Who Are the People of God?

Focus Scripture
Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22

PURPOSE
To explore the cost of belonging to God’s community.

Lesson Preparation
- Read Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22, biblical background for September 30, and the information on Purim in the Unit 1 Introduction.
- Set worship table with a green cloth, candle, Unit 1 logo (#4), a Bible, and offering basket.
- Print the opening and closing prayer on newsprint.
- Make copies of the “All God’s Children” drama resource sheet.
- Organize any props you need (see Exploring the Theme).
- Choose the option(s) you would like to use for Integrating the Theme. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.
- Check birthdays.
- Pray for the young people in your church knowing that, like us, the most difficult choices they make are outside the walls of the church.

Opening
Welcome everyone, especially any newcomers. Ask how their week has been.

Ask a volunteer to light the candle, saying “We light this candle to remind us that God is always with us.”

Birthdays, Offering

Prayer: Loving God, we make a lot of choices in our lives every day. Help us always to consider how our choices will affect others and consider what choices you would want us to make. Amen.

Introducing the Theme
Either/Or Exercise
Sometimes a choice comes down to one of two alternatives. Sometimes both outcomes are appealing; sometimes neither. However, people are often forced to choose. In the following exercise consider the two options and make a choice. Move to the left side of the room if you choose the first option and to the right side if you choose the second option.

Which of the following is most like you:
- thinking of the future or thinking of the present?
- talking or doing?
- wanting change or fearing change?

Which change is more difficult to adjust to:
- a new school or a new house?
- moving to a new city or taking a new job?
- a new church or new neighbours?
- divorce or death?
When finished, talk about the experience. Were some of the choices difficult to make? Did anyone want to just stand in the middle of the room for some? What makes a decision hard? When we make choices, what do we have to consider? (How will the decision affect others? What are the consequences of making that choice? etc.) What are some of the choices you are facing now that feel critically important?

Exploring the Theme

The scripture passage today is about a young woman named Esther who was forced to make a very difficult choice. *(Hand out copies of the “All God’s Children” dramatic reading resource sheet and ask for volunteers to read the parts of Andrea, Jennifer, Erin, Jason and Mike. Be as creative with this as you want. Bring throw cushions for the group to sit on, a bowl of popcorn, remote control, etc. for props.)*

When you have heard the dramatic reading, hand out Bibles and continue as follows:

Have everyone turn to Esther 4:6-14 and take turns reading the next part of the story. What choice do you think Esther will make? What could happen to her? If they heard the passage read in church before coming to class they may already know the ending. If this is the case, ask them to list all of the choices Esther could have made. How would the story have ended if this were the case?

Then have a volunteer read Esther 4:15-16. What did Esther do to gain strength to make this difficult choice?


Discussing the Passage: Esther

Who was the hero, heroine, and villain in this story? Why do you say that? How did Esther use her power to help her people? (She asked people to pray for her and then went to talk to the king.) What risks did she take? (She approached the king and might have been put to death for doing so.) Do you know of people in our time who have taken risks like this or stood up in an unjust situation? (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr., Craig Kielberger, Malala, youth after highschool shootings in Parkland, Florida) What gave Esther strength to act with courage? (Esther prayed for God’s help and asked the people to pray for her too.) Have you or someone you know had to make a difficult decision like Esther? Do things always turn out as well as they did in Esther’s case?

A Time for Wondering

*(Ask these open-ended questions not to find the “right answer” but to explore their thoughts, ideas and feelings.)*

- I wonder what gives you strength to face difficult decisions?
- I wonder if you ever ask for God’s help?
- I wonder how you think God might help?

*(This might lead into a discussion of how we can ask for God’s help, but that God’s care and love are often lived out in our own actions and in the actions of other people. For example, when we pray for someone who is unhappy, we also have to show our care to that person. This may be a new concept for youth who sometimes think of God as magician or puppeteer. We can help them to see that often God’s help comes to us through another person.)*

Integrating the Theme

Option A: Paper Bag Drama

**In advance:** Print “Parable: A story which teaches spiritual truth” on the side of a paper grocery bag. You will need a bag for each group of 3-4 youth in your class. Put approximately 6 different commonplace items such as cooking utensils, items of clothing, a beach towel, empty bottle, a magazine, a plastic garbage bag, a set of keys, etc. in each bag.

Hand out a prepared paper bag to each group. *Explain to them that they will have 5 minutes to plan a “drama” that deals with a dilemma that people their age face (i.e. a situation which requires characters to make a difficult choice.) The catch is that they must use all of the items found in their paper bags as props in their skits. Regroup after 5 minutes and perform these for each other.*
Option B: “I Can Make a Difference” Mini Collage  
**Materials:** construction or heavy stock paper, scissors, glue sticks, magazines  
**In advance:** Cut sheets of letter-size paper in half.  
Invite each person to think about their strengths. These might be qualities they know they have, or that others have pointed out to them. For example, they might be a good listener, compassionate toward animals, a good leader, organized, know how to make others laugh, creative. Make a small collage about yourself that shows your personal strengths. Cut pictures from magazines that represent your strengths. Arrange these to cover the whole half sheet, allowing these to overlap or fit together. Trim edges. When everyone has finished, invite each person to share theirs. Reflect silently on how you might use these strengths, as Esther did, to make a difference.

Option C: Follow-up to Last Week’s Options  
If you used the option “Planning Your Space” or the “Group Service Project” option last week, you may need to use more time this week to follow up on those options and what was started last Sunday.

**Closing**  
*(Invite everyone to stand in a circle to reflect our community of support and friendship in the midst of the difficult choices we have to face each day.)*

**Prayer:** O God, we thank you for friends and family who support us though difficult decisions; and for Jesus, who showed us how to live and love. Help us have courage to make faithful choices, Like Esther and Jesus. Amen.
September 30, 2018

Cast of Characters:

Jennifer, Erin, Andrea, Jason, Mike

Note: King Xerxes’ name is pronounced Zerk sees.

Opening Scene: Erin, Andrea, Jason and Mike are gathered in front of the TV.

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