



OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

How to Read This Lesson Plan (defines all components of the lesson plan)

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation (a reminder of why we do this)

Scripture(s) for the Session (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

Key Verses & Theology (background for teachers to ponder)

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

Preparation (including supplies needed)

Classroom Statement (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

Step-by-step process of the lesson (including the scripture to be read)

Suggested variations for age groups (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: Matthew 27:11-26

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14 But Jesus still gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. When you are accused of something, whether you did it or not, what is your initial response? My immediate response is to defend myself, give reasons, or explain the situation. This response in me is even more aggressive when I think I am being wrongly accused. I imagine other responses range from blaming others to begging for mercy or leniency. But Jesus does none of these things. This is quite remarkable. Jesus' life is on the line, and yet he lets false accusations stand without rebuttal. Who *does* this? It is no wonder that Pilate is greatly amazed. But why would Jesus function this way? Living the Way of God cannot be forced or argued upon someone else; a person can only invite others to experience it. Jesus is not in a position to invite any more. The chief priests and Pharisees had plenty of opportunities to receive the invitation, but they choose to arrest Jesus instead. At this point, what is left for Jesus to say?

20 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. In the last WRM session (S3.Session 7: Jesus enters Jerusalem), we studied Jesus' arrival to Jerusalem. He arrives with fanfare and a parade. People are waving tree branches and then they are attentively listening to him teach in the Temple after he drives out the merchants. That was at the start of what we call Holy Week. Now, 5 days later, Jesus has been arrested, falsely accused and the crowd, probably some of the same people who listened to Jesus in the Temple and cheered for him when he came in the gates, are now persuaded to condemn Jesus to death. So what gives? Why would the crowd be so fickle and short-sighted and forgetful? Because that's what crowds do! Just think of a sports crowd that cheers its team at the beginning of the game and then boos them halfway through because the team is now losing. Crowds are fickle, short-sighted and forgetful! They only want what's hot and what's now. Jesus was hot and now *so* five minutes ago. Now it's Barabbas who's hot, who's now. The chief priests and Pharisees use this to their advantage and get the crowd all riled up about something other than Jesus, in this case, Barabbas. It is in this story where we can very easily see how the ways of the crowd and the ways of the Pharisees kill the Way of God (as embodied by Jesus). When we do not accept the invitation to live God's way, then by default, we end up in the Pharisee or Crowd camp...and participate in the killing/ending of the Way of God.

24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, and that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." So Pilate is amazed at Jesus' silence. He knows this is not the response of a crazy, dangerous person. He does not think Jesus is guilty, plus his wife is having dreams about the innocence of Jesus and writing notes to him that say, "Dear, don't be stupid." But in the face of the anger and demands of the crowd, Pilate stops caring about the innocence of Jesus and starts caring about his own innocence. Once we start worrying about covering our own back, our own career, our own family, then that finalizes the ability of the crowd and Pharisees to end the possibility of living God's way. Traditional theology says that God sent Jesus to die for our sins. The story of Jesus' trial says otherwise; this story tells us that Jesus died because of bureaucratic cowardliness by Pilate, because of the crowd being easily

swayed due to an embrace of ignorance and because of the jealousy of the Pharisees that drove this whole charade of justice. God didn't send Jesus to die from that. God sent Jesus to SAVE us from that. But in order to be saved from the way of functioning, we have to choose to live God's way. When we don't, then we end up killing the life that God desires for us to live.

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Accusations – The act of accusing is to charge someone of wrong-doing. Whether accusations be true or false, they are an incredibly powerful tool of persuasion. Politicians, lawyers and co-workers use them with great skill to shape perception, and in so doing, ruin many reputations, careers and lives. The problem with accusing is that it does not allow for forgiveness or redirect one's actions. Prophecy is the redeemed act of accusation. Prophecy, like accusing, will name wrong-doing but THEN, prophecy, unlike accusing, also encourages/promotes actions that are about repentance (changing direction – seeking reconciliation with God and others). Even though the Pharisees come from a storied culture of prophets, in this story they choose the fallen form of prophecy: The Accusation.

Decision-making – Accusations gain so much traction in our lives because as humans, we often make decisions based on what we fear. Accusations play on our fear, amplify our fear and cause us to make decisions based on what we fear less. But even without the accusations, we are fearful. The Pharisees fear Jesus surpassing them in popularity and power; Pilate is afraid for his career and what a riot would do to it; the crowd fears missing out on the next big thing and makes snap-decisions that seem important and popular in the moment. All this fearful decision-making creates quite the frenzied mess, though, doesn't it? But what we see with Jesus is that his decision-making (choosing to follow God's way) leaves him still and calm, peaceful even, in the middle of this swirling chaos that will eventually kill him.

Surrender – Because Jesus has surrendered to living God's way, Jesus isn't trying to save himself in this story. Because Jesus isn't trying to save himself, he's not caught up in the fear that can so often drive us to make foolish decisions. So maybe he's not happy with what's happening (in fact, I think that's safe to assume), but he's also not worked up into a frenzy about what's happening, either. Jesus is making choices based on his relationship with God. God's telling Jesus to not fight back. So Jesus doesn't. And he's the only one who then appears sane in the story, even though he is the arrested, accused and beaten defendant.



THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: Stop watch/timer with seconds on it.

Classroom Statement

This Movement and Games classroom consists of reading the story of Jesus' Trial and two games. The first game "Left Out" seeks to demonstrate the power of peer pressure (relates to the pressure Pilate felt) while the second game "Quick Tie" seeks to demonstrate why peer pressure, though powerful, isn't that voice that is best for us to listen to (again, relates to Pilate).

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS "Question of the Day."

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY Short and simple is perfect. For example:

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- The story we're going to read today is often referred to as "Jesus' Trial."
- The story happens about 5 days after the story we finished in the last session where Jesus went into the city of Jerusalem and cleared the merchants out of the Temple.
- Between that story and this story, Jesus was arrested.
- This story starts with the chief priests and Pharisees who are having Jesus tried by Pontius Pilate, who is the Roman governor of the area. Pilate has to determine whether Jesus is guilty.
- There are some words in the story that you may not know that we'll go over now.
- The word "accuse" means to say that a person did something wrong. Also, when someone accuses someone else, there's often a gesture of finger pointing that goes with the accusing.

- “Crucifixion” is a terribly painful form of punishment that kills a person. The person’s wrists and ankles were often nailed (sometimes tied) to a wooden cross and then that cross was lifted up and the person’s weight would compress their lungs and eventually make it impossible for them to breathe. People who were crucified died from not being able to breathe. The Romans used this form of punishment for thieves and people who tried to overthrow the Roman rulers.
- “Innocent” means that an accused person has done nothing wrong.
- Jesus was innocent. But let’s listen for what happens to him...

READ Matthew 27:11-26

Now Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; and Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "That's what *you* keep saying." 12 But when Jesus was accused by the Israelite chief priests and Pharisees, he did not answer at all. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14 But Jesus still gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. 15 Now at the festival the governor was supposed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom the crowd wanted. 16 At that time they had an evil prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So after they had gathered, Pilate said to the chief priests, Pharisees and crowd, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 Pilate said "Jesus who is called the Messiah" to annoy the chief priests and Pharisees because he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over. 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, Jesus, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." 20 While that was happening, the chief priests and the Pharisees persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" And all of them said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 Then Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" 24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, and that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 26 So he released Barabbas to them; and after having his soldiers whip Jesus, he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

ASK (answers in parentheses)

- Pilate asks Jesus some questions, but he plays the role of judge (this means Pilate decides whether Jesus is guilty or innocent of the accusations) in this story. Who are the ones who are actually accusing Jesus in this story? (the Israelite chief priests and Pharisees)
- What is Jesus accused of? (Being the King of the Jews – a serious accusation that suggests Jesus is trying to replace the Roman rulers with Jewish rulers and is punishable by death if guilty)
- Pilate’s wife sends Pilate a note. What does the note say? (have nothing to do with this innocent man, Jesus, for I have had a dream about him)
- Even though Pilate plays the role of a judge in this story, does he ever say whether Jesus is innocent or guilty? (No)
- Who does Pilate let be the judge and make the decision? (the crowd)
- Why do you think he does this? (he’s afraid of making the chief priests and Pharisees angry; and then he’s afraid of the crowd rioting)

- At the end of the story, when Pilate washes his hands, he does say that *someone* is innocent. Who does he say is innocent? (He says that he, Pilate, is innocent of Jesus' blood).

TELL

- This is a very sad story. Jesus didn't have to die.
- This story shows us what happens when people make decisions without paying attention to God: God's way of living – which is how Jesus lives – gets killed.
- Pilate paid attention to his fear of the Pharisees and the Crowd and based his decision of what to do on his fear.
- Being concerned of what others think and basing our actions on what they think is often called "peer pressure." The word "peer" means "friend" or someone who COULD be a friend, but isn't yet.
- We're going to do two activities today. One activity will show the power of peer pressure and why we pay attention to it. The second activity will show the shortcomings of paying attention to peer pressure.

EXPLAIN "Left Out"

- Let's stand up in a circle
- The object of this activity is to follow the commands I give you.
- The two commands that I will give you are
 - "Mingle" which means you walk around in this space saying "mingle mingle mingle," separating yourself from others, changing your location, etc.
 - The other command I'll give you is a number. When I say a number while you're mingling, then you get into a group with that many people in it. If there are some of us left over, but not enough to make another group, then we just wait until the next command.
- After I say a number and we're in groups of that number, then I might say mingle, or I might call out the same number again. If I call out the same number, then you have to regroup, you can't be in the same group with the same people.
- This activity ends when I say, "Last number!" I will then call out a number. Whoever does not get into a group that matches that correct number loses the game.

