

2021 Children's Sabbath Lesson Plans

Preschool through High School

When and How to Use the Children's Sabbath Lesson Plans

The following Children's Sabbath lesson plans are designed for a one-hour class. They are presented in age-graded plans (preschool; early elementary; older elementary; middle school; and high school/youth group). However, they may be combined or adapted to be most appropriate for your classes. (Educational session plans for adults will be posted separately on CDF's website.)

The lesson plans may be used in a variety of ways:

- Use the lesson plans instead of your regular curriculum the week before (preferably) or the week of the Children's Sabbath
- Weave parts of the lessons into your regular curriculum
- Use the lessons during a special Children's Sabbath education session before (preferably) or on the Children's Sabbath weekend—in age-graded groups or combined for a multi-age or intergenerational gathering
- Use the lesson plans on a weekend or weeknight preceding the Children's Sabbath

All of the lesson plans use the same biblical passage, Psalm 31. If your church has a multi-age Sunday school class, you can combine elements of several lesson plans to meet the needs of your students.

Sharing Creative Outcomes of the Children's Sabbath Lessons

You are encouraged to consider using these lesson plans for the week before the congregation celebrates the Children's Sabbath. Each lesson plan includes a creative response by the students that is designed to be shared with the adults of the congregation during worship or fellowship time. If the lessons are conducted the week before the Children's Sabbath, those creative outcomes could be presented to the congregation on the Children's Sabbath. For instance, the preschool lesson includes a song the children could sing for or with the congregation; the early elementary lesson has a group art piece that can be displayed in the sanctuary; the older elementary lesson has cartoons that could be displayed where the congregation gathers for refreshments; the middle school lesson creates a psalm "journey" that can be set up in a central hallway or leading to the sanctuary; and the high school youths are preparing modern expressions of the psalm that may include a liturgical dance, paraphrase, poem, or spoken word piece that can be part of the service (e.g., prayers of the people, woven into the sermon, response to the sermon, scriptural reading).

If instead you use these lesson plans on the Children's Sabbath, the creative results of the lessons may be shared with the congregation the following week (e.g., in the prayers of the people or pastoral prayer, prayer of confession, woven into the sermon) to extend the focus on listening to and learning from children about "where it hurts" so that we can respond with compassion and justice to heal and prevent further harm.



LESSON PLANS

2021 Children's Sabbath Lesson Plan Theme

The 2021 Children's Sabbath lesson plans, "Listen to Us!" explore Psalm 31:1-8 and invite children and youths to recognize that the psalmist is urging God to listen to and respond to troubles; identify the "nets" or problems and circumstances that are tripping up or trapping children and youths today; and hear the psalmist's call to be delivered to a "broad place" of safety and security. Through the Children's Sabbath lessons, students will recognize that children and adults, as God's people, are called to love and listen to children; as God's people, we care about the "nets" or difficulties that are tripping up children; and as God's people we are God's partners who act with justice to remove the nets that ensnare our children and bring our nation to a "broad place" (Psalm 31:8) where all our children are safe and secure.

Teacher Preparation and Support

Advance Gatherings to Prepare with Teachers/Volunteers: We encourage you to schedule a gathering of all teachers and volunteers who will be involved in the Children's Sabbath classes at least two weeks in advance, either by Zoom or in person (perhaps over a bagel/muffin breakfast or a simple lunch after church). The aim of the gathering is to prepare for the special Children's Sabbath lesson plans, answer questions, address any concerns, make any adaptations to the lessons, and collaborate on support and identifying resources to help them help their students. Review your church or denomination's child and youth protection policy and any reporting mandates should a teacher or volunteer hear something in particular that concerns them.

Identifying Resources to Help You Help Your Students: With the 2021 Children's Sabbath focus on listening to our children to understand "where it hurts," the students may name problems that need immediate follow-up or further support—including problems that may go beyond what church school teachers, volunteers, or other church leadership can provide. There are two handouts that you may make available to students, parents, and teachers and post in the church buildings. The first version, "We're Here to Listen," provides phone numbers for a range of "hotlines" that children, youths, and adults can call to seek a listening, understanding ear and support. The second version, "We're Here to Listen, Too" has those numbers but also provides space where you can list support people and resources available through your congregation and community. This handout should be prepared in consultation and communication with your church's leaders as appropriate.

Remind the teachers and volunteers that they may not be able to answer every question or address every problem raised by their students in the moment. They can always respond "I hear you and I care, and we can work together to find help to try to make things better."

Follow-Up Gathering to Debrief with the Teachers/Volunteers: We encourage you to schedule a follow-up gathering with the Sunday School teachers and volunteers after the Children's Sabbath classes (either that day or the following week). In addition to reviewing how the classes went in general and making any notes for the next year's Children's Sabbath celebration, this would be a time to seek further information or resources to support students based on what was discussed in the classes (maintaining confidentiality as appropriate while also following reporting guidelines that are part of your child and youth protection policy and any mandatory reporting procedures), as well as to use the listening to shape responses of the Christian education team and the church as a whole. What did we learn? What could we do through Christian education or the congregation more broadly that would be responsive to what the children and youths shared?

Deepest thanks to the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Davis, Associate Professor of Christian Education, Union Presbyterian Seminary, for reviewing these lesson plans.

We're Here to Listen

God is always here to listen to us, from the very youngest to the oldest. There is nothing we are feeling or experiencing that we cannot share with God. God loves us and listens to us.

There are others who are here to listen—pastors, parents, perhaps a brother or sister, an aunt or uncle, a cousin, a grandparent, a friend, a neighbor, a teacher, or church friend.

There are also hotlines with a caring, trained, listening person on the other end who wants to hear what you are experiencing and help. These calls are confidential—just between you and the person on the other end of the phone.

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

“Text HOME to [741741](https://www.crisistextline.org/) from anywhere in the United States, anytime. Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. The volunteer Crisis Counselor will help you move from a hot moment to a cool moment.” The Crisis Text Line has resources related to anxiety, self-harm, depression, eating disorders, coronavirus, and more.

24-Hour National Crisis Hotline: 1-800-448-3000

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Spanish): (888) 628-9454

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing): (800) 799-4889

National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233 (1-800-799-SAFE)

National Sexual Assault Hotline: (800) 656-4673

Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 422-4453

LGBT National Youth Talkline: (800) 246-7743

CDC National HIV & AIDS Hotline: (800) 342-2437

Alcoholics Anonymous: (202) 966-9155

Narcotics Anonymous: (800) 543-4670

Gamblers Anonymous: (855) 222-5542



LESSON PLANS

We're Here to Listen, Too

God is always here to listen to us, from the very youngest to the oldest. There is nothing we are feeling or experiencing that we cannot share with God. God loves us and listens to us.

There are others who are here to listen—parents, perhaps a brother or sister, an aunt or uncle, a cousin, a grandparent, a friend, a neighbor, a teacher, or church friend.

