

Marty
Machowski



Listen

Jesus's
Parables for
Sunday School

Up

Pre-K & K

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404
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Interior Design, and Production: Scot McDonald

Illustration: Scot McDonald;

Cover Design: Faceout Studio

ISBN: 978-1-945270-88-8

Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 1 2 3 4 5



Listen

Jesus's
Parables for
Sunday School

Up

Pre-K & K

Introduction

Listen Up: Jesus's Parables for Sunday School is a twelve-week curriculum for preschool, elementary, and middle-school students, which provides an opportunity for children to hear the gospel as Jesus himself shared it. Jesus told simple stories using everyday activities and objects that point to surprising spiritual truths about life in his kingdom. In the parables children (and adults!) will learn to treasure the gospel.

The *Listen Up* curriculum provides twelve lessons for three different age groups: Pre-K & K, Elementary, and Middle School.

Since children's ministry programs differ in length, you will need to decide how many of the offered components to include in your program.

Lesson Components

Pre-K & K students are an exciting age to teach, as they can begin to repeat back what they are learning. Still, they will not fully comprehend every aspect of the lesson. Repetition is key to help them remember the concepts that they are learning. Each week, the lesson will focus on one key action word that characterizes the theme of the lesson. The basic goal is to help the children learn the meaning of that word and how it connects to the parables passage that we cover.

Make sure you give your helpers some tips on how to keep the children engaged in the lesson. When you ask a question and the children are stumped, they can help give the children clues, like pointing back to the word of the day or pointing to a part of their body that could signal the correct answer.

Welcome Time – Each week, start class with ten minutes of free play to allow for late arrivals. Once all the children are present, open the lesson with prayer. From there, you

can introduce the action word of the day. Each week has a new “action word of the day” with an associated page to be printed out and displayed in the classroom.

Each week have a review time, during which you review the words of the day and memory verses from past weeks. If you have a class library, each week you might want to add a couple of books that have to do with the word of the day. Be sure to read through your lesson in advance and practice presenting the material with enthusiasm.

Circle Time - Circle time gives you an opportunity to get down on eye level with the children. Pull up a chair for yourself and have your students gather in a circle on a carpet remnant or carpet squares.

Object Lesson - Each week we provide an object lesson designed to set the table for the parable you will read to the children. Be sure to gather materials for the object lesson ahead of time.

Bible Story - While the Bible passage is written in your lesson plan for your convenience, read the selected Bible passage to the children out of your Bible. This helps the children understand that the words you are now sharing are different than the other components of the curriculum. Tell the children you are about to read God’s Word.

We’ve provided a detailed message for you to use each week. Read through it ahead of time to become familiar with its content. You can read this directly to the children or paraphrase the lesson as you are comfortable.

Snack Time - Place this strategically in your class time to give the children a break and an opportunity to converse freely with the other students.

Learning Activities - There is no one best order for the various learning activities provided for your use in the classroom. Follow the order in the curriculum, or change the order based on your preferences.

Memory Verse and Motions - Each week we provide a memory verse and motions that connects with the action word of the week. The motions will help you and the children remember the verse.

Song - Each week we suggest a song from the Sovereign Grace Music Album “*Listen Up.*”

Game or Object Lesson - We provide an additional game or object lesson for you to use to help the children connect with the lesson.

Art Activity - We provide both a fun craft and/or a coloring sheet each week for you to use with the children. They work best after the main instruction. That way the children better understand the subject matter in these craft components. The coloring sheet is a simple activity to use in addition to the craft, or to slip in on a week when you have not had time to prepare for the larger craft project.

Puppet Show and Discussion - We’ve written optional puppet skits for each of the lessons. Smart Alex is the main character for the Pre-K & K skits. Each week Smart Alex shares a thought that connects to the action word of the week. These puppet skits do not need to be memorized and can be read by the puppeteer and teacher directly from the printed lesson.

There is no need to build an elaborate puppet theater. A hole cut in a large refrigerator box or a curtain strung across the classroom with a sheet draped over is all you need to hide the person behind the puppet. The puppet skits work well for both Pre-K & K and Elementary.

Closing Prayer & Wrap-Up - As class time draws to a close, use the discussion questions provided to help you engage children to see if they can remember what they have learned.

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The Parable of the Sower

Scripture: Matthew 13:1–17

Lesson 1 Snapshot

Lesson Aim: Children will learn that listening involves both hearing and obeying.

Welcome Time (10 minutes)

- ▶ Week 1 Bible Action Word: LISTEN

Optional add-on to welcome time: sound bites of various noises, such as a frog croak, cat meow, snapping fingers, jingling keys, closing book, etc.

Circle Time (15 minutes)

- ▶ Object Lesson: Listen Carefully
- ▶ Bible Story: Felt board or white board for illustrating Bible story

Snack (10 minutes)

Learning Activities (30 minutes)

1. Action Verse (Jeremiah 11:4)
2. Song: “Listen Up!”
3. “Teacher Says” Game
4. Art Activity: “Put Your Ears On”
(supplies: copies of “Put Your Ears On” art activity, children’s scissors, glue sticks, crayons)

Puppet Skit (optional) (15 minutes)

- ▶ “Smart Alex” Puppet Show

Closing Prayer & Wrap-Up (5–10 minutes)

Lesson Overview:

Jesus taught parables to both hide the truth from the religious leaders who criticized him but at the same time to draw in anyone eager to learn and believe. To the Pharisees, the parables were nonsense. But to those who were drawn to him, the parables and their explanations were words of life. Jesus told the crowd to listen to his teaching carefully. So it became important how you listened to what Jesus said—did you listen to learn, or listen to reject? Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9). When we read or hear a parable, the objects and people in the parable often represent or stand for something else. They are like secret code words we get to figure out.

Total minutes (approximate) 90–110

For the Teacher:

Take time during the week to read through the Scripture, Lesson Overview, and Lesson Aim, and to meditate on this week's Bible passage. The most important instruction you will give your students is the example of your own personal love for God and his Word.

Take time to read through the lesson and gather items for the object lessons you would like to include. We've given you more content than you may be able to fit in your time. Feel free to scratch or rearrange the lesson to suit your classroom. Where the object lessons are more involved, we've sought to include a simplified alternative.



WELCOME TIME

Preparation: Prior to class, print out this week's Bible action word page and hang it at the front of the classroom.

Bible Action Word of the Week – “Listen.”

Each action word (and accompanying graphic) will be represented on a page that will hang at the front of the classroom. Each week's page can be hung next to the page from the previous week, for easy review. One option would be to hang the pages in such a way that by the end of the curriculum, all twelve words could hang together in the final form of a cross. (Optional: Additional copies of the action word page can be printed out for use as a coloring page.)

To start the class, hold up today's Bible action word picture.

Ask: **What is this a picture of?** (An ear.)

Why did God give us ears? (God gave us ears so we can hear.)

Say: **Each week we are going to learn a new Bible action word. Our Bible action word for this week is “listen.” Can anyone tell me what the word “listen” means?** (“Listen” means to hear sounds with our ears. “Listen” also means to pay attention to words or sounds, so that you can hear them.)

Have the children close their eyes and listen carefully to identify the sounds they hear. Make a few of the following sounds (or play sound bites) to see if they can identify them: frog croak, cat meow, cow moo, dog bark, word “whisper” spoken very softly, snap of your fingers, jingling of keys, closing of a book.

Ask: **What are some sounds we need to listen carefully to hear?** (Draw the children out by using the example of raindrops, baby crying in the night, teacher's instruction. You can use a glass of water and drop a drop of water into a bowl or pan and see if the children can hear the drop of water falling to the ground or spin a quarter on a desktop and have the class listen as it wobbles and comes to a stop. If they are too noisy, they will not be able to hear those faint sounds.)

Say: **Today we are going to learn that the most important thing we need to listen to are words. Not just any words. The most important words we are supposed to listen to are Jesus's words—his teaching that we read in the Bible. So, when I read today's Bible story, make sure that you “listen”**

carefully to what I say. (Have the class close their eyes, and then whisper a few words and see if the children can hear what you are saying. Start louder and then get extremely quiet.)



CIRCLE TIME (15 minutes)

Listen Carefully

The object of this activity is to help children listen carefully to the words they hear.

Tell the children you are going to play a listening game. You are going to say something and they should raise their hand and repeat it carefully. Sometimes it will be easy because you will say a short word like “frog.” But other times you might say something more difficult like, “The fat frog leaped and flew over the log and plopped into the water.” If they don’t listen carefully, they won’t repeat it correctly. Use the following words and phrases to teach the children to listen carefully. Repeat one line at time. You can shout some lines, then whisper others so that if someone is not listening carefully they will miss it. After the exercise tell the kids to listen carefully to the Bible Story you are about to read. You can add a motion to get the children moving. Have them to pretend they are a cat, lunging for a rat; a dog jumping over a log to chase the frog; a bunny hopping around with a jar of honey in each hand; and finally, have them hold their arms out in the shape of a cross as you share that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin.

Cat

That cat

That cat from the flat

That cat from the flat captured a rat

That cat from the flat captured a rat under a wide brimmed hat.

Dog

Dog Dog

Dog Dog jumped over a log

Dog Dog jumped over a log chasing a frog

Dog Dog jumped over a log chasing a frog into a black bog.

Bunny

Bunny loved honey

Bunny loved honey which others thought funny

Bunny loved honey which others thought funny and bought one hundred jars full with his hutch full of money.

Jesus

Jesus save us

Jesus save us from our sin and change us

Jesus save us from our sin and change us fill us with your Spirit bless us.

Bible Story

Use a felt board to illustrate the story as you go along with the children. If you don't have a felt board use a whiteboard to draw a few simple details from the parable. You don't have to be a professional artist; remember, you are teaching an audience that is happy to draw stick figures. You can even pause your teaching to ask one of the children to come up to the whiteboard to draw an object from your lesson.

Say: **That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear"** (Matthew 13:1-9).

Note: As you act out various points of the story, like casting seed, you can have the children mimic your motions. This can help keep them engaged as you teach.

Say: **The story Jesus told about the farmer sowing his seed (act out casting seed as you talk) has a secret message. Jesus was not teaching how to plant seeds. Jesus was teaching about the Bible.** (Show the children a Bible.) **Farmers sow their seed by casting (throwing) it over the ground. Jesus sowed the Word of God by sharing it with the crowds. When we read or hear a parable, the objects and people in the parable often represent or stand for something else. They are like secret code words we get to figure out.**

Jesus also taught, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NIV), (pretend to be sowing the seed while you speak each of these verses) **and "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6). **Those words spoken out of Jesus's mouth were like the seeds of the farmer landing on the soil of men's and women's hearts** (point to your heart).

Ask: **Do you remember how many kinds of soil Jesus talked about?** (There are four kinds of soil. Have your assistants help the kids give the following four answers: the hard path, the rocky ground, the thorny soil, and the good soil.)

Say: **Each one of those soils is like a person who hears Jesus teach. Now I am going to help you learn the four soils:**

■ **HARD PATH - The seeds on the hard path that the birds gobble up are like a person who says "No, no, no, I do not want to listen to your words."** (Tell the kids to act that out by pushing away with an open palm and saying, "No, no, no, I do not want to believe.") **When we refuse to listen**

to God’s Word, the birds gobble it up the good news and then it is all gone. Do you want God’s Word to be gobbled up by the birds? (No way!)

■ **ROCKY GROUND** – The seeds on the hard path is like a person who is happy to hear what Jesus says, but then walks away from Jesus. His faith withers away like a plant with no root under the hot sun. (Tell the kids to act this out by saying “I believe,” jumping up with hands raised, only to slowly wither to the ground to mimic a plant dying.) **Do you want to be like a plant that springs up and then shrivels to the ground** (act this out)? (No way!)

■ **THORNY GROUND** – The seeds on the thorny soil are like a person who listens carefully (cup your hand to your ear) and is happy to follow Jesus. But then they start to love other things instead of Jesus. (Tell the kids to act this out by saying “I believe,” jumping up and down with hands raised and then move their hands to their own necks to represent the weeds choking the good plant.) **Should we love screen time, or sports, or money more than God?** (No way!)

■ **GOOD SOIL** – Tell the children the good (fertile) soil is the best soil of all. **When we listen carefully to what Jesus is teaching, the seed of God’s Word is sown deep into the heart.** (Scooch down to act out the seed planted in the heart and bring your hands and arms in close to your chest. Then tell the children that God makes the seed sprout and grow, slowly moving to a standing position with your hands up praising God, waving your hands back and forth like a stalk of wheat blowing in the breeze.) **The ground is good so the roots of the plant go deep into the soil. The sun warms the plant and helps it to grow. No weeds can reach the plant because the farmer pulls the weeds the try to grow in his field. The plant grows up to bear grain and multiply and fill the harvest baskets full of wheat.**

Ask: **Which seed would you like to be?** (Have your helpers remind them of the “good soil.”) **If we want to be like the seed on the good soil that sprouts and grows we need to open our ears and listen carefully to what God’s Word tells us.**



SNACK (10 minutes)



Use this time to prepare for the learning activities.



