To be honest, I had failed Him."

"Failed Him! You?"

“Yes. It was right after that big showdown with Ahab, Jezebel, and the 450 prophets of—well, you know. I don’t want to say that name here.”

We all look at each other. All false gods, of course, came from one being, the greatest of the fallen angels. He and all his evil cohorts are now confined to the ruined earth while we redeemed humans enjoy our first thousand years in heaven. We agree with Elijah’s decision. Nobody wants to talk about *him* here!

“So, God won, of course,” Elijah continues, and everybody laughs. Of course! “You’d think I would be at my best after a heavenly victory like that, but...I can only say I was tired. I’d prayed until rain began, then outran Ahab all the way to Jezreel, *then* I ran from there to Beersheba, and even *that* wasn’t enough—I went another day’s journey into the wilderness and finally collapsed. I’m ashamed to admit it, but I actually asked God to let me die! I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I knew, an angel was shaking me awake and giving me food.” Elijah’s eyes twinkle as he looks around at his listeners. “It just goes to show you what a brain-dead state I was in. I just ate, as I was told to, then fell asleep again, then the angel fed me a second time, and then I went another 40 days all the way to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Everyone is silent for a moment, thinking of all the amazing events that happened on that famous mountain.

Elijah shakes his head, lost in thought. After a moment he rouses himself. “I suppose you could say my earlier depression was a result of sheer weariness and stress. The angel knew I had to eat and drink and rest. But by this time, I should have snapped out of it. This is where I really failed my Lord. I told God *I* was the only one still faithful to him.” He winces. “In earthquake, wind, and fire, and when He had my

attention, in His own still, small voice, God reminded me that He still had 7,000 people who had never once bowed to false gods, and He would have more if His prophets remained faithful at their posts! That was when He told me I was to choose my replacement. I was no longer strong enough—not physically, and not spiritually—to go on by myself.” He is silent again for a moment, then smiles at Elisha. “He told me to go find you. So I did, and dropped my mantle on you, and then waited to see what you would do.”

“I wanted to go say good-bye to my family,” Elisha remembers.

“Of course you did. And...?”

Elisha grins. “And I wasn’t at all sure I wanted to be a prophet’s apprentice. I mean, even I knew Jezebel was out of her mind with wrath, sending people in all directions to find you and kill you!”

“So I gave you a moment...”

“And I came with you. There was no real choice. If God calls, you say yes!”

We all nod in agreement, remembering all the times God has called us. If you love Him, you don’t really want to do anything else, even if you’re scared and reluctant at first.

“So I walked with you and worked with you, and listened to God, and knew this was what I’d been put on the earth to do,” declares Elisha. “But not by myself! When the day came that I knew you were going to be leaving, I didn’t let you out of my sight!”

Elijah throws back his head and laughs. “You stuck to me like a thorny bramble you can’t get out of your hair! I kept saying, ‘Hey, Elisha, you should go do such-and-such,’ or ‘I’m going to go to Jericho now’...”

“And I wasn’t about to let you *breathe* without me beside you!” Elisha says merrily.

“And so you didn’t!” Elijah grows serious again. “The moment came, and it was nothing like I expected. I thought it was time for me to die. I asked you what you wanted me to leave you, and you said—”

“—a double portion of your spirit!” the two men say together.

“—and I said, ‘if you see me go, that will happen...’” Elijah shakes his head again. “I didn’t even know what I was talking about! And then when that...even now I don’t know what to call it!...chariot, sort of...with flaming...horses, kind of...when that showed up—”

“I thought I’d have a heart attack!” exclaims Elisha.

“Me, too! And then I started flying up into the air—”

“—and I couldn’t see you anymore, and your mantle floated down to me—”

“I could still see you,” Elijah says in a voice that still holds awe after all these centuries. “I saw you tear your clothes in grief, and I wanted to say, ‘I’m still here, I’m not dead!’”

“Well, I knew that, but I was still going to miss you!”

“Then I saw you divide the Jordan with my folded mantle, just as I had, and...” He looks around and spreads his hands. “I was brought *here*! If ever a human didn’t deserve such an honor—”

Dozens of voices, ours included, interrupt him. “Nobody deserves it! It’s the grace of God, period!”

And that calls for another round of praise and thanksgiving.

Finally, Elijah continues, “I continued to watch you, Elisha, as you grew in strength and faith, and took on the job God had called us to.” He turns to smile at the woman. “I saw the miracle God did through you for this woman. I’m sorry, ma’am, we never let you tell your story!”

She smiles. “That’s all right. I’ve been listening to your stories with great pleasure. It makes it clear how closely the Most High God is interested in our little human lives, doesn’t it? Our miracle was a small one, really, but it meant the world to us! My husband had died—” she squeezes the hand of the man with her, and he squeezes back, “—and my sons and I were left alone, with almost nothing. We had debts, and—no, my dear, don’t worry about it, it wasn’t your fault! We’re all together now, and that’s what matters. Anyway, the debtor was a selfish person, and was going to sell my boys as slaves to pay the debt! I begged you for help, Elisha.”