At our church, here are some of the leaders who are here to listen and help:

(As you prepare this handout, include names, roles, how to reach them, even photos can help. Consult with the pastor or other appropriate leaders to determine who to list and get any necessary approval to list them and include photos.)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

In our community, there are also people, places, and programs that are there to listen and help:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

There are also hotlines with a caring, trained, listening person on the other end who wants to hear what you are experiencing and help. These calls are confidential—just between you and the person on the other end of the phone.

- 24-Hour National Crisis Hotline: 1-800-448-3000
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Spanish): (888) 628-9454
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing): (800) 799-4889
- Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741741
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: (800) 656-4673
- Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 422-4453
- LGBT National Youth Talkline (800) 246-7743
- CDC National HIV & AIDS Hotline: (800) 342-2437
- Alcoholics Anonymous: (202) 966-9155
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LESSON PLANS

Preschool Lesson Plan: Listen to Me. Help Me. Help Me Feel Safe with You.

Scriptural Passage: Psalm 31:2 “Listen to me. Help me. Help me feel safe with you.”
(author’s paraphrase)

Focus: God hears us when we are happy and when we have a problem. God wants people who love God to listen to children and help them feel safe. We can listen to and help our friends.

Lesson Objectives

The children will:

- Hear a paraphrase of Psalm 31:2
- Learn that God loves us and listens to us when we pray and we can share all of our feelings with God.
- Understand that people are God’s helpers. As God’s helpers, we love each other and listen when someone tells us about a problem and try to help.
- Identify people in their lives who listen to them, help them, and help them feel safe—and who they can tell when they do not feel safe.

Materials:

- Items to make forts, such as sheets, blankets
- Drawing paper, crayons or markers
- Large piece of paper/poster board
- Food and items needed for snack time

Teacher Preparation:

- Review lesson plan and gather needed materials.
- Create a “fort” in the classroom: blankets or sheets draped over several chairs or tabletops, for example. Put a few toys, books, and other comforting items in it. Have extra “fort” materials for children who arrive early to work together to create additional forts.
- Write the words for “I Hear You, You Hear Me” on the large piece of paper/poster board and post it on the wall so parents and other adult caregivers can read and sing along at the end of class.

Overview

1. Activity for Early Arrivers
2. Opening: “Hurray for Children’s Sabbath!”
3. Introduction to the Message “Listen to me. Help me. Help me feel safe with you.”
4. Sing and Move: “If You’re Happy and You Know It Talk to God”
5. Activity: Who Listens to You and Helps You?
6. Snack and Playtime in the Forts
7. Song: “I Hear You, You Hear Me.”
8. Closing (song with parents and prayer)



LESSON PLANS

1. Activity for Early Arrivers

Invite the children to explore the fort in the classroom and work together to make additional forts.

2. Opening: Hurray for Children's Sabbath!

Greet the children by name and tell them how happy you are to see them. If any children are there for the first time, give them an especially reassuring welcome and invite the other children to say "Welcome, [name]."

Tell the children:

Today we are talking about a special day in the church called "Children's Sabbath." Children's Sabbath is a time to remind grownups and everyone that children are very special and it is important to love, listen to, and take good care of all children. Children's Sabbath is also a day that children think about how they can be loving and helpful to other children. We celebrate Children's Sabbath in church because we know that God loves every child and God listens to and wants to help every child.

3. Introduction to the Message "Listen to me. Help me. Help me feel safe with you."

Hold a children's Bible in your hand, and say:

In one part of the Bible, God's people wrote poems and prayers and songs to God, telling God how they were feeling and how they wanted God to help them.

Sometimes they were happy and thankful. Have you ever felt happy? (*Raise your hand to show yes, you have felt happy before. Children may join you in raising their hands if they have felt happy.*)

Sometimes they were angry. Have you ever felt angry? (*Raise your hand to show, yes, you have felt angry before; children may join you if they have felt angry.*)

Sometimes they were scared. Have you ever felt scared? (*Raise your hand; children may join you if they have felt scared.*)

Sometimes they were sad. Have you ever felt sad? (*Raise your hand; children may join you if they have felt sad.*)

Sometimes their feelings were all mixed together. Have you ever felt that way? (*Raise your hand; children may join you if they have had mixed-up feelings.*)

Allow time for children to share about times that they had one of these feelings. As seems appropriate, you may want to follow up by asking the child if there was someone they could tell at the time about that feeling, or ask them who helped them feel better. You can add, "We're here to listen."

Continue, by saying:

It's ok to have all of those feelings.

We can tell God that we have those feelings.



LESSON PLANS

And we can tell people we trust about all of our feelings—people like parents and other grownups who love us.

We can even tell our friends about our feelings.

One of God's people in the Bible said a prayer that went like this: "Listen to me, God! Help me quickly, God! Help me feel safe with you, God!" How do you think the person was feeling when they said that prayer? (*Allow time for responses. Affirm all responses, and reassure the children that they can say this prayer at any time about any feelings they have.*)

Can you say that prayer with me? We'll do it one part at a time. I'll say the words first, and then we'll say them together.

Listen to me, God! (*children repeat with you, Listen to me, God!*)

Help me quickly, God! (*children repeat with you, Help me quickly, God!*)

Help me feel safe with you, God! (*children repeat with you, Help me feel safe with you, God!*)

God's people are God's helpers. Grownups who love you and love God want to listen to you, help you, and make sure you feel safe. You are God's helper, too. You can be God's helper when you listen to other children.

4. Song "If you're happy and you know it, talk to God."

Teach the children the following song, and at the end of each verse demonstrate a different kind of response (for example, whooping "I'm happy" or whispering "I'm scared." They can add physical movements too, such as pointing up for "God" and to a child next to them for "friend," jumping for "happy," or hugging themselves for "scared.")

Verse 1: If you're happy and you know it, talk to God.

If you're happy and you know it, tell a friend.

If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it,

If you're happy and you know it talk to us. (whoop, "I'm happy!")

Verse 2: If you're mad and you know it... (growl, "I'm mad!")

Verse 3: If you're scared, and you know it... (whisper, "I'm scared!")

Verse 4: If you're sad and you know it... (whisper "I'm sad!")

Verse 5: repeat the first verse

4. Activity: Who Listens to You and Helps You?

Distribute paper and crayons and invite the children to draw pictures of people in their lives who listen to them and help them. Ask them:

Who is someone who listens to you and helps you? Who makes you feel safe? Who can you tell when you don't feel safe?

If there is a child who says that there is not anyone who listens to them and helps them, you can tell them that you are there to listen to them and help them. They can draw a picture of you. (*If this happens, plan to check in with the pastor or other appropriate person to discuss ways of offering support to the child and family.*)



LESSON PLANS

Label the pictures with words that the children share. Arrange to display the pictures in the congregation's building under the heading "God Hears and Helps Children. God's People Hear and Help Children, Too."

Ask the children how it feels to share their feelings with God and with other people. Does it feel easy or hard, scary or safe to do that?