LEARNING ACTIVITIES (30 minutes)



1. Action Verse

Children love to sing and recite with motions. Use this Bible verse with your class as a break from sit-down instruction.

Say: **Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God** (Jeremiah 11:4).

Listen to my voice, (Cup your hand to your ear)

and do all that I command you. (March in place)

So shall you be my people, (Cross your arms over your chest)

and I will be your God. (Point up to heaven)

2. Song

Every lesson has a suggested song. Don't worry about trying to teach a new song every week. Pick as many as you wish to teach your class during this 12-week curriculum. "Listen Up!" is a good theme song for the whole curriculum.

"Listen Up!" (based on Matthew 13:1–23)

VERSE 1

Here's a story 'bout a man I know

He set out with seed to sow

Some seed fell on the path that day

The birds swooped down and took it away

VERSE 2

Some seed fell on the rocks and stones

Shot up quick, but found no home

Other seeds fell on the thorny ground

The weeds came up and choked them out

CHORUS

Listen up! God gave us ears to hear His Word

Listen up! Then think about everything we've heard

Listen up! Our hearts are soil where the Word can grow

Holy Spirit, help us know how to listen up

VERSE 3

Some seed fell where the soil was good

The roots grew deep just like they should

Water and sun made the plants grow high

The fruit was good and multiplied

BRIDGE

If we want to grow then we need to know

The gospel, the gospel

Jesus died and rose to forgive all those

Who believe in Him

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Song
of the
Week

LISTEN
UP

3. “Teacher Says” Game

Play this game like the traditional “Simon Says” game of listening and following. Whatever you tell the children with the command “Teacher says,” the children should hear and do. So if you say, “Teacher says, jump on one foot,” the children should all jump on one foot. But if you say, “Jump on one foot” without first saying “teacher says,” the children should not act out the command. Those children who make the mistake of acting out the command when you don’t say “teacher says” are out of the game and need to sit down until you get to a winner (the last person or persons standing).

3. Art Activity

Put Your Ears On

Supplies:

- Copies of “Put Your Ears On” art activity
- Children’s scissors, or precut the pieces ahead of time (the ears) and place them into two bags (right ears and left ears)
- Glue sticks (enough for the class to share)
- Crayons (if you choose to color in your activity)

Pass out one “Put Your Ears On” activity sheet to each child. Use the following script for the activity, or explain the lesson on your own.

Say: **Our Bible Action Word for the day is “listen.” Can anyone tell me again what listening means?** (Take answers and steer them to the correct definition.)

Ask: **Look at your picture. What is missing in the picture?** (The children do not have ears.)

Why do we need ears? (We need ears to help us hear. Our ears catch the sound and take it inside to our eardrums so we can hear.)

These children were just called inside from playing; one of the children in the picture is ready to listen, but the other one is angry and does not want to follow the instruction. Can you guess which child is angry? (The child with the frown is unhappy.)

Say: **There are two important parts to listening to instruction. First, we need to hear the words and understand them so we know what message they are trying to give us. Let’s practice. I’ll give you an instruction and you repeat back to me what I say.**

Children, sit in your seats. (Now, have the children repeat the instruction.)

The second important part to listening to instruction is the “do” part, where we follow the instructions. I’m going to give you another instruction. I want you to repeat what I say first, and then follow the instruction by doing it.

Children, please sit up straight. (Have the children repeat what you said, and then have them do it by sitting up as straight as they can.)



Now we are going to help these children out by putting their ears back on.
(Pass out ears and glue sticks to your class.)

Glue the ears on the children.

While the kids are completing the craft, review Matthew 13:9 and the phrase Jesus used to remind those he taught to listen carefully to his teaching.

If time permits, have the children color in their project.

Place their names on the papers and set them aside to take with them when their parents come to pick them up.

OPTIONAL PUPPET SKIT (15 minutes)

Use the Smart Alex Puppet Show for Lesson 1: “Listen.” (see Puppet Skits)

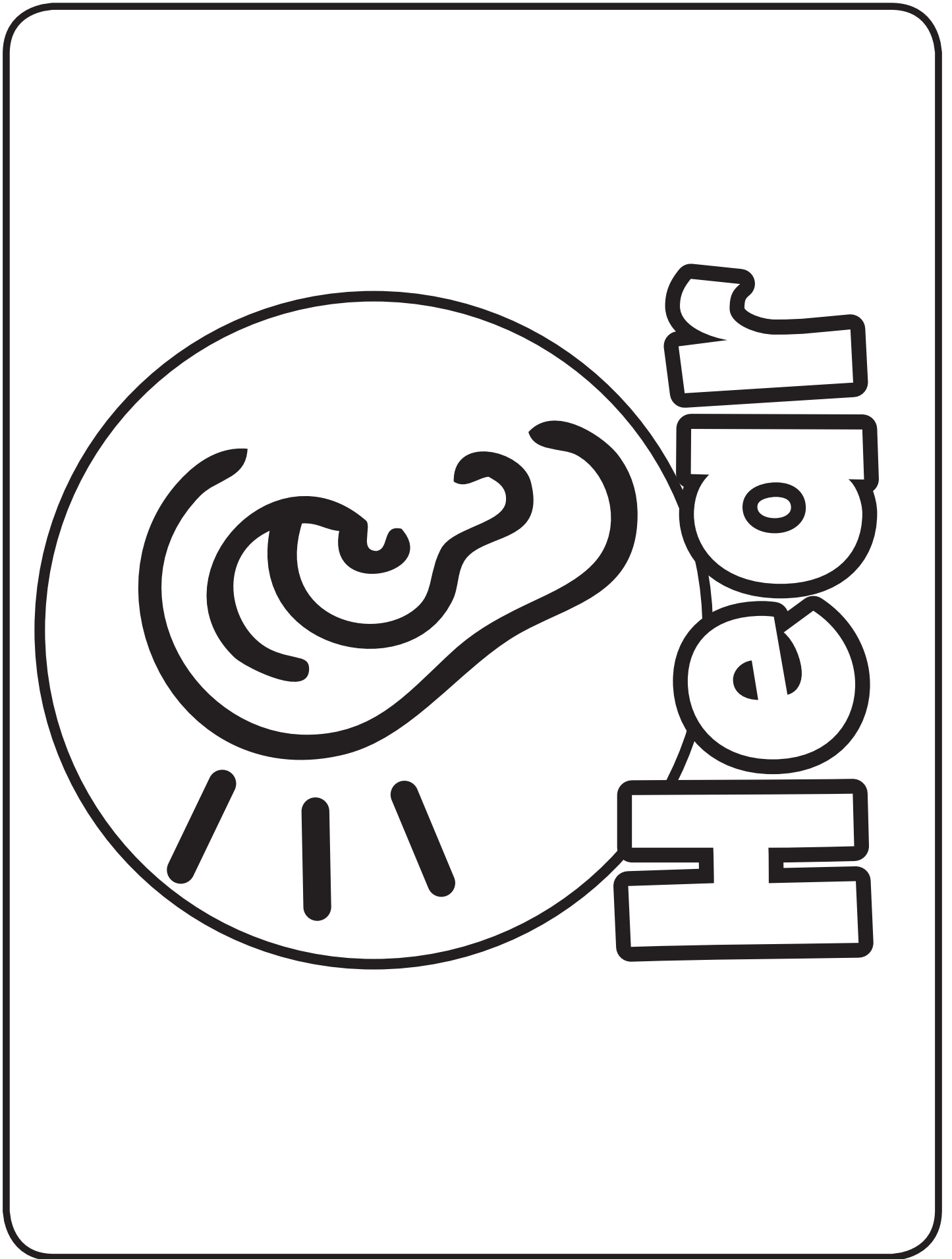
PRAYER & WRAP-UP

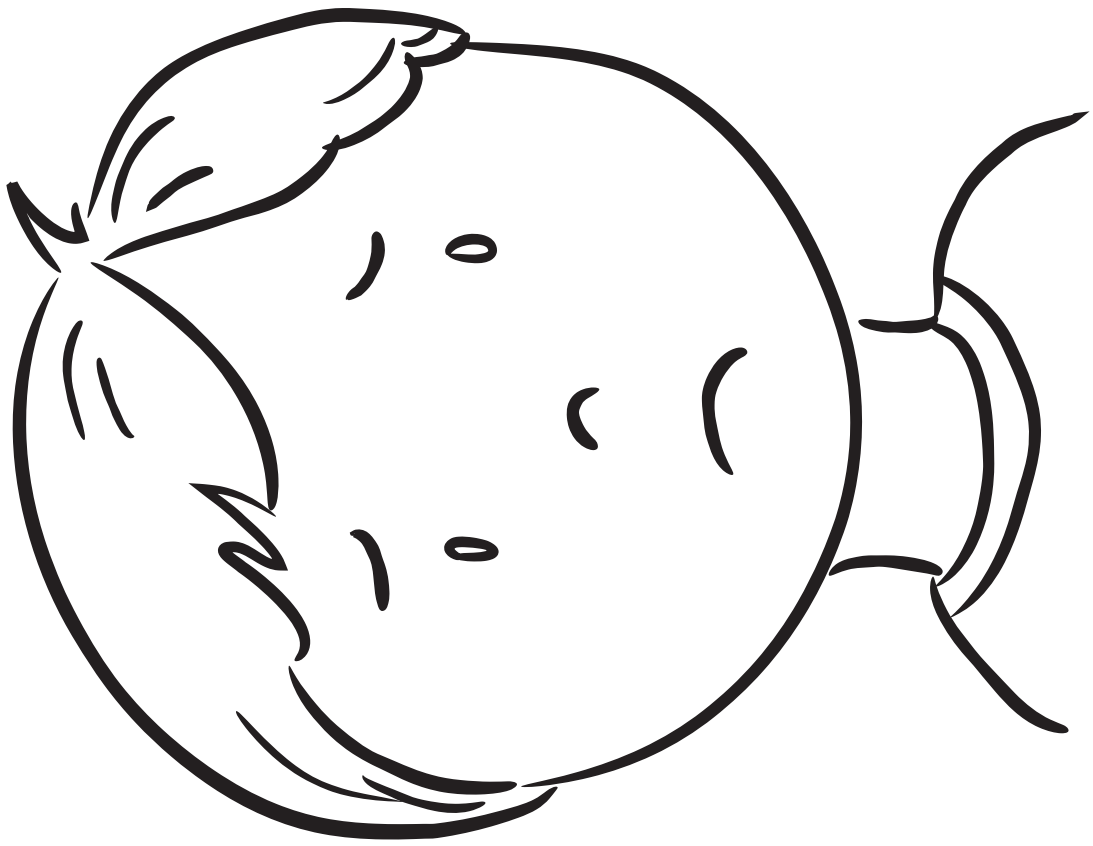
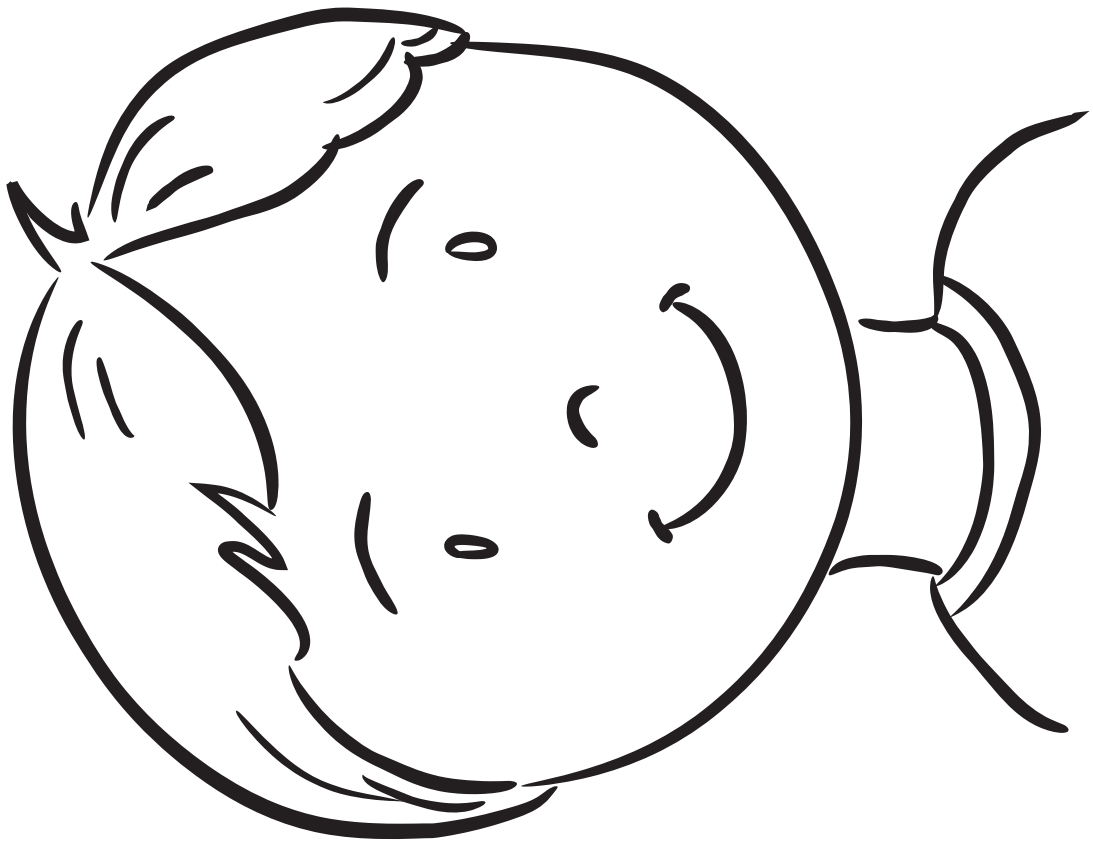
- ▶ **Can anyone tell me what our Bible action word of the week is?** (Listen)
- ▶ **What does the word “listen” mean?** (We need to both hear and then put what we hear into practice, or do what we hear with our lives.)
- ▶ **Which seed and soil do we want to be like?** (We want to be like the seed sown in the good soil, which is the person who listens to and believes what Jesus taught.)