A NOTE about this activity (for teachers):

- Tread carefully with this activity. The intention is for all or most of the students to feel the pain of being left out, but not that the class would use this exercise as an opportunity to pick on the outsider(s) of the group (or create one, for that matter).
- Make sure the teacher (you) and the shepherd play.
- Call out the same number a couple of times in a row so that different students get left out.
- Give the students about 3 to 5 seconds to get in a group, then call out the next mingle command. Keep them moving.
- Call out numbers that will usually leave one or more individuals out of the groups (if the class is odd-numbered, for example, call out even numbers).
- The teacher and shepherd should seek to often be part of the "left outs," though not all the time...

- **To end the activity, MAKE SURE you call out the number of however many are in the class MINUS ONE. Then “sacrifice” yourself.** Let everyone win but you – unless there is someone else willing to lose, then discuss with that person who should join the group and who should lose.

DO Activity

ASK

- Was there anything you didn't like about this activity? If yes, what was it?
- What did you feel when you were not able to join the group?
 - When you were not in a group, did you want to get back into a group the next round?
- How easy was it to keep finding a new group?
- When the last number was called, were you tempted to not join the group? Why or why not?
- What did you think of my (or whoever else volunteered) willingness to let the rest of the group win? (it was dumb; it was great because then everyone else got to win!)

TELL

- So in this activity, we can feel the pressure to be part of a group, any group, and we can feel how bad it feels to be on the outside of the groups. This is the power of peer pressure: To want to belong and be willing to do things to get back in the group.
- Pilate was feeling this peer pressure. He was on the outside of the Pharisee group and he was on the outside of the Crowd group. If he would just proclaim Jesus “guilty” then these two groups would “like” him. But if he proclaimed Jesus “innocent” then they would've been very mean to him, HOWEVER, Jesus would not have been crucified, either.
- So even though Jesus was innocent, and even though his wife knew and Pilate knew it, too, Pilate gave into the peer pressure. He didn't want the groups to be mean to him. It would cause too much trouble.
- And so, who, at the end of the story, gets left out of the groups? (Jesus does)
- Right. So one of the reasons Pilate let Jesus be killed was because of peer pressure.

TRANSITION to next activity

- So that is the power of peer pressure.
- Next, we're going to do an activity that will, hopefully, show us why we shouldn't let our peers make decisions for us, even though we want to be part of their group.

EXPLAIN Quick Tie Round 1

- For the next activity, we're going to take our shoes off and put them in a pile over here.
- Next, about 10 feet away, we're going to gather in a circle and once we're all over there, I'll tell you what we're going to do next.
- [while they gather in the circle, stir the pile of shoes, then join them in the circle]
- In a moment, I'm going to have you go get your shoes, put them on, tie them and return back to the circle and sit down where you are currently sitting.
- While you are doing this, I'll be looking at this stopwatch and calling out the seconds.

- Once you have your shoes back on, tied or fastened as they were, and you have sat down, remember what number I'm calling out so you know how long it took you.
- Any questions?

DO Quick Tie Round 1

EXPLAIN Quick Tie Round 2

- Well done! Do you remember how long it took you to put your shoes on? Good! Keep remembering!
- Well, guess what. We're going to do it again. So take off your shoes and go put them in the same place and come back here to the circle.
- [again, stir the pile of shoes while they gather in the circle]
- This time, we're going to do things a little differently.
- I'm going to put you with a partner (just assign them with whomever they are sitting next to)
- Choose who is going first.
- What you are going to do, when I say Go!, is that you're going to go find your partners' shoes, come back, and put them on your partners feet. You're going to make sure the shoes are fastened or tied just like they were in the last round.
- Your partner may not go with you to the shoe pile, but must stay here in the circle.
- Like last time, I will be counting the seconds outloud.
- Once you have fastened your partner's shoes, then you may sit down in the circle.
- Once you sit down in the circle, then you are done. Pay attention to what number I'm calling out at that time and remember it.
- Once the first set of partners have gone, then we'll have the other partners do the same thing.
- Any questions?
- Ready, set, GO!

DO Quick Tie Round 2

ASK

- How long did it take you to find and put on your own shoes?
- How long did it take you to find and put on your partner's shoes?
- Which activity took more time to do?
- Did you have any difficulty finding your own shoes? Why or why not?
- Did you have any difficulty finding your partner's shoes? Why or why not?
- Could you have walked all day with your shoes tied/fastened in the manner that your partner tied them? Were your shoes too loose or too tight?
- So when thinking about what we just did, do you think it is easier to take care of your own problems or the problems of someone else?
- Why?

TELL

- So in the story, Pilate gives into peer pressure from the Pharisees and the crowd.

- But based on what we just discussed, the Pharisees and the crowd did not know what the best thing was for Pilate to do.
- But Pilate listened to them, anyways.
- However, God DOES know us well, much better than our peers.
- And when we listen to God in prayer, God helps us to see other decisions we can make, decisions that are often times different than the decisions others want us to make.
- Pilate didn't do this. But we can.
- And when we do ask for God's help in making decisions then we will be helping to make the world into a place that is less and less likely to be a world that kills Jesus.

CLEAN UP

Note: Activities adapted from Pg 151 of *Activities that Teach – “Left out”* and pg 315 of *More activities That Teach – “Quick Tie.”* Both books authored by Tom Jackson.