Ask the children: How does it feel to be a listener? Does it feel good to listen to a friend here and know they are being one of God's listening helpers? Do they have brothers, sisters, cousins, or classmates that they can also be listening friends to?

Say: We are God's helpers when we listen to other children. And sometimes when a child needs the help of a grownup, we are God's helpers when we get a grownup to help them. Can you think of a time when you might want to look for a grownup to help another child?

God has given us each other to be helpers and listeners. There are so many of us to listen and help in many different ways. Thank you, God!

5. Snack and Playtime in the Forts

Tell the children:

The person in the Bible who said the prayer we learned was asking God to help them feel safe like being in a fort. There are many places in the Bible that describe God as a fortress or a fort.

Ask the children:

I wonder, why do you think God is called a fort or a safe place? (*Invite and affirm their responses.*)

Tell the children:

After snack, you can play in the forts. They are a good place to think about how we can feel safe and cozy with God.

6. Song: "I Hear You" (to the Barney/This Old Man tune)

Verse 1: I hear you, you hear me, we are part of God's family
With our love and our care and a prayer for me and you,
We can hear more children too.

Verse 2: I see you, you see me, we are part of God's family
With our love and our care and a prayer for me and you,
We can see more children too.

Verse 3: I help you, you help me, we are part of God's family,
With our love and our care and a prayer for me and you,
We can help more children too.



LESSON PLANS

Verse 4: I love you, you love me, we are part of God's family
With our love and our care and a prayer for me and you,
We can love more children too.
(If desired, you can add motions to the verses)

Closing: Singing with Parents and Other Caregivers

When parents and other caregivers arrive to pick up the children, invite them into the classroom for a song. Show the parents and caregivers the words you have posted on the wall and invite them to join in singing with the children. Lead the children and any adults who wish in singing "I Hear You." *(Note: If this lesson is held the week before the Children's Sabbath, the class could lead the congregation in singing this song for the Children's Sabbath worship service.)*

End with prayer:

Dear God, thank you for always listening to us and helping us. Thank you for the grownups who also listen to us and help us. Help us be good listeners with our friends. Amen.



LESSON PLANS

Early Elementary Lesson Plan: Listen to Me! Help Me! Help Me Feel Safe with You. (Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd Grade)

Scriptural Passage: Psalm 31:1-8

Focus: God listens to and loves us; we can share all of our feelings with God. People, as God's helpers, can also listen to and love us; we can share our feelings with them and we can work together to solve problems.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will

- Hear verses from Psalm 31 and recognize that psalmists shared many different feelings with God.
- Learn that God listens to us and loves us. We can share all of our feelings with God—sad, mad, hurt, and scared as well as happy and thankful.
- Identify adults who, as God's people, also listen to and love us. We can share all of our feelings with them too, and together find ways to solve big problems.
- Engage in an active response to help adults listen, learn, and respond to their needs.

Materials:

- A variety of old magazines
- Construction paper or newsprint
- Newsprint or poster board
- Glue sticks
- Paper and markers or crayons

Teacher Preparation:

- Review lesson plan and gather needed materials.
- Look through the magazines and cut out faces showing a variety of expressions (happy, sad, surprised, angry, scared, frustrated).
- Label different sheets of construction paper or newsprint with the “feelings” words.
- Cut a large “ear” out of a sheet of newsprint or posterboard.
- Arrange to display the outcome of the lesson in a location where the whole congregation may experience it (for instance, the fellowship room, a hallway, the entrance to the sanctuary, or the entrance to the congregation's building).

Overview

1. Activity for Early Arrivers
2. Opening “Hurray for Children's Sabbath!”
3. Introduction to the Message “Listen to Me! Help Me! Help Me Feel Safe with You.”
4. Exploring the Message “Who Listens to You?”
5. Responding to the Message “Listen to Me! Help Me!”
6. Song “Are You Listening? Yes, I'm Listening”
7. Closing



LESSON PLANS

1. Activity for Early Arrivers

Invite any early arrivers to work together sorting the cut-out magazine pictures to match “feelings” words: Happy, Surprised, Scared, Angry, Sad, Frustrated. They can then glue the cut-out faces on the paper with the appropriate “feeling” word.

2. Opening: Hurray for Children’s Sabbath!

Greet the children by name and tell them how happy you are to see them. If any children are there for the first time, give them an especially reassuring welcome and invite the other children to say “Welcome, [name].”

Tell the children:

Today’s lesson is about a special day in the church called “Children’s Sabbath.” Children’s Sabbath is a time to remind grownups and everyone that children are very special and it is important to love, listen to, and take good care of all children. Children’s Sabbath is also a day that children think about how they can be loving and helpful to other children. We celebrate Children’s Sabbath in church because we know that God loves every child and God listens to and wants to help every child.

3. Introduction to the Message “Listen to me! Help me! Help me feel safe with you.”

Look at the “feelings” posters the early arrivers created with the magazine cutouts. Name the feelings they depict and affirm that these are all feelings that children and grownups have. They are feelings that we have, and they are feelings that people had in Bible times. God knows that we have all different kinds of feelings and God loves us through all of them.

Hold a children’s Bible in your hand, and say,

“In one part of the Bible, God’s people wrote poems and prayers and songs to God, telling God how they were feeling and how they wanted God to help them.

Sometimes they were happy and thankful. Have you ever felt happy?
(allow time for children to respond)

Sometimes they were angry. Have you ever felt angry?
(allow time for children to respond)

Sometimes they were scared. Have you ever felt scared?
(allow time for children to respond)

Sometimes they were sad. Have you ever felt sad?
(allow time for children to respond)

Sometimes their feelings were all mixed together. Have you ever felt that way?
(allow time for children to respond)

Continue, saying:

It’s ok to have all of those feelings.



LESSON PLANS

We can tell God that we have those feelings.

And we can tell our parents and other grownups who love us about all of our feelings.

We can even tell our friends about our feelings.

One of God's people in the Bible said a prayer that went like this: "Listen to me, God! Help me quickly, God! Help me feel safe with you, God!"

The person who was praying to God was sounding very direct with God—they were having a really hard time and maybe didn't feel like God was listening to them or helping them fast enough or in the way they expected. But they weren't giving up on God, and they trusted that they could tell God how much they needed help.

Have you ever felt that way? *(Allow time for responses)*

Invite the children:

Let's try saying that prayer together. I'll say one part, and then you repeat it. We'll do it one part at a time.

Listen to me, God! *(children repeat, Listen to me, God!)*

Help me quickly, God! *(children repeat, Help me quickly, God!)*

Help me feel safe with you, God! *(children repeat, Help me feel safe with you, God!)*

Ask:

I wonder, how did it feel to say that prayer? *(allow time for responses.)*

3. Exploring the Message: Who Listens to You?

Say:

God doesn't have a body like we have bodies that we can see and touch. People who love God can be partners with God to offer a hug, or a helping hand, or a listening ear. We can work together to give the help that children need.