End your time with prayer.



Head







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Up

Elementary

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404
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Interior Design, and Production: Scot McDonald

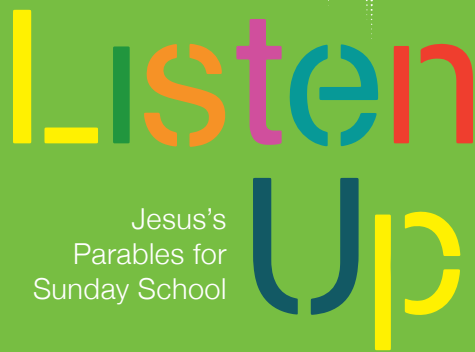
Illustration: Scot McDonald;

Cover Design: Faceout Studio

ISBN: 978-1-945270-88-8

Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 1 2 3 4 5



Elementary

Introduction

Listen Up: Jesus's Parables for Sunday School is a twelve-week curriculum for preschool, elementary, and middle-school students, which provides an opportunity for children to hear the gospel as Jesus himself shared it. Jesus told simple stories using everyday activities and objects that point to surprising spiritual truths about life in his kingdom. In the parables children (and adults!) will learn to treasure the gospel.

The *Listen Up* curriculum provides twelve lessons for three different age groups: Pre-K & K, Elementary, and Middle School.

Since children's ministry programs differ in length, you will need to decide how many of the offered components to include in your program.

Lesson Components

The elementary years represent a huge transition for children. By the time they finish first grade, most children are able to read from their very own Bible. Yet most begin the year not able to find a Bible passage because they cannot read the names of the books. Your instruction can vary widely, depending on whether or not you are teaching a first-grade or third-grade class, or a class with mixed ages.

If you are teaching first grade alone, you may want to start the year using part or all of the Pre-K & K lessons. Remember, you can mix and match the curriculum to fit the needs and learning levels of your classroom. Read through a lesson in both the Pre-K & K and Elementary levels to get a feel for the differences and help you know which one to choose for your first graders.

The components of the elementary lessons are geared to younger elementary children. While some of the components, like the message outline, are the same for both the elementary and middle-school lessons, the object lessons, activities, and craft are all designed with the younger elementary grades in mind. Read through a lesson in both the elementary and middle school levels, and you will come away with a better understanding of how the two different levels address the same material.

Lesson Overview – The Lesson Overview gives the teacher a brief introduction to the Bible passage the students will study.

Opening Introduction and Object Lesson

Object Lesson – Each week opens with an object lesson to help capture the students' attention for the message.

Scripture Reading – Have children bring their Bibles to class and help them look up the Scripture verse you are going to read. By the end of the twelve weeks they will become familiar with where the Gospels are located in their Bibles. Consider keeping a stack of Bibles for your classroom that you can use for children who either do not have a Bible or don't bring one to class.

We've taken the time to write out a suggested message outline. While we've provided everything you need to simply read through the message, you will want to take time to prepare during the week. Some of these have built in object lessons, which will require assembling some needed materials.

Each lesson is presented as a detailed, scripted outline for you to teach to the class. This may seem like a lot of "teacher talk," but it is important to recognize the role that teaching the truth of God's Word has in the life of everyone, including our children. The good news of the gospel is meant to be proclaimed. So don't be afraid to set aside ten to fifteen minutes of your class time for teaching.

The children will be able to tell if you've prepared ahead of time and done at least one run-through of the message. While we will all have times where the challenges of life rob us of preparation time, do your best to plan well enough in advance that you have time set aside to prepare and practice your lesson. That way you won't be so tied to the outline. Always feel the freedom to tailor the material to your particular audience. What we are providing is a suggestion for how to teach the lesson, not a mandate. Put things into your own words; scratch off or add a line that you think will serve your class.

Teaching to children is different than teaching to adults. Here are a few pointers to consider when presenting the teaching portion of this lesson:

- Read the passage dramatically by adding voice inflection to distinguish the different characters in the story. Change your volume and expression to match the tone of the sentence.
- Act out the story with motions. If a man is discovering a treasure, pretend that you are the man finding the treasure and get excited.
- When you get to the message, feel free to engage the children as you go with questions. While there are some scheduled interruptions to engage the students in the lesson sections, the goal is to give you the bones of a message outline. Add your own questions and interaction from the body of the lesson.

- Add in additional gospel connections, testimony, and any other extras that come to your mind to make these outlines your own.

When our children grow up with teaching in children's ministry, tailored to their age level, they become better equipped to sit in the main meeting and benefit from the preaching of God's Word.

Application Exercises

Object Lessons and Activities – Each week there are additional object lessons and activities sprinkled throughout the lesson. These will require some measure of preparation, so you may want to enlist the service of a few adult helpers. Think “team” teaching, and use those folks assigned to your classroom to help you teach an object lesson, activity, or other component of the lesson.

While we've located object lessons and activities in the lesson, you can move them around or eliminate them altogether. You do not need to do everything in the lesson. The *Listen Up* elementary lessons have been designed to fill a wide variety of church formats. We wanted there to be enough material for churches who have elementary students for an hour and a half or longer. So, if your class is an hour or less, you won't have time to use everything. In that case, you will need to decide which components to skip. Choose what is best for your class, and don't feel bad about eliminating other components.

Small Group Questions and Interaction – When children reach the elementary level they can begin to apply the material they are learning to their lives through discussion. Asking questions about the lesson in a smaller group gives more children an opportunity to answer a question or share a thought. The larger your class, the more important splitting up into smaller groups becomes if you are hoping to help the children apply what they are learning. If your class has less than ten children, you may not need to break down into smaller groups and can spend some additional time with the class as a whole. Groups of five to eight children work best. You'll have enough kids to allow for three or four quiet children, yet be able to get around to everyone if you've got a talkative bunch.

You will notice that the questions we've provided for small group discussion are more general. Feel free to add more specific questions based on your knowledge of the group. If you are studying the topic of money for instance, and your church is raising money for missions or a building, connect what is happening locally into your discussion by adding a more specific question.

Bible Memory – A memory verse is provided for the elementary students that may or may not be a different verse than the one memorized by the Pre-K & K students. If you are teaching a first-grade class, it may be appropriate to have them memorize the Pre-K & K verse.

Song – Elementary children love to sing. Each week we will suggest a song to sing from the *Listen Up* album. If you would like more consistency and repetition, repeat songs from previous weeks. Elementary students do well with up to three songs, particularly if accompanied by a guitar or piano. Children's worship is a great place to deploy a few teen volunteers to help you lead or teach hand motions with your younger kids. (Hand motions to the songs are found in the Pre-K & K lessons.)

Puppet Show and Discussion – We’ve written optional puppet skits for each of the lessons. Pappy the Puppet is the main character for all the skits. Each week Pappy tells a story that connects to the Bible action word of the week. These puppet skits do not need to be memorized and can be read by the puppeteer and teacher directly from the printed lesson.

There is no need to build an elaborate puppet theater. A hole cut in a large refrigerator box, or a curtain strung across the classroom with a sheet draped over, is all you need to hide the person behind the puppet. The puppet skits work well for both preschool and elementary students.

Art Activity – Each week we’ve provided a craft idea. You may also use the coloring sheet provided in the pre-K & K level. Whichever you decide to do, use this time during to talk with the children and help them connect what they are working on to the lesson.

Closing Prayer – As class time draws to a close, pray as a class about what students have learned, and how they might apply it in the coming week.

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The Parable of the Sower

Scripture: Matthew 13:1–17

Lesson 1 Snapshot

Lesson Aim: Today's Bible action word is "listen." Children will learn that listening involves both hearing and obeying the words of God.

Opening (10 minutes)

- ▶ Bible Action Word: LISTEN
- ▶ Object Lesson: Sowing Seeds
(supplies: sunflower seeds in shell)

Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

Lesson (15 minutes)

(supplies: "The Four Soils" flash card page)

Application Exercises (30 minutes)

1. Four Soil Flash Cards

(supplies: "The Four Soils" flash card page)

2. A Seed to Remember

(supplies: seeds; fine-line permanent black markers; envelopes)

3. Small Group Questions/Interaction

Bible Memory (10 minutes)

Song (10 minutes)

"Listen Up!"

Puppet Skit (optional) (15 minutes)

Choose Lesson 1 script from either puppet show level ("Smart Alex" or "Pappy the Puppet").

Art Activity: Sowing Seed (20 minutes)

(supplies: sesame seeds; "The Four Soils" flash card page, printed for coloring; "Sowing Seed" page, printed for each child; glue sticks; craft brushes; paper bowls; colored pencils)

Closing Prayer (5–10 minutes)

Lesson Overview:

Jesus taught parables to hide the truth from the religious leaders who criticized him but at the same time draw in anyone eager to learn and believe. To the Pharisees, the parables were nonsense. But to those who were drawn to him, the parables and the explanations of the parables that Jesus taught, were the words of life. Jesus told the crowd to listen to his teaching carefully. So it became important how you listened to what Jesus said; did you listen to learn, or listen to reject? Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9).

Total minutes: approximately 90–110

For the Teacher:

Take time during the week to read through the Scripture, Lesson Overview, and Lesson Aim, and to meditate on this week's Bible passage. The most important instruction you will give your students is the example of your own personal love for God and his Word.

Gather the items for the object lessons you would like to include. We've given you more content than you may be able to fit in your time. Feel free to scratch or rearrange the lesson to suit your classroom. Where the object lessons are more involved, we've sought to include a simplified alternative.

OPENING

Preparation: Prior to class, print out this week's Bible action word page and hang it at the front of the classroom.

Bible Action Word of the Week – “Listen”

The Bible action word activities in this section are for use with younger elementary students. If you have older students, go directly to the Object Lesson.

Each action word (and accompanying graphic) will be represented on a page that will hang at the front of the classroom. Each week's page can be hung next to the page from the previous week, for easy review. One option would be to hang the pages in such a way that by the end of the curriculum, all twelve words could hang together in the final form of a cross. (Optional: Additional copies of the action word page can be printed out for use as a coloring page.)

To start the class, hold up today's Bible action word picture.

Ask: **What is this a picture of?** (An ear)

Why did God give us ears? (God gave us ears so we can hear.)

Say: **Each week we are going to learn a new Bible action word. Our Bible action word for this week is “listen.” Can anyone tell me what the word “listen” means?** (“Listen” means to hear sounds with our ears. “Listen” also means to pay attention to words or sounds, so that you can hear them.)

Have the children close their eyes and listen carefully to identify the sounds they hear. Then make a few of the following sounds (or play sound bites) to see if they can identify them: frog croak, cat meow, cow moo, dog bark, word “whisper” spoken very softly, snap of your fingers, jingling of keys, closing of a book.

