

Children's Church Teacher's Guide

For January 23, 2005

Theme: Don't Waste Your Life

Key Passage: Ephesians 5:15-17

Passage Background:

Paul, in chapters 4 and 5, writes to the Ephesians about living the new life, the life they (and we) find in being born again in Christ. He counsels them to put away previous sinful behavior and to live a life imitating Christ Himself. In verses 15-21 of chapter 5 Paul talks about behaving consistently. Our focus passage only comprises verses 15-17. Verses 18-21 are his command not to become drunk but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Focusing on the key verses, Paul says:

1. We must pay careful attention, making sound decisions in our lives. (v.15)
2. We must make the most of the time we have as the days themselves are evil. We're surrounded by a sinful world and we can't expect things to get better over time unless we make an earnest effort to live a changed life impacting the world around us. (v. 16)
3. We must try to understand what God's will is for our lives. Going along without seeking His guidance, advice, and direction is foolish. (v. 17)

Introduction:

Open the Children's Church by praying. Pray specifically for God to help each child make the most out of his or her life as each are called. Then start the lesson with a review of last week's material.

Last week we talked about stewardship and how every single one of us are stewards. But what does that mean to be a steward?

Give the children an opportunity to respond. Assist them with the definition, if need be.

Stewards are people who are in charge of taking care of something. Usually it is something that belongs to someone else. For instance, we could be stewards of someone else's money. Since we are stewards, what is it that we are all stewards of and to whom does it belong to?

Hopefully one of the children will remember we are all stewards of God's gifts. Specifically, we are responsible for His gifts of our talents and abilities.

We are in charge of the talents and abilities God has given to each one of us. Some of us sing well. Others of us can make friends easily. Still others are gifted in school. Whatever our gifts, we make the choice on how to use them. Because God has put these gifts into our care, we are stewards of them.

This actually leads into this week's lesson. This week we'll talk about getting the most out of life. You've probably heard adults say that, but what does it really mean? I'll let you in on a secret: most of the adults who say that don't know. We know we have this life to live and it

only makes sense to do everything we're supposed to do, enjoy the things we're supposed to enjoy, see the things we're supposed to see, and be the places we're supposed to be. But how do we know what it is we're supposed to know to do, to enjoy, to see, and where to be?

We don't. It might be better to say we can't. To be able to know these things we'd have to be able to see the future and see it perfectly. That's impossible for us to do. We might be able to guess at things that may happen in the future, but we'll never be able to figure out everything. Also, some of our guesses will be wrong. This isn't working out so well, is it?

If we can't know everything we need to know to get the most out of life, how is it possible? The answer is very simple: we turn to God. The Bible tells us Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our counselor and our guide. The Bible also tells us the Holy Spirit is God Himself. So if you put that together, Jesus sent us someone to help us get the most out of life and that someone happens to be God!

I'll admit that this can be confusing. Thinking about God as the Father, as Jesus, and as the Holy Spirit yet still being just one God is something none of us, no matter how smart we are, can really understand. It's something we accept because the Bible makes it clear that's the way it is with God. Another Children's Church we'll look at this a bit more, but for now just remember God Himself is there to guide us! And that brings me to balloons.

Activity:

Materials: Balloons, Invisible Tape (Scotch® tape), and a pushpin or needle

Prepare for this activity by having a three pieces of invisible table (Scotch® tape) ready. Hand out a balloon to each child. Tell them this balloon is for them to take home. It is not to be blown up during children's church. Take a balloon for yourself and hold it up for the children to see (you'll need a second one during the demonstration).

Take a look at your balloon. Without any air there isn't much to look at it, is there? We're going to use a balloon to represent our lives. Who wants to play with a balloon that has no air in it?

Instruct the children to put away their own balloons. These are for the children to show their parents what they learned in Children's Church. Have them focus on your balloon.

There are some folks who go through life and they aren't doing a whole lot. They just go day to day and you don't see them trying to do much of anything. This balloon with no air represents those folks. There is nothing to their lives and as a result, there's nothing to look at. The gifts and talents God has given them are just going to waste. These people aren't good stewards, are they? God doesn't want us to be like these people. He wants us to enjoy life, especially life with Him. I use that word enjoy carefully. What God means by the word enjoy is often very different than what the world means.