(Children at this age think in literal ways. You may receive a response that questions God's ability to hear if God doesn't have "ears." Affirm the child's idea that, indeed, we do not know what God looks like or if God has no ears or really, big, big ears. HOW God hears us is up to God. The Bible teaches us through many, many stories that God hears AND responds.)

Continue:

God's people are God's helpers—we can be God's ears, arms, and feet here on earth. Grownups who love children and love God want to listen to children, help them, and make sure they feel safe.

Ask the children:

Who are some of the people who listen to children, help them, and make sure children feel safe?

- *Allow time for children to name them. There are, of course, no "wrong" answers.*



LESSON PLANS

Say to the children:

Grownups aren't the only ones who are God's helpers. Children are too. We can be God's ears, arms, and feet here on earth. We can listen to other children. Sometimes we can help children ourselves, and sometimes—when it is a really big problem—we can look with them for other helpers.

Invite the children to share:

When was a time you listened to another child and helped them?

4. Responding to the Message: Listen to Us! Help Us!

Show the children the large cut-out shape of an ear.

Tell them:

On the Children's Sabbath the grownups in the church want to listen especially carefully to hear what the children have to say to them. They want to listen to the children so they can understand more about the feelings and problems children have, so that the church can work together to help solve them.

Say,

On the Children's Sabbath, the church works to take good care of children in the church, and we also care about children who aren't in the church but live in our community and all across the United States. The church wants to learn more about the problems that children are facing everywhere and how the church can be good partners and helpers to solve those problems so that children everywhere are safe, happy, cared for, and loved.

Invite the children to write (or draw pictures of) things they want adults to listen to children about. What are the big problems they think children have that grownups should know about? What are the things that worry them, frighten them, or make children want to say "listen to us, help us!"

Tell the children that these don't need to be problems that they are facing themselves, but may be problems that other children face. It may be more comfortable for children to talk about problems children face more broadly, and it affirms the important role that children have in being listeners and helpers for other children.

Depending on the number of students and classroom set up, they can draw and write on separate pieces of paper to attach to the ear or draw directly on the cut-out ear. *(If your class is being held virtually, invite the children to write or draw on a piece of paper, and when all are done hold up their papers one at a time for the others to see.)*

Tell the children that their responses will be shared with the grownups in the church to help them understand problems that children want them to know about and help solve. It will be a reminder to the church to listen to children not just on Children's Sabbath but every day. Working together, the church can help children.

(If a child shares something that needs follow-up, reach out to the pastor or appropriate leadership, following reporting guidelines that are part of your child and youth protection policy and any mandatory reporting procedures.)



LESSON PLANS

5. Song: **Are You Listening?** (To the tune of “Frère Jacques”)

Divide the students into two groups. The first group sings the first sentence of each line. The second group responds by singing the second sentence. When the song is over, reverse the groups.

Verse 1: Are you listening? I am listening.

Hear me now. I hear you now.

I am feeling frightened. You are feeling frightened.

Stay with me. I'll stay with you.

Verse 2, third line: “I am feeling angry. You are feeling angry.”

Verse 3, third line: “I am feeling lonely. You are feeling lonely.”

Verse 4, third line: “I am feeling happy. You are feeling happy.”

If interest and time permit, you can invite the children to take turns creating their own verses with “feelings” words. The child who is leading sings the first part, including filling in their own feeling word for the third line. The rest of the class responds by singing the second part back to the child. (Other feeling words might include: silly, grumpy, sad, bored, sleepy, worried, hungry, thankful.) *This version of the song (where each child leads a verse with a feeling word they choose) could be a “check-in” song that you want to sing with the children at the start of class on other Sundays to get a feel of how each child is doing.*

Closing:

Dear God, thank you for always listening to us—even when we are not sure that you hear us. Thank you for the grownups who also listen to us and help us. Help us be good listeners and helpers too, so we can work together to make things better for all children. Amen.

(Optional: When parents and caregivers arrive to pick up the children, invite them to join in singing another round of *Are You Listening*.)



LESSON PLANS

Older Elementary Lesson Plan: Listen to Me! (3rd – 5th Grade)

Scriptural Passage: Psalm 31:1-8

Focus: God listens to and loves us; we can share all of our feelings with God. People, as God's helpers, can also listen to and love us; we can share our feelings with them and we can work together to solve problems.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will

- Read Psalm 31 and recognize that psalmists shared many different feelings with God.
- Learn that God is always available to listen to them.
- Think about ways in which they can listen to other children and be God's listening, caring helper.
- Take action to help adults listen, learn, and respond to their needs.

Materials:

- Bible/Children's Bible with marker at Psalms
- Copies of the handout paraphrasing Psalm 31:1-8
- Copies of the Cartoon Creation handout, markers, crayons, pencils, pens
- Bandanas or other material for blindfolds (used for half the students at a time)
- Masking tape or other tape that can be placed on the floor to trace a path for the Trust Walk

Teacher Preparation:

- Review lesson plan and gather needed materials.
- Make copies of both handouts.
- Set up a path for the Trust Walk. Use tape to mark a path around the classroom (or another part of the church building if space and time will permit). Include a few safe "obstacles," a table to crawl under, a chair to walk around, and so forth.

Overview

1. Activity for Early Arrivers
2. Opening: Children's Sabbath
3. Introduction to the Message: "Listen to me. Help me. Help me feel safe with you."
4. Exploring the Message: "Who Listens to and Helps You?"
5. Responding to the Message: Creating Cartoons
6. Closing

1. Activity for Early Arrivers

Invite early arrivers to help you set up the Trust Walk.

2. Opening: Children's Sabbath

Greet the children by name and tell them how happy you are to see them. If any children are there for the first time, give them an especially reassuring welcome and invite the other children to say "Welcome, [name]."



LESSON PLANS

Tell the children that today's class is all about a special day in the church called "Children's Sabbath." Children's Sabbath is a time to remind grownups and everyone that children are very special and it is important to love, listen to, and take good care of all children. Children's Sabbath is also a day that children think about how they can be loving and helpful to other children. We celebrate Children's Sabbath in church because we know that God loves every child and God listens to and wants to help every child.

3. Introduction to the Message "Listen to me. Help me. Help me feel safe with you."

Hold a Bible in your hand, and say,

"In one part of the Bible, God's people wrote poems and prayers and songs to God, telling God how they were feeling and how they wanted God to help them. They didn't just tell God about happy feelings. They told God when they were mad at God and at other people who were doing the wrong thing. They told God about when they were scared and felt lonely. They told God about when they were frustrated or hurting or had feelings all mixed together.

It's ok to have all of those feelings. We can tell God that we have those feelings. And we can tell our parents and other grownups who love us about all of our feelings. We can even tell our friends about our feelings.

One of God's people in the Bible said a prayer that went like this:

God, I seek a safe place in you;
Don't let me be put down.
Because you love goodness, fairness, and justice, save me.