Ask: **What are some sounds we need to listen carefully to hear?** (Draw the children out by using the example of raindrops, baby crying in the night, teacher's instruction. You can use a glass of water and drop a drop of water into a bowl or pan and see if the children can hear the drop of water falling to the ground or spin a quarter on a desktop and have the class listen as it wobbles and comes to a stop. If they are too noisy they will not be able to hear those faint sounds.)

Say: **Today we are going to learn that the most important thing we need to listen to are words. Not just any words. The most important words we are supposed to listen to are Jesus's words—his teaching that we read in**



the Bible. So, when I read today’s Bible story make sure that you “listen” carefully to what I say. (Have the class close their eyes, then whisper a few words and see if the children can hear what you are saying. Start louder and then get extremely quiet.)

Object Lesson

Sowing Seed

Supplies

- *Sunflower seeds in the shell (If there are applicable allergies in the room, you will want to alter what you use.)*

Welcome the students, and then read the following while you gently cast the sunflower seeds across the room.

As you go through the class look for opportunities to reinforce the idea of listening. Tell the class that you are going to play a game as you go through the lesson. If you cup your hand behind your ear and whisper the word “parable,” everyone should close their mouth, and put their hands on their lap, to see who the “last person to listen” is. The goal is to never be “the last person to listen.” Explain that we always want to be the first person to listen. Practice this a few times early and carry this through the class. This will reinforce the action word of the week.

After casting the seeds, draw students out to discover what they know about seeds and what they need to grow (fertile soil, sunshine, warmth, water).

Ask: **What happens when a seed sprouts?** (The seed puts out a shoot and a root.) **What does the root need to grow strong from our list? (Warm, fertile soil; water)** **What does the shoot need to grow?** (Sunshine and warmth)

Say: **Today is our first lesson on the parables of Jesus. Jesus used parables to draw people, and he used parables to send people away. Jesus drew the poor, sick, and needy, and anyone else who wanted to learn about the kingdom of God. But for those who hated him, the parables hid the true meaning of his teaching. Religious leaders like the Pharisees and scribes rejected his teaching. They were confused by the parables and were not interested in the secrets hidden within the stories.**

We will see this idea again and again in most of the parables.

Ask: **Now let me ask you a question. Why did I cast the seed like a farmer sowing a field?** (Draw out answers from the class.)

Say: **I cast out the seed as a living parable. The seed represents the instruction I and the other teachers are going to give you as we study the parables. I want you to be as eager to learn about Jesus as you were eager to get one of the seeds I threw. The seeds represent my teaching and you scrambling after the seeds represents students hungry to learn.**

So, do you see how parables work? The parts of the story—in this case, me tossing out the seed—represent important ideas and truths. If you understand what the parts mean, you can know what the parable is all about.

Today, we are going to study the parable of the sower, one of the most famous of Jesus's parables.

Before we read the parable, let me ask you a question. Who do we want to be like, the disciples who listened carefully to the parables and asked questions or the Pharisees who heard the words but rejected the teaching?

Enlist the help of the class in gathering up the sunflower seeds. You'll use them again later in this lesson.

SCRIPTURE READING

This Scripture reading is a bit longer, but it is important to read both the parable and Jesus's explanation as to why he taught in parables.

Say: **That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."**

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:1-17).



THE LESSON

EXTRA BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER

Wherever Jesus traveled, he healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk, and delivered those possessed by demons. As you can imagine, word spread of his power and amazing teaching. As a result, Jesus drew large crowds, often thousands of people. The people admired Jesus so much, they wanted to make him king.


His popularity made the religious rulers jealous. They didn't have his power, nor did they possess his ability to teach truth with authority. They were also afraid that the Roman government would take away their power. You see, the Romans allowed the Jewish religious leaders to govern their own country, under the authority of Rome. But if Jesus were to stir the crowd to rebel against Rome, they would lose those their positions and be stripped of their authority. While the crowds were drawn to Jesus's teaching, the religious rulers, the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees all came to find fault and to accuse Jesus. These men did not understand the parables, nor did they want to know what the parts of the parable stood for.

For thousands of years God spoke through his prophets to instruct the people of God. The prophets foretold of a coming redeemer who would deliver Israel from the curse of sin (Isaiah 53:4-6) and sit upon the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). The prophets longed for the day when the deliverer would come. The religious leaders studied the writings of these men. They knew the prophecies which said that the Messiah would be born in the line of David, in Bethlehem, to a virgin, but they refused to believe that Jesus was the one. They were hungry for power and blinded to the truth. The secrets of God hidden in the gospel message were lost to them (Matthew 13:15). As a result, Jesus spoke in parables and hid the very truth they refused to believe but needed, in order to be saved. In the end, their unbelief became their judgment.

1. The People and the Parable

Say: This week we are learning about the parable of the sower. As you just heard from the Scripture reading, a farmer sows his seed and some of it falls on the hard path and the birds snatch it away. Some of the seed falls among the rocky soil and the sun causes it to wither and die. Some of the seed falls among the thorns and the thorny weeds choke the seed. And some of the seed falls in the good, fertile soil and bears a crop filling the farmer's baskets with grain.

The parables are kind of like a secret code. If you don't know what the objects in the story stand for, you won't understand its meaning. For example, Jesus explained that the seed in the parable is the Word of God. But what if Jesus said the seed in the parable represented something completely different like a football and the birds stood for the opposing linebackers trying to intercept and steal the ball? That picture completely changes the meaning of the parable. In that interpretation, the farmer is actually a quarterback, not someone teaching the gospel.



Why did Jesus teach with parables? Why did Jesus use confusing word pictures like a bird snatching seed off a hard path? Why didn't Jesus simply say, "You need to pay attention to my words and believe in what I say, so that Satan doesn't snatch the truth of the gospel from you"? Why did Jesus hide his teaching in parables?

Thankfully Jesus gives us the answer to why he spoke in parables. It has to do with his audience.

After teaching the parable of the sower, the disciples questioned Jesus and asked him "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10). Jesus explained there are two groups of people, those who were given the secrets of the kingdom and those to whom the secrets of the kingdom are hidden; those who wanted to learn and those who came to criticize; those who were drawn to believe, and those who refused to believe. The parables hid the truth of the gospel so that the religious rulers couldn't understand it. It was hidden from them. But to those who were drawn to Jesus, like the disciples, the parables made them curious. They wanted to learn the hidden meaning; they wanted to learn the truth. Before we look at the meaning of the parable, we will explore the two groups of people: those who accepted Jesus and listened to his teaching, and those who rejected Jesus and did not listen to his teaching.

2. The Religious Leaders Who Rejected Jesus

Say: The religious leaders were jealous of Jesus.

Draw out the class to see if they can tell you some of the amazing things Jesus did that might make the religious leaders jealous. (Jesus performed miracles, drew large crowds, and knew the Bible and could teach it skillfully. The people even wanted to make Jesus king.)

3. The Disciples

Ask: The disciples were those people who followed Jesus and wanted to learn from Jesus. Can anyone tell me how we know the disciples were different from the religious rulers? (They gave up everything to follow Jesus. They asked questions to learn more, so we know they wanted to listen and learn.)

4. The Parable

Use the Four Soils flash cards to help you illustrate this lesson. Be sure to cut out copies of the cards prior to the lesson.

Say: In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explained the parable of the sower to the disciples.

■ **The Seed - The seed is the Word of God.**

■ **The Soil - The soil is a human heart. Can anyone name the four different kinds of soil and tell me about them? (Go through each soil type the children name and draw them out until they give you the correct answer.)**



■ **Hard Soil** – The hard soil is a hard heart that rejects the word and doesn’t listen at all. The seed on the hard path is like the Word which goes to the religious rulers with their hard hearts (Matthew 13:19). They refuse to believe and the enemy steals away the truth like a crow picking seed corn off a beaten down path.

■ **Rocky Soil** – The seed which fell among the rocky soil is like a person who hears what Jesus teaches and rejoices in it. But when the trials of life press in, his faith withers like a plant with no root under the heat of the sun. Rather than run to Jesus, he turns away from his faith (Matthew 13:20–21). Can anyone tell me what kinds of trials or hard times we sometimes face that can turn us away from God? (Draw out the children here, and see if they can name trials that both adults and children experience.)

■ **Thorny Soil** – The seed sprouting up among the thorns is like a person who hears and rejoices in Jesus’s teaching but then loves other things, like money and possessions, more than Jesus so he or she turns away and does not follow Jesus and his teaching (Matthew 13:22).

■ **Fertile Soil** – The seed sown on fertile soil sprouts and grows to maturity and bears a large crop. It represents the people who hear the word, understand it, and believe and bear much fruit in their life (Matthew 13:23).

Throughout the parable of the sower, Jesus asks all of us, “Which soil are you going to be?” (Draw out the class here and ask them to explain the “why”—why they want to be like the fertile soil and not like the other soil types.) Fortunately, we get to know the interpretation of the parable, so we know the exact meaning of each of the soils, the weeds, the birds and the seed. So, will we believe and place our trust in Jesus, or will we refuse to believe like the religious rulers? Will we live for Jesus through trial and difficulty or allow anger and bitterness over life’s challenges to turn us away from God? Will we find our joy in heavenly treasure, or live for earthly riches and turn away from the truth?

5. The Mystery Character

Explain to the children that in every Bible story there is a hidden mystery character. The hidden mystery character is the audience listening in. There were usually people in the background listening in when Jesus taught. As we read the story we become a part of that audience. So even when Jesus is in the boat with the disciples and there is no one else around, we are watching and listening.

Say: **In today’s story, Jesus spoke about that audience with these words: “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand”** (Matthew 13:13).

Write Matthew 13:13 on the whiteboard. Underline the words “them” and “they,” and then circle the words “hearing” and “hear.”

Say: **Then he told the disciples: “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it”** (Matthew 13:16–17).

Write Matthew 13:16–17 on the whiteboard. Underline “your” and “you,” and then circle the words “ears,” and “hear.”

Then ask the class: **How many words in these two verses talk about listening?**

Finally, challenge the class to “listen up.” As the mystery character for every lesson, only those who listen carefully will use what they learn from the Bible in their lives. In Jesus’s day, many people failed to listen. The same is true for us today. Many may hear the words of Jesus, but far less will allow what they hear to change what they do. In the end, only those who allow God’s Word to change them truly listened to what it said. Remember, listening is not only about hearing the words of Jesus, but also about following and obeying what he said.

APPLICATION EXERCISES (30 minutes)

Choose one or more of these exercises to reinforce today’s lesson:

1. Four Soil Flash Cards

Supplies

- “Four Soils” flash cards (print and cut one copy)

Use the flash cards to quiz the class until they can repeat accurately the description of the meaning and message of the parable of the sower.

You can also play a game where you name a situation and have the children guess which of the four soils the situation is like. Here are a few scenarios to start; feel free to make up additional ones.

A boy or girl goes to church, but he doesn’t listen to the teaching because he isn’t interested in learning about God at all. (hard path)

- A boy or girl’s mom tells them to spend time each morning in devotions. At first they begin to read, but secretly they start playing games on an old phone instead. They love playing on the phone more than reading God’s Word. (thorny soil)

- A boy or girl starts out loving God and enjoying church, but when they break their leg and can’t play their favorite sport and miss the playoffs, they reject God. They believe it is his fault. (rocky soil)

- A boy or girl told a lie, but when they heard about Jesus dying for their sin, they felt bad and knew they needed to turn away from their lying and trust in Jesus. They confessed the lie to their parents and asked Jesus to save them. (fertile soil)



2. A Seed to Remember

Supplies

- Seeds, one per child (Reuse the seeds from the “Sowing Seed” object lesson.)
- Fine-line permanent black marker (one marker for three students)
- Envelopes, one per child

Explain to the class that the seeds sown in the parable represent the Word of God, specifically the gospel message. The gospel has three main parts:

1. Jesus’s sinless life on earth.
2. His sacrificial death on the cross where he took our sins and our punishment.
3. His victory over sin and death, proved by his resurrection from the grave.

Pass out a seed to each of the children. Tell them that you are giving them the seeds to remind them of the important message of the parable. Explain that when they get their seed they should take a marker and draw a capital letter “G” on one side of the seed. The “G” stands for gospel (the good news that Jesus died for our sin and all those who trust in him will go to heaven.) This “G” written on the seed is meant to remind them of the secret message of the parable which was hidden from those who refused to believe in Jesus. They should take care of their seeds.

Pass out the envelopes, and have each student write their names on their envelopes. Tell the children that the envelopes represent their hearts. Our heart is the place where we either listen (hear, believe the Word, and follow Jesus) or refuse to listen (reject Jesus and love other things more than God). Instruct the children to place their seeds inside their envelopes, representing the seed sown in soil. Have each child lick his or her envelope and seal it closed.

