

Character Sketches

Generations Ministries

2009 camp teaching curriculum

produced by the staff of Higher Ground camp
edited by Jonathan Stepp and Ted Johnston

Introduction

This standard curriculum provides a compilation of biographical/theological sketches of key biblical characters (in some cases more than one sketch for a single individual).

Seven sketches are provided, and each camp may choose which ones to present—one for each chapel, or perhaps an introductory chapel followed by a sketch in each of the remaining chapels. Feel free to knit these sketches together in creative ways. The verbal presentations can be augmented with music, skits, etc. Be creative!

In each of the sketches we've provided more material than typically can be covered in one message. But each presenter can study the material – become familiar with it, and then present the story of that person's life, including their relationship with God, in such a way that the story flows out of their own passionate love for God, connecting the sketch to the story of the campers life in Jesus.

You will note that each sketch tells the story of that person from the perspective of a trinitarian, Christ-centered theology. In short, each story is viewed through the "glasses" of the BIG story—the story of Jesus and of humanity in union with him. Most of the sketches are of Old Testament characters. The meaning of their stories is found only by viewing them through the story of Jesus and mankind in union with Jesus. Thus we go to the Old Testament through the "portal" of the New. This gospel-based, Christ-centered approach is vital if we are to apply these stories to the lives of campers in ways that speak the truth about who they are in union with Jesus.

A Thief Redeemed (Jacob, option 1)

By Paul David Kurts

Character: Jacob

Text: Genesis 32:22-32

Primary Lesson: The story of Jacob teaches us that indeed God is bigger than our mess ups and no lemon in our past is capable of stopping God from making lemonade out of it.

Intro: In the novel *Le Miserable* Jean Val Jean was a thief who received mercy and redemption during the height of the French Revolution.

- We read also of a thief in the OT whose life was redeemed – where God stepped in and said to him “beginning today you are no longer the man you were before”.
- The man was Jacob and although you and I may not be thieves there is a lot of Jacob in all of us - all of us have done things in our lives that we aren’t proud of.

Text: Genesis 32:22-32

- Who was Jacob?
 - Son of Isaac, grabbed the heel of his twin brother Esau as he was being born
 - Swindled Esau out of his birthright
 - Connived with his mother to steal Esau’s blessing from his father
 - Manipulated his uncle Laban’s flocks in order to get the best for himself
 - Had not lived a “stellar life” – would have made a good employee at Enron!
- Read Genesis 32:22-32

1. It’s not that God wasn’t strong enough to overcome Jacob it’s that He couldn’t get Jacob to give up, He couldn’t overcome his determination

- His life had been defined by what he had done – his behavior – now he would be defined by God’s purpose for his life
- God came to Jacob at night, like He comes to us in our darkness, and embraces him, struggles with him and the process changes his entire identity

2. Jacob goes from being known as a thief or usurper (Jacob literally means “heel grabber”) to one who wrestles with and persists with God (Israel)

- The one who spent his whole life taking everything, wrestled the one who would eventually give everything - Jacob wrestled with the one who would later, through the incarnation, become his great, great, great.....grandson Jesus Christ (I Cor 10:4)

3. Perhaps people have defined you by your behavior, your mistakes, your sins, your mess ups. Here’s good news for you – Daddy doesn’t define you and me by our behavior!

- Now for Jacob the **PROCESS** for receiving his blessing was **PAINFUL**
- “Jacob I’m going to bless you but in the process I’m going to touch your hip”
- Meeting Jesus in our darkness and allowing Him to wrestle with our hearts and minds isn’t always pleasant! Why? Because the natural mind is enmity against God
- Perhaps Jacob wanted to earn his blessing for the very first time in his life – he had stolen almost everything else he ever had – had everything physically that he needed
- The blessing that Jacob truly needed and that he truly wanted was a new identity, a new lease on life, a new purpose, all of his physical blessings left him feeling empty.

4. Do you see your story in Jacob’s story? In Jesus Christ, you and I have been given a new identity, a new life, a new purpose and we didn’t have to wrestle Him for it!

- He came to us and continues coming to us in our darkness to deliver us from fear and doubt and worry and anger and everything else that opposes who we are in Him.