“I remember. I asked you, what *do* you have?”

“And I said, ‘Just a little oil, sir.’”

“So I told you to borrow jars and use your oil to fill them. Then you could sell the oil, pay your debt, and have enough to live on.”

One of the young men speaks up. “We kept filling jars and filling jars, and the oil never ran out till they were all filled!”

The woman grins. “I always wished we’d borrowed more jars! And I always felt we didn’t thank you enough, Elisha.”

“Not me, God!” says Elisha.

“That’s right, only God!” agrees Elijah. “I watched all that, and all the following kings, and the terrible foreign captivities...” His face begins to grow sad, but in heaven,

that can't last. "And then the birth of Jesus on earth! Now, that was shocking! I watched Him grow, and couldn't help feeling terrified, even in heaven, as the evil one tried so hard to destroy him...and then I—I, of all people!!—got to go down to the Mount of Olives with Moses to encourage Jesus Himself at the end of His life!"

Elijah turns toward the Master at the head of the table, as so many other storytellers have, but there is a different quality to the look they exchange. All the rest of us have experienced Jesus helping *us*. Only a small number of people here in heaven were privileged to help *Jesus* when He was a human being on earth. We sit in respectful silence, trying to imagine it.

All the Old Testament people are eager to hear more, and you and I can help to complete their knowledge of the miraculous ways God worked after they were in their graves waiting for this day.

Just imagine!

Thought/Discussion Questions

How do you think Elijah felt when he realized he had allowed his depression and weariness to make him doubt God and others?

How do you think Elisha felt when the old prophet asked him to be his apprentice?

Has anyone ever invited you to help in some way that makes you think that might be what you want to do when you grow up? What was it?

Have you ever tried to imagine what it might have been like to be one of those few people who didn't die at all, or were raised after their deaths, and have been in

heaven all this time? We're going to meet another one, too, this week. What things might be different about their memories and the stories they'll tell in heaven?

What are some of the things you'll tell people who died long ago about what God has done in the world since they were here?

What can you learn about leadership from this story?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

Use your imagination and try to draw, paint, or sculpt what the fiery chariot and horses might have looked like. We won't know until we get there, so you can imagine it anyway you like.

Create a diorama of one scene from the stories in this lesson, or another scene from Elijah or Elisha's life.

To do:

Act out one of the scenes in this story. Use the Bible to give you more details. For example, what kinds of attitudes might the sons of the prophets mentioned in 2 Kings 2:7 have shown after Elijah went to heaven and they saw Elisha strike the water and part it?

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY SIX

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

For some time now, a large and somewhat noisy group of men and women has been catching my eye. Do you see them? Over there, taking up both sides of the table. They're farther away, and we probably could neither see nor hear them if it weren't for our enhanced heavenly abilities. It seems that if we focus in on someone, it's almost as if that brings them closer. I'd like to hear what that younger, excited man is talking about. Let's listen!

Joseph and Benjamin

Bible References: Gen. 35:16-21; 37; 42-45. (See also *Signs of the Times*, Jan 22, 1880 for Simeon as chief instigator.)

A burst of laughter rises up from the men just as we focus on them and begin to listen. "I am not the baby! You can't call me that here!" protests the younger man, laughing.

Another one reaches out and ruffles his hair. "Oh, yes we can, Benjamin! You will always be the baby brother!"

"What—even when I'm a million years old?"

The laughter rises higher.

“Yes, even then,” says the man on Benjamin’s other side. He is very good-looking, dark-haired and dark-eyed (not that we aren’t all beautiful here). Hey, I’ll bet that’s Joseph! Do you suppose those are all the sons of Jacob? I can’t count them, but there is a white-haired patriarch in their midst, who can’t take his eyes off the two brothers. It’s a strange thing—you can tell he’s the father, but even so, his strength and energy are almost visible. He looks like a much younger man. We are all strong and healthy here. So the women are their mothers, wives, and I imagine their sister Dinah is here somewhere, too.

“I remember what it was like to really be the baby,” Benjamin says. “Of course, I don’t remember my own mother.” He looks across the table at a woman who looks at him with radiant eyes. “But with three mothers in the house, one sister, and crowds of brothers, I don’t think I was ever put down!”

“I’m glad your father changed your name,” says the woman—she must be Rachel, the only woman Jacob really wanted to marry. “For me, you were Benoni, the son of my sorrow, because I knew I was about to die. But your father changed that to Right-hand Son, and that’s better. I can’t wait to hear all the stories of your childhood—of all your childhoods!” She gazes around at the crowd.

An Egyptian-looking woman leans forward. “What was it like, Benjamin, being the younger brother of my husband—the man who became Prime Minister of Egypt?”

Benjamin grins at her. “Well, of course we didn’t think of him that way. He was just my big brother. I followed him around and wanted to do everything he did. When Father had that beautiful robe made for him, I couldn’t wait until I was big enough to have one, too.”

