

Youth Worship Lesson – November 1, 2020

WORDS IN ACTION

Focus Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12

Purpose: To examine what happens when our actions don't match our words.

Youth issue:
Peer Pressure and
Personal Integrity

Preparation

Worship Table – green cloth

Pictures for Bible story and activity materials at the end of the lesson.

Opening Prayer

Thank you, God, for this day and for this time to be together.

Help us to live out our love for you every day. We are not perfect.

We pray for forgiveness and the opportunity to right our wrongs and be Christians, not just in our words but also in our deeds.

Amen.

Song – What a Beautiful Name It Is: Hillsong Worship on YouTube

Introducing the Theme – Game: “Do as I say, not as I do”

We're going to play a game. Spread out so that you can all see me. This game is similar to Follow the Leader. I might say “Do as I do. Stamp your feet,” and you would stamp your feet. But there is a twist. Sometimes, I will do one thing but say another. I might stamp my feet, and say, “Do as I say, not as I do. Clap your hands.” The correct response would be to clap your hands. The key is to listen carefully to the instructions. Let's try it. Play a few rounds. Invite some of the students to take a turn being the leader. If you want, you can make it a little more complicated by doing two things. For example, you might stand on one foot and snap your fingers while saying, “Do as I say, not as I do. Snap your fingers.” Those who snap their fingers but do not stand on one foot are correct. Or even more tricky, I might jog on the spot while clapping my hands and say: “Do as I do. Jog on the spot.” Those who clap their hands and jog are correct. Play a few more rounds. Let every student have a turn being the leader. That was fun. Let's talk about the game a bit.

- Was the game difficult?
- Was it hard to be told to do one thing while being shown another?
- Which did you find influenced you more – the words or the actions?

Exploring the Theme – Bible Story

In today's Bible passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus talks about people whose words and actions don't match. They are more concerned with how others see them, with their reputations, than with following God. He uses the word "hypocrite" to describe them. Would anyone like to explain what a "hypocrite" is? If not, let's have someone look it up in the dictionary (or on a smartphone) and read the definition. (hypocrite: a person who pretends to have moral or religious beliefs but whose actions oppose those beliefs)

Hand out the Bibles. Please turn to Matthew 23:1–7. (Read the passage aloud or ask if a student would like to volunteer to read it.)

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, you must be careful to do everything they tell you. However, do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, bulky loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their clothing long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

The passage refers to phylacteries (pronounced "fellaCTeries") and tassels/fringes. Those were religious symbols that people wore in Jesus' time to show that they were faithful Jews. Here are some pictures. Look together at the teaching pictures "Phylacteries" and "Tassels and Tallith." Read aloud the information at the bottom of each sheet.

So, what was it that these religious leaders were doing? **(They were making a show of being religious, but that's all it was – a show.)**

Do you think the behavior of these leaders shows love for God? Why or why not?

What could they have done, but did not, that would have shown their love for God?

(They were burdening others but did not lift a finger to help them – verse 4)

When we do good things for others, what does this passage suggest we should be careful to not do? **(brag or boast about it, do it to get noticed or to gain honour)**

Now let's read verses 8-12. (Read the passage aloud or have a student volunteer read it.) "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. On the other hand, are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Who did Jesus say would be made great in God's eyes? **(Those who are humble – verse 12)**

How did Jesus say the "greatest one among you" must act? What name should leaders be known by? **(servant - verse 11)**

The Pharisees were important religious leaders. How do you think they felt when they heard Jesus saying these things – calling them hypocrites and saying that they would be humbled? **(Angry, defensive, surprised, sorry, worried)**

Can you think of any examples in our times where people have been hypocrites and said one thing but done another? **(politicians, TV evangelists, an adult who is upset with a child who has stolen money from a wallet, but cheats on their income tax; a young person who is angry with their younger sibling for taking a game that didn't belong to them, but then borrows some clothes from an older brother or sister without asking; athletes who promote anti-drug campaigns but use drugs; someone who comes to church or church school and talks about loving their neighbour, but then goes home and says unkind things about a Syrian family living across the street; wearing a cross around your neck, but gaining attention by swearing and telling dirty jokes)** If your children have trouble with this, try giving them the first half of an example ending with “but” or “then” and see what they come up with as an inconsistent action.

