

Children's Church Teacher's Guide

For January 16, 2004

Theme: The Principle of Stewardship

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Passage Background:

Paul was dealing with the issue of a group of the Corinthians saying they were followers of Paul while others were proclaiming themselves to be followers of Apollos. This was leading to fights and jealousy within the church. Paul's point to the Corinthians was both he and Apollos were mere men; they were co-workers with God and no more. Therefore the Corinthians were wrong to say anything other than, "I follow Jesus."

Our passage starts with Paul discussing how he built a foundation on the one Jesus had already laid with respect to the believers in Corinth. Someone (such as Apollos, though Paul doesn't specifically mention anyone) was building on Paul's foundation. This goes back to 3:6 where Paul uses the analogy of planting the seed, Apollos watering it, but God making it grow. Paul then goes on to describe how we can build in our own lives. Here are the scenarios Paul presents:

1. A person can attempt to build a foundation other than Jesus and His salvation. However, there is only one foundation and that is the one Jesus laid. Any other attempt is doomed to complete and utter failure. (v. 11)
2. A person can accept Jesus and receive as a foundation His salvation. The person then has a choice on how to live the rest of his or her life. Ultimately, how a person lives will be tested. (v.12-13)
 - a. A person can live his or her life in accordance with Scripture. This is building with gold, silver, and precious gems. When judgment comes and the works of a person and how he or she built their lives is put to the fire, the gold, silver, and jewels will survive and the person will receive a just reward. (v. 14)
 - b. A person can choose to live his or her life mostly out of sync with God. The life this person builds is one built as if it were made of wood, hay, or straw. When subjected to the fire of judgment, all of this work will be burnt up and nothing will be left except for the foundation of Jesus' salvation. While the person will experience salvation, that person will have nothing else to show for their time and walk with Christ. (v. 15)

Introduction:

Open Children's Church with prayer. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to guide each person in learning how to be good stewards of their lives. Then start the lesson by discussing what stewardship is:

Today we're going to talk about stewardship and about being a good steward. Who knows what stewardship is?

Allow a few responses. If a child is able to give a good description of stewardship, build on that description. Otherwise, take the time to explain stewardship.

God blesses each one of us with certain, special gifts. No two people have exactly the same gifts. Some people can sing really well. Others are very good at math. Some folks can play sports really well. There are still other people who have minds that can see how a building will look just from a drawing on a piece of paper. These are just some of the examples of the gifts God has given to each one of us. There are so many gifts God has given out we couldn't even begin to list them all. So how does God's gifts have anything to do with this word "stewardship?" Stewardship is how we use those gifts. A steward is someone who manages things like buildings, supplies, or in our case, gifts from God. Each one of us has been born with gifts God selected for us. It is up to us to determine how we'll use those gifts. Since we're in charge of using our gifts, we are stewards.

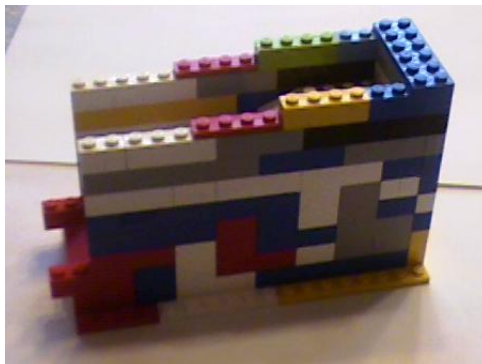
Some folks take their gifts and use them to honor God. Those folks are good stewards. They've taken the gifts God has given them and they've used those gifts as God intended. Other folks are bad stewards. The reason God gave each of us our own set of gifts is to honor Him. These folks don't use their gifts for God. So when these people don't use their gifts for God, they are misusing their gifts. A good steward takes whatever he or she is in charge of and makes the most out of it. If it's food, a good steward tries and do as much as possible with that food. If the steward is in charge of buildings, the steward tries to see the buildings are used in the best way possible. When it comes to our own personal gifts from God, being a good steward means taking those gifts and trying to use them in the best way possible to point people to Jesus, to honor God, and to serve Him. The Apostle Paul had something to say on stewardship. Let's talk about what he said.