Another brother sends a sideways glance at Joseph. “*You* may not have thought of him as a prime minister, Benjamin, but I declare, he sometimes acted like *he* was!”

Joseph shakes his head. “I’m afraid it’s true. I was sometimes proud and I did some boasting. I didn’t mean it that way—at least I didn’t always mean it that way! I’m glad you’ve all forgiven me. But you have to admit—those dreams were pretty exciting. I didn’t know why I had them, but I couldn’t get them out of my head.”

“First,” Benjamin recites, as if he’s done this before, “the sheaves of grain, and eleven were bowing down to Joseph’s sheaf. Then the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him.”

“I’m afraid I was pretty unbearable about it,” says Joseph.

“That doesn’t excuse for one minute what we did, throwing you in that pit!” exclaims one of the older brothers. “We were angry, but...well, there’s just no excuse!”

“You’re less to blame than any of us, Reuben,” another declares. “I actually wanted to—well, I can’t stand to say it here, but thank you for stopping us!”

“But then we sold him into slavery anyway! That’s almost as bad!” says yet another brother. “And told Father he was dead! Reuben’s right—there’s no excuse!”

“So it’s a good thing there is forgiveness,” says Joseph, looking tenderly at his brothers. “Forgiveness from God is for when there is no excuse. And it’s only by His grace that we’re here. Let’s think about the good things.”

“I just didn’t understand,” Benjamin says. “All I knew was that my big brother was supposedly dead, and it seemed as if the rest didn’t spend as much time with me, either. For one thing, they were all grown up and busy with their own families. Father

and I depended on each other. And then...years and years later..." His eyes shine with joy at the memory, and everyone around him lights up, too.

They all try to tell the story at the same time.

"We had that famine!"

"But Egypt had grain."

"Little did we know why!" Laughter.

"So I sent you all to Egypt to buy grain."

"Not all of us, Father. You wouldn't let me go. I was so disappointed!"

"I thought I'd lost one son. I couldn't stand to lose Rachel's other child."

"So we get there, and we have to go before this great, stiff-looking official!" The brothers are beginning to laugh and tease Joseph again.

"He's got his beard curled, and his hair in a weird style, and his clothes..."

"It's no wonder we didn't recognize him!"

"And here I was, looking down on this band of dusty desert nomads..." says Joseph, and is drowned out for a minute by more laughing protests. Seriously, Joseph adds, "I was so stunned I couldn't speak for a minute. I thought you could hear my heart beating. Here were my own brothers! After all these years! But I looked in vain for Benjamin. I didn't know if he was still alive, or even if Father was. I knew he was pretty old by then."

"We couldn't understand why you asked about our brothers and our father. We were scared to death—here was this powerful Egyptian ruler, next to Pharaoh himself, asking us questions—"

"—accusing us of spying!"

The laughter stops as someone says, “Putting us in jail for three days. We deserved it. Little did you know, we were thinking of only you. Your face had remained in our minds, tormenting us, all those years.”

Simeon looks up. “I was the one who deserved it the most, and when you kept me locked up while the others went back home, I knew it was God’s justice, even though I assumed you knew nothing about my guilt. I would have given anything—all of us would—to go back and undo our actions, but there was nothing we could do. Confessing the truth to Father would have killed him. So we just bore it.”

Benjamin enters back into the story. “On the next journey, I got to go, too. I was excited, but also nervous, after what my brothers had all said about this harsh man Pharaoh had put in charge. And then, here you were treating us like royalty, feeding us at your own table, giving us rich clothes...”

The brotherly laughter is back. “Us? He treated *you* like royalty, you mean! Five times as much food, much richer clothes!”

Benjamin laughs back at them. “Well, I finally got my fancy robe with sleeves!”

Jacob and Rachel join in the laughter at that one.

“Then, on the way home, there’s your silver cup in my grain sack!” Benjamin shakes his head. “I was so confused! I knew I hadn’t taken it! I thought I was a dead man for sure!”

“All we could do was turn back and face the music.”

Joseph looks into the face of the man who is speaking. “Then came the best moment of all. Judah, I’ll never forget your eloquent plea to me. You begged me to take you instead of Benjamin. You would be my slave, or I could even kill you if I wanted to (I

didn't!) but you had to get your little brother back to his father, or he would die of grief. I looked around at all your faces, and I knew—you had truly changed. Nothing I had done to test you had made you get angry or vindictive. You didn't mind when I gave Benjamin the best of everything, you didn't abandon him to me...I couldn't stand it anymore."

"You sent all your officials away," said Judah, "and even your interpreter. We thought that was it—we were all going to be put to death!"

The brothers all start to talk at once again.

"And then you burst into tears!"

"I was so shocked I couldn't even move!"

"You pulled off that Egyptian headdress..."

"You held out your arms..."

"You cried out, 'Don't you recognize me?'"

"No, are you kidding? We didn't recognize you!"

