

Children's Church Teacher's Guide

For April 17, 2005

Theme: What if there were no rules?

Scripture Reference: Judges 21

Key Passage: Judges 21:25

Passage Background:

After strong leadership due to Moses and Joshua, the time after Joshua's death was a dark one for Israel. The people would turn from following God to instead chase after the religions and practices of their neighbors. God would allow another nation to conquer Israel until the nation repented and prayed for redemption. The Lord would raise up a deliverer to free His people and for the duration of that person's life Israel would tend to follow a Godly path. Shortly thereafter, however, Israel would turn back to its sinful ways.

This means the content of Judges 19-21 would be rated R or NC-17 if it were to be made into a movie. As a result, it's not really appropriate to cover with children unless it's toned down greatly. However, the principle that comes through is the nation of Israel was in turmoil and out of God's favor because they didn't abide by His rules.

A "kid friendly" version of the incidents would be:

- Men of the city of Gibeah committed a great sin against a man who himself was sinful.
- This man appealed to the rest of Israel for revenge.
- Eleven of the twelve tribes responded, the twelfth tribe being Benjamin, of which the people who lived in Gibeah were a part.
- The eleven tribes fought against Benjamin, meaning it was brother against brother.
- When the fighting was over, the tribe of Benjamin was almost destroyed.
- In order to "make up" for what they had done, the eleven tribes condoned more sin.
- All of this was because Israel was not following God and had forgotten what He had done for the nation with Moses and Joshua.

Had the people of Israel chosen a different path and had they stayed true to God, it is likely this tragedy would never have happened. However, the sinfulness at Gibeah and throughout the land meant repeated occurrences of incidents and situations of great sadness and loss. This is the consequence when there are no rules or when all rules are "relative."

Introduction:

Open the Children's Church by praying. Pray specifically for God to help each child to understand why rules are important.

Today we're going to talk about why rules are important. Let's be honest, most of the time we don't like rules. Rules often tell us what we shouldn't do. Rules like, "Don't eat with your mouth full," or "No running with scissors." We say, "Hey, why do I have to follow that rule? It doesn't hurt me!" We have to understand, though, that the reasons for those rules existing are usually to prevent fighting or to protect people from the consequences of the action.

“Don't eat with your mouth full,” is said because doing so is rude. It's one of those things you don't want to see. You're sitting, enjoying a nice dinner, and you look over and the guy next to you is chewing with his mouth open. And you see all that mashed up, partially chewed food as he opens and shuts his mouth to chew. Think of green peas mixed with mashed potatoes and a little red fruit punch all being sloshed around. Yuck! No one wants to see that. Rather than fighting over it, we just have the rule.

Other rules exist for our protection. When we run, we might be more likely to trip and fall. If we trip and fall, usually that fall is a hard one. Now imagine if we happen to be carrying some sharp scissors as we trip and fall. We could really get hurt. Sure, most of the time we might be fine. But it only takes once to make that rule worth it. Therefore, we don't run with scissors.

Let's talk about some more rules. We'll first start with some rules we have to prevent fighting.

Cover the following situations with the children. Let them explain what the rule is and why we have it. Coach them as necessary.

- What is the rule for wanting to say something in class?
- What player moves first in chess?
- Who is allowed to use their hands in soccer (football)?

Good job! Those rules help us all get along well. When everyone talks at once, likely no one can be heard. Then people start screaming and that doesn't work either. So we have the rule to raise your hand. These rules prevent fights. But I also said rules can be in place for our own protection. Let's talk about some of those rules.

Cover the following situations with the children. Let them explain what the rule is and why we have it. Coach them as necessary.

- What are you supposed to do before crossing the street?
- What is the rule for talking to a stranger?
- What is the rule for down power lines?

These sets of rules definitely are there to keep us safe. Make sure you understand them. Before you cross a street, take a very good look both ways. This is to ensure we don't get hit by a car. As far as strangers are concerned, never talk to them or take anything from them. If a stranger tries to talk to you, call for help loudly. If you can, go to an adult you know and trust like your mom or dad. But certainly make as much noise and as much of a fuss as possible. The more attention you bring to yourself, the better. You can never be too safe. And as far as power lines are concerned, stay away! The people who know how to handle those down lines sometimes get hurt. If they can be hurt and they know what they are doing, don't you even go near a down power line, even if you think there's no electricity. It's too dangerous and you're better off being safe than sorry.

Activity:

Materials: Whiteboard or chalkboard, dry-erase markers or chalk.

All that talking about rules makes me want to play a game. It's got to be a simple game, though. Let's play tic-tac-toe. I need a volunteer.

Select a different child for each game. Play the first games correctly. Then start intentionally violating the rules. Some examples of how to do so:

- Declare you've won when you haven't.
- Moving twice.
- Erasing the child's move and replacing it with your own.
- Changing from Xs to Os and vice versa.

Each time, the children should say something about how you're not following the rules. Let them explain what the rule is and why what you did was a violation.

Even in a simple game like Tic-Tac-Toe, rules are important. If we didn't have rules to follow, the game wouldn't be any fun. Tic-Tac-Toe isn't very important, though. At least not compared to a lot of things in life. We face a lot of choices in life, some of them very important. Sometimes it's very hard to figure out what choice to make. That's where God comes in.

God has provided us the Bible. This book contains the rules we need in order to make the right choices. We talked about how we have rules to protect us like "Don't run with scissors." The Bible is a protective book. God's rules are there to keep us as safe as possible. They are also there so we can live the best life possible.

Some people don't understand this. They see God as some "meanie" who is trying to keep them from having fun. They see the Bible as an out-of-date fairy tale. They don't get that the Bible is there to show us the wise choices and to give us examples of what happens not only when we follow God's advice, but also when we don't.

We're not going to get into specifics today, but I will mention a certain book of the Bible, one which is important but often overlooked. That book is the book of Judges. The book of Judges is full of stories about Israel when they kept ignoring what God said. Because of this, Israel kept getting in one bad situation after another. The people would get stuck, then after a while they would figure out they weren't following God. Then the people would pray. God would fix the situation and everything would be fine for a little while. But then the people would slip back into ignoring God and find themselves in another bad situation. All because they either ignored God's rules or forgot them.

Rules are important. Some are to keep us from fighting with each other. Others, like the ones in the Bible, are there to protect us. I want to urge you to read your rulebook. Read your Bible. Know what it says. Know what rules God has set down. Look at the rules for what they are: instructions to keep us safe. They aren't restrictions God has said because He's mean.

God loves us. He loves us more than we can imagine. And He has given us the Bible because He loves us so much. Read His rules and follow them. You can't go wrong if you do.

Close by asking God in prayer to help each person understand and obey His rules.

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.