Now, take time to share the gospel again, and explain to the children that each of them has a decision to make: What kind of soil will they be like? Remember each of the pictures has both a seed and a soil. Will they believe and be like the seed sown in the fertile soil? The decision is up to them. By sharing the gospel, you have given them the true seed of God’s Word. Now it is up to them to believe and place their trust in Jesus, which is something you cannot do for them. Invite the students to take their envelopes home and explain to their families what is hidden inside.

3. Small Group Questions/Interaction

- ▶ What did you learn about listening today?
- ▶ What important truths did you learn from listening to the parable of the sower?



BIBLE MEMORY (10 minutes)

This Scripture emphasizes that only God can make us grow. So, when we hear the parable of the sower, we can desire to be the seed in the good soil but we must rely on God, not our own efforts.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:7).



SONG (10 minutes)

Every lesson has a suggested song. Don't worry about trying to teach a new song every week. Pick as many as you wish to teach your class during this twelve-week curriculum. "Listen Up!" is a good theme song for the whole curriculum.

"Listen Up!" (based on Matthew 13:1-23)

VERSE 1

Here's a story 'bout a man I know
He set out with seed to sow
Some seed fell on the path that day
The birds swooped down and took it away

VERSE 2

Some seed fell on the rocks and stones
Shot up quick, but found no home
Other seeds fell on the thorny ground
The weeds came up and choked them out

CHORUS

Listen up! God gave us ears to hear His Word
Listen up! Then think about everything we've heard
Listen up! Our hearts are soil where the Word can grow
Holy Spirit, help us know how to listen up

VERSE 3

Some seed fell where the soil was good
The roots grew deep just like they should
Water and sun made the plants grow high
The fruit was good and multiplied

BRIDGE

If we want to grow then we need to know
The gospel, the gospel
Jesus died and rose to forgive all those
Who believe in Him

Music by Jon Althoff, words by Jon Althoff and Bob Kauflin © 2017 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI)/Sovereign Grace Worship (ASCAP).



Song
of the
Week

Listen
Up



OPTIONAL PUPPET SKIT (Optional—15 minutes)

There are two different sets of puppet shows available to use in your classroom. Choose the Lesson 1 script from either puppet show level (“Smart Alex” or “Pappy the Puppet”), depending upon your students’ age or maturity level. The Smart Alex puppet shows are written for a younger audience, children ages 3–6; while the Pappy the Puppet series uses a more complicated vocabulary and will work better for older children, ages 6–10. Both present the Bible action word of the week and help reinforce the main idea.



ART ACTIVITY (20 minutes)

Sowing Seed

Supplies

- Sesame seeds, enough to give each child a hundred or so seeds to sprinkle on their drawings
- “The Four Soils” flash card page, printed for coloring (one per child)
- “Sowing Seed” page (one per child)
- Glue sticks
- Craft brushes (to apply the glue—one per three children)
- Paper bowls (some to hold the glue and some to hold the seeds—one per three children)
- Colored pencils

Pass out a “Sowing Seed” page for each child and colored pencils (if your students have the time to color in the drawing prior to adding the seeds). Have the children write their names on their sheets.

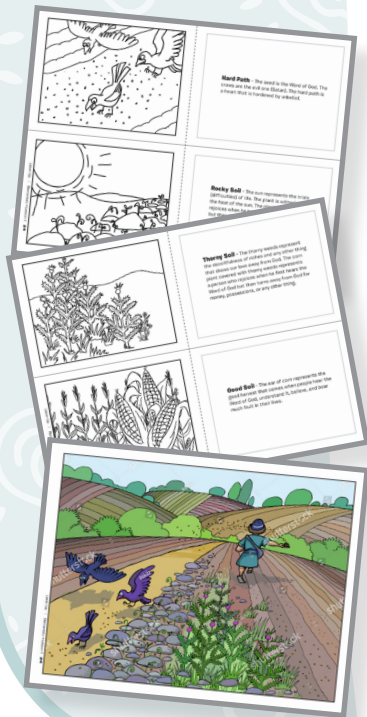
Have children rub a spot of glue on each of the four soils and sprinkle (sow) their seeds on that soil. Set the drawings aside to dry.

Use the finished drawings to talk about the parable. You can ask for children to volunteer to come to the front of the class, show their craft pages, and use them to retell the story in their own words.



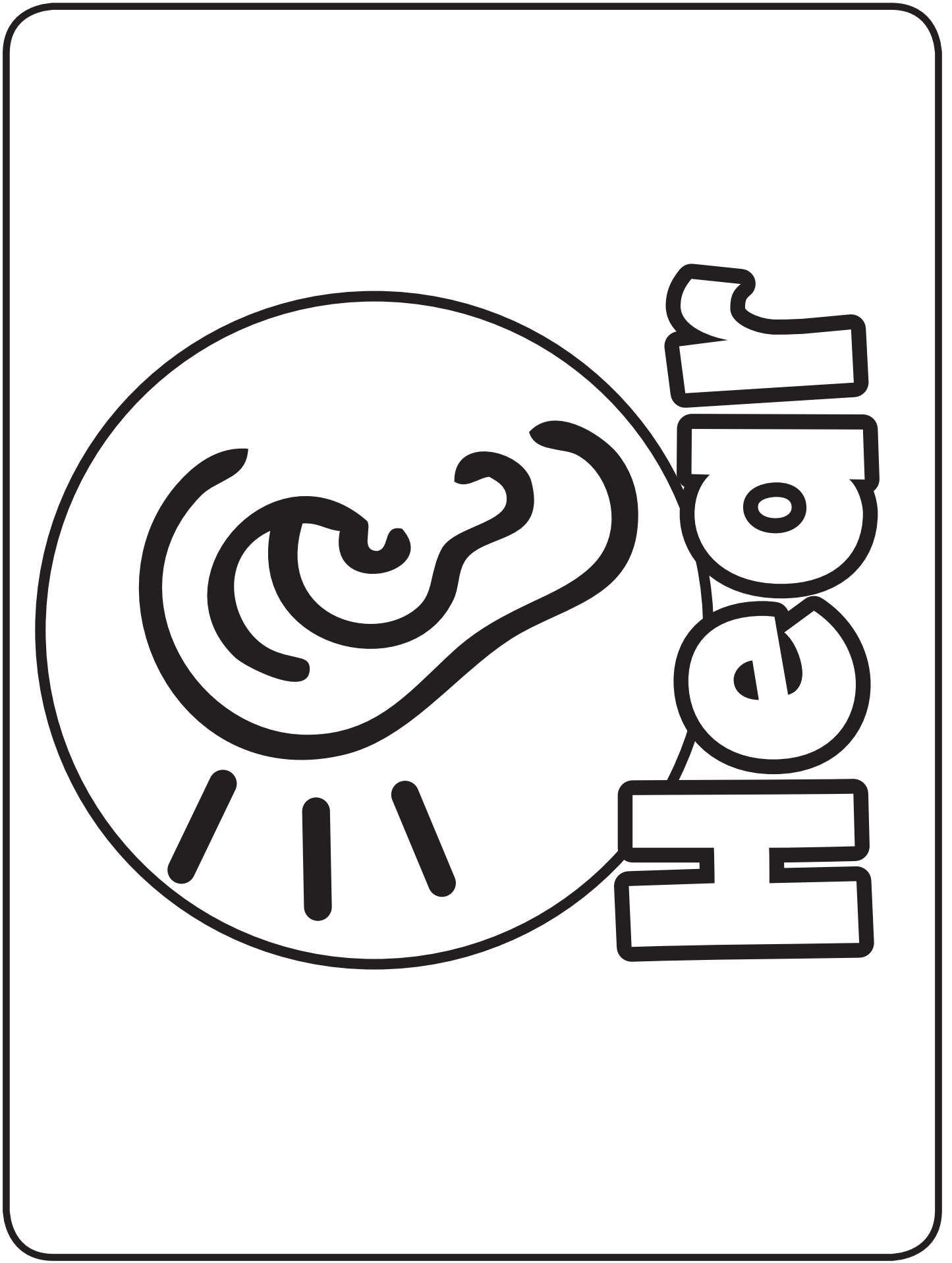
PRAYER (5 minutes)

Have one of the children pray and ask God to help the class be like the fertile soil—to believe in Jesus and not turn away.



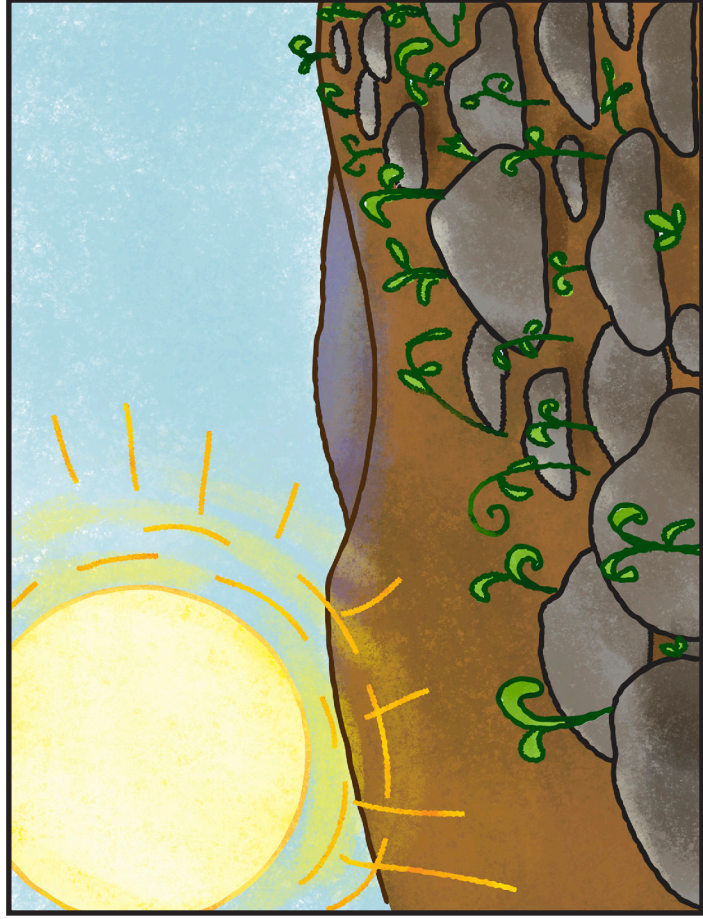


Healr





Hard Path – The seed is the Word of God. The crows are the evil one (Satan). The hard path is a heart that is hardened by unbelief.



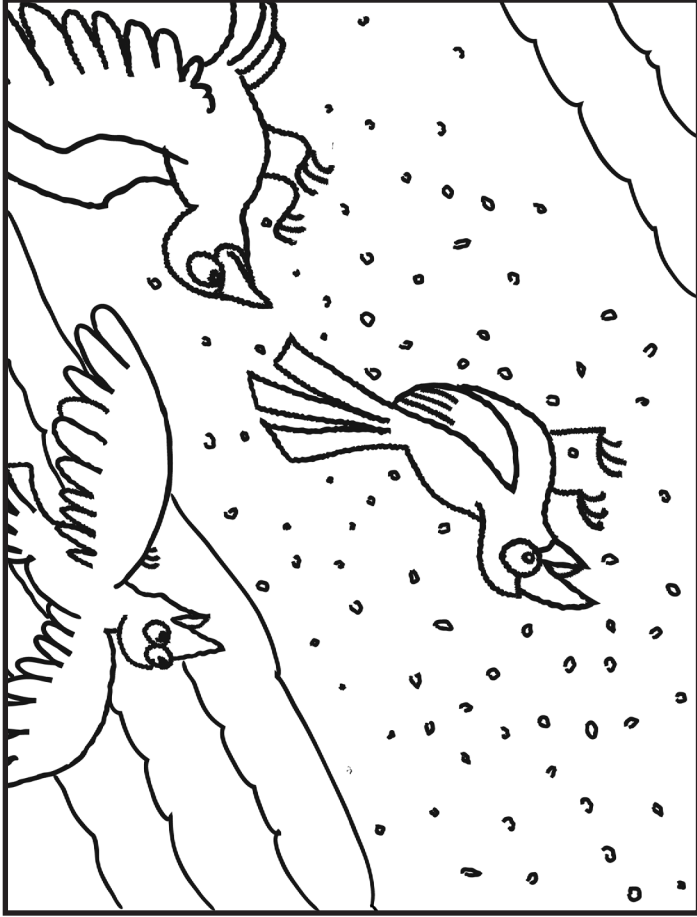
Rocky Soil – The sun represents the trials (difficulties) of life. The plant is withering under the heat of the sun. The plant is a person who rejoices when he hears the Word of God at first, but then the difficulties of life cause him to fall away from God (represented by the withering of the plant).