Listen to me!
Hurry up and rescue me!
Be a strong, safe place for me;
Protect me on every side.

You are my strong, safe place.
Lead me and guide me.
Take me out of the traps that are set for me,
For you are my safe place.
I trust you, God. You are my savior and love me faithfully.

I hate those who idolize worthless things,
But I trust God.
I will be joyful in your trustworthy love,
You have seen where I hurt,
You have seen those who would hurt me,
You have not abandoned me to them,
You have set my feet—and my sights—on a place of safety and security.
(Paraphrase of Psalm 31:1-8 by author)

4. Exploring the Message: Who Listens To and Helps Children?

Tell the children:

There is a cartoon I heard about. Some cartoons are just pure silliness and only meant to be funny. Other cartoons use humor not to make fun of a person or situation, but to share a serious message in a more light-hearted way. This cartoon was like that.

In the cartoon a person was in big trouble with a flood rising up around their house. The person climbed onto the roof and prayed to God: “God, listen to me! Help me! Rescue me!”

Just then, a neighbor rowed by in a little boat and asked them if they wanted to get in and row to safety. “No,” the person said, “I prayed to God to save me; I’m waiting for God.”

Next a Coast Guard boat came by and called to the person to come into the boat. The person said, “No thank you, I’m trusting God to rescue me.”

Then a helicopter flew over and dangled a rope. “Grab the rope and we’ll pull you to safety,” yelled the pilot. “No thank you,” said the person, “I’m waiting for God to save me.”

Finally God’s voice boomed out: “What are you waiting for?! I sent you your neighbor in a rowboat, I sent you the Coast Guard, and I sent you a helicopter. That’s how I am trying to help you!”

Now, real floods are not funny, and people in big trouble are not a joke. But the story is a kind of light-hearted way to remind us that God does not have a body like we have bodies that we can see and touch. People who love God can be partners with God to offer a hug, or a helping hand, or listening ears.

God’s people are God’s helpers. Grownups who love children and love God want to listen to children, help children, and make sure children feel safe. Children are also God’s helpers. We can listen to each other, help each other, and help each other find grownups who can help when we need them.

Ask the students:

Who are some of the people who listen to children, help them, and help children feel safe?

Allow time for children to name them. There are, of course, no “wrong” answers. If a child cannot think of anyone who listens to children and helps them feel safe, you can offer, “I am here and I want to listen to you and help you feel safe.” *(After class, you may want to check in with other church leaders or teachers to make sure this child does not “fall through the cracks,” and perhaps pair them with a trustworthy adult to be a special church-friend to reach out to the child when at church.)*

Ask the students:

How can you be one of God’s helpers who listens to and helps other children?

Allow time for responses. As appropriate during the discussion, you can talk about times that children can help another child solve a problem, and times when the way they can help is by helping the child with the problem connect with trustworthy adults who can work with them to solve the problem.



LESSON PLANS

5. Responding to the Message: Cartoon Creation

Tell the students:

For the Children's Sabbath, the grownups in the church want to listen especially carefully to understand the feelings children have, the problems that children are facing, and how children want adults and the church to help solve them.

Our class is going to create a series of cartoons that help show adults the problems kids are facing, what they might pray to God, and at least three different ways that adults or the church could help them. The last square of the cartoon shows what it would be like if the problem children face is solved. These cartoons will be displayed in the church to help the adults understand better.

Give each child a copy of the handout, or have the children work in pairs. Invite them to complete each square with a cartoon of their own. (If any are reluctant to draw, remind them that cartoons don't have to be drawn perfectly or artistically; the message and meaning is what is most important.)

(If your class is being held virtually, invite the children to write or draw on a piece of paper, and when all are done hold up their papers one at a time for the others to see.)

When the students are done drawing, invite them to share what they have drawn with the class if they wish.

6. Activity: Trust Walk

[This activity will use the "Trust Walk" path that you set up with any early arrivers before class started.]

Pair up the students for a Trust Walk. One in each pair will be blindfolded and then hold the arm of their partner. The partner needs to lead and guide the blindfolded one along the Trust Walk path you (and any early arrivers) have marked with tape and arranged with (safe) obstacles. At the conclusion of the Trust Walk, the pair should switch roles, and do the Trust Walk from the end back to the beginning.

If time allows, invite the students to share what it felt like to be the blindfolded one, trusting the other. Ask them how it felt to be the one who was being trusted and responsible for keeping the other one safe from harm.

7. Closing:

At the end, gather the students in a circle and re-read the paraphrase of Psalm 31:1-8:

God, I seek a safe place in you;
Don't let me be put down.
Because you love goodness, fairness, and justice, save me.

Listen to me!
Hurry up and rescue me!
Be a strong, safe place for me;
Protect me on every side.



LESSON PLANS

You are my strong, safe place.
Lead me and guide me.
Take me out of the traps that are set for me,
For you are my safe place.
I trust you, God. You are my savior and love me faithfully.

I hate those who idolize worthless things,
But I trust God.
I will be joyful in your trustworthy love,
You have seen where I hurt,
You have seen those who would hurt me,
You have not abandoned me to them,
You have set my feet—and my sights—on a place of safety and security.
(Paraphrase of Psalm 31:1-8)

Tell the students that Psalm 31 ends by saying to all who trust God “Be strong and let your heart take courage.” In a circle, invite people one at a time to turn to the person on their left and say “Be strong and let your heart take courage.” When it gets all the way around the circle to the first person, reverse direction and say to the person on the right “Be strong and let your heart take courage.”



LESSON PLANS

Cartoon Creation Handout

Box 1: Show a problem situation some kids face.

Box 2: Write what the kids might pray to God.

Box 3: Show one way God might offer help through people in the church working to change things.

Box 4: Show another way God might offer help through people in the community working to change things.

Box 5: Show another way that the kids might be helped by kids and grownups working together to solve the problem.

Box 6: Show the end where the kids have been listened to and helped!



LESSON PLANS

Middle School Lesson Plan: Listen to Me!

Scriptural Passage: Psalm 31:1-8

Focus: God listens to and loves us. We can share all of our feelings with God. People, as God's helpers, can also listen to and love us; we can share our feelings with them and we can work together to solve problems. Kids are God's helpers too. We can listen to each other, help each other, and—when needed—help each other find trustworthy adults to help.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will

- Explore Psalm 31:1-8 and prepare a paraphrase that puts it into meaningful, understandable language for them.
- Reflect on the call to God and God's people to listen to them.
- Identify the “nets” that are trapping and tripping up children and young people and consider what a “broad place” of safety and security for children today would look like.
- Engage in a creative response to help adults listen, learn, and respond to their needs.

