



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: DVD movie (online at www.rfour.org/media.html. Or you can contact me at support@rfour.org about receiving a DVD with all the movies on it for Season 3); TV w/DVD player; 4 to 5 scripts for puppets (see *Storytelling Supply Document S3-S8*); some sort of upright material to for the puppeteers to hide behind and put their puppets above (a large, modified cardboard box works perfectly – if you really want to get into it, get a refrigerator box from an appliance store); camcorder; popsicle puppets (see “How to make popsicle puppets” directly below)
- **How to make popsicle puppets:** Print out the pictures as provided in the *Storytelling Supply Document S3-S8*. Cut them out and either paste or tape them to large craft/popsicle sticks. I often times tape the pictures to dark-colored construction paper to help with support and contrast.

Classroom Statement

This Storytelling class consists of reading the scripture story of Jesus’ Trial, watching a movie about the story and then putting on a popsicle puppet play about the story.

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 last session's story 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 have brought Jesus to 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, 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 are in the 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.
- The Pharisees keep repeating their accusations, eventually the Crowd starts to believe these accusations and act on them, to the point that even Pilate thinks he must believe them.
- So in the story, do you think the crowd and Pilate listen to God? Or are they listening to someone else? (someone else – the Pharisees!).
- We're going to watch a video now that retells the story we just read.

WATCH DVD Video

ASK

- Do you think the trial was fair? (no)
- Why?
- Do you think the Pharisees, Pilate or the Crowd were most at fault/responsible?

TELL

- We're going to put on a popsicle puppet play, now, that will very simply retell the story that we've just read and watched.
- There are four parts: The Jesus part only has one line, the Pharisees mostly say just one thing, over and over again, the crowd who mostly say the same thing over and over again and then Pilate who says a whole lot. (for the Pharisees and the Crowd, assign more than one person to read the part, so that it sounds like a number of people chanting, instead of just one person).
- We'll do a practice run through, where I'll be the director, helping yall know what to do and when to do it.
- Once we got through the practice run, then we'll film it.

PRACTICE then RECORD Popsicle Puppet Play

Popsicle Puppet Script

Characters: Pilate, Pharisees, Jesus, Crowd

Jesus' Trial

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: Hello, Jesus. Are you guilty?

Jesus: That's what they keep saying.

Pharisees: See! Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: Yes, that is what they keep saying.

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: You can't let these people talk for you. What do you say for yourself?

Jesus: [stays silent]

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: You, Jesus, amaze me. I've never seen a man so calm before such accusers.

Jesus: [stays silent]

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: C'mon you pharisees, can't you say something else?

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pilate: I guess not! Which is a problem for me. The Pharisees have their minds made up, but Jesus is NOT guilty. Guilty men do not act like him. What should I do?

Crowd: Let us choose! Let us choose! Let us choose!

Pilate: Oh right! Today is the day of that silly tradition these Israelites have where we, the Romans, let one of their criminals go free. I know what I'll do! I'll put Jesus up as one of the "criminals" to be set free. For his competition, I'll put up the murderer Barabbas. There's no way the crowd will choose Barabbas.

Crowd: Let us choose! Let us choose! Let us choose!

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Crowd: Let us choose! Let us choose! Let us choose!

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Crowd: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Pharisees: Jesus is guilty! Find him guilty! Jesus is guilty! Crucify him!

Crowd and Pharisees: Crucify Jesus! Free Barabbas! Crucify Jesus! Free Barabbas!

Pilate: Oh no! My plan has failed horribly! Now I HAVE to hand Jesus over to be killed otherwise the crowd will riot and I'll lose my career! [*angrily*] This is your fault, Crowd and Pharisees, that this man, Jesus, is going to die! I wash my hands of his death for I am innocent!

Crowd and Pharisees: Crucify Jesus! Free Barabbas! Crucify Jesus! Free Barabbas!

Pilate: Take him away, then, to be crucified.

Jesus: [silence]

The End

CLEAN UP