Take the balloon and act like you're going to blow it up. However, move it to the side of your mouth where it doesn't get any air and begin to blow as if you were blowing up the balloon.

After a few puffs, look strangely at the balloon and scratch your head. Hold up the balloon for the children to see.

Did you see me trying to blow up the balloon? I didn't do a very good job of blowing it up. Why is that?

The children should point out (usually with a lot of laughing and giggling) that you weren't blowing into the balloon.

I wasn't blowing into the balloon, was I? Because I was blowing beside the balloon, none of my air went into the balloon and made it inflate. Do you remember me just saying that what God means by the word enjoy can be different than what the world means? That's what I was showing you here. We can put a lot of energy into living life to the fullest. We can even think we're doing a great job of it. However, if what we're doing isn't pleasing God, then we aren't really living life to the fullest. If you look at a person who is always putting time and energy into things other than what God would have that person do, you'll see that person has a very empty life. That person may say he or she "enjoys" life, but that person isn't doing so in the way God intends.

Take the balloon and blow into it this time. Tie it off. Then take two of the pieces of invisible tape and put them on the balloon making an "X."

When I blew into the balloon this time, it filled up. Now the balloon is something to look at, isn't it? This balloon is a life where the person put a lot of effort into the things God is pleased with. When we put our energy into things pleasing to Him, we are making the most out of life. We'll see our life expand just as this balloon did. If we turn to the Holy Spirit, remember He is God, and follow His lead, our life will be in great shape.

Just a minute, though! You are probably asking, "What's the tape for?" The tape represents those areas of our life we've tried to strengthen or build up. For instance, a person may have a problem with sleeping late. Does that sound familiar? Over time the person has worked on his or her life to overcome this problem. Maybe an alarm clock was the answer. Or maybe it was going to bed earlier. Whatever that person did, that's what the tape represents.

Hold up the pushpin beside the balloon.

Oh, no! What's this pushpin for? I'm not going to pop the balloon, am I? Well, I am, but not just yet. The tape represents where we've worked on our life, trying to build up a weakness. The pushpin, on the other hand, represents when we do things that God would disapprove of. For instance, our late sleeper may have knocked the alarm clock on the floor one morning and broke it. He or she hasn't gone to get another one. Or maybe our late sleeper has stayed up several nights in a row watching late night monster movies. Even though our late sleeper knows he or she has a weakness, our late sleeper is now acting in way that goes against all that work. We can show this by puncturing the balloon where I have put the tape. Watch what happens when I do so.

Puncture the balloon with the pushpin in the center of the taped "X" pattern. The balloon should begin to deflate slowly but it won't pop (the tape holds the balloon together so it doesn't rip apart).

The balloon didn't pop, did it? However, there is a hole in it and the air is leaking out. If we don't keep on top of things, we can find ourselves doing the very things we know God wouldn't like. Even if we've worked hard to overcome a problem, we can still fall back to our old ways. For instance, without the alarm clock our late sleeper begins to sleep later and later. If our late sleeper doesn't do something soon, all that work will be for nothing. All that effort put into living life to the fullest will go by the wayside as the sleeping problem begins to take over again.

Take another piece of tape and patch the hole. Make sure you do so soon enough so you can pop the balloon in the next example.

There, I've patched the hole and no more of the air is leaking out. We can do the same thing in life. We can see how we've fallen down in an area we've worked on to improve. If we catch it soon enough we can even patch things up before all the work we've done is wasted. This is what God wants us to do. He doesn't expect us to be perfect. He knows we can't be. But when we make a mistake, He wants us to correct it as soon as we can. Putting that extra piece of tape is just that. Fixing the mistake we've made with the pushpin.