It's important to God that the way we act matches what we say we believe. The opposite of being a hypocrite is having integrity. Do you know what “integrity” means? (Integrity: firm adherence to a code of behavior, trustworthiness, honesty, being a person of principle. You may wish to have a volunteer look it up.) Can you think of any times of when you did what you knew you shouldn't – when your actions didn't match your beliefs, and you were a hypocrite? **(Give time for silent reflection.)** Can you think of any times when you did what you knew was right even though it was hard to do, and you showed integrity? **(Give time for silent reflection.)**

I'm going to describe some situations. If you were there, how could you respond that would fit with what you believe? How could you show integrity?

(1) A group is telling racist jokes/making fun of someone who is different.

(2) Someone you know offers to sell you drugs.

(3) A group of kids are standing around discussing plans to throw eggs at a teacher's house on Halloween ...or take something from a convenience store.

Have your children develop several possible responses to each situation. Discuss each with questions such as:

What kind of authority were you responding to? Peer pressure? **(don't want to lose your friends, be left out)** Legal? **(you might be arrested)** Parental? **(don't want to let your parents down)** Moral? **(your conscience, knowing what is right)**

Where was God in the situation? (as your conscience offering guidance? “overlooking the scene?” giving you courage to do the right thing?)

How does your response fit with what you believe about God and Jesus?

Would it be easy to respond this way if you encountered the situation in real life?

Memory Verse: *Therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.* Matthew 23:3

Integrating the Theme – Tassels

Materials: Safety pins

Scissors

Several different colours of yarn (not too thin)

Ruler

In advance: Bring safety pins (one per student), scissors, several different colours of yarn (not too thin) and a ruler.

Do you remember what we learned about tassels? What were they? Why did the people wear them? (If needed, show the picture from the “Tassels and Tallith” teaching picture again and review the information.)

We’re going to make tassels. First, choose the colours of yarn that you would like to use, and cut 3 strands approximately 20cm/8in long. Attach the strands to the closed side of the pin by making a loop at the center of each strand, folding it over the pin and pulling the ends through (show the diagram). This makes 6 strands.

Next, divide the strands into pairs - 3 bunches of 2 strands. Braid these together about 3/4 of the way down. You may want to attach the pin to someone’s sleeve or to your own pant leg to hold it. Tie off the braided end with another piece of yarn (show the diagram) and separate the pieces of yarn to create the tassel.

In Jesus’ time, tassels were worn as signs of devotion to God. You might want to put your tassel on your jacket or backpack to remind you of your special relationship with God, and to remind you to act in ways that fit with what you say you believe.

Closing Prayer

May the blessing of God go before us;

may God’s grace and peace abound;

may God’s presence illuminate our hearts now and forever more.

Amen.



Phylacteries

These were small boxes made of leather, attached to the forehead and to the left arm and hand by leather straps. In each phylactery there were 4 passages of scripture from the Law of Moses. All Jewish boys wore them from the age of 13, as they said the Shema daily prayer each morning.

The passages were Exodus 13:1–10, Exodus 13:11–16, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and Deuteronomy 11:13–21. When the left arm was bent, the box lay directly over the heart. Wearing the phylactery showed respect for the Law of Moses, and that your head, heart, and hands were in God's service.



Tassels and Tallith

Moses told the Israelites: "You must make tassels like flowers on the corners of your garments, you and your children's children. Into this tassel you shall work a blue thread, and whenever you see this in the tassel, you shall remember God's commands and obey them." (See Numbers 15:38)

The tassels were made of 8 strands of thread which were twisted and tied in 5 double knots. They were to be attached to the outer garment, where they would be easily

seen. Later, when Jews were forced to live in foreign lands, these noticeable tassels brought persecution and hardship. So, the tassels were sewn to the 4 corners of a square piece of material worn under their cloak. This was a symbol that the people of Israel were a special people, and a reminder to follow God's commandments. Later this became a prayer shawl or "tallith." (Pronounced "tal-EET")