Materials:

- Flip chart paper, markers, tape
- Smart phone or other way of recording students' voices and/or video
- Net (for example, <https://www.homedepot.com/p/Hydro-Crunch-5-ft-x-30-ft-Heavy-Duty-Garden-Trellis-Netting-D940010612/303413840>)
- Blank index cards
- Roll of mural/butcher paper
- Two baskets

Teacher Preparation:

- Review lesson plan and gather needed materials.
- Make copies of the handouts.
- Arrange with the appropriate church leaders to create the Psalm Journey display in the church building where people may experience it on the Children's Sabbath (if this lesson is led in advance) or after the Children's Sabbath (if this lesson is led on the Children's Sabbath weekend).
- Prepare three sheets of flip chart paper with the following headings: Listen to Us, Nets, A Wide-Open Space.

Overview

1. Opening
2. Introduction to the Message
3. Exploring the Message
4. Responding to the Message
5. Closing

1. Opening

Welcome the students. Tell them that this class is focused on the Children's Sabbath, a weekend celebrated by congregations of every faith tradition across the United States to focus attention on



LESSON PLANS

the serious problems facing children and families; the priority in every faith tradition on working for justice, especially for those who are having the hardest time; and motivating congregations to deepen and expand what they are doing in partnership with children, youths, and families not only in their own congregations, but in the community, state, and throughout the nation.

This year is the 30th anniversary of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. The theme is "Tell Me Where It Hurts: Listening to Heal Our Children." Congregations are being encouraged to listen more carefully to what children and young people have to say about "where it hurts," meaning what problems they see and experience. Then, congregations' listening to young people and children is intended to guide the active responses they develop in partnership with young people to work for healing and systemic justice to prevent the painful circumstances going forward.

2. Introduction to the Message

Invite students who wish to take turns reading verses of Psalm 31:1-8 in the Common English Bible translation. (Be sure that students who prefer not to read aloud are able to decline comfortably.)

Before the reading begins, note that although this psalm, like many, has been attributed to King David as the author, we really don't know who wrote it. One of the gifts of not knowing who wrote the psalms—their age, gender, or anything else—means that we can put ourselves in the position of the psalmist, and imagine it being written from our own perspective. As we read through it the first time, imagine that it was written by a young person like them.

Introduce the text: Psalm 31:1-8 Common English Bible translation

- ³¹ I take refuge in you, Lord.
Please never let me be put to shame.
Rescue me by your righteousness!
- ² Listen closely to me!
Deliver me quickly;
be a rock that protects me;
be a strong fortress that saves me!
- ³ You are definitely my rock and my fortress.
Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!
- ⁴ Get me out of this net that's been set for me
because you are my protective fortress.
- ⁵ I entrust my spirit into your hands;
you, Lord, God of faithfulness—
you have saved me.
- ⁶ I hate those who embrace what is completely worthless.
I myself trust the Lord.
- ⁷ I rejoice and celebrate in your faithful love
because you saw my suffering—
you were intimately acquainted with my deep distress.
- ⁸ You didn't hand me over to the enemy,
but set my feet in wide-open spaces.



LESSON PLANS

What Do You Connect With?

Invite students to underline words and phrases that stand out for them, that connect to their experiences, as you read through Psalm 31:1-8 again.

Then, allow several minutes of silence for students to jot down notes of experiences they—or other kids they know—have had that relate to what the psalm says or other examples that connect with the psalm. Reassure them in advance that they will not have to share anything they write; this is for their own reflection. They are, of course, welcome to share what they choose.

3. Exploring the Message

Listen to Me! When the silent reflection time is over, point out the words in verse 2: “Listen closely to me! Deliver me quickly; be a rock that protects me; be a strong fortress that saves me!” The psalmist was being pretty direct—even demanding—to God. The psalmist didn’t always feel heard, or protected, and was making sure God knew “where it hurt,” wanted God to pay attention. Often it feels like God isn’t paying attention or protecting us, and it for sure can feel like adults and other people aren’t paying attention to or protecting children and young people. The psalmist is reminding us that it is OK to demand attention, response, rescue, help, and safety.

This Children’s Sabbath is a time to respect that feeling, and to be direct—even demanding—with God and God’s people, the church, about what needs to be heard, and how we need them to step up in paying attention and protecting and providing justice so that children and young people are safe. Some situations that are causing hurt and harm are both collective and personal. They affect many people and require many people to solve or prevent—like racism, poverty, and COVID. At the same time, those problems are personal when they affect an individual or a family, and there is the unique pain of that person’s experience.

Listen to me! Who are the people that they feel need to listen better to them and to other children and young people? Who has the potential to help that they aren’t being heard by? If they could say “Listen to us!” forcefully to someone, who would that be? Invite a “scribe” to jot down their responses on the flipchart paper with the heading “Listen to us!”

Nets: Lift up the words from verse 4, “Get me out of this net that’s been set for me.” Notice that it is expressed forcefully as a demand or strong direction to God.

Ask the students, what kinds of “nets” do they think children and young people are tangled up in today? What is trapping and hurting children and youths? What kind of “suffering,” “deep distress,” (verse 7) and problems do they want to strongly and forcefully tell God and God’s people to work with them to get them out of? Invite a “scribe” to jot down their responses on the flipchart paper with the heading “Nets.”

Share the handout “Nets” for additional information about “nets” that children, youths, and families experience in our nation.

A Wide-Open Space/Freedom: Tell the students that the phrase “wide-open spaces” in verse 8 is also translated as “a broad place” (New Revised Standard Version) and “Freedom to go where I wish” (Good News Bible translation). The psalmist is imagining what it will be like when God (and God’s people) have seen and responded to their suffering and kept them safe.



LESSON PLANS

You may want to play the music video of singer K'nann's song "Wavin' Flag" to communicate the spirit of the "wide-open spaces" that the psalmist describes.

Ask the students, what would it look like, feel like, be like when the church and others have seen and responded to the suffering of children and young people and created a place of safety, security, and well-being? Invite them to describe what that place or time would be like. Invite a "scribe" to jot down their responses on the flipchart paper with the heading "A Wide-Open Space."

4. Responding to the Message: Creating a Psalm Journey for the Congregation

Tell the students that they are going to create a "psalm journey" for the congregation to experience, helping the congregation listen to them, recognize the "nets" and suffering that the students see and experience, and understand what a "wide open space" of safety, security, and well-being would look like and how the adults can help achieve that vision. (Depending on what you arrange with the church leadership, this could be set up in a main hallway, in the area leading to the sanctuary, in a central stairway, in the fellowship hall, or any other central and well-traveled location in the building.)

Depending on the number and interests of the students, you can divide into three small groups to prepare each step of the journey or work on it together.

Part 1: "Listen to me!" Recordings Invite the students to work together to prepare a recording (audio only or video) that will be played for the congregation at the start of the "psalm journey" to be set up in the congregation's building. What do they want to say to get the attention of the adults? What do they want them to hear about the need to listen to young people?

Part 2: Nets Give this group the net (see materials list), blank index cards, markers, and tape. Invite them to write out on the index cards different problems that children face. Have them tape the cards across the net which will be displayed on a wall for the "psalm journey." If desired, in addition to the problems that the students identify from their own experience and observations, they may want to include some of the facts from the handout "Nets".