"How could we possibly know who this high and mighty official was?"

Benjamin's eyes are shining. "You said, 'It's me—it's your brother, Joseph!' I just stared at you, with my eyes bugging out of my head." He laughs.

"Is my father still alive?' I think that's when I started to realize the truth," says Judah. "When you said those words, 'my father,' and I heard that tone in your voice..."

"That's right," Reuben agrees. "That was Joseph. I was never more relieved in my whole life!"

"We all fell into one huge group hug, and everybody was crying, and exclaiming, and we were just trying to get our breath back."

The patriarch speaks, and all the others fall silent. “And then you came home to tell me.”

The brothers hang their heads. “It was the hardest thing we’d ever had to do, to confess to you what we’d done. We couldn’t have done it at all if we hadn’t told you from the beginning, ‘just hear us out. There’s good news at the end!’”

“Good news!” exclaims Jacob. “*Wonderful* news! The best news I ever heard! And I could see how it had hurt you, my boys, all these years. I could see how you’d changed. Grown up. You were different men. I’d always thought it was the loss of the brother you’d picked on that had changed you, but I knew, too, that something was eating away at you. I tell you the truth, it was a relief to me to know, finally, the real truth. And then, to get to go—to travel to Egypt, all my children and grandchildren, to arrive there and be treated like relatives of the king! To see my boy again!”

The whole group is tearful as they relive the time.

“And now, I am reunited, too,” says Rachel. “I can meet both my strong, godly sons.”

“And all of us,” adds Leah. “We are so proud of all of you. And so, so grateful to God for bringing so much good out of so much sin. We knew we shouldn’t have four different wives in one family. It was nothing but trouble. And yet, God has forgiven us and brought us out of sorrow into great joy, even on earth, in that beautiful, fertile land of Goshen, and now here—” Her voice fails her, and once again, the whole table erupts in praise and singing to God.

God, we all know, is the one and only source of true forgiveness, the kind of forgiveness that can even heal such tremendous and terrible rifts, making one whole

family out of a group of angry, hurting people, and using their story to teach centuries of other hurting people that there is always hope where there is forgiveness.

But you get it *only* from God.

Thought/Discussion Questions

Have you had family troubles even a little like the ones in this family? How can the story of Joseph bring you hope and help?

What are some of the ways God helped and worked with this family even though they were not following His ways in creating their family?

How can we prevent jealousy from leading to brokenness such as was found in this story? What can you do when you first discover you are jealous?

When one brother, in this story, said, “Egypt had grain,” and another brother said, “little did we know why!” what did they mean? Why did Egypt have grain during the famine? If you don’t know, read Genesis 41.

Why do you think Joseph tested his brothers so much before he let them know who he was?

Have you ever had to forgive someone who was cruel to you? Did you do it as well as Joseph did? If so, how did you find that strength, and if not, where can you get the strength?

Does forgiving mean excusing bad behavior and acting as if it doesn’t matter?

What can you learn about leadership from this story?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

Make a “many-colored robe” for a doll or paper doll, or use a piece of bright cloth to make a person-sized robe, if you are going to act out the story of Joseph’s robe.

Grind some grain with a stone mill if one is available, or in an electric blender, and make flatbread out of it. All you have to do is mix a little salt and oil into the flour, then add enough water to make a dough, and flatten it out and bake it on each side on a hot griddle or frying pan. Delicious! Every region on earth has its own version of flatbread. Ask one of the adults in your area to help you make the kind of bread your people use.

To do:

Act out one or more scenes from this story. The story of Joseph has so many great scenes in it that you could make a whole play of it and perform it for your church.

Share a dream you’ve had that you think contained a message from God for you.

Share stories about times when you and your brothers or sisters have gotten along well and honored God.

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY SEVEN

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

I'm fascinated by those two men over there. They seem completely bound up in each other, laughing and talking with their heads close together. Now and then one will tap the other's arm, or bump a fist on the other's shoulder, as if to emphasize some point they're making in their conversation. I wonder if they're brothers, and were separated by death. I'd like to ask them to share their story.

"Sir? I don't want to interrupt, but we've been sharing our stories, and I'd love to hear yours if you're willing."

David and Jonathan

Bible References: 1 Sam. 18 through 20; 2 Sam. 1

The two men turn toward us. "Oh, yes, sorry—we don't mean to shut anybody out. It's just that we've missed each other so much!" says one of them.

As we see his face more clearly, I realize he seems older than the other. Perhaps they are father and son. I barely finish the thought before the man adds, gesturing to his companion, "This is David, son of Jesse, King of Israel!"

Everyone perks up. King David! There is a murmur of excitement around us. But David laughs, saying, "Don't be silly, Jonathan, I'm not king here! I was only ever king under the Great King, the Great Shepherd of Israel—of the world!" Like so many others,

he turns shining eyes toward the head of the table. “Besides, I understand there were much greater kings after me.”