Activity:

Have children gather around the prop that will be used to demonstrate Paul's teaching. Since an open fire is generally not a good idea in most children's church settings, I used Legos to demonstrate the principle of stewardship Paul describes. Here are the props I constructed.

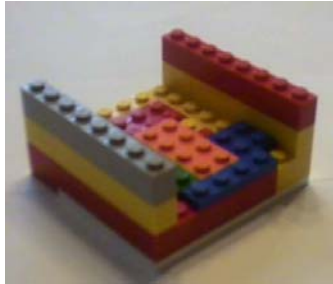
Ramp:

The ramp consists of a slope for the marble to roll down with walls to contain it in a straight line. There is a small platform at the top to hold the marble until it is time to roll it. The bumpiness of the Legos should hold the marble in place until you are ready to start it rolling downward. Notice the small "arms" that jut out.

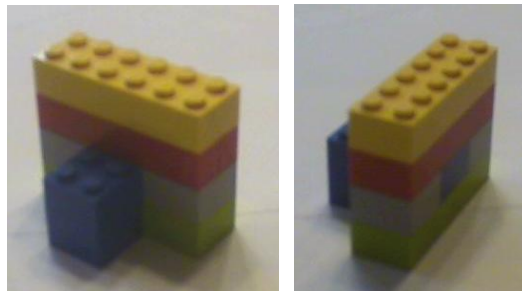


Foundation:

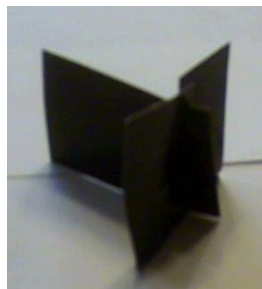
For the foundation I built a platform out of Legos. I designed the platform and ramp to be connected together. The “arms” of the foundation connect directly to the platform on the inside of the walls of the platform.

**Wall of Gold, Silver, and Jewels:**

Using Legos of yellow for gold, gray for silver, and various colors for jewels, I built a small wall with a buttress to support it. When the marble comes rolling down the ramp, this wall will stay up and be unmovable so long as it's connected to the foundation properly.

**Wall of Wood, Straw, and Hay:**

For this wall I used two pieces of cardboard and fit them together perpendicular to each other. This allows the cardboard “wall” to stand on its own.



Using your props, begin to interactively discuss Paul's scenarios to the children.

When we accept Jesus as the boss of our lives, when we make Him, as adults often say, “Lord and Savior,” He lays down a foundation in our lives. That's what Paul said in a letter to the members of the church in a city called Corinth. But what's a foundation?

Give the children a chance to answer and then continue with the building example.

Have you ever seen construction workers pouring concrete before they start putting up a building? The concrete they pour is what the rest of the building depends on. That concrete is the foundation. Not all buildings have concrete for a foundation. But concrete is probably an easy one to think of for a foundation. A foundation is something we can build upon.

The Bible tells us when we choose Jesus we have a new life. We sometimes say we're "born again." When we choose Jesus we know because of Him we'll get to live with Him forever in heaven. But having a new life is more than that. What we mean by a new life is how we look at things, how we think about things, and how we act all begin to change and change for the better. God will work on us and with us to make us more like He is. There never was a better person than Jesus. After all, Jesus is God! Jesus will work to make us more like Him. His salvation and our new life with Him form the foundation for our lives.

The Apostle Paul talked about this foundation when he wrote the letter to the Corinthians. You can find this letter in your Bibles in the section called the New Testament. It's toward the back of the book. In our Bibles we actually have 2 letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Today we're interested in the first letter, which we call First Corinthians. In chapter 3 of this letter, Paul talks about the foundation of Jesus. He then talks about building on that foundation. Just as construction workers can build a building on a foundation of concrete, we can build our lives on the foundation of Jesus and what He has done for us. We can think of our lives as a building we're slowly putting together. This is how Paul presented it to the Corinthians. Paul then started talking about how people build their lives.