Thorny Soil - The thorny weeds represent the deceitfulness of riches and any other thing that draws our love away from God. The corn plant covered with thorny weeds represents a person who rejoices when he first hears the Word of God but then turns away from God for money, possessions, or any other thing.

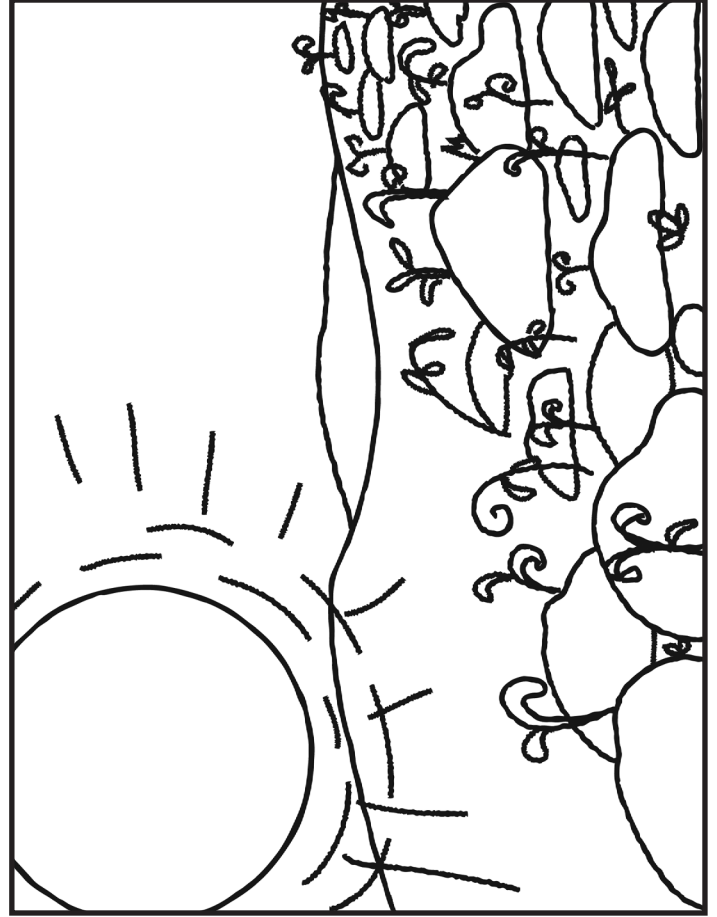


Good Soil - The ear of corn represents the good harvest that comes when people hear the Word of God, understand it, believe, and bear much fruit in their lives.



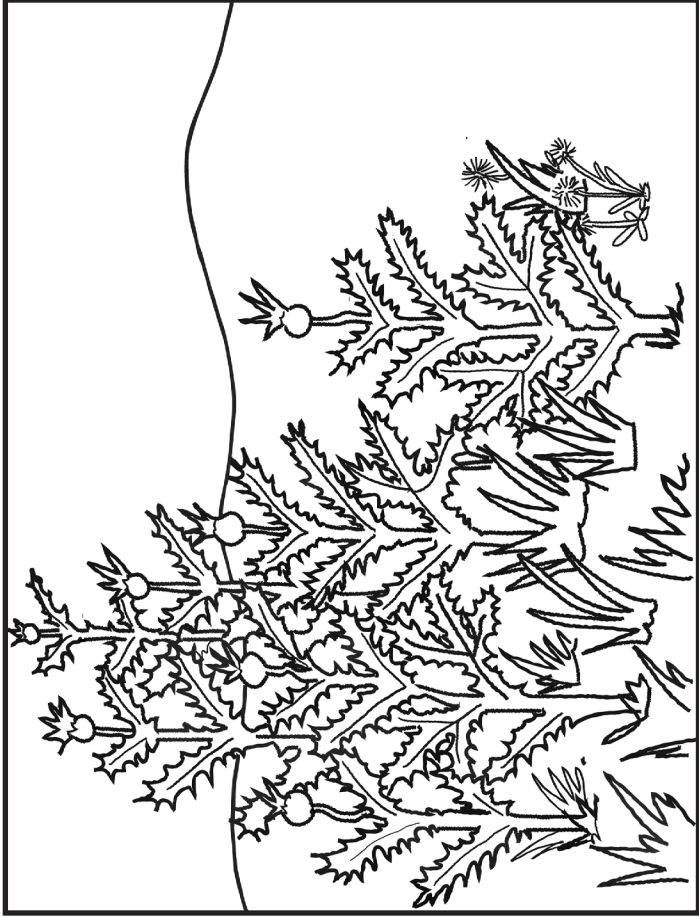


Hard Path – The seed is the Word of God. The crows are the evil one (Satan). The hard path is a heart that is hardened by unbelief.

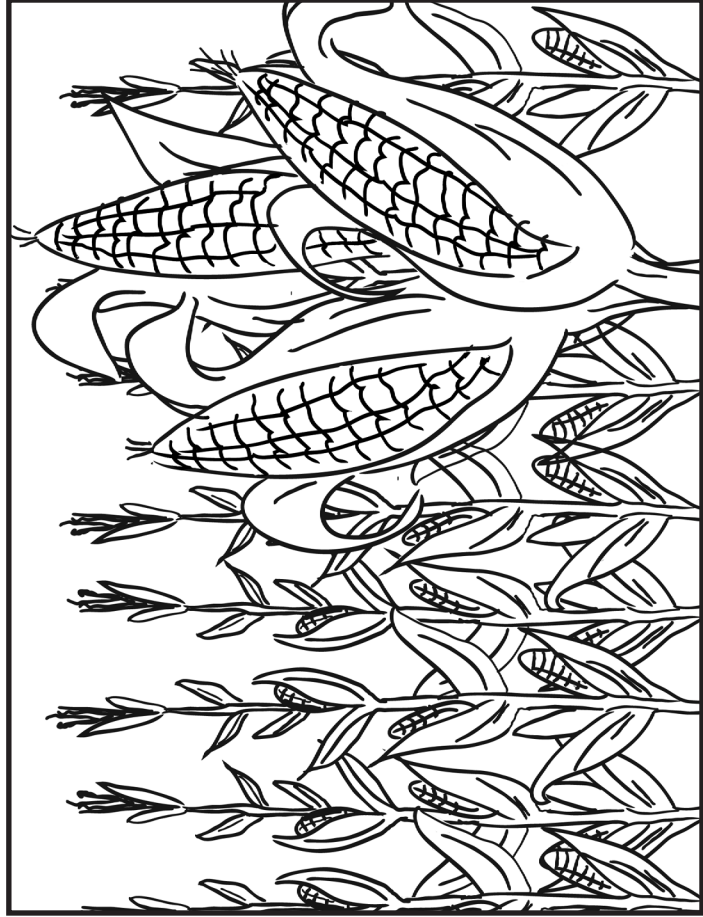


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Marty
Machowski



Listen

Jesus's
Parables for
Sunday School

Up

Middle School

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404

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Interior Design, and Production: Scot McDonald


Illustration: Scot McDonald;

Cover Design: Faceout Studio

ISBN: 978-1-945270-88-8

Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 1 2 3 4 5



Listen Up

Jesus's
Parables for
Sunday School

Middle School

Introduction

Listen Up: Jesus's Parables for Sunday School is a twelve-week curriculum for preschool, elementary, and middle-school students, which provides an opportunity for children to hear the gospel as Jesus himself shared it. Jesus told simple stories using everyday activities and objects that point to surprising spiritual truths about life in his kingdom. In the parables children (and adults!) will learn to treasure the gospel.

The *Listen Up* curriculum provides twelve lessons for three different age groups: Pre-K & K, Elementary, and Middle School.

Since children's ministry programs differ in length, you will need to decide how many of the offered components to include in your program.

Lesson Components

Middle school students love to be more hands-on. They do well with more small group discussion, projects, skits, and debate. If you have mostly fifth- through seventh-grade students in your classroom, the middle school lessons are the right choice for you. If you church is smaller, you may only have two grade school classes. In that case, one class with first-to-third-grade children and a second class of fourth-to-sixth-grade children is a helpful division. Fourth-grade students should do well with the middle school material.

The older the age of the children in your classroom, the more you should prepare in advance. Take time during the week to read through the lesson, look up all the Scriptures, gather your supplies, and practice running through the object lessons and other teaching components. While a thorough preparation takes time, you will enter your time with the children less tied to reading every word of your lesson.

You'll notice that many of the core components of the lesson are the same as those of the elementary lessons. The Lesson Overview, Scripture, and Lesson are identical to the lower elementary. The object lessons and discussion are different, are geared toward middle-school students, and are more demanding.

Lesson Overview – The Lesson Overview gives the teacher a brief introduction to the Bible passage the students will study. This is the same for all levels.

Opening Introduction and Object Lesson

Object Lesson – Each week opens with an object lesson geared toward middle school students. It is designed to help capture the students' attention for the main lesson.

Scripture Reading – Have children bring their Bibles to class and help them look up the Scripture passage you are going to read. By the end of the twelve weeks they will become familiar with where the Gospels are located in their Bibles. Consider keeping a stack of Bibles for your classroom that you can use for children who either do not have a Bible or don't bring one to class.

We've taken the time to write out a suggested lesson outline. While we've provided everything you need to simply read through the teaching material, you will want to take time to prepare during the week. Some of these have built in object lessons, which will require assembling a list of needed materials.

Each lesson is presented as a detailed, scripted outline for you to teach to the class. This may seem like a lot of "teacher talk," but it is important to recognize the role that teaching the truth of God's Word has in the life of everyone, including our children. The good news of the gospel is meant to be proclaimed. So don't be afraid to set aside ten to fifteen minutes of your class time for teaching.

The children will be able to tell if you've prepared ahead of time and done at least one run-through of the message. While we will all have times where the challenges of life rob us of our preparation time, make sure to plan well enough in advance that you have time set aside to prepare and practice your lesson. That way you won't be so tied to the outline. Always feel the freedom to tailor the material to your audience. What we are providing is a suggestion for how to teach the lesson, not a mandate. Put things into your own words; scratch off or add a line that you think will serve your class.

Teaching to children is different than teaching to adults. Here are a few pointers to consider when presenting the teaching portion of this lesson:

- Read the passage dramatically by adding voice inflection to distinguish the different characters in the story. Change your volume and expression to match the tone of the sentence.
- Act out the story with motions. If a man is discovering a treasure, pretend that you are the man finding the treasure and get excited.
- When you get to the message, feel free to engage the children as you go with questions. While there are some scheduled interruptions to engage the students in the lesson sections, the goal is to give you the bones of a message outline. Add your own questions and interaction from the body of the lesson.
- Add in additional gospel connections, testimony, and any other extras that come to your mind to make these outlines your own.

When our children grow up with teaching in children’s ministry, tailored to their age level, they become better equipped to sit in the main meeting and benefit from the preaching of God’s Word.

We’ve included the Bible action words in each middle school lesson, which are taught directly in the lessons for the younger grades. Since all the children are learning the same theme each week, it seemed good to also share the Bible action word of the lesson with the older class. This one-word distillation of the lesson can help keep your main focus on track. Be conscious of this word and look to sprinkle it throughout your conversation as you teach the lesson.

Application Exercises

Object Lessons and Activities – You’ll notice the object lessons for middle school students are different from those in the younger grades. If your class is on the younger side, feel free to pull an easier object lesson up from the elementary material.

As with the elementary lessons, each week there are additional object lessons and activities sprinkled throughout the lesson. These will require some measure of preparation, so you may want to enlist the service of a few adult helpers. Think “team” teaching, and use those folks assigned to your classroom to help you to teach an object lesson, activity, or other component of the lesson.

While we’ve located object lessons and activities in the lesson, you can move them around or eliminate them altogether. You do not need to do everything in the lesson. The *Listen Up* lessons have been designed to fill a wide variety of church formats. We wanted there to be enough material for churches who have middle school students for an hour and a half or longer. So, if your class is an hour or less, you won’t have time to use everything. In that case, you will need to decide which components to skip. Choose what is best for your class, and don’t feel bad about eliminating other components.

Small Group Questions and Interaction – While the small group discussions in elementary are optional, the small group discussions in middle school are key components of the lesson. Don’t skip breaking up your class into smaller groups unless you only have them for a short time. Middle school students will comprehend what you are teaching, and can talk it through and apply it to their lives and what they are going through. You could do this as a class, but then not everyone would get the chance to participate. Breaking the class into smaller groups ensures that everyone will have a chance to speak, and creates a context for social connection for students.