Part 3: Wide-Open Place; Freedom Give this group the roll of mural/butcher paper. Have them unroll a stretch of it (however long you will have at the end of the space you have arranged with the church leaders) and write on it what the group described as a "wide-open place"—what it would look like, feel like, be like when all children and young people have safety, security, and well-being. They can use words, images, and other creative means to create this part of the journey. Let them know that it will be taped down on the ground for the adults to walk on or alongside.

Part 4: What did you hear? What will you do? At the end of the psalm journey, have two baskets—one with blank index cards and pens/markers, and the basket to collect completed cards. Have a sign that says "Please take a card and tell us what you heard and what you will do."

5. Closing

Play the song "Lean On Me" to end.

Handout: Psalm 31:1-8 (Common English Bible translation)

- ¹ I take refuge in you, Lord.
Please never let me be put to shame.
Rescue me by your righteousness!
- ² Listen closely to me!
Deliver me quickly;
be a rock that protects me;
be a strong fortress that saves me!
- ³ You are definitely my rock and my fortress.
Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!
- ⁴ Get me out of this net that's been set for me
because you are my protective fortress.
- ⁵ I entrust my spirit into your hands;
you, Lord, God of faithfulness—
you have saved me.
- ⁶ I hate those who embrace what is completely worthless.
I myself trust the Lord.
- ⁷ I rejoice and celebrate in your faithful love
because you saw my suffering—
you were intimately acquainted with my deep distress.
- ⁸ You didn't hand me over to the enemy,
but set my feet in wide-open spaces.

Handout: "Nets"

Each Day in America

2	mothers die from complications of childbirth.
5	children are killed by abuse or neglect.
8	children or teens die by suicide.
9	children or teens are killed with a gun.
20	children or teens die from accidents.
46	children or teens are injured with a gun.
59	babies die before their first birthday.
121	children are arrested for violent crimes.
223	children are arrested for drug crimes.
514	public school students are corporally punished.*
678	babies are born without health insurance.
827	babies are born into extreme poverty.
860	babies are born with low birthweight.
1,541	babies are born into poverty.
1,785	children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
1,909	children are arrested.
2,906	high school students drop out.*
14,206	public school students are suspended.*

*Based on 180 school days a year

High School Lesson Plan: Listen to Me!

Scriptural Passage: Psalm 31

Focus: God listens to and loves us. People, as God’s partners, can also listen to and love children and young people and work together to solve problems confronting children.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will

- Read Psalm 31 reflect on the full range of emotions that the psalmist brought to God.
- Reflect on who, as God’s people, needs to “listen.”
- Identify the “nets” that are trapping children and young people and envision what a “broad place” of safety and security would look like for children and youths today.
- Prepare a creative expression of Psalm 31’s present-day meaning to present to the congregation as part of worship on or after the Children’s Sabbath to help adults listen, learn, and respond to their needs.

Materials:

- Handout 1: “Psalm 31”
- Handout 2: “Nets” (optional)
- Pens, pencils

Teacher Preparation:

- Review lesson plan and gather needed materials.
- Decide if you will play video clips of young people from CDF’s website or distribute copies of the handout “Nets” for the section Exploring the Message. If you decide to show the video clips, review them in advance and arrange to have equipment to play them for the class.
- Arrange with appropriate church leaders for the students’ creative expression of Psalm 31 to be presented to the congregation on the Children’s Sabbath or at another appropriate time.

Overview

1. Opening
2. Introduction to the Message
3. Exploring the Message
4. Responding to the Message
5. Closing

1. Opening

Welcome the students. Tell them that this class is focused on the Children’s Sabbath, a weekend celebrated by congregations of every faith tradition across the United States to focus attention on the serious problems facing children and families, the priority in every faith tradition on working for justice, especially for those who are having the hardest time, and motivating congregations to deepen and expand what they are doing in partnership with children, youths, and families not only in their own congregations, but in the community, state, and throughout the nation.



LESSON PLANS

This year is the 30th anniversary of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. The theme is "Tell Me Where It Hurts: Listening to Heal Our Children." Congregations are being encouraged to listen more carefully to what children and young people have to say about "where it hurts" and what problems they see and experience, and for that listening to guide the active responses they develop in partnership with young people to work for healing and systemic justice to prevent the painful circumstances going forward.

2. Introduction to the Message

Invite students who wish to take turns reading verses of Psalm 31 in the Common English Bible translation. (Be sure that students who prefer not to read aloud are able to decline comfortably.)

Before the reading begins, note that although this psalm, like many, has been attributed to King David as the author, we really don't know who wrote it. One of the gifts of not knowing who wrote the psalms—their age, gender, or anything else—means that we can put ourselves in the position of the psalmist, and imagine it being written from our own perspective. As we read through it the first time, imagine that it was written by a teenager like them.

Psalm 31 Common English Bible translation

- ³¹ I take refuge in you, Lord.
Please never let me be put to shame.
Rescue me by your righteousness!
- ² Listen closely to me!
Deliver me quickly;
be a rock that protects me;
be a strong fortress that saves me!
- ³ You are definitely my rock and my fortress.
Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!
- ⁴ Get me out of this net that's been set for me
because you are my protective fortress.
- ⁵ I entrust my spirit into your hands;
you, Lord, God of faithfulness—
you have saved me.
- ⁶ I hate those who embrace what is completely worthless.
I myself trust the Lord.
- ⁷ I rejoice and celebrate in your faithful love
because you saw my suffering—
you were intimately acquainted with my deep distress.
- ⁸ You didn't hand me over to the enemy,
but set my feet in wide-open spaces.
- ⁹ Have mercy on me, Lord, because I'm depressed.
My vision fails because of my grief,
as do my spirit and my body.
- ¹⁰ My life is consumed with sadness;
my years are consumed with groaning.



LESSON PLANS

Strength fails me because of my suffering;
my bones dry up.

¹¹ I'm a joke to all my enemies,
still worse to my neighbors.
I scare my friends,
and whoever sees me in the street runs away!

¹² I am forgotten, like I'm dead,
completely out of mind;
I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed.

¹³ Yes, I've heard all the gossiping,
terror all around;
so many gang up together against me,
they plan to take my life!

¹⁴ But me? I trust you, Lord!
I affirm, "You are my God."

¹⁵ My future is in your hands.
Don't hand me over to my enemies,
to all who are out to get me!

¹⁶ Shine your face on your servant;
save me by your faithful love!

¹⁷ Lord, don't let me be put to shame
because I have cried out to you.

Let the wicked be put to shame;
let them be silenced in death's domain!

¹⁸ Let their lying lips be shut up
whenever they speak arrogantly
against the righteous with pride and contempt!

¹⁹ How great is the goodness
that you've reserved for those who honor you,
that you commit to those who take refuge in you—
in the sight of everyone!