Conclusion: The story of Jacob teaches us that indeed God is bigger than our mess ups and no lemon in our past is capable of stopping God from making lemonade out of it.

Will the REAL You Please Stand Up (Jacob, option 2)
by Bill Winn

Character: Jacob

Text: Genesis 25-33

Primary Lesson: The reality of your life is that you've never been separated from the Blessed Trinity and you have always existed inside of His loving embrace in Jesus.

Intro: Do you ever feel that God couldn't or wouldn't love you because of your past? Today we're going to look at the story of Jacob and see who we really are as children of the Father in Jesus.

Text: Genesis 25-33; Summarize and re-tell the story of Jacob's life

- Jacob's Birth
- Jacob's name means usurper, line cutter, me first- forget you!
- Jacob the mamma's boy
- Esau the manly hunter- daddy's favorite.
- Jacob makes Esau trade his birthright for a bowl of soup

1. Jacob tricks Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau- lies about who he really is.

- Jacob has to run for his life
- Rachel and Leah 14+ years of servitude- see what a life of selfishness & wrong-relationships brings.

2. Jacob wrestles with the Word at Peniel (means- I have seen God face to face)

- God asks him what his name is... he says Jacob- acknowledges his own darkness and brokenness and God blesses him anyway.

3. Jacob reconciles with his brother Esau- and in the reconciliation he says "this is like the face of God."

- Righteousness (right-relationship) is what God is all about.

4. God the Trinity loves us and has embraced us in Jesus in our darkest parts. He has embraced even the parts we are ashamed of and has redeemed all of us especially the broken and dark parts of us.

- We may, like Jacob, say to God- "This is who I am, this is the real me." And hear the Father still sing His love over us through His Son in the Spirit.

Conclusion: God calls us to right-relationship and blesses us despite our shortcomings and failures. Are you like Jacob? Is there some part of you or your past that is keeping you ashamed or keeping you from being the fullest YOU in Christ? Is there something that the enemy is using to tell you that you are unlovable, unworthy, unforgivable, and separated from God? You've never been separated from the Blessed Trinity and you have always existed inside of His loving embrace in Jesus.

For Such a Time as This:
God's Redemption of Troubled Circumstances
by Steve Webb

Character: Esther

Text: Esther 1-10

Primary Lesson: God will use the bad circumstances in your life to not only show his care and concern for you but also to show his redemptive love to others through you.

Intro: Whose life here is less than perfect? Are you trapped in unpleasant circumstances beyond your control? Are you asked to do things you don't want to do? Do you feel these circumstances are beyond God's control or redemption? Let's look at a young woman in the Bible who could have answered a resounding "YES!" to all these questions and see how God used her in her circumstances to save an entire nation of people!

Text: Esther 1-10; Summarize and re-tell the story of Esther's life

- Esther was an orphan raised by her cousin, Mordecai.
- Xerxes, the king of Persia, was looking for a new wife, so he commanded that all beautiful virgins of marrying age be brought to the palace so he could select one as his new queen.
- Because the Jews were a conquered people, Mordecai instructed that Esther hide her ancestry.
- Xerxes chose Esther as his new wife. She had little choice in the matter, as refusing the king in marriage would have resulted in her banishment or execution.
- So, to sum it up, Esther was a (young) woman who, without her consent had to endure the following circumstances:
 - Was an orphan
 - Was captive in a strange land because of the mistakes of her ancestors
 - Was forced to go the king's palace for a year to be evaluated as his bride
 - Was forced to marry a man she didn't know
 - And on top of all that, she couldn't be herself

1. If you were Esther at this moment in her life, would you feel that God had abandoned you? Would you think your life was fair?

2. But, as we'll see, there is more to the story! After his wedding to Esther, Xerxes promoted a man named Haman to the second most powerful position in Persia.

- Haman got angry because Mordecai wouldn't bow to him. Mordecai would only bow to God.
- To get back at Mordecai, Haman convinced the king to sign a decree that on a certain day, everyone in the kingdom was to kill the Jews. They could keep the property of any Jew they killed.

3. Mordecai then sent word to Esther telling her to go to the king to plead for the lives of her and her people.

- There was one problem, though – to go to the king without being summoned, meant you could be executed – even if you were the queen!
- Understandably, Esther balked at this responsibility. Together, let's read Mordecai's reply to her.