Jonathan smiles. “No doubt. But you paved the way.” His eyes show a brief shadow. “I was so hoping to be with you, at the side of your throne.”

David looks sad momentarily, too. “You’ll never know how I missed you. I wrote a song of lament for you and your father. But—we’re here now—friends forever!”

The two clap each other on the shoulders, and all shadows flee.

“I’ve always wondered,” says someone across the table from them. “How could you lament for King Saul, too, after all he’d done to you?”

David shakes his head. “He was the Lord’s anointed. My duty was to him. Anyway, I remember the early days, when he was Israel’s golden king. I think he got sick, or something. There was something wrong with his mind. I definitely lamented when he was killed.”

Jonathan gives David a glowing look. “That was one of the things I always loved most about you—that you never stopped being faithful to my father, no matter what.”

“How did you get to be friends, anyway?” asks someone else. “Weren’t you a lot older than David?”

“I was, yes, and I was supposed to be king next. I can’t explain it, really. It was right after the incident of the giant, Goliath. He’d been annoying us all for a long time, and then here came this half-grown youth asking us how we dared let him keep on blaspheming God! He said, if no one else would go teach Goliath a lesson, he would!”

Jonathan laughs. “I can tell you, I was embarrassed. Then my father brought him and

put his own armor on him.” He and David both laugh uproariously. “He looked ridiculous!”

“I *felt* ridiculous!” says David. “I didn’t know how you warriors could *walk* in that stuff!”

“So he takes it off—not without a respectful word to my father, mind you—and off he goes with his sling and a few stones out of the creek!” Jonathan laughs even more, then sobers. “To answer your question, when I saw him go bravely out to do what not one of us would do, trained warriors though we were, my heart began to turn to him. And when he came back, and Father was asking him questions about who he was and where he came from...it was as if God knitted my heart and his heart together!”

“I felt the same way,” says David, smiling at his friend. “I knew we’d be friends forever—and so we are!”

“At first it was easy,” Jonathan continues. “David lived in the king’s house, and we talked and talked, and got to know each other well.”

“Although there was always a barrier, at first,” David puts in.

“Yes. I couldn’t figure that out. It was as if you were keeping some part of yourself secret. Finally, I came right out and asked. Did you, or did you not, really want to be friends? And you hesitatingly confessed that the prophet Samuel had anointed you as our next king. I’ll admit, I was taken aback for a few minutes. It was rather a shock. I’d always assumed that, as oldest son of Saul, I’d be king, and he’d been grooming me to take over his position since my boyhood. But...I don’t know, maybe it was God speaking to my heart, but there was something that felt completely *right* about

it. All at once, the only thing I wanted in life was to be your councilor, standing at your side when you took your throne. I swore I would be true to you forever.”

David’s eyes shine as the two men clasp hands. “That was all I wanted, too. Honestly, I’d been frightened at the idea of being king. I was nothing but a poor shepherd boy! How could I possibly lead God’s people? But with you, I felt I could do anything. And then...I didn’t get you as a councilor after all.”

“Well, what better preparation for leading God’s people than herding sheep?” asked Jonathan with a laugh, and a man with a white beard nearby startles us all by bellowing out a big laugh, too, and crying, “What indeed? There is no better preparation!”

“That phase of our friendship didn’t last very long,” Jonathan continues. “My father started having spells of madness. At first, David’s playing and singing could calm him—well, they could calm anybody! You’ll have to play and sing some of your psalms for us, my brother!”

“I will, after the meal, if you like,” says David.

“Then Father got so bad he even tried to kill David, so he had to leave. And over the next years, we only saw each other now and then. But we certainly *heard* enough!” Grinning, Jonathan chants, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!” They laugh, then sober again quickly.

“What a way to get famous!” says David soberly.

“But you were learning to be a leader,” Jonathan points out. “You didn’t need me.”

“Oh, yes, I did! Don’t you remember coming to encourage me different times? You can’t know how much I needed that! I especially remember that time just before the New Moon festival, when I was nearly in despair, and cried out, ‘What have I done? Why does your father want to kill me?’ You reassured me that you would always stand between him and me.”

“Yes, and that was the time I shot the arrows beyond you, as a sign that you should run. But not before we covenanted together that God would stand between us and even our children and grandchildren, forever.”

“Then there was that other time, when you came to me at Horesh and comforted and counseled me as a godly mentor. You have no idea how much it meant.”

“*You* have no idea how overjoyed I was to be able to get to you and see you!” Jonathan countered.

David is silent and thoughtful for a moment. “When I heard that you had died with your father...I was so distraught! At first I was just blinded by fury. I’m sorry to think of the way I avenged your death. Then I was in despair, thinking there was no way I could govern without your friendship, counsel, and experience.”

“But then you turned to your music,” said Jonathan.

David looks at him, startled. “How do you know? You weren’t there!”

Jonathan smiles. “Do I not know you, my brother? You always turn to your music in despair!” His grin widens. “Besides, somebody told me. Apparently, they wrote it down and kept it in a book of our people’s history, stories, and songs.”

