

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Illustrate the difference between conflict and violence
- Discuss how violence is rarely the end result when we seek God
- Highlight how God shows the Israelites another path

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Up In The Air*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. For activity:
 - a. Need one Bible per student
 - b. Need an armrest-less chair
 - c. Need a little bit of distance between the armrest-less chair and everything else (because students will be running to the chair)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here’s this week’s question:** What is something you want to (or have wanted to) escape?

TRANSITION TO Video Clip

- This week, we start a new session about God and conflict.
- In it, we’ll read different stories with conflict in them and look at how the characters deal with the conflict and how God is part or not part of the story.

- This will be a difficult session because there are a lot of Bible stories about conflict and they don't all agree with each other.
- For instance, one of the 10 commandments is "Do not murder."
- And yet, right after those 10 commandments were written, Moses punished the Israelites for making a golden calf by killing 3000 of them.
- Or another instance: Jesus tells his followers to love one another as they have loved themselves. He tells them to love their enemies. He tells them to forgive 70 times 7 times. But that doesn't stop him from driving the money changers from the Temple by using a whip (John 2:15).
- Then, there are all the battles and wars that the Israelites have (in the Old Testament stories) that God sometimes helps out with and sometimes doesn't.
- So, those contradictions can make it a difficult topic to discuss. But, let's give it a try and see what happens!
- To get started, let's watch a movie clip from the movie "Up In The Air."
- The job of the main character, played by George Clooney, is to fire employees of other companies.
- That's his job – he's paid by the company to go to their office and fire their employees.
- This usually happens when a lot of employees need to be let go at the same time.
- As we'll see, it's not an easy job since a lot of people have a lot of highly charged responses about being fired and those responses get directed at the people who are firing them.
- In the clip we're watching, George Clooney, along with his new co-worker, are doing their jobs by firing other people.
- Let's see what happens

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- Were any of the soon-to-be ex-employees happy about being fired? (no)
- At any point during the clip, did you think a heated argument or even a fist fight was going to happen? (probably would not have been too surprising had it happened)
- How well, do you think, did George Clooney's co-worker do during the last conversation? (not very well – "studies have shown children under a certain amount of stress fare better....")
- How well, do you think, did the George Clooney character do during the last conversation? (better than his co-worker)
- Did the soon-to-be ex-employee at the end of the clip seem to be less angry / less ready for conflict after his conversation with the George Clooney character? (he seemed less angry, yes)
- And what caused him to be less angry? (words that served as a reminder of other options, other paths)

TELL

- One dynamic we see in the movie clip is a conflict between two parties that might very well lead to violence
- But there are three things that the people who are firing do that help reduce the potential for violence:
 - 1. They are honest about the situation.
 - 2. They then listen to the people voice their displeasure about the situation.
 - 3. They then offer words that suggest a new path, which we saw with the last guy.

- In today's story, there is a conflict between the Israelites and the Egyptians.
- And that conflict is that the Israelites wanted to leave (for good reason: They were enslaved in Egypt) and the Egyptians don't want them to leave. (Note: this is a very basic retelling of the story)
- In today's story, the Israelites have actually left Egypt (after the 10 plagues, concluding with the Passover).
- But the Egyptians are now chasing the Israelites and wanting to bring them back into captivity.
- Which means, there is great potential for violence in today's story, especially since the Israelites are trapped between the Red Sea and the advancing Egyptian army.
- Let's see what Moses and the Israelites do.

READ Exodus 14:5-6, 9-16, 21-28 (*recommendation: Have class read it aloud; one person per verse*)

5When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" 6So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; 9The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

10As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 11They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. 14The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

15Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. 16But you lift up

your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.

21Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. 22The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 24At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." 26Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." 27So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

ASK

- Verse 5 and 6 – What does Pharaoh decide to do? (to pursue / re-capture the Israelites)
- Verse 11 & 12 – What do the Israelites tell Moses? (that it would've been better to have stayed in Egypt and serve the Egyptians because now they were all going to die)
- Does that surprise you – that the Israelites would want to go back to the way things were even if those things involved being enslaved? (yes and no – Yes, because it's not like they're leaving paradise. No, because people dislike the unknown even when entering the unknown will be for the better)