²⁰ You hide them in the shelter of your wings,
safe from human scheming.
You conceal them in a shelter,
safe from accusing tongues.

²¹ Bless the Lord,
because [God] has wondrously revealed
[God's] faithful love to me
when I was like a city under siege!

²² When I was panicked, I said,
"I'm cut off from your eyes!"

But you heard my request for mercy
when I cried out to you for help.



LESSON PLANS

²³ All you who are faithful, love the Lord!
The Lord protects those who are loyal,
but [God] pays the proud back to the fullest degree.

²⁴ All you who wait for the Lord,
be strong and let your heart take courage.

3. Exploring the Message

Silent Reflection: Provide four or five minutes for the students silently to read through the psalm on the handout. Invite them to circle or underline words or phrases that hit home with them. Invite them to make notes of any experiences or examples from their own lives or the lives of other young people related to what the psalmist said.

Reflecting on the Experiences of Others:

Option 1: Hearing the Experiences of Others

Play brief video clips from young people who shared their experiences with the Children's Defense Fund.

Option 2: "Nets"

Distribute copies of the handout "Nets" which provides an overview of "Moments for America's Children," statistics underscoring the varied and widespread crises that are confronting America's children, youths, and families. Invite volunteers to read the facts on the handout aloud. "

Listen to Me! When the reflection time is over, point out the words in verse 2: "Listen closely to me! Deliver me quickly; be a rock that protects me; be a strong fortress that saves me!" The psalmist was being pretty direct—even demanding—to God. The psalmist didn't always feel heard, or protected, and was making sure God knew "where it hurt," wanted God to pay attention. Often it feels like God isn't paying attention or protecting us, and it for sure can feel like adults and other people aren't paying attention or protecting children and young people.

This Children's Sabbath is a time to respect that feeling, and to be direct—even demanding—with God and God's people, the church, about what needs to be heard and how we need them to step up in paying attention and protecting and providing justice so that children and young people are safe.

Sharing: Tell the students that you'll go through the psalm together, and any who want to (and no one is forced to) can share the phrases that stood out for them and how they relate to what children and young people are facing today.

Let them know that when the conversation is over, they will either work all together or in small groups to develop a creative way of communicating the psalm and their own message to the congregation for Children's Sabbath [*if this class is the week before Children's Sabbath*] or after the Children's Sabbath [*if the class takes place on Children's Sabbath*].

4. Responding to the Message: Creating a Psalm Expression to Share with Congregation in Worship (25 minutes)

Decide together how the group will prepare and present a modern-day expression of Psalm 31 to the congregation, with the aim of helping adults listen to where children and young people are hurting today, recognize the "nets" that are trapping them, and understand how they, as God's people, can respond with justice.



LESSON PLANS

Depending on the size, interests, and gifts of the students, they may decide to prepare one collective response or they may divide into small groups to prepare several expressions.

Possibilities include:

- A modern-day paraphrase to be read in place of the scripture reading
- A liturgical dance
- A spoken word piece
- A series of poems to be read or displayed in the congregation's building
- A video
- A series of photographs to accompany words, phrases, or verses of the psalm (photos may need to be taken during the week and emailed to the leader to compile and print)

5. Closing

Tell the students that Joshua, as he approached a new and intimidating place that he had never been to before, not knowing what lay in store, used similar words to the psalmist: "Be strong and courageous."

In a circle, invite people one at a time to turn to the person on their left and say, as did the psalmist: "Be strong and let your heart take courage." When it gets all the way around the circle to the first person, reverse direction and say to the person on the right "Be strong and let your heart take courage."

High School Handout

Psalm 31 Common English Bible translation

For the music leader. A psalm of David.

- ³¹ I take refuge in you, Lord.
Please never let me be put to shame.
Rescue me by your righteousness!
- ² Listen closely to me!
Deliver me quickly;
be a rock that protects me;
be a strong fortress that saves me!
- ³ You are definitely my rock and my fortress.
Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!
- ⁴ Get me out of this net that's been set for me
because you are my protective fortress.
- ⁵ I entrust my spirit into your hands;
you, Lord, God of faithfulness—
you have saved me.
- ⁶ I hate those who embrace what is completely worthless.
I myself trust the Lord.
- ⁷ I rejoice and celebrate in your faithful love
because you saw my suffering—
you were intimately acquainted with my deep distress.
- ⁸ You didn't hand me over to the enemy,
but set my feet in wide-open spaces.
- ⁹ Have mercy on me, Lord, because I'm depressed.
My vision fails because of my grief,
as do my spirit and my body.
- ¹⁰ My life is consumed with sadness;
my years are consumed with groaning.
Strength fails me because of my suffering;
my bones dry up.
- ¹¹ I'm a joke to all my enemies,
still worse to my neighbors.
I scare my friends,
and whoever sees me in the street runs away!
- ¹² I am forgotten, like I'm dead,
completely out of mind;
I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed.
- ¹³ Yes, I've heard all the gossiping,
terror all around;
so many gang up together against me,
they plan to take my life!



LESSON PLANS

- ¹⁴ But me? I trust you, Lord!
I affirm, "You are my God."
- ¹⁵ My future is in your hands.
Don't hand me over to my enemies,
to all who are out to get me!
- ¹⁶ Shine your face on your servant;
save me by your faithful love!
- ¹⁷ Lord, don't let me be put to shame
because I have cried out to you.
Let the wicked be put to shame;
let them be silenced in death's domain!
- ¹⁸ Let their lying lips be shut up
whenever they speak arrogantly
against the righteous with pride and contempt!
- ¹⁹ How great is the goodness
that you've reserved for those who honor you,
that you commit to those who take refuge in you—
in the sight of everyone!
- ²⁰ You hide them in the shelter of your wings,
safe from human scheming.
You conceal them in a shelter,
safe from accusing tongues.
- ²¹ Bless the Lord,
because he has wondrously revealed
his faithful love to me
when I was like a city under siege!
- ²² When I was panicked, I said,
"I'm cut off from your eyes!"
But you heard my request for mercy
when I cried out to you for help.
- ²³ All you who are faithful, love the Lord!
The Lord protects those who are loyal,
but he pays the proud back to the fullest degree.
- ²⁴ All you who wait for the Lord,
be strong and let your heart take courage.



LESSON PLANS

Handout: “Nets”

Each Day in America

2	mothers die from complications of childbirth.
5	children are killed by abuse or neglect.
8	children or teens die by suicide.
9	children or teens are killed with a gun.
20	children or teens die from accidents.
46	children or teens are injured with a gun.
59	babies die before their first birthday.
121	children are arrested for violent crimes.
223	children are arrested for drug crimes.
514	public school students are corporally punished.*
678	babies are born without health insurance.
827	babies are born into extreme poverty.
860	babies are born with low birthweight.
1,541	babies are born into poverty.
1,785	children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
1,909	children are arrested.
2,906	high school students drop out.*
14,206	public school students are suspended.*

*Based on 180 school days a year