“They did?” David is amazed.

All together, we answer, “Oh, yes, David! We have hundreds of your songs! Songs of joy, songs of lament, songs begging forgiveness or praising God for His mercy, even songs of anger.”

David is speechless. So we all begin to clamor, “Sing one for us, David! Sing one of your songs!” Jonathan joins in, laughing.

A ten-string harp of the type David was familiar with in his time is brought, and David takes it, hesitates, then runs his hand across the strings. His eyes light up, because this heavenly harp has an infinitely more beautiful sound than he has ever heard. And so he begins to sing.

And once again, the table erupts in praise to the God who forgave us all so much, and brought us to live at His side forever.

Thought/Discussion Questions

Which song do you think David would sing first in heaven? You and your friends can look through the book of Psalms, most of which are David's, and come up with some favorites. You can sing some of them, too.

Be sure to read and discuss David's lament for Jonathan and Saul in 2 Sam. 1.

Do you have a best friend? How does it feel? What makes a best friend? Does that relationship reduce or increase the love you have for other friends? (Hint: If a friendship ever makes you less loving to others, that is not a true friendship.)

Have you ever lost a best friend? How did that feel?

How do you think David and Jonathan will feel when they meet again in heaven and can be truly best friends *forever*?

What can you learn about leadership from David? From Jonathan? From Saul?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

You can find patterns online to make a harp like David's from cardboard and rubber bands. Or, if you know a woodworker, there are even patterns to make a better one with wood. It's fun, too, to look at real works of art, harps made authentically like Bible ones. You can listen to them on YouTube or another video service.

Draw a picture of Jonathan and David or of yourself and your best friend.

Make a poster that illustrates all the beauties of friendship.

To do:

Find out if everyone in your class has close friends. If there are some who do not, figure out what you can do about that. Friendships don't just happen—they are built with care and built to last.

Make a list of counsel for people who want to be and have good friends.

Plan a special outing or activity with your best friend or friends.

JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2018: DAY EIGHT

At the Banqueting Table of the Lamb

The white-bearded man nearby has been listening with interest, and when David has ended his singing, he turns courteously to the man and says, “I noticed you agreed strongly when Jonathan pointed out that herding sheep is a good training ground for leadership. Are you a shepherd, sir?”

The man smiles and opens his mouth, but before he can answer, a woman next to him says, “Is he ever! This is Moses!”

David’s mouth drops open. “Moses! The great lawgiver and leader of our people? Oh, sir, I feel as if I should bow to you!”

Moses shakes his head, his eyes twinkling. “Now, now, you said it yourself—we are not kings or leaders here. We are only little lambs of the Great Shepherd!”

“True,” Jonathan agrees eagerly, “but we’d love to hear *your* story!”

And so we all settle in to listen some more, nibbling at the grapes and dates and manna.

Moses, Miriam, and Aaron

Bible References: Ex. 1, 2, 3, 15, and Num. 12

“I’ll begin,” says the woman. “I am Miriam, and I remember the earliest. I remember the dreadful days in Egypt when our people had become nothing more than

slaves...though those memories are fading, I'm happy to say! But I still remember the Pharaoh saying to kill all the boy babies! When Moses was born, we were terrified! We managed to hide him for three months, but you know, babies have no concept of keeping quiet!"

Moses folds his hands and looks upward with an innocent look, and everyone laughs.

"I'll never know where Mother got her idea—from God, I suppose! I thought she was crazy, making that basket to put him out on the Nile where all the crocodiles were, never mind how waterproof she made it! But at least she let me hide and watch him. There I was, shivering in the bulrushes, when who should come down but Pharaoh's daughter herself, and promptly send a maid to bring her the basket! I thought that was the end of it. She would report us to her father...but as she gazed down into the basket, I saw her face soften. I heard her say, 'Oh, poor little thing! Some Hebrew mother is trying to save her baby!' All at once I knew she disagreed with her father about the decree, but I was stunned by what she said next. She said *she* would take the baby and raise it! I couldn't believe my ears. Mother's faith had been honored. And then God gave me an idea of my own! I ran out of the rushes and knelt before her, shaking so hard I could barely speak. 'Mistress, if you want a nurse for your baby, I know where I can find one!'"

Miriam shakes her head and smiles, remembering. "It seemed like there was silence for a long time. Finally I dared to peek up to see the princess' face, and I think that was what she was waiting for. I could see in her face, in her smile, just as clearly as if she spoke it aloud, that she knew this was *my* baby brother, and I would bring my own

mother. I bit my lip, and she nodded. ‘Go get her.’ Let me tell you, my feet had wings! When I got back to the house, Mother could hardly understand me! But we got to raise our boy for twelve whole years—far longer than I thought the princess would leave him with us. We taught him every single thing we could about God and about our people.”