Some people won't build on the foundation Jesus laid down. This isn't very smart. What would happen if we tried to put up a building without a good foundation? Imagine trying to slap some walls together with nothing to build them on. How well would that last?

This is the case of a person not choosing Jesus. This person doesn't want Jesus as the boss. Too many people choose this way and they don't realize how weak things really are. When life starts to get tough, the walls of their lives begin to crumble and break down. In the end, when we all have to stand before God, they'll have to admit they never chose Jesus.

Point the children to the props. As seen in the picture, I used the ramp and the wall of gold, silver, and jewels in front of the ramp, but without the foundation.



It may be a little hard to understand all of this, so let's look at something that'll make it easier. Here I have a ramp and a wall made out of Legos. Notice the wall doesn't sit on a foundation. It's just there all by itself. It's a sturdy looking wall, but it's not built on anything. This represents a life where the person has not chosen to follow Jesus. The marble represents both the trouble we'll face in life as well as facing God. What do you think will happen to the wall when I start the marble rolling?

Give the children a chance to predict the outcome and then push the marble down the ramp.

The wall didn't stay in place, did it? Instead it was pushed out of the way by the marble. A life without Jesus is the same way. Jesus is the foundation that we need to build upon. Otherwise we will have a life that can be pushed around by whatever comes our way. I told you the wall was very sturdy and it is. It didn't do a whole lot to stop the marble, though, did it? This goes to show that it doesn't matter how well we think we've built things if Jesus isn't the foundation of our lives. We have to have Jesus as the foundation.

Paul also talked about people who had chosen Jesus as their boss. These are people who had Jesus as the foundation for their lives. However, there were two types of people who had made this choice. Paul said some people took Jesus' foundation and built upon it with materials that would really last: gold, silver, and jewels. Paul then talked about another type of people who used Jesus' foundation but built on it with materials that would burn up easily: wood, hay, and straw. If a big fire came, which set would last and which wouldn't?

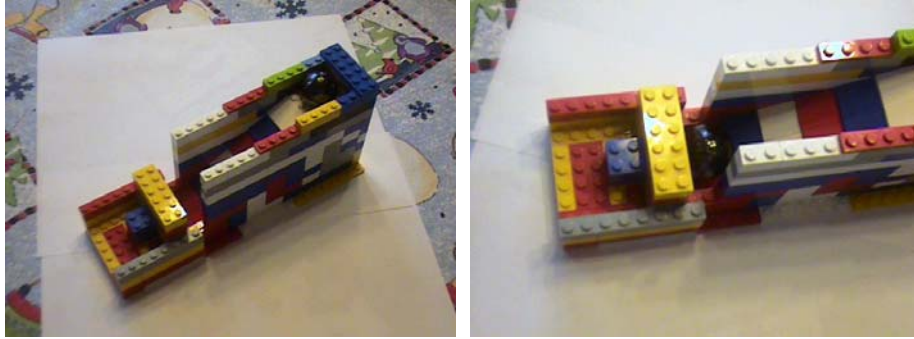
Give children a chance to respond, then attach the Lego foundation to the ramp.

We can use this Lego platform I have as the foundation that Jesus has built. Notice how I secure it to ramp. If I roll the marble down, no matter what else happens, the platform will still be there. The foundation Jesus has laid can never be destroyed. It's not going anywhere, just as the Lego platform isn't going anywhere when I roll the marble down the ramp.

Now let's talk about building with stuff that lasts. If we have a big fire, the gold, silver, and jewels will still be there after the fire. Did you know we use fire and heat to make gold and silver purer? See, when we get gold and silver out of the ground, they are often mixed together with other minerals. When we use heat, gold and silver can be pulled apart from these other minerals. The more heat and time we take, the more pure we can get our gold and silver. Therefore, a hot fire can make gold and silver purer.

The same is true for our lives. If we try to do what we know God would want us to do, if we try to follow the Bible, we're building with gold, silver, and jewels. Not only will our lives be beautiful and shiny to those around us, but also when life gets tough and we face the fire, our lives will be better for it. Also, on that day when we stand before God, we'll stand there having been brought through the fire with the lasting parts of our lives plain to see.