Read Esther 4:13-14

- Isn't that fascinating? Mordecai's reply was that maybe God placed her in her life circumstances precisely for this moment – to use her to deliver the Jewish people!

4. Our God is a triune God –Father, Son and Spirit—a God of relationship!

- The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in perfect unity.
- From before there was time, they purposed to share that relationship of love with us – all of humanity!
- They REFUSE to do anything without including us in it. In this case, they purposed to save the Jewish nation through the actions of Esther!

5. Imagine for a moment if even ONE THING in Esther's life had been different. Her people would have been slaughtered.

- Is this to say that God puts us in the bad situations in our lives? Did God make Esther an orphan? Did God make her an exile to a strange country?
- NO!!! What we see is that the Father, Son, and Spirit can and will, in perfect time, redeem every bad situation in our lives and use it for our ultimate good and the ultimate good of others!

Conclusion: What about your situation? When we began this message, I asked if anyone here had a life that was less than perfect. Where in your life can you identify with Esther's story? Where have circumstances that are beyond your control hurt you? Have you ever considered that God will use these circumstances to not only show his care and concern for you, but to show his redemptive love to others through you?

Who are You?

By Jonathan Stepp

Character: Jesus

Text: Mark 1:9-11

Primary Lesson: Our Father in heaven tells us who we are: we are his children in Jesus. When we are baptized we are saying that we believe this truth about ourselves.

Intro: Inform the kids that you are some famous person such as a rap star or movie star. Tell them you are now going to perform (a rap song or a scene from a movie) and you want them to cheer if they really believe you are that person and boo if they don't think you are that person. Perform horribly and let the kids have fun booing you.

Okay, so if I'm not who I claim to be, then who am I?

Text: Mark 1:9-11

- How do you know who you are? How do others know? Your parents told you your name, and who you are, and they introduce you to others.
- Read Mark 1:9-11
- At his baptism, Jesus' Father tells him who he really is, and he tells others who Jesus really is.
- Who is Jesus? He is God the Son. God is a divine relationship of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus is God the Son living as a human being like us. In the story here in Mark, the Father speaks from heaven and the Holy Spirit appears as a dove.

1. We're like Jesus. We need to be told who we really are. Like him we are really children of our parents and really children of God the Father.

2. If you didn't believe that your parents were your parents would they still be your parents? (Yes.) What if you believed something crazy about yourself, like I did at the beginning of this lesson, would believing something crazy make it true (No.)

3. Jesus is telling you that you really are his brother or sister and that God the Father really is your Father. The Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart and telling you that Jesus is telling the truth.

4. Just like Jesus did in his life, we all come to a special moment in our lives when we believe that we really are children of God the Father. Just like Jesus, when we believe that truth we get baptized as a way to say we believe.

Conclusion: Who are you? You are a child of God the Father and Jesus is your brother and that truth will never change.

[**Note:** information could be given here about pre-baptism counseling for those who want to take that step, either at camp or back home]

God's Son, Jesus, is a Real Human Being

by Tim Brassell

Character: Jesus

Text: Luke 2:27-52

SPS: Teaching about the life of Jesus as a young person emphasizes just how REGULAR, and REAL He was, and is, as a human being; that he has identified with us in our everyday, "real" lives!

Intro: When you think of Jesus as a teen, about your age, how do you think of him? Did Jesus grow up like we do or was he born acting like an adult?

Text: Luke 2:27-38

- The human birth of the Son of God
- Recognition/celebration of Jesus' birth by other people – *Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna* (Luke 2:27-38) His destiny is being called out by other human beings in the Spirit!

1. The Missing Son

- The Occasion – Passover Festival (Jesus got "dragged" to religious gatherings!)
- The Oversight – of Jesus and his parents. He didn't tell them where he was, *and*, they accidentally left him behind! (How much more human can you get?)
- The Outcome – Jesus not only got "dragged" to religious gatherings, but was into theology (God thoughts) as a young person and participated with questions and answers!