“I remember those days,” the man on Moses’ other side cuts in. “I even remember his babyhood, a little. I was jealous at first. We had to be quiet all the time—not just the baby, but me, too, and / was a big boy!” We know this must be Aaron. “I was only three years older, but I became his spokesman, interpreting his baby babble for the grown-ups—also for one big sister who was bossy enough it seemed she thought *she* was the mother!” He laughs at his sister, but lovingly, and she laughs back.

“Yes, and we began to think Moses never would learn to talk, with you doing all the talking for him!”

“Now, now, you can’t blame my stammer on him,” Moses says. “That was all my own. I was kind of a shy kid to begin with, and then there was all this talk that someday I would go live in the palace and be trained to be—what? Pharaoh myself? I couldn’t believe it, and honestly, didn’t want it!”

“But the years went by,” Aaron continues, “Moses became my shadow, and I, too, taught him everything I knew. By the time he was twelve and I was fifteen, I’d begun to hope the palace wouldn’t send for him at all. I thought maybe it was just the princess’ way of saving his life and giving him back to us. Then the summons came.” Aaron shakes his head and stops talking for a minute.

“It was hard on everybody,” says Miriam quietly. “Father and Mother grew so silent. I tried to control everything, because that was always my way of dealing with stress.”

“And I started misbehaving,” says Aaron.

“You grew out of it,” Miriam says consolingly, touching his arm.

“As for me,” says Moses, “I was just overwhelmed. None of the training my family had tried so hard to give me seemed to help me at all, now that I was at school with the children of scribes and officials, all of whom secretly looked down on me, even though they had to be respectful, at least in public. I learned science and math and language and writing that were foreign to me, and as for the religious training! It made no sense! It was actually that that helped me find my feet in my new life. As I studied about bird-headed gods and beetle gods and so on, my mind began to cling ever more closely to the God of my childhood, the God of my family and of my people. I recited the stories to myself so I would never forget them, so they would never be overtaken by all the other things I was learning. And still, I never knew what the plans were for me. I reached 40 years old, and nothing was settled. No career, not even a wife!”

“That was when you made your big mistake,” says Aaron sympathetically.

Moses smiles at him. “One of them! I was out in my chariot, and saw one of the Egyptian overseers beating a Hebrew...and I lost my head. I killed the overseer, and then buried him in the sand, hoping no one would find out. I thought I would be a hero to my own people, so I was horrified when I tried to stop two Hebrews fighting and they threw my sin up in my face. I knew the truth had spread, and it was only a matter of time before Pharaoh found out. So I ran.”

Miriam puts her hand on his arm. “We were so frightened when we heard. We had already had very little contact with you for so many years, but now...you were gone beyond our knowledge, and to all intents and purposes, we lost you. Forever, we thought. Our parents died, and we grew old...”

Moses grins at her. “And so did I! My life changed so drastically it was as if the old life had never happened. I did get to marry and have children, at least. I met a priest in Midian, and fell in love with one of his daughters. I had no idea how much of a blessing that man would be to me!” He looks at David. “And that’s when I became a shepherd. You would have laughed and laughed to see how bad I was at it at first! I knew all about Egyptian folklore and government, and cuneiform writing, and how to properly drape court clothing, curl my beard, and put kohl around my eyes!” He laughs merrily. “You can imagine how much this helped me with lambing, or dealing with hoof rot or rams who wanted to butt everyone who came near them!”

Everyone laughs, but it’s David and Moses who laugh the loudest and longest.

“Zipporah was patient,” (he shares a loving glance with a woman nearby) “and I learned. After forty more years, I thought I was pretty much an expert. I was 80, nearing the end of a long and eventful life, or so I thought. I was perfectly content to dwindle away as an old shepherd...and then I saw that bush that burned but didn’t burn up!”

He laughs again, sending a look up to the head of the table. When we turn to look, we find that Jesus is laughing, too.

Moses wipes tears of laughter from his eyes. “If you had ever told me...! Well, I wouldn’t have believed a word of it, that’s all. To make a long story short, God and I argued for a while, and guess who won?”

We laugh again, thinking of the times we've tried to argue with God in our earthly lives. "God always wins—thank God!" declares someone, and we heartily agree.

Aaron takes up the story. "When a message came to me to go to Midian to meet you, I was never so stunned in my life! And once I got over the shock and joy and excitement of seeing you and meeting your wife and sons, and learned I was going to interpret for you again..." He stops and we all laugh yet again. "Only—in front of Pharaoh!" says Aaron. "That was a shocker. I was almost as reluctant as you were, but the very idea that God was finally going to set us free was enough to make me agree!"

Miriam takes up the tale. "So there we were, 80, 83, and 89, setting out to save the world!" she shakes her head. "Only God would have such an idea. It wasn't easy—we had to go through all that argument with Pharaoh, all those awful plagues—the only good thing I can say about that time is that lots of Egyptians were starting to come over to our way of thinking. They figured out that their gods were no hindrance at all to ours, and that Pharaoh was so hard-hearted he wasn't thinking of them at all. When it came to the blood on the doorposts, I can't tell you how many Egyptian neighbors asked for details, and anointed their doors, too. And when we finally left, thousands of them came with us—firstborns and all!" She grins happily. "I was old, but I still led the dancing and singing!" She begins her praise song from so long ago, and once again, the table falls into praise, singing, and joy.