The larger your class, the more important it becomes to split up into smaller groups. This will greatly aid the children in applying what they are learning. If your class has less than ten children, you may not need to break down into smaller groups and can spend some additional time with the class as a whole. Groups of five to eight children work best. You’ll have enough kids to allow for three or four quiet children, yet able to get around to everyone if you’ve got a talkative bunch.

You will notice that the questions we’ve provided for small group discussion are more general. Feel free to add more specific questions based on your knowledge of

the group. If you are studying the topic of money for instance, and your church is raising money for missions or a building, connect what is happening locally into your discussion by adding a more specific question.

Song - Middle school children can be more resistant to singing in the classroom, but there is value in singing the songs. Each week we recommend you sing the assigned song and then review the lyrics with your class. See if your students can tell you, in their own words, what the song is about, and its main theme.

Bible Memory - The memory verse for middle school is the same as the elementary verse.

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The Parable of the Sower

Scripture: Matthew 13:1–17

Lesson 1 Snapshot

Lesson Aim: Children will learn that listening involves both hearing and obeying

Welcome Time (10 minutes)

▶ Object Lesson: Listen

Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

Lesson (15 minutes)

Application Exercises (30 minutes)

- 1. Compare and Contrast**
- 2. Listen Carefully**
(supplies: paper and pencils)
- 3. Knowing the Secrets**
- 4. Small Group Questions/Interaction**

Bible Memory (10 minutes)

Song (10 minutes)

“Listen Up!”

Closing Prayer (5–10 minutes)

Lesson Overview:

Jesus taught parables to hide the truth from the religious leaders who criticized him but at the same time draw in anyone eager to learn and believe. To the Pharisees, the parables were nonsense. But to those who were drawn to him, the parables and the explanations of the parables that Jesus taught, were the words of life. Jesus told the crowd to listen to his teaching carefully. So it became important how you listened to what Jesus said; did you listen to learn, or listen to reject? Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9).

Total minutes (approximate) 90–110

For the Teacher:

Take time during the week to read through the Scripture, Lesson Overview, and Lesson Aim, and to meditate on this week's Bible passage. The most important instruction you will give your students is the example of your own personal love for God and his Word.

Gather the items for the object lessons you would like to include. We've given you more content than you may be able to fit in your time. Feel free to scratch or rearrange the lesson to suit your classroom. Where the object lessons are more involved, we've sought to include a simplified alternative.



OPENING

Object Lesson: Listen

Explain to the children you are going to do a series of claps. You want them to listen carefully and then repeat the sequence. Start with two claps, then have them repeat. Then, add claps in an increasingly difficult pattern, until the response of the class is too jumbled to understand.

Then, talk about the two aspects of listening:

1. First, they had to hear your claps.
2. Second, they needed to carry out your instruction. Listening involves following directions. If a student had decided to be stubborn and not listen, he or she still would have heard the claps.

Say: **Listening in the Bible involves both kinds of listening—first, hearing what the Bible tells us; and then secondly, following what it says. So listen carefully to both *hear* the Word of God, and then also *listen* to understand what it is saying we should do with our lives.**



SCRIPTURE READING

See who in your class can open their Bible and find today's passage the fastest. (If you do these "sword drills" and offer prizes to the winner frequently, students will be rewarded for bringing their Bibles to class.)

Say: **That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."**

Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matthew 13:1–23).



THE LESSON

EXTRA BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER

Wherever Jesus traveled he healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk, and delivered those possessed by demons. As you can imagine, word spread of his power and amazing teaching. As a result, Jesus drew large crowds, often in the thousands of people. Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and delivered others from the demons who possessed them. The people admired Jesus so much, they wanted to make him king.

His popularity made the religious rulers jealous. They didn’t have his power, nor did they possess his ability to teach truth with authority. They were also afraid that the Roman government would take away their power. You see, the Romans allowed the Jewish religious leaders to govern their own country, under the authority of Rome. But if Jesus were to stir the crowd to rebel against Rome, they would lose those their positions and be stripped of their authority. While the crowds were drawn to Jesus’s teaching, the religious rulers, the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees all came to find fault and accuse Jesus. These men

did not understand the parables, nor did they want to know what the parts of the parable stood for.

For thousands of years God spoke through his prophets to instruct the people of God. The Prophets foretold of a coming redeemer, who would deliver Israel from the curse of sin (Isaiah 53:4-6) and sit upon the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). The prophets longed for the day when the deliverer would come. The religious leaders studied the writings of these men. They knew the prophecies which said that the Messiah would be born in the line of David, in Bethlehem, to a virgin, but they refused to believe that Jesus was the one. They were hungry for power and blinded to the truth. The secrets of God hidden in the gospel message were lost to them (Matthew 13:15). As a result, Jesus spoke in parables and hid the very truth they refused to believe but needed, in order to be saved. In the end, their unbelief became their judgment.

The People in the Parable

Say: This week we are learning about the parable of the sower. A farmer sows his seed and some of it falls on the hard path and the birds snatch it away. Some of the seed falls among the rocky soil and the sun causes it to wither and die. Some of the seed falls among the thorns and the thorny weeds choke the seed. And some of the seed falls in the good, fertile soil and bears a crop filling the farmer's baskets with grain.

The parables are kind of like a secret code. If you don't know what the objects in the story stand for, you won't understand its meaning. For example, Jesus explained that the seed in the parable is the Word of God. But what if Jesus said the seed in the parable represented something completely different like a football, and the birds stood for the opposing linebackers trying to intercept and steal the ball? That picture completely changes the meaning of the parable. In that interpretation, the farmer is actually a quarterback, not someone teaching the gospel.

One obvious question is, why did Jesus teach with parables? Why did Jesus use confusing word pictures like a bird snatching seed off a hard path? Why didn't Jesus simply say, "You need to pay attention to my words and believe in what I say, so that Satan doesn't snatch the truth of the gospel from you"? Why did Jesus hide his teaching in parables?

Thankfully Jesus gives us the answer to why he spoke in parables. It has to do with his audience.

After teaching the parable of the sower, the disciples questioned Jesus and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10). Jesus explained there are two groups of people, those who were given the secrets of the kingdom and those to whom the secrets of the kingdom are hidden; those who wanted to learn and those who came to criticize; those who were drawn to believe, and those who refused to believe. The parables hid the truth of the gospel so that the religious rulers couldn't understand it. It was hidden from them. But to those who were drawn to Jesus, like the disciples, the parables made them curious. They wanted to learn the hidden meaning; they wanted to learn the truth. Before we look at the meaning of

the parable, we will explore the two groups of people: those who accepted Jesus and listened to his teaching, and those who rejected Jesus and did not listen to his teaching.

The Religious Leaders Who Rejected Jesus

Say: **The religious leaders were jealous of Jesus.**

Draw out the class to see if they can tell you some of the amazing things Jesus did that might make the religious leaders jealous. (Jesus performed miracles, drew large crowds, and knew the Bible and could teach it skillfully. The people even wanted to make Jesus king.)

The Disciples

Ask: **The disciples were those people who followed Jesus and wanted to learn from Jesus. Can anyone tell me how we know the disciples were different from the religious rulers? (They gave up everything to follow Jesus. They asked questions to learn more, so we know they wanted to listen and learn.)**

The Parable

Say: In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explained the parable of the sower to the disciples.

■ **The Seed - The seed is the Word of God.**

■ **The Soil - The soil is a human heart. Can anyone name the four different kinds of soil and tell me about them?** (Go through each soil type the children name and draw them out until they give you the correct answer.)

■ **Hard Soil - The hard soil is a hard heart that rejects the word and doesn't listen at all. The seed on the hard path is like the Word which goes to the religious rulers with their hard hearts (Matthew 13:19). They refuse to believe and the enemy steals away the truth like a crow picking seed corn off a beaten down path.**

■ **Rocky Soil - The seed which fell among the rocky soil is like a person who hears what Jesus teaches and rejoices in it. But when the trials of life press in, his faith withers like a plant with no root under the heat of the sun. Rather than run to Jesus, he turns away from his faith (Matthew 13:20-21). Can anyone tell me what kinds of trials or hard times we sometimes face that can turn us away from God?** (Draw out the children here, and see if they can name trials that both adults and children experience.)

■ **Thorny Soil - The seed sprouting up among the thorns is like a person who hears and rejoices in Jesus's teaching but then loves other things,**

like money and possessions, more than Jesus so he or she turns away and does not follow Jesus and his teaching (Matthew 13:22).

■ **Fertile Soil** – The seed sown on fertile soil sprouts and grows to maturity and bears a large crop. It represents the people who hear the word, understand it, and believe and bear much fruit in their life (Matthew 13:23).

Through the parable of the sower, Jesus asks all of us, “Which soil are you going to be?” (Draw out the class here and ask them to explain the “why”—why they want to be like the fertile soil and not like the other soil types.) **Fortunately, we get to know the interpretation of the parable, so we know the exact meaning of each of the soils, the weeds, the birds and the seed. So, will we believe and place our trust in Jesus, or will we refuse to believe like the religious rulers? Will we live for Jesus through trial and difficulty or allow anger and bitterness over life’s challenges to turn us away from God? Will we find our joy in heavenly treasure, or live for earthly riches and turn away from the truth?**



APPLICATION EXERCISES

Choose one or more of these exercises to reinforce today’s lesson:

1. Compare and Contrast

Explain to the class that each of the Gospels were written by different disciples, and that none of the four accounts is exactly the same. John remembered things that Matthew didn’t include. Sometimes Matthew wanted to emphasize a certain point with his audience that John didn’t think was so important for his audience. Luke was not one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus; he was a doctor and became a follower of Jesus through the apostle Paul. He wrote down an orderly account of the life of Jesus by interviewing people and writing their firsthand stories.

Say: **When it comes to study of the Bible, we get more information if we compare what different gospels say about a particular event or lesson. So today, you are all going to become Bible scholars and compare two parables, to see what you can learn from one that you don’t discover in another.**

Break up the students into groups of five. Assign them Matthew 13:1–23, and either Mark 4:1–20 or Luke 8:4–15. Have each group list any differences that they see between the two accounts. For example, Matthew calls the birds the “evil one,” but Luke calls the birds the “devil.” Mark calls the birds “Satan.” Afterward, have them report back to the class. By comparing the gospel accounts, we can get a fuller understanding of the meaning of the parable.

2. Listen Carefully

Pair up your students. Give each team a piece of paper and something to write with, then give them the following instructions. Speak clearly and do not rush.

1. Tell them now it is time to listen and not be talking. (Do not repeat your instructions if they are not listening in any way. That is the point of this object lesson.)
2. Tell them to listen to your instructions carefully; they should take notes if they can't remember.
3. Ask them to think of five ways that children fail to listen to their parents, teachers, or coaches.
4. They should write down at least one reason on the bottom of their pages.
5. Then they should fold their pages in half, so their answers are not visible.
6. Finally, they should write the name of the person who recorded their answer, along the fold of the page, then turn their papers in to you.
7. Tell them to begin.

It is very likely that students will have questions. If they ask a question that indicates they listened to your instruction, go ahead and answer it (example: "Are we allowed to talk to one another to discuss our ideas?"). But if they ask a question that indicates they were not listening, do not answer it (example, "Can you repeat what you said?"). Ask them if they took notes as you were speaking. If they did, then help them get it correct. If they did not, remind them that you had specifically instructed them to take notes.

After you give them time to finish, see if any team completed the assignment accurately. Then talk about the two aspects of listening—hearing the words, and paying attention to follow what they say.

3. Knowing the Secrets

Say: **Let me read to you a section out of our Bible passage today, that comes after Jesus told the parable of the sower: "Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away'"** (Matthew 13:10-13).

Ask: **Can anyone tell me what the secret is?** (The secret is the identity of the Messiah. For hundreds of years God spoke through the prophets, promising to send a deliverer.)

Say: **Here are a few examples:**

- **The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen (Deuteronomy 18:15).**
- **I will raise up your offspring after you [King David], who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13).**

■ **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore (Isaiah 9:6-7).**

■ **The secret is that Jesus is the Messiah—the promised King who would reign forever.**

End by talking about how the prophets longed to know the identity of the Messiah, but that it was hidden from them. They all died before Jesus was revealed. John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament-style prophets, and he introduced Jesus by saying: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Take opportunity to share the gospel and emphasize that the most important thing is not simply knowing the secret, but believing the secret is true and giving your life to Jesus.

4. Small Group Questions/Interaction

Break your class down into groups of four to six students, and have them answer the questions below. The directions for your small group time can be typeset for distribution to the groups ahead of time.

When the groups have had a chance to answer the questions, have each group designate a spokesperson to report their answer to the class.