- Verse 14 – What does Moses tell the people to do? (you need to be still – which is Biblical language for “Pray”)
- Verse 16 – After this command to “be still,” what does Moses hear from God to do? (Stretch his hand over the sea)
- What happens when he does this? (the water divides)
- What does the parting of the sea provide for the Israelites? (a new path to take; a path that is different than the one of conflict and violence that seemed imminent)
- Verse 22 – What does the story say the Israelites walked on? (dry ground)
- Verse 23 – What does the story say the Egyptians followed the Israelites into? (the sea)
- So, it sounds like the path that was provided to the Israelites was not being provided to the Egyptians, doesn't it?
- Verse 25 – What happened to the Egyptian army once it went into the sea? (it was thrown into confusion; things stopped working correctly, like the wheels of chariots)
- Verse 26 – What is Moses told to do one more time? (stretch out his hand over the sea)
- Verse 28 – What happened to Pharaoh and his army after Moses stretched his hand out again? (they were swallowed by the sea)

TELL

- In the movie clip, we see that listening to words of complaint and then offering directive words about a new path could lead to a change in understanding that would then avoid violence.
- In today's story, we see a similar thing happen.
- At the beginning of the story, things look pretty bleak for the Israelites
- And so, they complain.
- Moses then reminds them to “be still and listen.” So they do
- And in that moment of stillness, they hear directive words from God about what to do.
- Those directive words from God eventually reveal a new path.
- Instead of fighting and losing and being brought back to captivity, God reveals a new way for the people through the Red Sea
- And that new way also keeps the Israelites from engaging in a violent interaction.
- Despite the Israelites new way, the Egyptians are not ok to let them go. So they chase the Israelites down their new path.
- But the path that God revealed for the Israelites was not the path that God had made for the Egyptians
- The path that God had made for the Egyptians was to let the Israelites go.
- And that path of “Let the Israelites go” was a path God had been revealing to the Egyptians for a long time.
- In short, there were two paths for two parties that God kept offering to both parties.
- And, had both parties listened, then they all could've gone their separate ways and avoided a violent resolution.
- But only one party listened.
- And, because the Egyptians didn't listen, because they kept choosing a path that wasn't for them, the Egyptians eventually found themselves mired in a chaotic situation and were violently overwhelmed by it.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- In the midst of a chaotic situation with increasing likelihood of violence, Moses and the Israelites listen to and follow God's direction in prayer.
- This is not the only way we can listen for God's direction, though.

- We can also listen for God’s direction and path through reading, discussing, and studying the Bible stories.
- So....we’re going to do the following activity to help us see how reading scripture can help us know/see God’s path for us can reduce violence.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We’re each going to get a Bible.
- And we’re going to sit over here, at this end of the room.
- And at the other end of the room, there’s one chair (with no armrests)
- [*Depending on size of class (say 8 or more), put them in teams, rather than have a free-for-all*]
- The way this works is that one of us (and I’ll start) will look for a passage in the Bible and then call out where it is found: **For example, the book of Judges, Chapter 3, verse 4**
- Once I say that, then everyone else will then look in their Bible to find the passage that I just mentioned.
- Once you find the passage, run to the chair, sit down and read the passage outloud.
- Now, other people might be running to the chair too, so you might have to struggle a bit for the chair.
- And by *struggling*, I mean using your hips to push/bump the other person/people off the chair – we’re not talking about throwing elbows or pushing with our hands. Just moderate hip-checking 😊
- First person to correctly read while their bottom is (mostly) on the chair gets to call out the next book, chapter and verse
- [*If you are playing with teams, everyone still looks up the passage. Whoever finds it first gives their Bible to the designated team runner for that round, who then runs to the chair. Keep track of points for the teams. After every round, the team leader for each team changes.*]
- Any questions?

DO ACTIVITY

TELL

- During our activity, were there any moments when two or more of us were trying to get on the chair at the same time?
- If so, what (or what *would have*) stopped the struggle for the chair? (the successful reading of the Bible passage)
- And, for those of us who were looking for the passage, so that we could then run to the chair and struggle for it, what stopped you from pursuing that course of action? (the successful reading of the Bible passage)
- This, then, was meant to be a fun demonstration of how seeking the direction that God offers – in prayer, studying the Bible stories, or worshipping together – can *help* lead us to paths of action that reduce or avoid violence, altogether.
- And that’s the good news for today.

CLOSING PRAYER