2. The Misunderstood Son (this is a good place for the chapel presenter to tell a story from their own life)

- A Mother's Rebuke! – "Why have you done this to us?" (parental concern/over-reaction)
- Jesus' Response (a) – "You should have known..." (taking parents for granted/obedience)
- Jesus' Reminder (b) – "...that I would be at my Father's house" (reminder of his distinction)

3. The Maturing Son

- Jesus grew in height (physical maturity)
- Jesus grew in wisdom (mental maturity)
- Jesus grew in favor with God (spiritual maturity)
- Jesus grew in favor with man (social/emotional maturity)

Conclusion: The Good News of Jesus' humanity is that he is sharing his relationship with his Father, in the Spirit, as it was lived in out in the whole course of our everyday, HUMAN lives! Because he did it without sinning, and did it as a youth, we can share in that redeemed life in every part of our HUMAN lives, too, even as young people! Jesus knows what it is like to live as a distinct HUMAN being in union with Go who is in union with all humanity and all of creation. He shares that life with us!

Samson: Real Life, Real Person, Real Good News
by Paul Kurts

Character: Samson

Text: Judges 13-16, Heb. 11:32-34

Primary Lesson: Through all our mistakes, God is with us and never forsakes us nor abandons us. He always loves us, no matter what.

Intro: What would you do if you were the strongest person in the world? How would you treat other people? Would you use your strength to good or do evil? Let's look at the story of Samson, who was the strongest person in his world.

Text: Judges 13-16, Hebrews 11:32-34; Summarize and re-tell the story of Samson's life

- Judges 13 Miracle birth
- Judges 13:12 Parents try to rear him right
- Judges 14: Samson ignores his parents' wisdom
- Judges 15-16 Samson's life spirals downward
- Judges 16 Samson stands up for God, dies and is buried.
- Heb.11:32-34 Samson listed among the Faithful in Heb. 11

1. Samson was a REAL person

- Miracle birth (as we all are)

2. Chosen by God

3. Was allowed to make many bad choices in life

- Brought suffering on himself (and his family)
- Paid the physical price during his life in suffering

4. Never abandoned by God

- Judged Israel 20 years
- At the end of his life strengthened by God

5. Adopted and included in the life of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through Jesus, from before the foundation of the world. Just as you and I are!

Conclusion: What about you? What mistakes have you made? What mistakes will you make? The lesson of Samson tells us that our mistakes cause suffering—for ourselves and for others—but through it all, God is with us and never forsakes us nor abandons us. He always loves us no matter what.

Listening for God

by Bill Winn

Character: Samuel

Text: 1 Samuel 3

Primary Lesson: Through the Incarnate One, God is calling out to humanity and all its members to live in and participate in His LIFE of love, laughter, fun, worship, community and all good things.

Intro: Do you ever wish God would speak directly to you? Today we're going to look at the story of a young boy named Samuel who heard God speak to him and we're going to talk about how God speaks to us today.

Text: Samuel 3

- Born to a mother named Hannah. She couldn't have children and prayed for Samuel promising that she'd give him to the Lord's service.
- At Age 3 Samuel was taken to the Temple and left there to help Eli in his ministry.
- According the ancient historian Josephus, when Samuel was about 12 years old, the Lord called out to him and told him He had a special job for him.
- Back in those days God worked through a few special people at a time.
- Samuel was called to get his friends and neighbors and all the people of his land to turn from their idols and instead listen to God.

1. God the Trinity is still calling out to His children, but not just to a select few. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh.

- He is now calling out to all of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Galatians 4:6-7

2. Samuel was, understandably, a little freaked out by hearing God's voice.

- You and I don't need to go into freak mode because God is speaking constantly and if we are willing to listen we can hear.

3. The One speaking to you is the Word of God—the Revelation of God, Jesus Christ.

- He constantly sings the Father's love song to you in the Spirit. He wants you to know that the Father loves you, and includes you in the relationship he has with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: The Lord is no longer working in the lives of just a few people. Through Jesus, the Incarnate One, he is calling out to humanity and all its members to live in and participate in His LIFE of love, laughter, fun, worship, community, sharing, acceptance, confidence, security and all good things.

Do you hear Him? Shhhhhhh.... I think I hear Him, He's calling your name, and He's saying "you're mine and I love you."