- ▶ **Why do you think God included the parable of the sower in the Bible?**
- ▶ **What are the two most important truths or lessons that we should learn from the parable and Jesus’s explanation?**

Students should reread the parable, Matthew 13:1–23, and come up with what they believe are the two most important takeaways from the passage. While they are working as teams, travel around the room and help the teams formulate their thoughts.

When the teams have finished, give time for them to present their arguments. Write the key truths on the board. If you don’t have time for every team to share, you can ask teams who have a different answer from those who were shared to come forward, so you can record all the different answers. Then take a vote as a class as to what the single most important takeaway point was from the Bible passage.

BIBLE MEMORY

This Scripture emphasizes that only God can make us grow. When we hear the parable of the sower, we can desire to be the seed in the good soil but we must rely on God, not our own efforts.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:7).

 **SONG**

Every lesson has a suggested song. Don't worry about trying to teach a new song every week. Pick as many as you wish to teach your class during this twelve-week curriculum. "Listen Up!" is a good theme song for the whole curriculum.

"Listen Up!" (based on Matthew 13:1-23)

VERSE 1

Here's a story 'bout a man I know
He set out with seed to sow
Some seed fell on the path that day
The birds swooped down and took it away

VERSE 2

Some seed fell on the rocks and stones
Shot up quick, but found no home
Other seeds fell on the thorny ground
The weeds came up and choked them out

CHORUS

Listen up! God gave us ears to hear His Word
Listen up! Then think about everything we've heard
Listen up! Our hearts are soil where the Word can grow
Holy Spirit, help us know how to listen up

VERSE 3

Some seed fell where the soil was good
The roots grew deep just like they should
Water and sun made the plants grow high
The fruit was good and multiplied

BRIDGE

If we want to grow then we need to know
The gospel, the gospel
Jesus died and rose to forgive all those
Who believe in Him

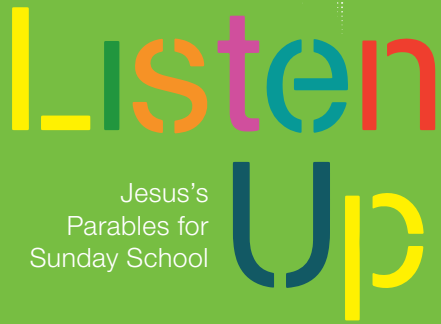
Music by Jon Althoff, words by Jon Althoff and Bob Kauflin © 2017 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI)/Sovereign Grace Worship (ASCAP).

 **CLOSING PRAYER**

Ask a student to pray a prayer related to today's lesson.



Listen
Up



Marty Machowski

PUPPET SKITS

SMART ALEX PUPPET SKITS (AGES 3-6)

PAPPY THE PUPPET SKITS (AGES 6-10)

Puppet Shows

There are two different sets of puppet shows which follow the *Listen Up* curriculum. The **Smart Alex** puppet shows are written for a younger audience, children ages 3–6; while the **Pappy the Puppet** series uses a more complicated vocabulary that will work better for older children, ages 6–10.

Puppet shows can be read directly from the scripts, so no memorization is needed. The skits are written assuming two roles, the puppeteer and teacher. While it is theoretically possible for one person to read both roles, it is far easier to use two individuals. It is helpful to read the script at home before class to familiarize yourself with the skit, and then to do a quick run-through of the script before class. Even a little practice will help you pull away from just reading the lines, and to add a layer of expressiveness for the children that will make the show come alive for them.

Don't be concerned that some of the subtle humor may be "over their heads." Like most children's animation, the following skits are written to entertain both student and teacher. After all, we adults like to enjoy puppet shows just as much as the children.

Now if you are thinking, "I can't do puppets," go ahead and slip a puppet onto your hand and see if in fact you can move its mouth and say the following words: "I can do puppets if I don't mind looking a bit silly." If you are able to move the mouth with your hands while you say those words, then you are a sufficiently gifted puppeteer to act out the following scripts. Enjoy!

Smart Alex Skits

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The Smart Alex Learns to Trust in the Lord



Smart Alex pops out from behind the stage.

Alex: Good morning, children.

Class: Good morning, Alex.

Teacher: Hi, Alex. Are you ready to try and guess our Bible action word?

Alex: You bet I am. Only I never guess; I figure it out by the clues.

Teacher: OK, Alex, are you ready for your clue?

Alex: As ready as I will ever be.

Teacher: Listen carefully.

Alex: OK!

Teacher: That's it.

Alex: What is it?

Teacher: It is the clue. Listen carefully.

Alex: I told you that I am listening carefully, but you are not giving me a clue!

Teacher: I told you that's it.

Alex: What's it?

Teacher: The clue.

Alex: What clue?

Teacher: Listen carefully.

Alex: OK, I'm listening for the clue.

Teacher: But I gave it to you.

Alex: I think we are going around in circles. I ask, "What is the clue?" You say, "Listen carefully." But then when I listen you don't give me a clue. You'd better give me the Bible clue.

Teacher: OK, Alex. Here you go: Jesus said that he who has ears should do this.

Alex: Wait a minute. Now I get it. The first clue must be the two words "listen carefully." When Jesus taught the crowds, he told them to listen carefully. He would say, "He who has ears, let him hear." That was like saying, "Listen carefully because I have something important to say."

Teacher: So what is your guess?

Alex: I don't have to guess—I know! The Bible action word of the week is *listen*!

Teacher: Great job, Smart Alex!

Alex: You fooled me on that one.

Teacher: How did I fool you?

Alex: You gave me the Bible action word as a part of the clue.

Teacher: I thought you said you were Smart Alex.

Alex: I am Smart Alex. Now let's do another one.

Teacher: Sorry, not until next week. We'll see you then. (to the class)
Say goodbye to Smart Alex.

Class: Goodbye, Smart Alex!

The Smart Alex Thanks, class! See you around. I'm going to tell all of my friends about trusting in the Lord. Trust the Lord. Trust the Lord. Trust the Lord.

PAPPY THE PUPPET SKIT

Put Your Ears On

Pappy Puppet is a grandfatherly figure who loves to tell stories. He always uses the phrase, “He who has ears, let him hear.” He will always ask, “Do you have your ears on?” and wants the children to cup their hands around their ears so they can hear the story. Each week he tells a story depicting the Bible action word of the week.

Pappy Puppet appears on the puppet stage and welcomes the children.

Pappy: Good morning children; let me introduce myself. My name is Pappy. *Pappy* is short for *Grandpappy*—that’s what my grandchildren call me. You can call me Pappy, too. Why don’t you all say, “Good morning, Pappy.”

Class: (responding to Pappy) Good morning, Pappy.

Pappy: I’m sorry, I didn’t hear what you said. Let’s try that again. Let’s do it all together and much louder. My ears are not what they used to be. OK. When I count to three you all say, “Good morning, Pappy.” One, two, three . . .

Class: (responding to Pappy) Good morning, Pappy!

Pappy: I think I heard a squeak, but that was very weak. I saw your mouths open but I couldn’t make out the words. Let’s try that again. When I say “one, two, three,” you repeat after me by saying “Good morning, Pappy.” OK, here we . . .

Teacher: (interrupting) Pappy, wait a minute.

Pappy: Huh?

Teacher: I said, wait a minute. I don't think you have your ears on.

Pappy: (shouting back) What did you say?

Teacher: (loud and slow, pointing to his or her own ears) I don't think you have your ears on.

Pappy: You think I should grow a beard? On my ear?

Teacher: No, Pappy. You don't have your ears on.

Pappy: Shoot my spear gun? I don't have a spear gun.

Teacher: (pointing to his or her own ears) Pappy, you don't have your hearing aids turned on.

Pappy: I can't understand a thing you are saying. Let me turn on my hearing aids. (Pappy adjusts his hearing aids in both ears.) Now what were you saying?

Teacher: I was trying to tell you to turn on your hearing aids.

Pappy: I have my hearing aids on, what else do you want?

Teacher: Never mind. Look, why don't you let me introduce you to the class this time?

Pappy: Alright, if you think it will work. They keep moving their mouths, but no sound is coming out. Awful quiet bunch.

Teacher: OK kids, let's let Pappy have it. Nice and loud, when I count to three, you say, "Good morning, Pappy," as loud as you can. One, two, three. . . .

Teacher/Class: GOOD MORNING, PAPPY!!!

Pappy: (Pappy stumbles backward at how loud the kids are, then recovers.) OK, OK, good morning to you all!

Teacher: You know Pappy, I just got an idea to help the children with the Bible action word of the week.

Pappy: What is the Bible action word of the week?

Teacher: The Bible action word of the week is . . . wait, let me see if any of the children remember. Kids, what is the Bible action word of the week? (Teacher prompts children to say *listen*.)

Pappy: So, the Bible action word of the week is *listen*. *Listen* is a very important word. Why, if we don't listen, we can miss all kinds of important sounds. You know I have a saying that I use whenever I want people to listen carefully.

Teacher: You have a saying. What is your saying?

Pappy: Well, let me tell you a little bit about me first. After all, this is the first time I've ever met this class.

I grew up on a farm and drove a tractor every day. I didn't know it, but the loud noise of the tractor made it so that as an old puppet, I can't hear very well. That is why I use hearing aids in my ears. Now that I'm older, sometimes I forget to put my ears on. That is the saying I use for my hearing aids—put your ears on.

Sometimes I forget to turn on my hearing aids. If that ever happens—if you ever notice that I'm not hearing you—just tell me, “Put your ears on.” I learned that saying from my dad.

When I was a little puppet and my dad was teaching me something, he would always remind me by saying, “Put your ears on.” Now, back then I could hear fine. But as a little puppet, I didn't always pay attention. My dad might be teaching me something important and I might be daydreaming or watching a butterfly flutter by. That is when he would tap me on the shoulder to get my attention and say, “Son, you need to put your ears on.” Now if he ever said that, I knew he wanted me to listen carefully. So, that is my saying—“Put your ears on.” I say that when I am trying to teach something important. So, now listen closely and I will tell you my story.

More than a hundred years ago, a group of wealthy men bought a piece of land with a lake in South Fork, Pennsylvania. They created a hunting and fishing club and called it the South Fork Hunting and Fishing Club. The lake in the center of their property was formed by a dam on the Conemaugh River. The problem was that each time it rained, the dam would spring leaks.

Now these guys had plenty of money, but they didn't want to spend it on fixing the dam. They could have repaired the dam with rock and stone or cement, but instead they used patches of clay and straw. They were told the dam needed better repairs, but they didn't listen.

One day it rained so much that the dam filled up and logs and trash clogged the spillway. The president of the club saw the problem and warned that the dam could burst any moment. He sent a messenger by horseback to warn the town of South Fork, but the officials of the town did not believe his message. So, they did not evacuate the town, nor did they send the message along to the city of Johnstown.

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, the dam burst. It was so loud that the people of South Fork heard it coming and scampered up the hill to safety. But the people of Johnstown were not so fortunate. A wall of water as high as a telephone pole carried whole houses and railway cars down the mountain and flooded the city. More than two thousand people died that day. Most of those lives could have been saved if people had listened.

So, as my dad used to say, if the owners of the dam had only put their ears on and listened to the warnings and repaired their dam with rock, it never would have broken. If the officials of South Fork had put their ears on and listened to the warning, and passed it along, thousands of lives would have been saved.

And that is my story.

Teacher: That is a sad story, Pappy. Did you know that Jesus had a saying that is very close to the one your dad taught you?

Pappy: I didn't know. What is Jesus's saying?

Teacher: Well, when Jesus was teaching a parable—that's what he called the stories he taught—Jesus would say, "He who has ears, let him hear."

Pappy: (repeating slowly) He who has ears, let him hear (pause). I get it. Jesus was saying, “Listen up, I’m telling you something important, so if you have ears, turn them on and listen carefully.”

Teacher: You got it, Pappy.

Pappy: (turning to address the class) OK kids, I want you to put your ears on. Now just to be sure, I want you to cup your hands behind your ears to show me that you’ve got your ears on.

Teacher: (helping to get all the kids focused on Pappy) OK kids, everyone cup your ears like this with your hands to show Pappy you have your ears on.

Pappy: I can’t stay long but I wanted to say one last important thing. Mr./Ms ____ (insert teacher’s name) is trying to help you learn about Jesus and all that he taught. Make sure that whenever he/she is teaching you, that you put your ears on—or should I say it like Jesus, “he who has ears, let him hear”?

Teacher: Thank you, Pappy. You helped us to learn our Bible action word for the week.

Pappy: You are very welcome. I’m so glad to help. But now I’ve got to go. I’ve got things to do and people to see.

Teacher: Class, let’s say goodbye to Pappy.

Class: Goodbye, Pappy!