One thing to remember is the balloon helps us think about life. It's what we call an illustration or an example. The balloon isn't a perfect example, though. For instance, if we work with God to correct the mistakes in our lives, He can repair our mistakes perfectly. He can make it like there was never a hole. Using tape I can't do that to the balloon. This just goes to show that when I try to do it on my own I can cover things up, but I can't ever make them the way they were. Only God can. The same is true of everyone. We've got to depend on God!

Show the children the pushpin again but puncture the balloon in a place where the tape doesn't protect it. The balloon should pop.

Wow! Now you're probably wondering why I did that. The pushpin represents when we do things that God doesn't approve of. If we've done nothing to work on our weaknesses, if we've not put effort into becoming a better person as God commands us, our lives can get very messy in an instant. When we've made a commitment to Jesus to love Him and make Him the boss of our lives and we start following the Holy Spirit, our life expands just as the balloon did. Others usually see this. If we then suddenly do something God would not approve of, it can be like a pushpin popping a balloon. Suddenly those around us see what we've done and life can feel like it exploded all around us. All that work is gone just like that!

Is that the end? No, it is not. Remember, the balloon is an example. Like with the tape, I can't use it to show everything. If we've chosen to follow Jesus, if we've made Him our boss, He can put the pieces back together. He can remake our life and help us get back on track. We can then start living life again in a way pleasing to God. And then our life will expand again. I can't show this with the balloon, but the Bible tells us God will do this for us.

In the Bible the Apostle Paul talks about the very same idea we've shown with the balloon: living life to the fullest, but doing so in a way pleasing to God. Paul's words are found in a letter he wrote to the church in a city called Ephesus. You can find this letter as the book of Ephesians in the New Testament. Chapter 5, verses 15-17, is where Paul talks about the same idea we've discussed this morning in Children's Church. Here is what Paul said in the New Living Translation:

So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Paul said we should be careful how we live. We shouldn't live as fools. That's either the person who isn't doing anything or the person who is living life but isn't following God. Remember, that second person I showed by blowing a bunch of air, but none of it went into the balloon.

Paul also said to live wisely and to make the most of every opportunity for doing good. This is living life to the fullest and doing so according to God's commands. This is the example where I blew up the balloon. Our life in service to God will expand, just as my air caused the balloon to grow. But that's not all Paul said. Notice Paul's warning. He says not to act thoughtlessly. He tells the church in Ephesus to try to understand what the Lord wants them to do. That goes for us, too. Remember what the pushpins did to the balloon. If we don't listen to the Holy Spirit, if we don't follow God's direction, we can really make a mess of our lives. Depending on the situation, that can happen slowly but surely like when I made the hole where the tape was, or it can happen suddenly like when I popped the balloon.

Paul's message to the Ephesians is the same as the message to the Corinthians: we must make Jesus our boss, but our walk doesn't end there. We should always go to God and follow His directions and advice. That means we have to get to know God. That means we have to spend time with Him, whether in prayer or by studying our Bibles. If we do those things we'll see what God wants us to do. We still have to choose to follow His commands, but we're making that choice knowing what the right thing to do is.

Speaking of knowing about God, let's close in prayer and then we'll play a game of bingo. Only this is no ordinary game of bingo. This is the Names of God bingo game! The squares, except for the free space, are all names or descriptions of God we find in the Bible. They help us to know Him and understand Him a little bit better.

Close in prayer, asking God to help each child live a full life pleasing to Him.

Fun Time:

This activity will require some preparation on your part. Copy enough blank and filled in Names of God bingo sheets for the number of children for Children's Church. You'll need to cut up the filled in sheets and mix up the squares before gluing the squares onto the blank sheet. Make one extra copy of the filled in sheet and cut it up into squares as well, discarding the free square. This extra set of squares is what you'll use to call the games.

Give the children instructions on how to play bingo. The rules for Names of God bingo are the same as for most bingo games. Children should go ahead and place a counter on the free square. Thereafter, each time a name of God is called, children should find it on their cards and mark it. Since each card will have every name, children will be placing a counter after each call. This will ensure no children become discouraged because they have fewer counters than their neighbor(s). Encourage the older children to help the younger children locate the names on their cards. Each game will tend to complete quickly, meaning there is the opportunity to have lots of winners.