Take the wall of gold, silver, and jewels and secure it to the foundation. It'll need to stand up to the marble rolling down and if it's not connected well the demonstration won't work. See the pictures for examples. The second picture shows the wall holding firm even after the marble has rolled down the ramp.



I have the foundation and I have the wall from before. Notice the colors I've chosen. There is yellow for gold and gray for silver. There are also other colors to represent the jewels. The wall is securely attached to the foundation. This is for the person who has not only chosen to let Jesus be the boss, but tries to follow God as much as possible. Watch what happens when I push the marble down.

Push the marble down and note the reaction of the children.

This time the wall stood up to the marble, didn't it? The foundation made all the difference. This is something we have to remember. People can do a lot of great things but if they try to do them without Jesus, it won't stand up in the end. But when we put our trust in God and we obey His commands, we build a life that can stand up to anything.

What about that last group of people? What about when someone builds with wood, straw, and hay? When the fire comes, none of that is left. All of it gets burned up. After the fire is done, all that is left is the foundation. The foundation Jesus puts down cannot be destroyed. However, everything else is gone. All that work is lost.

You're probably asking, "What is building with wood, straw, and hay?" It is when a person has chosen Jesus as the boss but isn't doing a good job of listening to Him. The person is doing things God says not to do. That person isn't trying very hard to follow what the Bible says. When life gets hard or when that person stands before God, all the actions not pleasing to God will be seen. They'll get burned up. They won't last.

Remove the Lego wall and put the cardboard wall in its place. The picture shows an example.



We represent the wood, straw, and hay with a cardboard wall. It's not very sturdy looking but that's what our actions are like if they don't follow God's commands. If we choose to act in a way that's not pleasing to God, we're not doing a very good job of building. Notice, too, that the cardboard doesn't attach to the foundation like the other wall did. If our actions aren't pleasing to God they can't be secured to His foundation. We may be building, but we aren't building very successfully on what Jesus has laid down. With our cardboard wall in place, what will happen when the marble comes rolling down?

(Give the children an opportunity to predict the result and then perform the demonstration.)

The cardboard wall went flying out of the way, didn't it? But notice the foundation is still present. This person has chosen Jesus as a boss so that is still left. However, the actions of that person after that choice didn't stand up to the test. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that this person is like one just escaping the flames. Imagine having to drop everything to miss being burned by a very hot fire. You get out but anything you had with you is lost. That's what this person's life is like.

In our lives we have to make choices with the gifts God has blessed us with. We can first choose whether or not to accept Jesus as the boss of our lives, to make Him our Lord and Savior. Only a life with Jesus will stand the test. His foundation is a must. If we've chosen Jesus we have another choice to make. We can try our best to follow His commands and obey what we read in His Word. This is a life that will stand up when things get tough. It's also the only way to have something to show God when we stand before Him. The other choice isn't so great. We can choose Jesus but then we don't do such a good job of listening to Him. We make choices He wouldn't approve of and we do things we know wouldn't please Him. We may have chosen Him to be our boss but we're not a very good worker. In the end our work will be burned up. The choice you make is up to you.

You are the one to choose how you will use God's gifts. If you use them wisely, if you build a life of gold, silver, and jewels, you will be a good steward. If, however, you use the gifts in ways that don't honor God, you will be a poor steward. Our goal here is for everyone to be good stewards. You can do it. If you ever think you can't, ask God for help. That's what He's there for. Also don't be afraid to ask an adult Christian. That's what we're here for, too.

Close this time in prayer asking God to help each adult worker and each child be a good steward of the gifts God has blessed each person with.

Fun Time:

Make sure you have enough copies of the worksheet for all the children. Also have on hand crayons and stickers. I like the sparkly star stickers you can find in most office supply stores. Most of the time you can find gold and silver stars as well as multi-color ones to represent jewels. Point out the statement at the bottom of the worksheet stating, "Jesus is the foundation of my life." Also show the children the statement at the top about building with gold, silver, and jewels. Allow the children to decorate the worksheet any way they want to using the crayons and stickers.