When it quiets back down, Miriam's face shadows momentarily. "You'd think that mixed multitude would cure me of thinking *we Hebrews* were so special to God—He loves everybody! I knew that, really, but I did get critical of Moses' Cushite wife."

“Admit it, sister,” says Aaron, “what we were both jealous of was Moses’ authority.”

“True—” begins Miriam, but Moses interrupts.

“But I didn’t *have* authority! It was all God!”

“I know, I know,” his brother and sister agree, putting their hands on his arms.

“I am so grateful for God’s mercy and forgiveness!” says Miriam, looking back to the head of the table again, where Jesus is smiling tenderly at her.

We all echo her words in heartfelt agreement.

“We both died before you reached the Promised Land, but you did get there, brother, didn’t you?”

Moses smiles. “Well, / didn’t. I took the people right to the borders—the second generation, that is. You both know how the first generation could have gone in within two years, but refused.” Miriam and Aaron nod. “After yet another forty years, we reached the border again, and God announced that all would go in—except me. I, too, got jealous of my authority—just as you two had—and took God’s task on myself. I had been told to speak to the rock, and I not only pounded it instead, but I yelled angrily at the people, ‘Listen, you rebels, do *we* have to bring you water out of this rock?’ We?” He shakes his head at himself and repeats, “We? Seriously? I wasn’t at all surprised when God said I couldn’t go in with the people. He did give me a vision from Mount Nebo of the bountiful land, and I was grateful for that. Then I died.”

Miriam and Aaron are looking shocked. “You didn’t get to go?”

But Moses’ face lights up. “Then I opened my eyes.”

“What?!”

“God raised me! He sent Gabriel, and even though I understand the enemy whose name we don’t speak here argued it, of course there was nothing he could do. I was raised, and I’ve lived here for three thousand years.”

Miriam and Aaron fall back against their chair backs, stunned. “Really?”

“Really. I even got to go down, with my brother Elijah over there, and comfort Jesus when He went to earth as a human.” The two old sages share a nod.

“You can’t begin to imagine all I’ve learned here, but I still agree—being a shepherd is the best preparation for leading people!”

More laughter.

Then Moses says solemnly, “One thing I have learned much more deeply here than in my whole 120 years on earth was that all of those Egyptians, Pharaoh included, were children of God’s heart. All those peoples whose countries we wandered through, too. And the Canaanites. If only we could have somehow made them see that.”

“We didn’t see it ourselves,” says David sadly. “It was all ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ in those days.” He looks around the table. “I hope you got past that in later ages?”

We all have to shake our heads sorrowfully. No, humankind never did catch on that we were all *one* people, all beloved by God.

But I hear one of you speak up. “Some people did. We read and listened to stories about all of your lives, and some of us paid attention. We saw the mistakes you made, and then we saw how God forgave you and you turned back to Him in humility. We learned we could do that, too. Some of us began, especially in the latter days before Jesus came again, to create real communities, places where people were *all* accepted

as they were, *all* loved, *all* seen as the daughters and sons of *one God*. And now...here we are!”

We have to stop and sing some more praises.

Finally, all the Bible characters lean toward us eagerly. “Tell us about that! We want to hear *those* stories!”

And so we do.

Thought/Discussion Questions

With whom do you relate the most: Miriam, Aaron, or Moses? Why?

Would you say that each of them was a leader in his or her own way? What are the differences and similarities you can learn about leadership from these three people?

What part of Moses’ life is your favorite? Share why.

Why is sheep herding good training for leading people? If any of you have personal experience with livestock, share that, and if not, see if you can find someone who does, to talk to your group.

What story will you tell in heaven?

Activity Suggestions

To make:

Make a sheep from cotton or wool and glue, toothpicks, or wire. You can use bits of darker wool or cloth or felt for their faces. Make them look like sheep from your country. Sheep vary a lot. To see different varieties, look online or in a book.

Draw or paint a picture of Moses at the burning bush. How has God spoken to you?

Make a poster that illustrates all the different kinds of people in the world, especially the different kinds in your area. Across the top in large letters, write, “God has made of ONE BLOOD all the nations of the earth” Acts 17:26. Some Bibles read “of one man,” which is even more direct. We are ALL each other’s brothers and sisters. Find ways to act like it and model that to your community.

To do:

If possible, take a trip to see sheep being herded. Write down all the ways you can see that leading them is like leading people, and share them with your friends when you come back. If you have sheep or goats or other livestock in your own family, try paying attention to the lessons God wants to teach you through caring for His animals.

Choose one or two people to be shepherds, and let everyone else be sheep. Act out some of the things people do when God tries to guide them. The shepherds will act out some of God’s responses to these actions.



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